

Notes on Greek Jewelry-inscriptions

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1. Not even a cent

A ring recently auctioned at London joins another auctioned at Munich and recently published in *SEG* (LXIII 1740) as a witness to an enigmatic Greek inscription. There are reasons for adding both to a series of taunting texts belonging to an amatory context, discussed below. The London ring, unprovenanced, is said to be of silver,¹ with a ribbed hoop and nearly square bezel,² inscribed in four lines lengthwise in a seemingly late Hellenistic or early Imperial hand with horseshoe-shaped Ω and four-barred sigma that might be assigned to the first centuries BCE-CE (*fig. 1*).

ἐγὼ δέ γε
οὐ δίδωμι
ἰ σοι οὐδὲ
κόλλυβον.

But as for me, I won't give
you so much as a cent.



Figure 1: Silver ring auctioned at London. ©TimeLine Auctions Ltd

¹ Described in the online catalogue for TimeLine Auctions (London), *Antiquities & Coins* sale, 1–4 December 2015, lot 272 <<https://www.timelineauctions.com/lot/ring-with-greek-inscription/58893/>> (last accessed 12 February 2018), with dating to the 2nd or 3rd cent. CE, partial and inaccurate majuscule transcription, and color photograph, from which the text is read here. The catalogue compares the ring catalogued by L. Ruseva-Slokoska, *Roman Jewellery* (Sofia 1991) 171 no. 197, which is however anepigraphic.

² For the form cf. F. H. Marshall, *Catalogue of the Finger Rings, Greek, Etruscan, and Roman, in the Departments of Antiquities, British Museum* (London 1907) 35 no. 208 with plate V.

The Munich ring, again unprovenanced, is of a simple type, with plain hoop and large oval bezel, inscribed in three lines lengthwise across the bezel, to which the same date has been assigned (*fig. 2*).³ The text is reprinted for convenience:

ἐγὼ δέ γε οὐδ-
 ἰδωμί σοι οὐδ-
 ἐ κόλλυβον

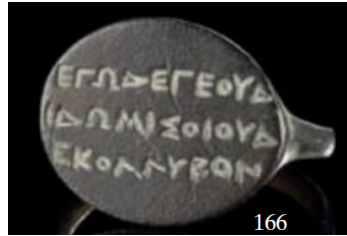


Figure 2: Bronze ring auctioned at Munich. ©Gorny & Mosch Giessener Münzhandlung GmbH

Rolf Tybout, who provided commentary to the edition in *SEG*, found no precise, published parallels. He could however adduce Eupolis fr.233 for a κόλλυβος as a cheap price for sex, and compare the taunting texts on silver spoons of the sixth or seventh centuries CE from Lampsakos, ἀκέρμις οὐκ εἶ εὐμορφος (“With no money you have no allure”),⁴ τρῶγε ἐρωτόκρουστε (“Eat, you love-stricken man!”),⁵ and ἦν φιλῆς μισῆ σε (“She whom you love hates you”) on another of unknown provenance,⁶ concluding that “[s]uch objects probably played a role in sympotic discourse, e.g. with the objects being exchanged and the inscriptions being read aloud and serving as food for con-

³ *SEG* LXIII 1740, read by R. A. Tybout from a photograph published in Gorny & Mosch, Giessener Münzhandlung GmbH, Munich, auction catalogue no. 214, *Auktion Kunst der Antike*, 19. Juni 2013 (Munich 2013) 99 no. 166. For the genre see *SEG* XLI 1867, and for more affectionate sentiments on rings see recently M. Zellmann-Rohrer, “Notes on Two Inscribed Gems and an Affectionate Address,” *GRBS* 56 (2016) 709–713.

⁴ *SEG* XLII 1096 B 6 (cf. LSJ Suppl. s.v. ἄκερμος).

⁵ *SEG* XLII 1096 B 7; for the novel compound ἐρωτόκρουστος cf. LSJ s.v. ἐρωτόληπτος and *LBG* s.vv. ἐρωτοκέντητος and ἐρωτοκράτης.

⁶ *SEG* XXXVIII 1927 with XLII 1096 app.cr. (l. φιλεῖς, μισεῖ).

versation.”⁷

Another apposite comparandum among inscribed rings is οὐ φιλῶ σε, μὴ πλανῶ· νοῶ δὲ καὶ γελῶ (“I don’t love you, don’t fool yourself, but I’m aware [of it] and laugh”) and its variants,⁸ and perhaps a Latin instance, *parum te amo* (“I love you too little” [to register, i.e., not at all]).⁹ On the theory of a sympotic discourse, the present formula could offer an answer to a plea such as εἰ φιλεῖς κολάκευε καὶ μὴ παράγων [με?] πλάτυνε (loosely rendered, “If you love me, flatter me, and don’t boast misleadingly”).¹⁰ The sequence δέ γε particularly suggests a riposte. It may be added that, consistent with other texts in this genre,¹¹ the phrase is metrical, nearly an iambic trimeter, needing only κόλλυβον to be treated as κόλυ-

It must be admitted, however, that there is nothing explicitly sexual about the Greek text itself. The phrase δίδωμι κόλλυβον need connote only general payment. Though the amatory con-

⁷ The spoons can only have preserved a reminiscence of any such original sympotic context since, as noted by Tybout already in the apparatus to *SEG* XLII 1096, further inscriptions show that they were made for a Christian bishop.

⁸ E.g. *SEG* LVI 2054 (5); A. van den Hoek, D. Feissel, and J. H. Herrmann, “Lucky Wearers: A Ring in Boston and a Greek Epigraphic Tradition of Late Roman and Byzantine Times,” *Journal of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston* 6 (1994) 41–62, at 60 no. J.2.a-b [*SEG* XLIV 1561]; G. Bevilacqua, “Osservazioni su alcune formule affettuose e galanti di età imperiale,” *MGR* 16 (1991) 225–237 [*SEG* XLI 1867].

⁹ Marshall, *Catalogue* 109 no. 652 (Franks Bequest, said to be from Amiens); for *parum* as essentially the simple negative adverb cf. *OLD* 1304a s.v. 3a. Marshall, however, translates simply “I love thee too little” and takes the object as a token of betrothal (p. xxii).

¹⁰ H. B. Walters, *Catalogue of Engraved Gems and Cameos Greek, Etruscan and Roman in the British Museum* (London 1926) 348 no. 3702, with G. Bevilacqua, *Antiche iscrizioni augurali e magiche dai codici di Girolamo Amati* (Rome 1991) 13–14 no. 1b [*SEG* XLII 933], rendering “Se ami, adula (mi), e, senza ingannarmi, apriti (confidati).” See also Bevilacqua, *MGR* 16 (1991) 225–237.

¹¹ See C. Gallavotti, “Revisione di testi epigrafici,” *BollClass* 9 (1988) 23–28 no. 24 [*SEG* XXXVIII 1925]; Zellmann-Rohrer, *GRBS* 56 (2016) 709–713.

text remains in this writer's opinion the most plausible, alternative explanations must be allowed, such as a personal motto advertising the bearer as thrifty or a driver of hard bargains.

2. Relief for them that yearn

The opportunity may also be taken to call attention to a neglected ring inscription that addresses, as will be argued here, the affect of those who have succumbed to the passions refused, perhaps, by the speaker of the formula in text 1.

The object is a gold ring with simple hoop and square bezel. The bezel features an engraving of a larger than life, diademed female figure seated on a throne, apparently Aphrodite, menacing two small, embracing human figures with a torch in her right hand. Above the human figures is an inscription filled with niello. The ring was said to have come from Arados before entering the collection of Napoléon-Antoine Péretié (French consul at Beirut), then that of Louis De Clercq (1836–1901), where it was first published by André De Ridder.¹² After the ring passed through the hands of De Clercq's nephew and heir Henri de Boisgelin¹³ to the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, the text was re-edited as if unpublished and of uncertain provenance, and interpreted in a less satisfactory fashion.¹⁴ The fullest edition thus far after this transfer has attributed the ring to Byzantium

¹² *Collection De Clercq. Catalogue VII.2* (Paris 1911) 781 no. 3474.

¹³ G. Le Rider and H. Seyrig, "Objets de la collection Louis De Clercq," *RN* 9 (1967) 7–8; A. Parrot, "La donation L. De Clercq - H. de Boisgelin," *La revue du Louvre* 18 (1968) 299–300. For another ring acquired by the Virginia Museum from the same source see *SEG XXX* 1795.

¹⁴ Richmond, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, accession 67.52.10, described by M. C. Ross, "Jewels of Byzantium," *Arts in Virginia* 9.1 (1968) 13 no. 3, with a poor black and white photograph, no text, and a translation attributed to Glanville Downey, "the end [or cessation] of those who are fearful [or timid]" or "the repose of those who are timid," dated to the "Late Antique period, probably the 4th century." A fuller edition was given by E. Buono in S. Heuck Allen, *Survival of the Gods: Classical Mythology in Medieval Art* (Providence 1987) 116–117 no. 36, with a superior black and white photograph, text in unarticulated majuscules, and similar translation, "the end (or cessation) of those who are fearful."

of the fourth century CE, which remains possible as the place of manufacture, albeit less likely in view of the findspot at Arados, as opposed to a Syrian center such as Antioch, Apamea, or Emesa. Good color photographs furnished by the VMFA confirm the text of the first edition (*figs. 4–5*).

παύσε
τὸν πο-
θούν-
των

Leave off (tormenting) them
that yearn.



Figure 3: Gold ring with imprecation, impression after De Ridder, digitally mirrored



Figure 4: Gold ring with imprecation, front.



Figure 5: Gold ring with imprecation, back.

Richmond, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts accession 67.52.10, Adolph D. and Wilkins C. Williams Fund, images courtesy of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, via Creative Commons CC-BY-NC

The tentative interpretation of the first editor, André De Ridder, can be confirmed on the basis of more recently published texts and recognition of the Greek conception of erotic

desire as pathological affliction,¹⁵ and is reprised with adjustments here: the figures were identified as “Aphrodite, nue, assise ... la main appuyée à gauche sur un sceptre (?), la main gauche baisée et tenant une bandelette ou une palme ... devant, et en bas, symplegma (d’Eros et de Psyché ??).” The identification of a torch seems likelier in the presence of an erotic torment from which relief is sought (παῦσε), while nothing in the appearance of the embracing couple particularly favors Eros and Psyche against a generic pair of mortal lovers. A facsimile of an impression was given (*fig. 3*), accompanied by an accurate text, but without translation. De Ridder classed the text among magical gems, though it lacks the characteristic textual and iconographic features of that genre, such as non-Greek *logoi* and apotropaic divinities. On the basis of De Ridder’s publication, René Mouterde identified “une réflexion piquante” instead of a magical inscription, and made use of a drawing by Raphaël de Bernoville, taken when the ring was still in the possession of Péretié, to propose a new reading in line 1, not supported by the new photograph.¹⁶ Mouterde also recognized a mirror in the hand of the goddess, iconographically possible but blunting the urgency of the plea in παῦσε. Attilio Mastrocinque accepted the text of De Ridder and considered the object a votive gem bearing “una preghiera che certamente sarebbe stata più appropriata in un tempio della dea, piuttosto che sulla mano di uno dei due interessati.”¹⁷ While a prayer certainly provides the substance of

¹⁵ For a representation on a gem of Eros bound and chastised, acclaimed as “justly so” (δικαίως), including a menacing torch, see *SEG* LV 2084 and LX 1886 with further references; for another scene possibly representing Eros punished by Aphrodite, *SEG* LV 1890 (8). For the torments of ἔρωος in general see C. A. Faraone, *Ancient Greek Love Magic* (Cambridge, [Mass.] 1999), esp. 43–55.

¹⁶ “Le glaive de Dardanos. Objets et inscriptions magiques de Syrie,” *MUSJ* 15 (1930) 58 with 131 [*SEG* VII 77]; the drawing was commissioned “pour le P. Bourquenoud et conservé par P. Ronzevalle.”

¹⁷ “Le gemme votive,” in J.-P. Brun (ed.), *Artisanats antiques d’Italie et de Gaule. Mélanges offerts à Maria-Francesca Buonaiuto* (Naples 2009) 56–57 [*SEG* LIX 1994 (2)].

the text, the most attractive context for its inscription, given the large number of rings inscribed with comparable amatory messages but no discernible imprecation, is the exchange of gifts, as is the case with text 1.

1 παῦσε: so De Ridder; ΝΑΥΣΣ Buono; ΗΔΥCC Mouterde, who articulated ἡδύς [ό] and supposed an ellipse of ἀσπασμός. The color photograph shows that the final letter, taller and rounder than the lunate C preceding it, is simply an ε in which the niello has worn off the center crossbar, or was never applied. The form παῦσε is to be read as the middle imperative παῦσαι, addressed to the goddess; for the sense see LSJ s.v. I 3. De Ridder's correction to παῦσον is unnecessary.

2 τῶν: l. τῶν.

4 ΤΩΑΝ Buono, mistaking as Λ the flame of the torch in the hand of the goddess.¹⁸

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¹⁸ I am grateful to the editorial board and an anonymous reader of *GRBS* for helpful criticisms of this article; all remaining errors are my own.