

Eardwulf bishop to Lul fellow-bishop -- a letter from an eighth-century bishop of Rochester

The letter in question was part of a remarkable collection of correspondence which accumulated in the archive of the church of Mainz during the eighth century. None of the originals survive ... but they survived long enough to be copied, by scribes who recognized their value. Bishop Eardwulf's letter is one of the batch preserved in a single mid ninth-century manuscript (Vienna, Nationalbibliothek, Cod 751, fos 1--77), the scribe of which was, to all appearances, copying directly from the originals.

With this particular letter, as with some of the others, the scribe seems to have found his exemplar hard to read. He stumbles over the English names; even with the Latin he makes (in my opinion) more than a decent quota of mistakes. But the mistakes are small, and the meaning is mostly clear. Bishop Eardwulf hopes that bishop Lul will remember him in his prayers; he says that he is sending him a small gift; he looks forward to hearing Lul's news. There is not much more to it than that.

Because there are no topical allusions, the letter cannot be dated closely; for the same reason, that does not matter much. We have no solid dates for Eardwulf's time as bishop. His predecessor, Dunn, is last heard of in 747 (Spelman 1639:245); his successor, Diora, is first heard of in 775 (Sawyer 109); so those are the outermost limits on the date of any transaction in which Eardwulf was involved. On the German side, Lul was made bishop in 754, and that tightens up the bracket to some extent. In short, this letter cannot be earlier than 754, nor later than 775.

There is one further clue. As well as sending his own greetings, bishop Eardwulf sends greetings from Eardwulf king of Kent. Unluckily for us, king Eardwulf is such an obscure figure that we do not gain much from this fact. Besides the letter, two charters are the only proof of his existence (see below). In both charters, as in this letter, king Eardwulf is associated with bishop Eardwulf; in the second, the two of them are associated with archbishop Cuthberht, who died (this is tolerably certain) in 760. My guess would be that Eardwulf was king for no more than a short while, during the period 754--60, which happened to be just around the time when bishop Lul, newly promoted, was making contact with his counterparts back home. But other people may have better guesses than that.

The letter has been edited several times -- initially by Serarius (1605), definitively (or very nearly so) by Tangl (1916). The following text is basically a line-for-line copy of Tangl's text (the lines are his, the line-numbers are mine) checked against the online images of the manuscript (fos 49v--50r). Without wishing to pretend that my Latin is on the same level as his, I have allowed myself to make a few adjustments. Wherever he changed *u* to *v*, I have changed it back; I have substituted *ae* for an occasional tailed *e*; and I have made a few other alterations, so small that they are hardly worth mentioning -- perhaps even hardly worth making. (To be clear: the notes are meant to indicate where my text differs from Tangl's, not where my text differs from the manuscript.)

There is one crux, at line 25. This is where Eardulf says that he is sending Lul a small gift, namely *reptem ruptilem unam*. Does anybody know what a *reptis ruptilis* might be? Assuredly I do not. Du Cange saw reason to think that a *reptis* might be some kind of waterproof jacket; but the evidence seems very thin, and I am doubtful whether an anorak would be a suitable present for a bishop (unless perhaps it had been specifically asked for). However that may be, the word *ruptilis* is still a puzzle, and nobody has solved it, as far as I am aware. (At a pinch, I could possibly bring myself to believe that it might be a misreading of *subtilis* -- but I get no further than that.)

+ Reuerentissimo nobisque omnium
episcoporum carissimo Lullo coepiscopo Aeardulfus
Hrofensis ecclesiae antistes cum sanctae ecclesiae
filio Aearduulfo rege Cantiae sinceram
in Christi nomine salutem.

5

Ueracium igitur sociorum inter alia amicalis memorialisque
mos esse dinoscitur, cum sese ob interiacentium terrarum spatia
seu prouinciarum exterarum regiones presentialiter nequeunt
inuisere ac salutare, certe per suos fideles nuntios siue etiam
per litteras ad inuicem salutationis dirigere uerba et de rebus
dignis atque utilibus tractare, ne mens scilicet sollicita, quid
de statu amici diuina dispensatione et iudicio agatur, uel taedio
diutius adficiatur uel anxia rerum incertitudine cotidie gemat.
Quocirca inprimis diligentius salutes per hunc gerulum uisi-
tans eminentiam uestram, desiderium quippe habentes audire
et nosse eandem gloriosissimum prosperumque per omnia pro-
fectum habere, hoc modis omnibus optantes, -- ut nos ipsos
nostrosque carissimos uestrae beatitudini subnixis commenda-
mus precibus --, ut in uestris sacris ac Deo placitis orationibus
et suffragio uestrae paternae pietatis undique auxiliante Deo
muniti atque muro protectionis uestrae circumdati contra omnes
infestationes inimici in hac uita, quae tota temptatio est, defensi
et ad illam, quae morte uacans et fine carens, uestris almis
intercessionibus peruenire mereamur.

10

15

20

Misimus uobis parua exenia, id est reptem ruptilem unam,
deprecantes obnix, ut amorem mittentis magis quam censum
perpendatis ob spem meliorum, quod celerius fit orantibus uobis,
si Dominus uitam et uires concesserit. Memores enim sumus
uerborum omnium, quae ex abundantia cordis uestri prolata
nostris auribus sonuerunt adimplenda; quae, quantum ames
amantes te, ex omni parte declarabant. Quid ergo pro...e
aliud nobis agendum est, nisi quod, ... Deo disponente et
finem cunctorum considerante omnes aduixerimus, fideliter ad
inuicem custodiamus? Preterea nihilominus et deinceps, dum
aliquis e nobis alterius uitae uias, ut opto felices, prior ingre-
diatur, en superuiuens sine mora missis et elemosinis itiner illius
hinc et inde, quantum ualeat, tuere ac prosperum facere saepius
reminiscat ac studeat, obsecrantes obnix, ut per hunc fratrem
nostrum fidelissimum presbyterum nomine Laearoredum scripta
pietatis tuae ad nos dirigere digneris, quatenus per haec earum,
quae tibi placita sunt, rerum cognitio clarescat, quia habetis
sine dubio in eodem prefato presbytero ueredicum fidelemque
inter nos legatarium et ideo per illum ualebis quaecumque uis
uiuae uocis attestatione nobis patefacere.

25

30

35

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+ Precedentium quoque nomina propinquorum nostro-

45

rum, id est Irmigi, Noththry atque Duhchae -- omnes Deo
dicatae uirgines -- tibi direximus postulantes, ut in oblationibus
missarum et orationum suffragiis habeatis, quia similia uobis
ad uicem beneficii rependere parati sumus.

Deus te incolumem custodiat et in eius ministe-
rio pollentem longa per temporum spatia custodire
dignetur.

50

8 presentialiter] presentaliter 30 quae] que 31 pro...e] prolate
with a query (proinde conj. C.F.) 32 quod, ...] quod, dum conj. (quod
MS : quod, quoad conj. Jaffé) 34 custodiamus?] custodiamus. 35
uitae] vite 38 obnixe] obnixae 39 Laearoredum] Heardredum conj.
Levison 42 prefato] præfato

The scribe supplied a heading, *Incipit epistola aeardulfus*, written in
red ink; and at the end of the letter he added a copy of the address
that he found written on the outside of the original, showing the
position of the perforations through which it was secured, approximately
so:

Aeardul^o \ / fus episc'; Lullo^o \ / coepisc'

This was a man who took his job seriously. Let us hope that posterity
says the same about us.

References

Cod. 751 https://manuscripta.at/hs_detail.php?ID=10086

Serarius 1605 Nicolaus Serarius (ed.), *Epistolae S. Bonifacii
martyris* (Mainz, 1605).

Spelman 1639 H. Spelman (ed.), *Concilia, decreta, leges,
constitutiones, in re ecclesiarum orbis britannici*, vol. I (London,
1639).

Tangl 1916 M. Tangl (ed.), *Die Briefe des Heiligen Bonifatius und
Lullus* (Berlin, 1916). -- *Epistolae selectae in usum scholarum ex
Monumentis Germaniae Historicis separatim editae*.

Appendix

These are the two charters which confirm the existence of a king of Kent
named Eardwulf:

(1) a Reculver charter (Sawyer 31), undated, surviving as a single
sheet, donating one ploughland at a place called *Perhamstede*, adjoining
the nine ploughlands donated previously (as this charter tells us) by
his father Eadberht. Eardwulf's charter has been pertinaciously
misinterpreted, but I think that I have managed to make sense of it.
The place called *Perhamstede* was identified correctly by Wallenberg
(1931:51) as Palmstead TR 1648 in Upper Hardres. There is no reason to
question that. The nine ploughlands, not named, situated to the east
and north of Palmstead are to be identified accordingly as Kingston

TR 1951 -- or, to put it more carefully, as that part of Barham which came to be called Kingston later (Ward 1933:82--3). The name *heahhaam* (*in regione caestruuara ubi nominatur heahhaam*) is an error: it ought to be *bearhaam*. Somehow or other the name got miscopied from somewhere -- perhaps from an earlier charter granting those nine ploughlands to Ealdwulf's father. That is a mistake which might quite easily happen, given the shapes of *h*, *b* and *r* in eighth-century script.

(2) a Rochester charter (Sawyer 30), wrongly dated, surviving as a copy in Rochester's twelfth-century cartulary. Because the charter is witnessed by archbishop Cuthberht, the dating clause -- *Anno ab incarnatione christi dcclxii. indictione xv.* -- cannot be right. It may possibly be an interpolation modelled on the corresponding clause in another Rochester charter (Sawyer 32). The date is good for that charter (which is witnessed by Cuthberht's successor, archbishop Bregowine), not good for this one.

References

- Wallenberg 1931 J. K. Wallenberg, *Kentish place-names* (Uppsala, 1931).
- Ward 1933 G. Ward, 'The lists of Saxon churches in the Domesday Monachorum, and White Book of St Augustine', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, 45 (1933), 60--89.

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