Anglo-Saxon and Viking Wire Rings
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Metal wire finger rings were common in the Anglo-Saxon era (6th-11th C), and also in Viking-era Scandinavia, as extent examples attest. Most of my Anglo-Saxon exemplars are taken from the UKDFD [1]. This is a centrally-located database where amateur metal-detectors can upload and classify their findings. Dating is done on the basis of scholarly research and on similarity with and geographical proximity to other dated findings. A similar database, the Portable Antiquities Scheme [2], contains examples of wire rings identified as Anglo-Saxon and Viking, which are often indistinguishable from each other in terms of metal, material, and shape/style.

The rings that I have found were made with copper alloy [6], silver, and gold wire. As a rule, in the UKDFD finds, the copper wire is round while the silver wire is square, but this "rule" is broken in the PAS examples. I started out with copper, steel, and brass wire, all round, both because that is what I had accessible and because silver and gold wire of the appropriate gauge is expensive; though after having worked with the 1mm wire for awhile, I decided that .8mm might not be too small, and so I picked up some silver wire in that gauge from the craft store (this being the highest gauge silver wire they have). I was then able to find some 1.5mm flat copper wire, which clearly won't work quite the same way as square but was interesting to try nonetheless.

Regarding gauge, this information is not provided in the UKDFD examples, and it is hard to tell from the pictures exactly what size wire is being used. A few of the PAS examples note that the wire is 1.25-1.5mm. I bought 1mm wire, though upon making the first few rings, I've come to the conclusion that this is a bit thin for some of the designs. However, it was the thickest I could get at either my local craft store or the hardware store, so it'll have to suffice for now. And then when I decided to buy silver wire, the thickest I could acquire was .8mm.

The simplest rings are a single or double loop of wire, with the ends curled over to form a sliding loop, allowing the resizing of the ring. Examples of this type are the 6th-9th C silver ring for sale at [5] (an unusual example of a silver ring using round, instead of square, wire), the 9th-10th C silver ring UKDFD 11526, and the 9th-11th C copper ring UKDFD 23068.

More complex designs knotted the wire in complicated knots or spirals, as can be seen in the 9th-11th C copper ring UKDFD 25909 and the 6th C (?) gilded (?) silver ring UKDFD 29806. The wire could itself be bevilled or stamped in order to enhance its decorativeness.

These rings seem fairly simple and plain to me, and given that beads of various types (amber, amethyst, glass, cf. [3]) were known to be used in Anglo-Saxon jewelry, it seemed natural to wonder if they were ever strung on the wire to decorate the rings. So far, I have not found any extant examples, but Martin Welch's review of Brugmann, Birte,*Glass Beads from Early Anglo-Saxon Graves: A Study of the Provenance and Chronology of Glass Beads from Early Anglo-Saxon Graves, Based on Visual Examination*. Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2004. Pp. xiv, 145. $59.95. ISBN: 1-84217-104-6 in *The Medieval Review* 05.09.28 notes "Beads provide a rich source of evidence, occurring in significant numbers. Typically they were worn strung between brooches in fifth to sixth-century graves and combined with metal wire rings and metal beads in later seventh-century burials." As a result, I've cheerfully added glass beads to some of my rings, because SHINY.

Ring #1: Copper wire, 1mm. Based on the 6th-9th C silver ring in [5].

Ring #2: Copper wire, 1mm. Based on UKDFD 11526 and UKDFD 13944.

Ring #3: Copper wire, 1mm. Based on UKDFD 29806. This design is very similar to UKDFD 35119 and British Museum #1995,0102.180 [4], and, as it turns out from more google searching, with various Anglo-Saxon and Viking rings in the "Finds" database [5], including LEIC-D4A8A2 (square wire, silver), KENT-4444A4 (round wire, gold), and KENT-C90BE3 (round wire, silver).

Ring #4: Steel wire, 1mm, with blue glass bead. Since I wasn't sure where the bead would go on beaded rings, since I have no pictures of extant rings, I put it between the coiled ends so that it would slide the least. Making this ring I discovered that steel is a lot harder than copper and I don't like it nearly as much! (I also wish it were silver, it would be much shinier).

Ring #5: Copper wire, 1 mm. Based on UKDFD 25909. Though I'm sure I've got the pattern of the knot right,mine turned out quite a bit more flat than the original, I'm not sure why.

Ring #6: Brass wire, 1mm, with green glass beads. Based on UKDFD 11526. I thought the brass would be easier to work with than the steel, but not so much. I had a hard time keeping the circle as small as I wanted, and while the first coiled end worked well, I had a more difficult time with the second coiled end.

Ring #7: Copper wire, 1 mm, with blue glass bead. Based on UK 25909, however, I discovered I'd prematurely trimmed the ends too short and so could not complete the knot, and had to coil the ends off with just two loops instead of four.

Ring #8: Brass wire, 1mm. Based on KENT-4444A4 (PAS). Again, I find that brass doesn't do what I expect gold would do, and this one didn't really turn out.

Ring #9: Copper wire, 1mm, with green and blue glass beads. Based on UKDFD 11526.

Ring #10: Copper wire, 1mm, with yellow glass bead. Based on UKDFD 25909. Again, I have no idea why my knot isn't looking like the original, though I'm sure I've got the right looping.

Ring #11: Copper wire, 1mm. Based on PAS-697F83 (PAS), which isn't actually a wire ring, but a metal ring with decorative twists to form bezels, which I tried to mimic (without much success).

Ring #12: Brass wire, .3mm. This isn't based on a single design, but extrapolated from the simplest versions, but wrapped multiple times because the wire was so narrow.

Ring #13: Copper wire, 1mm. Based on UKDFD 29806, though I curled the spiral a few extra times.

Ring #14: Steel wire, 1mm. Based on LEIC-D4A8A2 (PAS). I wanted to try working with the steel wire again, and found it surprisingly more manageable than previously, though still extremely difficult to trim the ends off with the wire-cutter I have.

Ring #15: Silver wire, .8mm. Based on KENT-4444A4 (PAS). Silver wire is MUCH nicer to work with than steel! (And prettier).

Ring #16: Silver wire, .8mm, with red and yellow glass beads. Based on UKDFD 13944. This one I

found harder to keep pulled tight to the size I wanted, which is why the ends are curled over so far away from the beads.

Ring #17: Silver wire, .8mm. Based on UKDFD 25909. Yet another attempt. Still doesn't look right.

Ring #18: Silver wire, .8mm, with blue glass bead. Based on roughly on KENT-C90BE3 (PAS), with added bead.

Ring #19: Silver wire, .8mm. Based on PAS-697F83 (PAS). I'm still not sure about this design.

Ring #20: Silver wire, .8mm. Sort of based on UKDFD 11526. This style persists in being way more difficult than I feel it should be.

Ring #21: Silver wire, .8mm. Based on KENT-C90BE3 (PAS).

Ring #22: Silver wire, .8mm, with red, black,and gold glass beads. Not based on anything at all; I just wanted to do something in Drachenwald colors. I'm not terribly happy with it.

Ring #23: Brass wire, .3mm. Based on KENT-4444A4 (PAS).

Ring #24: Copper wire, 1.5mm flat. Based on UKDFD 29806 and LEIC-D4A8A2 (PAS). This looks, to me, much more like how I expect the originals did.

Ring #25: Copper wire, 1mm. Sort of based on KENT-4444A4 (PAS), except I omitted the central spiral.

Ring #26: Silver wire, .8mm. Based on UKDFD 25909. Again. Still confused.

Ring #27: Copper wire, 1mm. Based on LEIC-D4A8A2 (PAS). This one is *not* going to TRM for largesse/Pennsic gift basket! Gwen had been watching me make rings all afternoon and kept trying them on, so I decided to make one for her. It ended up being a bit small, it only fits on her pinkies, but it's *so cute*.

Rings #28-#31: Silver wire, .8mm with blue glass beads. These are all nominally based on LEIC-D4A8A2 (PAS), except for the undocumented addition of the bead. But I wanted to have a number of silver/blue ones for the Pennsic gift basket, and I like this style, so I did them all up this way.

Ring #32: Copper wire, 1mm with blue glass bead. Ditto above, except I hadn't done so many with the copper wire recently so decided to remedy that.

Bibliography

[1] United Kingdom Detector Finding Database, http://www.ukdfd.co.uk/.

[2] http://www.finds.org.uk/

[3] J.W. Huggett, "Imported Grave Goods and the Early Anglo-Saxon Economy", *Medieval Archaeology* 32 (1988), 63-96, especially pp. 64-68, discussing amber and amethyst beads, and p. 70

discussing crystal beads.

[4] http://www.britishmuseum.org/

[5] http://www.time-lines.co.uk/saxon-adjustable-double-looped-finger-ring-022904-36582-0.html

[6] "Copper alloy" is the term archaelogists and museum curators use to cover the spectrum from copper to bronze, including brass, since it is often not possible to tell the exact chemical component. When I discovered this, I was pleased, since it meant my using brass (since I couldn't obtain gold) was not actually unreasonable. Steel, on the other hand, I have no evidence of being used in this sort of jewelry.