

A Puzzle from the *Scotia Pontificia*

Introduction

FMG News no.10, sent to members electronically in September 2014, invited readers to submit solutions to a puzzle over the date of a papal letter from the 12th century. The puzzle was posed by Andrew B W MacEwen, and is repeated in summary form below, together with the solution submitted by Benedict Wiedemann, Department of History, University College, London.

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The puzzle and the solution

The letter¹ from Pope Adrian IV, *Intra cetera justitie*, dated at the Lateran on 13 March, was addressed to the bishops of Scotland, exhorting them to show due obedience to Archbishop Roger of York. Withdrawing such obedience would endanger both their souls and their episcopal offices. If the bishops had any reason why they ought not to obey Roger they should present their arguments before the pope before next Laetare Sunday.² Based on the pope's itinerary the letter must have been written in 1157, 1158 or 1159. Somerville suggested that the legation to Italy in 1159 of Bishop William of Moray, and Nicholas, clerk and chamberlain to King Malcolm IV, was in part a response to this letter.

The problem posed was whether it can be determined with certainty in which of the three possible years the letter was written.

Dr Wiedemann's solution is as follows: The letter from Adrian IV probably dates to 13 March **1157** because of its decision to give "the next" – *proximam* – Laetare Sunday as the cut-off point for an appeal. Laetare Sunday is dependent on the date of Easter and so is a movable feast. In 1157 Laetare Sunday had been on 10 March. Thus the "next" Laetare Sunday for a letter composed on 13 March 1157 would be Laetare Sunday 1158 (30 March 1158), allowing the recipient the best part of a year to travel to the papal court in order to appeal. However if the letter had been written on 13 March 1158 then the next Laetare Sunday would be on 30 March 1158 – just 17 days after the letter was written. Had the missive been composed on 13 March 1159 then the next Laetare Sunday would have been 22 March 1159 – nine days after. If the letter had been composed in either 1158 or 1159 then by the time it reached Bishop Robert in St Andrews the date for appeals would have long passed. There is no way that the letter could even reach Scotland, let alone a reply be dispatched to the curia, in either 17 or nine days. The time allotted to allow an appeal would be obviously inadequate. Therefore the letter must have been written in 1157 with the intention of setting Laetare Sunday 1158 as the deadline for an appeal.

Mr MacEwen concurs with this analysis, pointing out that Adrian must have written in a year when Laetare Sunday preceded the date of his letter. Had Somerville worked out the dates of Laetare Sunday in these years the solution would have

¹ Robert Somerville, *Scotia Pontificia: papal letters to Scotland before the pontificate of Innocent III*, (1982), 47-48 (#40).

² Laetare Sunday is the 4th Sunday in Lent, deriving from the start of the *introit* at Mass (*Laetare* [O be joyful] *Jerusalem*). It was also, according to Cardinal Albinus's *Ordines Romani* of c.1188, one of "eighteen festive occasions during the year when the pope 'must be crowned'...."; I S Robinson, *The Papacy 1073-1198: Continuity and innovation*, (1990), 20-22.

been obvious. If the Scottish embassy of 1159 was a response to the letter, it was a belated one.

Further background

Mr MacEwen has contributed this additional information:

Nicholas Breakspear, the only English pope, was elected on 4 December 1154 in succession to the aged Anastasius IV. He was crowned the following day, 5 December, taking the name Adrian IV. "*Strong-willed and clear-sighted, determined to assert the full monarchical claims of the papacy,*" he "*combined unyielding resolution with amiability and a willingness to listen to criticism.*"³ He died 1 Sept 1159, aged about 60.

Quite apart from the evidence of his itinerary, which presumably shows he was not at the Lateran in mid-March in the first two years of his pontificate, it is clear that the letter to the Scottish bishops could not have been written in 1156 when Laetere Sunday was 25 March, only 12 days later. In 1155, as in 1157, it was earlier, 6 March. However he had on 27 February that year addressed *Quotiens in aliqua* from St Peter's, Rome, to the Scottish bishops informing them that he had received Roger of York and granted him the *pallium*. The pontiff commanded the bishops to show Roger due obedience. *Intra cetera iustitie* was thus written two years after *Quotiens in aliqua*, as it had become clear the Scottish bishops were refusing obedience to Archbishop Roger.

The problem of the York obedience dragged on for decades⁴ until Celestine III decreed on 13 March 1191/2 that the Scottish church, as a "special daughter" of the apostolic see, ought to be subject to it directly with no intermediary.⁵ This applied to the sees of St Andrews, Glasgow, Dunkeld, Dunblane, Brechin, Aberdeen, Moray, Ross and Caithness. Whithorn (Galloway) remained subject to York.

Adrian IV, the English pope



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³ J N D Kelly, *The Oxford Dictionary of Popes*, pp.174-5, 1986.

⁴ Somerville *op. cit.* pp.3-10, 163-5.

⁵ Somerville *op. cit.* pp.142-4.