

Alison I. Beach, Shannon M. T. Li, Samuel Sutherland (ed.), Monastic Experience in Twelfth-Century Germany. The Chronicle of Petershausen in Translation, Manchester (Manchester University Press) 2022, 248 p., ISBN 978-1-5261-6697-5, EUR 20,00.

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Standing on the north bank of the Rhine, directly opposite the city of Constance, Petershausen was originally founded in the 980s by the local diocesan, bishop Gebhard, in what had formerly been a swamp belonging to the monks of nearby Reichenau, now colonized by monks from Einsiedeln 100 kilometers to the south. On the edge of a great inland sea and within earshot of the bells of Constance Cathedral, a century after its foundation the monastery sided unequivocally with Pope versus Emperor, not least because of threats to its property, looted by Gebhard's successors to augment the endowment of Henry IV's new bishopric at Bamberg. With support from the papal legate, the future Pope Urban II, both Constance and Petershausen became incorporated within the pro-papal network of Hirsau, Petershausen after 1085 accepting monks and an abbot from Hirsau's self-consciously »reformist« congregation: an 11th-century equivalent to such earlier Benedictine initiatives as Gorze or Cluny, albeit more limited in scale or reputation. By the 1090s, Petershausen had 40 monks and 50 »bearded brothers«: adult *conversi*, for the most part of noble birth, whose relations with the community were to lead thereafter to at least two occasions of violent dispute. In 1159, moreover, the monastery was ravaged by fire, started by carelessness in a room adjacent to the infirmary where various monks had been accustomed to gather »with illicit food, drink, and chatter« (p. 171, an interpolation). Rebuilt, it survived through to Napoleon and 1803, whereafter its manuscripts and archives were mostly lost, and its church was demolished.

The chronicle and associated texts here translated carrying the story through to the 1160s, survive in a unique 12th-century copy in the library of the University of Heidelberg, edited for the »Monumenta« in 1868, revised by Otto Feger in 1956. Amongst other significant authorities, Manfred Krebs in 1935 supplied an account of the abbey's charters, many of them known only from the present source, a high proportion of them either heavily interpolated or outright forgeries. As elsewhere – English instances would include Gloucester Abbey after 1102, or Rochester after 1179 – fire seems to have supplied both spur and opportunity for reinvention. Much of the broader history of Petershausen and Hirsau has already been set out by Alison Beach in her 2017 monograph, »The Trauma of Medieval Reform«, including her identification of the chronicle's author as abbot Gebhard,



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the community's leader from 1164 to his death before 1173. But as Beach points out, she and her team of translators, were determined to bring the text itself to a wider audience, and with it the significance both of the Hirsau reforms and of the particular circumstances of a community subjected not only to local power struggles (both with the bishops of Constance and neighbouring lay patrons) but with international rivalries between Emperor and Pope.

Beyond its flowery prologue and an occasional metrical epitaph, the Latin itself is stylistically uncomplicated, albeit on occasion poetically intense. It supplies, for instance, a terrifying denunciation of Henry IV, who from Saxony, the »kitchen of the Emperor« (p. 87: *imperatoris coquina*), »bored through the eyes of the faithful like a smoking firebrand« (p. 84: *quasi ticio fumigans oculos fidelium terebravit*). No translation is ever perfect. But the blemishes here are few and trivial: for the most part quibbles over idiom (i.e. p. 168 »a very high and rather nice bell tower« [*campanum ... permaximum satis bonum*], or p. 160 »he was a tad belligerent« [*aliquantulum iniuriosus esset*], where the difficulty lies in conveying deliberately ironic understatement applied here to a raging psychopath). Perhaps because the translation is a group effort, there is occasional forgetfulness by the right hand of what the left has already undertaken. Thus »crocus-coloured« is rendered alternatively as »violet« (p. 82) or surely more correctly as »yellow« (p. 153).

But this is to strain after gnats, where the real feast lies in the wealth of incidental details. To appreciate this, the text deserves a reading cover-to-cover, the absence of a subject index making such a reading all the more desirable. Of themes that recur, or items of especial interest, here noticing merely a few of the riper plums, we find tall stories of the escape of Otto I's caged lion (p. 4); repeated references to art and decoration, including lapis paint gifted by »the bishop of the Venice« (*recte* the patriarch of Grado) (p. 54); the usual tales of dishonest artisans outwitted by their patron (p. 54–55), but here supplemented with accounts of lime-kilns (p. 174), organ-building (p. 149–150), the making and dedication of bells (p. 158, 178), and of a former abbot of Neresheim (p. 120–121) abandoning the religious life to oversee the building of a »tower« (presumably a castle). We learn of the dangers of swimming in the Rhine (p. 105), or of rolling stones down mountains (p. 115).

There are booklists (p. 126–127), a wealth of detail on the abbey's relics, including the *furta sacra* of the head of St Gregory, carried off from Rome (p. 55, 202–203), and the 1134 translation of the sainted founder Gebhard, whose bones were found damp (p. 158) and were thereafter dried in the sun. We read of the legend (p. 89, another interpolation) that Pontius Pilate originated from Forchheim, and of folksongs that identified him with Rudolf of Swabia, the Pope's anti-emperor. There are several other-world visions of purgatory and beyond, and a particular concern with lice, ants (p. 144), and especially fire (p. 138–139, 163), this latter



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anticipated long before the disaster of 1159 and perhaps a pointer to the date of composition of at least parts of a manuscript, elsewhere attributed mostly to the 1130s and itself apparently (p. 18) damaged by fire.

We read of an abbot who petulantly hurled his pastoral staff (p. 79), and of others who declined into senility (p. 143), became obsessed with their own or their family's salvation (p. 141), or proved incapable of intoning the mass (p. 127, here with important evidence for part singing). Beyond local affairs, there is much information both on the Investiture Contest and the Second Crusade (including, p. 167, rumours of Raymond of Antioch's seduction of Eleanor of Aquitaine). There is also what seems to be deliberate *suppressio veritatis*, most notably over the presence of women as well as men in what was in reality a double community, not dissimilar from, and potentially an influence over Sempringham (itself, of course, just as disturbed as Petershausen by disputes between its religious and their subordinate lay-brothers). Of this female presence we learn very little from the chronicle, but rather more from a life and miracles of Gebhard, perhaps by the same author as the chronicle, translated here from a 15th-century copy now bound into the Heidelberg manuscript, the »vita« (BHL 3292) opening (p. 193) with a bizarre theological proposition that, before the Fall, Adam had been formed to supply »spiritual offspring« sufficiently numerous to replace »both in body and soul« the cohort of rebel angels condemned with Satan (*ut spiritalem ibidem gigneret prolem, donec praedestinatorum numero completo, sine ullo mortis interventu simul cum corpore et anima illum scanderent locum, de quo malignus cum suis sequacibus ceciderat spiritus*: MGH SS, vol. 10, p. 583).

Beach and her team are to be congratulated on a translation both accessible and richly informative. It forms a worthy addition to other such translations from German medieval sources, in which this Manchester series has long led the field.

Mittelalter – Moyen Âge (500–1500)

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