

ADDITIONAL NOTES ON FINGER RINGS AND ON SOME
ENGRAVED GEMS OF THE EARLY CHRISTIAN
PERIOD.

By C. D. E. FORTNUM, F.S.A.

It has been my privilege on some former occasions to bring before the notice of the Institute, and to publish in our *Journal*, descriptions of Early Christian finger-rings in my own possession, and to refer to others preserved in some of the public museums and private collections in Europe. Reference to vol. xxvi, page 137, to vol. xxviii, p. 266, to vol. xxix, p. 305, and to vol. xxxiii, p. 111,¹ will discover the papers to which I allude.

A recent sojourn of some months at Rome has enabled me to accumulate additional material on this subject, I having been fortunate enough, by various means, to secure important additions to my own collection, some of which, from the subjects represented, are worthy of record.

By the liberality of friends; by a fortunate opportunity of securing the private collection of an amateur of long experience and critical judgment resident at Rome; further by the acquisition of that portion of a friend's collection of engraved gems; and also by good fortune in the chace, I have been enabled to acquire the interesting addition to my *Dactyliotheca Christiana*, which I now propose to describe in detail. Thirteen gems, engraved with Christian subjects, some of which are unique, will be included in the category.

For convenience of reference it will, perhaps, be better to commence the numeration of my list in sequence of that published in vol. xxviii. of the *Journal*, and which ended with No. 33.

Some of the illustrative woodcuts were executed at Rome, others in England by Mr. Utting; they have occasionally been taken from the originals, but several are from impressions of the intaglio, reversing the representations of the subject. These woodcuts are, with one exception, of the size of the originals.

¹ The ring described in this notice has, passed into my own collection.
through the kindness of Mr. Baxter, since

CHRISTIAN FINGER RINGS.

34. A bronze ring with simple hoop; on the flat circular bezel is incised the sacred monogram $\chi\rho$ reversed, within a border line. Fourth or early fifth century. From the Dressel collection. Of similar character to those numbered 10, 18 and 19 of my former list, and others in the Vatican and Castellani collections, &c.

35. Bronze ring with circular bezel, the hoop lobed in leaf shape on the shoulders; rudely made. The bezel bears incised a palm branch between two fish. It also is probably of the later fourth or early fifth century, and from the Dressel collection. The woodcut is taken from the impression upon wax.



36. Bronze ring, the hoop beaded (one half is wanting). On the plain circular bezel is the rudely incised figure of a sheep or lamb, standing upon a ship and with head turned backwards. From the Dressel collection, Rome. Of the fourth or early fifth century.



37. Bronze ring; the hoop, plano-convex, thickening to a slight protuberance at the shoulders, widens to the oval bezel on which is a coarsely executed figure of the *pastor bonus* in intaglio. He is clad in a short tunic, carrying the sheep or lamb on his left shoulder, and stands facing to his left (the engraving is from the impression and reversed) between two other sheep, or perhaps his dogs,¹ which look upwards towards him.



This ring was found in the Tiber and is from the Dressel collection. It is probably of the well-advanced fourth century. I have never previously seen the subject upon a metal ring, although it is one of the most usual upon gems.

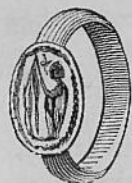
38. A bronze ring with plain circular bezel, on which, rudely incised, is a representation of the raising of Lazarus, surrounded by a beaded bordering line. The hoop, of plano-convex section, widens slightly to the shoulders.



Lazarus, swathed, is standing beneath

¹ Vide a gem in the British Museum referred to by King, "Gems and Rings," vol. ii, p. 30.

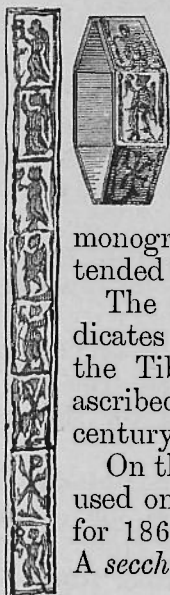
the doorway of the sepulchre, before which the Saviour stands erect, holding a rod or wand raised by his right hand towards the tomb. He is fully draped, the feet and hands not visible; a nimbus is round the head, and a cruciform star is seen in front and above. It may be of the later fourth or early in the fifth century. This ring is in perfect preservation and covered by a fine green patina. It was probably found in the neighbourhood of Rome, and was presented to me by an esteemed friend.



A similar subject treated very much in the same manner, except that the Saviour is without a wand, is to be seen depicted on the vault of a chapel in the Catacombs of S^a. Agnese; also in the Basilica of Petronilla (*Bull.*, vol. iv, pl. i, ii.)

Again on a sarcophagus in the Gregorian Museum the Saviour represented beardless, and holding a wand. On glass also, as figured by Buonarroti, &c. Other variations exist of this probable symbol of the Resurrection, but I am not aware of its occurrence upon gems or rings. The subject is also similarly rendered in the Gregorian Gospels in the Library of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge.

39. A hoop ring of bronze, octagonal externally. On six of these sides, between a beaded border line, are representations, incised, of winged figures, each bearing an object which may be intended for a wreath or coronal; some seem to be habited in longer drapery, others in short tunics, with high domed hats and boots. On the other two sides the sacred monogram $\chi\rho$ is repeated. These figures may be intended to represent angels, or more probably victories.



The ring is in perfect condition; the surface indicates that it has been under water, probably in the Tiber. I purchased it at Rome. It may be ascribed to the later fourth or early in the fifth century.

On the subject of the pagan figure of Victory being used on Christian objects, *vide* De Rossi, *Bulletino* for 1867, p. 77 and 84, on a monument from Tunis. A *secchia di piombo*, a leaden pail or *situla*, on which,

among other devices, are the figures, in relief, of an *Orante* and a *Victory*, near a palm tree. The former probably represents the martyr *Perpetua*, the Victory the symbol of triumph. A figure of Victory was also impressed on the coins of the early Christian emperors, associated with the sign of the cross or sacred monogram. Again it occurs on consular diptychs of Christian times, and this, notwithstanding that the *curia* and the altar and cultus of Victory had been abolished. See also Renier (*Inscrip. de l'Algérie*) who records a marble from Cirta, on which Victory is represented with a crown in the right and a palm in the left hand; three crosses and the words A . DEO . DATVR . BICTORIA prove that the Victory is the emblem of spiritual as of moral triumph, symbolising the *manus Dei*, the Divine influence.

AENVNLIATV2YNDEOCAN SERCIT ? T



40. Bronze ring, a hoop circular within, and seven-sided externally, bearing an inscription, engraved from right to left as though to serve for impression upon wax or other soft material. It reads—

VENANTI VIVAS IN DEO CVN SERCIIV (SERGIOLA ?)
? T

the last letters indistinct. Probably of the later fourth century, and found in or near Rome, where I purchased it.

It is doubtless a marriage ring, or *anulus pronubus*, remarkable also for having only seven instead of the more usual number of eight sides.

The name VINANTII, similar to that of the bridegroom, occurs on a medallion figured by the Comm^{re} de Rossi in the *Bulletino*, vol. vii, p. 43-45, 1st series.

+ TECLA . VIVAT . DEO . CVM . MARITO . SEO . is incised on a gold ring found at Arles in 1619. (See the able article by Prof. Babington in Smith's *Dic. of Ch. Antiq.* at page 1808).

41. Bronze ring; an octagonal hoop, on the outside of which is engraved SPES . IN . DEO . SEMPER . ✱, and what appears to be an eight-pointed star, or double cross. For other octagonal rings see my Nos. 3, 4, in former paper.

42. Bronze ring, a flat hoop, on the outside of which is incised the name RODON . Φ , and the sacred monogram. Of the fourth or early fifth century.

It is so far interesting as shewing that this name was still in use among Christians more than two centuries after the time of the celebrated teacher of doctrine, who bore it in the time of S. Severus.

43. Bronze ring, with plain hoop slightly swelling to the shoulders, beneath a high square bezel laterally pieced with a hole at a right angle with the hoop. On the face is engraven the name reversed as for sealing, the outer letter of the last word being indistinct from wear. I procured this at Naples.

C R E
S C E S
V I V A S

44. Bronze ring, with beaded hoop and oval bezel, on which is engraven the sacred monogram above what would seem to have been intended for a ship, but which is rendered indistinct by the corrosion of the metal; surrounding are the words: SPES IN DEO.



This ring, which was found on the Esquiline, is probably of the later years of the fourth century.

45. Bronze ring with simple hoop, half of which is wanting, and tabular bezel, upon which is deeply incised the reversed word VIVAS between two branches of palm. From the Dressel collection.

46. Copper ring, a simple hoop, slightly convex externally, widening at right angles into a square bezel, upon which is rudely engraved the name SILVANUS . COMVNALIS ., the letter s being reversed. It was, as I believe, found in Algeria, and is of coarse workmanship, perhaps not older than the end of the fourth or early fifth century. The gift of my esteemed friend the Com^{te} J. B. de Rossi.

SILVA
NVSCOMV
NALIS

47. Gold ring of oval form, the hoop swelling to the shoulders and flattened bezel, upon which a palm branch is rudely engraven; weight, 4 dwts. 19 grs.

The general character and workmanship of this ring would lead to the conclusion that it is probably Christian, and of the fourth or early fifth century.

RINGS; THE SUBJECTS UPON WHICH MAY OR MAY NOT
BE OF CHRISTIAN SYMBOLIC SIGNIFICANCE.



48. Bronze ring: the hoop of plano-convex section widening to the shoulders. On the circular bezel is a rudely incised representation of Orpheus surrounded by animals which he charms by his music. It is probably of the latter half of the fourth century. From the Dressel collection.

Orpheus is seated, fully draped, and holding a lyre in the left which he plays with his right hand; an ill-defined covering, a Phrygian cap, or may be a wreath, is on the head, and a six pointed star is seen in the field above his left shoulder; on his right are a monkey, a lion, and a bull or goat (?), on his left a reptile or fish, and a hare or rabbit. The arrangement of this subject differs but little from what is found on pagan gems, but I do not recollect the star, which may have Christian significance, or may, on the other hand, be merely emblematic of the sun, or the lyre of Orpheus, which, after his death, became a constellation.

Representations occur of the good shepherd standing among his sheep and playing upon the "*siringa*" (De Rossi, *Rom. Sott.* t. ii, p. 353, also in Cat: of the Arvali), having the pipes (*Bull.*, vi, pp. 74 and 86) approaching to the characteristics of Orpheus, but not so distinctly as on our ring.

It is, however, the opinion of some Roman archæologists, who are among the highest authorities on early Christian antiquities, that there is great probability of this being an emblematic representation of a pagan subject having Christian reference.

De Rossi (*Rom. Sott.*, 3) states his belief that Christians did not always scrupulously observe the precepts of Clemens in regard to the subjects depicted on their rings and domestic objects. In support of which opinion is the evidence of a ring found by M. Armellini in the Catac: of Callistus, on a finger bone in one of the loculi; it was set with a red jasper, on which a Cupid, holding a torch in the right and a butterfly (emblem of Psyche) in the left hand, was engraved in intaglio.

49. Bronze ring with projecting angular shoulders and

small oval bezel, on which a dolphin is very rudely incised. Probably, but not certainly, Christian.

50. Bronze ring, the hoop of plano-convex section flattened at the shoulders, which are engraved with a palm branch, and to the oblong square bezel on which a monogram is rudely cut, with surrounding dotted line. Probably Christian, but of the fifth or sixth century. This is one of a class of rings mostly engraved with monograms and of rude workmanship, many of which are probably Christian.

Of such is the following, as are also those described in my former paper, Nos. 12, 16, and 21: consult De Rossi, *Bull.*, 1863, pp. 33, 34, for Christian Monograms of the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries.

51. Bronze ring, the hoop widening to an oval bezel, on which is rudely incised what may be a monogram formed as a sort of double anchor, with a surrounding plain line, and of somewhat similar character to that described in my former paper (*Archæological Journal*, vol. xxvi, p. 144, Nos. 13, 21), but less distinctly an anchor, and with greater probability monogrammatic.

There is, perhaps, equal uncertainty in respect to the rings Nos. 5, 7, 9, and 23 of my former list.

I do not attempt to include in these notices rings or ring stones of so late a period as that of the Merovingian dynasty.

52. Gold ring, hollow, the hoop of plano-convex section widening and swelling to the shoulders, which are produced on either side beyond the ends of an oval bezel, in which is set an intaglio on sard, representing a sheep standing before two ears of corn.

The workmanship is good, probably of the second or early third century, and the ring quite intact.

It is possible that this subject may have a Christian symbolic significance, but at the same time there is equal probability that it is merely of pastoral character and pagan. A sheep or ram is the hereditary device of the *Gens Rustia* (King, i, p. 345), but on the denarius of that gens struck anterior to 70 B.C. it is in a defiant attitude as though to repel attack. Corn is not usual food for sheep, and must have some special significance.

In the museum at Naples I recently observed what I had not previously noticed in my former paper, viz., a


Christian ring formed entirely of calcedony, and having the chrisma engraved upon the bezel.

Of key rings, similar in character to mine (No. 32, figured at page 290 of vol. xxviii of our *Journal*), and thought from the cruciform ward openings to be Christian, three are preserved in the Kircherian Museum at Rome.

Of key-like rings, of the same type as that described by me in vol. xxix, at page 305, a very fine one, set with small cameos and bearing an inscription in *opus interrasile*, is in the possession of Signor Alessandro Castellani at Rome, who suggests that their purpose may have been the protection of the long finger nail, like the contrivance with that intent used by the Chinese. The ring, he possesses, is a small one, which might have fitted the last joint, but both that belonging to Mr. Franks, that in the British Museum, and one in the Museum at Basle are too large in circumference to have fitted the last joint of any finger save that of a giant; they may, however, have decorated a stout thumb.

Of the Christian rings in the Vatican collection, some twenty-six in all, not counting those of the later monogrammatic period and mediæval, some one or more appeared to me to have been acquired since my last visit, or may have been overlooked by me at that time. Of these is a gilt bronze tubular ring, fluted externally and inscribed with a letter in each channel VTEREFEX (Utere Felix).

The inscription on a small gold ring, a flat octagon widening to the bezel, reads
 BICT
 ORIA
 EVITA
 (Victory [the fruit] of life.)

In the same collection the only early Christian ring stone to be seen is an oval red jasper worked in intaglio. (I.  Θ v c).

ENGRAVED GEMS.

1. Intaglio on nicolo of oval form. The *Pastor Bonus*¹ between the two letters R. v., doubtless the initials of the owner of the signet, and of contemporary execution. The woodcut is from the impression, but gives but a poor idea of the quality of the workmanship, which is of a



¹ On this subject consult Martigny, "Etude Arch. sur l'Agneau, &c.," Macon, 1860. De Rossi, "Roma. Sott., &c.,"

and Smith's "Dict. of Christian Antiq.," sub voc. "Gems."

good period of art, probably of the second century, if not earlier. I purchased this intaglio in Rome.

He is clad in a short tunic having the small domed shepherd's cap upon the head. As seen in the intaglio he is advancing towards his left, supporting the lamb upon his shoulder with his left hand, and carrying a situla in his right.

The water vessel, emblematic of baptism, is occasionally to be seen in the hand of the "good shepherd," but not frequently as a situla. In the church of S. Prassede, at Rome, is a sarcophagus, on which this figure occurs at the angles, but it is a vase, not a situla which he carries.

It is, however, seen on wall paintings. Occasionally also with the attributes of Orpheus.

2. Intaglio on green jasper, streaked with red (blood stone), of oval form. The good shepherd standing among his sheep and holding the lost and found one upon his shoulder. He is clad in the usual short tunic and hat; he



stands upon one leg, the other being crossed over it; one sheep is reclining behind him, two others stand in front beneath the shade of a tree, upon which a bird, probably intended for a dove, is perched. It is of a good period of art, perhaps as early as the second century, and was recently found at Rome, where I purchased it.

In the British Museum is a red jasper of nearly similar size and form, perhaps the work of the same artist, on which a like subject is engraved, but with only two sheep upon the ground.

On a broken fragment, in the possession of Dr. Dressel, is a nearly similar representation. The good shepherd stands with sheep about him and on either side a tree, on each of which a dove is perched. It is in intaglio on carnelion. Refer also to No. 6 in my descriptive list (*Archæological Journal*, vol. xxvi, p. 141), which, however, differs considerably, though probably of cognate significance.

Again it is depicted over an arcosolium in the Cat. of S^a Agnese.

Also on a cippus figured by De Rossi (*Bull.*, 3rd ser., vol. iv, pl. vii.)

In the British Museum are two gems, on which the

good shepherd among his flock is represented, together with the Jonah and other emblematic subjects.

3. Intaglio on a golden yellow sard of oval form, through which a vein of darker colour passes longitudinally. On the slightly convex surface two figures are represented standing in water, which covers their feet to and above the ankles; this water is represented by waved

lines intended to convey the idea of a running stream, doubtless the Jordan. The taller of the two figures, both of which are habited in short tunics, seems to guide or sustain the other by slightly holding the side of his tunic. The shorter has the arms extended in the position of an *Orante*, emblematic of eternal reception, his left hand rising above the other's shoulder. No head-covering is worn by either, but a dove is perched upon the head of the shorter personage, who doubtless is intended to represent the Christ, the taller St. John the precursor. The workmanship is fairly good and may be anterior to the third century. I acquired this interesting gem from the Dressel collection at Rome.

At Ravenna, in S. Giovanni in Fonte, and S^a Maria in Cosmedin; at Rome in SS. Cosmo and Damiano; in the cemetery of Pontianus, &c. we have representations of this subject in Mosaic and in painting, as also upon Christian glasses, &c., but I am not aware of its occurrence hitherto upon rings or engraved stones.

4. Intaglio on red jasper, of flat surface. A fish, before the head of which is a bunch of grapes, seemingly hanging from a nail. The workmanship of this gem is excellent, the head of the fish highly polished in the intaglio. It may probably be of the earlier years of the second century. From the Greville Chester collection, and found in Italy.

In the Castellani collection is a ring on which a hare is represented eating a bunch of grapes. It is believed to be Christian.

5. Intaglio on red jasper, oval, of slightly convex face, half an inch long. A fish between the Greek letters Α Α as they occur on the impression.

This is also of fairly good work, and perhaps of not



much later date than the preceding. Probably also found in Italy, and from the Greville Chester collection.

6. Intaglio on sard, of slightly convex surface. The seven-branched candlestick, curiously modified in respect to the three central branches, which are formed as Roman Standards. These, as well as the four outer limbs are surmounted by figures of birds, not the Roman eagle with outstretched wings, but which may be intended for doves; on the medallions, in lieu of the Imperial portrait, and

pagan devices, a cross is distinctly to be seen. The outer limbs are represented as imbricated or foliated branches; the base would seem to be fluted. There is no Hebrew inscription on the back, as on that described and figured by Mr. King (*Gems and Rings*, 2nd ed., vol. ii, pp. 37-83), the candlestick on which, by the way, is only five-branched.

From the Greville Chester collection. Found in Italy.

7. Intaglio on carnelian, of oval form and convex surface. The name $\text{I A } \Omega$ between two stars of six points: beneath is a fish, above it is a bird, probably a dove. The workmanship is fairly good, and may be of the earlier half of the fourth century. From the Dressel collection.



collection.

There is a certain Gnostic *rapprochement* in this signet, although hardly so much as in the curious gem belonging to Col. Stronge, which is figured at p. 37, and described in the foot note at the bottom of page 27 in Mr. King's second volume of the second edition of *Antique Gems and Rings*, and in Smith's Dictionary, *sub voce*, "Gems." Does not " $\text{I A } \Omega$ " here more distinctly apply to Jehovah as the Father; the fish, the Christ; the dove as the Spirit—in fact an emblematic representation of the Trinity; or is it of cabalistic character, invoking the names of I A O of the Spirit and of the Fish?

8. Intaglio on red jasper, oval: long $5\frac{1}{2}$ lines. An anchor between an eight pointed star and a crescent. From the Greville Chester collection.

9. Intaglio on paste, imitative of red jasper, of oval

form : long, $4\frac{1}{2}$ lines. An anchor. Greville Chester collection. Found in Egypt.

10. Intaglio on nicolo, oval : $9\frac{1}{2}$ lines long. An anchor, without cross bar, reversed, the arms and flukes of which thus form a cross ; from each arm a fish is suspended. Of coarse but deep cutting. Found in Egypt, where it was probably incised. From the Greville Chester collection.



11. Intaglio on garnet, irregularly circular, with flat face ; $\frac{1}{2}$ inch in diameter. Within a surrounding wreath is a figure with outstretched arms, in the attitude of an *orante*, between two animals ; doubtless it represents Daniel in the den of lions and in the same typical manner as it is to be seen on Christian glasses and other monuments. On either side, above his arms, is a cross. The execution, by the wheel, is extremely rude, but nevertheless effective. I am not aware of a similar subject being recorded as upon a gem. It was found in Egypt, and is doubtless a work of that country, probably of the fourth or fifth century. From the Greville Chester collection.

12. Intaglio on pyrites, a material very rarely made use of for gem engraving ; it is oval, barely half an inch in its longer diameter. On the flat surface the winged figure of an angel or probably Victory is very coarsely incised, closely draped to the feet ; a sort of long shafted double cross is held in the right hand, seemingly a sort of cruciform *Signa* or standard with double arms.

There can be no doubt of the Christian significance of this standard, and I have already referred to the representation of Victory upon Christian objects in my description of the bronze ring, No. 39 (*vide ante*). The rudeness of the engraving, doubtless difficult upon so intractable a material, would denote a late period, probably not earlier than the fifth or even the sixth century. It was found in Egypt, and is from the Greville Chester collection.

13. Intaglio on nicolo, circular, diam. $\frac{1}{3}$ of an inch. A cross "potent," round which are three letters of the Pehlevi language. Found in Egypt. From the Greville Chester collection.

¹ De Rossi (*Bull.* vol. iii, p. 76, plate v), notices a gold ring belonging to Ct : Stroganoff, on which the fish between JY and OX is incised.

I am indebted to Mr. E. Thomas, the great authority on Pehleri gems, for the translation of this legend, which reads *Avasta*, signifying "praise," a word usually associated with *Afastân-ul-Yazdân*, equivalent to "*Laus deo*." There is reasonable supposition, rather than distinct evidence, that this gem may have belonged to some Persian Christian, as also that of like character and workmanship on nicolo referred to in my first paper when describing No. 25, and bearing a similar cross with the figure of a lion; but we must not forget the fact that the cross may also be intended to represent the solar emblem of the Persians themselves, to which the laudatory exclamation *Avasta* would equally apply.

I am indebted to my friend, Mr. A. W. Franks, F.R.S., for permission to describe an interesting early Christian gem in its antique gold mounting as a pendant, probably for the use of a child or young person. It is an intaglio on carnelian of oval form and convex surface, seven-twelfths of an inch in its longest diameter. On it is represented, in unusually deep intaglio, a bird seated upon a branch, without leaves, but from which a fruit, in form resembling a pomegranate, is projecting. The gold mounting covers the back of the gem, and forms an overlapping edging round the sides; a small hole on the upper part indicates the former existence of a loop or ring for suspension. In punctured relief upon this gold backing is the name or word *VERIAE*, above which is a chrisma of unusual form, approaching nearer to that upon the lost Barberini ring referred to in vol. xxviii, p. 271. In that the cross bar surmounts the loop of the P, beneath which is the X saltirewise. On Mr. Franks' the cross bar is placed beneath the loop of the P and above the saltire. This very pretty and suggestive ornament is probably of the well-advanced fourth century of our era, but the intaglio may be earlier.

I regret that an opportunity of communicating these additional memoranda on Christian finger rings and seal stones did not occur before the admirable, but to me too flattering, articles on these subjects, by Prof. Churchill Babington, were published in the volumes of Dr. Smith's *Dictionary of Christian Antiquities*, a work of the greatest value to all students of cognate subjects.