



This is a repository copy of *Alison I. Beach, The Trauma of Monastic Reform: Community and Conflict in Twelfth-century Germany.*

White Rose Research Online URL for this paper:  
<http://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/136803/>

Version: Published Version

---

**Article:**

Thompson, K. (2018) Alison I. Beach, *The Trauma of Monastic Reform: Community and Conflict in Twelfth-century Germany*. *Speculum*, 93 (4). pp. 1161-1162. ISSN 0038-7134

<https://doi.org/10.1086/699873>

---

© 2018 The Medieval Academy of America. Reproduced in accordance with the publisher's self-archiving policy.

**Reuse**

Items deposited in White Rose Research Online are protected by copyright, with all rights reserved unless indicated otherwise. They may be downloaded and/or printed for private study, or other acts as permitted by national copyright laws. The publisher or other rights holders may allow further reproduction and re-use of the full text version. This is indicated by the licence information on the White Rose Research Online record for the item.

**Takedown**

If you consider content in White Rose Research Online to be in breach of UK law, please notify us by emailing [eprints@whiterose.ac.uk](mailto:eprints@whiterose.ac.uk) including the URL of the record and the reason for the withdrawal request.



[eprints@whiterose.ac.uk](mailto:eprints@whiterose.ac.uk)  
<https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/>

More general considerations appear in the introduction by Benoît-Michel Tock (15–28) and in an interesting study of *artes dictandi* and formularies by Anne-Marie Turcan-Verkerk (131–44). There is also a survey of Cistercian chirographic practices in the Val-de-Loire by Chantal Senséby, who shows that in this matter the Cistercians contributed hardly anything (145–62). The final paper by Laurent Morelle (337–46) successfully draws together the various threads that appear in the book and presents a useful summary of its main themes. If there is one thing that stands out, perhaps, it is that there is nothing quintessentially Cistercian about Cistercian diplomatics.

The quality of the contributions is, without exception, first class, and many of them break wholly new ground. In some cases, the authors make it clear that what they have written is but the beginning of what needs to be done: there is “une recherche en cours” (113), “un premier aperçu” (131), “observations préliminaires” (257), and “premiers résultats d’une enquête” (271). But one of the values of this sound and solid collection is how it does not simply reiterate what we already know, but how it points forward to what needs to be done.

The book itself is beautifully printed on heavy paper (it is a heavy volume) and profusely illustrated. There are more than seventy colored illustrations of manuscripts, parts of manuscripts, and seals, apart from numerous maps and tables, and the quality of the illustrations cannot be faulted. Most can easily be read with the naked eye, but even in those cases where the writing is very small (for example, on pp. 107, 162, 195, or 224), the text may still be read with the aid of a good magnifying glass. I would add that the volume also contains abstracts of all the papers in both French and English, and a useful index nominum (360–72).

All in all, the papers in this collection throw a great deal of new light on Cistercian record keeping and its manipulations, and they also contain a wealth of new information. The book is an excellent and informative contribution to Cistercian studies, and at a price of €28—I can only assume that its publication must have been heavily subsidized—an undoubted bargain.

DAVID N. BELL, Memorial University of Newfoundland

ALISON I. BEACH, *The Trauma of Monastic Reform: Community and Conflict in Twelfth-century Germany*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. Pp. x, 190; 11 black-and-white figures, 4 maps, and 3 tables. £75. ISBN: 978-1-108-41731-0. doi:10.1086/699873

Reform carries overtones of improvement and change for the better, but one man’s reform can be another man’s ruin, and there were those in eleventh- and twelfth-century Europe for whom new monastic practice represented the wreck of their community. In a new history of Petershausen, the Benedictine abbey which lay on the shores of Lake Constance in modern Baden-Württemberg, Germany, that covers the period from its foundation to the closing years of the twelfth century, Alison I. Beach aims to understand this human dimension and to “explore the lived experience of reform in the central Middle Ages through the lens of Petershausen’s chronicle” (36).

A prologue, six chapters, an epilogue, and a postscript each start with a vignette that leads us into the discussion. They cover the foundation as a proprietary episcopal monastery by Bishop Gebhard II of Constance in 986; the reform initiated by Bishop Gebhard III and carried out by monks from Hirsau under the leadership of Abbot Theodoric (1086–1116); the characteristics of the new monastic practice; Petershausen’s own efforts at the reform of other communities; and its relations with the turbulent elite that acted as its patrons. The postscript describes the later history of the house up to its dissolution in the early nineteenth century and an important appendix puts proposals on the authorship of the house chronicle, the *Casus Monasterii Petrishusensis*.

The sole surviving copy of this chronicle is to be found in the *Codex Salemitani* IX 42a, now preserved in the library of the University of Heidelberg. The appendix presents the results of a detailed codicological study and contents analysis of that manuscript which leads the author to conclude that the chronicle may have been the work of Abbot Gebhard I (1164–71). A former cantor of another community reformed by Hirsau, Gebhard took a generally positive view of reform, since as cantor he was custodian of the new liturgy, but a second authorial voice that can be detected in the final six folios of the manuscript makes a more negative assessment. This variation in perspective has contributed to the insights into the contested nature of reform at Petershausen.

The study outlines the potential trauma caused by changed liturgy—liturgy and ritual being the bedrock of the monastic community, the challenges to the expertise of the existing monastic officials and the structural change as new personnel arrived from the reforming community and the existing monks left. In short all the change management factors that modern organizational developers encounter were present. Two developments are described in detail: the introduction of lay brothers and the greater openness in the reformed community to the recognition of women's religious experience. The lay brothers or bearded ones (*barbati*) were a response to growing lay interest in leading the apostolic life; they were the Marthas whose labor outside the monastery would enable greater focus on God for the Marys who remained within. Their presence could be unsettling, however, for they were often recruited from the elite and their behavior could be resentful and rebellious. Polemical literature from the monastery of Lorsch describes the flocks of *barbati* in terms reminiscent of Payn Bolotin's diatribe against the "false hermits" of Chartres.

It was probably contemporary interest in the apostolic life, too, that influenced the Petershausen chronicler to give eloquent support for female inclusion within the monastic community, citing the women and men who made up Christ's followers in Jerusalem. Nonetheless Petershausen was aware of the importance of physical separation between the sexes as demonstrated in the necrology, where the monks' names appear in the furthest left column of the four that make up that text, separated from the religious women in the furthest right column by two columns devoted to lay brothers and those in confraternity (89). In the discussion of the role played by Petershausen in promoting reform elsewhere we are made acutely aware of the practicalities and this leads into a nuanced discussion of the realities of dealing with patrons. The account of Petershausen's sponsorship of a new community at Mehrerau at the request of its patron, Count Ulrich X of Bregenz, demonstrates the drain on the resources of the mother house, the eventual loss of influence over the daughter house and the shift of its patrons' interest to the new community. It was a pattern that would recur in many other communities and orders.

All this draws on up-to-date scholarship from the Anglophone and German worlds with insights derived from sociology and literary philosophy. The idea of elite violence features strongly in Beach's study and this reviewer would have welcomed some consideration of the challenges to that idea, the including, for example, the "documentary revolution" (*mutation documentaire*) identified by Dominique Barthélemy. In a field that is by no means unplowed, however, this study has new and interesting things to say about monasticism in the central Middle Ages. The book is written with energy, drawing the reader in and onwards. Above all, what interests its author is the "lived experience" and it is this focus on the practicalities of reform that makes it an engaging and attractive work.

KATHLEEN THOMPSON, University of Sheffield