

Bloodfeud in Scotland 1573-1625: Violence, Justice and Politics in an Early Modern Society.



Review Author[s]:
Alan MacFarlane

Man, New Series, Volume 21, Issue 4 (Dec., 1986), 752-753.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0025-1496%28198612%292%3A21%3A4%3C752%3ABIS1VJ%3E2.0.CO%3B2-K>

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

Man is published by Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland. Please contact the publisher for further permissions regarding the use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/journals/rai.html>.

Man

©1986 Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland

JSTOR and the JSTOR logo are trademarks of JSTOR, and are Registered in the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. For more information on JSTOR contact jstor-info@umich.edu.

©2003 JSTOR

underlined; thus, myths are seen as one amongst other explanatory modes and 'as performed events that involve interpretive processes' (p. 37).

Chapters 5 and 6 revolve around the relation between myth and ritual. Firstly, Basso analyses the relation between myth and the Kalapalo cycle of mourning rituals and demonstrates how the spontaneous weeping and wailing immediately after a death has taken place gives way gradually to controlled and stereotyped 'mourning songs'. Myth and ritual combine to ensure the success of cultural forms in the 'government of personal grief'. Secondly, she turns her attention to the fantasies of erotic aggression in both myth and ritual. While mythological images 'create a sense of the ambiguity of gender classification and the artifice in the cultural construction of sexuality' (p. 240), in ritual performance 'sexual identity is dissolved in a merging of listener and speaker, male and female, within a common performative experience' (p. 240). This, Basso suggests in the last chapter, is achieved through music which provides 'a performative frame that dissolves social and personal differences so as to create an experience of unity that is simultaneously physical and mental and therefore has deep moral significance' (p. 310).

Basso's analogy between myth and ritual, and our Western concept of 'work of art', together with the unearthing of such 19th century concepts as 'illusion' and 'fantasy' prove to be simultaneously her work's strongest and weakest points. On the one hand, the emphasis on 'creativity' and 'performance' re-establishes the importance of the individual(s) (in their interaction) in the production of myth, and re-introduces a diachronic dimension in the study of myths which 'can be regarded as strikingly imaginative sources of variation and adaptation to changing conditions' (p. 5).

On the other hand, the emphasis on 'imagination', 'illusion' and 'fantasy' which the positivists oppose to 'reason', 'science' and the 'real' seems, to say the least, misleading in the Kalapalo context. The extrapolation of such Western concepts to understand the production of myth and ritual amongst the Kalapalo leaves aside the whole question of belief and ignores the character of myth and ritual as 'revealed divine truths'. By reducing her focus to the creative and imaginative (secular) aspects of myth and ritual the author obviates the fact that mythico-ritual action is above all an aspect of the more encompassing phenomenon of religious thought and religious practice.

When Basso suggests that it is through the contrast between the performative aspect of mythico-ritual discourse and other nonperformative types of discourse that '[mythical] illusions, apparitions, and self-enchantments

acquire and subsequently convey propositional truth value' (p. 5), she seems once more to draw her analogy from theatrical performance with its capacity to generate an illusion of reality and to affect emotionally both the actors and the audience. But while the 'truth value' and 'reality' of theatrical performances is temporary and bracketed in time and space, the 'truth value' and 'reality' of mythico-ritual action is, as far as the actors are concerned, time-less and space-less, that is, sacred and eternal. Rather than being derived from performance, truth value seems to precede it. The distinction might only be a matter of perspective (the anthropologist's or the actors'), but what is certain is that Basso's work breaks new grounds in the study of lowland South American myths and rituals and proves to be of interests for specialists and non-specialists alike.

FERNANDO SANTOS GRANERO

*London School of Economics &
Political Science*

BROWN, KEITH M. *Bloodfeud in Scotland 1573–1625: violence, justice and politics in an early modern society*. x, 299 pp., tables, bibliogr. Edinburgh: John Donald, 1986. £25.00

In 1619 the clan MacFarlane 'captured William Buchanan who had recently won a court case against them, stripped him, tied him to a tree, slashed him with dirks, cut out his tongue, slit open his belly, took out his entrails, entwined them with those of his dog, and then cut his throat' (p. 32). Less than a hundred and fifty years later a country where such a bloody outcome of feuding was not uncommon had become a land which was the intellectual capital of Europe, where much of the foundation of modern anthropology, sociology, political science and economics was laid down. The very late survival of a feuding society and its rapid transformation into a nation living under royal law is the theme of this book. Drawing extensively on anthropological theories from Gluckman to Black-Michaud, and using a very wide range of archival sources including diaries, State Papers, court records and many others, Brown has provided a very thorough and careful analysis of the decline of a feuding society. This should be of considerable interest to anthropologists since it is unusual to have such a well-documented case.

Brown analyses both statistically and quantitatively some 365 feuds over his period; an average of at least fifty known feuds a year were being carried on. He considers the roots of feuding, the weakness of central government, the strength of kinship, the notions of honour, blood and vengeance. He suggests that structurally Scottish society was based very heavily on kinship ties and devolved power, so that feuding was endemic. But it rose to a peak in the

period under consideration, before rapidly fading away. It became an epidemic because 'the twin pillars on which the late medieval Scottish kingdom rested, the Stewart monarchy and the Catholic Church, both collapsed . . .' (p. 266). It was made more lethal by the rapid spread of handguns; as in many feuding societies studied by anthropologists, such as the Nagas of Assam, a balanced and controlled form of violence with traditional weapons was upset by the rapid spread of firearms. We are given extensive analyses of particular feuds, of the role of magistrates and servants, of the relations between the court and the nobility. Although the detail sometimes becomes tedious to a non-specialist, the presentation is always clear and scholarly.

Of most interest is the analysis of the reasons for the decline of feuding. Brown rightly rejects simplistic and tautologous explanations based on the 'civilizing process', or the 'rise of the absolutist state'. He shows some of the political and administrative moves that were made, and particularly the importance of James VI's accession to the crown of the non-feuding and wealthy kingdom of England. He convincingly analyses the very great role of the Calvinist church in substituting allegiance to God, in place of the bonds of kinship and lordship. As peace flourished, the castles and keeps, the armed retainers and personal handguns became obsolete. The process had only begun during the Jacobean period, however, and we look forward to the sequel to this book which will take the story on to its conclusion at Culloden. A final anthropological comment. One might distinguish two major kinds of bloodfeud world; that of peasant violence in a situation of 'total scarcity', as analysed by Black-Michaud and illustrated archetypally in Albania. Then there is the vengeance warfare represented by many tribal societies, the Ifugao, Tausug and other Philippine tribes, the Nagas of Assam, and many South American tribal peoples. The Scottish case seems to lie between these two models; one of its interests is that, if anything, it seems to be closer to the tribal than the peasant end of the continuum. This would also merit further study.

ALAN MACFARLANE

University of Cambridge

CAMBRANES, J. C. *Coffee and peasants in Guatemala: the origins of the modern plantation economy in Guatemala 1853-1897*. 334 pp., bibliogr. Stockholm: Institute of Latin American Studies, 1985. \$14.95

This is a well researched book which, through the use of extensive documentation, substantiates the early origins and long history of exploitation suffered by the Guatemalan peasants and especially by the Indian population. The

dictatorship and enrichment of an elite minority, a great number of whom were recent European (and especially German) settlers, at the expense of the majority of the native population is forcefully presented throughout the book, backed up by a wealth of references to a wide variety of historical records and other material in Guatemala, the USA and Europe. This exploitation, and its dependence on the spread of coffee production and the expropriation and direct theft of land from the Indians who were virtually enslaved as beasts of burden, is presented as the major cause for the 'pauperization and economic and social oppression of the vast majority of the Guatemalan population and the country's underdevelopment' (p. 30).

The importance of documenting the origins and history of this exploitation is obvious, and the author has done a great service in so doing. Although it may be too optimistic to hope that the book will cause an improvement in social justice and the general welfare of today's Indian population in Guatemala, there can now be no question of the long history of unfair treatment to the Guatemalan Indians and of the justice of any effort by this population to regain a fair share of land and social security to establish at least a reasonable standard of living.

With its more than 100 pages of documentation (1/3 of the total), the book does, however, suffer from repetition. The original was written in Spanish and this may have been much more readable than the English version. The technical production of the book could also have been better, and the rather arbitrary division of words at the end of lines is distracting. It is hoped that the next two volumes of the series, now being prepared by the author, will benefit from greater editorial assistance and will therefore be more succinct and more easily readable. This will enhance the presentation and attract a wider audience; the subject deserves it.

H. K. HEGGENHOUGH

London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine

CATTLE, DOROTHY J. & KARL H. SCHWERIN (eds). *Food energy in tropical ecosystems* (Fd Nutr. Hist. Anthropol. 4). xxiv, 290 pp., illus., tables, bibliogr. New York: Gordon & Breach, 1985. \$55.00

This long awaited data-rich volume is the outgrowth of a symposium presented at the 1980 Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association. There is a preface by the editors; an introduction by Angela Little, one of the few nutritionists to contribute to this volume; and eleven papers divided into four sections on dietary staples, subsistence strategies, adaptation to ecosystems, and afterwards. The authors are primarily anthropol-