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Brancaster type signet rings

A study in the material culture of sealing documents in Late Antique Britain

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‹¹ as well as the ›De Excidio of Gildas‹². 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 centuries³. This is also attested and confirmed by the inscribed stone monuments of Western Britain⁴.

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. Patrick⁵ 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 Victoricus⁶. The work of Gildas⁷ 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 correspondence⁸.

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‹⁹ provide examples from the early Empire, and from the fourth and fifth centuries letters written in Gaul by Ausonius, Sidonius Apollinaris, Ruricius of Limoges,

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*.

² Gildas, *De Excidio*; D. Howlett, *The Celtic Latin Tradition of Biblical Style* (Dublin 1995).

³ N. Wright, *Gildas' reading. A survey, Sacris Erudiri* 32 (2), 1991, 121–162.

⁴ T. M. Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons 350–1064* (Oxford 2013) 75–173.

⁵ Patricius, *Confessio* and *Epistola*.

⁶ Patricius, *Confessio* 23; J. Stevenson, *Literacy in Ireland. The evidence of the Patrick dossier in the Book of Armagh*. In: R. McKitterick (ed.), *The Uses of Literacy in Early Medieval Europe* (Cambridge 1990) 17.

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.

⁹ A. Bowman, *Life and Letters on the Roman Frontier* (London 2003).

and Avitus represent survivals of this form of literary endeavour¹⁰. 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 understood¹¹.

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 date¹², 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 styli¹³. 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 way¹⁴. 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 behest¹⁵, required such seals. Wax seals could also be applied to bags of valuables in transit¹⁶ and even to household cabinets¹⁷ 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 / 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.«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

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* (Princeton 2012) *passim*.

¹¹ Sidon. *epist.* 3, 9.

¹² W. Davies, *Land and power in early medieval Wales, Past and Present* 81, 1978, 3–23; A. Seaman, *The Roman to early medieval transition in south-east Wales* (PhD Thesis Cardiff 2010) 15–28 and Appendix 1; C. Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages* (Oxford 2005) 328–330.

¹³ P. Rahtz, *Cadbury Congresbury 1968–1973. A late/*

post-Roman hilltop settlement in Somerset. BAR 223 (1993) 119 s.

¹⁴ A. Breeze, *A Gildas and the Schools of Cirencester. Ant. Journal* 90, 2010, 131–138.

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.

¹⁶ C. Andrews, *Roman Seal Boxes in Britain. BAR British Ser.* (Oxford 2012).

¹⁷ *Clem. Al. Paid.* 3, 11.

¹⁸ Johns, *Jewellery* 53 s.

might be of fifth-century date¹⁹. 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 coins²⁰, spindle whorls²¹, combs²², pottery²³ and even fourth-century bracelets cut down to form finger-rings²⁴, have all been advanced as potentially dating to the fifth century. Meanwhile the Portable Antiquities Scheme has recorded ever increasing numbers of objects²⁵. 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 allow²⁶. 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 Johns²⁷ observes, one of the defining characteristics of the Brancaster ring is its square or rec-

¹⁹ M. Henig, *The Art of Roman Britain* (London 1995) 172.

²⁰ P. Walton / S. Moorhead, *Coinage and collapse? The contribution of numismatic data to understanding the end of Roman Britain*. *Internet Archaeology* 41, 2015, <http://intarch.ac.uk/journal/issue41/8/3-2.html>.

²¹ H. Cool, *The parts left over. Material culture in the fifth century*. In: T. Wilmott / P. Wilson (eds.), *The Late Roman Transition in the North*. BAR British Ser. (Oxford 2000) 47–65.

²² C. Hills / S. Lucy, *Spong Hill Part IX. Chronology and synthesis* (Cambridge 2013) 134 s.

²³ J. Gerrard, *Finding the fifth century. A late fourth- and*

early fifth-century pottery fabric from south-east Dorset. *Britannia* 41, 2010, 293–312; id., *Roman Pottery in the Fifth Century*. *Internet Archaeology* 41, 2016, <http://intarch.ac.uk/journal/issue41/intro.html>.

²⁴ E. Swift, *Object biography, re-use and recycling in the late Roman to post-Roman transition period and beyond. Rings made from Romano-British bracelets*. *Britannia* 43, 2012, 167–214.

²⁵ See <https://finds.org.uk>.

²⁶ For instance Blazot et al., *Malbosc* (comp. 28).

²⁷ Johns, *Jewellery* 53 s.



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.

tangular bezel. For the purposes of this study the bezel shape is seen as crucial. Rings with other bezel shapes, such as those from Amersham²⁸, Ickham²⁹ and Moor Park³⁰, 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 alphanumeric 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 IArd'. 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-

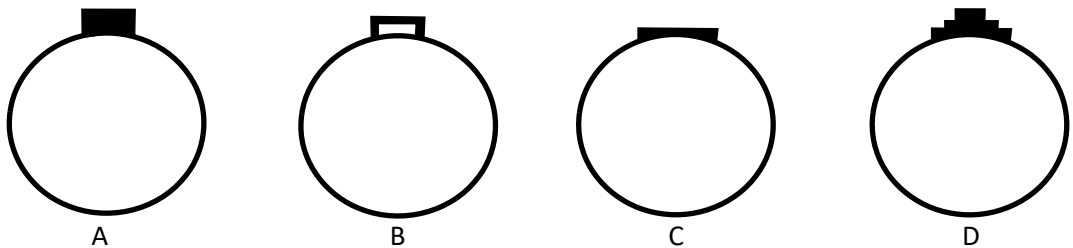


Fig. 2 A typology of bezel forms. (A) raised box bezel, (B) transverse projection, (C) incipient box bezel, (D) stepped bezel.

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 known³¹, 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* rings³². These have a narrow band, usually inscribed *CONSTANTINO* or similar, and a rectangular bezel inscribed *FIDES* or *FIDEM*. Such rings were almost certainly

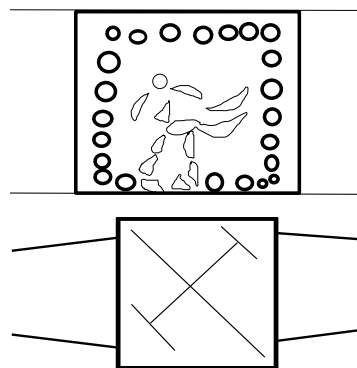


Fig. 3 Hoop types. (1) the broad hoop, (2) the narrow hoop. Decorative devices on the bezel are indicative only and based on the Whorlton (cat. 14) and St Albans (cat. 8) rings respectively.

²⁸ M. Henig, A cache of bronze finger-rings from Amersham. *Records Buckinghamshire* 26, 1984, 129–131.

²⁹ M. Henig, Finger rings. In: P. Bennett et al. (eds.), *The Roman Watermills at Ickham* (Canterbury 2010) 203 s.

³⁰ M. Henig, An early Christian signet-ring from the Roman villa at Moor Park. *Hertfordshire Arch.* 9, 1983, 184 s.

³¹ For instance T. Graham, A rho-cross engraved on a jet finger ring from Bagshot, Surrey. *Oxford Journal Arch.* 21 (2), 2002, 211–216.

³² I. Popović, Fidelity Rings. To the Emperors of the Constantinian House. *Starinar* 50, 2001, 187–198.

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 Fifehead 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 coins³³ but it probably would not have entered common usage in Britain until after A. D. 388, when Theodosian nummi bearing the symbol entered circulation³⁴. 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 spread³⁵.

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 buried³⁶. 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‹³⁷. ›Julianus II‹ must refer to the Emperor Julian (r. 361–363), but what is meant by ›downwards‹ is uncertain. It might mean coins earlier than Julian or later than his reign. The record is, however, so scanty and the association so weak that too much weight cannot be placed on this association. A situation might, for instance, be envisaged whereby the coin of Julian was singled out for attention because it was readily identifiable (the busts of Julian the Apostate have a so-called philosopher's beard, identifying him as a pagan). The remaining coins may have been so severely clipped as to be unidentifiable. Such hypotheses are speculations and it is best to move on to firmer ground.

The three Amesbury rings were discovered in 1843 in a pottery vessel associated with an unknown number of silver and bronze coins (cat. 5–7). There are stylistic reasons for considering

³³ See, for instance, a solidus of A. D. 336–337: RIC VII (Antioch) 100.

³⁴ C. Thomas, *Christianity in Britain to AD 500* (Berkeley 1981) fig. 3; Graham, rho-cross (note 31) 213.

³⁵ Henig, signet-ring (note 30).

³⁶ Waugh, Great Horwood (cat. 51).

³⁷ Akerman, Wantage (cat. 12) 38.

theſe rings to be of fifth-century manufacture³⁸. 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)³⁹. 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 Britain⁴⁰ and moſt commentators have taken »Theodoſius II« to be an error for Theodoſius I (r. A. D. 379–395)⁴¹.

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 clipped⁴². Only parts of the Whorlton hoard, which originally weighed two ſtone (12, 7 kg), have ſurvived but it too includes clipped ſiliquae⁴³.

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 depoſited⁴⁴.

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 ſcholars⁴⁵. The moſt recent diſcuſſions by Abdy⁴⁶ 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 re-conſtruction 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 Gellep⁴⁷. 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 beyond⁴⁸.

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. 1463.

⁴² St John O’Neil, South Ferriby (cat. 13) 269 s.

⁴³ Burnett, Whorlton (cat. 14) 112.

⁴⁴ Robertson, Inventory no. 1619.

⁴⁵ A. Burnett, Clipped ſiliquae and the end of Roman Britain. *Britannia* 15, 1984, 163–168; P. Guest, The Late Roman Gold and Silver Coins from the Hoxne Hoard (London 2005); R. Abdy, The Patching Hoard. In F. Hunter / K. Painter (eds.), *Late Roman ſilver and*

the end of the Empire. The Traprain Treasure in context (Edinburgh 2013) 107–115.

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.

⁴⁸ P. Guest, The hoarding of Roman metal objects in fifth century Britain. In: F. Harrer (ed.), AD 410. The history and archaeology of late and poſt-Roman Britain (London 2014) 117–129; G. Noble et al., (Re)diſcovering the Gaulcross Hoard. *Antiquity* 90 (351), 2016, 726–741.

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 known⁴⁹ and they are usually seen as the beginning of the later sequence of Byzantine marriage and betrothal rings⁵⁰. Jeffrey Spier favours a start date in the fourth century for this type of design on art-historical grounds⁵¹, while Marvin Ross favours a late fourth- to early fifth-century date⁵². 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.



Fig. 4 (above) Ring from Chedworth (cat. 20). – Fig. 5 (below) Ring from North Dorset (cat. 17).



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 Roman⁵³. 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 drill⁵⁴ and led Jocelyn Toynbee to comment on its crudity⁵⁵.

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

⁴⁹ For instance M. Deloche, *Étude historique et archéologique sur les anneaux sigillaires et autres des premiers siècles du Moyen Age* (Paris 1900) 76 no. 57; Henkel, *Römische Fingerringe* no. 401; M. Ross, *Catalogue of the Byzantine and Early Medieval Antiquities in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection II* (Dumbarton Oaks 1963) no. 50; A. Chadour, *Ringe. Die Alice und Louis Koch Sammlung. Vierzig Jahrhunderte durch vier Generationen gesehen I* (Leeds 1994) nos. 449–450.

⁵⁰ Ross, *Dumbarton Oaks* (previous note) 48–50; G. Vikan, *Early Christian and Byzantine rings in the Zucker family collection*. *Journal Walters Art Gallery* 45, 1987, 32–43; id., *Art and marriage in early Byzantium*. *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 44, 1990, 145–163; Spier, *Gems* nos. 35–36.

⁵¹ Spier, *Gems* 24.

⁵² Ross, *Dumbarton Oaks* (note 49) 49.

⁵³ For instance Spier, *Gems* no. 40.



Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8



Fig. 9



Fig. 10



Fig. 11

Figs. 6–11 Rings (6) from South Holland (cat. 30); (7) from South Cambridgeshire (cat. 18); (8) from Haddenham (cat. 32); (9) from Sleaford (cat. 36); (10) from East Riding of Yorkshire (cat. 44); (11) from Tupholme (cat. 48).

Corinthian helmets. This arrangement immediately recalls the four helmeted busts on one of the silver rings from Amesbury. A single helmeted bust is also depicted on a gold ring from Richborough (cat. 19). The ring from South Cambridgeshire has two helmeted 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 ΝΙΚΗ 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 VE / NVS, although »we cannot imagine, at least not by iconographic standards that are attested in Greco-Roman tradition [...] that this image represents Venus«⁵⁴. There is a secondary inscription around the exterior of the faceted ten-sided hoop that reads /SE/NI/CI/A/NE/VI/VA/SII/ND E/ (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.

⁵⁵ J. Toynbee, *Christianity in Roman Britain*. *Journal British Arch. Assoc.* 16, 1953, 1–24; 19.

⁵⁶ P. Corby Finney, *Senicianus' ring*. *Bonner Jahrb.* 194, 1994, 175–196, 190.

Seniciani⁵⁷. 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 Finney⁵⁸ 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 *IV/ST/IN/E V/IVA/S I/N D/EO*. 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 Magnentius⁵⁹.



Fig. 12 Ring from West Dorset (cat. 39).

The bronze ring from Richborough is important evidence for Christianity at the site, where a church and baptistry have been identified⁶⁰, 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 bird⁶¹. 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)⁶². 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, *Senecianus* (previous note) 192–194; Henig, *Corpus* 186 and references therein.

⁵⁸ Corby Finney, *Senecianus*.

⁵⁹ S. Pearce, *The Hinton St Mary mosaic pavement. Christ or Emperor?* *Britannia* 39, 2008, 193–218; 196.

⁶⁰ P. Brown, *The church at Richborough*. *Britannia* 2, 1971, 225–231.

⁶¹ RIB II 3 nos. 2422.16 and 2422.17; Johns, *Jewellery* 67.

⁶² RIB II 3 nos. 2422.44 and 2422.45.



Fig. 13–15 Rings (left) from Wiltſhire (cat. 31); (middle) from Canterbury (cat. 34); (right) from Deopham (cat. 42).

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-Rhos. 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 finger rings⁶³. A ring of ſlightly different form, with a narrow hoop and ſoldered bezel, in copper-alloy, from King’s Lynn bears (in retrograde) the inſcription *DOM/NICA/VIVA* (long life to you Domnica) (cat. 28, Fig. 16). All that has ſurvived of the third ring from ſouth Northamptonſhire is a bezel with three lines of text: *LEGO/NIIV/SVIV* (with the

⁶³ For parallels ſee RIB II 3 no. 2423.28 (from Southwark) and R. Tomlin, *Inſcriptions. Britannia* 47, 2016, 389–

415; 395 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 notes⁶⁴, 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 century⁶⁵.

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.



Fig. 16 Ring from King's Lynn and West Norfolk (cat. 28).

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 numerous⁶⁶. ›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 Fifehead 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 significance⁶⁷ 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

⁶⁴ Spier, *Gems* 193–195 nos. M1–M39.

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 century⁶⁸. 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 unſtratiſied 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 Buergruef (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 Mayence⁷⁰. 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 Cirenceſter⁷¹. 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



Fig. 17 Ring from Nether Wallop (cat. 54).

⁶⁸ C. Hawkes, *A Late Roman buckle from Tripontium*. *Transact. Birmingham and Warwickshire* 85, 1972, 145–159; Mawer, *Christianity* (cat. 21) 61–65 nos. D1, Br.1 – D1, Br.4 and D2, Br.2 – D2, Br.8 and D2, Br.10; C. Brown / M. Henig, *A Romano-British buckle plate from Eaſt Challow, near Wantage*. *Oxoniensia* 67, 2002, 363–365.

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)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 ›wyrml‹ 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-ſiſtern cluster with the well-known diſſe 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's⁷³ 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 forms⁷⁴. Nevertheless, of late French archaeologiſts have begun to identify rings as being of the Brancaſter type⁷⁵.

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 type⁷⁶. 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

⁷³ H. Guiraud, *Gallia* 46, 1989, 173–211.

⁷⁴ Henkel, *Römische Fingerringe*.

⁷⁵ For inſtance Feugère, Béziers (comp. 24) 148.

⁷⁶ Henkel, *Römische Fingerringe*.

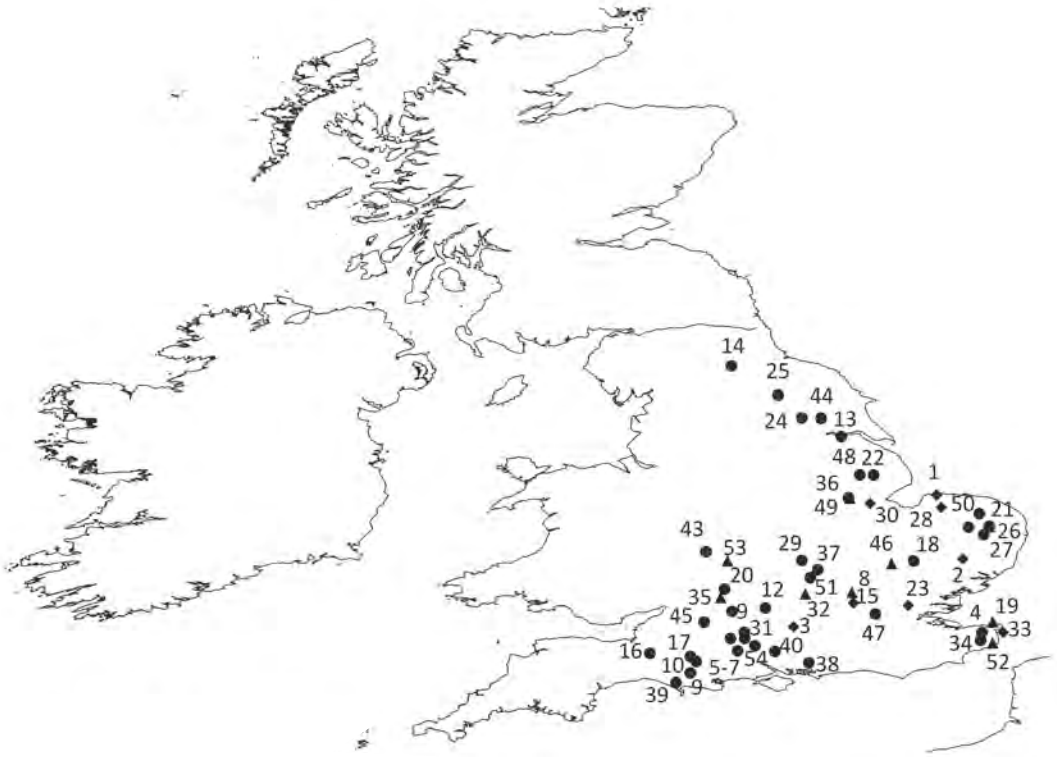
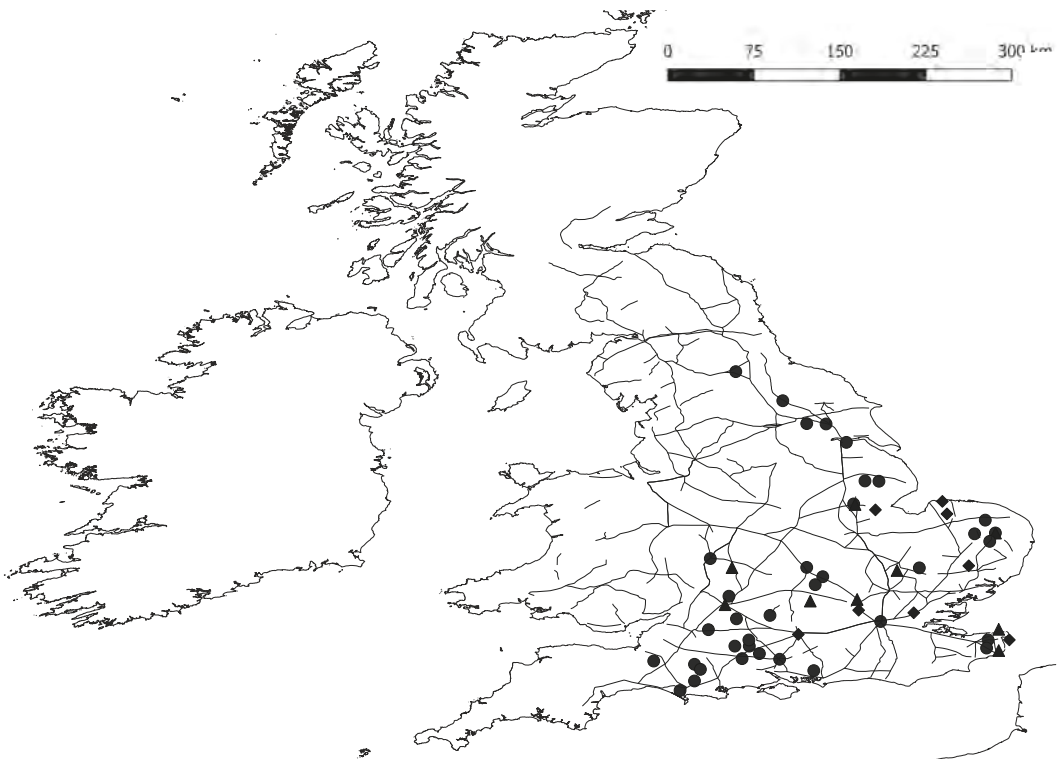


Fig. 18 (above) Brancaster rings from Britain. (diamonds) gold, (circles) silver, (triangles) copper-alloy.
Fig. 19 (below) The distribution of Brancaster rings in Britain and the Roman road network.



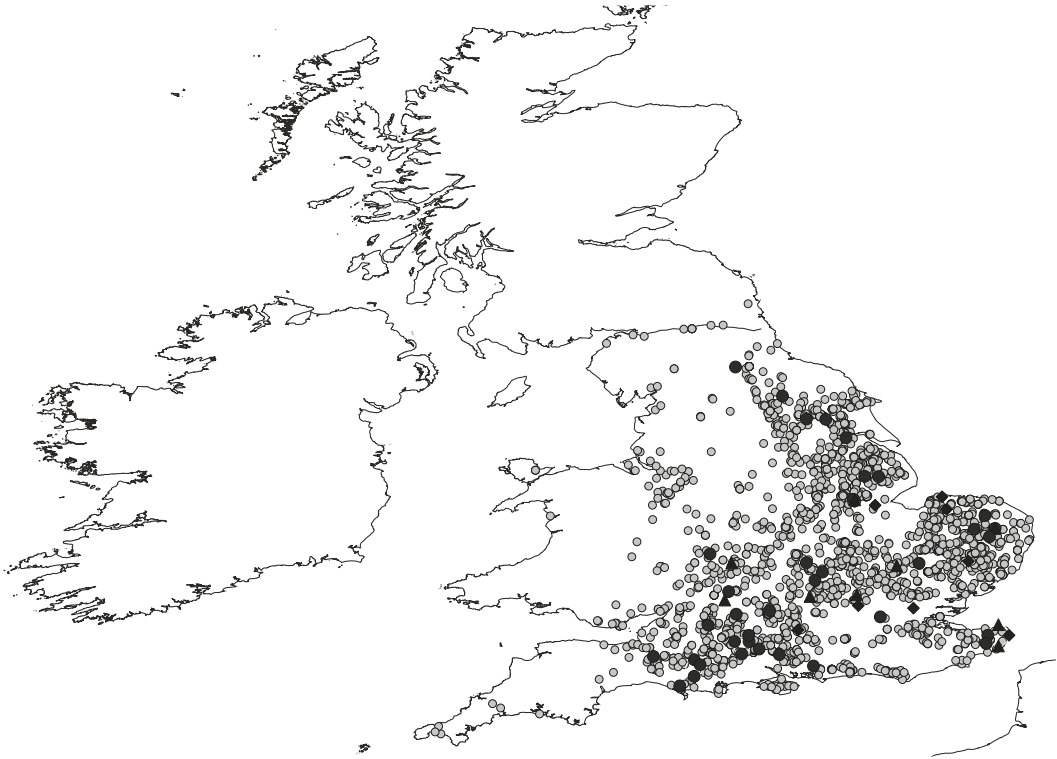


Fig. 20 (above) Brancaster rings in Britain (see Fig. 18) and all finger-rings recorded by the Portable Antiquities Scheme (grey circles).

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 IA_{1d}). 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 Buergruef (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 beveled 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

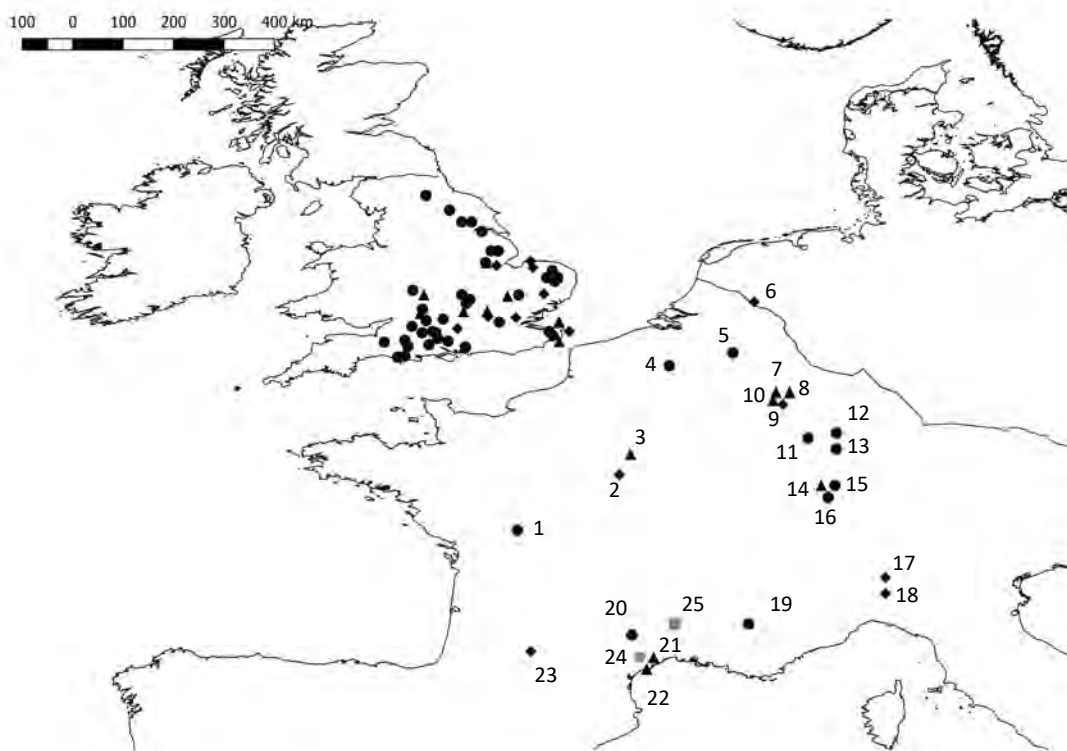


Fig. 22 Distribution of British rings and continental comparanda listed in Appendix B. (diamonds) gold, (circles) silver, (triangles) copper-alloy, (grey circles) unknown material, (grey square) erroneously classified. The numbers correspond to the comparanda in Appendix 2.

and it is to the Merovingian period that the Poitiers ring has been assigned⁷⁹. 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 Tombe 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 grave⁸⁰. 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

⁷⁷ I. Grapizanov, *The rise of graphicacy in Late antiquity*. *Viator* 46 (2), 2015, 1–22.

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-nineties⁸¹. 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 unexpected⁸² 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 repurposed⁸³. 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)⁸⁴. 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 Alexandria⁸⁵. 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*.

⁸² For instance G. Lucas, *The Archaeology of Time* (London 2005) 100.

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).

⁸⁵ Clem. Al. *Paid.* 3, 11. – P. Corby Finney, *Images on finger rings and early Christian art*. *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 41, 1987, 181–186.

⁸⁶ Clem. Al. *Paid.* 3, 12.

⁸⁷ J. Gerrard, *The Ruin of Roman Britain* (Cambridge 2013).

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 either⁸⁶. 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 others⁸⁷.

	Au (*)	Ag (*)	
<i>Solidi</i>			
cat. 2	27,5	412,5	6,14
cat. 19	9	135	2,01
cat. 23	8,4	126	1,88
cat. 28	3,7	55,5	0,83
<i>Siliqua</i>			
cat. 5	0,54	8,1	4,05
cat. 6	0,59	8,85	4,425
cat. 7	0,62	9,33	4,665
cat. 13	0,33	4,9	2,45
cat. 16	0,13	1,9	0,95
cat. 17	0,38	5,64	2,82
cat. 20	0,32	4,8	2,4
cat. 27	0,59	8,9	4,45
cat. 31	0,25	3,8	1,9
cat. 34	0,55	8,3	4,15
cat. 38	0,24	3,64	1,82
cat. 39	0,31	4,68	2,34
cat. 42	0,14	2,05	1,025
cat. 43	0,68	10,17	5,085
cat. 54	0,55	8,2	5,125

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.

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Appendix A. Catalogue of rings from Britain

(cat. 1) Brancaster, Norfolk. – Norwich Castle Museum. – Gold. – Type IA1. – Busts. Inscription: *VIVAV / IN DEO*. Hoop plain. – S. Woodward, *A descriptive outline of the Roman remains in Norfolk*. *Archaeologia* 23, 1831, 361; Henig, *Corpus* no. 790; M. Henig, *The gold objects*. In: J. Hinchcliffe / C. Sparey-Green (eds.), *Excavations at Brancaster 1974 and 1977*. *East Anglian Archaeology* 23 (Dereham 1985) 195 s. fig. 85, 2; RIB II 3 no. 2422.15; Johns, *Jewellery* 53 and fig. 3, 12. See also Henig, *Corpus* 14.

(cat. 2) Site name unknown, Suffolk. – British Museum Acc. no. 1983,1003.1. – Gold. – Type IVA1. – Chi-Rho, bird on branch. Inscription: *PX*. Hoop plain. – C. Johns, *Roman Christian ring from Brentwood, Essex*. *Ant. Journal* 65, 1985, 461–463.

(cat. 3) Silchester, Hampshire. – The Vyne, National Trust. – Gold. – Type IA1d. – Bust and text. Inscription: *VE/NUS* and *SENICIANE VIVAS IIN DE[O]*. Hoop decorated. – Henig, *Corpus* 789; Corby Finney, *Senicianus*.

(cat. 4) Richborough, Kent. – Lost. – Copper. – Type IA1d. – Chi-Rho A O; text. Inscription: *IVS-TINE VIVAS IN DEO*. Hoop faceted and decorated. – B. Cunliffe, *Fifth Report on the Excavations of the Roman Fort at Richborough, Kent*. *Reports of the Research Committee of the Society of Antiquaries of London* (London 1968) pl. 42, 160; RIB II 3 no. 2422.70.

(cat. 5) Amesbury, Wiltshire. – British Museum Acc. no. 1857,0630.3. – Silver. – Type IA1d. – Stag with fishtail and bird. No inscription. Hoop decorated. – F. Ouvry, *The Amesbury rings*. *Proc. Soc. Ant. London* (1st Ser.) 4, 1859, 27 s.; Henig, *Corpus* 802.

(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. 9) Roundway Down, Wiltshire. – Location unknown. – Silver. – Type IB1d. – Bust. Inscription:

NIKH. Hoop decorated. – M. Henig, *Art in Roman Wiltshire*. In: P. Ellis (ed.), *Roman Wiltshire and After*. *Papers in honour of Ken Annable* (Devizes 2001) 122 s. fig. 6, 14.

(cat. 10) Fifehead Neville, Dorset. – Lost. – Silver. – Type IA1. – Chi-Rho. No inscription. Hoop plain. – J. Middleton, *Roman villa at Fifehead Neville*. *Proc. Soc. Ant. London* 9, 1883, 66–70; Henig, *Corpus* 794.

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

(cat. 12) Wantage, Oxfordshire. – Lost. – Silver. – Type IA1d. – Confronted sea beasts. No inscription. Hoop decorated. – J. Akerman, *Silver ring from Wantage*. *Proc. Soc. Ant. London* (2nd Ser.) 4, 1870, 38 s.

(cat. 13) South Ferriby, Yorkshire. – Hull Museum. – Silver. – Type IA2. – Bird and foliage. No inscription. Hoop plain. – B. St John O’Neil, *The South Ferriby Theodosian hoard*. *Num. Chronicle* 5th Series 15 (1935) 254–274; Robertson, *Inventory* no. 1557 fig. 2; Henig, *Corpus* 799.

(cat. 14) Whorlton, Yorkshire. – British Museum. – Silver. – Type IA1. – Bird. No inscription. Hoop plain. – British Museum Acc. no. 1857,1109.2. A. Burnett, *The Whorlton (Yorkshire) Hoard* (1810). In: R. Carson / A. Burnett (eds.), *Roman Coin Hoards from Britain*, *British Mus. Occasional Paper* 5 (London 1979) 110–118; Robertson, *Inventory* no. 1608; Henig, *Corpus* 800.

(cat. 15) Gt. 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.

(cat. 19) Richborough, Kent. – British Museum Acc. no. 1988.0402.1. – Gold. – Type IA1. – Buſt. No inſcription. Hoop plain. – M. Henig, Exhibits at Ballots. A late Roman gold ring and other objects from Richborough. *Ant. Journal* 68 (1988) 315–317.

(cat. 20) Chedworth, Glouceſtershire (Fig. 4). – Cirenceſter Muſeum. – Silver. – Type IC2d. – 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. 21) Caistor-St-Edmund, Norfolk. – Private Collection. – Silver. – Type I. – Buſt. Inſcription: RSN DEDI. Hoop decorated. – Henig, gold objects (cat. 1) 197; M. Haſſall / R. Tomlin, Inſcriptions. *Britannia* 15, 1984, 333–356, 344; F. Mawer, Evidence for Chriſtianity in Roman Britain. *The ſmall-finds* (Oxford 1995) 71 s. no. D3.Si.2.

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

(cat. 23) Brentwood, Eſſex. – British Muſeum. – Gold. – Type IIA1. – Chi-Rho reversed. Inſcription: PX. Hoop plain. – British Muſeum Acc. no. 1984.1001.1; Henig, *Corpus* 793.

(cat. 24) Site name unknown, Yorkſhire. – Munich, Chriſtian Schmidt Collection. – Silver. – Type I. – Chi-Rho. No inſcription. No Hoop. – Spier, *Gems* 184 no. R8; C. Schmidt, Siegelring mit XP-Chriſtogramm. In: J. Engemann / A. Demandt (eds.) *Constantin der Große. Exhibit. Trier* (2007) Begleit-CD no. II.1.125.

(cat. 25) Hambleton, North Yorkſhire. – Private Collection. – Silver. – Type IB2d. – Star. No inſcription. Hoop decorated. – PAS: LANCUM-133991.

(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 IArd. – 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 NIIV SVIV. Hoop NA. – PAS: NARC-41DB75.

(cat. 30) South Holland, Lincolnſhire (Fig. 6). – British Muſeum. – Gold. – Type IC2. – Bird. No inſcription. Hoop plain. – PAS: NMS-AF4E73.

(cat. 31) Wiltſhire (Fig. 13). – Wiltſhire Heritage Muſeum. – Silver. – Type IC2d. – 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. 33) Richborough, Kent. – Loſt. – Copper. – Type I. – Bird / beaſt. No inſcription. Hoop NA. – C. Roach Smith, *The Antiquities of Richborough, Dover and Lymne in Kent* (London 1850) 89.

(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 maſoleum II. *The finds and environmental evidence* (Aylesbury 1994) fig. 142 no. 86.

(cat. 38) Compton, Weſt Suſſex. – Loſt. – Silver. – Type IC2d. – Bird and diſcs. No inſcription. Hoop decorated. – PAS: SUSS-112A4D.

(cat. 39) Weſt Dorſet, Dorſet (Fig. 12). – Private Collection. – Silver. – Type IC2d. – 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.

(cat. 42) Deopham, Norfolk (Fig. 15). – Norwich Castle Museum. – Silver. – Type IA2d. – Bird. No inscription. Hoop decorated. – PAS: NMS-79BD95.

(cat. 43) Bays Meadow, Droitwich, Worcestershire. – British Museum Acc. no. 1928,0714.1. – Silver. – Type IA1. – Bird. No inscription. Hoop plain. – Henig, *Corpus* 798.

(cat. 44) East Riding of Yorkshire (Fig. 10). – Norwich Castle Museum. – Silver. – Type I. – Dolphins. No inscription. Hoop NA. – PAS: YO-RYM-CFDB11.

(cat. 45) Gastard, Corsham, Wiltshire. – Wiltshire Heritage Museum. – Silver. – Type I. – Bird and a fish with foliage between. No inscription. Hoop NA. – M. Henig, A silver ring-bezel from Gastard, Corsham. *Wiltshire Arch. and Natural Hist. Magazine* 92, 125 s. fig. 1; id., *Art in Roman Wiltshire*. In: P. Ellis (ed.) *Roman Wiltshire and After*. Papers in honour of Ken Annable (Devizes 2001) 122 s. fig. 6, 16.

(cat. 46) South Cambridgeshire, Cambridgeshire. – Private Collection. – Copper. – Type IC2. – Horse's head. No inscription. Hoop plain. – PAS: CAM-D69FA5.

(cat. 47) Guildhall Yard, London. – London Archaeological Archive Resource Centre. – Silver. – Type ID. – Lion. No inscription. No hoop. – N. Bateman / C. Cowan / R. Wroe-Brown, *London's Roman Amphitheatre: Guildhall Yard, City of London* (London 2008) 93–95; 194 fig. 99.

(cat. 48) Topholme, East Lindsey (Fig. 11). – Private Collection. – Silver. – Type IC2d. – Busts? No inscription. Hoop decorated. – PAS: LIN-4D6297.

(cat. 49) North Kesteven, Lincolnshire. – Private Collection. – Copper. – Type IA2. – Worn. No inscription. Hoop plain. – PAS: LIN-70CD03.

(cat. 50) Site name restricted, Norfolk. – Norwich Castle Museum. – Silver. – Type IC1. – Worn. No inscription. Hoop plain. – PAS: PAS-ACA706.

(cat. 51) Great Horwood, Buckinghamshire. – Buckinghamshire County Museum. – Silver. – Type IA2. – Undecorated. No inscription. Hoop plain. – H. Waugh, *A hoard of Roman silver from Great Horwood, Buckinghamshire*. *Ant. Journal* 46, 1966, 63 and fig. 2, 3.

(cat. 52) Richborough, Kent. – English Heritage. – Silver. – Type IA. – Monogram. Inscription: BASIA. Hoop decorated. – M. Henig, *A monogram ring from Richborough*. *Ant. Journal* 56, 1976, 242 s. pl. 39.

(cat. 53) Salford Priors, Warwickshire. – Warwickshire Museum. – Copper. – Type I. – Stylized. No inscription. No hoop. – S. Palmer, *Archaeological excavations in the Arrow Valley, Warwickshire*. *Transact. Birmingham and Warwickshire* 103, 1999, 1–231 fig. 57 and 35.

(cat. 54) Nether Wallop, Hampshire (Fig. 17). – To be acquired by the Hampshire Cultural Trust. – Silver. – Type IA1. – Wyrm eating quadruped. No inscription. Hoop plain. – PAS: WILT-17E7E6.

Appendix B. Catalogue of rings from continental Europe

(comp. 1) Poitiers, France. – Silver. – Type IA1. – O. Dalton, *Catalogue of the Finger Rings in the British Museum*. Early Christian, Byzantine, Teutonic, Medieval and later bequeathed by Sir Augustus Woolaston Franks KCB (London 1912) no. 147.

(comp. 2) Cortrat, Loiret, France. – Gold. – Type IC1. – H. Böhme, *Germanische Grabfunde des 4. bis 5. Jahrhunderts zwischen unterer Elbe und Loire* (Munich 1974) 313 pl. 118.7.

(comp. 3) Marolles-sur-Seine, Seine et Marne, France. – Copper. – Type I. – J.-M. Séguier, *La céramique du Bas-Empire du secteur Seine-Yonne: productions, typologie et proposition de classement chronologique des ensembles*. *Diocesis Galliarum: Documents de Travail* 9, 2011, 13–44, 38.

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

(comp. 5) Tongeren, Belgium. – Silver. – Type IC1. – K. Sas / H. Thoen, *Schone Schijn. Brilliance et Prestige*, Exhibit. Tongeren (Leuven 2002) no. 233.

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

(comp. 7) Krefeld-Gellep, Germany. – Copper. – Type IA1. – R. Pirling / M. Siepen, *Die Funde aus den römischen Gräbern von Krefeld-Gellep* (Stuttgart 2006) 354 pl. 60, 6.

(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. 12) Buergruef, Grevenmacher, Luxembourg. – Copper. – Type IC2. – J. Krier, Ein römisches Bergheiligtum auf dem Buergruef bei Grevenmacher. In: 175 Joar Harmonie municipale Grevenmacher 1834–2009 (Luxembourg 2010) 128 fig. 9.

(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 römisches 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 römisches 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 tesoretto. Not. Scavi Ant. 7 (2), 1941, 303–310.

(comp. 21) Certosa di Pavia, Italy. – Gold. – Type IA1. – G. Patroni, Carpignago, tesoretto di monete 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. 22) Lazer, Haut Alpes, France. – Silver. – Type IC1. – H. Guiraud, Bagues et anneaux à l'époque romaine en Gaule. Gallia 46, 1989, 173–211, here 189.

(comp. 23) Creiſſels, Aveyron, ſouth of France. – Silver. – Type I. – M. Labrousse, Circonscription de Toulouse. Gallia 22 (2), 1964, 427–472 fig. 9.

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

(comp. 25) Caſtelnaud-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.

(comp. 27) Caux, cemetery at Saint Geniès-Eſt 2, France. Material uncertain. – Type IC2. – M. Feugère, Plaidoyer pour la petite épigraphie. L'exemple de la cité de Béziers. In: R. Häuſſler (ed.) Romanisation et épigraphie. Études interdisciplinaires ſur l'acculturation et l'identité dans l'Empire romain (Monique Mergoil 2008) 119–134, here 148 fig. 6, 2 a.

(comp. 28) Malboſc, Montpellier, Hérault, France. – Material NA. – Type NA. – F. Blaizot et al., L'ensemble funéraire rural de Malboſc (Montpellier, Hérault). Pratiques funéraires de l'Antiquité tardive. Rev. Arch. Narbonnaise 41 (1), 2008, 53–99, here 65; 103 fig. 3, 15.

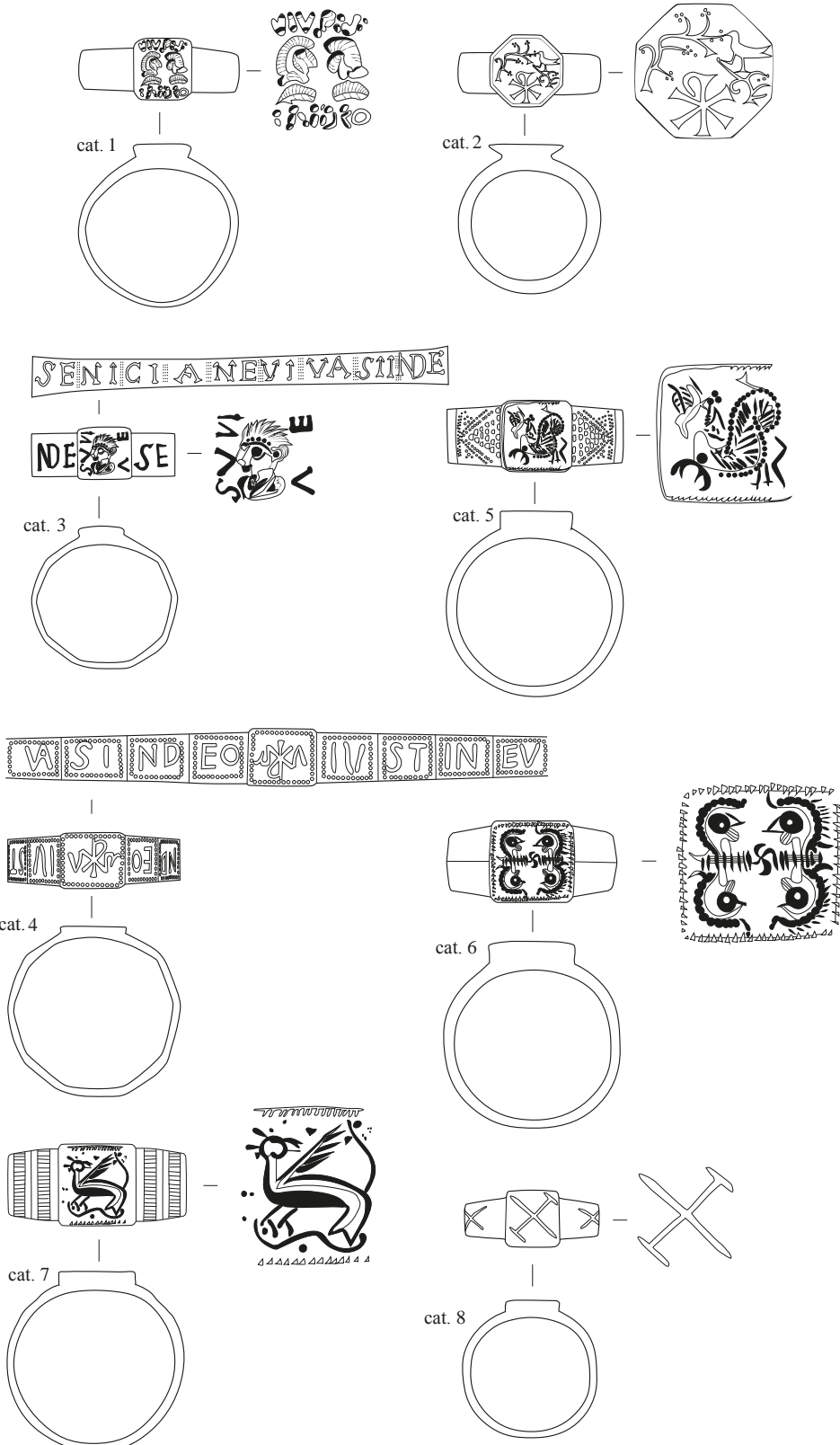
Resümee. Die spätantiken Ringe des Brancaster-Typus bestehen vollständig aus Gold oder Silber. Ihre erhabene rechteckige Lünette trägt meist Dekoration in Intaglio-Technik, nämlich Christogramme, Schrift, Tiere und Fabelwesen sowie behelmte Köpfe und männliche oder weibliche Büsten. Die Stücke stammen aus dem spätantiken Kulturkreis des späten vierten und frühen fünften Jahrhunderts und sind in Britannien, aber auch in Gallien und den germanischen Provinzen bis hin nach Italien verbreitet. Sie bilden ein seltenes Zeugnis für die finale Phase der Römerzeit im Nordwesten des Reiches und wurden vermutlich von der gebildeten Elite verwendet. Die Ikonographie deutet darauf hin, dass die Träger sowohl christliche Symbole als auch individuelle, fast wappenähnliche Darstellungen und Bezüge auf die römische imperiale und militärische Macht verwendeten, um Identität und Status darzustellen.

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 provincie 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, scelsero sia simboli cristiani, sia raffigurazioni con allusioni alla forza romana imperiale e militare.

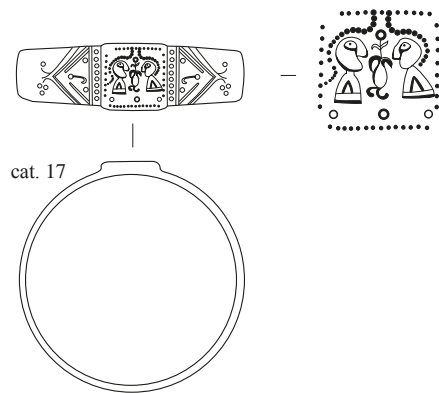
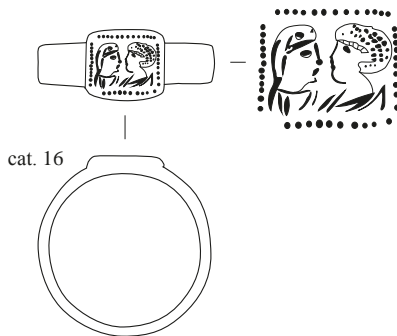
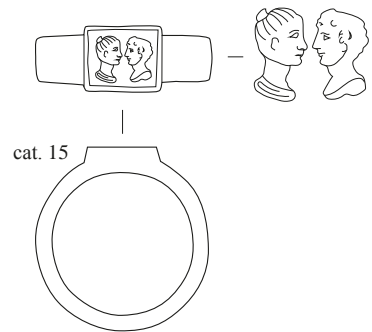
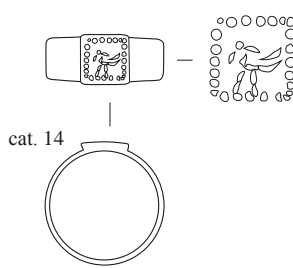
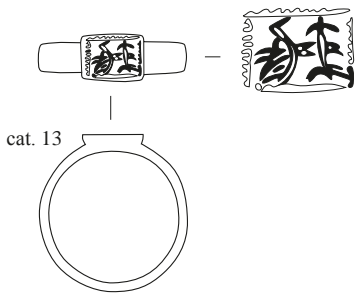
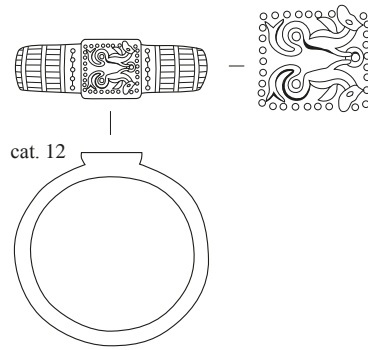
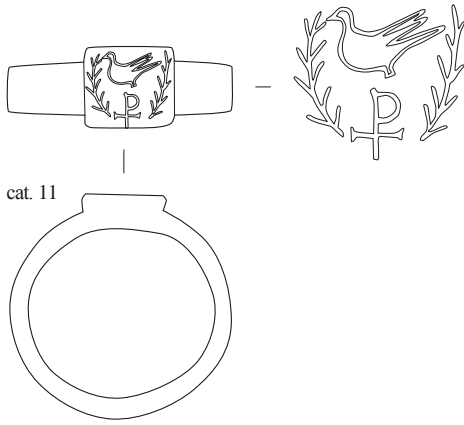
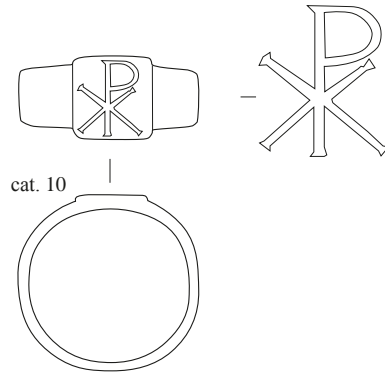
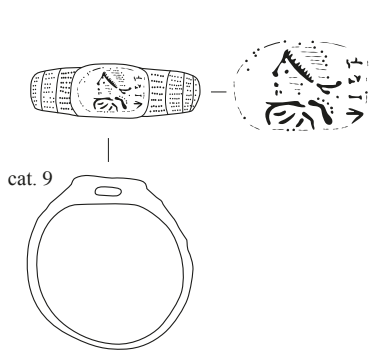
Résumé. Les bagues de type Brancaster sont entièrement faites d'or ou d'argent. Leurs lunettes surélevées présentent dans la plupart des cas des décors intaglio comme des Christogrammes, des lettres, des animaux et des créatures mythiques, ainsi que des têtes casquées et des bustes masculins ou féminins. 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.

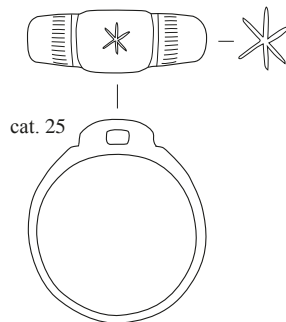
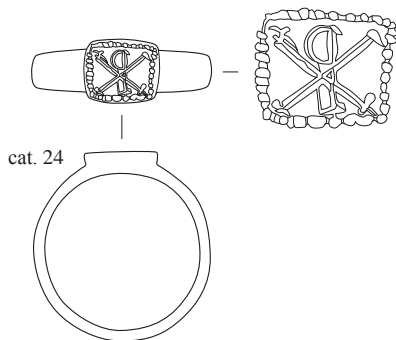
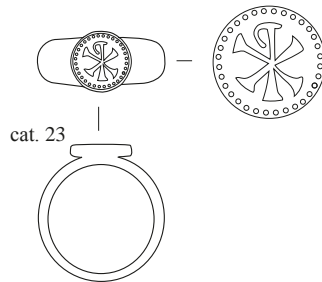
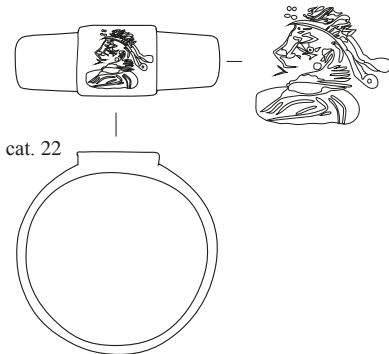
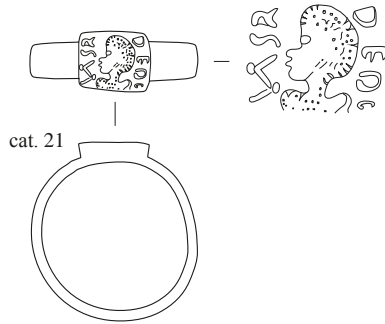
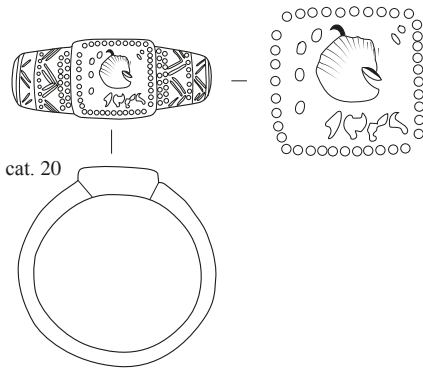
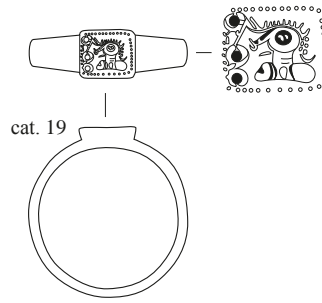
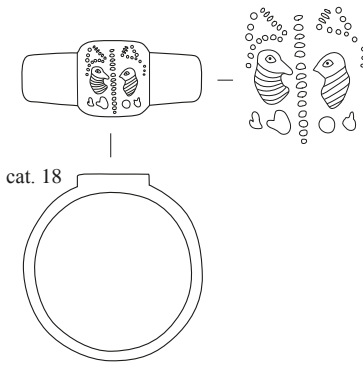
Abbreviations

Hadjadj, Bagues Mérovingiennes	R. Hadjadj, Bagues Mérovingiennes. Gaule du Nord (Paris 2007).
Henig, Corpus	M. Henig, A Corpus of Roman Engraved Gemstones from British Sites. BAR British Ser. 8 (Oxford 2007).
Henkel, Römische Fingerringe	F. Henkel, Die Römischen Fingerringe der Rheinlande und der benachbarten Gebiete (Berlin 1913).
Johns, Jewellery	C. Johns, The Jewellery of Roman Britain. Celtic and Classical traditions (London 1996).
PAS	Portable Antiquities Scheme, see https://finds.org.uk/ .
Robertson, Inventory	A. Robertson, An Inventory of Romano-British Coin Hoards (London 2000).
Spier, Gems	J. Spier, Late Antique and Early Christian Gems (Wiesbaden 2013).

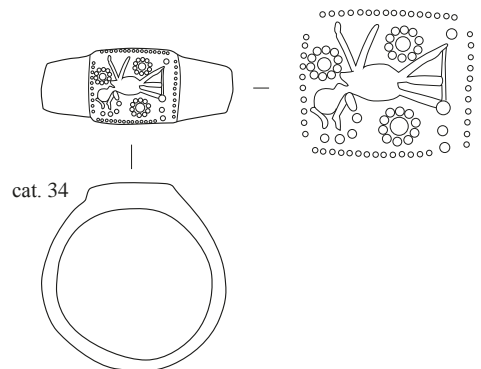
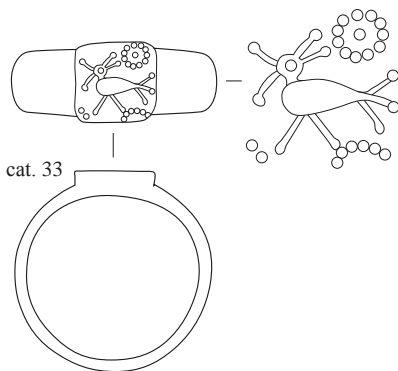
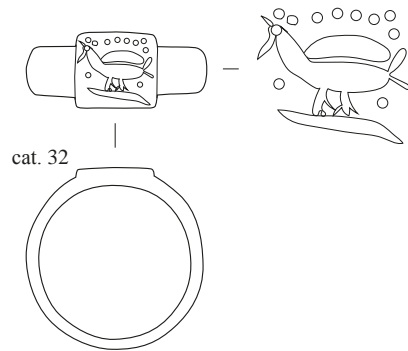
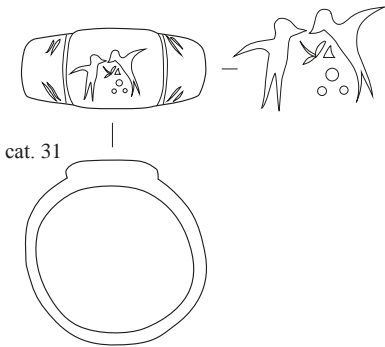
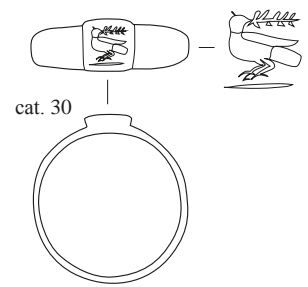
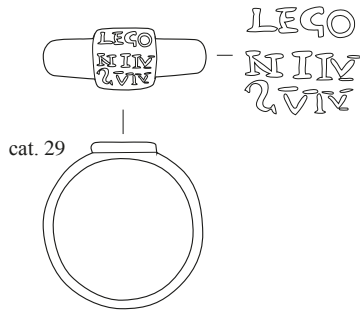
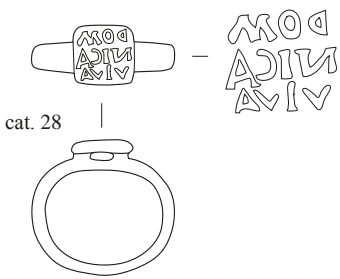
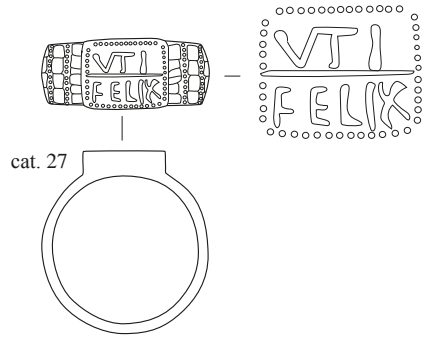
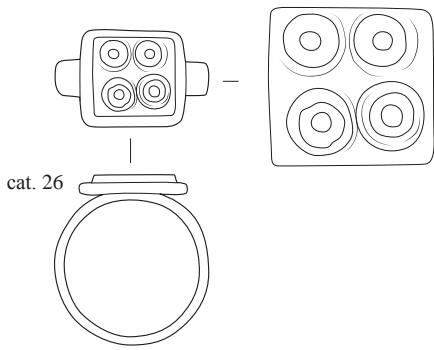


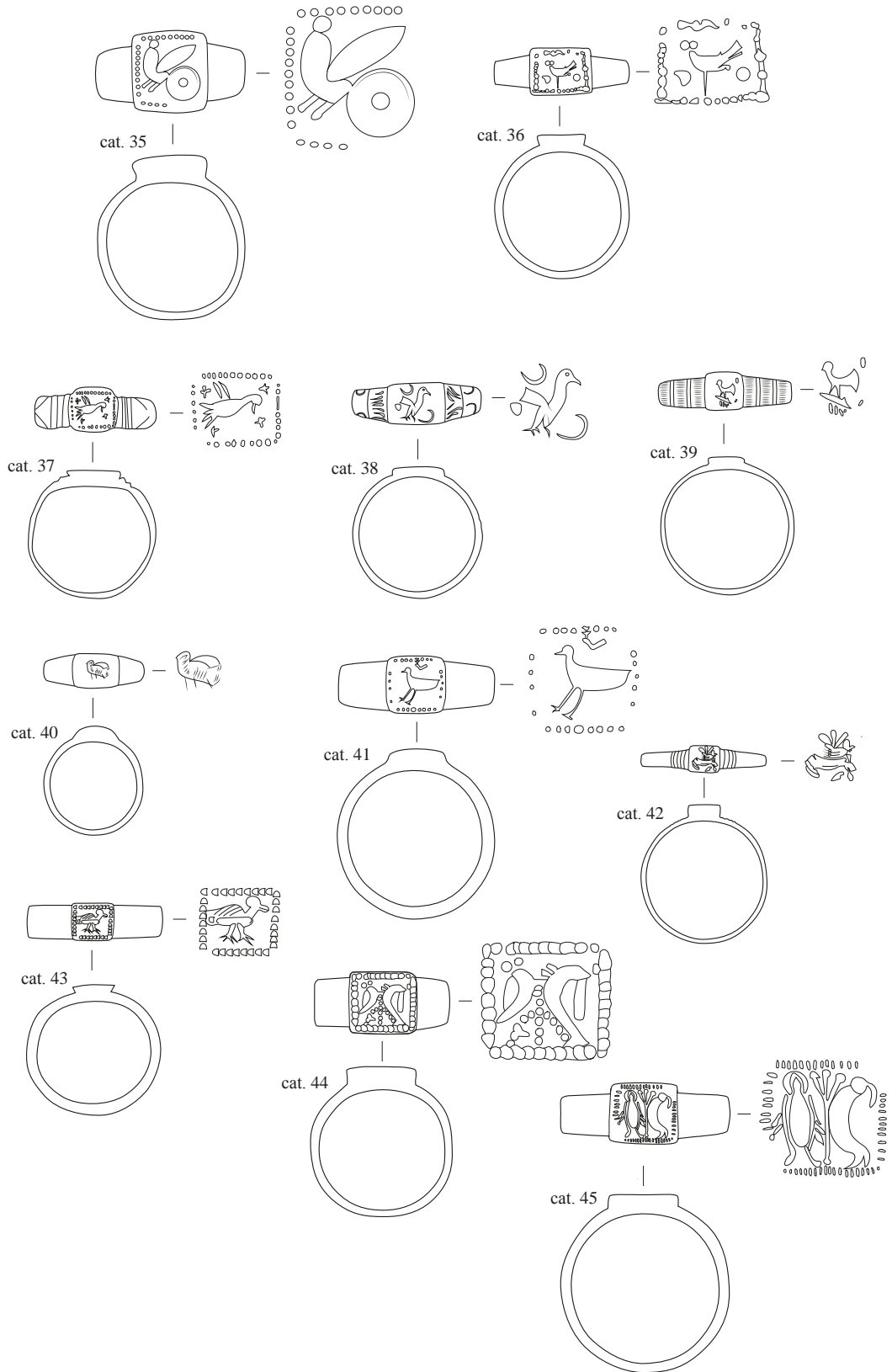
The corpus of Brancaster rings in order of discussion, redrawn from photographs and illustrations. Original size.



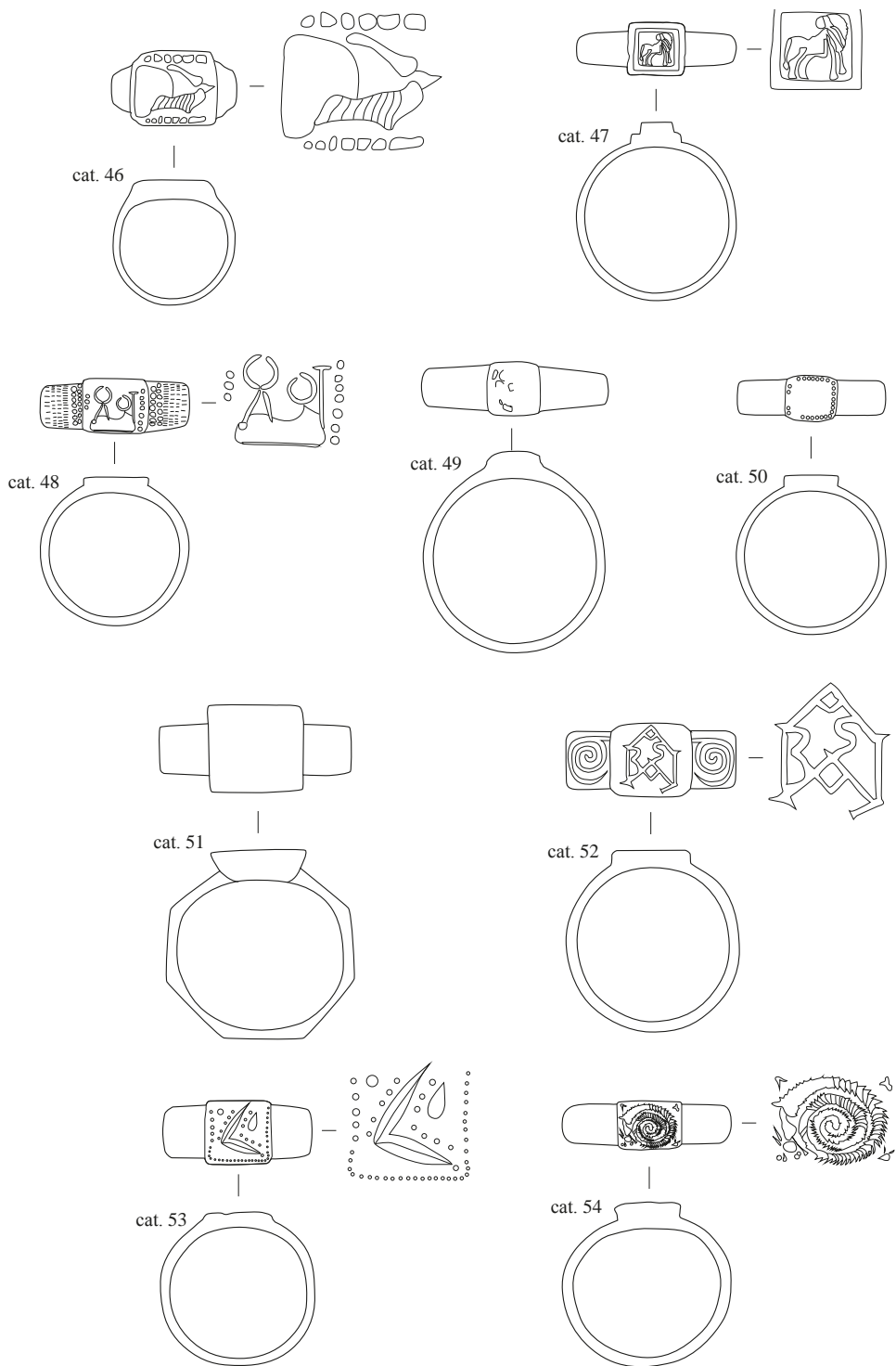


(Opposite page and above) The corpus of Brancaster rings in order of discussion, redrawn from photographs and illustrations. Original size.





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