



Aldhelm: the Prose Works

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Aldhelm, born c.640 in Wessex, and becoming abbot of Malmesbury and later bishop of Sherborne, was the first English man of letters; up to 1100, his prose writings were the most widely read of any Latin literature produced in Anglo-Saxon England. His surviving prose works include a long treatise *De virginitate*, and a number of letters; these in particular are an important source of knowledge concerning Anglo-Saxon England. The treatise, a lengthy exhortation on virtue addressed to nuns at Barking Abbey, is a fascinating series of exempla drawn from the prodigious range of Aldhelm's knowledge of patristic literature, and tailored to the expectations of a seventh-century Anglo-Saxon female audience. Because of the extreme difficulty of his Latin, however, Aldhelm's prose works have rarely been read, and have never been adequately appreciated - which this translation seeks to remedy. It is accompanied with an introduction outlining Aldhelm's central importance to Anglo-Saxon literary culture; a critical biography which throws new light on what has previously been assumed about him; and an essay establishing an accurate canon and chronology of his writings.

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