

## BELLARIA XXXIII



### MEDIEVAL LATIN (1)

This sequence of texts will be drawn from Keith Sidwell's *Reading Medieval Latin* (Cambridge, 1995). It is a teaching text, with 86 passages, prose and verse, from St Benedict (b. 480) to Nigel Whiteacre (b. 1130), a monk active at the time of Henry II and Richard Lionheart.

The texts are supported by full historical and cultural introductions and running vocabulary and grammatical help. It ends with a brief grammar (summarising the main differences from classical Latin), a note on orthography, and total vocabulary for the texts.

Professor Sidwell has kindly translated, as literally as possible, the passages selected for this series of *Bellaria*. You can find the Sidwell's *Reading Medieval Latin* online [here](#).



Bede at work (12th C)

### **Bede (673-735)**

At the very end of his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (which he finished in 731), Bede modestly summarised his life as follows:

‘With God’s help I, Bede, the servant of Christ and priest of the monastery of the blessed Apostles Peter and Paul at Wearmouth and Jarrow, have assembled these facts about the history of the Church in Britain, and of the Church of the English in particular, so far as I have been able to ascertain them from ancient documents, from the traditions of our forebears, and from my own personal knowledge.

‘I was born on the lands of this monastery, and on reaching seven years of age, my family entrusted me first to the most reverend Abbot Benedict, and later to Abbot Ceolfrid for my education. I have spent all the remainder of my life in this monastery, and devoted myself entirely to the study of the scriptures. And while I have observed the regular discipline and sung the choir offices daily in church, my chief delight has always been in study, teaching, and writing.



A stained-glass window reconstructed from ancient glass fragments found in Bede’s monastery that could have been known by him.

'I was ordained deacon at the age of nineteen, and priest at the age of thirty, receiving both these orders at the hands of the most reverend Bishop John at the direction of Abbot Ceolfrid. From the time of my receiving the priesthood until my fifty-ninth year, I have worked, both for my own benefit and that of my brethren, to compile short extracts from the works of the venerable Fathers on holy scripture, and to comment on their meaning and interpretation.'

Tr. by Leo Sherley-Price

This is followed by the titles of his thirty-four works, all of an educational, biblical, exegetical or historical nature.



Bede's monastery: the dedication stone (AD 685)

DEDICATIO BASILICAE  
SCI PAUL VIII KL MAI  
ANNO XV EFRIDI REG  
CEOLFRIDI ABB EIUSDEM  
Q ECCLES DO AVCTORE  
CONDITORIS ANNO IIII

The dedication of the basilica  
of St. Paul on the 9th day before the Kalends of May  
in the 15th year of King Ecgfrith  
and in the fourth year of Abbot Ceolfrith, once (Q= ?quondam) founder,  
by God's guidance, of the same church.

The 'Death Song' ascribed to Bede in his final minutes is translated and discussed [here](#).



The remains of Bede's monastery in Jarrow

Thanks to the library at Wearmouth-Jarrow—one of the best north of the Alps—Bede became one of the great scholars of Europe. He also popularised the BC/AD convention (invented by a Scythian monk Dionysius Exiguus in 525), as a result of which it spread all over Europe.

These extracts are taken from Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* 2.1-2.



Bede records Gregory (before he became Pope in 590) enquiring after some English slaves newly arrived in Rome.



Pope Gregory

**A** Nor should the opinion be passed over in silence which has been handed down right up to us (i.e. our time) through the tradition of our ancestors about the blessed Gregory; that is to say, admonished by (lit. 'from') what reason he took such sedulous care towards the salvation of our [i.e. English] race. **B** They say that, because one day, when, with the recent advent of merchants, many items for sale had been brought together into the marketplace, many had flooded together with a view to purchasing, Gregory himself also had arrived among the others, and had seen, amongst other things, boys put up for sale of white body, and of charming visage, and also with an extraordinary style (*forma*) of hair. **C** When he saw them, he asked, as they say, from what region or land of the earth they had been brought here. And the reply was, that they were from the island of Britain, the inhabitants of which were of such an appearance. He asked again, whether the same islanders were Christian, or were entangled still in pagan errors. The reply was that they were pagans.

*A nec silentio praetereunda opinio, quae de beato Gregorio traditione maiorum ad nos usque perlata est; qua uidelicet ex causa admonitus tam sedulam erga salutem nostrae gentis curam gesserit. B dicunt, quia die quadam cum, aduenientibus nuper mercatoribus, multa uenalia in forum fuissent conlata, multi ad emendum confluxissent, et ipsum Gregorium inter alios aduenisse, ac uidisse inter alia pueros uenales positos candidi corporis, ac uenusti uultus, capillorum quoque forma egregia. C quos cum aspiceret, interrogauit, ut aiunt, de qua regione uel terra essent adlati. dictumque est, quia de Brittania insula, cuius incolae talis essent aspectus. rursus interrogauit, utrum idem insulani Christiani, an paganis adhuc erroribus essent implicati. dictum est, quod essent pagani.*



Angel faces

Grieved, Gregory finds that they are Angli, from Deira in Northumbria, under the rule of king Aella, and finds significance in each name.

**A** But he, from his innermost heart drawing long sighs, said ‘Alas! What misery, that men [object] of a visage so full of light the author of shadows holds in thrall, and so great a grace of external appearance hides (lit. ‘bears’) a mind free from internal grace!’ Therefore he asked again, what was the name of that people. The reply was that they were called the ‘Angli’. **B** But he said: ‘Good! For they also have an angelic appearance, and such people it becomes to be co-heirs of the angels in heaven. What name does the province from which they have been brought here have?’ The response was that the (lit. ‘same’) provincials were called ‘Deiri’. **C** But he said: ‘Good, Deiri! Torn away from anger (*de ira*) and summoned to the mercy of Christ. What is the king of that province called?’ The response was that he was called ‘Aelli’. But he playing on the name said: ‘Alleluia, in those regions the praise of God the creator ought to be sung!’

*A at ille, intimo ex corde longa trahens suspiria: ‘heu, pro dolor!’ inquit, ‘quod tam lucidi uultus homines tenebrarum auctor possidet, tantaque gratia frontispicii mentem ab interna gratia uacuum gestat!’ rursus ergo interrogauit, quod esset uocabulum gentis illius. responsum est, quod Angli uocarentur. B at ille: ‘bene,’ inquit; ‘nam et angelicam habent faciem, et tales angelorum in caelis decet esse coheredes. quod habet nomen ipsa prouincia, de qua isti sunt adlati?’ responsum est, quod Deiri uocarentur idem prouinciales. C at ille: ‘bene,’ inquit, ‘Deiri; de ira eruti, et ad misericordiam Christi uocati. rex prouinciae illius quomodo appellatur?’ responsum est, quod Aelli diceretur. at ille adludens ad nomen ait: ‘Alleluia, laudem Dei Creatoris illis in partibus oportet cantari.’*

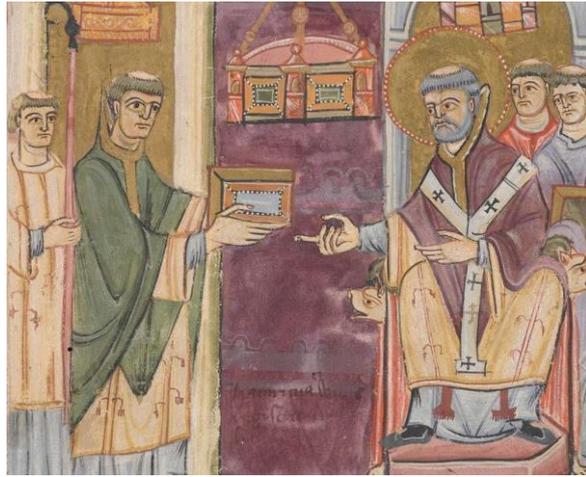


Pope Gregory and St Augustine (Belmont Abbey)

Gregory invites the Pope to send Augustine to convert them, but is turned down. As Pope in 595 Gregory sends St Augustine to Britain to lead the mission.

**A** And coming to the pontiff of the Roman and apostolic see, for he had not yet himself been made pontiff, he asked that he (sc. the Pope) send some ministers of the word to Britain to the people of the Angli, through whom they (lit. 'it') might be converted to Christ. He himself (sc. he said) was ready for the completion of this task, with the Lord's help, if it pleased the apostolic Pope that this should happen. **B** When he was unable to achieve this, because, although the pontiff wanted to concede to him what he had asked, the citizens of Rome on the other hand were not able to allow him to retreat so far from the city—soon, when he himself performed the duty of pontiff (lit. 'of the pontificate'), he completed the task long desired; **C** sending indeed other preachers, but himself helping the preaching to bear fruit by his exhortations and prayers. We have considered it opportune to insert these things into our ecclesiastical history according to the opinion which we have received from the ancients.

*A accedensque ad pontificem Romanae et apostolicae sedis, nondum enim erat ipse pontifex factus, rogavit, ut genti Anglorum in Britanniam aliquos uerbi ministros, per quos ad Christum conuerteretur, mitteret; se ipsum paratum esse in hoc opus Domino cooperante perficiendum, si tamen apostolico papae, hoc ut fieret, placeret. B quod dum perficere non posset, quia, etsi pontifex concedere illi, quod petierat, uoluit, non tamen ciues Romani, ut tam longe ab urbe secederet, potuere permittere; mox ut ipse pontificatus officio functus est, perfecit opus diu desideratum; C alios quidem praedicationem mittens, sed ipse praedicationem ut fructificaret, suis exhortationibus ac precibus adiuuans. haec iuxta opinionem, quam ab antiquis accepimus, historiae nostrae ecclesiasticae inserere oportunum duximus.*



Pope Gregory commissioning St Augustine (11th C)

**In 603, St Augustine calls a meeting of British Catholic leaders to bring them into line with Catholic teaching.**

Meanwhile Augustine, using the aid of King Ethelbert,† called to his meeting the bishops or doctors of the nearby province of the Britons in the place which even today is called ‘Augustinaes Āc’, that is ‘Augustine’s Oak’, on the borders of the Huiccas‡ and the Western Saxons; and he began to persuade them with fraternal admonition to undertake the common labour of evangelizing the peoples on the Lord’s behalf, keeping the catholic peace amongst themselves.

† Ethelbert (550-616) was the first English king to be converted.

‡ ‘Augustinaes Āc’ may be Aust on the River Severn. The [Latin] *Huicci* were an Anglo-Saxon tribe in the Gloucester-Somerset region.

[2] *interea Augustinus adiutorio usus Aedilbercti regis conuocauit ad suum colloquium episcopos siue doctores proximae Brettonum prouinciae in loco, qui usque hodie lingua Anglorum Augustinaes Ac, id est robur Augustini, in confinio Huicciorum et Occidentalium Saxonum appellatur; coepitque eis fraterna admonitione suadere, ut pace catholica secum habita communem euangelizandi gentibus pro Domino laborem susciperent.*

**The Britons refuse to agree and Augustine sets up a challenge—healing a blind man—to ascertain whose side God is on.**

**A** For they did not observe the dominical day of Easter at the correct time (lit. ‘at its time’), but from the 14th to the 20th moon; this computation is contained within an 84-year cycle. But they were also doing very many other things contrary to ecclesiastical unity. **B** Since after a long disputation neither by prayers nor by exhortations nor by the criticisms of Augustine and his comrades had they wished to demonstrate assent with him, but rather had preferred their own traditions to all the churches which agree with each other in Christ across the world, the holy father

Augustine made this end to the laborious and extended contest, by saying (lit. 'that he said'): **C** Let us beg God, who makes us dwell with one mind in the house of his Father, to deem it right to insinuate to us by celestial signs which tradition should be followed, by which paths we should hasten for entry into his kingdom. Let some sick man be brought here, and let the faith and grace of him by whose prayers he shall have been cured be believed as vowed to God and to be followed by all.'

*A non enim paschae diem dominicum suo tempore, sed a XIII usque ad XX lunam obseruabant; quae computatio LXXXIII annorum circulo continetur. sed et alia plurima unitati ecclesiasticae contraria faciebant. B qui cum longa disputatione habita, neque precibus, neque hortamentis, neque increpationibus Augustini ac sociorum eius adsensum praebere uoluissent, sed suas potius traditiones uniuersis, quae per orbem sibi in Christo concordant, ecclesiis praeferrent, sanctus pater Augustinus hunc laboriosi ac longi certaminis finem fecit, ut diceret: C 'obsecremus Deum, qui habitare facit unanimes in domu Patris sui, ut ipse nobis insinuare caelestibus signis dignetur, quae sequenda traditio, quibus sit uis ad ingressum regni illius properandum. adducatur aliquis eger, et per cuius preces fuerit curatus, huius fides et operatio Deo deuota atque omnibus sequenda credatur.'*

**The Britons fail the test, while Augustine succeeds, but demand a second synod involving all their people.**

**A** When his opponents, albeit unwillingly, conceded this, a man from the people of the Angli was brought there, one deprived of the sight (lit. 'light') of his eyes; when after being brought before the priests of the Britons he received no healing or cure through their ministrations, at length Augustine, compelled by just necessity, **B** bent his knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying that he restore to the blind man the vision which he had lost and by the corporeal illumination of one man kindle in the hearts of the very many faithful the grace of spiritual light. **C** Without delay, the blind man was given light and Augustine was proclaimed by all to be the true herald of the highest light. Then the Britons confessed indeed that they understood that it was the true path of justice which Augustine preached; but they could not without the consent and agreement of their own people renounce their ancient customs. Hence they asked that for a second time a synod be held with many people in attendance.

*A quod cum aduersarii, inuiti licet, concederent, adlatus est quidam de genere Anglorum, oculorum luce priuatus; qui cum oblatus Brettonum sacerdotibus nil curationis uel sanationis horum ministerio perciperet, tandem Augustinus, iusta necessitate conpulsus, B flectit genua sua ad Patrem Domini nostri Iesu Christi, deprecans, ut uisum caeco, quem amiserat, restitueret, et per inlumenationem*

*unius hominis corporalem, in plurimorum corde fidelium spiritualis gratiam lucis accenderet. C nec mora, inluminatur caecus, ac uerus summae lucis praeco ab omnibus praedicatur Augustinus. tum Brettones confitentur quidem intellexisse se ueram esse uiam iustitiae, quam praedicaret Augustinus; sed non se posse absque suorum consensu ac licentia priscis abdicare moribus. unde postulabant, ut secundo synodus pluribus aduenientibus fieret...*

**[The synod is a failure and Augustine prophesies that they will be punished for it—as eventually happens]**

In 613 or 616 the powerful pagan king of Northumbria, Ethelfrith, gathers an army in Chester (Legacaestir) to attack the British and hears that the monks from Bangor-on-Dee, guarded by Brocmail, were praying for the safety of the British army



Ethelfrith sees the wildly gesturing monks

**A** Now after this the very King of the Angli whom we mentioned, the very brave Ethelfrith, after collecting a large army at the City of the Legions, which is called Legacaestir by the people of the Angli, but by the Britons more correctly Carlegion, made (lit. 'gave') an enormous slaughter of the perfidious people. And when on the point of waging war he saw that the priests, who had convened to pray to God for the soldiery waging war, were standing apart in a safer location, he asked who these men were and what they had gathered together to do. **B** There were many of them from the monastery of Bangor, in which there is said to be such a great number of monks, that when the monastery was divided into 7 portions along with the leaders assigned to them, no part of these had fewer than 300 men, who were all accustomed to live by the labour of their hands. **C** Most of them therefore had gathered together at the aforementioned battle-line, having completed a three-day fast, along with others for the purpose of praying, having a defender by the name of Brocmail, to protect them from the swords of the barbarians while they were intent on their prayers.

*A* siquidem post haec ipse, de quo diximus, rex Anglorum fortissimus Aedilfrid, collecto grandi exercitu ad ciuitatem Legionum, quae a gente Anglorum Legacaestir, a Brettonibus autem rectius Carlegion appellatur, maximam gentis perfidae stragem dedit. cumque bellum acturus uideret sacerdotes eorum, qui ad exorandum Deum pro milite bellum agente conuenerant, seorsum in tutiore loco consistere, sciscitabatur qui essent hi, quidue acturi illo conuenissent. **B** erant autem plurimi eorum de monasterio Bancor, in quo tantus fertur fuisse numerus monachorum, ut, cum in VII portiones esset cum praepositis sibi rectoribus monasterium diuisum, nulla harum portio minus quam CCCtos homines haberet, qui omnes de labore manuum suarum uiuere solebant. **C** Horum ergo plurimi ad memoratam aciem, peracto ieiunio triduo, cum aliis orandi causa conuenerant, habentes defensorem nomine Brocmailum, qui eos intentos precibus a barbarorum gladiis protegeret.



Ethelfrith slaughter the monks of Bangor-on-Dee

## Ethelfrith attacks the monks and then the Britons

**A** When Ethelfrith had learned the reason for their arrival, he said: 'Therefore if they are crying to their God against us, then certainly they themselves too are fighting against us, even though they are not bearing arms, since they are attacking us by inimical curses.' **B** And so he ordered arms to be aimed (lit. 'turned') at them first, and in this way he destroyed the remaining forces of the abominable army not without great loss to his own troops. They report that in that battle those who died, out of the ones who had come to pray, numbered around 1200 men, and only 50 had slipped away in flight. **C** Brocmail at the first arrival of the enemy, turning his back with his men, left those whom he ought to have defended unarmed and naked for the swords which struck. And so was fulfilled the prophecy of the holy pontiff Augustine, although he himself had been taken up to the heavenly kingdoms already a long time earlier, that even by the vengeance of temporal death the traitors would know that they had spurned the counsels offered to them of perpetual salvation.

*A quorum causam aduentus cum intellexisset rex Aedilfrid, ait: 'ergo si aduersum nos ad Deum suum clamant, profecto et ipsi, quamuis arma non ferant, contra nos pugnant, qui aduersis nos inprecationibus persequuntur.' B itaque in hos primum arma uerti iubet, et sic ceteras nefandae militiae copias non sine magno exercitus sui damno deleuit. extinctos in ea pugna ferunt de his, qui ad orandum uenerant, uiros circiter mille CCtos, et solum L fuga esse lapsos. C Brocmail ad primum hostium aduentum, cum suis terga uertens, eos, quos defendere debuerat, inermes ac nudos ferientibus gladiis reliquit. sicque completum est praesagium sancti pontificis Augustini, quamuis ipso iam multo ante tempore ad caelestia regna sublato, ut etiam temporalis interitus ultione sentirent perfidi, quod oblata sibi perpetuae salutis consilia spreuerant.*

Next week: 1066 and all that—The Battle of Hastings



*This is an extract selected for you as part of Classics for All's 'Bellaria' series to cheer us up during the COVID-19 pandemic. The full series of weekly instalments may be found on our website [classicsforall.org.uk/bellaria/](https://classicsforall.org.uk/bellaria/)*

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