# Epitome of the Life of St Botolph, from the Schleswig Breviary[1]

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1. After the faith of Our Lord Jesus Christ became well-known throughout the world, there was a man worthy in God, named Botolph, descended from the noble lineage of the kings of Scotland, who, when he was pressed to accept the throne after the death of his father,[2] for the love of God not only relinquished the throne, but also his homeland, and journeyed to England. There, he was received with reverence by Edmund, King of England, and not long after, by the command of the same king,[3] he was raised to holy orders.

2. But when he had stayed with the same king for seven years, he petitioned him to grant him a place where he might more freely serve the Lord.[4] The king assigned him a most beautiful place, surrounded on all sides by the streams of a certain river. There he built a church to the honour of God, and began through divine grace to become well-known for many miracles. Now while the man of God was staying there with his disciple, one day a poor man knocked at the door, begging for alms in the name of God.

3. When the holy Father ordered the disciple to give him something, he replied that he had nothing for all their[5] food, except a single loaf of bread: which he ordered to be divided into four parts, and one of them to be given to the poor man. Then what? When three other poor men came, he distributed the three remaining pieces. When the disciple therefore murmured about this, the holy man said, "Do not be troubled, my son, for God is able to give it all back to us again." Hardly had he finished his words, and behold: four little boats loaded with food and drink were being drawn along the aforementioned river, which Almighty God, through His faithful ones, provided for the holy man.

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[1] The *Schleswig Breviary* (SB) is a service book printed in Paris in 1512 at the order of Gotteschalk von Ahlefldt, the last Catholic bishop. Two copies are held in the Danish Royal Library in Copenhagen. This text was reprinted in the *Acta Sanctorum* (AASS), with notes by D. Papebroch, which are translated below, prefixed by a, b, c etc. This translation and other notes by Roger Pearse, 2025, and improved by comparison with the unpublished translation of D. G. Dalziel, kindly made available to me by Denis Pepper of the the Society of St Botolph. My thanks to Dr Miklós István Földváry of Usuarium for facilitating access to the SB. This document and its contents are made public domain.

[2] a. It seems that this was Eugenius IV, who died in the year 620; nor was the kingdom offered immediately to Botulph, but only after the princes and people were no longer able to tolerate the crimes of his successor Ferquard: so great that it was decided to throw him into prison, in which he later died, say around the year 624. But when Botulph fled, the administration passed to another of the brothers, Donald, who then reigned after Ferquard's death until the year 646. [See the Wikipedia article on Legendary Kings of Scotland – RP]

[3] b. Or rather, the Christian mother of the still pagan king, who took him as her chaplain, and as an instructor in the pious education of her daughters.

[4] c. In order to obtain this more conveniently, I believe he had first persuaded the Queen to send her daughters to one of the Frankish monasteries.

[5] SB actually has "eorum"; but strangely the AASS copy has "corporis," which would make this "he had nothing for all the food of the body."

4. But one day, when he was visited by the aforementioned king, he petitioned for another place to live, because in the first site he was exceedingly pestered by unclean spirits. The king, granting his request, gave him a more suitable place on the River Thames;[6] in which place the man of God built a church in honour of St. Martin. Then, staying in the same place, he began to raise hens, which an eagle from a nearby forest used to come and carry off. But one day, when it had carried off a cockerel, the man of God rebuked[7] it, and it immediately came and placed the cockerel alive at his feet, and then fell down dead.

5. After thirteen years had passed in that place, the ancient enemy[8] came in the form of a snake and inflicted a nasty bite on the man of God. Because of this, he again approached the king to give him another place; who led him far from the sea, into a vast wilderness: where, as he proceeded through thorny places, he came to a certain valley, which had a small stream of water; and the man of God said, "This is the place."[9] And so in that place given to him by the king, he built two churches, in honour of the apostles Peter and Paul. When these were completed, he went abroad[10] to Rome for the purpose of prayer, to visit the shrines[11] of those same most blessed apostles.

6. Returning from there and bringing with him many relics of the saints, before entering his own cell, he restored sight to a blind girl through his prayers. King Edmund, hearing of the return of the holy man, met him with great joy, and stayed with him for three days. After these things, Botolph, the man of God, passed over to the Lord. His disciples honorably committed his body for burial. Many miracles happen at his tomb, by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be honour and glory forever. Amen.

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[6] d. This confirms what I have said, that Edmund ruled in Surrey on the right bank of the Thames, and that it was a part of Southern England. Perhaps also the saint was moved to leave the court because he saw that he was wasting his time in trying to lead the king to faith.

[7] Cf. Mark 4:39.

[8] Satan.

[9] e. Thus far, that is, up to around the year 644, Botulph had lived as a hermit, when it seemed divinely inspired to him to cross over into Gaul, there to be trained in monastic discipline (though this is here omitted) and to visit various monasteries, especially staying at the one where his spiritual daughters, the sisters of the King, resided, who had taken monastic vows. And so he will first have returned around the year 654, advanced in age and now fitted to establish and promote monastic discipline among the South Angles; and from this point begins that opening part of the earlier "Life," which alone we approve, as written by a near-contemporary.

[10] f. I would think that this happened after the year 660, suppposing that the saint returned while Edmund was still alive; who (unless the South Angles had different kings from the East Saxons, for which there is no evidence) received as his successor about that year Edelwalch, baptized in 661 (as Alford believes). At that time St. Vitalianus was the Pope of the Roman Church. (This refers to Fr. Michael Alford S.J. (1587-1652), *Fides Regia Britannica, sive Annales Ecclesiae Britannicae*, Liege (1663). – RP)

[11] "limina", lit. "thresholds", but indicating the tombs and basilicas – Niemeyer, "Mediae Latinitas Lexicon Minus."

## Epitome Vitae S. Botolphi ex Breviario Sleswicensi.[12]

[1] Postquam fides Domini Nostri Jesu Christi ubique terrarum claresceret; fuit vir Deo dignus, Botulphus[13] nomine, ex illustri prosapia regum Scotorum oriundus: qui dum post obitum patris[14] regnum suscipere cogeretur; ipse propter Dei amorem, non solum regnum, sed &[15] patriam derelinquens, in Angliam est profectus. Ubi a rege Angliae Edmundo devote susceptus, non multo post, jubente eodem[16] rege, ad sacros ordines est promotus.

[2] Cum autem septem annis cum eodem rege commoratus fuisset, supplicavit ei ut sibi locum tribueret, ubi liberius Domino deserviret.[17] Qui locum pulcherrimum ei assignavit, rivulis cujusdam fluminis undique circumseptum. Ubi ad honorem Dei aedificata ecclesia, coepit per divinam gratiam multis clarescere signis. Viro autem Dei ibidem cum discipulo suo commorante; quadam die pauper homo januam pulsans petebat eleëmosynam propter Deum.

[3] Jubente sancto Patre ut discipulus ei aliquid daret, respondit ille se nihil habere pro toto victu eorum[18], nisi unicum panem: quem ille jussit in quatuor partes dividi, & unam earum pauperi dari. Quid plura? Venientibus tribus aliis pauperibus reliquas tres particulas[19] erogavit. Cum igitur de hoc discipulus murmuraret; ait vir sanctus; Noli, fili, turbari: potens est enim Deus totum restituere nobis. Vix verba compleverat, & ecce quatuor naviculae onustae cibo & potu, per praedictum fluvium trahebantur, quas omnipotens Deus per suos fideles viro sancto ministrabat.

[4] Quadam vero die, a praedicto rege visitatus, petivit alium locum ad inhabitandum: eo quod in priori loco nimis ab immundis spiritibus infestabatur. Cujus precibus, rex annuens, super fluvium Tamisiam[20] ei aptiorem locum dedit. In quo loco vir Dei aedificavit ecclesiam in honorem S. Martini. Manens autem in eodem loco, gallinas nutrire coepit: quas aquila de vicina silva veniens rapere solebat. Sed cum quadam die gallum rapuisset, vir Dei comminatus est ei: quae statim veniens gallum vivum ante pedes ejus posuit, sicque cadens expiravit.

[5] Evolutis autem annis decem & tribus in eodem loco, venit hostis antiquus in specie colubri, viroque Dei gravem morsum inflixit. Ob quod iterum regi institit, ut alium locum sibi daret. Qui duxit

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[12] This is the text as given in the *Acta Sanctorum* (AASS), except where noted, but with capitalisation regularised. The AASS "coepit" and "aedificata" is retained, where the Sleswig Breviary (SB) has "cepit" and "edificata". The notes to the AASS text by D. Papebroch are included, prefixed by a, b, c, etc, as in the AASS.

[13] SB: "Botolphus", AASS: "Bothulphus", AASS footnotes: "Botolphus". This suggests that the Bollandists did not have a copy of the SB before them, but were reliant on a careless copy.

[14] a. Videtur hic fuisse Eugenius 4, mortuus anno 620; neque statim oblatum Botulpho regnum, sed postquam Principes & populi non amplius videbantur tolerare posse Ferquardi successoris scelera, adeo grandia, ut de ipso in vincula conjiciendo, in quibus postea obiit, cogitaretur, puta circa annum 624. Fugiente autem Botulpho, administratio cesserit alteri fratrum Donevaldo, qui deinde post mortem Ferquardi regnavit usque ad an. 646.

[15] "&" – BS, AASS; "etiam" surely.

[16] b. Aut potius, Regis adhuc Pagani matre Christiana; quae ipsum sibi in Capellanum assumpserit, & filiarum pie educandarum instructorem.

[17] c. Hoc quo commodius obtineret, credo eum prius persuasisse Reginae, ut filias suas dirigeret ad aliquod monasteriorum Francicorum.

[18] "eorum" – SB; "corporis" – AASS.

[19] "perticulas" – SB; "particulas" – AASS.

[20] d. Hinc confirmatur quod dixi, in Surreia, ad dextram Tamisiae ripam imperitasse Edmundum, eamque fuisse Australis Angliae portionem. Forte etiam ad deserendam aulam motus fuit Sanctus, quod in Rege ad fidem adducendo operam se perdere videret.

eum longe a mari, in vastam solitudinem: ubi cum per spinosa loca procederet, pervenit ad quandam vallem, quae rivulum aquae habebat; & ait vir Dei: Hic est sedes.[21] In illo itaque loco dato sibi a rege, duas ecclesias in honorem apostolorem Petri & Pauli construxit. Quibus consummatis transivit[22] Romam orationis gratia, ut limina eorundem beatissimorum apostolorum visitaret.

[6] Inde rediens, & multas sanctorem reliquias secum ferens, antequam cellam propriam intraret, puellam caecam suis orationibus illuminavit. Audiens rex Edmundus reditum viri sancti, cum magno gaudio ei occurrit, atque per triduum secum mansit. Post haec vir Dei Botulphus[23] transivit ad Dominum: cujus corpus discipuli honorifice tradiderunt sepulturae: ad cujus tumbam multa miracula fiunt, praestante Domino nostro Jesu Christo,[24] cui est honor & gloria in seculorum. Amen.

[21] e. Hactenus, idest ad annum circiter 644, eremitam Botulphus egerat, quando videtur ei divinitis inspiratum, ut transfretaret in Galliam, monasticis institutionibus informandus (quid tamen hic praetermittitur) variaque obeunda monasteria, illud praecipue frequentando, in quo spirituales suae filiae Regis sorores commorabantur, Monachatum professae; atque ita primum redierit circa an. 654, aetate provectus, & monastica disciplinae inter Australes-Anglos ordinandae ac promovendae idoneus: atque hinc initium sumit pars illa prioris Vitae, quam solam laudamus, ut a suppari scriptam.

[22] f. Hoc factum crediderim post annum 660: siquidem rediit Sanctus vivente adhuc Edmundo; qui (nisi Australes Angli diversos ab Orientalibus Saxonibus Reges habuerint, quod nullo indicio probatur) isto circiter anno successorem accepit Edelwalchum, anno 661 (ut Alfordo videtur) baptizatum. Tunc autem Romanae Ecclesiae Pontifex praesidebat S. Vitalianus.

[23] See earlier note on “Botolphus.”

[24] A phrase from the Pontificale Romanum.