

FOUR EARLY BYZANTINE INSCRIBED RINGS FROM ANTIOCH-ON-THE-ORONTES WITH AN APPENDIX ON THREE OTHER INSTRUMENTA

Ergün Laflı*, Maurizio Buora**

Keywords: inscribed rings, *instrumenta inscripta*, Antioch-on-the-Orontes, southeastern Turkey, northwestern Syria, Early Byzantine period, Byzantine epigraphy

Cuvinte cheie: inele cu inscripție, *instrumenta inscripta*, Antiochia pe Orontes, sud-estul Turciei, nord- vestul Siriei, perioada bizantină timpurie, epigrafie bizantină

Introduction

Scholarly literature on Late Roman and Byzantine rings in Asia Minor is not abundant (Map 1). Apart from the Sardis finds, which amount to a few dozen¹, there is a collection of over a hundred specimens from Ephesus which have recently been published by Andrea M. Pülz². Of these only a small proportion bear inscriptions or figurative compositions. The authors of this paper have published recently another 13 rings³. Overall no more than two hundred rings are published. Obviously, the isolated specimens found during excavations and those preserved in various museums around the world must be properly analysed and published.

Early Byzantine jewellery perpetuated those Roman traditions which were kept alive in its capital, Constantinople, but also in other metropolitan cities, such as Ephesus and Antioch-on-the-Orontes (Map 1). Roman techniques and styles were the foundation of the skills even of those Byzantine goldsmiths who were not complete imitators; some innovations such as the use of Christian iconography and further perfection of new and old techniques occurred. As

* Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi, Edebiyat Fakültesi, Arkeoloji Bölümü, Oda No A-418, Tinaztepe/Kaynaklar Yerleşkesi, Buca, TR-35160 Izmir, Turkey, e-mail: elafli@yahoo.ca

** Società Friulana di Archeologia, c/o Via Gorizia 16, I-33100 Udine, Italy, e-mail: mbuora@libero.it

¹ Waldbaum 1982, nos. 813–852.

² Pülz 2020, nos. 110–185.

³ Laflı, Buora 2021.

production in Constantinople increased it surpassed the old jewellery centers of Alexandria and Antioch. Byzantine jewellery had a huge influence on the manufacturing of personal decorations across the rest of the medieval world. The Early Byzantine jewellery technique and their products, especially bronze ornaments, from eastern centers such as Antioch and Alexandria, are, however, almost entirely unknown in scholarly literature. Antioch-on-the-Orontes (modern Antakya, in the province of Hatay, in southeastern Turkey) was one of the great cities of the Byzantine world and remained an important city through the Seljuk, Crusader and Ottoman periods. From 1932 to 1939, an archaeological expedition at Antioch by a consortium of institutions, including Princeton University, produced a remarkable wealth of excavated finds that opened new lights onto a city that played a fundamental role in the shaping of developing political life and cultures in the Greek, Roman and Byzantine East for more than a millennium. It may have had up to 250,000 people during Augustan times, but declined into relative insignificance during the Middle Ages because of warfare, repeated earthquakes, and changes in trade routes.

Unfortunately, the number of excavated rings in Antioch or in any other place in Asia Minor or Syria is not large, even though there are many thousands of Byzantine rings, especially in bronze, stored in Turkish local museums. We therefore present here a collection of four well-preserved inscribed rings curated in the Archaeological Museum of Hatay, probably coming from ancient Antioch-on-the-Orontes or its surroundings. The Archaeological Museum of Hatay was founded in the early 1930s and owns an extensive collection of Greek, Roman and Byzantine bronzes and jewellery. All of these four rings as well as three items in the appendix are held in the museum by acquisition. The chronology of these unpublished rings is not easily to determine; nevertheless by form and type of inscription etc. they can generally be attributed to the Early Byzantine period, from the sixth century AD onwards.

At the end of this brief paper three further trinkets from the same museum are presented. The first one is an uninscribed finger ring, the second one is a pendant with an inscription. The last one is again a ring, with an Early Arabic-Islamic inscription.

Catalogue

1. A bronze finger ring of an unknown person (Fig. 1)

Acc. no. 9315. Purchased on 12 January 1963. The rod is broken into four fragments. Silver band ring with an oval bezel on which there is an apparently (unclear) representation of a person. A line is inscribed towards the edge which surrounds two other (?) lines incised in the central part and delimited by a curvilinear incision. Text in the centre ΩΧΕΡΑ / CI --- A / T - AP. In the marginal line A — NIYVX —.

The outer line text is not legible at all.

2. Bronze finger ring of Epiphanius (Fig. 2)

Acc. no. 9320. Purchased on 30 January 1963.

H 40 mm and width 24 mm.

State of preservation: Very bad, with part of the border missing.

Cast with a plain hoop, round in section, tapering slightly towards the shoulders and merging with the underside of the almond-shaped bezel, which is engraved with a galloping horse and inscription in two lines in lower register ΕΠΙΦΑ / ΝΙΟΥ (Επιφανίου).

Translation. I am property of Epiphanius.

Clearly it is a ring bearing the name of the owner, i.e. Epiphanius.

Sixth-seventh century AD.

3. Bronze finger ring of another Epiphanius (Fig. 3)

Acc. no. 9321.

Width of bezel 19 mm.

Cast with a plain hoop, round in section, tapering slightly towards the shoulders and merging with the underside of the disk-shaped bezel with a flat surface. The ring has a semicircular section rod.

Inscription in three lines ΘΘΘ / ΕΠΙΦΑ / ΝΙΟΥ (Επιφανίου).

Translation. ΘΘΘ. I am property of Epiphanius.

The name Epiphanius was evidently widespread in and around Antioch. It appears on ring no. 2 (above).

Sixth to seventh century AD.

4. Bronze finger ring of a possible Sergius (Fig. 4)

Acc. no. 12236.

Width of square bezel 21 mm.

Band ring, with triangular section rod and convex sides on the outside. The applied bezel is flat and has a square area within a frame which is divided into several quadrangular cells in turn. This patterning is framed with a finely-etched border of lines on all four sides. Its band is thick, very symmetrical, extremely smooth all over, soldered to the back of its square bezel and defined at the edges. The decorated frame recalls some patterning examples of Ephesus, published by Andrea M. Pülz but without firm date⁴. In the first line the letter Σ appears in the center, while in lower register, likewise in the center, there is a kind of monogram in which it seems to be able to distinguish an epsilon, perhaps an upsilon and a retroverted gamma. Perhaps name of the owner was ΣΕΡΓΙΟΣ (Σέργιος).

The presence of the monogram points to a date in the sixth century or later.

⁴ Pülz 2020, 69–70, nos. 139–142.

Appendix: three other trinkets

5. A bronze finger ring without inscription (Fig. 5)

Acc. no. 15835.

H 18 mm and width 22 mm.

In the center, a square with lowered corners, which was covered with blue enamel in antiquity. In the square its center is rotated by 90 degrees within an equally square frame. Its surface is smooth.

It corresponds to type 2.VII.2a of Baldini Lippolis, which she dated to the seventh century⁵.

According to Jeffrey Spier the presence of a smooth square bezel on the rings suggests a late date in the fifth century AD. Spier believes that there are numerous such examples which were produced in Constantinople⁶.

Dating. From the sixth century AD.

6. An inscribed pendant with holy rider nimbate, holding spear, riding to right (Figs. 6a-b)

Acc. no. 8737.

H 33 mm and width 22 mm.

Originally to be hung on a chain. The pendant (or perhaps amulet) has an elliptical shape, with a perforated loop hole above for suspension.

On the main face it features the image of a saint on horseback with a halo (St George?), riding to right. The horse is rearing. The „holy rider” figure that was simply incised, holds a long cross in his right hand, like a spear. On the back an inscription was engraved in three lines, not previously comprehended.

+ ΘΚ / ΣΤΟΙ / ΚΟΝ

Θ[εοῦ] κ[ύριον] [Χρ]ιστο[ῦ] εἰκόν[α]

Translation. Image of God and Christ

We do not know if the third line should be read as ΣΤΟΙΚΟΝ or ΙΚΟΝ as an iotacism of εἰκόνα, *i.e.* image. The first letter of the second line, which is poorly legible, seems to be a sigma (but not in semilunate form). From the Byzantine period onwards, compositions with the „rider saint” or the „holy rider” are numerous and contain different elements⁷. On this particular object from Hatay, however, it is not possible to determine whether the male figure was a traveler or a mounted warrior. In any case this was a common motif in Early Byzantine period and was probably used to protect both a woman’s womb from miscarriage and children from demons and sickness. In Early Byzantine period there are almost no iconographic instances of riders on a stationary horse.

Comparanda. For some examples of pendants with a similar representation, see Bonner 1950, 294, nos. 298–304, no. 306, pls. 15–16 and 303.

⁵ Baldini Lippolis 1999, 204.

⁶ Spier 2010, 15.

⁷ See Spier 1993, 31 and Vikan 1991/1992; Kotanski 2020.

From the sixth century AD onwards.

7. A bronze finger ring with a probable Early Arabic-Islamic inscription (Fig. 7)

Acc. no. 13408. Purchased on 2 April 1970 from Mr İbrahim Katum.

Diameter 17 mm and h of rod 5 mm.

Cast with a plain hoop, round in section, tapering slightly towards the shoulders and merging with the underside of the disk-shaped bezel with a flat surface and a distinct edge by a line. The actual ring is made up of a thin band. The bezel is divided by three horizontal lines into three parts, each of which bears some indiscernible Early Arabic-Islamic scripts.

Presumably Middle Byzantine period.

Conclusions

Compared to other studies – except the exemplary case of Ephesus – our short contribution features a dozen rings inscribed or in any case marked with decoration, coming only from Antioch-on-the-Orontes or probably from its territory.

Of course, they do not exhaust the whole range of Byzantine rings, but offer new and interesting subjects for study. We have not found extraordinary examples. The evolution of the rings towards a purely graphic decoration seems evident, as in our no. 4.

Notes and acknowledgements

For the study of these seven objects at the Archaeological Museum of Hatay an authorisation has been issued to Ms Göknur Geçimli (Dokuz Eylül University, Izmir) in the course of her Master's thesis by the Directorate of the Museum of Hatay on 23 December 2019 and numbered as 36840858–155.01-E.1062933. Documentation was done by G. Geçimli in August 2020 who took all the photos for which we would like to thank her. Map 1 was arranged by Dr Sami Patacı (Ardahan) in 2021 for which we would like to express Dr Patacı our gratitude.

We also would like to thank Professor Peter Liddel (University of Manchester) for his kind revision of our text.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Baldini Lippolis 1999,

I. Baldini Lippolis, *Loreficeria nell'impero di Costantinopoli tra IV e VII secolo*, in *Bibliotheca archaeologica*, 7, Bari 1999.

Bonner 1950,

C. Bonner, *Studies in magical amulets, chiefly Graeco-Egyptian*, in *University of Michigan Studies, Humanistic Series*, 49, Ann Arbor 1950.

Kotansky 2020,

R. D. Kotansky, *A bronze "rider saint" pendant with the Lord's prayer*, in *Early Christianity*, 11, 2020, 229–243.

Laflı, Buora 2021,

E. Laflı, M. Buora, *Inscribed finger rings from Late Antique and Byzantine Asia Minor, in Greek, Roman and Byzantine bronzes from Anatolia and neighbouring regions*, E. Laflı ed., BAR S3038, Oxford 2021, 273–282.

Pülz 2020,

A. M. Pülz, *Byzantinische Kleinfunde aus Ephesos. Ausgewählte Artefakte aus Metall, Bein und Glas*, in *Forschungen in Ephesos herausgegeben vom Österreichischen Archäologischen Institut der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien*, 18/1, Vienna, 2020.

Spier 1993,

J. Spier, *Medieval Byzantine magical amulets and their tradition*, in *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 56, 1993, 25–62.

Spier 2010,

J. Spier, *Some unconventional Early Byzantine rings*, in *"Intelligible beauty": recent research on Byzantine jewellery*, C. Entwistle, N. Adams, eds., British Museum Research Publication, No. 178, London, 2010, 13–19.

Vikan 1991/1992,

G. Vikan, *Two Byzantine amuletic armbands and the group to which they belong*, in *The Journal of the Walters Art Gallery*, 49/50, 1991/1992, 33–51.

Waldbaum 1983,

J. C. Waldbaum, *Metalwork from Sardis: the finds through 1974*, in *Archaeological Exploration of Sardis, Monograph*, 8, London, 1983.

PATRU INELE INSCRISE BIZANTINE DE LA ANTIOHIA PE ORONTES CU ANEXĂ PE ALTE TREI INSTRUMENTA

Rezumat

În acest scurt articol vă prezentăm o colecție de patru inele cu inscripție, păstrate în Muzeul de Arheologie din Hatay din sud-estul Turciei, provenind probabil din antica Antiohia de pe Orontes. Aceste inele de bronz aparțin unei persoane necunoscute, unei persoane numite Epiphanius, unui alt Epiphanius și unui posibil Serghius. Cronologia

acestor inele inedite nu este ușor de determinat; cu toate acestea, după forma și tipul inscripției etc., ele pot fi atribuite în general perioadei bizantine timpurii, începând cu secolul al VI-lea d. Hr. La sfârșitul acestei lucrări sunt prezentate alte trei bijuterii, din bronz, păstrate în același muzeu. Primul este un inel de deget neinscripționat, al doilea este un pandantiv cu inscripție, iar ultimul este un alt inel, cu o probabilă inscripție arabo-islamică timpurie.



Map 1. Places referred to in the text (by Pataci 2021). / Locațiile la care se face referire în text (după Pataci 2021).



Fig. 1. A ring of an unknown person; Archaeological Museum of Hatay, acc. no. 9315 (photo by G. Geçimli, 2020).
/ Inel al unei persoane necunoscute, Muzeul de arheologie Hatay, inv. nr. 9315 (fotografie de G. Geçimli, 2020).



Fig. 2. Ring of Epiphanius; Archaeological Museum of Hatay, acc. no. 9320 (photo by G. Geçimli, 2020). / Inelul lui Epiphanius; Muzeul de arheologie Hatay, inv. nr. 9320 (fotografie de G. Geçimli, 2020).



Fig. 3. Ring of another Epiphanius; Archaeological Museum of Hatay, acc. no. 9321 (photo by G. Geçimli, 2020). / Inelul unui alt Epiphanius; Muzeul de arheologie Hatay, inv. nr. 9321 (fotografie de G. Geçimli, 2020).



Fig. 4. Ring of a possible Sergius; Archaeological Museum of Hatay, acc. no. 12236 (photo by G. Geçimli, 2020). / Inelul unui posibil Sergius; Muzeul de arheologie Hatay, inv. nr. 12236 (fotografie de G. Geçimli, 2020).



Fig. 5. A ring without any inscription; Archaeological Museum of Hatay, acc. no. 15835 (photo by G. Geçimli, 2020). / Inel fără inscripție; Muzeul de arheologie Hatay, inv. nr. 15835 (fotografie de G. Geçimli, 2020).



Fig. 6a-b. An inscribed pendant; Archaeological Museum of Hatay, acc. no. 8737 (photo by G. Geçimli, 2020). / Pandantiv fără inscripție; Muzeul de arheologie Hatay, inv. nr. 8737 (fotografie de G. Geçimli, 2020).



Fig. 7. A ring with a probable Early Arabic-Islamic inscription; Archaeological Museum of Hatay, acc. no. 13408 (photo by G. Geçimli, 2020). / Inel cu o posibilă inscripție arabică-islamică timpurie; Muzeul de arheologie Hatay, inv. nr. 13408 (fotografie de G. Geçimli, 2020).