

## AS A SEAL OR A SIGN

### BISHOPS' RINGS AND THEIR METAPHORS

JULIETTE CALVARIN

A RING CAN be given by a king as a token of a greater gift, such as land or office. In that case, the ring functions as the means by which the gift is given, and also as a visible sign of the gift.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, a treasurer or someone else acting on behalf of a king carries documents sealed with the king's seal authorizing him to dispense largesse. The king's seal both signifies the officer's authority and, in practical terms, creates it.

These two examples are paraphrased from a treatise by William of Auvergne (ca. 1180–1249), who used them to explain the role of visible signs in the sacraments—signs like water in baptism.<sup>2</sup> Water is a sign, a metaphor, of the spiritual cleansing of baptism, but water is also part of an efficacious ritual: those washed with water using the correct formula are baptized and thus part of the Christian community. William used the ring and seal to explain how this works. According to him, these various signs

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\* This chapter came about and found its present form in conversation with Jitske Jasperse, whose friendly and editorial input was invaluable and to whom great thanks are due. Further thanks go to Judith Dreiling, Hannes Fahrnbauer, and Caroline Vogt for many stimulating conversations on matters episcopal, to CJ Jones for time spent thinking together through diachronic change, and to Joseph Munns for consultation on language and structure.

1 For an example of such a token, see Chapter 3 in this volume.

2 “Quemadmodum anulus regius signum est doni, quo quis per eum investitur... et quemadmodum ad sigillum regium thesaurarius seu dispensator eiusdem regis, dat dona regalia illud portanti, ubi verum, et non furtivum illud esse cognoverit.” From William of Auvergne, “De sacramento baptismi,” 422; cited from Rosier-Catach, *La parole efficace*, 543n85. According to Rosier-Catach, the tract on Baptism dates to around 1228, before the better-known “De legibus,” which, however, offers a similar analysis of some of these signs.

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operate by institution or, to use the language favoured by modern scholars, covenant: God or the king says that these signs have meaning, and agrees to abide by them in the future. Because the king—and by extension the society which operates under his authority—agrees to recognize such signs, treating the wearer of the ring as the legitimate holder of the office and so on, the signs cause that which they signify.<sup>3</sup>

As regent master of the University of Paris, close confidant of Louis IX, canon of the cathedral chapter and, starting in 1228, bishop of Paris, William was as familiar with current forms of official practice as he was with theological debate on the nature of the sacraments.<sup>4</sup> He wore a ring and used a seal. And although he does not name the bishop's ring specifically in his examples, they can nonetheless serve as a jumping-off point for thinking about the bishop's ring as it relates to the office of bishop.

The first point to note is that William uses the ring, and specifically the gift of a ring, as an example of this sort of efficacious sign. In this, he was echoing much older concerns, as evidenced by the word he uses: *investitur*. The example of the ring is, in fact, lifted from a list of investiture tokens in a sermon on the sacraments delivered by Bernard of Clairvaux in 1139, less than twenty years after the Concordat of Worms (1122) partly resolved the Investiture Controversy.<sup>5</sup> As Bernard explained, much as the signs of investiture differ according to the office being invested (a book for a canon, a staff for an abbot, a ring and a staff for a bishop), so the sacraments differed in their form according to the variety of grace that they confer. By implication, a ring, when given by the right person, in the right circumstances, and with the right intent, conferred the office of bishop and as such had some real (social and/or sacramental) causal power.<sup>6</sup> This position is, to some extent, a necessary consequence of the papal stance on Investiture: only archbishops and popes were authorized to hand over the

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**3** On covenantal causality, Courtenay, "The King and the Leaden Coin," and more recently Rosier-Catach, *La parole efficace*. In modern terminology, following J. L. Austin, we would call these signs "performatives."

**4** As Brigitte Bedos-Rezak has argued, it was common until the thirteenth century for "chancery-scholars" to be deeply involved in both discourses; Bedos-Rezak, *When Ego was Imago*, 95–107.

**5** See Courtenay, "Sacrament, Symbol and Causality in Bernard of Clairvaux."

**6** Earlier in the sermon, the causal nature is more explicit: "datur anulus absolute propter anulum, et nulla est significatio; datur ad investiendum de hereditate aliqua, et signum est, ita ut iam dicere possit qui accipit, 'anulus non valet quidquam, sed hereditas est quam quaerebam.'" Bernard of Clairvaux, "In Cena Domini," *Sancti Bernardi Opera*, vol. 5, *Sermones II*, ed. Leclercq, 67–72.

ring and staff because this act had consequences.<sup>7</sup> While William has a different analysis of how the bishop's ring works, he clearly inherits from his monastic predecessor a sense of the handover's importance. For both men, gifts of rings, including and perhaps especially bishops' rings, are paradigmatic performative signs.

The prolonged conflict about investiture was not the only reason why rings were paradigmatic signs. In the texts which surrounded the ritual use of bishops' rings—both the short formulas said when they were put on and the longer explanations of their significance in liturgical commentaries—rings are often called “signs.” More precisely, rings, much more than other items of clerical dress, are attached to the Latin root *sign-*: a ring is a *signum* or a *signaculum*; the beringed bishop is *insignitus*, and the ring signs or *signat*.

It is here that another feature of William of Auvergne's text becomes interesting: he juxtaposes rings with seals, which he understands to be similar kinds of signs.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, the sign (*signum*) and the seal (*sigillum*) are closely connected etymologically, and it is because rings are used for sealing that the root *sign-* was so often tied to them—a connection retained in the modern English word “signet.”<sup>9</sup> For a variety of reasons, not least changes in sealing practice, these associations had largely faded by the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. This chapter will attempt to trace the fate of the episcopal signet ring as lived reality, symbol, and afterimage, and in doing so try to bring different, usually separate, scholarly discourses—on liturgical history, semiotic theory, and sigillography—to bear on a small selection of rings found in episcopal tombs.<sup>10</sup>

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**7** For more on the Investiture Controversy, see below, in the section “By Ring and Staff.”

**8** This also represents an effacement of the specific features of sealing; see Bedos-Rezak, “The Ambiguity of Representation.”

**9** Especially for *signaculum*, seal or signet seems to be the primary meaning: see, for instance, Ducange: “Signaculum, quod alicujus rei ad hoc imprimitur, ut lateat, quousque reseratur.” Uses documented by Ducange run from the letters of St. Jerome and other late-antique writers to common formulas in charters. The word *sigillum* is another diminutive of *signum*. See Harvey, “This is a Seal.” I thank Jitske Jasperse for this reference.

**10** For a variety of practical reasons, discussed in the text below, episcopal rings have not been the subject of much systematic study in the past century. The standard work thus remains Deloche, *Le port des anneaux*; for a more up-to-date overview and typology, see Cherry, “Medieval Episcopal Ring.”

## Episcopal Signets in the Early Middle Ages

Like many other elements of clerical dress (and unlike more visible insignia such as the mitre), the bishop's ring was a codified form of what had been a common item of wear for late antique elites. Signet rings were worn by both men and women to seal correspondence and containers, and thus formed a part of the apparatus for managing property and personnel in a (late) Roman household.<sup>11</sup> As such, they belonged to the panoply of the bishop in his role as the administrator of the church, as well as increasingly of the *civitas*, in the late Roman and early medieval world.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, archaeologists have identified some monogrammed signet rings as belonging to bishops: Endulus, Bishop of Toul in the early seventh century, was buried along with a ring bearing his name in a cemetery near the abbey of Saint-Èvre.<sup>13</sup> In a tomb *ad sanctum* in Saint-Martial in Limoges, the corpse held a staff of some sort in both hands and wore a ring with two, diametrically opposed, bezels: an intaglio of a Victory on one side, and a stylized letter A on the other. The tomb's position and its grave goods also suggest an episcopal occupant, likely a sixth- or seventh-century bishop of Limoges.<sup>14</sup>

We do not know whether these men considered their rings to be personal insignias or official pontifical rings as they would be defined in later centuries.<sup>15</sup> This is one of the many difficulties besetting the study of episcopal rings: when a bishop wears one of more rings, it is unclear whether it is to be considered an episcopal ring (or, when there are multiple, which one).<sup>16</sup> These uncertainties are magnified for the earlier period, making direct correlations between objects and concepts difficult. Even without being able to resolve these questions (which may be anachronistic at any rate), it is nonetheless helpful to consider the relationship between the bishop's ring as it appears in normative texts and real rings worn by real bishops.<sup>17</sup>

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**11** Moreira, "Rings on Her Fingers," 308–9.

**12** So, as noted by several scholars, Bishop Avitus of Vienne wrote a letter of thanks to his brother for the gift of a seal-ring, which he called a "signatorium." "Epistola 78," in Avitus of Vienne, *Epistolae*, col. 280.

**13** Moreira, "Rings on Her Fingers," 310, and Lièger et al., "Sépultures mérovingiennes."

**14** Dąbrowska-Zawadzka, "La tombe de l'évêque A."

**15** Cf. Cherry, "Medieval Episcopal Ring," 217.

**16** For rings and their connection with bishops, see also Chapter 7 in this volume.

**17** It may be helpful to imagine a version of our modern society in which one could signal marital status by wearing any ring on the correct finger, not necessarily a ring

It does seem clear from the texts that, in the seventh century, some people considered a ring an official sign of a bishop's office, and that the ring thus envisioned was a seal ring, like the rings found in Limoges and Toul. The earliest evidence comes from Isidore of Seville's work *On the Divine Offices*, which offered interpretations for the crozier and the ring, the bishop's two distinguishing props. While he discusses the crozier within a pastoral metaphor, he calls the ring a *signum*. "He is also given a ring as a sign [*signum*] of episcopal honour and for the sealing of secrets [*vel signaculum secretorum*]. For there are many things that ... priests establish as 'under the seal' [*sub signaculo*] lest the sacraments of God be exposed to those who are unworthy."<sup>18</sup>

Isidore transfers to a spiritual sphere the pragmatic, physical act of late antique sealing: closing and, via closing, concealing. The emphasis on secrecy speaks to late-antique church norms in which parts of the liturgy were limited to those more thoroughly instructed in the faith,<sup>19</sup> but Isidore's language also discloses more administrative concerns. In the next paragraph, he goes on to warn against the ordination of unworthy priests and bishops.<sup>20</sup> Decisions about appointments are among the activities which might be conducted by sealed correspondence: Isidore himself notes that all bishops of the province were required to acquiesce in a new bishop's consecration, "no fewer than three being present, the others nonetheless consenting by the testimony of letters."<sup>21</sup> The seal rings of the acquiescing bishops act, theoretically, to protect the office from unworthy men.

Other, later, sources further document the use of seal rings within religious ritual in Iberia. For instance, tenth- and eleventh-century pontificals in Vic and Narbonne provide for sealing the relic containers within altars with "the bishop's seal," (*episcopus sigillum*), and indeed seal impressions, largely from signet rings, have been found on many such relic containers from Catalunya.<sup>22</sup> The practice is probably older than the pontificals themselves, although perhaps not reaching back to Isidore's day. Nonetheless, in

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used in the marriage ceremony itself. The relationship between rings and views of marriage would therefore be looser, but nonetheless important.

**18** Isidore of Seville, *De ecclesiasticis officiis*, ed. Lawson, 60; English trans. Koebler, 74. (bk 2, ch. 5, par. 12).

**19** For the evolution of these norms to the sixth century, see Saxer, *Les rites de l'initiation*.

**20** Isidore of Seville, *De ecclesiasticis officiis*, II.v.12, p. 60.

**21** Isidore of Seville, *De ecclesiasticis officiis*, II.v.11, p. 60; trans. Koebler, 74.

**22** Sureda i Jubany, "Lipsanothèques, reliques et autels en Catalogne romane,"

sealing away and thereby guaranteeing the relics of altars around the millennium, bishops and their rings were enacting a protection of holy matter in terms close to Isidore's. Even without such explicit ritual contexts, the use of the seal ring for administrative purposes, such as giving one's consent to an election, suggests a fluid exchange between the seal ring's pragmatic and metaphorical functions. Central to the fluidity of this exchange is the productive ambiguity in Isidore's Latin of the word *signum* and its diminutive *signaculum*, hovering between abstract sign and concrete seal.

A similar ambiguity is at play in the earliest known liturgical form accompanying the handover of the bishop's ring during the consecration rite. The Carolingian bishop Hincmar of Rheims, prescribing a rite for episcopal consecration in a letter to Adventius, Bishop of Metz, provides this formula for the act of putting the ring on the new bishop's finger: "This is the seal [*signum*] of faith, that you may seal [*signet*] those things of the divine mysteries which are to be sealed, and open [*aperiat*] those which are to be open."<sup>23</sup> A similar but more extensive formula survives in late tenth-century Anglo-Saxon pontificals, from St.-Germans in Cornwall and Winchester, as well as in a contemporary sacramentary from Corbie:

Take the ring of discretion and honour, the seal [*signum*] of faith; that you may seal what is to be sealed, and open what is to be opened, tie what is to be tied and loosen what is to be loosened, and open the doors of the heavenly kingdom to the believers by the faith of baptism, but to the fallen and penitent with the ministry of reconciliation.<sup>24</sup>

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33–34. At least one, twelfth-century, container, has been found with impressions from a larger mandorla-shaped seal, speaking to the decline of the signet ring.

**23** "et mittat annulum in dexteræ manus digito qui præcedit minimum, dicans a quid illi annulus datur, Signum et enim fidei, ut audientibus se ex divinis mysteriis signet quæ et quibus signanda sunt, et aperiat quæ et quibus aperienda sunt." The letter is edited with commentary in Andrieu, "Le sacre épiscopal d'après Hincmar," here p. 54. For reasons of narrative flow, Hincmar uses the third person; I give a reverse-engineered second-person version following Andrieu. Andrieu assumes that the forms reflect those then in use in Reims and Sens, where Hincmar was consecrated.

**24** "Accipe anulum discretionis et honoris et fidei signum, ut que signanda sunt signes et que aperienda sunt prodas, que liganda sunt liges et que solvenda sunt solvas, atque credentibus per fidem subvenias, lapsis autem et penitentibus per misterium reconciliationis ianuas regni celestis aperias, cunctis vero de thesauris dominicis nova et vetera proferas, ad eternam salutem hominibus consulas gratia domini nostri Iesus Christi," Cited from Andrieu, "Le sacre épiscopal d'après Hincmar," 58; and Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS latin 12502, fol. 16r; Sacramentary commissioned by Ratoldus of Corbie.

In these texts, the ring is primarily understood as a seal matrix, enabling the bishop to act in a way that seals and signs (*signet*), but the language is, again, productively ambiguous: it is also possible to understand the ring in the opening sentence as an impression marking, or sealing, the new bishop.

## A New Metaphor: The Vicar and the Bride

The tenth century saw the appearance of a new interpretation of the bishop's ring in Gallic pontificals, alongside the seal metaphor. One book from Aurillac contains the following prayer for handing over the ring: "With this ring of faith we commend to you the bride of Christ, the unharmed Church, so that you may keep her holy and immaculate in His sight."<sup>25</sup> Another form, from Sens, reads "take the ring of holy devotion, marked [*insignitus*] by which you may sincerely keep the bride of God and make the holy people overflow with divine deeds."<sup>26</sup> In these forms, the idea of the bishop as sealed and sealing by his ring has been largely replaced by an equally complex metaphor, in which he is a keeper or custodian of Christ's bride, the universal Church. Though not himself the bridegroom—that role is reserved for Christ—the bishop acts in his stead and as such wears something like a marriage ring.<sup>27</sup>

The marriage metaphor, as attested by these liturgical formulas, became dominant in later centuries. The form in which it entered Roman use,<sup>28</sup> and which became generalized in the pontifical of William Durandus (ca. 1230–1296) in the late thirteenth century, is known from the eleventh:<sup>29</sup> "Take this ring, that is the seal of faith [*fidei signaculum*], so

**25** "Sub hoc anulo fidei commendamus tibi sponsam Christi, illibatam ecclesiam, ut eam sanctam et immaculatam custodias in conspectu illius in omni bonitate." Now Albi, Médiathèque Pierre Amalric, MS 34, fol. 17v.

**26** "Accipe anulum sacre devotionis, quo insignitus sponsam Dei sinceriter custodias et populum sanctum divinis effectibus habundare facias." The manuscript is now in St. Petersburg; cited from Andrieu, "Le sacre épiscopal d'après Hincmar," 57.

**27** See the extended discussion of this metaphor in Labhart, *Zur Rechtssymbolik des Bischofsring*, 30–51.

**28** Andrieu, *Le pontifical romain au Moyen Âge 1: Le pontifical romain du XIIe siècle*; and *Le pontifical romain au Moyen Âge 2: Le pontifical de la curie romaine au XIIIe siècle*, XI.29.

**29** In addition to the PRG tradition discussed below and other contemporary manuscripts, the prayer is found in Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek (HAB), Codex Guelph. 7.2 Aug. 4o, fol. 26r, within a rite for ordaining bishops inserted as a separate quire into a collection of episcopal liturgy. Parkes argues, largely on paleographic

that you, adorned with uncorrupted faith, may keep the Lord's bride, namely the Holy Church, unharmed."<sup>30</sup> This prayer, although focused on the marriage metaphor, inserts the language of the seal: the *signaculum* or signet is inherited from Isidore's and other commentaries. Taking this language seriously, one can read the seal in two ways. On the one hand, it acts as a delegation of authority: the bishop is assigned to watch over God's bride, and like the chancellor or royal official, is given a seal ring to do so.<sup>31</sup> This authority is also a responsibility: the bishop is being reminded of his duty and faithfulness in a formulation that emphasizes avoiding conflicts of interests. Importantly, therefore, it is also the bishop here who is sealed or marked by faith.

Among the early witnesses to this prayer are the complex compilations of Frankish, Roman, and other liturgical sources known collectively as the "Pontifical romano-germanique" or PRG, within at least two different recensions of the episcopal consecration.<sup>32</sup> While one version only includes the *signaculum fidei* prayer, another situates it within a three-prayer sequence for the ring (interwoven with three prayers for the crozier).<sup>33</sup> First comes a benediction of the ring upon the altar, in which it is called a "sign [*signum*] of most holy faith" which might designate a wearer (who is then *insignitus*).<sup>34</sup>

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grounds, that the *ordo* was copied and inserted into the codex in the cathedral scriptorium in Mainz in the eleventh century; *The Making of Liturgy in the Ottonian Church*, 141.

**30** "Accipe anulum scilicet fidei signaculum. quatinus sponsam dei sanctam videlicet ecclesiam intemerata fide ornatus illibata custodias. Per dominum." Cited from the pontifical of William Durandus, I.XIV.42, ed. Andrieu, *Le pontifical romain au Moyen Âge 3: Le pontifical de Guillaume Durand*.

**31** For (seal) rings as tokens of delegation and obligation for worldly office, see Depreux, "Investitura per anulum et baculum," 179–80.

**32** The edition is Vogel and Elze, *PRG*. For a critical review of the edition's history and a challenge of the traditional attribution to Mainz, see Parkes, "Questioning the Authority of Vogel and Elze's Pontifical Romano-Germanique." The *ordo* of episcopal consecration (ch. 63 in Vogel and Elze's edition) is one of the core elements of the PRG tradition and survives in most manuscripts of the group, albeit with significant variations; Parkes, "Questioning the Authority of Vogel and Elze's Pontifical Romano-Germanique," 82.

**33** The longer form is found in the manuscripts of Vogel's group 1, which he considered to have the original sequencing of items but later versions of some rites, including episcopal consecration. See Vogel and Elze, *PRG* 1:220–23 (I.LXII.37–45).

**34** "Benedictio anuli: Creator et conservator humani generis, dator gratie spiritualis, largitor eterne salutis, tu, domine, permitte tuam benedictionem super hunc anulum

A second prayer, said when giving the ring (*quando datur*), repeats the extended seal metaphor seen in Anglo-Saxon pontificals: “so that you may seal what is to be sealed and open what is to be opened.”<sup>35</sup> Lastly, the *signaculum fidei* prayer is said “upon putting the ring on the finger,” distinguishing that act as connected to marriage and completing an act of sealing. One last prayer, given as an alternate in some manuscripts and appended to the *signaculum fidei* in at least one other, pushes the marriage metaphor further: “remember the marriage and betrothal of the church,” it instructs the new bishop, “and beware lest you forget it.”<sup>36</sup>

The extended version of the rite testifies to the strength of the sealing metaphor in the eleventh century, as well as to its potential integration with the marriage metaphor. It should be noted that this sequence of prayers may not have been performed as such, but may rather represent an attempt to bring together or reconcile different traditions; it has been argued that such reconciliation was the purpose of the PRG compilation in general.<sup>37</sup> If so, the complex handover of the ring in three moments may have been a maximalist version for consultation purposes. Nonetheless, the sequence possesses a logic of its own, the ring shifting from signet to wedding band as the emphasis moves from the object itself to its appearance on the bishop’s body.

Later Roman pontificals edited by Michel Andrieu include only the *signaculum fidei* prayer, while Durandus’ pontifical, compiled in the closing decades of the thirteenth century, includes the benediction from the PRG as well; but the addition of the two other prayers (*que signanda sunt* and *memor sponsionis*) in the margins of an early copy of the latter, made for use in Autun, confirms the long circulation of all four texts.<sup>38</sup>

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ut qui hoc sacrosancte fidei signo insignitus incedat, in virtute celestis defensionis ad eternam sic proficiat.” Vogel and Elze, *PRG*, 1:221.

**35** “Quando datur anulus dicatur: accipe anulum discretionis et honoris, fidei signum, ut que signanda sunt signes.” Vogel and Elze, *PRG*, 1:221. Full text as in n. 24 above.

**36** “Memor sponsionis et desponsationis ecclesiasticae et dilectionis domini Dei tui; in die qua assecutus es hunc honorem cave, ne obliviscaris illius.” Vogel and Elze, *PRG*, 1:222.

**37** See Parkes, “Questioning the Authority of Vogel and Elze’s Pontifical Romano-Germanique,” and Parkes, *The Making of Liturgy in the Ottonian Church*, esp. 198–205.

**38** Andrieu, *Le pontifical romain au Moyen Âge 3: Le pontifical de Guillaume Durand*, I.XIV.42; the manuscript in question is Lyon, Bibliothèque de l’université, cod. 11.

## The Sign of Aribo Archbishop

Some confirmation that the *signaculum fidei* in tenth- and eleventh-century prayers was still understood as a reference to sealing comes from a ring found in the grave of an archbishop of Mainz (Figure 6.1). Aribo, who served as archbishop from 1021 to 1031, was very likely consecrated using this prayer,<sup>39</sup> and the ring found in his grave materializes the symbolism of the signet: its small-ish bezel (1.2 by 1.4 cm) contains a flat inscription zone arranged around an amethyst.<sup>40</sup> Such a format, in a signet ring, allowed for a personalized inscription to be joined to a foreign, even pagan theme shown on an engraved gem. The inscription on Aribo's ring correspondingly names him and his office, starting with the customary cross of seal inscriptions: "+ ARIBO ARCHIEPS" (Archbishop Aribo). The text, however, is not mirrored, but reads normally when looking at the ring—it would be illegible if impressed. Moreover, the letters are filled in with niello, enhancing their legibility on the gold ground of the ring itself but decreasing their functionality as a matrix.<sup>41</sup> The ring was an image of a signet: a sign or insignia in the form of a *signaculum*.

Worn on his own finger, Aribo's ring advertised his name and his rank. In a way, this seems superfluous: anyone who saw the ring close enough to read its inscription already knew who the archbishop was. It may have been sent with a messenger as a guarantee of delegated authority,<sup>42</sup> but such use would surely have been exceptional: unlike a seal, which allows the authoritative material presence of the sealer to be multiplied, the ring remained a singular object, and its normal place was on the owner's hand. The ring, therefore, likely did not serve to identify Aribo; rather, it materialized the union of person and office. As the archbishop performed the various blessings and offices that were his prerogative—consecrating churches,

**39** According to Parkes, the main witness for this would be the Wolfenbüttel manuscript HAB, Cod. Guelph. 7.2 Aug. 4o; see n. 30 above.

**40** Sanke, *Gräber* (CD-Rom), Kat.-Nr. D 16.1. Aribo died while returning from a pilgrimage to Rome, and his body must have been carried back to Mainz; he was buried in the western crossing of the double-choired cathedral church begun under his predecessor Willigis. A tablet-woven gold band was also found in the grave and attributed to some sort of head-covering.

**41** Argued also in *Deutsche Inschriften Online* by Fuchs, Hedtke, and Kern, "SN1, Nr. 6 (Ring des Aribo)," [www.inschriften.net](http://www.inschriften.net) (unique identifier urn:nbn:de:0238-di002mz00k0000603).

**42** See Labhardt, *Zur Rechtssymbolik des Bischofsrings*, 97, for the practice of giving a messenger a ring. See also Chapter 5 in this volume.



Figure 6.1. Ring of Aribo, Archbishop of Mainz, 1021–1031. Gold and amethyst; diameter 2.6 cm. Found 1928, in a grave in the west crossing of Mainz cathedral. Mainz, Diocesan Museum, inv. nr. S 00062. © Bischöfliches Dom- und Diözesanmuseum Mainz. Photo by Marcel Schawe, reproduced courtesy of the Dom- und Diözesanmuseum.

ordaining priests, perhaps presiding over synods—the signet-lookalike on his finger “sealed” his actions with his dual, personal and institutional, authority.

At the same time, the legibility of Aribo’s ring, as though it were an impression rather than a matrix, highlights the other potential reading of the seal metaphor: with the ring, Aribo himself is sealed. Here, the small cross in the inscription is crucial. P. D. A. Harvey has recently argued that such crosses, in conjunction with the word *sigillum* or the abbreviation *S* found in many seal legends (starting in late Anglo-Saxon England), align the seal with written and, more importantly, gestured crosses made when signing documents.<sup>43</sup> The seal, with

its cross, becomes a lasting witness to an ephemeral gesture, the sign of the cross, made by human witnesses over the document.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, the bishop’s ring serves as one of several visible, durable witnesses to the ephemeral consecration rite, during which the sign of the cross was made over him several times, including (starting in the Carolingian period) with the oil of unction on his forehead and right hand.<sup>45</sup> In most versions of the rite, it is immediately following the anointing that the ring and staff are blessed and handed to the bishop.<sup>46</sup> At this point, the sign of the cross would additionally be made over the ring at the altar, when, as we saw, a common prayer

<sup>43</sup> Harvey, “This is a Seal,” 2.

<sup>44</sup> The difficulty of writing this sentence, in which “signing” a document and “signing” oneself evoke radically different actions, speaks to the importance of these different identifying and legitimizing signs; see also Fraenkel, *La signature*.

<sup>45</sup> For the introduction of anointing see Andrieu, “Le sacre épiscopal d’après Hincmar,” 39–54.

<sup>46</sup> Andrieu, “Le sacre épiscopal d’après Hincmar,” 56–57. For an overview of diversity around the year 1000, Méhu, “L’ordination de évêque,” esp. 88–89 for the ring.

called it “this most holy sign/seal of faith” (*sacrosanctum fidei signum*) with which the new bishop would be *insignitus*. It is not difficult, in those circumstances, to see the ring as incorporating and commemorating that other “most holy sign of the faith,” the gesture of the cross. Wearing his ring, Aribo was *insignitus*, signed with the cross, as Aribo Archiepiscopus.<sup>47</sup>

It is always a challenge, when considering grave goods, to know how and whether they were used in life. Aribo’s ring was probably not made directly for burial—burial goods are typically made of cheaper materials, and this ring is pure gold—but we cannot know when it was worn in life. There are, however, textual sources mentioning rings in connection with Aribo. His rise to the archdiocesan see is described in the *Vitae* of two bishops of Hildesheim involved in a jurisdictional dispute with Mainz over the abbey of Gandersheim.<sup>48</sup> According to the *Vita posterior* of Godehard of Hildesheim, Aribo was chosen or “*praesignatum*” by the gift of a ring from the emperor, Henry II. Being, at the time, an imperial *capellanus* and not yet a priest, he was ordained by Bernward of Hildesheim at Gandersheim itself, and only later consecrated as archbishop by Ekkehard of Schleswig.<sup>49</sup> This sequence exemplifies the multi-stage ritual of enthroning new Ottonian bishops, elegantly described by Timothy Reuter: first singled out by the gift of a ring and/or staff, new bishops were consecrated by their fellow bishops, and separately enthroned in their new cathedral church.<sup>50</sup> These different steps can be understood as representing the layers and spheres of a bishop’s authority, his “two bodies” as urban ruler and font of sacramental power.

Within this sequence, the first gift of a ring from the emperor is both a sign (Aribo is *praesignatus*) of the consecration to come, and an act of delegation of authority. For the archbishop of Mainz in particular, traditionally

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**47** Again, there is a productive cycle at play, for the blessing of Aribo’s hands is what then allowed him to confirm young Christians by tracing the cross on their forehead with his anointed thumb. The logic of transference resonates with metaphors of impression.

**48** See the discussion in Depreux, “Investitura per anulum et baculum,” 192–94.

**49** “Huic autem Aribo regius cappellanus successit, quem imperialis anuli dono regio more praesignatum Bernwardus episcopus ad principale altare praenotatae Gandisheimensis ecclesiae presbyterium ordinavit.” *Vita Godehardi episcopi posterior*, ed. Pertz, 205–6. Wolfhere’s two lives of Godehard, like Thangmar’s life of Bernward, insist on Aribo’s quarrelsome personality, as a result of the long dispute over the canonesses of Gandersheim; the account of Aribo’s consecration seems designed to stress the rights of Hildesheim. See the different accounts gathered in Bøjmer, *Regesta archi. maguntinensium* I, 150–51.

**50** Reuter, “Bishops, Rites of Passage, and the Symbolism of State,” 31–33.

archchancellor of the Empire, the signet ring functioned particularly well as a symbol of such authority. Afterwards, a ring—perhaps the same but perhaps not—was placed on the altar, blessed by Ekkehard of Schleswig, and handed to Aribo with the *signaculum fidei* prayer. Spiritual powers of sealing joined the administrative ones already conferred.<sup>51</sup> It is unclear whether either of these rings is the one Aribo took to his grave: while it seems unlikely that Henry would have had a ring made at short notice to select his candidate, Aribo would have had a few months to commission the ring for his consecration.<sup>52</sup> He could also, of course, have had it made at any time in the subsequent decade.

### By Ring and Staff

Neither of the writers who described Aribo's consecration objected to his selection by the emperor, or to Henry II's use of a ring to signal that selection. Later in the eleventh century, however, these practices became the object of a major controversy between the pope and the emperor. Starting or intensifying with the papacy of Gregory VII in the 1070s, the papacy challenged the right of emperors, and other laymen, to appoint bishops.<sup>53</sup> In the ensuing decades of conflict and propaganda, a period known as the Investiture Controversy, the handover of the liturgical insignias of ring and crozier became a powerful symbol for lay infringement on properly clerical

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**51** Töbelmann has similarly argued that the crozier was always a twofold (*duplex*) sign of temporal and spiritual power, which he sees as setting it apart from the ring. Töbelmann, *Stäbe der Macht*, 218–25.

**52** The non-identity of consecration and pontifical rings is another of the difficulties in the study of episcopal rings. By the twelfth century at the latest, these would normally be different: Roman pontificals of the time explicitly prescribe the use of two rings in the consecration rite (*Provideat autem ipse electus ... anulus pontificalis et alius anulus parvus*): the consecration ring proper, sized to be worn on the bare hand, which is blessed and handed over with the prayers we have been discussing, and a separate “pontifical ring,” sized to be worn over a glove, which is worn by the new bishop upon exiting the church of consecration. Andrieu, *Le pontifical de la curie*, XI.9. The use of episcopal gloves was developing in Aribo's day, but he does not seem to have been buried with them. Therefore, the ring worn over his bare finger may still have been the pontifical ring. For the history and significance of episcopal gloves, see Fahrnbauer, “Handlungen mit Handschuhen.”

**53** For introductions to the events and the copious bibliography, see Hartmann, *Investiturstreit*, and the essays gathered in Jarnut and Wemhoff, eds., *Vom Umbruch zur Erneuerung?* For a concise introduction in English, see Malegam, “Pro-Papacy Polemic.”

matters. The eventual compromise at Worms in 1122 conceded imperial influence on appointments, and even a ceremony of investiture, but not the use of the ring and staff.<sup>54</sup> During this period, writers on either side of the conflict wrote and disseminated hundreds of pages of polemical texts arguing for or against the emperor's right to handle or give the ring and staff; and while it is not possible to consider the breadth of this production here, looking at how a few texts from different phases of the crisis used the metaphors of sealing and marriage is nonetheless instructive.<sup>55</sup>

Towards the middle of the eleventh century, a book on simony by the cardinal-bishop Humbert of Silva Candida (ca. 1000–1061) helped usher in the Controversy. The symbolism of the ring, while not central to his argument, appears in one of the middle chapters.

For the ring points to [*indicat*] the seal [*signaculum*] of heavenly secrets, warning preachers that they should keep the wisdom of God ... as sealed [*velut signatam*] away from the imperfect ... or that, like the bridegroom's friends, they should always show and praise the bride gift [*arrham fidei*] of his bride, namely the church.<sup>56</sup>

A few chapters later, Humbert seems to summarize this in referring to “the ring of preaching and of betrothal to the church” (*anulus praedicationis seu ecclesiasticae desponsationis*).<sup>57</sup> Humbert uses both the seal and the *arrha*, somewhat awkwardly, as images of an authority to preach: proclaiming Christ's marriage to the church and exercising judgment.<sup>58</sup> Ring and staff together are the visible signs of this authority, which cannot be truly given prior to proper consecration and unction.<sup>59</sup>

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**54** For more object-oriented discussions, see Tobelmann, *Stäbe der Macht*; and Depreux, “Investitura per anulum et baculum.”

**55** See Melve, *Inventing the Public Sphere*, for the context and reach of the polemic texts.

**56** Humbertus of Silva Candida, *Libri III adversus simoniacos*, ed. Thaner, 205 (bk. 3, ch. 6); translation mine. See the discussion in Labhart, *Zur Rechtssymbolik des Bischofsrings*, 82–85.

**57** Humbertus of Silva Candida, *Libri III adversus simoniacos*, ed. Thaner, 217 (bk. 3, ch. 15).

**58** The link to preaching is more natural in the case of the crozier, which Humbert discusses first.

**59** Humbert is concerned that the visible signs should only be given when they correspond to invisible reality, in this case the state of being a consecrated bishop: *Libri III adversus simoniacos*, ed. Thaner, 205 (bk. 3, ch. 6).

Around 1110, Rangerio, Bishop of Lucca (r. 1092–1112) wrote a long poem “On the Ring and Staff,” focused on the sacred signs which should not be sullied by the bloodied hands of a king.<sup>60</sup> Much of the argument’s force depended on the idea of marriage, said to be coded in the image of the ring. In the first few lines of the poem, he explains that the ring is the bridegroom’s, given to the bride, and that the gem designates the bride and the gold the bridegroom, coming together in a single object.<sup>61</sup> Later, a rhetorical climax is reached when he compares the double rite of investiture and consecration to two conflicting marriages, or bigamy.<sup>62</sup>

Like Humbert, Rangerio is concerned with the possibility that the ring and staff, granted to an unconsecrated man, would be false signs, and he frequently uses language of sealing and impression to make this point. This language, however, is not attached to the ring as a seal matrix, but rather reinforces its meaning as a marriage ring and, just as often, the crozier’s as a shepherd’s crook: he who seeks the signs/seals (*signacula*) of the shepherd should be a true pastor, or the ring holds the sign/seal of marriage (*signum coniugii*) and expresses (*exprimat*) the marriage bond.<sup>63</sup> In such cases, the seal image has become a paradigm for signification, detached from the ring in particular.

Both Humbert and Rangerio, at different moments in the Investiture Controversy, drew on the available metaphors of the ring (and staff) to make their points that these sacred signs should stay exclusive to clerics. The marriage metaphor, however, with its inherent drive to exclusivity, seems to have been seen as more rhetorically effective as the crisis wore on.

The resolution of the crisis is frequently attributed to the Bishop Ivo of Chartres (bishop from 1090–1115), who in two letters urged moderation on zealous archbishops of Lyon, Hugh and Ioscerannus.<sup>64</sup> In both letters, Ivo

**60** For the phenomenon of polemical poems, appearing in the later period of the controversy, see Melve, *Inventing the Public Sphere*, 104–6.

**61** “Anulus est Sponsi, sponsae datur anulus, / ut se noverit unius non alium cupere. / Gemma notat sponsam, sponsus signatur ab auro, / haec duo conveniunt, sicut et illa duo.” Rangerius of Lucca, *Liber de anulo et baculo*, ed. Sackur, 509.

**62** “Ut prius uxorem ducat sub rege licenter / Quam Christi sponsam sentiat, aecclesiam, / et bigamus fiat, cum debeat unius esse.” Rangerius, *Liber de anulo et baculo*, ed. Sackur, 523.

**63** “Huius coniugii signum tenet anulus ille / quem dat pontifici, qui sacrat ipse Deus. / Scilicet, ut mediut sponsi sponsaeque maritum / exprimat uxori ... qui sibi tantarum quaerit signacula rerum / et quod signatur, debet habere simul.” Rangerius, *Liber de anulo et baculo*, ed. Sackur, 510.

**64** See Laudage, *Gregorianische Reform und Investiturstreit*, 47–58, for an overview

argued that, while kings should not choose bishops, there was a need for them to concede to each new bishop temporal authority and possessions held in fief. “What does it matter whether this concession is given by the hand, by a nod, by the tongue, or by the staff, as long as the king does not intend to give anything spiritual?” asked Ivo around the year 1096,<sup>65</sup> adding in 1112 that “a layman, who thought that he could confer a sacrament or a sacramental thing [*rem*] of the church in the giving and taking of a staff, we would deem heretical, not because of the manual investiture, but for their diabolical presumption.”<sup>66</sup> Though aware of the symbolism of the objects—in his sermon collection, Ivo provided an allegory of priestly vestments to his diocesan clergy<sup>67</sup>—he played it down in these letters. Instead, he favoured a clear, legalistic definition of the act, independent of its outward form and thus independent of any symbolism. Ivo’s implicit suggestion eventually became the compromise: kings and emperors could concede *temporalia* to newly elected bishops using a rod or sceptre, not a crozier. Paradoxically, this solution both heightened and hollowed out the significance of the ring and crozier.<sup>68</sup> Ivo’s combination of a meaningful act with an arbitrary, because conventional, sign is fundamentally similar to that used by later authors like Bernard of Clairvaux or William of Auvergne.

## Signets in the Past Tense

Before and after its resolution, the Investiture Controversy spurred the writing of many new liturgical commentaries: handbooks enabling clerics to read meaning in the “actions, words, and things” of the liturgy.<sup>69</sup> In earlier versions, written by Carolingian prelates, the seal metaphor had been the dominant meaning of the ring. For instance, Hrabanus Maurus, in *De*

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of the traditional position, and Melve, *Inventing the Public Sphere*, 610–21, for a more nuanced position. Ivo’s letters, written on behalf of the gathered prelates of the province of Sens, circulated widely, and continued to be copied with the rest of his correspondence long after Ivo’s death.

**65** Ivo of Chartre, ep. 60, in *Epistolae ad litem investiturarum spectantes*, ed. Sackur, 645; see also the electronic edition and translation by G. Giordanengo, TELMA, <https://telma-chartes.irht.cnrs.fr/yves-de-chartres/notice-acte/20997>.

**66** Ivo of Chartres, ep. 236, in Dümmler et al., *Libelli de Lite*, 2:654; see also <https://telma-chartes.irht.cnrs.fr/yves-de-chartres/notice/21174>.

**67** Ivo of Chartres, Sermo III, in *PL* 162, cols. 525–26.

**68** See the analysis in Töbelmann, *Stäbe der Macht*, 219–23.

**69** Reynolds, “Liturgical Scholarship,” and Miller, *Clothing the Clergy*, 58–59.

*Institutione Clericorum*, quotes Isidore to call the ring a “sign [*signum*] of pontifical honour or a seal [*signaculum*] of secrets.”<sup>70</sup>

Commentators from the period of the Investiture Controversy, however, most prominently Honorius Augustodinensis (d. ca. 1140) and Rupert of Deutz (d. ca. 1129), cite the marriage metaphor rather than the idea of sealing. Rupert briefly names the ring as the *arrha* of Christ’s bride, but his focus is on the ring as an active sign: gleaming on the bishop’s finger as he ordains different orders of clergy, the ring with its gem symbolized the descent of the Holy Spirit, conferring different gifts on the faithful.<sup>71</sup> This image, while compatible with the active role of the seal ring, relies on light metaphors rather than on any image of closing or sealing. Honorius Augustodinensis, meanwhile, provides glosses associated with the marriage ring and its supposed origin with Prometheus: gold and gems, he says, correspond to love and delight, and the bishop is to remember his duty as a bridegroom.<sup>72</sup> These ideas, unsurprisingly, are close to the ones in Rangerio’s polemical poem *On the Ring and Staff*. Although neither Honorius nor Rupert is very descriptive, it is notable that both of them focus on the materials and appearance of the ring, which replace the active function of sealing as anchors for meaning.

Unlike Rupert, Honorius explicitly addressed the older metaphor. “Once,” he says, “kings used to sign [*signare*] letters with a ring;” and he repeats the

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**70** “Datur et anulus propter signum pontificalis honoris, vel signaculum secretorum. Nam multa sunt, quae ante carnalium minus que intellegentium sensus occultantes sacerdotes quasi sub signaculo condunt, ne indignis quibusque dei sacramenta aperiantur.” Rabanus Maurus, *De Institutione Clericorum*, bk. 1, ch. 4. The ring is not discussed in Amalarius of Metz’s commentary, *On the Liturgy*.

**71** “Anulus digiti donum significat spiritus sancti... Harum diuisiones gratiarum inuisibiles imitatur uisibiliter utpote christi uicarius catholicus pontifex per sacrorum diuisiones ordinum ponens quosdam in ecclesia sacerdotes alios diaconos et ceteros sacri altaris officiales. Latius autem significatio praedicti extenditur anuli quia dum omni ecclesiae sanam doctrinam et fidem integram praedicat uelut oppignoratam anulo sponsam christo subarrat. Non ergo ab re in eius digito gemmatus fulget anulus per cuius ministerium christus dominus tam fulgida distribuit dona sancti spiritus.” *Ruperti Tuitiensis Liber de diuinis officiis*, 1.25.

**72** “Fertur quod Prometheus quidam sapiens primus annulum ferreum ob insigne amoris fecerit, et in eo adamantem lapidem posuerit... Postmodum vero aurei sunt pro ferreis instituti, et gemmis pro adamante insigniti; quia, sicut aurum cuncta metalla praecellit, ita dilectio universa bona excellit, et sicut aurum gemma decoratur, ita amor dilectione perornatur. Pontifex ergo annulum portat, ut se sponsum Ecclesiae agnoscat, ac pro illa animam, si necesse fuerit, sicut Christus, ponat.” Honorius, *Jewel of the Soul*, 1.216.

idea that bishops should “seal” (*sigillet*) mysteries from the unworthy.<sup>73</sup> For Honorius, the use of a signet ring is no longer a live source of metaphor, but a dead practice that must be uncovered behind the words of his sources. Such explanations recur in later authors, most notably William Durandus, whose *Rationale divinatorum officiorum* (ca. 1285) became a key text of liturgical knowledge for the next two centuries.<sup>74</sup> The text repeats and expands on the interpretations provided by Rupert and Honorius,<sup>75</sup> but relegates the seal ring to the third and briefest of his paragraphs, where it is prefaced with a similar explanation: “the ancients used to seal documents with rings.”<sup>76</sup>

Signet rings had not disappeared from common use by the twelfth and thirteenth century. On the contrary, they seem to have undergone a revival, and many gem-set signet rings survive from the thirteenth century in particular.<sup>77</sup> Honorius’s brief statement, therefore, should not be read as indication of his lack of familiarity with this type of object. Rather, it is indicative of various shifts in sealing practices which, as Brigitte Bedos-Rezak has amply documented, changed the modalities by which seals carried meaning. Over the course of the eleventh century, potentates like bishops and counts came to use enlarged seal matrices, too large to be worn as rings, to authenticate charters; these seals typically carried an image representing the seal-bearer.<sup>78</sup> In face of this growing official practice of sealing, signet rings came to be relegated to a second rank, used largely on personal correspondence or as

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**73** “Annuli usus ex Evangelio acceptus creditur, ubi saginati vituli conviva prima stola vestitur, annulo insignitur (Luc. XV). Olim solebant reges litteras cum annulo signare; cum hoc soliti erant et nobiles quique sponsas subarrhane ... Mysteria Scripturae a perfidis sigillet, Secreta Ecclesiae resignet.” Honorius, *Jewel of the Soul*, 1.216. These statements are separated from each other by the marriage-ring discussion, above, and no explicit connection is drawn between them.

**74** On the *Rationale* and its sources, see most crucially the Introduction to the critical edition, Thibodeau, “Apparatus Fontium,” in *Guillelmi Duranti Rationale divinatorum officiorum*, 3:248–69.

**75** The episcopal ring as marriage ring, explicitly cross-referenced to the sacrament of marriage, is discussed in *Guillelmi Duranti Rationale divinatorum officiorum*, 3.14.1–2; Rupert’s idea of the ring and the Holy Spirit in 3.14.4 and the second half of section 3, expanded with a gloss on the circular shape.

**76** *Guillelmi Duranti Rationale divinatorum officiorum*, 3.14.3. The section places greater emphasis on revelation over concealment, a shift from the earlier tradition and perhaps another source of discomfort vis-à-vis the seal image.

**77** Henig, “The Re-Use and Copying of Ancient Intaglios.”

**78** Bedos-Rezak, *When Ego was Imago*, 90–95.

counterseals. Correspondingly, the language on the rings themselves often relates to secrecy or privacy.<sup>79</sup>

New practices of sealing differed not only in the size of the matrices, but in the seal impression's life-span. On the letters sealed by seal rings, the seal was broken when the letter was read (by its intended recipient or otherwise): its authority lay in its unbroken state and was one-use-only. In contrast, a seal appended to a charter is (theoretically at least) meant to represent the sigillant's authority as long as the charter itself survives and is no longer positioned in such a way as to forbid access to the text.<sup>80</sup> These changes in sealing practices reinforced the distance between new official seals and personal signet rings. They also changed the metaphorical reach of the seal, from images of closing and protecting towards semantics of resemblance and sameness.<sup>81</sup>

## A Paris Ring

A ring found in a bishop's tomb in the choir of Notre-Dame de Paris, now in the Louvre, might be said to exemplify the typology of episcopal rings after the Investiture Crisis (Figure 6.2).<sup>82</sup> While the ring's history is complicated, it seems that it was found in 1858 during Viollet-le-Duc's renovations, in one of four excavated medieval graves. Identified as a bishop's ring by the presence of a wooden crosier in the same tomb, it has been dated on stylistic grounds to the late twelfth or early thirteenth century.<sup>83</sup> The ring likely

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**79** See the examples in Henig, "The Re-Use and Copying of Ancient Intaglios." For the use of signets, often without an explicit naming of the bearer and therefore relying on personal memory for significance, as counterseals in the twelfth century, see Jasperse, "With This Ring," 76–79.

**80** Bedos-Rezak, *When Ego was Imago*, 96–100. According to Bedos-Rezak, the modality of the letter in particular implies the importance of a trustworthy messenger, which in turn relates to the role of the (signet) ring as a material trace of delegation.

**81** Bedos-Rezak, *When Ego was Imago*, 100–107 and *passim*. Scholastic and pre-scholastic works, including a text by Honorius Augustodiniensis, use the word *sigillum* to discuss a wide variety of topics having to do with resemblance, from typology to the divine image to the practices of learning and teaching. See Novikoff, "Anselm, Dialogue, and the Rise of Scholastic Disputation," esp. 414–16, for Honorius' *Sigillum Sante Marie*.

**82** Gold with niello and garnet; Paris, Musée du Louvre, OA 3357. See Taburet-Delahaye, "À propos de l'anneau."

**83** Taburet-Delahaye, "À propos de l'anneau," 268–70. See the Preface to this volume for another ring and a seal matrix found during the same excavation. The ring was



Figure 6.2. Ring called “of Maurice de Sully,” probably of Eudes de Sully or Pierre de Nemours, late twelfth century. Gold and garnet; diameter 2.1 cm, height of bezel 2.5 cm. Apparently found 1858, in a grave in Notre Dame cathedral. Gift 1893 of Edouard Corroyer. Paris, Louvre Museum, OA 3357. Photos © GrandPalaisRmn (Musée du Louvre) / Stéphane Maréchalle. Reproduced courtesy of the Réunion des Musées nationaux.

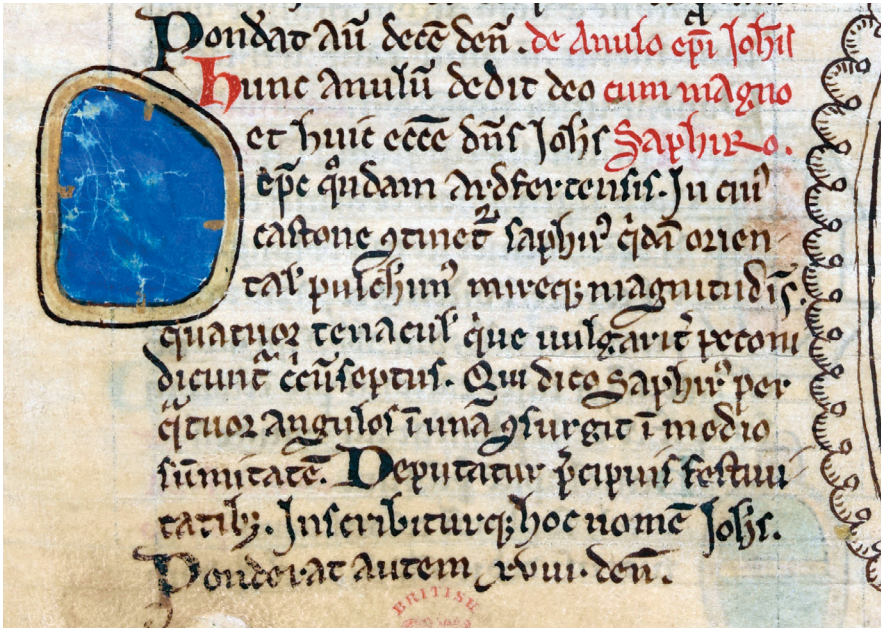


Figure 6.3. Matthew Paris, ring of “Bishop John” in the treasury of St. Albans. Detail from *Liber additamentorum*, London, British Library, Cotton MS Nero D.I, fol. 146v. © British Library Board, reproduced with permission.

belonged to Eudes de Sully (1197–1208, no relation to the more well-known Maurice de Sully) or Pierre de Nemours (1208–1219).<sup>84</sup> Despite the uncertain attribution, the Parisian context nonetheless helps to outline the ring's meaning.<sup>85</sup>

The Louvre ring and Aribo's have little in common but their materials: gold and semi-precious stones. Both fit within the very vague descriptions offered by Honorius and Rupert. Yet whereas the bezel of Aribo's ring is comparatively small, 1.4 cm at its widest, that of the Paris ring is massive, 2.5 by 2.1 cm, enough to hide the hoop (2.1 cm in internal diameter) and the finger when worn. This large bezel consists of a single, flat, polished garnet stone, edged by an even, thin band of gold and possessing neither letter nor image.<sup>86</sup> Seen from the top, it resembles some of the contemporary episcopal rings illustrated in Matthew Paris' account of the treasury of St. Alban's, like that of "Bishop John" with its large, irregularly-shaped sapphire (Figure 6.3 here).<sup>87</sup> Seen at a distance, the ring is impressive and legible in its simplicity. The fine ornamentation of the hoop (Figure 6.2b), the unfurling leaves reaching up tangentially to support the sides of the bezel, and the bird-like creature outlined in niello on its underside, all were invisible to the public and even to most who interacted with the vested bishop. These details may have served for his own private pleasure, or impressed with their refinement those clerics who surrounded the bishop in his official acts, perhaps holding or handling the ring in the liturgy of vesting.<sup>88</sup> During the liturgy, however, or in other occasions when

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lost in a theft in 1860, and apparently bought on the London art market by Édouard Corroyer, a student of Viollet-le-Duc; Taburet-Delahaye, "À propos de l'anneau."

**84** Taburet-Delahaye, "À propos de l'anneau," 271. It is also possible that the ring was used for the burial of a later bishop; unfortunately, other goods from this grave seem not to have survived. Yet, as with Aribo's ring, the material value of the gold speaks against the idea of a designated burial object (unlike the wooden crozier), and for the idea that this ring belonged to the bishop buried there.

**85** For Eudes and Pierre and their relationship to the cathedral liturgy, see Nemarich, "*Organistae* and the Cultivation of Polyphony."

**86** It is sometimes said that text was prohibited on late-medieval rings, but Elżbieta Dąbrowska-Zawadzka has conclusively shown that this prohibition dates to the sixteenth century. For this fascinating cautionary tale, see Dąbrowska-Zawadzka, "La tombe de l'évêque A," 256.

**87** London, British Library, Cotton MS Nero D.I, fol. 146v; an observation made by Taburet-Delahaye, "À propos de l'anneau," 272.

**88** This ring is small enough (at 2.1 cm in diameter) to have been worn over the bare hand; it may have been used as a consecration ring, and was likely worn by the

a larger public could see the bishop from a distance, the ring functioned, first and foremost, as a visible and obvious ring, almost akin to stage jewellery. So, if Aribo's ring was a sign of a *signaculum*, the Paris find was a sign of a ring.

### Signum tantum

For thirteenth century Parisian bishops, then, a bishop's ring no longer served a sealing function, nor did it resemble seals or seal rings. Rather, a ring like the one found in Notre Dame looked like ... a ring. What remained of the seal metaphor was the language of the sign in the liturgical formulas: the words *signum*, *signaculum*, and *signare*. These words, spoken over signet rings, had once evoked rich metaphors of guarding, closing (and opening), and authenticating. As these gestures came to be performed with independent matrices, however, the words had lost their once precise meaning.

Returning to the *signaculum fidei* prayer, it is possible to see how the ring could now be understood as a "sign of faith" rather than "a seal of faith:" the ring adorns or designates the bishop in an outward form of inner ornament, matching the "pure faith" with which he should truly be adorned (*ornatus*). For the bishop, it should act as a reminder of his duties (during and beyond liturgical performance), and for others, as a marker of his particular authority. The ring is no longer an object acting in the physical world but a visible stand-in for invisible realities: unction, the office of bishop, faith.

This relationship between the visible and the invisible came under new scrutiny in a time of growing intellectual concern with the theory of signs, including the special kind of signs called sacraments. In pre-scholastic and scholastic writing, the word *signum* was again of great importance, as an abstract term for those peculiar relationships of the intellect which link one thing with another thing as signified and signifier.<sup>89</sup> William of Auvergne was one of many writers in this period puzzling over signs and how they worked. For him, the word *signum* primarily related to those more abstract questions, with seals (*sigilla*) as one of many possible concrete phenomena serving in that function.

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bishop acting officially outside the liturgy. During pontifical liturgy, the bishop would by this time certainly have worn larger rings over gloves, then removed both for the eucharistic consecration.

**89** Rosier-Catach, *La parole efficace*, 23–31; or see a broader view in Broadie, *Introduction to Medieval Logic*.

In this context, it is perhaps worth reflecting on William's own ring use, as far as it is known. Like Maurice de Sully in the previous century, he was buried in Saint-Victor, probably wearing a ring.<sup>90</sup> But he left another, pontifical ring to Notre-Dame upon his death, as part of a splendid "chapel" or full set of ornaments for a service. The cathedral's obituary lists "a chasuble, a dalmatic and a tunicella, and two decorated albs (of which one is wholly silk), a stole, a mitre, a maniple, a crozier and a ring,"<sup>91</sup> All of these objects, which together amounted to a full costume for pontifical ceremonies, had their own metaphorical meanings according to prayers and commentaries.<sup>92</sup> William was very concerned about the moral and religious fibre of his clergy, and like the polemicists before him he certainly cared to see these meanings correspond to the virtuous character of the (future) wearer.<sup>93</sup>

The donation nonetheless reminds us that William, following contemporary practice, considered the individual item—whether ring or chasuble—to be interchangeable. While he likely had some impact on the design of the items he donated, the ring was inevitably among the many that a bishop might wear over his time in office. Unlike the rings found in graves, the one in his chapel remained in the possession of the cathedral, associated with a specific altar and used for particular occasions. Whereas signet rings and, perhaps, consecration rings, had a personal relationship to their wearer, a pontifical ring like this one designated a function, the bishop of Paris. Yet though this ring had little in common with the matrices worn by earlier bishops, it remained a *signaculum fidei*.

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**90** Taburet-Delahaye, "À propos de l'anneau," 270–71.

**91** Guérard, *Cartulaire de l'église Notre-Dame de Paris*, 4:38–39. Other items listed in the entry, including vessels for chrism, should probably not be understood as part of the *capella*.

**92** See Miller, *Clothing the Clergy*, 51–95.

**93** See Nemarich, "Organistae and the Cultivation of Polyphony," 134–36.

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