Looking for Burn Victims or Survivors in Medieval Europe

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There can be nothing more traumatic than being burnt. The pain of the initial injury might give way to shock, blistering, further pain and possible infection. The extent of the injury – the depth of burning through layers of skin, the proportion of the body surface caught in the flames (scalds share some of the same effects, but not all) – can determine whether a patient is likely to survive or succumb to death. Secondary effects, such as inhaling smoke, can severely damage internal organs or cause the person to lose consciousness, delaying or preventing their escape from the fire. Above all, burns are disfiguring – even modern surgical technologies utilizing skin grafts and prosthetics cannot restore the ‘before’ appearance of a person. As burns survivor James Partridge, founder and CEO of the UK charity *Changing Faces* has commented, ‘Successfully changing faces amounts to completely facing up to your new face ... and effectively persuading all those whom you meet that behind your mask is a perfectly normal person....’¹ The trauma caused by burns, then, can be catastrophic in both physical, psychological and social terms, yet the historiography of burning and being burned in the medieval period seems mainly to focus on the use of fire as a tool to destroy heretical bodies or books,² or as a means to dispose of corpses,³ or, most devastating of all, as a tool of warfare, discussed below. Whether consigning both to the flames was intended to evoke images of burning in hell has recently been open to question: certainly fire did not totally

1 James Partridge, *Changing Faces: the Challenge of Facial Disfigurement* (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 4. Although his comment is about a severely burnt face, the change he refers to could apply – though possibly less dramatically – to any visible part of the body that is burned.

2 An early example of fire as a tool of execution is discussed by Michael D. Barbezat, ‘The fires of hell and the burning of heretics in the accounts of the executions at Orleans in 1022’, *Journal of Medieval History*, 40 (2014), 399–420; Alexander Murray, ‘The burning of heretical books’, in *Heresy and the Making of European Culture: Medieval and Modern Perspectives*, ed. A. Roach and J. Simpson (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 77–88.

3 *Der Leichnam im Mittelalter: Einbalsamierung, Verbrennung und die kulturelle Konstruktion des toten Körpers*, ed. Romedio Schmitz-Esser (Ostfildern: Thorbecke, 2014).

consume flesh and bones.⁴ Such historiographical themes, however, have served to obscure the role of fire as an everyday tool in medieval life, and its associated hazards.

Archaeologists have been rather more sensitive to this issue – hearths are after all very distinctive archaeological features, and the positioning of ovens and kilns for domestic and industrial use was often dictated by considerations about the risk of fire. Medieval buildings were, by and large, made of wood, and in urban dwellings built close together, meaning that when fire broke out it could spread catastrophically. To take just one example, the annals of the city of Genoa record numerous fires, and the annalist, Caffaro, even adds pen sketches of buildings aflame to emphasize the damage. His report of the fire that took hold on Christmas night 1154 is particularly vivid:

... [A]s night came, it happened that a fire broke out in a small house in the suburb, and spread up to other houses nearby. The citizens who were then in the city, who were most fearsome warriors and the bravest defenders of the city against any adversity, ran to the fire, tore down the alight houses and threw on water to extinguish the fire, so that although a small part of the suburb was destroyed the rest of it and the houses of the city remained unharmed.⁵

Caffaro's chronicle of course emphasises the collective civic responsibility on display here, but one that nevertheless would have been a shared memory for the residents affected and those who had run to help.

Nonetheless such reports, and secondary studies of the urban environment, still highlight the risk of fire to the *buildings*, rather than focusing on potential injuries to *people* and the signs of fire on skeletal remains.⁶ Studies of the

4 Romedio Schmitz-Esser, 'The cursed and the holy body: burning corpses in the middle ages', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 45 (2015), 131-157.

5 *Annali Genovesi di Caffaro e de' suoi continuatori*, ed. L.T. Belgrano (Rome: Istituto Storico Italiano, 1890), reporting fires for the years 1122 (p. 18), 1141 (p. 31) and 1154 (p. 39): '...nocte veniente, fortuito casu, accidit in quadam domuscula burgi civitatis quod ignis accensus fuit, et iuxta manentes super alias mansiones comburendo ascendit. Cives illico qui in civitate erant, ferocissimi bellatores et contra omnia adversa fortissimi deffensores, sine mora ad ignem cucurrerunt, et mansiones destruendo et aquam prociendo, ignem ita extinxerunt, quod postquam particula burgi combusta fuit, omnes alie mansiones burgi et civitatis incolumes remanserunt'.

6 See, e.g. John Schofield and Alan Vince, *Medieval Towns: the Archaeology of British Towns in their European Setting* (2nd ed., London: Continuum, 2003), pp. 121 and 135; an exception is Carola Berszin and Joachim Wahl, 'Verbrannt oder enthauptet: auf den Spuren mittelalterli-

human remains that are concerned with health and welfare do not even raise the possibility of burns manifesting in the evidence, despite the possibility that full-thickness burns could leave traces of damage to the bone.⁷

Modern scholarship, then, has somewhat overlooked the medieval burns victim, but the challenge also lies in finding evidence for them, which is exiguous to say the least. Was being burned so commonplace, so mundane, as to not warrant attention in the medieval narrative sources? Or were the clergy and the elite, about whose lives we know the most, the least likely social group to come into regular and close contact with fire or boiling liquids? How survivable were burns injuries, and what treatments were known or available to deal with them? This chapter will attempt to sketch out some areas worthy of further investigation. It does not claim to be at all comprehensive, but will consider the very few documented cases, to see why they were documented, and whether they can be said to be at all typical of the burns victim's experience. Modern support groups, it should be noted, disagree on whether to categorise those who have been burned as 'victims' or 'survivors'. In using 'victim' here I refer simply to someone who has been burned, as the possibly deleterious effects on their life thereafter are entirely absent from view: but later on this chapter will consider someone who could be called a true 'survivor'.

Two clauses from the Edict of Rothar, king of Lombard Italy, issued in 643 CE, introduce the theme of this chapter, the human collision with fire and its possibly traumatic consequences in the medieval period.

Concerning a brand of fire carried more than nine feet from the hearth. He who carries a brand of fire more than nine feet from his hearth and thereby causes some damage to his own or to another man's property shall render compensation singlefold, that is, he shall pay the value of the damage alone as compensation as he did so unintentionally. *If the dam-*

cher und frühneuzeitlicher Hinrichtungsoffer in Constanz', in *Richtstättenarchäologie* 2, ed. J. Auler (Dormagen: archaeotopos, 2010), pp. 428-433, but this only considers executed, not injured bodies.

7 Charlotte Roberts, 'Health and welfare in medieval England: the human skeletal remains contextualized', in *Reflections: 50 Years of Medieval Archaeology 1957-2007*, ed. (Leeds: Maney, 2009), pp. 307-325, has nothing on burns. Full thickness effects: Online, <http://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/healthlibrary/conditions/dermatology/burns_85,P01146/> [Accessed 22 September 2015]; Douglas Jackson, 'Burns of bone: can these bones live?' *Burns*, 1 (1975): 342-355, suggests, p. 342, that 'Burns of bone... must have occurred ever since fire and the falling sickness were known to men'. Methodologically, the issue would be whether the burning signs were pre-, peri- or post-mortem.

age occurs to himself or to someone else within nine feet from the hearth, he shall not be liable for compensation.⁸

He who makes a fire beside the road should extinguish it before he goes away and not leave it negligently. If, after his departure, someone sustains damage or injury from that fire, he who made it and left it negligently shall pay the amount of the damage which has been adjudged to have been sustained as composition. And this is to be reckoned from that hour when the fire was left up to the same hour of the next day or night, that is, for twenty-four hours.⁹

In each law, the main concern of the legislator was to ensure that retaliatory measures for injury (whether to property or to the person) were replaced by financial compensation, but the clauses are also interesting for what they reveal about attitudes to fire. Spatially, fire was a hazard if taken beyond the boundaries of the home, yet accidental burns within nine feet of the hearth, whether to the householder or anyone entering that space, did not establish any cause for claim. The primary concern was again to protect property from the careless use of fire: although the Lombard laws, and many others like them issued in the early middle ages, are detailed in the levels of compensation required for personal injuries to the body, they seem to envisage deliberate harm with weapons or fists rather than the indiscriminate or deliberate use of fire as a weapon.

Fire was of course ubiquitous in the medieval household, whether in the hearth place or its equivalent for heat and cooking, or in the form of candles or lamps, for light. The naked flames of fires and torches could give off hot embers, and whilst a solid beeswax candle, with its higher melting point, might melt in a predictable way when lit, tallow and oil were rather less stable, and often

8 The emphasis is mine. 'De fogum foris novem pedes a fogolarum portatum: Si quis focum foris novem pedes a focolarum portaverit, et damnum ex ipso focum sibi aut alterius factum fuerit, ipse qui portavit damnum componat ferquido id est similem ideo quia nolens fecit. Et si intra ipsos novem pedes, id est de focolare, damnum facere sibi aut alterius contigerit, non ei requiratur': *Leges Langobardorum*, Rothari 147, ed. F. Bluhme, *MGH LL*, IV, ed. G.H. Pertz (Hannover: Hahn, 1868), p. 34. English translation from *The Lombard Laws*, tr. K. Fischer Drew (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1973), p. 76.

9 'Si quis focum foris in itinere fecerit, antequam egrediatur, extinguat eum et non negligenter dimittat. Nam si contigerit post egressum ipsius alicui ex ipsum focum damnum aut lesionem ficerit, ipse qui focum fecit et negligenter dimisit damnum sicut arbitratum fuerit caput tantum componat; sic tamen ut post relictum focum, qua ora eum reliquerit usque ad aliam talem oram die aut noctis conpotetur, quod sunt oras viginti et quattuor...': *ibid.*, Rothari 148, p. 34. English translation *ibid.*, p. 76.

used with open, burning wicks of cloth. The sixth century collection of *Lives of the Confessors* written by Bishop Gregory of Tours tells a cautionary tale of the perils of placing one's bed too close to the built-up fire, especially in winter when the days were short and cold. A stray spark might have destroyed his mother's house, he records, had the relics of St Eusebius that she kept there not turned the flames from the roof beams and enabled the fire to be extinguished.¹⁰ The Lombard laws ostensibly take a practical view, then, that accidental burns were part and parcel of life within that notional nine-foot boundary, but that irresponsible carrying of that fire brand outside the home was an inherently risky act that exposed the householder to liability if s/he burned something or somebody. Yet these passages also signal a space in which the non-resident took her or his chances: their very presence in the house was a penetration of legal space, whether or not they had been invited, and they had only themselves to blame if they were not careful whilst visiting a strange environment.

The second quotation follows on immediately from the first in the laws, and builds on the theme of fire out of bounds (preceding and later clauses deal with acts of arson, against houses or mills). Making and then leaving a fire burning in a public or open space was a deliberate act, for which the maker was responsible. Whether or not s/he intended it, the burns sustained by people or property from this fire were her or his responsibility, and compensation was again payable up to twenty-four hours after the fire had been set (acknowledging, though not explicitly, the intense heat that might remain in charred wood even if the flames had died down). Accidental and deliberate burns were treated in the same, undifferentiated manner in these clauses. Other early law codes consider the dangers of fire as well, but in quite specific ways. The eighth-century *Lex Baiwariorum* penalizes the person who 'throws another into a fire so that the flames come above his head' (alongside clauses about throwing people off horses and ladders).¹¹

Returning to accidental burns, hazards in the home might include the scalding-hot liquids of cooking pots and brewing operations. A ninth-century East Frankish stricture, issued in the context of the church council at Tribur in 895, is alive to the accidental and domestic dangers of fire and boiling water:

10 *Liber in Gloria Confessorum*, c. 3, in *Gregorii Turonensis Opera*, II, ed. B. Krusch, *MGH SS rer. Merov.* I.2 (Hannover: Hahn, 1885), p. 300. For another story of miraculous extinction of fire, this time in the fields but still attributable to the piety of Gregory's mother, *Liber in Gloria Martyrum*, c. 83, in *ibid.*, p. 95.

11 'Similiter qui in ignem impinxerit ita, ut flamma super caput emineat, cum XII sold. componet': *Lex Baiwariorum*, IV.20, ed. E. Liber, *MGH LL. Nat. Germ.*, V.2 (Hannover: Hahn, 1926), p. 330.

About the mother, through whose negligence her baby dies. If a woman, as often happens, places her baby next to the fire, and someone else hangs a cauldron/pot above the fire and fills it with water, and the heat of the fire makes the water boil over and spill over the child, on account of which it dies, the mother will be punished by a priest on account of her negligence, and the man, who hung the cauldron shall remain blameless (*securus*).¹²

This case clearly highlights an accidental death, but the baby's proximity to the fire is the cause of negligence, not the subsequent action of the person cooking. There is no distinction again between accident and design. (Note, however, the apparent distinction between the negligent mother and the rather careless, or at least unthinking, man who hangs the pot.)

Much later, Welsh law took a slightly different view. The *Damweiniau* or 'Eventualities', appended to the core of Welsh law manuscripts from the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, made a distinction between intentional and accidental burning.¹³ This stated that: 'There is no damage done by a person's fire to another person's flesh, without the person's act associated with it, for which compensation is made'.¹⁴ This somewhat ambiguous clause requires that something other than simple collision takes place – whether the 'person's act' be that of the fire-owner or the victim is unclear in the English translation.

All of these legal examples are essentially prescriptive: the early Lombard laws hint at the trauma of fire damage but do not link it to their extensive lists of other types of bodily injury at the hands of others. It is also risky to assume that the compensation required for a visible scar from burning would be the same as one from a weapons injury, accidental or not. Rothar's law, like the

12 'De muliere, cuius infans aliquo casu propter negligentiam eius moritur. Si quae mulier, ut sepe contingit, infantem proprium prope ignem collaverit et alius quis caldarium super ignem ipsum pependerit et aquam infuderit atque aqua ipsa per ignem fervens egreditur et infanti superfunditur et propterea mortuus agitur: mater infantis propter negligentiam iudicio sacerdotum poeniteat, et homo, qui caldarium pependit, securus permeneat': *Additamenta ad capitularia regum Franciae orientalis* 252: *Concilium Triburiense* (895), c. 37, in *MGH Capit. Reg. Franc.* II, ed. A. Boretius and V. Krause (Hannover: Hahn, 1897), pp. 234-5.

13 On the relationship of the *Damweiniau* to the rest of the laws, see the excellent website <<http://cyfraith-hywel.cymru.ac.uk/en/index.php>> [accessed 22 September 2015] and the edition by Dafydd Jenkins, *Damweiniau Colan* (Aberystwyth: University of Wales Press, 1973).

14 English translation in *The Laws of Hywel Dda: Law Texts from Medieval Wales*, tr. D. Jenkins (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 1986), p. 171.

canons of the Frankish council at Tribur, envisages negligence at the heart of burns injuries, rather than deliberate acts of violence. The Bavarian law, by contrast, does consider the possibility of pushing or throwing an opponent into the fire, but simply sets a compensation payment for the survivor, without further comment. Compared with other contemporary codes from Francia, it has little concern for possible medical treatment, and it does not even specify whether the person thrown is expected to survive – presumably they are, since compensation is due.¹⁵ The nature and placing of these references in the wider context of the laws, however, suggest that burning was conceived as a different category from other injuries in medieval legal records.

Working on an earlier project examining acquired facial disfigurement in early medieval Europe, it soon became apparent that burns victims are indeed remarkably elusive in the sources, despite plenty of evidence that medieval writers often found visible difference fascinating to write about.¹⁶ There are some early medieval references to branding the faces of miscreants (the thief in Lombard law, a treasonous, female palace servant in sixth-century Francia), but the narrative materials were reticent about burns.¹⁷ The ninth-century Frankish case only considers what happens to a negligent mother in the case of her baby's death, and does not allude to the possibility of the child's survival. The association of fire with fatality continues in later medieval English coroner's records, heavily mined for accidents to medieval people. Here, *fatalities* from burning, especially among women and children, include falling onto fires or being scalded by hot liquids, and again it is striking that the domestic setting features as a site of burns.¹⁸ Adam the Welshman, for instance, is recorded as having been burnt to death in his own home (*combustus fuit in domo sua propria*) in the Shropshire Eyre Roll of 1263. The record laconically attributes his death to 'misadventure (*infortunium*) and we learn nothing more.¹⁹ The

15 Discussion in Patricia Skinner, *Living with Disfigurement in Early Medieval Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming), Chapter 6.

16 Skinner, *Living with Disfigurement*. The project leading to that book was funded by the Wellcome Trust, grant no 097469, whose continuing support I gratefully acknowledge.

17 Lombard law: *Leges Langobardorum*, Liutprand, 80, dated 726. Treason: *Gregorii Episcopi Turoniensis Libri Historiarum X*, IX.38, ed. B. Krusch and W. Levison, *MGH ss Rer Merov.*, I (Hannover: Hahn, 1951), discussed in Skinner, *Living with Disfigurement*, chapter 4.

18 See the assertion by Barbara Hanawalt, *The Ties that Bind: Peasant Families in Medieval England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 149, that 5% of women's fatalities were connected with brewing accidents. She notes also, *ibid.*, p. 157, cases of small children dying through scalding injuries.

19 Fire-related deaths today in the UK are four times as likely to occur in the home as elsewhere, but 15% of these, in the latest statistics, were the result of deliberate, rather than

death of Simon the parson of Donington, however, is treated as a deliberate act of arson (to conceal his murder) by a group of unknown malefactors.²⁰ The very nature of coroners' rolls as records of unusual deaths, however, prevents us from assessing what life would be like for a seriously-burnt or scalded survivor of such accidents. The 'trauma' of burning in these accounts is terminal, not survivable.

Fire out of place could cause accidental damage, but it was also, it is clear, a weapon used in warfare, whether by burning of dwellings or fields, so vividly illustrated in the Bayeux Tapestry in the scene of a woman and her child fleeing a burning house,²¹ or being shot at the enemy, as in the case of showers of lighted arrows or trebuchet missiles – an aesthetic favourite of 'medieval' film directors – or 'Greek fire'. The latter was particularly feared for its ability to burn on water and thus could inflict grievous wounds.²² Its existence no doubt inspired later, hagiographic accounts claiming that the Byzantine Emperor Constantine V (r. 741-775), in his purge against icon worship, also imprisoned and tortured his opponents, including soaking the beards of holy men with pitch and setting light to them.²³ The hagiographer includes this example among many other methods of torture, but does not elaborate on whether the monks long survived their ordeal. Fire was also used in judicial processes, whether in ordeals, as a punishment (for example, the facial branding referred to above) or as a means of putting people to death.²⁴

accidental, fires: Online, <https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/456652/Fire_Statistics_Great_Britain_2013-14_PDF_Version_.pdf> [Accessed 22 September 2015]. Figures for the US are collated by the National Fire Protection Association: <<http://www.nfpa.org/research/reports-and-statistics/fires-in-the-us>> [Accessed 22 September 2015].

- 20 *The Roll of the Shropshire Eyre of 1256*, cases 797 and 809, ed. A. Harding (London: Selden Society Publications vol 96 for 1980, 1981), 275-6 and 278 respectively.
- 21 She has been noticed but not much discussed: Catherine E. Karkov, 'Gendering the battle? Male and female in the Bayeux Tapestry', in *King Harold II and the Bayeux Tapestry*, ed. G.R. Owen-Crocker (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2005), pp. 139-148.
- 22 Examples of fire used to devastate towns and countryside are too numerous to list; on 'Greek fire' see John Haldon, "'Greek fire" revisited: recent and current research', in *Byzantine Style, Religion and Civilization in Honour of Sir Steven Runciman*, ed. E. Jeffreys (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 290-325.
- 23 *La Vie d'Étienne le Jeune par Étienne le Diacre*, c. 56, ed. and tr. M.-F. Auzépy (Ashgate: Variorum, 1997), p. 256.
- 24 Robert Bartlett, *Trial by Fire and Water: The Medieval Judicial Ordeal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, repr. 2014); Vickie L. Ziegler, *Trial by Fire and Battle in Medieval German Literature* (London: Camden House, 2004); Christophe Archan, 'Trial by fire in medieval

Although first-person accounts of being burnt are quite exceptional (a reported case will be discussed below), several examples of deliberate burning of others can be found in medieval texts. *Njál's saga*, for instance, culminates in the dramatic and extended account of the eponymous hero's death, barricaded into his burning house, and the subsequent feud and reconciliation this instigated.²⁵ William Ian Miller highlights the disapproval of such cowardly acts of killing in the saga literature.²⁶ Little scholarly attention, however, has been paid to the escape of Kári, Njál's son-in-law, across the burning rooftop, having suffered quite serious burn trauma:

By that time all of Kári's clothing was on fire and even his hair. He plunged down from the roof and ran along with the smoke [...] Kári ran until he came to a small watercourse. There he threw himself down and quenched his burning clothes.²⁷

Escaping, he is seen by Geirmund who reports that, 'his hair and upper clothes were burned off him'.²⁸ No further reference is made to Kári's injuries, however, and later in the saga his military prowess seems unaffected, despite the likelihood of his head, face and upper body being scarred. Without wishing to read too much into this evidence, the fact he was able to immerse himself in (presumably very cold) water may have assisted his recovery. In terms of the narrative itself, Kári has to survive his ordeal, for it is he who is the protagonist in the subsequent avenging of his family and act of reconciliation at the end of the saga.

The examples of *Njál's saga* and the burning of holy men's beards highlight one of the main challenges of tracking burns victims in medieval Europe: there is a small, but significant body of examples of people *getting* burned, but almost nothing at all about the after-effects of such burning. One possibility to

Ireland', *Peritia*, 24/25 (2013/2014), 197–212. On facial branding: Skinner, *Living with Disfigurement*, Chapters 4 and 6.

25 See Marco Mora, 'Ripped bodies, pierced heels and burned bodies: violence and its evaluation in Norse saga literature', in *Rules and Violence/Regeln und Gewalt: On the Cultural History of Collective Violence from Late Antiquity to the Confessional Age*, ed. C. Dietl and T. Knäpper (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), pp. 49–62, esp. 55–58. Njál's wife and son perish alongside him.

26 William Ian Miller, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking: Feud, Law and Society in Saga Iceland* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1990), p. 196.

27 *Njál's saga*, tr. Carl F Bayerschmidt and Lee M. Hollander (London: George Allen Unwin, 1956), Chapter 129, p. 267.

28 *Ibid.*, Chapter 130, p. 269.

consider is that serious, traumatic burns almost always resulted in death, whilst non-fatal injuries healed well enough not to leave a permanent impairment. Yet this is an argument driven by lack of evidence: more likely, the lower-status victims of burns did not merit attention from authors more concerned with the lives of other clerics or the elite, unless, like Septimina the treasonous palace servant, they drew attention to themselves through their actions. We shall return to this point later.

One exception to this general oversight, of course, was judicial ordeal by fire, whose aftermath *was* the main focus of attention. This was a deliberately-inflicted trauma, normally the holding of a heated brand, intended to cause a burn. The subsequent healing (or not) of the wound was taken as indicative of guilt or innocence: an infected wound was clearly a manifestation of a corrupt nature, whilst a clean scar indicated innocence.²⁹ Burns to the hands and arms, whether judicial or accidental, were probably commonplace, and have attracted considerable attention from clinicians interested in the history of burns treatment to this area.³⁰ What though of medieval medical responses to burns? Again, clinicians interested in this field have begun to explore the evidence for historical practices, but there is noticeably little medieval material in their surveys and they have tended to focus on specific medical traditions rather than consider the patient's view.³¹ This latter is of course an issue for medievalists as well, since the evidence of medical texts cannot be taken at face value as evidence of contemporary practices. Nevertheless, it is instructive to sample some well-known works to see how they envisaged the treatment of burns.

The Anglo-Saxon *Leechbooks*, dating to the tenth century, include several remedies for burns that all act as salves to apply to the wound and incorporate butter as the carrier of the medicinal ingredients. Notably, in *Leechbook III*, some differentiation between types of burn is included:

29 Bartlett, *Trial*, pp. 39–41. The ordeal by hot iron seems to have spread eastwards with the Latins by the thirteenth century: Ruth Macrides, 'Trial by ordeal in Byzantium: on whose authority?' in *Authority in Byzantium*, ed. Pamela Armstrong (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 31–46.

30 E.g. G.D. Warden, 'The burned upper extremity: historical perspectives', *Major Problems in Clinical Surgery*, 19 (1976): 16–23; E.B. Robotti, 'The treatment of burns: an historical perspective with emphasis on the hand', *Hand Clinics*, 6 (1990): 163–190.

31 E.g. P. Badr et al., 'Knowledge of burn wound healing: the heritage from traditional pharmacy of Persia', *Pharmaceutical Historian*, 44 (2014): 88–93; D.J. Barillo and D.E. Max, 'Silver in medicine: a brief history BC335 to the present', *Burns*, 40, supplement 1 (2014): S3–8; M. Pećanac et al., 'Burns treatment in ancient times', *Medicinski Pregled*, 66 (2013): 263–7.

[F]or a burn; if a man be burnt with fire only, take woodruff, and lily, and brooklime; boil in butter, and smear therewith. If a man be burnt with a liquid, let him take elm rind and roots of lily; boil them in milk, smear therewith thrice a day. For sunburn; boil in butter tender ivy twigs; smear therewith.³²

One of the most extensive medieval remedies for burns occurs in the thirteenth-century compendium known as the *Trotula*, though its positioning in the text may have led to it being overlooked in the history of burns medicine. Introduced as a means of relieving lesions caused by scratching the private parts in women, the unguent is also:

[G]ood against *burns caused by fire or hot water* (*usturas ex igne vel aqua calida*), and for excoriations of this kind. Take one apple, [Armenian] bole, mastic, frankincense, oil, warm wine, wax, and tallow, and prepare them thus. We should place the apple, cleaned of both exterior and interior rind and ground, on the fire in a pot with the oil, wax and tallow; and when they have boiled, we put in the mastic and the frankincense, both of which have been powdered. Afterward, it should be strained through a cloth. Note that if anyone because of any burn has been anointed with this ointment, on the anointed place ought to be put a leaf of ivy, cooked in wine or vinegar, or a leaf of gladden. This remedy is decent.³³

Both texts emphasise the use of an emollient to cover the burn (the *Trotula* text adds a cover over the remedy in the form of the leaf), perhaps also to reduce scarring, and are consistent with modern advice on treating minor and more serious burns, but what of the psychological trauma of being burnt?³⁴ Is it possible to read medieval texts with an eye out for shock or distress caused by a burn? One striking example suggests that this is an area for future scrutiny.

32 Leechbook I.9 and III.29, in *Leechdoms, Wortcunning and Starcraft of Early England*, ed. O. Cockayne, 3 vols (London, Longmans Green, 1864-1866), II, pp. 131 and 325 respectively: 'Viþ bryne gif mon sie mið fyre ane forbaernneð nim puðurofan & lilian & hleomoc pyl on buteran & smire mið. gif mon sie mið paetan forbaernneð nime elm rinðe & lilian moran pyl meolcum smire mið þripa on ðaeg. Viþ sunbryne merpe ifig tþigu pyl on butran smire mið'.

33 *De curis mulierum*, c. 166, in *The Trotula: a Medieval Compendium of Women's Medicine*, ed. and tr. Monica H. Green (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), pp. 134-5.

34 Advice on burns from the NHS in the UK: <<http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Burns-and-scalds/Pages/Introduction.aspx>> [Accessed 22 September 2015].

The case occurs in the year 1091. The Norman chronicler Orderic Vitalis tells us that a young priest named Walchelin had a close encounter with the walking dead that left him scarred for life, his face burnt by the touch of a hellish knight, his foot burnt from trying to catch and mount a ghostly black horse. Fifteen years later, Walchelin recounted his tale to Orderic, who wrote an extended account of the incident. Not surprisingly, the tale has attracted the attention of other scholars, who have seen it as part of the Church's attempt to promote the liturgy of the dead and oppose the violence of knights in this period.³⁵ The focus has been on how Orderic's story fits into a broader context, rather than on its protagonist. Here, though, it is worth focusing on the personal experience of the extended vision of walking dead, including multisensory perception and, ultimately, trauma. Walchelin does not only see the procession, he hears and engages in conversation, and touches and is touched (or rather, seized violently) by members of the knights' group. The scar he receives on his face and neck (referred to without further comment by Schmitt as the *signum* of authenticity) is recognised by Orderic as a site of a burn 'caused by the touch of the terrible knight'.³⁶

Elsewhere, I have discussed Walchelin's vision as a possible means of giving his scarred face a value, deflecting a possibly negative reaction by making it an object of wonder.³⁷ Literally, in recounting his tale, Walchelin was 'changing face', explaining his visibly-different appearance in a manner that would engender sympathy rather than rejection, and in telling his story to Orderic this cleric made it into the written record. Here, however, I want to raise the possibility that medieval vision records of this type should be re-read for evidence of prior physical and emotional trauma – the medieval mind's way of dealing with injury so painful or terrible that it took on a dreamlike, or rather, nightmarish, quality.³⁸ The association of signs with past trauma is discussed in the context of war by Catherine Clarke, but in terms of personal visions, the tendency has been to retro-diagnose mental illness without considering the

35 Jean-Claude Schmitt, *Ghosts in the Middle Ages: The Living and the Dead in Medieval Society*, tr. T. Lavender Fagan (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1999), pp. 93–97, details Walchelin's vision as the first recorded account of Hellequin's hunt. The vision is included in the anthology *Medieval Visions of Heaven and Hell*, ed. Eileen Gardiner (New York: Garland, 1993).

36 '...*faciem eius horrendi militis tactu lesam perspexi*': *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*, VIII.17, ed. M. Chibnall, 6 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969–1980), IV, pp. 248–9.

37 Skinner, *Living with Disfigurement*, chapters 4 and 6.

38 Stephen Gordon, 'Medical condition, demon or undead corpse? Sleep paralysis and the nightmare in medieval Europe', *Social History of Medicine*, 28 (2015): 425–444, considers a similar nexus.

physical trauma that might underlay such stories.³⁹ Walchelin's story suggests that work on medieval visionaries should examine more closely whether any physical after-effects described could in fact be interpreted as the *cause* of the vision, not its result. Signs such as stigmata aside, work might profitably be done to collate other physical *signa* described as burns or burning sensations, and to consider whether the application of heat to the skin ever figured as a means of self-mutilation in medieval Europe.⁴⁰

The trauma of fire in the medieval texts surveyed here operated at several levels. At the level of the community, it could destroy homes, crops and livelihoods: used deliberately, therefore, it was a devastating tool of warfare. At a personal level, accidents in the home could cause fatalities that impacted upon the survivors: the blame attached to the 'negligent' mother only adding to her own grief at the traumatic loss of her child. And at an individual level, surviving serious burns might cause mental trauma, relived memories, as well as physical effects such as disfigurement, impairments to mobility or, more likely, to manual dexterity, and residual pain and/or infection.

The challenges of tracking down medieval burns victims – or survivors – are clear. An agenda for future research might simply start by *looking* for them, in medieval cemetery remains, and being more alive to the possibility in written sources of mapping events and circumstances where the risk of being burnt was significantly increased, whether in war or personal conflict, domestic or agricultural work requiring the use of fire, or simply when the season was cold and beds and children were likely to be placed in closer proximity to unguarded flames. If we cannot find many *burns* survivors, we might consider more broadly those who survived *fires*, possibly losing loved ones in the process, and who might have been the most traumatized of all.

39 Catherine Clarke, 'Signs and wonders: writing trauma in twelfth-century England', *Reading Medieval Studies*, 35 (2009); Jerome Kroll and Bernard Bachrach, 'Visions and psychopathology in the middle ages', *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, 170 (1982): 41-9. Bachrach and Kroll published several similar articles before issuing their book, *The Mystic Mind: the Psychology of Medieval Mystics and Ascetics* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

40 On self-mutilation through cutting, see Robert F. Mullen, 'Holy stigmata, anorexia and self-mutilation: parallels in pain and imagining', *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, 8 (2010): 91-110; and Patricia Skinner, 'Marking the face, curing the soul? Reading the disfigurement of women in the later middle ages', in *Medicine, Religion and Gender in Medieval Culture*, ed. Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2015), pp. 181-202.