SHORT ABSTRACT

William Filmer-Sankey D.Phil

New College Michaelmas 1989

On the function and status of prestige finger-rings in the early medieval Germanic world, c.450 - 700.

This thesis explores a method of defining status by understanding the function of objects used as gravegoods. The compact group of early medieval Germanic finger-rings is ideal for such a study.

The rings are first studied in isolation, without reference to the graves in which they were mainly found. They are classified so as to emphasise their function. The main division is between those with a practical function (e.g. as a seal) and those with a purely symbolic or decorative function. It is the former group that defines most accurately their owners' status. This definition is refined by understanding both the skills (e.g. literacy) needed to make the ring, and the ways by which someone gained such a ring.

Analysis of the origins of the different forms of prestige finger-rings shows that contemporary Byzantium inspired the vast majority, though there are few actual Byzantine rings. Very few late Roman or pre-migration Germanic forms endure.

Having been studied in isolation, the rings are then seen in the context of the grave and of the other objects found with them. This enables their potential contribution to the understanding of Germanic burial rite to be assessed. In the areas of distribution and dating they add little. In the area of status, they refine considerably the present, arbitrary divisions, particularly when interpreted in terms of the model of the 'prestige goods economy'.

Finally continental and Anglo-Saxon ring-wearing practices are compared. Although most influenced by their pre-migration past, the Anglo-Saxons did nevertheless copy a restricted range of continental types, which show that they understood both the practical functions and the corresponding status-implications of these rings.

LONGER ABSTRACT

William Filmer-Sankey D.Phil

New College Michaelmas 1989

On the function and status of prestige finger-rings in the early medieval Germanic world, c.450 - 700.

The starting point for this study of 'prestige' finger-rings is the Snape ring. As almost the only surviving find from the ship burial excavated in 1862, it is crucial not only for the dating of the grave, but also for the understanding of its status.

A second, but related reason was the wish to explore a new way of analysing status which did not depend upon an intact grave, but which looked instead at the function of objects and attempted to define the reason for their presence in the grave.

Prestige finger-rings are particularly suitable for testing such an approach since they form a compact, yet generally well-published group which has not been properly studied since Deloche in 1900.

Although several attempts have been made to classify early medieval rings, none of these was suitable for adoption in the present work. This is not only because they were concerned with different groups of rings, but also because they were directed at producing a chronological scheme. The group of rings covered in this thesis are those which are either of 'prestige' materials (i.e. of gold or silver, with gilding or silvering, or with a precious, semi-precious or engraved stone). Also included are rings which have the same form, but which are of bronze or iron. The classification has been specifically directed at providing information on the different functions of the rings.

The primary division is between rings with a 'practical function' (as seals, means of identification or badges of rank) and rings with a 'non-practical function' (as symbols, for example, of marriage, or as pure decoration). Within these 2 main divisions are further divisions, based on different forms and means of decoration.

The 258 rings on which the thesis is based are listed in a catalogue. This catalogue is not intended to be exhaustive. It contains only published rings, most of which are from intact, recently and well-excavated graves.

The rings are first analysed in isolation, without reference to their graves or to the other objects found with them. Looked at as a group, it appears that they were normally worn singly, on the left hand. The diameter of a ring is not a reliable guide to the sex of the wearer.

The rings of the 'practical function' group form 31% of the total and were worn by men and women. They can be divided, according to their function, into seal, name, intaglio and coin rings.

Most of the seal rings have an inscription in reversed letters. The skill needed to produce such a ring is the same as that needed to produce a coin die and they were probably made by the same men. This implies that seal rings were produced for the controllers of mints, the kings, but it is usually necessary to distinguish between the commissioner of the ring and the wearer. There are two ways in which someone who did not control a mint might gain a seal ring. The first was through contact with the late Roman/Byzantine world; the second was as a gift from one's overlord. Both ways implied the subordinate status of the receiver.

Name rings are distinguished from seal rings by having an unreversed inscription, which is usually a monogram. Like seal rings, their manufacture required literacy. The origins of the type lie in Byzantium. Their exact function cannot be deduced from the form of the ring, but there is clear evidence, both written and archaeological, that they were worn by the person named, in several cases in conjunction with a seal ring.

Intaglio rings incorporate an engraved gemstone. In 2 cases the intaglio carries a reversed inscription, thus proving its use as a seal. Both are associated with known Germanic kings. The remainder are Roman gemstones, reset in a Germanic ring. Actual Roman rings are rare. The forms are based on late Roman and contemporary Byzantine styles, though Germanic influence appears in the 'lyre-shaped' ends to some of the hoops.

Deduction of the status implied by the intaglio rings depends on whether they were used as seals. This cannot be proved, but is strongly suggested by their use as seals both in the preceding Roman period and in the succeeding Carolingian period. It is also suggested by the find of one intaglio and two seal rings in 3 graves, interpreted as belonging to succeeding members of the same family of Lombard aristocrats.

It appears furthermore that Germanic jewellers were selecting specifically intaglios with standing or seated figures. It is suggested that such figures symbolised the high rank of the sealer.

Coin rings have a gold, usually Byzantine coin as their bezel. They are an unusually close-knit group and seem to have been made at the same time for a set purpose. This may have been as a badge of royally-given rank, perhaps connected with the regulation of Byzantine trade.

The bulk of rings provide no evidence for such a 'practical function'. and were therefore either purely symbolic or purely decorative. Such a function cannot be deduced from the form of the ring and the 'non-practical function group' cannot therefore contribute so directly to the understanding of status through definition of function. The principle aims in the discussion of this group have therefore been its subdivision into recognisable forms and the analysis of their origins.

The main subdivision is into jewellery rings (with a decorated bezel) and plain rings. Jewellery rings are confined to female graves.

Within the jewellery ring group, 8 forms can be distinguished. The first is based on the intaglio ring forms. The second form has a protruding bezel. Its members are either actual Byzantine rings or close Germanic copies of Byzantine forms. The rings of Form 3 carry on from and elaborate a Roman form. They are often called 'matrimonial rings' and are linked with marriage or betrothal. Their distribution, however, shows this interpretation to be, at the very least, over-simplified.

Forms 4, 6 and 7 are unusual in being Germanic forms, without any trace of Roman or Byzantine influence. Form 8 contains the very few actual Roman jewellery rings that have been found in Germanic graves.

The plain ring group stands apart from all the others in having a far higher percentage (though still a minority) of bronze examples. Plain rings are found in male and female graves. Although there are strong indications that plain rings did have a clear symbolic meaning, the understanding of this meaning is obscured by regional variations and by burial rite. There are no grounds for the often assumed link with the modern custom of plain wedding rings. Whatever their precise meaning, it is apparent that it was not related to status.

Comparing the prestige ring forms to the non-prestige forms, it is clear that they are completely separate, with remarkably little overlap. The lack of clearly definable forms among the non-prestige rings indicates a corresponding lack of symbolic function.

More generally, prestige rings account for 25% of all finds. However, only 2% of graves contain a ring of any type, so that ring-wearing in the grave is very unusual. Wide regional variations are again apparent and the proportion of ring-wearers in the grave should not be taken as a direct reflection of number of ring-wearers in life.

Having extracted all possible information from the rings in isolation, it is possible to turn to see them in the context of the grave that produced them. This is a two-way process, with the understanding of the ring being both deepened by and deepening the understanding of the grave. This process is illustrated by looking at 3 areas: distribution, dating and status.

Except for a few individual cases, the distribution of rings can add little to our overall knowledge since it is largely conditioned by the distribution of *Reihengräberfelder*. It is also individual cases (those rings which can provide a fixed date or a *terminus post quem*) which can contribute most to dating. The group as a whole is not suitable for a typology, since their forms change too slowly. There is furthermore, no way of calculating the length of time between manufacture and burial. Despite this, there seems little evidence for rings being handed from generation to generation and most seem to have been buried within a lifetime of their manufacture. The date of the grave as fixed by its other contents is therefore likely to be reasonably close to its date of manufacture. Accepting this, one can see a general increase in the popularity of rings, a general

standardisation of forms, together with the elimination of the few Germanic forms, and a change from red settings to yellow and blue ones.

Rings can contribute most to a better understanding of status, as the analysis of their function has shown. This can be improved by the application of the model of the 'prestige goods economy', which explains both the strong Byzantine influence on the forms, and the evidence for central manufacture to standard patterns in terms of a society that defined its ranks through access to imported and locally-copied status objects. This model links seal, name and coin rings to the highest ranks and intaglio rings to a slightly lower level in the political hierarchy.

The fact that these practical function rings are found as often in female as in male graves implies that women exercise political power at all levels in their own right.

Having defined the nature and significance of ring-wearing on the continent, it can be compared with Anglo-Saxon England. In the first place, the Snape ring can be seen as definitely a continental ring of the first half of the 6th century. It is thus one of a small group of rings which are either Merovingian or inspired by continental types. These rings stand apart from the bulk of pagan Anglo-Saxon rings, which derive from pre-migration Germanic usage. The Merovingian and Merovingian-inspired rings mostly have a practical function and are of prestige materials. They show that the Anglo-Saxons were copying not only the practical but also the symbolic uses of these rings as indicators of status. Just as the Merovingians looked to Byzantium, so the Anglo-Saxons copied the Franks. In assessing the status of the Anglo-Saxon rings, some adjustment must be made. There was no literacy, so that seal and name rings could not be made. This increases the status implied by the Anglo-Saxon finds of coin and intaglio rings. The more restricted a ring's use, the higher its status. The lack of documents to seal in Anglo-Saxon England thus further boosts the status of the intaglio rings.

The Snape ring, in its Anglo-Saxon context, must be of the highest status. The fact that it was found in a ship burial which is certainly earlier than Sutton Hoo mound 1 shows that Sutton Hoo was not, as is usually thought, an isolated phenomenon. The Snape ring shows that East Anglia was no stranger to high level foreign connections.

ON THE FUNCTION AND STATUS OF PRESTIGE FINGER-RINGS IN THE EARLY MEDIEVAL GERMANIC WORLD, c.450 - 700.

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for the degree of D.Phil.



New College

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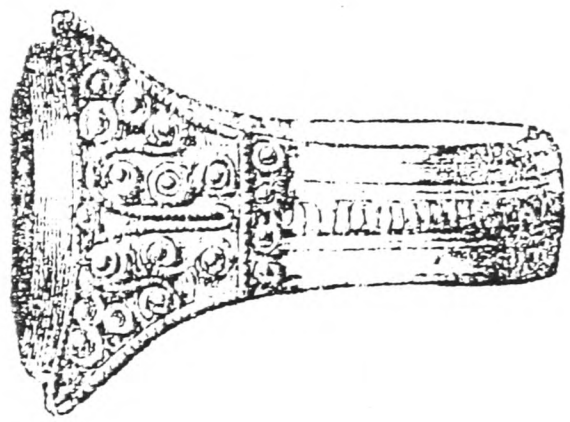



Frontispiece: Septimus Davidson's 1862 drawing of the Snape ring (2 : 1)

L'anneau, comme le bracelet, comme le collier, est une parure primitive que l'on pourrait appeller naturelle à l'homme.....Nous nous renfermerons dans le cercle Mérovingien, le seul qui convienne à notre sujet. Eh bien! dans ces bas-temps de l'histoire du monde, dans ce chaos de l'humanité d'ou sont sorties les nationalités modernes, nous voyons les anneaux et les bagues briller au doigt de ces générations éteintes comme ils étincelaient sur leurs mains pendant la vie.

L'Abbé Cochet *Le Tombeau de Childeric* (Paris 1859), 351-2

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PART I: INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The initial impetus for this study of finger-rings in the early medieval Germanic world arose from the need to understand the status of the Snape ring and hence of the ship burial in which it was found. The Snape ring (plate 1; fig. 27, 9) was discovered in 1862 when it was plucked from the spoil heap during the excavation of the ship burial and there can be no doubt that it came from within the area of the ship. It consists of a Roman onyx intaglio, showing the figure of Bonus Eventus, set in a massive gold ring which is decorated in Germanic style with beaded wire and granules. After a period in which it was lost, it was presented to the British Museum in 1950 by the grand-daughter of the finder (Bruce-Mitford 1974, 123).

It would appear that the Snape ship burial had been plundered in antiquity since, apart from the ring, the only other finds were the shattered remains of a glass claw beaker, a clump of hair wrapped in a cloth (perhaps the remains of a cloak), two spearheads, a small piece of blue glass and some fragments described by the excavators as 'jasper'. The presence of the two spearheads implies a male burial. Today, only the claw beaker and the ring survive. This fact gives the ring a crucial significance not only for attempting to date the grave but also for assessing the status of the man buried in it.

Previous studies of the ring, mainly with a view to dating and provenancing it, have resulted in a large measure of disagreement. Bruce-Mitford's expanded study of the ring argued for a consideration of the possibility of English origin and, if this was so, for a late 6th or 7th century date (Bruce-Mitford 1974, 126-129). He cited various insular parallels for the use of beaded wire and of the 'hook and eye' motif which decorates the ring's shoulders. Werner, by contrast, drew attention to the parallels between the Snape ring and the ring from grave 1782 at Krefeld-Gellep (dated to 520/30; plate 2; fig. 5, 3) and postulated therefore a continental origin and a date some 100 years earlier, in the first half of the 6th century AD (Werner 1971, 997). Werner and Bruce-Mitford disagreed similarly about the origin and date of the claw beaker. Subsequent commentaries (Hawkes 1975, 345; Fisher 1979, 71-75) on the ring and on Werner's and Bruce-Mitford's interpretations of it, have tended to side with Werner, although Pirling, the excavator of Krefeld-Gellep, thought the parallels between the two rings to be not close enough to deduce contemporary manufacture (Pirling 1974, 126-127). One of the difficulties about accepting Werner's early dates for the ring and the claw beaker was that, if the date of the Snape ship burial was anywhere near Werner's dates for the manufacture of the ring and the claw beaker, then it would considerably predate the earliest of the known Vendel period boat graves from Sweden and would thus upset the theory that the rite of boat burial came from Sweden to England. The recent revised dating of the Vendel and Valsgärde graves has, however, to some extent solved this problem since they are now thought to start during Ament's AMII phase (520/30-560/70) (Arrhenius 1983, fig. 6).

It was not only the disagreements about the date and origin of the Snape ring which prompted the present re-examination. Renewed interest in Snape caused by the new campaign of excavations at Sutton Hoo had also focused attention on the status of the Snape ship burial. The parallels between Snape and Sutton Hoo are many: the rite of ship burial, the existence of barrow burials with an associated flat cemetery, the similar heathland landscape and the proximity both to a major river and to each other all implied a close connection. There was, furthermore, a feeling that the Snape ship, because of its gold ring, must have contained someone of above-average importance (e.g. Filmer-Sankey 1984). At this point, speculation stopped. The grave had been robbed and so the normal criteria for assessing the status of Anglo-Saxon graves were not applicable. It was not possible to add up the total number of objects originally contained in the grave and this prevented all the possible permutations of calculating status by the quantity of objects in the grave. Similarly, although the gold ring and the claw beaker gave a hint, the presumed robbing of the grave made it impossible to say what other 'status objects' it might once have contained. So speculation came to a halt and, if anything, there was a tendency to ignore the Snape site as a rather unwelcome complication to an otherwise quite simple interpretation of Sutton Hoo as the burial ground of the Wuffinga dynasty. It was perhaps this feeling which led Bruce-Mitford to devote much energy to dating the Snape ship as late as possible and to his unwillingness to consider a direct connection between the two sites (Bruce-Mitford 1974, 132-137).

It is not only with robbed graves such as Snape that speculation about status has reached a dead end. Various methods for calculating relative status in Anglo-Saxon graves have been tried, with varying degrees of conviction (Shephard 1979; Arnold 1980). Whatever the method, however, it is clear that the richest graves, such as Sutton Hoo and Taplow, are so unique and rise so far above the rest that they are not susceptible to the comparative analysis which has been the basis of all previous status measurements. The written sources hint at numerous different grades among the upper ranks of Germanic society (Campbell 1978, 456). These ought to be reflected in the evidence of the graves, but current archaeological methods lack the precision to recognise them. A traditional method of overcoming this has been to attempt to tie in the archaeological evidence with known historical persons. Thus Sutton Hoo mound 1, St. Denis grave 49 and the Russian grave from Malaja Perescepina (Werner 1984, 38-43) are all described as 'royal' on the basis of identification with Redwald, Arnegunda and Kuvrat, Kagan of the Bulgars, respectively. Such identifications are, however, only possible in a tiny minority of the cases and are, in any case, rarely unchallengeable. Neither the written nor the archaeological evidence is strong enough to bear the weight of interpretation often placed on it. If further progress towards defining status is to be made, then a new method must be found.

One potential way forward is to move away from seeing the contents of a grave as a collection of individual and disparate objects and to look instead at the function of groups of objects, or, in some cases, of single objects. Until recently, the greatest need in Germanic

archaeology has been the establishment of a reliable chronology and this need has done much to determine the present way of looking at gravegoods. The emphasis has been on the use of gravegoods as tools for dating. If they are to be used to establish a chronology, then it is necessary to find links with other, similar objects from better dated graves. The best way to do this is through stylistic or technological comparisons. The actual function of an object, or the reason for its presence in the grave, cannot normally provide much information on date and so has tended to be ignored. In his recent review of Sutton Hoo volume III, however, Professor Werner attempted to analyse the whole of the grave group and to divide it up into a series of sub-groups based on function (Werner 1986, 478-495). He was able to identify, among other things, a large set of feasting equipment placed at the east end of the chamber. It comprised drinking vessels and buckets, eating dishes, cauldrons and knives, and washing bowls and combs. That the man buried at Sutton Hoo was equipped with the wherewithal for giving a feast must have implications for the social level at which he lived. There must surely have been an important distinction between someone buried expecting to give a feast in the next world and someone buried expecting simply to turn up at one. As Professor Werner himself says (Werner 1986, 495), his ideas need much further work but they do seem to have great potential for finer divisions in rich Anglo-Saxon and Germanic graves.

An object or group of objects within a grave assemblage may have more than a purely practical function (Pader 1982). Within the context of the grave they may also have a symbolic function. The definition and

understanding of this symbolic function is another potential way forwards, but is one which is fraught with difficulty, as it requires an understanding of the thought-world of the Germanic peoples which may be beyond our grasp. Numerous attributes, such as age, sex and status, may have been symbolised in various ways and it is very hard to disentangle which symbol refers to which attribute. The same object may have different symbolic meanings and, conversely, different objects may have the same meaning. Thus status may have been indicated differently according to age and sex. The same object may take on different meanings in different positions. Some objects may 'mean' the same in the grave as they meant in life. Others may take on new meanings in the burial rituals. It is vital to be aware of these difficulties when attempting to define the symbolic function of objects and their placing. On the other hand, I feel that they should not deter us from attempting definition and that, contrary to Pader's belief (Pader 1982, 78), there is a use in looking at individual items or groups within the total grave assemblage.

With the problems clearly understood, it is possible to start trying to identify those symbols which refer to status and to understand them. Germanic archaeologists are fortunate in having some non-archaeological evidence which can be used, with care, to help in this. For both from the archaeological evidence and from careful use of the contemporary written sources, it is possible to get an idea of what the Germanic peoples considered to be 'prestigious' objects, indicative of bravery and status, and to separate them from those indicating age or sex. They can be divided into two broad categories. There are those

objects, the manufacture of which required a complex technology and access to rare materials. Such objects include the sword Hrethel given by Hygelac to Beowulf (Beowulf, 44) and the gold-grip swords, such as that found in the grave of the Frankish king Childeric (Böhner 1981). The second group contains imported objects, foreign both in the technology required to manufacture them, and in the designs decorating them and in the use to which they were put. Such objects, mainly Byzantine, were the gold medallions which King Chilperic showed off to Gregory of Tours at Nogent-sur-Marne (Gregory of Tours VI, 2) and the Coptic bowls, intended for hand-washing, found at Sutton Hoo and elsewhere (Werner 1954-57).

Having defined the types of objects which might indicate status, it is possible to move on to attempt to isolate individual examples and to define their meaning, their origin and the rank that they imply. This is not always easy. The attempts to interpret the whetstone 'sceptre' from Sutton Hoo show how difficult it is to analyse the many influences which may have gone into the construction of this enigmatic object. Many of the problems with the interpretation of the Sutton Hoo 'sceptre', however, lie precisely in the uniqueness of the object and in the fact that it is without precise parallel. Not all objects with a symbolic function as a definer of status are so complex and obscure. Indeed, it is surely one of the prerequisites of a symbol of status that it is easily understood. The more widely known, used and understood the symbol, the more powerful it is likely to be. For this reason, it ought to be possible to identify and characterise possible objects which carry implications of status from among the general

categories outlined above. It ought, furthermore, to be possible to define the reasons for the adoption of a specific object as a symbol, even though they may have been long forgotten by the user, and to define the level of status which is implied.

One advantage of this way of defining status is that, unlike other methods, it does not necessarily depend on the grave being intact. Although it is clearly not possible to argue from the absence of an object with symbolic status from a robbed grave, the presence of such an object can lead to valid conclusions. This is potentially of great value, since it is the richer graves that are most likely to have been robbed.

The deduction of a person's status from the symbolic gravegoods with which he or she is buried depends on the idea that Germanic afterlife was directly comparable to Germanic life on earth and that grave contents are therefore an accurate reflection of the dead person's status in life. In our present state of knowledge, this statement should perhaps be treated with an element of caution. Nevertheless, recent studies of Germanic burial practice seem not so much to question this premise as to warn against too simplistic an approach. Status may be just one among many attributes which are reflected in the grave goods. There seems to have been no unified belief in the nature of the pagan Germanic afterlife (Young 1977, 6). More serious is the fact that grave assemblages are not as simple as they might at first sight appear and that considerable care is therefore needed in their interpretation. Pader, using anthropological data in her extensive

critique of existing interpretations, draws attention to many of the pitfalls of an oversimplified approach (Pader 1982, 53-68). In particular, she argues that the burial ritual may reflect an idealised view of society which is far removed from its everyday existence. Steuer (1968, 61) and Härke (1989) have shown that weapons buried in graves do not always make practical combinations and should not necessarily be seen as the total weapon set of the dead man. Nor do they necessarily represent the physical ability to fight. It would appear that the weapons selected for burial are in some way symbolic of the weapons of the dead man and thus, in some way, of his status. The general tendency in the study and interpretation of grave goods would thus seem to be moving away from the straightforward in favour of a more subtle approach. If weapons are being used symbolically in the grave, then it follows that other categories of grave goods - food offerings, dress equipment, etc. - should be seen in the same light. It is not enough to count up the number of objects or of object types in the grave in order to calculate status. If there is to be progress, an attempt must be made to understand and interpret the symbolic functions of the various categories of grave goods.

It is my contention, and it is the purpose of this thesis to prove, that prestige finger-rings are an admirable place to begin this analysis. They form a relatively small and tightly defined group. The origins of the various types can be traced as can their development and distribution. There is thus enough evidence, both from the rings themselves, from the associated finds and from written sources, to be able to form some idea both of their functional use and of their

symbolic value as indicators of status. They are thus of use in both of the possible new ways of defining status defined above. There are many other objects, or groups of object, which could and ought to be analysed in a similar way. The purpose of this study is to use finger-rings to test the theory and the method.

Some of the problems caused by the attempts to date and provenance the Snape ring originate in its unique nature, particularly when seen against the background of other early Anglo-Saxon ring finds. Although there are a few other rings with intaglios from Anglo-Saxon contexts, none of them is closely comparable to the Snape ring. They appear to be actual Roman rings, rather than Roman intaglios reset in a Germanic ring. On the continent the situation is different. There are at least 28 examples of Roman intaglios reset by Germanic jewellers. This means that, in simple numerical terms, it is far easier to find a context and parallels for the the Snape ring among the continental material than among the English finds.

The corpus of continental rings is not easy to use, however, quite simply because it has never been collected together and seen as a whole. The extensive work of Maximin Deloche (Deloche 1900), who gathered together and illustrated all rings known to him from the area of ancient Gaul as known to Caesar, has never been followed up and is inevitably now out-of-date both in contents and methodology (Appendix 1). Where rings found since then have been published, they tend to be described, given a few haphazard parallels, often drawn from Deloche, and left there. There has been no recent discussion of the whole group

and no real discussion of their function. Some individual reports have gone further (e.g. Fingerlin 1971, 66-69) and have discussed briefly the origins and uses of rings similar to that in question but these are very much the exception. The reason for this general neglect has been, once again, the emphasis that has necessarily been placed on refining the chronology of the *Reihengräberfelder*. It is primarily those finds which can contribute most to this that are most fully discussed. Thus most of the discussion about rings is directed at trying to fit them into one or other of the established *Zeitstufen*. This is difficult, both because of the relative paucity of finds and also because, with a few exceptions, they are not in themselves susceptible to close dating on stylistic grounds. Where function or symbolic status is discussed, it is usually incidental to the main chronological argument. Thus the implications of conclusions drawn about function and status, being not strictly relevant to the main purpose of ever closer chronological accuracy, are generally not followed through. There is, for example, a normally tacit recognition that rings incorporating re-used Roman intaglios were used, or, at very least, could have been used, for sealing. But this is rarely stated explicitly and the potentially startling implications of this have not been considered.

Since they are so often made of gold and silver, contain precious stones and are frequently found in graves which can be shown for other reasons to be 'rich', so finger-rings have been seen by continental scholars to be indicators of high status. Christlein showed gold finger-rings as belonging to his *Qualitätsgruppe D*, the highest in his classification (Christlein 1973, Abb. 11). Christlein's work represents

one of the few serious attempts to systematise what is essentially an instinctive feeling. It is based on the principle that quality can be subdivided on an exact basis, in much the same way that chronological divisions can be made. Just as certain types and styles of objects can be seen as belonging to a particular *Zeitstufe*, so, he argued, could they be assigned to a particular *Qualitätsgruppe*. This was simply because of their associations and their intrinsic merit and involved no consideration of their possible use and symbolic status. As such it represents the most carefully thought-out and by far the most useful version of the theory that the status of a grave can be judged by the quality of its gravegoods. At the other extreme, a cruder form of what is basically the same idea is expressed in the report of the grave from Pouan (Salin and France-Lanord 1956, 75), which produced a gold ring engraved with the name HEVA: "*Il s'agit bien d'un roi car, à cette époque, pareille richesse exige la qualité royale.*"!

Such discussion as there has been on the function, both practical and symbolic, of rings has occurred in the discussion of one or two individual rings, but the implications of the conclusions have not been very widely or systematically applied.

The most celebrated and discussed of these rings has been that found on the left thumb of the woman buried in grave 49 in the Parisian church of St. Denis (fig. 3, 4). As usual, the primary purpose of the discussion was to fix the date of the burial. Any consideration of the function of the ring was purely incidental to the main argument. Inscribed around the edge of the bezel with the name (in the genitive)

ARNEGVNDIS and with a central monogram interpreted as REGINE, the ring was seen by the excavators and Alföldi as the seal-ring of the Queen Aregund, mentioned by Gregory of Tours (H.F. IV, 3) as the second wife of King Chlother I (France-Lanord and Fleury 1960; Alföldi 1963). The ring was thus an excellent way of dating the grave and its other prototype style II contents to c.565/70. Wilson, however, pointed out that the ring was not a seal ring but a name ring, since neither the monogram nor the name were in reversed writing (Wilson 1964). A seal produced by the ring would thus be illegible. He argued further that people would not wear a ring with their own name on it, though they might well give it to a friend or follower. The grave was not, therefore, that of Queen Arnegunda and could only be dated to sometime after she had become queen (c.538/9) and was thus in a position to commission and give away the ring. In the following year Ament (Ament 1965) argued that a study of the seal rings illustrated by Deloche showed both normal and reversed inscriptions with an additional S or SV which Deloche interpreted as SV[BSCRIPSIT] and thus as proof of a seal ring. This did not really counter Wilson's point as it is as much a pointer to weaknesses in Deloche's methodology and his often rather optimistic interpretations of inscriptions. It was Werner (Werner 1967/8) in his consideration of name and seal rings who pointed out that the grave of Apahida I contained both a name ring, engraved with 'OMHARVS' and a monogram ring interpreted as 'OMAPOC', the Greek version of Omharus. This, taken with other evidence, both archaeological and historical, discussed below, would seem to remove any obstacle to identifying the occupant of St. Denis grave 49 as Queen Arnegunda. Whether this is the same person as Gregory of Tours' Queen

Aregund is, of course, a separate question and there do seem increasingly strong arguments for placing St-Denis grave 49 into the 7th century.

Much quoted, though rarely discussed in detail, is the seal ring of King Childeric (fig. 1, 4; plate 3), found at Tournai in 1653 and stolen from the Cabinet des Médailles in Paris in 1831 (Böhner 1981; Schramm 1954). Once again, the impetus for discussion has been the use of the ring for dating the grave and identifying its occupant. The ease with which this could be done has tended to limit further consideration of its function and implications. It is worth remarking that, if this ring had not so clearly identified the occupant of the grave as a Frank, the style of the remaining contents, in particular the remarkable parallels between the cloisonné patterns and those found on fittings in the Apahida II grave (Horedt and Protase 1972, Abb. 33, 39, 48; Tab. 1), might well have led to an identification of the grave as that of a central European raider. We should therefore be wary of being too certain that the Pouan grave, with similarly exotically decorated objects, contained a Gothic victim of the battle of the Catalaun Fields in c.450 (Salin and France-Lanord 1956, 75; Kazanski 1982, 25-30).

More recently, there has been discussion of a small group of rings which will do much to advance our understanding of the status and function of seal rings in the Germanic world, both on account of the unique nature of the find and of the discussion which has not focussed simply on the chronological implications but has also considered the questions of function and implied status. The find of three rings from

graves 1, 3 and 4 at Trezzo sull'Adda near Bergamo in northern Italy has very important implications which have yet to be fully worked out, yet alone applied elsewhere (von Hessen 1976; von Hessen 1983; Kurze 1986; Roffia 1986). While the first (and earliest) ring incorporates an intaglio, the second and third are engraved with the bust of a man (perhaps a king?), surrounded by a personal name and, in one case, the initial VIL for 'Vir Illuster' (fig. 6, 5; 1, 11-12). The personal names are not those of Lombard kings and so must represent men (succeeding members of the same family?) entitled to seal documents. They are the first properly excavated examples of a type already known from the ring of Graifarius (fig. 2, 3), found at Siders-St-Luc in Switzerland in the last century (Moosbrugger-Leu 1971, 213).

It does appear that the time is ripe for a reassessment of the evidence provided by the finger-rings. Deloche's catalogue is very out-of-date and is no longer adequate as a basis for study. There have been many new finds since 1900 and many of these have benefited from the improvements in the techniques of archaeological excavation and recording. This means that the limited evidence provided by the written sources and by the study of the rings themselves - all that Deloche had to go on - can be supplemented by the evidence provided by the archaeology. Virtually none of Deloche's rings came with any knowledge of associated finds or information about the grave. Deloche was also seriously handicapped by the lack of any way of dating the rings other than by the epigraphy. Some of the rings which he included must today seem very doubtful. Today, virtually any ring found with associated objects, or within a cemetery, can be fitted into

the established framework of Merovingian chronology with a reasonable degree of certainty. This enables a far clearer idea of the development of different styles which, taken with the improved techniques of classification, enables a far more precise picture of their changing frequency and geographical occurence. In order to make full use of this new knowledge, it is necessary to go beyond the present emphasis on seeing grave finds as principally a way of refining the chronology. Rings are not suitable for this. If, however, a different approach is tried, one which makes use of the already established chronology and combines with it the new ideas about the interpretation of 'status objects' and prestige burials, then it becomes possible to see finger-rings as more than just objects which, although often of gold or silver and of high artistic worth, are of limited use.

By applying the new interpretative methods to the evidence of new finds and improved chronology, it is possible to see much more clearly why, how and by whom finger-rings were worn and used, and thus to make proper use of them in increasing our understanding of Germanic society. They may be used primarily to define the status of the wearer. Since many of the finger-ring types current from the 5th to 7th centuries are not traditional Germanic styles, but are copied from other cultures, they are a way into the 'thought-world' of the early Germanic peoples in that they show us which peoples were admired and emulated. Finally, since the wearing of at least certain styles of ring was restricted to the upper ranks of Germanic society, the study can throw light on the emergence of kingship and aristocracy, which was such a feature of this period.

This study will investigate principally those groups of rings which throw most light on these aspects. It will begin by classifying the rings by function and decoration (chapter 2) and by considering what conclusions can be drawn from the study of the rings themselves about the origins and functions of the different types (chapters 3 - 6). It will then look more widely to see how these conclusions can both be strengthened by and strengthen our understanding of Germanic burial rite and society (chapter 7). It is inevitable that some groups of rings are more easily interpretable than others. This applies especially to those rings which have a practical function, rather than a purely symbolic use. Although the classification will include all 'prestige' ring types, the discussion about status and about functional and symbolic use will be more restricted. It will use only published material and will deal primarily with rings from recent and well-recorded excavations and, wherever possible, from undisturbed graves. There are only a few cases where stray finds can be much use, except as parallels for properly associated finds. Virtually the only exceptions to this rule are those rings, like that ascribed to Queen Berteildis, one of the wives of Dagobert I (Deloche 1900, no.186), which carry legible inscriptions and thus can be used in a limited fashion without reference to their associated finds (fig. 1, 13). The ring of 'Graiferius', a stray find, can thus be seen as important evidence for the existence of officials delegated to seal in the Frankish area. A comparison with the information to be gained from the intact Trezzo grave group, with its two properly associated and excavated seal rings, bears out the limited use of even this evidence.

The study will be confined principally to those rings which are of silver or gold, or which incorporate intaglios, precious or semi-precious stones. The distinction, though easy to draw in theory, is not always so easy to maintain in practice as there are bronze and even iron rings of identical style and manufacturing technique which are clearly so closely linked to their more precious cousins that they ought to be included in the discussion. On the other hand, I have excluded from all but the briefest discussion in chapter 6 those bronze and iron rings from continental graves which are not related in style to those in precious metals.

The 'Germanic' world covered by this thesis includes, of course, Anglo-Saxon England. The central sections of what follows, nevertheless, are concerned with the continental Germanic rings, so that the Anglo-Saxon finds are considered in the final chapter. There are a number of reasons for this approach. The first is simply that the Anglo-Saxon rings, of all types and metals, have already been catalogued, classified and discussed by Fisher (Fisher 1979). There is no point in duplicating her work.

The second reason is that, since it has been suggested that the Snape ring is of continental manufacture, it is necessary to compare it with the more numerous continental intaglio rings. If it can be shown that it is indeed of continental manufacture, then the analysis of its function and status must see it initially as such. Only once its original meaning has been fully understood can one look to see how this meaning may have changed in crossing the Channel.

The possibility that a change in function and symbolic meaning might have occurred in this way is a further reason for separating the Anglo-Saxon from the continental Germanic. Although England was an integral part of the early medieval Germanic world, it had nevertheless its own peculiar ways, which set it more clearly apart than do the differences between, say, Francia and Alamannia. It is clear that the habits of ring-wearing are no exception to this rule. If these differences are to be clearly defined and accounted for, then the forms and functions of the continental rings must be fully understood, before contrasts can be drawn with the insular Anglo-Saxon material.

A full understanding of the corpus of continental prestige finger-rings may seem an obscure way of approaching the problem of defining the status of the Snape ship burial. Nevertheless, as will be argued in what follows, just as Byzantium was the model for Frankish rings and their use, so Francia exercised a crucial influence on the pattern of Anglo-Saxon ring wearing. To understand the latter, we must therefore begin with the former. Whether or not the Snape ring was made on the continent, the key to its understanding lies not in Suffolk but on the mainland of Germanic Europe.

CHAPTER 2

THE CLASSIFICATION OF PRESTIGE FINGER-RINGS

Before launching into any discussion of the prestige rings, it is necessary to devise a scheme for their classification which is both all-encompassing and not too complex. Since so little work has been done on the prestige rings of the period it has been necessary to devise an entirely new scheme. Before explaining this and the reasoning behind it, it is useful to begin by summarising the previous attempts at classification and by showing why they are not suitable for adoption in the present work.

Deloche, the general shortcomings of whose work are discussed in Appendix 1, is theoretically only interested in seal rings, although he does illustrate a number of rings which he acknowledges could not have been used as seals (Deloche 1900, LXVIII). He does not, however, attempt any sort of classification which includes them. Since Deloche, a number of works have attempted classifications which include all ring types and these may be divided into two basic categories, depending on whether they take decoration or form as the primary basis for classification.

Three works which utilise decoration are Dalton's on the Byzantine and early Medieval parts of the Franks collection (Dalton 1912), Böhner's on the *Trierer Land* (Böhner 1958, 118-123) and Moosbrugger-Leu's on Switzerland (Moosbrugger-Leu 1971, 212-216). Of these, Böhner and

Moosbrugger-Leu are both the most recent and comprehensive. They also choose relatively similar categories as Table 1 shows. The problem with all three classifications, and the reason why none is suitable for direct adoption here, is that they are all designed to cover a limited and specific selection of material and are not capable of being adopted to fit the corpus without substantial enlargement and amendment. In spite of their similarities, it would even be difficult to fit the Trier rings into Moosbrugger-Leu's scheme and *vice versa*. A further problem with both Böhner and Moosbrugger-Leu is that their classifications are intended primarily to produce a chronological scheme and are not therefore well adapted to suit the purpose of this work.

Of the four works selected to illustrate classification based on form, three deal in fact with the Roman period and have been studied as demonstrations of the wide range of possibilities. Henkel's massive work on Roman rings from the Rhineland (Henkel 1913) is by far the most complex classification, as it contains some 45 sections and subsections for gold and silver rings alone. Henig's work (Henig 1978) on engraved gemstones adopts a more simple 15 type division, but is limited to rings with gemstones. Both Henkel and Henig are, once again, principally interested in a chronological scheme. Beckmann's corpus of finger-rings of the Roman Iron Age found in 'Free Germany' aims to throw light not only on the chronology of the area but also on the geographical origins of the various types. Basing her classification on Henkel's, she distinguishes 42 forms, within 3 main types (Beckmann 1968). For her work on rings of the early Anglo-Saxon period, Fisher defined 6 clear categories (Table 2), with the aim of

illuminating chronology, origins and geographical spread (Fisher 1979, 92). While her classification is based on form, she does make use of decorative elements in her analysis of regional variations (Fisher 1979, 3, 31-36).

While it is clear that Henkel, Henig and Beckmann's schemes, being intended for Roman-period rings, would need extensive modification (and, in the case of Henkel, simplification) in order to fit them to the early Medieval period, Fisher's Anglo-Saxon classification also proved unsuitable for direct adoption here. The reason is a variation on that which ruled out Böhner and Moosbrugger-Leu's schemes. Like their's, Fisher's was designed to suit a particular group of data - pagan Anglo-Saxon rings of all metals - which is very different to that under consideration here. Thus, if Fisher's categories were applied to continental prestige rings, virtually all would fit into groups 4-6, with the vast majority appearing in group 6. This distribution is virtually the reverse of the distribution of Anglo-Saxon rings.

In discussing the various different ring classification schemes, I am not attempting to discredit them. Rather I would argue that, although they were all of equal validity when applied to the data that they were designed to classify, they are not suitable for the classification and analysis of the full spread of prestige early Medieval rings attempted here.

There is a second, related reason why none of the previous schemes could be adopted or even adapted here. This is that they were designed

not only for different data sets, but also for different results. The consideration of the different classifications shows that, while there are two basic approaches - based on form and decoration - there are many possible and equally valid sub-approaches. The choice of which approach to adopt must depend not only on the nature and size of the group of objects but also on what is required from the data. There is no such thing as a single, unbiased and correct classification for an object group. Each group has a large number of possible classifications, each of which is equally valid. If we take the example of the Sutton Hoo coins in volume 1 of the Sutton Hoo publication, we see that, in section 2 of chapter IX (*The coins and the date of the burial*) they are classified by metal content in order to give a chronology, while in section 3 a classification based on typology (i.e decoration) is adopted in order to give indications about the locations of mints and moneyers (Kent in Bruce-Mitford 1975, 588-607, 608-647). Neither classification is more valid than the other, but both have different aims. Thus it is not only the different scope and nature of the ring data in the present work that makes the already existing classification schemes unsuitable. It is also the fact that they have a different aim - the elucidation of a chronology - from the present work.

In devising a classification to suit the scope and purpose of this thesis, it is necessary to have clearly defined both the nature of the group of objects to be classified and the questions which are to be asked of it. In this case, the objects to be classified are not all early medieval Germanic finger-rings, but rather 'prestige' finger-

rings. A 'prestige' ring is here taken to mean one of gold or silver, with gilding or silvering, or which incorporates a precious or semi-precious stone or intaglio. The word has sometimes been used by archaeologists too embarassed to admit that they are only interested in gold and silver, but the decision here to concentrate on 'prestige' rings was taken for more practical reasons. In the first place, they form a compact and easily manageable group. Furthermore, since they use precious metals and stones, they tend to be published more rapidly and to higher standards than most other objects. This continues to be the case, despite the new archaeological puritanism, with its professed disdain for fine objects. These facts made feasible the compilation of a reasonably complete catalogue within the available time.

The final and most important reason for the decision to concentrate on 'prestige' rings was that, as will be demonstrated in what follows, they do form a coherent group, which is largely independent of the group of non-prestige rings. In classifying the early medieval Germanic rings, therefore, the primary division has been made between 'prestige forms' and 'non-prestige forms'. The definition of a 'prestige form' is one in which the great majority of rings are made from 'prestige' materials, while in a 'non-prestige form' the reverse is true. With one exception, all the forms considered below are clearly of the former type, with only very few (if any) examples made from non-prestige materials. The exception is the category of plain rings, where prestige and non-prestige examples are roughly equally balanced. The significance of this group is discussed fully below.

This generally clear division between the forms of rings made of prestige materials and those of non-prestige metals allows the concentration on the former group without the risk of imposing abitrary or unnatural divisions on the material. In those few cases where rings of 'non-prestige' metal occur in 'prestige forms' they have been included both in the discussion and in the catalogue, but this has not substantially increased the numbers involved.

The limitation of the scope of the classification to the consideration of prestige ring forms is thus possible, without any distortion of the results. Having thus defined the scope of the material to be classified, the next stage is to define what the classification hopes to demonstrate. As outlined in the introduction, the aim of this thesis is to attempt to move away from a principally chronological view of gravegoods towards one where the function of the object is understood. From this it ought to be possible to draw conclusions about status. Since the definition of function is the important first stage, it follows that function is what the classification should be designed to emphasise.

A classification based on the function of the various finger-ring types has therefore been attempted (Table 3). Underlying it is the assumption that all finger-rings must have a purpose. The word 'function' is here used in its widest sense to cover both active use (for example as a seal) and passive use (i.e. as a symbol, for example, of marriage, or as simple decoration). In the discussion of previous ring classifications above, it was noted that the basic choice of

approach was between one based on details of form and one based on details of decoration. The 'function' classification put forward here draws on both approaches. The reason for this is partly that a ring's function is likely to have a strong influence on the design both of its form and of its decoration, making the two hard to separate. Thus a ring designed for sealing will usually have a bezel which protrudes sufficiently to enable a clean impression without the wearer's finger coming into direct contact with the hot wax! It will also be decorated with an incised pattern (whether in metal or gemstone) to enable a distinctive mark to be left in the wax. A more important reason why both form and decoration are used to define groups is the fact that, while on rings with an active use it is methods of decoration (for example, the use of reversed or unreversed writing) that distinguish the groups, in the case of rings with a passive, symbolic use, it is details of form that are more important indicators of differing function.

The overriding aim has been to keep the classification as simple as possible and the basic division is therefore between rings with a 'practical function' and those with a 'non-practical function' (Table 3). The criteria for judging a ring group to have a 'practical function' are if its components could be used as *seals*, as *methods of identification*, or as *badges of rank*. It is important to note that, just because a ring has a potential practical use, it does not necessarily mean that it was so used. The case of those rings which use intaglios is a good example of this and will be discussed later. Furthermore a ring with a

practical function may also have an equally important symbolic function.

Within each main division there are sub-groups (fig. 22). For the 'practical function' group, these are:

Seal rings: rings which carry the name of a person or a monogram in reversed writing. Intended as a signet.

Name rings: rings which carry the name of a person or a monogram in unreversed writing and intended, therefore, as a means of identification and not as a signet.

Intaglio rings: rings which incorporate an engraved gemstone and potentially useable, therefore, as a signet.

Coin rings: rings which use a coin as a bezel.

For the 'non-practical function' group, they are:

Jewellery rings: rings which belong to none of the above categories, but which have an expanded bezel, which is usually decorated in some way.

Plain rings: rings without a bezel.

Finally, where the rings of a sub-group are of differing styles, they have been further subdivided into 'forms'.

The extent to which the function of a ring-type can be defined varies very greatly, since it can, in most cases, only be deduced from the internal evidence of the ring itself. There are scattered references (summarised in Oman 1930 and Fourlas 1971) to rings at this period, but as they are both sparse and often contradictory, it is not possible to make any connection between the archaeological and the written evidence. For example, it is known from the written sources that churchmen possessed rings, but only the slightest hint of their existence occurs in the archaeological evidence, as will be discussed below. The lack of any connection between the written and archaeological evidence inevitably means that it is much easier to define the function of a ring with an active or practical use since it must incorporate certain features to enable it to fulfil its purpose. Thus a seal ring must carry an emblem or name which will make sense when impressed in wax and a name ring must have a readable name or monogram. It is these features which enable us to deduce its function. A ring with a passive or purely symbolic use, however, need not incorporate any feature from which we can deduce what it symbolised. We may be sure that the type has a function, without being able to define it. A particularly good example of this is Form 3 of the 'jewellery ring' group, the so-called *'Matrimonial'* rings (fig. 13, 1-4). On account of their peculiar bezels, they form a very distinctive group and, since the surviving examples occasionally carry a male and a female name (engraved unreversed), they have been seen as betrothal or wedding rings (Mastrelli in Degani 1959, 75-78). There is, however, no proof of this, either in the rings themselves or in any contemporary source and all that we can safely say of them is that their distinctive

form points to a symbolic function, now unknown to us. The 'plain rings', too, have often been seen as wedding rings and there was, for example, much discussion in the nineteenth century as to whether the plain ring in Childeric's grave was his (as Chiflet had suggested) or was that of his wife Basina (Cochet 1859, 350-361; Deloche 1900, 192-5). The only basis for this speculation is the present day custom of wearing plain gold wedding rings and there seems no evidence that it existed in the Merovingian period (Oman 1930, 16). There is a reference to a ring given at the time of betrothal, but there is nothing to indicate either that this was standard practice, or that the ring was of a defined form (Weidemann 1982 I, 314).

As stated above, the classification based on function adopted here is just one of several possible ways of dividing up the corpus of early medieval Germanic prestige rings. It was adopted as that best suited to the purpose of the study. Other possible classifications would have resulted in totally different groupings. Had the refinement of a 'ring chronology' been the prime aim of the work, then such features as the use and number of granules on either side of the bezel or the presence of 'lyre-shaped' ends to assist the joining of hoop to bezel might have been used. Such a form-based classification would have preserved the 'plain ring' group intact, but the others would have been completely lost since both 'lyre-shaped' ends and granules occur on 'coin rings', on 'seal rings', on 'intaglio rings', on 'name rings' and on 'jewellery rings'. The results would have been equally valid, but would have provided information neither on the function of the rings nor on the status of the wearer.

PART II THE RINGS IN ISOLATION

CHAPTER 3

THE RINGS AS A GROUP

Having in the introduction outlined the extent of previous work on finger-rings, and in the previous chapter the method of classification, the next stage is to investigate the rings themselves and to see what can be deduced from them alone. This section approaches the rings in much the same way as Deloche did (Deloche 1900). Once this necessary preliminary work has been done, it will be possible to move on to use all of the available evidence of accompanying gravegoods and structures, in order to discuss their dating, the origins of the styles and the status that they reflect.

The rings on which this thesis is based are listed in the accompanying catalogue in part V. It contains 258 rings. Twenty-one of these are stray finds. The rest come from 211 graves at 123 sites in 11 countries. One hundred and forty-eight rings (57%) come from definitely female graves, 24 (9%) from definitely male graves and 9 (3%) from juvenile graves.

The catalogue is not intended to be exhaustive. It is limited to the period from c.450-700 and it contains only published rings of 'prestige' forms, whether or not they are of 'prestige' materials. There has been an element of selection within this group of 'prestige' ring

forms. Since the aim of the thesis is to deduce function and status by using the full range of available evidence, the catalogue has tended to select only those rings which come from well-published excavations of properly stratified graves. Stray finds, or finds from poorly published or badly disturbed graves have been included only if they can in themselves provide useful information or can be used as comparanda for better recorded finds. In the former category is the ring, found in unknown circumstances in Laon and ascribed, on account of its inscription, to Queen Berteildis. In the latter are 7 rings from various findspots in northern Italy which can be compared with the three better recorded finds from Trezzo sull'Adda.

There are also geographical limits. Italy in general suffers from poor publication of even its most vital sites and the problem is especially acute for the Lombard period. No rings from the preceding Ostrogothic period have been included for slightly different reasons. Of the 26 rings listed by Bierbrauer, only 1 comes from a sealed grave group. Twenty-three come from 2 hoards and the other two are unassociated (Bierbrauer 1974, 176-80). Spain has been omitted entirely, partly because of the problem of the language, but also because of the difficulty of separating the material culture of the incoming Germanic settlers from that of the indigenous population (Zeiß 1934, 59; see also Reinhart 1947). On the other hand, the 'Germanic' frontier has occasionally been stretched to include finds which, although not within the Germanic world, are nevertheless closely comparable and therefore illuminating. The Hungarian grave find of Apahida I (Fettich 1953) and

the splendid Russian grave of Malaja Perescepina, recently published by Werner (Werner 1984), are included for this reason.

The catalogue is intended, not so much to replace Deloche's work, as to update it, both in content and methodology. Thus the bulk of the rings included have been found since 1900. The only reasons for a ring known to Deloche being duplicated in this catalogue are if sufficient extra information about accompanying grave goods or the grave structure is available (as at Hardenthun, for example), or if the ring itself provides a useful point of comparison for a later find.

Before considering each ring-group individually, a few general points can be made about the whole body of material. The vast bulk of finger-rings were worn singly. Of the 237 rings for which information is available, 179 were found alone. Pairs of rings were found in 26 graves and groups of 3 rings in only 4 graves. It was normally jewellery and plain rings that were worn in combination, though 'matrimonial' and intaglio rings are also found in combination at the Italian sites of Castel Trosino and Senise. All bar three cases occur in female graves. The three male graves with more than one ring are all in other ways exceptional. The grave of King Childeric at Tournai contained a seal and a plain ring, that at Apahida I a name and two seal rings and that at Malaja Perescepina a name and a seal ring.

It is hard to get any very firm statistics as to exactly where the rings were worn. Modern excavators have been generally unwilling to state definitely on what finger the ring was found and this fact tends

to cast doubt on the confident statements of many older excavators. The Castel Trosino report, unusually detailed for its time, illustrates the problem excellently (Mengarelli 1902). In the accounts of seven graves containing 'matrimonial' rings (7, 16, 65, 124, 168, 173, 220) the precise finger on which the rings were worn is stated. In grave 7, it was on the ring-finger of the right hand. In all the others, it was on the ring-finger of the left hand. Yet, when one looks at the published plan of grave 7 (here fig. 23), or reads the descriptions of the skeletons in graves 16, 124 and 173, it is clear that the bones were not well preserved. Finger-bones being among the most vulnerable to decay and displacement, it is surely unlikely that they would have survived well enough to enable the excavator to locate the ring with certainty. Furthermore, the skeleton in grave 65 is described as being very mixed up, while that in grave 220 had its hands over the pelvis. This would have made the distinction between left and right hand hard enough, let alone the actual finger! It would seem, therefore, that Mengarelli's statements about where the rings were worn may be based more on a preconceived idea that rings he saw as symbolising marriage ought to be worn on the ring-finger, than on dispassionate observation of the archaeological evidence.

The Castel Trosino report is by no means the only one in which such precision is shown. Among others which are equally doubtful are those from Chaouilly, Molsheim gr. 19 and Güttingen gr. 38. Castel Trosino has been particularly discussed here because it is one of the few older reports which contains enough detail to check the excavator's conclusions.

Another way in which excavators have from time to time attempted to determine the finger upon which a ring was worn was by the size of the hoop. This will be discussed further below, but it should be said now that, owing to the enormous variation in the relative sizes of peoples' fingers, it is not reliable!

It is safest, therefore, to confine oneself to observing only on what hand the ring was normally worn. This can be stated with confidence in only 107 cases. In 72 instances (67%) the ring was on the left hand and in only 22 (20%) on the right. In spite of the warning just given, on the dangers of considering the actual finger on which the ring was worn, it is perhaps worth noting that the three examples of name or seal rings for which we have recent information (name: Paris St. Denis gr. 49, Toul St-Evre 2; seal: Trezzo sull'Adda gr. 2) were all worn on the left thumb. The thumb is probably the most suitable finger on which to wear a seal ring, since it can easily be used without the need to remove it.

There are, in addition, thirteen definite cases of rings being carried in places other than on the finger. It is frequently hard to tell whether the ring has been shifted from its original position by decay or by animal or robbing disturbance, and since only definite cases are here used, the actual number may be higher. In Schleitheim gr. 30 and in Nocera Umbra gr. 148, there seems good evidence that the ring was part of a necklace. The Schleitheim ring was an intaglio type; that at Nocera Umbra a unique, crystal, Roman jewellery ring, with the bust of a woman, which may have been worn rather as an exotic bead than as a

ring. The ring in Haillot gr. 14 was found in the mouth of the skeleton and could have been either an obolus or part of a necklace.

There are two reasonably certain examples of rings being incorporated into girdle hangers. In Hailfingen gr. 353 the bronze and gemstone 'intaglio' ring was found by the lower left leg, along with keys and beads. In Nocera Umbra gr. 31 the silver and carneleon 'intaglio' ring came from inside the right knee in a string which included beads, silver plaques and pendants and an elephant's tooth.

Finally, one ring (Rittersdorf gr. 51) was found by the feet, without any accompanying objects.

As mentioned above, the internal diameter of a ring has been used to attempt to name the finger upon which it was worn. A more common use has been to determine the sex of the wearer, on the apparently self-evident assumption that the male finger is larger than the female. To check the accuracy of this, the internal diameter of the rings was recorded wherever possible.

The internal diameter of 150 rings in the catalogue is known, either from the excavator's direct statement (though it is perhaps surprising how often it is not mentioned), or by measuring off scale drawings or photographs. The diameter was recorded to the nearest 0.05 centimetre and was averaged out in cases where the hoop was of more oval shape.

The results show, perhaps surprisingly, that male fingers are not always larger than female and that, therefore, internal diameter is not a reliable guide to the sex of the wearer. Of the 150 examples, there are 132 cases where the sex of the wearer is definitely known from the other gravegoods. When the respective averages for male, female and juvenile were calculated, they were found to be much as expected:

	no. of examples	average (cms.)
Male	24	2.02
Female	101	1.82
Juvenile	7	1.42

However, when the full spread was plotted on a table (Table 4), it is apparent that there is a considerable overlap, which makes any attempt to preduct sex from internal diameter very doubtful. The top of the female range is only 1.5 millimetres below that of the male range. The bottom of the female range overlaps with that of the juveniles. Thus Dr. Bruce-Mitford, to take just one more recent example, was wrong to argue that the 2.2 centimetre diameter of the Snape ring meant a male wearer (Bruce-Mitford 1974, 124).

Internal diameter should never be used, therefore, to deduce the finger on which the ring was worn and should only be used with great caution to deduce sex. It is really only of use in corroborating existing evidence. Thus, for example, the ring found in unknown circumstances at Bergamo, and now in the British Museum, is inscribed with the female name Gumedruta. This points to a female wearer and the conclusion is strengthened by its small diameter of 1.75 centimetres. Exactly the

same is true of the ring inscribed Berteildis from Laon, though its internal diameter of 1.90 is less definite. The internal diameters of the three jewellery rings from Paris, St. Denis gr. 16 (1.80, 1.85, 1.90) will in chapter 5 be combined with other evidence to suggest that this is a female grave and not, as Salin suggested (Salin 1958, 45), that of a prince.

The ring from Arlon, unfortunately a stray find, missing its setting, has its closest parallels in the two intaglio rings from Krefeld-Gellep gr. 1782 and Snape, both male graves. It has an internal diameter of 2.30, again tilting the balance slightly in favour of a male wearer (fig. 5, 4).

This brief general view tends to confirm the idea that rings (like all gravegoods) should not be seen in isolation, if their function is to be understood. Thus the internal diameter of rings alone should never be used to show on what finger they were worn, and only if there is other evidence should it be cited as an indication of the sex of the wearer. That rings were normally worn singly, on the left hand, is about as far as the available evidence allow us to go.

CHAPTER 4

THE PRACTICAL FUNCTION GROUP

Introduction

As described in chapter 2, this group comprises seal rings, name rings, intaglio rings and coin rings, all of which can be seen as having a potentially practical function or active use. It contains 81 rings, 31% of the total. Each of these sub-groups will be discussed separately.

Seal rings

A ring belongs to this group if it has on its bezel a matrix which, when an impression is made of it, produces a clear, understandable design. In most cases this pattern includes an inscription, either a name or monogram, which must be engraved into the metal in reverse so that its meaning only becomes clear when an impression is made of it. Rings, the inscription on which is engraved into gemstone, are included in the 'intaglio' group.

The seal ring group has 21 members (Table 5; figs. 1-2). Nine of these come from 8 male graves and 3 from female graves. Since the remaining 9 are all either stray or old finds, the sex of their wearer is not archaeologically establishable. However, since seven of them have male names and two have female names, it seems reasonable to deduce the wearer's sex on that basis. As mentioned above, the fact that the two rings with female names have internal diameters of 1.75 and 1.90 strengthens, but does not prove, the case for female ownership.

The most common form for the actual seal is an inscribed name around a central bust or, in one case, monogram. Twelve of the rings are of this type. Four carry reversed monograms. Of those without inscriptions, one has a pattern of equal-arm crosses and 3 have a motif which includes a horse.

The predominant metal is gold. Gilded silver is used once, silver once and bronze twice. In form the rings can be divided into four distinct types (Forms 1-4). The first of these, Form 1, has a solid hoop, which widens to form an oval plate. The two examples of this type are both from the Gepid grave of Apahida I (fig. 1, 1-2; 24, 1). The first, on which the shoulders are cut back to allow the seal plate to stand free, is engraved with a monogram interpreted by Werner (Werner 1967/8, 122) as OMAPOC and thus the Greek seal counterpart of the name ring OMHARVS (see below). The second seal ring from the grave has its shoulders angled in the same way as the name ring, but, unlike the name ring, is hardly worn. It is decorated with four symetrically set equal-arm crosses, deeply incised. Werner describes it as a jewellery ring (Werner 1967/8, 121), but its presence in a male grave argues against this. There can be no proof, but I should prefer to see it as a seal ring.

Form 2 occurs also in two examples and is characterised by a massive hoop and plain circular plate, on which the reversed inscription is engraved. The celebrated ring of the Frankish king Childeric, found at Tournai in 1653, is of this type (fig. 1, 4; plate 3). In the centre is the bust of the king, with long, centrally parted hair, with a cloak

(paludamentum) fastened over his shoulder and holding a spear. The surrounding inscription reads CHILDERICI REGIS and it is this which enabled the identification of the occupant of the grave. This identification has never been questioned, although it is worth remembering that it cannot be certainly proven. A devil's advocate might argue that, less than a century later, the ring of Childeric's grandson Sigibert (reigned 561-75) was kept not by the king but by his referendary (Gregory of Tours V, 3) and that the bulk of the gravegoods have a character which is not obviously Frankish.

The portrait on the ring has often been described, but otherwise remarkably little discussed. It bears a striking ressemblance to the portrait of Stilicho, dressed as a Magister Militum, on an ivory dyptych of c.395 (Delbrück 1929, 242-48 and N63). Stilicho has short hair, but in other respects, is equipped in the same way as Childeric, with Paludamentum over a splendid tunic and a spear. Childeric is usually thought to be wearing armour under his cloak, but the chess-board effect could equally represent an elaborately embroidered tunic, such as Stilicho wears.

The second ring of this type comes from the fantastically rich grave of Malaja Perescepina, near Poltava in modern Russia (fig. 1, 3; 24, 2). This ring bears a reversed monogram which has been interpreted by Dr. W. Siebt (in Werner 1984, 44-5) as the Greek XOBPATOU ΠATPIKIOU. A second monogrammed ring, a name ring, was interpreted as XOBRATOU (see below). These interpretations match very well with the conclusion that Werner had already reached by other means (Werner 1984, 38-43), that

the grave could be linked with Kuvrat, Kagan of the Bulgars, who died in around 650. He had been baptised in Constantinople and was a friend of the Emperor Heraclius, who gave him the rank of Patricius. Among his extraordinary gravegoods was the largest Byzantine gold buckle ever found, which Werner sees as the only remains of his Patrician uniform of gold-braided tunic and belt.

Form 3, with 15 examples, is by far the most common seal ring type and four out of the 5 female rings belong to it. Its form is characteristic of many rings of all types from c.525 onwards. It is similar to the previous group, having a hoop and circular plate, but, in addition, the joint between the plate and hoop is embellished by two or three granules. Ten of the 14 rings of this form have pairs of granules. The most common form of the actual seal is a central bust (or monogram in one case) surrounded by an inscribed name, followed sometimes by a title or exhortation. Of the rest, one has just a monogram and 2 have no inscription.

Nine of the rings of this type stand out as particularly closely linked. They are made and inscribed virtually identically, have beaded borders and all come from the area of northern Italy between Bergamo in the north and Orvieto in the south. Although the bulk of the rings in the group are old finds, their existence and significance was realised only recently and this has had the advantage of focussing attention on their function and role in Lombard society. Some of the rings are missing today and known only from drawings or photographs. Only one of these old finds comes with any useful knowledge of its associated gravegoods.

It is not surprising, therefore, that not much thought had been given to them.

This changed in the late 1970s, when two more rings of an identical type were found during the excavation of a small group of 5 graves in Trezzo sull'Adda, a small town between Bergamo and Milan (Roffia 1986). All were exceptionally rich, all were male and three of them contained finger-rings. One ring, of the same form as this group of seal rings had, instead of a seal plate, a setting for a gemstone and this will be discussed below. In grave 2, along with sword, sax, knife, shield, spurs, a gold-foil cross and a Byzantine belt set was a seal ring of very high quality (fig. 1, 11). The central bust shows a bearded man, with his hand raised in a 'gesture of rank'. Around the edge, within the beaded border, is the reversed inscription +ROCHISVIL, interpreted as 'Rodchis V(ir) il(luster)'.

Grave 4 contained spatha, sax, spear, shield, spurs, two shears, two knives and a spindle whorl. Its ring is of rather cruder workmanship than that in grave 2 and the hand is not raised, but otherwise the style is identical (fig. 1, 12). Around the central bust is the inscription ANSV+ALDO, the cross being positioned directly over the central parting of the head.

The whole grave group dates to within the first half of the seventh century, with grave 4 (Ansvald) being placed earlier than grave 2 (Rodchis), which is the latest at c.650.

It was during the work on these two rings that the others of the group were noticed. In *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 17, Otto von Hessen (von Hessen 1983) published a very preliminary account and the fact that it was so preliminary has subsequently caused some problems. Taking as his starting point Schramm's discussion of the ring of Graiferius (Schramm 1954, see below), von Hessen argued that the busts on the rings were those of Lombard kings. This was shown by the fact that they were often shown with their hand raised in a 'gesture of rank' or apparently wearing a diadem, indicated by a cross directly over the head. However, since none of the names surrounding the inscriptions were those of known Lombard kings, von Hessen concluded that they must be the names of men, delegated by the king to seal on his behalf.

Otto von Hessen went further than this. He argued that the figure on the Rodchis ring bore a striking ressemblance to the portraits of the Lombard king Agilulf (591-616) on the helmet plate from the Val di Nievole and on the gold-foil cross from Bienasco. At this very early stage in the analysis of the find, grave 2 (Rodchis) was thought to date to the first half of the seventh century, and von Hessen sought to explain the similarities in terms of a personal portrait of the king.

The final report, however, revised the dating of grave 2 to c.650 (Roffia 1986, 166), thus effectively ruling out any idea of a personal portrait of Agilulf on the Rodchis ring. As Werner pointed out in his review of the final publication (Werner 1987, 287), the ressemblance was more likely the result of a continuous iconographic tradition. Apart from this, Werner accepted von Hessen's theory that the busts

were those of Lombard kings and the inscribed names those of their specially appointed Gastaldi or Referendarii. At the same time that Werner was writing, however, a very contrary view appeared in *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* (Kurze 1986). Written by Wilhelm Kurze of the *Deutsches Historisches Institut* in Rome, it bemoaned the inability of archaeologists to make sensible use of 'historical' sources and in particular latched on to the discrepancy between von Hessen's early attempt to link the Rodchis ring with Agilulf and the revised date of grave 2. He then presented a very different view of the evidence of these rings, to which he was also able to add some new examples. Kurze argued that von Hessen had misused Schramm's conclusion (in itself possibly wrong anyway) that the Graiferius ring was given by a king to his Referendarius. It might equally have been given to a follower as a gesture of friendship. Furthermore there was no reason to argue that the busts of the Italian group represent kings. The 'gesture of rank' may not only have been for kings but also for aristocrats in general and for royal servants. The cross over the hair-parting is not a diadem but simply a common device, which often occurs in inscriptions. If it does not divide the inscription, it marks the beginning, as on Rodchis's ring. Finally, there is for this period no evidence, positive or negative, that Lombard royal charters were sealed.

All this led Kurze to the conclusion that this Italian group were no more than the personal seals of Lombard aristocrats, carrying their own busts, names and titles. Unlike Werner, who suggested central manufacture at the royal court, he explained the wide variations in

quality by favouring local manufacture of an established and widespread type.

Kurze's arguments raise important questions which need further study before progress can be made towards understanding this group. Who, in particular, was entitled to make the 'gesture of rank'? Some of his arguments, however, are not as conclusive as he portrays them. For example, while he does show that there is no proof that the figures represented are kings, he does not prove that they definitely are not. Like Werner, he argues that the undeniable ressemblance between the two known portraits of Agilulf and the representations on a number of the rings is due not to a personal likeness but to iconographic tradition. Since, however, neither Agilulf portrait shows the king in a diadem, why cannot it be this same iconographic tradition which leads to none of the seal ring busts showing diadems? I feel too that he is a little disingenuous to argue that the crosses above the head do not represent diadems, but are simply inscription dividers. Why can they not be both? Contemporary Byzantine coins, which would seem to provide the ultimate model for the seals, frequently show the Emperor wearing a diadem (which is not always readily distinguishable from his hair), the cross on the top of which also serves to divide the surrounding inscription.

It is particularly frustrating that only the two Trezzo rings were found properly 'in situ'. A certain amount of supplementary information can be deduced from contemporary accounts about the grave which produced the ring of Marchebadus (Kurze 1986, 421-7). It was found in

1813 in the church of St. Ambrose in Milan. A stone sarcophagus contained, apart from the ring, a spatha, spurs, a spearhead, a gold-foil cross, shears and a comb. The ring itself is now missing and is known only from a drawing (fig. 1, 9). This makes it uncertain whether the bust had a raised hand. The inscription reads MARCHE+BADVSVIV, which Kurze would interpret as the name Marchebadus, followed by either VIV(as) or V(ir) IL(luster).

There is also a little background information - and yet more disagreement - about the ring from Bagnoregio, now in the Victoria and Albert Museum. It is of good quality and shows the usual bearded bust, with raised hand and the surrounding inscription AVFRET (fig. 1, 5). It was found in 1726 in a grave in a ruined church of St. Peter in Bagnoregio, along with much rusted iron. The disagreement arises over the identification of Aufret with one Ansfrid, mentioned in a letter of Pope Gregory the Great. Ansfrid ('gloriosus filius noster') had informed Gregory that he had just overseen the election of a new bishop in Bagnoregio. This occured in c.600, before it is generally thought that the area was controlled by the Lombards. On account both of this and of the different spellings of Aufret/Ansfrid, Werner (Werner 1987, 287) rejected any connection. Kurze (Kurze 1986, 427-35), on the other hand, argued that they were the same person, that Pope Gregory had secretly handed Bagnoregio over to the Lombards to end the siege of Rome in 593 and that the uncertainties of the medieval transcriptions of Gregory's letters accounted for the change from Aufret to Ansfrid.

Of the circumstances of the finding of the remaining five rings, from Palazzo Pignano (fig. 1, 10), Friuli (fig. 1, 8), Chiusi/Montepulciano (fig. 1, 7) and Bergamo (fig. 1, 16), together with the unprovenanced example in the Ashmolean Museum (appendix 2; plate 9), we know nothing, and little extra information can be wrung from them. It would appear that the appearance of a cross over the head and of the hand raised in a 'gesture of rank' are mutually exclusive symbols and this may be of some significance. It is not possible to decide definitely whether they were manufactured centrally, as Werner felt and I would favour, or locally, as Kurze suggested. Perhaps the most intriguing of these remaining rings is that from Bergamo, now in the British Museum, whence it was brought to light by Kurze (Kurze 1986, 449-51). It is of identical construction and general composition to the others, but it differs in important details. Thus the bust is not that of the usual long-haired and bearded man, without a diadem, but of a clean-shaven person, wearing a circlet, whence dangle three pendants at each side (fig. 1, 6). There is no indication of any hair. The hand is raised and a punched circle below the neck may represent a brooch. The inscription is also unusual in that it appears to contain a woman's name. In full it reads +GVMEDRVTAVEC, the final C having a dot within it. Kurze cannot explain this final C, but sees the rest as 'Gumedrut ave' On account of this, he assumes that the bust is also female, which may well be true. If it were, it would be a powerful addition to his argument in favour of the bust representing the person using the seal, though equally it might argue for court ladies receiving their authority to seal from the queen. However, it does not have to be a female representation, since the bust does bear a close resemblance,

right down to the circlet and tassles, to emperor portraits on certain Byzantine coins of the later sixth and seventh centuries. The final C and the initial + could even be seen as an attempt to copy the crescent and sun which appear in the same position on some of Heraclius's coins (Wroth 1908, pl. XXVI, 8-10).

Kurze would like to see this ring as belonging to the Ostrogothic rather than Lombard period. He based this on two arguments: first, that the standard of craftsmanship is, in his opinion, higher than the rest; and second, that there is strong Byzantine influence evident in the figure. The former opinion is debatable. The quality of the craftsmanship is high, but no higher than Rodchis's ring. The second need only reflect the model chosen. Overall, there would seem no overwhelming reason for separating this ring from the main, definitely Lombard, group.

The best reason for hope that more information may become available is the relatively large number of these Italian rings which have been found. This indicates that they were a relatively common type and must surely increase the liklihood of more examples appearing in properly stratified and recorded excavations.

Turning to look at the 7 examples of this form from north of the Alps, three of them are closely similar to the Italian group. It is particularly unfortunate, therefore, that all three are stray finds, found in unknown circumstances. The first, already mentioned in the discussion of the Italian group, was found at Siders-St. Luc in the last

century (fig. 2, 3). It shows the profiled bust of a diademed figure, similar to that appearing on coins of Dagobert I (reigned 630/40) (Schnyder 1979, 175). It is surrounded by the reversed inscription +GRAIFERIVS.VTERE FELIX. As a stray find, it can only be dated by the epigraphic evidence of the appearance of F rather than P in the name. This indicates a date not earlier than 600. There can be no doubt (even Kurze agrees) that the diademed bust is that of a king. As with the Italian group, however, no Merovingian or Burgundian king Graiferius is known. So the debate has centred on the precise relationship between Graiferius and the king portrayed on the seal. Does the phrase 'Utere felix' imply that Graiferius was invested with the power to seal on the king's behalf, as Schramm believed, or does it simply imply a friendly gift to a follower, as Kurze argued? There can be no solution to this debate, unless new finds provide some fresh evidence.

While the Graiferius ring has attracted much discussion, another, very similar, has been largely forgotten (fig. 2, 4). Of unknown provenance, but probably from somewhere in France, it is now in the Dumbarton Oaks Museum. In type it differs only in the addition of a third granule at either side of the plate. On the plate, around a rather crude bust, is the reversed inscription +ABBONENSO. Deloche wanted to read this as ABBONE SO[bscripsi], but this seems far from convincing. Although an Abbo is known to have been a moneyer at Limoges in the early 7th century, the name was a common one and we can get no indication of the status of the wearer from the ring itself.

The final ring in this group was found at Laon in unknown circumstances and its importance lies in the fact that, like the Bergamo ring, it has a female name (fig. 1, 13). The inscription around the edge is in reverse and reads +BERTEILDIS. In the centre is a monogram, also reversed. This was interpreted by Deloche as 'Regina' and the ring was thus associated with a wife of Dagobert I of that name. The interpretation is not absolutely satisfactory as the actual monogram contains no E and it is therefore necessary to use the E from the inscription. The G, furthermore, appears back-to-front when an impression is made. Whether or not Berteildis was a queen, however, there can be no dispute that she had the right to seal.

The four properly associated rings from north of the Alps all depart from the norm both in having seals which do not consist of an inscription around a central bust and in having a trefoil rather than a pair of granules. Three of the four, furthermore, are not of gold. The first, from Mazerny grave 213, is of silver and carries simply a reversed monogram, a form more common in name rings (fig. 2, 1; 24, 4). In addition to the ring, the grave contained a pair of gold earrings and a set of damascened shoe-fittings. It was associated with an equally well-furnished male grave and, together, the two are thought to have initiated a new area of the cemetery in ⊆.650. The monogram on the ring was read by Fleury as S[ignum] AENNAEA (fig. 24, 4). The reasons for this interpretation are not readily apparent, since the monogram does not have an obvious A, but does have an M!

The final 2 seal rings of Form 3 come from Lauchheim and Kirchheim-am-Ries. A third ring, from Oberolm, though in shape belonging to the next form, is also best discussed here, since the three make up an intriguing sub-group. Instead of an inscription, all three have a device which includes a horse. The best example is from Lauchheim grave 36, a rich male grave containing (despite robbing) fragments of sword, sax and harness fittings and associated with 3 horse burials. The ring is of virtually unalloyed gold, yet shows no traces of wear. The matrix is very neatly executed, though the design is very crude. It shows a horse with, over its back, a double cross flanked by a circle and a crescent. These are interpreted either as an alpha and omega or a sun and moon. Below the horse are further lines of even greater obscurity.

The two other rings are both of bronze and from female graves, which is unusual for the seal group. That from Kirchheim-am-Ries grave 131 is very worn, but quite clearly has a horse, portrayed in a way similar to that on the Lauchheim ring (fig. 2, 2). The grave, although unrobbed, contained an unremarkable selection of objects. Grave 4 from Oberolm was apparently rather better equipped, though the integrity of the grave group is uncertain. The ring's main bezel in this case shows a horse with rider, who is carrying a cross-shaped staff (fig. 2, 6).

The fourth and final form of seal ring is characterised by having two bezels. Apart from the Oberolm ring, it is represented in the catalogue by only one example, though both Christlein and Deloche illustrate several other unprovenanced examples (Christlein 1978, Taf. 84). It

was found during excavations on the site of the former abbey church of St. Evre in Toul. Grave 1 was apparently male, although it contained an odd selection of objects, including a gilded composite brooch, a spur, an inlaid iron belt plate and a purse with knife and shears, dating to the first half of the seventh century. The ring, of gilded silver, is in the form of a ribbon hoop, decorated with 'arabesques', which widens into a rectangular plate, on which is engraved a monogram, based around a reversed N (fig. 2, 5). Opposite this plate was soldered a second, circular bezel, with a very crudely engraved head in profile, possibly wearing a diadem. The excavators interpreted the monogram as 'Endulus' and, on this basis, linked the grave with Endulus, bishop of Toul from c.600-620.

If this identification is correct, and proof as ever is lacking, it is tempting to link this very distinctive ring style with the ecclesiastical rings for which there is written evidence from the 6th century (Fourlas 1971, 101). Two similar examples published by Deloche (Deloche 1900) provide some slight support. Deloche's no. XIX, very similar in form to the Toul example, though of bronze, has on its circular plate two superimposed crosses and on its rectangular plate a jumbled monogram that even Deloche cannot fathom! No. XLIII, of silver, from Touraine, bears on one bezel the name Leubacius and on the other a monogram read by Deloche as 'In Dei nomine' (fig. 20, 1). A Leobatius is known from Gregory of Tours to have founded a monastery in Touraine and Deloche, usually sceptical in these matters, is prepared to consider a link! The idea must remain no more than a very tentative suggestion.

One way in which one can move towards an understanding of the status that is implied by these rings is by considering not only the raw materials but also the skills or contacts that were needed to make or to obtain such a ring.

Thus, for the seal ring group, it has already been noted that sixteen out of the twenty-one are made of gold. This fact in itself points to their 'high status', though in a rather nebulous and ill-defined way. A more precise definition can be gained by understanding, in the first place, what skills were needed to make the rings, and, in the second place, how a ring might arrive in the hands (or on the finger) of its eventual possessor.

In discussing the skills needed, it is important to make a clear distinction between those (the great majority of the group) which have inscriptions and those which do not. In general, it is certainly true that little technical virtuosity was needed to produce the body of the ring, which is always of very simple construction. In fact, seal ring forms are the simplest of all the groups. What sets the inscribed seal rings apart, however, is the fact that a literate jeweller was needed to engrave the correctly reversed inscription. In this way, the production of an inscribed seal ring has clear parallels with coin production. Both require the skill to produce reversed inscriptions, which will only make sense once the coin is struck from the die or the seal is impressed with the ring. No other art form of the period required this particular and specialised ability

An examination of the inscribed seal rings and coins of the period under discussion shows that it is not only the shared use of reversed inscriptions which links the two. There can be no doubt that the devices on the seal rings are very similar to those used on coins. Thus the parallels for the Graiferius ring come from among the coins of Dagobert I. It is the motif of the emperor in armour, holding a spear over his shoulder, on Roman coins which lies behind Childeric's seal (eg: Robertson 1982, plates 92-94). The Italian group of seal rings did not take as its model the same Byzantine coin type that was used in contemporary Lombard coinage - that showing the profiled and diademed bust (Wroth 1911, lv). Instead, they took the other main Byzantine type, showing the Emperor 'en face', with a diadem or crown. The only change was the substitution of the hand raised in a 'gesture of rank' for the raised hand holding an orb.

There does seem good reason for arguing, therefore, that the inscribed seal rings were engraved by the same men who produced the coin dies. This seems especially true for the rings produced within the Germanic world. Those which seem Byzantine (see below) are harder to be sure about, since they do not bear the same close ressemblance to the coins. Since literacy and the art of engraving were so much more widespread within the Eastern Empire, it may well be that there were separate seal engravers.

If it is true that, within the Germanic world, inscribed seal rings were made by the moneyers, then it can be argued further that the status of any person who was able to commission such a ring was equivalent to

that of the controller of a mint, or rather, that it was the person who controlled the minting of coins who also controlled the production of seal rings. Since in the Germanic kingdoms it was, in theory at least, the king who controlled the coinage, it was also the king who commissioned the seal rings.

Although the production of inscribed seal rings was, on this model, the prerogative of the highest in the land, there is clearly a distinction to be drawn between the commissioner of the ring and the person who wore and used the ring, and with whom it was finally buried. In some cases they are one and the same. Thus Childeric and Berteildis presumably commissioned and wore their own rings. Kurze would see the rings of the Italian group as commissioned and worn by the same person (Kurze 1986, 445). Yet we know that this was not always the case. There is the information given by Gregory of Tours (V, 3) that king Sigibert's ring was held by his referendary. The ring of Graiferius quite definitely shows a royal diademed head, yet Graiferius himself is not a king. If the Italian rings do portray the busts of kings, as von Hessen and Werner believe, then they too provide more evidence of rings made for the king being passed down to subordinates. Indeed one could use the theory, that only people controlling mints could commission rings, to provide perhaps rather tortuous support for Werner and von Hessen's argument. The minting of coins in the Lombard kingdom seems to have been the exclusive prerogative of the king. This would imply that nobles would not have had access to the skills necessary for seal ring production and that, therefore, their rings came from the king and bore royal images.

One can envisage two sources by which someone who did not have control of a mint or did not have access to literacy could gain an inscribed seal ring. The first of these is through contact with the world of the late Roman or Byzantine empires. Among the seal rings are three examples of this. Childeric's seal ring must have been engraved by a Roman die-master, since the Franks at that time could not possibly have done it themselves. Then there are the two rings from Apahida I and the one from Malaja Perescepina. Both of these finds come from areas where coin production and literacy were unknown. Both in form and in their impeccably executed monograms and other decoration, they stand out as totally alien to the 'native' objects with which they were found. Since the rings in both Apahida I and Malaja Perescepina were found with other objects of indisputably Byzantine origin, it seems most likely that the rings too originated within the empire, and were not the products of Greek craftsmen working away from home. Just as Kuvrat's gold buckle may have symbolised his patrician rank, so Omharus's cross-bow brooch indicates that he held some Byzantine office (Werner 1967/8, 122). It is possible that the rings too were symbolic of at least Byzantine approval. The limited written evidence for early Byzantine ring use indicates that they could function as symbols of legality or *Beglaubigungsmittel* (Fourlas 1971, 89-93). The 'Byzantine' style of these seal rings is distinctively different from those which appear in the Germanic areas. They do not appear to have any links with coins and they carry monograms without any central bust. They belong rather to a well-established style of Byzantine seal ring. The richness of the three graves and the identification of two of them as the graves of Childeric, king of the Franks, and Kuvrat, Kagan of the

Bulgars, indicates that such rings were only given to powerful tribal leaders.

The only other way that someone who did not control a mint could gain an inscribed seal ring was by the gift of his or her overlord. A seal could certainly be given as a symbol of office, as was the case with Sigibert's referendary, as von Hessen and Werner would argue was the case with the Italian group and as Schramm argued for Graiferius. It could perhaps be given as a token of friendship, as Kurze has argued for the Graiferius ring. In whatever circumstances the ring was received, however, it must have implied the subordinate status of the receiver. The giving and receiving of gifts in the Germanic world was a way of defining status. The act of giving confirmed the superior rank of the donor and put the receiver in his debt. To this extent, the debate as to whether Graiferius received his ring as a friend of the king or as an office-holder is misguided. In either case he was the king's subordinate, a position symbolised by the royal bust on his ring. The distinction just made between those receiving their rings from late Roman or early Byzantine contacts and those receiving them from their overlords is also to some extent a false one. The fact that Childeric's ring is modelled on a Roman coin style and portrays him dressed, like Stilicho, as a Roman military officer implies that he saw himself as subordinate to the emperor. In the same way, the title of Patricius, which appears on the name ring from Malaja Perescepina and which may have been symbolised by the gold buckle, implies that Kuvrat saw himself as subordinate to the Byzantine emperor, who had bestowed it on him.

The discussion of the links between the inscribed seal rings and coin production serves to emphasise yet another way in which the three uninscribed seals form a clearly separate group. Their horse design is definitely not derived from contemporary coin patterns (fig. 2, 2+6). This implies that, though their practical function as a seal was the same, their symbolic meaning must have been different. It cannot be chance that a horse features on all three. The horse must have 'meant' something, in the same way that the royal portrait on Graiferius' ring 'meant' that he was subordinate to his ruler. Establishing this meaning without the aid of an accompanying inscription is virtually impossible. Exactly the same problem occurs in any attempt to understand the significance of the group of rings which incorporate an intaglio. In that case, the greater number of rings does enable some tentative conclusions to the drawn. Since this small group of seal rings has much in common with the intaglio rings, it is best to postpone the further consideration of their significance until these conclusions have been drawn.

For the moment, the information from an examination of the inscribed seal ring group can be summarised as follows. They were undoubtedly used as seals, by both men and women. Their manufacture required access to a technology and literacy only available within the late Roman or Byzantine world or to those controlling the mints of the Germanic world. They were therefore manufactured at the highest level of society, though they could be passed down to followers as a sign of subordination.

Name rings

A ring belongs to this group if it carries an inscription, whether a name or monogram, which has been engraved into the metal in unreversed letters, so that its meaning is clear to anyone looking at the ring. Inscriptions engraved into stone are discussed in the next section, on intaglio rings.

The distinction between name and seal rings was not made by Deloche, who considered any ring with an inscription to have been used for sealing. It was first put forward by David Wilson in his contribution to the debate on the role of the Arnegunda ring in the dating of Paris St. Denis grave 49 (Wilson 1964). In their publication of the ring, France-Lanord and Fleury had referred to it as a seal ring and had assumed that it must, therefore, have been the personal property of Queen Aregund and buried with her (France-Lanord and Fleury 1960). Here, then, was an excellent way of dating the grave and its prototype style II objects to c.565-70. Wilson, however, argued that the ring was not a seal ring, both since the inscription ran in a clockwise direction and since the letters of the monogram and the name, with the exception of the final S, were not reversed (fig. 3, 4). An impression made with this ring would produce a meaningless impression, since the name would run backwards and the letters would be back-to-front. Wilson cited Childeric's and Berteildis's rings and the gem on the Lotharkreuz as evidence that properly reversed inscriptions could be made. He went on to argue that, although seal rings might be personal possessions, it was unlikely that someone would wear a ring with their own name on it. Arnegunda's ring might therefore be a gift to a friend

or follower. This meant that St. Denis grave 49 was not necessarily that of queen Aregund and so could not be dated to c.565-70, but only to anytime after 543, when she became queen and was thus in a position to give away a ring inscribed with her royal title in monogram.

Wilson's argument could perhaps be criticised as being founded on a twentieth century rationalism which did not apply in the early medieval period. As has been pointed out in another context, Merovingian coin-die makers certainly had a relaxed attitude to the placing of individual letters, which frequently appear upside-down or back-to-front (Bruce-Mitford 1983, 142). It may be that we are imposing standards which are too strict and thus creating an artificial division. On the other hand, Wilson's point that the Merovingians were perfectly capable of producing accurate and correctly engraved rings is amply backed up, both by Werner's work on the Apahida rings (Werner 1967/8) and by the evidence from the Italian group, just discussed. Merovingian coin-die cutters may not have worried about individual letters, but they always made their words run in the correct, clockwise, direction. It would seem best, therefore, to impose Wilson's distinction rigorously on the material.

It is even possible to take the argument one stage further and to distinguish between genuinely literate name rings and illiterate copies. This distinction can most often be made in the case of monograms. On the one hand are those which comprise carefully composed arrangements of recognisable letters and are clearly the work of a literate craftsman (fig. 24, 1-14). On the other are those which consist simply

of collections of meaningless squiggles, and are clearly the work of illiterates (fig. 24, 15-16).

The validity both of Wilson's distinction between name and seal rings and of the further distinction between genuine and 'pseudo-monograms' is demonstrated by the fact that they can be imposed on the material with only a couple of ambiguous cases.

The name ring group contains ten rings (table 6; figs. 3 & 4). Nine are definite name rings with unreversed, coherent inscriptions. In addition to these is one ring which will not fit easily into either the seal or the name category. Its monogram contains both reversed and unreversed letters and so might have been used as either a name or a seal ring. This is not necessarily the result of careless composition, since a number of fine late Antique monograms also include reversed and unreversed letters. That on the consular dyptych of Areobindus, now in the Louvre, is a good example (Delbrück 1929, n13).

In addition to the ten are two rings, of identical form, which are discussed here even though they carry neither inscription nor decoration of any sort. The reason for their inclusion under 'name rings' is that Professor Werner has argued that one of them, found in the 'prince's grave' (809) under Köln cathedral, was intended to be engraved (Werner 1967/8, 120).

Eight of the ten rings come from graves which, although by no means all excavated to the highest standards, at least have produced

associated gravegoods, allowing us to know the sex of the wearer. Four came from male graves and four from female graves. As with seal rings, there can be no doubt that name rings were worn by women as well as by men.

On three of the rings, the full name is spelt out. On seven, there appears a monogram (fig. 24, 7-14). Deloche was able to produce an interpretation of virtually every monogram that he illustrated, but more recent experts have become more hesitant. Wilhelm Berges (In Schramm 1954, 222) stated that 'a method of working out late antique and medieval monograms has not yet been worked out' and his words remain largely true today.

Where recent attempts have been made to decipher monograms on the name and seal rings, they have usually been helped by other evidence (fig. 24). Thus the monogram in the centre of Arnegunda's ring could be interpreted as 'Regine' because it was already thought that Arnegunda was a queen. So also the selection of XOβPATOV and XOβPATOV ΠATPIKIOV from among the various possible readings of the two Malaja Perescepina rings was made possible by the already formed theory that the grave was that of Kuvrat, who was known to have held patrician rank (Werner 1984, 39). The monogram on the seal ring from Apahida I would never have been read as OMAPOC, had the name ring not had OMHARVS clearly upon it (Werner 1967/8). The monogram on the gemstone now in the Pierpoint-Morgan museum, New York, is similar to monograms which appear on known coins of the Ostrogothic king Theoderic the

Great and this enables a reasonably positive identification (see below, intaglio rings).

As with the seal ring group, the predominant metal is gold, which is used in seven of the ten examples. The remaining three are silver. Their forms can be divided up into much the same types as the seal rings. Form 1 contains those rings which have a solid hoop, widening to form an oval plate. There are two examples of this form, which Werner has described as being late Antique (Werner 1967/8, 121), and both are from graves which date to before 525. The first was found at Pouan in 1842, in a grave which was either in or by the river Aube. Its shoulders have been lightly cut back to allow the oval plate to stand slightly proud of the hoop (fig. 3, 1). On the plate are engraved the letters 'HEVA'. They are not very competently done and, either because the plate has been heavily worn or because the letters were not deeply cut in the first place, the ring could not now be used as a seal. Apart from the ring, the grave contained a gold-grip sword and sax, a gold arm-ring and torque, and various gold and cloisonné buckles. Since the bulk of the gravegoods, especially the sword and sax, find their closest parallels in the south Russian material, Salin and France-Lanord saw the grave as that of a Goth, who had perhaps been killed at the battle of the Catalonian Fields in 451 (Salin and France-Lanord 1956, 75). Although the man's eastern Germanic origin seems backed up by the name Heva, which would appear to be contracted from a Gothic name, which probably began with 'Ever-' (Werner 1967/8, n.11), the matter is far from settled. Indeed, a recent paper has argued for a

western origin for most of the supposedly 'Gothic' objects (Kazanski 1982).

The second ring of this type comes from the Gepid grave of Apahida I and is very much the partner of the two seal rings, discussed in the previous section. With its angled shoulders, its form is identical to that of the 'seal' ring with the four crosses, though while the latter appears in mint condition, the former is extremely worn (fig. 3, 2). It carries the inscription, in three lines, +/OMHAR/VS, no more than competently carried out. Though its pair in form is the ring with four crosses, it really belongs as the pair to the seal ring, on which is the monogram which is decipherable as the Greek form of Omharus: OMAPOC. The name Omharus cannot be localised with any certainty, though no element in it rules out a Gepid origin (Werner 1967/8, n.24)

Except for the fact that its plate is blank, the gold ring from the richly furnished grave of a six year-old boy, apparently buried in a small chapel built in the atrium of Köln cathedral in c.525, is of identical type to the seal and name rings from Apahida I and the name ring from Pouan (fig. 4, 2). This, together with the fact that the form is otherwise unknown at this period, led Werner to suggest in 1967/8 that the Köln ring was intended to be engraved as a name or seal ring. He proposed that the child was still too young to be entitled to use such a ring, hence its blank state. Werner's case has been somewhat weakened by the subsequent excavation of a silver ring of the same, blank form at Hemmingen (fig. 4, 1). Grave 11, which produced the ring, contained the body of a 40-60 year-old woman, with an average

selection of grave goods and dating to c. 500. While it remains undeniably true that such rings could be subsequently engraved as name or seal rings, there are no grounds for assuming that this necessarily happened.

Form 2 is also the second form of the seal rings. It is characterised by a massive hoop and circular plate. There is one name ring of this type, from Malaja Perescepina, and it forms the 'name' twin to the seal ring from the same grave in exactly the same way as in the Apahida I grave (fig. 3, 3). Although similar in form to the seal ring, it is not identical, having a thicker but smaller plate. The monograms, too, though similar, are not identical (fig. 24, 2+7). Allowing for the fact that one is reversed and the other not, they are both arranged around a basic cross motif, with the letters arranged at the ends of each arm. In general, however, the name monogram is the neater and better formed of the two. This is partly because it incorporates fewer letters than the seal ring, as it reads simply XOβPATOV, as opposed to XOβPATOV ΠATPIKIOV on the seal. The two do not seem to have been made at the same time as a pair. W. Siebt thought details of the letter forms on the seal ring monogram to be not very typically Byzantine (in Werner 1984, 44). However, there seems little doubt they were intended to compliment each other as the name and seal rings of the Kagan of the Bulgars.

The third name ring form once again corresponds closely to the third seal ring form. Its characteristic feature is the positioning of granules on either side of the plate, where it meets the hoop. One

respect, of possible yet obscure significance, in which the name rings of this type (and all other groups) differ from the inscribed seal rings is in the number of granules. All the inscribed seal rings, except that of Abbo, have a pair of granules. The uninscribed seal rings and the name rings all tend to have a trefoil. There are four examples of this type, and all come from female graves.

Only one of them carries the actual name, and that is the one, already much discussed, from St. Denis grave 49 (fig. 3, 4). Apart from the fact that one has a reversed inscription and the other does not, the Arnegunda ring is very similar to the Berteildis seal ring from Laon (fig. 1, 13). Both have the name around the edge, a feature which does not appear on any of the other name rings, and a monogram interpreted as 'Regine' in the centre. In every respect, except the crucial one of the unreversed inscription, the Arnegunda ring is far more closely allied to the seal ring group than it is to the other name rings.

The other three all carry monograms. It is interesting to note that, just as the Arnegunda ring belongs more to the seal rings, the monogrammed seal ring from Mazerny is closer is style to the name rings. Only one of the name ring monograms is capable of any sort of solution and, once again, the interpretation was only possible because there was already a suitable name to attempt to fit the letters to. Grave 2 in the former abbey church of St. Evre in Toul contained a silver ear-ring of Böhner's type E, a bronze arm-ring, a pair of silver shoe or garter buckles and a gold ring. The burial was thus female and datable to the first half of the seventh century. The monogram is less

clearly executed than that on the seal ring from grave 1, but was interpreted by the excavators as PRETORIA (fig. 3, 6; 24, 10). The reason that this particular arrangement of the letters was favoured was that a lady called Pretoria was known, at the time of bishop Endulus, to have been one of the prime benefactresses of the church of Toul. The excavators therefore saw 'no impossibility' in thinking that the grave was her's.

The ring from St. Moré was found together with a gold and garnet circular brooch and has a monogram in similar style to that from Toul grave 2 (fig. 3, 5; 24, 9). That from Mels, grave N1, was the only object accompanying the body of a 57 year-old, which could not be sexed (fig. 3, 7; 24, 12). The monogram is a very simple one, based on an N. This and other graves within the church have been interpreted by Martin as belonging to a surviving Roman family (Martin 1988).

The one example of a coherent name ring of the fourth, 'double-bezel' form is a remarkable piece (fig. 3, 7; 24, 12). Save in the unreversed nature of its two monograms, it is strikingly similar to the double-bezeled seal ring from Toul St. Evre grave 1 (fig. 2, 5). It would in fact be more justified to describe the Toul ring as similar to this one, since it is an infinitely better piece in all respects. Thus it is of gold, not gilded silver. The decoration of the hoop and the execution of the monograms and bust is far more competent (though still far from perfect). Finally, the main circular bezel is not roughly soldered to the hoop, but is hinged so that it can swivel, thus allowing both sides to be decorated. Like the Toul ring, the smaller bezel is square and

has on it a monogram, based in this case on an R. Also like the Toul ring, one side of the main circular bezel has on it a bust, possibly wearing a diadem and with a cross and letter(s) behind and in front of it. On the 'reverse' of the bezel is a second monogram, formed around an N.

The unique nature of this ring makes all the more frustrating the fact that it is completely unprovenanced. "*Signalons que l'objet, de provenance inconnue, est entré dans une collection particulière*" write the authors coyly and it is further unfortunate that the rest of the article is equally uninformative and, in places, actually wrong. Thus the ring is described as a seal ring, although both monograms are incontestably unreversed. Casting aside the present caution in the interpretation of monograms, readings for both are produced which are eccentric to say the least, especially in the case of the main one. These readings (CHLODOVEVS and S[ignum] REGIS) then enable the authors to claim the ring as the seal ring of Clovis II (630-57), to attribute its manufacture to St. Eligius and to suggest that it was removed from the king's tomb at St.-Denis at the time of the French Revolution.

None of these claims has any foundation. Indeed they serve only to obscure the importance of the ring's form and decoration. Its remarkably close similarity in both these respects to the Toul St. Evre grave 1 ring imply that the two are closely linked and share the same symbolic funtion, despite their differing practical uses as name and seal rings. It was suggested tentatively above that the double-bezel form might be linked with members of the church. It is frustrating

that the lack of information on this potentially crucial ring prevents it from being anything more than a curiosity.

There is a final type of name ring, which is not matched by seal rings. It is characterised by a band hoop, which widens to form a rectangular bezel and occurs in two examples, both from old excavations, of silver and with monograms. The monogram of the ring from Lausanne Bel-Air was interpreted by Deloche as Si(gnum) Augise (fig. 3, 9; 24, 14). The gravegoods accompanying the ring - a buckle, knife and pottery jug - do not allow definite identification of the sex of the wearer and so we are left to rely on the excavator's statement that the grave contained the skeleton of an 'old man'. The grave is seventh century.

Also seventh century is the grave from Armentières, since it contained a gold and garnet composite brooch, together with a large iron buckle. The monogram on this ring contains both reversed (E, E and N) and unreversed (S, B) letters and so could be seen as either a seal or a name ring (fig. 3, 8; 24, 13).

Looking briefly, and by way of comparison, at those rings which have been excluded from the name group on account of their incoherence, it is notable that they all have attempts at monograms. It is not only their illiteracy that divides them from the name group. Although a few examples (from Rittersdorf gr. 164 and Andernach gr. 17; fig. 24, 15) are made of prestige metals, the bulk are of bronze and although a few come from male graves (Rittersdorf gr. 114, again), most are from female graves. The fact that it is monograms rather than fully spelt-

out names that are copied might be taken to indicated that it was easier for an illiterate jeweller to fake a convincing-looking monogram than an actual name. On the other hand, since monograms are more a feature of name rings than of seal rings, it could mean that the illiterate jewellers were copying specifically name rings.

Such a conclusion is relevant when one attempts to guage the status implied by the possession of a name ring. Since illiterate versions were available, it follows that the simple possession of a name ring was not in itself a sign of rank, in the same way that a seal ring was. Thus the high proportion of gold examples points vaguely to 'high status', even though the simple styles of the rings meant that great technical virtuosity was not required in their manufacture. For greater precision, it is necessary to analyse the name rings in the same way as the seal rings, focussing especially on the skill needed to manufacture a genuine name ring.

Thus, for a name ring, as for a seal ring, a literate jeweller was required and there are, once again, parallels to be drawn with coin manufacture. These are not, however, as close as those between the seal ring group and coins. Although there are points of overlap between the name and seal groups, most notably in the 'double-bezel form, there are also distinct differences. Most obviously, the name rings do not copy coin designs, so that none of them incorporates a bust, while there is a general preference for monograms over the full spelling of the name. Where the name is fully spelt out, it tends to be in a straight line, or

lines, rather than in a circle around the edge of the bezel. The Arnegunda ring is the only exception to this rule.

These differences reflect the different traditions of the name ring type, which has its origins in late Roman and, more immediately, in contemporary Byzantine styles of name ring. The type, judging at least from the frequency of its occurence in modern collections, was popular and clearly the inspiration for the Germanic examples. The use of a monogram rather than the full name was more usual among the late Roman/Early Byzantine rings, occuring in 23 out of 29 examples in the British Museum collection (Dalton 1912, nos. 81-110). If the name is spelt out in full (eg Dalton 1912, nos. 81-5), it tends to be in a line.

Despite these differences, the particular skills needed to lay out a name ring, principally literacy, were of the same calibre and rarity as those needed to make a seal ring. The ways in which such a ring could be obtained were, thus, also the same. The Pouan 'Heva' ring came from the late Roman world; the Apahida I and Malaja Perescepina name rings, along with their seal counterparts, came from Byzantium. The others must, like the seal rings, have been commissioned by controllers of literate jewellers, either for their personal use or for passing down to their subordinates. Name rings, in contrast to their illiterate copies, can only have been commissioned at the highest levels of Germanic society.

Another way to move towards an understanding of the status of the name group is to analyse what they were used for. In the case of the seal

ring group this analysis was not difficult, since the reversal of their inscriptions proves that they were used to create legible impressions. For the name ring (and other) groups, this analysis is not so simple, since the rings do not in themselves contain absolute proof of their function. Nor is there normally any written evidence for us to fall back upon.

As already discussed, name rings had not been distinguished from seal rings until Wilson's 1964 article on the Arnegunda ring. It had simply been taken for granted that all rings with inscriptions were used for seals and Deloche interpreted any occurence of S, SV or SO, reversed or unreversed, as a contraction of 'subscripsit'. In view of the fact that only one of the definite seal rings of the period (that from Mazerny gr. 213; fig. 24, 4) has such a contraction, this seems a rather unlikely interpretation which should be treated with caution. Apart from the owner's name, the seal rings tend to carry a title and/or exhortation such as VTERE FELIX (Graiferius) or AVE (Gumedrut). The same is true of the early Carolingian seals, such as the XPE ADIUVA HLOTHARIUM REG(EM) on the gem in the Lotharkreuz (Schramm and Mütterich 1962, no. 30).

The fact that Wilson's distinction between name and seal rings can be made in virtually every case, even with monograms, shows that he was correct to argue that name rings were not used as seals and thus had a different function. His further argument, however, is less convincing. Wilson suggested that this alternative funtion might have been as gifts to followers, since it was unlikely that one would wear a ring with

one's own name on it. He cited the three English name rings as evidence. All three have royal names and, in Wilson's opinion, '*could hardly be considered the personal rings of the man or woman whose name they bear*' (Wilson 1964, 267). It was too much of a coincidence that the 3 surviving English examples should all bear the names of known monarchs (Wilson 1964b, 56).

While it is cetainly true that these three examples may not have been personal rings, their relevance to the continental name ring group in general, and to the Arnegunda ring in particular, is less certain. One of Wilson's examples, the ring of Aethelswith, is not really comparable, since the inscription of the Queen's name and title appears scratched on the inner face of the bezel. The other two have forms which find no analogies among the continental material. Furthermore, all three date to the mid 9th - 10th centuries and are at a considerable remove from the later 6th (or early 7th) century date of the Arnegunda grave. Many changes in the style and wearing of name rings may have happened in the intervening 200 years.

There is, furthermore, some evidence that name rings were worn by the person named. To begin with the least convincing, Deloche (Deloche 1900, 311-12) quotes from a letter from St. Avitus, bishop of Vienne to St. Apolinarius, bishop of Valence, which is securely dated to between 502 and 520. In it, Avitus is describing the seal ring (*signatorium*) that he would like Apolinarius to make for him. Deloche's interpretation of the passage is that the ring should have a swivelling bezel with, on one side, Avitus' monogram and on the other his name,

spelt unreversed, in a circle, so that the monogram could be read by referring to the full name. There are, however, problems with this interpretation, as Deloche realises. Chief of these is the fact that Avitus has already asked for one side of the bezel to have a green stone, while the other should be of pale electrum (*electri pallentis*). If Deloche's interpretation is right, it would mean that Apolinarius was prepared and able to carve either the monogram or the full name onto a gemstone, a feat which, in the early 6th. century, would be extremely unusual. A more convincing reading of the text would see the ring as having a green stone on one side of the bezel and, on the other, a central monogram surrounded by the fully spelt name, in the same way that Berteildis' and Arnegunda's names surround the Regina monogram. If this is correct, then it implies that both were on the same seal plate and that the name as well as the monogram was thus reversed. It seems wisest, therefore, to discount this letter as evidence for people wearing rings with their own names, while seeing its similarity to the unprovenanced double-bezel name ring, described above, as a slight boost to the association of such rings with members of the church.

Rather stronger, though still not conclusive, is the will of Erminetrude, dating to c.700, which mentions a gold brooch and two gold rings (Knögel 1936, 182, no.848). The first, '*anolo aureo nigellato*', was clearly decorated but the text gives no further details. The second, left to the church of St. Gervaise in Paris, is described as '*anolo aureo, nomen meum in se habentum scribtum*'. This could be taken as either supporting or contradicting Wilson's argument. In favour is the evidence for someone giving away a ring with their own name on it,

in the same way that Wilson suggested for Arnegunda. On the other hand, there is no suggestion that the ring is being left specifically as a name ring or that the church of St. Gervaise is specially linked or indebted to Erminetrude. Like the gold brooch and the other gold ring, it is left simply as a valuable object. The description is intended to distinguish it from the other gold ring, which is described as *nigellato* for the same reason. The argument against Wilson's claims are stronger. Here we have an explicit reference to someone possessing a ring with their own name on it.

Following on from this, the archaeological evidence for people wearing rings with their own name is stronger and was first brought to notice by Werner, in his counterblast to Wilson's argument that St. Denis, grave 49 was not necessarily that of queen Aregvnd (Werner 1967/8). He pointed out that the Gepid grave of Apahida I contained both a name ring and a seal ring inscribed with the personal name Omharus. The presence of the seal ring, undoubtedly a 'personally-bound' (*personenbezogen*) object, proved that the grave contained Omharus and, therefore, that he also wore a ring, not for sealing, upon which was his own name.

Another case, not noticed by Werner, can also be used in support of the argument. As we have seen, the Malaja Perescepina grave also contains a pair of rings, in this case both with monograms, one of which has reversed letters and is read as XOBPATOU ¶ATPIKIOU and the other of which has unreversed letters and is read simply as XOBPATOU (fig. 24,

2+7). There can be no doubt that we have here the same name/seal combination as in Apahida I.

It is notable that, in both these cases, the rings are of Byzantine manufacture and this points to the custom of having both a name and a seal ring as being a Byzantine one. The extent to which the western Germanic name rings are dependent on Byzantine models has already been discussed and this would seem to indicate that, although we have no direct proof from western Europe, name rings were most probably worn by the person named. Just as Byzantine styles were copied, so also, it seems logical to conclude, were Byzantine usages. In this case, Wilson could perhaps be criticised for too much 20th century rationalism for saying - without any supporting argument - that it was unlikely that someone would wear a ring with their own name one it. It is likely, after all, that a good number of name ring wearers would not have been able to read and this must have given them a completely different prespective. The possession of such a ring, with its implications of literacy, might in itself have been seen as a symbol of status.

It follows from this that St. Denis grave 49 did indeed contain the body of queen Arnegunda. In order to make this square with the increasing tide of feeling that would like to date the grave in the 7th century (references in Welch 1987, 256), it is necessary to argue, as John Hines has already suggested (Hines 1984, 31), that the Arnegunda of grave 49 and of the ring is not the same as the Aregvnd, mentioned by Gregory of Tours as the wife of Clothar I, who must have died in c.565-70. Indeed one could argue that the ring itself, with its close

parallels to the seal ring of Queen Berteildis (628-38) is more likely to be 7th than 6th century. Since, however, the identification of the Berteildis ring with the wife of Dagobert I suffers from the same weakness as that of Arnegunda, it is safest to wait quietly on the fence, until the battle of the date of St. Denis grave 49 has been lost and won!

Using the evidence of the name rings themselves, we can therefore show that they were most probably worn by the person named on them, and that that person could be either male or female. The status that they represent can be guaged by the similarities of the special skills needed to make them to those needed for the seal ring group. From the fact that their forms and uses were strongly influenced by Roman and Byzantine usage, we can get some idea as to their function and their relationship to the seal ring group, but it is unfortunately not possible to define this function as precisely as was possible for the seal group.

Intaglio rings

A ring belongs to this group if it incorporates in its setting an intaglio and is potentially usable, therefore, as a seal.

The intaglio group has 30 members (Table 8; figs. 5 & 6). Five of these come from male graves. A further two are stray finds but have male names inscribed on them and can thus be linked to male owners. Fifteen intaglio rings come from definite and 2 from possible female

graves. Two come from juvenile graves of uncertain sex. Three come from unsexable or inadequately published graves and one is a stray find. It is clear, therefore, that intaglio rings were worn by men, women and children, though, for the first time, the type occurs more frequently in female than in male graves.

Gold, once again, is the predominant metal for their construction, and is used in 20 cases. Silver is used in 4 cases and bronze thrice. There is one iron example. Two intaglios survive without their associated rings, though there can be no doubt that they were once thus mounted.

The forms of these intaglio rings differ markedly from those of the name and seal groups. The main reason for this is that their form is conditioned by the need to incorporate a non-metallic gemstone. This means that, unlike the majority of the name and seal groups, they could not be cast in one piece, but must use solder and some form of collar to hold the stone. Furthermore, intaglios are often oval, not round, and this fact influences the design and decoration of the ring. For these reasons, the forms of the intaglio group share many common characteristics with the forms of the jewellery rings, especially those which incorporate stones, and which thus present the jeweller with similar technical problems.

Given the popularity of rings set with intaglios in the Roman period and the probability that relatively large numbers of these must have survived to be picked up in the Germanic period, it is perhaps

surprising and certainly significant that only two of the intaglio rings from secure Germanic contexts on the continent are actual Roman rings. The first is of bronze and incorporates the intaglio of a ship. It was found, along with a jewellery ring and a plain bronze ring, in grave 86 at Sirnau, dating to the later 7th century (fig. 5, 2).

The second is of greater interest. It is of iron, with a heavy hoop which swells to incorporate the gemstone (fig. 5, 1). It is a type which seems to have been generally common at various times within the Roman period and it is unfortunate that neither the excavator's description nor his drawing is sufficiently detailed to enable the manufacture of the ring to be dated with any greater precision. There is no doubt, however, as to the date at which it was finally buried. The grave in which it was found, in the northern French cemetery of Templeux-la-Fosse, was described by Theodore Eck, the excavator, as '*one of the most interesting*'. It contained a silvered buckle, an iron horse bit, a bronze bowl and, at the waist, a cloisonné purse mount with two iron knives, one of which had a silver chape and studs. It was thus definitely a male grave (Ament 1970, 69), though it is not certain from Eck's description whether this list represents the entire contents of the grave. The absence of a sword and other weapons in what was clearly a rich and apparently undisturbed burial is puzzling. The purse-mount does, however, allow us to place the grave in Böhner's Stufe II (450-525).

Although the Templeux-la-Fosse and Sirnau rings are the only actual Roman rings to have been found in continental Germanic graves, the

influence of late Roman styles, or, more accurately, of one particular late Roman style, is visible in the second intaglio ring form, Form 2. The style on which it is based is characterised by a wide ribbon hoop, a slightly protruding setting for the gem and, most particularly, by the extensive use of filigree wire, in spirals and S-scrolls, and of granules, to decorate the ring's wide, roughly triangular shoulders. Henkel illustrates several examples from the Rhineland (Henkel 1913, nos. 266-8 & 285-6) and from his illustrations it is clear that the type has two variants. In the first (nos. 266-8) granules predominate and are used to form a triangular pattern, reminiscent of a bunch of grapes (no. 267). In the second (nos. 285-6) filigree predominates and the pattern is generally more complicated and fills a larger area of the shoulders. The hoop can either be of solid strip or, as in the finds from Terling Place and the fifth century Germanic grave from Frickingen (Christlein 1974b, 566-8), thin gold sheet filled with a white paste.

Quite why this particular late Roman ring form, in preference to all others, should have been adopted by the early Germanic intaglio ring-makers is uncertain, since it was by no means the most popular or predominant of the late Roman types, as even a cursory glance at Henkel shows. The three examples from Germanic contexts show, however, that this type alone was taken over from the late Roman jewellers.

The first of the three is the Snape ring, which, as an Anglo-Saxon find, will be discussed in the final chapter (fig. 27, 9; plate 1). The second comes from grave 1782 - the so-called *Fürstengrab* - from the

large Roman and Frankish cemetery of Krefeld-Gellep (fig. 5, 3; plate 2). Superficially it is identical to its late Roman predecessors. It has a broad ribbon hoop, which widens to allow the setting of a circular chalcedone gemstone, thought to represent the contest of Apollo and Marsyas. The triangular shoulders (as well as the collar holding the gemstone) are decorated with filigree and granules. A more subtle examination shows, however, how the Roman style has been adapted better to reflect Germanic tastes. This is most apparent in the arrangement of the shoulder decoration, which, in its combination of granules and filigree work, can be argued to create a definite zoomorphic impression. On the Krefeld-Gellep and Snape rings this effect is particularly created by the use of an elongated 'hook and eye' motif, which forms eyes and a long snout. The suggestion that this decoration was zoomorphic and thus marked a development from the late Roman style was first proposed by Müller-Wille (Müller-Wille 1968/9, 45). Pirling, however, in her discussion of the Krefeld-Gellep ring (Pirling 1974, 126), argued against this and drew attention to a definitely Roman ring from the cemetery of Abbeville-Homblières (fig. 20, 2; Pilloy 1886, Pl. V, 5). This, in her opinion, was very similarly decorated. Since no-one could argue for zoomorphic decoration on the Roman Abbeville-Homblières ring, these similarities thus made their occurence on the Krefeld-Gellep ring 'not very likely'. Comparison of the two rings does indeed show the concept of the decoration, with spirals of diminishing size ending with a semi-circular 'mouth', to be very similar. However, by its use of the 'hook and eye' motif to link the top two spirals and by reducing the importance and number of the lower spirals, the Krefeld-Gellep ring contrives a definite zoomorphic

appearance that the Abbeville-Homblières ring does not possess. It required only minor changes to effect this shift, but they give the ring a definitely Germanic character. The decoration of the Snape ring shows, if anything, an even greater development of these decorative shifts.

The third ring to be based on this late Roman type has unfortunately lost its setting and may therefore have held a stone rather than an intaglio (fig. 5, 4). It is, furthermore, a stray find, found during the excavation of twenty-one 6th and 7th century burials within an early church at Arlon in Belgium. It seems best to discuss the ring here, however, since it is the only other ring in the catalogue to be based on this late Roman type. With an internal diameter of 2.3 cms, it is perhaps most likely to have been a male ring (see table 4). If this were so, it would follow that it must have contained an intaglio, since jewellery rings (the only other type to have a setting) are found only in female graves.

The Arlon ring differs from those from Krefeld-Gellep and Snape in that it is derived from the first variant of the basic late Roman ring type and has on its shoulders filigree and granule decoration in the form of a triangle, which by no means fills all of the shoulders. Once again, the superficial characteristics of the decoration are identical to the late Roman examples (Henkel 1913, no. 266 for example) and, since the ring is a stray find, it is of course quite possible that it is of Roman manufacture. There are, however, differences in technique and in the overall effect, which indicate Germanic manufacture. The filling of

the triangles, for example, is done with beaded wire, and not with granules, as is the case with the Roman rings. The outlining of the lower sides of the triangles with wire and the positioning of collared granules at each corner can be interpreted as a version of the 'hook-and-eye' that gives the other rings their zoomorphic effect. Thus the maker of the Arlon ring can be seen to have adapted the original 'bunch of grapes' motif to fit Germanic decorative ideas, once more emphasising the small shift of interpretation that the Germanic craftsmen made to their adopted pattern.

The third form (Form 3) in which intaglio rings were made should most probably be seen as a continuing development of the previous form and it is one which is also used for jewellery rings which incorporate stones (see below, jewellery Form 1). It is characterised by the same ribbon hoop, most usually with its ends joined beneath the setting. The hoop, however, is generally far less massive than on the examples from the previous form and the decoration on the shoulders is far less extensive, though the appearance of the 'hook-and-eye' motif on at least two of the examples continues to give a zoomorphic air, albeit much reduced.

There are 8 rings which have this form and they are a rather mixed bunch as if different craftsmen were developing the form in divergent ways. This is well illustrated by the various types of decoration which appear in conjunction with the characteristic ribbon hoop. At the most basic are the completely plain shoulders of a ring from Kirchheim-unter-Teck. Only marginally better is the decoration on the

shoulders of the ring from the rich female grave at Alzey (fig. 5, 5). That has no more than a single collared granule on each shoulder. The 'traditional' 'hook-and-eye', by contrast, is retained on the ring from a female grave, Castel Trosino 30. There is considerable variation too in the form of the actual setting. Several of the rings seem to have had a function that was both practical and decorative, a phenomenon which appears also in the final intaglio group (Form 4, see below). The most notable of these is the ring from Köln-Junkersdorf grave 135 (fig. 5, 8). The grave had been robbed, but could be identified by its remaining gravegoods as female and dating to the first half of the 7th century. The gold ring's ribbon hoop has basic 'hook-and-eye' decoration on the shoulders, but the gemstone (of Mars with lance and trophy) is set in an unusually tall, oval bezel, which has at its side a small, secondary setting, now empty. There are a number of parallels for this form of bezel, and all are 'jewellery' rings (Form 2d, see below). One, from the 'princess's' grave (808) under Köln cathedral, has a convex piece of what is probably bone in the main setting, while the smaller setting is empty (plate 8). Another (a stray find from Lede in Belgium and not included in the catalogue) is illustrated by de Loe (de Loe 1939, fig. 47). Both its settings are now empty, though the square shape of the main setting must rule out an intaglio and mean that, like the Köln example, it was originally a jewellery ring. A third example, from Dieue-sur-Meuse, has four secondary settings, all containing blue glass (fig. 12, 2). A more general parallel for the decorative use of the multi-setting form can be found among some Frankish pin heads. The form of a pin head with four secondary settings, from Chéhéry (Childeric-Clovis 1984, D.165) is particularly

close to the Dieue-sur-Meuse ring, while the applied wire decoration is similar to that on the Lede ring.

Another, equally remarkable example of an intaglio occurring in a form which is most usually associated with jewellery rings comes from Bislich grave 98 (fig. 5, 6). It is unfortunate that, although the ring has been published, the associated grave has not, so that there is information neither on the sex of the wearer nor on the associated grave goods. The intaglio is here mounted on a free-standing 'arcade' of beaded wire columns, which appears on jewellery rings from Bulles grave 282, Bülach grave 14 and Castel Trosino grave 168 (fig. 11, 6).

A further example from this group of a ring which might be seen as having a decorative as well as a practical function came from grave 31 under Bonn cathedral (fig. 5, 7). The grave was that of a child, buried with a large selection of Roman and Frankish pottery vessels and 2 small Byzantine silver buckles and strapends. It is unfortunate that none of these objects allow determination either of sex or of a date closer than 6th century. The setting of the gemstone has, in addition to the usual beaded wire border, a circle of 10 gold granules spaced evenly between the border and the gemstone. Variations on this are the most common way of embellishing the essentially practical function of the ring and they occur on 2 other intaglio rings of Form 4 (see below). It will be noted that none of these 'decorative' elements in any way hinder the potential practical use of the ring as a seal.

The fourth form of intaglio ring is also the largest, with 14 members. It is also the commonest overall form of Germanic ring, being the equivalent of Form 3 of the seal and name rings. Since most of the seal and name rings have been cast in one piece, there are constructional differences, but the general appearance of the rings is clearly intended to be the same. The form is also much used in the coin and jewellery groups, where the technical demands are similar to those of the intaglio rings. This seems, therefore, a good point at which to describe the technical details and possible origins of the entire form.

Form 4 is characterised by the use of a wire hoop, the ends of which are not generally joined together (as in Form 3), but are soldered separately to the back of the plate which holds the setting. In order to increase the surface area of the join, the ends of the hoops are usually hammered, split and curved back to give a 'lyre-shape', which sometimes develops into a full double-spiral. This feature also occurs on those seal and name rings which have not been cast in one piece, and the 'Arnegunda' ring is a particularly fine example (fig. 3, 4). This double-spiral shape would seem to have a significance over and above its immediate practical function to increase, and thus strengthen, the area of the join. This could, after all, have been achieved by the simple hammering of the ends. The identical double spiral, used simply as a decorative motif, appears quite often on rings of the Roman Iron Age from 'Free Germany'. They are form 29 in Christamaria Beckmann's corpus of finger-rings from Free Germany and she describes them as going back to La Tène types (Beckmann 1969, 42). There is furthermore

a solitary example in the catalogue of the same type, in silver, from the robbed female grave 191 at Basel-Kleinhüningen, probably dating to c.500 (see below, jewellery Form 6; fig. 14, 2). With this ring, as indeed with the Roman Iron Age examples, there is no sign of any setting having been attached to the spirals. They are the rings' main decorative element. If the lyre-shaped attachments of the intaglio group are indeed a version of these spirals, it would follow that they had a symbolic function for Germanic peoples that surpassed their simple decorative use. Only thus can one explain the continuing, hidden, use of the motif on this type of ring.

If this detail of the construction of the rings shows a Germanic influence, the direct origins of the type are harder to identify precisely. Another feature of this ring form is the use of granules, sometimes in pairs, but more commonly in a trefoil, to cover the area where the hoop joins the plate. This feature, as well as the overall appearance of the group, points generally to a late Antique model. The question, however, is whether it is based on a late Roman type, as is Form 2, or whether there is a more contemporary, Byzantine inspiration for the form. The late Roman ring forms certainly include one with a wire hoop and granules, usually in pairs, and this might indicate the origin of the form. On the other hand, although plain wire hoops do occur (Henkel 1913, 274 & 6), hoops of beaded or twisted wire (Henkel 1913, 278-82) are far more common. The Germanic rings of this form, by contrast, have almost exclusively plain wire hoops. A further problem in seeing the Germanic rings as direct descendants of these 4th century Roman examples is a general lack of any 5th century finds

to link the two together. Böhme (1974, 121) notes a general lack of prestige finger-rings in Germanic graves from the first half of the 5th century and it is not until the second quarter of the 6th century that the type reappears in the female grave 50 in Paris, St. Denis (fig. 6, 3). The same objection could equally be raised to the link just made between the late Roman forms and Form 2 of the intaglio rings, though in this case the ressemblence between the two is so close as to be undeniable. In the case of Form 4, the resemblance between the late Roman and Germanic versions is not nearly so close and there is, in any case, an alternative source for the style.

That source is the Byzantine East and Italy, which, as the discussion of the jewellery ring forms will make clear, was not only the origin of a substantial number of actual rings, but also exercised a general influence over jewellery ring designs. Nor, of course, was it only rings that were following Byzantine styles. Fingerlin has shown the widespread copying of earring types (Fingerlin 1974), while, more fundamentally, Schulze has argued for the adoption of Byzantine dress fashions by the Frankish aristocracy from the later 6th century (Schulze 1976). The problem with attempting a detailed analysis of Byzantine ring types is the acute shortage, in fact the almost total absence, of properly dated examples. The British Museum, the Victoria and Albert and Dumbarton Oaks all have large collections of Byzantine rings, but none come from securely dated or excavated contexts and must therefore rely on stylistic comparisons for their dating. Precision is, as a result, rarely possible.

Accepting this limitation, especially since it is one that is likely to remain, it does appear from these collections that 5th and 6th century Byzantine rings in general tended to have smooth hoops of circular or plano-convex section and that the join between the plate and the hoop was occasionally covered by either a pair or a trefoil of granules. There is an example in the Guilhou collection (Sotheby 1937, no. 451 and pl. XV), a seal ring, which has a Greek Christian inscription and is dated to '*4/6th century*'. The Dumbarton Oaks collection has three examples of rings with a pair of granules, two dated to the 6th and one to the early 7th century, and one example with a trefoil, dated to the 7th century (Ross 1965, nos. 6F, 63, 179Q; 75; here fig. 20, 3-6).

In view of the incomplete nature of the evidence, the argument is difficult to prove, but at least it can be said that, during the early Byzantine period, rings existed of a type which appear more closely similar to their contemporary Germanic counterparts than do the 4th century examples from the late Roman west. The origin of Form 4 is more likely to be contemporary Byzantine than 4th century Roman.

Another, rather indirect argument for the contemporary Byzantine inspiration for this Germanic ring form is the way that the type has no obvious regional variations and also remains remarkably unchanged during the almost two centuries of its currency. This is well ilustrated by a comparison of the rings from Paris, St. Denis grave 50 (fig. 6, 3), dated to 525-50, Trezzo sull'Adda grave 1 (fig. 6, 5), dated to c.600, and Dettingen, St. Dionysus grave 2 (fig. 5, 12), dated to 650-700, and it is a phenomenon that no other Germanic artifact type can

match. This remarkable stability is in contrast to the way that we have seen Form 2 move further away from its late Roman original, until in Form 3 it loses all links. This implies that once the inspiration is no longer present, the form is free to develop in its own ways. The fact that Form 4 remains the same would imply that the inspiration for the form was a contemporary one which continued to hold its force.

Against the argument for Byzantine influence, on the intaglio group at least, might be set the absence (with one possible exception) of clearly Byzantine intaglios among those used in the Germanic rings.

The only variety that can be seen is that which has already been noted in the previous form (Form 3), the occasional addition of extra 'decorative' elements around the gem-setting. These additions, although they do not interfere with the stone's potential use as a seal, do nevertheless give the ring a 'jewellery' air. The most notable of these comes from a later 7th century female grave in Senise. The setting is uniquely large and has, in concentric ovals around the gemstone, a border of coarsely beaded wire, a line of plaited wire and a circle of small cloisonné cells. The general effect of the ring is very similar to a pair of sumptuous gold and cloisonné earrings, with a mosaic-like pattern of a female head and they were probably intended to be worn as a set. A similar effect, though on a less grand scale, is achieved by the Bonn grave 31 ring, already described, and also on a ring from Kirchberg, which ressembles the Bonn ring in having a row of, in this case, toggle-shaped granules between the outer beaded border and the gemstone (plate 6). The ring from Schretzheim, finally, has a rather

clumsily executed (and now very worn) pattern of continuous circles around the collar which holds the stone (fig. 6, 4), reminiscent in a distant way of the decoration on the collar of the Krefeld-Gellep ring.

Apart from these examples, the only variety appears in the number of granules. It was suggested above that there might be some obscure significance in this. The fact that four rings of the intaglio group have 2 granules, while the rest have 3, tends to reinforce the suspicion, particularly since the granules have only a marginally practical role. While on those rings which have a separate hoop and setting they might be said to disguise the join, this does not apply to the seal and name rings, which are cast as one. Two of the intaglio rings with pairs of granules, those from Paris St. Denis grave 50 and Trezzo sull'Adda grave 1, might be interpreted, because of their associations, as particularly 'high-status' examples and thus indicate that, on a seal or intaglio ring at least, the fewer the granules, the higher the status. St. Denis is always associated with the Merovingian royal family, while the Trezzo ring is clearly made in the same style as the 2 later seal rings, discussed above. Of the context of the Senise and La Turraque graves, whence came the other intaglio rings with pairs of granules, we do not know enough to draw any conclusions.

There are 3 rings - from the rich male grave (260) at Hordain, Hailfingen grave 353 and Nocera Umbra grave 79 - that are neither illustrated nor described in sufficient detail by their excavators to enable their form to be ascertained. Finally, there are two intaglios

which are today loose, but which must originally have been mounted in rings (Schramm 1954, 217, 220; here fig. 6, 7+8).

As with the name and seal ring groups, some clues as to the status of the intaglio rings can be gained by a study of the raw materials and of the particular skills needed to make them. It is necessary, however, to draw a distinction between the two elements of the ring - the actual intaglio, which is usually not Germanic, and its setting, which usually is - and to discuss the two separately.

Looking first at the settings, the vast majority are of gold and therefore indicate 'high' status. It is notable however that, although the proportions of gold and silver are roughly the same as in the seal and name groups, other metals also occur. Thus bronze occurs twice and iron once. This might be taken to indicate a less high status and Christlein's table shows, for example, silver rings occurring in the upper half of his *Qualitätsgruppe B*. One must be careful, however, especially if the ring is from a robbed grave. The Templeux-la-Fosse grave, which produced the iron ring, also produced horse gear and a bronze bowl, both objects which qualify that grave for 'C' status. All the other intaglio rings from male graves are of gold.

The skills needed to make the rings vary. Those from Paris, St. Denis grave 50 and Trezzo sull'Adda grave 1 are, like the name and seal rings, of unadorned simplicity (fig. 6, 3+5). Others, particularly those of Form 2 and those which incorporate 'extra' decoration, show considerable technical and artistic virtuosity. The ring from Krefeld-

Gellep is perhaps the most striking, with its near perfect use of filigree and granules to create the zoomorphic effect that subtly distinguishes it from its late Roman model (fig. 5. 3; plate 2). A less happy attempt at virtuosity is the over-elaborate and consequently muddled attempt at continuously linked circles on the collar of the Schleitheim ring (fig. 6, 4).

The general impression given by the intaglio group is one of practicality and simplicity which gives it more in common with the other 'practical' types than with the 'jewellery' rings. A very skillful jeweller was generally not required to make the setting for an intaglio.

The skills required to engrave an intaglio are, of course, of a different order, being more closely related to coin-die cutting (Henig 1978, 130-6). Since the bulk of the intaglios used in the Germanic rings were not of contemporary manufacture but are Roman stones that have been reset, it follows that a consideration of the skills used to cut them is not relevant to an understanding of the ring's status. There are, however, two examples of intaglios which can be shown to be contemporary with their Germanic wearers and, for these at least, an understanding of the skills needed is of considerable importance to understanding their status.

It is unfortunate that both intaglios are old, stray finds and, as already mentioned, neither survive with their original setting. The first was found before 1574 and survives today in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna. It is a sapphire and shows the

'en-face' bust of a man with short hair and, on his chest, a pattern reminiscent of that on the seal ring of Childeric and thus either a breastplate or a richly embroidered tunic (fig. 6. 8). Around the bust runs a beautifully cut and reversed inscription, which reads ALARICVS REX GOTHORVM. The similarity of the overall design to those on the seal rings is immediately obvious, while the reversal of the inscription means that it too must have been used to seal.

There are two Visigothic kings to whom this seal might have belonged, and it is unfortunate that there is no feature of the intaglio itself which enables us to say with certainty whether it should be associated with Alaric I (395-410) or Alaric II (484-507). Schramm, however, favours Alaric II for various reasons, not least the short, Roman style hair-cut of the bust, which he feels to be better suited to the more Romanophile Alaric II (Schramm 1954, 219).

The second intaglio which can be shown to be of contemporary manufacture must also have been used as a seal. It was part of the Gilhou collection in 1912 and was bought by the Pierpoint Morgan Museum. Its findspot, like that of the previous gem, is unknown. It is an amethyst, engraved as usual with an 'en-face' bust of a man with a moustache and either longish hair or a laurel wreath (fig. 6, 7). He is probably wearing a toga. The quality of the craftsmanship is very high and the iconography, once again, is strikingly similar to that of the seal rings. The only difference is that, instead of an inscription, there is a reversed monogram which is placed immediately below the bust (fig. 24, 6).

Given the difficulty of deciphering early medieval monograms, it is fortunate that this monogram can be matched with one of the various types that occurs on coins of Theoderic, king of the Ostrogoths, from 493-526. This, in the opinion of both Schramm and Berges, enables the secure identification of this intaglio as Theoderic's seal (Schramm 1954, 226).

A third ring which may have contained a contemporary Germanic intaglio was found in 1636 in the nunnery of Jouarre, in what was claimed to be the grave of St. Agilbert, bishop of Paris in c.670 (Deloche 1900, xix-xx, no. LXXII bis). The intaglio, known only from a description written some 10 years after the writer witnessed the discovery, was said to show St. Jerome on his knees at the foot of the cross, striking his breast with a stone! If this rather fanciful interpretation is correct, then this is most likely to have been a Byzantine intaglio, since these do sometimes show quite complex religious scenes (e.g. Ross 1962, nos. 113 & 114). However, since the ring itself is no longer, it is safest to exclude it from the argument.

Confining ourselves simply to the 2 surviving finds, and to a consideration of the skills needed to make them, the status that they represent must at least equal that of the seal ring group. This is clear not only from the fact that both can be associated with known Germanic kings but also from their great similarities to the seal ring-group and from the fact that they too are purpose-made. All that was said about the seal rings, therefore, applies equally here. To commission such a ring, it would be necessary to control a craftsman

who was not only literate and capable of cutting inscriptions in reverse, but could also engrave gemstones, an art which seems to have gone into serious decline during the 4th century (Henig 1978, 39). These two gems must have been engraved by late Roman craftsmen, since gem-cutting was unknown to the Germanic jewellers. It is impossible to say, however, whether these craftsmen were in the direct employ of the commissioning kings or whether, like the Malaja Perescepina and Apahida seals, the intaglios came through contacts with the late Roman Imperial court.

The same conclusions cannot be applied to the remaining intaglio rings, since the intaglios used are not of contemporary manufacture but are instead Roman gemstones that have been remounted by Germanic jewellers. Although we cannot be certain of the source of the various gems, it seems most likely that they were simply picked up from among the Roman ruins which littered the early medieval landscape. An appreciable number of these intaglios must still have been mounted as rings and the possible significance of the fact that only two actual Roman intaglio rings have been found in a Germanic context has already been noted. Germanic jewellers were not able to engrave new intaglios, but they could almost always provide a more appropriate setting.

There seems, moreover, to have been a significance in the type of intaglio chosen. It is often stated that the Germanic users of Roman intaglios had no idea of their meaning and, in the strict sense, this is certainly true. The significance of such Roman mythological figures as Bonus Eventus, Apollo Citharedes, Ceres-Fides or Apollo and Marsyas was

no doubt completely lost on the wearers of the Snape, Paris St. Denis grave 50, Kirchberg and Krefeld-Gellep rings, to take but four examples.

It does not follow from this, however, that the Germanic wearers selected the stones simply for their decorative or supposedly magical qualities, as is often supposed (Henig 1978, 161; Platz-Horster 1984, 23). Richard Bradley has recently argued that the attribution of new meanings to old monuments was an important way for a new elite to legitimise its position (Bradley 1987). There is no reason why, on the smaller scale of the Roman intaglios, the same process should not have taken place, with the Germanic peoples investing the figures with their own meaning.

We know from the work of Heslop and Henig that, in the medieval period, intaglios were interpreted in ways that had nothing to do with their original meaning. Thus the great cameo of St. Albans was intended by its first-century AD maker to glorify the Imperial house, by representing the emperor Augustus, holding a sceptre in one hand and Minerva in the other, and with Jupiter's eagle at his feet. By the thirteenth century, however, it had taken on a rather different meaning and was thought to help with childbirth. In Matthew Paris's description of the cameo, the emperor has become a 'distressed figure', the sceptre a spear and Minerva a clothed boy! From other references to the cameo, it is clear that, to thirteenth century eyes, the clothed boy was a child, 'whose safe delivery the stone had ensured and that the 'distressed figure' was the poor mother whose labour had been such a trial' (Henig and Heslop 1986, 149)! Another equally unsuitable

example of the medieval re-interpretation of a Roman intaglio is the scene of 3 votaries at a Bacchic altar seen in a medieval seal as the Annunciation (Henig 1983, 57).

It would appear that the early Germanic period also gave its own meanings to the intaglio scenes. Quite what these meanings might have been is beyond our grasp, and, given the lack of written descriptions, likely to remain so. Who would have guessed what the St. Alban's cameo came to mean, if we did not have Matthew Paris's word for it? That intaglios did have a meaning, however, is indicated by the types of scenes that were being chosen for setting in rings. If, instead of defining the intaglios according to their strict classical meaning, one bases the classification on the stones' most immediate visual characteristics, a clear pattern can be seen to emerge.

Table 7 shows the occurrence of certain basic intaglio types from the Roman period and as re-used in Germanic finger-rings. They are divided according to their most obvious visual characteristics, without any reference to their 'correct' Roman mythological meanings. The 'other subjects' category includes such things as animals, circus scenes, etc.. The Roman figures have been calculated by adding together the totals taken from Henig's corpus of the Romano-British finds (Henig 1978) and from the Imperial examples in the royal collection at the Hague (Maaskant-Kleibrink 1978), some several thousand pieces in all. This would seem to form a sample of reasonable size and thus to give an idea of the frequency of the different scenes throughout the Imperial Roman period, and therefore theoretically available to be found

by Germanic settlers within the frontiers of the empire. It could be argued that more later than earlier Roman intaglios would be found, since stratigraphically they would tend to be closer to the surface. This may be true, although since we have no detailed knowledge of how the intaglios were collected and since the intaglios are frequently difficult to date by themselves, it is not possible to adjust the table to take account of this possible bias. In any case, it can also be argued that, since most of the Romano-British intaglios and all of the Hague collection were found not by modern excavation, but as chance surface finds, they probably reflect the same spread of subjects as that available to Germanic craftsmen in the sixth and seventh centuries.

A different set of problems should be borne in mind when assessing the reliability of the Germanic figures, for the problem here lies in the small size of the sample. Only those intaglios judged worthy of incorporation in the catalogue - those therefore of the date and origins of which we can be sure - have been included and so the number is restricted to 27. Each example therefore counts for 3.7%.

Even taking account of these limitations, however, the table does show significant differences in the occurrence of the different types. Thus, while the proportion of standing figures is roughly the same in the Roman period and in the intaglio rings, the number of seated figures is significantly larger (6% : 19%) in the Germanic rings, while the number of 'other subjects' is correspondingly much smaller (41% : 30%). The total of standing and seated figures used in Germanic rings, at almost

70%, is far greater than what one would expect if the gems had been re-used at random and as found.

It is unfortunate that the size of the Germanic sample is so small that any more detailed study or subdivision is not practical. It is worth noting, however, that there seems to have been a different attitude to intaglios among the Lombards in Italy than among the Germanic tribes north of the Alps. They seem not to have had the same interest in standing or seated figures. Thus, of the 8 intaglios which show 'other subjects', no less than 4 come from Italian sites. Only 1 Italian intaglio, that from Nocera Umbra grave 31, shows a standing figure and thus does not come into the 'other subjects' category. If, therefore, the Italian rings are omitted from the calculations, the impression that, north of the Alps, Germanic craftsmen were selecting standing or seated figures for incorporation into their rings, becomes overwhelming. It must follow that such figures were interpreted by Germanic society as having a particular significance. A discussion of what this significance might be must wait until the function of the intaglio ring group has been discussed.

As has already been argued, the understanding of a ring's practical function is an essential prerequisite for an understanding of its status. For the seal group, the function was self-evident, since their carefully reversed inscriptions prove beyond doubt that they must have been meant to make impressions, presumably in wax and on documents. The same must also be true of the two intaglios, of Alaric II(?) and

Theoderic, which carry a reversed inscription and a reversed monogram respectively.

Once more, however, it is necessary to separate these two from the bulk of the intaglio rings, which, although potentially useable as seals, do not in themselves contain the proof of a reversed inscription to show that they were thus used. In any case, since the bulk of the intaglios are, as we have seen, re-used from the Roman period, even the presence of an inscription would not prove their use as a seal in the Germanic period.

Lacking this proof, it is necessary to fall back on more circumstantial evidence, which, although it cannot prove, does nevertheless strongly suggest that the intaglios were used as seals. In the first place, they were definitely used as seals in both the immediately preceding and following periods. The Roman intaglio rings were used extensively to seal correspondence and legal contracts (Henig 1978, 17-19). Although initially restricted to Senators and Equestrians, from the reign of the emperor Severus (193-211) all free men had the right to wear (and use) a gold seal ring (Fourlas 1971, 80).

For the following period, the earliest surviving impressions of Carolingian seals, dating to the mid 8th century, indicate that they were using intaglios without inscriptions to seal their documents and it has been suggested that some were even re-used Roman intaglios (Posse 1909, Taf. 1, A-C; Christlein 1974, 582, n. 22). Judging by the occurrence of the impressions, the use of an inscription-less seal was

soon replaced by one on which the inscription was engraved onto a flat area of metal surrounding the gemstone and finally by the actual engraving of the inscription onto the gemstone (Posse 1909, Taf. 1, C). The ring of Leodenus, illustrated by Deloche (Deloche 1900, no. CXXIV), is a good example of the intermediate type (fig. 20, 7). Deloche's date for the ring (accepted by Fingerlin 1971, 66-7) in the first third of the 7th century is based solely on the quality of the inscription. On the basis of the parallels with the mid-late 8th century Carolingian impressions, however, it is more likely also to be later 8th century. The gem set since about 1000 in the Lotharkreuz in Aachen cathedral, is an excellent example of the final type (Schramm and Mütterich 1962, nos. 30 and 106). Its reversed inscription proves that it must have begun life as a seal, of either Lother I or II. It thus dates to the 9th century.

Given that intaglios were used as seals both before and after the period under consideration and that the Carolingians were re-using Roman gemstones, it does seem reasonable to conclude that early Germanic intaglio rings were also used as seals. There is, finally, one further piece of circumstantial evidence from the period itself.

The excavated area of the Trezzo sull'Adda cemetery contained 5 graves: 3 male adults and 2 male juveniles. The two later adult graves, 4 (c.600-650) and 2 (c.650), contained the purpose-made seal rings of Ansvald and Rodchis that have already been discussed (fig. 1, 11+12). Whatever conclusions are drawn about their iconography, there has been no doubting their use as seals. The earliest grave, 1, has a *terminus*

post quem of 607-8 from a solidus of Phocas and is, in material terms, the richest (Roffia 1986, 11-25). The sword has a damascened silver Style II pommel, remarkably paralleled by the pommel from Liland (Norway; Speake 1980, 51, fig. 3, g); the shield has gilded studs; the fittings of the belt set are Byzantine and of gold. Like the other two adult male graves, grave 1 contains a ring which is in many respects identical to the other two. It has a wire hoop, with pairs of granules on either side of the join with the setting. The setting has a border of beaded wire that echoes the punched dots around the other two rings. The only difference is that, while the other two are seal rings, this ring has a setting for a carneleon gemstone engraved with a crab (fig. 6, 5).

The juxtaposition of these three male graves, with their 1 intaglio and 2 seal rings, indicates strongly that the intaglio ring fulfilled the same function as the purpose-made rings and that they belonged to succeeding generations of the same family of office holders (Roffia 1986, 164). There seems little purpose in speculating why the earliest ring should have contained an intaglio rather than being a purpose-made seal. We could see it as a reflection of the date at which the distinctive group of Italian seal rings began and call to our aid the ring from Bagnoregio, which, if Kurze is right and Aufret is Ansfrid, must also date to shortly after 600. Since, however, the remaining five rings cannot be dated at all, it seems too slender a foundation upon which to build an argument. The feeling remains, nevertheless, that the intaglio ring from Trezzo grave 1 was used for sealing.

Despite the lack of express proof, there do seem to be good grounds for arguing that these intaglio rings were used as seals. It has already been noted that even when 'extra' decorative elements are included, they never impede the intaglio's potential use.

Having established the group's function, it is worth considering in greater detail the possible significance of the apparent preference for intaglios with standing or seated figures. The purpose of an engraved, as opposed to a plain seal was, in the first place, to identify the sealer, but it was also intended to impress the recipient with the power and authority of the sealer, so that the proper action would be taken. Both these aspects are apparent in the seal ring group. The inscribed seals carry personal names or monograms and are all readily distinguishable. More important, however, is the way that rank is almost always emphasised. Childeric appears as a high-ranking officer and king of the Franks; Berteildis' ring contains a Regina monogram; Graiferius' has the unmistakably diademed head of a king; all the Italian group busts have either the hand raised in a 'gesture of rank' or a cross above the head which may indicate a diadem; they are all, furthermore, based on Byzantine imperial coin effigies. The rank of the sealer is as important as their personal identity.

If intaglio rings also functioned as seals, then it is surely right to expect that they should have a similar role, as both the personal sign of an individual and as a mark of that individual's power. The former was easily achieved as the details of most intaglios differ widely, even if the Bonus Eventus figures used by the makers of the Snape and

Kirchheim-unter-Teck rings were virtually identical. It is fortunate that the Snape ring was safely in the earth, a long way away, while the Kirchheim-unter-Teck ring was in use! How the impression of power and authority was achieved cannot be proved but it would seem most likely that it was by the incorporation of intaglios of standing or seated figures, which must in Germanic society have had a power and symbolism to enhance the rings' already high status. At this point it is worth recalling the small group of the three uninscribed seal rings. The fact that all three have a horse must be interpreted in the same way as the standing or seated figures of the intaglio rings. The horse must surely have symbolised something to both wearer and receiver, which made it appropriate for use on a seal. That horses, standing and seated figures, as well as imperial and royal effigies, had such meanings, gives some idea of the complexities of unravelling the symbols of the early medieval Germanic world.

Finally, it is worth noting briefly that intaglios occur in Germanic art not only in finger-rings, but also mounted in brooches, pendants and buckles. Though it is unlikely that any of these were used as seals - it would be needlessly cumbersome to have to undress in order to seal a document - there is no reason why the symbolism of the intaglio figure should not have applied to them as well.

Coin rings

A ring belongs to this category if its bezel is a coin. The category has been included in the overall 'practical function' group since,

although this cannot be proved beyond doubt from the evidence of the rings themselves, there are strong indications, discussed in greater detail below, that some at least of the coin rings served as badges of a specific rank. It has also been argued that they were used to produce an impression on a seal (Werner 1950, 36-7).

Since they can be used to provide much needed fixed dates for the graves in which they are found, and are thus important in tying down the chronology of the 7th century *Reihengräberfelder*, coin rings have attracted more attention than most other ring types (e.g. Werner 1935, 59; Christlein 1966, 84; Martin 1986, 86-88). They have, however, never been studied as a group in their own right and, since Werner's 1950 suggestion that they were used as seals, no further efforts have been made to understand their function.

The group contains 18 examples (table 9; figs. 7 & 8). Five come from male graves and five from female graves, thus proving, as with the groups already discussed, that coin rings were worn and used by both men and women. One ring is from a grave which cannot be sexed, since we know nothing about the other gravegoods. There are no coin rings from juvenile graves, a fact of possible significance, although the sample is very small. One ring is from a hoard. The catalogue also includes six stray finds. This relatively high proportion of stray finds is included since, although the coin ring group is small, it is of great significance and it was thought necessary to marshall all the available evidence. In the same way that the unassociated Italian seal rings were able to throw light on the 2 properly excavated seal rings

from Trezzo sull'Adda, so the stray finds of coin rings can provide much extra information. With two exceptions, however, stray finds which are also unprovenanced, have been omitted. Also included in the catalogue are two possible coin rings, from Deißlingen and Laubenheim, but these have not been extensively discussed below, since their identification is not certain. Both are old finds, from female graves, and have bezels which may include barbarian copies of Byzantine coins. They may thus be similar to the rings from Wittislingen and Wieuwerd. Two coin rings on display in the Römisch-Germanisches Museum in Köln (one from the excavations in St. Severinus) have however not been included, since no information on them is available. A 'coin ring' included in his discussion by Christlein (1966, 84), from the Département de l'Aisne, is clearly a coin brooch and is therefore omitted (Fleury 1878, 200; Prou 1892, no. 1384). The three English coin rings, all atypical, will be discussed in chapter 8.

As is clear from the name, the basic feature of this group is the use of a coin as the bezel. The coins are fully described in Appendix 3, but their main characteristics may be summarised as follows: Eleven of the eighteen coins used are Byzantine. There are 6 (or 5) solidi, 3 (or 4) light-weight solidi and one Semissis from the mint of Constantinople and one Provençal Tremissis from the Marseilles mint. These coins come from a restricted date range (Table 10). Of the Constantinopolitan coins, one is of Justinus II (565-78); two are of a late type of Phocas (607-10), 6 are of Heraclius (610-41) and 1 is of an early type of Constans II (641-6). Of the Heraclius coins, one shows the emperor alone and dates to 610-13. The remaining five show

Heraclius together with Heraclius Constantinus. Four of these show Heraclius Constantinus as very small and thus date to 616-25. The final one shows him almost as large as his father and dates to 626-9. The coin from Pfahlheim has been trimmed down so that only the bust of Heraclius remains. The Marseilles coin is a second type of Maurice Tiberius, dating to 596-602. There is one Roman imperial coin, of Tiberius (14-37), on the solitary Italian example from Cividale (fig. 7, 3).

The remaining 6 coins are Merovingian. There are solidi of Clothar II (613-629) and of Childebert the Adopted (660-62), a Frisian triens and a Merovingian civic issue, the mint of which is not ascertainable. The final two coins, from Wittislingen and Wieuwerd, are very barbarian copies of uncertain Byzantine originals. The two possible coin rings have similarly unidentifiable types. That from Deißlingen is too worn to be able to get any clue, while the fact that at least some of the decoration is incised may indicate that it was a seal rather than a coin ring. The Laubenheim ring is better preserved and shows a diademed head in profile, surrounded by the enigmatic inscription HVNILA/ISTOI (fig. 8, 2).

The coins are mounted in a very simple way. As has already been seen to be the case with the seal, name and, to a lesser extent, intaglio rings, the making of a coin ring required virtually no technical virtuosity or artistic skill and the strictly functional nature of most of the group might be taken as an indication of their essentially practical nature. In general, there is really remarkably little

variation among the coin rings. Essentially, they are all made in the same form and share the same four basic characteristics.

The first of these characteristics is the mounting of the coin, so that the obverse is uppermost and most usually so that the bust is set broadly at right-angles to the line of the hoop. There is only one case where the reverse is uppermost and this is the ring from Hardenthun, the coin on which is one of only two Merovingian triens to appear (fig. 7, 5). In five cases, the obverse is uppermost but the bust is not at right angles. The ring from Sinzig has clearly been provided with a replacement hoop, since the coin has two beaded wire borders and traces of two sets of attachments on the reverse (fig. 7, 7). Both hoops would have made the busts at roughly 45° to the hoop. The coin on the Wonsheim ring also has the busts at roughly 45° but has the cross on the reverse at the correct 90° angle (fig. 7, 10). Werner, in his publication of the Wonsheim grave, saw this as a deliberate act and a statement of the wearer's Christianity, but this seems to be an unnecessary explanation (Werner 1964, 217). It would seem more likely that the goldsmith, when soldering the hoop to the reverse, assumed that both reverse and obverse were struck on the same axis, as is normal on Byzantine coins, and therefore aligned the hoop on the cross in the expectation that the bust would also be correct. If, however, Werner is right and the Wonsheim ring is a token of the wearer's Christianity, then it is an isolated example. In the seven other ascertainable cases where the reverse of the coin shows a cross, it is either thoroughly obscured by the mounting or not aligned to the hoop. The cutting-down of the Pfahlheim coin left Heraclius' bust

intact, but eliminated all of the cross on the reverse (fig. 7, 9). On the Westergeest ring, both bust and cross are at 45° to the hoop.

On one ring, that from Hintschingen, the bust is parallel with the hoop (fig. 7, 6). The final case where the bust is not at right-angles to the hoop is the Bemersheim ring, which has the bust at 45° (fig. 7, 2). Since, in this case, the reverse of the coin is completely obscured, we cannot know how this 'error' occurred.

The second characteristic of this group is that the coin is not mounted in any way, but is soldered directly to the hoop, which can be either ribbon-shaped or of wire. There are only two exceptions to this, the rings from Wittislingen and Bemersheim, and in both cases the coin is attached first to a circular plate which is in turn soldered to the hoop (fig. 8, 1; 7, 2). The ends of the hoop are normally 'lyre-shaped' (see above for the possible significance of this form of attachment) but otherwise are simply hammered flat. One ring, unprovenanced, but now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, has 'BARINOTA' inscribed on the outer face of the hoop.

The third characteristic is that the coin is surrounded by a beaded wire border and has a trefoil of granules at either side. Five rings, those from Bemersheim, Hardenthun, Hausen, and Pfahlheim and the unprovenanced example in the Bibliothèque Nationale, have no beaded wire borders and that from Hardenthun also has no granules. As already noted, the Sinzig ring has a second beaded border, apparently linked to the replacement of the hoop (fig. 7, 7). A similar

explanation might account for the triple border of the Laubenheim ring, since it too has traces of an earlier hoop (fig. 8, 2). Multiple borders, which cannot be accounted for in this way, occur on the two Dutch finds, from Wieuwerd and Westergeest. These two also stand apart in having borders of twisted, rather than beaded, wire. On both, bands of twisted wire are separated by a thin undecorated strip. The Wieuwerd ring has two bands of twisted wire; the Westergeest one has four, so that the 'collar' is more dominant than the small central coin.

The fourth and final characteristic is that the hoop, like the coin, is always of gold. The only exception to this rule is the ring from Bemersheim, on which both the hoop and the plate underlying the coin are of bronze.

It is noticable from this discussion of the characteristics of the group, and of the exceptions, that five rings in particular seem to stand slightly apart from what one might call the main or 'core' group. Thus the Bemersheim coin does not have its bust at right-angles to the hoop, is separated from the hoop by a bronze plate, does not have a beaded wire surround and is not matched by a gold hoop. In addition to this, the date of the coin (660-2) puts it somewhat later than the remarkably concentrated main group of coins. The Hardenthun coin is the only one that does not have its obverse outwards, is the only Merovingian civic issue and has neither beaded border nor granules. One might also see the geographical isolation, as well as the unique use of an early Imperial coin, as setting the Cividale ring apart from the main group. Finally the Dutch pair, in particular that from

Westergeest, with their more elaborate settings, also seem different in spirit from the main group. It has been suggested that both are of local Frisian manufacture (Mazo Karas 1985, 166; Berghaus 1959, 96) since their settings are best paralleled by the settings (also Frisian) of the 28 Wieuwerd coin pendants.

Even including these five 'outliers', however, the group is quite remarkably homogeneous, far more so than, for example, the seal group which, although it has the same number of members, has four different forms and several different types of seal design. The coin rings, all of the same form, are virtually identical to look at.

If one concentrates on the 'core' group, this uniformity of appearance is yet further reinforced by the selection of a very similar set of coins, all mounted similarly. The use of coins of course means that, uniquely, a *terminus post quem* for each ring may be given, enabling Werner, after due allowance for wear, to use the coin rings as a *Zeitsitte* for his group V graves (650-700) (Werner 1935, 59). The dates of the coins further reinforce the coherence of the group (table 10). Excluding the 'outliers' from Bemersheim (660-62) and Cividale, (14-37!), the 12 Merovingian and Byzantine coins, for which regnal dates can be assigned, spread between 565 (the accession of Justinus II) and 648 (the latest date of the Constans II coin in the Victoria and Albert ring). Nine of these 12, however, those of Phocas, of Heraclius and of Clothar II, cluster between 607-29. Given this chronological cohesion, it is tempting to see the bulk of the group as being made at the same period, most likely during the reign of Clothar

II. For it is interesting to note that no coins of Justinian are used, even though they are by far the most common type overall, still occurring as single finds or pendants in 7th century graves (eg. Cobern grave 2, whence came a coin ring with a solidus of Phocas). This might be taken to imply that only 'current' coins were used on the rings, and strengthens the case for manufacture of the initial group during Clothar II's reign. Although it might be tempting to attribute this group (with the exception of the Victoria and Albert ring, with its coin of Constans II) to this period, it must be remembered that coins of Heraclius are among the last to be found in any quantity in Germanic graves, since Byzantine subsidies are thought to have stopped during his reign (Hawkes, Merrick and Metcalf 1966, 100). The coins in the rings are among the latest to enter the Germanic west. It could equally be, therefore, that the whole group (including the Victoria and Albert and Bemersheim rings) was made later, using the last available Byzantine coins.

Whether the group was manufactured under Clothar II or later, the use of Byzantine gold coins is remarkable at a period when Byzantine coins were becoming increasingly scarce within the Frankish kingdom (Martin 1986, 86) and when debasement of the Merovingian royal coinage, even in the Provençal mints, was becoming necessary (Kent in Bruce-Mitford 1975, 592-600). Clothar II's reign saw the main Provençal mints forced to drop their gold content to around 90%, while the mints outside Provence dropped their's to around 70%. Since the Byzantine coinage was much more successful in maintaining its high gold content, the discrepancy between the Byzantine coins used in 11 of the rings and

that of the Merovingian coinage would increase as the 7th century progressed. The coin of Clothar II incorporated into a ring is from Arles, a mint which, along with Marseilles, was one of the few able to maintain its standards, with 90%+ gold. The coin of Childebert 'the adopted' in the Bemersheim ring is from the Marseilles mint, though by this time the gold content of the products of even this mint had sunk to c.35%. It does seem that, even with the Merovingian coins, an effort was made to use coins of the highest available standard, a pointer again to the group's significance.

This significance is yet further reinforced by further evidence which, though negative in character, is nevertheless important. The use of coins, unadorned, in rings is a phenomenon which is virtually confined to the Germanic world (principally north of the Alps) and to the 7th century (Berghaus 1959, 96). Unlike the seal, name and intaglio rings, all of which have counterparts in the late Roman and/or contemporary Byzantine worlds, the use of coins in rings in this way occurs at virtually no other time and at no other place. It is worth noting too what coins are not used in the rings. As we have seen, there are no coins of Justinian or earlier, even though these occur commonly as pendants or on their own. There are no late Roman silver or bronze coins, even though such coins, like the intaglios, must have been frequent finds among the Roman ruins littering the early medieval world and are often found in graves. The Cividale ring is the only one to make use of an 'antique' gold coin, though many of these too must have been available. Above all, with the exceptions of the Hardenthun and Westergeest rings, the increasingly common and widely circulated

Merovingian and Frisian 'civic issues' are not used. If the coin rings had been intended purely for decoration, it is surely inherently likely that such coins would have been used as well as, perhaps even rather than, the increasingly scarce Byzantine issues. The narrow range of types argues for special selection.

The impression given by the 'core group', by its homogeneity, by its use of a restricted group of high-quality and rare coins and by its distribution, is that its rings were all produced at the same time, conceivably in the same Frankish place, for a specific and clearly defined purpose that demanded set and high standards. The five 'outliers' are so similar to this 'core group' as to be closely related, and should probably be seen either as separate, local developments of this Frankish form, or, in the case of the Bemersheim ring, as a continuation of the same idea. The Frisian settings of the two Dutch examples, as well as the Frisian coin in one of them, fits this picture well, even if the suggested date of the Wieuwerd hoard (627-30: Lafaurie 1961, 84) might seem to cast doubts on the derivation of the Frisian type from the Frankish 'core group'. Whatever their precise relationship, the overall similarities imply that the purpose of these 'outliers' was similar to that of the main group.

It is the understanding of this purpose, through the analysis of the group's function, that offers the best hope of defining precisely the status that the possession of such a ring implied. A number of other factors point generally to this status being 'high'. Thus the fact that, with the exception of the hoop and plate of the Bemersheim ring,

gold is the only material used, gives us a nebulous impression of high status and certainly qualifies all the graves for Christlein's 'C' status. A minimum of technical skill was needed to make a coin ring, though it was of course necessary to have access to a Byzantine or Merovingian coin at precisely the time when Byzantine coins were getting more scarce. Since, however, we have no idea of the extent to which such coins circulated, it is hard to be certain of the significance of this fact. The fact that the granules on the rings are never less than a trefoil may also be significant. Finally, the requirement of literacy, which helped to define the status of the seal and name rings, was not necessary for coin rings and thus cannot help.

Understanding of the function of the coin rings, although offering the best hope of defining their status, is not easy since, as with the name and intaglio rings, there is no way that it can be deduced from the evidence contained within the rings themselves. For the name and intaglio ring groups it was possible to take a different approach, by referring to contemporary Byzantine usage for the name rings and to late Roman and Carolingian usage for the intaglios, in order to draw conclusions about the 6th and 7th century functions of those types. For coin rings, however, this approach is also not possible since, as already stressed, the type (with a single and unilluminating 9th century exception: Berghaus 1959) does not occur elsewhere, so that comparison is impossible. Although coin rings do not contain proof of their use, they do nevertheless contain evidence, which can be seen as an indication of their practical and symbolic role.

The first and strongest indication of this role is the marked resemblance of the coin rings to the most common seal ring type, on which a central bust is surrounded by an inscription. There is a danger of circular argument here, since it was argued above that this design was not only based on coin types, but was also made by the people responsible for making the coin-dies. In some ways, therefore, it is not surprising that coin rings look like seal rings, since the coins used were themselves the inspiration for the seal type. Nevertheless, it does seem that the resemblance goes deeper than this and that the coin rings were made deliberately to copy the seal rings. There is first of all the way that the coin rings mirror the simple form and basic construction of the seal rings, adorned only with granules at either side of the plate. One could go further to interpret the beaded wire surround, which is one of the characteristics of the coin ring form, as an echo of the surround of punched dots on the seal rings. One could explain the absence of the border on the Clothar II coin ring in the Bibliothèque Nationale by the fact that the coin has pellets around its edge, thus eliminating the need for a separate beaded border. Again, the coins are almost exclusively placed so that the obverse is uppermost and, like the seals, so that the bust is at right angles to the hoop. It seems of particular significance that, in all cases except Hardenthun, where the reverse is uppermost, coins are selected which have clearly visible busts, and which mostly have legible, ungarbled inscriptions.

Combining all this with the case, made tentatively above, that the core of the group was made at the same time (during the reign of Clothar II

or later), to a common standard and with a specific purpose in mind, the resemblance between the coin rings and the seal rings seems more than co-incidental and must imply some link in the functions of the two groups. The most obvious possibility is that coin rings were actually used as seals, in areas where the appropriate skills to produce correctly reversed inscriptions were not available. Werner, in his 1950 publication of the Wittislingen coin ring, took this view, seeing them (and the intaglio group) as the eastern Germanic equivalent of the seal rings, which he saw as having a more westerly distribution (Werner 1950, 36-7). It is certainly true that the seal rings do have a more westerly (or, perhaps more strikingly, southerly) distribution, while the virtual absence of coin rings from Italy is striking, but in general there are too few seal rings from north of the Alps to produce a definite pattern (compare maps 5 & 8). Nor do either the coin or the intagio rings have a totally eastern Germanic distribution. Furthermore, by the 7th century, there were local mints in most areas in which coin (and intaglio) rings are found (Werner 1961, Abb.15), so it seems likely that the technology to make seals was available at the time that the coin rings were manufactured. The inclusion of a Frisian triens in the Frisian-made Westergeest ring makes the point nicely.

Although coin rings could in theory have been used as seals, the strongest argument against such a use is the fact that the inscriptions would have come out illegibly, anti-clockwise and with the individual letters reversed. Since the validity of this argument as the test of a signet has already been accepted in making the distinction between name and seal rings, it would be illogical not to accept it in the case

of coin rings. We must conclude, therefore, that coin rings were not used as seals. At the same time, however, it is worth noting that the obverses of many of the coin rings are very worn. The Hausen ring, the busts on which have been virtually smoothed away, is perhaps the most extreme example, but a similar pattern of wear occurs on many others of the group. Wear of this nature cannot simply be the result of many years on the finger. It implies that the face of the ring has been brought repeatedly into contact with another surface, such as would occur if it were used as a seal.

If they were not intended for use as seals, how else are we to account for the coin ring's apparently deliberate copying of seal rings? One way would be to see them as immitating not so much the seal rings themselves, but rather the product of their use: the actual seal. In the same way that a seal guaranteed the status and origin of the document sealed, might the possession of a coin ring be seen as guaranteeing the status of the wearer, by showing that the source of his (or her) power was the person from whom the coin ring had come? The royal or imperial bust on the coin, together with the surrounding inscription, would thus act, as on the seals, as a statement of the origin of the wearer's status. The predominant use of Byzantine, rather than Merovingian coins should not necessarily be seen as a sign that the wearers of such rings saw themselves as the direct subordinates of the Emperor. Since Byzantine coin subsidies were, in so far as we know, paid to the Germanic kings, the Byzantine coins incorporated into the rings would have reached their owners via the king and would thus be seen as royal, not imperial, gifts.

The interpretation of coin rings as badges of a royally-given rank or office is, sadly, archaeologically unprovable. It would, however, fit in well with the absence of finds from juvenile graves, as well as with the conclusions reached above, that the rings of the 'core group' were all made at the same time and that their close similarity to each other implies, if not central manufacture, then manufacture to set standards and patterns. One might also, taking account of the 'core group's' general Austrasian distribution and of the fondness for coins showing not only Heraclius, but also his son, the young Heraclius Constantinus, make a fanciful link with Clothar II's installation of his son Dagobert on the Austrasian throne in 623 (James 1982, 140).

This interpretation of the group as badges of royally-given rank can be further supported by reference to contemporary Byzantine practice. Although, as we have seen, coins were not used as rings within the Byzantine empire, they were nevertheless incorporated into belts and 'pectorals' and it has been suggested that such objects were used as badges of imperial office. The belt, apparently hastily made for the funeral of Kuvrat at Malaja Perescepina, is a particulary good example (Werner 1984, 17-18). The type is often known as a 'marriage belt', but such an interpretation is clearly not applicable in this case. Two particulary fine 'pectorals' are illustrated by Dennison, with *termini post quos* set by coins of Justinian (527-565) in one and of Maurice Tiberius (582-602) in the other. Each has 14 coins set around a central imperial medallion, with a further medallion attached below. Dennison suggests that they may have been worn by the imperial bodyguard, on account of the close parallels in form with those worn by

Justinian's bodyguard on the San Vitale mosaics at Ravenna, and by St. Sergius or Bacchus on a 6th century silver bowl from Cyprus (Dennison 1918, 109-135; esp. 116-17 and pls. I and XVII). As with the coin rings, the obverse of the coins is always outwards, so that the bust appears vertically. The idea that someone's rank and official position were proved by their possession of portraits of the emperor can be traced back to at least the late Roman world, where judges sat flanked by imperial icons (Brown 1971, 42-3). We have already seen several times (and shall see again) the extent to which Germanic ring practice was influenced by Byzantine usage, so it seems at least conceivable that the inspiration behind the coin rings was the Byzantine custom of using the imperial portrait as a token of authority and thus as a badge of rank.

It is also worth comparing the coin rings with those other Germanic objects which incorporate unmelted-down Byzantine coins. There are a few coin brooches, such as that from a child's grave (gr. 4) in a church at Stein-am-Rhein in Switzerland. They are mainly of Italian origin, but do not form a very coherent group (Martin 1986, 86-88). More coherent, and therefore more worthy of comparison, are the coin pendants. Coin pendants, either simply drilled through or provided with a loop, are far more numerous finds in graves than are coin rings. Werner in 1935 listed 27 Austrasian examples, and the number has since increased enormously. They would also appear to be a slightly earlier phenomenon, though there is an overlap (table 10). They were usually worn singly, but also in pairs or even greater numbers, as parts of necklaces and girdle hangers. They are thus found only in female

graves. A particularly splendid example of such a necklace is that from the 'princess's grave' (808) under Köln cathedral, which also produced two 'jewellery' rings (Doppelfeld 1980a, 274-78; here plate 8). The seven coin pendants were strung along with 5 circular discs decorated with filigree, 3 cloisonné pendants and various gold spacer beads. A single additional coin pendant was strung separately on a gold chain. A similarly extravagent girdle hanger came from Basel-Kleinhuningen grave 126, where 20 coins were strung together, along with beads (fig. 26).

The simplest interpretation of these pendants would be to see them purely as decorations, of no greater importance than the beads and other pendants that they accompany. On the other hand, broadly speaking, it is noticable that basically the same coins are used (and, of equal significance, are not used) to make the pendants. Thus most are broadly current Byzantine gold coins, with only a minority of 'antique', silver or bronze pieces. Similarly, as can be deduced from the positioning of the loops, the vast majority were intended to be hung with the imperial bust both facing outwards and the right way up. Seven out of the eight Köln pendants and all of the Basel pendants were thus looped and, in view of the arguments presented above, it seems logical to conclude that coin pendants, like the coin rings, acted as some kind of badge of rank. Since they are earlier, far more common and restricted to female use (or at least to appearance among female gravegoods), it is clear that the function of the pendants cannot have been identical to that of the coin rings. Detailed study of the whole group, much needed anyway, might define this function more closely.

Once more, the limits of reasonable inference based on the evidence of the coin rings themselves have been reached. Of all the groups that make up the overall 'practical Function' group, the coin rings are the least susceptible to provable definition of their function. This is frustrating since, as argued above, they would appear to imply a very precise status. The inability to do more than hint at what this status might be is caused firstly by the lack of proof within the rings themselves (such as was contained in the seal rings) and secondly by the lack of closely analagous rings from other areas or periods (such as was the case with the name and intaglio rings). It has led to an approach to the group which is more speculative, but which, since it follows closely the methods used for the other groups, can produce new insights.

CHAPTER 5

THE NON-PRACTICAL FUNCTION GROUP

Introduction

As described in chapter 2, on the classification of the ring types, the non-practical function group comprises those rings for which there is no evidence from the rings themselves of a practical use, and which must be assumed, therefore, to have functioned purely symbolically. As will be seen, this assumption of a symbolic function is strongly supported by an analysis of the different ring types but the fact that this function is in no way connected with a practical use makes it impossible to be precise in defining what it may have been. Symbolic function, unlike practical function, cannot be deduced from the form of the ring.

Since the deduction and understanding of function, as a necessary prerequisite to an improved understanding of status, is an important aim of this thesis, it follows that the non-practical group cannot contribute so directly. This has lead to a slightly different approach to the material. In the first place, the criteria for inclusion in the catalogue are much stricter, so that stray finds and finds from old or poorly published excavations have only been included in exceptional circumstances. Secondly, since function cannot be fully defined for this group, the discussion of what can be deduced from the rings themselves will concentrate on the classification of the various different forms and on understanding the origins of these forms. Such

an analysis, although it can say little about the function of the rings, is nevertheless useful. The production, for the first time, of a classification to include all prestige rings is in itself an important advance. The non-practical function group can also provide important comparative material, with which to sharpen our understanding of the practical function group. Understanding the origins of the various styles can throw light on which peoples the Germanic settlers admired and wished to emulate and can thus be used as a rough guage of status. Finally, when combined with information on dating, the analysis will enable conclusions about the changing fashions of ring-wearing in the Germanic world.

The non-practical function group contains 167 rings, c.65% of the total. It is subdivided into 2 broad groups, jewellery rings and plain rings, each of which is considered separately.

Jewellery rings

A ring belongs to this group if it has a bezel which is clearly separated from the hoop, but which is not a seal, name, intaglio or coin ring. To some extent, therefore, it should be seen as a 'catch-all' group, containing those rings which, although they have a bezel, cannot be fitted into the various sub-sections of the practical function group. It is called 'jewellery' because it seems likely that the rings' function was, in part at least, decorative, even if several of the groups would appear to have had a more specific symbolic role.

The jewellery ring group contains 103 rings (tables 11-15; figs. 10-14). Three are stray finds and the rest come from 82 graves. Eight-four of the rings come from definitely female graves, 5 from possibly female graves and 1 from a female juvenile grave. Six come from graves which cannot be sexed on the basis either of the other grave goods or of the skeleton. Finally, there are two cases, involving 4 rings, of jewellery rings coming from a grave which the excavator identified as male. The first of these is grave 147 in the cemetery of Lausanne-Bel Air, excavated in 1838. It was identified by the excavator as male on the apparently reasonable grounds that it contained a sax. However, the grave also produced two small silver and bronze buckles, probably Byzantine, the size of which indicates that they may well have been shoe buckles of the type normally associated, at least before c.700, with female graves (Fingerlin 1971, 94). This would imply either that the grave was more complex than the excavator realised, or that the finds were mixed, and it would probably be best to regard the sex of this burial as unproven.

A rather better known example of jewellery rings from a 'male' grave is the group of three outstandingly fine rings from Paris, St.-Denis grave 16, excavated by Edouard Salin in 1957 (plates 4 & 5). The contents of the stone sarcophagus had been plundered, but Salin saw the existence of what he interpreted as the remains of a preserved leather belt and 'baldric' as establishing '*avec certitude*' that this was a male grave. The diameters of the 3 rings, varying from 1.8 - 1.9 cms., showed that this person had '*les mains fines*' and that he must therefore still be young, while the wealth of the surviving objects indicated a prince.

Salin therefore suggested Clothar III, the son of Clovis II, *'mort à la fleur de l'âge'* and buried at St.-Denis in 673, as the most likely candidate.

Salin's argument is, however, flawed at its first stage. The evidence for the 'baldric' - a single strip of preserved leather some 10cms. long - seems doubtful, while the presence of a belt most certainly does not rule out a female grave. Indeed, the other surviving finds, if anything, point positively to a female grave (plate 4) . Thus the 2 strap-ends and, most especially, the two small gold counter-plates with Style II decoration find their closest parallels, in both size and decoration, in the shoe fittings from Paris St.-Denis grave 49, that of Arnegunda (who was, of course, also wearing a belt!). During the sixth century, such shoe fittings occur normally in female graves, so the evidence for seeing grave 16 as a female burial seems at least as strong as the evidence for a male burial. The find, in the robbers' backfill of the grave, of the fragment of a bronze pin, further strengthens the case for a female identification, as indeed does the general absence of rich male graves from the church. The three rings, with their diameters of 1.8 - 1.9 cms., would fit as neatly on the fingers of a queen as they would on those of a prince (see table 4).

If one can accept these revisions, the figures are now 84 rings (82%) from definitely female graves, 8 (8%) from possibly female graves, 1 (1%) from a juvenile female grave and 7 (7%) from graves of uncertain sex. It is thus clear that jewellery rings were worn exclusively by women and this fact distinguishes the group sharply from the members

of the practical function group, which are found in both male and female graves. One could also add that they were worn principally by adult women.

With its 103 members, the jewellery group is by far the largest group and it displays a wide variety of quality and style. In order to make sense of this variety, it has been further subdivided into 6 principle forms and these too have, in some cases, been further subdivided, in order to take account of finer variations. The basis for these divisions, as with the practical function rings, has been the overall form of the ring, in the belief that this will best reflect the differing symbolic functions, even if it cannot define or understand them.

The task of producing a scheme of classification for the jewellery rings has been made relatively simple by the existence of a number of completely different forms, which means that there are no cases of rings belonging equally happily to several groups.

Another way in which the jewellery rings might have been divided is by the presence or absence of a stone. Such a division would have produced very different results, which can be briefly summarised: 55 out the 103 jewellery rings have settings for stones; of the 55 settings, 32 contain precious or semi-precious stones, 8 are now empty, while the remaining 15 contain non-precious settings, mainly glass. It also shows that precious and semi-precious stones occur only in gold settings and, as will be discussed at greater length below, that there

occurred a gradual shift in fashion from red stones - mainly garnet, but also ruby and red glass - in the 6th century to blue (mainly glass, but also topaz and sapphire) and yellow (mainly amethyst) in the 7th century.

In what follows, therefore, the 8 forms which make up the jewellery group will be considered separately, to see what information on their symbolic function, their origins and the status that they represent can be extracted from the study of the rings themselves.

Form 1: 'Intaglio-style' rings

This form is the equivalent of the intaglio ring Forms 2, 3 and 4. Since the intaglio ring Forms 2 and 3 are only represented by a very few jewellery rings and since, even given the differences between them, they are still far closer to each other than to the other jewellery ring forms, it was decided to combine them all into one form, while maintaining the distinction in 3 sub-forms, labelled a-c (Table 11).

Form 1a, then, is the equivalent of the intaglio ring Form 2 and may contain only one ring, the stray find from Arlon which, as already discussed, has an empty setting and may thus equally have been an intaglio ring (fig. 5, 4).

Form 1b is the equivalent of intaglio ring Form 3. It is characterised by a ribbon hoop which usually has beaded wire and granule decoration on the shoulders. This decoration, as was suggested above, derives from the more extensive zoomorphic decoration of intaglio ring Form 2.

There are 3 jewellery rings from this group. The first is somewhat isolated, both in its early date (c.450) and in its form. It comes from a rich and early Alamannic female grave from Wenigumstadt and has plain shoulders and a unique setting, which consists of gold leaf sandwiched between glass and held in an organic 'cushion'. The other two are more closely linked. They are both of silver with glass inlays, and come from Güttingen grave 100 and from Sirnau grave 86 (fig. 9, 1+2). The closeness of this group to the intaglio ring Form 3 is emphasised by the close resemblance of these 2 rings, not only to each other but also to the intaglio ring from Tüttlingen grave 2. On all three, the shoulders are decorated with a triangle of granules delimited by a beaded wire border and it has been suggested that they may be the product of the same workshop (Fingerlin 1971, 67-8).

Form 1c, by far the largest, is the equivalent of intaglio ring Form 4. It is characterised by a wire hoop, frequently ending in 'lyre-shaped' ends, and by the use of granules, almost invariably a trefoil, to cover the joint between hoop and plate. It contains 28 definite rings. There are, furthermore, four rings which are incomplete and may, like the Arlon ring, have contained intaglios. Three of these, from Fridingen grave 241 (fig. 10, 9), Güttingen grave 1 (fig. 10, 8) and Miesenheim grave 119 (fig. 10, 10), are most likely to have been jewellery rings since their settings, now empty, are circular, while most intaglios used in Germanic rings are oval.

Of the 28 rings, 7 are of gold, 11 of silver, 8 of bronze, while 2 combine silver and bronze. There is therefore a wide variety of

quality in the materials used and this variety can be further emphasised by contrasting those which have settings for stones or other non-metallic objects with those which do not. In the former category are 14 rings. Six of them have gemstones, one has amber, 6 have glass and one enamel. All but one of the rings with gemstones are of gold. The rest are silver or, in two cases, combine a bronze hoop with a silver setting.

The remaining 14 rings have bezels which either have incised decoration (8 cases), applied filigree and granules (2 cases) or are plain (4 cases). None of these is of gold, though 1 is partially gilded; 5 are of silver and 8 of bronze. In terms of materials used, therefore, it is clear that those rings with settings are generally of higher quality than those without stones and this is further reinforced by notable differences in the standard of workmanship between the two groups. At the top of the scale, the rings from Kirchheim-am-Ries and Lahr-Burgheim are superbly executed pieces with fine materials (fig. 9, 6+8). At the bottom, the Iversheim ring is no more than a bronze disc soldered onto the roughly lyre-shaped ends of the hoop (fig. 10, 2).

This wide variation in quality both of the materials used and of the level of craftsmanship makes any overall conclusions of status based on quality impossible and one must fall back on Christlein's criteria which include gold rings in group C and silver rings in group C and the upper half of group B. Bronze rings do not feature in his table!

Nor can a consideration of *function* advance us, even if, in some cases at least, we can be sure that a symbolic function of some sort was intended. This is most notable in a group of rings, seven of which have been included in the catalogue, and all of which have on their plate an incised animal, looking back over its shoulder and attempting to bite its tail. The design is executed with fluctuating degrees of skill and varies from the instantly recognisable (as in Ehrang grave 32) to the totally garbled (as in Langsur grave 24). Since many of the finds of this type of ring come from the Trier region, they were discussed by Böhner, who saw the backward-looking animal as deriving ultimately from the representations of flying horses and griffins which were used as Christian symbols in mediterranean and southern French workshops. He saw their adaption for use on finger-rings as another sign of the strong influence from the South-West on Trier metalwork (Böhner 1958 I, 120-122). While this must be true, it is surely also necessary to see the adoption of this specific motif, on finger-rings, as more than simply a decorative device. Given the arguments already put forward, it would follow that the appearance of a backward-looking animal on a ring had a symbolic meaning, in the same way that horses on uninscribed seal rings, standing figures on intaglios and, equally, the imperial effigy on coin rings, have been argued to be symbolically important. One could also see the general resemblance of the form of the backward-looking animal group to the coin ring group as further evidence of such a symbolic meaning. The fact that the rings with backward-looking animals occur only in female graves and are most commonly of bronze argues against their symbolising rank, as was

argued for the coin rings, but does not disprove their function as a symbol.

With the exception of these 'backward-looking animal' rings, however, it is tempting to conclude that the wide variety of style and quality of workmanship indicates that the form did not have any overall symbolic function, but was simply for adornment. This would not prevent individual rings having their own meanings, given by the specific materials used, but in most cases this is hard to quantify. An indication of the sort of significance that certain semi-precious stones may have had is given by the fact that, in Byzantium, the use of amethyst and sapphire was theoretically limited to the imperial family (Schulze 1976, 157). That such stones may have represented status in the Germanic world is further indicated by the exclusive use of gold to set them. The next step - turning this indication into a definition of the status implied - must remain tantalisingly out of reach.

The origins of these three forms (1a-c) are the same as those of intaglio ring Forms 2-4 and have already been discussed. Thus Form 1a was derived from the late Roman style (typified by Henkel 1913, no. 267), with the decoration given a zoomorphic twist by the Germanic jewellers. Form 1b should be seen as the Germanic jewellers' further development of this style. Form 1c, by slight contrast, was argued to be inspired by more contemporary, Byzantine forms. This distinction between late Roman and contemporary Byzantine origin, clear in the case of the intaglio rings, is more blurred within the jewellery group. This is partly on account of the small numbers of Forms 1a and 1b (1

possible and 2 definite members respectively), but it is also because two examples of the Form 1b rings seem to echo deliberately the features of Form 1c. Thus both the Sirnau and Güttingen grave 100 rings have decoration on their shoulders which resembles a spread-out version of the trefoil of granules on Form 1c (fig. 9, 1+2). The distinction is yet further blurred by the way that the trefoil of granules on the Form 1c ring from Güttingen grave 1 is mounted on a secondary plate in a very similar way to the two Form 1b types (fig. 10, 8). It is possible that this ring should also be seen as a product of the south German workshop, which, as Fingerlin has suggested, made the Tüttlingen, Sirnau and Güttingen grave 100 rings.

It could be concluded from this blurring of the distinction between late Roman and Byzantine origins that the inspiration behind the jewellery rings of Form 1 came not directly from the late Roman or contemporary Byzantine types, but rather via the intaglio rings. In other words, the jewellery rings of this form, when they have stones, are deliberate copies of the intaglio rings. Following on from this, the Form 1 rings which do not contain stones could either derive from the other practical function rings of the same form or could have copied in turn the more splendid, stone-set examples. Since the plain types of Form 1 are all of less good quality, in terms both of materials and of workmanship, than the stone-set rings, the latter alternative seems the most plausible and has been adopted for table 12.

The theory that jewellery rings set with stones are copied from the intaglio rings and were in turn copied more humbly by the rings

without stones can at least be proposed from a study of the rings themselves, but clearly can neither be proved nor disproved without consideration of the relative dates of the jewellery and intaglio forms. Since this cannot be deduced from the rings themselves, but must depend on the grave in which they were found, consideration of the relationship of the Form 1 jewellery rings to the intaglio rings must be postponed for a subsequent chapter.

Form 2: rings with strongly protruding bezels

Unlike Form 1, this form is without parallel in any of the groups which have been discussed. It contains 22 rings which, although they share the same basic feature of a sharply protruding bezel, show nevertheless a number of variations on this basic theme (table 13). As with Form 1, therefore, it has been thought best to subdivide Form 2 into 4 sub-forms (a-d), shown in Table 13. In this respect, the form does have similarities with Form 1. It does not, however, share Form 1's wide variety of quality. Of the 22 rings in Form 2, 18 are of gold. Of the remainder, 2 are of silver, while 1 makes use of gold, silver and bronze and one of gold and bronze. Of the 14 rings with settings for stones, only 2 contain glass. The rest have a remarkable collection of precious and semi-precious stones, ranging from garnet and ruby, through turquoise, chrysoprase, and sapphire, to topaz and amethyst. In all, the standard of workmanship is of the highest order and it is in general - and unusually among the ring types thus far considered - a form which made use of complex techniques and thus demanded considerable technical and artistic virtuosity.

Form 2a is characterised by a ribbon hoop, which is often decorated with applied filigree (fig. 11, 1-6). The setting, either round or square, is in the form of an arcade which supports a 'roof' into which the stone (or stones) are set.

The catalogue contains 6 rings of this form. Several more could have been included, but since they are all either from old excavations or are stray finds, they add nothing to our knowledge, apart from confirming the definition of the form. There are good examples from Samobor (Kovacevic 1960, 66 and fig. 73), Krainburg (Reigl 1903, figs. 217 & 218), Cividale (Fogolari 1906, 29), Herpes (Delamain nd, Pl. IX; here fig. 11, 2), La Garde (Deloche 1900, II; here fig.11, 3) and from Ciply (Childeric-Clovis 1984, D58; here fig. 11, 1). It is particularly sad that the latter was a stray find, since its form is mirrored by the ring from grave 195b of the same cemetery. While the stray find was of pure gold, that from 195b made use of bronze and silver, as well as gold, and it would have been very instructive to compare the other contents of the 2 graves.

In Form 2b the arcade is replaced by columns, usually four in number, which support a rather cruder structure, usually composed of one or more tablets of gold, surmounted sometimes by the setting for a single stone.

There are 3 rings of this form, 2 of them with settings for stones and all of gold (fig. 11, 7+8).

Form 2c is very closely associated with Form 2b, in having a bezel formed of superimposed squares and tablets of gold (fig. 11, 9+10). In this case, however, it is not supported on the columns. Although the three examples in the catalogue do have columns beside the bezel, they have a purely decorative role. The ring from Lorsch, unfortunately a stray find and until recently thought to date to the Carolingian or Ottonian period, is a particularly fine piece of craftsmanship (plate 7). Uniquely in the group, the shoulders of the ring are decorated with 'hook-and-eye' filigree and with collared granules which give a zoomorphic effect similar to that on the Snape and Krefeld-Gellep grave 1782 rings (fig. 5, 3; fig. 27, 9; plates 1 & 2).

These three forms are commonly linked together in the literature and are given the general title of '*architectonisch*', in the belief that their bezels are intended to copy a building. It is probably correct to see all 3 types as springing from the same source of inspiration, even though, as a comparison between the rings from Castel Trosino grave 220 (fig. 11, 5) and Donzdorf grave 78 (fig. 11, 10) shows, the different types did develop very differently, even to the extent that, in Form 2c, the columns cease to be functional and become purely decorative. What must be the most devolved type of this form can be seen in an extrordinary group of rings from Gondorf (Rheinisches Vorzeit 1939, 123). It is extremely unfortunate that none of these is stratified or has any reliable associations and thus cannot be dated. The rings all have columns of one sort or another, though only on one are they functional. This fact indicates that, in spite of their very different appearances, they should be seen as the same type as the more

obviously 'architectural' forms of, for example, the Donzdorf and Bulles rings, though at a considerably more distant remove from the original and shared inspiration.

Once again, this ultimate inspiration appears to be Byzantine. The most direct evidence for this comes from one of the very few stratified finds of a Byzantine ring (Antike Welt 1975, 54). Found in Jerusalem, together with 2 gold chains and a selection of bronze objects, it was associated with a 6th century building, south of the temple destroyed by the Romans in AD70. It has an openwork hoop and a square, arcaded bezel, surmounted by a conical 'roof' (fig. 21, 1). The excavators interpret the bezel as a model of the tomb of Jesus. The type was clearly not a common one and the only other Byzantine example of which I know is a stray find from Dalmatia (Bulic 1902, 211 and Tav. XII). However, a closely similar arcaded form, with the domes in this case formed out of pearls, occurs as the heads of a pair of linked pins(?), from the Piazza della Consolazione treasure in Rome, which is dated to the early 5th century (Ross 1965, no. 1; here fig. 21, 2). Again, the form is not widespread, but the dates and locations of these three finds would seem to prove conclusively that the origin of the Germanic style is not to be sought among late Roman provincial ring forms, where it does not occur, but among more contemporary Byzantine styles.

It is Form 2a, the arcaded type, which is most closely related to its Byzantine inspiration. Even among members of this group, however, there is considerable variation. In several cases, the rings from Bülach grave 14 (fig. 11, 6) and the stray finds from Krainburg and

Cividale being perhaps the most notable, it is hard to point to any specific features which make it certain that the rings are Germanic copies of a Byzantine type, rather than actual Byzantine rings. Werner, in his publication of the Bülach cemetery, saw the ring from grave 14 as a Frankish copy, citing the Herpes and La Garde rings as the closest parallels (Werner 1953, 12). In form, and also in its use of a ruby, however, this ring could be argued to be as close to the Byzantine examples as it is to the Frankish ones. For most of the rings of the form, however, including the old and stray finds of Herpes, La Garde and Ciply (fig. 11, 1-3), there can be no question of Byzantine origin, since they all display characteristics which could only be Frankish and which demonstrate once again how a specific Byzantine type has been adopted and modified by Frankish jewellers.

Thus the shoulders of the Lorsch ring are decorated with unmistakably Germanic zoomorphic decoration (plate 7). Flat-cut garnets are set into the 'roofs' of the Bulles, Ciply, Herpes and La Garde rings and extensive use is made of filigree. The La Turraque ring also has filigree and its arcade, crudely formed by cutting out areas of the setting, supports a carnelian (fig. 11, 4). The hoop of the Jerusalem ring is open-work; the hoops of the Frankish rings are usually decorated with lines of plaited and beaded wire. The shoulders of the Castel Trosino grave 220 ring (and those of one of the Gondorf rings) have 'hook-and-eye' filigree identical to that appearing on several of the intaglio rings (that from Castel Trosino, grave 30, for example) and on the Form 3 'matrimonial' rings, considered below (fig. 11, 5; 13, 2). The appearance of these Germanic features thus clearly

distinguishes the bulk of the Form 2a-c rings from their less highly decorated Byzantine models. Finally, in the same way that Germanic features from other forms appear on these rings, so, as discussed above, the arcaded setting is used to mount the intaglio from Bislich grave 98, thus producing a ring which, although still capable of a 'practical function' has a strong 'jewellery' feel (fig. 5, 6).

The Piazza della Consolatione treasure shows that Byzantine jewellers used the arcaded setting as a way of decorating pins as well as rings, and this is echoed by Frankish finds of pins with arcaded heads. A particularly fine example comes from the Belgian cemetery of Trivières (Childeric-Clovis 1984, D34). Like the rings from nearby Ciply, the pinhead makes use of flat-cut garnets and little ringlets of beaded wire, which show that, as with the rings, the Frankish jewellers elaborated on the original idea.

An exactly comparable relationship between a Byzantine inspiration and a group of Germanic rings can be seen in Form 2d. The form is characterised by one or more secondary bezels attached to the main setting. That the form is originally a Byzantine one can be seen from a fine example from the collection of Hélène Stathatos, found 'in the sea' and dated to the 5th. or 6th century (Collection Helène Stathatos 1963, no. 230; here fig. 20, 8)), and also from 3 rings in the Narona hoard, coin dated to AD582 (Bulic 1902 and 1903). On all of these, the secondary bezel, in the shape of a cornucopia, is clearly separated from the main bezel. Turning to the Germanic examples, there are several which could be actual Byzantine rings. That from the 'Princess' grave'

(808) under Köln cathedral is one (plate 8), as is the stray find from Lede, with a magnificent cornucopia secondary bezel, illustrated by de Loe (de Loe 1939, fig. 47). On both these, the secondary bezel is clearly separate. The remaining 2 examples, from Beerlegem and Dieue-sur-Meuse (fig. 12, 1+2), are by contrast clearly Germanic adaptions of the Byzantine style. On the Beerlegem ring, the secondary bezel has been partially subsumed into the main one, which is set with a garnet. At each corner of the Beerlegem ring, separated by characteristically Germanic 'figure of eight' filigree, are even small settings, filled with paste. This development towards a multiplication of settings is even more notable on the Dieue-sur-Meuse ring. This has four secondary settings, one on each side. These and the rectangular main bezel each hold pieces of blue glass. The overall effect is very similar to a pin head from Chéhery (Childeric-Clovis, D.165), which also has four secondary settings, set with a garnet. As already mentioned, the intaglio ring from Köln-Junkersdorf grave 135, although basically an intaglio ring of Form 2, also has a secondary setting (fig. 5, 8).

Although sharing the same distinguishing feature of a protruding bezel, the rings of Form 2e are in most ways very different to those of Forms 2a-d. It is for this reason that their consideration has been kept separate from that of the other members of the form.

The most striking way in which Form 2e differs from the others is in appearance. It is characterised by having a stone - in all surviving cases a precious or semi-precious one - mounted on a prominent but usually not very elaborate bezel. The role of the bezel is simply to

show off the stone to maximum advantage and this contrasts with Forms 2a-c especially, in which the stone, where incorporated, was just one part of the overall 'architectural' design. It is difficult to define any more precisely the characteristics of this group, since the aim of showing off the stone was achieved by using a wide variety of settings and hoops.

The catalogue contains 7 rings of this form, all of gold and all, as already said, containing a stone which, where it survives, is precious or semi-precious (table 13). It is to this group that the 3 rings from Paris, St.-Denis grave 16 belong and they can be used as a good illustration of the variety of ways in which the stone could be mounted (plate 5). The square chrysoprase is set in an openwork pyramidal bezel, with edges of stylised branches. The hoop is in the form of a string of heart-shaped leaves. The hoop of the ring containing the sapphire is decorated with bands of plaited and beaded wire. The setting, however, is solid and unadorned, in the shape of a high-necked vase with the spherical sapphire set into its mouth. The sapphire seems originally to have been intended as a bead, since it had been drilled through. The amethyst, finally, is set in a bezel decorated with interlace, but with a completely plain hoop. Yet further types of setting are found on the Senise ring, where the stone is set like a flower, on a narrow stem, with gold 'petals' acting as claws to retain the stone, and on the ring from Güttingen grave 38, in which the amethyst is held *'à jour'* by four delicate claws (fig. 12, 3).

In considering the origins of Form 2e, we are led once more to Byzantium, though in a far more direct way than has hitherto been the case. For it seems most likely that the members of this group are, for once, not Germanic copies or adaptions of Roman or Byzantine types, but actual Byzantine rings. It is difficult to be absolutely definite in this identification since, as already discussed, the corpus of Byzantine rings is largely unstratified, poorly researched and dependant for its dating on doubtful artistic parallels. It could be, therefore, that the rings from Germanic graves are not actually Byzantine but close copies by Germanic jewellers of Byzantine rings. Even if this were the case, however, the closeness of the copying and the fact, virtually unique to this group, that they cannot be distinguished from their models, would still set them apart not only from most of the other members of Form 2, but also from all the other ring groups.

With the wide variety of hoops, settings and stones, it is not easy to find exact parallels for each ring among the Byzantine material. Thus the *'à jour'* setting of the Güttingen ring cannot be matched on any other ring, but does occur on a Byzantine brooch from Mengen, grave 403 (Fingerlin 1964, 21; Zeiß 1939, 269-273). The individual elements can, however, mostly be matched on other rings. The hoop of heart-shaped leaves of the chrysoprase ring from St.-Denis grave 16 is very similar to the hoop of a ring from Constantinople, dated to the 7th century and now in the Dumbarton Oaks collection (Ross 1965, no. 75; here fig. 20, 6). In general, however, it seems that, in the Byzantine material, as among the Germanic finds, there was an enormous variety of types, linked only by the common feature of a protruding setting for a fine

stone. Rather than citing numerous and tedious parallels of detail, it would seem best simply to note the overall similarity of the protruding bezel of the various Byzantine finds (fig. 20, 9; 21, 3-6) to those from Germanic graves and to see this as reliable evidence for the Byzantine origin of the entire group.

Turning to a consideration of the status implied by the form, all five sub-groups can once more be considered as a whole, for the simple reason that no clear indications can be gained. Certainly Form 2 stands apart from all the other types, whether 'practical function' or not, through its ostentation. Whether this ostentation implies a separate symbolic function, however, is impossible to say. No clear idea of the status implied by such a ring can be formed, other than by using Christlein's table and by noting the amazingly high proportion of gold rings and, especially in Form 2c, of fine and very unusual stones. Furthermore, and in marked contrast to the Form 1 'intaglio style' rings, the protruding bezel rings seem only very rarely to have been copied in more humble materials. Perin (1985, 98) illustrates a bronze version of a Form 2c ring, similar to those from Gondorf, but this is exceptional. It could be argued that the form, because of its status, demanded the best materials and workmanship.

Form 3: so-called 'Matrimonial rings', or, more prosaically, rings with paired lozenges

This very distinctive form is characterised by a hoop which widens to form a bezel, on which is the motif of 2 lozenges, set side by side

(fig. 13, 1-5). The lozenges can be cast, or formed by applying pieces of sheet, cut to shape (as at Köln St. Severinus cloister grave 217), but most commonly by building lozenge-shaped 'cloisons', as if to take an inlay. Since in no case does any inlay survive, it seems probable that the cells were intended to remain empty. The cells are usually surrounded by beaded wire and beaded wire is also used on the shoulders, often combined with granules in a 'hook-and-eye' motif.

The catalogue contains 18 definite and 2 possible rings of this form (Table 14). Various unstratifed or old finds have been omitted, including a ring from Angers (fig. 13, 1), about the associations of which there is considerable doubt (Zeiß 1941, 94), and one from Paris (Perin 1985, 618-9). The 18 definite rings of Form 3 come from 16 graves, since two graves produced pairs of rings. Of the possible rings, the first, from Tarquinpol, is poorly described and not illustrated; the second is from the possibly male grave 147 at Lausanne-Bel Air, discussed above. This ring is unique in having the lozenges set at right angles to the hoop (fig. 13, 5). Ten of the rings are of gold and 10 are of silver. With the exception of the Lausanne find, all are from definitely female graves. It is also worth noting at this stage that no less than 14 of the rings come from the cemetery of Castel Trosino.

Defining the origin of the form is extremely simple. The distinctive double lozenge derives from a type which was widespread throughout the Roman period. The Roman form was in general plain: in some cases the hoop was simply split into 2 slightly expanded strands for about one

quarter of its diameter. Others were more elaborate, with decorative pellets, and some have inscriptions. Among the latter is a large group of about 50 examples of identical form, found on the site of the legionary *Canabae* at Bonn (Henkel 1913, nos. 818-73). They are inscribed with such phrases as *Amo te*, *Dulcis* and *Suavis*.

It is not only the simplicity of the Roman examples that distinguishes them from their Germanic counterparts. Technically too there are differences. Whereas the Roman rings are usually cast in one piece and have little or no applied decoration, the Germanic examples, as we have seen, mostly have broad ribbon hoops and soldered decoration. In spite of these technical differences, however, the formal similarities between the two leave no doubt that the Germanic ring type derives from the Roman. In this case, furthermore, there are no other possible origins, since the double lozenge motif does not appear on any Byzantine rings.

On account of their distinctive form and of their clear links with a Roman ring-type, the rings of this form from Germanic graves have over the years attracted more discussion as a group than have most others. Equally unusually, this discussion has included an analysis of their symbolic function.

It was Mengarelli, in the introduction to his report on the Castel Trosino cemetery, who first suggested that they symbolised marriage (Mengarelli 1902, 178 note 1). He saw the paired lozenges as symbolising the *vincolo* (ties or chains!) of marriage, in the same way that linked hands or hearts did on rings of other periods. He also

cited an unassociated ring, from Ripatransone. This has paired lozenges, with the names of Gerontius and Regina inscribed, one on each lozenge. This he saw as further evidence that rings of this type, with or without inscribed names, were connected with marriage. Accordingly, the rings of this form from Castel Trosino, all of which are uninscribed, are often described in Mengarelli's catalogue simply as '*anelli coniugali*'.

The idea, that the male and female names found inscribed on such rings connected them with marriage, was further explored by Mastrelli in his discussion of a ring (in form much closer to the Roman than to the Germanic type) from the Reggio Emilia treasure, dated to the end of the 5th century (Mastrelli in Degani 1959, 75-78). This ring has the Germanic names of Ettila (male) and Stefara. Other cases, quoted by Mastrelli, of male/female names on rings of this type come from Vitry-le-François (Babulfus and Haricufa: Deloche 1900, CXXVII), from Angers (Marco and Nivia: Deloche 1900, XLVI; here fig. 13, 1) and from Orvieto (Blithia and a monogram of the spouse's name: Dalton 1912, 3, no. 11). Mastrelli thought it most likely that such rings were given by would-be husbands to would-be wives (since they are all from female graves) at the time of betrothal. He therefore went one step beyond Mengarelli in his terminology and named them *Anelli matrimoniali*, a name which has generally stuck.

Such a theory, even when applied only to inscribed rings, is not without its flaws. In the first place, the interpretation of several of the pairs of names is not always straightforward. Deloche (1900,

XLVI), discussing the Angers ring, favoured not 2 people (Marco and Nivia) but one, Marconivia! In support of this interpretation is the ring from Paris, which is very similar in form to the Angers ring and which is definitely inscribed with the one name of GVN/DIS (or INGVN/DIS, according to Perin's ingenious reading: Perin 1985, 618-9). The monogram below Blithia on the Orvieto ring could possibly be that of the prospective husband, but could equally be that of Blithia herself!

There seems furthermore no evidence that the Roman precursors of the form had any connection with marriage or betrothal. Henkel, though he does identify several types of marriage and betrothal ring, does not mention them in his discussion of the Rhineland rings, even though they are a common find (Henkel 1913, 337-9). Several of the inscriptions on the group from Bonn, described above, certainly indicate a connection with Love, but their findspot and the general tenor of the inscriptions indicates a less pure version of the Noble Emotion! If we are to accept the connection between the Germanic rings and marriage, we must also accept that the form took on a symbolic meaning which its predecessor form did not have.

The main obstacle to the straightforward acceptance of the theory that these rings were used in the Germanic world as a symbol of marriage or betrothal must be their distribution. As already stated, 14 of the 19 rings come from the one site of Castel Trosino. It has been said (Werner 1958, 11) that these rings are a Lombard type, but this is not really so. None were found at Nocera Umbra, the other extensively

excavated Lombard cemetery in Italy and the stray finds from Ripatransone, Orvieto and Cividale and the Reggio Emilia hoard find are the only others that I have found from Italy. If anything, therefore, they are a Castel Trosino type. Even within the Castel Trosino cemetery, however, they are not especially common finds. Out of 106 definite female graves, only 12 had 'matrimonial' rings, while the women in graves 16 and S both wore 2.

This very eccentric pattern, both within the cemetery and more generally, must mean that, at the very least, the matrimonial theory must be modified. It would, of course, be nonsense to suggest that only 12 ladies in Castel Trosino, along with a handful of others from the rest of the Germanic world, were ever married. Even if one still does accept a 'matrimonial' link, it is thus necessary to account for the unbalanced distribution. The only way to do this must be by postulating marked local variations in custom. Whether the custom in this case related to the ceremonies surrounding betrothal and marriage, to the rituals and gravegoods allowed to a dead married woman or to something else altogether, is impossible to deduce.

Indeed it seems that the interpretation of these rings as symbols of betrothal or marriage is so full of uncertainty as to be of no use. The presumably conscious adoption and adaptation of a Roman ring type, along with the fact that Germanic 'matrimonial' rings, unlike their Roman inspiration, are only made of gold and silver could be taken to mean that these rings did have a defined symbolic function, but cannot be used to define it.

Yet again in the non-practical function group, the only way that the study of the rings themselves can lead to an understanding of their status is by renewed reference to Christlein's already well-thumbed table!

Form 4: rings with a cloisonné plate

In Form 4, the plate of the ring is made of a cloisonné plate (fig. 13. 6-10). The use of cloisonné makes this form, like Forms 2 and 3, so distinctive that there is no danger of overlap with any of the other forms. Above all, it is the only ring type in the Germanic world which incorporates this most distinctive barbarian art form.

The group contains 9 definite rings and 1 which, because it is so inadequately described, must be counted a possible Form 4 ring (table 15). Six are of gold, 1 of silver, 1 of whitemetal, 1 of gold and bronze and 1 of bronze. The latter two are from the same grave and are notably later than the main, gold group. The ring from Bouxières-aux-Dames also stands apart from the main group, on account both of its date and form. Garnet is used exclusively on 6 of the rings; the ring from Picquigny has a central circle of green glass, while the gold and bronze ring from Lörrach-Hirschengarten grave 1 and the silver ring from Bouxières-aux-Dames have only red glass.

Just as the task of classification is made easier by the unique character of this group, so too the analysis of its origins is facilitated. In design and technique of manufacture, if not in size, the

cloisonné plates of the rings are identical to the 'simple small garnet brooches and rosettes', identified by Rupp (1937, 69-70) from among the class of garnet-inlaid brooches. There can be no doubt that they are so closely related as to make Rupp's conclusions about the brooches equally valid for the rings. The type, in her opinion, having been developed by the Goths in S. Russia, was adopted by the Thuringians and the Franks from the third quarter of the 5th century onwards. Virtually all of the cloisonné rings have forms and layouts which correspond most closely to the Frankish and Thuringian garnet brooches and this fact, together with their findspots, indicates that, like the brooches, they are Frankish adaptations of the Gothic type.

There are only two exceptions to this rule. The ring from Lörrach-Turmringstraße has a square plate with, at each corner, 2 small circular cells (fig. 13, 7). This pattern is precisely paralleled by the 2 rings from the Gothic Olbia treasure (Ross 1965, no. 166; here fig. 21, 7) and also by a ring from Kouban in Russia (Kondakov, Tolstoy and Reinach 1891, 475, fig. 430). Taken in isolation, there would be no hesitation in attributing this ring directly to the Gothic tradition. The presence in the same grave of 2 gilded silver Ostrogothic bow brooches, however, enables us to go further and to fix with more than usual certainty the ethnic origin of the lady buried.

The second exception, from Bouxières-aux-Dames, stands out on account of the irregularity of its cloisons (fig. 13, 6). Instead of the neat radial patterns of the other examples, the cells around the central circle are far more complex, though a basic 'cross-pattern' can be

discerned. It resembles not the early, simple garnet brooches, but rather the succeeding composite brooches, which tend to go in for more complex designs. This ring would therefore seem to be a unique example of the cloisonné ring form developing in parallel with the brooches. An alternative, more exciting explanation would see it as made from the subsidiary roundel, cut from a composite brooch, perhaps even a Kentish one, since it is most similar, both in scale and design, to the roundels of the Kingston and Faversham brooches (Speake 1980, pls. 11 & 12). The ring would need careful examination for such a theory to be proved.

Although elements of previously discussed ring types, such as 'lyre-shaped' ends to hoops, have been attributed to Germanic rather than to Roman or Byzantine origins, this form is the first which can genuinely be described as a wholly Germanic type, quite without any traces of Roman or Byzantine influence.

Form 5: rings with small settings

This form is enigmatic. Not only does it have few rings, but it is also without obvious antecedents (table 15; fig. 13, 11+12). Its three members have narrow, silver, ribbon hoops, which widen to take a setting which is either square or circular and which does not protrude beyond the line of the hoop. The two rings which retain their stones both have garnets. It is thus clearly a separate form, unrelated to the Form 1 jewellery rings. More than this, however, it is difficult to say. In default of other indications, one can only assume that, like the many of the other jewellery forms, their function was principally decorative.

Form 6: double-spiral rings

This form is characterised by a hoop, the ends of which are split and bent back to form pairs of opposed spirals (fig. 14, 1+2). It has already been mentioned as the possible origin of the 'lyre-shaped' ends which are often used to fasten the hoop of the ring to the plate.

In the catalogue there is only 1 ring of this, once more, very distinctive form (Table 15). It is in excellent condition and shows, at least in the published photograph, little sign of wear (fig. 14, 2). It was found in grave 191 in the cemetery of Basel-Kleinhuningen, a double grave containing the plundered and jumbled remains of 2 female skeletons. The survival of a gilded silver bow-brooch enabled the grave to be dated to c.500. Unusually, there are no stray finds of the type which could have been added to the number. It would seem, therefore, to have been a genuinely rare type within the period under consideration.

From outside that period, however, there are a number of analagous rings. They are form 29 of Beckmann's corpus of finger-rings from 'Free Germany' in the Roman period and she notes 26 examples, with a strongly Baltic distribution and a generally Roman Iron Age date (Map 1; Beckmann 1969, 42 and Taf. 14). This might be taken as indicating that the Basel-Kleinhuningen ring was an heirloom, carried for many years and many miles before being finally buried. Two facts seem to tell against this and to suggest a continuing, if hardly popular, tradition of such rings.

The first is the find, since Beckmann wrote, of a further ring of this type, which goes some way towards reducing both the geographical and chronological isolation of the Basel find (fig. 14, 1). Grave 363 in the *Reihengräberfeld* at Schleitheim-Hebsack dates to c.400 and thus constitutes the earliest evidence so far for Alamannic settlement in this area (Ruckstuhl 1988). Along with a double-spiral finger-ring (again in good condition, with little sign of wear), the grave contained a late Roman chip-carved belt-set, a silver neck-ring, 2 necklaces of silver rings, pendants, glass and amber beads, a bone comb, pottery vessels and an iron-bound box. This find forms an interesting link between the Baltic origins of Beckmann's form 29 and the Basel-Kleinhuningen find, and could be taken as an indication of the ethnic origin of at least some of those Alamanni who eventually came to rest in Switzerland.

The second indication that the Basel-Kleinhuningen ring was not an heirloom, but part of a living tradition is the adaptation of the double-spiral motif to attach the plate to the hoop of other early medieval Germanic ring-types. It was suggested above that the motif was not a purely decorative one, but had some indefinable symbolic significance, which must still have been understood in the 6th century.

If the Basel ring does belong to a living tradition, then it is, like the cloisonné rings, a type which owes nothing to Roman or Byzantine models.

Form 7: rings with massive plate and triangular shoulders

The same may be true of Form 7, which, once again, is completely different from all the others. It is characterised by a massive plate and triangular shoulders, decorated with deeply chip-carved and punched decoration. The skills needed to make such a ring (basically those of casting) were thus of a very different order to those required for the other ring forms.

As with the previous form, the catalogue contains only one ring of this form (table 15). It comes from grave 808 under Köln cathedral, the so-called princess's grave, which also produced the double-bezeled Byzantine ring of Form 2d, along with other grave goods which indicate a Lombard or Thuringian origin. The main motif on the ring's plate is a 12-pointed star- or wheel-spoke pattern, which has been emphasised by the filling of the areas around it with a blue-black paste (plate 8). The hoop of the ring has been cut through and the 2 ends rather roughly hammered back together, as if an attempt has been made to reduce its diameter. In all other respects, however, the ring is in excellent condition, with few signs of wear.

The fact that this ring shows no obvious signs of a long working life is significant since, as with the single example from the previous group, its closest parallels lie at a considerable temporal remove. These are 2 rings from a hoard from Lengerich (Kr. Lingen), which also produced a spiral finger-ring (of Beckmann's form 30), a finger-ring with animal-head decoration (of Beckmann's form 42), 2 gold arm-rings, a gold pendant and a coin of Constantine II (337-340) (Beckmann 1969,

37; Kat. no. 616). There seems no reason to argue that the hoard was deposited long after the *terminus post quem* given by the coin, so the find must predate the 'princess's grave' by about 175 years.

In spite of this gap, the similarities are striking, all the more so, given the lack of any other parallels. Although the plate of one of the Lengerich rings is circular, the other is square and both have as the dominant motif the same wheel-spoke or star shape, surrounded by deeply chip-carved ornament of the same distinctive form. Both, finally, have large, triangular shoulders, bisected by a broad vertical line.

Beckmann has little to say about the 2 Lengerich rings - they are classified under form 19, a general group for *individuelle Einzelstücke* - but feels that they are not of Roman origin. The Köln ring cannot add anything new to this guarded conclusion. One cannot even say whether it was an antique ring re-used or whether, as was suggested for the previous form, it represents the continued manufacture of a very unusual type.

Form 8: Reused Roman rings

The remaining jewellery rings have been grouped together not by virtue of any shared forms, for they are all markedly different, but because they can all be seen as Roman rings, presumably picked up and re-used during the early medieval period.

There are 7 rings in the group (table 15). Of these, the massive crystal ring from Nocera Umbra grave 148 had been incorporated into a necklace and should therefore be described as a 'bead' rather than a ring. Since we do not know the precise location in the grave of 3 of the others, we cannot be sure that they were worn on the finger.

Although the sample is really too small for any reliable pattern to emerge, those Germanic ladies who chose to wear a Roman ring do not seem to have favoured any particular type, though 3 of the rings do have inscriptions. The general impression is of a complete lack of uniformity, as if the selection of such a ring were based purely on its decorative merits.

The identification of these rings as Roman is in almost every case certain. Not only do they stand out as completely different from the established Germanic types already discussed, but they can also be paralleled by known Roman rings, illustrated by Henkel. Thus the ring from grave 756 at Vicq has a narrow hoop and a minute rectangular plate (with an illegible inscription), which scarcely protrudes beyond the line of the hoop (fig. 14, 4). This fits perfectly into Henkel's silver type A IV b) and is closely paralleled by his no. 402, from Freiburg im Breisgau. The Chi-Rho on the plate of this ring might even provide a clue to the deciphering of the remaining lines on the Vicq ring.

The ring from Rittersdorf grave 8 is of silver and has a solid, hemispherical bezel, with a cross engraved on it. On the shoulders is

incised palmette decoration and the inscription +SVM INANIS+ runs around the hoop. Böhner, while aware of some parallels with Roman ring forms, suggested nevertheless that it was a contemporary import from the mediterranean (Böhner 1958 I, 120). Such an exotic origin is however unnecessary, since there are closer parallels to Rhineland Roman forms than those that Böhner cited. Most decisive is the palmette decoration on the shoulders, which occurs on a number of rings illustrated by Henkel (eg nos. 454-457) and dated by him to the third century. It is interesting to note that a bronze ring of the same type was found in grave 429 at Rübenach (Neuffer-Müller and Ament 1973, 79; here fig. 14, 5).

The third inscribed ring comes from Lorsch grave 12 and is of silver, with VIVAS inscribed on its pointed oval plate (fig. 14, 3). While the exact form of the ring cannot be precisely paralleled from Henkel's corpus, it is generally similar to several (eg no. 88), while 'Vivas' is an inscription which is reasonably common on Roman rings.

It is the conical cutting of the blue stone - now missing - of the Lausanne-Bois de Vaux ring (fig. 14, 6) which indicates a Roman origin, since similarly shaped stones do not occur in Germanic or Byzantine rings. They are however used in Roman rings and Henkel, as always, can provide several examples (239, 267, 278).

A Roman origin seems most likely for the gold ring, with ribbon hoop and circular, undecorated plate cast as one, found among the robbed and partially destroyed remains of St.-Denis, gr. 1954/6. Its form, in

particular the combination of ribbon hoop and plate on a cast-in-one ring, does not seem at home among the definitely Germanic (or even Byzantine) rings and parallels can be found in Henkel's no. 95 and no. 1760 (which is unfinished). The ring appears from the published photograph to be very worn and it is even possible that the plate was originally hexagonal, but wear is not generally a reliable criterion for judging the age of a ring and a Germanic origin should not in this case be ruled out.

Finally, the massive crystal ring which was re-used as a bead on the necklace from Nocera Umbra grave 148, with its sculpted female bust, is of a well-known Roman type. An amber example (among others) is illustrated by Henkel, as no. 1676.

The significance of this group lies precisely in its small size and unimportant nature. The 7 Roman prestige rings re-used as finger-rings by Germanic ladies amount to a tiny percentage (7%) of the total number of jewellery rings. Given that literally hundreds of Roman rings, of all metals, must have littered the post-Roman landscape of the Germanic world, it is remarkable that so few of them reappear in Germanic graves.

Before passing to a general summary of the significance of the jewellery ring group, it must be noted that 3 rings, from graves 7, 65, and 93 at Castel Trosino, are too poorly described to be allotted to any form (table 15).

A summary of the jewellery ring group

The clear divisions between the various jewellery ring forms, together with the very distinctive shapes of several of the forms, implies that some at least did have specific symbolic functions over and above their purely decorative role. It is possible too that the materials used, in particular the precious and semi-precious stones, also carried their own symbolic meanings. In some cases rank and status may have been symbolised, in others, as we have seen, marriage and betrothal, but it is unfortunate that the form of the jewellery rings can give no indication to enable any closer definition of what is being symbolised.

The subject of the origins of the various Germanic ring types will be discussed in greater detail below, but it is worth noting that, although the inspiration behind most of the jewellery types remains contemporary Byzantine or late Roman, other influences can also be seen. Thus the cloisonné plate of Form 4 betrays a Gothic origin, while the isolated examples of Forms 6 and 7 hint at the continuation of older Germanic styles. An alternative view of the Form 6 Basel-Kleinhuningen and Form 7 Köln rings would see them as old rings re-used and would thus link them to the re-used Roman rings of Form 8. This re-use of old rings, although noted very occasionally with the previous groups, is definitely a more widespread phenomenon among the jewellery group, even if such rings remain a tiny and unimportant minority.

Plain rings

A ring belongs to this group if it has no clearly separate bezel. If it is decorated, then the decoration is likely to cover the entire area of the hoop.

The principle problem of this group is, of course, that plain rings have many uses other than as adornments for the finger. In the Bavarian cemetery of Altenerding, plain bronze rings of finger size were found on necklaces, as purse fasteners and on girdle hangers (Sage 1984, graves 773, 506 and 1004). The only way to identify such a ring as a finger-ring is by finding it *in situ*. Accordingly, this discussion of plain finger-rings will take into account only those rings which were actually found on a finger, or in the general area of the hand bones, or for which there can be reasonable certainty. Some doubt must nevertheless remain and the group of spiral rings may serve as a good illustration both of the general problem and of the difficult decisions that must often be made as to whether to include a certain ring in the catalogue. Three of the four spiral rings in the catalogue come from early medieval graves in the cemetery of Frenouville (Pilet 1980; here fig. 15, 9+10+12)). The preservation of bone was not sufficiently good to allow complete certainty, nevertheless one ring was found where the left hand would have been (grave 470), one near a belt buckle (grave 472) and one in the pelvis area (grave 629). The excavator, on this basis, classified all three as finger-rings. However, spiral rings of identical type were also found in Haillot grave 14 and Rübenach grave 70 (Breuer and Roosens 1957, 226; Neuffer-Müller and Ament 1973, 169). Both of these came from the area of the breast bone, while the position

of the arms of both skeletons meant that they could not possibly have been worn on the finger. In both cases it seems most likely that the ring was worn around the neck, though separate from the main bead necklace. Thus, when buried, these two were not *finger*-rings and so have been ommitted from the catalogue. The silver spiral ring from the rich female grave of Heilbronn-Bockingen has been included, however, even though the nature of the grave's discovery and excavation allowed for the recovery of no details of the ring's location (fig. 16, 2).

The matter of the definition of the function of such rings, and the question of whether to include them in the catalogue, becomes even more complex when one remembers that the evidence from the graves relates only to the rings' function *at the time of burial.* When buried, the intaglio ring from Schleitheim grave 30 was apparently worn on a necklace, yet the form of this ring leaves no doubt as to its primary function. Just because a plain ring, spiral or otherwise, is found hanging around the neck of a body, it does not follow that it had always been thus used. It is, of course, common today for those who use their hands often to wear a precious ring on a necklace, without in any way altering its meaning.

The suspension of a finger-ring around the neck is perhaps a special case. The use of plain rings as bag-closers or as parts of girdle hangers is more clear cut, for it is surely unlikely that these would have had a dual function.

In the catalogue and in the ensuing discussion of plain rings, these problems of definition must be borne in mind. On the one hand, some rings (such as that from Heilbronn-Bockingen) may have been wrongly included, while others (such as those from Rübenach and Haillot) may have been wrongly excluded through too rigorous a definition of what constitutes a finger-ring. In general, it has been thought best to err on the side of over-caution. Where the purpose of a ring included in the catalogue cannot be proved by its location in the grave, this has been noted in the catalogue with the phrase '*No evidence that it was a finger-ring*'.

The catalogue contains 63 plain rings from 58 graves and they are listed in table 16. Ten are of gold, 50 of silver, 2 of whitemetal and one is of gilded bronze. Five of the rings are from male graves (8%), 2 from the graves of juvenile males (3%), 46 from female graves (73%) and one from the grave of a juvenile female. One comes from a possibly female grave and 8 from graves of uncertain sex (13%). It was said in the chapter on classification, as part of the argument for concentrating on prestige rings, that the inclusion of non-prestige rings would not substantially increase the numbers. The previous chapter on the jewellery rings demonstrated this well. Even covering the bronze rings derived from the grander, stone-set intaglio style rings did not substantially increase the total. If anything, it emphasised the dominance of prestige metals in the types discussed. In the case of plain rings, a rather different pattern can be seen, since large numbers of bronze examples do occur. It could be argued from this that the prestige plain rings are in fact (and in contrast to the

previous types) no more than the 'top of the range' of a form which occurs in all metals.

In order to answer this question and, more generally, to see the prestige plain rings in their proper context, it is necessary to view them as part of the wider group of plain rings of all metals. One way to do this would have been to attempt to trace every single plain finger-ring, but this was thought to be an unnecessarily cumbersome way of gaining a representative sample. Instead, those cemeteries which have produced prestige plain rings and for which good quality information was available were examined in detail for examples of non-prestige plain rings. In addition and as a check, a number of other similarly well-excavated and published cemeteries were also examined. All the plain rings from these cemeteries, irrespective of their metal, are listed in table 17, but prestige plain rings from isolated graves or from graves in otherwise poorly published cemeteries have been omitted. The rings listed in table 17 are taken to be a more representative sample than the catalogue and it is the information contained in table 17 which is therefore used as the basis for the following discussion.

Table 17 lists 91 rings from 86 graves. One is of gold, 46 are of silver, 1 is of whitemetal, 1 of gilded bronze and 47 are of bronze. It is of interest that there are no iron examples. Nine rings are from male graves (10%), 57 from female graves (63%), 5 from the graves of juvenile females (5%) and 19 from graves of unknown sex (21%). The fact that these percentages are roughly the same here as they were for

the prestige rings alone indicates that the prestige rings were in no way separated from the rest and justifies the examination of the entire group.

Before going on to look in detail at the bulk of the plain rings, it is worth extracting one group which stands clearly apart from the rest and which, therefore, is best seen in isolation. Plain ring Form 1 is characterised by a very broad hoop, either cast or of thick sheet. In the latter case the ends are overlapped and hammered together. In most examples the hoop widens at one point, but what really distinguishes this group from the rest is the fact that the entire area of the hoop is decorated with stamped and/or filigree decoration (fig. 17, 22-3).

There are 6 rings in the group, listed in table 19. Two graves produced pairs of rings, so that the six come in fact from only 4 graves. Five are of gold, one is of silver and they are all from female graves. Only one of them (the gold example from Pfahlheim) was definitely found on or near a hand. The silver Pfahlheim ring was on the breast, along with a pin and a knife, which might be taken as an indication that it was in fact either a purse ring or worn from the neck. The Husby grave was a cremation, while the two Italian examples were insufficiently recorded. It should not automatically be assumed, therefore, that they were all finger-rings.

Both in their wide hoops and in their extensive use of stamped decoration, the members of this group are very distinctive. Apart from this, however, it is very difficult to incorporate them into any

coherent group. Although small in number and apparently a 7th century phenomenon, they span the entire Germanic world in a way that no other ring type does (map 14, triangles). The pair from Husby are a very unusual occurrence of prestige rings outside the area of the former Roman Empire. Furthermore, although linked by a common type and overall scheme of decoration, the individual rings appear nevertheless to reflect local styles in the details of their decoration. One of the Husby rings has an S-stamp which Åberg characterised as typical of the Vendel period and area and which dates the grave to this rather than to a later period (Åberg 1953, 121). The rhomboidal stamp on the Belluno ring and the triangular stamp on the Parma ring are typical (also according to Åberg) of Lombard stamped ornament (Åberg 1923, 44). In both Lombard Italy and Vendel Scandinavia, stamped decoration was reasonably common. In Merovingian metalwork, by contrast, filigree was preferred and the use of stamped ornament was not nearly so widespread. This predominance of filigree ornamentation is reflected in the very simple punched dots on the silver Pfahlheim ring and, above all, in the exclusive use of filigree to form the characteristic 'hook-and-eye' and S-scrolls on the gold ring from the same grave.

In previous chapters, the problem of an unusual type has usually been solved by a look at the antecedents of the particular form. Such an approach proved fruitful in the case of the double-spiral rings (Jewellery Form 5) but in this case provides no illumination. Uniquely, there are no obvious Germanic or Roman antecedents of this form and this makes all the more curious its combination of small numbers and scattered distribution. A clue may be given by the use of a complex

pattern of stamped ornament on a ring from a very rich, probably Germanic, grave from Graciana in Yugoslavia (Vinski 1968, 152 and Tab. 2 & 3; here fig. 17, 24). The form of this ring is very similar to the 'double' rings which are Beckmann's form 10 (Beckmann 1969, 33), though the stamped decoration is unparalleled on any of her examples. The distinctive 'double' form of the Graciana ring, however, does not appear on any of the Form 1 rings and this tends to weaken any attempt to link them directly to Beckmann's form 10 (which she sees as having a predominantly Scandinavian distribution). The isolation of this form is particularly well illustrated by the Husby pair. In the Migration period, there are various ring types current in the Scandinavian area. On Gotland, these include plain bands, spiral rings and the multiple rings just mentioned. None of them bears any similarity to the Husby pair, but they are at least described by Nerman as 'numerous' on Gotland (Nerman 1935, 75). In the succeeding Vendel period, however, not only do all these types disappear but they are not replaced. Nerman lists no Vendel period rings from Gotland (Nerman 1969). Simply as finger-rings, the Husby pair are quite without contemporary Scandinavian parallel.

If the antecedents of this form are obscure, it is at least possible to say what its successors are, even if the nature of the link is far from clear. Among the most common finds in hoards of the Viking period, specifically from c.1000 onwards, are rings of precisely this type. They are, in fact, one of only two ring types which appear in these hoards and they are so distinctive, and their distribution is so limited, that Stenberger sees them as a Gotland type (Stenberger 1958,

134-9). Quite how one links six 7th century rings spread thinly across the entire area of Germanic Europe, with a large number of 11th century rings concentrated almost exclusively on Gotland is a problem which defies an easy solution.

Nor is it possible to draw any firm conclusion about the function of such rings, though they are certainly remarkable for their size and the extent of their decoration. In default of other information, it is safest to see them as purely decorative and more closely related, therefore, to the jewellery group than to the other, more mundane, plain rings.

Those remaining plain rings (plain ring Form 2) are certainly less distinctive. Although a couple of them have decoration (VTERE FELIX is engraved on the octagonal outer surface of the ring from Basel-Kleinhuningen grave 100 and there is a pattern of scratched lines on the broad hoop of the Wallersheim grave 4 ring), the vast majority are quite plain. They can be subdivided (and labelled A-D) on the basis of their form, which derives exclusively from the method of manufacture. Thus there are (A) closed bands, which have been either cast or have had their edges overlapped and hammered together. There are (B) rings formed simply by bending a piece of wire into a circle, without any attempt to seal the ends, and there are those (C) formed by bending similarly a strip of sheet. Finally there are (D) rings where the wire has been bent not into a simple loop, but rather into a spiral. With the exception of a basic knowldge of casting for the first type, it is

clear that only a minimum of metalworking skill was required in the manufacture of such plain rings.

In spite of this, there are a number of indications that plain rings had a significance which belies their simple form. In the first place it appears that plain rings of prestige metal are not, as was suggested above, simply the 'top of the range' of plain rings. If this were so, one would expect the vast majority of plain rings to be of non-prestige metals, with only a very few of silver and gold. Yet there as many prestige as there are non-prestige rings, the reverse of what one might expect. Secondly, there is the fact that, when one breaks the group down into the various sub-types just described, there are interesting differences in composition (table 19). Gold is only used for closed bands. The proportion of prestige : non-prestige is not 1 : 1 in every group. Among the closed bands, the open sheet and the spiral rings, prestige rings are in the majority. The bent wire rings, by contrast, are almost exclusively of bronze.

Further variation can be seen if the group is broken down, not by form, but by cemetery. Above all it is important to realise that, in spite of their relatively large number, plain rings are still not a common type. Table 20 shows the percentage of graves in the cemeteries examined which contained rings. In almost every case, the percentage of the cemetery population buried wearing a plain ring is 2% or less. A few cases rise above that. In Arlon, Haillot and Niederstotzingen this can be explained away by the small size of the total sample (21, 17 and 12 graves respectively) so that a single find affects the percentage

disproportionately. The cases of Sirnau (with 222 graves) and Rittersdorf (164 graves) cannot be quite so easily accounted for.

Since both are old excavations it may be that the excavators were over-confident in their description of any old ring as a finger-ring. On the other hand, several of the cemeteries examined had no plain rings at all. Bargen with 47 graves, Berghausen with 106 graves and Giengen-an-der-Brenz with 50 graves all produced no plain rings (Koch 1982; Paulsen and Schach-Dörges 1978). There are, furthermore, other examples of differences from cemetery to cemetery which hint that the high proportions of plain rings wearers at Sirnau and Rittersdorf (and their absence elsewhere) may not be the result of chance. The proportion of prestige : non-prestige varies widely from cemetery to cemetery: Rittersdorf is characterised by an unusually high number of silver rings (7 silver to 3 bronze), as is Nouvion-en-Ponthieu (5 silver to no bronze among the Merovingian graves). Rübenach and Sirnau present the reverse picture (2 silver to 7 bronze). The distribution by sex and age is also different from site to site. Sirnau has an unusually large number of male wearers (5 out of 11) while the only 2 plain rings among the 238 excavated graves at Marktoberdorf were buried with juvenile girls. There seems also to be an indication of specific ring-types being found in specific cemeteries. Examples of this are the 3 spiral rings from Frenouville (out of a total of 5 rings from the early medieval part of the cemetery), the very similar decoration of parallel scratched lines on the 2 rings (one silver, one bronze) from Arlon graves 3 and 7 (fig. 15, 2+3) and the equally similar triangular sections of the three silver rings from

Haillot graves 6, 9 and 14 (fig. 15, 4-6). More generally, it is notable that rings of bent wire occur in only 5 out of the 22 cemeteries examined in detail.

The nature and size of the sample of cemeteries examined (with a total of 6148 graves) makes it likely that these variations are not the result of chance, nor of the vagaries of excavation, nor of too small a sample. Rather they seem to reflect differences, from area to area, in the wearing of plain rings by the dead. The existence of such differences has already been suggested in order to account for the remarkably unbalanced distribution of the so-called 'matrimonial' rings (jewellery Form 3) and it seems only logical to detect the same pattern in the case of plain rings.

To argue for such regional variation must inevitably increase the complexity of the problem of deducing the function of these rings. Does the variation relate to the rite of burial or to the use of the plain rings? The high proportion of plain ring wearers at Rittersdorf and Sirnau could reflect (among other things) either a local belief that rings should not be removed before the burial or a function for such rings that was more widely applicable in those areas than elsewhere. Unless one can answer such questions, any attempt at an accurate and demonstrable suggestion of the rings' function will be fruitless.

Such problems may stand in the way of complete understanding but they cannot mask the fact that these rings do seem to have had a function

which was not purely decorative. Thus, in additon to the evidence already discussed, they are found in male as well as in female graves, a fact which in previous groups has always been found to be associated with a more than decorative use. The simplicity of the plain rings, together with their wide range of quality also argues that they had a function that was symbolic rather than decorative or practical.

The similarity between the early medieval plain rings and the wedding rings of today has led inevitably to the suggestion that this function was, as it is today, as a symbol of marriage, despite the lack of any clear written evidence to support such a view (Oman 1930, 16-22). Noone seems to have asked how these wedding rings related to the 'matrimonial' rings and it was perhaps fortunate that the two types have never been found together in the same grave!

The link between a Germanic plain ring and marriage was first made by Chifflet, in his description of the plain gold ring (fig. 15, 7) in the grave of Childeric (Chiflet 1655, 96). The identification of this as a wedding ring has never been challenged though, during the 19th century, there was some debate as to whether it might not in fact be the ring of Childeric's wife Basina. It was Deloche who suggested this, basing his case initially on the fact that the plain ring's internal diameter was some 3mm smaller than the diameter of the seal ring (Deloche 1900, 192-5). On this rather shakey foundation, Deloche was then able to build the hypothesis that Basina had predeceased Childeric and that her wedding ring was placed in his coffin! Although Deloche saw 'nothing to contradict' this theory, it has attracted few followers. The 2.1mm

diameter of the plain ring most certainly does not rule out a male finger, as table 4 shows and as Deloche himself unconsciously demonstrated by quoting in support of his argument the 'HEVA' ring from Pouan, which he mistakenly believed to be a woman's ring.

Despite the lack of any more recent discussion of the function of these rings, the impression that they are linked with marriage does linger on. Yet, just as was the case with the Form 3 jewellery rings, the evidence is surely not strong enough to support such a link. Anyone who backs it must explain why, in most cemeteries, less than 2% of the population wear plain rings. If Childeric's plain ring symbolised his married state, why were neither Arnegunda nor Redwald, both known to have been married, buried with plain rings? Furthermore, can the finding of plain rings on the fingers of children fit such an interpretation? It is known that marriage could occur during teenage at this period, but the girl in Niederstotzingen grave 4 with a plain gold band on her right hand was only two years old. Finally, one must account for the occasional finding of pairs of plain rings in graves such as Donzdorf grave 38 or Schretzheim grave 615 (fig. 15, 19+20; 17, 9+10).

Such problems, combined with the apparent local variations in practice already discussed make it difficult to link convincingly the plain rings with marriage. This does not necessarily mean that they were not linked, but rather that the available evidence does not allow the link to be proved. If there is a link, it is far more subtle than the existing views allow for.

Similar problems of interpretation must inevitably bedevil any attempt to suggest alternative symbolic functions. On the other hand, it is possible to be negative and to rule out a function directly connected with status. Even though, as already demonstrated, the high proportion of 'prestige' plain rings suggests that they were not just the 'top of the range', it is interesting that there does not seem to be any direct connection between the quality of the ring and the status of the grave in which it is found. Christlein's well-thumbed table is for once of no use (Christlein 1973, Abb. 11). Indeed the inherent tendency of his argument to circularity is well demonstrated by its application to the case of the plain rings.

As an admittedly crude test, Table 17 lists the number of gravegoods found in each grave, as a rough independent guide to its status. Taking only intact graves, it is of great interest that the average number of goods in a grave with a prestige ring is, at 10, only slightly higher than the average number for a grave with a non-prestige ring (8.5). Furthermore, 'prestige' plain rings are frequently found in graves with few other objects, while, conversely, bronze rings occur not only in 'poor' graves, but also in graves with numerous and high quality objects. The contents of grave 7 at Arlon, among them a gold disc brooch, are very similar in both quantity and quality to the contents of grave 3. Yet the latter has a silver ring (fig. 15, 2) and the former a bronze ring (fig. 15, 3). At Sirnau, male grave 215 produced, apart from a silver ring (fig. 17, 19), no more than a shield boss and knife fragments. Male grave 191, by contrast, has a bronze ring (fig. 17, 18), along with a sword, a sax and sheath with bronze

studs, spearhead, shield boss, spurs and a belt set. In the latter case, the presence of the spurs and sword confirm the status of the grave as at least C, but one must surely wonder whether the silver ring in grave 215 really does qualify it for the upper half of group B, as Christlein's table suggests. The same is true of all those graves which, though they contain a 'prestige' ring, have no other objects by which to define their status according to Christlein's table. There seems little reason to see Dieue-sur-Meuse grave 71, with a silver ring and an iron buckle, as any grander than grave 172 in the same cemetery, with a bronze ring and a bone comb.

In short, it seems that, in the case of plain rings, the rigid application of Christlein's ideas will lead only to circular argument. The type of metal of which such a ring is made seems to have no relation to the status of the grave as ascertained by other means. This in turn implies that the symbolic meaning of plain rings was in no way related to status.

If this is indeed the case, then plain rings fulfill a very different function to the majority of types previously discussed, where status seems dominant. It is possible, however, that this distinction is not so marked as it appears. Some of the plain rings, which are definitely finger-rings, and most especially those made by simply bending a piece of wire into a hoop, are so crude as to be extemely uncomfortable, if not actually quite unwearable (e.g. Schretzheim grave 159: fig. 17, 6; Rübenach grave 70: fig. 16, 20). In several graves (Güttingen grave 49 and Schretzheim grave 348, for example) similarly unwearable rings were

made by bending a bronze earring into a spiral (fig. 17, 7). This fact, combined with the number of cases, discussed above, of bronze rings occurring in graves where one might normally expect to find a 'prestige' ring, might be explicable by the suggestion that such rings were only placed on the body at the time of burial, perhaps in exchange for a 'prestige' ring, which was kept by the heirs.

Such a theory can only be based on very slender and essentially negative evidence. It cannot explain the presence of 'prestige' rings in otherwise 'poor' graves, but it would go some way to explain the unique lack of correlation between the quality of the rings and the status of the grave. It would also emphasise yet again that the symbolic importance of these rings was not as indicators of status and was not dependant on the metal of which they were made. The wearing of a gold plain ring might possibly imply that the owner was of high status, but this was of secondary importance. The ring's main importance lay in the message given by its plain form.

Just as the precise symbolic function of these rings cannot be deduced from their form, so too a consideration of their origins throws little light. A couple of the rings, notably the octagonal rings from Lorsch grave 25 (fig. 15, 1) and Basel-Kleinhuningen grave 100 (the latter inscribed VTERE FELIX) are in the Roman tradition, if not actual Roman rings (Beckmann 1969, 31, form 9). The remainder of the forms, however, are universal in their simplicity and occur as frequently in 'Germania Libera' as they do within the Roman Empire. Henkel certainly sees plain bands as a sign of marriage, but can produce only an

ambiguous quote from Pliny in support and it is clear that his conclusion is influenced mainly by 20th century practice (Henkel 1913, 337-9). There is no indication at all as to the function of such rings among the barbarians, so no truly valid conclusions can be reached, let alone applied to their early medieval successors.

Once again, therefore, it is necessary to stop short of any clear definition of use. Indeed the plain ring group illustrates well the complexities of trying to disentangle the function of a ring, where this is purely symbolic. Quite apart from the virtual impossibility of deducing a function which requires no specific features of form or decoration, the great unknowns of religious belief and of local variations in custom, when combined with a lack of analagous information from neighbouring periods or areas, conspire to prevent any conclusion more positive than that plain rings did indeed have a symbolic function of some sort.

CHAPTER 6

NON-PRESTIGE FORMS AND RING WEARING PRACTICE IN GENERAL

After a general description of how and where prestige rings were worn, the previous pages have concentrated on a detailed examination of each of the individual prestige ring forms. This discussion has focussed in particular on classifying the rings in such a way as to suggest the differing practical and symbolic functions of the various forms, and to reach thereby conclusions about the status that they represent. The discussion has been purposely confined to information derived from the rings themselves and has not attempted to use information from other, external sources, such as the accompanying gravegoods. That is the purpose of the next chapter. Before moving on to that, it is necessary to set the prestige ring forms into a wider context, firstly by comparing them with the non-prestige ring forms and finally by looking at the overall practice of ring-wearing, as shown by the grave finds. This will enable the significance and limitations both of the individual ring forms and of the group as a whole to be clearly understood, and will set the scene for the wider consideration of prestige rings as just one element of the grave assemblage.

Looking first at the non-prestige rings, a primary distinction was made in the chapter on classification between 'prestige' and 'non-prestige' ring forms. A non-prestige ring form was defined as one in which the vast majority of rings are made of non-prestige materials, in practice almost always of bronze and glass. Since they are not the subject of

this thesis, no attempt has been made here to classify these forms in any detail, although a couple of particularly distinctive types will be looked at more carefully.

The purpose of this brief discussion is to provide an overall point of comparison for the prestige forms. In order to do this as economically as possible the group has been treated in the same way as the plain rings. Thus no attempt has been made to seek out all examples. Instead, a representative selection of 27 well-excavated and published cemeteries, with a total of some 7770 graves has been thoroughly examined and all non-prestige rings extracted and listed (table 21; map 2). Among those 7770 graves, only 60 (less than 1%) contained non-prestige rings. Eight of the cemeteries examined produced none at all. Of those 60 graves, 36 were female (60%), 3 were male (5%), and 21 (35%) could not be sexed. It is clear, therefore, that non-prestige rings were worn in the grave almost exclusively by women. The vast majority of the rings in the sample were of bronze, though iron and potin are also occasionally found. They are most usually cast in one piece and the decoration, if there is any, is generally engraved. It is unusual to find a separate material used as a setting.

The rings which make up the bulk of the non-prestige group contrast very strongly with the prestige rings in that they do not fall into clearly separate forms. While it was relatively easy to classify the latter, without any ambiguous or doubtful cases, the same could not possibly be done with the non-prestige rings. Although there are widely differing types, they are not separated by clear divisions, so

that there are few obvious groups. Many of the rings (perhaps as much as 25% of the sample) seem to be actual Roman rings. This group is thus very similar to the small group of re-used Roman rings in 'prestige materials', discussed above. The conclusion there, that such rings were randomly selected purely for their decorative merits, seems equally applicable to these more humble and numerous Roman examples.

Some of the rings are clearly distant and ill-understood copies of prestige rings. This is most evident in the group of 'pseudo-monogram' rings, discussed with the name rings above, but it is interesting how few of the prestige forms do appear debased in this way. Roman intaglios, mounted in bronze and iron rings, cannot have been rare finds. Why then does one not find a far greater number of non-prestige examples? As has been repeatedly stressed, the prestige forms mostly required a minimum of technical or artistic skill. The remarkable fact, therefore, is not that there are a few bronze rings in prestige forms. Rather, it is that there are not a great deal more. The overwhelming impression gained from these rings is that they were a completely separate form, with no clearly defined types and, by implication, no clearly defined function.

Amid this rather dreary and amorphous group there are one or two cases of clearly defined types which stand in interesting contrast to the rest and which can be analysed in a way similar to that applied to the prestige forms. The clearest of these groups is represented by 5 examples in table 21 but a further 6 cases from other cemeteries make

it clear that the type is both a reasonably numerous and widespread one (Table 23).

It is characterised by a cast-in-one construction, a bezel which is most usually round but can also be square and which is engraved with either a cross or a swastika (fig. 19, 1-3). Of the 12 examples traced, 9 are of bronze and 2 of silver, while one combines bronze, iron and gold. One comes from a male grave, one from a male juvenile grave, and 5 from female graves. Five, including one pair, come from graves of uncertain sex and one is a stray find.

It has been suggested above on the evidence of the prestige forms that men did not wear rings purely for decoration, and it is logical to apply the same criterion here to suggest that this group had a function over and above mere decoration. This suggestion is certainly backed up by the rings' very distinctive form, particularly when viewed against the undifferentiated uniformity of the remainder. Perhaps the closest parallel to this group are the 'backward-looking animal' rings which were included in the prestige group on account of their constructional similarities with the Form 1 jewellery rings. In that case, it was not possible to make any suggestions about function since the 'backward-looking animal' provides no clue. In the case of these cross or swastika rings, however, the temptation must be to see them as religious symbols, perhaps even denoting the faith of the dead person.

This group is by far the clearest example of a definable form among the non-prestige rings, though it is one which finds no echo among the

prestige forms. Another form, also restricted to non-prestige rings, occurs in 3 cases in table 21 (Curtil-sous-Burnaud gr. 22; Frenouville gr. 487; Réville gr. 130), but like the cross/swastika rings, also occurs elsewhere. In this form, prestige types are recalled in the positioning of a trefoil of granules on either side of the plate. However, the rhomboidal shape of the plate, as well as its frequent decoration with ring-and-dot stamps, clearly diffentiate it from any prestige form (fig. 19, 4).

As the sample illustration (fig. 18) of the non-prestige form rings from the cemetery of Curtil-sous-Burnaud shows, these two types stand out conspicuously from among the vast majority of unclassifiable types. They serve only to emphasise the contrast with the clearly defined and easily classified types of prestige rings. This contrast is relevant not only to the problems of classification. It has much wider application. If a ring is to function as a symbol with a clearly defined meaning, it follows that it must have an equally clearly defined form. The existence of such clearly defined forms among the prestige rings points to their clearly defined symbolic roles. The lack of such definition among the bulk of the non-prestige rings shows a corresponding lack of symbolic function.

As has already been said, the remarkable fact is not that there is some overlap between the two groups, with the occasional bronze ring being made in a prestige form and *vice versa*. It is rather that there is so little overlap between the two groups. The fact that the overwhelming majority of rings with a tightly defined symbolic function are made of

'prestige' metals backs up the assertion that they symbolised either status or something else which could only be acquired with status. Since this thesis is concerned with the clearer definition of status, it follows that the decision to concentrate on the prestige forms alone does not mean that evidence has been neglected, since the study of non-prestige forms is a totally separate area.

The final task, then, is to set the prestige rings against the overall pattern of Germanic ring-wearing. In the discussion both of the plain rings and of the non-prestige forms, figures have been quoted from a sample group of cemeteries to give an idea of the overall occurence of rings in graves. In table 22 these figures have been combined with similar figures for the other prestige ring forms in order to complete the overall picture of Germanic ring-wearing.

Several points are illustrated. The first is that, as has already been noted in the discussion of plain rings, there is a wide variety both in the overall totals and in the proportions of the various types (prestige : plain : non-prestige) from site to site. While the average number of graves with rings is 2% overall, in Rittersdorf the figure is 7%, in Castel Trosino 6.5% and in Curtil-sous-Burnand 5%. At the bottom of the scale are such sites as Ciply, Fridingen, Kirchheim-am-Ries and Marktoberdorf with 1% or less. There is an impression that the further east one goes, the scarcer the rings. In the cases where the figure is definitely above average, it is generally caused by an unusually large number of one type of ring: non-prestige at Curtil-sous-Burnand, plain at Rittersdorf and prestige at Castel Trosino. In

view of the suggestion made above that such variations reflect local differences, it is of interest that these differences appear to relate not to ring-wearing in general but rather to the wearing or burial of specific ring types. The same point is made less dramatically by the varying proportions from other cemeteries, as shown in table 22. The overall averages may indeed work out at 0.5% for prestige and non-prestige rings and 1% for plain rings, but these are most emphatically averages, masking a wide variety of different habits.

What is most striking about the figures, however, is the very small proportion of people (2%) who were buried wearing a ring of any type. It is very important to realise that this figure does not necessarily reflect the proportion of people who wore rings during life. It is of course common today for rings to be passed on, or sold, at the time of the wearer's death. In the discussion of plain rings it was suggested that there was some evidence for the exchanging of rings before burial and, while this cannot be proved or in any way quantified, it illustrates the need for great caution in any attempt to use the figures above to come to conclusions about Germanic ring-wearing. It might be tempting to use variations in the proportions of different ring types to draw conclusions about their relative popularity. The generally higher percentage of non-prestige rings in western cemeteries could also be used to argue for variations in the habits of ring wearing throughout the Germanic world. Such conclusions would, however, be false ones. Until (or unless) we can understand better the vagaries of pagan burial rite, any conclusions about Germanic life based on Germanic death must be very tentative.

The analysis of the rings themselves, and especially of their function, is an approach which largely avoids such problems. The fact that the prestige forms fall so easily into a series of clearly defined categories not only divides them from the bulk of bronze and other rings but also implies that they had clearly defined symbolic meanings. In some cases, these symbolic meanings were derived from the ring's practical use, and can be defined with some precision. Where the ring did not have a practical function, but was purely symbolic, less precision is possible, though hints can be gained from the levels of craftsmanship and materials required.

Through such analysis, it is possible to be far more subtle in the definition of the status of someone buried with such a ring than has hitherto been the case. On the other hand, it would be wrong to argue that information can only be extracted from the rings themselves. The next section, therefore, looks at them in the wider context of the grave and has two aims: the first is to augment the evidence provided by the rings themselves and the second is to use the conclusions to increase our wider understanding of Germanic burial rite and society.

PART III: THE RINGS IN CONTEXT

CHAPTER 7

RINGS, *REIHENGRÄBERFELDER* AND GERMANIC SOCIETY

Introduction

The previous section of this work dealt with the information that could be extracted from the rings as objects without a context. In approach, it was thus very similar to Deloche's work, in which the circumstances of a ring's discovery were of secondary importance to the ring itself (Deloche 1900). The overall aim of this previous section was to classify the rings according to their function and thereby to gain a detailed understanding of both the potential and the limitations of the group as a source of evidence for the early medieval Germanic world.

One advantage of this approach is that it enables the rings to be seen not simply as gravegoods. As the discussion of the plain rings in particular showed, there is evidence that the function of a ring in the grave was not necessarily the same as its function in the living world. Concentration on the rings themselves and on their practical uses, rather than on their role as gravegoods, thus allows us to define the status that they implied to living people.

Whatever the advantages of such an approach, however, it can only be partial and no more than a necessary first stage in the progress towards a full understanding of the group's significance. Rings in

isolation cannot provide all the information which is needed to draw the full conclusions. The question of dating illustrates the point neatly. With the exception of the coin rings and those few seal and name rings that can be identified with a known person, rings are not in themselves closely datable. The previous section, therefore, could include no discussion of possible changes in ring-wearing through time. It is only by widening the discussion, by seeing the rings as just one object in a dated grave assemblage, that dating evidence can be produced and its relevance to the rings better understood.

The aim of this section, therefore, is to go beyond the point where Deloche left off and to see the rings against the background of the graves which, in the overwhelming majority of cases, produced them. It was in order to maximise the validity of this wider look that the decision was taken to concentrate in the catalogue on those rings which had been properly excavated and which could, therefore, provide a proper context.

This wider look can lead to results in two ways. In the first place, our understanding of rings may be supplemented by the information obtainable from the graves; in the second, the understanding of the graves (and thereby ultimately of Germanic society) may be increased by the information derived from the detailed study of the rings. These two areas are generally in inverse proportion to each other. The more rings benefit from the wider understanding of the grave, the less they will be able to contribute to that understanding. The balance and

overall direction of the contribution varies widely and depends entirely upon the specific aspect being studied.

In order to illustrate this range, the following sections study the rings in terms of each of the three main ways in which early medieval cemeteries, the graves in them and the contents of those graves have been analysed: distribution, dating and status.

Rings and Distribution

The distribution of cemeteries, and of specific types of objects in them, has been studied for a number of purposes. Werner plotted the overall distribution of *Reihengräberfelder* in order to give an idea of the areas of Germanic settlement (Werner 1979, 8; here map 4). In a separate paper, he plotted the distribution of Coptic bowls, to argue for the existence of the Italy-Alps-Rhine trade route, and he contrasted the distribution of mints and of balances to illustrate the differing economic bases of the eastern and western areas of Germanic settlement (Werner 1961, Abb. 2 & 15). Distribution has also been used to argue for the ethnic origins of the Germanic settlers. On the basis of the finds and burial customs from the cemetery of Basel-Bernring, Max Martin argued that the group originated from the area between the middle Rhine and the Harz mountains (Martin 1976, 146-55). The lady in grave 42, however, because of her pot and brooches, was Frankish, while the man (her husband?) in grave 5 had been 'frankified' and so had his sword placed at his right side (Martin 1976, 154). The remaining sword-bearing men had their swords to the left, in the

Thuringian manner. Similar analysis of the 'princess's grave' (808) under Köln cathedral has led to the less certain conclusion that she may have been of Thuringian or Lombard origin (Steuer 1980, 58, 66).

There are two cases of rings being able to contribute with a reasonable degree of certainty to the establishment of ethnic origins. Both are jewellery rings and were discussed above. The distinctive double spiral of the jewellery Form 7 ring from Basel-Kleinhuningen grave 191 links it (and the rather earlier example from Schleitheim-Hebsack grave 363) to the Baltic distribution of an identical type, Beckmann's form 29 (Beckmann 1969, 42). Its occurence in the two Swiss graves is most simply explained as showing a link between the inhabitants of the two areas (map 1). Similarly the square setting with two small circular cells at each corner on the jewellery Form 4 cloisonné ring from Lörrach-Turmringerstraße differentiates it from the bulk of Form 4 and clearly points to the Gothic origin of this lady. The identification in this case is strengthened by the unmistakably Gothic origin of the two brooches from the same grave.

With the exception of these two individual and isolated examples, rings as a group can contribute very little through an analysis of their distribution. A serious problem here is the small number of examples, especially when subdivided by form, which makes the production of a convincing distribution map all but impossible (maps 5-14).

A second problem is the fact that, since virtually all the rings come from graves in *Reihengräberfelder*, their distribution reflects first and

foremost the distribution of that particular form of cemetery. This can be seen clearly by a comparison of the overall distribution map for the rings (map 3) with Werner's map of the *Reihengräberfelder* (Werner 1979, 8; here map 4). The general absence of finger-ring finds from Italy and from south-west France can be seen as a reflection of variation not of ring-wearing but of *Reihengräberfelder*. This factor places severe limitations on any attempt to draw independant conclusions from the distribution of the rings, even when a pattern can be observed.

There is for example the fact that the rings of jewellery Form 1, those rings similar in style to intaglio rings, are concentrated in the Trier region, on the middle Rhine and in the area between the Rhine and Danube (map 9). It is tempting to interpret this generally easterly distribution as reflecting a preference for such rings styles in those areas. There are, however, alternative, less interesting conclusions. In the first place, the Trier area concentration should probably be ascribed simply to the disproportionate influece of Böhner's study, a regional study unmatched elsewhere (Böhner 1958). It could also be argued that, since most of the jewellery Form 1 rings are 7th century, and since the vast majority of cemeteries producing 7th century gravegoods are in the east, what this map really shows is not a ring-wearing fashion, but the earlier disappearance of gravegoods in the western areas of Germanic settlement.

A similar problem is encountered when trying to account for the fact that, with a handful of exceptions, the rings all come from within the

former boundaries of the Roman empire (map 3). It is very tempting to interpret this as a sign that ring-wearing was adopted by the incoming Germans as a Roman habit. In favour of this could be the fact that only one of the 'native' ring types described by Beckmann endures and even that one is known from just 2 examples. As discussed below, the majority of ring types are of Roman or Byzantine inspiration, so their virtual limitation to those areas of the former Roman empire taken over by the Germans could be a reflection of the same phenomenon. On the other hand, *Reihengräberfelder* are also largely limited to within the same area, so the rings may simply reflect this bias.

There are other discernable patterns which do not appear to be linked to the distribution of cemeteries, but which the small numbers involved make impossible to explain. The bizarre distribution of the jewellery Form 3 'Matrimonial' rings, 14 out of 20 of which come from the one site of Castel Trosino, is the clearest case and thus the most frustrating, since the remaining 6 examples, spreading widely throughout Switzerland, France and Germany, form no coherent pattern (map 11).

Then there is the fact that there appears to be a contrast between the generally south-westerly distribution of the name and seal rings (maps 5 & 6) and the more northerly and easterly spread of the intaglio and coin rings (maps 7 & 8). Werner accounted for this in terms of the absence in the latter areas of those skills of literacy and die-cutting that are necessary to produce seal and name rings (Werner 1950, 36-7). Lack of literacy may indeed account for the absence along the Rhine and

in Alamannia of seal rings with inscriptions, though the uninscribed seal rings of Lauchheim, Oberolm and Kirchheim-am-Ries as well as the reasonably numerous Rhineland mints show that by the mid-7th century the die-cutting skills were certainly present in these areas. In any case, the evidence from the coin rings suggests that they were not for sealing, as Werner believed, but functioned rather as badges of rank. With this in mind, the distribution of the coin rings could, with equal justification, be compared with that of the Coptic bowls (Werner 1961, Abb. 2). Coin rings could, on this basis, be seen as somehow connected with the regulation of the Rhine trade in Byzantine luxury goods, which Werner saw reflected in the distribution of the Coptic bowls. It seems likely that the coins would have entered the Germanic world by the same route. The choice of a coin, mounted in a ring, would thus be an obvious way to mark one's control of, or access to, this vital trade. It is interesting that 3 of the graves with coin rings (Pfahlheim, Wittislingen and Wonsheim) also produced out-of-the-ordinary Coptic vessels.

The suggestion that coin rings were linked to the control of Byzantine imports along the Rhine is certainly an attractive one, especially when seen with the Anglo-Saxon material (see below, chapter 8). However, the distribution maps are simply too sparsely dotted to provide any firm grounds for preferring it to Werner's more prosaic explanation.

In short, the distribution of the rings, whether as one large group or subdivided by type, can only rarely provide information that is not already known. Thus, for ethnic origins, the rapid abandonment of

native styles means that, of all the 258 rings in the catalogue, only two of them can give any clue as to the areas of origin of the Germanic settlers. The fact that so few of the rings that replace the native forms are actual imports, but rather are copies of Roman or Byzantine styles, means that they can provide no new information on trade routes. Even areas of Germanic settlement cannot be narrowed down by the distribution of the rings, since we cannot be sure that they were all worn by Germans. In three cases, graves 29 and 31 under Bonn cathedral and grave N1 at Mels, it has been suggested that these are the graves not of Germanic settlers but of surviving Roman families, who had partially adapted to Germanic ways (Böhner 1978; Martin 1988). There are, no doubt, many other cases of the same phenomenon which are no longer archaeologically recognisable.

The application of the already existing information to the rings, by contrast, is more helpful, even if its main contribution is in stressing the problems of understanding the true meaning of any patterns that do emerge.

Rings and Dating

In the field of dating, perhaps the most extensively analysed area of early medieval cemetery studies, rings are once again more helped than helpful, although the balance is a little more even that it was for distribution.

There are two ways in which a ring may be 'dated', and three different types of 'date' which can be obtained. The first type is derived from the ring itself, where it contains clear evidence for its *date of manufacture*. The only rings which can provide such information are those which name a person, whose dates are known from other sources. Such rings are the seal ring of king Childeric of the Franks (died c.482), the seal ring of Queen Berteildis (c.628-38) and the two intaglios of king Theoderic of the Ostrogoths (493-526) and king Alaric II(?) of the Visigoths (484-507?) (fig. 1, 4+6; 5, 7+8). Since the reigns of all four of these monarchs are known or can be deduced from the written sources and since all four are portrayed (and, in three cases, described) as rulers, the date of the maufacture of the ring can be ascribed to the period of their rule. Also into this category fall the rings from Malaja Perescepina (Kuvrat, Kagan of the Bulgars), Toul St. Evre graves 1 (Bishop Endulus) and 2 (Pretoria), Paris St.-Denis grave 49 (Arnegunda) and Bagnoregio (Aufret/Ansfrid) (fig. 1, 3; 2, 5; 3, 6+4; 1, 5). In these cases, doubts varying in degree from case to case must remain about the accuracy of the identification, based in the first three cases on the deciphering of monograms and in the fourth and fifth on the certainty of the identification of the name on the ring with the historically attested person. The rest of the inscribed seal rings, especially those from Italy and Siders St. Luc, together with the name rings of Pouan and Apahida I could all come within this category, if only they could be convincingly linked to known persons (fig. 2, 3; 3, 1+2).

The second type of date is also derived from the ring itself. It is not, however, a date of manufacture, but merely a *terminus post quem* for the ring's manufacture. The only rings which can provide this sort of date are, of course, the 14 coin rings which use datable coin types. The implication of the coins used for the date of that group's manufacture was discussed above. It is worth noting that the precision of the *terminus post quem* obtained from the coins depends on two factors. The first, which is measurable, is the date range of the particular coin type. While the coin of Heraclius and an older Heraclius Constantinus mounted in the Emling ring seems to have had a period of issue restricted to four years (626-629), the coins of the same pair, but showing a much younger Heraclius Constantinus, used on the Hausen, Pfahlheim, Sinzig and Wonsheim rings, were in production for 10 years (616-625: Grierson 1968, 216-328). The *terminus post quem* derived from the coin of Lothar II (613-629) is, by the same token, even vaguer. The second factor, which is unfortunately not measurable, is the amount of time between the minting of the coin and its mounting in a ring. The form of the Cividale ring is similar to that of the rest of the group and this indicates approximately contemporary manufacture. Since the coin used is one of Tiberius (15-37), some 600 years appear to have elapsed between the minting of the coin and the making of the ring. One can only hope that such a gap was exceptional! It was argued above that the restricted date and type range of most of the coins used implies a date of manufacture for the rings not much later than the striking of the coins, but this can neither be proved nor accurately measured.

The third type of date is derived not from the ring, but from the other contents of the grave in which the ring was found, or from the position of that grave within the cemetery's overall horizontal stratigraphy. This date is connected not to the manufacture of the ring, but fixes instead its *date of burial*. 'Fixes' is perhaps too strong a word in this context since, despite the enormous advances that have been made in the construction of a chronological scheme to cover the Merovingian period, the margins within which a grave may be dated remain wide. Of the rings in the catalogue, 200 can be given such a date. Of those, only 45 are given a range of less than 50 years; 94 dates are given to the nearest 50 years, while the rest are generally dated to the nearest century.

It is clear, therefore, that even though the date of a ring's burial gives indirectly a *terminus ante quem* for its manufacture, the date thus provided is far less precise even than that provided by the coins. This vagueness is yet further compounded by an extra unknown, the amount of time that may have elapsed between a ring's manufacture and its burial.

The difficulties of tying the rings into an 'absolute' chronology are of course similar to those experienced with all object types of the period. Indeed rings are better served than most in the number (still very small) that can be given an absolute date of some sort. No other object, except coins, can match the precision with which the first type of datable ring can provide a *terminus in quo*, a date closed at *both* ends, for their manufacture. The importance of the second group, the

coin rings, in providing a rare contact - albeit open-ended - with 'absolute time' is shown by the extensive use that has been made of them in tying down the misty chronology of the 7th century (Werner 1935, 59; Christlein 1966, 84).

The traditional way of circumventing the paucity of objects to which fixed, 'absolute' dates can be assigned has been to build up a 'relative chronology' for a group of objects or object type (Ament 1977; Périn 1980, 99-200). This 'relative chronology' is usually based on a typology, which traces the development of the object in question through time. Once constructed, the 'relative chronology' can ideally be transformed into an absolute one by tying it into as many fixed dates as possible, through coin-dated graves, etc.. It can then be used in turn to date other graves or types of object which occur in the same place.

For an object type to be suitable for the construction of a typologically-based 'relative chronology', it must fulfil a number of criteria. Firstly, it must show frequent changes, which can be related to chronological rather than geographical variations. Secondly, it must be a type which occurs frequently, both in order for a sufficiently broadly based typology to be built up and for the resulting scheme to be widely applicable. Thirdly, there must be a minimum of delay between the manufacture of the object and its burial. In practice, this means that the object should have a short 'working life' and should not be too precious. Both these would minimise the risk of its being passed from generation to generation.

Finger-rings certainly fail in the first two criteria and arguably in the third as well. They are thus not suited for the construction of a relative chronology. This is a pity since, with such a high proportion of reasonably closely dated examples, the move from 'relative' to 'absolute', the point at which many chronological schemes are at their weakest, would have been an easy one. The dated finger-rings span reasonably well the period in question. However, although the forms of the rings do change over time, the changes are slow and irregular and any typology which attempted to chart them would be of little use. The fact that the intaglio rings from Paris, St.-Denis grave 50 (dated 525-50), Trezzo sull'Adda grave 1 (dated c.600) and Dettingen, St. Dionysus grave 2 (dated 650-700) span up to 175 years, yet are of virtually identical form, illustrates well the very conservative nature of the rings and their unsuitability to a classification which sought to elucidate chronology (fig. 6, 3+5; 5, 12).

In the second place, there are really too few rings either to construct a sufficiently broadly based typology or for the results to be of very wide use. It is very rare for a ring to be the only potentially datable object in the grave and it is far more likely that, among the other gravegoods, there will be something (a buckle, spear or pot) which can provide a closer date. For this reason, even major cemetery reports, which have set out to produce local chronologies (Schretzheim and Rübenach, for example) have spent little time on the rings, preferring instead to concentrate on more productive object types (Koch 1977; Neuffer-Müller and Ament 1973).

Potentially more serious, particularly as most typologies are intended to date the *burial* rather than the *manufacture* of the object, is the fact that rings, both because they are made of precious materials and because they are marks of status, are classic candidates for 'heirloom' status. Surviving Germanic and Anglo-Saxon wills leave no doubt that precious objects were bequeathed but the extent to which this happened, especially in the pre-Christian period, is very hard to quantify. It can be suggested that Christianity, by discouraging gravegoods, must have increased the number of possessions which a dying person had to dispose of. Thus a lady by the name of Erminetrude, in a will dated to c.700, bequeaths objects, notably a *fibula aurea gemmata* and two gold rings, which 100 years earlier would surely have been buried with her (Knögel 1936, 182 no. 848). If the provision of gravegoods in the 6th and 7th centuries was as tightly defined as is often assumed, there may have been fewer objects to leave (Stein 1967, 182). Certainly there are very few clear-cut examples from continental graves of objects which are clearly much 'older' than the other gravegoods and this seems to indicate at the least that the burial of heirlooms was not a common occurrence. Rings are no exception to this rule. The fact that many, especially coin rings, show signs of heavy wear cannot be taken as a sign that rings had many owners. There can be no distinguishing between wear caused by continuous use over a short period and that caused by intermittent use over a long one. The wear on the obverses of many coin rings is, if anything, rather a sign of the former than the latter. There is thus no evidence from the rings themselves that they were passed from hand to hand. The reason for this may simply be that objects were divided between those suitable for burying and those

not to be buried, but to be passed on to one's descendants. The absence of obvious 'heirlooms' does not, therefore, indicate that objects were not passed from generation to generation; simply that such objects never got buried. Such an argument would imply that, even if not found in Arnegunda's tomb, but in that of a friend or follower (Wilson 1964, 267-8), the ring with her name on it could not have been buried more than one generation after her death. Since this case is essentially a negative one, however, it would be unwise to ignore the possibility of the occasional occurrence of 'heirlooms'. This factor must, therefore, limit the reliance that can be placed on any object of a type likely to be judged of high material value and therefore potentially bequeathable.

In the case of finger-rings, it is not only their high intrinsic value which makes them vulnerable to being bequeathed. Most of the ring types classified can be shown, with varying degrees of precision, to have denoted status and in certain cases perhaps even a specific rank. In assessing the extent to which an object denoting or symbolising status may be handed from generation to generation, a distinction can be made between status which is acquired and status which is inherited (Pader 1982, 61). Since acquired status, such as that conferred by the tenure of a specific office, cannot be passed on, its insignia lose their force on the death of the rank-holder. Symbols of acquired status, it can further be argued, are most likely to be 'personalised'. '*Personenbezogen*' is the word used by Werner to describe Omharus' seal ring (Werner 1967/8, 120). Such 'personally-bound' objects are more likely too to have been buried with the deceased, since they are relevant only to him. Hence Werner's argument that Apahida I was

definitely Omharus' grave. Symbols of inherited status, by contrast, unless they are particularly linked to the dead person, are likely (like the crown jewels) to be passed to the successor, gaining yet greater symbolic importance as their age increases. It would follow from this argument that those symbols of rank which get buried are those which are either symbolic of an acquired status or are the purely personal symbols of a person with inherited status. Whatever the theoretical attractions of this distinction, however, it is impossible to distinguish the two archaeologically. Thus, although it seems justified to assume that those seal rings on which a person is named (Tournai St. Brice: Childeric; Trezzo sull'Adda grave 2: Rodchis; Trezzo sull'Adda grave 3: Ansvald) were buried with the person named, on the grounds that these rings would be of no use to anyone else, it would be wrong to go on from this to argue that all 3 were holders of an acquired status, which lapsed with their death. It could equally be that the timeless symbols of their inherited staus were passed to their successor, leaving only the more personal symbols of their rank to be buried with them. The distinction between 'acquired' and 'inherited' may, furthermore, be a purely theoretical one, which was at least blurred in reality, if it existed at all. The men (assumed to be of the same family) buried in graves 1, 2 and 4 at Trezzo sull'Adda may indeed have acquired status, their rings and their titles from the Lombard king, as von Hessen suggested (von Hessen 1983). On the other hand, the fact that, between 600-650, three members of the same family appear to have held the same office implies that the office was in practice hereditary. Similarly, the power and prestige of the king of the Franks may have been hereditary, but the office had to be acquired (and

held onto) by force and, not infrequently, the spilling of much blood. The intaglio ring in the grave of a child at Dettingen St Dionysus and the possible name ring in the Köln prince's grave (809) should not, conversely, be taken as evidence of inherited staus. It could be that the parents were demonstrating their acquired status through their son's burial, as Pader has pointed out (Pader 1982, 62). Whatever the difficulties about deductions on the nature of status drawn from the evidence of the rings, it does seem justified to argue that those rings which are found in graves and which are taken to have symbolised status are most unlikely to have been inherited from a previous generation. Where it can be proved, they are all the personal symbols of the dead person's rank and it is logical to assume that they accompanied him to the grave and beyond.

Such an argument can certainly be used to suggest that, at least in the case of those rings which name known persons, the gap between manufacture and burial is likely to have been short, but it cannot remedy the other shortcomings which make a chronologically-based typology of finger-rings of little use. Rings, therefore, cannot as a group contribute to the further tightening of the chronology of *Reihengräberfelder*. On the other hand, the existing chronologies can be used to further our knowledge of the rings. When one adds the dimension of a date of burial to the pre-existing classification of the rings by function, new patterns do emerge, even if the 'date' is in most cases no more than a time-span during which the date of burial may lie.

The patterns which emerge can be divided into two types. The first relates directly to changes in ring-wearing styles and fashions; the second would appear to reflect as much changes in burial rite as in actual ring wearing. The two influences cannot always be clearly distinguished and, in several cases, both are visible. The best example of this is the general increase in the number of people buried with rings (table 25A and B). Between AD450 and 500 nineteen datable male and female graves produced rings. From 501 - 600 there are 56 and from 601 - 700 there are 84. Given the vagaries of dating, these figures should not be taken too seriously, but they do clearly show a sharp increase. The problem is the extent to which this increase in the numbers appearing in graves should be attibuted to a general increase in the popularity of ring-wearing among the living population, or to factors connected with burial rite. The influence of the latter can be seen particulary in the fact that, although ring finds in graves are at their highest during the 7th century, the 8th century sees a complete fall off. It is clear that this reflects simply the abandonment of the majority of *Reihengräberfelder* and of the deposition of grave goods (Stein 1967, 181-3). It has nothing to do with a sudden decline in the popularity of ring-wearing, which one must assume continues at the previous level. Similarly it is notable, even taking account of the vagaries of dating, that there is a general fall off in the number of rings buried in graves of the second half of the 6th century (table 25A & B; table 24C). Rather than seeing this as a sudden loss of popularity, it could reflect the fall-off in the number of 'rich' graves which follows the spate of late 5th century and early

6th century founder graves of the Flonhein-Gultingen horizon (James 1982, 131).

It is clear therefore that the visible increase in rings should not be seen simply as a reflection of their growing popularity among the living. Other factors are involved. Having taken account of these, however, one is still left with the strong impression that they cannot account for all of the increase in numbers and that, therefore, the number of Germanic ring wearers was generally on the increase during the period of the *Reihengräberfelder*.

An example of a pattern caused by burial rite rather than by ring-wearing habit must surely be the 7th century 'reappearance' of the jewellery Form 3 ('matrimonial') rings (table 24B, 3). I say 'reappearance' because, as discussed above, the type is so clearly derived from the late Roman examples that it seems inconceivable that there should have been a complete break in manufacture between the late 5th century (the date of the Reggio Emilia hoard) and the second half of the 6th century (the date of the Köln, St. Severinus cloister grave 217). It is, of course, not only the dating of this ring type that forms an odd pattern. Their unbalanced distribution, with 14 out of the 20 examples coming from Castel Trosino (map 11), has already been discussed and related to local variations in burial rite. Their sudden re-emergence in the 7th century fits neatly with the same interpretation and backs the assertion that we see here the reappearance in certain graves of a type which had always existed, but which was not normally buried.

Other patterns revealed by the dating of the rings can be attributed to changes in ring-wearing fashion. Thus the period sees a general 'standardisation' of types, so that by the late 7th century, the trefoil of granules, the lyre-shaped ends and wire hoop is by far the most popular form of all rings, whether seal, name, intaglio, coin or jewellery. This standardisation involved the early fading out not only of the few 'Germanic styles', such as the cloisonné plate of jewellery Form 4, all the best examples of which are 6th century, and the double-spiral of jewellery Form 6, but also of the re-used Roman prestige rings (jewellery Form 8) (table 24B, 4, 8). With the exception of the few, generally poor quality cloisonné rings, the only sign of Germanic influence left in the 7th century were the lyre-shaped ends, used to fasten the hoop to the plate. The latest Roman ring, from Nocera Umbra grave 148, comes from a grave dated to 600-650 and was, in any case, in use not as a finger-ring, but as an exotic bead.

A different aspect of this shift away from Germanic styles (always in the minority anyway) can be seen also in the way that the colours of the settings in jewellery rings changed over the centuries. As table 25C shows, the predominance of the red (mainly garnet, but also ruby and red glass) in the late 5th and 6th centuries gives way to a predominance of blues and purples in the 7th century. This change in taste for colours is not confined to rings. As Schulze has pointed out, the contrasting colours of red and green gives way at the same time to a preference for blue and white, the favoured colours of Byzantine jewellers (Schulze 1976, 157).

Finally, study of the relative dates of the intaglio rings and those jewellery rings, the form of which is based on intaglio forms (jewellery Form 1), enables the suggested relationship between the two types to be defined. Based on deductions made from the rings themselves, it was concluded above that those jewellery rings with stones were inspired by the intaglio rings and that the jewellery rings without stones were in turn humble copies of the stone-set rings (table 12). Although the dates of the two groups cannot prove this assertion, the fact that the intaglio rings start generally earlier than the jewellery Form 1 rings, and continue in tandem with them, indicates that this view of the relationship between the two groups is indeed correct (compare table 24A with table 24B, 1).

It is thus not so much the whole group of rings as individual cases that can contribute to the wider study of the dating of Germanic graves. Those rings which can be linked to 'absolute' time form rare contacts which enable the tying down of the widely-based relative chronologies of more commonly occurring object types. As a group, the rings fail to satisfy the necessary criteria to enable a date-oriented typology.

In the other direction, the use of the knowledge of the date of a ring's burial must depend on acceptance of the deduction that the dates of burial and manufacture are likely to be less than a life-time apart. If this is accepted, and it was argued above that it should be, then the information on date derived from the grave in which the ring is found can increase our overall knowledge of the group. It can show

variations both in ring-wearing by the living and in ring-burial with the dead, even if the extent to which the evidence relates to the former or the latter is, as with the distribution, not always clear.

Rings and Status

Second only to the energy expended on dating the contents of a grave, comes that expended in attempting to calculate the status of the dead person. The basic supposition lying behind all these attempts has been that the status of the dead person as reflected by the accompanying gravegoods is an accurate mirror of that person's status in life.

Finger-rings can contribute to an understanding of status in several ways. There is the fact that they are made of 'prestige' materials and are found only rarely. When they are found, they are generally with other, similarly 'prestigious' objects. It was on this basis that they were incorporated into Christlein's widely-used scheme for status ranking, with gold rings denoting C or D status and silver rings (restricted, for some reason, to female graves only in his table) denoting C, D and the upper half of B (Christlein 1973, Abb. 11).

There are, however, difficulties with such an approach. As was seen earlier, plain rings of prestige metals occur in otherwise poorly furnished graves. Conversely, well-furnished graves occasionally contain bronze plain rings. This phenomenon is not confined to plain rings. Young has pointed out that prestige jewellery rings are similary affected (Young 1984, 13). Lavoye grave 240, with its fine,

garnet-set silver ring, is a good example. Apart from the ring, it contained only a plain pair of silver earrings, 2 bronze S-brooches, an iron buckle, 2 glass beads, an iron knife and a bronze pin. In such cases, where the finger-ring is the only indicator of high rank, it is hard to know whether to accept the implications of its presence at face value.

A second area of difficulty lies in the problem of relating Christlein's A/B/C/D divisions to the known, if little understood, divisions in Germanic society. Linked to this is the further problem of taking account of changes in status through time. The increase in the number of people buried with rings through the 6th and 7th centuries appears to mean that such rings are becoming more widely available. It would follow from this that the relative status indicated by the possession of such a ring would decline as their numbers increased. Membership of *Qualitätsgruppe C* in the 7th century was less restricted than it had been in the 6th, thus making even harder the task of relating the theoretical divisions to the actual ones.

Given the criticisms which can be levelled not only against Christlein's divisions but also against the whole basis of his thought (Samson 1987), it is fortunate that a different approach can be applied to the understanding of the status implied by a ring. This is the approach which formed the previous section of this thesis and which extracted information on status from the detailed examination of the rings themselves, in particular from the analysis of their function and of the skills needed to make them. This approach has the advantage of

overcoming some of the problems encountered in applying Christlein's method. In the first place, by seeing the rings as functional objects, it avoids many of the potential confusions caused by the vagaries of burial rite. Since it defines use which relates directly to the rings' role in living society, it avoids the need first to impose artificial divisions on the material and second to attempt to reconcile those divisions with the realities of Germanic society. By omitting, as it were, the rings' role as gravegoods, it can go directly to the heart of the problem and make direct deductions of living status.

Through analysis of the skills needed, this approach furthermore provides a method of checking the way that the growing numbers of rings debase the importance of the status group that they represent. Thus the spread of literacy and of the technical skills required to produce a seal or name ring can be charted through the expansion of the network of mints and this can be used as a rough guide to the availability of the necessary skills. The status of both the seal and the intaglio rings must be linked to the number of documents in need of a seal. The further down the social scale the practice had gone, the lower the status implied by the possession of a seal ring. Problems with the written record make any very definite statements on the spread of documents and literacy at this period virtually impossible. Even at the highest level it remains uncertain whether the Lombard kings used seals (Kurze 1986, 442-445), and such uncertainties prevent as close a definition as one might like. On the other hand, the link does exist and does lead to greater precision in the definition of status.

The availability of Byzantine gold coins, whether measured directly or through the declining gold content of Germanic jewellery (Hawkes, Merrick and Metcalf 1966), can act as a yardstick against which to measure the status implied by the coin rings.

A less direct approach to the greater understanding of status through rings lies in a consideration of the influences which lay behind both the practice of ring-wearing and the styles chosen.

The obvious source for the practice of finger-ring wearing in the early medieval Germanic world is Roman Iron Age 'Free Germany'. As Beckmann has shown, rings were commonly worn in the Germanic areas outside the empire (Beckmann 1969, 7-9). There are, however, significant differences in practice. Thus rings were worn by both men and women, solely as jewellery. They do not seem to have had any practical function. Furthermore, in 'Free Germany', it was most usual for the ring to be worn on the right hand. In the early medieval period, by contrast, the ring was most commonly on the left hand. In fact, the two periods and areas have little in common.

The fact that the wearing of a ring on the left hand was also a Roman habit (Beckmann 1969, 7) gives a first indication that the predominant influence on the ring-wearing habits of the Germanic settlers was not inherited from their ancestors but was acquired from their new subjects. This is further indicated by the fact that the use of rings, not simply as jewellery but as functional objects, was also a Roman habit. Final proof of the origins of ideas governing 6th and 7th

century Germanic ring-wearing is the fact that finger-rings are unknown in Lombard graves until they arrive in Italy (Werner 1962, 82), where the extraordinarily high percentage of prestige rings at Castel Trosino testifies to the alacrity with which they adopted the habit.

This view of Germanic ring-wearing as wholly influenced by Roman practices might be taken as an indication that the incoming settlers adopted wholesale not just the practices of ring-wearing but also the styles of the rings. Study of the various types, however, shows that such a view is incorrect.

On the one hand, it is certainly true that Germanic styles play a tiny part. Of all the various types, only two, jewellery Form 4, with a cloisonné plate, and Form 6, with the double spiral, can be seen as truly Germanic styles. They are represented by only eleven examples and, as the previous section on dating showed, they do not endure for long. The only example of Germanic influence that manages to survive to the end of the period is the 'lyre-shaped' end to the hoop.

On the other hand, the styles of ring adopted and evolved by the Germanic settlers do not show simply a continuation of existing Roman styles. This may well have happened with the non-prestige rings, but is not the case with the prestige rings. The specific origins of the different prestige types have been discussed in detail above, but it is worth reiterating the relatively restricted number of types that are taken up, especially when compared with the enormous range of Roman types illustrated by Henkel and others (Henkel 1913). It is equally

notable that many of the types, specifically the name rings and the use of wire hoop and granules which became the most common early medieval form, are not inspired so much by late Roman as by contemporary Byzantine forms. What we are seeing here, therefore, is not a harking back to a late Roman past, with the slavish copying of all existing ring styles from within the area occupied. On the contrary, the careful choice of selected Byzantine ring styles shows a desire to emulate the contemporary world of the New Rome.

This desire to follow Byzantine fashions, so apparent in the finger-rings, is part of a more widespread phenomenon in the 6th and 7th century Germanic world. It is no coincidence, therefore, that finger-rings are often not the only sign of Byzantine influence in the grave. At Malaja Perscepina, Kuvrat was buried with his gold buckle, symbol perhaps of his Patrician rank, and his 'marriage belt' of Byzantine coins. Apart from his three rings, Omharus, in Apahida I, had with him a cross-bow brooch, 2 Byzantine silver wine jugs and pendentives from a Byzantine-style headdress. Horedt and Protase have commented specifically on the contrast between the strongly Byzantine impression of Apahida I and the completely barbarian (and ringless) Apahida II (Horedt and Protase 1972, 211). In Krefeld-Gellep grave 1782, Arpvar(?) had, along with his intaglio ring, two Roman glasses and a magnificent late Antique-style wine jug, complete with a Latin inscription praising the fame and fortune of its owner (Pirling 1986, 139-164). At Trezzo sull'Adda, the man in grave 1 wore his ring on his finger and a magnificent gold Byzantine belt set around his waist. In Güttingen grave 38, the ring (itself probably an actual Byzantine ring)

was accompanied by 2 brooches incorporating Byzantine medallions, and a Coptic bowl. Arnegunda, in St.-Denis grave 49, wore Byzantine gold-embroidered silk (Crowfoot and Hawkes 1967, 55). The list could go on, but these examples suffice to make the point that finger-rings are not isolated in their copying of Byzantine fashions and that their appearance in the grave was part of a wider desire to be 'Roman'.

The way in which this copying of Byzantine and late Roman finger-ring usage was linked to status can be elucidated in two ways. In the first place it can be shown that the general emulation of contemporary Roman fashions, of which rings are just one aspect, was very restricted in its scope. Schulze has shown that this phenomenon was confined to the highest ranks of the Frankish aristocracy and had as its aim the copying of the trappings of the Byzantine imperial court (Schulze 1976). This is seen particularly clearly in the 7th century fashion for using beads, not just as necklaces but at the cuffs and elsewhere on the body in imitation of court fashions. It is seen also in the change from the red/green colours of the 6th century to the Byzantine inspired blue/white of the 7th, in the imitation by Frankish jewellers of Byzantine earring types, in the use of Coptic bowls for washing (Paulsen and Schach-Dörges 1978, 50-53) and in countless other ways, both archaeological and historical. Finger-rings are typical of all Byzantine-inspired objects of the period in their selection of types that were both limited in number and high in status.

The fact that finger-rings are among this group of elite objects adopted within the Germanic kingdoms demonstrates, therefore, their

'high status', but it remains a frustratingly vague definition. We must assume that, as the 7th century progressed, so the influence of Byzantine court dress and usages filtered gradually downwards from the highest ranks of Germanic society. A lady dressed in the manner of a consort of the empress Theodora (and wearing a ring) in the late 6th century would be likely to be of higher status than one similarly dressed in the 7th century.

There is a potentially more precise way of defining this desire to dress and act like a Byantine, by making use of the model of the 'prestige good economy'. This model, derived from ethnography and filtered through the work of prehistoric archaeologists, describes the way in which a primitively organised society can develop a hierarchy, based on restricted access to high-value foreign goods, and with ranks that are defined by the possession of certain 'prestige' items. Such a process of 'hierarchisization' happens when the primitive society establishes an economic link with another, economically more advanced society, which is prepared to supply a limited number of 'prestige objects', needed to mark the various ranks, in return for trade or other services.

This model has been applied most extensively and successfully to explaining the effects on late Iron Age society in southern Germany of contacts with Greece and Rome (Frankenstein and Rowlands 1978), but it is clear that it will fit equally well when applied to the early medieval Germanic world. In particular, the nature of the contacts between Byzantium and the Franks indicates that precisely the same

process took place in 6th and 7th centuries AD as did, in much the same area in 7th - 5th centuries BC. In our case, as is well known, Byzantium supplied a restricted range of high value objects (gold coins, silks, Coptic bowls, the occasional finger-ring, etc.) in return for Frankish military assistance against the Ostrogoths and Lombards (James 1982, 135).

The acceptance of this model as reflecting accurately the nature of the already well-established contacts between the two cultures would bring the further implication that such contacts must have had a major impact on Frankish society, causing it to develop a rigid hierarchy, based on the access to prestige objects, used as badges of rank. The proper testing of such a wide-ranging theory would require study of the full range of Byzantine-made or -inspired objects and it is thus far beyond the scope of this work. A preliminary indication of its validity can, however, be gained by looking specifically at prestige rings in the terms of the model. It has already been shown by other means that such rings are indicators of status, that find their inspiration in Byzantine forms. If the theory of the 'Prestige goods economy' is to help to explain 6th and 7th century Francia, then surely it will fit excellently the evidence of the finger-rings. This in turn should lead to a more precise definition of the status implied by the rings.

In the process of adapting the model from an ethnographic to an archaeological one, a number of 'indicators' have been isolated, to enable the identification of the 'prestige goods economy' from

archaeological evidence alone. Many of these relate to changes in social organisation and burial rite and are thus not directly relevant here. Three of them, however, describe the effects on the manufacture and status of prestige objects and thus can be tested on the rings.

The first of these indicators (Frankenstein and Rowlands 1978, 83) is that the 'paramount' of the less advanced tribe will be seen to copy the dress and habits of the more advanced society. The dress and habits of the 'paramount' will in turn be copied by his subordinates.

It is clear that this indicator, albeit expressed in the rather drier terms of the prehistorian, describes precisely what is happening in the Merovingian world in general and with finger-rings in particular. It explains very accurately the way that, although there are relatively few actual Byzantine rings, the rest are all inspired by Byzantine forms. The latter are not copied directly from Byzantium, but rather at second hand, perhaps from rings that have made their way to the Germanic kingdoms. This would further imply that actual Byzantine rings indicate a higher status than the Byzantine-derived rings. Such an implication is especially relevant to Paris, St-Denis grave 16, with its three Byzantine jewellery rings, and Güttingen grave 38.

The second indicator (Frankenstein and Rowlands 1978, 82-3) is that those objects which are used to mark status are centrally manufactured and distributed, and that they show a uniformity of style and content. There should be a contrast between such status indicators and other locally-produced objects, which will show regional variation.

This is surely a particularly neat way to account for the lack of overlap between the 'prestige' and 'non-prestige' forms, for the fact that the prestige rings can be fitted into a small number of clearly defined and distinctive forms and for the fact that the non-prestige forms cannot be thus subdivided. While it is certainly difficult to prove central manufacture for the prestige ring forms, it has been suggested for the Italian seal group by Werner (Werner 1987, 287) and it is certainly indicated more generally for the coin and seal groups. In general, and when compared with most other Germanic object types, the lack of variety, both chronological and regional, of the finger-ring forms is remarkable. It points at the least to clearly spelt-out rules for the construction. Such limitations would, of course, make them especially suitable as universally recognised symbols of rank.

The third indicator of the existence of a 'prestige goods economy' (Frankenstein and Rowlands 1978, 82) which is relevant to finger-rings is that there is a link between the status value of an object and the point in the political hierarchy at which it is made. It was argued above that inscribed seal rings were made by coin die cutters, who were under the direct control of the king. Seal rings, therefore, and name rings too since they also required a literate jeweller, were made at the highest point in the political hierarchy and, on this model, would not be 'passed down' to a level much below that of the king's immediate surbordinates. The use of high-quality Byzantine and Merovingian gold coins, at a time when gold was short and quality was slipping, argues for a similarly high status. Applying the same criteria to the intaglio rings enables a comparison with the other practical function

forms. Since the skills and materials required for their manufacture were less scarce, it would follow that this group represents a slightly lower level in the hierarchy. This is particulary so of the 7th century, when the spread of mints must indicate a wider availability of literate jewellers. The lower rank implied by these rings in the 7th century is, of course, also indicated by their greater numbers.

The application of these three indicators to the finger-rings, particularly to those with a practical function about which most can be deduced, indicates firstly that the model of the 'prestige goods economy' is one that would merit wider examination. For the rings, it confirms and sharpens the impression that prestige finger-rings symbolise clearly defined ranks. It can even go some way to sub-dividing these ranks, according to the importance of the rings associated with them, and it can thus lead to a precision unattainable in Christlein's scheme.

With this conclusion in mind, it is interesting to note the high number of practical function rings that are found in female graves. The figures for the individual practical function types are given in table 26, but the overall ratio of male : female for sexable, adult graves is 50 : 50. Finger-rings, being one of the restricted number of 'prestige' objects that occur in both male and female graves, give us an unusual opportunity to make direct comparisons of status between graves of differing sex. It seems only reasonable to assume that women used their practical function rings in exactly the same way as men. This

means, to take the most obvious example, that high status women were just as likely to need to seal documents as were their male colleagues.

It could be argued that women held this right only by extension, as a reflection of the rank of their husbands. Such a suggestion would, however, be based more on prejudice than on logic and the evidence of the rings does not support it.

In any case, the implication that women had the right (and need) to seal should come as no surprise. It is known both from continental and from Anglo-Saxon sources that women owned land in their own right, to administer and to leave as they saw fit (Fell 1984, passim; James 1982, 86) They gained such land not only through their '*Morgengift*' but also by inheritance. The administration of such estates could be a complex affair and seal rings might well be needed. Given the conclusion that, especially in the 7th century, intaglio rings represent a less high status than the seal, name and coin rings, one could see intaglio rings as the private seals of the aristocracy.

Even accepting this, however, the evidence of the rings goes further and suggests that women could seal not just in a private capacity as landowners, but also officially as office-holders. The clearest evidence for this comes from the ring of queen Berteildis, where the central 'Regina' monogram emphasises the basis of her right to seal in the same way as 'Rex' does on the seals of Childeric and Alaric. If the Italian group of seal rings are those of office-holders of the Lombard king, then Gumedrut, the owner of the Bergamo ring, must have

held that office in the same way as Rodchis, Ansvald, etc.. If the bust in the centre of her ring is that of a woman rather than a man, as Kurze believed, then there is a further intriguing possibility that Gumderut held her office not from the king, as her male colleagues did, but from the queen.

As before, the idea that women could hold state office, acting and sealing in that capacity, should cause no surprise. Although the only known woman to appear on coins was Cynethryth, the wife of Offa of Mercia (Fell 1984, 90-1), there are plenty of powerful continental and Anglo-Saxon ladies who are known to have exercised power in the state. The evidence of the rings indicates that they did not do this simply on behalf of another (an infant king for example) but in their own right. The evidence from the rings of 'second rank' office holders, like Gumedrut, is less easily predicted from the written sources. The only female 'official' mentioned by Gregory of Tours is Septimina, nurse/governess ('nutrix') of the children of Childebert II (Weidemann 1982 I, 100). If women exercised power at royal level, however, there seems no need to seek excuses to deny the evidence of the rings, that women played an important role at all levels of the organisation of early medieval Germanic society.

Conclusion

This wider look at rings against the background of the graves that produced them has illustrated well the variable way in which they can contribute. Their distribution added little to the pattern already

known. The ability of certain rings, those relating to known people and those incorporating a coin to provide an 'absolute' date, made them more useful than most object types for linking 'relative' chronologies to 'absolute' ones. This made all the more unfortunate the fact that the rings are too few in number and too slow to change to enable a chronologically-based classification to be constructed.

The decision to construct instead a classification based on function was, therefore, vindicated since it was principally in the field of status that rings proved most useful. Through the precise deductions about the rings' function and the skills needed to make them, it was possible to reach a far closer and more realistic definition of rank than was hitherto possible, with Christlein's A-D divisions. As the introduction stated, finger-rings are most certainly not the only class of object which would benefit from a similar analysis of practical and symbolic function as a tool for refining the definition of status. What this work has sought to prove, by applying the methods to the relatively tight-knit and restricted group of prestige finger-rings, is that such an approach can provide much needed precision to the determination of the status not only of the Germanic dead but of the living as well.

PART IV: CONCLUSION

CHAPTER 8

A COMPARISON OF CONTINENTAL AND ANGLO-SAXON RING-WEARING

In the introduction to this work, three reasons were given for concentrating first and foremost on the continental rings, before looking at the Anglo-Saxon material. The first reason was quite simply that the Anglo-Saxon rings have already been collected and classified by Fisher (Fisher 1979). By looking similarly at the continental rings, this work is intended to supplement Fisher's study, by providing a continental comparison. For this reason, and to avoid duplication, the English section of the catalogue contains only rings which are either definitely of Merovingian origin (and which fit into the classification scheme), or which can be argued to have been inspired by Merovingian ring types and usage.

The second reason was Werner's suggestion, based on its similarity to the ring from Krefeld-Gellep grave 1782, that the Snape ring might be of continental origin. If continental manufacture were to be proved, however, it was clearly necessary to look beyond the immediate Krefeld-Gellep grave 1782 parallel, to see whether the Snape ring fitted into the wider background of continental intaglio ring forms and uses. If such an examination showed that it was indeed of continental origin, then the true significance of its presence in the Snape ship, as a

means both of dating the grave and of assessing its status, could only be understood after it had first been seen in its 'native' environment.

The third reason for concentrating first on the continental rings was in order to draw attention to the contrasts between continental Germanic and Anglo-Saxon ring styles and uses. Before these could be defined and explained, it was necessary to get as clear a picture of the continental rings as already existed for the Anglo-Saxon rings.

For these reasons, the previous chapters have studied only the continental material, carefully avoiding any mention, let alone discussion, of Anglo-Saxon rings. With the completion of that study, and the extraction of the full amount of evidence on the status of the continental rings, it is possible to turn at last to a consideration of the Anglo-Saxon material. It is best to begin this by tackling the thorny question of the origin of the Snape ring (fig. 27, 9; plate 1).

The arguments that have surrounded this question form in themselves an interesting study, since all can be seen as reflecting clearly the ideas of their authors and of their time. Following the rediscovery of the ring in 1950, it was published by Bruce-Mitford in 1952, as part of his wider study of the Snape boat grave (Bruce-Mitford 1952). Anticipating the curious reluctance to look to the continent, which Werner so strongly criticised in the treatment of the Sutton Hoo find (Werner 1982, 205-6), Bruce-Mitford decided that the ring was Anglo-Saxon and the possibility of a continental origin was never even considered. In his search for parallels among the Anglo-Saxon material, he was notably

unable to find any similar rings but instead drew attention to individual elements of the decoration on the ring's shoulders. His prime concern was with dating. Thus, although he saw the S-scrolls as common on 6th and 7th century jewellery, the 'hook and eye' was rare. The best parallels were the two clips from the hilt of the Sutton Hoo sword, thought on account of their low gold content to be Anglo-Saxon additions, made not long before the burial (Bruce-Mitford 1978, 612). The appearance of granulation on the Sutton Hoo shoulder clasps was further seen as a parallel for its use on the ring. Since, like the sword clips, the shoulder clasps were thought to be among the latest pieces in the grave, they too pointed to a date of manufacture for the Snape ring shortly before the burial of the Sutton Hoo ship. In 1953 this was still thought to have occured in c.650 and on this basis Bruce-Mitford found it '*difficult to assign the manufacture of the Snape ring.....to a date any earlier than 625AD or its burial to any date much before 630-35, allowing for the signs of wear.....which show that it must have been worn for some little while before burial*' (Bruce-Mitford 1952, 19).

In the years between 1952 and Werner's paper to the 7th Congress of the Union of Pre- and Protohistoric Sciences in 1966 (Werner 1971), in which he suggested a continental origin for the ring, two important developments substantially affected Bruce-Mitford's case. The first was the redating of the coins in the Sutton Hoo purse, and thus of the *terminus post quem* for the burial, from c.650 to c.625. Since the closest parallels for, and the basis for Bruce-Mitford's date of, the

Snape ring were drawn from the Sutton Hoo collection, this redating also implied a redating of the ring from ç.625 to ç.600.

It was the second development, however, that allowed Professor Werner, in characteristic style, to suggest the continental origin of the ring. This was the excavation in 1962 of grave 1782 at Krefeld-Gellep, with its magnificent intaglio ring (fig. 5, 3; plate 2). Here was clearly a much closer parallel for the Snape ring than any that Bruce-Mitford had been able to produce from among the Anglo-Saxon material. It had not only similar uses of technical detail, 'hook-and-eye' and granulation among them, but also a striking overall similarity of form and feeling. Like the Snape ring, it was a Germanic setting (with elaborately decorated shoulders) of a Roman intaglio. As Müller-Wille subsequently pointed out, the combination of 'hook-and-eye' with collared granules gave the decoration of both rings a characteristically Germanic zoomorphic effect (Müller-Wille 1968/9, 45). Like Bruce-Mitford, Werner was principally interested in date and he therefore used the date of the Krefeld-Gellep burial to argue for the manufacture of the Snape ring in the first half of the 6th. century and for its burial in ç.550.

It was unfortunate that the format in which Bruce-Mitford chose to publish his rejoinder to Werner's arguments very much limited its value. 'The Snape boat-grave', published in *Aspects of Anglo-Saxon Archaeology* in 1974, was no more than an edited and slightly expanded version of his 1952 paper and he was thereby committed to continuing to claim an Anglo-Saxon origin (and a correspondingly late date) for the ring. In spite of this, careful reading of this revised version reveals that he

does not in fact reject Werner's case for the ring. Instead, he leaves the question open: '*If we accept the ring as Frankish, Krefeld requires a possible horizon for its manufacture in the second quarter or the middle of the 6th century. If it is Anglo-Saxon, the Anglo-Saxon parallels.....seem rather to indicate a late 6th or early 7th century date*' (Bruce-Mitford 1974, 131). Bruce-Mitford based his argument against Werner's c.550 date for the burial on the possibility that both the ring and claw beaker were heirlooms. In spite of this he did adjust the date of the burial by more than the redating of Sutton Hoo strictly demanded. He now put the ring as late 6th or 7th century and the burial to c.600 or later. He accepted, in other words, that it was likely to be earlier than Sutton Hoo mound 1.

Although Bruce-Mitford was able to point to technical differences between the Snape and Krefeld-Gellep rings (Bruce-Mitford 1974, 131), and although Pirling felt that the two were not sufficiently similar to deduce contemporary manufacture (Pirling 1974, 126-7), the wider study of the continental intaglio rings leaves no doubt that Werner was correct both in his attribution and in his date. In the first place, the form of the Snape ring is, as Bruce-Mitford found, unparalleled among the Anglo-Saxon material. Although some five other intaglio rings have been found in Anglo-Saxon contexts, they are all actual Roman rings. They are not Anglo-Saxon resettings of Roman intaglios. On the continent, in complete contrast, the resetting of Roman intaglios in Germanic rings is the norm. As seen above, only two of the 30 or so intaglios from Germanic graves retain their original settings. The rest have been given a new Germanic setting.

The technical and decorative parallels of the Snape ring, furthermore, are not confined to the Krefeld-Gellep ring. The ring from Arlon, sadly a stray find and without its setting, shares the wide and decorated shoulders of the Snape and Krefeld-Gellep rings. The use of 'hook-and-eye' may be '*extremely rare*' in Anglo-Saxon England (Bruce-Mitford 1974, 127), but is common on the shoulders of both intaglio Form 3 and jewellery Form 3 ('matrimonial') rings. Collared granules occur with equal regularity. A particularly close parallel for the decoration on the shoulders of both the Snape and Krefeld-Gellep rings is to be found on the Jewellery Form 2c ring from Lorsch (plate 7). A stray find, this was long thought to be Carolingian, simply on account of its findspot near the monastery. As Wamers has recently shown, however, the similarity of its ziggurat setting to the setting of the ring from Donzdorf grave 78 (fig. 11, 10) leaves no doubt that it too dates to the second half of the 6th century (Roth and Wamers 1984, 137). On its shoulders, 'hook-and-eye' motifs are flanked by collared granules to clearly zoomorphic effect. Several of the ways in which the Snape ring differs from the Krefeld-Gellep ring can be matched on the Lorsch ring. Like the Snape ring, the decorated area is demarcated by a border of beaded wire. Twisted, as opposed to beaded, wire appears from the most recent published photograph to be used for the 'hook-and-eye' and for the spirals surrounding the flanking granules.

The undoubtedly close parallels that exist between the Snape and Krefeld-Gellep rings can thus be reinforced by a wider look at the continental rings. It is not only that all the individual technical links made by Bruce-Mitford with Anglo-Saxon objects can be matched

and surpassed among the continental rings. The parallels of form and character leave no doubt that the Snape ring is of continental origin.

It is the ring's form also that allows us to confirm Werner's date for its manufacture in the first half of the 6th century. In the consideration of the continental intaglio rings, it was argued that the Snape form (intaglio Form 2) was based on a late Roman prototype and that it, in turn, evolved into the rather less sumptuous Form 3. It is unfortunate that Form 2 is so rare, with Krefeld-Gellep being the only securely dated example. Nevertheless, Krefeld-Gellep, along with the Lorsch ring, implies an early date for the style. The negative evidence is also especially strong. Eighteen of the continental rings can be dated from the accompanying gravegoods to between 550 and 700. If the wide-shouldered grandeur of intaglio Form 2 had been current during that time, it is surely likely that at least one example would have been found. It seems quite safe to conclude that intaglio Form 2, like other more unusual ring forms, is an early 6th century type, which disappears after the middle of the century, to be replaced by intaglio forms 3 and 4. It follows that the Snape ring could not have been made much later than the Krefeld-Gellep ring and this conclusion is reinforced by the ring's high gold content (86% pure: Bruce-Mitford 1978, 625).

As a continental Germanic ring of the first half of the 6th century, the Snape ring can now be seen as one of a small group of nine Merovingian rings which have been found in Anglo-Saxon contexts (Table 27; fig. 27; map 15). The understanding of this group is made difficult

firstly by the poor quality of the evidence available for them. Thus only two come from excavations less than 30 years old and, of the remaining seven, three are completely unassociated. Equally serious, though rather more interesting, is the fact that none of the Merovingian rings found in Anglo-Saxon England can be described as a typical example of its type. Both problems can be well illustrated by a look at the individual rings.

The only definite seal ring, from the excavations at Richborough, is unstratified. While all the seal rings in the catalogue have circular bezels and most are inscribed, this example is uninscribed and has an octagonal bezel, with lightly concave sides. Although this form can be paralleled among unprovenanced examples in Deloche and elsewhere (Boardman and Scarisbrick 1977, no. 116), it is definitely unusual. The profiled bust is unusually crudely executed, even by the standards of the unprovenanced ring, inscribed 'Abboneso', now in Dumbarton Oaks (fig. 2, 4).

Of the two name rings, the first is also an unstratified find from Richborough. Its form is unlike any of the Continental examples. Indeed it is, in Henig's opinion, of a familiar late Antique shape, which, in most cases, need be no later than c.400 (Henig 1976). It is only the exceptionally well-composed and executed monogram on the bezel that allows Henig, drawing on Deloche, to suggest a Merovingian date and origin.

The second name ring, from Harnham Hill grave 54, was excavated in or before 1853 (fig. 27, 4). It is of bronze and, once again, its form does not closely match any of the continental types, though it is similar to one of the more distinctive non-prestige forms discussed above. The monogram, though admittedly simple, is competently executed and consists of a B and an E.

The circumstances of the excavation in 1862 of the only definite Merovingian intaglio ring, that from Snape, leaves a certain amount to be desired. It was found on the spoil heap! The ring itself, as just discussed, is certainly not the normal continental type. Apart from this, Henig has suggested that the poor quality intaglio in the gilded bronze ring from Alfriston grave 28 may be Byzantine (Henig 1978, no.718; here fig. 27, 2). On the other hand, the setting of the bezel does find parallels among Romano-British material, while the mid 6th century date for the grave would make it an unusually early import (White 1988, 105). For these reasons, it seems equally likely that the Alfriston ring is in fact a re-used Romano-British ring and it will be considered as such below. If, however, it were an import, it would not fit easily into the types of continental intaglio rings.

The only Merovingian coin ring, from Aldeburgh, was a stray find in 1840 and its present whereabouts is unknown (fig. 27, 1). It is known only from a drawing, which is luckily of sufficiently good quality to allow the coin to be identified as a 'civic' issue triens, from a north-eastern mint, possibly Quentowic. In many ways, this ring fits well the normal coin ring type. The coin has its obverse uppermost and the

bust at right-angles to the hoop. Its hoop is soldered directly to the reverse of the coin, there is a border of beaded wire around the coin and it is entirely of gold. It differs from the bulk of the continental coin group, however, in using a civic issue triens rather than a Byzantine or Royal issue solidus. The only other coin ring to use a civic issue is that from Hardenthun which, as discussed above, clearly stands apart from the 'core group' of coin rings (fig. 7, 5). There can, of course, be no proof that the Aldeburgh ring is a continental one, rather than an Anglo-Saxon copy. The differences between it and the two more obviously 'insular' coin rings from London and York, discussed below, make a continental provenance most likely.

Turning from the practical-function group to the jewellery rings, the picture is equally odd. Jewellery Forms 2-7 do not appear in Anglo-Saxon England. If, by contrast, the extrordinary Dover ring (most regrettably not a grave find!) is continental, as Fisher concludes that it probably is, then it is absolutely unique (Fisher 1979, 80-84). Since it has been fully discused by Fisher and since its incorporation in the catalogue would require the creation of a wholly new type, it was thought best to omit this ring from the discussion. Barring new finds, there is nothing to add to Fisher's full discussion and tentative conclusion.

The only continental jewellery type represented is Form 1, the intaglio style, and, yet again, the two examples are eccentric! The silver ring with an amber setting from Sibertswold grave 163 (excavated in 1772!) has an unusual square bezel (fig. 27, 8), which led White (1988, 105) to

claim it as Byzantine, on the grounds of a square-bezelled ring, with a Greek inscription, illustrated by Boardman and Scarisbrick (1977, no. 109). The use of amber as a setting is similarly unusual, occurring in only one continental ring in the catalogue (Lahr-Burgheim, grave 10: fig. 9, 6).

The gilt bronze ring from Finglesham grave 58 is marginally easier to fit into the continental material, even though its stone is unusually small and set with its long axis parallel to the hoop (fig. 27, 5). Two continental rings can, however, be cited as similar: that from Worms Schillerstraße and, to a lesser extent, that from Nouvion-en-Ponthieu grave 117 (fig. 9, 9+5). The Finglesham ring is further unusual both in coming from a male grave and in being not found on the finger of the corpse. Together with a garnet-inlaid sword pyramid and a knotted silver wire ring, it had been placed, perhaps in a small bag, either in the dead man's mouth or under his chin.

The simple and universal form of the plain ring makes it virtually impossible to distinguish between Continental and Anglo-Saxon rings of this type. Fisher was thus able to suggest only one possible Merovingian plain ring (Fisher 1979, 44-45). Of a form akin to the examples from the grave of Childeric and from Köln St. Severinus grave 64, it was found in the grave of a sword-bearing man in Mucking, cemetery II (grave 993). Its occurrence in a male grave, a unique example among the Anglo-Saxon plain rings, but definitely acceptable on the continent, gives added strength to the case for continental origin of the ring and perhaps even of its wearer.

In addition to these, Fisher felt that the silver ring from Harnham Hill grave 40 was of continental origin, but neither she not White was able to provide any very convincing parallels (Fisher 1979, 58-9; White 1988, 105). Once again, if it is continental, then it is not a typical example (fig. 27, 3). Sibertswold grave 125(?) produced a ring with a small, circular bezel sunk between what might be seen as a Merovingian-type trefoil of granules. Fisher therefore pronounced it continental (Fisher 1979, 59-60). White, by contrast, pronounced it Roman on the strength of a parallel from South Shields (White 1988, 104). Finally, there are a number of incomplete rings which Fisher believed to be continental (Fisher 1979, 75). Since, however, they are all too fragmentary for their precise form to be reconstructed, they have not been considered here.

To this small and curious collection of Merovingian rings can be added a further group. This contains seven rings which can be shown to have been inspired by the Merovingian rings and which must further be taken to reflect the presence of Merovingian ring usage in Anglo-Saxon England. This group contains rings of two, practical function forms: coin and intaglio.

The two coin rings, neither considered by Fisher, are both stray finds and come from London and York. They differ from the 'core group' of continental coin rings in several significant ways. The most striking is that they have multiple borders, of plain, twisted and beaded wire. These are an integral part of the ring and cannot be accounted for in terms of the replacement of the hoop, as was the case on the Sinzig

coin ring. They also use coins which, assuming that the rings are broadly contemporary with the continental group (i.e. 7th century), were already old when incorporated. The York ring has a solidus of Valentinian I (364-375); the London ring has one of Theodosius II (408-450), which has been mounted with its reverse uppermost. Although the London ring has the regulation lyre-shaped ends and trefoil of granules (plate 10), the hoop of the York ring has simple hammered ends and the trefoil has been replaced by a roughly triangular cluster of numerous pellets at the shoulder. Nelson, in a brief discussion of the two rings, decided that the York ring was of English workmanship, but that the London ring was continental (Nelson 1939). The wider consideration of the coin ring form enables a rather more precise conclusion to be reached.

Although multiple borders set these two English examples clearly apart from the 'core group' of continental coin rings (and from the Aldeburgh example), they also link them closely to the two Frisian coin rings, from the Wieuwerd hoard and from Westergeest. The London ring is particularly close to both Frisian examples in having a washer of gold which surrounds the coin and on to which the border is set (plate 10). The arrangement of twisted wire to give a plaited appearance is very similar to the Wieuwerd ring. Lyre-shaped ends and trefoils of granules occur on both Frisian examples.

It is therefore possible (even likely in the case of the London ring) that these rings are Frisian, rather than Anglo-Saxon. At the same time, an Anglo-Saxon origin cannot be ruled out. The exclusive use of

beaded wire on the York ring, as Nelson pointed out, is closely paralleled by the surround of the coin on the Wilton pendant. Frisian gold-working was in any case heavily influenced by Kentish styles (Mazo Karras 1985, 73). There is thus no reason why a 'Frisian-looking' piece should not have been made in England. The similarities may indicate no more than contemporary manufacture. Two rather later finds point to a continuing tradition of coin rings in Anglo-Saxon metalwork. The first of the these is the Bossington ring, thought to be a late 8th or 9th century piece (Hinton 1974, 9-12). The form of the setting, with multiple strands of beaded and plaited wire and a triangular area on the shoulder, filled with numerous pellets, is clearly a development of the form already apparent in the York and London rings. The Bossingtion ring does not hold a coin but a struck disc, with a bust surrounded by an inscription which reads 'IN xpo nomEN ChLLA FIC[?]'. The appearance of a runic 'h' in the inscription means that the disc is certainly Anglo-Saxon. The second ring, from Garrick Street (London), has an identical hoop and setting but, instead of a coin or disc, a geometric cross-pattern of granules and beaded wire (Hinton 1974, 11).

So even if the London and York rings are Frisian, they must stand at the start of an Anglo-Saxon development of this distinctive form. Both for this reason and for the fact that 'Frisian' is not the same as 'Merovingian', it is more accurate to describe these rings not as Merovingian (as the Aldeburgh ring) but as Merovingian-inspired.

The five Merovingian-inspired intaglio rings make up a very different group to the coin rings, since they are all re-used Roman rings. Their forms differ widely, as do the dates of their manufacture. The massive and solidly-made Howletts ring dates to the 4th or 5th century. The Milton-next-Sittingbourne ring is of broadly similar appearance but dates to the late 2nd or early 3rd century (fig. 27, 7). They both contrast with the less easily datable, but undeniably more elegant and delicate Chatham Hill ring.

In the case of the two coin rings, the inspiration lying behind them was clear: it could only be continental or, more directly, Frisian. In the case of the re-used Roman intaglio rings, the source of inspiration is not so clear-cut. The most simple explanation for this re-use of intaglio rings would be that it had nothing to do with continental usage, but was simply another facet of the Anglo-Saxons' fondness for using Roman jewellery rings, in particular those with expanded bezels and settings (Fisher 1979, 52, 64). Although the case cannot be proved, there is a number of indications that the true explanation is less simple. In the first place, all except one of the Anglo-Saxon finds of Roman intaglio rings are of 'prestige' metals. The one bronze example, from the area of the Highdown Hill cemetery, is a stray find and may therefore be unconnected with the Anglo-Saxon use of the site (fig. 27, 6). This dominance of prestige metals does not reflect the proportion of prestige to non-prestige among the full spread of Roman intaglio rings, where bronze and iron rings occur in large numbers. Nor is it reflected in a similar desire to choose only prestige materials in other re-used rings. Of those other Roman rings which

have either an expanded bezel or a setting (Fisher's forms E and F), 10 are of bronze or iron, while only 2 are silver. None is of gold. This pattern fits far more accurately the spread of Roman rings and points to random collection and re-use.

It seems, therefore, that the Anglo-Saxons were selecting for re-use only Roman intaglio rings of prestige metals, in a way that contrasts with the random selection of other Roman ring types. This must imply that the intaglio rings, selected according to stricter criteria, had a different function to the rest. That this function was inspired by the Merovingian usage of intaglio rings is implied by this preference for prestige metals, which mirrors the continental situation. It is also implied more directly by the fact that one of the Anglo-Saxon examples, from Milton-next-Sittingbourne, was probably from a male grave (fig. 27, 7). It is unfortunate that the circumstances of this find are so hazy and we must be grateful to Fisher for disentangling the ring, together with the spearhead, glass vessel and gilt bronze bucket said to have been found with it, from the nearby Chatham Hill ring (Fisher 1979, 69-70). As a result, there seems no reason to doubt the association of the ring with the spear, glass and bucket and to identify the grave as that of a man of high status. The fact that the Snape ring was also in a male grave adds further credibility to the suggestion, by showing that it is not an isolated occurrence.

In Anglo-Saxon England, as on the continent, jewellery rings are not found in male graves. The fact that 2 out of 6 prestige intaglio rings from Anglo-Saxon England were buried with men must surely be linked

with the Merovingian usage of such rings as signets. A possible explanation for the use of Roman rings in this case has been provided by White's general study of re-used Roman objects in Anglo-Saxon graves. He suggested that Roman objects were being re-used as copies of continental Germanic objects, which were unobtainable in this country (White 1988, 163). He is thinking here particularly of 'crossbow' and 'tutulus' brooches, but the evidence points to it being equally applicable to the re-used intaglio rings. It would reinforce the case for seeing them as based on the Continental examples.

Quite why the Anglo-Saxons, in marked contrast to the continental Germans, did not reset the intaglios in new rings is uncertain. They seem to have been quite happy to reset them into brooches and pendants (eg. White 1988, 102, no.4; 104, no.23). The sample is regrettably too small to get any indication as to whether the Anglo-Saxons shared the apparent continental preference for standing and seated figures. Of the six Anglo-Saxon intaglios, 3 have standing figures, one has a charioteer driving a Biga and two have animals (a scorpion and a goose or eagle peering into a shell).

Although this disparate group of re-used Roman intaglio rings is in many ways different to the Merovingian-inspired coin rings, both types can nevertheless be seen to have had the same basic aim. This was quite simply to copy the styles of certain ring types which, on the continent, had a practical function. Since the rings themselves were normally not available, it was necessary to improvise by making use of materials more readily to hand, whether old Roman coins or old Roman

gold, silver or gilded intaglio rings. That it is not just the styles that are being copied, but their functions as well, is implied by the fact that only gold coins and prestige intaglio rings are used and by the occurrence of the intaglio rings in male as well as female graves. The significance of the continental forms thus chosen for imitation will be considered below.

In summary, the combined Merovingian and Merovingian-inspired group contains 14 rings, some 5.5% of the total of Fisher's catalogue. They are restricted to certain types. Above all, and in contrast to the rest, the vast majority can be seen to have had a practical function and to have been made of prestige materials (Tables 28 and 29). Their overall distribution (Map 15) shows, as one would expect, that they centre on Kent, though the coin rings seem an exception to this (see below).

In order to understand the significance of these 14 rings, they must be seen as part of the wider picture of Anglo-Saxon ring-wearing. As revealed by Fisher, this shows both interesting similarities and curious contrasts with the continental picture. Looking first at the similarities, the overall number of people buried with rings appears proportionally as low, though the small number of completely excavated cemeteries makes direct comparison hard. One would expect the wide variations noted from cemetery to cemetery on the continent to be reflected in England, but the sample is not large enough for certainty. The ratio of prestige : plain : non-prestige rings in England (0.5 : 2 : 0.5) is broadly similar to to 1 : 2 : 1 ratio for the continent. In

England, as on the continent, most rings were worn by women and on the left hand. The only rings in male graves are either practical function types which one would expect or, like Finglesham grave 58, which were not being worn as finger-rings.

Turning to the contrasts, the most striking is the number of Anglo-Saxon forms which do not appear on the continent and *vice versa*. As we have already seen, jewellery Forms 2-7 are unrepresented. Instead there are several forms which either do not appear or are very rare in continental graves. Most notable by their absence are three types, classified by Fisher under the overall title of 'wire rings with twisted bezels', which are fairly common in England (accounting for 8.5% of Fisher's catalogue) but which are virtually unknown on the continent. Seligenstadt-Klein-Welzheim grave 1 is a rare associated example and several unassociated finds come from Rüsselheim (Möller 1987, Taf. 86).

There is furthermore an 'insular' type of jewellery ring, of which Fisher notes 2 Kentish examples (unprovenanced F20; Bifrons grave 42 F21). They take their inspiration very clearly from a Roman form with a solid hoop and the stone set flush with the surface (Henig type XII). Indeed Fisher suggested that the unprovenanced ring might in fact be a Roman ring, into which a garnet was later, and not very expertly, set (Fisher 1979, 79-80). The Bifrons ring, although similar in form, shows no sign of secondary resetting and must be seen as an Anglo-Saxon piece. No continental ring bears the slightest resemblance to this pair, since that particular Roman form, though widely available, played no part in influencing the continental Germanic jewellery forms.

Among the Anglo-Saxon jewellery forms in general, there is no sign of the distinction, so clear on the continent, between prestige and non-prestige forms. All types are made equally of all metals, so that the primary division in the classification of the continental forms is simply not possible for Anglo-Saxon rings. This would imply that, in Anglo-Saxon England, the form of the ring was in no way symbolic of status, in the way that was suggested for several of the continental prestige jewellery rings. They showed status only through the metal of which they were made. If such rings had an overall function, other than simply as decoration, then it cannot have been as indicators of status.

Finally, the Anglo-Saxon plain rings differ curiously from those across the channel. Of all the possible variations of the plain form, it is spiral rings that occur most frequently in Fisher's catalogue. This is in marked contrast to the continent, where it is very rare to find unequivocal evidence for a spiral ring in use as a finger-ring.

These ways in which Anglo-Saxon rings contrast with the contemporary, continental picture can at the same time be seen to link them to the earlier, pre-migration rings of 'Germania Libra', as revealed by Beckmann (Beckmann 1969). Thus the three types of 'wire ring with twisted bezels' are all found and are classified by Beckmann as forms 16, 22c and 22d. Unlike Fisher, she would see form 16 at least (that with the single twisted bezel) as deriving not from a Roman but from a native Germanic type. Spiral rings are the most common plain form. As in Anglo-Saxon England, so in Roman Iron Age northern Europe, there

is a heavy reliance on actual Roman rings and exactly the same mix of metals is to be seen in each ring type. The later continental distinction between prestige and non-prestige forms does not exist here either. The pre-migration rings, finally, like the majority of the Anglo-Saxon rings, were worn purely for decoration.

It would be wrong to suggest complete continuity and there are, as one would expect, changes. In 'Free Germany', rings were worn predominantly on the right hand, equally by men and women. In Anglo-Saxon England, as on the continent, the left hand was favoured and the wearing of jewellery rings by men ceased. On the other hand, the overall picture suggests very strongly that Anglo-Saxon ring-wearing habits were derived mainly from pre-migration usage. This is in contrast to the continent, where, as we have seen, native Germanic ring styles and uses had virtually no influence on the succeeding rings. In Anglo-Saxon England, the styles of the native rings, along with their decorative function and the lack of distinction between prestige and non-prestige forms, link them far more closely to their pre-migration homelands than to contemporary continental practice.

The small group of continental rings, together with the Anglo-Saxon coin rings and the re-used Roman intaglio rings based on them, are an anomaly which cannot be fitted into this general picture of Anglo-Saxon ring-wearing. Thus they do not follow on from pre-migration styles. They are found in male as well as female graves. They are overwhelmingly made of prestige metals and most of them have a potentially practical function. These factors mean that they cannot be

seen simply as a miscellaneous group of rather unusual rings, which were used in the same decorative way as the other re-used Roman rings and the twisted bezel rings. Instead, they demand to be seen as a separate group, with separate functions. Since the ring types, if not the actual rings, are continental, it follows naturally that this function is continental as well. Since most of the rings have a practical function, one must conclude that this function was understood in England and that, furthermore, the importance of these rings as symbols of status was also understood. The relationship between the native and continental rings in Anglo-Saxon England is in many ways comparable to the relationship between the status-indicating prestige forms and the decorative non-prestige forms on the continent. They are two separate groups with clearly distinct functions.

It is justified, therefore, to apply the same methods of analysis to these Anglo-Saxon practical function rings as were applied to those on the continent, in order to increase the precision of the definition of the status that they imply. At the same time, it is clear that the different circumstances of Anglo-Saxon England mean that some adjustment is needed. In the first place, the necessary skill of literacy and the technology to produce correctly reversed dies were not available in Anglo-Saxon England. Hence the lack of Anglo-Saxon copies of name and seal rings. Intaglio and coin rings did not demand such rare and specific skills. In the case of coin rings, the necessary components for their manufacture, in the case of intaglio rings, a supply of Roman examples, were readily available. Hence the presence of Anglo-Saxon versions of these two practical function types.

Literacy was needed, of course, not only to produce the reversed seal dies, but also to produce the documents for sealing. It must be assumed that, before the Conversion, certainly in the Anglo-Saxon areas of Britain, there were no documents to seal. Even after the Conversion, the spread of literacy and the growth of the need for written contracts must have been slow. This means that all the Anglo-Saxon intaglio rings were buried well before there can possibly have been any documents for them to seal. It is of course possible that these intaglios had other uses - to produce the badge of an envoy, for example, or as a mark of ownership. Nevertheless, any assessment of the status that these rings represented in Anglo-Saxon England must depend on the effect that the absence of documents would have on their role, both as objects of practical use and as symbols of status. For the continent, it was argued that the greater frequency of these rings in the 7th century implied a lowering of the status that they represented, as literacy and the need for documents spread down through the hierarchy. It is only logical to take the same argument in the opposite direction and to argue that the fewer the documents in need of sealing, the greater the status implied. As the functional use of an object is restricted, so the rank that it symbolises is increased. The status imparted to the Anglo-Saxon wearers of the Snape and other intaglio rings must thus have been augmented by the fact that they may never have been used.

The same process can be observed with the coin rings. It was suggested that on the continent such rings functioned as a badge of rank and, in this case, there is no reason why they should not have

played a similar role in England. It was also suggested that the similarities between their distribution and that of the Coptic bowls might indicate that they were connected with the regulation of Byzantine trade along the Rhine. The three English rings provide extra support for this theory. Their distribution is, for once, not Kentish-centred (map 15, nos. 1+8+13). Instead, they complete very nicely the Italy-Rhine-Frisia trail of the continental examples. Two come from known Anglo-Saxon emporia, Londonwic and Eorforwic, while the third is from an east-coast site. The coin set in the Aldeburgh ring is possibly from the mint of another emporium, Quentowic. Such a theory would further explain why Frisia alone copies the Frankish habit of setting coins in rings and why the London and York rings are so closely related to the Frisian examples. The coin rings reflect the complex mechanisms by which Coptic bowls and other Byzantine objects made their way along the Rhine and across the North Sea to the kingdoms of Anglo-Saxon England.

As with the intaglio rings, so the status of the controller of trade must depend on the volume and character of the trade. The more restricted the volume and the higher the value of the traded goods, the greater is the status of the trader. The quantity of Byzantine objects reaching England (at the end of the chain) was inevitably smaller than that reaching Francia. The quality was just as high. This must mean that an English controller of such trade was of correspondingly higher status than his Rhineland counterpart. If coin rings do indeed mark such controllers, then their status must be adjusted in the same way as was done for the intaglio rings.

These factors, combined with the inability of the Anglo-Saxons to copy the more prestigious seal and name rings, must mean that the coin and intaglio rings should move to the top, as indicators of the highest status in Anglo-Saxon England.

What these rings also show, both in their forms and in their uses, is a desire to copy Frankish ways. In this there is an intriguing parallel to be drawn between the way that the Continental Germans chose Byzantium as their ideal to be emulated and the way that the Anglo-Saxons looked to the continent. This hints that the relationship between Francia and England was similar to that between Byzantium and Francia, so that all that was said about the latter could equally be applied to the former. Just as Byzantine 'imports' into Francia are of restricted range and quality, so Frankish trade with Anglo-Saxon England (including the passing on of Byzantine objects) was similarly limited. Finger-rings are typical of the quality and quantity of Frankish finds, even in Kent. Just as Frankish aristocrats strove to dress and behave as Byzantine courtiers, so Anglo-Saxon aristocrats strove to ape their Frankish cousins. It is tempting to see here the 'prestige goods economy' once more in action, though the indicators are not so clear and hint at a more complex relationship.

Whatever the precise relationship between England and the continent, it is clear that the presence of a Merovingian ring in an Anglo-Saxon grave implies more than just 'high status'. It indicates also a conscious desire by the wearer to copy the more advanced manners of the continental Germanic aristocracy.

Having thus defined the peculiar role of Merovingian rings in Anglo-Saxon society, it is possible to turn finally to the specific case of the Snape ring and its relevance to the ship burial in which it was found. It is important first in helping to date the grave. The date of its manufacture in the first half of the sixth century fits well with the latest thinking on the only other surviving find, the claw beaker (Evison 1982, 48), to give a *terminus post quem* of ç.550 for the burial. While accepting Bruce-Mitford's point that both ring and claw beaker might be heirlooms and that the gap between manufacture and burial could be large, there do seem to be good grounds, boosted by the results of the excavation of graves dating to the second half of the 6th century in the adjacent cemetery, for arguing that the ship is likely to be earlier than that in mound 1 at Sutton Hoo, with its current *terminus post quem* of ç.625. Even accepting Rupert Bruce-Mitford's date of ç.600 or later for the Snape ship, after all, would still make it earlier than mound 1 (Bruce-Mitford 1974, 131).

While the exact date of the burial must remain uncertain, its status need not. Through the analysis of the Snape ring's practical and symbolic function, it can be shown that the man who owned it was of the highest possible rank. It could well be that the only difference between the Snape grave and Sutton Hoo mound 1 is that, while the former was plundered, the latter survived intact for its royal nature to be proved.

The Snape ring also shows that its owner was consciously emulating Frankish and, more distantly, Roman and Byzantine customs. Here too we

see parallels with Sutton Hoo, where the Frankish coins and Byzantine objects in mound 1 emphasise that man's Roman and Frankish aspirations.

The evidence of one single finger-ring, no matter how splendid, should not be stretched too far. Nevertheless, the existence of the Snape ring contradicts the widely-held view of Sutton Hoo as an isolated, 'one-off' flowering of wealth and cosmopolitan culture in an otherwise parochial and minor kingdom of East Anglia. It shows that the man buried in the Sutton Hoo ship was not a royal 'flash in the pan', surrounded like the metaphorical hall of Edwin's thegn by the impenetrable darkness of ignorance (H.E. II, 13). He was in fact doing no more than following a well-lit path of power and cosmopolitan culture in the kingdom of East Anglia.