VI.—CHRISTIAN EVIDENCES IN THE ROMAN PERIOD

THE NORTHERN COUNTIES

PART I

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Introduction

The most recent published account of Christian Evidences in the Roman period over the country as a whole is that of Professor J. M. C. Toynbee in the Journal of the British Archæological Association, 3, xvi (1953), 1-24, *Christianity in Roman Britain.* A later article by Dr. W. H. C. Frend[1] *Religion in Roman Britain in the Fourth Century A.D.* adds little of note. Dr. Frend bases his useful distribution map on the material of the earlier article. These two comprehensive and authoritative works might seem to make a further study of Christian evidences a work of supererogation. There are, however, at least three reasons to support a fresh review, made, as it is, with some temerity.

First: a work which treats of the country as a whole must, of necessity, omit a great deal of *regional* matter if it is to avoid needless detail and be contained within a reasonable compass. It was as long ago as 1914, in a characteristically synoptic paper[2] before this Society by Professor F. J. Haverfield, that the regional concept was last treated in detail. I believe that he would be among the first to urge a fresh study of the fund of material which has since come to light.

Secondly: as a part of the Military Zone the Northern Counties constitute a special case among the regions of

[1] *J.B.A.A.*[3], xviii (1955), 1-18.
[2] *A.A.*[3], xv (1914).

Roman Britain in the context of the study of Christian Evidences.

Thirdly: some material not included in the works of Toynbee and Frend, together with significant finds which have come to light subsequently, to some extend modify their conclusions. In particular a considerably greater number of evidences than is apparent from Frend's distribution map indicate that this was a region comparatively rich in Christian evidences.

I have examined the sources for every reported evidence known to me, large or small, certain or manifestly false. It is difficult, bearing in mind the different degrees of doubt which must attach to different sources and claims, to arrive at any exact classification. Nevertheless I have attempted to divide these evidences into two broad groups, namely accepted (38) and rejected (8) claims, together with one doubtful evidence which I have been unable to include in either category. I have further divided the accepted evidences broadly between those of archæological and epigraphic significance (30)—by far the greater number—and those of literary significance (8) among which I include the evidence of place names and dedications, which I hope to deal with at some later date.

Finally, the Northern Counties may be understood to comprehend the area now occupied by Yorkshire and Lancashire, Northumberland, Durham, Westmorland and Cumberland. In view of the comparative paucity of evidences from Scotland I have found it convenient to include also the whole of that country in this review.

A. ARCHÆOLOGICAL : EPIGRAPHIC

Tombstones

The most considerable evidence in sheer physical size is afforded by a group of four tombstones, three of which were discovered in the Wall region.

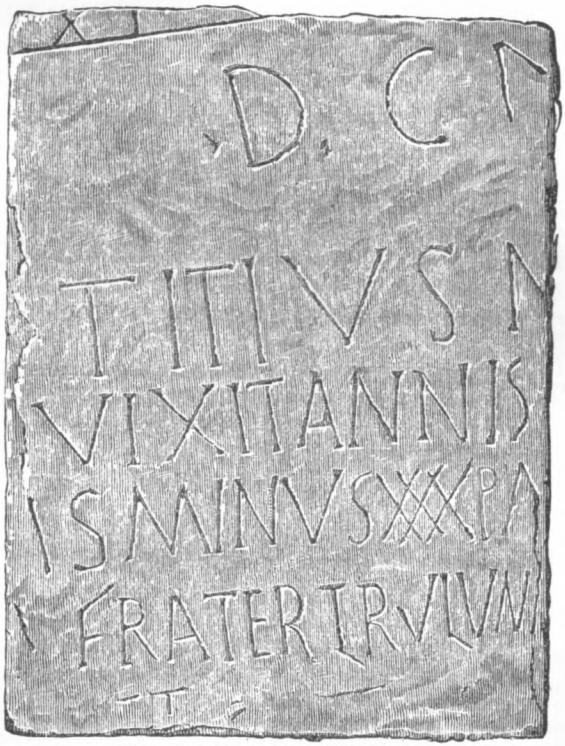
Tombstone of DECEPT(VS) from Risingham,
University of Newcastle, Museum of Antiquities. (No. 1.)

(1) The first comes from the outpost fort at Risingham (HABITANCVM) on the road from Corbridge into Scotland. It measures 24″ × 13″ and commemorates one DECEPT(VS). An otherwise unknown word REHITIA(VIT?) occurs which has been thought to represent REQUIEVIT, "Rest in Peace", a Christian formula: in addition it has certain resemblances in style with continental Christian tombstones. Unfortunately, when I examined it recently after its transfer from the Black Gate to the Museum of Antiquities in the University of Newcastle, a break in the stone which was noted in earlier catalogues, and which bisected the operative word REHITIA(VIT?), has now developed to sever the stone into two separate pieces. The style of the lettering supports an approximate dating to the fourth century. The Christian character of this stone is the least certain of the group.

(2) The second tombstone commemorates one FLAVIVS ANTIGONVS PAPIAS, and was discovered in 1892 at the Harraby Hill Roman Cemetery, Carlisle. It measures 20″ × 31″ and the inscription is as follows:

D M
FLA(viv)S ANTIGON(v)S PAPIAS
CIVIS GRECVS VIXIT ANNOS
PLVS MINVS LX QVEM AD
MODVM ACCOM(m)ODATAM
FATIS ANIMAM REVOCAVIT
SEPTIMA DOM(ina conivnx fecit)

Professor Robinson Ellis first suggested to Professor Haverfield, who published this find, the translation "He lived sixty years more or less, for so it was that when his spirit was prepared to meet its doom he recalled it to life (and did not die)". The formula "plus minus" is of course Christian and suggests a suitably Christian indifference to the precise length of earthly life as compared with eternity; and it occurs frequently in definitely Christian epitaphs. Con-



Size, 2 feet 6 inches by 1 foot 11 inches.

FIG. 1. TOMBSTONE FOUND AT BROUGHAM.

sequently, the tone of the words indicates a resignation to death more Christian than pagan in character. The formula D M (Dis Manibus) "To the gods of the underworld" might be regarded as being purely conventional by this date and as by no means excluding the possibility that the persons commemorated had embraced the Christian Faith. "It is even possible that such slabs were bought in pagan workshops with the D M already in place, the rest of the inscription being added ad hoc."[3]

Haverfield seemed to accept the definitely Christian

[3] J. M. C. Toynbee: *J.B.A.A.*[3], xvi (1953), p. 14.

nature of the inscription, but he distinguished between this and the Faith of the deceased—"It is possible, though it is not capable of actual proof, that he was a Christian".[4] In the nature of the case, I think it unlikely that a heathen would be commemorated by a Christian inscription, and conclude that Flavius was indeed himself a Christian. This interpretation is supported by the phrase "REVOCAVIT ANIMAM" in the "less certain" second half, which Haverfield rightly took to be an equivalent to the common Christian formula "REDDIDIT ANIMAM".

(3) The third tombstone was also discovered at a Roman military site, BROCAVVM(Brougham) and is the only one of the four which is not clearly related to the Wall region, although still well within the "Military Zone". It must surely now occupy the most bizarre site of any Christian Roman relic (if not of any Roman inscription in general) built into the ceiling or headway of a short wall passage or gallery on the second floor of the Norman Castle at Brougham, abutting on the North rampart of the fort.

The inscription, which is in parts defective, may be translated as:

> "SACRED TO THE MEMORY OF TITTUS M..... WHO LIVED 32 YEARS OR THEREABOUTS (PLUS MINUS). HIS BROTHER A..... SET UP THIS INSCRIPTION".

It was first published by Collingwood Bruce,[5] who did not at the time realise its Christian significance. This was first noted by R. G. Collingwood in 1921[6]—"Its special interest lies in the fact that the formula 'plus minus' indicates a contempt for the meticulous reckoning of age customary

[4] *C.W.*[1], xiii, pp. 165-171. c.f. also *C.W.*[1], xii, pp. 370ff.
[5] *Lap. Sept.* 814, and reproduction.
[6] *C.W.*[2], xxii, p. 142, copied by Hübner in *E.E.* iii.

on Roman tombstones. It is a characteristically Christian phrase, and shows, almost with certainty, the presence of a Christian population at Brougham in the late 3rd or 4th century of our era". It is significant that an immediately post-Roman Christian evidence is found in close association with this Roman inscription, at i.e. a Ninianic dedication at Nynekirks, only $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles away to the East. (No. 35 below.)

(4) The remaining tombstone differs in some marked respects from the rest of the group. It measures $1' 9'' \times 1' 7''$ and commemorates one BRIGOMAGLOS or BRIGOWAGLOS. It was discovered at Chesterholme in a heap of stones which were about to be used for the repair of a cottage. Before that it had apparently been removed from its original location and used in the construction of a raised carriage road, a short distance to the north-east of the Roman station at VINDOLANA.

The inscription reads:

BRIGOWAGLOS
(HIC) IACIT
.....CVS
"Brigomaglos lies (here)"

Although the letters on the stone are very boldly cut, they represent a degeneration of the careful Roman style of the fourth century[7] and have much in common with the so-called Catstane with which I shall presently deal. This fact, together with the termination OS instead of VS places the stone outside the Roman period, although still of "relatively high antiquity"—probably circa mid fifth century.

Two reasons have been adduced for regarding this inscription as Christian:

(1) HIC IACIT (for IACET) is the usual Christian formula in such sepulchral inscriptions.

[7] The letter W in the first line has doubtless been intended for an M, and the first letter in the second has been intended for an I, though it has a horizontal stroke at the bottom giving the appearance of an L turned the wrong way.

(2) The name BRIGOMAGLOS has certain affinities with other known British Christian names used in similar inscriptions from the fifth century onwards.

Eric Birley has added the comment:[8] "If Haverfield's restoration and identification are correct, this BRIGOWAGLOS is the BRIOMAGLUS or BRIOCUS who came from Britain to work for GERMANUS in Gaul in the early years of the fifth century. In any case, the inscription is very late, and Christian (to judge by its formula). It therefore provides some indication of occupation of the site in the period immediately following the severance of Britain from Rome."

Although there are many post-Roman Christian tombstones, principally in Wales, several in Cornwall and the South-West, and a number in Scotland,[9] this is the only one which has ever been found at a Roman site in the proper sense of the term.[10]

Although some reservations might be held concerning the definitely Christian character of some of the tombstones which I have described, taken as a whole they reinforce the evidence for the presence of a conscious Christian faith in the late fourth and early fifth centuries in the Northern Counties.

The Chesterholme inscription is one of a class of memorial stones already noted as occurring in Wales and the South-West: and also, I may now add, in the Lowlands of Scotland—the earliest Christian monuments in the Celtic Lands. These stones were erected to commemorate priests and chieftains and originally stood above their graves. Many are inscribed simply with the name of the deceased. Sometimes, as in the case of the Chesterholme example, this is preceded by a simple formula such as *Hic jacet*. A few bear Christian symbols of various types. The chronology of these memorials is established by the fact that they follow continental practice; the lettering is often of types that can

[8] In *A.A.*[4], viii (1931), p. 194.
[9] See below, Nos. 5-8.
[10] c.f. R. G. Collingwood, *The Archæology of Roman Britain* (1930), p. 176.

be dated. The greatest concentration of this type in the North is in Galloway, and the Scottish series as a whole does not extend north of the Forth-Clyde isthmus. For reasons which will be given later it is proper to regard this part of Galloway as having closer affinities with the North of England than with the rest of Scotland, hence its inclusion in the present study. None of the stones found in Scotland can be dated by external evidence, but there is no reason to doubt that the criteria established in Wales and the South-West hold good in the North also. The series would, then, range from the fifth to the seventh centuries. Only the earliest—two certainly and possibly a third—from Whithorn and Kirkmadrine in Wigtownshire, therefore fall within the period of this present study, together with the isolated find in West Lothian dealt with next.

(5) The CATSTANE or CAT STONE still stands in its original position in a cornfield, beneath which a number of graves are known to exist, at Kirkliston. (Unlike the other Celtic memorials, it does not stand in a Christian cemetery. This and certain other memorials represent a survival of the pagan custom of burial on private ground, a custom which continued into the Christian period and was only slowly replaced by the custom of burial in the churchyard.)

The stone stands $4\frac{1}{2}$ feet high and the inscription reads:

IN (H)OC TV-
MVLO IACIT
VETTA F(ILIVS)
VICTI[11]

"In this tomb lies Vetta the son of Victus"

(6) The earliest Christian memorial in Scotland, the LATINUS stone, dating from the middle of the fifth century,

[11] See the *Proceedings* of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, iv, p. 119 for a drawing, and an article by Sir James Y. Simpson, who here argues that the Catstane commemorates the grandfather of Hengist and Horsa.

FIG. 2. THE CATSTANE.

and possibly earlier, is a roughly squared pillar stone with an inscription. It was found in 1891, probably near the early church of *Candida Casa*, and is now in the museum at Whithorn at the gate of the churchyard.

The inscription in twelve horizontal lines reads:

P

(ET) DOMINV(M) LAVDAMVS LATINVS
ANNORV(M) XXXV ET FILIA SVA
ANN(ORVM) IV (H)IC SI(G)NVM
FECERVT NEPVS BARROVA DI

—that is to say, "We praise the Lord. Latinus, aged thirty-five and his daughter, age four. The grandson Barrovadus set up the monument here".

The letters, though some are carelessly formed, are all Roman capitals. The allusion in the opening words is to the 146th Psalm, "I will praise the Lord in my life", which forms part of the Roman office for the dead. The erection of the memorial stone by the surviving relative is frequently attested in early Christian memorials, and is here in imitation of continental usage.[12]

(7) The near and associated ancient church site of Kirkmadrine lies in the parish of Stoneykirk in the Rhinns of Galloway nine miles south of Stranraer and two miles from the village of Sandhead. The site is a natural rock outcrop entirely enclosed by an ancient graveyard where were found three of this class of gravestone, now in the porch-museum at the end of the church. All three bear a cross, and a ☧ monogram, but in the Scottish form which is the later of two known types, the other being the form common on the con-

[12] A second stone at Whithorn, but dated in the seventh century, is of interest because it is one of the four Scottish stones of this class which bear the ☧ monogram. On the front of its stone pillar is incised a cross similar to that described above, but set within a double circle. The cross is formed of four segments of circles which intersect near the centre of the enclosing circle. The cross and circle are set on a small stem with a flat base and curved sides. Inside the stem is the letter T, and outside and to the right an incised line at 45 degrees, for which no explanation has been offered. To the left and below are incised in three lines the words LOCI PETRI APVSTOLI, "The place of Peter the Apostle". A locus is a place, possibly a cemetery, with perhaps a small oratory, dedicated to God in honour of a Saint. The phrase and the use of Gaulish characters suggest Celtic rather than Saxon connections. It has been suggested that it may have marked the site of a relic brought back from Rome by some pilgrim; and that it may even replace an earlier stone marking the place of a relic brought back by St. Ninian himself. Unfortunately there is here insufficient evidence to merit the stone a place in our schedule. cf. also *St. Ninian: a Preliminary Study of Sources*, N. K. Chadwick in Trans. Dumfriesshire and Galloway Nat. Hist. and Antiq. Society, 3, xxvii (1950), p. 48.

tinent. Only the two earliest of the three stones strictly fall within the period of our study.

The first is a roughly squared pillar stone with an inscription and a cross on the front. The cross has curved expanded arms of equal length and concave terminations set within a circle, the right hand line of the upper arm serving as the upright of the capital P of the ☧ monogram. Above the circle are inscribed the letters A et W,[13] and below is a Latin inscription in six horizontal lines:

HIC IACENT
S(an)C(T)I ET PRAE
CIPVI SACER
DOTES IDES
VIVENTIVS
ET MAVORIVS[14]

"Here lie the holy and chief priests IDES, VIVENTIUS, and MAVORIUS"

The term chief priests should probably be interpreted as Bishops in view of the adjectives "holy and eminent", implying that Kirkmadrine was one of the principal evangelistic centres in this part of Scotland shortly after the time of Ninian.

The letters are good, well cut Roman capitals, with a number of ligatures. The indications are that it dates from the fifth century.

(8) The so-called *bishops stone* was found within the old burial ground, at the entrance to which it had formerly been used as a gatepost. A similar roughly squared pillar stone, with cross and inscription, had been used as a post on the

[13] This conjunction of two Christian symbols—A and W and the ☧ —is common on the continent and is found at the Lullingstone Roman villa, Kent.

[14] Haverfield, in *Early Northumbrian Christianity*, Note 8, *A.A.*[3], xv, renders the inscription: A et .. Hic iacent s(an)c(t)i et praecipui sacerdotes, id es(t) Veventius et Maiorius (or Mavorius). He thus gives id est in the place of the name Ides and adds an alternative form for Mavorius. This reading has been superseded. c.f. also *P.S.A.* Scotland 1897-98; also 1916-17, pp. 199-207, and Hübner, *I.B.C.*, pp. 205-6.

other side of the gate. The alpha and omega do not appear in this case. Below a cross and monogram similar to that on the *bishops stone* is a Latin inscription in three horizontal lines:

.....S ET
FLOREN
TIVS

"(Here lie) .....S and FLORENTIUS".

Various attempts have been made to decipher the first name but none of the solutions proposed is convincing. It has been suggested, in view of the similarities between the two stones, that the two men commemorated were also bishops. Since the generally accepted dating is in the late fifth century, the memorial would strictly fall outside our period were it not for its connection with the *Latinus* and *Bishops* stones.

(For this reason we may finally take note of, if we cannot include, a third roughly squared pillar stone of the same type found at Kirkmadrine. The cross encircled in its *Halo of glory* has thicker and heavier arms with pronounced wedge-shaped ends. Below is a Latin inscription in the now familiar style in two horizontal lines. . . .

INITIVM
ET FINIS .....

"The beginning and the end".[15] The allusion is to the passage from Revelation already quoted. It is used to indicate that the stone was a cross of Christ, probably set up to indicate a space used for worship. The more advanced character of the cross and of the lettering indicate a date about 600 A.D.)

All the stones of this class, but more particularly the fifth century stones which we have described, attest the presence of a local Christianity whose roots are to be found in the

[15] Initium et Finis is a variant of Alpha and Omega, *Revelation* xxi, 6. Both are emblematic of Christ.

fourth century Roman period. In the case of the Whithorn and Kirkmadrine examples this connection is undoubtedly through the mission of St. Ninian in Galloway and its neighbouring territories in the early fifth century.

Clear evidence of the presence of Christianity is afforded by the discovery of the ☧ monogram inscribed in plaster or stone. Two such evidences now fall to be considered.

(9) The first, at *Maryport* (ALAVNA), was recorded,

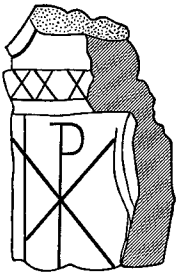


FIG. 3. INSCRIPTION AT MARYPORT.

but its significance was not understood, by William Hutchinson in 1794.[16] Only recently in 1954 was this record "rediscovered" and its significance appreciated for the first time, by Dr. M. G. Jarrett.[17] He rightly pointed out that although it was tucked away amongst many obviously more interesting stones, on the last but one of the plates, it surely deserves more attention than any of the other stones, for it portrays an undoubted ☧ monogram in the top left hand corner of a panel, some 12″ high and 6″ wide, the upper border of which shows three of what were no doubt a longer series of simple crosses (which are probably nothing more than ornaments of purely descriptive significance). Since most of the inscribed and sculptured stones found their way to the Senhouse collection at Netherhall, Dr. Jarrett searched there

[16] *History of Cumberland,* 1794. It would be more proper to say that this inscription was recorded by a young artist, James Lowes, whose work was commissioned by Hutchinson for his book (Pl. 6 facing page 284), for Hutchinson himself nowhere describes the inscription, if indeed he ever visited the site.

[17] *C.W.*[2], liv. (1954), pp. 269ff.

for this fragment, but without success. Its present whereabouts remain a mystery. Dr. Jarrett concluded, "It constitutes the only record of its kind on stone in the Northern part of Roman Britain," a judgment which must now be slightly modified in the light of the find next described. It remains, however, the first indication of the presence of Christians at Roman Maryport.[18]

(10) A similar but much more recent find at *Catterick* has considerably strengthened the evidence for Christianity in the Northern Counties. This was the discovery in 1959 of a ☧ inscription on sandstone, $4\frac{1}{2}'' \times 7''$, built into the external face of the South Wall of the cold plunge bath. Before the mortar could weather the structure was disused and filled with rubbish, datable to the early fourth century. While the other stones were plain, this one, lying on its longer axis, was first decorated with two vertical strokes and one horizontal stroke. Then an X, made in four separate strokes, was cut across this horizontal. Finally the horizontal stroke was by two short strokes converted into a P with angular loop, in all forming an intentional but inconspicuous ☧ lying on its side with its head towards the west.[19] This extant fragment confirms the credibility of the missing Maryport example, and the accuracy of its reproduction.

Inscribed Tableware, Personal Ornaments, and the like

We turn now to a consideration of more portable objects whose presence implies that their owners, whether residents or travellers, were themselves Christians.

(11) Of prime importance for this present study was the discovery, in 1735, in the south bank of the Tyne at Corbridge—apparently washed up there by the river—of an inscribed silver bowl. This proved to be one of a group of five pieces discovered at widely spread intervals, of which the most celebrated is the Corbridge Lanx—a highly ornamented silver tray, now at Alnwick Castle—and collectively known,

[18] c.f. also Eric Birley, *Research on Hadrian's Wall* (1961), p. 260.
[19] *J.R.S.*, li. (1961), p. 193.

from their association with one another, as the *Corbridge Treasure*. Unfortunately, the bowl, much corroded when found, has disappeared from our knowledge, if it has not in fact disintegrated. However, it has been carefully recorded, and there remains no doubt of its provenance or Christian

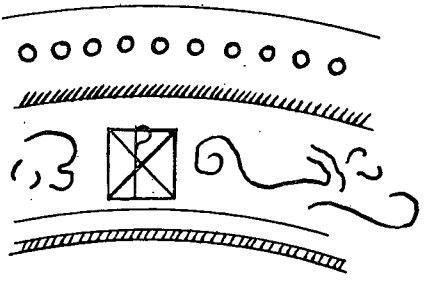


FIG. 4. DETAILS FROM BOWL FROM CORBRIDGE.

character. Drawings made at the time show it to have been a round, flat bottomed bowl with a flat rim, weighing 20 ozs., and measuring 4″ overall height and $8\frac{1}{4}$″ overall diameter. The bowl itself was without ornament, except for a circular design as of a conventional rose, $1\frac{1}{2}$″ in diameter, placed inside on the centre of the bottom. The rim, $1\frac{3}{4}$″ wide, bore a row of 57 round knobs, each $\frac{1}{4}$″ high, and a conventional scroll pattern of indifferent workmanship in which the ☧ monogram recurs six times at regular[20] intervals. The ☧ monogram is conclusive evidence of a Christian association.

It has been held that this bowl was intended for church use, but Haverfield dissented from this view, citing its shape. The presence of this relic does not, of course, in itself point to an indigenous church or even a local adoption of the Christian faith. It proves that some Christian, possibly a travelling Roman official, was in North Britain in the course of the fourth century. This is borne out by the fact that all the associated pieces were discovered near a river crossing

[20] M.S. minutes of the London Society of Antiquaries, 14 and 28 October, 1736, pp. 231, 234. Gay's additions to the copy of the same, for 28 October, in Gough's papers in the Bodleian library, has "at *irregular* intervals".

on an important highway to the North. It is possible that they fell into the river accidentally during a difficult passage.

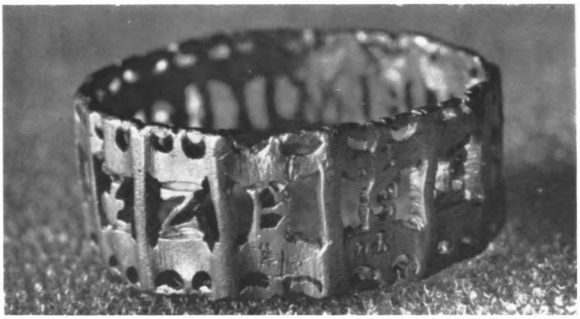
(12) The final item of the *Corbridge Treasure* was discovered in the river Tyne at Bywell, some five miles below Corbridge, by a fisherman in 1760. It was a small silver cup or beaker "rolling on the waves" and bore the inscription DESIDERI VIVAS round the rim. Wallis, who first described the discovery,[21] conjectured, I think rightly, that it was probably washed out of the banks about Corbridge, "where other Roman vessels of silver are said to have been turned out by the floods". The beaker was 4″ in height and 2″ overall diameter, at its broadest part.[22] Collingwood Bruce translated the inscription as "Long life to you, O Desiderius", as usual ascribing to this formula no Christian significance. He did however relate this inscription to one found on the back of an altar at Maryport, which I shall presently describe.[23] Although when Wallis wrote the vessel was in the possession of William Fenwick, Lord of the Manor of Bywell, Collingwood Bruce gave it as his opinion that by then it had probably perished. Like the ☧ bowl, it has by now undoubtedly disintegrated. The similarity of the pieces, and the close proximity of their find spots, indicate that they belonged to the same set and most probably had a common Christian owner.

Finger Rings

(13) and (14) Of a number of smaller and more portable objects with Christian associations, perhaps the most attractive and finely executed are two similar gold finger rings, discovered at Corbridge. The first was unearthed in 1840 by a man pulling turnips in a field, and the second as recently as 1935. The earlier is in the cabinet of antique rings in the possession of the Duke of Northumberland at Alnwick Castle, where I have been afforded the opportunity of making

[21] *History of Northumberland*, Vol. II, p. 152.
[22] Brand, *History of Newcastle*, Vol. I, p. 608.
[23] No. 2 below, "Rejected Claims", to follow in Part II.

Tombstone of TITTUS M...., at Brougham.
(No. 3.)



Gold finger-ring inscribed AEMILIA ZESES;
Duke of Northumberland's Collection. (No. 13.)

a detailed examination. The ring weighs a mere 75 grains. It is formed by the junction of fifteen fluted facets, each facet bears a letter, with the exception of three, and these are filled with leaf stop ornaments. It is "inscribed" with the words AEMILIA ZESES (Fig. 5), that is to say, "Long life to Aemilia". The second ring is "inscribed" in Greek characters πολεμιου φιλτρον that is to say, "The love token of POLEMIOS". It is now in the British Museum. This ring was first described in detail to this

FIG. 5

Society by John D. Cowen in 1936,[24] together with a short description of the AEMILIA ring. In 1948 Cowen added a full footnote on the dating of this class as a whole.[25] It might seem therefore an unnecessary presumption to add any further comment. There is however one cogent reason for a fresh review.

As early as 1856, when the Aemilia ring was published in the Catalogue of the Edinburgh Museum, it was held to possess a Christian significance, and this view has generally been accepted ever since for the class as a whole. It has been based in particular on the work of C. Drury Fortnum, the nineteenth century authority on finger rings of the Roman period,[26] accepted by Cowen in his 1936 paper (not however in 1948 for reasons which will become apparent), and repeated as recently as 1961 by Dorothy Charlesworth in respect of the AEMILIA but not the POLEMIOS ring.[27] However this accepted view has been more recently challenged. It would seem to be useful therefore to review the arguments which tell in favour of or against

[24] *A.A.*[4], xiii (1936), pp. 310ff.
[25] *A.A.*[4], xxvi (1948), pp. 139ff.
[26] See for example *A.J.*, vols vii (1850), p. 192 and fig.; xxvi (1869), p. 148; xxviii (1871), pp. 266-292; xxix (1872), pp. 305-313.
[27] *A.A.*[4], xxxix (1961), pp. 9 and 24.

a Christian association, and come to some conclusion in the matter.

The class comprises: First, the AEMILIA; second the πολεμιου φιλτρον ring (the only two certain British examples, found at Corbridge).

A third "of unknown type" discovered at Stonham Aspel in Suffolk, and inscribed ΟΛΥΜΠΕΙ ΖΗΣΑΙΣ, "Long life to Olympia". This ring must be included with due reserve.[28]

A fourth discovered at Cologne and inscribed ΑΛΑΣΩΝΙ ΖΗΣΑΙΣ, "Long life to Alasonius".

FIG. 6

A fifth from Rome, now in the Fortnum collection at the Ashmolean inscribed χρωματι.

A sixth, by inference from Egypt since it came from the Demetrio collection, part of the Franks bequest now in the British Museum. It is inscribed on the bezel ACCIPE DVLCIS and on the hoop MVLTIS ANNIS.

A seventh from Tirlemont in Brabant, now supposedly in Paris, inscribed CONCORDI COMMVN.

Finally an eighth ring from Herstai, Province Liège, and now in the Cinquantennaire Museum, Brussels. It is similar to the Franks ring and is inscribed in two auto registers VTERE FELIX and GELASI VIVAS ET AMERIS A NOBIS.

Their common characteristics may be summarised as follows:

1. Made of gold in the cases where the metal has been specified.

[28] *Gentleman's Magazine*, lxxxi, Pt. II, p. 516. References for the other rings are given in the comprehensive list in the Appendix.

2. Both decoration and/or inscription is finely formed by a delicate "openwork" technique in which the design is not etched or engraved on the metal but completely punched out.
3. The hoop of the ring is composed of a number of slightly concave panels or flutings presenting in plan or section an octagon.
4. Where ornament is present (in all cases except one), it consists of a foliated and pierced scrollwork in the borders or registers above and below the inscription.
5. Each letter of the inscription occupies one of the square panels in the centre register, the ground of the panel being cut away, leaving the letter reserved in the metal and attached merely by points to the sides. Fortnum seems to have coined the phrase "champlevé à jour" for this technical peculiarity. It is the *opus interrasile* of Pliny's day.

In addition to these common characteristics, the ornament of three of the rings, from Tirlemont and the two from Corbridge, consists of a pelta or palmette motif in which the centre and the volute ends are turned to the exterior. In the case of the POLEMIOS ring the back of the pelta is attached to the horizontal bar by a minute lozenge. Otherwise the series of pelta on the Tirlemont ring is indistinguishable from the POLEMIOS ring, and the resemblance is so striking that both rings must have come from the same workshop. In four cases, again including the Corbridge examples, one or more of the panels is occupied by a leaf stop in *opus interrasile*.

In total, this considerable number of marked similarities constitutes the rings a very distinctive class. Our argument is therefore that if some of the rings can be shown to possess Christian associations, there is strong presumptive evidence for the remainder. The first of these features is bound up with the formula of the inscriptions. In addition to being, though not exclusively, Christian in spirit and sentiment, no

less than four of the eight include a personal acclamation accompanied by the allegedly Christian formula VIVAS, "Long life to . . .", or its Greek equivalent ZHΣAIΣ (for ζησειας). Cowen has pointed out[29] that on the AEMILIA ring "the word has suffered a curious fate, the Latin VIVAS, translated into the Greek ζησειας, has been re-transliterated into Roman capitals, suffering in the process a partial Latinisation to the form ZESES". His further contention that the force of the word arises from the fact that it is an abbreviation for the ubiquitous formula VIVAS IN DEO, has been recently challenged on the ground that it is found also in pagan contexts.[30] It has been pointed out, for example, that but for the use of this word, in the case of the Herstai ring, there is nothing to suggest a Christian influence in the normally pagan character of the remainder.[31]

The case for the Christian connotation of these rings however does not rest solely on the claim that this word where it occurs is the abbreviated form of a distinctively Christian formula. We can cite in addition the following evidences:

1. Rings were early a favourite means for expressing Christian sentiments.
2. They were frequently, although again not exclusively, used by the Christians as a sign of betrothal or marriage.[32]
3. "Inscriptions on early Christian rings frequently took the form of acclamations or expressions of goodwill."[33] It is possible that some of these rings were fashioned as a betrothal or new-year's gift, from one member of a Christian family to another.

[29] *A.A.*[4], xiii (1936), p. 314.

[30] The Maryport example, see No. 2 in "Rejected Claims" (Part II), is just such a case in point.

[31] *A.A.*[4], xxxi (1948), p. 140 and Pl. V, fig. 2.

[32] In the case of the POLEMIOS ring the use of the word φιτλορυ, 'love token', raises the distinct possibility that it was a token of betrothal. The fact that a 'love charm' or amulet seems at first sight to be distinctly un-Christian in sentiment need not rule out the later use of the word by Christians in a sense then devoid of magical overtones.

[33] B.M. Guide to Early Christian Antiquities, p. 134.

4. Three of the rings, from Tirlemont and Herstai, and the Franks ring, are key-rings, having a square projection from the hoop for inserting into the latch of, for example, a cabinet. Their significance for us lies in the fact that the bezel of the Franks ring is pierced with a diaper of nine Greek crosses.
5. The final, if uncertain, piece of evidence concerns the personal names which are inscribed on two of the rings. Fortnum claimed in 1869[34] that in the case of the ring in his collection, found at Rome, the inscription χρωματι was "known to be a Christian family name of the fourth century", and this he had in turn from the antiquarian De Rossi, his contemporary.

In the case of the AEMILIA ring, it would be extravagant to claim that this was becoming a recognised Christian name by the fourth century, but it is interesting to note that a third century gold ring, also angular and fluted on the outside, in the British Museum, has the name AEMILIA occurring together with the distinctively Christian emblems of a fish, a dove and a tree of life engraved in intaglio on the two sides of an oval bezel.[35]

By themselves of course these evidences are slight, but in sum they strongly support the presumption that all the rings, including our Corbridge POLEMIOS ring, are Christian, and that the presence of the word VIVAS or its equivalent in this context represents the ubiquitous Christian formula VIVAS IN DEO.

Dating

The openwork technique, the pelta decoration, and the fineness of the execution generally, argue for a late fourth century date. If the rings are Christian, the appearance of Christian formulae on such articles of outward show as finger

[34] *A.J.* xxvi (1869), p. 148.

[35] B.M. Cat. of *Early Christian Antiquities*, p. 8, No. 48, repeated in Cat. of *Early Christian Finger Rings etc.* c.f. also Fortnum in *A.J.* xxviii (1871), p. 271, No. 5, and *A.J.* xxvi (1869), p. 142.

rings would support a dating after the Peace of the Church in A.D. 343. It is interesting to note however that the later the dating on other grounds the stronger is the presumption for a Christian association. Cowen was thus obliged in his later paper to reject his earlier conclusion for the class as a whole—"in the phrasing of the inscriptions there can hardly be any question of Christian formulae"—because he found that the Tirlemont ring was allegedly associated with an excavation dated by the Belgian authorities to the end of the first or the beginning of the second century A.D. Without adducing detailed evidence, the circumstances of that find are very suspicious,[36] and the use of openwork decoration, with or without an inscription, is certainly a late Roman development. Cowen's earlier conclusion must therefore be allowed to stand, unaffected by this questionable association.

For speculation on the centre of origin, ownership, and circumstances surrounding the loss of the two Corbridge rings, I would refer you to Cowen's fuller account.[37] It is sufficient if we note here that he hazarded Alexandria, where there was a numerous and powerful Christian community in the fourth century A.D., as a possible source. Sir I. A. Richmond has indicated several points of resemblance between these two rings and the *Corbridge Treasure* noted earlier.[38] They too were of the Lower Empire, of oriental inspiration, possibly of Alexandrian workmanship, and, as we have noted elsewhere, possessed Christian associations.

In conclusion, five of the eight rings, including our Corbridge examples, carry inscriptions which are either written in Greek characters, or directly transliterated from the Greek. Significantly there are a number of other evidences to suggest a considerable Greek element in the vicus at CORSTOPITVM. The inscriptions on two of the altars found here, for example, are in Greek. We know from a reading of early Christian history elsewhere that such a mer-

[36] Thus D. Charlesworth, *Roman Jewelry in Northumberland and Durham*, in *A.A.*[4], xxxix (1961), p. 9.
[37] *A.A.*[4], xiii (1936), pp. 310ff.
[38] *Ibid.*, footnote 17.

cantile Greek environment proved congenial to the diffusion of the Faith in the first centuries of our era.

(15) Two other finger rings with Christian associations remain to be considered. The first, fortunately still extant, is to be seen on display in the museum at Chesters.[39] It is of jet, with an oval hoop 1″ in diameter, broadening and flattened externally at either end, the upper and lower edge being decorated with incised lines. The outer edge bears the

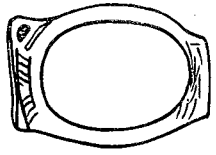


FIG. 7. JET RING, ACTUAL SIZE.

MONOGRAM 2x

legend QVIS SEPA MEVM ET TVVM DVRANTE VITA, "What shall separate thee and me during life", a sentiment distinctly Christian in tone, though not exclusively so. The feature which clinches the matter is the presence of a ☧ monogram of unusual form, in which the Rho (P) is attached to the right side of the stem of a vertical bar bisecting the Chi (X) in the upper register. Again, it is most probable that this ornament was presented as a betrothal ring. Unfortunately, the precise find spot has not been noted. We may fairly conclude, however, from its presence in this collection, so intimately associated with the name of John Clayton, that it was discovered in the Wall region, and, from inclusion in this show-case, most probably at CILVRNVM itself.[40]

(16) Some time after 1828, but before 1866, a "curious ring bearing the Christian monogram" was found in the river bed below the fort at Brough under Stainmore, one of a large number of finds, presumably during the incumbency of the Rev. Lancelot Jefferson. The first notice of this

[39] In Table Case C, originally No. 1710, now 3582.

[40] E. A. Wallis-Budge: *Account of Roman Antiquities at Chesters*, 2nd Edition (1907), p. 389. c.f. also D. Charlesworth, *A.A.*[4], xxxix, p. 24, and Pl. I (8).

"most unusual find of all the Roman series" was made in passing in the very first paper delivered to the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian Society by Canon James Simpson in 1866.[41] Unfortunately, the whereabouts of this ring, of which we possess only this scanty information, are now unknown. Significantly, Eric Birley, writing as recently as 1961,[42] could regard this as "One more item to be added to the *short* list of archæological evidence for Christianity in the North of England". (Italics mine.)

(To be continued)

APPENDIX

GOLD FINGER RINGS: A COMPREHENSIVE LIST

(Numbers in parenthesis denote rings as listed in the text)

(1) *Lap. Sept.* 655.

(1) *C.I.L.* 1300.

(1) *E.E.* ix, 688.

(1) *Catalogue of Edinburgh Museum* (1856), 59, 60, with refs. and fig.

(1) *Manuscript Catalogue of Duke of Northumberland's Antiquities at Alnwick Castle.* Way.

(1) *Northumberland County History,* x, (1914), "Corbridge", 515 and Bibliography, Haverfield.

(1, 6, 7) *B.M. Cat. of Early Christian Antiquities,* 9, No. 49. (7)—Brief Reference.

(1, 6, 7) *B.M. Cat. of Early Christian Finger Rings etc.* (Franks Bequest), Identical with Foregoing.

A.J. iii (1846), 267, 358, on Talismanic Rings in general.

(1) *A.J.* vii (1850), 192 and fig.

(1, 5) *A.J.* xxvi (1869), 137ff., esp. 148 and fig.

(5, 6) *A.J.* xxviii (1871), 266-292, on Christian Symbols. (5) 266, (6) 290.

(6) *A.J.* xxix (1872), 305-313, esp. 305 and fig.

[41] *C.W.* 1, i (1866), p. 9.
[42] *C.W.* 2, lxi (1961), p. 298.

The last three references are to articles by C. Drury E. Fortnum.

(1, 2, 6, 7) *A.A.*[4], xiii (1936), 310ff. (1) 312, (2) 312, (6) 313, (7) 314, Note 10.

(2, 6, 7, 8) *A.A.*[4], xxvi (1948), 139ff. (6) 139, brief reference. (7) Pl. v, fig. 3. (8) Pl. v, fig. 2. These two articles by John D. Cowen.

(1, 2) *A.A.*[4], xxxix (1961), 1-36, esp. pp. 9, 24. (1) Pl. 1, 7. (2) Pl. 1, 6. By Dorothy Charlesworth.

(2) British Museum Loan Collection, 1935.

(6) *Les Musées de France* (Paris, 1873), Pl. 38, fig. 9, 10.

(3) *Gentleman's Magazine,* lxxxi, Pt. II, 516.

(4) *Die Römische Fingerringe Der Rheinlande,* Henkel, No. 9, Pl. 1, 9 and a-d.

(7, 8) *Belgique Ancienne, Catalogue Descriptif et Raisonné,* I-III; *La Periode Romaine par le Baron de Loe,* Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire à Bruxelles (1937).

(7) 93-4, with bibliography and fig. 31. (8) 122, refs., and fig. 52.

(7) c.f. also Sale Catalogue of Castellani Collection, No. 928, p. 120, for a similar ring.

The Aemilia ring is included in the following:

B.M. Catalogue of Early Christian Antiquities, 8, No. 48.

King's *Antique Gems,* i, 344.

Catacombes de Rome. Perret, Pl. xvi.

A.J. xxvi (1869), 142; xxvii (1871), 271.

Other examples of British openwork rings, otherwise dissimilar:

Archaeologia, Liv, 468, fig. 5.

The Roman Fort at Templeborough, T. May. 10, Pl. iva, fig. 5.