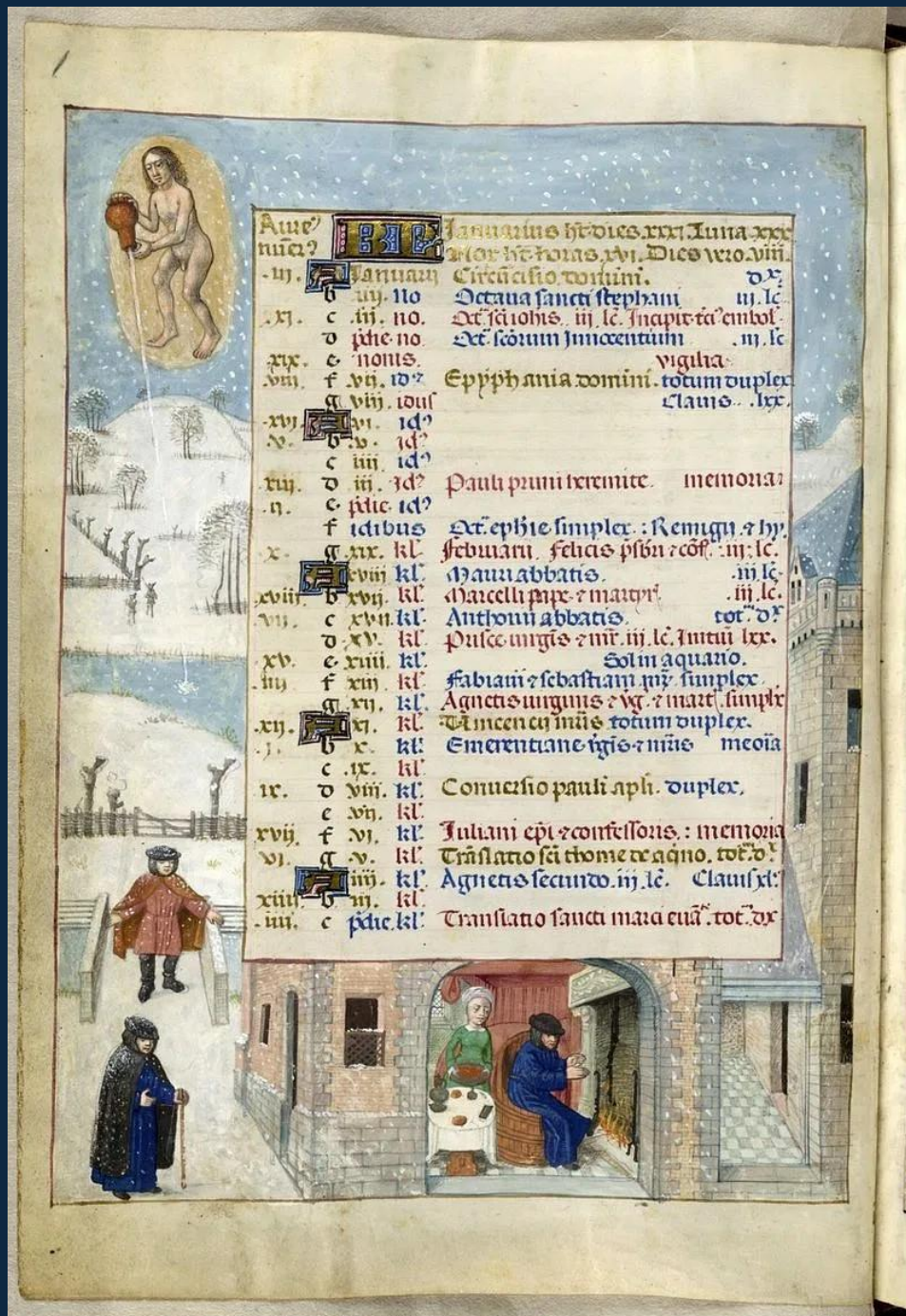




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MA Medieval Studies

DATING EXERCISE

Exercise A:

“Memorandum that the Thursday after the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the 8th year of King Richard II the abbot of Byland was accused in the wapentake court held at Pickering.”

My answer: 18th August 1384.

To find this date, I used the class-provided Handbook for Students of English History¹ and looked up the 8th Regnal Year for King Richard II. This was stated to have run from 22nd June 1384 – 21 June 1385. I used the same book to determine the date of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary – which is recorded as 15th August. Finally, using Table 20 under the “Calendars for All Possible Dates of Easter” section of the book, the Thursday after the Assumption is 18th August 1384.

Exercise B:

“Confirmation by Bishop Anian of St Asaph of the charters for Shrewsbury Abbey issued by his predecessors Bishops Reiner, Abraham, and Hugh. Given at Shrewsbury the day after St Mary Magdalene in the first year of his pontificate.”

My answer: Friday 23rd July 1250

I used the class-provided Handbook of British Chronology² mentioned above to determine when Bishop Anian was consecrated. There are two Anians listed in the book – but I used the information for Anian I because the predecessors in the quote are listed immediately before him. Anian 1 was consecrated in November 1249. I then used the Handbook for Students of English History to look up St Mary Magdalene’s day – which is 22nd July. As this occurred during the first year of his pontificate, this must be the following calendar year 1250. Using Table 6 of the Calendars section of the book, I found out that the day after St Mary Magdalene’s day in 1250 was Friday 23rd July 1250.

Exercise C:

“Downham: court held on Thursday the day after Ash Wednesday in the fourth year of the reign of King Edward and the first year of the episcopate of John de Ketene [Ketton]”

My answer: Tuesday 5th March 1310

Using the Handbook of British Chronology, I found that John Ketton was consecrated as the Bishop of Ely on 6th September 1310. Therefore, the “King Edward” referenced here must be Edward II as that was the Edward on the throne in 1310. Edward II’s fourth Regnal year started 8 Jul 1310. Table 29 in the Calendars section of the Handbook for Students of English History lists Ash Wednesday as occurring on 4th March and the Thursday after that being 5th March. However, the same table has the Annunciation (the start of the new year) listed as occurring on March 25th – which means we are still in the year 1310, not 1311, as the Julian calendar is still in use. Therefore, this court was held on Thursday 5th March 1310.

¹ C. R. Cheney, *Handbook of Dates for Students of English History* (London, Offices of the Royal Historical Society, 1961) <<http://archive.org/details/handbookofdatesf0000chen>> [accessed 6 December 2024].

² E. B. Fryde and others, *Handbook of British Chronology*, Third Edition (Royal Historical Society, 1986) <<http://archive.org/details/handbookofbritis0000unse>> [accessed 6 December 2024].

Exercise D:

“Henry, king of the English, greets the bishop of Lincoln and Earl David and the earl of Leicester, and Earl Rannulf of Chester, and all the barons and lords of whom Geoffrey Ridel held lands, and all the sheriffs within whose jurisdiction he held them. Know that I have given to Richard Basset the daughter of Geoffrey Ridel to wife, and the custody of Geoffrey Ridel’s land until Robert Ridel can be made a knight and marry the granddaughter of Ralph Basset, namely the daughter of one of his daughters. ... And this gift and compact have been made at the request and with the advice of Rannulf, earl of Chester, and William his brother, and Nigel d’Aubigny and Robert Ridel’s other kin and Geva his mother, and Geoffrey the earl’s chancellor, and Simon, dean of Lincoln, and William, son of Rannulf, and Thomas of St John and Geoffrey de Clinton, and Payn son of John, and William d’Aubigny and Humphrey de Bohun and Robert Musard and Robert Basset and Osmund Basset and Thurstan Basset and William, constable of Earl Rannulf of Chester, and Ralph, son of Norman, and Hugh Maubanc. At Woodstock.”

My proposed date range for the above event is late November 1120 to, at the latest, 13th April 1123.

Initially, I could not understand the meaning of the text when taken from outside of its context. My first action after reading the text was to try identify which King Henry was mentioned. To do this, I chose a name from the text that I deemed unique and was not likely to produce many search engine results for several people with the same name: Nigel d’Aubigny. I discovered that he was one of King Henry I’s most trusted advisors – and that he died in 1129³. This gave me two great starting points: that we were talking about Henry I, and that this event had to have occurred prior to 1129 (d’Aubigny’s death) but before 1100 (Henry I’s year of accession).

I then searched online for Geoffrey Ridel⁴, whom I had identified as the subject of this meeting. I found that he was a former Royal Justice who had died in the White Ship disaster on 25 Nov 1120. It then became clear to me that this text was describing a meeting to divide up his assets after his death. At this point I had narrowed down the earliest potential date for the meeting as late November 1120.

I then began to research the person who was inheriting the land: Richard Basset. Basset married Geoffrey Ridel’s daughter, Matilda Ridel, at an undetermined date between late November 1120 and 1123, narrowing my date range to November 1120 to 1123.

I found an online biography of Henry I⁵ to attempt to determine his activity between November 1120 and up to and including the year 1123. I learnt that in 1123, Henry travelled to Normandy to try quell an escalating war, and that he stayed there for a prolonged length of time. Finally, I came

³ ‘Nigel d’Aubigny’, *Wikipedia*, 2024

<https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Nigel_d%27Aubigny&oldid=1258559471> [accessed 6 December 2024].

⁴ J. A. Green, ‘Ridel, Geoffrey (d. 1120), Justice’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/23617.

⁵ C. W. Hollister, ‘Henry I (1068/9–1135), King of England and Lord of Normandy’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/12948.

across an itinerary of Henry I⁶ that listed his crossing to Normandy as 11 June 1123. It also lists Woodstock, the setting of this meeting, as being visited for the last time prior to Normandy starting on 25 March that same year. On 15 April, Henry is listed as being in Winchester – a distance of approximately 62 miles. I searched for a paper on Medieval travel times and found that the average medieval traveller could expect to travel up to 30 miles in a day on foot, or 40 on horseback⁷. Although the paper states that Royal travellers were often slower due to having larger parties and an insistence on travelling in comfort, it does mean that to get to Winchester he would have had to set off, at the very latest, on 13th April to arrive by the 15th to cover the 62 miles.

Because he does not come back to England for almost three years, and we know the marriage of Matilda and Richard occurred between 1120 and 1123, it is therefore plausible that the meeting took place between late November 1120 after the White Ship disaster, and 13th April 1123 which is the last time Henry is recorded at Woodstock with enough time to travel to Winchester.

⁶ Charles Johnson and H.A. Cronne, *Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum, 1066-115. Volume II Regesta Henrici Primi 1100 - 1135* (Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1913)

<<http://archive.org/details/registaregumangl02grea>> [accessed 6 December 2024].

⁷ Marjorie Nice Boyer, 'A Day's Journey in Mediaeval France', *Speculum*, 26.4 (1951), pp. 597–608, doi:10.2307/2853052.