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- 1 The theme of vengeance is one which runs through the history of crime, and of social relations in Europe more generally, from antiquity to the present day, and is one which is of special relevance to historians of violence. As well as the sometimes fascinating findings of research into individual case studies, the historical phenomenon of vengeance is enmeshed to in two broad themes. The first of these is the role of the state, and of how (to use Weberian terminology) the monopoly of physical violence achieved by the state has overcome old-style violence, a theme obviously also of relevance to Norbert Elias's *Civilizing Process*, focussing as it does on the interplay between state formation and the internalization of more pacific norms, initially at least, among the elite. And it is this internalization of behavioural patterns that leads us to the second theme, pioneered by anthropologists working on the feud, that of the cultural significance of vengeance both to its practitioners and to the society in which they lived more generally.
- 2 The volume under review here makes an important contribution to our understanding of the history of vengeance, although, as its editors are aware, we are still a long way

from a comprehensive history of the phenomenon. Gauvard and Zorzi's collection arose from conferences held between 2007 and 2009 at Paris, Pescara and Porquerolles, and the project was supported by L'Institut Universitaire de France, the Laboratoire de Médiévisique de Paris and the Department of Historical and Geographical Studies at the University of Florence. This support, and the imaginative approaches of the various authors, has brought together a collection of strong essays which open up a number of approaches to the study of the history of vengeance. There are sixteen essays and these are preceded by a brief introduction by Claude Gauvard and Andrea Zorzi, and rounded off by a suitable reflective conclusion by Aude Musin and Xavier Rousseaux. The essays come in a variety of languages (eleven in French, three in Italian, two in Spanish and one in English) and cover a variety of territories – Germany, the Low Countries, Spain and France – and draw on a wide range of sources – court records, notarial records, law treatises, and religious and other normative texts.

- 3 The net product of this is to produce a fascinating and thought-provoking collection, but the chronological, thematic and geographical range of the various essays taken together does make it a rather difficult work to review. Perhaps the most consistent of the themes is the degree to which traditions of vengeance were gradually brought under control, and ultimately eradicated by the processes of state formation, and the slow and usually imperfect replacement of traditions of private vengeance by the state legal systems. Early in the seventeenth century the English statesman, scientist and jurist Sir Francis Bacon described revenge as “a kind of wild justice”, a theme touched on by a number of contributors to this volume (perhaps most explicitly by Daniel Lord Smail), something which was seen as an essential mechanism for the righting of wrongs before the justice of the state evolved to a sufficient level to provide an equivalent level. What a number of the essays touch on is the way in which the state regulated vengeance as a means towards containing it – Aude Musin's essay on developments in Namur between 1360-1555 mobilises some fascinating materials in an examination of this issue, while another angle is explored by Jörg Wettlaufer's essay on the *Urfehde*, an oath of reconciliation or truce involving a renunciation of vengeance on the part of the oath-taker which lasted in Germany into the eighteenth century. This essay is also interesting in touching on broader cultural and social changes which might be interpreted as evidence of a “civilising process”. Another force for a softening of the recourse to vengeance was, of course, Christianity. Romans 12 :19 exhorted its readers to eschew revenge and put away wrath, reminding them that “vengeance is mine, sayeth the Lord”, a text which could easily be mobilised in hopes of dissuading individual mortals from pursuing vengeance. Two of the essays in this collection, from different ends of its chronological range, concern themselves with the impact of Christianity. Anna Benvenuti uses a number of devotional texts, including saints' lives, to examine how the Christian message may have come across in the late middle ages, while Anne Bonson provides a close account of how Lazarists attempted to spread that message in rural France over the early modern period. And, for the eighteenth century, we encounter another ideological perspective with Michel Porret's analysis of the interplay of ideas about vengeance between proponents of Enlightenment values and conservative judges.
- 4 A number of themes stand out as inviting further research. One of these is how acts of violence posited on vengeance were distinct from other violent acts. Smail, for example, argues that vengeance-directed violence had a rhythm very different from that of everyday brawls, while the contributions of other contributors address or signal

the problem of how vengeance was connected to feuding, or to the duel. As Paulo Broggio makes clear, peace-making and reconciliations operated on both a private and official level, and the attempt by the state and the Roman Catholic Church to suppress duelling and other revenge practices in the face of a noble culture heavily dependent on a code of honour sometimes led to very interesting compromise solutions. And, ratchetting the scale of violence up a notch or two, Hervé Dré villon provides an excellent reminder that the theme of vengeance could run through warfare, one suspects in any period.

- 5 Overall, then, this is an excellent collection of essays which, despite the diversity of its subject matter, is very successful in raising, and illustrating, some important general issues of the history of vengeance. One hopes that it will encourage further research into the subject, not least in territories (Scotland would prove fruitful in this respect) whose experiences of vengeance and related matters are not touched upon in this volume.

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