

One Astralabe or two ?

The mystery of Abelard's son.

by

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To M. & Mme
and the Association Culturelle Pierre
Abelard, with the author's thanks.

Brenda M Cook
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Notice

This paper of approximately 6,000 words is a summary of work in progress (1999). The author has in preparation a full-length work which expands all the points alluded to here and contains full documentation, sources, &c.

The author would welcome any comments, criticisms and especially any references to unpublished material that may shed further light on the events described.

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It would seem that every aspect of the life of Peter Abelard, except one, has been minutely examined by a wide range of distinguished scholars.¹ This area of neglect is his relationship with his son, Astralabe, to whom Heloise gave birth in about 1118 while in exile in Brittany. Not only is this episode usually relegated to a footnote in Abelard's career, but the poem of advice which Abelard purportedly wrote for his son, the *Carmen ad Astralabium*, has received almost no scholarly attention. A critical edition of the text was produced in the Netherlands in 1987,² but there has been no serious examination of the content. The generally held belief is that not every line is from the pen of Master Peter, but no one has yet published an attempt to determine which lines may be regarded as authentic and which spurious.³ The only available translation of it in a modern European language is in Italian.⁴

¹ Including the most recent biography: Clanchy, Michael. *Abelard: a medieval life*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1997.

² *Peter Abelard: Carmen ad Astralabium, a critical edition*; proefschrift ter verkrijging van het doctoraat in de Letteren aan de Rijksuniversiteit te Groningen ... door Josepha Marie Annaïs Rubingh-Bosscher. Groningen, 1987.

³ Except that Peter Dronke has expressed the opinion that the lines 375-384 relating to Heloise in rescensions B & C are authentic.

see Dronke, Peter: *Abelard and Heloise in medieval testimonies*. Glasgow: University of Glasgow Press, 1976. (W.P. Ker lecture, no. 26.) Page 15;

and Stephen Jaeger comments on Abelard's educational standpoint as expressed in the *Carmen*.

see Jaeger, C. Stephen: *The envy of angels: cathedral schools and social ideals in medieval Europe, 950-1200*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994. Pages 229-230.

⁴ Ballanti, Graziella: *Pietro Abelardo: Insegnamenti al figlio*. Roma, 1984.

