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Overall, it is a valuable resource that will be of immense use to those working in the field. It is a project that one would like to see extended to the manuscripts containing English produced and used in other centuries of the Anglo-Saxon period. Obviously the scope of such a project would be immense, and the relationship of the numbering within this conspectus to the larger whole would require some reassessment. The potential for using the *Conspectus* in researching the scribes and English manuscript culture of the long eleventh century is enticing, and future studies of individual scribes will both draw on and refine the details that this useful work contains.

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Peter S. Baker, *Honour, Exchange and Violence in 'Beowulf'*. Anglo-Saxon Studies 20. Cambridge: Brewer, 2013. x + 279 pp. ISBN: 9781843843467.

Peter Baker's study of violence as a social and economic construct in Anglo-Saxon England accomplishes the rare feat of being deceptively simple to read yet highly complex and eclectic in its approaches and solutions to long-lasting puzzles in *Beowulf* scholarship. Its main merit consists in making explicit a socio-economic system (and its component structures) which would have been obvious to the 'textual communities' from which the poem arose, and are therefore encoded implicitly in the text, but which otherwise remain invisible to us.¹ We might think that we know how a heroic society lives and breathes, but Baker successfully proves that we do not and that presentist biases always block the view of even consummate scholars. This lack of familiarity with the intimate life of a heroic society (albeit an ideal one, which lives only in heroic poems) makes us strangers to the meaning of many gestures which we often interpret on the basis of speculative nineteenth-century approaches uncritically perpetuated to this day. Baker astutely uses what is at heart an anthropological framework to gain access to the culture implied by *Beowulf* and makes explicit the workings of the heroic system in which honour, violence, and treasure are commensurable forms of capital.

His monograph is not merely the study of violence in Old English literature, but a successful attempt to understand the ways in which violence shapes a society and its economy. Although the idea of a socio-economic system organized around treasure and honour as signs of one's worthiness in an ideal heroic society like the one portrayed in *Beowulf* is not new, Baker's study is the first to present a coherent system which explains many phenomena otherwise poorly understood so far.

In his introduction (pp. 1–34), Baker firmly sets his work in the wake of previous scholarship on violence (Guy Halsall most recently among others), the economy of gifts (Marcel Mauss), and Anglo-Saxon studies (too many to list). While it is clear that Baker's knowledge of his eclectic range of secondary sources is thorough, his innovations come to light only slowly and modestly in the following chapters. Baker's main contention is that violence is a social practice, and every violent act is a social transaction (and hence subject to regulation and part of a system which we do not see but to which the authors, disseminators, listeners/readers of early medieval heroic poems would have been intimately accustomed).

¹ For the notion of 'textual communities', see Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), pp. 1–10 and 30–87.

Thus, to win honour is not only to perform violent acts by which to win treasure and renown, but to perform them according to the rules.

In his second chapter (pp. 35–76), Baker explains the rules. They make up a system which he calls the ‘Economy of Honour’. This chapter has a strong Maussian flavour (updated to fit the needs of an Anglo-Saxonist), but beyond this it is a brilliant application of the theory of gift-based economy (built on reciprocity — a gift is never free) to the context of *Beowulf* to throw light on the relationships in a heroic society (especially those between lord and warriors). Violence is a means of procuring honour and booty and, in a heroic society, it is an economic force, even a form of capital (as is honour). In the world of *Beowulf*, to be rich is to be happy and have honour (a concept which Baker rightly considers more useful than ‘glory’). Wealth is not measured in treasure, but also in honour and deeds of violence. Violence itself is understood to be the means of gaining or repaying wealth, hence *weorð* as transferable value (between people, but also from objects to people and vice-versa). This explains why violence enables this transfer of value: when someone is killed, their possessions and honour go to the victor. Baker is wisely careful to use poetic sources with caution, not as unproblematic reflections of the society in which they are composed, but as ideal refractions of it and as reflections of an imagined glorious (though tragic) past.

In his third chapter (pp. 77–102), Baker continues his Mauss-inspired *tour de force* by illuminating a well-known dilemma among *Beowulf* scholars: why does Unferth lend Beowulf his sword after he had previously done his best to berate him? When his Economy of Honour theory is applied, it becomes clear that Beowulf’s coming devalues the honour of the Danish warriors (since he is willing to attempt something no one else dares to). Unferth, as their representative, tries to devalue Beowulf’s inflationist honour by proving that he is not an honourable man in the first place (hence his pointing to the hero’s troubled youth). After Beowulf defeats Grendel, when he goes against the monster’s mother, Unferth ‘wants a piece of the action’ (p. 95), he wants to be part of the hero’s honour-accruing actions by lending him his sword (which, had it been used, would have been the instrument of the violent act through which glory had been gained, thus making its original owner a partaker in the honour). However, Unferth fails to gain honour because the hero doesn’t use Hrunting at all.

In chapters four (pp. 103–38) and five (pp. 138–66), Baker makes the very insightful connection between the Economy of Honour and the role of women in a heroic society. He challenges the usual interpretation of women as peace-weavers (queens exchanged in marriage between hostile nations to make peace) and proposes an alternative explanation of the word *freoðuwebbe*, instantiating this in chapter five in alternative readings of three of the queens featuring in *Beowulf*. His main contention is that women should not be seen as passive tokens of peace, but as agents with power who can use it for the better (Wealththeow) or for the worse (Thryth).

Baker begins by deconstructing the prevalent understanding of women as peace-weavers in heroic texts as a paradigm rooted in a Victorian understanding of the woman as the angel of the house (or mead hall, in this context), then proceeding to demonstrate through a detailed semantic and etymological study that the word *freoðuwebbe* never appears in contexts having to do with marriage or peace-making, and that sources have little to say about women’s role in peacemaking in any case. The prevalent interpretation of the phrase is harmful, Baker explains, because it has led to a simplistic, all-pervasive understanding of gender roles in Anglo-Saxon England (‘men made war, women peace — a clean division of labour!’, p. 126). This vision remains popular because it answers the cultural expectations and the desires of

many readers. But Baker argues instead that the semantic areas of *sibb/frið* are situated at the intersection of early medieval ideas concerning divine authority and good rulership, which promote harmony and good feeling (peace as absence of violent hostility). Thus *freoðuwebbe* is tied to the queen's ideal image as promoter of both material and spiritual welfare of the polity (an ideal image, not an actual role).

Baker reminds us that the Germanic ideal of making peace does not necessarily mean removing disturbing elements and letting things settle down, but rather introducing a greater power among the disputants which would be capable of enforcing peace. For peace is maintained by threat and violence, and is a state of temporary quiet (accomplished through military victory) rather than the absence of war. In fact, Baker invites us to drop the assumption that peacemaking is central to Anglo-Saxon understandings of womanhood. Thus Thryth and Wealhtheow were not included in the poem as examples of a bad versus a good queen, but as different aspects of queenship – queens wielded power, which could mean shedding blood/use of violence (pp. 144–55). In the case of Freawaru (pp. 155–66), Baker convincingly argues against the idea that princesses were given in marriage to settle disputes. In a heroic society, marriage was understood more as a gift (functioning in the Economy of Honour, just like other gifts in the early medieval economy dominated more by gift than by trade), than as commodity exchange. The queen's condition (though subordinate) was far above that of slave and was not accompanied by the loss of subjectivity. Like any gift in such a society, a queen given in marriage both acquires and confers honour, but more importantly, imposes obligation and defines the relationship between the recipient and the giver.

In his sixth chapter (pp. 167–99), Baker explains the perils of peacemaking in a thought-provoking reading of the Finn episode (performed by Hrothgar's *scop* during the celebration in Heorot after Grendel's defeat) as the story of a failed attempt to settle a dispute. In a heroic society, violence was seen (unlike today) as a reasonable — though not ideal — way to settle disputes. A dispute was a means of organizing and maintaining the smooth functioning of a society (nowadays, in similar fashion, though in less obvious ways, the violence of confrontations is ritualized and thus sublimated in elections, court proceedings where two sides confront each other, and so forth). In Anglo-Saxon England, the very idea of success included the expectation of dispute and violence, which were however always governed by well-defined rules and customs. Hence, to be a bad person was not to be violent, but to be violent in ways which did not follow the rules legislating violence.

In his seventh and last chapter (pp. 200–39), Baker interprets Beowulf's death as his 'last triumph', and not as a failure. The presentist bias we bring to the text again blurs our vision – the point of view from which the hero's death looks like a defeat is a modern one, but if the problem is set in the terms of the Economy of Honour, Beowulf's death does not look like a defeat. Baker invites us to ask not 'who is still alive?' but rather 'who has the treasure?' – this is what matters in the end. Thus he cuts the Gordian knot of the heavily disputed meaning of Beowulf's death and its aftermath. Beowulf secures the peace by making war, so fighting the dragon is not a bad decision stemming from some tragic flaw, but that which the hero simply has to do (his *heahgesceap*). Still, Baker acknowledges that *Beowulf's* author is too great a poet to permit his audience entirely to lose sight of the costs of the heroic values that he celebrates (which is obvious in Wiglaf's lament — here the hero's death does not quite emerge as a triumph).

Although he is exhaustive in the issues he approaches, it would have been interesting to see Baker tackling institutionalized/legislated violence — Anglo-Saxon legislation that allowed for

trial by ordeal (Laws of Ine) or that did not ban private vengeance but rather sought to mitigate it (by sublimating it into *wergeld*), or that clarified how vengeance could be pursued (Edmund II's blood-feud laws). However, in the short afterword (pp. 140–42), Baker lets his readers in on the original intention of his study, which was to propose a semiotics of conflict in *Beowulf*. He observes that violence is structured like a language, and any exchange of blows or a feud functions like a dialogue. This would have been a fascinating read and also a highly-needed study. Despite the author's modest demur about his ability to write it, I think it would be only fitting for Peter Baker to complete his ambitious plan. Judging by the complex approaches, the innovative solutions, and the overall high quality of his scholarship in this monograph, he has all the resources to accomplish it.

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Castration and Culture in the Middle Ages, ed. by Larissa Tracy. *Medieval Cultures* 32. Cambridge: Brewer, 2013. xiii + 351 pp. ISBN 978-1-84384-351-1.

This collection of essays brings together a range of researchers interested in the theme of castration from the late Roman to the Early Modern period. This volume is notable among similar compilations for the effectiveness with which the articles create a coherent whole, starting with the brilliant introduction by Larissa Tracy. Over the past twenty years, medieval sexuality and medieval masculinity have received much attention, but 'very little has been done specifically on *medieval* castration' (p. 3) and this excellent collection of essays provides a detailed and stimulating analysis on the subject. Students and scholars will find Tracy's introduction and footnotes a helpful overview on historical, interpretative and bibliographical matters. Moreover, the introduction lays out the primary theoretical arguments that link this collection of essays.

The volume is divided into fourteen chapters, each containing an article treating a facet of the question, and is organized in chronological order, beginning with Reusch's article on the archaeology of castration, and proceeding, through various medieval texts and sources, to bodily mutilation in Shakespeare's works. It appears quite evident that the book could be divided into three sections, the first containing the eight chapters that deal with late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages, the second (chapters 9–13) more focused on the high and later Middle Ages, then concluding with chapter 14 on the early modern period. This incisive collection is mostly successful in achieving its aim and the only flaw is that the first chapter seems disconnected from the whole. Although the theme is obviously the same, Reusch's article ('Raised Voices: The Archaeology of Castration', pp. 29–47) is the only text that does not analyse a written source and, unfortunately, as the author openly states, her work is limited by the scarcity of historical sources describing how and where castrated people were buried. Nonetheless, Reusch provides useful information to better understand the living condition of some more successful eunuchs.

Shaun Tougher's essay ('The Aesthetics of Castration: The Beauty of Roman Eunuchs', pp. 48–72) brilliantly explores some major works written by Roman and Byzantine historians in which the question of the aesthetics of castration is raised. After highlighting the difference between the Galli, the self-castrated religious devotees of a Mother Goddess, and the beautiful and desirable castrated slave boys who lived in the Roman Empire, Tougher provides an excellent analysis of the role of eunuchs during the Roman Empire and their relationship with