

Bishop Adventius of Metz's letter about the Vikings – CW 2019

Adventius was elected as bishop of Metz in 858, and died in 875. A number of his letters concerning the divorce case of King Lothar II are preserved in a manuscript now in the Biblioteca Vallicelliana in Rome.¹ This letter, however, is on a different topic, and is preserved in a different manuscript, University Library, Voss. Lat. 92.

This manuscript is made up of three originally independent parts. The letter was copied onto the final folio (f. 155r) of the third part, which is chiefly devoted to Irish scholarly texts possibly linked to Liège, and dates from the 10th century. At certain places the manuscript is illegible, marked here with ellipses, but only a few letters are obscured, and the letter's overall meaning is plain.

The letter is undated. However, the letter's first editor, Daniel Misonne, connected the letter to one of two Viking raids in Lothar's kingdom mentioned in the Annals of St-Bertin, in 863 and 867. Because in 863 the 13th June was a Sunday, a day when fasting was not usually allowed, Misonne suggests the letter cannot have been from that year, and therefore must date from 867. As it happens, another letter from Bishop Adventius to Pope Nicholas mentions a highly successful royal expedition in July that year against the 'pagans'. Nevertheless, we cannot assume that the Annals of St-Bertin were comprehensive in their coverage of Viking raids in Lotharingia (indeed they neglected to mention the outcome of the 867 battle). It is therefore possible that the prayers concerned an otherwise unrecorded Viking raid from a different year, and so the letter cannot be definitively dated.

It was quite common for Frankish bishops to organise collective prayers and fasting on the request of kings, whether in response to natural disaster or, as in this case, impending battle. Charlemagne had arranged a very similar liturgical occasion in 807, so Bishop Adventius, and his king, were following a time-honoured tradition.

Edition: Daniel Misonne, 'Mandement inédit d'Adventius de Metz à l'occasion d'une incursion normande (mai-juin 867)', Revue Bénédictine 93 (1983), 71-79

Further background reading: Michael McCormick, Eternal Victory: Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium and the Early Medieval West (1986)

TRANSLATION

Adventius, bishop of Metz through the mercy of God.

According to the royal order (*iussio*) sent to us, please understand that we have ordered a three-day fast to take place throughout our diocese. That is, on the 9th June, the 12th June and the 13th June, we wish the whole people (*omnis populus*) of both sexes to go to church on the sixth hour of the third day... Let them come together with ash on their heads, dressed in sackcloth, barefoot, and process behind the cross until the ninth hour of the day.

Let everyone abstain from meat and wine, except the ill who should redeem themselves with alms, and let them beseech the mercy of almighty God with prayers, that Almighty God will submit all the barbarian peoples (*barbarae nationes*) to our lord king, for our perpetual peace. And let Him give the king safety and long life, and destroy all his enemies with His victorious right hand... Let Him allow his armies to triumph with a celestial victory, and keep us safe and sound under His protection.

Let all priests and other ordained ministers all together beseech the Lord with litanies, psalms and antiphonies, together with the common people (*vulgaris populus*). We order and firmly command that every priest takes care to announce this to his parishioners (*parochiani*) during these three rogation days...

¹ See Charles West, 'Knowledge of the past and the judgment of history in tenth-century Trier: Regino of Prüm and the lost manuscript of Bishop Adventius of Metz', *Early Medieval Europe* 24:2, 2016, 137-159