

ON A KEY-LIKE GOLD FINGER-RING OF THE SIXTH OR SEVENTH CENTURY FOUND AT MARZABOTTO.

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THE ring now figured and described was kindly lent to me for that purpose by Mr. S. T. Baxter, of Florence, the fortunate owner of many fine specimens of antique goldsmith's work. It was found, as I am informed, at Marzabotto, in the neighbourhood of Bologna, during excavations made by the Conte Aria. By accidental pressure it has been bent from a circular into an almost triangular form. Its present entire length is $1\frac{3}{4}$ inch; the key-like portion from the hinge of attachment, eleven-twelfths of an inch; the width of the hoop, a quarter of an inch; its weight, 6 dwt. 19 gr. This curious ring is formed as a circle or hoop of open work, to which a key-formed piece is attached by a hinge. Its mode of construction is, however, worthy of being considered more in detail, and would seem to be as follows:—Two hoops of beaded wire—the beading probably formed by rolling between two grooved surfaces of stone or metal, or by the use of a wedge-shaped hammer—are kept apart by, and fastened on either side to, a waved square wire, which impinges upon them at each alternate bend and is attached by fusion. At their point of union to form the hoop, which thus presents the appearance of a flat band, edged by beading, with a wavy line between and spaces left *à jour*, two stout loops are attached, between which the perforated extremity of the key-like appendage is fastened by a pin passing through it and them, working as a hinge. The stem of this projecting or suspended key-formed portion, which gives characteristic importance to the object, is formed of a stouter wire less deeply beaded; it is solid, and from one side project the simulated wards. These are formed of a flat wire, one piece of which is bent into a quadrilateral form, the centre being filled in by other pieces of the same wire, bent in wavy and circular forms without design, and

the whole soldered or rather fused together at the points of junction, thus forming a small grating of irregular open work ; by one of its longer sides it has then been attached by fusion to the beaded stem. It is made of soft gold. This workmanship, curious in its rude simplicity, yet bears the impress of earlier modes of ornamentation—the granulated beading, of Oriental origin, coarsely represented by another method in the beaded wire ; and the *opus interrasile*, or open work, but this again arrived at in effect only, by uniting bended wires in lieu of cutting designs through the flat bar of solid metal, also an eminently Oriental method, still so ably executed in Persia, &c. But it shows also to what a low degree the goldsmith's art had descended at the period and place of its production, probably Italy, and during the sixth century of our era or early in that which followed. Its precise date who can fix with certainty ? for how few data have we to work from, and how little is left to us of the handicraft in precious metals of that dark age of discord. That this ring could be for no practical use as a key is manifest, but that the semblance of a key was intended in its fashion is equally obvious. What then was its purpose ?

In Volume XXIX. of our Society's Journal, at page 305, was described and figured a remarkable latch key-like ring of gold belonging to Mr. Franks, which, of earlier date and more dainty workmanship, was shown to be equally of practical uselessness. In that notice I ventured to suggest that these rings may have had some emblematic significance ; may have been badges of some office, public or private ; and I directed attention to the curious statement by Boldetti in his "Osservazioni," lib. ii. cap. xiv., p. 507, that—"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."¹

Can this be one of these key-like rings of gold, which, let down through the grating by a cord to touch the tomb of the key-bearing Apostle, was sent by the then Pope—perhaps Gregory I.—to some personage of high estate ? or was it but an emblematic badge ? In plan it approaches more to the silver and bronze key ring (also probably of earlier time)

¹ See foot-note "Arch. Journal," vol. xxix. p. 308.

belonging to Mr. Soden Smith, and referred to by me in the same paper at page 311, and others of similar form which are preserved in the British Museum.

I may be permitted to take this opportunity also of referring to two other rings, which seem to be of the same family as that belonging to Mr. Franks. One is in the Museum at York, is formed of jet, cut out of the solid, and having a projecting tongue which is ornamented by incision. It was found in Yorkshire, and may be of the later Roman period. The other is in the British Museum, and is of Byzantine character, made of gold; on the upper portion or table of the hoop a cabuchon emerald is set; a lateral oval tongue thence projects, corresponding to the latch lift, not worked with open work pattern, but set with a cabuchon sapphire. There can be little doubt that these may be considered as varieties of the same class as Mr. Franks' beautiful ring, and although differing materially in form, perhaps not so much in significance from that now under consideration, unless the latter be really one of those referred to by Boldetti. But even in such case it is possible that a double meaning may have been conveyed by their gift, as an emblem or badge of some unrecorded position or authority, and an Apostolic benediction conveyed in tangible and evil-dispelling form.

