



Extracts from the Chapter minutes from 1701 onwards
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ERRATA

Hubert Walter became Archbishop of Canterbury and moved from Salisbury in 1893 should of course have been 1193: well-spotted John.

EPIPHANY

This Church festival on the 6th January is centred on the **Three Magi**. Epiphany being *a moment of understanding or revelation*. The Eastern Orthodox Church celebrates it on the 25th December. I just had the feeling that this story did not really fit with the New Testament and seemed like an import from another culture.

On looking into it I found that only the gospel of Matthew (written 80AD to 90AD) refers to the wise men but does not name them nor say how many there are, though he does mention the three gifts. In Eastern Christianity the Magi can number up to 12! Although the three are an important part of the Christmas tradition, the idea that they were present at the birth is a later adaptation as is the change to Three Kings. Indeed some traditions have the Magi arriving up to two years after the birth. Although this sounds surprising it does at least tie in with Herod's *Massacre of the Innocents* in which boys up to two years old were included. Also the original Greek translates as *house* rather than *stable*, and in fact some believe that Jesus was born in Nazareth, not Bethlehem. It is not uncommon to encounter such anomalies as some writers have altered the facts to fit in with Old Testament prophesies.

(Below, shrine of the Three Magi in Cologne Cathedral *courtesy of Wikimedia*).

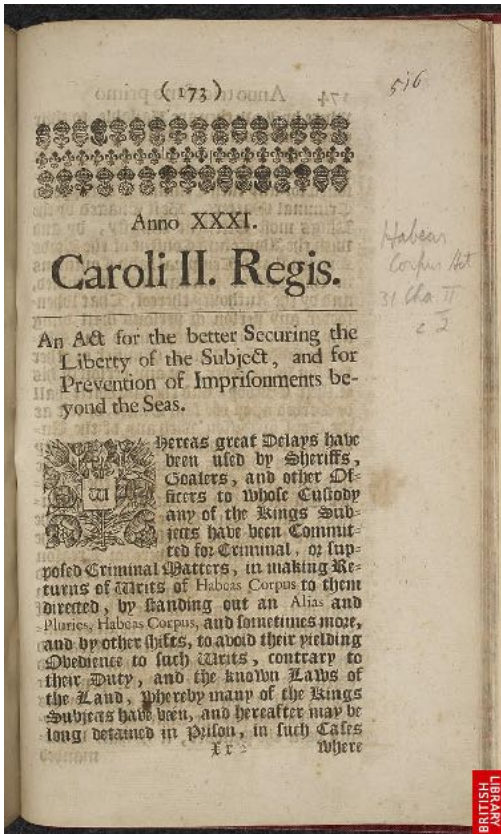
Magoi is Greek from the original Old Persian *Magus* which in turn came from the Avestan *magauno*. This last is the priestly caste into which Zoroaster was born. The Zoroastrian magi were famed for their knowledge of astrology, which incidentally led to our word *magic*. In Western Christianity they have been regarded as saints and given names: Melchior, Caspar (or Gaspar) and Balthazar. This possibly originates in an Alexandrian manuscript dated 500AD. Also in Medieval times



countries were attached to each: Persia, India and Arabia. Ethiopian and Armenian churches have their own names. There are also groups as far away as China that believe one of the Magi came from their country and even that the mythical *Prester John* was a descendant of one of them. Interestingly, King Tiridates of Armenia travelled with his magi to pay homage to Nero in 66AD, a few years before the composition of Matthew's gospel.

Balthazar's blackness is a variant found largely in northern Europe by the 15th century. The three gifts were gifts often given to kings and Seleucus 1 Nicator of Syria was recorded as offering to Apollo gold frankincense and myrrh. Attributes have also become attached to them: gold is

simply valuable, frankincense as an incense was associated with deity and myrrh as an embalming oil was naturally associated with death. There are a number of stories of what happened to the gifts - including being misappropriated by Judas!



No mention is made of the Wise Men's return to their country but a 17th century *Chronicon of Dexter* talks of their martyrdom in *Arabia Felix*. Another tradition states that they were martyred in Constantinople and their bodies translated to Milan in 344AD. Yet another states that St. Helena (the mother of Constantine and a notorious collector of relics), took the remains to Hagia Sofia before they were moved to Milan, finally ending up in Cologne. The Milanese hold a medieval costume parade on 6th January but Cologne actually displays the sarcophagus of the *Drei Könige* (see page 1). Finally, Marco Polo claimed to have seen the three tombs in Saveh, Persia, where *their bodies are still whole and they have hair and beards*. I suppose that so many stories are passed down orally that it should be no surprise that tracking down the definitive narrative is well-nigh impossible.

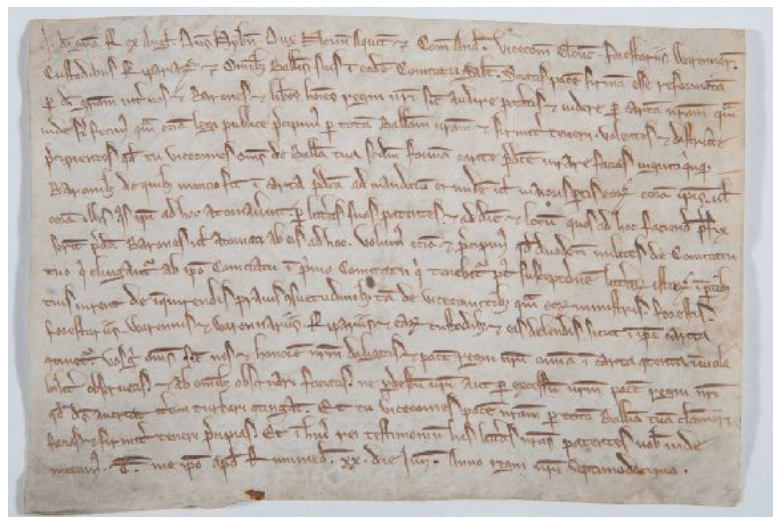
MORE ABOUT MAGNA CARTA

Habeas Corpus

I am often asked if MC is responsible for Habeas Corpus? Although Habeas Corpus' origins in common law predate Magna Carta (and probably originated at the Assize of Clarendon), it was actually not enacted in law until the Habeas Corpus Act of 1679 (see above, *courtesy of the British Library*).

The writ

(right, *courtesy of the Dean & Chapter*) Hereford Cathedral houses the best copy of the 1217 Magna Carta. More importantly it has the only copy of *King John's Writ* (left), essentially the



covering note to MC and a letter to Royal officials to make the charter publicly known.

Remember the Sheriff of Nottingham

Magna Carta, finally agreed on 15 June 1215, was intended to re-establish peace. For this to be implemented, the rebel barons had first to renew their homage to the king, repudiated since May. This they did at Runnymede, probably on 19 June. The terms of the settlement then had to be communicated to the country at large. This letter, dated from Runnymede on 20 June, informs the sheriff of Gloucestershire that a firm peace has been restored (*pacem firmam esse reformatam*). The sheriff is to ensure that the men of his county pledge obedience to the 25 barons appointed to keep the peace. At the next meeting of the Gloucestershire county court, so the writ demands, 12 knights were to be elected to enquire into abuses by sheriffs, foresters and others of the king's officers.

Letters identical to this were drawn up for publication in at least 33 counties, as well as in London and the Cinque Ports. The problem was that the king's sheriffs, who would normally have published the settlement, were themselves the subject of complaint and investigation in Magna Carta. The solution adopted was to have the King's letters read out by the sheriffs but for the most part distributed and preserved by bishops or clerics; hence the survival of the present document in the archives of Hereford Cathedral. The sheriff to whom it was addressed was a Frenchman, Engelard de Cigogné (d. 1244). In Magna Carta he had been specifically named among those of King John's foreign favourites forbidden to hold office as sheriff. As this suggests, the peace established at Runnymede was a fragile affair. In the event, the King's refusal to dismiss Engelard and his other loyal servants was one of many points on which peace foundered, and from which civil war very swiftly re-emerged.

How many copies are there?

The 1215 Magna Carta was based on the Articles of the Barons (right, *courtesy of the British Library*). There is only one exemplification (attested copy under an official seal) of the 1216 MC - in Durham Cathedral.

Four of the 1217, three are in the Bodleian Library.

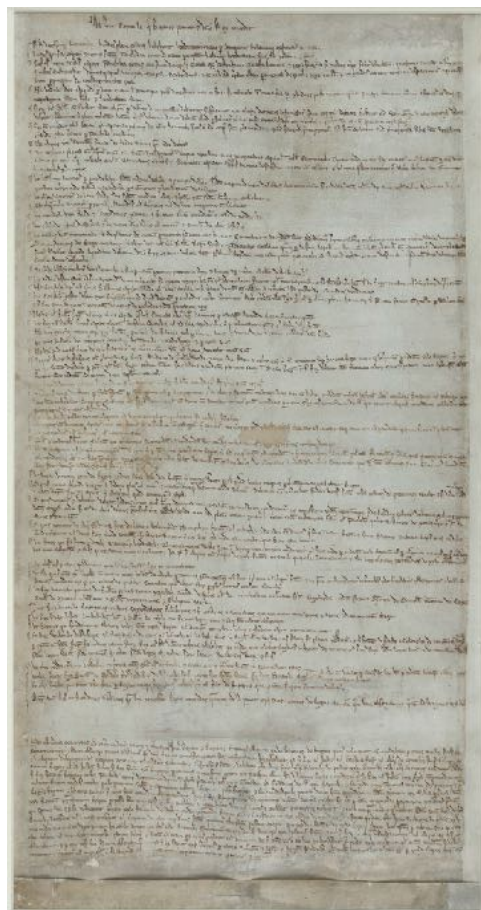
Four of the 1225, one each in the British Library (from Lacock), Durham, Bodleian and the National Archives.

There is a draft of the 1215 version at the Society of Antiquaries (from Peterborough Abbey

There are two 1297 versions, one in Australia bought in 1952 from Kings School Bruton for £12,500 and one sold by the Brudenell family (earls of Cardigan) to the US Perot Foundation in 1984. It was then sold on to David Rubenstein in 2007 for \$21.3m. It is on permanent loan to the US National Archives. There is also a 1297 copy in our National Archives and another in the Guildhall, London.

7 copies of the 1300 (Edward I) exemplification survive: Faversham, Oriel College*, Bodleian, Durham Cathedral and Sandwich* (Kent County archives). *have their companion Charter of the Forest.

During the 13th and 14th centuries, Magna Carta was





frequently copied into chronicles and collections of charters and statutes, for use by lawyers and administrators. In some cases, only the most recent version of Magna Carta was recorded; sometimes, texts of different versions of the charter were conflated. Errors of transcription are not uncommon in such compilations. Above is Durham's lovely 1400 MC.

Carta Foresta

2 copies of the 1217 Charter of the Forest survive - Durham and Lincoln. A 1225 version is in the British Library (left).

This Charter sought to restore rights of access to Royal forests that the normans had eroded.

As I am sure you know, Forest in this context is an enclosed area in which the owner had the rights of hunting and the greenery the animals fed on. It was not

necessarily completely wooded, as indeed is the case in the New Forest. The charter restored the area classified as Forest to that of Henry II's time. Special verderers' courts were set up to enforce the charter, and again the New Forest still has one.

Although Magna Carta has had the limelight all these years, the Charter of the Forest probably did more for the working man. Sir Edward Coke rated it equal to MC and it is the longest lived statute, being finally replaced by the Wild Creatures and Forest Laws Act of 1971.

The Salisbury connection

Sir Robert Bruce Cotton (1570 - 1631) was elected member of parliament for Old Sarum in 1624. (Right, *Attributed to Cornelis Janssens van Ceulen*). As an antiquary and a great collector of manuscripts it is he we have to thank for the two copies of the 1215 exemplification and the Articles of the Barons housed in the British Library.

