

Olivier Hanne, *Adélard de Bath: Un passeur culturel dans la Méditerranée des croisades* [Adelard of Bath: A Culture Conveyor in the Mediterranean at the Time of the Crusades] (Turnhout: Brepols, 2023). Print, 324pp., €85,00, ISBN: 9782503605708.



Review

Easily confused with Peter Abelard, his more famous contemporary theologian and philosopher, Adelard of Bath is not well known outside academia despite his contribution to the transfer of Islamic epistemology and scientific knowledge to Europe in the wake of the First Crusade. Hence, this book by Olivier Hanne, an eminent French Islamic Studies specialist, argues in the introduction that Adelard has not found in French historiography the attention he has received in the Anglo-Saxon world and that previous scholarship has predominantly addressed distinct aspects of his contribution to twelfth-century intellectual history with no recent synthesis available to researchers. The author sets out to provide a biography of Adelard of Bath coupled with detailed analyses of his writings in the fields of natural philosophy, practical arts, algebra, geometry, astronomy, astrology, and magic. Hanne successfully presents Adelard's life, works, and legacy in an accessible book that provides clear explanations of concepts, maps, and graphic illustrations of geometrical and astronomical questions in his works. Hanne balances expert analyses of relevant information in Latin, Greek, and Arabic with user-friendly explanations that make the reading experience engaging and enjoyable. The body of this

monograph is divided into ten chapters, but it can be thematically organized into two parts: the first addresses Adelard's travels and intellectual development, and the second focuses specifically on his final return to England and conveyance of key Arabic scientific texts to the Latin world.

Chapter one draws the portrait of an Anglo-Saxon young man living in post-conquest England. Hanne argues that Adelard's family enjoyed episcopal favors and that Jean, the Bishop of Bath, encouraged their knowledge-thirsty son to travel south and study in the thriving French centers of learning. Chapter two retraces the footsteps of the Englishman, particularly in Laon and Tours, where he studied the trivium, the quadrivium, and the studium. It was based on this phase in his intellectual journey that Adelard wrote his first important work, *On the Same and the Different*. In chapter three, Hanne argues that the dissatisfaction of the scholar from Bath with the teachings that he had received in France, coupled with his longing for the science and epistemology of the moderns, made him travel to the cradle of Latin culture, where he hoped to find practical, applied, and eloquent applications of the quadrivium (p. 59). Adelard was not disappointed since he found the opportunity to study the physics of tangible reality in southern Italy. Thanks to this experience, he wrote *Questions on Natural Science*, which was an immediate success and a widely reproduced work. Adelard then came back to Bath, but his intellectual restlessness made him leave once again for the Middle East, this time to discover the contributions of Islamic scholars. Based in the Crusader-dominated city of Antioch, he was close to the major centers of cultural and scientific transfers in Harran, Baghdad, Aleppo, and

Raqqa. Adelard learned Arabic and began working on troves of scientific manuscripts. Chapter four is about the scholar's return to England, where he possibly served in the royal court of Henry I, thanks to his mastery of the exchequer table (p. 95). It was during this period of intellectual maturity that Adelard wrote a treatise on falconry, encouraged his contemporaries to use Arabic numerals, and became interested in music as 'an art, a science, and a therapy' (p. 102). The remaining chapters provide in-depth discussions of the works of the scholar from Bath.

In chapter five, Hanne focuses on Adelard's *Questions on Natural Science* and lingers on the latter's aspiration for an epistemology of science based on rational inquiry rather than deference to the wisdom of established authorities. In the following chapter, the author expands on the Englishman's *Treatise on the Astrolabe* as well as on his passage to the Middle East and the transformative impact of that experience on his intellectual development. Hanne rightly notes that, unlike many of his contemporaries, Adelard had no interest in the ethnic markedness and religious difference of the Islamic world; for him, Arabic was a vector of knowledge and rational inquiry, and the Arab masters were eloquent polymaths who translated, transmitted, and enriched Classical, Indian, and Persian knowledge (pp. 153-54). Chapter seven discusses Adelard's translations of al-Khwarizmi's astronomical tables and Euclide's *Elements* from Arabic sources. Hanne argues that the English Arabist was more often an adapter than a translator, usually reducing his sources to their syntactic essentials and avoiding their stylistic complexities. In chapter eight, Hanne

focuses on Adelard's translations of arithmetical and geometrical works from Arabic sources. This part is very technical but well-illustrated, focusing on the scholar's work on the abacus and the three versions of his translation of *The Elements*. The next chapter addresses Adelard's fascination with the astrolabe and his many contributions to European astronomy; for him, only science could shed light on the complex architecture of the universe (p. 225). The last chapter begins with a suitable distinction between astronomy and astrology and then explains how Adelard regarded astrology as a science in its own right and argued for the benefits of its benign magical applications (p. 265). In this context, Hanne discusses the Englishman's translation of the *Ysagoga Minor* and *Book of Talismans*, a short collection of recipes for talismans that can help channel the powers of the astral bodies to their wearers. The final section of this long chapter focuses on the master's translation of *Mappae Clavicula*, a florilegium of chemical procedures with alchemical purposes. Hanne's alchemy transforms scant historical evidence and a wide range of sources in different languages into an enjoyable biography of an early humanist who contributed to the 'Renaissance of the Twelfth Century.'

As he follows Adelard's intellectual journey, Hanne provides clear maps and beautiful illustrations, which graphically help even the uninitiated reader understand the 'half-alien' science of the past. The four excerpts from illuminated manuscripts (pp. 297–300) in the reviewed copy are not very legible, however. Likewise, the author tells a clear narrative that shows the complex dynamics of a tense historical period that permitted contact between cultures, religions, ethnicities, and intellectual

traditions (p. 74). Hanne shows Adelard's role in the conveyance of scientific knowledge from East to West; however, the reference in the subtitle of his monograph to the Mediterranean at the time of the Crusades does not seem justified because the book mentions the sea and the protracted religious wars only incidentally, focusing instead (and as it should) on Adelard and his works. As it winds down towards the conclusion, the book encourages the reader to reach the last word despite a slight impression of repetitiveness, which can be justified for readers who need intermittent reading sessions to finish the work. In the last sentence of the book, Hanne wonders if Adelard of Bath actually was the first modern man. This baffling proposition is a rhetorical reprise of M. D. Chenu's bold statement about Peter Abelard perhaps intended to give the two scholars equal weighting. The book could fare better without this controversial and provocative final statement. Despite these infelicities, the monograph presents state-of-the-art research on Adelard of Bath, and it is recommended to francophone readers with different levels of expertise in premodern studies. The well-made figures (9 tables, 5 maps, and 30 illustrations) further testify to the author's hard work and his passion for the topic. The rich paratextual apparatus can be helpful to anglophone readers, but a translation of a slightly edited version of the book into English will present a welcome addition to current scholarship about Adelard of Bath.

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