

Adomnán of Iona

Adamnan, Adomnanus, Adamnanus

DATE OF BIRTH c. 625
PLACE OF BIRTH County Donegal, Ireland
DATE OF DEATH 704
PLACE OF DEATH Iona Abbey, Scotland

BIOGRAPHY

Adomnán was an Irish monk, who in 679 became the Abbot of Iona, the foremost Irish monastery in Scotland. He is best known as the author of a life of Saint Columba, founder of Iona, and of a treatise of law, the *Cain Adomnan*.

MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Primary

Bede, *Ecclesiastical history of the English people*, ed. J. McClure and R. Collins, Oxford, 1994

Betha Adamnain: Life of Saint Adamnan, ed. and trans. M. Herbert and P.Ó Riain, Dublin, 1988

Secondary —

WORKS ON CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS

De locis sanctis, 'On the holy places'

DATE c. 680
ORIGINAL LANGUAGE Latin

DESCRIPTION

The work consists of a description of the holy sites of Jerusalem and Palestine: it is a treatise of sacred geography for use as an exegetical aid. Adomnán's principle source is an oral informant named Arculf, a bishop from Gaul who traveled to the Holy Land in the 670s and who described the sites he visited. Arculf presents the Saracens' 'king Mavia's' (the Umayyad Caliph Mu'āwiya, r. 661-80) as a quasi-Christian who invokes Christ as savior and who builds a 'church' in Damascus.

He describes a primitive prayer house (*orationis domum*) on the Temple Mount, the site of the future al-Ḥaram al-Sharīf. He describes this house as 'poorly constructed' (*uili fabricati*) on top of ruins; he says however that it could hold 3,000 people.

The description and the date seem to match neither the Dome of the Rock nor the al-Aqṣā mosque; Adomnán may be the unique testimony to an earlier, temporary mosque constructed on the site.

SIGNIFICANCE

Arculf, through Adomnán, provides a rare glimpse of Jerusalem between the Muslim conquest of 638 and the construction of the Dome of the Rock in 692. Bede, in his own *De locis sanctis*, reworks Adomnán's text and reproduces many of his descriptions, including that of the prayer house on the Temple Mount.

MANUSCRIPTS

For the four extant manuscripts, which are all from the 9th century, see Wilkinson, p. 193.

EDITIONS AND TRANSLATIONS

- H. Donner, *Pilgerfahrt ins Heilige Land. Die ältesten Berichte christlicher Palästina-pilger (4.-7. Jh.)*, Stuttgart, 1979, pp. 315-421 (German trans.)
- J. Wilkinson, *Jerusalem pilgrims before the Crusades*, Warminster, 1977, pp. 93-116 (English trans., with Arculf's drawings of floor plans of Jerusalem's holy sites on pp. 191-97)
- Itineraria et alia geographica*, ed. P. Geyer et al., 2 vols, Turnhout, 1965 (*Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* 175-76), i, pp. 175-234 (edition)
- Adomnán, *De locis sanctis*, ed. and trans. D. Meehan, Dublin, 1958 and 1983 (*Scriptores latini hiberniae* 3) (edition and trans.)
- Arculf, *Eines Pilgers Reise nach dem heiligen Lande (um 670)*, trans. P. Mickley, 3 parts in 2 vols, Leipzig, 1917 (German trans.)

STUDIES AND SIGNIFICANT REFERENCES

- J. Tolan, 'Le pèlerin Arculfe et le roi Mavia: la circulation des informations à propos des «Sarrasins» aux VII^e-VIII^e siècles, de Jérusalem à Iona et Yarrow', in P. Henriot and J. Ducos (eds), *Passages. Déplacements des hommes, circulation des textes et identités dans l'Occident médiéval*, Toulouse, 2009
- T. O'Loughlin, *Adomnán on the holy places. The perception of an insular monk on the locations of the biblical drama*, London, 2007

- T. O'Loughlin, 'Adomnan and Arculf. The case of an expert witness', *Journal of Medieval Latin* 7 (2007) 127-146
- M. Gorman, 'Adomnán's 'De locis sanctis': the diagrams and the sources', *Revue bénédictine* 116 (2006) 5-41
- M. Dietz, *Wandering monks, virgins, and pilgrims. Ascetic travel in the Mediterranean world, A.D. 300-800*, University Park PA, 2005, pp. 194-200
- O. Limor, 'Pilgrims and authors. Adomnán's "De locis sanctis" and Hubeburc's "Hodoeporicon Sancti Willibaldi"', *Revue bénédictine* 114 (2004) 253-75
- K. Scarfe Beckett, *Anglo-Saxon perceptions on the Islamic world*, Cambridge, 2003, pp. 44-46, 51-53, 69-71 and *passim*
- A. Kaplony, *The H̱aram of Jerusalem, 324-1099. Temple, Friday mosque, area of spiritual power*, Stuttgart, 2002, pp. 207-12
- D. Woods, 'Arculf's luggage: the sources for Adomnán's *De locis sanctis*', *Ériu* 52 (2002) 25-52
- Tolan, *Saracens*, pp. 72-73
- T. O'Loughlin, 'Palestine in the aftermath of the Arab conquest: the earliest Latin account', in R.N. Swanson (ed.), *The Holy Land, holy lands, and Christian history*, Woodbridge, 2000, 78-89
- Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, pp. 220-23
- E. Rotter, *Abendland und Sarazenen. Das okzidentale Araberbild und seine Entstehung im Frühmittelalter*, Berlin, 1986, pp. 31-42 and *passim*
- P. Geyer, *Adamnanus II. Die handschriftliche Überlieferung der Schrift De locis sanctis*, Erlangen, 1897

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