

**An early inscribed gold ring from the Argolid**  
(PLATE VIII)

For Miss L. H. Jeffery

This paper publishes a gold ring until recently in private hands in the United States.<sup>1</sup> The former owners, private persons with no scholarly background, brought the ring to the present writer's attention upon learning that he had some knowledge of Greek inscriptions. The one deplorable fact is that this ring was removed from its context, so that much of its scientific value is forever lost to us. Nonetheless, the damage was done by others years ago, and its owners deserve praise for making the ring available for study. The dedicatory inscription on it is an invaluable example of early Argive script. The details of acquisition are unclear. I have been able to ascertain only that the ring was acquired in ancient Mycenae from some Greeks who claimed to have dug it up in the area. As will be seen, in all probability it comes from the Argive Heraion.

Physical description: Gold finger ring decorated on the outer side with three grooves articulating two dentilated bands (PLATE VIIIc). A dedicatory inscription completely encircles the ring on one side, the front; the back is plain. A crack and repair (?), probably of ancient origin, are visible on the back (PLATE VIII d); they continue through to the front and partially obscure the second letter of the dedicator's name. While the teeth of the bands show considerable wear, the letters of the inscription are quite fresh and free from wear. This suggests that the ring was worn for some time before it was inscribed at the time of its dedication.

Weight: 4.808 grams

Diameter (at outside): 0.022 m.

(at inside): 0.018 m.<sup>2</sup>

Thickness (measuring from inscribed face to back): 0.003 m.

Height of letters: c. 0.003 m.

ΗΡΡΙΚΙΝΙΔΑΜ'ΑΝΕΘΕΚΕ:

ΘΗΘΙΗΕΥΦΟΙΕΜΟΙΕΡΡΑΙ:

Ἡρρικινίδας ἀνεθέκε:  
Θηθίι λευφῶλενῶι Ἡρραί:

The dotted alpha is the letter which has been damaged by the crack in the ring. The vertical and horizontal of the letter are clear and are exactly like the vertical and horizontal of the alpha of ἩΡΡΑΙ which just precedes. The area above the horizontal has been battered so that the upper slanting stroke is not at all clear. In some lighting conditions the upper part of the letter takes on a rectangular shape, a shape which conforms to no letter of the early Argive script. Alpha seems to be the correct reading.

The lettering represents the earliest form of the Argive alphabet<sup>3</sup> and suggests a date around the middle

<sup>1</sup> This ring is now part of the collection of the J. Paul Getty Museum (accession number 85.AM264). I wish to thank S. Dow, L. H. Jeffery, A. L. Boegehold, and G. Nagy who have generously shared their expertise.

<sup>2</sup> This diameter would fit either a man or a woman of today depending on which finger the ring was worn and the size of the hand. It would be rather small for most men and somewhat large for many women. Since the ancients were generally smaller in stature, the ring size suggests that this ring originally belonged to a man.

<sup>3</sup> This entire discussion depends on L. H. Jeffery's invaluable study,

of the sixth century BC or even somewhat earlier. Iota to express the 'on-glide' ζ between iota and a following vowel went out of use by the end of the sixth century. The shape of rho, namely Jeffery's ρ1, which appears twice, does not occur often after the beginning of the sixth century. The present lettering is close to Jeffery's no. 3 on plate 26 of the late seventh century and nos. 7, 9 on plates 26-27 of c. 560. Note that the shapes Η and Ψ with open tops are new; they may well be generated here by the difficulty of incising on a small convex surface.

Since *san* and *mu* are indistinguishable in the Argive script at this early date, the first line might alternately be read Ἡρρικινίδα μ' ἀνεθέκε. However, this would be odd for a feminine nominative in Argive dialect, where one would expect an ending in omega.

The name of the dedicator, Ἡρρικινίδας, is heretofore unattested. The -ρρ- formant is paralleled in Argive ἀρρήτευε for later ἀρήτευε.<sup>4</sup> This might be Argive dialect for an unaspirated name, Αὔρικινίδας or Ἄρρικινίδας,<sup>5</sup> which also are unattested.

This dedicatory inscription takes its place as one of the earliest of all Argive texts. The letters, despite their very small size, are well made, and the inscription was planned to fill the entire space available. The points of punctuation are carefully placed exactly opposite one another, dividing the ring and the text into halves. The dedicator's name and the verb occupy one half; the name of the goddess and her epithet the other. Each contains eight syllables. While the inscription does not quite make a dactylic hexameter (the name won't scan), the dative clause nicely reproduces the close of the epic hexameter from the feminine caesura. Recall *Iliad* i 572:

μητρὶ φίλῃ ἐπίτηρα φέρων λευκωλένωι Ἥρῃ.

The epithet *leukolenos*, regularly applied to Hera in Homer, is not attested in inscriptions from the Argive Heraion. It is, however, known among the earliest dedicatory inscriptions from the sanctuary of Hera at Perachora.<sup>6</sup>

Rings are one of the most frequent finds at the Argive Heraion. Some 600 are recorded;<sup>7</sup> almost all are of bronze and all are uninscribed, humble offerings of humble folk. The present gold ring is unique—an unusually fine and elaborate offering. Miss Jeffery wondered *per litteras* 'whether the dedicator may have been a Macedonian? That could account for the odd unusual name, perhaps, and the *gold* offering. Alexander I of Macedon (family Ἀργεάδαι) claimed descent from Argos.'

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*The local scripts of archaic Greece* (Oxford 1961), particularly 151-3.

<sup>4</sup> See C. D. Buck, *The Greek dialects* (Chicago 1955) 51.

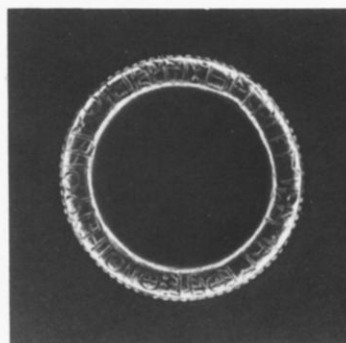
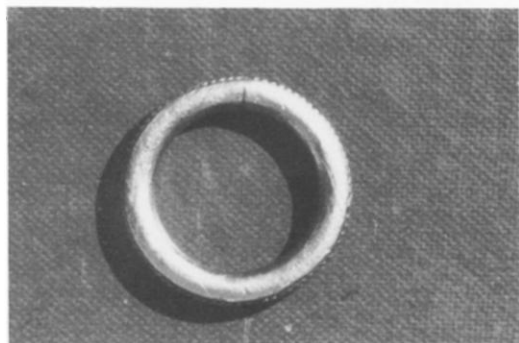
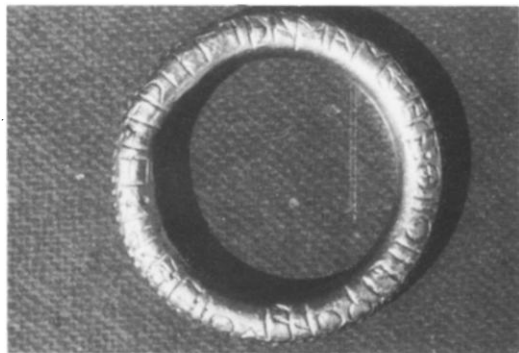
<sup>5</sup> I owe this suggestion to L. H. Jeffery (*per litteras*), who adduces in support of this (possibly) added initial aspirate Argolic Ηε (= η) and Ηισκλαπιει (= Αισκλαπιει). See Buck (n. 4) 55.

<sup>6</sup> H. Payne, *Perachora I* (Oxford 1940) 256-66, nos. I and III.

<sup>7</sup> Charles Waldstein, *The Argive Heraeum II* (Boston 1905) 250-64. A like number of bronze rings were found at the sanctuary of Hera at Perachora (Payne [n. 6] 178-80). Twenty gold rings were also found in the geometric deposit associated with the temple of Hera Akraia at Perachora ((Payne [n. 6] 73-4)). Payne comments (73): 'With one exception, a ring of thin gold wire, these are all strips of beaten gold, the ends of which are joined not by soldering, but by folding them into each other.' These gold rings were made especially for dedication; none is inscribed.



(a) Circe with companions of Odysseus, who have been transformed into different animals. Attic Black-figured Kylix, 550-525 BC. Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.



(b)-(e) Inscribed gold ring from the Argolid. Courtesy of Paul Getty Museum.

A CONVENTION OF METAMORPHOSIS IN GREEK ART (a).  
AN EARLY INSCRIBED GOLD RING FROM THE ARGOLID (b)-(e).