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Three Persian-Period Metallic Finger Rings from Burial Cave 2, South Ḥorbat Tittora

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During the first season of a salvage excavation at South Ḥorbat Tittora (Kogan-Zehavi 1998), three metal finger rings were found in L724 of Repository C in Burial Cave 2 (Kogan-Zehavi, this volume).[1]

In this publication, an attempt is made to list most of the excavated parallels, in the chronological order of their publication, as a solid basis for discussion. Parallels from collections are noted only if they contribute additional data to the excavated material. Since illustrations of the parallels are not incorporated in this article, several references are given for the same items under the assumption that some are more accessible than others.

The four main dimensions used in this publication are: L = length, W = width, H = height, and T = thickness.

Description and Discussion

1. IAA No. 98-4106, L724, B1376 (Fig. 1)

Material: Iron (Fe 98.9% corrosion of iron, and the impurities Co 0.6%, Cu 0.11%, Cr 0.07%).

Dimensions: Bezel: L 22 mm, W 13 mm, H 2 mm; ring: L 23.5 mm, max. T 2.25 mm.

Method of Manufacture: Casting in the 'lost-wax' process (Moorey 1991:1).

Workmanship: Good quality.

Preservation: Complete, but heavily rusted and corroded; the rust had formed additional growths on the ring and the bezel. The ring is cracked in four places.

Ring Shape: Stirrup-shaped with a thin, lozenge-shaped bezel, a thin hoop, oval in section in its center and plano-convex in section near the bezel, with the flat face inward.

Bezel Decoration: Very corroded, at first glance appears to have been plain, but perhaps should be compared to Finger Ring No. 2.

Typology: This ring belongs to Type I in Boardman's typology of classical finger rings (Boardman 1970:212–213, Fig. 217:I). Such rings with plain bezels have only been found at a few sites in the country, in contexts that predate the Hellenistic period.

The first published ring comes from the excavations at Tell Jemmeh (Petrie 1928:16, §33 [No. 6], Pl. 32:6). The largest number of rings (at least 15) originated in the Southeastern Cemetery of 'Atlit,[2] several examples were found in the tombs at Ketef Hinnom, Jerusalem (two appear in Barkay 1986: photograph on p. 33 of the Hebrew section), and a fragmentary ring, at Tel Mikhal (Muhly and Muhly 1989: 283, Fig. 25.10.177, 284 [No. 177]).

Date: Persian period (fifth–fourth centuries BCE), on the basis of shape and excavated parallels.[3]

Archaeological Context: Accumulated material in Repository C, which included Persian-period artifacts.

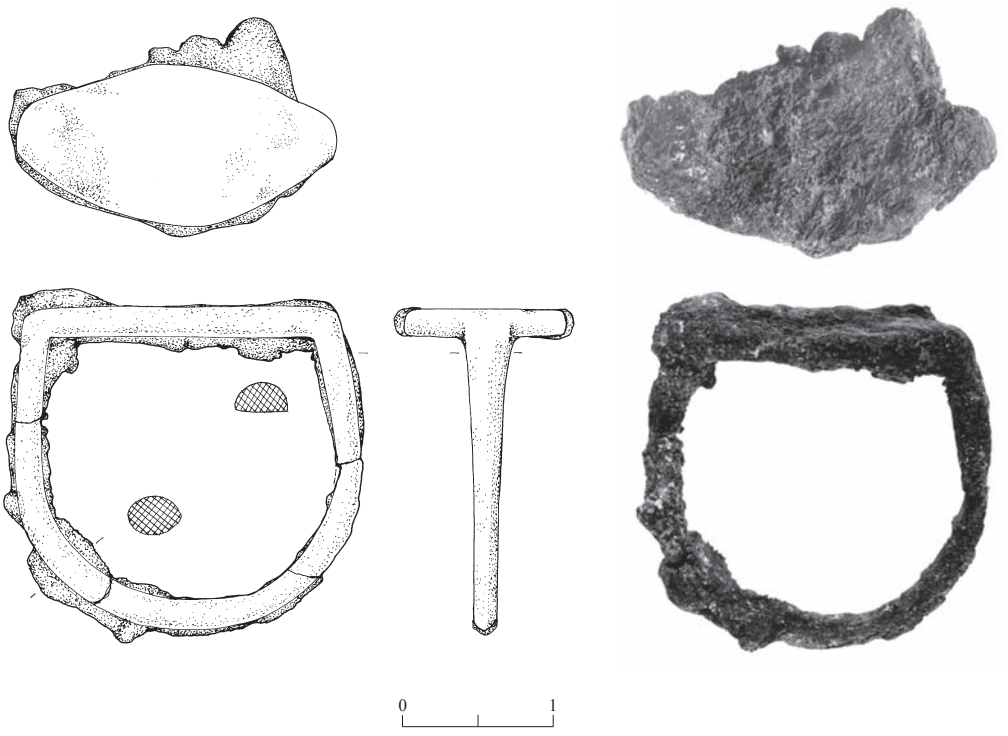

Fig. 1. Finger Ring No. 1.

2. IAA No. 98-4107, L724, B1441 (Fig. 2)

Material: Iron (Fe 99.2% corrosion of iron, and the impurities Co 0.5%, Cr 0.05%).

Dimensions: Bezel: L 24 mm, W 16 mm, H 2–4 mm; ring: L 24 mm, max. T 2.5.

Method of Manufacture: Casting in the 'lost-wax' process.

Workmanship: Excellent.

Preservation: Complete, but heavily rusted and corroded; the rust formed additional growths on the ring.

Ring Shape: Stirrup-shaped with a partially protruding bezel, a thin hoop, plano-convex in section with the flat face inward.

Bezel Decoration: Despite corrosion, enough has survived to identify it as a lion forepart shown in profile. The best preserved section is the protruding lion's head. Little remains of the mane (on the right),[4] the lower edge of the lower jaw, and the lion's foreleg (reconstructed in Fig. 2).

Lion foreparts appear on various objects of the Persian period,[5] for example on silver coins from Persepolis (originally identified as Lydian), from the days of Croesus (Olmstead 1948: Pl. 29 [lower left]; Goldman 1957:46–47, Fig. 4; Cullican 1965:168–169, Fig. 51a; Roaf 1990:202); on a gold rhyton said to originate at Hamadan-Ecbatana (Wilkinson 1955:221–222; 1967:2980, Pl. 1493; Porada 1965:163–165, Pl. 47 [left]),[6] on a Phoenician green jasper scarab from the Tharros cemetery, dated to the fifth century BCE (Hölbl 1986:332 [No. 238], Pl. 154:3a–d; Boardman 2003:114 [38/8], Pl.

Fig. 2. Finger Ring No. 2.

40: [38/8]), on a quartz seal purchased by the Reverend Grenville John Chester at Tartus on the Syrian coast (Buchanan and Moorey 1988:77 [No. 525], Pl. 17:525; Nunn 2000:95, 118 [No. 87], Pl. 48:80), and on a Phoenician scarab from a private collection (Boardman 2003:128 [43/59], Pl. 48: [43/59]).

Details of the lion's head can be compared with those on the rhyton and the reconstructed foreleg with that of the forepart on the scarab from Tharros.

Lion foreparts also appear on two local Persian-period numismatic groups: the Samarian coinage and the Philistian coinage. The lion heads on the Samarian coins are shown enface (Meshorer and Qedar 1999:98–99, Nos. 83–86), and as such have no relation to the motif on the ring from South Ḥorbat Tittora.

The lion heads on the Philistian coins are shown in profile, some with tongues hanging out, some with closed mouths, others roaring (Gitler and Tal 2006:180–181, No. XIII.7HOa; 246–247, No. XIX.1Da; 284–285, Nos. XXVIII.3Oa–c; 288–289, Nos. XXVIII.9Oa–b, respectively). The roaring heads, struck from the same pair of dies, look stylistically different from the example discussed here. It seems that these two local numismatic groups, of which most of the coins are of unknown provenance, have no connection with the ring discussed here.

Typology: This ring belongs to Type I in Boardman's typology of classical finger rings (Boardman 1970:212–213, Fig. 217:I). It is possible that one of the iron rings from the Southeastern Cemetery of 'Atlit was decorated in the same manner (Johns 1933:100 [No. 32.949], Pl. 37:32.949).[7]

Date: Persian period (fifth–fourth centuries BCE), on the basis of shape (similar to Ring No. 1) and decoration.

Archaeological Context: Accumulated material in Repository C, which included Persian-period artifacts.

3. IAA No. 98-4108, L724, B1444 (Fig. 3)

Material: Tin bronze (Cu 85.6%, Sn 9.6%, Pb 3.7%, and the impurities Fe 0.3%, Zn 0.2%).

Dimensions: Bezel: L 23.5 mm, W 14.5 mm, H 0.75 mm; ring: L 21 mm, max. T 1.5 mm.

Method of Manufacture: Casting into a mold, flection, soldering and incision.

Workmanship: Good quality.

Preservation: Almost complete, with some corrosion on the upper and lower edges of the bezel; rust stains.

Ring Shape: Stirrup-shaped with a thin, lentoid bezel, a thin hoop, lozenge-shaped section near the bezel and plano-convex in the center.

Bezel Decoration: The entire area of the bezel was incised with a horizontal scene depicting a running ibex attacked by a winged ibex. Both the ibex and the winged ibex are very common motifs in Achaemenian art and appear on a variety of objects: nine ibexes are seen on the scabbard of a dagger of a Median royal official depicted on a bas-relief of Darius I from the Treasury at Persepolis (Ghirshman 1954:178–179, Fig. 70; von der Osten 1956:278–279, Pls. 62 [upper], 74 [right]; Frankfort 1958:229, Fig. 117, Pl. 184A; Porada 1965:139–140, Fig. 76); an ibex appears on an Achaemenian cylinder seal (Collon 1987:90–92 [No. 421]); and another on a clay bulla said to come from the vicinity of Samaria (Stern 1992:11, Ill. 1:2, Pl. I: 2; 2002:93–94, Ill. 1:2, Pl. I: 2). The latter is also attacked by a winged creature, in this case, a gryphon.[8] A handle in the shape of an ibex was originally attached to a metallic vessel (Porada 1965:164, 166, 167, Pl. 48), and two others are still attached (Porada 1965:166, 168, 169, Pl. 49).

The most well-known example of winged ibex is a pair of metal handles, each shaped as a winged ibex standing on the head of a silenus, one in Berlin (Olmstead 1948: Pl. 63 [upper left]; von der Osten 1956:279, Pl. 70; Cullican 1965:124, 250–251, Pl. 71), the other in Paris (Frankfort 1958: Pl. 192; Porada 1965:168, 171, Pl. 50). This motif also appears on a cylinder seal acquired in Kermanshah (Wiseman 1959: No. 116;[9] Collon 1987:190–191 [No. 926]; 1995:181, 183, Ill. 146b).

Typology: The ring belongs to Type I in Boardman's typology of classical finger rings (Boardman 1970:212–213, Fig. 217:I). Similar rings with incised decorations, made of a variety of metals, have been found at several sites in the Levant: a bronze ring was

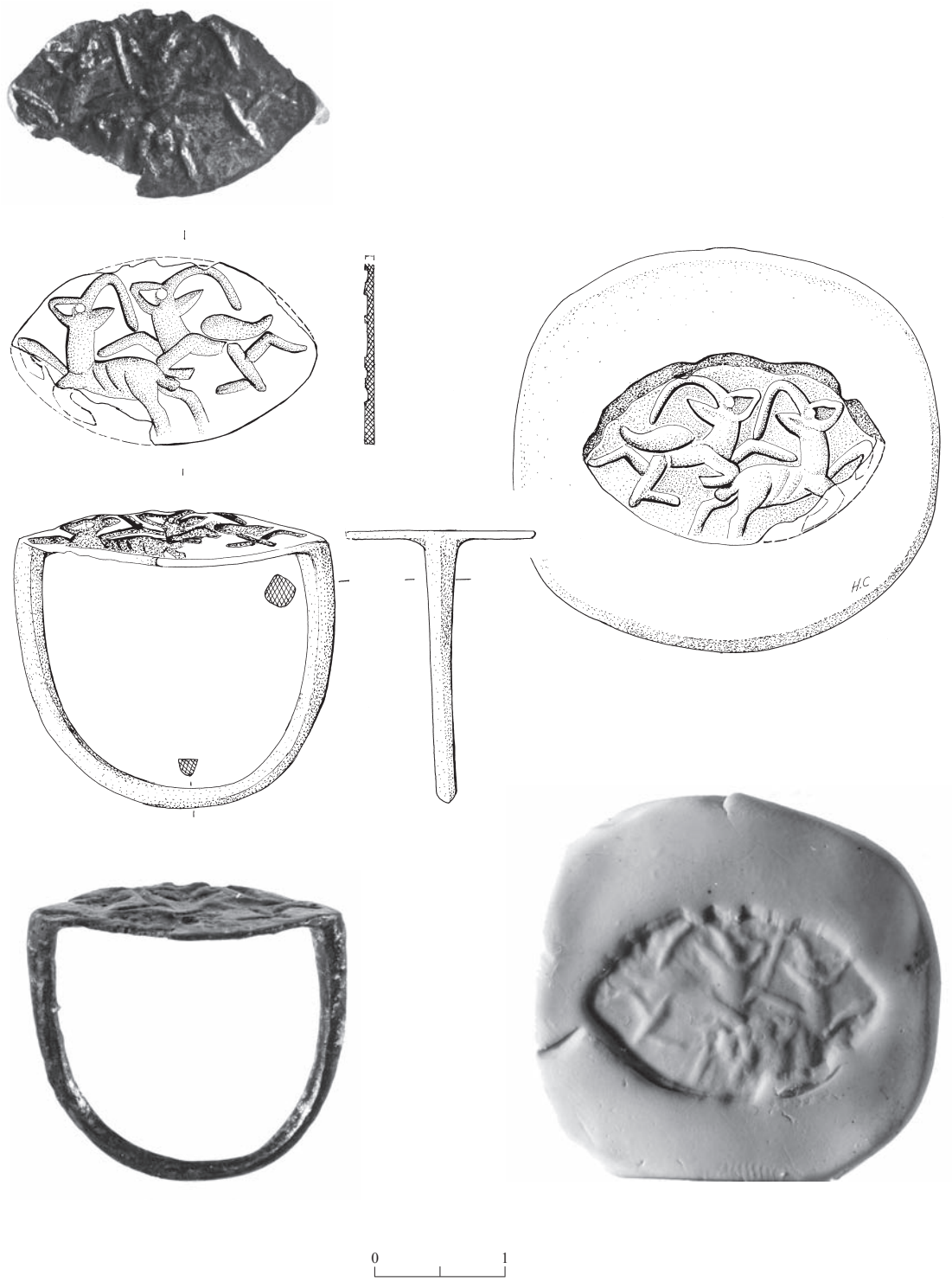

Fig. 3. Finger Ring No. 3.

discovered at Deve Hüyük (Moorey 1980:85, Fig. 12:324), a silver ring at Tel Mikhal (Barak and Amorai-Stark 1989:334, Fig. 28.1.4; 335–336 [No. 5]; 445, Pl. 75:1; Muhly and Muhly 1989:283, Fig. 25.10.174, 284), a bronze ring at Tell el-ʻAjjul with a very similar motif to that from Tel Mikhal, identified by Petrie as a Roman product (Petrie 1933:10, Pl. 25:194),[10] and a corroded silver ring in Grave 5 at Gezer (Macalister 1912 I:296, Fig. 157:19).

Date: Persian period (fifth–fourth centuries BCE), on the basis of shape (similar to Ring No. 1), excavated parallels and decoration.

Archaeological Context: Accumulated material in Repository C, which included Persian-period artifacts.

General Discussion and Conclusions

The three finger rings from South Ḥorbat Tittora are all-metal products, and due to their inland provenance, far from the sea, their preservation is relatively better than those found at coastal sites. They all belong to Type I in Boardman's typology of classical finger rings.[11] All three were found in the same archaeological context, and therefore, it can be assumed that they were placed in the repository at the same time.

These rings should be dated to the Persian period, or more specifically to the fifth–fourth centuries BCE, on the basis of their shape, decoration, and the excavated parallels. They comprise a welcome addition to the relatively small number of all-metal rings from the Persian period that has been found in this country.[12]

Two of the rings indicate the existence of a distinct group of iron rings in the Persian period. This observation is supported by ring impressions made on clay tablets from the Murašû Archive at Nippur, Babylonia (454–404 BCE), whose material was recorded by the scribes.[13]

The iron ring decorated with the lion forepart (No. 2) seems to be rare, although it is possible that Ring No. 1, and an example from ʻAtlit (see above), were also decorated in a similar manner.

In my view, iron finger rings seem to date exclusively to the Persian period. Accordingly, any appearance of iron rings in Iron Age contexts should be examined carefully.[14]

Although two of the rings bear Achaemenian motifs, it seems likely, on the basis of the cast-iron technology, that they all, or at least those made of iron, were produced in a center along the Anatolian-Syrian coast (Moorey 1994:281).[15]

Notes

[1] I wish to thank Elena Kogan-Zehavi for the invitation to study and publish these objects. The finger rings were cleaned by Ella Altmark, former Head of the IAA Metal Laboratory, who also prepared the modern impression of Finger Ring No. 3. Photographs were taken by Clara Amit and Marianna Salzberger, drawings and reconstructions were made by Carmen Hersch, Nos. 2 and 3 under the author's guidance [B.B., January 11, 1999].

I also wish to extend my gratitude to the anonymous reader for his comments (made in 2005), and to Sariel Shalev (Head of the Archaeomaterials Laboratory, Leon Recanati Institute for Maritime Studies, University of Haifa) for the XRF Surface Analysis of the metal compositions (made in 2010). Many thanks are due to Shelley Sadeh for the excellent final editing [B.B., February 20, 2010].

[2] Johns 1933:52 and 100 (No. 32.949), 71 (No. 32.503), 85 (No. 32.690), 87 (No. 32.718), 88 (Nos. 32.753, 32.759), 91 (No. 32.808), 92 (No. 32.814), 93 (Nos. 32.823; 32.827, 32.829), 95 and 99 (No. 32.936), 97 (No. 32.903), 102 (No. 32.1003) and 103 (Nos. 32.984, 32.995); Pl. 37:32.759, 32.829, 32.936, 32.949, 32.995.

[3] Despite the attribution of two iron rings from Ketef Hinnom to the seventh–sixth centuries BCE (Barkay 1986; caption of photograph on p. 33), it seems to me that they belong to the Persian period. The excavator himself mentions objects from the Persian period in at least two tombs (25 and 13; see Barkay 1986:22, 26, 28). Moreover, according to Moorey: "…The regular appearance of the bezel rings in the Near East coincided with the Achaemenid Empire" (Moorey 1980:85).

[4] However, this narrow strip rules out the possibility of reconstructing it as a circular mane, like those on the gold ajouré bracteates said to originate at Hamadan (Needler 1966:9; Maxwell-Hyslop 1974:211, Figs. 173a, 174), or on the glazed tile from the Apadana at Susa (Muscarella 1992:230–231 [No. 158]).

[5] An earlier object with this motif is a mount of beaten gold from Ziwiyeh dated to the seventh century BCE (Cullican 1965:123, 243, Pl. 16).

[6] A forepart of a winged lion appears on another gold rhyton from the same source, now in Teheran (Cullican 1965:123, 245, Pl. 33).

[7] However, after more than 70 years of storage in the Rockefeller Museum without any treatment, it is now impossible to prove for certain.

[8] A seal impression from Gezer shows a lion attacked by a horned animal (Macalister 1912, II: 223–224; III: Pl. 200:33).

[9] It was identified there erroneously as a winged bull.

[10] Its motif could also be compared to that of a gold finger ring from the Oxus Treasure (Boardman 1970:322, 357, black and white Pl. 991).

[11] We have preferred Boardman's typology for the finger rings since Keel's "Typ II" is more general (Keel 1995:113–114).

[12] Including rings that are not stirrup-shaped, and those made of gold and silver, and as such not mentioned in this work.

[13] According to Bregstein, 30 of the ring impressions were labeled as made of iron (AN.BAR*, parzillu*) rings (Bregstein 1993:53; 1996:55), although the correct number is actually 31 (Bregstein Nos. 102, 128, 157, 165, 197, 266, 281 [= Legrain 1925: No. 818], 285, 307 [= Legrain No. 810], 317, 332 [Legrain No. 813], 366, 367 [Legrain No. 823], 368, 384, 388, 469,507 [Legrain No. 888], 552, 568, 575, 577, 580, 583, 590 [= Legrain No. 971], 593 [Legrain No. 976], 594, 600, 613, 618 and 647).

[14] An intrusive ring from the fourth century CE was found in Tomb 106 at Lachish; the tomb was in use during the seventh–sixth centuries BCE (Tufnell 1953:187, Pl. 54:14).

[15] For the Phoenician coast, see Bregstein 1996:56.

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