

Anselm of Canterbury

by Simonetta Carr

with Illustrations by Matt Abraxas



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Anselm of Canterbury
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Cover artwork by Matt Abraxas: Anselm defends a hare.

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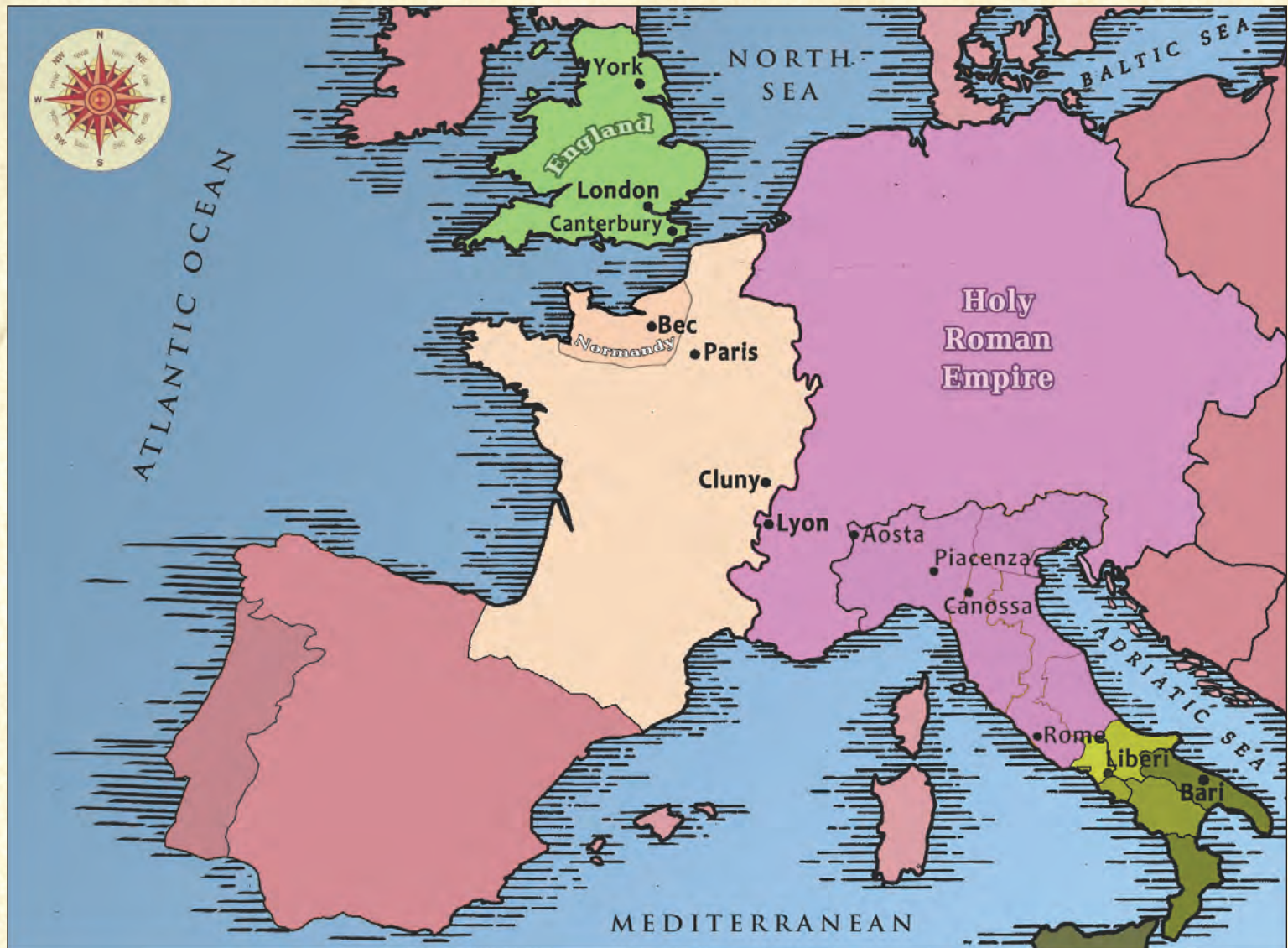
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MAP CREATED BY TOM CARROLL



A map of Western Europe during Anselm's life. Borders between countries changed often in those days, but this gives a general idea of the places where Anselm lived. You may want to use it to follow his travels.

Introduction



Anselm loved to think about God and always tried to understand Him better. The answer he gave to a very important question (Why did God become man?) has helped Christians understand what Jesus did on the cross. But while thinking and writing about God was his passion, Anselm had to spend much of his life dealing with moody, irritable kings and going on long, dangerous journeys.

He is called Anselm of Canterbury because he held his most important job in Canterbury, England. He is also known as Anselm of Aosta because he was born in Aosta in 1033, and Anselm of Bec because he studied and taught at the Abbey of Bec.



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We don't know what Anselm looked like. This portrait was in a copy of his *Book of Meditations and Prayers* and was painted during his lifetime, but we don't know if it is accurate.

CHAPTER ONE

A Boy with a Dream



PHOTO BY STEFANO ZULIANI



A view of the Alps from Aosta

Aosta is an ancient town that today is near the border between Italy and France. The border is marked by a chain of very high mountains called the Alps. The Alps are so close to Aosta that Anselm could see them everywhere he went. As a child, he stared at them with amazement. They were high and powerful and always capped with shining snow, so he was sure God lived there. Once, he dreamed he was able to climb to the top of one of

those mountains, where a kind and powerful lord and his servant gave him some white bread to eat. In those days, only rich people ate white bread, so this was a special meal. When he woke up, he thought the lord in his dream was God and that he had gone to heaven.



As a child, Anselm stared at the mountains with amazement.

As he grew up, Anselm learned more about God and understood that He is a spirit not seen by men. He was especially close to his mother, Eremberga. She came to his rescue once when a harsh teacher made him study so hard, without any breaks, that Anselm lost all joy and became very timid and discouraged.

When Anselm was about fourteen years old, he decided to become a monk. Monks live together in places called monasteries, or abbeys, and devote all their time to prayer, learning about God, and helping others. In Anselm's time, people thought that to become a monk or nun (for women) was the best thing a Christian could do.

For Anselm, however, there was a problem. To become a monk, he had to have his father's permission. But Anselm's father, Gundulf, had different ideas for his son's future. He wanted him to have a good career and make money. Anselm insisted. He even prayed that God would make him sick, hoping that the abbot in charge of the abbey in Aosta would feel sorry for him and take him in, even if his father disagreed. When he finally got sick he called the abbot, begging him again, but the answer was still no.



Anselm tried to get sick to convince the abbot to take him as a monk.

Soon, however, Anselm became less interested in both God and studies and more interested in having fun with his friends. He still tried to behave because he really loved his mother, but a few years later she died. Without her influence, he spent even more time doing whatever he liked.

He was also having many strong disagreements with his father, so much that he felt he could not please him anymore. Finally, when he was twenty-three, he packed a few of his things and left home with one of his servants. He wanted to travel to the other side of the Alps to look for a teacher who could help him understand the most important things in life.

PHOTO BY ENEA FIORENTINI



Many believe Anselm was born in this house in Aosta.

PHOTO BY ENEA FIORENTINI



Some think Anselm was born in this house in Gressan. It's possible that his family owned two houses.

Many young people at that time traveled around Europe to look for greater knowledge. The Internet, television, and radio had not been invented. Books were still few because they had to be copied by hand. There weren't even any universities, so people could increase their knowledge only by visiting famous teachers, who often ran their own schools.



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Students during the Middle Ages,
about two hundred years after Anselm's time.

Traveling was difficult and dangerous. People usually traveled on foot, horseback, or in wagons and had to watch out constantly for robbers. Anselm used a donkey to carry his belongings over the Alps because donkeys are very good at climbing mountains.

PHOTO BY FRANCO56, WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



Mount Cenis

The trip across the Alps was long and tiring. At one point, when all the food seemed to be gone, Anselm was so hungry that he started to eat snow. He might have fainted if his servant had not looked carefully in the bag they had tied to the back of their donkey, where he found some white bread they didn't know was there.

On the other side of the Alps, Anselm moved from region to region throughout the area we now call France, listening to different teachers. After traveling three years, he moved further north to an abbey in the town of Bec, in the region of Normandy. There, an Italian teacher named Lanfranc had become famous for his great knowledge and wisdom. Anselm was twenty-six at that time.



Anselm was nearly fainting from hunger when his servant discovered some white bread in their bag.