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ON
PORTRAITS OF CHRIST
IN THE
BRITISH MUSEUM

By CECIL TORR, M.A.

ILLUSTRATED.

LONDON :
C. J. CLAY AND SONS,
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THE originals of figs. 1 and 2 were formerly in the Matarozzi collection at Castel Durante near Urbino¹, and were acquired by the British Museum in 1863.

They are the remnants of two glass bowls, or saucers, of a type that generally is associated with the Catacombs at Rome. The design is formed by laying down gold-leaf on a sheet of glass; a second sheet of glass being afterwards fixed on above, so that the gold-leaf is enclosed between the two, and thus protected from decay.

On the bowl in fig. 1 there is a portrait bust, with the name CRISTVS, in a circle in the centre; and round this circle there are portions of six full-length portraits, with columns bearing tablets for the names. One of these tablets shows traces of the letters TEVS, probably the ending of the name TIMOTEVS.

In another bowl of similar design² two of the tablets are preserved, and the names are PAVLVS and FELIX. In another³ the whole six tablets are preserved, and the names are PETRVS, PAVLVS, LAVRENTIVS, SVSTVS, CIPRIANVS and EPOLITVS. This group of names suggests a date.

Sixtus, the bishop of Rome, was beheaded on the 6th of August in 258 A.D.; and Cyprian, the bishop of Carthage,

¹ They appear in Garrucci, *Vetri ornati di figure in oro*, pl. 18, figs. 1, 2 = *Storia dell' arte cristiana*, pl. 187, figs. 1, 2; and also in San Clemente, *Musei sanclementiani numismata selecta*, vol. 3, pl. 42, figs. 7, 9. In those works, however, there are only outline drawings, which hardly do them justice.

² Garrucci, *Vetri*, pl. 19, fig. 6 = *Storia*, pl. 188, fig. 6.

³ *Ibid.*, fig. 7.

was beheaded on the 14th of September. Laurence, the deacon, was killed a few days after Sixtus; and Hippolytus a few days after Laurence. On the 29th of June, when the persecution was impending, the bodies of Peter and Paul had been removed to other tombs⁴.

Most probably the bowl with those six names was made while the events of 258 A.D. were fresh in people's minds. And from the similarity of its design, the bowl in fig. 1 may be attributed to the same maker.

On the bowl in fig. 2 there is again a portrait bust, with the name CRISTVS. But here it is enclosed within two squares set crosswise; and in the triangles between these squares there are four smaller busts, unnamed.

On both these bowls, figs. 1 and 2, Christ is represented as a beardless youth, with flowing hair that falls in masses on his shoulders. And this is how he generally is represented in works of early date, although in works of later date he always figures as a bearded man.

That discrepancy involves the question:—Whether the older Christian artists shared the views of their successors about the age attained by Christ; but liked to represent him in the earlier, rather than the later, portion of his life. Or whether, on the other hand, they held that Christ was still a youth when he was crucified, and thus could not be represented as a man.

All the four gospels place the Crucifixion in the time of Pontius Pilate; and this is the only matter of chronology that has been embodied in the Creed.

Josephus says that Pilate was ordered home by Vitellius, the legate of Syria, in consequence of serious complaints

⁴ This fact is noted in a *Depositio Martyrum*, which dates from 354 A.D., printed in Mommsen's *Chronica Minora*, pp. 71, 72:—*III kal. Iul. Petri in Catacumbas, et Pauli Ostense, Tusco et Basso cons(ulibus)*. Tuscus and Bassus held the consulship in 258 A.D. Although this *Depositio* does not mention very many martyrs, it includes the four in question here:—*VIII idus Aug. Xysti in Callisti*.....*III idus Aug. Laurenti in Tiburtina*.....*Idus Aug. Ypolitii in Tiburtina*.....*XVIII kal. Octob. Cypriani Africe: Romæ celebratur in Callisti*.



FIGS. 1, 2. GLASS BOWLS IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM. Actual size.

about his conduct as procurator of Judæa⁵. As this Vitellius held the consulship in 34 A.D., he cannot have arrived in Syria as legate until the spring of 35, and can hardly have ordered Pilate home before the summer of that year. Josephus goes on to say that, after ordering Pilate home, Vitellius came up to Jerusalem at the time of a Passover; returned to Antioch, went down to the Euphrates, interviewed the king of Parthia, organized an expedition, and so forth; then came up again to Jerusalem at the time of a feast, and there received despatches saying that Tiberius was dead⁶. Thus, as Tiberius died on the 16th of March in 37 A.D., Vitellius must have ordered Pilate home some little while before the Passover of 36. And as the Crucifixion was close upon a Passover, it cannot have been later than the spring of 35.

Josephus also says that Pilate had held the procuratorship for ten years⁷: which is his way of saying that Pilate had been procurator in ten Jewish years reckoned from the 1st of Nisan to the 1st of Nisan, or, roughly speaking, March to March. Therefore, if Pilate was ordered home in the year that ran from the 1st of Nisan in 35 A.D. to the 1st of Nisan in 36, he must have arrived as procurator in the year that ran from the 1st of Nisan in 26 to the 1st of Nisan in 27. And as the Passover was kept on the 14th of Nisan, the Crucifixion can hardly have been earlier than the spring of 27.

The gospel of Matthew places the Nativity in king Herod's reign.

Josephus says that Herod reigned thirty-seven years counting from his recognition by the Romans, or thirty-four years counting from the murder of his predecessor⁸; and Josephus places those events in the consulship of Calvinus and Pollio and the consulship of Agrippa and Gallus, that is to say, in 40 and 37 B.C. respectively⁹. Thus, the Jewish year from the 1st of Nisan in 40 to the 1st of Nisan in 39 B.C. would be reckoned as the first of Herod's reign *de jure*, and

⁵ Ant. xviii. 4. 2.

⁷ Ant. xviii. 4. 2.

⁹ Ant. xiv. 14. 5; 16. 4.

⁶ Ant. xviii. 4. 3; 4. 5; 5. 3.

⁸ Ant. xvii. 8. 1.

that from the 1st of Nisan in 37 to the 1st of Nisan in 36 B.C. as the fourth *de jure* and the first *de facto*; so that his thirty-seventh year *de jure* and his thirty-fourth *de facto* would be the Jewish year from the 1st of Nisan in 4 to the 1st of Nisan in 3 B.C. But as Josephus says that Herod died immediately before a Passover¹⁰, and the Passover was kept on the 14th of Nisan, his death would have occurred in 4 B.C. Josephus also speaks of an eclipse of the moon during Herod's last illness¹¹; and there seems to have been an eclipse of the moon, visible at Jerusalem, on the night between the 12th and 13th of March in 4 B.C., but none in the succeeding year. Hence the death of Herod may be placed with certainty in the spring of 4 B.C.

Thus the Nativity could not have been later than the beginning of 4 B.C. On the other hand, the Crucifixion cannot have been earlier than the spring of 27 A.D., and may have been as late as the spring of 35. Christ would therefore have attained the age of thirty before the Crucifixion, and might have attained the age of thirty-eight or more.

The gospel of Luke says that Christ was about thirty years of age when he began to teach. And the gospel of John places the beginning of his teaching at a time when the Temple had been forty-six years in building.

If these two statements are connected, they will show that Christ was born about sixteen years after the building of the Temple was begun. Josephus says that the building was begun in the eighteenth¹² and the fifteenth¹³ year of Herod's reign. The eighteenth year of Herod's reign *de jure*, and the fifteenth year *de facto*, was the year that ran from the 1st of Nisan in 23 to the 1st of Nisan in 22 B.C. And thus Christ would have been born about the year that ran from the 1st of Nisan in 7 to the 1st of Nisan in 6 B.C. In other words, he would have been born some two or three years before the death of Herod.

The gospel of Matthew seems to imply that Christ was born some little while before the death of Herod, for it says

¹⁰ Ant. xvii. 9. 3.

¹¹ Ant. xvii. 6. 4.

¹² Ant. xv. 11. 1.

¹³ Bel. i. 21. 1.

that Herod slew the children "from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently enquired." And thus all these statements are consistent.

But if the Nativity is placed a couple of years before the death of Herod—that is to say, about the end of 7 or the beginning of 6 B.C.—the Crucifixion cannot have occurred till Christ was thirty-two years old, and need not have occurred till he was forty.

Seeing that the building of the Temple was begun in the year that ran from the 1st of Nisan in 23 B.C. to the 1st of Nisan in 22, the Temple would have been "forty-and-six years in building" in the year that ran from the 1st of Nisan in 23 A.D. to the 1st of Nisan in 24. But as the words were spoken at the season of a Passover, and the Passover was kept on the 14th of Nisan, they could have been spoken a little after the 1st of Nisan in 23 or a little before the 1st of Nisan in 24. The gospel of John thus seems to place the beginning of Christ's teaching in the spring of 23 or 24 A.D.

The gospel of Luke, however, seems to place the beginning of Christ's teaching in the fifteenth year of Tiberius. And this year ran from the 19th of August in 28 to the 19th of August in 29 A.D.

Anybody who attained the age of thirty in this year, must have been born between the 19th of August in 3 and the 19th of August in 2 B.C.; whereas anybody who was born in Herod's reign, must have been born before the end of March in 4 B.C. But this gospel only says that Christ was "about" thirty years of age when he began to teach. And by giving a very wide interpretation to the word "about," the date of the Nativity could still be carried back to Herod's reign.

The gospel of Luke elsewhere places the Nativity at a time when Quirinius was legate of Syria. It is highly probable that Quirinius held this office twice¹⁴; and quite

¹⁴ *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, vol. xiv., no. 3613, lines 5, 6, *pro consul(e) Asiam provinciam optinuit: legatus pr(o) pr(æ)lore] divi Augusti [i]terum Syriam et Phœnicen optinuit*. As to the reasons for applying this to Quirinius, see Mommsen, *Res gestæ divi Augusti*, pp. 161—182 in the second edition.

possible that the years 3 and 2 B.C. were included in his first administration. In that case, the statement would agree with those just cited from this gospel. But it seems impossible to make the first administration of Quirinius reach back to Herod's reign.

Josephus repeatedly mentions Varus as the legate of Syria at the end of Herod's reign and the beginning of the reign of his successor, Archelaus¹⁵. And the fact is established by the coins of Varus, struck in Syria, with the



FIG. 3. THREE BRONZE COINS IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM. Actual size. *Obverse.* Head of Zeus, to right. *Reverse.* The statue (by Eutychides) of Antioch on the Orontes. Inscribed *Ἀντιοχέωv* and *ἐπι Οὐάpου* or *ἐπι Ὀάpου* with the dates *εκ* and *ςκ* and *ζκ* respectively.

dates of 25 and 26 and 27 in the era of Actium, which represent the three years running from the 6th of September in 7 to the 6th of September in 4 B.C. Josephus says that Varus was the successor of Saturninus¹⁶. And he speaks of Saturninus as the legate just after Herod's return from a visit to Augustus, while he speaks of Titius as the legate just before Herod's departure on this visit¹⁷. Saturninus must therefore have succeeded Titius. Hence, if Titius and Saturninus and

¹⁵ Ant. xvii. 5. 2-7; 9. 3; 10. 1, 9, 10.

¹⁷ Ant. xvi. 9. 1; 8. 6.

¹⁶ Ant. xvii. 5. 2.



Varus held the post for three years each, as was the rule, they held it from some time before 11 B.C. until after Herod's death; and Quirinius was not eligible until 11, as he did not fill the consulship till 12.

But as the gospel of Luke speaks of a census in connexion with Quirinius, it clearly is referring to his second administration. This census is mentioned in an inscription¹⁸, and also by Josephus¹⁹. Josephus places it within year 37 of the era of Actium, that is to say, between the 6th of September in 6 and the 6th of September in 7 A.D. He also says that it occurred just after Archelaus was deposed; and Dio Cassius shows that Archelaus was deposed in the consulship of Lepidus and Arruntius²⁰, that is to say, in 6 A.D. And obviously no census could be taken by Quirinius in Judæa, until that country was brought within the Roman province by the deposition of Archelaus.

If the Nativity is placed at the end of 6 or the beginning of 7 A.D., the following results ensue:—Christ must have been born nearly ten years after Herod's death in the spring of 4 B.C. Instead of being about thirty years of age at the fifteenth year of Tiberius in 28 and 29 A.D., he would only have been about two-and-twenty. He could not have been more than eight-and-twenty at the time of the Crucifixion, even if it was as late as the spring of 35 A.D.; and if it was as early as the spring of 27 A.D., he would not have been more than twenty. And he would only have been sixteen or seventeen when he began to teach, if this was when the Temple had been forty-six years in building, in the spring of 23 or 24 A.D.

Of course, these results cannot be reconciled with those that follow from the other passages that have been cited. But the divergence may possibly be explained.

In the gospel of Luke the mention of the census is prefaced by the phrase "in those days"; and presumably the phrase

¹⁸ Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum, vol. iii., no. 6687, lines 8—11, *idem iussu Quirini censum egi Apamene civitatis millium homin(um) civium CXVII.*

¹⁹ Ant. xvii. 13. 5; xviii. 1. 1; 2. 1.

²⁰ Hist. lv. 25, 27.



has reference to the statement that comes immediately before, namely, that John the Baptist was in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel. This "shewing unto Israel" can hardly be anything but his appearance at Jerusalem for the Passover when he was twelve years old²¹. There is much material for proving that the strict observance of the Law became a matter of obligation when a child attained the age of twelve²². It is clear that Christ came up to Jerusalem for the Passover when he was twelve years old. And no doubt the rule was followed in the case of John as well as in the case of Christ.

But if John was twelve years old at the end of 6 or the beginning of 7 A.D., he must have been born at the end of 7 or the beginning of 6 B.C., the date at which those other passages would place the birth of Christ. And the inference is this:—It was John who was born in 7 or 6 B.C., while Christ was born in 6 or 7 A.D. But by the time the gospels were composed, a group of traditions that originally were connected with the infancy of John, had already been transferred to the infancy of Christ.

This inference is supported in a very striking way by a number of early pictures of the baptism of Christ, where John is represented as a bearded man while Christ is represented as a boy. And obviously such pictures cannot be explained at all, if the gospel of Luke is held to prove that Christ was born just six months after John.

The ivory tablet in fig. 4 was formerly in the collection of the Rev. W. Maskell, and was acquired by the British Museum in 1856.

To judge by the design, it probably was made at Ravenna in the days of Theoderic, that is to say, about 500 A.D. The

²¹ The expression in Luke, i. 80, *ἡ ἀνάδειξις αὐτοῦ πρὸς τὸν Ἰσραὴλ*, must be compared with the expression in Luke, x. 1, *ἀνέδειξεν ὁ κύριος ἑτέροισ ἐβδομήκοντα*, where *ἑτέροισ* shows that *ἀνέδειξεν* is applied to the admission of new members. This is also the sense of *ἀνάδειξον* in Acts, i. 24.

²² A number of passages to this effect will be found in the notes to Luke, ii. 42, in the larger editions of the New Testament, such as that by J. J. Wetstein.

scene of the Baptism is substantially the same in the mosaics at S. Maria in Cosmedin, and also in the panels on the throne of bishop Maximian. But where the mosaics have a bearded figure to represent the river Jordan, this tablet has a bearded angel, or possibly an archangel, while the bishop's throne has angels of the ordinary type. And this bearded angel wears sandals on his feet, after the manner of the angels in the mosaics at S. Apollinare Nuovo. The scene is bounded on each side by palm trees, drawn in the conventional style of the mosaics. And in the other scene, where Christ is reasoning with the doctors, the Temple is represented as a brick building with round arches and curtains hung between them, just as Ravenna itself is represented in the mosaics at S. Apollinare Nuovo.

This tablet not only makes Christ a great deal younger than John, but it makes him very little older in the scene of the Baptism than in the scene where he is reasoning with the doctors at the age of twelve. The gospels all agree that he began his miracles and teaching very shortly after he had been baptized. And in scenes taken from the Ministry and Passion the earliest Christian monuments make him very little older than this tablet makes him at the Baptism²³.

In fact, these monuments depict the life of Christ exactly in accordance with the statements in the gospels, if those statements are taken in the sense that is proposed here:— Having reasoned with the doctors at the age of twelve, he was baptized and entered on his Ministry when he was sixteen or seventeen years old, and perhaps was crucified when he was only twenty²⁴.

And this view of the chronology not only suits the monuments that depict him as a youth, but it links together the events recorded in the gospels. The narrative becomes continuous; and his venture into public life as a youth of sixteen or seventeen, forms a natural sequel to his precocity in encountering the doctors when he was only twelve:

²³ Most of the early Christian monuments are collected in Garrucci's *Storia dell' arte cristiana nei primi otto secoli*, a book that has 500 folio plates.

²⁴ See above, p. 10.



FIG. 4. IVORY TABLET IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM. Actual size.

whereas, if he reasoned with the doctors then, and yet was not baptised till he was thirty, the narrative is broken by a gap of eighteen years, which cannot be explained.

Thus the position of affairs is really this :—There are two contradictory accounts, one of them placing the Nativity in Herod's reign, while the other puts it ten years later on, when Quirinius took the census in Judæa. And one or other of these accounts must be erroneous. In recent times the later date has steadily been ignored ; and when artists have depicted any of the acts of Christ from the Baptism onward to the Passion, they have portrayed him as a man of fully thirty years of age. Yet there seems to be just as much reason for setting aside the earlier date, and thus returning to the older Christian mode of representing him throughout his Ministry as a youth of less than twenty.

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