

Olivier Hanne, Adélarde de Bath. Un passeur culturel dans la Méditerranée des croisades, Turnhout (Brepols) 2023, 324 p., 26 ill. en n/b, 4 en coul., 9 tab. en n/b., 5 cartes en n/b (Témoins de notre histoire, 23), ISBN 978-2-503-60570-8, EUR 85,00.

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Hanne has produced a rich and informative book on the intellectual history of twelfth-century Europe centered on the writings of Adelard of Bath. Although little is known about the man himself, a number of manuscripts written by or attributed to the English scholar survive. Adelard is probably best known as one of the earliest European scholars to have learned Arabic and translated scientific texts from the Arab Muslim world into Latin. Adelard traveled to both southern Italy and Syria in the early twelfth century, and Hanne sees him not only as a rare example of innovation in the twelfth century but also as an alternative to the crusading mentality characterized by antagonism between Christians and Muslims. Instead Adelard crossed the Mediterranean for education not war, becoming an agent of cultural transfer between the Latin and Arab worlds in the process.

The author divides Adelard's careers into two phases, the first in which he wrote books on natural philosophy in the tradition of Neoplatonism and Boethius and the second in which he produced translations. One of his earliest texts, *On the Same and the Different*, was written based on his studies of the liberal arts in France before his travels East. It follows closely the ideas of Plato and emphasizes traditional monastic values such as retreat from world, solitude, and the elevation of the soul. Yet even in this early text Adelard expressed the desire to go beyond the learning he had received in France, advocating for intellectual innovation similar to Peter Abelard.

Next Hanne examines Adelard's most popular work, *Questions on Natural Science*, which takes the form of a conversation between an uncle and nephew and covers a wide variety of topics, including corporality and sensation, body and soul, emotions, the human condition, and plants and animals. It was written immediately after Adelard's return to England from Syria and is thus the first fruit of his experience with the Arab world, even if no Arab authors or Arabic terminology appear in the text. A central theme of the book was a call to follow reason in order to make the universe comprehensible and to distinguish truth from falsehood. The book also contains eight long chapters on astronomy based on current teachings in Europe, a topic which the author was interested in all his life and to which he would return later on. In addition, the text contains a lively critique of teachers and students in France,



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contrasting their old style of learning with modern scholarship based on Arabic texts and methods.

The second part of the book discusses in detail five of Adelard's translations, including Euclid's *Elements*, the astronomical tables of al-Khwarizmi, *Ysagoga minor* of Abū Ma'šar, *Centiloquium*, and *Liber prestigiorum Thebidis*. Other texts and translations have been attributed to Adelard, and Hanne gives concise yet compelling reasons why he rejects many of these attributions.

In this part of the book Hanne provides an interesting and insightful discussion of the meaning of translation, and the various forms it can take. Translators can choose a literal or non-literal approach (*ad litteram* versus *ad sensum*), and they can summarize or paraphrase a text instead of actually translating it. Hanne views Adelard of Bath more as creating adaptations of the Arabic texts rather than actual translations. He often transliterated Arabic words rather than translating them, creating almost a new Latin language infused with Arabic terminology. The author also provides direct comparisons between Adelard's translations and the original Arabic texts, offering insightful critiques and commentary. Similarly, he provides a thoughtful analysis of Adelard's astronomical tables based on al-Khwarizmi, showing how his calculations were at times faulty. In addition, Hanne notes how Adelard's translations did not circulate widely at the time because better translations quickly became available.

The texts translated by Adelard covered a variety of subjects, and show important transformations in Adelard's thinking. Whereas in early works, Adelard admired the beauty and harmony of nature, in these later texts, nature became a machinery that could be controlled by science. In this view, the universe was created by God but then acted independently based on its own rules. Hanne also demonstrates how the main aim of Adelard's scholarship at this point in his career was to unlock the secrets of the world, passing from math to astronomy to astrology and culminating in talismanic magic. For Adelard, astrology and magic had practical applications as they could be used for protection, predictions, and medicinal purposes. In his book on astral magic, *Liber prestigiorum*, a translation of Thābit ibn Qurra al-Harrānī's book on talismans and esoteric science, Adelard provided instructions on talismans including how to calculate the correct times of the year when they would be effective, based on the position of stars.

In this part of the book, Hanne provides a useful discussion of the debates over astrology and magic in medieval Europe, with some Christian scholars embracing the subjects and others condemning them and linking them to devil worship. According to Hanne, Adelard became interested in magic as a young man although he acknowledged its danger because of the association between talismans and superstitions. Later in life he embraced the subjects enthusiastically, evidenced not only by his scholarship but also by the emerald ring he wore because of its curing powers. Moreover, Adelard was not an outlier in this respect. According to Hanne,



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40 % of the texts translated from Arabic into Latin in the twelfth/thirteenth centuries were works of astrology, magic, or divination, demonstrating the popularity of these subjects in Europe, and Adelard himself was never condemned for his views on magic or astrology.

Although the book mostly focuses on Adelard's intellectual output due to the paucity of biographical details, the author does piece together evidence suggesting that Adelard had connections to the English royal court. His book on the abacus focused not on the object itself but on techniques for monetary calculations that were used by the Exchequer, leading the author to speculate that Adelard perhaps worked for the royal treasury. Adelard's translation of Euclid and his books on astronomy also had practical applications for rulers. Geometry could be used to measure and build, and astrology could predict the future or give advice about when to undertake an activity. Thus, Adelard's scholarship served those in power, such as bishops and kings.

Hanne's book brings to light the exciting intellectual environment of twelfth-century Europe with the arrival of learning from the Arab Muslim world. The author does seem to assume a certain level of familiarity with the complexities of ancient and medieval science and philosophy, so the book may prove a bit challenging for those with no knowledge on these topics. In the end the author is to be lauded for bringing to light the intellectual activity of a lesser-known scholar, and he ends the book with the question: should Adelard of Bath, just as much as Peter Abelard, be considered the first modern man?



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