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
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THE PROVENANCE OF THE OPEN RHO IN THE
CHRISTIAN MONOGRAMS ¹

PLATE III

THE subject of the Christian monograms has been treated by various scholars, notably G.B. DeRossi,² O. Marucchi,³ M. Sulzberger.⁴ It is the purpose of this article to add to the discussion as a whole a study of one of the details of the subject, *viz.*, the provenance and significance of the open rho, which it is hoped may be of some value in determining the artistic influences in monuments of the fourth to the seventh centuries.

It is now generally agreed that the Constantinian monogram is not of Christian origin, but rather came to have the meaning of *Χριστός* from the general abbreviation in Greek inscriptions for any word beginning with the letters *χρ*. In this way it is commonly used as an abbreviation in epitaphs for the formula *ἐν Χριστῷ*. This use was so frequent that the monogram finally became independent of the context of the inscription and stood by itself as a symbol, although in many cases it still retained its significance as an abbreviation as is shown by numerous inscriptions, especially those found in Sicily, where the monogram is followed by C (Σ) or T according to the inflection of the word. Dölger⁵ has shown the fallacy of the earlier theory that the C stood for *σωτήρ*, since the C is occasionally preceded by a T, and also because of the presence of case-endings other than the nominative. The monogram is followed sometimes by a Δ, apparently as an abbreviation for *Χριστοῦ δοῦλος*.⁶

A later form of the monogram is the combination of  and a cross, which appears as . From this may have been derived the cross monogram , or it may have been borrowed from pagan symbols.⁷ In the period of their most extensive use the latter form

¹ I wish to express my thanks to Professor C. R. Morey for his help all through the preparation of this article. The material on which it is based is drawn chiefly from the Index of Christian Art at Princeton University. About nine hundred monuments have been consulted and of these about three hundred show the open rho. The monuments are classified approximately as follows: 50 sarcophagi, 50 buildings, public and private, 600 epitaphs, 200 frescoes, mosaics, coins, etc. More specific statistics will be given in the course of the discussion.

² *Bull. Arch. Crist.*, 1869, pp. 33 ff.; 1880, pp. 154 ff.

³ *Röm. Quart.*, 1869, pp. 86 ff.

⁴ *Byzantion*, vol. II (1925), pp. 337-448.

⁵ *IXΘTC*, vol. I, p. 375.

⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 376.

⁷ Sulzberger, *op. cit.*, p. 401.

predominates in the Orient, and the Constantinian monogram in the Occident.¹ There seems to be little difference in the significance of the two types except that the cross monogram is rarely used as an abbreviation. This would point to a later development of the original monogram at a time when it was used independently as a symbol, especially since the meaning of the *chi* is lost when it changes to the cross form.

In the study of the monograms with a view to determining the significance of the open rho, our sources are mainly four—epitaphs, sarcophagi, coins, and small objects such as reliquaries, lamps, etc. The value of epitaphs lies in the epigraphic evidence which they afford, and in the fact that they are generally found *in situ*, or at least very near the place of their origin. The different types

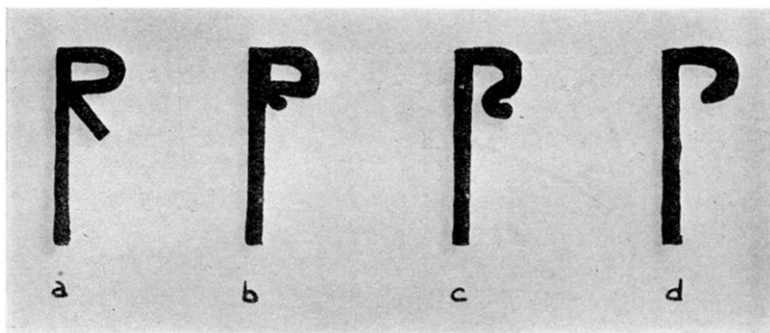


FIGURE 1. TYPES OF OPEN RHO

of sarcophagi, as Latin and Eastern, have been established by Professor Morey,² and the coins speak for themselves. Reliquaries, lamps, and other small objects are easily moved about so that little can be determined from their location, but their iconography and general style are often of great importance as criteria of their provenance.

The open rho occurs in two forms, differing widely in their development and in the circumstances of their use. The one shown in Figure 1a I shall refer to as the R form, and those in 1b, c, d as the open rho, since these three seem to be derived from one original type; 1d, however, must not be confused with monograms in inscriptions which are carelessly cut and merely unfinished rather than indicating a conscious attempt to make an open rho. In such cases

¹ Sulzberger, *op. cit.*, p. 448.

² Sardis, vol. V, I. "The Sarcophagus of Claudia Antonia Sabina and the Asiatic Sarcophagi," pp. 21 ff. Cf. also Marion Lawrence, *Art Bulletin*, Sept., 1927, pp. 1 ff.

the cutting of the inscription itself is usually sufficient to show whether or not the monogram may be considered as having the open rho in its strict sense. These variations in form have been noticed by previous writers, but little has been said about their significance and the circumstances under which each form occurs.

A study of the geographical distribution of the monuments bearing the Constantinian or cross monogram with the open rho reveals the fact that these monuments exist largely in districts having recognized Oriental trend during the fourth to the seventh centuries, *i.e.* in the Orient itself, in Gaul, and in Ravenna. The accompanying map (Plate III) shows the predominance of open and closed rhos in the various districts of the Mediterranean world.

One of the earliest strongholds of the Christian church was Lyon in Gaul, evangelized about the year 140 by St. Pothinus, a missionary from Smyrna; being an offshoot of the Asiatic church the new church at Lyon was always in communication with those of Asia. From the beginning it numbered among its members Asiatic merchants and their slaves who brought Christianity from Asia Minor along with Oriental merchandise, and these Christians maintained a lasting connection with their Asiatic churches. Eusebius¹ quotes letters written to the people of Asia Minor and Phrygia concerning the death at Lyon and Vienne of such martyrs as SS. Pothinus of Smyrna, Attalus of Pergamum, Alexander, a doctor of Phrygia, and Epipodes, a Lyonnais of Greek parentage. The letters are valuable not only because they show the close interest with which the churches followed the vicissitudes of one another, but also because of the information which they give regarding the nationalities of those who spread the Christian faith through Gaul. The unity of the churches is indicated by the salutation of the letter quoted by Eusebius: "οἱ ἐν Βιέννῃ καὶ Λουγδούνῃ τῆς Γαλλίας παροικούντες δοῦλοι Χριστοῦ τοῖς κατὰ τὴν Ἀσίαν καὶ Φρυγίαν τὴν αὐτὴν τῆς ἀπολυτρώσεως ἡμῶν πίστιν καὶ ἐλπίδα ἔχουσιν ἀδελφοῖς, εἰρήνῃ καὶ χάρις καὶ δόξα ἀπὸ Θεοῦ πατρὸς καὶ Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν."²

But although the churches of Lyon and Vienne were primarily Eastern in their origin there were also Christians among the Roman and Gallic population and among the civil and military officers, as is evidenced by a tombstone with the epitaph of Aelianus "vir praesidialis" and "cives (*sic*) Remus."³

It is evident that the distribution of monuments indicated by our map, so far as it concerns certain cities, was connected with

¹ *Historia Ecclesiastica*, V. I.

² *Op. cit.*, V. 1, 3.

³ *C.I.L.*, XIII, 1796.

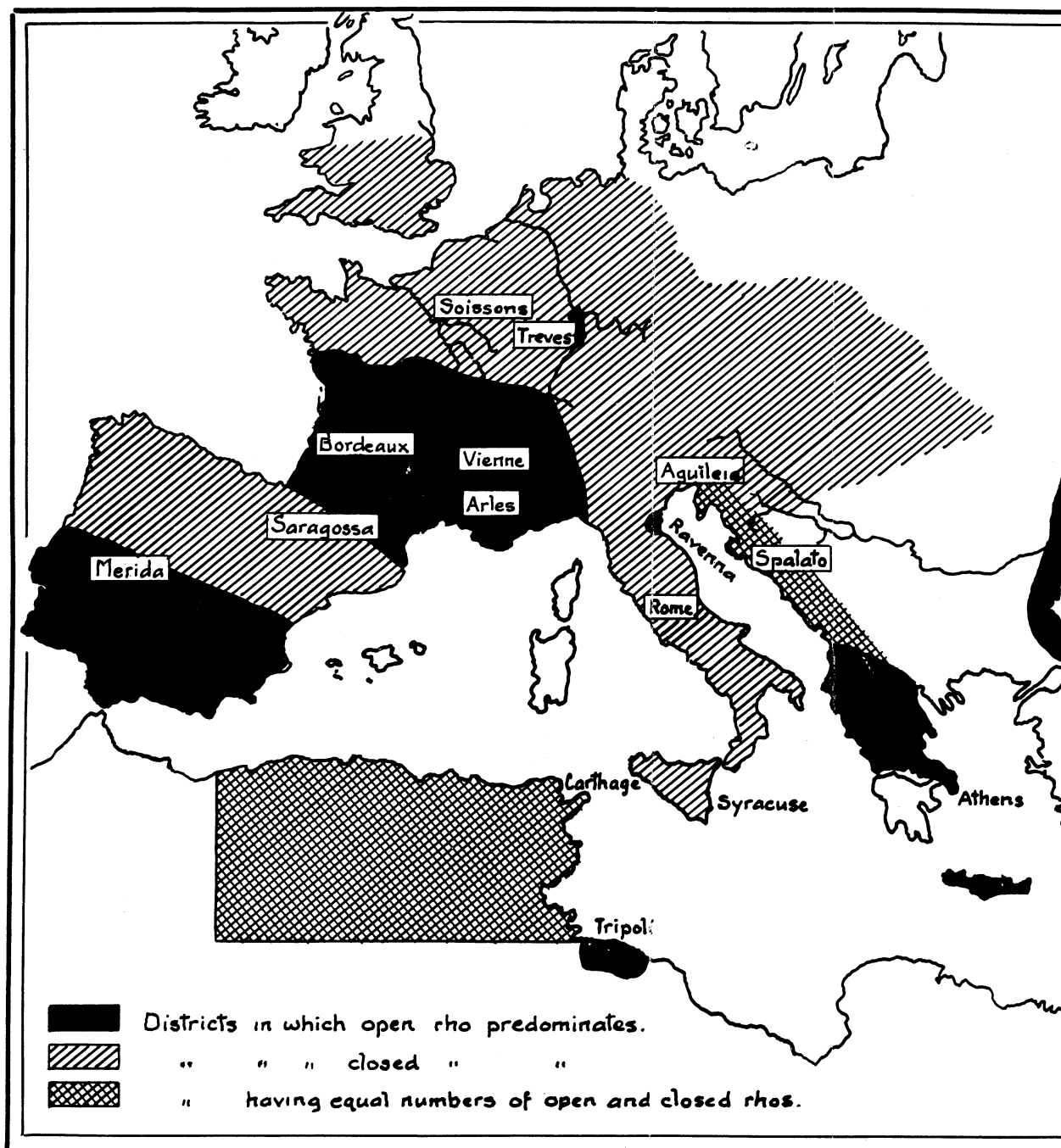
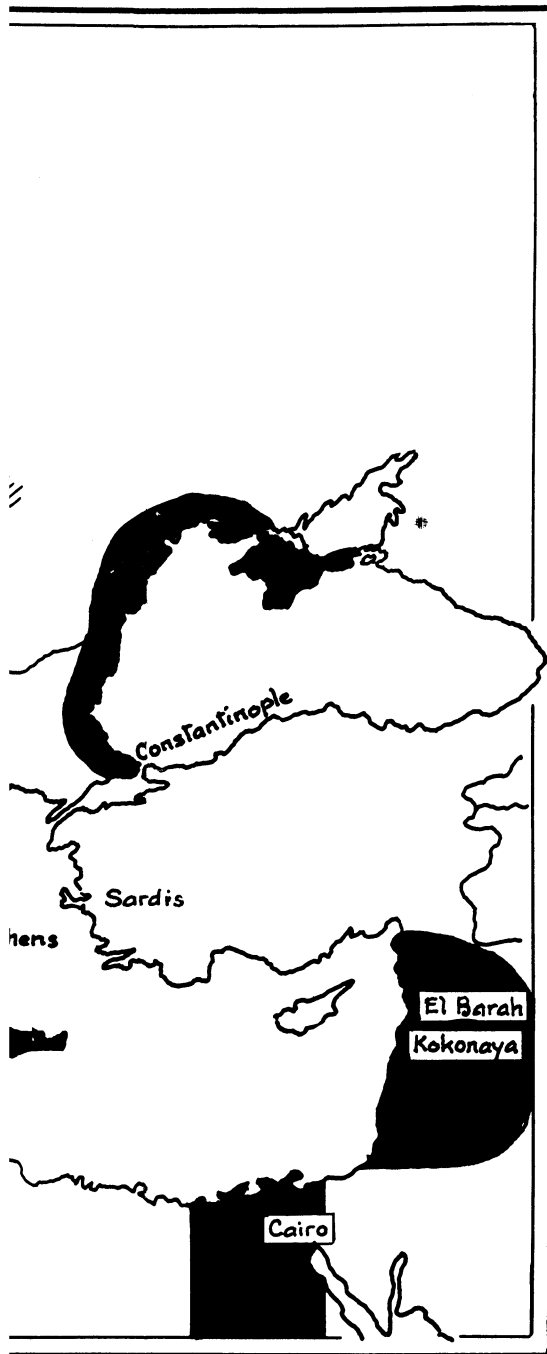


PLATE III. MAP SHOWING DISTRIBUTION OF OPEN AND CLOSED RHOS



their situation on the great trade routes. In the fourth century all of the larger cities of Gaul contained corporations of Eastern merchants who often made up communities which continued to speak their own language and gradually extended their influence from commerce to larger matters and introduced many Oriental elements into Western civilization.¹

It is necessary, then, to consider in what way the history of the church in Lyon and Vienne is indicative of an Eastern provenance of the open rho. In the first place we find that in these two places,

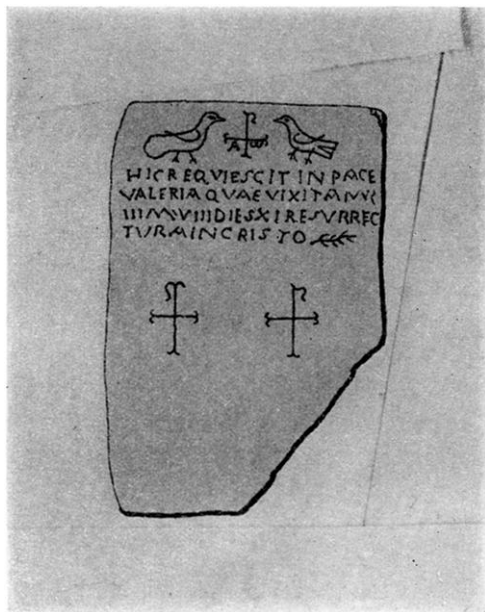


FIGURE 2. EPITAPH FROM VIENNE

especially Vienne, the monogram with the open rho occurs far more frequently than with the closed (Fig. 2). Furthermore, in too many cases to be ignored, it is used on epitaphs of people whose names show clearly that they were of eastern descent, if not birth, *e.g.* Adelfius.² The name "Eugenis" appears on one epitaph of Lyon, evidently, as LeBlant³ has pointed out, a spelling that represents the pronunciation of the Greek Εὐγένης. It would be natural, therefore, to find in such inscriptions the monogram in its eastern form, whatever that might be.

¹ Louis Bréhier, *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, XII (1903), pp. 11 ff.

² *C.I.L.*, XIII, 2404; LeBlant, *Inscriptions chrétiennes de la Gaule*, vol. I, no. 15, pl. 1, no. 4.

³ *Op. cit.*, I, no. 39, pl. 6, no. 25.

The predominance of the open rho might, of course, be purely coincidental with the Eastern influences in Lyon and Vienne were it not for the fact that there is a corresponding situation in other parts of Gaul. Although there is only one other city where monograms of any kind exist in such numbers (*viz.*, Trèves, of which I shall speak later), still the many isolated examples in the various cities of Gaul may add to the weight of evidence which seems to point to an Eastern provenance. Poitiers was the seat of one of the many colonies of Easterners who settled in Gaul for the purpose of trading and was influenced by the general stream of Eastern commerce; here is a wooden reading desk¹ said to have belonged to St. Radegonde,² decorated with the symbols of the four Evangelists in medallions and having the monograms $\chi\rho$ and ρ . Other cities in Gaul in which the open rho is found are Bordeaux, Besançon, Agen, Arles, Aniane, Beziers, Cologne, Worms, and many others, centering principally in the Rhone valley and almost entirely on rivers or the sea coast.

But Trèves has the monogram with the open rho in greater numbers than any other city in Gaul.³ Always an important city under the early empire, it lost none of its prestige in later times, having been rebuilt by Constantine in the fourth century and made the imperial residence for that part of the Empire;⁴ it would naturally, therefore, be in close touch with the new capital at Constantinople and subject to whatever artistic influences were at work there. That Greek was spoken to a great extent we know from the verses of Conrad Celtes, who wrote in the fifteenth or sixteenth century:

“Sepulchra Graecis vidi epitaphiis
Inscripta, busta et stare sub hortulis
Et manibus sacrata functis
Vena suprema reperta in agro est.”⁵

And we have epigraphical evidence that Trèves counted at least some Easterners among its inhabitants in a Greek epitaph of Azizos Agripa, a Syrian.⁶ LeBlant discusses this epitaph at some length pointing out the formula characteristic of inscriptions of Orientals

¹ Garrucci, *Storia dell' Arte cristiana*, vol. VI, 411-2; Fernand Cabrol, *Dictionnaire d'Archéologie chrétienne et de Liturgie*, I, col. 882 ff., and fig. 201.

² It is worthy of note that Radegonde sent a mission to the Orient to obtain a piece of the true cross.

³ There are listed, in the Index of Christian Art, 21 open rhos and only two closed.

⁴ Ausonius places Trèves sixth in his “Ordo Urbium Nobilium”—“imperii vires quod alit, quod vestit et armat” (XI, 6).

⁵ *Libri Odarum*, III, xxvi, quoted from LeBlant, *op. cit.*, I, p. 327.

⁶ LeBlant, *op. cit.*, I, no. 225.

“κω καπροζαβαδαιων,” abbreviated from ἀπὸ κώμης καπροζαβαδαίων. Among the epitaphs having the monogram with open rho are those of Saudes, Flavius Gabso, Arcadius, Iledus, and Barbario, as well as others of a more purely Latin form.

Turning from Gaul to Italy there is a marked change in the distribution of open and closed rhos. Except in the region of Ravenna the number of monograms with the closed rho exceeds in great proportion those with the open, especially in Rome.¹ It is to be noticed also that in Rome the majority of open rhos occurs either on epitaphs of foreigners, as Siddlhc,² Eutyichianus,³ or else in inscriptions of inferior cutting; in the latter case they are always represented without the tail and can hardly be included among the unmistakable open rhos.⁴ In view of this fact it is interesting to consider the history of Rome in the fourth to the seventh centuries. Resistance to the barbarians demanded all of the enfeebled resources of the city, and the main trade routes instead of leading to Rome as formerly, went through northern Italy and ended in Marseilles, Lyon, Arles, and other cities of Gaul, cutting Rome off almost entirely from the streams of commerce operating in the rest of the Mediterranean world. Ostia was abandoned, the decline of Rome had set in, and Ravenna was taking its place as the head of the Western Empire. Although there were settlements of Easterners,⁵ their influence was negligible as yet in setting standards of art and thought, the “Orientalizing” period in the art of Rome having begun later than the epoch which concerns us. There is evidence that in the fifth century it was necessary for the bishop of Rome to have an interpreter of Greek.

At Ravenna, on the other hand, the situation is quite different; here the open rhos far outnumber the closed, and there is no need to go into the history of Ravenna and its connection with the capital of the Eastern Empire to show how subject it was to the influences of the East. Mosaics, sculpture, and architecture all testify to the Byzantine character of the art which was brought to Ravenna, and an examination of the monuments with the open rho will bear out the theory of an Eastern origin.

Let us first consider the Ravenna sarcophagi. There are thirteen showing monograms with the open rho which may be divided into two groups, the Asiatic and the Ravennate. My classification is

¹ In Rome we have listed over 300 monograms with the closed rho, and 25 with the open.

² De Rossi, *Inscriptiones Christianae Urbis Romae*, vol. I, no. 666.

³ Sulzberger, *op. cit.*, p. 399.

⁴ Cf. the incised designs of the catacombs. De Rossi, *Roma Sotteranea*, vol. II, pl. XLV-67.

⁵ Bréhier, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

based on that of Professor Morey and Miss Lawrence.¹ The first group is best illustrated by two sarcophagi between some of whose scenes there is a striking similarity. One is that of the exarch Isaac, in S. Vitale. The lid, which is of the barrel shape characteristic of Ravenna, bears a Greek inscription with a Latin translation;² in the middle is a large cross. On the front is represented the Adoration of the Magi, beardless, wearing Phrygian caps and advancing in a line in profile toward the Virgin and Christ Child; the latter appears here as a two-year-old child. On the ends are the Raising of Lazarus, and Daniel among the Lions. In the former scene Lazarus is represented veiled in an arched tomb; in the latter Daniel wears the characteristic Eastern cap and trousers. Professor E.

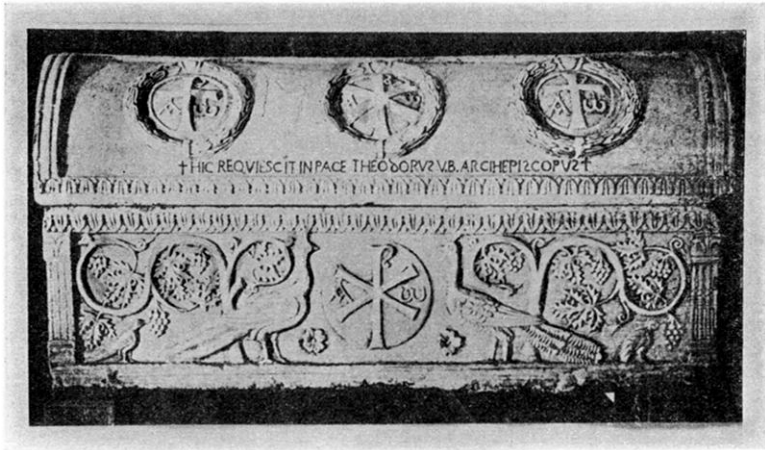


FIGURE 3. SARCOPHAGUS OF THEODORUS, RAVENNA


Baldwin Smith³ has shown that these features are all typical of Oriental-Hellenistic iconography. The back of the sarcophagus is occupied by the Constantinian monogram with an open rho, in a circle flanked by two peacocks after the manner of the fresco at Sardis mentioned below. On the second sarcophagus, now in the Ravenna Museum, for the Adoration of the Magi is substituted Christ on the Mount, a scene most frequent on the "city-gate" sarcophagi.⁴ The scenes on the ends are almost identical with

¹ Morey, *op. cit.*, pp. 21 ff.; Lawrence, *op. cit.*, pp. 1 ff.

² Dalton (*Byzantine Art and Archaeology*, p. 138) calls attention to the fact that Isaac is described as an Armenian.

³ *Early Christian Iconography and a School of Ivory Carvers in Provence*, pp. 38, 114 ff.


⁴ "City-gate" is the term applied to those sarcophagi having a row of city gates crowned with crenellations as a background for the figures. Miss Lawrence (*op. cit.*, pp. 5 ff.) has shown their origin in Asiatic ateliers.


those of the sarcophagus of Isaac, and the fourth side is undecorated. On this sarcophagus Christ is represented in both cases with the monogrammed nimbus with , once with the addition of A and ω .


The Asiatic group includes also the sarcophagus of Barbatianus, of the "columnar" type. The front is divided into five niches with conches radiating upwards and a cymation decorated with a vine pattern. The three central niches are occupied by Christ, Peter (carrying the cross in the Eastern fashion), and Paul; those at the end by chalices. The lid is barrel-shaped, having at one end a chalice flanked by vines, and at the other the Constantinian monogram with an open rho, and two peacocks. The upward-radiating conch is an Eastern type as shown by Weigand.¹




Representative of the Ravenna type is the sarcophagus of Theodorus (Fig. 3). This also has the barrel-shaped cover, but its design is more conventionalized, consisting entirely of vines and peacocks instead of the figure scenes common on the Asiatic type. The other sarcophagi of Ravenna follow in general the characteristics of these two groups.


For purposes of comparison there follows a list of the sarcophagi with monograms,² indicating the type of monogram and other decoration, the examples first listed being those with the open rho:


Aniane³—Gallic panel type;⁴ vine decoration; .

Arles⁵—Gallic imitation of columnar type;⁶ .

Auch⁷—Gallic type; vine decoration; .

Bordeaux⁸—Gallic type; vine decoration; , , .

Bordeaux⁹—Gallic type; vine decoration; .

Ampurias (Spain)¹⁰—Strigilated type with monogram  in wreath.¹¹

¹ *Jb. Arch. Inst.*, XXIX (1914), pp. 63 ff. Cf. also Miss Lawrence, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

² Not including the Ravenna sarcophagi mentioned above.

³ LeBlant, *Les Sarcophages chrétiens de la Gaule*, no. 145, pl. XXXII, 1, 2.

⁴ *I.e.*, with its sides divided into panels containing alternately figures and conventional vine decorations borrowed from the East.

⁵ Garrucci, *op. cit.*, 342-3; LeBlant, *Étude sur les Sarcophages chrétiens antiques de la Ville d'Arles*, p. 44.

⁶ *I.e.*, with sides divided by columns into several niches, each of which contains a figure or ornamental design.


⁷ Garrucci, *op. cit.*, V, 387-5.


⁸ *Op. cit.*, V, 388-1, 6.


⁹ LeBlant, *Sarc. Gaule*, no. 88, pl. XXXIII, 1.


¹⁰ Botet y Siso, *Sarcófagos romano-cristianos esculptados que se conservan en Cataluña*, p. 39.


¹¹ The monogram here replaces the Latin "imago clipeata."


Fusignano (near Faenza) ¹—Ravenna type; vine decoration; peacocks; .


Milan ²—Ravenna type; vine decoration; peacocks; .


Nîmes ³—Gallic panel type; vine decoration; .

Rodez ⁴—Gallic panel and gable type; .


Soissons ⁵ (lost)—Gallic columnar type ⁶; Baptism of Christ; .


Valbonne ⁷—Gallic panel type; vine decoration; .


Villanueva de Lorenzana (Spain, Province of Lugo) ⁸—Strigilated type; monogram  in wreath. ⁹


Location unknown ¹⁰—Asiatic ¹¹ type, late; vine decoration; .


The following sarcophagi show the closed rho:


Arles ¹²—Gallic imitation of columnar type; .


Concordia ¹³—Poor imitation of columnar type; .

Mantua ¹⁴—Columnar type, but reworked at a later period, ¹⁵ no inference, therefore, can be drawn from the monogram .

Manosque ¹⁶—Gallic or Asiatic “star and wreath” type ¹⁷; .

Marseilles ¹⁸—Gallic imitation of Asiatic type; .

Milan ¹⁹—Asiatic “City Gate” type; .

Ravenna ²⁰—Late degeneration of Ravenna type; .

¹ Garrucci, *op. cit.*, V, 393–1. 2, 3.

² *Op. cit.*, V, 387–6.

³ Photograph in Index of Christian Art.

⁴ Garrucci, *op. cit.*, V, 339–5, 6, 7.

⁵ *Op. cit.*, V, 403–4, 5, 6.

⁶ Baldwin Smith, *op. cit.*, table IV.

⁷ LeBlant, *Sarc. Gaule*, no. 125, pl. XXVIII–1.

⁸ *Archivio español de Arte y Arqueología*, 1925 (II), p. 201.

⁹ See above, p. 8, note 11.

¹⁰ LeBlant, *op. cit.*, p. 3, and fig.

¹¹ See below (p. 20) for the meaning of this term.

¹² Garrucci, *op. cit.*, V, 343–3.

¹³ *Op. cit.*, V, 387–1, 2, 3.

¹⁴ *Op. cit.*, V, 320–2, 3, 4; 321–1, 2.

¹⁵ Lawrence, *op. cit.*, p. 16, note 30.


¹⁶ Garrucci, *op. cit.*, V, 351–1, 2, 3.


¹⁷ The “star and wreath” type is a form of the columnar, but the division between the figures is indicated only by stars between the heads and wreaths above. (Lawrence, *op. cit.*, p. 5.)


¹⁸ Garrucci, *op. cit.*, V, 386–3.


¹⁹ Lawrence, *op. cit.*, pp. 6 ff.

²⁰ Garrucci, *op. cit.*, V, 392–1.


Ravenna ¹—Late columnar type; .


Rome ²—Latin type, fragment; .


Rome ³—Latin type; Latin inscription; ; no other decoration.


Rome ⁴—Latin type; animals flanking inscription; .


Rome ⁵—Latin type, Daniel among Lions; .


Rome ⁶—Latin type; .


Rome ⁷—Latin type; inferior workmanship; .


Rome ⁸—Gallic or Latin imitation of columnar type; .




Rome ⁹—Imitation of columnar type; .


Rome ¹⁰—Imitation of columnar type; .


Saint Remy ¹¹—Gallic imitation of Asiatic “star and wreath” type; .


Saragossa ¹²—Latin type; .


Spalato ¹³—Latin type; inferior workmanship; .

Tolentino ¹⁴—Asiatic “City-gate” type, but Latin in the use of the *parapetasma* and composition of the front and back; , , .

Toulouse ¹⁵—Gallic type; imitation of Eastern vine decoration; .

Toulouse ¹⁶—Gallic type; .

Toulouse ¹⁷—Gallic panel and gable type; .

Toulouse ¹⁸—Gallic panel and gable type; .

¹ Garrucci, *op. cit.*, V, 347.

² Wittig, *Die altchristlichen Skulpturen im Museum des deutschen Nationalstiftung am Campo Santo in Rom*, p. 135, fig. 57.

³ *Bull. Arch. Christ.*, 1863, p. 15; Cabrol, *op. cit.*, III², col. 3254, fig. 3500.

⁴ Garrucci, *op. cit.*, V, 396–13.

⁵ Marucchi, *I Monumenti del Museo cristiano Pio-Lateranense*, pl. LVI.

⁶ Wittig, *op. cit.*, p. 137, pl. VI-1.

⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 129, fig. 53.

⁸ Garrucci, *op. cit.*, V, 350–2.

⁹ *Op. cit.*, V, 350–4.

¹⁰ *Op. cit.*, V, 350–1.

¹¹ Wilpert, *Römische Mosaiken und Malereien der kirchlichen Bauten*, II, fig. 343.

¹² Garrucci, *op. cit.*, V, 381–4, 5, 6.

¹³ Cabrol, *op. cit.*, I¹, fig. 206.

¹⁴ Garrucci, *op. cit.*, V, 303–1, 2, 3.

¹⁵ *Op. cit.*, V, 387–9.

¹⁶ *Op. cit.*, V, 390–1.

¹⁷ *Op. cit.*, V, 373–1, 2, 3.

¹⁸ *Op. cit.*, V, 339–1, 2, 3, 4. Gallic columnar sarcophagus in Rome has same monogram.

I have used the term "Asiatic" to apply to the whole group of columnar sarcophagi, including the variations of the type as seen in the "city-gate" and "star and wreath" sarcophagi, since these have been shown by Miss Lawrence to be descended from the Asiatic pagan sarcophagi of the second century.¹ This conclusion is based on the fact, among others, that the iconography of the group corresponds in general to that of works of accepted Eastern origin. The earliest examples of the sarcophagi are decorated on all four sides—a survival of the Greek practice, since Greek sarcophagi stood in an open space while the Latin were commonly placed against a wall with only three sides visible; to meet the taste of a Latin market the decoration of the fourth side was soon abandoned also on the Eastern sarcophagi. Moreover, a comparison of the ornamental details of the columnar sarcophagi with those of Asiatic manuscripts and other works of art indicates a common source. At Ravenna a type was developed which derived its decorative motifs from the East, but used them differently. The columnar device was abandoned and the conventional design of vines, chalices, lambs, peacocks, etc., was substituted for the figure scenes of the columnar sarcophagi.

It will be observed that the first list includes all the sarcophagi of the pure Asiatic and Ravennate types except the Milan sarcophagus treated by Miss Lawrence.² If it is proved to be of definite Asiatic origin, as seems to be the case, it has the only example as far as we know of a closed rho on an Asiatic sarcophagus of the pure type. On the other hand, we have no knowledge of an open rho on any sarcophagus not showing some Eastern influence. Furthermore, the only closed rhos in Ravenna are on late sarcophagi which were made by local workmen in imitation of the finer ones of the previous period.

It is chiefly in the case of sarcophagi that we can draw conclusions from style, but there are also individual monuments affording some evidence that the open rho is characteristic of monograms in the Orient. Among these is a silver reliquary in the Museo Cristiano of the Vatican, from Henchir Zirara in Numidia, described by De Rossi³ and Muñoz⁴ (Fig. 4). According to Muñoz the cover of the reliquary distinctly shows Syrian influence in the representation of the four rivers, the face of the saint, and the palm-leaf border.

The only exception to the predominance of open rhos on the main

¹ Lawrence, *op. cit.*, pp. 1 ff.

² *Op. cit.*, pp. 6 ff.

³ *Bull. Arch. Crist.*, 1887, pp. 118 ff. and pls. VII-IX.

⁴ *L'Art byzantin à l'Exposition de Grottaferrata*, p. 152; cf. also Dalton, *op. cit.*, pp. 563 ff.

trade routes is at Aquileia. Here there are very few open rhos and a very considerable number of closed. This might seem to prove that the open rho is no indication of Eastern provenance, considering the important part played by Aquileia in ancient commerce with its commanding position at the head of the Adriatic, but we must remember that the Constantinian monogram was not in use until the fourth century, and Herfurth¹ has shown that commerce in Aquileia had almost completely lapsed by that time. It is, then, rather added proof of Oriental influence that a town which had lost its commercial prestige should adhere to the original form, while



FIGURE 4. RELIQUARY FROM HENCHIR ZIRARA, ROME

others which kept up their contact with the East should use the open rho.

The material for the stretch of land from Dalmatia to Asia Minor is disappointingly scanty. As far as can be determined at present, Dalmatia has equal numbers of open and closed rhos,² but one of these is on a sarcophagus of late Latin workmanship and style.³ Coincident with this situation is the fact that the later boundary between the Eastern and Western churches ran through Dalmatia. In Greece the open rhos outnumber the closed,⁴ and there evidently are or have been many more in existence, since the tradition is strong enough to be preserved in a recent issue of postage stamps.

¹ *De Aquileiae Commercio*, p. 34.

² There are five of each.

³ See above, p. 19.

⁴ Eleven are open and four closed.

It is worthy of note, too, that in Greece the use of the closed rho seems to be confined to private monuments, while the open is found in the pavement of the Byzantine church of Hagios Georgios in Eretria,¹ in the sculptures of the Asclepium,² as well as in other parts of Greece. Delphi was the seat of an important Christian community, probably a bishopric,³ in the fifth century, and although there are no buildings left from this period⁴ there have been found many architectural fragments including several impost blocks with

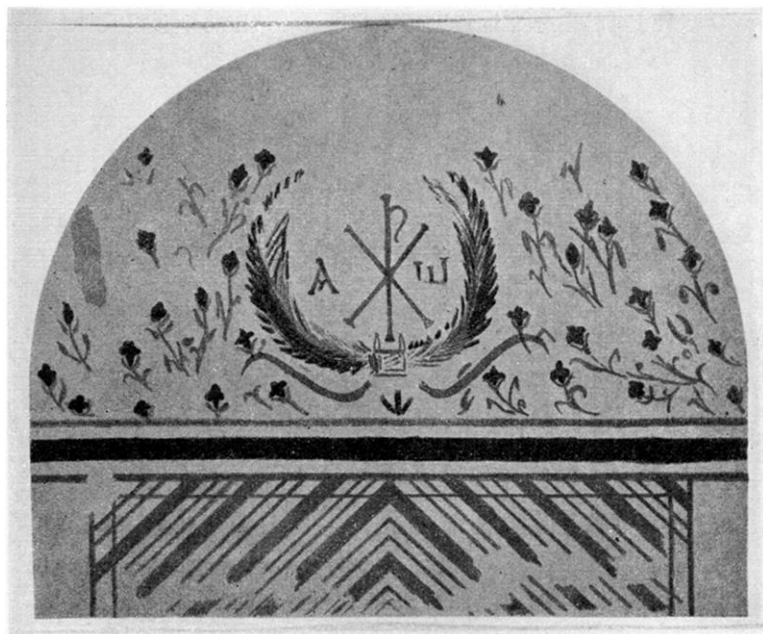


FIGURE 5. FRESCO ON TOMB, SARDIS

the monogram ρ ; other fragments here are compared by M. Laurent with those of Ravenna and Daphni.⁵

Following the trade routes eastward the number of closed rhos diminishes considerably, and the open predominate in Constantinople, on the shores of the Black Sea, in Syria, Egypt, and a small area around Tripoli in North Africa.⁶ There are many examples

¹ *Arch. Eph.*, 1914, pp. 192 ff., and pl. 5.

² *Op. cit.*, 1915, p. 57, fig. 6.

³ Laurent, *B.C.H.*, 1899, pp. 215 ff.

⁴ This fact is explained by Laurent by the probability that the temple of Apollo was used by the Christians as a church.

⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 218.

⁶ The number of monograms of any kind in Asia Minor is too small to be of any value in determining their provenance; we know of only two open and two closed.

on the Golden Gate in Constantinople, and another important one is the painted tomb in Sardis which has the monogram ✠ , and is decorated according to Rostovtzeff and Morey¹ in the Eastern style derived from textile design (Fig. 5). There is also a plaque in the cathedral at Etschmiadzin with the monogram ✠^c .² In Syria there are only two or three monograms with the closed rho, while



FIGURE 6. COPTIC STELE, CAIRO

the open is found on houses, churches, epitaphs, etc., in El Barah, Hâss, Serdjilla, Kokonaya, Moujdeleia,³ and other places, in connection with Greek inscriptions.⁴

¹ *Sardis*, vol. V, pl. IV, and pp. 181-183.

² Cabrol, *op. cit.*, II², fig. 2220.

³ De Vogue, *Syrie Centrale*, pp. 51 ff.

⁴ This does not agree with De Rossi's theory that the open rho was a modification of the Latin R at a time when the removal of the imperial court to Constantinople made the surrounding countries bilingual (*Bull. Arch. Crist.*, 1880, p. 159).

Among the most valuable pieces of evidence for an Eastern provenance of the open rho is that which is furnished by the Coptic stelae from various parts of Egypt, most of which are now collected in the Cairo Museum.¹ Out of ninety stelae (Fig. 6) showing either the Constantinian or cross monogram, seventy-five have the open rho, and the inscriptions are all either in Greek or in Coptic. Owing to the large numbers at our disposal here, there seems no reason to doubt that the open rho was the form most firmly established in Egypt.

The distribution is different in the rest of Africa. Except for the area around Tripoli, which I mentioned above, the monograms (which are abundant) show the open and closed rhos in almost equal numbers, with the closed slightly exceeding the open. The situation here is interesting in view of the history of Africa in the first few centuries of our era and before. In the Hellenistic period Africa began to be opened up to Greek commerce, and this was well established when Rome began to expand outside of Italy.² According to Tertullian, Greek was commonly understood in Carthage in the second and third centuries,³ although Latin was the usual language of society. The African was the first Latin church outside of Italy, and maintained a close connection with the church at Rome.⁴ One would expect, therefore, to find Eastern and Western elements side by side in such a civilization, and that is the case if open and closed rhos are criteria of Oriental and Occidental influence.

Likewise in Spain and Britain there seems to be a direct connection between commerce and monograms. In southern Spain, which was always in contact with Greece,⁵ the open rho predominates, and it is invariably found along rivers and main roads, as in Seville, Merida, and Talavera de la Reina. In the north, on the other hand, the rhos are nearly all closed. As we might expect, the closed rho predominates in Great Britain, but there are a few open ones, and Bréhier⁶ has shown that there were colonies of Easterners there at this time.

In Sicily the closed rho predominates, but the open is by no

¹ Crum, *Catalogue Général du Musée au Caire, Coptic Monuments*; Gayet, *L'Art Copte*.

² Rostovtzeff, *Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire*, p. 304.

³ "Sed et huic materiae propter suaviludios nostros Graeco quoque stilo satisfacimus."—*De Corona Militis*, VI; "Sed de isto plenius iam nobis in Graeco digestum est."—*De Baptismo*, XV.

⁴ Cheetham, *History of the Christian Church during the First Six Centuries*, pp. 75 ff. Cf. also Dalton, *op. cit.*, p. 424.

⁵ Rostovtzeff, *op. cit.*, p. 35. Cf. also Bréhier, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

⁶ Bréhier, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

means unknown, and it is found in connection with such names as Eutychia¹, Aristos Konstantinopolites², and Aeneas Pyrrhus.³

This completes a survey of the geographical distribution of the monograms with open and closed rhos; it remains to consider the origin and development of the R form, which seems to have been quite different from that of the open rho. Its examples are not only far less numerous,⁴ but are confined, with a few exceptions, to Gaul. This form, unlike the open rho, appears to be an entirely Occidental form, though undoubtedly arising from a misunderstood imitation of the Eastern monogram with the open rho. Gallic origin is indicated by evidence drawn from geographic, epigraphic, and numismatic sources. Except for three doubtful examples from Africa, one from Italy, and one from Crete where there are represented, in addition to the R monogram, two open rhos on the same epitaph, all of which we have any knowledge come from Gaul. The epigraphic and numismatic evidence is more convincing, since most of the names on epitaphs with a representation of the R form of monogram are Gallic, *e.g.* Gundeberga,⁵ Escupilio,⁶ and Bertraus.⁷ Merovingian coins bearing the R type of monogram would indicate that this was the accepted form in Gaul in the sixth and seventh centuries. That this R type originated in Latin-speaking countries is evident from the fact that it never occurs in any but Latin inscriptions, with the single exception of the inscription in Crete mentioned above, where it is represented with two open rhos as well.⁸ Moreover, when the A and ω are added they have usually become decorative pendants, as $\pi \text{ } \overline{\text{f}}$. The Gallic R, then, may be interpreted as a Latin attempt to domesticate the rho.

Sulzberger in his excellent article⁹ has discussed the dating of the monograms. Nothing points to their use as independent symbols before 313, when it became possible to make public profession of Christianity without fear of punishment, and the earliest dated example of the Constantinian monogram is of the year 338.¹⁰ Its use as an abbreviation, however, began at a much earlier period. It is generally considered that of the two types of monogram which we have been discussing the Constantinian is the earlier, and that

¹ *Römische Quartalschrift*, 1896, p. 39, no. 68.

² *Op. cit.*, 1893, p. 50, no. 85.

³ *C.I.L.*, X, no. 7117.

⁴ Not more than 50 are known.

⁵ *C.I.L.*, XI, no. 941.

⁶ *C.I.L.*, XIII, no. 3820; LeBlant, *Inscr.*, vol. I, no. 247, pl. 26, no. 160. This name has been variously interpreted as Escupilio and Escurilio.

⁷ Boissieu, *Inscriptions de Lyon*, p. 527, no. 1.

⁸ *A.J.A.*, 1896, p. 604, no. 1.

⁹ Sulzberger, *op. cit.*, pp. 397 ff.

¹⁰ De Rossi, *Inscriptiones*, vol. I, no. 48.

from it was derived the cross monogram of which the first known dated example occurs on an epitaph of the year 355.¹ The open rho begins to appear within twenty-five years after the closed, and the two forms continue in common use for about four centuries. After that time the monogram in all its forms seems to be an affected antiquarianism rather than a natural expression of a familiar symbol, and in this way we find it used through the fourteenth century, into the Renaissance, and in modern times.

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¹ There is, however, in the Lateran Museum an epitaph found within the wall of Aurelian with two monogram crosses with the closed rho. Marucchi (*Bull. Arch. Crist.*, 1886, pp. 15 ff.) dates it in the third century both because of the style of the letters and its location; since the Roman law did not permit burial within the city walls it would necessarily belong to a period before that of Aurelian, who died in 275. The question naturally arises whether the monogram might not have been added at a later date than the rest of the epitaph, but the cutting seems to belong to the same period as the inscription, and the monogram forms an integral part of the design. Every feature of the epitaph points to an Asiatic rather than a Roman origin. Other epitaphs in the same place record the burial of Levantines, and the mixture of Greek and Latin in which this inscription appears indicates the foreign birth of Beratious Nikatoras, as the owner of the tomb spells his name. The formula $\delta \beta \lambda \omicron \varsigma \tau \alpha \upsilon \rho \alpha$, infrequent in Christian inscriptions, is Asiatic, as is the scene of the prophet Jonah cast up by the sea monster, since Jonah is represented in the monster's mouth as clothed, and the monster itself is depicted in Asiatic fashion with canine muzzle and hairy hide. I am indebted to Professor F. W. Shipley of the American Academy in Rome for a description of the epitaph.

It is impossible, of course, to establish the date of the cross monogram a century earlier than the accepted date, merely by one example of an epoch apparently earlier than the wall of Aurelian, but it leaves the question whether or not the monogram was in common use before the period of Constantine, or at least known and used to some extent not as an abbreviation, but as an independent symbol. If this is true, is the Asiatic origin of the epitaph under discussion an indication that the monogram, or at least the cross monogram, was an Eastern conception? If this epitaph is dated in the third century and the monogram was cut at the same time as the inscription, the development of the cross monogram immediately becomes questionable, and if that is disproved it is necessary to determine anew the significance of the monogram F , since in its pagan use it stands for *tau rho*,

a combination with no special significance for the Christians. The later history of the monograms does not bear out this theory, since in the first period after the Peace of the Church only the Constantinian monogram is found, and the use of the cross monogram seems to begin about the middle of the fourth century. It seems, therefore, that we must reject the monogram on the Lateran epitaph as a later addition, or assign the whole epitaph to a later period in spite of indications of a third century date, or else we must assume a much earlier beginning for both monograms, used perhaps only on private documents for fear of persecution. Whatever theory we accept, the epitaph presents some difficulties, since none explains satisfactorily all aspects of the problem.