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

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 Mavias’ (the Umayyad Caliph Mu‘awiyah, 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-Sharif. 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-Aqsā 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**


**STUDIES AND SIGNIFICANT REFERENCES**

M. Dietz, *Wandering monks, virgins, and pilgrims. Ascetic travel in the Mediterranean world, A.D. 300-800*, University Park PA, 2005, pp. 194-200
Tolan, *Saracens*, pp. 72-73
P. Geyer, *Adamnanus II. Die handschriftliche Überlieferung der Schrift De locis sanctis*, Erlangen, 1897

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