The fifth and sixth centuries in Britain have often been characterised as a ‘Dark Age’ because the period is, supposedly, bereft of written sources. Yet, while we may lack texts equivalent to the histories of Ammianus or Bede, this was a period which produced literary works comparable to others written in the Late Antique West, amongst them in Britain Patrick’s ‘Letter to the soldiers of Coroticus’ and his ‘Confessio’ as well as the ‘De Excidio of Gildas’. Frustratingly for the majority of modern readers these are basically theological tracts, only aligned obliquely with our more material and historical interests in the period, although they are undeniable evidence for the existence of an elite stratum in society which continued to be educated to Late Antique norms during the fifth and sixth centuries. This is also attested and confirmed by the inscribed stone monuments of Western Britain.

One of the often under-appreciated elements of all such writings is that they shed light on how the Romano-British elites communicated during the twilight of the Western Roman Empire. Patrick chose to write a letter to the soldiers of Coroticus, while in his ‘Confessio’ he recounts a vision in which he receives letters from a man called Victorius. The work of Gildas also sits neatly within this context. The ‘De Excidio’ is an ‘epistola’, a document designed to be disseminated and read. It also contains the appeal to Aetius, the context of which suggests that Gildas was claiming at least to be quoting from some kind of diplomatic correspondence.

The composition of letters (epistolography) was a form of communication and literary genre that had deep Classical roots. Pliny the Younger’s ‘Epistulae’ and the letters among the documents from ‘Vindolanda’ provide examples from the early Empire, and from the fourth and fifth centuries letters written in Gaul by Ausonius, Sidonius Apollinaris, Ruricius of Limoges, Patricius, Confessio and Epistola.

Dates refer to centuries A. D. – All examples of the described type from Britain are displayed on the plates. In the text these objects are quoted as «cat.», following the catalogue Appendix 1; the comparanda from continental Europe are quoted as «comp.», following Appendix 2. Both appendices contain bibliographical indications abbreviated in the notes. The photographs show the rings in scale approximately 1:1.5. For exact measures see the plates.

1 Patricius, Confessio and Epistola.
5 Patricius, Confessio and Epistola.
7 Gildas, De Excidio; Patricius, Confessio and Epistola.
8 Gildas, De Excidio 20, 1; N. Higham, The English Conquest. Gildas and Britain in the Fifth Century (Manchester 1994) 124 s.
James Gerrard and Martin Henig

and Avitus represent survivals of this form of literary endeavour\textsuperscript{10}. Indeed, Sidonius even sent a letter to a British – or Breton – warlord called Riothamus in the late fifth century and he clearly expected to be understood\textsuperscript{11}.

The literate elements in fifth- and sixth-century British societies assuredly did not confine themselves to letters and religious tracts. The evidence of the post-Roman inscribed stones – whatever their origin – shows that recording names and titles was an important element of secular elite society and it may also be supposed that records of land, rents, and tribute existed, while the early elements in the Llandaff charters, perhaps as early as the late sixth century but more likely to be of seventh century or later date\textsuperscript{12}, hint at the variety of record keeping in operation.

In the absence of an archive of fifth- or sixth-century letters and other documents found waterlogged at the bottom of a well, this post-Roman literate elite remains elusive. The refortified hillforts and hilltop ‘citadels’ of western Britain look to our modern prejudices unlikely settings for literacy, although Cadbury Congresbury has yielded objects that might have served as styli\textsuperscript{13}. Similarly, the shells of Roman towns and villas do not retain the character of places we might anticipate to be centres of learning, even if some continued to function in this way\textsuperscript{14}. A little light may, however, be shed on this Late Antique literate elite by a particular type of finger-ring that arguably provides a glimpse of Britain in the years after A.D. 400.

These finger-rings bear designs on their bezels that would have made them functional as seal- or signet-rings. This implies that the wearers, whether they were male or female, were interested in applying wax seals as a form of security device or identifying mark. Correspondence and other documents, whether written by the ring’s wearer or by a scribe at their behest\textsuperscript{15}, required such seals. Wax seals could also be applied to bags of valuables in transit\textsuperscript{16} and even to household cabinets\textsuperscript{17} as a means of preventing thefts by servants and slaves.

The Brancaster ring

In 1829 a gold finger-ring was ‘hoed up’ at the Shore Fort of Brancaster (Norfolk). This object is a famous item of jewellery, engraved on the bezel with confronted male and female busts and inscribed vivav \textit{/ in deo} (cat. 1). It has been published many times. Catherine Johns identifies this ring as an exemplar of a specific form of late Roman finger-ring:

«The characteristics of the form are that the hoop is of constant width and comparatively broad, and that the bezel is noticeably raised, usually square or rectangular in shape, and decorated in intaglio by direct engraving into the metal. The form is found in gold, silver and bronze. Some rings with circular or polygonal bezels may be variants of the form.»\textsuperscript{18}

Johns considered the fourteen then known examples and suggested that they dated to the end of the fourth and perhaps the first decades of the fifth century. Considering the related Amesbury rings, their iconography can be linked with the so-called Quoit Brooch Style and

\textsuperscript{10} For letter writing in late antiquity see P. Brown, Through the Eye of a Needle. Wealth, the fall of Rome and the making of Christianity in the West AD 350–550 (Prince- ton 2012) passim.
\textsuperscript{11} Sidon. epist. 3, 9.
\textsuperscript{15} It is worth recalling that some centuries later a man as exalted in secular power as Charlemagne was almost illiterate and would have required scribes to produce his correspondence. Notker, Vita Karoli Magni 25.
\textsuperscript{16} C. Andrews, Roman Seal Boxes in Britain. BAR British Ser. (Oxford 2012).
\textsuperscript{17} Clem. Al. Paid. 3, 11.
\textsuperscript{18} Johns, Jewellery 53 s.
Brancaster type signet rings

might be of fifth-century date. This late dating is extremely unusual for any category of Romano-British objects and ought to have elevated the Brancaster ring type to wider knowledge and discussion. Unfortunately, the very small number of examples recorded had the effect of reducing these rings to relative obscurity.

Over recent years, finds specialists have become more open to the idea that some forms of Romano-British material culture may have continued to be used and even produced into the fifth century. Objects as diverse as coins, spindle whorls, combs, pottery and even fourth-century bracelets cut down to form finger-rings, have all been advanced as potentially dating to the fifth century. Meanwhile the Portable Antiquities Scheme has recorded ever increasing numbers of objects. Together these changes in both approach and available data suggest that the time is right to re-evaluate object types that have traditionally been thought to straddle the divide between Classical antiquity and the early medieval period. Of these objects the Brancaster-type rings offer an obvious opportunity: not only has the number known grown exponentially, but their lateness already renders them a suitable candidate for an artefact-type that could have continued into the fifth century. Finally, it may also be noted that the term Brancaster ring has been adopted in France, where the term is now being used to describe a wider variety of rings than Johns’ definition would allow. A restatement of the type and its characteristics would appear helpful.

For the purposes of this paper the authors have, for the first time, collated a near comprehensive corpus of all the known Brancaster-type rings from Britain (completed in 2017). There are now fifty-four rings and bezels known and these have been identified in publications, the Portable Antiquities Scheme database and other online sources, such as the websites of antiquities dealers and metal-detecting fora. All of these rings, including previously unpublished ones, are illustrated together in the plates for the first time. The rings are depicted in the order that they are discussed below. Other arrangements are possible (for instance: by typology, material, findspot) but all have their drawbacks and we have adopted this approach as the easiest for the reader to follow.

The rest of this study is dedicated to a discussion of the Brancaster ring and its typology, chronology, iconography, and spatial distribution. A number of kindred rings from Continental Europe are included in order to emphasise the place of the insular examples in a broader Late Antique context. Indeed, the rings of the Brancaster type offer an insight into not only the dress, but also the beliefs, ideologies, and education of the people who wore them during the twilight years of the Western Roman Empire. As such they deserve to be recognised as the important objects that they are.

**Typology**

The form of a finger-ring is generally defined by either the shape of its bezel or by its hoop. As Johns observes, one of the defining characteristics of the Brancaster ring is its square or rec-
tangular bezel. For the purposes of this study the bezel shape is seen as crucial. Rings with other bezel shapes, such as those from Amersham, Ickham and Moor Park, which are generally circular or angled in shape, are clearly related to the Brancaster type but with the single exception of the very fine and well-known gold ring from Suffolk with an octagonal bezel (cat. 2), these rings are only briefly noted here.

The square or rectangular bezel falls into four broad types. The first is a raised box upon which a bezel bearing a device in intaglio is attached. The second is clearly a derivative of the first bezel type. These rings have two transverse projections from the hoop to which the bezel is soldered. Thirdly, there are rings which have a bezel which is only incrementally raised from the hoop, which we term an ‚incipient box bezel‘ (although no implications of evolutionary and chronological development are implied). Finally, there is the rare stepped box-bezel.

The hoop is almost always circular. The exceptions are the extraordinary Senecianus ring (cat. 3), a ring from Richborough (cat. 4) and one from a small hoard of late Roman silver found between Great Horwood and Winslow (cat. 51), all with octagonal hoops but clearly falling within our remit on other grounds. Generally, the hoop is the same width as the bezel, but there are a number of examples where the hoop narrows or the bezel is wider than the band. Decoration of the hoop is present on some – but by no means all – of the rings and can vary from being very elaborate (as on the Amesbury rings, cat. 5–7) to the simple (as on a ring from St Albans, cat. 8).

Typologically these attributes can be used to define individual sub-types using an alphanumerical scheme. Thus the bezel shape is the first attribute (Fig. 1), the type of bezel is the second (Fig. 2) and the width of the hoop is the third (Fig. 3), with decoration on the hoop forming the fourth attribute. Thus the ring from Amesbury depicting a griffin has a square bezel (Type I, cat. 7), which forms one side of a box (Type A) attached to a hoop as broad as the bezel’s width (Type 1). The shoulders of the hoop are decorated so the ring can be classed a ‚Type IA1d‘. Methodologically such an approach is derived from the classificatory schemes used in pottery studies. The advantages of its inelegant nomenclature are that it allows different combinations of attributes to be recorded and the scheme to be extended if needed.

Rings of Types II (Ickham), III (Moor Park), and IV (Suffolk) are uncommon and we have not systematically recorded them. Nevertheless, in seeking out rings of Type I it has become clear that rings of these variant bezel shapes are uncommon. Of the more than fifty British rings re-

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**Fig. 1** A typology of bezel shapes. The majority of Brancaster rings are of Type I. Types II (Amersham), III (Ickham) and IV (Unknown, Suffolk) are best considered variant types.

**Fig. 2** A typology of bezel forms. (A) raised box bevel, (B) transverse projection, (C) incipient box bezel, (D) stepped bezel.
corded in our corpus forty-eight have rectangular or square bezels (Type I). In nine cases only the bezel survives and the ring form cannot be determined. The rings are classified according to the typological scheme in the following way.

- type IA1: fourteen rings;
- type IA2: seven rings;
- type IB1: one ring;
- type IB2: three rings;
- type IC1: two rings;
- type IC2: ten rings;
- total: thirty-nine rings.

This emphasises the comparative rarity of Type IB and it is perhaps worth noting one example of this form, the ring from Roundway Down, that has to be considered an import on the basis of its Greek inscription (cat. 9). Alternatively, the relatively large number of disassociated bezels may be derived from the IB type. The form of attachment between ring and bezel might encourage easy separation.

Shoulder decoration is restricted to eighteen rings in the corpus. Decorative designs vary considerably from quite complex (cat. 7) to very simple (cat. 8). Decoration is largely restricted to rings of Type IA (ten examples) and Type IC (six examples).

One striking aspect of these rings is the fact that the vast majority of them were manufactured in precious metal. Silver rings dominate the corpus and this is not just a reflection of the propensity of Late Romano-Britons to hoard silver, as most of the silver rings are stray finds. The small number of gold rings emphasises this pattern further and, once again, the odd ring comes from a hoard context, but most are stray finds.

Copper-alloy rings form a minor component in the corpus and allied types in jet, which are known, need not concern us here. These bronze rings follow the precious metal examples very clearly in terms of form and decoration. Given the number of Roman period finger-rings routinely discovered in Britain from both excavations and metal-detecting, it is surprising that there are not more of these base-metal rings known. We may tentatively suggest that the preferred media for these rings was gold and silver and consequently implies elite ownership.

Chronology

The chronology of the rings is something of a puzzle, although all commentators are united in seeing them as late. In this section we review the associations (both stratigraphic and artefactual) that the Brancaster rings have, alongside a consideration of the stylistic attributes.

On stylistic grounds, a potential origin for the Brancaster rings could be sought in the well-known Constantinian fides rings. These have a narrow band, usually inscribed constantino or similar, and a rectangular bezel inscribed fides or fideum. Such rings were almost certainly

30 M. Henig, An early Christian signet-ring from the Roman villa at Moor Park. Hertfordshire Arch. 9, 1983, 184 s.
imperial gifts to faithful army officers. However, it is difficult to see these rings as the origin of the Brancaster form. The rectangular (rather than square) and often barely raised bezel, the lack of a decorative border and the exclusively epigraphic decoration cannot be easily paralleled in the Brancaster type. Thus, we do not see the Fides rings as being an early fourth-century progenitor of the Brancaster ring.

Finds from archaeological excavations ought to help in determining the date of rings of the Brancaster form but unfortunately only a small number have been found in these circumstances. Of those that have been found in excavations, only three have been recovered from stratified contexts. The two rings from Fifhead Neville were found together alongside a small hoard of copper-alloy bracelets and a silver chain in the fill of a pit cut through the floor of a late Roman villa (cat. 10 and 11). The excavations pre-date the Second World War but the coin list from the site runs to a «denarius» (sic, for «siliqua»?) of Gratian and a very late fourth or fifth century date would seem appropriate for the stratigraphic position of these finds. This date is strengthened by the use of a rho-cross on one of the rings. The rho-cross was used rarely from the middle of the fourth century on coins but it probably would not have entered common usage in Britain until after A. D. 388, when Theodosian nummi bearing the symbol entered circulation. The other «ring» is in fact a silver bezel from the «dark earth» deposits that accumulated in the late fourth or fifth century in London’s amphitheatre (cat. 47). This bezel is of an unusual form (Type ID) and the design is atypical too. Another atypical ring (not included in the corpus: Type III) is the example from the villa or sanctuary site at Moor Park, depicting two doves flanking a palm branch. This ring was found along with Theodosian coins (A. D. 388–402) in an ash layer filling a hypocaust and sealed by a thin mortar spread.

The Great Horwood hoard consists of the ring, two spoons, a pin, a penannular brooch and a beaker, all except the beaker complete though the last would have been complete when buried. The remaining rings are all found among hoards of late Roman coins and Hacksilber. It is worth reiterating one of the fundamental tenets of relative dating: the coins in these hoards merely provide a terminus post quem. They do not identify a date of manufacture for a ring or provide a date for its loss. They simply demonstrate that the ring must have been deposited after the year of the coin’s minting.

Five hoards contain Brancaster rings. Of these, the ring with the earliest coin-based terminus post quem is the example from Wantage (cat. 12). Unfortunately, it is unclear as to whether this antiquarian discovery was really part of a hoard. A small group of silver coins that may have been associated with the ring were described as «from Julianus II downwards».
these rings to be of fifth-century manufacture. The coins provide some support to this dating but, as with the Wantage ring, the age of the discovery has confused the issue. The original report describes the rings as being found with coins from »Postumus to Theodosius II« (r. A. D. 408–450). A coin of Theodosius II would provide a very late date for the deposition of the rings but Roman coins as late as this are extremely rare in Britain and most commentators have taken »Theodosius II« to be an error for Theodosius I (r. A. D. 379–395).

The rings from South Ferriby (cat. 13) and Whorlton (cat. 14) were both from silver hoards containing issues of Honorius and Arcadius. Most of the South Ferriby coins were clipped, with approximately a third described as severely clipped. Only parts of the Whorlton hoard, which originally weighed two stone (12, 7 kg), have survived but it too includes clipped siliquae.

The final ring is the gold example from Great Stanmore (cat. 15). Found with an uncertain number of silver coins, gold solidi and other precious objects, this ring has the latest provable terminus post quem. Of the forty recorded solidi, one proved to be an issue of Constantine III, so only after A. D. 407 can the hoard have been deposited.

Fifth-century dates of deposition are also plausible for the South Ferriby and Whorlton rings. The peculiarly British phenomenon of clipping siliquae has been commented upon by a number of scholars. The most recent discussions by Abdy suggest that the clipping must have taken place after the deposition of the Stanchester hoard about A. D. 406 but before the deposition of the Patching and hoard around A. D. 470. He goes on to suggest that clipping began as a policy of Constantine III and continued for some unknown length of time with coins decreasing in size. If this reconstruction of the process is correct, then both South Ferriby and Whorlton might have been deposited in the middle of the fifth century or thereafter. Some supporting evidence for this does, in fact, come from the Whorlton hoard, which contained a silver tongue from a belt buckle. This object is best paralleled by examples from the Traprain hoard and a mid-fifth century grave at Krefeld Gellep. Of course, even if the clipping of siliquae took place in the middle of the fifth century, we have no way of knowing for how long the silver continued to circulate. It is possible, as evidence from Pictish silver hoards in Scotland may be showing, that Roman silver objects were being hoarded and deposited into the sixth century and perhaps even beyond.

It is unfortunate that so few of the rings in the British corpus have any associated dating evidence. Of those that do, the rings cannot have been deposited any earlier than the very last decades of the fourth century and the majority must have been deposited during the fifth century. Of course, there is a world of difference between a date of deposition and a date of manufacture but the lateness of these rings is remarkable. It should also be noted that the absence of this ring type in contexts dateable to the early or mid-fourth century is further confirmatory evidence of their lateness, as is the dating evidence for many of the Continental rings (below).

38 Henig, Roman Wiltshire (cat. 9) 122 s. fig. 6, 15; Henig, Corpus 23 and fn. 60.
39 Ouvry, Amesbury rings (cat. 5).
40 Walton/Moorhead, Coinage and collapse (note 20).
41 Robertson, Inventory no. 146.
42 St John O’Neil, South Ferriby (cat. 13) 269 s.
43 Burnett, Whorlton (cat. 14) 112.
44 Robertson, Inventory no. 1619.
46 Abdy (previous note); R. Abdy Oxborough, Norfolk/ Patching and Oxborough. The latest coin hoards from Roman Britain of the first early medieval hoards from England. Coin Hoards from Roman Britain 12, 2009, 393–395.
47 Burnett, Whorlton (cat. 14) 113.
Rings with a bust or busts

Ten rings from the British corpus have bezels decorated with one or more busts. The obvious starting point for an analysis of this group is the gold ring from Great Stanmore, which is unfortunately only known from an antiquarian drawing (cat. 15). The ring has a rectangular bezel and two facing busts in intaglio: one male and the other female. The quality of the engraving is high and executed in a Classical style. Similar rings are well known and they are usually seen as the beginning of the later sequence of Byzantine marriage and betrothal rings. Jeffrey Spier favours a start date in the fourth century for this type of design on art-historical grounds, while Marvin Ross favours a late fourth- to early fifth-century date. Such a late date would certainly be appropriate for female Grave 26 from Cortrat (comp. 2, F), which included a gold ring with a rectangular bezel figuring facing male and female busts and a ring from Certosa di Pavia (comp. 21, I) associated with Honorian solidi. The Great Stanmore ring, as we have seen, was deposited in the fifth century.

Within the group of Brancaster rings the best stylistic parallel for the Great Stanmore ring is an unpublished example, purportedly found in the nineteen-eighties in Langport, which has recently been offered for sale by a London dealer (cat. 16). This silver ring displays facing male and female portraits on a square bezel surrounded by a border of dots. The style is typically late Roman. Rather different is the eponymous ring from Brancaster, which displays two confronted busts and the text vivav / in deo (cat. 1). Attention has been drawn to the style of engraving on this ring, which makes considerable use of the vertical drill and led Joce-lyn Toynbee to comment on its crudity.

Both of these rings are broadly paralleled in terms of design by a silver ring from North Dorset (cat. 17, Fig. 5) and a silver bezel from South Cambridgeshire (cat. 18, Fig. 7). The North Dorset ring depicts two facing busts with an uncertain device between them. Both busts have what are either elaborate hair arrangements (as shown on the Brancaster ring) or more likely

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51 Spier, Gems 24.

52 Ross, Dumbarton Oaks (note 49) 49.

53 For instance Spier, Gems no. 40.
Corinthian helmets. This arrangement immediately recalls the four helmed busts on one of the silver rings from Amesbury. A single helmed bust is also depicted on a gold ring from Richborough (cat. 19). The ring from South Cambridgeshire has two helmed figures confronting one another and divided by a line in a manner very reminiscent of the North Dorset ring. The use of helmets on these rings surely precludes their function as marriage or betrothal rings and perhaps indicates their use by individuals interested in martial qualities.

The Richborough ring takes this discussion towards an important group of Brancaster rings decorated with individual busts. A number of these rings are exceptional objects but one starting point might be the ring decorated with an imperial bust from Roundway Down (cat. 9). Unusually for Britain, this silver ring has the inscription ΝΙΧΙ in Greek along the right hand side of the bezel. This device on this ring must surely have been a statement of the wearer’s commitment to the victory of the emperor and the army. It is difficult to see it as anything other than the possession of a soldier in the late fourth- or early fifth-century army in Britain.

Similar in style are silver rings from Chedworth and Caistor-St-Edmunds (cat. 20 and 21, Fig. 4). The Chedworth ring shows a male bust in intaglio on a square bezel surrounded by a dotted border. This bust is not, however, obviously intended as an imperial personage. The Caistor ring bezel is described as having »a male head and the blundered legend v[iv]as in deoi«, while Roger Tomlin rendered the text RSN / DEDI and describes the bust as »of a negro (?) cut in intaglio«. The illustration in Frances Mawer’s work suggests that the former was the intended reading. What must be understood as an imperial representation is a boldly executed bust in intaglio on a bezel from Horncastle (cat. 22). Most obvious are the spiky hair and the exaggerated diadem with long tassels even if the bust itself is rather crudely rendered. Stylistically this bezel immediately recalls the design of the Senicianus ring (cat. 3), where a rodent-like figure is depicted with spiky hair and a diadem of punched dots. The bust on the Silchester ring is labelled V/NVS, although »we cannot imagine, at least not by iconographic standards that are attested in Greco-Roman tradition […] that this image represents Venus«. There is a secondary inscription around the exterior of the facetted ten-sided hoop that reads /S/ν/ν/Ι/α/Σ/Ι/Λ/ν/ν/Ι/α/Σ/Ι/Λ (Senicianus vivas in Deo) and much discussion about this ring has focussed on whether it is the same ring noted by one Silvanus in a Lydney curse tablet as being stolen from him by the

54 Henig, Roman Britain (note 19) 195.
This discussion is, sadly, futile. It cannot be proven that the ring in the curse is the same as the Silchester object nor can it be proven that it is not.

The Horncastle and Silchester rings are important in that they indicate the use of what must be intended as imperial or quasi-imperial busts on the Brancaster rings. Paul Corby Finney favours a local Romano-British context for the production of the Senicianus ring and suggests that the individual who cut the bezel may have also produced dies for the striking of local imitations of Roman coins. This seems a plausible explanation and the busts on both the Senicianus ring and the Horncastle bezel will look immediately familiar to anyone used to handling the irregular fourth-century coinage of Britain. This does not need to imply that either were necessarily manufactured in the fourth century. High quality imitations of late fourth-century siliquae are known and there seems no reason to suppose that the die-cutters for those coins could not have turned their hands to engraving ring bezels in the early fifth century.

Rings with Christograms

Six rings of the Brancaster type are engraved with Christograms of one form or another. A bronze ring from Richborough, with hoop of nine facets, fits neatly into the sub-type exemplified by the Senicianus ring from Silchester discussed above (cat. 3). Each of the facets has a border of dots and the hoop carries the inscription IVST/IN/ES IV/IN/D/E. The rectangular bezel contains a Chi-Rho in intaglio flanked by an inverted Lambda and Omega (cat. 4). This is the form of Chi-Rho seen both on the Hinton-St-Mary mosaic and upon the coinage of Magnentius.

The bronze ring from Richborough is important evidence for Christianity at the site, where a church and baptistry have been identified, but when compared to the remaining rings decorated with Christograms it is, nevertheless, in itself a relatively humble object. The gold rings from Brentwood (cat. 23) and an unknown location in Suffolk (cat. 2) are both atypical Brancaster types. The former has a circular bezel containing a retrograde Chi-Rho in intaglio, surrounded by a border of dots. The latter has an octagonal bezel with a retrograde Chi-Rho beneath vines sheltering a bird. More typical are the two silver rings (now lost) from Fifehead Neville (cat. 10 and 11). One of these has a Chi-Rho on its rectangular bezel and the other a Chi-Rho with a horizontal cross bar (Rho-Cross). Finally, there is a silver bezel, said to be from Yorkshire and now in Munich (cat. 24), with a retrograde Christogram surrounded by a border of punched dots.

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57 RIB II 3 no. 2422.14; Corby Finney, Senicianus (previous note) 192–194: Henig, Corpus 186 and references therein.
58 Corby Finney, Senicianus.
61 RIB II 3 nos. 2422.16 and 2422.17; Johns, Jewellery 67.
62 RIB II 3 nos. 2422.44 and 2422.45.
Rings with geometric or abstract designs

Four rings have bezels that can be loosely grouped together as abstract or geometric designs and of these two were, perhaps, intended to be Christograms or influenced by rings decorated with Chi-Rhgos. The first is a copper-alloy ring from St Albans with saltires on its shoulders and a saltire on its bezel, one diagonal of which is barred at either end. The second is a fragmentary silver ring from Hambleton (cat. 25), with shoulders decorated with incised lines. The bezel of this ring has a lightly engraved saltire divided by a vertical line. The ring and its design are paralleled by an example from Trier (comp. 10, D) and another from Tongeren (comp. 5, B).

The third ring, from King’s Lynn (cat. 26), is made from copper-alloy and has a narrow hoop with a square, stepped bezel. The bezel is decorated with four dots, one in each quarter, which are surrounded by concentric rings. This ring may either reflect the taste for dot-and-ring that is so common in late Roman and early medieval decoration, or alternatively it might be an attempt to emulate a bezel design like the one with four busts from Amesbury. Finally, a thin copper-alloy bezel from a rural site at Salford Priors has a border of punched dots enclosing an L-shaped motif surrounded by more punched dots (cat. 53).

Rings decorated with text or inscriptions

A number of rings that include texts have already been discussed in previous sections. This category of rings is reserved for those that exhibit only texts upon their bezels. The finest example is a silver ring with decorated shoulders from Southern Norfolk (cat. 27). Its rectangular bezel, complete with dotted border dots, bears the inscription vti / felix (use this happily). This is a common motto upon late Roman and early medieval decoration, or alternatively it might be an attempt to emulate a bezel design like the one with four busts from Amesbury. Finally, a thin copper-alloy bezel from a rural site at Salford Priors has a border of punched dots enclosing an L-shaped motif surrounded by more punched dots (cat. 53).

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63 For parallels see RIB II 3 no. 2442.28 (from Southwark) and R. Tomlin, Inscriptions. Britannia 47, 2016, 389–485: 385 no. 10, a gold ring from Lydney both of which are probably earlier, perhaps third century.
S retrograde) (cat. 29). This inscription appears unintelligible but the final line might be a blundered vivas. Finally there is a silver ring from Richborough with a monogram engraved on its bezel and a hoop embellished with a curvilinear design which was exhibited at a Society of Antiquaries ballot in 1975 (cat. 52). The monogram has been read as Latin, reading basia, suggesting a fifth or even a sixth century date. As Spier notes, Roman monogram gems are often as early as the third century in date but this all-metal ring from Richborough is clearly of Late Roman form and may be broadly compared with a bronze ring, said to be from Italy, with a monogram in a rectangular bezel dated to the late fifth century.

To the British examples we may add a ring from Caux (comp. 27, F). This ring, with a narrow hoop and a rectangular bezel has the inscription vivas / in deo in retrograde. The lines of text are divided by a horizontal bar and the bezel has a dotted border. The cemetery was in use from the third to the fifth century.

These rings, to which may be added the rings from Silchester, Richborough, Roundway Down, and Caistor discussed above, are all part of a broader group of inscribed rings with deep antecedents in the Roman period. Parallels for the use of ‘vivas’ are numerous. ‘Vivas in Deo’ is surely Christian and other uses of ‘vivas’, as in the South Norfolk ring, may also have had a Christian significance or simply been intended to convey felicitations. Perhaps more importantly these rings demonstrate the importance of the written word as an indicator of identity to both the wearer, viewer and recipient of any documents sealed with such signets.

Rings decorated with birds and beasts

The largest group of rings have bezels depicting birds – often doves and peacocks – and these depictions clearly fall within a Late Antique and Christian cultural milieu. There is also a small number of rings that are decorated with other kinds of animals and fantastic beasts.

The rings decorated with birds can be divided into a number of groups based upon their iconography. The gold ring from Brentwood (cat. 23) has already been discussed but here the juxtaposition of a bird amongst the fruiting vine and the Chi-Rho below should be noted. A similar arrangement of dove above a Christogram flanked by foliage is represented on the ring (cat. 11) from Fifhead Neville. To these examples may be added: the fragment of a gold ring from South Holland (Lincolnshire) depicting a dove, with olive branch in its beak and a line representing the ground (cat. 30, Fig. 6); and a silver ring from Wiltshire with two opposed birds divided by foliage (cat. 31, Fig. 13). All four of these rings have undoubted Christian significance and refer to the dove released by Noah (Genesis 8, 11).

A copper-alloy bezel from Haddenham depicts a bird with a prominent tail standing on a horizontal line and surrounded by incomplete border of dots (cat. 32, Fig. 8). The tail seems likely to indicate that this bird may be intended as a peacock, a well-known motif in late antique art with Christian connotations, and well attested on a group of Romano-British buckle plates.

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65 Spier, Gems 188 no. R100.
66 For instance Henkel, Römische Fingerringe no. 98.
67 Johns, Jewellery 67.
and strap-ends dated to the late fourth and especially the early fifth century.68 Another possible peacock is figured on a copper-alloy bezel from Richborough (cat. 33), which shows a creature looking over its shoulder at a rosette formed of a circle of dots with a central point. Elements of further rosettes are beneath the creature’s feet. The creature on this lost bezel can be compared with a seventh-century ring in the British Museum69 but it also shares a number of similarities with a silver-ring from Canterbury, which depicts a standing bird with a crested head and a boldly rendered tail formed of three lines (cat. 34, Fig. 14). This bird is set within a border of punched dots and the remaining space is filled, as on the Richborough bezel, with rosettes.

The association of birds with circular motifs is continued by a ring from Cirencester, which shows a bird with a wheel or solar disc at its feet (cat. 35). The Cirencester bird is not, however, a peacock and the avian in question has a similar posture to a bird surrounded by a border of punched dots on a silver bezel from Creissels (comp. 23, F). A silver bezel from Sleaford continues the theme with a bird standing between two punched dots (cat. 36, Fig. 9). Interestingly the border of dots on this example contains two cells filled with what appears to be cream enamel. Another silver ring, found unstratified at the Bancroft Villa, shows a standing bird between four stars and within a border of punched dots (cat. 37). Astronomical or astrological phenomena may be similarly referred to by a silver ring from Compton showing a bird accompanied by a crescent (moon?) above and another crescent below (cat. 38).

Other lone birds are depicted on silver bezels from West Dorset (cat. 39, Fig. 12), Winchester (cat. 40) and on a metal detector find discussed online but otherwise unreported (cat. 41). The latter bird, set within a border of punched dots, is surely intended to depict a dove. Rather different in style is the silver ring from Deopham, with a narrow hoop, and a bezel showing a deeply carved, almost chip-carved, bird interpreted as a cockerel (cat. 42, Fig. 15). This example is paralleled by a ring from Buerggruef (comp. 12, L). Of more typical form are the silver rings from Whorlton (cat. 14) and Bays Meadow, Droitwich (cat. 43). The former depicts a curiously rendered long-legged bird and the latter seemingly shows a duck, also the subject on the bezel of a gold ring from Mayence.70 Both the Whorlton and Droitwich birds are bounded by a border of punched dots.

Sea creatures are a well-known element within late Roman art. A silver bezel from East Riding of Yorkshire depicts two opposed curving lines, plausibly interpreted as dolphins, separated by a triangular area of dots and within a dotted border (cat. 44, Fig. 10). The silver bezel from Gastard depicting two beasts separated by a branch is deserving of mention (cat. 45). These animals can be interpreted as marine creatures although they may equally and perhaps more likely be intended to represent birds. More certain is the fine silver-ring decorated with confronted sea creatures from Wantage (cat. 12). These beasts appear to be winged, with clearly marine tails at the end of long sinuous bodies. They bear comparison with the sea-griffin depicted on a mosaic from Cirencester.71 Their heads are turned away from each other, but their forelimbs clutch a ring, in the manner of stylised victories holding wreaths on fourth-century coins. Stylistically this ring


69 Dalton, Catalogue (comp. 1) no. 166; Hadjadj, Bagues Mérovingiennes no. 562.

70 Henkel, Römische Fingerringe no. 97; Chadour, Ringe (note 49) no. 448.

71 S. Cosh / D. Neal, Roman Mosaics of Britain IV. Western Britain (London 2010) figs. 91 and 93 d.
is very close to three rings from Amesbury. Of these, two depict animals: a stag looking over its shoulder at a bird (cat. 5) and a griffin (cat. 7). A fragmentary copper-alloy ring from South Cambridgeshire is also claimed to show a «decorative motif depicting a horse’s head forward facing turned left. The horse’s mane is clearly formed by a series of closely set parallel diagonal lines toward the right hand side of the bezel» (cat. 46), although this design is unclear from the original photograph.

A highly unusual ring from Nether Wallop is decorated with a fascinating design (cat. 54, Fig. 17). The square bezel of this silver ring is engraved with a wyrm-like creature curled twice around its tail and widening towards a broad flat head which appears to be devouring a quadruped (?) which vainly tries to escape towards one corner. The body of the creature is composed of V-shaped cuts, presumably to present a scaly appearance, though the same technique is employed for the long tail of a beaked monster on a frieze engraved around the hoop of a copper alloy ring from Barton Court Farm (Oxfordshire)\(^\text{72}\). The other three corners are cut with an X-shaped mark (possibly intended for a star) shown on some other rings of Brancaster type.

The inspiration for the design may have come from the finding of fossil ammonites, sometimes in folklore thought to be petrified snakes. It seems appropriate to use the Old English word ›wyrm‹ for this creature, for it looks forward to the monsters of Anglo-Saxon art and Grendel and his mother in the epic poem Beowulf.

The final ring depicting an animal is the stepped bezel (Type ID) from London’s amphitheatre. This ring, like the previous example, is exceptional for depicting in intaglio an unusual animal: in this case a very classical lion looking over his shoulder (cat. 47). Lions are perhaps best interpreted as symbols of strength and manly virtue, although an astrological significance cannot be ruled out.

A ring with a plain bezel

The bezel of the Great Horwood ring (cat. 51) is completely plain apart from »very small crescentic tool-marks« which were just visible, and is in very fresh condition, suggesting it was unfinished and thus strongly implying local manufacture.

Distribution

The distribution of the rings presents an interesting, if not easily explicable, pattern (Fig. 18). They are predominantly distributed in the south and east of Roman Britain and the Fosse Way forms something of a boundary (Fig. 19). This pattern contrasts somewhat with the distribution of all Roman finger-rings recorded on the Portable Antiquities Scheme database (Fig. 20). However, the distribution does share much with the spread of late fourth-century coinage (Fig. 21). Whether this is a casual or causal relationship is difficult to determine. It may for instance be that these rings were most likely to be used in regions that were also well integrated into the late Roman economy. The absence of rings from the northern frontier zone is also worthy of note.

It is, perhaps, more useful to think of the distribution in terms of clusters. This would emphasise a south-western group of sites in and around Wiltshire. Additionally, a focus in East Anglia may be noted, but this could simply be a consequence of the well-known over-representation of East Anglia in metal detector finds. Two less prominent clusters are the scattering of rings throughout Lincolnshire and Yorkshire as well as a small group in eastern Kent.

\(^{72}\) M. Henig / P. Booth, Roman Oxfordshire (Stroud 2000) 196 s. fig. 7, 8.
There is also value in plotting the distribution of the rings against known villa sites. Here the correlation of the south-western cluster with the well-known dense grouping of late Roman villas in this region can be noted. In East Anglia and the Midlands no such correlation is apparent, although villas are less common in these regions. This underlines another aspect of the distribution: the majority of rings are found in rural locations. This might be simply a consequence of patterns of metal-detecting but the small number of rings from towns that have seen extensive excavation is striking. Where associations between the ring find spots and known sites can be made the correlation often seems, as the distribution map suggests, to be with villas. A small number of rings has also been found at Shore Forts. The eponymous Brancaster ring is the classic example, but the group from Richborough is noteworthy and perhaps best explained as a consequence of that fort’s long history of excavation.

Some European comparanda

Hélène Guiraud’s study of Gallo-Roman finger-rings contains only one example, which she assigns to her Type 4e, of a silver ring that could possibly be interpreted as akin to the Brancaster type. It has a rectangular bezel decorated with a possible christogram and was found in Lazer (comp. 22, F). The absence of further examples is surprising, particularly as Friedrich Henkel’s catalogue contains a number of late Roman rings from Germany that are comparable to some of the Brancaster forms. Nevertheless, of late French archaeologists have begun to identify rings as being of the Brancaster type.

In this section we do not attempt to offer an exhaustive or comprehensive discussion of the Continental parallels for the British corpus. Instead, we offer a small number of rings that provide useful points of comparison with the British rings and some of these have already been alluded to above. These emphasise that the Brancaster ring is both a product of Roman Britain and part of a broader late antique repertoire of personal adornment. The European rings also shed some interesting light on the chronology of the British rings (Fig. 22).

Henkel’s detailed catalogue contains a number of rings that can be considered akin to the Brancaster type. There is a gold ring from Velp (comp. 6, NL), which parallels the Roundway Down ring, decorated with a single bust on a square bezel surrounded by a border of punched dots. It was part of a hoard of objects including another ring and necklaces. In the same region another hoard of gold objects, including coins to A.D. 425, was discovered and the two hoards are usually considered as contemporary with one another. Henkel also describes a similar ring, with a female bust and inscribed MARINA VIVAS, from the River Ruwer (comp. 9, D). A gold ring from Certosa di Pavia, depicting a crudely styled bust and clearly akin to the Brancaster series (comp. 21, I), also deserves comment, as it was associated in a hoard with solidi of Honorius. Another gold ring from a hoard from Trivolzio, near Pavia (comp. 20, I), depicts two facing busts surrounded by a border of punched dots in a style very reminiscent of the Brancaster and Great Stanmore rings. The other objects from this hoard, two other rings and four necklaces suggest, on stylistic grounds, a fifth century date.

Henkel discusses four further silver rings that can be broadly classed as Brancaster forms (Type IA1 and IC1). The first one, from Trier, of unknown provenance, has a bezel inscribed with a saltire (comp. 10, D). The bezel on the second ring, from Zilling (comp. 13, F), is defaced, but the third and fourth rings, both from the River Ill in Alsace, have bezels decorated with two confronted busts and a Chi-Rho respectively (comp. 14 and 15, F). Another ring with a Chi-Rho
Fig. 18 (above) Brancaster rings from Britain. (diamonds) gold, (circles) silver, (triangles) copper-alloy.
Fig. 19 (below) The distribution of Brancaster rings in Britain and the Roman road network.
Fig. 20 (above)  Brancaster rings in Britain (see Fig. 18) and all finger-rings recorded by the Portable Antiquities Scheme (grey circles).

Fig. 21 (below)  Brancaster rings in Britain (see Fig. 18) and all coins of the House of Theodosius (AD 388–402) recorded by the Portable Antiquities Scheme (grey circles).
on a rectangular bezel (Type IC1) comes from a fourth-century grave at Tongeren (comp. 5, B). This ring is similar to the example from Hambleton (cat. 25). To these we may add the probably Gallo-Roman gold ring now in Munich (cat. 24). This finger-ring has a square bezel with a Chi-Rho surrounded by a border of punched dots (akin to a Type IAtd). The shoulders of the ring are decorated with engraved lines in a manner reminiscent of the Amesbury rings (cat. 5–7).

Roman period cemeteries in Germany and Austria have also yielded a number of rings that appear to be similar in form to the Brancaster type. A bronze ring from female grave 5470 at Krefeld-Gellep has an undecorated raised square bezel and is close to what we could classify as a Type IA1; the grave is dated to the first half of the fifth century (comp. 7, D). A fourteen-to-sixteen-year-old was buried in Grave 5 at Eschweiler-Lohn with a corroded bronze ring broadly comparable to our Type IC2 (comp. 8, D). The grave is dated to the end of the fourth century. There is also a bronze ring with a bezel decorated by three crossed lines from Grave 1002 at Bregenz (comp. 19, A). This finger-ring is broadly comparable to our type IC2 and is dated to the last decades of the fourth century.

In France the silver bezel decorated with a bird from Creissels (comp. 23, F) has already been mentioned and it is joined by another bezel, also depicting a bird but in copper alloy, from a pit dated to the final third of the fourth or first quarter of the fifth century at Marolles-sur-Seine (comp. 3, F). The form, style and date of these bezels are certainly in keeping with the British examples. There is also a gold ring from Montaut-les-Crénaux (IA1) (comp. 26, F) with a dove and foliage engraved on its bezel. This, unfortunately unstratified, ring can be compared with the South Holland ring (cat. 30, Fig. 6).

At Castelnau-de-Guers a single pit, dated to the beginning of the early medieval period, contained two rings that conform to the Brancaster types defined above (comp. 24 and 25, F). One of these is a ring with an incipient bezel (Type IC1) and the other with a bezel wider than its hoop (Type IC2). Both depict geometric designs possibly intended as monograms with the first also capable of being plausibly interpreted as a stylised bird. The bezel designs of both rings share little with the British corpus but the ring forms are well paralleled.

The ring from Buerggruef (comp. 12, L) has been noted above in connection with the Deopham ring. The style of the Grevenmacher example is strikingly different from the majority of British examples. The deeply engraved, almost chip-carved, rendering of a bird recalls another bird on a ring from Augst, although the illustration is not clear enough to make one certain of the similarity (comp. 18, CH). There is also a chip-carved, square bezelled ring depicting Daniel and the lion from Trier (comp. 11, D). Two other late Roman rings from Augst can be classed as Type IC rings with incipient box bezels (comp. 16 and 17, CH).

A ring from a late fourth- and fifth-century cemetery in Malbosc (comp. 28, F) is identified in the report as a Brancaster type ring typical of British examples dating from the end of the fourth or early fifth century. The ring in question has a green soapstone gem with an eagle and star engraved upon it in intaglio. The stone is set on a wire hoop. This description should demonstrate that this particular ring cannot be classified as a Brancaster type. It illustrates that the term has been adopted by Continental colleagues but is not always being used to describe the correct ring form.

The Malbosc ring emphasises that very few of the continental rings discussed here truly conform to the classic Brancaster type (Type IA), which represents forty percent of the British corpus. A ring, allegedly from Poitiers and now in the British Museum (comp. 1, F), is the closest continental parallel for the classic Brancaster form. It is in silver, with a raised box bezel and a broad hoop (Type IA1). The rectangular bezel has a border of punched dots, divided centrally by another line of dots. To either side of this line is the monogram IANE/OVT. Monograms were a feature of fourth-century communication and visual media and continued to be used in the Byzantine East until the seventh century77. They were also popular in the early medieval west78
and it is to the Merovingian period that the Poitiers ring has been assigned. Without doubt the monogram is unparalleled in Romano-British rings but there are clear affinities with the silver ring from South Norfolk.

Another Merovingian ring of relevance comes from T ombe 154 in the cemetery at Nimy (comp. 4, B). This silver ring has a barely raised rectangular bezel (Type IC) with a border of punched dots. Within this border are two dot-and-ring motifs with long tails of punched dots. Usually this design is interpreted as an extremely stylised moustachioed face and parallels have been drawn with the rendering of the faces on the gold bees found in Childeric’s grave. The Nimy ring is perhaps further from Brancaster rings than the Poitiers piece but the bezel design, conceivably recalling the abstract dot and ring arrangements or the opposed figures seen on some British rings, suggests it deserves consideration here.

Space and time have not permitted a comprehensive or exhaustive analysis of Brancaster type rings in Gaul, the Germanic provinces and Spain. There are clear parallels to be drawn between some Romano-British and continental rings and further research in this area is desirable. What is interesting from the limited study so far is the lateness of some stratified European Brancaster type rings. If nothing else, the continental rings reinforce the suggestion that the Brancaster type is of the late fourth and fifth century. The Poitiers and Nimy rings, along with stylistic parallels

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78 Hadjadj, Bagues Mérovingiennes 2007.
79 Dalton, Catalogue (comp. 1) 24 cat. 147.
80 Hadjadj, Bagues Mérovingiennes 318.
among other Merovingian examples, strengthen the likelihood that some of the Brancaster rings in Britain date to the fifth, rather than the fourth century.

Concluding remarks

The number of Brancaster type rings recorded from Britain remains small but is still considerably larger than the corpus discussed by Johns in the nineteen-nineties. Where these rings are associated with dating evidence they are all assignable to the very late fourth century or to the fifth century. The evidence of similar continental rings supports this late dating, as does the absence of these rings stratified in third or early to mid-fourth-century contexts. The stylistic attributes of some of the rings must also place them firmly within an early medieval cultural context too. As such the Brancaster type ring must join the growing number of Roman object types that can be assigned to the fifth century and are eroding the boundary between late Roman and early medieval. Such developments are not entirely unexpected and should shed new light on fifth-century developments.

Finger-rings formed one component of the package of dress accessories that was popularized during Britain’s incorporation within the Roman Empire. Many thousands of rings are known but they, like many other object types, fell from favour during the fifth century. There are few finger-rings from Early Anglo-Saxon sites and they tend to be either simple bands or spiral rings or Roman objects reused or repurposed. The Brancaster rings are thus the last flowering of the Romano-British ring-wearing tradition and should be seen in the context of late Roman and indigenous post-Roman social development, rather than as an element of early Anglo-Saxon material culture.

The materials from which most of the Brancaster rings were manufactured, demonstrate that these were items of elite material culture. The notion of value can perhaps be approached, if only crudely, by comparing the known weights of complete gold and silver rings. Using Hobbs’s ratio of one gram of gold to fifteen grams of silver allows the rings to be ranked (Table 1). This emphasises the relative values of these rings to one another and demonstrates the exceedingly high value of the gold examples. The Ring from Suffolk (cat. 2), for instance, is equivalent to just over six and one seventh solidi, the equivalent of more than a pound of silver. All of the gold and silver rings may be viewed as ‘high status’ objects but clearly some were of a substantially higher value and probably implying higher status than others.

The wearers of Brancaster rings all shared a desire to possess and wear an individualised object. In some cases, the iconography of the ring bears a clear ideological message. The group with explicitly Christian designs must be a testament to the beliefs of their owners, and in some cases these designs conform quite closely to those mentioned as appropriate by the third-century ecclesiastic Clement of Alexandria. The rings bearing overtly Christian devices (such as the Chi-Rho) and those with subtler Christian iconography, such as the rings intended as tokens of marriage or engagement and ‘vivas’ texts, also fall within this cultural context. It may not be going too far to suggest that the octagonal gold ring from Suffolk (cat. 2) might have been the pos-

81 Johns, Jewellery.
83 G. Owen-Crocker, Dress in Anglo-Saxon England (Woodbridge 2004) 80; Swift, re-use and recycling (note 24).
84 R. Hobbs, Late Roman Precious Metal Deposits c. AD 200–700 (Oxford 2006).
86 Clem. Al. Paid 3, 12.
session of bishop or other high churchman. Many of the Brancaster type rings, if the dating advanced above is broadly correct, may therefore have been some of the accoutrements of very late fourth- and fifth-century Christians in Britain.

This returns us to the starting point of this paper. The function of the Brancaster rings and their designs were not simply about advertising the beliefs of their owners. In most, if not all, cases these rings were primarily intended to function as seal or signet rings. In this guise, the ring functioned to secure letters and parcels of valuables through the addition of a wax sealing made unique to the sender by the ring’s impression left upon it. The role of the ring in sealing things which must be kept safe around the home should not be ignored either. The letters, documents and gifts sent by and to individuals like Patrick, Victorius, Riothamus, Gildas, Ruricius, Faustus of Riez, and nameless others lost to the oblivion of time, were probably all adorned with a wax seal. In Britain some at least of these seals may have been impressed by a ring in the Brancaster style. As such these rings are important evidence of the existence of elite social groups engaging in written discourse during the late fourth and fifth centuries.

The status of these social groups, as demonstrated above, probably varied. The gold and silver rings probably belonged to powerful individuals, members and descendants of the villa-dwelling provincial elites. The copper-alloy rings must have been possessed by individuals of lower status. Whatever the status the rings offered a symbol of individual identity. The choices made arguably demonstrate some of the tensions inherent in the fifth-century world. Some chose to display their Christianity, others chose mythical beasts or animals to define themselves and, of course, there is the important group of rings with single busts. In some cases, these aspire to adopt imperial iconography and in others, helmeted heads perhaps allude to not only some imperial portraits but also martial qualities. The Brancaster rings may thus embody one of the fundamental ideological struggles of the Late Antique West: the choice between the Christian civilian life of individuals like Sidonius and the warlordism of Riothamus and others.

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Table 1: Gold and silver Brancaster rings from Britain for which weights are available. Actual weights are shown in dark red, and equivalences are provided in either gold or silver by weight or coin. (*) Weight in Grams.

Dr. James Gerrard, School of History, Classics and Archaeology, Armstrong Building, Newcastle University, Newcastle Upon Tyne NE1 7RU, Great Britain, james.gerrard@newcastle.ac.uk. – Revd. Professor Martin Henig, Institute of Archaeology, 36 Beaumont St., Oxford, OX1 28G, Great Britain.
Appendix A. Catalogue of rings from Britain


(cat. 3) Silchester, Hampshire. – The Vyne, National Trust. – Gold. – Type IA1d. – Bust and text. Inscription: ve/nus and seniciane vivas in de[o]. Hoop decorated. – Henig, Corpus 789; Corby Finney, Senicianus.


(cat. 6) Amesbury, Wiltshire. – British Museum Acc. no. 1857,0630.2. – Silver. – Type IA1d. – Bust. No inscription. Hoop plain. – Ouvry (cat. 5); Henig, Corpus 803.

(cat. 7) Amesbury, Wiltshire. – British Museum Acc. no. 1857,0630.1. – Silver. – Type IA1d. – Griffin. No inscription. Hoop decorated. – Ouvry (cat. 5); Henig, Corpus 801.

(cat. 8) St. Albans, Hertfordshire. – Private Collection. – Copper. – Type IC2d. – Saltire. No inscription. Hoop decorated. – PAS: BH-29CA26.


(cat. 11) Fiffehead Neville, Dorset. – Lost. – Silver. – Type IA2. – Rho-Cross, bird and foliage. No inscription. Hoop plain. – Middleton (cat. 10); Henig, Corpus 795.


(cat. 15) Gr. Stanmore, Middlesex. – Lost. – Gold. – Type IC2. – Busts. No inscription. Hoop plain. – R. Gough, Camden’s Britannia (London 1806) 108 s. pl. 120; Henig, Corpus 791.

(cat. 16) Langport, Somerset. – Private Collection. – Silver. – Type IC2. – Busts. No inscription. Hoop plain. – PAS: BUC-79ACD3.

(cat. 17) North Dorset, Dorset (Fig. 5). – British Museum. – Silver. – Type IA1d. – Busts. No inscription. Hoop decorated. – PAS: BUC-79ACD3.

(cat. 18) South Cambridgeshire, Cambridgeshire (Fig. 7). – Private Collection. – Silver. – Type I. – Opposed figures. No inscription. Hoop NA. – PAS: CAM-8F33A3.
Brancaster type signet rings


(cat. 20) Chedworth, Gloucestershire (Fig. 4). – Cirencester Museum. – Silver. – Type I2c. – Bust. No inscription. Hoop decorated. – PAS: GLO-30DC46; S. Worrell / J. Pearce, Finds reported under the Portable Antiquities Scheme. Britannia 45, 2014, 397–425.


(cat. 22) Horncastle, Lincolnshire. – Private Collection. – Silver. – Type I. – Bust. No inscription. Hoop NA. – UKDFD 35649 (http://www.ukdfd.co.uk/).


(cat. 26) King’s Lynn and West Norfolk, Norfolk. – Private Collection. – Copper. – Type ID2. – Ring and dot. No inscription. Hoop plain. – PAS: NMS-D7DBF2.

(cat. 27) South Norfolk, Norfolk. – British Museum. – Silver. – Type IAtd. – Text. Inscription: vti felix. Hoop decorated. – PAS: NMS180.

(cat. 28) King’s Lynn and West Norfolk, Norfolk (Fig. 16). – Norwich Castle Museum. – Gold. – Type IB2. – Text. Inscription: dom/nica/vivas. Hoop plain. – PAS: NMS-065376.

(cat. 29) South Northamptonshire. – British Museum. – Silver. – Type I. – Text. Inscription: LEGO NICE SVIV. Hoop NA. – PAS: NARC-4tDB75.

(cat. 30) South Holland, Lincolnshire (Fig. 6). – British Museum. – Gold. – Type I2c. – Bird. No inscription. Hoop plain. – PAS: NMS-AF4E73.

(cat. 31) Wiltshire (Fig. 13). – Wiltshire Heritage Museum. – Silver. – Type I2c. – Birds. No inscription. Hoop decorated. – PAS: WILT-D4FD13.

(cat. 32) Haddenham, Buckinghamshire (Fig. 8). – Private Collection. – Copper. – Type I. – Bird. No inscription. Hoop NA. – PAS: BH-976273.


(cat. 34) Canterbury, Kent (Fig. 14). – Canterbury Museum. – Silver. – Type Ic2. – Bird. No inscription. Hoop plain. – PAS: KENT-E3CFD7.

(cat. 35) Cirencester, Gloucestershire. – Cirencester Museum. – Copper. – Type IA2. – Bird and wheel. No inscription. Hoop plain. – M. Henig, A late Roman signet ring from Cirencester. Transact. Bristol and Gloucester 97, 1979, 121–123.

(cat. 36) Sleaford, Lincolnshire (Fig. 9). – Private Collection. – Silver. – Type I. – Bird and two pellets. No inscription. Hoop NA. – PAS: LIN-337C26.

(cat. 37) Bancroft, Buckinghamshire. – Buckinghamshire Museum. – Silver. – Type IA2d. – Bird and four stars. No inscription. Hoop decorated. – R. Williams / R. Zeepvat, Bancroft. A Late Bronze Age / Iron Age settlement, Roman villa and temple mausoleum II. The finds and environmental evidence (Aylesbury 1994) fig. 142 no. 86.

(cat. 38) Compton, West Sussex. – Lost. – Silver. – Type I2c. – Bird and discs. No inscription. Hoop decorated. – PAS: SUSS-112A4D.

(cat. 39) West Dorset, Dorset (Fig. 12). – Private Collection. – Silver. – Type I2c. – Bird. No inscription. Hoop decorated. – PAS: BH-715823.

(cat. 40) Winchester, Hampshire. – Winchester Museum. – Silver. – Type IA2. – Bird. No inscription. Hoop plain. – Martin Henig personal observation.

(cat. 41) Site name unknown, county unknown. – Private Collection. – Silver. – Type Ic1. – Bird. No inscription. Hoop NA. – Seen in an online Metal Detecting Forum in 2016.
Appendix B. Catalogue of rings from continental Europe


(comp. 4) Nimy, Hainaut, Belgium. – Silver. – Type IC1. – Hadjadji, Bagues Mérovingiennes no. 413.


(comp. 6) Velp, Gelderland, The Netherlands. – Gold. – Type IA2. – Henkel, Römische Fingerringe no. 99.


(comp. 8) Eschweiler-Lohn, Germany. – Copper. – Type IC2. – R. Gottschalk, Spätromische
Gräber im Umland von Köln (Darmstadt 2015) 304 pl. 37, 19.

(comp. 9) Ruwer, Germany. – Gold. – Type IA1. – Henkel, Römische Fingerringe no. 98.

(comp. 10) Trier, Germany. – Copper. – Type IA2. – Henkel, Römische Fingerringe no. 399.

(comp. 11) Trier, Germany. – Copper. – Type IA1. – Sas/Thoen, Schone Schijn (comp. 5) no. 246.


(comp. 13) Zilling, near Phalsbourg, Alsace, France. – Silver. – Type IA1. – Henkel, Römische Fingerringe no. 400.

(comp. 14) Ill, near Ehl, Alsace, France. – Silver. – Type IA1. – Henkel, Römische Fingerringe no. 401.

(comp. 15) Ill, near Ehl, Alsace, France. – Silver. – Type IA1. – Henkel, Römische Fingerringe no. 402.

(comp. 16) Augst, Switzerland. – Silver. – Type IC. – E. Riha, Der römische Schmuck aus Augst und Kaiseraugst (Augst 1990) pl. 7 no. 121.

(comp. 17) Augst, Switzerland. – Silver. – Type IC. – Riha (comp. 16) pl. 7 no. 122.

(comp. 18) Augst, Switzerland. – Copper. – Type IB2. – Riha (comp. 16) pl. 8 no. 132.

(comp. 19) Bregenz, Austria. – Copper. – Type IC2. – M. Konrad, Das römische Gräberfeld von Bregenz. Brigantium I (Munich 1997) 86 pl. 12, 10

(comp. 20) Trivolzio, Italy. – Gold. – Type IA1. – N. Degrassi, Trivolzio (Pavia). Rinvenimento di un tesoreto. Not. Scavi Ant. 7 (2), 1941, 303–310.

(comp. 21) Certosa di Pavia, Italy. – Gold. – Type IA1. – G. Patroni, Carpinigno, tesoreto di monet e di oggetti d’oro dell’età di Onorio, scoperto presso la stazione ferroviaria della Certosa di Pavia. Not. Scavi Ant. 1911, 4 s.


(comp. 24) Castelnau-de-Gers, Hérault, France. – Copper. – Type IC2. – M. Feugere / N. Houlet, Un four domestique de l’Antiquité tardive à Castelnau-de-Giers (Hérault). Arch. Languedoc 16, 1992, 152–154, here 152 fig. 7 no. 2.

(comp. 25) Castelnau-de-Guers, Hérault, France. – Copper. – Type IC1. – Feugere/Houlet (comp. 24) 152 fig. 7 no. 3.

(comp. 26) Montaut-les-Crenaux, Gers, France. – Gold. – Type IA1. – Sas/Thoen, Schone Schijn (comp. 5) no. 243.


Image rights. Plates 1–6 Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd, London (Cate Davies). – Figs. 1–3, 18–22 James Gerrard. – Figs. 4–17 PAS.

**Résumé.** Gli anelli tardoantichi del tipo Brancaster consistono interamente di oro o argento. La loro lunetta rialzata di solito porta una decorazione intagliata, che può includere cristogrammi, scritte, animali reali e fantastici nonché teste con elmo e busti femminili o maschili. Questi oggetti fanno parte dell’ambito culturale tardoantico del quarto secolo avanzato e del primo quinto. Si ritrovano in Britannia, ma anche in Gallia e nelle province germaniche e perfino nell’Italia Settentrionale. I gioielli di questo tipo costituiscono una rara testimonianza per la fase finale dell’età romana nella parte nordoccidentale dell’Impero, dove forse vengono usati dall’élite culturale. L’iconografia dimostra come i portatori di questi manufatti, per rappresentare la propria identità o lo specifico status politico-sociale, siano sia simboli cristiani, sia raffigurazioni con allusioni alla forza romana imperiale e militare.

**Résumé.** Les bagues de type Brancaster sont entièrement fai des d’or ou d’argent. Leurs lunettes surélevées présentent dans la plupart des cas des décors intaglio comme des Christogrammes, des lettres, des animaux et des créatures mythiques, ainsi que des têtes casquées et des bustes masculins ou féminins. Les pièces proviennent de la culture antique tardive de la fin du quatrième et du début du cinquième siècle et sont disséminées en Grande-Bretagne, mais aussi en Gaule et dans les provinces germaniques jusqu’en Italie. Elles sont un témoignage rare de la phase finale de la période romaine dans l’Empire du nord-ouest et ont été vraisemblablement utilisés par les élites. Les éléments iconographiques indiquent que les porteurs d’anneaux utilisaient à la fois des symboles chrétiens et des figures de style individuel et héraldique, ainsi que des références à la puissance impériale et militaire romaine pour présenter leur identité et leur statut.

**Abbreviations**

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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Reference</th>
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<tr>
<td>Henig, Corpus</td>
<td>M. Henig, A Corpus of Roman Engraved Gemstones from British Sites. BAR British Ser. 8 (Oxford 2007).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Henkel, Römische Fingerringe</td>
<td>F. Henkel, Die Römischen Fingerringe der Rheinlande und der benachbarten Gebiete (Berlin 1913).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAS</td>
<td>Portable Antiquities Scheme, see <a href="https://finds.org.uk/">https://finds.org.uk/</a>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robertson, Inventory</td>
<td>A. Robertson, An Inventory of Romano-British Coin Hoards (London 2000).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spier, Gems</td>
<td>J. Spier, Late Antique and Early Christian Gems (Wiesbaden 2013).</td>
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The corpus of Brancaster rings in order of discussion, redrawn from photographs and illustrations. Original size.
(Opposite page and above) The corpus of Brancaster rings in order of discussion, redrawn from photographs and illustrations. Original size.
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