

SHORTER CONTRIBUTION

TWO MEDIEVAL GOLD FINGER-RINGS FROM GREAT WRATTING

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During restoration work in 1983 on the 16th-century Maltings Farmhouse at Great Wrattling (TL/6948), Mr M. Lodge discovered a gold finger-ring (L1984-35A), in a trench for a drain, about 3ft down under the living-room floor. Later that year, whilst digging the foundations for a porch, he discovered another gold ring (L1984-35B), about 8ft away from the first. He reported that 'the farmhouse was built on a terrace cut into the hillside, the ground was disturbed and contained reddened soil and bones of pig and sheep'.¹ As both rings are in equally good condition (if not of the same quality of gold) and are of similar date, it is probable that they were originally associated and so may be regarded as constituting a small hoard. At first placed by the finder on loan in Moyses Hall Museum, they were subsequently sold.²

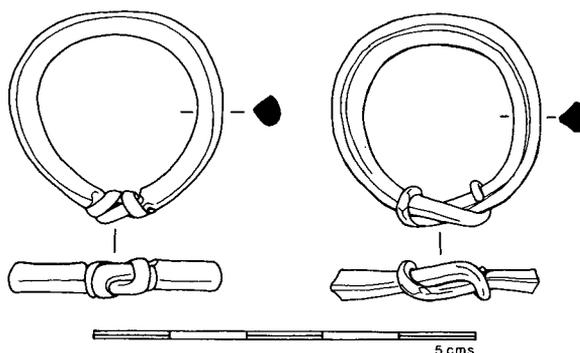


FIG. 13 – Gold rings, 11th–12th century, from Great Wrattling.

Descriptions

L1984-35A (Fig. 13, left): ovoid gold ring, the hoop having a rounded outer and an angled inner face with narrow rod-shaped ends twisted together into a tight knot, lying flat within its circumference. Ext. diam: 2.85cm; hoop section: 0.4×0.4 cm.

L1984-35B (Fig. 13, right): circular gold ring, the hoop being of lozenge-shaped cross-section with its angles hammered flat, tapering to rod-shaped ends closed by single twists. Ext. diam: 2.7cm; hoop section: 0.4×0.4 cm.

Analyses, by D.R. Hook, British Museum Research Laboratory

The two rings were analysed by X-Ray Fluorescence spectrometry (XRF). Ring L1984-35A (Lab. No. 19063U) was analysed on uncleaned surface metal, and therefore the result quoted in the Table should be regarded as semi-quantitative only, as the surface metal rarely reflects the true composition of the body metal. Ring L1984-35B (Lab. No. 22030P) was analysed on a gently abraded surface, and hence the result should be quantitative, with an accuracy of approximately $\pm 1\%$ for gold, $\pm 5\text{--}10\%$ for silver and $\pm 25\%$ for copper.

Specific gravity (SG) determinations were also carried out. These can be compared to theoretical SGs calculated from the XRF results:

<i>Ring No</i>	<i>Au%</i>	<i>Ag%</i>	<i>Cu%</i>	<i>SG(Calculated)</i>	<i>SG(Measured)</i>
L1984-35A	96	4	0.3	18.72	18.48
L1984-35B	79.8	18.3	1.9	16.41	16.41

The results show the rings to be very different in composition, ring L1984-35B being far less pure, with silver making up most of the difference. The theoretical and measured specific gravities for this ring are in agreement (indicating the XRF result is accurate), whereas the measured SG for ring L1984-35A is lower than the calculated SG, indicating that it is likely to have a true gold content *lower* than that indicated by the XRF result. This discrepancy between the two SGs corresponds to a difference of *c.* 2% in gold content.

Discussion

The ovoid form of ring L1984-35A, with its terminal-knot treated almost in the manner of a bezel, is tending to that of the 'stirrup-shaped' ring-type, so-called from the triangular form of its hoop. Stirrup-shaped rings are known to have existed in France by the middle of the 12th century which suggests a date for this Great Wratting ring in the first half of that century (Cherry 1981, nos. 119-21; Stratford 1984, nos. 311-18). However, the available evidence is too limited to date the development of the stirrup-shaped ring precisely and its origins could well have been earlier so that a date of *c.* 1100 might well be acceptable for ring L1984-35A. On the other hand, it is unlikely to be any earlier than that in date for its form is not paralleled in 10th/11th-century contexts.

In contrast, the simpler of the Great Wratting rings, L1984-35B, belongs to a tradition established in England during the Viking Age, being a scaled-down version of a plain annular type of silver arm-ring with lozenge-shaped cross-section – as found, for example, in the Cuerdale, Lancashire, and Ballaquayle (Douglas), Isle of Man, hoards which were deposited *c.* 905 and *c.* 970 respectively (Shetelig 1940, Figs. 11 and 19). It could thus easily be of 10th/11th-century date. It is, however, unlikely to have been of any great age on deposition for it is in very fresh condition, with the original hammering marks clearly evident.

The analyses indicate that the Great Wratting rings were made on separate occasions – or at least from different gold supplies (no relevant comparative analyses have been located) – even if there appears to be no great difference in age between them. Despite the chronological uncertainties outlined above, a date for the deposition of the Great Wratting gold finger-rings in the early 12th century may be suggested by way of conclusion.

Notes

- 1 The invitation to publish the Great Wratting rings and information about them was furnished by the late Miss Elizabeth Owles, then Curator of Moyses Hall Museum. I am most grateful to Mr John Cherry and Mrs Leslie Webster of the British Museum for discussing these rings with me and to Mr Duncan Hook of the Research Laboratory for permission to publish his analyses.
- 2 Christie's, 11 Dec. 1987, lots 24 and 25. The rings were first noted and illustrated in *Proc. Suffolk Inst. Archaeol.*, xxxvi (1985), 46, Fig. 6.

References

- Cherry, J., 1981. 'Medieval Rings, 1100–1500', in A. Ward, J. Cherry, C. Geere and B. Cartledge, *The Ring from Antiquity to the Twentieth Century*. London.
- Shetelig, H. (ed.), 1940. *Viking Antiquities in Great Britain and Ireland, Part IV: Viking Antiquities in England*. Oslo.
- Stratford, N., 1984. Catalogue entries in G. Zarnecki, J. Holt and T. Holland (eds.), *English Romanesque Art 1066–1200*. Arts Council of Great Britain, London.