

ON FINGER-RINGS OF THE EARLY CHRISTIAN PERIOD.

By C. DRURY FORTNUM, F.S.A.

IN vol. xxvi. of the *Archaeological Journal*, issued by this Society in 1869, at page 137, will be found a somewhat hasty and inadequate notice of twenty-six finger rings of various materials.

All these are ornamented by engraving in intaglio or otherwise, with emblems, monograms, or inscriptions, by which we may conclude that they were, for the most part, fashioned for and used by Christians of the early period of the Church's history.

I now have the pleasure of exhibiting other examples of considerable interest, some of which it has since been my good fortune to obtain; and, in order to give some additional interest to the subject, I have laid upon the table the whole of my collection of early Christian rings, for inspection by the members of our Society.¹

Before describing these additions to my cabinet, I would first propose entering into some consideration of the emblems of more frequent occurrence upon such rings, referring to the works of authors in which examples are recorded, and to collections in which specimens are preserved.

I would then briefly notice the early Christian rings preserved in those museums and private collections which I have had the opportunity of examining.

And, lastly, I would describe those which I now have the honour of presenting to the notice of the Institute.

In my former paper I have referred to the well-known passage in the *Pedagogus Christianus* of Clement of Alexandria. The emblematic representations recommended by him to the members of the Christian Church, for use as signets engraved upon their rings, are—The Dove; the Fish; the Ship running before the wind; the Lyre (a device

¹ This memoir was read at the monthly meeting of the Institute. February 2nd, the collection of rings being then exhibited.

used by Polycrates); the Ship's Anchor (which Silenus wore); a Man Fishing, by which the wearer will be reminded of the apostle and of the children drawn out of the water.

Accordingly we find in the works of Bosio, Aringhi, Boldetti, and later writers, descriptions and some figures of rings and ring stones, discovered in the catacombs and elsewhere, upon which these various emblems are represented. We also find upon rings, other emblems and devices figurative of the Christian faith, and frequently of very beautiful symbolism; together with sentences and words of acclamation. These are engraven upon the material of which the rings are formed, or upon stones with which they are set.

That gold rings were in use by Christians at the time of the Apostles may be inferred from the passage in the Epistle General of St. James, ch. ii. v. 2: "For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel," &c., and Prudentius is referred to (*Peristeph.*, hymn i. v. 85) as an authority for their use, of gold, of silver, and adorned with precious stones. It is against the wearing too many of such adornments that Clement of Alexandria, St. Cyprian, and St. Jerome protest, desiring the use to be limited to one signet, the *annulus*, or *annulus sigillarius* of the Romans.

Two rings are preserved, which are said to have been worn by the Blessed Virgin. One of these was treasured in the Church of Sta. Anna at Rome, and is alluded to by Baronius. The other and more notable is at Perugia, and is formed of amethyst. It is spoken of by V. Du Saussay, in the *Panoplia Episcopalis*, 194; and there is a small volume by Jo. Baptista Laurus (*De annulo pronubo Deiparæ Virginis, Roma*, 1622), entirely devoted to the consideration of this relic, which I regret never having seen.

Boldetti refers to the *ansulæ* or simple rings of bone and ivory which have frequently been found attached to the closing bricks of the *loculi*; the smallness of some, and the large size of others of which, as also the fact of several occurring attached to the same niche, would preclude the idea of their being finger rings. Boldetti and Buonarotti were of opinion that they were for funereal use only. That term was, however, applied to simple hoops worn as finger rings, for it is recorded that St. Saturnus at his martyrdom

gave such an one to Pudens, dipping it in his blood—
"Ansulam de digito petiit, et vulneri suo mersam reddidit ei, hæreditatem pignoris relinquens illi, et memoriam sanguinis."
 Simple rings of iron and bronze have been found in the Catacombs.

1. One of the earliest, if not the most ancient emblem in use was the Anchor, which in the form of its upper portion at once represents a cross, and was a favourite device with the early Christians. It was, moreover, the emblem of hope in Christ, "the anchor of the soul, sure and stedfast." It sometimes occurs alone and upright, the transverse bar thus directly representing the cross or patibulum on which our Saviour was suspended; sometimes between the Greek letters **X** and **P**, as also between the **A** and **Ω**. On a gem mentioned by Bottari, it is seen between the letters **X** and **B**, which, as he suggests, may stand for **XPICTOC · BIOC**—




Christ our life. In the Vatican Museum, on No. 2 of the list of that collection which I shall presently give, it occurs with the ship. On the bronze rings in my own cabinet, described under Nos. 13 and 21 of my former paper, it is represented crossed by a second anchor with a single lower arm or fluke.²



In the Museum at Naples is a duplex ring of gold, on which this emblem is seen with the palm branch. On No. 1 of my list of the Castellani Collection, a gold ring, is the anchor of simple form, not having the loop or ring at the lower end, as so frequently depicted on the slabs of the Catacombs, nor the recurved arms; neither are the ends of the cross-bar wedge-shaped.

A ring figured by Boldetti, and from him by Macario (p. 157), Martigny, and others, has a bezel formed of two conjoined circles, upon one of which is a ship and on the other an anchor. This last, if rightly figured from the original, would cause some doubt as to the genuineness of the ring, the anchor being without cross-bar, the lower arms having double-winged or barbed flukes, like those in modern use. A similar careless misrepresentation occurs however in the engravings of anchors accompanying inscriptions.


² By the word fluke I do not wish to denote that flattened and winged or barbed extremity of the curved lower arm, which is characteristic of the modern

anchor, and, I believe, never to be seen on antique representations, but the lower and hook-formed arm itself.

2. The Cross. Volumes have been written upon this glorious emblem of our faith, but I do not propose going further into the subject than to mark those varieties recorded upon rings or ring stones. That the anchor was a covert representation of the cross there can be but little doubt;³ and it seems equally probable that its use preceded that of the sacred monogram composed of the letters **X** and **P**, *chi* and *rho*. That the "wedge-limbed" cross was derived from the form, and was to a certain extent representative of the Greek letter, as suggested by the Rev. J. G. Joyce, F.S.A., B.D., in his able paper on the Sarcophagus of Valerius Amandinus, in vol. xxvii. of the *Archæological Journal*, would seem to be highly probable; but that it preceded the simple form represented by the upper portion of the anchor, may be open to question. A peculiar and early form of the cross occurs, which I have never observed upon rings, it is  what in heraldry is termed a "cross cramponnée," the limbs of equal length having their extremities bent at a right angle to the right.

A plain upright cross , having arms of equal length, and not wedge-shaped, occurs on various objects, and sometimes on rings. The same form turned one-fourth round becomes a "saltire," and would represent the letter **X** of the sacred monogram. This again crossed perpendicularly by an upright stem is another variety , which is referred to by Boldetti and Longpérier, and thought to be a form of sacred monogram derived from the letters **I** and **X**, and without the **P**. Of this variety we have an instance on the gold triple ring described in my former paper (No. 1). Dr. Smith is of opinion that these several forms were in use anterior to A.D. 312.



A further complication of this figure consists of two crosses crossing each other, and forming a star of eight points . An example of this occurs on a ring in the Castellani Collection (No. 11 of my list). It also is seen apparently as a star upon a ring now in the Vatican (No. 15 of my list), and figured by Aringhi, Boldetti, Curtius, and others, in combination with a dove and the sacred mono-

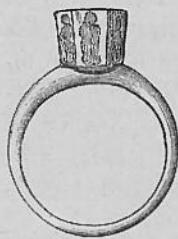
³ See De Rossi's references to gems, &c., in the *Spicilegium of Pitra*, noticed by the Rev. Mr. Joyce.

gram. Aringhi figures a foot-shaped stamp ring having the name JVSTVS and the star ✱ or double cross.

These forms lead us to, and are almost superseded by, the sacred monogram.

Nevertheless the cross occurs alone at a later date, in the form generally known as the Greek cross, as also with the lower limb elongated. Two varieties are frequent—one with wedge-formed limbs of equal length ✞ as seen on either side of a monogram on the gold ring described and figured (No. 24) in my former paper, and which may be of earlier date than there stated. Also upon a gilt bronze ring in the Vatican (No. 17 of my list). It is the "cross patée" of heraldry. The other variety, having the lower limb longer than the others, we have illustrated on the gold Byzantine ring of the fifth century, bearing two portrait-heads, which I shall presently describe under No. 33.

Again we have another variety, the arms of which have a **T** tau-formed termination—the "cross potent" of the heralds. It is seen on a fine gold duplex ring in the Castellani Coll. (No. 2 of my list), above a monogram and beneath the name BLITHIA. Again on No. 3 of the same collection, on either side of a seated figure. In the Vatican, on Nos. 7 to



10, and on No. 14 with the word VIVAS. No. 26 of those in my own collection, figured in my former paper, is another instance, where it surmounts what may be a bunch of grapes, but which the Rev. Padre Garucci thinks may represent a glass cup, decorated with those bosses of blue or green colour enclosing subjects in gold, so well known to students of Christian antiquities, and which have been so ably illustrated by that learned antiquary. While upon this matter, I would call attention to the subject engraved on the bezel of the iron ring described by me in that paper under No. 22. On it are represented two figures, surmounted by the sacred monogram, probably intended for Sts. Peter and Paul, and exactly corresponding with

the representations upon some of the gilded glass bottoms

of drinking-cups found in the Catacombs, and so well known.

The significance of the cross is palpable, and its power as a charm over evil well known. Prudentius says—

“Crux pellit omne crimen,
Fugierent crucem tenebra,
Sali decet signo,
Meus fluctuari nescit.”—*Hymn vi.*

3. The sacred monogram composed of the letters **X** and **P**, the *chi* and *rho* of the Greek alphabet. This emblem is found more frequently than any other on Christian rings and various objects, but it cannot be considered as one of the earlier symbols. It was adopted by Constantine on the *labarum*, although probably known and in use anterior to his placing it on the imperial standard. The earliest instance of its occurrence is said to be about A.D. 317, although it has also been stated that its first use was in A.D. 323. We find it alone, and accompanied by almost all the other emblems, with inscriptions, with monograms, and between the **A** and **Ω**.

Letronnius (quoted by Macario) thinks that its earliest form was as the upright Greek cross, the upper limb of which **Ϛ** is looped to form the letter **P**.

Under the ordinary form **Ϟ** it was publicly used in 377. Macario, in his *Hagioglypta* (Paris, 1856), at pages 162-3, gives a great variety in the form of this monogram as occurring on monuments. He, however, sadly misrepresents an engraving from a ring given by Aringhi (*Roma Subterranea*, p. 385), and correctly copied by Curtius (Francesco de Corte) at p. 120 of his *Syntagma*. This ring, which belonged to Cardinal Francesco Barberini, was of crystal, with twisted or corded stem; upon the *scudo* or face was

engraved an unusual type of the monogram **Ϟ** formed by an elongated **T** passing through the centre of the **X**, and having the reversed lobe of the **Ϛ** immediately beneath its top bar; thus combining the *tau* cross with that derived from the letter **X**. The letters **Ω** and **A** are, one on each side of the upper part; a snake coils round the base, on either side of which is a cock; the word **SALVS** is engraved beneath the bezel. It will be observed that the **A Ω**, as well as the **P**,

are reversed, the ring having served as a seal. In Macario's engraving from Aringhi he reverses the letters as though copying from an impression of the signet, omitting the cross bar of the **T** above the loop of the **P**, and merely leaving us the ordinary monogram. Again, in place of the serpent at the base, as shown by Aringhi, he figures a sort of flower of four petals, and he represents the hoop as though fashioned like a series of cylindrical billets placed side by side, in lieu of being corded.

This interesting ring no longer exists in the Barberini cabinets. In answer to inquiries kindly made by a friend at my request, the librarian most courteously made recent search among all the private collections in the palace, as well as the contents of the library cabinets. It is supposed to have been swept away among the many thousand other objects of which Italy was pillaged during the devastating wars of the first years of this century.

The ordinary form of the monogram is seen alone or with other emblems on rings Nos. 11, 15, 16, 18 to 25 and 26 of my list of the Vatican collection, on one now missing from the Waterton collection with the ship, on No. 7 of the Castellani Collection, also with the ship. On No. 5 of that collection the **P** and **X** occur separately as on No. 14 of my own with the ship. Boldetti figures one on which it is placed between two palms.



In my own collection it is graven on No. 15 with a female and doves; on Nos. 18, 19 alone; on No. 20 with **COSME VIVAS**; and on the iron ring No. 22 with two figures. On No. 30, presently to be described, it is of the form of the upright slightly wedge-limbed cross; and on a fine gold ring in the Castellani Collection (No. 5)

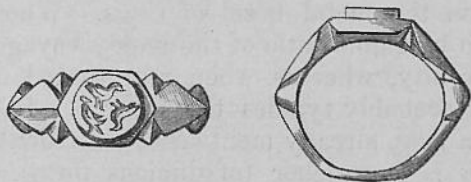


it is similarly formed of cloisons to contain precious stones or enamel. The same shape is seen on a stamp in the Vatican. The variety having a third and horizontal cross bar is to be seen on a rudely worked gold ring in the British Museum engraved on nicolo. This ring has

been, not too well, figured by Edwards in his "History and Poetry of Finger Rings," at p. 40.

4. The letters **A** and **Ω**, the alpha and omega under which our Lord is represented in the Apocalypse, "I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last," "the beginning and the ending." These occur with other symbols as in the nielloed ring which I shall describe under No. 30, and again upon Nos. 16 and 26 in the list of those in the Vatican. Boldetti at p. 504 figures a ring on which these letters occur alone. The **Ω** is, as far as my observation goes, always written thus, and not as the capital letter now in use. I may here add, as a correction to my former paper, that a more careful cleaning of the bronze ring there described under No. 10 has revealed the existence of the **A Ω**, one on each side of the sacred monogram.

5. The Dove, which typifies the Holy Ghost, the Christian soul, or when flying with the palm or olive branch it represents the *SPIRITVS . IN . PACE*, having won the prize in the race or battle of life. It is frequently depicted with other emblems. On a ring figured by Aringhi, and now in the Vatican (No. 15 of my list), it occurs with the **☩** and a star. Boldetti mentions it on a flat gold ring; and a gold one is recorded by De Rossi, probably the fine ring now in the British Museum, set with an emerald on one side engraved with the fish, while the lower bezel has a tree engraved on the metal, surmounted by a dove, the letters of the name *AEMILIA* being on either side.⁴ A bronze ring in the Waterton Collection (No. 3) is engraved with a dove. In my own



collection it is seen on No. 11 with the fish; on No. 15 with a female figure, probably typifying the church.

⁴ In my former paper at p. 142, the first letter of this name is wrongly printed as **F** and the lower **A** omitted. On the ring they are reversed, as for a signet, thus:—

Ω A
I M
I U
A

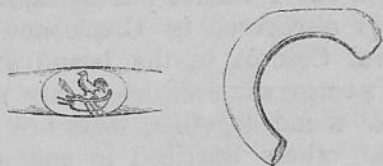
This ring is not too correctly represented at the top of Plate XVI. in Perret's "Catacombes de Rome," in which it is made to appear deeper in proportion to its width than is actually the case.

6. The fish, or **ΙΧΘΥΣ**, a symbol of our Lord, used because the letters of the word form an acrostic of His sacred name and title Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Saviour. This symbol is one of the earliest, and occurs more frequently on gems, than engraved on the metal of rings. It is moreover the symbol more frequently forged in various ways than perhaps any other, that of the **✠** being however almost as often added to antique plain metal rings, and other objects, by the clever fabricators of false antiquities. The fish would sometimes appear to typify the Christian. It occurs on the fine gold ring in the British Museum, engraved upon the emerald with which it is set; on another gem, the fish, on the back of which is the dove with palm or olive branch, with the **✠** and the name **RVFI**. The ring of St. Arnulphus, which is considered to be earlier than the fourth century, and is preserved in the Cathedral of Metz, has an agate of milk-white colour on which a fish is engraved. In my own collection it is seen with two doves on the coarse bronze ring No. 11, and two fish, between which is an ear of corn, on No. 17. On No. 9 of the Castellani collection one large fish is seen between three smaller ones. Again on a simple gold ring in the museum at Naples. De Rossi describes about thirty genuine gems on which the fish and variations of the word **ΙΧΘΥΣ** occur. Some others have since been found.



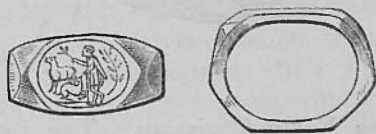
7. The Ship. This emblem is met with engraved on stones and on the metal bezel of rings. When alone it is considered to be emblematic of the happy voyage to the safe haven of eternity, whereas, when represented on the back of the fish it probably typifies the Church. In Boldetti we find figured a ring, already mentioned, with double bezel, on one of which is an anchor (of dubious form), and on the other a ship. In the Waterton Collection was a massive bronze signet ring, with the ship in full sail, having the sacred monogram upon the sail, while round it are the names, **STEPÆNVΣ . HELENÆ**. In the Castellani Collection are two fine bronze rings in perfect preservation, on which this emblem is seen (Nos. 6 and 7), and it is rudely represented on No. 14 in my own cabinet. Alexander (Ref. Symb. Rom., 1628) describes a ring-stone, and another is given by Ficoroni (Gemme Antiq.) on which the ship is

borne upon a fish. The ring of Cardinal Borgia was set with an antique intaglio, the subject of which was a ship, having six rowers on one side, which, presuming the corresponding six on the other, would represent the twelve apostles ; there is also a pilot or helmsman, and the name **IHC OYC** inscribed on the reverse, allusive to Our Lord. Another variety of the



ship, on which is a cock, with palm, is seen on a jasper ring, No. 2 in my former list.

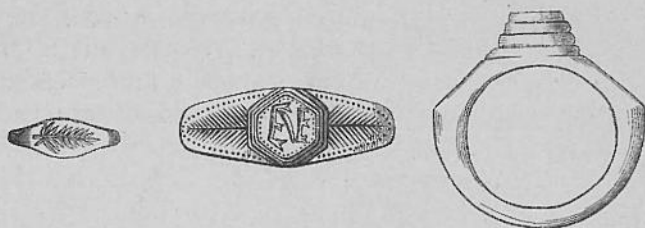
8. The Good Shepherd, the *Pastor bonus*, generally represented carrying the lamb in his arms or upon his shoulders, is a subject engraved upon ring-stones, but I have never seen it upon the metal bezel of the ring itself. Forgeries of this figure are also frequent. In the British Museum is an early Christian gem with this subject on red jasper ; another on carnelian, with a wreath and **☩**, and the inscription, *Deus dedit vivas in Deo* ; and also on an onyx of three strata between the fish and a palm. I may again refer to my own collection, No. 6 of which is a bronze ring set



with an intaglio on red jasper, representing the Shepherd holding a branch of olive to two sheep, a variety differing from the typical representation. The lamb alone occurs on a fine bronze ring in the Waterton Collection. Tertullian tells us that in his day it was usual to represent the *Pastor bonus* upon the chalice used for the commemoration of the Sacrament. "Procedant ipsæ pictura calicum vestrorum ubi est ovis perdita a Domino requisita et ejus humeris revecta."

9. The Palm Branch. This emblem occurring alone is one of various signification, as there is no doubt that it was in constant use as a pagan symbol of material victory, and adopted by the Christians as emblematic of the spiritual victory over

sin and death. For this reason, in the absence of other evidence to prove that the object on which it occurs is really Christian, I should hesitate accepting it alone as a warrant for such attribution. Mr. Waterton is of opinion that those really Christian may be distinguished by the rude manner of the representation, more truly, as he justly observes, figuring the natural object, but I cannot pin my faith on that alone. Among the rings discovered in Greek and Greco-Roman tombs by General Cesnola in the Island of Cyprus, were several children's rings, some of which are now in my possession; of those found together, some are rudely figured with a palm leaf, others inscribed in *opus punctatum* with the word ΕΠΑΓΑΘΟΙΣ or ΕΠΑΓΑΘΩ—Ἐρ' agathois, or agathō "to the good," child or children being understood, and from which we may infer that they were rewards or prizes given for success in learning, or in the games.⁵ Moreover, no other Christian emblems have occurred on objects found with these rings. I should be disposed, therefore, to doubt whether the examples numbered 7, 8, and 9, and perhaps even 12, and described in my former paper, can really



be considered as Early Christian. The same doubt may attach to a silver ring with palm in the British Museum; to a duplex ring of gold with two palms, and to several small single rings of gold in the Naples Museum; as also to a gold one in the Waterton Collection.

When used as a Christian symbol the palm branch is also the emblem of martyrdom; it signifies victory over death, as seen by St. John in the Apocalypse.

⁵ Mr. Oldfield suggests that these words may rather imply that the rings were given as rewards for the good deed or action, deeds or actions; as it would hardly be reasonable that *one* ring should be given between good children. It was also suggested that they may have been

votive rings to the good deity or deities of the temple or spot where they were found. It is even more probable that the words signified, or were intended to convey, a wish or invocation of good to the recipient of the gift.

10. We find on some Christian rings and stamps words and sentences, or acclamations, of a parallel character though in a different spirit from those so frequently occurring upon Pagan Roman objects. Thus we have VIVAS . BIBE. &c., and again SPES . IN . DEO—VIVAS . IN . DEO alone, or accompanied by a proper name. On a gem in the British Museum we find DEVS . DEDIT . VIVAS . IN . DEO. De Rossi gives a nearly similar reading to the monogram on my ring, No. 16,



and on Nos. 3 and 4 are varieties of the second admonition. On No. 20 COSME . VIVAS . surrounds the sacred monogram. On the gold ring I shall presently describe it occurs with the name and a star. Upon shoe-sole shaped rings we have IN DEO. Again, upon larger stamps of bronze in the Vatican Museum, and upon one in my own collection to be described. A larger shoe-sole stamp in the Vatican bears SPES . IN . DEO. The word VIVAS alone, and accompanied by the palm and cross, and by the words IN . DEO, is also seen upon rings in the Vatican Collection (Nos. 6, 13, 14).

Some sixteen years or more since, a fine gold ring was discovered in the river Saone, which passed into the hands of Cardinal de Bonald. It is believed to be of the third or fourth century, and round the *chaton* is engraved the acclamation, VIVAS . IN . DEO . ASBOLI. It is figured by Le Blant (*Insc. Chrét. de la Gaule*, t. i. p. 64, pl. 6).

Other devices more rarely occur, as that of Abraham's Sacrifice, which I shall presently describe; the female figure typifying the Church on No. 15 of my former list; the ear of corn on No. 17; the lion on No. 25.



No. 8 of the Castellani series is a bronze ring with twisted shank of exactly similar character, and apparently of similar *provenance*, to those on which the ship is incised. This represents a hare or rabbit feeding on a bunch of grapes, and is believed by that gentleman to be a Christian emblem.

When last in Rome I purchased a solid gold antique ring engraved with the subject of a hare pursued by a dog.

I hesitated adopting the opinion of some, that a Christian emblem of persecution was here represented, agreeing rather with the suggestion of the Rev. Padre Garucci, that dogs chased hares before the days of Christianity. The ring is of the fourth or fifth century. Perret, in his folio work, "Catacombes de Rome," volume iv. on plate xvi. at No. 43, figures a gem on which this subject is represented, and which, it appears to me, has little more claim to rank as an early Christian emblem than that upon the gold ring in my possession, and which I have exhibited with the rest. I have already alluded to a bronze ring in the Waterton Collection, on which a sheep or lamb alone is engraven. In that gentleman's description of the portion of his rich *Dactyliotheca* contributed to the Special Loan Exhibition of 1862, at page 627 of the revised edition of the catalogue, he gives an explanatory account of the subject on a gold ring with silver bezel, engraved with an elaborate symbolical representation. I do not recollect having examined this ring, which has unfortunately been lost sight of during the vicissitudes to which that fine collection was exposed, previous to its being secured for the nation. A coarse double-bezeled ring, No. 6 in that collection, has the cross upon one, and the figure of an *orante* on the other.⁶

EARLY CHRISTIAN RINGS IN THE VATICAN MUSEUM OF CHRISTIAN ANTIQUITIES.

As might be expected, the Vatican contains one of the richest collections of early Christian rings, many of which were found in the Catacombs.

I will briefly describe all the more important from notes taken directly from the rings themselves, the greater number of which I had an opportunity of minutely examining.


The majority are of bronze, of which the following,—


1. A key-ring, with circular projection, pierced with a cross, of precisely similar type to that presently to be described and figured (No. 32) from my own collection. It is believed to have been found in the Catacombs.

⁶ While writing on a subject connected with early Christian antiquity, I am made too painfully aware that one kindly face is missing from amongst us, which used to beam over our table and our assembly, spiriting our driest subject with a genial

joke, enlightening us with a fund of learning, illustrating our discussions by apt reference, and now by the want of these we are sadly reminded how much we have lost in our lamented friend the very Rev. the Canon Rock.

2. One with circular bezel, on which is engraved the ship and the anchor.


3. Having a monogram on the bezel, , composed of the letters N . A . P . E . E and perhaps I. There is no Christian symbol on this ring, nor on that which follows.


4. With the letters .

5. Having the separate letters P . X . (I had some doubt of the integrity of this ring, but it may have been over-cleaned).

6. Having a square bezel, incrimed

VIVAS
INDEO


7 to 10. Three bronze hoops, each engraved with a  "potent," and inscriptions which I was unable to transcribe.


11. A fine ring, with broad pelta-shaped bezel engraved with the  between two stars * above a name, which in consequence of the oxidation of the metal is not clearly legible, but which appears to be composed of the letters N O T -- M or M I T -- M.


12. On the circular-oval bezel are inscribed two words separated by a transverse line, which Mr. Soden Smith suggests may be read—


<i>Kυριε</i>	O LORD
<i>Σωτηρ(?)</i>	(our) SAVIOVR.


13. A stamp-ring, of bronze, with bezel shaped as the sole of a shoe, and engraved with the word VIVAS reversed, SAVIV.

14. A hoop-ring, engraved with a branch of palm, a , and the word VIVAS.

15. A bronze ring, with large oblong square bezel engraved with the  (reversed) and the dove standing on an olive branch, and beneath a star. This is, in all probability, the ring engraved and described by Aringhi in the Roma Subterranea, p. 385, of his second volume.

16. The  between A and ω .

17. A bronze ring, gilt, with high trumpet-shaped bezel, similar to that described under No. 21 of my former paper, and engraved with a .

18 to 25. Are bronze rings of less importance, engraved with the  only, or with the dove, the palm, &c., one of which is formed as the sole of a shoe.

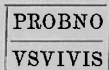
26. A bone or ivory ring, on the oval bezel of which is engraved the P between the A and W . This can hardly be one of the ansulæ referred to by Boldetti?

27. The only gold ring in the collection was found with a gold and a silver bell. It is a simple hoop, I think inscribed, but unfortunately I am unable to find a memorandum of the inscription.

As I shall presently have to direct your attention to a bronze stamp, found with the ring No. 30 in my own collection on which is represented the sacrifice of Abraham, I have appended hereto the inscriptions upon four similar stamps, which are also preserved in the Christian Museum of the Vatican. On one of them the following inscription in relief is upon the oblong square face of the stamp,

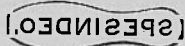


On another of similar form is incised



Another of the same shape is in relief, $\boxed{+ \text{ANST}}$

Another, formed as the sole of a shoe, of larger size than the rings of that form, has the letters reversed and incised—



THE MUSEUM AT NAPLES

contains some Christian rings of gold.—

1. Of duplex form, is engraved with the palm and the anchor.

2. Of simple form, engraved with a fish.

3. Set with an intaglio on sard, engraved with a ship.

4. Duplex, with palms engraved on each bezel; doubtful whether Christian.

And several small gold rings engraved with a palm, which may or may not be Christian.

In several of the continental museums are to be seen antique rings with palms engraved upon them, and occasionally one with the sacred monogram.

The unfortunate state of the French capital, till lately,

has precluded my examination of the contents of her cabinets. I am therefore unable to refer to them in this paper.

THE CASTELLANI COLLECTION.

now exhibited in the British Museum, contains some remarkably fine early Christian rings.

1.⁷ Of gold, a flat band swelling towards the bezel, on which is a raised oval, engraved with a simply-formed anchor.

2. A heavy duplex ring of gold, found at Orvieto ; on the oval bezel of one of the united hoops is incised the name BLITHIA, and on the other $\text{L} \frac{\text{I}}{\text{A}} \text{B}$, apparently a monogram of the same name.

3. A massive gold ring, set with a garnet, on the face of which is rudely engraved a draped figure seated between two Greek crosses, of the form known in heraldry as "potent." The gold setting is embossed with figures of doves on the shoulders.

4. A heavy plain gold ring, round, with flattened bezel, coarsely engraved with the palm (? Christian).

5. Gold ; an octagonal hoop, swelling to the shoulders, and surmounted by the letter Ψ , formed of *cloisons* of gold, which have held stones or enamel. A remarkable and beautiful ring.

6. Bronze ring, with twisted or corded hoop and circular bezel, engraved with a ship propelled by oars, the mast and yard of which form a Φ cross.

7. Bronze ring of similar form ; on the bezel is engraved a ship, also propelled by oars, the mast of which supports a circle bearing the sacred monogram, $\text{C} \times$.

8. Bronze ring of similar form ; on the bezel is engraved a hare feeding on a bunch of grapes.

9. Bronze ring of coarse work, the bezel engraved with one large fish between three smaller ones.

10. Coarse bronze ring, with oval bezel, engraved with a cross or anchor, partially obliterated by wear.

⁷ These Nos. are only used for the convenience of reference, and do not correspond with those of the Castellani

Catalogue. The same remark applies to the other lists.

11. Coarse bronze ring, circular bezel, engraved with a double cross ✱.

THE WATERTON COLLECTION,

recently purchased for the South Kensington Museum, contains a few interesting specimens of early Christian rings. I have already referred to one exhibited by that gentleman in 1862, and to another engraved with a ship, but which are now unfortunately wanting in the series. Of those still in the collection are the following :—

1. A leaden ring, of coarse workmanship, having the figure of a cross punched upon the bezel (S. K. M. Inv., No. 607.71).

2. A small ring of gold, with broad flat hoop, swelling to the bezel, which bears a palm branch, rudely punched with a blunt instrument—possibly Christian (No. 467.71).

3. A heavy bronze signet ring, with massive hoop and projecting bezel, upon which is the figure of a dove; the hoop is modelled as a wreath, having the bezel as a central ornament (No. 605.71).

4. A bronze signet ring, with oval bezel, on which is incised a sheep or lamb; the hoop of this also is formed as a wreath (No. 604.71).

5. Of bronze, with square bezel, inscribed VIVAS IN DEO (No. 603.71).

6. A bronze ring of remarkable form: a hoop surmounted by a flat circular bezel, on which is rudely engraved the figure of an *orante* with nimbus; on the opposite point of the hoop is a smaller tabular sigillum, engraved with a Greek cross. Of rude workmanship; perhaps Byzantine (No. 606.71).

In the British Museum is a remarkable gold ring of analogous form, on one face of which are three interlaced triangles, and on the other intertwined circular lines, leaving the form of a cross in the centre. These lines, and others on the hoop, are in niello.

Mr. Crofton Croker, in his catalogue of rings and personal ornaments formed for Lady Londesborough, describes and figures under No. 152 a gold ring set with a stone of elongated octagonal form, and rising with sloping sides to the face, on which is engraved what is said to be a palm,

but what appears more closely to resemble an olive branch ; while the sloping sides bear the inscription, TE . AMO . PARVM. It is stated to be of fine Roman workmanship, of the fourth or fifth century, and found at Amiens, and that the form of the gem resembles that of a Christian coffin lid. Without the opportunity of examining this ring, I should, from the engraving and description, have some doubt of its being early Christian.

No. 183 of the same catalogue, of "alchemy" or mixed metal, bears upon its face the sacred monogram, composed of the letters **X** and **P**.

The Braybrooke Collection, by the catalogue, would only appear to contain one which may be early Christian. It is No. 49, described as bearing the sacred monogram.

It is, in all probability, one of these rings which is figured by Mr. Fairholt, at page 85 of "Rambles of an Archæologist," 1871, in which volume his "Facts about Finger Rings" are reprinted from the Art Journal.

On plate xvi. of the fourth volume of Perret's "Catacombes" are figured several ring-stones, which, it seems to me, have no more claim to being of Christian origin than the many others on which the palm alone is engraved. Thus we have portrait heads with the palm, figures, and animals, which may be pagan as well as Christian. I have exhibited in my case some half-a-dozen antique rings, which have quite as strong a right to that distinction as those referred to in Perret's work. On one of gilded bronze is a rude palm or laurel branch. On the square bezel of another, also of bronze, is a male head in profile, having a palm on one side and the word VITA on the other. Another, of gold, is set with a nicolo, on which is engraved in intaglio a male and a female draped figures, facing each other, while "hand joins hand." She is the taller of the two, and behind her is a branch of palm. The lady may be a Christian or a pagan bride, or may represent a wingless victory, or a province welcoming a brave or fortunate ruler or soldier. Another bronze ring is engraved with a fish, but I fear it is a pagan gurnard, and the ring Greek or Italo-Ionic work, of too early a period for its conversion. Another bronze ring of curious form, with wide splayed shoulders of open work, is set with a paste, on which is what appears to be a peacock ; but this again may be intended for Juno's emblematic bird, as well as a Christian

symbol. These have as strong a claim to be recorded among good Christians as many of those figured in the above named and other works, and which I fear may have been too easily admitted into the fold; but I hesitate accepting them, and they may not pass the *atrium* without further proof of character.

It is well known that when the tomb of Maria, the wife of the Emperor Honorius, was opened in the year 1544, a vast quantity of personal jewellery was discovered, nearly all of which has been dispersed and lost to knowledge. The *bullæ* is preserved in the Trivulzio palace at Milan; but of the contents of one casket, her *Dactyliotheca*, plated with gold and silver, and containing more than 150 rings of gold set with gems and precious stones, nothing is left to us which can be recognised. Among these was the priceless emerald engraved with a portrait of Honorius, but whether many or few of them were ornamented with Christian symbols we are not informed; and indeed it is more probable that such was not the case, but that they were of the usual type of costly ornaments belonging to a Roman lady of high position, and treasured for their beauty and their value. But as a Christian lady she would more probably wear, at any rate on ordinary occasions, a signet ring, or rings, on which her faith was symbolically represented.

I will now proceed to describe the new additions to my own collection.

No. 27.⁸ A gold ring of duplex form, the united bezels being each of elongated and pointed oval shape. On one is engraved the name



D
FILINAN, and on the other VIVAS
IN DEO. * From
A

between these ovals at their junction a line of six beads falls on either shoulder of the ring, the remainder of the hoop, diminishing in width from the bezel, being plain and rounded externally. It is of solid gold, and weighs $5\frac{1}{2}$ pennyweights.

This remarkable ring was discovered in the neighbourhood of Masignano, a small township of the archdeaconry of

⁸ These numbers are in sequence of those under which I described other Christian rings in my former paper.

Fermo, in the Marches, by some peasants who were digging trenches for planting trees, in the year 1860. They found some large slabs of stone, placed together to form a tomb, beneath which were pieces of cement and small fragments of gold, some bones of the deceased, and the ring. On hearing of the discovery my friend, Don Antonio Donati (till lately librarian to the college of the "Sapienza" at Rome), and who was then in the neighbourhood, immediately visited the spot for the purpose of ascertaining whether any inscription existed upon the stones; but none was found, nor could he hear of the discovery of any coins. He, however, secured the ring, which was shown by him at the Roman Exhibition of Ecclesiastical Objects in 1870, and which he subsequently ceded to me.

I have already referred to a duplex ring of gold, of somewhat coarser workmanship, preserved in the Castellani Collection, No. 2.

The ring now described is in all probability of the latter part of the third or beginning of the fourth century, although it has been stated that Christianity extended to that part of Italy as early as the second.

No. 28. A silver ring of duplex form, the united bezels being each of elongated and pointed oval shape, similar in general fashion to that of the gold ring just described, but wanting the bead-work on the shoulders, where, in the present example, the united bezels are received into a wider collar of the hoop, marked by two transverse incised lines. On one oval is engraved the name FAVSTVS, and on the other is the palm branch. The weight of this ring is 4 dwt. 4 grains. In the year 1865, during excavations made by Prince Torlonia, at Porto, on the northern side of the Tiber's mouth, ruins of a large house were discovered, which are believed to be those of the Xenodochio of Pammachio, the friend of St. Jerome. In and near these ruins many objects for domestic and table use were subsequently discovered, of glass, of pottery, bronze, and silver, the greater part, or nearly all of which were adorned with Christian subjects or Christian emblems. The larger number of these most interesting objects were presented by the Prince to the Christian Museum of the Vatican, and are now preserved there. They are described by Signor de Rossi in



his "Bulletino" for May and June, 1868, and in subsequent numbers of that work. But although many were acquired by the Vatican Museum some others escaped, notably some "rat-tailed" silver spoons, inscribed with names and monograms in niello, which are now in the rich collection formed by Signor Castellani, now exhibited at, and we hope secured for the British Museum. Among other small objects which escaped, the ring now under observation is believed to be one, having been sold in Rome by a person who had been employed at Porto. It was immediately recognised by Sig. de Rossi as being of the same workmanship, having the same patina, and bearing the same name as one of the spoons now in the Vatican, the figure of which, No. 6, will be seen on the plate from the "Bull. d'Arch. Crist.," Nov. and Dec., 1868. One of the spoons in the Castellani Collection bears the same name.

Christian rings of silver are unusual. The date of this specimen is probably of the latter half of the fourth century.

No. 29. A bronze ring, with high projecting bezel of square form, expanding to the shield; the hoop is a simple circle, of angular projection externally. On the square face the subject of Abraham's sacrifice is deeply engraved, covering the whole surface.



In the centre of the composition Abraham stands grasping the upraised knife in his right hand, while with the left he holds the head of Isaac, who kneels before the altar. Abraham's attention is seen to be arrested at the moment, for he looks behind over his left shoulder at the ram, standing beneath what would seem to be a palm branch. Above his right arm, and between the sword and the back of the patriarch's head, is what would appear to be the figure of an angel, but may also represent, as suggested by the Padre Garucci, rays of light (the celestial voice) descending to stay the sacrifice.

This figure or object, which is rendered with a near approach to accuracy in the accompanying engraving, is not sufficiently well defined in the intaglio of the ring to enable us to decide upon its nature with certainty, but I am dis-

posed to think that it conveys a rough idea of the figure of an angel quite as much as that of rays of light, or of a roll of a book.

The execution of the intaglio, which is in a perfect state of preservation, is superior to the fashion of the ring, and may be attributed, perhaps, to the latter end of the third century, but more probably to the fourth.

This subject is new upon a ring. It occurs in mosaics, on sarcophagi and lamps, on wall paintings, and on gilt glasses.

The ring, which I obtained in Rome during the winter before last, was brought by a person from Viterbo, in which neighbourhood it was presumed to have been found, together with the bronze stamp No. 29* (here also figured), and which is incised with the words QVINTILIANE VIVAS. This inscription is in intaglio and reversed, the stamp having been probably used for impressing the name upon pottery when in a soft state, previous to baking. The engraving shows the impression.



The Chevalier de Rossi, to whom I communicated these objects, giving him impressions from them, has published both in a late number of his valuable serial, the "Bulletino" (new series). Number 3 of the first year (1870) contains engravings from the ring and from the stamp; and in No. 1 of the second year (which has only recently arrived in England) he has given a description of them. Abraham's sacrifice he reminds us is typical of the sacrifice of Our Blessed Lord; and he states his opinion that the object represented between the back of Abraham's head and the sword, may be intended for a bundle of rolls of writings, tied together with cord or ribbon, and meant to express the volumes of the prophetic Scriptures; which gives to the subject a sublime symbolical meaning, proclaiming Abraham Father of the Faithful, in whose posterity all people should receive the promised blessing.⁹

⁹ "Tra il capo di Abramo ed il ferro da lui impugnato, e un piccolo arnese dal mio disegnatore assai incertamente

delineato. Nell'impronta che ho sotto gli occhi, favoritami dalla cortesia del possessore, parmi vedere un fascetto di

The Chevalier de Rossi agrees with me in assigning this ring to the latter end of the third or beginning of the fourth century. He publishes another stamp, which was brought into Rome for sale at about the same time as those just described, which may be of rather later date, and upon which the name FLORENTINI and the sacred monogram P are incised. This was purchased by Count Gregorio Stroganof. And also an intaglio ring-stone, which was secured by the Rev. Padre Tongiorgi for the Kircherian Museum, and on which is engraved $\text{IX}\Theta\text{YC MT}$ around an anchor with loop between its lower arms, which are recurved, and upon the stem of which a fish is placed. This may be an interesting emblematic representation of the Crucifixion.

The suggestion that these objects had perhaps been found in the neighbourhood of Viterbo, from the circumstance of their having been brought from that place for sale to Rome, may, I fear, have been imparted by me when conversing on the subject with the Chevalier, in language more affirmative than I intended; as he makes my communication the authority for such being the locality of their discovery.

I wish, therefore, to state that it was merely suggested as a probability, heightened by the indefinite information of the vendor, but not from any positive knowledge of the facts. This is the more necessary, as at the same time the Chevalier tells us that this would be the first instance recorded of the occurrence of Early Christian remains in the vicinity of that city. The duplex gold ring in the Castellani Collection, engraved with the name BLITHIA, is stated by that gentle-



man to have been found near Orvieto; possibly some locality between these two cities may have been the site at which all these objects were discovered.

No. 30. A bronze ring with square expanding bezel, on which is engraved the sacred symbol, the united *chi* and *rho* between the *alpha* and *omega* above, and two sheep below.

It is remarkable that although the q is reversed as though intended for sealing, the *alpha* and *omega* are rightly

volumi legato con cordicella o nastro, del quale pendono da ambi i lati le estremità. Sarà questo a mio avviso, il volume delle scritture profetiche, che danno alla scena

il sublime simbolico significato e proclamano Abramo padre dei credenti nella cui posterità era promessa a tutti i popoli la benedizione."

placed, and would be reversed in the impression. The form of the sacred monogram is precisely similar to that on the sepulchral tablet of the boy Marcianus (except that the loop of the P is reversed), which is figured in plate 1, at page 279 in vol. xxvii. of our Society's Journal, in the Rev. Mr. Joyce's extremely interesting paper on the Sarcophagus of Valerius Amandinus, discovered at Westminster.

It may, however, be doubted whether the ring was intended for sealing, as there is an appearance inside the engraving on the bezel and the ornament of the hoop, as of the remains of niello, with which all the incisions may have been originally filled. The hoop is circular, swelling to the shoulders, and of angular section; it is ornamented with incisions, probably intended as palm leaves, and of similar character to that on the ring No. 16, described in my former paper, at page 144 of Vol. xxvi. of our Journal.

This interesting ring, which is probably of the middle of the fourth century, was recently brought to me from Rome.

No. 31 is a bronze ring, the bezel of which surmounts the swelling shoulders of a hoop of half-round wire, and is shaped as the sole of a shoe, upon which is coarsely incised INDEO, with a continuous border line of punctuations. The bronze is covered with a dark-green patina. This ring could hardly have been used for stamping or sealing, as the lettering reads rightly on the ring, and would of course be inverted in the impression.



Aringhi, followed by Francisco de Corte, figures a ring with shoe-sole shaped bezel, bearing the name IVSTVS with a *, which was found in the Catacomb of St. Agnese on the Via Nomentana.

There is a foot-shaped stamp ring in the Vatican Museum (No. 25), engraved with the palm and a sort of star, or double cross.

Boldetti gives an engraving, at page 506, of a ring-stamp, shaped as the side of a boot, on which are the letters MARO, and what seems to be a heart. It was found in the Cemetery of Priscilla.

The foot-stamp was probably typical of possession, the "*pedis positio*" among the Romans, but whether adopted

by the Christians as having another signification is a question which would lead me beyond the subject of this paper. It was a form used previously and contemporaneously by pagans, and similar rings, bearing names and words that cannot be assumed as Christian, are preserved in the Castellani, the Waterton, the British Museum, and other collections.

No. 32. A key-ring of bronze, which opened the lock by lifting a latch. It is a simple hoop, the bezel of which is slightly raised and flattened, and from the side of which projects a small neck, attaching a circular table flattened towards the ring. This is pierced with a cross, which is surrounded by a circular depression or bordering; the cross-shaped piercing corresponded with the wards of the lock. It is presumed to have been for the use of a Christian, as the emblem of that faith adopted for fashioning the wards, would hardly have been applied inadvertently at a period when the cross was looked upon as a badge of disgrace, or as the Christian standard. I have referred to a key-ring of similar form in the Christian Museum at the Vatican, which is believed to have been found in one of the Catacombs.



It is perhaps worthy of remark that the cross is placed in an upright position relatively to the hoop of the ring, and not as the letter X; neither is it in any degree wedge-limbed, but a pure Greek cross. I procured this ring several years since at Rome. It is perhaps of the fourth century.

Boldetti gives us figures of key-rings found in the Catacombs, but upon which no Christian emblems are to be seen. These have been supposed to possess talismanic properties from having been placed in contact with relics of the saints, a supposition which may savour of a later period than that at which they were made and worn.

No. 33. A gold signet-ring, formed as a hoop of angular projection externally and flat inside, which bears a circular button-like bezel, on the face of which are a male and a female bust, looking towards each other; above them is a cross, the lower limb of which is longer than the others, and all having a wedge-shaped termination.

The subject is incised upon the gold; the workmanship is of that rude and peculiar character so well known upon

the coins of the Byzantine emperors of the earlier half of the fifth century, and I am accordingly disposed to consider its probable date as about 440.

This ring is probably a *Bicephalic* matrimonial or love ring, having the portraits of husband and wife "respectant," as the language of heraldry would express. Such exist of pagan times, and I am reminded by Mr. Way that a ring of that class, found in the north of England, is figured in the *Archaeological Journal* at vol. vii., p. 191. They were doubtless the prototypes of the love rings of the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries, some of which are in my collection.



It is a ring of Byzantine character, as regards its form and style of workmanship, and was sent to me from Athens. Its weight is $3\frac{5}{8}$ pennyweights.

It was my intention to have added to this paper a notice of Early Christian rings referred to by various writers, but to do this it would be necessary to go over considerable ground, the which, I find, has been already and most ably traversed; for only since writing the foregoing pages has an opportunity been afforded me, for the first time, of reading the interesting *brochure* by the Abbé Martigny, "*Des Anneaux chez les Premiers Chrétiens*" (Macon, 1858), in which I find that he has adopted an arrangement of the subject somewhat similar to mine. I have merely given a list of the emblems mentioned by Clement of Alexandria, and have then considered those met with upon *rings*, not venturing to do more than occasionally refer to engraved ring stones, or gems, in illustration of my subject. Upon these the Abbé Martigny, in the pamphlet just named, gives much interesting matter. His references to the works of previous writers are most valuable, as also to recent authorities on the engraved gems, but he does not refer directly to more than a few rings as existing in museums and private cabinets. Probably from the statements of Boldetti and other early writers, he tells us that such rings have been found in Catacombs in considerable quantity; but if such were ever the case, how few, comparatively, now remain to our knowledge.

I am afraid, in consequence of the many forgeries which have been produced within the last few years, that Early Christian engraved stones have been, and are often regarded with suspicion and consequent neglect.

The discrimination between a genuine antique intaglio or cameo and a modern imitation, is a matter requiring, in the first place, an inherent appreciation of those indescribable characteristics which distinguish the art of various epochs, and the power of a keen eye. The development of these faculties by the examination and comparison, the constant handling and intimacy with objects of art and antiquity of all sorts and periods, stimulated by a real love for them and for their study, is the next requirement. No amount of classic learning or book-knowledge will make up for the want of these ; although most valuable, and indeed necessary for the elucidation of the objects themselves and of their history.

The art exhibited in Early Christian gems is almost invariably of a low order ; they were, for the most part, the production of a period of decadence. The greater number have been cut by means of the wheel. Hence arises an additional difficulty in distinguishing the genuine from the false. Their rude workmanship is easy to copy with the same instrument as that with which they were cut ; antique stones are abundant at hand, and Roman artists are apt and facile in imitation.

I do not think that the fabrication of Early Christian rings has been carried on quite to the same extent, but that such falsification is practised I can too truly testify. Some of the imitations in ivory and in silver are very ingenious, and well executed ; fragments of antique ivory or bone are worked upon ; as in the case of bronze, plain antique rings of which are engraved with the requisite emblems, and duly coloured ; or, where they have held a stone or paste, it has been replaced by a modern intaglio with Christian symbol, the interstices being filled up with green wax, or a composition of the scraping of antique bronze and other ingredients.

It is greatly to be regretted that these nefarious practices among all the various objects of art and antiquity receive so much encouragement from dishonest vendors and unwary purchasers.