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Chapter 3

The Communication of Trauma and Monastic Friendship

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It is a banal but nonetheless accurate observation that over the past couple years, we have all been touched by trauma, albeit to varying degrees; but academic interest, indeed, fascination with trauma has already been gaining momentum for some time.[1] Trauma Studies has emerged as a field connecting researchers across multiple disciplines, though examinations of trauma are often connected to the history of emotions. Barbara Rosenwein's continued (and impressively prolific) work on emotions, such as her latest book on anger, proves we have uncovered a rich field of study.[2] This essay will consider the relationship between pain and emotions in the context of monastic communities in the Age of Reform (ca. 1049–1122). Monks experienced what Alison Beach has called "communal stress" in the tumultuous years of the eleventh century.[3] Not all monasteries welcomed reform when it came, and its imposition brought very real shock and anguish. How could it not? Reformers attacked established traditions that upended monastic life in each community. But is *trauma* the appropriate word to describe their pain and painful experiences? To answer that question, this essay focuses on the communication of pain. Emotions like sympathy or empathy are typically modern responses to someone's pain; but how were condolences and comfort expressed among medieval monks, religious figures who, by definition, welcomed suffering? And how did individual monks discuss emotions associated with their own torment?

Epistolary collections have proved invaluable in reconstructing emotional communities because letters include "emotion words" and capture conversations between friends that might otherwise be lost.[4] Rarely do such complete collections come from earlier periods, making it difficult, but not impossible, to visualize relationships. The Paston Letters remain the example *par excellence* for medievalists for many reasons, not least of which is the fact that the collection truly reflects a network since letters from both senders and recipients survive. There are, of course,

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other corpora on par with the Paston collection and beyond late medieval England, such as the correspondence of Italian merchants like the Datini and the Medici, both similarly extensive webs of correspondence.[5] Still, a single-authored corpus suits other kinds of analyses. Medieval authors understood that letters could elicit a specific response in the recipient, and therefore, letters were powerful tools. From letters, we can discern patterns of communication;[6] and letters offer an opportunity to delve into the rhetorical strategies of an individual.[7] Pope Gregory VII, for instance, left behind a vast epistolary corpus, which I.S. Robinson used to reconstruct the pontiff's friendship network.[8] In the late eleventh century, Gregory VII built ties and effected change through communication to his partisans, and his letters reflected specific objectives. Gregory's approach to reform was hardly novel; indeed, he followed in the footsteps of his one-time rival and fellow former cardinal, Peter Damian. Yet, Damian's own corpus of over 180 letters has not received quite the same attention as an instrument of reform.[9]

Gregory VII inherited a massive reform program focused on eradicating clerical marriage, simony, and lay investiture, but the pontiff's aggressive tactics surpassed those of his predecessors. For that reason, his pontificate has received disproportionately more attention. His approach to reform, however, only partially represented broader movements. Reform could mean many things and occurred in many contexts.[10] As Giles Constable has explained, no one term can adequately express eleventh-century processes of religious reform, not only because contemporaries themselves applied multiple words to describe the transformations of the period, but also because the very nature of these *renovationes* defies classification.[11] Early scholarship sorted institutional change into the absolute categories of "reformed" and "unreformed." These constructions hardly accommodate the complexity in eleventh-century reform movements; and perhaps even more problematic, "unreformed" possesses a pejorative quality, as though heroes and villains existed in the narrative.[12] The issue reflects a traditional perspective of Church reform, which characterizes reform as a uniform, pan-European phenomenon, born in monastic congregations like Cluny and Gorze, and spreading until it reached Rome where it radiated outward from the papal curia.[13] More recent studies stress the local over the universal[14] and shed light on the charismatic individuals and personal relationships communicating ideas about reform.

"Reformed monasticism" varied enormously, both regionally and locally,[15] yet common threads existed even between disparate movements. By the year 1000, rhetoric about how to reform both oneself and society through love and friendship had diffused widely through channels of reform.[16] Dialogues rife with emotive language in letters, *vitae*, and theological treatises elevated the expression of emotion. Like other aspects of reform, emotional expressions manifested in multiple ways corresponding to singular circumstances. Showing emotion confirmed the sincerity of ascetic experience. Affection between brothers spoke to fraternal charity. Anselm of Canterbury, John of Fécamp, and Romuald of Ravenna (d. 1027)

argued for reform through affection; that is, to reform meant to extend the love of God to the love of society.[17] For Peter Damian, the author of Romuald's *vita* and self-appointed heir to his movement, emotions were fundamental to his pastoral mission. Damian's fiery polemic belies his compassion. He desired a reformed Church that blurred any distinction between monastic and lay devotions.[18] In his letters, Damian cultivated monastic devotion among his recipients, lay and clerical, a notion corresponding to his ecclesiology. As Patricia Ranft argues, the idea of *witness* defined how Damian perceived the reformed Church.[19] Ranft describes *witness* as the relationship between the individual and the community of the faithful as interdependent, in which one supports the other. To put it bluntly, "[To] be saved one must save others." Damian wove that sentiment into many of his letters, and it became fundamental to his emotional community.[20] Damian's language of fraternal love reflected a broader change in monastic sensibilities.

Peter Damian has acquired an undeserved reputation as an insensitive hardliner in Church reform. This essay makes no attempt to redeem his character, that would take far more time, but to explore how Damian employed the trope of trauma to specific ends in three distinct contexts: grief, violence, and illness. In all three cases pain served as penance. The intersection of religious devotion and tragic crises created opportunities to deepen relationships within, between, and even beyond the bounds of monastic communities. The vestiges of these eleventh-century friendships reveal coping strategies and a desire to overcome a fear of death, which, theologically, they should not have feared at all. In the background, on the eve of Gregorian Reform, tensions were running high. Scholarship tends to focus on the more dramatic shifts during this period. Eruptions of reform, like the Patarene struggle in Milan, or the Vallombrosan-led movement to oust the bishop of Florence draw our attention for good reason, but it then becomes harder to appreciate the tamer aspects of reform.

The theory undergirding my analysis is the question of what, exactly, constituted trauma in this context. Trauma as a category of analysis is multivalent and spans disciplines. PTSD has become practically interchangeable with "trauma" because it involves reliving the moment of trauma not as memory but as experience. Wendy Turner and Christina Lee offer an excellent definition in their edited volume, *Trauma in Medieval Society*. Today and in the past, when people experienced violence beyond their own understanding, it caused the levels of stress and shock to exceed an individual's ability to cope with what they term a "'wounding' to the mind, body, and spirit."[21] However useful this definition is, back-diagnosing PTSD is not the goal of this study; rather, I argue that Peter Damian employed trauma as a trope to characterize pain in specific ways. Trauma can, but does not always, result from any kind of suffering or pain, including grief and illness. The terms *pain* and *suffering* are not specific and applying the word *trauma* adds texture to these feelings. On this point, Donna Trembinski has stated that as an analytical category, *trauma* can be useful, not so much to diagnose actors, but to deepen our

historical understanding.[22] When Peter Damian spoke to a distressful experience involving pain and suffering, he often, but not always, described it in such a way as to connect the immediate pain to the aftershock of that pain. *Trauma* aptly captures that distinction.

Damian sought to elicit reactions and feelings in the recipients of his letters. In so doing, he reinforced the bonds of friendship. Damian drew his circle of friends into what Barbara Rosenwein has called an emotional community, here the wider community of Benedictine hermits. Rosenwein's first book on emotional communities makes a compelling case not to ignore emotions in social history; and studying Peter Damian's circle of friends, which was not limited to clergy, lends itself to such an approach. Rosenwein defines emotional communities as groups in which people adopt shared norms of expressing emotion and that they assign common meaning to those same emotions.[23] Multiple emotional communities can be present at once and they are dynamic, not static, and change over time.[24] In the emotional community, its members have "a common stake, interests, values, and goals."[25] The community can be either social or textual, the latter referring to groups with shared systems of thought.[26]

Hermitism presents a broad context. Its origins extend back to the fourth and fifth centuries, when men as well as women sought to exist in literal and figurative deserts, from Egypt to Syria to Gaul and Britain, and often did so collectively in communities. The practice then declined in popularity in the early Middle Ages but experienced a significant revival in Italy on the eve of the Investiture Conflict when devout Christians came together to live alone. The word *hermit* conjures up images of long beards and disheveled clothes and above all, solitude. The idea of a hermit community might seem paradoxical today, but it was a widespread phenomenon across the medieval West around the first millennium. Like monks and nuns, hermits retreat from society and sociability; the performance of renouncing the world creates the terms on which they socialize with each other and with the outside. But unlike monasteries, hermitages were not closed off from the world by walls. Hermits ostensibly renounced all previous sociability by cutting ties with the outside world, but material conditions at the hermitage guaranteed that sociability remained open to its residents. Moreover, hermits were more mobile than we might expect and moved in and out of the secular world outside the hermitage rather often.

There is no scholarly consensus on how to identify hermits, or who "counts" as a hermit. For the sake of clarity, I rely on loosely defined criteria: hermits are people who live in (relative) isolation outside the boundaries of a monastic property or church as part of their ascetic practice. Absolute solitude and truly "wild" wilderness functioned more as idealized aspects of asceticism. The wave of hermitism that swept over Western Europe during the tenth and eleventh centuries was called "Benedictine Hermitism" by renowned medievalist Jean Leclercq.[27] Henrietta Leyser then later referred to the movement as the "New Hermitism."[28] The "New Hermitism" manifested in various forms but generally embraced poverty

and simplicity and the care of souls. Many hermits lived in individual cells but regrouped in a community and adopted a rule. They shared a desire for the solitude and quiet of an imagined wilderness. Given the range of possible experiences in the wilderness, expressions of the New Hermitism varied. Western Monasticism reinterpreted flight to the desert metaphorically, as an inner journey of the mind taking place in the cloister or cell, where the real work of becoming closer to God began.[29] Hermits often lived in cells around a central structure, like a church or monastery.

It is at this moment, in the late tenth century, when two wandering solitaries founded the hermitage called Fonte Avellana, or "Hazelnut Spring," in the Marches near Gubbio. Fonte Avellana delivered the austere way of life that so many contemporary ascetics sought. This setting apparently encouraged friendship. The hermitage's fate changed in 1035 when a new convert arrived. His name was Petrus Damiani, a previously unknown grammar scholar from Ravenna who eventually became a member of the pope's inner circle. Almost immediately, Damian excelled in both theology and religious practice. He became prior of his hermitage and head of its congregation by the early 1040s. In 1057 he was made a cardinal bishop and member of the papal curia, from which point he became an international figure. Peter Damian's friendship circle reached beyond the walls of his hermitage, as his extensive letter collection attests.

Damian wrote to both friends and family. Around 1062, Damian wrote to his sisters Rodelinda and Sufficia. Rodelinda, the elder sister, had been like a mother to Damian. Their actual mother, as Damian's biographer reported, had not been especially kind to her youngest son, to say the least, refusing to nurse the infant for a time and, as he grew into a child, essentially abandoning him.[30] The letter addressed the sisters' lives as widows. Although it is not clear when, precisely, they had lost their husbands with respect to the date of the letter, Damian spoke to their shared grief, which he characterized in terms of suffering, or as he put it, "temporal distress," emphasizing grief's fleeting nature. He likened the course of their lives to receiving repeated blows as slaves endure harsh beatings (*duris verberibus*) from a master.[31] He communicated the reverberating effects of grief as blow after blow after blow; the analogy might resonate with anyone who has experienced profound grief. What Damian meant was that each beating recalled earlier occasions of violent emotions. Trauma matters here because trauma involves a re-living of suffering. Damian explained that only the saved suffered through this temporal existence, because through their labors, salvation was the reward.

Damian sent a strikingly similar letter to the Empress Agnes of Germany but some years after her husband Henry had died. While Agnes' communications to Damian have not survived, we know that she wrote to him on two matters: first, she asked whether it was appropriate to recite the Psalms whilst in the toilet (incidentally, Damian's answer was yes); and second, she intimated her intention to retire to a monastery.[32] In his reply, he reminded Agnes of a meeting between the

two in St. Peter's Basilica in Rome when he had heard her confession. Through many tears she had recounted her sins from the time she was five years of age. He admired that she grieved both her own sin and her ponderous guilt, remarking, if only murderers and criminals felt a shred of such remorse for their deeds that Agnes felt over every trifling misstep from her childhood. Interestingly, he described those sinners as suffering from "toxic humors and diseases" for which the only cure was confession.[33] Gregory the Great, a theologian Damian admired greatly, wrote that penance, because it is performed, was an active reliving of the sin; guilt was part of the process. Confession, then, could be devastating. Gregory perceived the human mind as the battleground in the war between virtues and vices.[34] That war generated trauma, apparently, and Damian tried to recreate what Agnes had felt that day, pushing her to relive the grief and guilt, the aftershocks. But to what end? Because she should want to suffer.

Damian sent many letters to Agnes over the years, and they all shared similar pleas to persist steadfast through emotional pain. In 1065, when Agnes was left alone after an extended period entertaining guests such as the bishop of Como and her sister-in-law, Damian sent a letter offering comfort and consolation for a different ailment, loneliness. He instructed her to expel sadness from her heart and reminded her that since Christ was always by her side, she was never truly alone.[35] Perhaps he was concerned that her piety might slip, but there is no reason to doubt that he sincerely cared about his friend's mental state. Damian did not perceive trauma as a universal result of suffering. He understood Agnes' feelings of loneliness in terms of reliving the moment her friends left her side.

Damian communicated a different message to a husband and wife when their infant son died. He empathized with their loss, writing that he was "overcome" with sorrow at the news and even described having a physiological reaction to grief when "bitter pangs of compassion" had "pierced" his heart.[36] But then, he reflected and realized the response was misguided. God had, in fact, blessed the couple by taking their child into heaven; the more appropriate emotion to feel under the circumstances was joy, not sadness. Damian wrote that exuberant joy should instantly replace their tears, which recalls his statement to Agnes to urgently expel sadness. He again stressed an immediate conversion of emotion upon revelation. However, in this letter he also likened their grief to prolonged illness. While he argued that not one moment should be given over to grief or sadness, at the same time, Damian recognized reliving the moment of loss was inevitable and even, perhaps, not unwelcome; trials and tribulations represented an opportunity to save your soul.

Would this advice have been appreciated by two new parents who had lost their only child, while he was only an infant? Might they have found the message dismissive of their grief? It sounds to modern ears much like the traditional platitudes—"there's a divine plan" or "what doesn't kill you, only makes you stronger," or the even more inane, "get over it." We will never know how these

two people felt, but we do know that the recipients of Damian's letters were part of a wider emotional community. Expressing emotions—how we feel and react—is limited by conventions defined by the emotional community. These conventions pressure people to direct, as Rosenwein puts it, their emotions down a "few narrow channels"; and when that happens, people lose their emotional liberty.[37] Since emotives mutate constantly as we move through various experiences in our lives, our emotions will inevitably conflict with the existing "emotional regime" and consequently, we feel guilt, or fear, or shame when we deviate from the prescribed norms.[38] Damian found it necessary to instruct his friends on how to grieve, which suggests he was at least partly motivated by a desire to reinforce emotional norms in his social circle. Nothing he wrote on grief was new; the idea that suffering should be embraced was positively ancient. Moreover, voluntary suffering was certainly not confined to monastic circles; lay believers performed voluntary penance, too, albeit far less regularly.

Peter Damian extended guidance to his own hermit brothers not unlike that which he dispensed to his lay friends, but his brothers presumably had far more familiarity with the notion of welcoming pain. In 1060, the hermitage of Suavicinum, not far from its motherhouse, Fonte Avellana, fell victim to repeated attacks by "evil and violent men" who plundered the community and terrorized the brothers.[39] Again, Damian seized on the trope of trauma, this time resulting from violence, to produce shame. The brothers of Suavicinum had threatened to abandon their hermitage and build another should the plundering continue. Erecting a new community elsewhere would have been no small undertaking and speaks to the lengths the hermits were willing to go to end their suffering. Damian, however, showed little sympathy for their situation. He wrote that he was more greatly saddened by the "timidity" of his brothers than by these violent attacks.[40] How could they just run away when they had been instructed by Scripture to be patient in all matters? According to Damian's letter, the Scriptures delivered a message of hope. They "tell of how God's chosen ones must undergo great suffering and hardship, they also show what reward they shall receive because of them."[41] He implied that the constancy of their trauma, by which I refer to the fear of violent reprisal (or the aftershock of pain) in the interim, was an opportunity. As Damian explained, "[H]ow much more marvelously can God provide for our welfare by using the calamities provided by others?"[42] After all, did not the saints also suffer the violence of wicked men? Even Christ could not enter heaven until after he endured the Crucifixion. Whereas he laid no blame on Agnes, nor on his sisters or his bereft friends for their emotions, the fact his brothers had not seen this truth deeply disappointed Damian. They should have known better. The emotion Damian attempted to elicit here was shame. Shame is often part of trauma; the traumatized can feel responsible for their own victimization. But Damian did not blame his brothers for the violence, only for their reaction to it. Emotional responses to trauma can be perceived as weakness while burying emotion and pushing forward receives praise. The hermits

submitted to a common human frailty, fear, and they were weak. They should have known that adversity builds character or, in Damian's words, resilience "bears up under persecution."[43]

Like violence, illness behaved as suffering inflicted on the saved for the purpose of accumulating spiritual capital. At the same time, Damian wrote that plague sought out damned men.[44] God delivered disease and only God could take it away. In the context of a Benedictine hermitage, suffering was embraced but had to be voluntary, meaning self-inflicted, which is why enduring sickness was not part of the formula. This might strike us as odd considering that violence and grief are not self-inflicted either. And yet, according to Damian, the way an individual bore an episode of violence, grief, or of disease also communicated piety; namely, a holy man should display tranquility and patience, even indifference, in the face of disease and imminent death. He praised the rigorous devotion of his brother Leo, for example, because he refused to take medicine.[45] Brother Leo was, however, exceptional. The customs of Fonte Avellana actually placed great emphasis on curing the sick. Overcoming illness depended on God's favor but human interventions could relieve pain and suffering. Caring for the sick was a fundamental act of Christian charity, after all; it was an opportunity to reinforce fraternal bonds, which raises the question of whether they would have actively welcomed ill or disabled novices to their ranks.

Christian asceticism has historically represented a living death, so we might expect punishment of the body to include resigned acceptance of illness. The archetypal Holy Man renounced earthly comforts to release his soul from the confines of his body, which seems consistent with Brother Leo's refusal to accept medicine. Leo was unique in this respect, which speaks to an ongoing tension in contemporary ascetic practice. The brothers of Fonte Avellana were not encouraged to follow Leo's example. On the contrary, Damian's rule for hermits stipulated that if a brother took ill, his companions should volunteer to nurse him back to health.[46] The charters of Fonte Avellana also repeatedly guaranteed that a nearby monastery would have accepted (with fraternal kindness) the sick brothers of the hermitage for the purpose of sustaining and restoring them back to health in the more restorative setting of the monastery, or as Damian wrote, "where you will receive the gentle treatment of a less strict life."[47] Moreover, if a brother could not perform his imposed penance, for reason of either illness or death, his brothers received his obligation and divided it equally among themselves.[48] In addition to mutual charity, the brothers' devotions emphasized three fundamental duties of a hermit: solitude, silence, and renunciation. These aspects of hermitism mandated that the hermit not obey his body but force his body to obey him. The body became the battleground between good and evil. At Fonte Avellana, control of impulses led to moderating fasting, eating, and drinking more severely than the Benedictine model. Nevertheless, seeking medical care was not seen as submitting to the will of the body.

The relationship between asceticism and medicine has a long scholarly history, not surprisingly considering suffering for the faith is an idea as old as Christianity itself. Christian ascetics regarded the body and soul as linked to a person in such a way that bodily mortification cured the soul of sin. Fasting caused the body to experience hunger; self-flagellation caused the body to feel pain, and by the High Middle Ages, illness could lead to self-reflection and even conversion. The most obvious example to study this phenomenon is the life of Saint Francis, which Donna Trembinski treats at length in her book on the illness and authority. Although Francis' vitae often described the saint himself as sickly, Franciscans were urged not to seek medical care because it represented giving in to the flesh.[49] Only in the earliest rule of the order did punishment of the body include sickness; that is, passive acceptance of illness could serve as punishment of the body, which coincided with the idea that a sick brother should let be what God designed. Some vitae, however, make clear that Francis saw many doctors at the end of his life. Thomas of Celano, for instance, wrote that Francis and his brothers sought medical care, when necessary, while Bonaventure, in contrast, minimized the presence of doctors in his life.[50]

Anxiety about when to seek out medical care and when to passively endure an illness had its roots in early Christian ambivalence about the nature of Christ as healer versus Christ the healed, or in other words, resurrected. In the eleventh century, before views about the body shifted, these two approaches to illness had not yet crystalized, and Peter Damian negotiated a line between them. In 1058, his brothers Rodolphus and Ariprandus received a poignantly emotional letter from their prior, laden with affective reactions. As such, it allows historicization of the trauma of serious illness; that is, it provides the language Damian used to express a brush with death. He explained that between brothers, empathy should thrive: "It is the quality of cordial friendship that a brother tells his brother both good news and bad, so that as one's heart faithfully feels compassion for the bearer of such a message when misfortune strikes, it can likewise rejoice with him when all goes well."[51] Especially striking are the verbs communicating empathy, what Barbara Rosenwein calls "emotion words"—*compatitur* and *collaetetur*, to suffer together, to rejoice together.[52] He further invited his friends to feel pain as he shared his story: "So I will tell you the whole blessed story of my calamities so that you may grieve with me as I was forcibly struck down by divine blows and may be delighted as I was also mercifully released by the power of the same good God."[53] Again, he employed the verbs imbued with empathy like *patiamini*, "[so that] we may suffer," and *congaudeatis*, "[so that] you may share in [my] joy."[54]

Damian had prayed for illness to "chastise the wanton arrogance" of his body, but his prayers were answered "with interest."[55] He characterized the ordeal in terms of trauma: a wound to his body, soul, and mind that shocked his being beyond his abilities to cope. In his recounting the story he thoroughly relived his affliction. One Sunday, he retired to bed with a fever and spent the next seven

weeks in bed. He arose, again on a Sunday, and was convinced he had recovered but after a few days, he relapsed and sank into severe illness. Although he claimed to have gladly endured the disease, he likened the experience to being consumed by fire and beaten by hammers. He reported vomiting blood and phlegm to the point that his doctors concluded that his death was nigh. Damian pleaded with God to cleanse his soul thoroughly by amputation, burning, and cutting out corrupting sin. Even in the throes of sickness, he managed to write "I am burning. I am dying. I am being killed."[56] He never denied the severity of his pain, or his fear of death, but understood that it was temporal, not spiritual, and it subsided not due to his patience but by the mercy of God. He even begged for death at one point but noted that his own thoughts were irrelevant; the decision was entirely in God's hands. The situation deteriorated to the point that Damian was anointed with holy oil as preparations for his burial commenced. That night, far away in another hermitage, Brother Leo had a dream in which a man, elegantly dressed, visited his cell. The man told Leo that his prior was on the verge of death but should ignore his doctors and simply give food to one hundred poor persons to be restored to health. Given that Leo was too far away to deliver the message in time, he and his brothers assumed the burden and gave alms to the poor. The following day, Damian made a full (and miraculous) recovery.

There is some evidence that the feelings Damian described were authentic. He seemed very concerned about the confidentiality of his story, which implies it was not merely hyperbole. At the close of the letter, he wrote "As a friend, my dear brothers, I have revealed these matters to you, my friends and confederates, and with intimate familiarity have explained the course of my affliction as if I were speaking to my blood brothers . . . My dear brothers, after God I commit this [breakthrough] of mine to your confidence."[57] In any case, the description of his ordeal communicated sincerity through emotives, and pain was an inherent part of genuine penitence.[58] While actual trauma may or may not have been present, we can never know, but as a trope it surely was. Damian used the incident both to ask for intimacy and to create it by exposing his vulnerability.

Damian's own illness informed how he described disease in later letters. In 1060, he wrote to an unnamed bishop and vividly analogized the man's bout of sickness to a brutal beating. He applied the same language when comforting a lay noble recovering from severe illness who had requested that Damian send him some words of consolation (*consolatoria verba*). In that letter he sent a familiar message writing, "This very chastisement is truly a great comfort to those whom God has chosen, because by bearing up under temporary blows, their steps grow stronger in the firm home that they will attain the glory of everlasting happiness."[59] He specifically remarked that the blows were similar to what a father might give a misbehaving child and not at all like a master beating an enslaved person, but the words also recalled self-flagellation. Damian exhorted his friend to embrace the pain, which was temporary anyway, as it was good for the soul.

Resign acceptance of illness lay on a spectrum of suffering; more extreme still was the refusal of medical care, the latter of which occurred, at least in the corpus of Damian's letters, just among monks. And even then, only the most extreme hermits refused care, and the practice was hardly encouraged. Damian repeatedly stated that each hermit should perform individual devotions according to his own abilities. In a 1065 letter to his brothers Ariprandus and Liupardus, Damian addressed their concerns when he granted their request to be buried at the hermitage of Fonte Avellana. Since it was customary for sick hermits to retire to the monastery for the duration of their ailment, the brothers worried that if they died in the care of monks, their bodies would not have been returned to the hermitage for burial. Damian, in his words, "decreed" and "confirmed" in an "unalterable decision" that sick hermits could only remain at the hermitage if they could stand not to eat meat, normally excluded from their strict diet anyway but permitted for the sake of recovery in illness.[60] If they could persist in their devotional fasting, they could stay, but if they could not recover from illness without eating meat, then they must absolutely be taken to a monastery or church; however, if they died away from Fonte Avellana, their bodies would be returned and buried at the hermitage. Damian's judgment on the matter implied that some of the hermits wanted to push through their illness denying themselves care and comfort, as part of their ascetic practice.[61]

In light of this observation, we might expect some hermits to appear indifferent to death. The life of the Late Antique Holy Man meant living death, but that was not always true in the eleventh century. Damian advised his friends not to fear death and yet, he became acutely sensitive to the brevity of life. He was ill many times in his life and possibly as a result he feared death and had no trouble admitting it. Toward the end of his life, he wrote his brother, Damianus, and expressed an acute awareness of his impending demise: "[M]y spirit is constantly afflicted with sorrow as I carefully watch the day of my death coming ever closer and appearing before my eyes as if it were present."[62] He commented that he had lived many years, that his hair had become white. He lamented that in any gathering, he was always the oldest person in the room. He fixated on the grave; he feared not only the death of his body but also the judgment of his soul:

> I put aside all my concerns and think only of death, meditate on the grave, and do not avert my eyes from my last resting place. Nor is my unhappy spirit satisfied with this dread sight alone, fixing the limits of its attention on the death of the body but is soon hauled before the judge, there to muse, and not without great trepidation, over what can be held against it, and how it can plead its defense.[63]

He contemplated not only death but the entire process of dying, a far more complex fear. Damian recommended contemplating death as a coping mechanism during severe illness, but his letters expose a tension between

meditating on the grave while simultaneously fearing the end of one's life and what came next.

Reading Damian's letters through the lens of trauma complicates the notion that monks and hermits welcomed discomfort, and even traumatic trials and tribulations, as part of their spiritual development. There is power in trauma; overcoming illness or violent injury signaled divine favor. If we think of trauma as the reliving and re-experiencing of pain and not the memory of pain, since the memory is always present, then trauma has benefits to the soul—the constant suffering, rather than the overcoming of suffering, indicates God's favor, too. But human weakness could, and did, interfere. The letters of Peter Damian show that talking about trauma also had its purpose. Sharing a trauma experience, either by recounting a personal experience or by empathizing with the experience of someone else, could deepen relationships between religious brethren but also beyond the bounds of the monastery. Damian communicated to friends as they were grieving, suffering, consumed by fear, and in short, at their most helpless, which brings me to my final point. Peter Damian took great pains to comfort and console family, friends, brothers, and even rivals, and in so doing he drew multiple actors together in a single emotional community. Emotional communities created and reinforced values and ideals, which is why Damian's trope about suffering as a spiritually ennobling mattered. His expression of emotions reinforced community bonds, but more importantly, he communicated these emotions and thus shored up the values of that community.

Notes

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1 Trauma studies span social sciences and humanities disciplines, including, but not limited to, anthropology, art history, comparative literature, linguistics, psychology, and sociology; and they also intersect with the study of disability, feminist studies, indigenous studies, race studies, and the study of enslaved persons. It would be impractical, therefore, to cite all the relevant scholarship here, but the general works I consulted include Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore, 2001); A. Dirk Moses, "Genocide and the Terror of History," *Parallax* 17 (2011), 90–108; *Early Modern Trauma: Europe and the Atlantic World* (Lincoln, Nebraska, 2021). The work of Cathy Caruth has become enormously influential reading, especially among literary scholars; see Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore,

1995); Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Caruth, "Parting Words: Trauma, Silence, and Survival," *Intervalla* 2 (2014), 21–33. The "Caruth School" has become so pervasive that a countermovement arose in the early 2000s; see Michelle Balaev, "Literary Trauma Theory Reconsidered," in *Contemporary Approaches in Literary Trauma Theory*, pp. 1–13, ed. Michelle Balaev (New York, 2014); Petar Ramadanovic, "The Time of Trauma: Rereading *Unclaimed Experience and Testimony*," *Journal of Literary and Trauma Studies* 3 (2014), 1–23; Joshua Pederson, "Speak, Trauma: Toward a Revised Understanding of Literary Trauma Theory," *Narrative* 22 (2014), 334–53.

2 Barbara Rosenwein *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca, 2006); *Generations of Feeling: A History of Emotions, 600–1700* (Cambridge, 2015); (with co-author Riccardo Cristiani), *What Is the History of Emotions?* (Cambridge, 2017); *Anger: The Conflicted History of an Emotion* (London, 2020); *Love: A History in Five Fantasies* (Cambridge, 2021).

3 Alison I. Beach, *The Trauma of Monastic Reform: Community and Conflict in Twelfth-Century Germany* (Cambridge, 2017).

4 Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities*, see table 3, pp. 52–3.

5 Federigo Melis is arguably the most prominent historian of the Datini letters; a bibliography of his works is available through the Instituto Internazionale di Storia Economica "F. Datini": www2.istitutodatini.it/pagina200_bibliografia.html. There are several published editions of certain letters but not the complete corpus, which is housed in the Archivio di Stato in Prato, Italy. For an excellent study of the Medici as a social network, see Paul D. McLean, *The Art of the Network: Strategic Interaction and Patronage in Renaissance Florence* (Durham, NC, 2007). On the Paston letters and emotions, see Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities* and *Generations of Feeling: A History of Emotions 600–1700*.

6 Walter Ysaebert, "Medieval Letters and Letter Collections as Historical Sources: Methodological Questions and Reflections and Research Perspectives (6th–14th Centuries)," *Studi medievali: Revista della Fondazione Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo* 50 (2009), 41–73; Julian P. Haseldine, "Friendship Networks in Medieval Europe," AMITY: *The Journal of Friendship Studies* 1 (2013), 69–88. See also, Margaret Mullett, "Power, Relations and Networks in Medieval Europe," *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Filologie en Geschiedenis/Revue Belge de Phililogie et d'Histoire* 83 (2005), 255–314.

7 Richard Southern, *Saint Anselm and his Biographer* (Cambridge, 1963); R. Southern, *Saint Anselm: A Portrait in a Landscape* (Cambridge, 1990). Brian Patrick McGuire, *Friendship and Community: The Monastic Experience 350–1250* (Ithaca, 1988; repr. 2010). H.M. Canatella, "Friendship in Anselm of Canterbury's Correspondence: Ideals and Experience," *Viator: Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 38 (2007), 351–67; Julian P. Haseldine, "Friends, Friendship and Networks in the Letters of Bernard of Clairvaux," *Cîteaux:*

commetarii cistercienses 57 (2006), 243–79; Haseldine, "Understanding the Language of Amicitia: The Friendship Circle of Peter of Celle (c. 1115–1183)," *Journal of Medieval History* 20 (1994), 237–60.

8 I.S. Robinson, "The Friendship Network of Gregory VII," *History* 63 (1978), 1–22.

9 Kathryn L. Jasper, "Peter Damian and the Communication of Reform," *The Catholic Historical Review* 104 (2018), 197–222.

10 Steven Vanderputten argues that strains of reform running side-by-side constitute a long process stretching into the twelfth century and beyond; see his monography entitled *Monastic Reform as Process*: *Realities and Representations in Medieval Flanders, 900–1100* (Ithaca, 2013).

11 Giles Constable, "Renewal and Reform in Religious Life: Concepts and Realities," *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century*, eds. Robert L. Benson and Giles Constable (Cambridge, 1982), as well as Constable, *The Reformation of the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge, 1996).

12 Beach, *The Trauma of Monastic Reform*, p. 19; Constable, *The Reformation of the Twelfth Century*, p. 3.

13 See Book 3 in Augustin Fliche, *La Chrétienté Médiévale 395–1254* (Paris, 1929), 281–301; Gerd Tellenbach, *Libertas*. *Kirche und Weltordnung im Zeitalter des Investiturstreits* (Stuttgart, 1936); an English edition was published entitled *Church, State and Christian Society at the Time of the Investiture Contest*, trans. R. F. Bennett (Oxford, 1940; rpt. ed. Cambridge, Mass., 1991); see Tellenbach's position on the issue in section IV, chapter 3, pp. 112–125.

14 Steven Vanderputten, "Monastic Reform from the Tenth to the Twelfth Century," in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Monasticism in the West*, eds. Alison I. Beach and Isabelle Cochelin (Cambridge, 2020), pp. 599–617.

15 Vanderputten, "Monastic Reform from the Tenth to the Twelfth Century," pp. 600–601.

16 Damien Boquet and Piroska Nagy, *Medieval Sensibilities: A History of Emotions in the Medieval West*, trans. Robert Shaw (Cambridge, 2018), p. 69. Originally published as *Sensible Moyen Âge: Une histoire des émotions dans l'Occident médiéval* (Paris, 2015).

17 Boquet and Nagy, *Medieval Sensibilities*, p. 69.

18 Kurt Reindel, ed., *Die Briefe des Petrus Damiani*, Die Briefe der Deutschen Kaiserzeit, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, 4 volumes (Munich, 1983–93); here Reindel, *Briefe*, volume 1, Letter 17, pp. 155–167; Peter Damian, *Vita Beati Romualdi*, ed. Giovanni Tabacco (Rome, 1957), Chapter 37, p. 78.

19 Patricia Ranft, *The Theology of Peter Damian: "Let Your Life Always Serve as a Witness"* (Washington D.C., 2011), pp. 8–11. See also P. Ranft, *The Theology of Work: Peter Damian and the Medieval Religious Movement* (Washington D.C., 2006).

20 Ranft, *Theology of Peter Damian*, p. 11.

21 Wendy J. Turner and Christina Lee, "Conceptualizing Trauma for the Middle Ages," in *Trauma in Medieval Society*, pp. 3–12, eds. Wendy J. Turner and Christina Lee (Leiden, 2018), here p. 8.

22 Donna Trembinski, "Trauma as a Category of Analysis," in *Trauma in Medieval Society*, pp. 13–32, eds. Wendy J. Turner and Christina Lee (Leiden, 2018), here p. 14.

23 Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities*, 8; Anthony Bale, "Afterword: Three Letters," in *Medieval Affect, Feeling, and Emotion*, pp. 203–17, eds. Glenn D. Burger and Holly A. Crocker (Cambridge, 2019); see *The Routledge History of Emotions in Europe*, eds. Andrew Lynch and Susan Broomhall (New York, 2020).

24 Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities*, p. 2.

25 Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities*, p. 24–25.

26 Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities*, p. 24–25.

27 J. Leclerq, "La crise du monachisme aux XIe et XIIe siècles," *Bullettino dell'Istituto storico italiano per il medioevo* 70 (1958), pp. 9–41; trans. "The Monastic Crisis of the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries," *in Clunaic Monasticism and the Central Middle Ages*, pp. 217–27, ed. N. Hunt (London, 1971); J. Van Engen, "The 'Crisis of Coenobitism' Reconsidered: Benedictine Monasticism in the Years 1050–1150," *Speculum* 61 (1986), 269–304.

28 Henrietta Leyser, *Hermits and the New Monasticism: A Study of Religious Communities in Western Europe* (New York, 1984).

29 Judith Adler, "Cultivating Wilderness: Environmentalism and the Legacies of Early Christian Asceticism," *Society for Comparative Study of Society and History* (2006), pp. 4–27; here 28.

30 Reindel, *Briefe*, volume 3, Letter 149, pp. 546–54; Johannes of Lodi, *Vita Petri Damiani*, in *Studien zue literarischen Wirksamkeit des Petrus Damiani*, ed. Stephan Freund (Hannover, 1995). An elder brother took him in but mistreated the child, denying him food and comfort and forcing him to take care of his pigs. Another brother showed Peter kindness and arranged for him to leave his miserable situation and receive an education in Ravenna, where this brother, called Damianus, served as an archpriest; his name was most likely the one Peter Damian adopted as his own.

31 Reindel, *Briefe*, volume 3, Letter 94, p. 31.

32 Reindel, *Briefe*, volume 3, Letter 104, p. 150. English translations of the letters are published in Owen J. Blum, ed., *The Letters of Peter Damian*, The Fathers of the Church: Medieval Continuation, 7 volumes (Washington D.C., 1989–2005]; here Blum, *Letters*, volume 5 (1998), Letter 104, p. 156.

33 Reindel, *Briefe*, volume 3, Letter 104, p. 152; English translation in Blum, *Letters*, volume 5 (1998), Letter 104, p. 156.

34 Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities*, pp. 82–3.

35 Reindel, *Briefe*, volume 3, Letter 124, pp. 409–10; English translation in Blum, *Letters*, volume 6 (2004), Letter 124, pp. 21–25.

36 Reindel, *Briefe*, volume 1, Letter 15, p. 151; English translation in Blum, *Letters*, volume 1 (1989), Letter, p. 140.

37 Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities*, p. 18.

38 Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities*, pp. 21–23.

39 Reindel, *Briefe*, volume 2, Letter 76, p. 378; English translation in Blum, *Letters*, volume 3 (1992), Letter 76, p. 159.

40 Reindel, *Briefe*, volume 2, Letter 76, p. 378; English translation in Blum, *Letters*, volume 3 (1992), Letter 76, p. 159.

41 Reindel, *Briefe*, volume 2, Letter 76, p. 378; English translation in Blum, *Letters*, volume 3 (1992), Letter 76, p. 160.

42 Reindel, *Briefe*, volume 2, Letter 76, p. 378; English translation in Blum, *Letters*, volume 3 (1992), Letter 76, p. 160.

43 Reindel, *Briefe*, volume 2, Letter 76, p. 384; English translation in Blum, *Letters*, volume 3 (1992), Letter 76, pp. 165–6.

44 Reindel, *Briefe*, volume 3, Letter 76, p. 533; English translation in Blum, *Letters*, volume 3 (1992), Letter 146, p. 156.

45 Reindel, *Briefe*, volume 2, Letter 44, p. 20; English translation in Blum, *Letters*, volume 2 (1990) Letter 44, p. 231.

46 Reindel, *Briefe*, volume 2, Letter 50, pp. 104–5; English translation in Blum, *Letters*, volume 2 (1990), Letter 50, pp. 309–10.

47 Reindel, *Briefe*, volume 3, Letter 128, p. 430; English translation in Blum, *Letters*, volume 6 (2004), Letter 128, p. 47. The following passage from the charters on Fonte Avellana explains the practice: "[C]um necessarium fuerit, et monasterium infirmos fratres heremi ad refoccilandum et sustentandum usque ad Saintitatem cum licencia prioris fraternal benignitate suscipiat et hermite fratres monachos de monasterio venientes, cum licentia abbatis, libenter admittant" (*Carte di Fonte Avellana*, *i Regesti degli anni 975–1139*, volume 1, eds. Celestino Pierucci and Alberto Polverari, [Rome, 1972], document 15, p. 38).

48 Reindel, *Briefe*, volume 2, Letter 50, p. 99; English translation in Blum, *Letters*, volume 2 (1990), Letter 50, p. 304.

49 Donna Trembinski, *Illness and Authority: Disability in the Life and Lives Francis of Assisi* (Toronto, 2020), p. 115.

50 Trembinski, *Illness and Authority*, p. 115.

51 "Unanimis amiciciae proprium est, ut cum fratre frater et prospera comunicet et adversa, quatinus fideliter animus sicut referenti in adversitate compatitur, ita nicholominus et in prosperis unanimiter collaetetur" (Reindel, *Briefe*, volume 2, Letter 55, p. 149; English translation in Blum, *Letters*, volume 2 [1990], Letter 55, p. 355).

52 Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities*, table 3, pp. 52–3.

53 "Ego vero cumulates utroque beatam vobis refero meae calamitatis hystoriam, ut et superno verbere me patiamini vehementer attritum, et per eiusdem Dei nostri potentiam congaudeatis etiam clementer ereptum" (Reindel, *Briefe*, volume 2, Letter 55, p. 149; English translation in Blum, *Letters*, volume 2 [1990], Letter 55, p. 355).

54 Reindel, *Briefe*, volume 2, Letter 55, p. 149; English translation in Blum, *Letters*, volume 2 (1990), Letter 55, p. 355.

55 Reindel, *Briefe*, volume 2, Letter 55, p. 149; English translation in Blum, *Letters*, volume 2 (1990), Letter 55, p. 355.

56 Reindel, *Briefe*, volume 2, Letter 55, p. 150; English translation in Blum, *Letters*, volume 2 (1990), Letter 55, p. 356.

57 "Haec vobis, dilectissimi, tamquam complicibus et amicis amicus exposui, meaeque visitationis seriem velut uterinis fratribus unanimim familiaritate digessi . . . Hunc filium nostrum, dilectissimi, in vestra post Deum fiducia dirigo" (Reindel, *Briefe*, volume 2, Letter 55, p. 155; English translation in Blum, *Letters*, volume 2 [1990], Letter 55, p. 360).

58 Esther Cohen, *The Modulated Scream: Pain in Late Medieval Culture* (Chicago, 2009), p. 32.

59 "Magna quippe electis Dei est consolatio, ipsa divina percussio, quia per momentanea flagella, quae perferunt, ad nanciscendam supernae beatitudinis gloriam firmae spei gressibus convalescunt" (Reindel, *Briefe*, volume 4, Letter 179, p. 288; English translation in Blum, *Letters*, volume 7 [2005], Letter 179, p. 291).

60 Reindel, *Briefe*, volume 3, Letter 128, p. 429; English translation in Blum, *Letters*, volume 6 (2004), Letter 128, p. 47.

61 Reindel, *Briefe*, volume 3, Letter 128, p. 429; English translation in Blum, *Letters*, volume 6 (2004), Letter 128, p. 47.

62 "[Q]uia continuo mens mea maerore deprimitur, dum diem propria exitus iamiam proprius inminentem et tamquam prae oculis positum assidue contemplator" (Reindel, *Briefe*, volume 3, Letter 138, p. 473; English translation in Blum, *Letters*, volume 6 [2004], Letter 138, p. 97).

63 "[P]ostpositis omnibus curis de sola morte cogito, sepulchrum meditor, a sepulchro mentis oculos non avello. Neque hoc solo infelix mens mea pavore contenta in morte corporis considerationis suae limitem figit, sed mox ad iuditium rapitur, quid sibi obici valeat, quid ipsa defensionis optendat, non sine magna formidine meditator" (Reindel, *Briefe*, volume 3, Letter 138, p. 473; English translation in Blum, *Letters*, volume 6 [2004], Letter 138, p. 97).