



VIOLENCE IN MEDIEVAL EUROPE

WARREN C. BROWN

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SERIES EDITOR'S PREFACE



Violence troubles us. It raises acute moral issues. It may invoke potent religious sanctions. It poses challenges to ideas about the proper boundaries between the “public” and “private”, between the individual and the wider community and thus may call into question the nature of the “state”. And the control of all forms of violence is deeply embedded in common notions of human progress towards a better society. But is it correct simply to dismiss the Middle Ages as violent and therefore somehow backward? We are all in Warren Brown’s debt for his refutation of this popular stereotype in this splendid new addition to Longmans Medieval World. In this book, he argues forcefully that to dismiss the Middle Ages as somehow “more violent” than the modern western world is fundamentally to misunderstand that era as well as our own. Instead, he explores a medieval world of differences: different forms of violence, justifications for it, and arguments about it. Above all, he presents the Middle Ages as a world of competing norms of behaviour that cannot be reduced to a simple, linear story. The implications for the ways in which we understand the contemporary world around us are immense.

In this lucid and exceptionally wide-ranging study Brown covers the whole span of the Middle Ages from Merovingian Gaul to the Hundred Years War. In so doing, he helps us to rethink conventional wisdom about the development of royal power and authority, the role of Christianity in social action, the rise of justice, and even the nature of the “self”. He is exceptionally well-qualified to guide his readers through this sensitive and fascinating material. An expert on conflict and disputing in the Middle Ages, he brings historical, anthropological and sociological insights to bear on the question of how people in the Middle Ages conceptualized, justified, and deployed violence, in which circumstances, and to what purposes. By refusing to let modern preconceptions cloud his judgement, he makes sense of how and why people acted and re-acted as they did. By situating violence within wider competitions for power and legitimacy, he shows how the norms which regulated it shifted over time and thus enables his readers to appreciate

SERIES EDITOR'S PREFACE

the interplay between the normative and the subjective experience of violence.

I welcome this addition to Longmans Medieval World for its breadth of vision, deep humanity and engagement with pressing concerns.

Julia M.H. Smith

PREFACE AND AUTHOR ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



This book looks in two directions. On the one hand, it makes a set of arguments about violence in medieval Europe, arguments that concern in particular the ways that medieval Europeans understood violence and how their attitudes towards violence developed over time. It draws, therefore, on the primary sources in Latin, and on the secondary works in German, French, and Italian as well as English that are necessary to support the arguments and to enable my colleagues in the field and their graduate students to properly evaluate them.

On the other hand, and in keeping with the goals of the Medieval World series, the book is designed to serve as a gateway to one of the most vibrant areas of current research in medieval studies, that is, into conflict, power, and political order. In this regard, it is aimed at undergraduate students, scholars in other fields, and those outside academia who are interested in these subjects or in learning about what goes on inside the ivory tower. The book is based, therefore, on primary sources that are readily available in English translation so that these readers too, in the classroom or on their own, can explore what the sources say and decide for themselves what to make of my arguments. Doing so has been made easier not only by the great number of medieval source translations that have been published in recent years, but also by those that have been posted on the World Wide Web. Such online source translations have been matched, as we will see in one important case, by outstanding digitized facsimiles of medieval manuscripts. One can only express profound gratitude for the professionalism of those who put long and intense labor into these facsimiles and then made them freely available to everyone on the Web.

Neither of this book's two faces has required any sacrifice from the other. As it happens, the most important primary sources for the study of medieval violence are also among those that are most important for studying the Middle Ages in general. Most of them have, therefore, been translated. In order to meet the needs of different audiences, I have cited both the original texts and the English translations, including WWW addresses whenever possible. I have also taken advantage of the burgeoning amount of secondary scholarship available on the Web, at sites such as

the Internet Medieval Sourcebook (<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/sbook.html>) or the Online Reference Book for Medieval Studies (<http://www.the-orb.net>). I have likewise made use of online language dictionaries, such as the online edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, with its extensive entries on etymology (<http://dictionary.oed.com>), the online edition of Lewis and Short's Latin dictionary (<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/>), or the Germanic Lexicon Project (<http://lexicon.ff.cuni.cz>), which includes dictionaries of everything from Gothic to Old Saxon.

To write a book of this nature required the help of a number of people. To begin with the colleagues who read and commented on early drafts of parts or the whole: Courtney Booker (as well as the students in his advanced undergraduate seminar at UBC in Vancouver in the fall of 2007), Jennifer R. Davis, and Jason Glenn (as well as the talented and refreshingly direct members of his graduate seminar at USC in the fall of 2007). Piotr Górecki has earned my particular gratitude for his exceptionally close and helpful reading of the manuscript's early chapters. Thanks also go to John Hudson, Paul Hyams, and the graduate students of the seminar "Conflict and the Law in Medieval Europe" held at the Central European University in Budapest, Hungary, in July of 2005, who helped me think through the sources underlying Chapters 3 and 6. Chapters 6 and 9 also benefited a great deal from conversations with Thomas N. Bisson and John Gillingham at a meeting in Kraków, Poland, in April 2007. The Division of Humanities and Social Sciences at Caltech provided me with research leave during the academic year 2006–2007, part of which I spent in Vienna as a guest of the University of Vienna's Institute for Austrian Historical Research, and the Austrian Academy of Sciences' Institute for Medieval Research, studying the German-language scholarship on violence; I thank the directors of these two institutions, Karl Brunner and Walter Pohl. Finally, I tip my hat to the Caltech undergraduates who took my advanced seminar "Violence in Medieval Europe" in the spring of 2008, in which I laid out the sources for the book in sequence to see what real-live undergraduates would make of them. The enthusiasm with which they took up the subject, and the lively and intelligent discussions in which we engaged, gave me confidence and helped me shape my arguments.

I am grateful to the editor for the Medieval World series, Julia Smith, for inviting me to write this book in the first place. Both she and Longman's Mari Shullaw helped me hammer down what was a project of challenging scope into a readable book; I appreciate their help and the time they graciously allowed me. The anonymous reader of the manuscript likewise helped me see where I was succeeding and where

PREFACE AND AUTHOR ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I was not, and saved me from some potentially embarrassing mistakes. Finally, I want to express my gratitude to my wife Louise, and to my sons Christopher, Peter, and Michael, for putting up with the long hours I spend locked away in my study and my occasional crankiness when facing deadlines (though they did get a trip to Vienna out of it). To them the book is dedicated.

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ABBREVIATIONS



- Bosworth and Toller Joseph Bosworth and T. Northcote Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1882–98 and Clarendon Press, 1921), online as part of the Germanic Lexicon Project at http://lexicon.ff.cuni.cz/texts/oe_bosworthtoller_about.html
- DRW *Deutsches Rechtswörterbuch*, online edition, <http://www.rzuser.uni-heidelberg.de/~cd2/drw/>
- LDM Robert Auty *et al.*, eds., *Lexikon des Mittelalters* (Munich: Artemis & Winkler Verlag, 1977–98)
- Lewis and Short Charleton T. Lewis and Charles Short, eds., *A Latin Dictionary. Founded on Andrews' edition of Freund's Latin dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879), online at the Perseus Digital Library, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/>
- Linc. Doris M. Stenton, ed., *The Earliest Lincolnshire Assize Rolls, A.D. 1202–1209* (Lincoln: Lincoln Record Society, 1926)
- Mansi Joannes Dominicus Mansi *et al.*, eds., *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, 53 vols. (H. Welter, 1900–1927)
- MGH *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*
 Capit. = Capitularia regum Francorum
 Epist. = Epistolae
 LL = Leges
 SSRM = Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum
- MHW *Mittelhochdeutsches Wörterbuch. Mit Benutzung des Nachlasses von Georg Friedrich Benecke ausgearbeitet von Wilhelm Müller und Friedrich Zarncke*. 4 vols. (Stuttgart: S. Hirzel, 1990; reprint of the original, Leipzig 1854–66), <http://germazope.uni-trier.de/Projects/WBB/woerterbuecher/>
- MSF *Liber Miraculorum Sancte Fidis*, ed. Luca Robertini (Spoleto: Centro Italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo, 1994)

ABBREVIATIONS

NCMH	<i>The New Cambridge Medieval History</i> , 7 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995–2005)
Niermeyer	Jan Frederick Niermeyer, <i>Mediae latinitatis lexicon minus</i> , 2nd rev. ed., 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2002)
OED	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i> , online edition: http://dictionary.oed.com
ORB	<i>The Online Reference Book for Medieval Studies</i> , http://www.the-orb.net
SM	A. Richard, ed., <i>Chartes et documents pour servir a l'histoire de l'abbaye de Saint-Maixent</i> , vol. 1 (Poitiers: Oudin, 1887)
WGS	A. Fick et al., <i>Wörterbuch der indogermanischen Sprachen: Dritter Teil: Wortschatz der Germanischen Spracheinheit</i> (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht: 1909); revised by Alf Torp and placed online as part of the Germanic Lexicon Project, http://lexicon.ff.cuni.cz/

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VIOLENCE AND THE MEDIEVAL HISTORIAN

The English knight hit Sir Regnault de Roye very hard near the top of his helm, but did no other damage to him; Sir Regnault hit him on the shield with such a firm, powerful thrust, delivered with so strong an arm – for he was one of the strongest and toughest jousts in France at that time and also he was truly in love with a gay and beautiful young lady, and this contributed greatly to his success in all his undertakings – that his lance pierced the left-hand side of the English knight's shield and went straight into his arm. As it did so, the lance broke, the longer part falling to the ground and the shorter part remaining in the shield with the steel point in the arm.

Jean Froissart (c. 1337–c. 1410), Chronicles, IV, on the tournament held at Saint-Inglevert in 1390.¹

Medieval violence seems to exercise a certain fascination for a great many people, as witnessed by the violent tenor of movies or books set in the Middle Ages and of the ever more popular fantasy role-playing games set in medieval-like worlds. The appeal perhaps lies in the fact that violence in the Middle Ages was personal, direct, and visceral; it involved not guns or bombs but swords, knives, and lances, wooden staffs, clubs, and fists. According to the texts that describe it, it was often motivated by equally visceral feelings: anger, shame, and the craving for revenge, but also love, pride, and the desire for justice and glory. Medieval texts make no effort to hide the effects of violence. They tell us quite openly of torn or burnt flesh, spurting blood, the noise of metal striking metal, and the suffering of victims. It is possibly because of these qualities that medieval violence can be compellingly interesting, particularly to undergraduate students; the courses I have taught on violence in the Middle Ages, or on its purveyors such as knights, have consistently been the most well-attended of my offerings.

I too am drawn to medieval violence, not simply because it fascinates me as it does my students, but also because it opens up a route into the medieval worldview. From a modern perspective, medieval accounts of