

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The author would welcome any comments, criticisms and especially any references to unpublished material that may shed further light on the events described.

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The mystery of Abelard's son.

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.

The popular opinion seems to be that Astralabe's parents had little affection for him.

Yet without the advent of Astralabe, Abelard's calamities might have followed a different course and certainly Heloise's career would have been very different. As a catalyst, Astralabe can hardly be underestimated. Additionally, on the two occasions where Abelard is recorded as making reference to his son, he does so in terms of unmistakable affection. When he is obliged to return to Paris leaving the boy in his sister's care, he calls him his *parvulus*, his "poor little chap";⁵ and in the opening lines of the *Carmen*, he invokes the boy as *Astralabi fili, vite dulcedo paterne*, "Astralabe, my son, the delight of your father's life."⁶ These words from the pen of Abelard, whether conventional epithets or not, run counter to the claim that as a parent he took no interest in or had no concern for his son.

The problem is not that there is insufficient evidence on which to construct a biography of Astralabe, but that some of the core evidence is contradictory. The evidence for the life of a man - or men - called Astralabe falls naturally into three groups which can be numbered for convenience as 1a, 1b and 2.

The fundamental question must be:

Do all these references relate to the same man, or are there two men with the same name ?

⁵ Abélard: *Historia calamitatum*; critical text with an introduction by J. Monfrin. Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1959. Line 559.

⁶ *Peter Abelard. Carmen ad Astralabium, a critical edition* (1987) Line 1.

1A. References to the Astralabe, who is indisputably the son of Heloise and Abelard.

1. The references to Astralabe's conception, birth and fostering in Abelard's autobiographical *Letter of Consolation to a Friend* more generally known as the *Historia calamitatum: The History of [Abelard's] calamities*.⁷
2. Abelard's poem entitled *Carmen ad Astralabium*.⁸
3. A letter after Abelard's death from Heloise to Peter the Venerable, Abbot of Cluny.⁹
4. Peter the Venerable's reply.¹⁰
5. The Commemoration of Astralabe's death in the *Necrology* of the Paraclete.¹¹

1B. References to an Astralabe who is almost certainly the son of Heloise and Abelard

1. The charter of the Cistercian monastery of Buzé near Nantes contains a reference to Canon Astralabe of Nantes, a document currently dated to 1153-1157.¹²

⁷ Monfrin, (1959).

⁸ *Carmen ad Astralabium*. (1987).

⁹ *The letters of Peter the Venerable*; edited by Giles Constable. Harvard, 1967. No. 167.

¹⁰ Constable (1967) No. 168.

¹¹ "Abbaye du Paraclet." *Obituaires de la province de Sens*. T. IV: (Diocèses de Meaux et de Troyes) edited by Boutillier du Retail and Piétresson de Saint-Aubin under the direction and with a preface by Auguste Longnon. Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1923. Page 425.

¹² "Charte mentionnant Astralabe, fils d'Abailard. (1153-1157)." *Bulletin de la Société des Bibliophiles Breton*. Vol. 4., 1880-81. Pages 50-51.

2. References to an Astralabe, who claims to be the son of Abelard and Heloise.

1. An Abbot Astralabe is named in a charter of the Abbey of Hauterive which is dated by the most recent editor to c.1162.¹³
2. An Astralabe is named as the fourth abbot of the Cistercian Abbey of Hauterive, Switzerland in a list dating from 1302.¹⁴
3. The commemoration of the death of Astralabe, fourth abbot of Hauterive, in a necrology dated to 1680.
4. The commemoration of the death of Astralabe, fourth abbot of Hauterive in a necrology dated to 1774 together with his inclusion in the list of the Founding Fathers of the abbey in 1138 and the date of his election as abbot as 1162.¹⁵

Additionally, there is a tradition at the Abbey of Hauterive concerning Abbot Astralabe which was first recorded in 1846.¹⁶

The name "Astralabe" for a man is quite extraordinary, unknown at any date outside these groups of references. Properly speaking it is not a Christian name at all but the name of an astronomical measuring instrument which was widely used in the twelfth century. The greatest exponent of the astrolabe¹⁷, the Englishman Adelard of Bath, was in Leon¹⁸ when Abelard

¹³ *Liber donationum Altaeripae: cartulaire de l'abbaye cistercienne d'Hauterive (XIIe-XIIIe siècles)*; critical edition by Ernst Tremp. Lausanne, 1984. (Mémoires et documents publiés par la Société d'Histoire de la Suisse Romande. 3rd series, vol. 15) Page 139.

¹⁴ "Liste des Abbés de Hauterive, depuis la fondation de ce couvent jusqu'à l'année 1302." *Mémorial de Fribourg, recueil périodique*. Vol. 2, 1855, Pages 14-15.

¹⁵ *Le necrologe de l'abbaye cistercienne d'Hauterive*; edited by Bernard de Vevey. Berne, 1957. [Photocopied typescript] Leaf 80.

¹⁶ Pittet, Romain: *L'abbaye d'Hauterive au moyen age*. Fribourg: Fragnière Frères, 1934. Page 96.

¹⁷ In the literature the name of the man can be spelled either "Astralabius" or "Astrolabius". In the interest of clarity, I have use the spelling *Astralabe* for the man and *Astrolabe* for the astronomical instrument.

visited that city in about 1112 between the time he visited Brittany to escort his mother to a nunnery and his return to Paris where he met and seduced Heloise, his colleague's niece.

Speculation about the significance of the name Astralabe has been inconclusive. The usual meaning offered, that it means a *Shadow on the Sun* and refers to Abelard's shame at his son's birth, seems to be an interpretation typical of the prudery of the nineteenth century.¹⁹ A more recent suggestion has been that the name is part of an anagram revealing his hidden parentage: the letters of ASTRALABIUS PUER DEI can be arranged to read PETRUS ABAELARDUS II.²⁰ Abelard specifically says that Heloise named their son.²¹ Since he was illegitimate at the time of his birth it was the privilege of his mother, rather than of his father, to name him. It is important to remember that Astralabe was, of course, rendered retrospectively legitimate by his parents' marriage a few months after his birth.²² It seems most unlikely that in twelfth century Christian Europe, two sets of parents would make the same bizarre and unorthodox choice.

The first requirement in any attempt to create a coherent biography of Abelard's son is to plot such of the above evidence as has been reliably dated into a single chronological sequence and to see what pattern, if any, emerges.

¹⁸ Cochrane, Louise *Adelard of Bath: the first English scientist*. London: British Museum Press, 1994. Page 23.

¹⁹ Victor Cousin *Fragments philosophique*. Brussels, 1841. (Euvres complète, 2) Page 168

²⁰ W. G. East. "Abelard's anagram." *Notes & queries*. Sept. 1995. Page 269.

²¹ Monfrin. (1959) Line 399.

²² Monfrin (1959) Line 420.

Chronological Table combining all the dated references to men named "Astralabe"

No.	Date	Event	Source	Age of Abelard's son
1A.1	1118	Birth of Astralabe in Brittany, he is fostered with Abelard's sister.	<i>Historia calamitatum</i> , written c. 1132.	Under 1 year old.
2.4	1137/8	Foundation of the Cistercian Monastery of Hauterive, Astralabe listed among the "Founding Fathers".	Copy of the <i>Necrology</i> of Hauterive compiled in 1774.	20
1A.3	1143/4	Heloise asks Peter the Venerable to find a Prebend for "our Astralabe and yours";	Letter of Heloise to Peter the Venerable, written shortly after Abelard's death	26
1A.4		Peter the Venerable replies cautiously.	Letter of Peter the Venerable to Heloise, in reply to the above.	
1B	1153-7	Reference to the presumably late Canon Astralabe of Nantes.	A charter of the Cistercian Abbey of Buzé, Brittany, drawn up during the reign of Abbot Adam..	35-39
2.4	1162	Election of Abbot Astralabe of Hauterive.	Copy of the <i>Necrology</i> of Hauterive compiled in 1774.	44
2.3 2.4	5 August	Commemoration of the death of Astralabe, 4th Abbot of Hauterive.	Copy of the <i>Necrology</i> of Hauterive compiled in 1680 and 1774.	
1A.5	30/31 October	Commemoration of the death of Peter Astralabe, "son of our Master Peter".	<i>Necrology</i> of the Paraclete.	

Two things immediately become obvious from this chronological table. The first is that the "two" Astralabes are exact contemporaries, and it becomes very difficult indeed to believe that they are *not* the same man. The second is that as a career structure for a twelfth century cleric this chronology is absolutely untenable. Whereas it was possible for a canon to become a monk, it was not possible for a professed monk to be appointed to any cathedral position under the rank of a bishop. Had Astralabe become a Cistercian monk in 1137, it would have been out of the question for his mother to have been seeking a prebendial appointment for him in 1144.

It is also something of a false trail to discover that circumstantial evidence does point to the possibility of Astralabe having become a Cistercian in his youth. In 1135, when Astralabe was about seventeen, Bernard of Clairvaux visited Nantes to inaugurate the new Cistercian monastery at Buzé which was in the process of being founded by Duke Conan III of Brittany and his mother, Ermengarde of Anjou. At the same ceremony as that in which the new monastery was formally inaugurated, Saint Bernard exorcised a Breton noblewoman who had been possessed of the devil for seven years.²³ Some scholars identify this woman with Mahaude of England, the wife of Conan III,²⁴ but whoever she was, such a dramatic event must have had a powerful effect on the congregation among whom it is reasonable to place the young Astralabe. At least one canon of Nantes, a man at that time called Cinardus of Escoblac, renounced his prebend, followed Bernard back to Clairvaux, changed his name to

²³ *Vita S. Bernardi*. Liber II, Caput VI.

²⁴ Bourdeaut, A: "Ermengarde, Comtesse de Bretagne: entre Robert d'Arbrissel et Saint Bernard: fondation de l'abbaye de Buzay." *Bulletin de la Société Archéologique et Historique de Nantes*. 1935. Vol. 75. Page 192.

'Bernard' out of admiration for his patron and remained a monk there for thirteen years.²⁵

In the *Carmen ad Astralabium*, which Abelard may well have written at about this time (the late 1130s), there are at least three passages which can be identified as warning the young man against the perils of joining the Cistercian order. The first passage (293-307) pours scorn on a religious order who are identified by clothes the colour of a sheep-skin; the second (357-366) warns Astralabe soberly about the difficulties of deciding between one religious direction and another; while in the third (655-664), using the poignant image of Icarus who defied his father Daedalus and came to grief, Abelard urges Astralabe not to take vows that he will find impossible to keep. It would seem that this advice was heeded, and it was not until he was faced with his own mid-life crisis long after his father's death, that Astralabe seriously turned to the Cistercian order. But it also suggests that during his father's lifetime, Astralabe was not immune to the attractiveness of Bernard of Clairvaux and his preaching.

If the evidence for Astralabe of Hauterive is examined carefully, it becomes plain that while the evidence for Abbot Astralabe himself is sound and relies on three separate sources: (1) an undated charter, (2) the 1302 list of Abbots, and (3) the entry in the 1680 Necrology, yet the evidence for Astralabe *as one of the twelve original monks* of the foundation of 1138 rests on a document dated only to 1774. It is therefore possible to forward the hypothesis that while Abbot Astralabe is genuine and the date of his election (1162) correct, his inclusion in the list of the "Founding Fathers" is an error. The 1774 copy of the necrology of Hauterive was compiled under

²⁵ Le Grand, Albert: *Les vies des saintes de la Bretagne armorique* ...Quimper: J. Salaun, 1891. [First published c. 1640]. Page 61-2.

the auspices of Abbot Bernard-Emmanuel von Lenzbourg who had the reputation of being a scholar of great integrity.²⁶ It is clear, therefore, that the additional material included in the 1774 copy of the necrology must have been copied from some document or documents which are now lost. Is it possible to speculate as to what the document might be in which Abbot Bernard-Emmanuel found the list of "Founding Fathers" which he had transcribed under the entry for January 2nd?

When in about 1158 the monks of Hauterive moved from their temporary accommodation at St Loup to the monastic church which is still the house of prayer for the present abbey, they translated their founder's body to rest beside the high altar in the new church. Lord William of Glâne had died on 11 February 1142 and Gerald of Cherlieu, the first abbot seems to have resigned on 1 January 1157/8, probably dying within the next couple of years. The tomb of William of Glâne was moved in 1825 but in 1946 was restored to its original position. At the time of the second transfer, thirteen skeletons were identified as having occupied that tomb.²⁷ This is an interesting number since it not only corresponds to the traditional number of choir monks required for the foundation of a new Cistercian monastery, it also corresponds to the number of choir-monks listed under 2 January in the 1774 necrology plus one extra. It would have been wholly in accordance with mediaeval monastic practice for the remains of the original pioneers of Hauterive to have been buried in the same tomb as their founder, awaiting the resurrection of the dead as a select company. The 1302 list of abbots states clearly that Abbot Gerald's bones were *posita ... cum ossibus fundatoris Alteripe seorsum in quodam calato posito in tumba presbiterii*.²⁸

²⁶ Vevey (1957) Leaf 21

²⁷ Vevey (1957) Leaf 6.

²⁸ "Liste des Abbés de Hauterive, (1855) Pages 14-15.

In other words, Abbot Gerald had his own tomb in the chancel of the new Abbey Church and was not buried with William of Glâne.

It is therefore plausible that the list of Founding Fathers transcribed in 1774 on the orders of Abbot Bernard-Emmanuel von Lenzbourg under 2 January was originally a *Livre de Sépultures*, a list of the monks who had been buried in close proximity to the Founder. This place of honour may originally have been reserved for the Founding Fathers alone, but by the time Astralabe came to die (any time between c.1164 and c.1169), he may well have been deemed worthy of being included in this auspicious company. If this hypothesis is correct, then the list must originally have been headed something like *Our Founding Fathers who are buried alongside Lord William of Glâne*. Such a title might well have been correct when the list was begun, but Astralabe's name could easily have been added to it when he died, not to include him in the contingent from Cherlieu as such, but simply to indicate his resting place. Possibly in its original form the list would have carried some phrase to indicate this, the significance of which would have been ignored by a later copyist.²⁹

Additionally, if this hypothesis is correct, then the list of monks transcribed under 2 January must be in the chronological order of the death of each monk. This might be of assistance in fixing the comparative chronology of some of the undated early charters. In particular, it might suggest that the enigmatic figure of Abbot William whose term of office is

²⁹ It might be argued that in this case there should have been 14 skeletons found in the tomb of William of Glâne, not thirteen. However with a multiple burial such as this, moved at least once (in 1825) without proper archaeological supervision, it would be quite easy for the bones to have become confused and one skull to have become fragmented beyond recognition. It is also quite possible that these bones represent a sequence of burials over a 700 year period, and not a specific group relating to the first decades on the monastery's life. This item of information is included only as a interesting side issue: it is not regarded as hard evidence for the hypothesis advanced above.

calculated to have been between that of Abbot Richard (died just before 3 December 1158) and Abbot Pons (died just before 11 November 1162).³⁰ Abbot William [I] is omitted from the 1302 list of abbots. A monk called William is listed after Pons but before Astralabe. If this is indeed Abbot William I, it would suggest that he was elected in 1158, but resigned shortly after, dying during Astralabe's time in office. Possibly there was some irregularity over his election and it was considered invalid by those who compiled the 1302 list, or more likely his not having died in harness confused the compilers. Having said this, it is clear from the *Liber Donationum* that it was during William's term of office that the monks took possession of their new monastic church.³¹

If we postulate that some scribal accident or misunderstanding had led to Astralabe's inclusion into Abbot von Lenzbourg's list of the Founding Fathers, then the rest of the chronology of Astralabe's life slips easily into place. It may be assumed that his initial career was that of a secular priest, having followed family tradition by becoming a Canon of Nantes Cathedral as his uncle had been before him. Indeed it would seem likely that sometime after 1144 when his uncle Canon Porcar became a monk at Buzé,³² Astralabe 'inherited' the prebend. Since his uncle had resigned in order to become a Cistercian monk, there is nothing inherently unlikely in Astralabe doing the same thing in due course, although it needs to be noted that even Canon Porcar seems to have refrained from taking this step during *Abelard's* lifetime. That in spite of the personal enmity between Peter Abelard and the

³⁰ These dates have been reached by collating the information from different parts of the necrology. While it is the date of the commemoration of the death that is recorded rather than the date of the death itself, these men were monks at this monastery and presumably died on the premises. The date of the commemoration is unlikely to have been more than two days after the date of the death and may well be the same day.

³¹ *Liber donationum Altaeripae*. (1984) No. 317, page 326.

³² "Charte mentionnant Astralabe" (1880-81) Page 50-51.

saintly abbot of Clervaux, there was powerful Cistercian influence in Abelard's own family is quite clear. It is also clear that this influence does not manifest itself until after Abelard's death in 1142. Both the customal³³ of the Paraclete, where Heloise was Abbess, and its liturgy³⁴, show strong Cistercian influence dating from the 1140s. What does require some explanation is why Astralabe of Nantes should have become a Cistercian monk in Burgundy.

The clue to the answer lies in the oral tradition concerning Astralabe of Hauterive which was recorded in 1846 by the then Swiss Minister of Culture. Dr Sinner visited the abbey only a short while before the outbreak of the Sonderbund War. At the conclusion of this, the few Swiss monasteries which had survived the Reformation and the French Revolution (including Hauterive) were sequestered to the state. Dr Sinner writes:

“... le révérendissime Abbé mitré Dom Dosson, raconte que saint Bernard ... déroba le jeune enfant aux persécutions des ennemis de son père, le fit entrer dans les ordres, le plaça à Cherlieu, et, de là, le fit passer en Suisse, où personne ne devait découvrir le secret de sa naissance.”³⁵

As it stands this statement is clearly absurd. Apart from the monks of St Gildas, most of Abelard's enemies were the Cistercians themselves and Abbot Bernard in particular. In addition, the Cistercian Order did not take either pupils or oblates³⁶ and Cherlieu had only become a Cistercian

³³ *The Paraclete statutes: notes towards a commentary on the Paraclete Institutiones nostrae (Troyes, Bibliothèque Municipale MS 802, ff. 89r-90v)*; introduction, edition, commentary by Chrysogonus Waddell. [Louisville], Kentucky: Gethsemani Abbey, 1987. (Cistercian liturgy series, no. 20) Page 131.

³⁴ WADDELL, Chrysostom. “Peter Abelard as a creator of liturgical texts.” *Petrus Abaelardus (1079-1142): Person, Werk und Wirkung*; edited by Rudolf Thomas [et al]. Trier: Paulinus-Verlag, 1980. (Trierer Theologische Studien, vol. 38) Page 270

³⁵ Quoted in Pittet. (1934). Page 96

³⁶ Lawrence, C.H. *Medieval monasticism: forms of religious life in Western Europe in the Middle Ages*. London: Longmans, 1984. Page 152.

monastery in 1130³⁷ by which time Astralabe was already 12 years of age. We know from the Buzé charter that Astralabe was a Canon of Nantes Cathedral during the late 1150s, but the future Saint Bernard of Clairvaux had died in 1153.³⁸ Finally, if Astralabe wanted to hide his identity why did he not change his name ?

However, if the impossibilities, which may well be later embroideries on the original version of the tradition, are stripped out, we are left with a statement something like this which could very easily apply to the adult Astralabe of the 1150s:

Bernard of Clairvaux rescued Astralabe from his enemies, made a monk of him, and sent him to Cherlieu from where he was sent to Switzerland [ie to Hauterive].

In the late 1150s Brittany was in the grip of a succession crisis which erupted into a civil war that particularly affected Nantes.³⁹ In such a situation, an active supporter of the losing side, disillusioned with the new regime, might well take refuge in a monastery.

The events of the Breton succession crisis may be summarised as follows: On his death-bed in September 1148, Duke Conan III the Fat of Brittany had disinherited Hoël, Count of Nantes who up till that moment had been regarded as Conan's son, and named his son-in-law, Count Eudo of Porhoët, the husband of Conan's daughter Berthe as his new heir.⁴⁰ For some eight years after this, there was a stand-off between Hoël and Eudo,

³⁷ *Gallia Christiana*, vol. 15, col. 254.

³⁸ "La chronique de Saint Florent de Saumur". Morice. *Preuves*. (1742) Vol. 1, column 127.

³⁹ La Borderie, Arthur le Moyne de. *Histoire de Bretagne*. Rennes: Plihon & Hervé; Paris: Picard, 1899. Vol. 3. Pages 271-2

⁴⁰ "Chronicon Britannicum", entry for MCXLVIII [1148]. Morice. *Preuves*. (1742) Volume 1, column 103.

with Hoël calling himself Duke of Brittany while doing little about it. Then in 1156, the Duchess Berthe's eldest son, also called Conan, and the child of her first husband, Alan II the Black, Earl of Richmond (in Yorkshire, England) and Count of Penthièvre (in north Brittany), reached the age of 14 and challenged the power of his step-father. Count Eudo, an experienced soldier, inflicted decisive defeats on both Conan le Petit and on his uncle, Count Hoël. Conan fled to his paternal lands in England and very soon was in a position to invoke the help of Henry II Plantagenet who had recently become king there. With Henry's help, Conan successfully re-invaded Brittany, recovering all the lands held by his step-father who was exiled, and was proclaimed Duke of Brittany as Conan IV.⁴¹

However, in Nantes itself, the position was rather different. Hoël had succeeded in alienating his Nantaise subjects and in a revolt staged in the winter of 1156/7 he was expelled. Henry Plantagenet's younger brother, known as Geoffrey the Angevin, was invited by the Nantaise to become the Count of Nantes in Hoël's place.⁴² Clearly this situation pleased Henry Plantagenet for he was now, either in his own right or in the right of his wife, lord of all the western seaboard of Francophone Europe with the exception of Brittany; and this meant that his younger brother now ruled the only part of the Breton peninsula not under the power of his vassal, the Earl of Richmond who was also Duke of Brittany.

This satisfactory situation did not last. In the summer of 1158, while Henry was apparently preoccupied fighting the Welsh and shortly after Conan le Petit had returned to his capital at Rennes, Geoffrey the Angevin died suddenly and unexpectedly at the age of 26. Immediately Conan

⁴¹ La Borderie, Arthur le Moyne de *Histoire de Bretagne*. (1899) Vol. 3. Pages 271-2.

⁴² "Chronicon Britannicum", entry for MCLVI [1156]. Morice. *Preuves*. (1742) Volume 1, column 103.

claimed Nantes and took possession of the city.⁴³ Although there is little doubt that Conan was legally in the right, his high-handed behaviour incensed Henry who reorganised his Welsh campaign, confiscated the Earldom of Richmond and arrived in Normandy within a matter of a few brief weeks. He then menaced Conan in two ways: he ordered a muster of Norman troops on the Breton border for the end of September and meanwhile set out to woo the king of France and conclude marriage negotiations between his own infant son and Louis VII's infant daughter.⁴⁴ The position of Brittany was a grey area. Was Brittany the vassal of the King of France or of the Duke of Normandy? Henry and Louis reached an accord whereby Henry was appointed Seneschal of France and commissioned by Louis to resolve the Breton crisis.⁴⁵

Conan, isolated and intimidated, panicked. He attended the muster at Avranches on Michaelmas Day 1158, surrendered Nantes to Henry II Plantagenet as the lawful heir of Geoffrey the Angevin, and paid homage for the rest of Brittany. Henry had already named his newly-born son "Geoffrey" after his dead brother. It was this child who was to be betrothed at a very tender age to Conan's daughter, Constance, and to become Duke of Brittany in 1181. Henry immediately followed up the psychological advantage of Conan's capitulation by occupying both Rennes and Nantes and then going on into neighbouring Poitou and for good measure trouncing the Viscount of Thouars who might possibly have come to Conan's aid.⁴⁶

⁴³ *The chronicles of the reigns of Stephen, Henry II and Richard I, vol. 1 containing the first four books of the Historia rerum anglicarum of William of Newburgh*; edited by Richard Howlett. London: Longmans, 1884. (Rolls series, 82) Page 114.

⁴⁴ *The chronicles of the reigns of Stephen, Henry II and Richard I, vol.4: Chronica Roberti de Torigneo*; edited by Richard Howlett. London: Longmans, 1884. (Rolls series, 82) Page 196.

⁴⁵ *The chronicles of the reigns of Stephen, Henry II and Richard I: Opera historica, vol. 1: Gervasii monachi Cantuariensis*; edited by William Stubbs. London: Longmans, 1879. (Rolls series, 73) Page 166

⁴⁶ *Chronica Roberti de Torigneo*. (1884) Page 197

This done he returned to Paris and the hospitality of Louis of France. During the 1158/9 Christmas season Louis brokered a peace between Henry and the brothers de Blois who were respectively lords of Blois and Champagne. The brothers de Blois were the nephews of the late king Stephen of England and could have made life difficult for Henry had they chosen to support his enemies. Henry the Liberal of Blois, Count of Champagne was, it must be noted in this context, also overlord of Nogent-sur-Seine where the Paraclete was situated.⁴⁷

There must have been at least two factions in Nantes during 1150s: those who supported the old Breton house of Cornouaille, specifically Count Hoël and later his nephew Duke Conan IV; and those who supported first of all Geoffrey the Angevin and later Henry Plantagenet. All the evidence suggests that Abelard's family were loyal adherents of the House of Cornouaille.⁴⁸ Although no contemporary chronicler so much as hints at such a thing, the death of Geoffrey the Angevin is too timely to be free of suspicion. It is not hard to postulate that in the summer of 1158, Geoffrey fell victim to a plot to oust him and restore the legitimate Count of Nantes, that is Conan IV le Petit, Duke of Brittany. If Astralabe were implicated in such a plot, might that not account for his hasty departure for Cherlieu to "escape from his enemies"?

It is possible that the location of Cherlieu is significant. Two years earlier, in 1156, when the heiress of Burgundy, Beatrix of Mâcon married

⁴⁷ *The chronicles of the reigns of Stephen, Henry II and Richard I, vol.4: Continuatio Beccensis*; edited by Richard Howlett. London: Longmans, 1884. (Rolls series, 82) Page 320.

⁴⁸ Cook, B.M. "Abelard and Heloise: some notes towards a family tree." *The Genealogists' Magazine: the journal of the Society of Genealogists*. Vol. 25, part 2. June 1999. Page 205.

Frederick Barbarossa, the Haute-Saône where Cherlieu is situated,⁴⁹ become part of the Holy Roman Empire. It was, however just over the border from the land ruled by Henry of Blois, Count of Champagne, and of all the Cistercian houses inside the Empire, was probably the most convenient for the Nogent-sur-Seine. It was certainly ideally situated, in 1158 in particular, for someone who wanted to be safely out of the reach of Henry II Plantagenet and his newly established allies but within communicable distance of the House of the Paraclete. Astralabe, as Abelard's legitimate heir, must have had some moral, if not legal, authority over this nunnery which was his father's foundation and where his mother was abbess.

One of the areas of contention between Henry II Plantagenet and the church, and indeed the root of his quarrel with Thomas à Becket, was the question of the trial and punishment of criminous clerks. That is, the legal jurisdiction over churchmen - and the term *clerk* of course covered virtually any man who had learned to read - who had committed civil offences. As it was, clerks might be tried only in church courts, and church courts could not pass sentences which resulted in mutilation or loss of life. Thus a layman who committed murder could be tried in a civil court and condemned to death whereas a clerk who had committed the same offence could only be tried in an episcopal court where the heaviest penalty would be *exile in a strict monastery*.⁵⁰

It is in the light of this contentious contemporary issue that the departure of Canon Astralabe from Nantes to a Cistercian monastery outside the influence of Henry Plantagenet and his allies must be viewed. If Astralabe had been convicted before the Bishop of Nantes for a capital

⁴⁹ *Dictionnaire des monastères cisterciens*, par Maur Cocheril. Rochefort: Abbaye Notre-Dame de St-Remy., 1976. (La documentation cistercienne, vol. 18, part 1) Chart France, 9.

⁵⁰ Barlow, Frank. *Thomas Becket*. London: Weidenfelt & Nicolson, 1986. Pages 90ff.

crime, then being stripped of his prebend and exiled to a Cistercian monastery such as Cherlieu is exactly the kind of punishment that he might expect. It would also not be surprising if, when his affairs were being settled after his departure, the formula *in vita sua* (during his lifetime) might be used in the document.⁵¹

In the Hauterive tradition, it is claimed that “Bernard of Clairvaux” saved Astralabe from his (father’s) enemies, made him a monk and sent him to Cherlieu. In 1158, the future Saint Bernard⁵² had been dead for five years, but the Bishop of Nantes from 1148 to 1161 was a Cistercian monk *from Clairvaux* called “Bernard”. This Bernard was the former canon of Nantes Cathedral, referred to above and then known as “Cinardus of Escoblac”, who had been present at Saint Bernard’s spectacular visit to Nantes in 1135 and who had surely known Astralabe since his schooldays. Given the flexibility of nomenclature in the twelfth century, there is no reason why the bishop of Nantes should not have been known as “Bernard of Clairvaux” to his colleagues in Nantes Cathedral. Here surely is the true identity of the man who “rescued” Astralabe and sent him to the Cistercian monastery of Cherlieu. Indeed, we may see in the Hauterive tradition, as recorded by Dr Sinner, a later embroidery by the monks of the three basic facts about himself that their new abbot chose to tell them: a) that he was Abelard’s son; b) that he had originally come to Cherlieu to escape his enemies; and c) that Bernard “of Clairvaux” had been his protector. Indeed, the ambiguity of the name of his protector could well have been Astralabe’s own doing. Without actually telling a falsehood, he could have allowed the natural mistake of the monks of Hauterive to go uncorrected, both to bolster his own authority and

⁵¹ As it is in “Charte mentionnant Astralabe, fils d’Abailard.(1880-81) Pages 50-51.

⁵² Bernard of Clairvaux was not canonised until 1174.

to mislead those outside the monastery who might have heard the news of his appointment.

It has to remain an open question as to whether Bishop Bernard of Nantes sent the former Canon Astralabe to Cherlieu as a political exile or as a convicted and penitent sinner. What is convincing is that all the elements of tradition, independent fact and political context seem to come together to suggest the hasty, and indeed covert, departure of Astralabe from Nantes to Cherlieu in the autumn of 1158. There is however one difficulty.

The Buzé charter in which Canons Porcar and Astralabe are named is undated. Bishop Bernard of Nantes is named in it as is Abbot Adam of Buzé. In the *Gallia Christiana*, Abbot Adam's dates are given as 1153-1157,⁵³ making the departure of Astralabe from Brittany seem to be two years (1157 rather than 1159) before the most appropriate year for his flight. However, the dates for Abbot Adam are not securely based. The latter date is given because it appears that Abbot Adam's successor, Abbot David, was first mentioned in 1157, in the *Tabula* of Buzé, a document which did not survive the French Revolution. The earlier date is taken from a charter drawn up in Buzé recording a gift of land made to the Abbey by Count Hoël of Nantes and his sister the Duchess Berthe.⁵⁴ This charter is very thoroughly dated indeed, giving not just the year as *Anno Incarnacionis Dominice M.C.L.III* [1153], but also the Indiction, the Epact and the Concurrence. The editors of the *Gallia Christiana* have pointed out that the various elements of the date do not match: the *Anno Incarnacionis Dominice* may be 1153, but the Indiction, the Epact and the Concurrence all agree with

⁵³ "Charte mentionnant Astralabe, fils d'Abailard. (1880-81) Pages 50-51.

⁵⁴ *Recueil d'actes inédits des ducs et princes de Bretagne (XIe, XIIe, XIIIe siècles)*; edited by Arthur de la Borderie. Rennes: Imprimerie Ch Catel, 1888. Pages 98-99.

each other and all point to 1155.⁵⁵ Most editors have assumed that the Anno Incarnacionis Dominice is correct and the rest an error, but the reverse may equally be true. It is just as likely that the Abbey of Buzé's calendar was out of synchronisation with the rest of the world, and that not only is the earlier Charter more correctly dated to 1155 but that Abbot David did not take office until 1159. This would then make it possible to ascribe a date in 1158 for the charter in which the departed Canon Astralabe is named.

If Astralabe came to Cherlieu as a postulant in the late summer of 1158 he would have taken his vows as a Cistercian monk in the autumn of the following year. If he were no more than a political exile, there is little difficulty about him becoming Abbot of Hauterive after the death of Abbot Pons who died just before 11 November 1162. He was after all, a mature man with administrative experience and three years should have been long enough to train him in the Cistercian way of doing things. Would his being a penitent who had been involved in political conspiracy, even murder, disqualify him from office ?

There seems little doubt that Astralabe was sent from the mother-house to be Abbot of Hauterive. The tradition states that he was sent from Cherlieu to Hauterive, although the assumption about the date of this event is clearly incorrect. The early history of Hauterive is confused and fragmented. While the monastery had only one abbot (or possibly two) for the first twenty years of its life, during the following twenty years it seems to have had something in the region of eight. This alone points to an unsettled state of affairs. Some of these abbots are to be found named in charters but are not included, or seem to be included in the wrong order, in the 1302 list. The

⁵⁵ "Haec data legitur charta anno 1153, ind III, epact XV, concurr V in annum Christi 1155 conveniunt, neutiquam in annum 1153." *Gallia christiana*. Vol. 14, Col. 860

scenario suggests a house that was unable to elect as abbot a candidate acceptable to the whole community, at resignations, re-elections and brief, unsatisfactory periods in office.

It is not clear how long Astralabe was in fact abbot. The 1774 necrology says that he was consecrated in 1162, and that would mean any time between November 1162 when Abbot Pons died and March 1163 when the year ended.⁵⁶ The next abbot for whom there is reliably dated evidence is William [II] the Provencial who was on seat by 1172. His name suggests that he too was an external appointment, a man who originated from the Kingdom of Provence rather than a man born in one of the local lordships. Between Astralabe and this William two shadowy abbots called Hugh of Port and Ulrich of Matran are identified in the 1302 List of abbots.⁵⁷ Their names suggest they were from local families.⁵⁸ They may have ruled briefly in the late 1160s, and also may have had second terms of office following that of Abbot William II the Provencial. The alternative hypothesis is that both Hugh and Ulrich came after Abbot William and that Abbot Astralabe ruled until c.1171. In 1199, the General Chapter of the Cistercian Order instructed the abbots of Cherlieu and Clairvaux (the mother and "grand-mother" houses of Hauterive respectively) to investigate the abbey although the subject of the enquiry was not recorded, but following the investigation, Abbot John ruled for nearly thirty years, an indication that discipline had at last been restored.

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⁵⁶ It was not until 1582 that 1 January was fixed as New Year's Day for the whole of (Catholic) Christendom. *see* Duncan, David Ewing. *The Calendar*. London: Fourth Estate, 1998. Page 286.

⁵⁷ "Liste des Abbés de Hauterive" (1855). Pages 14-15

⁵⁸ Port and Matran are both in the district of Sarine, in the Canton of Fribourg, as indeed is Hauterive.

⁵⁹ The bulk of the raw material from which these conclusions are drawn is to be found *in* Renard, Jean-Pierre. "Hauterive." *Helvetia sacra*; edited by the Kuratorium der Helvetia

It was, of course, the obligation of the mother-house to provide an abbot if the monks of the community were unable to elect an abbot from among their own number.⁶⁰ Thus the despatch of Astralabe as abbot to an Hauterive in the grip of internal dissension may not have been an honour, still less a soft option. He would, of course, have the advantage of being quite unconnected by blood-tie or allegiance to any local faction. This may account for him being mentioned by name in only one charter (negotiations with the local nobility and gentry being conducted by their blood-kin from within the Community), but it may also explain why he was deemed worthy to be counted among the Founding Fathers in death. Certainly he was abbot at a very significant period in the Abbey's history. He took over not long after the community had moved into their new, permanent premises which had been nearly a quarter of a century a-building.⁶¹

If the year of Astralabe's death is not known, the day set aside for the commemoration of his death has been preserved: the 1774 copy of the Necrology says,

5. Augusti.

Commemoratio Reverendi Domini ASTROLABIL, Abbatis 4.⁶²

Sacra. Section 3: Die orden mit Benediktinerregel. Vol. 3, part 1. Bern: Franke Verlag, 1982. Pages 198-203.

⁶⁰ *The Rule of Saint Benedict, Chapter LXIV: The institution of the abbot*, translated by Abbot Parry OSB; introduction and commentary by Esther de Waal. Leominster: Gracewing, 1990. Page 103.

⁶¹ According to document no. 317 in the *Liber donationum Altaeripae*, the translation of the bones of William of Glane from St Loup to the new church took place during the reign of this elusive Abbot William. However, Abbot William must have been succeeded very speedily by Abbot Pons, since in the two versions of charter no. 29, it says respectively "Actum in monasterio novo Alteripe" and "Actum est hoc in monasterio, in manu P[ontii] abbatis", thus confirming that the church was still considered "new" during the rule of Astralabe's immediate predecessor. *Liber Donatum Altaeripae*, (1984) Pages 102-104

⁶² *Necrologium seu mortirologium in quo continentur Nomina Reverendissimorum D.D. Abbatum, Religiosorum, ac Benefactorum Monasterij B.V.M. de Altaripa Ord. Cist. Confectum Anno 1774*. Per Fr. Raphaellem de Castella. [Fribourg, BCU L812]

It may be assumed that Astralabe died either on, or just before, 5 August, and it on the latter day that he is still remembered in the prayers of the present-day Community.⁶³ Since the date recorded is the date when his death is commemorated rather than the precise day of his death will explain why Astralabe is remembered on a different day in the necrology of the Paraclete. It is the annual commemoration of an event that matters, not the historical accuracy of the dating. Therefore it is not a problem that the House of the Paraclete commemorated Abelard's son on 29/30 October.

The Necrology of the Paraclete reads:.

30 oct Petrus Astralabius, magistri nostri Petri filius.

The editors note that in the transcription of this necrology by Baluzé "cet obit [est placé] au iv des calendes (29 oct)."⁶⁴

When an abbot died, monks from his Community set off to take the news to other selected monastic houses, carrying with them an Obituary Scroll to which each monastery visited would add an appropriate comment or epitaph. If Astralabe were known as in Hauterive as Abelard's son, then quite properly the scroll would eventually be taken to Abelard's foundation, but equally it could take three months for the messengers to walk that far, especially if they spent two or three days in every monastery they visited. Death was not urgent news. Thus we may conclude that 29/30 October is the anniversary of the day on which the first Requiem Mass for Astralabe was celebrated at the Paraclete. In this way can the discrepancy between the two necrologies be easily explained.

⁶³ Private communication, 1999. (Letter from Fr Henri-Marie, prior of Hauterive to M. & Mme Roucou of Le Pallet.)

⁶⁴ "Abbaye du Paraclet." (1923). Page 425.

The entry in the Paraclete necrology is the only recorded occasion when Astralabe's name is prepended with "Peter". Is this an error, or did the ladies of the Paraclete have inside knowledge? It seems certain that Astralabe died after Heloise's own death in May 1163 or 4. Indeed, it would seem that she lived long enough to know of her son's elevation to the abbacy. However it is possible that by the time the news of his death came, there was no one there who remembered him personally, or at any rate no one from his old family circle in Nantes. To them, or possibly to a later copyist of the necrology, the name "Astralabe" on its own must have seemed anathema. As has been stated above, it was not a *Christian* name. They would therefore conclude that "Astralabe" was a byname, and that he had also been called "Peter" like his father. Or it is possible that the repetition of "Petrus" in the Necrology entry is simply a slip of the pen, the eye of the scribe racing ahead of the writing.

The above summary should be sufficient to establish that in twelfth century Europe there only ever was one man called Astralabe, and that he was the son of Abelard and Heloise. It also demonstrates that he was not a footnote to his father's career but an individual with a life of his own who responded in his own way to his own challenges. He appears to share certain of the characteristics of both his parents. Like his father, he seems to have had a talent for backing the wrong side, but like his mother he seems to have shown ability not only for administration, but also to carve success out of disaster. Neither of his parents would have had any reason to feel ashamed of him: not the Shadow on the Sun, but indeed the second Abelard.

"Filius est sapiens benedictio multa parentum."

Carmen ad Astralabium, line 59.