

The foundation charter of the church of Saint Andrew of Rochester ... perhaps

In the 1120s, when one of the Rochester monks set about compiling a cartulary of his church, the document which demanded to be put in first place was a charter of the church's founder, Ethelbert king of Kent (Campbell 1973, no 1). Of the Anglo-Saxon charters which passed through this scribe's hands, only a minority are still in existence (in the British Library, not in Rochester); and Ethelbert's charter, unluckily, is not among the survivors. But at least we do know what it said.

In the form in which it was copied into the cartulary, the charter cannot be genuine. Nevertheless, there is only one portion of the text which is manifestly inauthentic. Excising that, transposing two passages which are out of place, and making a few lesser adjustments, I arrive at this modified version of the text:

+ Regnante in perpetuum domino nostro Iesu Christo
saluatore. (1)

(2) Ad monitionem catholicae fidei optabilem, nobis est
aptum semper inquirere qualiter per loca sanctorum, pro
animae remedio uel stabilitate salutis nostrae, aliquid de
portione terrae nostrae in subsidiis seruorum dei (3)
deuotissima uoluntate debeamus offerre.

Ideoque tibi, sancte Andrea, tuaeque aecclesiae quae est
constituta in ciuitate (4) Hrofibreui, ubi praeesse uidetur
Iustus episcopus, [ego (5) *Æthelberhtus* rex, filio meo
Eadbaldo (6),] trado aliquantulum telluris mei,
(7)

Si quis uero augere uoluerit hanc ipsam donationem: augeat
illi dominus dies bonos. Et si presumpserit minuere aut
contradicere: in conspectu dei sit damnatus, et sanctorum
eius, hic et in aeterna secula, nisi emendauerit ante eius
transitum quod inique gessit contra christianitatem nostram.

Hoc cum consilio Laurentii episcopi et omnium principum
meorum signo sanctae crucis confirmaui, eosque iussi ut mecum
idem facerent, [mense Aprilio, sub die iiii kalendas
Maias, indictione vii.] (8)

(1) At this point, between the invocation and the proem, MS has two fragments of text which do not properly belong there: the date, which I have put at the end, and the words *ego Æthelberhtus rex, filio meo Eadbaldo*, which I have put where *ego* can govern the verb *trado*. Though I cannot explain how they might have got displaced, I think we can be sure that they did. (Brooks (2006:10) refers to the second fragment as an "address", but an address belongs in a letter, not in a diploma. Besides, *ego* and *meo* are not the language of an address, which is, by its nature,

written in the third person (*Tullius Terentiae suae salutem dicit*, for example). So far as the king is addressing anyone in particular, he is speaking to Saint Andrew. In other respects, Brooks's comments are useful.)

(2) *admonitionem ... Nobis* MS, emended as above by Levison (1946:223--4): "At the welcome bidding of the catholic faith, it is always apt for us to ask ...". (As the text stands in MS, the king appears to be "admonishing" his son. But that cannot be right. Even if he had been minded to do it, he would not have embarrassed everyone by doing it here.)

(3) *deuotissimam uoluntatem* MS.

(4) A unique form of the name, which seems to begin as English but end as Latin. Perhaps read *in ciuitate Hrofi breui*, "in Hrof's city [otherwise called Doru]brevis", or something of the sort.

(5) *Æthelberhtus* MS is not a seventh-century spelling: read *Aedilberctus* or something similar.

(6) Supply some phrase associating Eadbald with the donation (something along the lines of *consentiente et confirmante*, "my son Eadbald consenting and confirming").

(7) Some description of the land should follow here.

(8) The crosses and subscriptions should follow here. MS ends with the word *Amen*.

If the charter survived in this form, there would, no doubt, be different opinions about it; but most people, I imagine, would be willing to accept it as a botched copy of a genuine charter. (Perhaps the copyist did the best he could; perhaps the original was so faded or so damaged that it was only partly legible.) Taken at face value, it is a charter of king Ethelbert for bishop Justus and the church of Rochester, and the date of it is given as "month of April, fourth kalends of May, seventh indiction" -- which translates as 28 April 604.

That date tallies with the information obtained by Beda from his friends in southern England, who told him that the churches of London and Rochester were founded in just that year. If we thought that the Rochester charter was genuine, therefore, we might venture to infer that a similar charter would have been drawn up for the church of London, with Saint Paul's name in place of Saint Andrew's and Mellitus's in place of Justus's; on top of that we might venture to infer that it was the missionaries'

policy, from the very beginning, to have the donations made to them recorded in writing. Whether it would be safe to build such a large conclusion on such an uncertain foundation is not a question that I am competent to answer.

References

Brooks 2006 N. Brooks, 'Rochester, A.D. 400--1066', in T. Ayers and T. Tatton-Brown (eds.), *Medieval art, architecture and archaeology at Rochester* (British Archaeological Association Conference Transactions 28, 2006), 6--21.

Levison 1946 W. Levison, *England and the Continent in the eighth century* (Oxford, 1946).

C.F. February 2018