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An Iron Signet Ring from Cirencester

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AN IRON SIGNET RING FROM CIRENCESTER

In July 1972 Mr Robin Booth showed the writer a ring (PL. II)¹ which he had, and retains, in his possession at No. 7, St Mary's Road, Cirencester. Although it was not possible to be precise about the find-spot or the date of recovery of the ring, it seems most likely that it was discovered during Mr Booth's employment at Messrs John Jefferies' nurseries in Swindon Road, Cirencester, half a mile outside the site of the south gate of Corinium, and alongside the route of Ermin Street into the town from the south-east.

The ring was submitted to Mr Martin Henig, who contributes the following report²:—

'The ring consists of a hoop of metal which expands from *c.* 3 mm at its narrowest point to *c.* 10 mm at the bezel. Its simple form is characteristic of first- and early second-century signets.³ Unfortunately, this specimen is rather corroded and about a third of the total circumference is missing. Its onyx setting is flat and has a bevelled edge so that it stands *c.* 1.5 mm above the surface of the metal. Its total dimensions are 16 x 12 mm (upper surface 11.5 x 8.5 mm).⁴ The device shows Achilles standing in profile towards the left, with his right leg flexed behind the left; he is holding the spear of Peleus, his father, in his right hand and his plumed helmet in his left. In front of him is a shield. Achilles is nude apart from the chlamys which hangs from his shoulders.

The subject evidently appealed to the Roman soldier and a number of gems cut with the same figure as this example have been recovered from military sites such as Caerleon, Heronbridge (Cheshire) and Corbridge.⁵ Although others come from places with no very obvious connection with the Roman army, nothing precludes their

¹ I am grateful to Mr A. D. McWhirr, B.Sc., M.A., F.S.A., and Cirencester Excavation Committee or facilities to photograph the ring.

² I am grateful to Mr Henig for his prompt examination and report.

³ cf. Guildhall Museum, *Small Finds from Walbrook* 1954-5, p. 6 and PL. II, 10, and *Arch. Ael. fourth series*, xxxix (1961) p. 29 No. 74 and PL. v, 5 for type.

⁴ The upper surface is greyish; below the stone is very dark. The condition of the stone is good.

⁵ For these pieces, showing Achilles with the armour of Thetis, and a discussion of the type in general, cf. Martin Henig, 'The Veneration of Heroes in the Roman Army', *Britannia*, I (1970), pp. 249-65, and especially pp. 252-6. In addition, cf. C. Leigh, *The Natural History of Lancashire* (Oxford 1700), p. 81, PL. 1, 2 for a specimen from Standish, Lancs, not far from the fort of Coccium. Also, for continental examples, cf. L. Jacobi, *Das Romerkastell Saalburg* (Hamburg 1897), pp. 515-6, No. 2 and FIG. 85, No. 3, and P. Steiner, *Xanten, Sammlung des Niederrheinischen Altertums Vereins* (Frankfurt a.m. 1911), Gems Nos. 119-21.

NOTES

having been owned by veterans,⁶ and the presence of a gem with a 'martial flavour' dating so soon after the abandonment of the fort at Cirencester need occasion no surprise.⁷

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⁶ Thus a gem from Atworth villa, Wilts. which seems to depict Achilles is included in a list of finds that contains a bronze boss closely paralleled at Caerleon and probably of military origin. *Wilts Arch. and Nat. Hist. Mag.* XLIX (1940-2), pp. 75-6.

⁷ A gem showing Mars Gradivus was found in 1970 during the continuing excavation by Cirencester Excavation Committee of a late Roman cemetery outside the western limits of Corinium, near the amphitheatre. A report is in preparation.

PLATE II Iron Signet Ring,
Cirencester.

