

Petri Abaelardi. Sermones. Edited by L. J. Engels and Christine Vande Veire. (Corpus Christianorum. Continuatio mediaevalis, 286). Pp. cxxv + 508. Turnhout: Brepols, 2020. €365. 978 2 503 57701 2
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In settling Heloise and her sisters in the religious life into his oratory dedicated to the Paraclete Peter Abelard wrote copiously to them and for them. These writings are spiritual, exegetical, liturgical and legislative. They include a collection of sermons which is prefaced by a short letter to Heloise in which Abelard writes that to meet her request he has provided sermons which are not fancifully rhetorical but explain Scripture in plain language that makes understanding easier. For this purpose, Abelard adds, rusticity is preferable to urbanity. The sermons have been arranged to follow the order of major feasts beginning with the Annunciation. What now survives of this collection includes some twenty-one sermons which follow the Church's year to Pentecost (i–xiii, xv–xxii). In addition there is a smaller number of miscellaneous sermons for saints' days (xxiii–xxv, xxvii, xxix, xxxi–xxxiv), a commentary on the Lord's Prayer (xiv), a sermon on the Assumption (xxvi), a sermon on the dedication of a church (xxviii), an appeal for funds for the Paraclete (xxx) and a polemic (xxxv) against the Cistercians. Much of the material – but not all – consists of meditative, edifying, erudite and scholarly glosses on relevant biblical passages. Scholastic thinker as he was, and an abbot too, Abelard studied the Bible closely: the index of biblical quotations and allusions which is given here fills nearly fifty pages. Not all the sermons were for preaching in the Paraclete. Some may have been but others were preached elsewhere and in general these are copies recycled for reading to the nuns in their refectory. The collection was largely unknown outside the convent. For the most part Abelard's authorship is assured. But the authority of the versions we have is weak, for they are plagued by interpolations and transcriptions which lack sense. The only known manuscript that preserved some of the character of a collection belonged to the Sorbonne in the sixteenth century and was lost long ago. But the *editio princeps* made from it in 1616 has saved thirty-two sermons from extinction. However, we do not know how fully or how faithfully the 1616 edition reproduced what was in the Sorbonne manuscript. In the 1616 text three sermons break off abruptly (xi, xxxii, xxxiii), three of the eight sermons for Pentecost are missing, two sermons are included which do not belong and one so-called sermon (xiv) is an exposition of the Lord's Prayer. Two manuscripts with, in total, eight items have since been found at Einsiedeln and Colmar but these do not complete the collection, and the nineteenth-century editions of Cousin and Migne are in various ways unsatisfactory. The present edition is the work of L. J. Engels, skilfully brought to completion after his death by Christine Vande Veire. It is based on all the known evidence and the editors have succeeded brilliantly in reconstructing the transmission history and in repairing the faults that the sources contain. Their main challenge was to review the text found in the versions printed in 1616 – versions, that is, not version, since the surviving printed copies themselves vary. To remove corruptions from the transmitted text as found in the *editio princeps* and in the three surviving manuscripts requires a thorough familiarity with both the witness in question and with Abelard's *usus*, that is, the network of *auctoritates*, viewpoints and turns of

phrase found in Abelard's other works. One indication of how thorough this edition is comes in the references given in the apparatus to quotations from the vulgate Bible and other source texts. Pluriformity in the presentation of excerpts was acceptable to Abelard, but every deviation of his from a common standard is shown for us here in the apparatuses. The sermons also shed considerable light on Abelard's life and work. His sermon xxxiii, for example, is a deeply moving exploration, illustrated by the figure of the wild donkey (Job xxxix.5–8) for whom the desert is home and for whom the freedom provided by solitude and abstinence is the essential prerequisite of a contemplative life devoted to 'philosophising in the hermitage', following the examples of both Diogenes and St John the Baptist. But the sermon becomes unexpectedly vitriolic as Abelard turns upon his celebrated contemporary, Norbert, the founder of the abbey of Prémontré and of the new Premonstratensian order of Augustinian canons, whom Abelard considered to be a sham miracle-worker and an unsaintly quack. Another striking example of Abelard's insistence on a pure form of monastic solitude is sermon xxxv in which Abelard again becomes polemical and turns his fire upon another new development in forms of religious life, namely the Cistercian order. It is clear from his correspondence that Abelard did not think well of Cistercian reforms and observances and that he wanted their leading spokesman, Bernard, abbot of Clairvaux, to keep well away from the convent of the Paraclete. Abelard is unrestrained in writing here against their false prophets (Matthew vii.15). One Cistercian abbot, he writes, having expelled women from the community to secure solitude, then brought in males (*mares*) to engage in abominable bestial practices. The scribe of the Colmar manuscript stops copying the diatribe at this point. Little wonder.

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The Lateran Church in Rome and the Ark of the Covenant. Housing the holy relics of Jerusalem. With an edition and translation of the Descriptio Lateranensis Ecclesiae (Bav Reg. Lat. 712). By Eivor Andersen Oftestad. (Studies in the History of Medieval Religion, XLVIII.) Pp. xvi + 260 incl. 2 tables. Woodbridge–Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2019. £75. 978 1 78327 388 1

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This dense monograph offers a reexamination of the dating and manuscript tradition of the *Description of the Lateran Church (Descriptio Lateranensis Ecclesiae)*, a well-known Latin tract dating from the decades around 1100. This text purports to describe the history and contents of a shrine hidden in the Lateran Church in Rome, which allegedly held not only precious relics of Christ's earthly ministry and passion and the remains of innumerable saints, but also the Ark of the Covenant itself, which survived the destruction of the Temple of Solomon by the Romans in 70 CE and somehow made its way to Italy. The anonymous author of the *Descriptio* was clearly interested in promoting the Lateran Church as a legitimate heir to Solomon's temple. While previous editors and commentators have situated the creation of this text on the eve of the First Crusade in the later eleventh century, Oftestad argues that it was a product of the early twelfth century that took its cues from earliest pilgrim guides from crusader Jerusalem and Fulcher of