

# Hermann of Carinthia

Hermann Dalmata, Hermannus Sclavus,  
Hermannus Secundus

DATE OF BIRTH    Uncertain; early 12<sup>th</sup> century  
PLACE OF BIRTH    Possibly in Carinthia, near St Peter im Holz  
DATE OF DEATH    Uncertain; mid 12<sup>th</sup> century  
PLACE OF DEATH    Uncertain

## BIOGRAPHY

Nothing is known about Hermann of Carinthia (who is not to be confused with Herman the German (d. 1272), the translator of works by Aristotle in Toledo), apart from the scant information that can be gleaned from his own works. He studied in Chartres or Paris, and between 1138 and 1143 he was in the Iberian peninsula, perhaps in the entourage of Michael, bishop of Tarazona (1119-51), working on Latin translations of Arabic scientific texts, especially mathematics, natural sciences and astronomy (see Robert of Ketton, *Biography*). His translations include Euclid's *Elements*, Theodosios's *Sphaerica*, Albumasar's *Introductorium maius* (1140), and Abū 'Uthmān Sahl ibn Bishr's *Fatidica (Prognostica)* (1138). He collaborated in the translation of al-Khwārazmī's astronomical tables, and he was also the author of *De essentiis* (1143), dedicated to Robert of Ketton (q.v.).

Between 1142 and 1143, commissioned by Peter the Venerable, abbot of Cluny, he collaborated in the translation of doctrinal and historical works from the Islamic tradition.

## MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

*Primary*

Hermann's prologues to his works and translations are our principal sources of information about his life and activity. As for the production of Latin works on Islam, the main information is in the *incipit* (both the *Liber de generatione Mahumet* and the *Liber de doctrina Mahumet* lack a prologue) and in references made by Peter of Cluny, *Liber contra sectam Sarracenorum*, p. 61 (ed. Gleib, 1985) in direct reference to the titles translated by Hermann 'librum Abdiae Iudaei nec Genealogiam Mahumeti (...)'; *Summa totius haeresis Sarracenorum*, p. 18 (ed. Gleib, 1985), in reference to the works about the doctrine and history of the Arabs, without express mention of him.

*Secondary*

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- R. Gleiberg, *Petrus Venerabilis. Schriften zum Islam (Corpus Islamo-Christianum 1)*, Altenberge, 1985
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#### WORKS ON CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS

*Liber de generatione Mahumet, Liber  
de generatione et nutritura eius,  
Liber generationis Mahumet nuncii Dei,  
'On the birth of Muḥammad'*

DATE 1142-43 (Latin translation)

ORIGINAL LANGUAGE Arabic

#### DESCRIPTION

The *Liber de generatione Mahumet* is a Latin translation of the 13<sup>th</sup>-century *Kitāb al-anwār* ('Lights') by Abū l-Ḥasan al-Bakrī. It first addresses the theme of how the mystical light (*nūr*, *lumen*), which is a sign of true prophethood, was transmitted from Adam to Muḥammad. When the line reaches the Prophet Muḥammad, the account turns to its main theme, giving extensive details of his birth (*de natiuitate Mahumet*), with the natural *prodigia* (wonders) that occur when he is born, and the visit of the three angels who wash his heart in snow. This is given in the words of the daughter of Ḥalīma, Muḥammad's wet-nurse. The story ends with Ḥalīma returning the young Muḥammad to Mecca, where again portents of his future destiny are witnessed.

Ḥalīma's first person narration is reminiscent of the style of Islamic Hadith, reproducing conversations with the characters involved in the incidents, which are sometimes not mentioned in other sources about the life of the Prophet.

#### SIGNIFICANCE

The *Liber de generatione Mahumet* was one of the translations commissioned by Peter of Cluny for his anthology of texts on Islam. In this collection, the manuscript tradition refers to the trilogy of texts:

*Chronica mendosa*, *Liber de generatione Mahumet* and *Liber de doctrina Mahumet* as *Fabulae Sarracenorum*. Peter of Cluny used them in the *Summa totius haeresis Sarracenorum* and in the *Liber contra sectam Sarracenorum*, and the information given in the *Liber de generatione Mahumet* about the prophetic significance of Muḥammad proved useful in the on-going tradition of anti-Islamic polemic, although the theme of divine light marking out the prophets does not appear often in Latin works. As regards the theme of the Prophet's infancy, the episode of the angels purifying Muḥammad's heart is especially widespread, although this tradition does not always depend on the account that the Latin version of the *Liber de generatione Mahumet* offers (it is not impossible that Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada [q.v.], in his *Historia Arabum*, knows the original Arabic version).

The work's importance in later tradition is less significant than other works of the collection compiled by Peter of Cluny, particularly compared with the Latin translation of the Qur'an by Robert of Ketton, but it is used in Alfonso de Espina's  *Fortalitium fidei contra Iudaeos, Sarracenos et alios christianae fidei inimicos* IV, 'De bello Sarracenorum' (1458-59); in Nicolas of Cusa's *Cribratario Alcorani* (1462) Dionysius the Carthusian's *Contra Perfidiam Mahometi* (c. 1462), and in the anonymous 16<sup>th</sup>-century treatise, *Theophrastus redivivus*. It also circulated in Bibliander's edition, and in the critical notes written by Ludovico Marracci for his commentary on the Qur'an (*Prodromus ad refutationem Alcorani* (Padua, 1691, 1698).

#### MANUSCRIPTS

- MS Paris, Bibliothèque de l' Arsenal – Lat. 1162, fols 11r-18r (12<sup>th</sup> century)
- MS Paris, BNP – Lat. 3390, fols 12r-20r (13<sup>th</sup> century)
- MS Paris, BNP – Lat. 3668, fols 12v-20r (13<sup>th</sup> century)
- MS Oxford, Corpus Christi College – 184, fols 19-34 (13<sup>th</sup> century)
- MS Paris, BNP – Lat. 3391, fols 7v-12r (13<sup>th</sup> century)
- MS Oxford, Bodleian Library – Selden supra 31, fols 16r-23v (later 13<sup>th</sup> century)
- MS Paris, BNP – Lat. 6064, fols 6r-10r (13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> century)
- MS Oxford, Merton College – 313, fols 11v-20v (14<sup>th</sup> century)
- MS Troyes, Bibliothèque Municipale – 1235, fols 13v-24r (14<sup>th</sup> century)
- MS Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana – lat. 4072, fols (wrongly ordered) 7v – 6v-r – 8r-v – 9r-v – 10r-v – 11r-v – 12r-v – 13r-v – 16r-v (14<sup>th</sup> century)
- MS Paris, BNP – Lat. 14503, fols 254v-259v (14<sup>th</sup> century)

- MS Paris, BNP – Lat. 3392, fols 15r-22r (14<sup>th</sup> century)  
 MS Paris, BNP – Lat. 3393, fols 11v-19r (14<sup>th</sup> century)  
 MS Vat – lat. 4071, fols 10r-16v (1462)  
 MS Kues, Hospitalsbibliothek – Cod. Cus. 108, fols 19v-25r  
 (15<sup>th</sup> century)  
 MS Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana – C-201, fols 13r-21v (15<sup>th</sup> century)  
 MS Paris, BNP – Lat. 6225, fols 257r-267r (15<sup>th</sup> century)  
 MS Cambridge, Corpus Christi College – 335, fols 57r-65r (15<sup>th</sup>  
 century)  
 MS Paris, BNP – Lat. 3670, fols 208v-222r (1515)  
 MS Turin, Biblioteca Nazionale – H. II. 33 (1213) (formerly CLVI  
 e. IV 17), fols 215r-223r (1525)  
 MS St Petersburg – Lat. Q. I. 345, fols 16v-27v (end of 15<sup>th</sup> century-  
 beginning of 16<sup>th</sup> century)  
 MS Dresden, Sächsische Landesbibliothek – A. 12ob, fols 13v-24r  
 (16<sup>th</sup> century)  
 MS Mantua, Biblioteca Communale – 65 A.III.I, fols 31r-53v  
 (16<sup>th</sup> century)

## EDITIONS &amp; TRANSLATIONS

The only edition of the *Liber de generatione Mahumet* is by Theodore Bibliander, *Machumetis Saracenorum principis eiusque successorum vitae ac doctrina, ipseque Alcoran... Haec omnia in unum volumen redactae sunt opera et studio Theodori Bibliandri*, [Basel], 1543, i, 201-12, (repr. [Basel], 1550, Zurich, 1556).

## STUDIES

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- M.-T. d'Alverny, 'Deux traductions latines du Coran au moyen âge', *Archives d'Histoire Doctrinale et Littéraire du Moyen Age* 22-23 (1947-48) 69-131

*Liber de doctrina Mahumet, Gesta quendam  
sive disputatio ridiculosa et questionum  
stultarum solutiones frivole cum quodam Abdia  
iudeo, Diálogo de Abdías, 'On the doctrine of  
Muḥammad'*

DATE The Arabic version was probably written in the 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> century, the Latin translation by Hermann of Carinthia between 1142 and 1143.

ORIGINAL LANGUAGE Arabic

DESCRIPTION

The *Liber de doctrina Mahumet*, translated by Hermann of Carinthia, was classified by Moritz Steinschneider as an apocryphal treatise of Judeo-Muslim controversy between the Jew, 'Abdallah ben Salam (sc. Abū l-Ḥārith 'Abdallāh ibn Salām, d. 663-64) and the Prophet Muḥammad. It addresses the working of a popular theme, in which four Jews appear who ask Muḥammad different questions and in his

answers he explains aspects of his doctrine. The work begins with the announcement to Muḥammad by the archangel Gabriel of the arrival of some scholars eager to know the new doctrine that the Prophet is preaching. The spokesman of the group of Jewish scholars is Abdias (ʿAbdallāh ibn Salām), who poses a series of questions to Muḥammad that vary in character from doctrinal questions to cosmographical ideas. The numerical system of symbols in which the arguments are articulated is especially interesting. At the end of the work, Abdias, convinced by the words and arguments, recognizes Muḥammad's mission and converts to Islam.

#### SIGNIFICANCE

The *Liber de doctrina Mahumet* belongs to a genre of polemic between religions which was prolific throughout the Middle Ages in the Muslim world, especially in the Iberian peninsula, as well as in Jewish and Christian circles. Translations into Persian, Urdu, Tamil, Javanese, Malay and Buginese show that it came to be regarded as a catechism of Islamic belief.

Hermann's Latin translation of the *Doctrina Mahumet* was part of the collection of translations commissioned by abbot Peter of Cluny (q.v.). Its purpose was essentially to provide fodder for Latin Christians who sought to recognize and refute the theological foundations of Islam: in this sense the commentary by the translator that is found in the explicit, *Hic multa mendacia sunt et multa ridiculosa* ('Here are many lies and ridiculous things'), takes on special significance.

The original Arabic version of the *Liber de doctrina Mahumet* presents Islam as superior to Judaism, as is shown by Abdias' conversion. Probably the Latin version is of concern to Christianity as a basis for the appropriate refutation of both Islam and Judaism.

As soon as it was translated into Latin, Peter of Cluny used the *Liber de doctrina Mahumet* and the other treatises from the *Corpus Islamochristianum* to write his treatises *Liber contra sectam Sarracenorū* and the *Summa totius haeresis Sarracenorū*. In both works by the abbot of Cluny there is evidence of the work's influence. For example, in Hermann's work there is a caricature of the Prophet inspired by the poems of Horace, also found in Peter's *Summa*, 10 (ed. R. Gleib, 1985).

Both this work and the other titles from the *Collectio* compiled by Peter were also used in later tradition. Its influence can be identified in Alfonso de Espina, *Fortaliturū fidei contra Iudaeos, Sarracenos et*

*alios christianae fidei inimicos* IV, 'De bello Sarracenorum' (1458-59); Nicolas of Cusa, *Cribratario Alcorani* (1462); Dionysius the Carthusian, *Contra perfidiam Mahometi* (c. 1462); and in the *Theophrastus redivivus* by the anonymous freethinker of the 16<sup>th</sup> century (ed. G. Canziani and G. Paganini, Florence, 1983), among many others. It was also circulated in Bibliander's edition, and in the critical notes made by Ludovico Marraci for his commentaries on the Qur'an (*Prodromus ad refutationem Alcorani*, Padua, 1691, 1698).

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- MS Paris, BNF – Lat. 3391, fols 12r-17r (13<sup>th</sup> century)
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- MS Oxford, Merton College – 313, fols 20v-28v (14<sup>th</sup> century)
- MS Troyes, Bibliothèque Municipale – 1235, fols 24r-34r (14<sup>th</sup> century)
- MS Vat – Lat. 4072, fols 16v-24r (14<sup>th</sup> century)
- MS Paris, BNF – Lat. 14503, fols 259v-264r (14<sup>th</sup> century)
- MS Paris, BNF – Lat. 3392, fols 22r-27v (14<sup>th</sup> century)
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- MS Vat – lat. 4071, fols 16v-22v (1462)
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- MS Paris, BNF – Lat. 3670, fols 222r-234v (1515)
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- MS Dresden, Sächsische Landesbibliothek – A. 120b, fols 24v-35r (16<sup>th</sup> century)

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(16<sup>th</sup> century)  
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(16<sup>th</sup> century)  
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## EDITIONS &amp; TRANSLATIONS

For the numerous eastern MSS in Arabic, Persian and Turkish which include this work and translations of it, see Steinschneider, *Polemische und apologetische Literatur*, pp. 110-14.

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'*Abdallāh ibn Salām Kitāb Masāi – The 1404 questions put to Muhammad by 'Abdallāh ibn Salām the Jew, before his conversion to Islam, with the Prophet's answers to them*, Cairo, 1867  
M. Margoliouth, 'The 1404 questions put by Abadalla Ben Salaam to Mohammed', in *A pilgrimage to the land of my fathers*, 2 vols, London, 1850, ii, pp. 1-40 (227 questions)  
N. Davis, *The errors of Mohammedanism exposed, or A dialogue between the Arabian Prophet and a Jew, translated from the Arabic*, Malta, 1847  
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## STUDIES

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