



No 1.



No. 2

Gold Rings in the Possession of A. W. Franks, Esq.

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ON A ROMAN KEY-LIKE FINGER RING OF GOLD, AND A BYZANTINE BICEPHALIC SIGNET OF THE SAME METAL.

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ON two former occasions¹ I have ventured to direct attention to certain finger rings of the Early Christian and immediately succeeding periods, the great interest of which arises from typical representations occurring upon them, symbolic of the, then, newly-promulgated and adopted faith.

Through the kind courtesy of my friend Mr. Augustus W. Franks, Director of the Society of Antiquaries, I am now enabled to supplement these notices by a description of two rings, recently added to his choice *Dactyliotheca*, each of which is of singular interest and rarity.

It may be recollected that in my last paper (at page 290 of our twenty-eighth volume) I described and figured a key finger-ring of bronze, the projection from the bezel of which is pierced with the figure of a Greek cross, corresponding to the wards of the latch-lock it was intended to open, and I urged that this device warranted the presumption, that it had been made for the use of a believer in that symbol of the atonement. In confirmation of my opinion I referred to a key-ring, of similar model, preserved in the Christian Museum at the Vatican, and which is believed to have been found in one of the catacombs.



The key-like ring now under consideration might seem to have been formed for similar use, but is of a more noble material and far more dainty fashion. In this respect nothing indeed can be more elegant, the artistic workmanship corre-

¹ Arch. Journal, vol. xxvi. p. 137, and vol. xxviii. p. 266.

sponding with the beauty of the design. (Woodcut No. 1.) Its form is a wide hoop of flattened gold, twelve times fluted or channelled externally, and ornamented with a foliated and pierced scroll-work edging. Each fluting has a central square piercing, in which one letter of the inscription is reserved in the metal, and from which the ground is entirely cut away (*découpé-à-jour*). I have ventured elsewhere to designate this style as *champlevé-à-jour*. It is the *interrasile opus* of Pliny's day, and was in use from the time of Severus; an ornamentation of which I know no finer example than this ring.

The inscription round the hoop reads *MVLTVS ANNIS*, the twelfth space being occupied by a leaf; while on the upper side or *chaton* the words ^{ACCIDE}
~~EVILCIS~~ occur in double line, between three plain bands of the metal. Thence projects the tongue or lift, by which, if practically serviceable, a latch may have been raised, opening the door or lid of casket, cabinet, or other treasure house, the contents of which would gladden our antiquarian eyes could we but see them. The piercing or seeming wards of this projecting tongue, is as a diaper of Greek crosses, nine in number, attached by pellets of the metal, and bordered laterally with a corded edging, on the top with scroll ornament. The width of the hoop is $\frac{4}{10}$ ths of an inch, its diameter $\frac{7}{8}$ ths, and the projecting tongue $\frac{5}{8}$ ths long by $\frac{6}{10}$ ths wide; the weight of the ring is 192 grains.

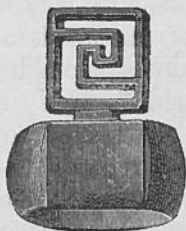
Another fine ring, ornamented with the words *AEMILIA ZESES* in *opus interrassile*, belongs to the Duke of Northumberland, and is figured in the *Archæological Journal*, vol. vii. p. 192. In vol. xxvi., at page 141, I have described and figured a more humble example from my own collection.

I have been informed that a key-ring of silver occurred among the *trouvaille* at Ostia in 1858, but, if published, I cannot now quote the reference to it; the present is, however, the only instance, of which I am aware, of a ring so formed in the more noble metal.

I term it a key-like ring from its correspondence in form and character with others of the same class in inferior metal, but that it was intended for use as a key may, I think, be open to doubt. That it was fashioned as a birth-day, or New Year's gift, from one member to another, of a Christian family, of the latter half of the third or earlier years of the fourth century, is, I believe, more probable. The arguments

used in favour of the Christian origin of my bronze key-ring² confirm the latter inference. The kindly words upon it are such as may be found both on pagan and Christian rings and ring-stones of that period, for the most part, however, conveyed in the Greek rather than in the Latin language.

In support of the former suggestion I have figured another bronze key-ring from my own collection, found at Rome; devoid of ornamentation, but corresponding in form, and probably of about the same period as its more noble contemporary. This was undoubtedly made for service as a key.



In the Waterton Collection, at the South Kensington Museum (No. 551, '71), is one with a circular lift, pierced with seven holes, and attached to the hoop by a neck, as is the case on mine.

Our information on the origin, uses, and import of these key-rings, which are found abundantly on various Roman sites, and in great variety of form, is still very imperfect. Learned writers³ have connected them with various quotations from the classic authors, having reference to the habit of securing the casket or the wine cupboard of ancient days, but in so doing they have frequently superadded confusion to our imperfect knowledge; the method of securing by the impression of the signet ring on clay or wax, attached to the door by a cord or otherwise, being sometimes confounded with the rings in question, which were presumably formed for turning locks or lifting latches. That they were for both these uses is assured by an examination of various examples in collections, and by a reference to the figures given by Licetus,⁴ Montfaucon, and other writers. The lateral wards attached to a pipe projecting from the ring-formed handle can be for no other use than turning on a central pin, and driving the bolt; while on other varieties the projecting tongue could only be used for lifting a latch, on the plan of the so-called "French latch-lock." One

² Arch. Journal, vol. xxviii, p. 290.

³ See Gorlaei, *Dactylioth.* 42, 205-209.

⁴ Licetus de *Anulis*, 1645, figures seven varieties, of which one is a latch. Six are with pipes; of these Nos. 2, 5 and 6 are, I suspect, the original cuts, which

Georgius Longus and Francisco de Corte have badly reproduced. One of them has the figure of a rudder between two ears of corn engraved on the bezel. His No. 8 is precisely similar to one in my collection.

example in my own collection combines both these arrangements, a piped key projecting from one side of the finger ring, and a double-tongued (one half unfortunately injured) latch-key from the other; it could, therefore, open and close two distinct locks of small size and probably was so used. Notwithstanding, it has been doubted whether these key-rings were really intended for use; but if merely emblematic why the great variety and intricate arrangement of the wards on some of the examples in our collections? almost equalling those of the larger keys of bronze and iron which have descended to us from Roman times. That they were frequently used as talismans in a darker subsequent age is probable. Boldetti tells us that it was the custom for the Pope to send keys (? key-rings) to great princes, to some of gold, which had been lowered through an opening in the altar of the confessional into the vault, to touch the tombs of the Saints Peter and Paul; referring particularly to some sent by S. Gregory I. (Pope A.D. 590—604.) This statement has been referred to by the learned Abbé Martigny and other writers. Boldetti figures some found in the catacombs, and it has been supposed that they might have had talismanic powers from having been placed in contact with the relics of saints. He also tells us that, in his day, silver key-like rings were suspended to the necks of children as charms, said to have come from the Santa Casa at Loretto. He, however, figures one (No. 37) which he distinctly states to have been used for the ordinary purposes of a key.⁵


⁵ Boldetti, Osservazioni sopra i Cimiterj De' S. S. Martiri, lib. ii. cap. xiv. p. 507. "A numeri 36 e 37 si veggono delineate due Chiavette di metallo inserite negl' Anelli trovati in diversi Cimiterj E l'uso di quella del N. 36 potrebbe ascrivarsi al pio costume de i Cristiani antichi di toccarvi le Reliquie de i Santi, o altre cose Sagre, e poi per devozione portarle o in dito, o addosso; e corrispondendo in cio la loro piet  alla Fede, venivano con esse ad esser preservati da i mali. Anzi i sommi Pontefici costumarono di trasmetterle a i gran Principi in luogo di Reliquie, e massime quelle d'oro calate prima da una piccola finestra dell' Altare della Confessione del Principe degli Apostoli S. Pietro *ad hauriendam Sanctitatem*. Di una di queste chiavi trasmessa da S. Gregorio Papa in dono a

Gio: Ex Console cos  parla il medesimo Santo: '*Clavem parvulam a Sanctissimo corpore Beati Petri Apostoli pro ejus benedictione transmissimus*' (S. Greg. l. i. * . 26* and * . 31*). Ed altrove '*Beati Petri Apostoli vobis claves transmissi, qu  super cegros posita multis solent miraculis curare*;' e scrivendo a Childeberto (* . 6, l. 5*). '*Claves Sancti Petri, in quibus de Vinculis Catenarum ejus inclusum est, excellentia vestra diriximus, ut collo vestro pens  a malis vos omnibus tuantur*.' Il che diede poi occasione alla piet  de i Fedeli di restituirne altrettante d'oro da collocarsi ne i Cancelli della

¹ Upon this statement Mr. Waterton founded the opinion that the large, so called, "papal rings" contained filings of St. Peter's chains.

Kirchmann refers to key-rings, but without giving any very definite explanation, nor does Longus throw much additional light on the matter. Licetus, writing of the use of the signet to secure treasure, &c., further refers to key-rings. Mr. Waterton supposed that they were used by slaves. Edwards⁶ repeats the opinion advanced by some Roman archæologists, that they were given at marriages, and emblematic of the possession of the husband's household goods by the wife. Others suppose that they were given to the affianced bridegroom by the future bride's father, in token that his house was opened to his son-in-law. Mr. King thinks that they must have been the secret keys, *crypto claves* of the ancients, as being concealed when turned inside the hand.

But few deny that some, at least, among these bronze key-rings must have been made for practical purposes, as a convenient and safe form of portable key for opening the casket or the cash-box; a fashion which has been renewed in our own times.

The doubt, however, again arises as to whether the beautiful and delicately-formed ring of nearly pure and soft gold, now under notice, could really have borne any such practical application; and this doubt is strengthened by the fact, noticed by Mr. Franks, that the projecting tongue or lift is attached to the hoop, not merely by a neck, but in all its breadth; differing herein from those of bronze which I have figured. The latter would pass through and up the inverted  T-shaped key-hole, whereas it is difficult to conceive an arrangement which would permit of the up-

Confessione di S. Pietro in contrassegno di gratitudine per le grazie ricevute per mezzo delle altre donate loro da i Papi. Rimane anche oggi l'uso di sospendere dal collo, o da gli omeri de i Bambini alcune chiovette con anelli di argento fatte a somiglianza della chiave, che dicono essere della stanza della B. V. che si trova in Loreto, sperimentate di molta virtù per il contatto della medesima, o pure di qualche altra insigne Reliquia.

"La piccola chiave poi delineata al No. 37, congiunta coll' anello, e sigillo, era di quelle, che gli Antichi in uso appunto di sigillo, e di chiave da aprire, e chiudere gli Scigni, come riflette l'erudito Nicolai, per non ismarrirle, sempre portavano in dito a guisa di anello." (Jo.

Nicolai di sigtis, antiquor, cap. 44, de acquir: vel amittend: poss:

"*Meræ claves sunt cum annulo, qualis et hodie in nostris Clavibus, que sunt longiores, scapo digiti inserebantur, et annuli sigillatorii quo commodius verti possent intra claustrum; Scapum quippe non habent, quo teneri queant quippe sit instar manubrii. Excepto annulo totæ intra claustrum mergebantur.*"

"Festo ancora fa menzione di alcune chiovette, che costumavansi mandar in dono alle Donzelle, come annunzio di felicità nel futuro parto. *Clavium consuetudo erat mulieribus donare, ob significandam partus facilitatem.*"

⁶ Hist. and Poetry of Finger Rings, p. 196.

ward passage of such a tongue as that upon Mr. Franks's ring.

In the collection of Lord Braybrooke is a finger ring of mixed metal, "similar to that of many of the Roman denarii," with a broad tablet bezel on which a lion passant is represented in high relief, and gilt. Thence projects a tongue or flap, but not hinged, rounded at the end and "incuse" with figures, which may represent a central vase, on either side of which a bear is seated, facing his fellow. Seven minute holes open between the vase and the limbs of the bears, which have been supposed to have some reference to the Pleiades. It was found in December 1853, in the Borough field, Chesterford, with Roman remains. Here we have the openings in the tongue (doubtless somewhat filled in by the oxydation of the metal), which also is affixed to the hoop in its entire breadth.

In the Museum at Basle, Mr Franks informs me that there is another ring of the same class, of gold, with the inscription FELIC. AVROR. worked in niello on the bezel, from which projects a tongue of pierced work formed as two eagles, with some object between them. It was found at Augst, and may be of the Merovingian period.

Both these examples would be equally impracticable as latch-lifting keys.

Considerably modified, but partaking of the same character as to form, is the well-known ring in the British Museum, bearing in niello the name of Ethelwulf (A.D. 836-838), the father of Alfred the Great, the pyramidal projecting tongue of which is ornamented with eagles on either side of a central standard. This ring is also figured in the *Archæological Journal* in a paper on Niello by Mr. Waterton, vol. xix., p. 326.

May we not, therefore, infer that these rings were fashioned, not for practical purposes, but as representative of their earlier, as also contemporary, and more useful prototypes, and possibly emblematic of that office or position in the household or the family, which entitled the holder to the possession of the key-ring? Or were they merely eccentric developments of antique fancy, of which we have abundant parallel instances in our own day?

Another form of ringed key, which in the smaller examples became, and was probably worn as a key-ring, of later date

and probably Byzantine origin, is figured by Licetus, at fig. 4 on his folding-plate, but he omits the *chaton*, a characteristic feature seen on all those specimens which I have examined. They consist of a short-stemmed and piped key, suspended to a ring, which passes through an eye purposely formed, and kept in position by a projecting shoulder on either side; the substance of the ring, thicker where the key is suspended, diminishes towards the opposite point of the circle, where it is attached to a circular button-like bezel incised with inscription or figures. A series of these keys, of various sizes, is preserved in that rich mine of antiquarian wealth, the British Museum. One, I believe unique, is in the possession of my friend, Mr. R. H. Soden Smith, F.S.A., the hoop and bezel being of silver, and the key of bronze; the subject engraved on the *chaton* is too indistinct to be recognisable; it seems to represent a man fishing. There is every reason to believe that this was worn as a finger ring. Possibly the double security of locking and sealing may have been attained by the use of this curious variety.

The second ring which I have to describe is one also of unusual type, and remarkable for the amount of ornamentation with which it is covered. (Woodcut No. 2.) In form it consists of a rectangular bezel or table, perfectly plain, but on which two portrait heads, confronting each other, male and female, and beneath a Greek cross, are deeply incised. The hoop is formed of a series of small circular discs, having a pellet of gold on either side of the point of junction with each other and with their attachment to the bezel of the ring. On each of these is a bust, with leaves in the background; they seem to be alternately male and female, as shown by the cruciform fibula on the shoulder of the former, and the ear-rings of the latter. These busts are engraved and filled in with niello; their drawing is carefully finished, but marks the decadence of art.

There can be no doubt that this fine Byzantine *bicephalic* ring was used as a signet, and that it belonged to a person of high position; possibly a matrimonial or betrothal gift. It has been suggested that the heads resemble those of the Emperor Leo. I. and Verina (A.D. 457-74), but it is doubtful whether they are Imperial portraits. They are probably of man and wife, and are deeply and well incised. The male figure is clad in a toga, which is fastened on the

left shoulder by a large cruciform fibula, worn with the point upwards. This would seem to be of the same kind as that massive one of gold found at Odiham in Hampshire, and figured at page 46 in Vol. ii. of our Journal, which is now preserved in the British Museum. His hair is closely cut over the head, with whiskers and moustache. The hair of the female is dressed in a frizzed (?) coil or roll behind, whence small ringlets, four of which are shown, fall over the forehead; in her ears are ear-rings formed of two large beads or pearls, a string of which adorns her neck. Her dress consists of a simple under-garment, covered by one which falls over either shoulder. The workmanship of this ring is massive, but rather rude; it weighs $445\frac{1}{2}$ grains. I am inclined to ascribe it to the middle or perhaps the earlier half of the fifth century. It is clearly of similar character,



although, to judge from its superior art, possibly of somewhat earlier date than that more simple one in my own collection, described in the Journal, vol. xxviii. p. 291, and which may probably be of about A.D. 440; both are of gold.

This fashion of double portrait signets was in use in earlier times, as witnessed by many well-known gems and metal rings. Mr. King refers to one of gold in the Uffizi at Florence, having the busts of M. Aurelius and L. Verus incised on the metal.

As might be surmised, the habit of engraving in intaglio on the metal for the signet, worn as a ring, existed at a very early period, both among the Etruscan⁷ and Italiote inhabitants of Italy, and from still earlier times in Egypt. By the Greeks it was much used at various periods on bronze, iron, silver, and gold, as also by the Romans, and its practice was probably more or less retained among the

⁷ A recent learned writer on the glyptic art has stated that no rings of bronze had come under his observation which were anterior to the later times of the Roman Empire. My own collection affords bronze rings of form, and incised in intaglio of sufficient depths for sealing, with subjects of purely Tyrrhenian character. Egyptian signet rings of

bronze engraved with hieroglyphics also occur. One in the Londesborough collection is engraved in Fairholt's "Facts about Finger Rings," p. 77; "Rambles of an Archaeologist." Another is in my own possession. Greek and Roman engraved bronze rings of early date are also well known in collections.

Byzantines when the sculptor's art was dead to the barbarized nations of the west.

The engravings of the two rings now described are of the dimensions of the originals. It is presumed that they were found in Egypt, where they had been preserved in the Demetrio collection until acquired by Mr. Franks.