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‘Robert Grosseteste at Durham’

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Establishing the record of Robert Grosseteste’s life and career is an essential part of the broader study of that life and career. The present note is concerned with a question about that record.¹ What follows is a short discussion of Grosseteste’s activities including a possible journey he made at the beginning of 1231. The discussion focuses on the presence of Grosseteste’s name in the Durham Cathedral Priory *Liber vitae* and a correspondence with the Abbot of Reading.

Folio 28r(2) of the Durham *Liber vitae* includes the following entry: ‘Mag(iste)r Adam de Marisco, p(er)sona de Weremuth’ which is followed immediately, and in the same hand, by ‘Mag(iste)r Rob(er)t(us) archid(iaconus) Leycestr(ensis)’.² The *Liber vitae* is a small, composite manuscript, consisting of some 86 leaves.³ A ninth century core, of names recorded by rank or clerical degree, in regular and high quality script was added to throughout the medieval period. The whole book was re-arranged in the later twelfth century, leaving the original core as folios 15r-47v and 50r-55v, with new prefatory gospel extracts. The additions of names take two forms, those from the monastic community at Durham from its establishment in 1083 until about 1520, and those of non-monks, added from the late twelfth century until 1539. As opposed to monastic names, the non-monastic names are added in a less formal, and less organised manner. They tend to be added in lines across the page, rather than in column, to which tendency those of Adam Marsh and Grosseteste conform. Their names are added at the foot of folio 28, to a page within the original core consisting of clerical names from the period 800-840, to which their names bear no identifiable relation. The *Liber Vitae*, remained in situ at Durham throughout the medieval period. It does not feature in any of the series of library catalogues, but appears instead to have been kept in the main monastery church, on the high altar.⁴

The entry for Marsh and Grosseteste can be dated to the period 1229-1232.⁵ Marsh is described as ‘Master’; a title he held from 1226, and Rector of Bishop Wearmouth, a wealthy parish benefice in the gift of Adam’s uncle, Richard Marsh, Bishop of Durham

¹ J. McEvoy, *Robert Grosseteste* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) encapsulates the arguments over Grosseteste’s first sixty years, pp. 19-30.

² D. Rollason and L. Rollason, *The Durham ‘Liber Vitae’: London, British Library, MS Domitian A. VII: Edition and Digital Facsimile, with Introduction, Codicological, Prosopographical and Linguistic Commentaries*, 3 Vols (London: The British Library, 2007), Vol. 1, p.112. The three volumes of the *Liber Vitae* are accompanied by a high resolution digital copy of the codex. Digital images of the *Liber Vitae*, including the entry on Fol. 28(r), are available also amongst the digitised manuscripts on the British Library website: http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Cotton_MS_Domitian_A_VII

³ Rollason and Rollason, *The Durham ‘Liber Vitae’*, Vol. 1 *Introductory Essays, Edition, Commentary on the Edition and indexes*, L. Rollason, ‘History and Codicology’, pp. 6-8 for what follows, p. 18 for the ‘recreation’ of the book in the later twelfth century, p. 24 for the subsequent foliation of the original core.

⁴ The *Liber Vitae* is identified with the Altar book described in the *Rites of Durham*, composed in about 1593 by a former servant of Durham Priory, ed. J. T. Fowler, Surtees Society, 107 (1903, repr. 1964), pp. 16-17. A new edition of the *Rites of Durham* is under preparation by Dr Lynda Rollason and Dr Margaret Harvey.

⁵ Rollason and Rollason, *The Durham ‘Liber Vitae’*, Vol. 1, p.112.

(c.1217-122), which he, Adam, held until he joined the Franciscan order in DATE.⁶ The description of Grosseteste as ‘archdeacon of Leicester,’ allows firmer dating; he held the position from 1229 until he resigned the archdeaconry in November of 1232. These dates suggest that the entry in *Liber vitae* could have been made anytime between 1229 (Grosseteste is made archdeacon of Leicester) and November 1232 (resigns archdeaconry).

Marsh and Grosseteste were close friends, Adam acting in later life as Grosseteste’s long-term advisor and counsellor. The first securely dateable correspondence between the two of them is a letter from Grosseteste, written soon after 1 November 1232. Referring to the comfort of a letter received from Adam, Grosseteste goes on to outline his resignation of his benefices, including his archdeaconry.⁷ A later letter from Adam to Grosseteste, now bishop of Lincoln, refers to his beneficent role in Adam’s life from his youth, implying a familiarity prior to the 1230s.⁸ C. H. Lawrence observes, entirely plausibly, that: ‘It was probably Adam who, as rector of Wearmouth, had their two names entered together in the ancient commemoration book of Durham Cathedral Priory’.⁹

However, the circumstances of the entry of the two names can be further illuminated with evidence from Grosseteste’s letter collection. The most recent translators of the letter collection establish, convincingly, that an original selection of the letters took place under Grosseteste’s guidance in about 1246, with the themes of pastoral care, authority and the reification of abstract values of mercy and justice and so forth, are dominant.¹⁰ Included in the collection are ten letters from the period before his election, including five, letters two to six, dating to his period as Archdeacon.¹¹ Letter Four concerns, amongst other things, a possible visit Grosseteste made to Durham.

The letter, written shortly after Christmas 1231, consists of Grosseteste’s rejoinder to the Abbot, Adam of Lathbury, and the monks of the Abbey of St Mary’s, Reading, regarding an annual payment claimed by the community from Grosseteste in his capacity as rector of Abbotsley.¹² The benefice of Abbotsley is important in the attempts

⁶ For the reconstruction of Adam’s earlier life see C. H. Lawrence, ‘The Letters of Adam Marsh and the Franciscan School at Oxford,’ *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 42 (1991), 218-238, at 226. See also *The Letters of Adam Marsh*, vol. 1 pp. xiv-xviii and for the relationship between Adam and Grosseteste, pp. xviii-xxx. On Richard Marsh see Robert C. Stacey, ‘Marsh, Richard (d. 1226),’ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/18061>, accessed 5 Aug 2013].

⁷ *The Letters of Robert Grosseteste, Bishop of Lincoln*, trans. F. A. C. Mantello and Joseph Goering (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), Letter 9, pp. 77-80 (henceforth Grosseteste, *Letters*). The standard edition remains that of Henry Richards Luard, *Roberti Grosseteste episcopi quondam Lincolnensis epistolae*, Rolls Series, 25 (London: Longman, Green, Longman and Roberts, 1861) (henceforth Luard, *Epistolae*). On the relation between the translation and the edition see Grosseteste, *Letters*, pp. 24-25.

⁸ *The Letters of Adam Marsh*, ed. and trans. C. H. Lawrence, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006-2010). See Letter 41, vol. 1 p. 116 and the discussion in the Introduction, vol. 1, pp. xviii-xix.

⁹ Lawrence, *The Letters of Adam Marsh*, vol. 1, p. xix, and earlier in ‘The Letters of Adam Marsh’ p. 224. Adam’s name is recorded directly after Grosseteste’s: ‘Mag[ist]er Adam de Marisco, p[er]sona de Weremuth’, Rollason and Rollason, *The Durham Liber Vitae*, vol. I, p. 112, reflecting fol. 28r², for commentary see vol. III. p. 111.

¹⁰ Grosseteste, *Letters*, ‘Introduction’, pp. 16-22.

¹¹ Grosseteste, *Letters*, pp. 49-73.

¹² Grosseteste, *Letters*, no. 4, pp. 58-65 (Luard, *Epistolae*, pp. 25-33); Grosseteste, *Letters*, p. 58 n. 3: the dispute over Reading’s parochial revenue had been going on since 1225. Abbotsley is in

to chart Grosseteste's life and career. The gift of the rectory by the bishop of Lincoln, Hugh of Wells, to Master Robert Grosseteste, then in deacon's orders, mandated for 25th April 1225, although not in effect until 6 May, marks a turning point in Grosseteste's life.¹³ The benefice came into Bishop Hugh's hands as the result of the failure by the, unknown, patron to present a candidate within six months of the vacancy which began in November 1224. Part of Grosseteste's defence against the community of St Mary's Reading was that because of the six months delay the claim that any annual rent was made 'continuously and peaceably' was invalid: the revenues had been collected and held by the diocese.¹⁴ The main ground for his defence was, however, the lack of good faith and just title to the rent.¹⁵

In the course of Grosseteste's response, which focuses on the moral hazards of mendacity, the dangers of fraudulent claims, and an injunction against mockery, something of the process of arbitration is revealed. A meeting at Durham had been suggested before Christmas 1231, although it had not proved possible in practice, as Grosseteste recounts:

As to the remark you add next in your letter, that although I could not meet with you at Durham on the appointed day, I could nevertheless, had I preferred, have fixed an earlier day to discuss terms of peace with you, before Christmas just past, say, or immediately afterwards, my answer is that after I made plans to go abroad on pilgrimage, I could not have gone to meet you at Durham before Christmas, not only because time was short, but also because of my pre-occupation with affairs requiring my immediate attention.¹⁶

The plans for his pilgrimage, between Epiphany (January 6th) and Pentecost (May) of 1232, Grosseteste had been forced to abandon, but insisted to the community at Reading that this change of plan was well known.¹⁷

Grosseteste appears to have suggested an alternative meeting at Salisbury as well to which both sides could send representatives. A challenge by Reading that he could have sent the same sort of person to Durham drew the response that:

Because he was nearby and had the time, he was able to be in Salisbury one or two days before the day stipulated for the suit, but in view of the distance, problems of

Huntingdonshire, and was Grosseteste's first benefice, to which he was appointed on 25th April 1225, as deacon (nothing more exalted) in somewhat hurried circumstances as detailed by R. W. Southern, *Robert Grosseteste, The Growth of an English Mind in Medieval Europe*, 2nd edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 69-70.

¹³ Southern, *Robert Grosseteste*, p. 67 pp. 69-70.

¹⁴ Grosseteste, *Letters*, no. 4, p. 59, n. 4-5.

¹⁵ Grosseteste, *Letters*, no. 4, p. 64.

¹⁶ Grosseteste, *Letters*, no. 4, p. 61. Luard, *Epistolae*, p.28: 'Ad hoc autem quod consequenter subjungitis in litera vestra, videlicet, quod licet non possemus convenire die statuto apud Dunelmum, potui tamen, si mihi placeret, diem citeriorem ad tractandum de pace vobis constituisse, videlicet ante Natale jam praeteritum, vel statim post; respondeo, quod postquam firmaveram propositum de peregre proficiscendo, non potui ante Natale vobis [apud] Dunelmum occurrere, cum pro temporis brevitate, tum pro negotiorum arctius urgentium occupatione'.

¹⁷ For the delayed pilgrimage see Grosseteste, *Letters*, no. 3, pp. 53-58.

timing, and his unavoidable involvement in spiritual matters, he could not be in Durham on the day we had mutually agreed to.¹⁸

As the translators of Grosseteste's letters suggest, although the identity of this person, described as 'a certain important man' in which he had 'more confidence...than in anyone else' is not forthcoming, Adam Marsh would be a good candidate.¹⁹ His connections to Durham, still, at this point presumably rector of Wearmouth, make Grosseteste's proposed solution to the dilemma all the more explicable.

A final resolution is suggested at the end of the letter, in which Grosseteste proposes another meeting at Durham, and specifically invokes good judgment of the bishop, Richard Poor.²⁰ Poor had been translated to Durham from Salisbury on 14th May 1228, enthroned in September of the same year. A significant member in the councils of Henry III's minority, Poor was also an energetic reforming bishop, first of Chichester (1215-1217) and then Salisbury (1217-1228), before Durham. He had attended the Fourth Lateran Council, was instrumental in the transition from Old Sarum to the new Cathedral at Salisbury, and reformed its liturgy to create the Sarum rite which would dominate English church practice for the rest of the medieval period. At Durham, he was particularly noted for his settlement of a long-running dispute between the Priory and the bishopric over the rights of the Priory. *Le convenit* of 1228 remained the basis for the Priory's jurisdictional claims until the dissolution. Dispute settlement was something of a speciality for Poor; he was frequently appointed papal judge-delegate, and as bishop of Salisbury and Durham attended to many cases, before his death in 1237.²¹

Poor was an apt choice for Grosseteste in his dispute with St Mary's. Not only was he skilled in such matters, but Reading was part of Salisbury diocese during the medieval period; Poor was probably acceptable to both parties.

So then, if you agree, let the lord bishop of Durham be arbiter between us, and let his decision be regarded as valid by both sides. Now, should you holy monks prefer, as is your right, to discuss terms of peace in some other way, I shall be pleased to meet you at Durham, or somewhere closer, where and when you wish, assuming life and health and the removal of any unforeseen obstacles, for just as my pilgrimage

¹⁸ Grosseteste, *Letters*, no. 4, p. 61. Luard, *Epistolae*, p. 29: 'qui et loci propinquitate et temporis opportunitate uno vel duobus diebus ante diem statutum liti potuit apud Sarum interesse ; sed die conducto inter nos apud Dunelmum, prae loci distantia et temporis incongruentia et negotiorum spiritalium occupatione necessaria, interesse non posset'.

¹⁹ Grosseteste, *Letters*, no. 4, p. 61, n. 9.

²⁰ For what follows on Poor, see: Philippa Hoskin, 'Poor, Richard (d. 1237)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Oct 2009 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/22525>, accessed 13 June 2013].

²¹ See W. Rich Jones and W. Dunn Macray, eds., *Charters and documents illustrating the history of the cathedral, city, and diocese of Salisbury, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries*, Rolls Series, 97 (1891): there are numerous examples, one from May 1224 concerns the church of Ebbesborne, Wake, pp. 164-165. Jane Sayers, *Papal Judges Delegate in the Province of Canterbury 1199-1254* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971) includes many references to Poor as judge delegate while bishop of Chichester and then Salisbury: for example, p. 125 (on the reliance of papal delegation in judicial matters on the diocesan clergy), p. 133 (on his appointment in 1220 to replace the dean of Winchester), p. 169 (as judge in 1222 considering the claims of the bishop of London and the Dean and Chapter of St Paul's, over the status of the abbot and convent of Westminster)

was once firmly arranged without option, so it has for the present been postponed without option, at the advice and even command of men who are greater than I.²²

Sir Richard Southern remarked at the end of his last review of Grosseteste's career that while the task of enlarging knowledge of medieval theological, literary, philosophical and legal doctrines had dominated medieval studies since the 1920s, the work to come would be 'to relate these various bodies of theoretical knowledge ever more closely with the personalities, circumstances, historical events, and local environments of those who developed them'.²³ It is in this spirit that the present suggestion that Grosseteste visited Durham is made. Although the evidence is circumstantial, Grosseteste's inscription in the Durham *Liber Vitae*, makes plausible the notion that his suggested visit to Durham did take place, sometime after Christmas 1231, and before his resignation of his archdiaconate in November 1232.²⁴

What effect the visit had, if any, is far more difficult to gauge. It is worth noting in this connection, perhaps, Durham Cathedral MS A.III.12, a manuscript well known as one of the earliest securely dateable collections of Grosseteste's works. While it may not include Grosseteste's autograph as Thomson suggested, it does include early versions of sermons, *dicta* and commentary on the first 54 Psalms.²⁵ The first folio announces the volume as 'Liber Sancti Cuthberti ex dono Bertrami de Midiltona Prioris Dunelm'.²⁶ Bertram of Middleton was a monk of Durham from c.1213 or 1218 - 1266, and prior 1244 - 58.²⁷ As Thomson pointed out 'ex dono' implies a gift within Bertram's lifetime, rather than after death, for which 'ex legato' would be more usual.²⁸ The manuscript consists of a complex series of gatherings, but appears to have been in its current form when Bertram made his gift, that is before 1258. Thomson, Hunt and Southern concur in a more precise earlier dating of before 1232 (certainly for Grosseteste's commentary on Psalms and his sermons, which occupy folios 2-17, 78-87 and 104-127) on the basis of a series of notes at the foot of folios 122r and 137v including a penitential note dated to 27th February 1232, folio 130r. The penance includes an obligation to feed 100 poor people for seven years, the other notes concern costs, of a journey from London to

²² Grosseteste, *Letters*, no. 4, p. 64. Luard, *Epistolae*, p. 32: 'Sit igitur, si placet, dominus Dunelmensis inter nos arbiter, et quod ipse decreverit, ratum utrinque habeatur. Si autem placeat, sicut placere debet, vestrae professionis sanctitati, aliter de pace tractare, libens occurram vobis [apud] Dunelmum, vel citra, ubi volueritis, et quando, vita et sanitate comitantibus, et inopinatis impedimentis sublatis de medio; mea namque peregrinatio sicut ex causa necessaria fuit firmiter disposita, sic ex causa necessaria majorum consilio et etiam imperio est ad praesens dilata'.

²³ Southern, *Robert Grosseteste*, p. lxvi.

²⁴ The circumstances of Grosseteste's resignation from his benefices were the subject of letters to his sister, *Letters*, no. 8, and to his friend Adam Marsh, *Letters*, no. 9. A later letter of 1239, no. 74, to the papal legate Otto of Tenengo reveals Grosseteste's anxieties about holding to benefices with cure of souls, in this case Abbotsley and his prebendal church in Leicester, see *Letters*, no. 9, p. 70, n. 3 and no. 74, p. 263. See also Southern, *Robert Grosseteste*, p. 75.

²⁵ S. Harrison Thomson, *The Writings of Robert Grosseteste* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940), pp. 13-17; R. W. Hunt, 'The Library of Robert Grosseteste', in D. Callus ed., *Robert Grosseteste Scholar and Bishop* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955), pp. 121-145, esp. pp. 138-140; Southern, *Robert Grosseteste*, pp. 72-73, 113-116 and 176-181; Edward B. King, 'Durham Cathedral MS A.III.12 and the Corpus of Grosseteste's Homiletical Works', in *Robert Grosseteste: New Perspectives on His Thought and Scholarship*, ed. J. McEvoy (Turnhout: Brepols, 1995), pp. 277-288

²⁶ Durham Cathedral MS A.III.12, f.1v.

²⁷ A. Piper, 'Biographical register of Durham Cathedral Priory (1083-1539)' in *The Durham Liber Vitae* eds. Rollason and Rollason.

²⁸ Thomson, *The Writings*, p. 14.

South Wales, of parchment, and according to Southern ‘small purchases of the cathedral chapter of Llandaff.’²⁹ As Hunt observes ‘with so many clues available, it is disappointing not to be able to identify the man’, and went on to posit him as an Oxford student.³⁰ Southern also presumes that the author of these notes owned the volume, but suggests an employment in the household of the bishop of Llandaff, and the volume as representative of: ‘Grosseteste at the high of his academic influence, when the record of his words was eagerly seized, annotated and passed from one owner to another until it ended up in the library at Durham’.³¹

The suggested identification seems plausible enough, and takes the question of ownership up to February 1232. How A.III.12 ended up in Durham, between February 1232 and Prior Bertram’s death in 1258 is not known.³² To connect it to Grosseteste’s possible visit in 1232 although speculative, might at least be worth consideration.³³

²⁹ Southern, *Robert Grosseteste*, p. 72; Thomson, *The Writings*, pp. 14-15; Hunt, ‘The Library’, pp. 138-139.

³⁰ Hunt, ‘The Library’, p. 140.

³¹ Southern, *Robert Grosseteste*, p. 73.

³² For a study of the sermons in A.III.12 and a detailed study of the relevant codicological material see Suzan Paul *An edition and study of selected sermons of Robert Grosseteste*, PhD thesis, University of Leeds (2002). This is available online at: <http://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/335/>

³³ The Priory library catalogues of the later 14th century speak to an interest maintained in Grosseteste’s pastoral theological and scientific works, although the volume of scientific works no longer survives, see Durham Cathedral MS B.IV.46 fol. 33r-v. In this context the creation and development of Durham College in Oxford from the later 13th to early 14th centuries should be recalled.