Marcham Intaglios

Martin Henig MA, DPhil, DLitt, FSA

1. SF 252, Context 9012 (MF01)
Intaglio, ovoid with flat upper face and sides bevelled inwards (shape F1). The material is green jasper, with yellow-brown spotting and with a yellow-brown streak down the right side of the stone. 14 x 11 x 2mm.

It depicts the goddess Ceres, wearing a long chiton and mantle seated on a throne with a high back. She faces right; in her left hand she holds two ears of corn; with her right hand resting on the edge of her seat. In front of her and on the level of her knees is her cult symbol, an ant. Ground line. 2nd century.

The green colour evokes growing vegetation while the yellow-brown is that of the ripe corn. The intaglio was previously published (Henig 2025, 258-9, fig.4) in a paper suggesting that images of such standard Roman deities might stand for local gods and as here goddesses probably stood for local godlings which possessed no iconography of their own.

There is a good parallel, likewise cut in green and yellow jasper, from Dover (Henig 2007a, 206-7, pl. xxix no. App.134). Also note two gems in the Thorvaldsen Collection, Copenhagen (Fossing 1929, 231 nos 1709 and 1710) The same subject in green and red jasper (bloodstone) is figured on a gem from the fort of Y Gaer, Brecon (Henig 2007a, 123, no.257). A number of intaglios from Aquileia in north Italy (Sena Chiesa 1966, 230-31 nos 554-62, tav. xxviii, especially nos 556, 556 on green jasper) likewise portray Ceres seated.

Gems which show Ceres standing and holding ears of corn and a dish perhaps containing fruit, are very much more widespread (Henig 2007a, 123-4. pl. ix, nos 259-273). There is a male equivalent for this standing figure of Ceres, in *Bonus Eventus* who was also concerned with the cereal harvest *(*Henig 2007a, 116-118. pls. vii-viii, nos 203-219). Part of a cornelian intaglio depicting a standing figure of this personage holding corn ears was found by the late Mr Cumber on the Marcham site prior to the commencement of excavations (Goodburn and Henig 1998)



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2. SF 2474, Context 18137 (MF03)
Intaglio, ovoid with flat upper face and sides bevelled outwards (shape F4). The stone is an onyx, layered with a blue-white upper face on a brownish ground and is slightly translucent. The contrasting colours of blue on dark brown correspond to the material called 'nicolo' by jewellers. 15 x 12 x 3mm.

The subject is an athletic youth in profile to the left, nude apart from the cloak (chlamys) hanging from his shoulders. His right leg is bent at the knee, and he supports his weight on his left leg. His right foot appears behind his left foot. In his left hand he holds a plumed helmet and in his right hand a spear which he holds transversely. The type is that of Achilles with the armour brought to him from Vulcan's forge by his mother Thetis. There is a short ground line. 2nd century.

Henig (1970, 252-6), discusses the type and notes that the subject is an adaptation of the *Doryphoros* by Polykleitos and that the Elder Pliny (*Naturalis Historiae* xxxiv, x) describes states of nude ephebes holding spears in gymnasia as *Achillaeae*. Although many examples are from military sites (e.g. Henig 2007a,150, pl. xv, no.457 from Corbridge, Northumberland; 150, no.459 from Heronbridge, Cheshire; 150, no 460 from Caerleon, Monmouthshire, and p.208, pl.xxx no App.154 from Watercrook, Westmoreland). These reflect the veneration for the ancient heroes in the Roman army, although there must be another explanation of the Marcham specimen as in other examples of similar gems from Civil settlements, for instance from the ditch between Chalgrave and Toddington, Bedfordshire (Henig 1970, 254 no. 2b; Henig 2007a, 150, pl. xv, no.458) and others from the villa at Atworth, Wiltshire (Henig 2007a, 159., no.461) and from Cirencester (Henig 2007a, 198, pl. xxv no. App.39). These may, of course, reflect an interest in Classical myth and Graeco-Roman culture amongst the native elite, in which the athletic culture represented by Roman baths with their associated gymnasia had become established as I previously suggested in a paper where this gem was first published (Henig 2007b, 459-60, fig 24.8) . However, it is also not unlikely that the intaglio was identified by its owner, as a portrayal of Mars, venerated widely in Britain and elsewhere as an Agrarian deity. In a local context we may note that Marcham has yielded model weapons and shields (Bagnall Smith 1995,198-200) and that Woodeaton has in addition provided two images of Mars (Bagnall Smith 1995,186-7, figs 12 and 13).



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3. SF 3334, Context 18191 (MF05)
Copper-alloy ring, with narrow hoop of D-shaped section expanding towards the bezel (type III). The ring is in good condition but cracked across the narrowest part of the hoop. Diameter 20mm; depth 16mm; width across bezel 7mm; across narrowest point of hoop 1mm. The bezel is set with an oval intaglio moulded from clear glass, 8 x 5mm depicting a satyr walking to the left holding a bunch of grapes in his right hand, his left arm is held downwards. There is a short ground line. Probably 2nd century.

The theme evokes rustic prosperity. However, unlike the two engraved intaglios discussed above, this mass-produced item belonged to someone of lower social status. There is a clear glass intaglio depicting a satyr from Dragonby, Lincolnshire (Henig 2007a, 112, pl.vi no.166).

4. SF3833, Context 24002 (MF05)
Moulded glass intaglio imitative of nicolo, with a blue upper surface on a dark ground. Only the bottom 40% is preserved. It measures 10mm across and from the break to the bottom is 5mm. When complete the gem would have been perhaps some 12 mm in height. It is 2mm thick. The sides gently slope outwards.

Very little survives of the image. A single figure seems to be standing to the left on the long base line which extends to the right. To the right, at a higher level another depression perhaps represents something held by the figure. A very tentative identification is that the device represents Bonus Eventus holding a bunch of grapes in front of him (Henig 2007a, 115, nos 192-194. pl.vii especially the last). 2nd-3rd century.

5. SF 4744 Context 8564 (MF 06)

This small copper alloy trinket ring has flattened everted shoulders and a raised bezel containing a glass setting, royal blue in colour, with a moulded intaglio design. This appears to show a standing male figure holding or beside a vertical object probably intended for a staff. It belongs to a large class of imitation gemstones largely confined to southern Britain which I have called 'Romano-British Imitations' (see Henig 2007a, 58-9 fig.2; 161-163 and pls XVII and XVIII nos 539-578. Very many more have been found since). They reflect the wide distribution of wearing rings set with glass 'jewels' in emulation of a practice that was originally a sign of some status, as the wearing of a signet ring spread to the wider population, including the peasantry. It may be no accident that the devices of Romano-British imitations bear some resemblance to the more barbarous of the barbarous radiates dating from the same period, c. third quarter of the 3rd century.

Intaglios depicting Ceres, Bonus Eventus and a satyr would have been useful charms for anyone farming the land and hoping for good harvests; the same might be said of Mars who protected the fields.

It is hard to know to what extent the six gems known from the site, five of which are from this excavation, reflect the deities venerated in the sanctuary; nearby Woodeaton has provided evidence for 'Venus' (a female deity) (Bagnall Smith 1995, 179-80, figs 2 and 3) as well as for Mars, and the small finds from Marcham perhaps point in the

same direction. Perhaps, then, Marcham too was a sanctuary of more than a single deity. The evidence from the gems as far as it goes points, unsurprisingly, to concerns for agricultural prosperity. That is shown by the gems from the jewellery hoard rom Snettisham, Norfolk, the stock-in-trade of a travelling smith, half of whose gems depicted either Bonus Eventus or Ceres. A Romano-British imitation gem set in a trinket ring is no surprise, it is tempting to think that the owner regarded the figure on it having the protective function of a deity, such as a local version of Mars.

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