

R406 Petrus Alfonsi and his medieval readers. By Tolan,
J.[V.] Gainesville, 1993.

Petrus
Alfonsi

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PETRO VARADIN [see WARADĪN].

PETRUS ALFONSI, Andalusian polemicist and translator (fl. A.D. 1106-ca. 1130), convert to Christianity in 1106, composed his *Dialogi contra Iudaeos* in 1108 or 1110. Staged as a debate between his former Jewish self (Moses), and his present Christian self (Peter), the *Dialogi* ridicule Talmudic Aggadah, showing that they contradict principles of Graeco-Arabic philosophy and science (in particular astronomy); the *Dialogi* became the most widely-read anti-Jewish text of the Latin Middle Ages.

In the fifth chapter of the *Dialogi* Alfonsi attacks Islam, following—to a large extent—the Arabic text attributed to 'Abd al-Masīh b. Ishāk al-Kindī [q.v.]. Alfonsi portrays Muḥammad as a charlatan driven by lust and political ambition, ill-tutored in religious matters by a heretical Christian, Sergius [see BAḤĪRĀ] and two heretical Jews, Abdias ('Abd Allāh b. Salām [q.v.]) and Chabalahabar (Ka'ab al-Aḥbār [q.v.]). He gives a curious description of pre-Islamic cult rituals at Mecca (based, it seems, on Spanish Jewish sources), asserting that current Islamic practice is tainted by these pagan origins. Later Latin writers on Islam used Alfonsi's tract extensively.

Alfonsi taught astronomy in England and France. In 1116, he produced an inept Latin adaptation of the *Zīj al-Sindhī* of al-Kh'wārazmī [q.v.]; subsequently, Adelard of Bath (probably with Alfonsi's help) produced a somewhat better version. He later wrote an *Epistola ad Peripateticos*, urging French scholars to study astronomy and arguing for the superiority of Arab texts to those of Latin authors such as Macrobius.

Alfonsi's *Disciplina clericalis* is a collection of proverbs accompanied by short, illustrative fables; it is one of the earliest Latin texts to contain stories of Arabic provenance. The *Disciplina* was extremely popular for centuries (both in Latin and in its many vernacular translations); its fables were used by preachers as *exempla*, incorporated by Boccaccio into the *Decameron*, and resurfaced in the 15th and 16th centuries in printed editions of Aesop.

Bibliography: The best edition of the *Dialogi contra Iudaeos* is that of K.-P. Mieth, diss. Berlin 1982, although the older edition by J.P. Migne, in *Patrologia latina cursus completus*, clvii, 527-672, is more widely available. *Disciplina Clericalis*, A. Hilka and W. Söderhjelm (eds.), in *Acta Societatis Scientiarum Fennicae*, xxxviii/4, Helsinki 1911; E. Hermes (tr.), *Die Kunst, vernünftig zu Leben (Disciplina clericalis)*, Zürich and Stuttgart 1970. The *Epistola ad Peripateticos* is edited by J. Tolan (see below). The translation of the *Zīj al-Sindhī* is edited by O. Neugebauer, in *The astronomical tables of al-Kh'wārazmī*, Copenhagen 1962. On Alfonsi, see B. Septimus, *Petrus Alfonsi on the cult at Mecca*, in *Speculum*, lvi (1981), 517-33; G. Monnot, *Les citations coraniques dans le "Dialogus" de Pierre Alphonse*, in *Cahiers de Fanjeaux*, xviii (1983), 261-77; J. Tolan, *Petrus Alfonsi and his medieval readers*, Gainesville, Fla. 1993. (J. TOLAN)

PHILBY, HARRY ST. JOHN BRIDGER (1885-1960), Arabian explorer and traveller, adviser to King 'Abd al-'Azīz b. Su'ūd (Ibn Su'ūd) [see su'ūd, ʿĀ] and British convert to Islam.

Born of parents connected with planting and with

official service in the Indian subcontinent, he had a conventional public school and Cambridge University education, and himself entered the Indian Civil Service in 1908. Already he showed a flare for learning Indian languages and for immersing himself in the cultures of India, until the First World War found him in 'Irāk (1915-17), where he first acquired what became a lasting love for the Arab world and made his first trip into the interior of Arabia as part of a government mission in 1917-18 to persuade Ibn Su'ūd (Ibn Saud) to attack Hā'il and its pro-Turkish rulers the Al Rashīd [q.vv.]. After the War, he remained in the Middle East, with Sir Percy Cox in 'Irāk and then in the newly-created kingdom of Transjordan.

But in 1924 he decided to resign from government service, disillusioned with British policy in the Middle East and its failure to recognise the new forces of Arab nationalism. In the ensuing lean years, he became involved, with little success, in business ventures in the Middle East and in pro-Arab, anti-British press polemics. He had often mentioned the potential advantages for his business activities in becoming a Muslim, and in 1930 became one at the hands of Ibn Su'ūd, though most Arabs were subsequently to consider him insincere and most Europeans to regard his Islam as a convenience rather than an act of genuine faith. It did, however, give him the entrée to Ibn Su'ūd's court and the King's companionship. He was now able to make his great cross-Arabian Desert journeys, including of the Rub' al-Khālī [q.v.] in 1932 (although he had been beaten to this by Bertram Thomas two years previously), and in 1936-7 around the southern fringes of Nadjd [q.v.] and the northern fringes of the region to the east of the Aden Protectorate, where his appearance with a Su'ūdī armed party prompted British fears that his mission involved Su'ūdī designs on the South Arabian shaykhdoms; a deliberate intention in various of his journeys of enlarging Su'ūdī borders was in fact almost certainly a motive as well as the pure love of exploration (see J.B. Kelly, *Jeux sans frontières: Philby's travels in southern Arabia*, in C.E. Bosworth *et alii* (eds.), *The Islamic world, from classical to modern times. Essays in honor of Bernard Lewis*, Princeton 1989, 701-32). Philby's journeys were nevertheless heroic ones, during which he took meticulous records of all aspects of natural phenomena (much of this material is deposited with the Royal Geographical Society, London). Further business projects involved him with American oil companies and with the import of Ford cars. He was back in Britain during the Second World War, but returned to Arabia in 1945, and between 1950 and 1953 undertook further journeys of exploration—to Karyat al-Fāw [see AL-FĀ'W], to Midian [see MADYAN SHU'AYB] and into the south, where he gathered petroglyphs and Thamudic and South Arabian inscriptions. But the new king, 'Abd al-'Azīz's son Su'ūd, was displeased at Philby's denunciations in his writings of the laxity of morals and habits of luxury amongst the ruling élite which newly-found oil wealth had brought; in 1955 he had to leave Saudi Arabia for Beirut; and after returning twice to al-Riyāḍ [q.v.], died in Beirut in 1960.

Philby's various public careers were vitiated by his at times immoderate language and hectoring behaviour, for he lacked the qualities of the diplomat and conciliator. His fame rests upon his many books about the peninsula and his acute observation of its geographical and scientific features. He never claimed to be a professional historian, and was careless about checking dates and consulting parallel sources in his books on Su'ūdī history (see G. Rentz, *Philby as a*