

Transcription of a letter from William Gilbert to William Barlow, 14th February, 1603[?].
Printed in Barlow, *Magneticall Animadeversions* (London, 1616), pp. 87-8.¹

To the Worshipfull my good friend, Mr. *William Barlow at Easton by Winchester.*

Recommendations with many thanks for all your paines and courtesies, for your diligence and enquiring, and finding divers good secrets, I pray proceede with double capping your Loadstone² you speake of, I shall bee glad to see you, as you write, as any man. I will have any leisure, if it were a moneth, to conferre with you, you haue shewed mee more, and brought more light than any man hath done. Sir, I will commend you to my L. of *Effingham*,³ there is heere a wise learned man, a Secretary of *Venice*, he came sent by that State, and was honourably received by her Majesty,⁴ he brought me a lattin letter from a Gentle-man of *Venice* that is very well learned, whose name is *Johannes Franciscus Sagredus*,⁵ he is a great Magneticall man, and writeth that hee hath conferred with divers learned men of *Venice*, and with the Readers of *Padua*,⁶ and reporteth wonderfull liking of my booke, you shall have a copy of [t]he letter: Sir, I purpose to adjoyne an appendix of [si]x or eight sheets of paper tu my booke, after a while I am in hand with it of some new inventions,⁷ and I would have some of your experiments, in your name and invention put into it, if you

¹ "The Contents of This Treatise", state that it contained twelve chapters and "A true copie of one of D. Gilberts letters written to the Author, concerning his Magneticall Experiments."

² Capping was the new procedure of placing iron or steel covers over the poles of a loadstone to increase its strength.

³ Charles Howard, second Baron Howard of Effingham and, from 1597, first Earl of Nottingham. His patronage in naval matters, which he held as Elizabeth's trusted Lord High Admiral, was much sought after by experts in navigation like Barlow.

⁴ Possibly Giovanni Carlo Scaramelli, a Venetian Secretary in England. He recorded that his mission was fomally received by Elizabeth on 16th February 1603. We might therefore date Gilbert's letter to 1603. See Venice: February 1603, 16-28', *Calendar of State Papers Relating to English Affairs in the Archives of Venice, Volume 9: 1592-1603* (1897), pp. 531-548. URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=95575> Date accessed: 17 September 2010.

⁵ Giovanni Francesco Sagredo (1571-1620), the Venetian mathematician and close friend of Galileo, who honoured him posthumously by making him an interlocutor in his *Dialogue concerning the Two Chief World Systems* of 1632, where Gilbert's magnetic philosophy was praised.

⁶ Galileo was discussing *De Magnete* with the leading Venetian intellectual Paolo Sarpi by 1602, whilst a professor of mathematics at Venice's University of Padua. Sarpi wrote 'all those who have until now touched the topic of magnetism have merely babbled; this man is the first who has actually written something. See Magrini 'Il "De Magnete"', p.29, and Reeves, "Good as Gold", p.137.

⁷ Thomas Blundeville published an addendum, forming pp. 279-92 of his 1602 edition of his *Theoriques of the Seven Planets*. He called it *The making, description and use of two most ingenious and necessarie instruments for sea-men... first invented by my good friend, Master Doctor Gilbert... and now here plainly set downe in our mother tongue*. It contained no significant new material, although it developed the use of the dip instrument for finding latitude first outlined in *De Magnete*, Book V, and so it may not be the addition Gilbert had in mind. Gilbert died 9 months later.

please, that you may be known for an augments of that act. So for this time in haste I take my leave the xiiijth of February,⁸

Your very loving friend, W. Gilbert.

This is the only letter of Gilbert's to have survived, and there is no reason to doubt the genuineness of Barlow's reproduction, although he had an obvious interest in printing it. Many texts at this time, especially scientific and mathematical ones with their limited readership, were circulated ("published") in manuscript rather than printed form, which allowed real and suspected plagiarisms to flourish. Indeed, Barlow would accuse Mark Ridley of plagiarizing an earlier manuscript version of *Magneticall Advertisements*, and he in turn was accused of having done little more than rehash Gilbert's discoveries in English. As we can see from the quotation below, Barlow used Gilbert's letter as part of his claim to independence and originality. He also argued, with some justification, that his book was of more practical use than *De Magnete*, and that he differed from Gilbert, notably and vehemently, by denying Gilbert's claim in Book VI that the Earth rotated.

He addressed his patron thus:

Many yeeres since divers of my good friends, and among them some honourable persons, were very desirous that I should publish such observations as I had collected, both before, and also after the setting forth of D. *Gilberts* booke: And none more earnest herein then D. *Gilbert* himselfe, unto whom I communicated what I had observed of my selfe, and what I had built upon his foundation of the *Magnetisme* of the earth. Both which hee liked well and wished me to publish them, as I remember at the time of our private conference, as may further appeare by letters that I received from him; which I have to shew under his owne hand.⁹

⁸ If Gilbert wrote on 14th February 1602, according to the old style calendar still in use in England, this was 24th February 1603, in the new style used in Venice.

⁹ Barlow, *Magneticall Animadeversions*, "Epistle Dedicatorie", sig. A2v.