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Wounds and Wound Repair in Medieval Culture

Edited by

Larissa Tracy and Kelly DeVries



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Visible Prowess?: Reading Men's Head and Face Wounds in Early Medieval Europe to 1000 CE

Patricia Skinner

The violence of the Middle Ages (and its social regulation) has already attracted the attention of historians, giving rise to something of an industry in studying this theme. Head and facial trauma, arguably, were the most serious of injuries in early medieval society due to their very visibility. Wounds in this area, and their scars, were often closely scrutinized and commented upon by contemporaries, who seem to have had a clear sense of their potential for shame and dishonor. Such scrutiny was, however, only applied to acquired injuries and was not connected with the ancient pseudo-science of physiognomy, which concerned itself with deducing character from facial and other physical features and would enjoy some popularity later in the Middle Ages in the West.¹ Injury to the head might also often result in injury to the brain, offering a further perspective on wounds, their care, and their aftermath.

Injuries to the face and head could occur through combat, accident, or judicial punishment.² The latter might take the form of mutilation, branding of the facial features, or of complete removal of nose and ears. Such punishments are known from the early medieval period, but their public display and increas-

¹ See the useful discussions in *Seeing the Face, Seeing the Soul: Polemon's Physiognomy from Classical Antiquity to Medieval Islam*, ed. Simon Swain (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

² Combat and its aftermath: *Noble Ideals and Bloody Realities: Warfare in the Middle Ages*, ed. Neil Christie and M. Yazigi (Leiden: Brill, 2006); Sean McGlynn, *By Sword and Fire: Cruelty and Atrocity in Medieval Warfare* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2008); John Gillingham, "Killing and Mutilating Political Enemies in the British Isles from the Late 12th to the Early 14th century," in *Britain and Ireland 900–1300: Insular Responses to Medieval European Change*, ed. Brendan Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 114–134. Judicial punishment: Nicole Gonthier, *Le châtement du crime au moyen âge (XIIe–XVIIe siècles)* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 1998); Mitchell Merback, *The Thief, the Cross and the Wheel: Pain and the Spectacle of Punishment in Medieval and Renaissance Europe* (London: Reaktion Books, 1999); Celia Chazelle, "Crime and Punishment: Penalising without Prisons," in *Why the Middle Ages Matter*, ed. Celia Chazelle et al. (New York: Routledge, 2012), 15–28, points out the positive aspects of restorative and retributive justice in reconciling the offender with her/his community, in contrast to her/his social isolation behind "modern" prison walls.

ingly detailed descriptions thereof, served early on to reinforce the image of the later medieval period as, in Piero Camporesi's words, a "horrible, indescribable and sadistic age."³ Less clear, however, is whether these detailed accounts reflect a continuation of earlier violence or its intensification.⁴ Individual studies suggest that the late Middle Ages did see an increase in cruelty and atrocity,⁵ which so appalled Johan Huizinga, Norbert Elias, Marc Bloch, and Michel Foucault, and led to their now classic statements of the uncontrolled, emotive violence of medieval people.⁶ The injuries inflicted through judicial mutilation in the early Middle Ages, however, will not be considered in detail here for the simple reason that reading them was unambiguous: the person had offended and been punished in the most visible way.⁷ While it is difficult to quantify how many men and women suffered such punishment (as opposed to the number of legal codes that sanctioned it), that people must have known of these penalties does inform discussion of other wounds to the face and head. Hagiographic texts, too, are largely excluded from the following discussion – while they have offered rich evidence for sickness as punishment

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- 3 Piero Camporesi, *The Incorruptible Flesh: Body Mutation and Mortification in Religion and Folklore*, trans. T. Croft-Murray and H. Elson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 225.
 - 4 The essays in *Violence in Medieval Society*, ed. R.W. Kaeuper (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2000) vary in their view of whether the period was any more violent than modern times, but do not consider whether the early and later medieval periods experienced different levels or types of violent behaviour.
 - 5 Gillingham, "Killing;" P. Freedman, "Atrocities and the Executions of Peasant Rebel Leaders in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe," *Medievalia et Humanistica* 31 (2005): 101–113. Medieval literature, too, reflected and often condemned this brutality: Larissa Tracy, *Torture and Brutality in Medieval Literature: Negotiations of National Identity* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2012).
 - 6 Johan Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages* (Michigan: E. Arnold, 1924); N. Elias, *The Civilising Process*, trans. E. Jephcott (Oxford: Blackwell, 1939, rptd. 1978); Marc Bloch, *La société féodale* (Paris: Michel Albin, 1939), 116–117. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. A. Sheridan (London: Allen Lane, 1977), 47–48, describes medieval punishment as a ritual display of the sovereign's "vengeance" on the criminal. The spectacle of violence is further discussed in Valentin Groebner, *Defaced: the Visual Culture of Violence in the Later Middle Ages* (New York: Zone, 2004).
 - 7 Such punishments, however, had to be clearly justified: Geneviève Bührer-Thierry, "Just Anger or 'Vengeful Anger'? The Punishment of Blinding in the Early Medieval West," in *Anger's Past: The Social Uses of an Emotion in the Middle Ages*, ed. Barbara H. Rosenwein (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 75–91.

inflicted by God and/or the saint/s, their generic nature and moralizing purpose render them less reliable as historical evidence.⁸

Earlier texts are not short of graphic descriptions of this and other types of violence – one has only to read Gregory of Tours' account of the horrors of treason and civil war in Merovingian Francia⁹ – but while the endemic warfare of the early Middle Ages placed a premium on the status of warrior, with boys of the aristocratic elite trained from an early age in martial skills (and those from lower social classes called up to fight with whatever weapons they could muster), the overwhelming impression gained from written sources prior to the end of the first millennium is that violence was codified, controlled, and needed ample justification.¹⁰ The influence of gender studies, too, has resulted in more nuanced studies of the aggressive masculinity of warrior culture and the management of anger and its performance both in battle and in rituals such as judicial combat, hand-to-hand fighting, and the hunt.¹¹

Although the historiography of medieval violence is now well-established, however, rather less attention has been paid to the fate of the wounded man in early medieval culture, particularly one suffering facial or head wounds of a disfiguring or disabling nature. Early medieval law codes, medical texts, and written narratives (both historical and imaginary) provide some clues as to how the facially-wounded were treated, and an increasing body of archaeological evidence can assist in determining what wounds were inflicted and how survivable they were. There was a fine line dividing prestigious battle scars (whose potential to convey honor can be contested) and facial injuries so disfiguring (or disabling) that they engendered horror and rejection, rather than admiration, in the viewer. There is some evidence that medical assistance was

8 Maire Johnson examines the frequency of blinding and eye-bursting as a hagiographical motif in Irish sources, juxtaposed against Irish law codes. "In the Bursting of an Eye: Blinding and Blindness in Ireland's Medieval Hagiography," in this volume, 448–70.

9 *Gregorii Episcopi Turonensis Libri Historiarum X*, ed. B. Krusch and W. Levison, *MGH SS Rer. Merov.* 1.1 (Hanover: Hahn, 1951), e.g. the regular removal of noses and ears (5.18, 8.29, 9.38, 10.15); the punishment of branding to the face (9.38) [hereafter GT].

10 E.g. *Violence and Society in the Early Medieval West*, ed. Guy Halsall (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1998). Halsall's introduction states that: "Violent relationships can often be seen as a discourse structured around shared norms" (16).

11 Rosenwein, *Anger's Past*, 59–74, 75–91 and 191–202. On warrior culture in the early medieval West, see: *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*, ed. D.M. Hadley (London: Longman, 1999). On the literary depictions of women's wounds, see: Barbara Goodman, "Women's Wounds in Middle English Romances: An Exploration of Defilement, Disfigurement, and a Society in Disrepair," 544–71, in this volume.

available, but whether it could mitigate the long-term effects of head and face injuries is open to question.

From a legal perspective, there is abundant evidence that deliberate wounding of the face – particularly, but not exclusively, in times of peace – carried with it substantial financial penalties for the perpetrator in early medieval law codes. These, of course, were normative texts, and their primary purpose was a rhetorical statement of kingly power and authority. But contemporary evidence from other sources, such as chronicles, reveals an apparently high concern for personal appearance, with descriptions of injuries and other facial flaws.¹² This suggests, at the very least, that face and head wounds required care to ensure that they healed cleanly and with the minimum of lasting damage: the law codes assume the existence of doctors to attend to injuries inflicted illegally (the perpetrator being ordered to pick up the bill for medical assistance), but provide little evidence of their practice and competence. The intervention of a competent surgeon could have a significant effect on the victim's chances of surviving quite serious trauma,¹³ and prompt surgical intervention could potentially reduce the scarring and permanent damage of a head or face wound.¹⁴ The availability of practical – that is, surgical – wound care in early medieval Europe has hardly been addressed by scholars.¹⁵ The

12 See: Iain A. MacInnes, “Heads, Shoulders, Knees and Toes: Injury and Death in Anglo-Scottish Combat, c. 1296-c. 1403,” and William Sayers, “The Laconic Scar in Early Irish Literature,” in this volume, 102–27 and 473–95, respectively.

13 For further discussion on the treatment and significance of head wounds see: Debby Banham and Christine Voth, “The Diagnosis and Treatment of Wounds in the Old English Medical Collections: Anglo-Saxon Surgery?” and Larissa Tracy, “‘Into the hede, throw the helme and creste’: Head Wounds and a Question of Kingship in the Stanzaic *Morte Arthur*,” in this volume, 153–74 and 496–518, respectively.

14 As evidenced by the two versions of the forensic reconstruction of King Philip of Macedon's face, one before and one after the reconstruction team had learnt of a report that he had received skilled treatment on the battlefield for his traumatic arrow injury to the forehead and eye: John Prag and Richard Neave, *Making Faces: Using Forensic and Archaeological Evidence* (London: British Museum, 1997), 65–86 with illustrative photographs. The difference between the two was based on the assumed difference in levels of care to the traumatic flesh wound, which would not have been recoverable from the archaeological remains alone. The key question here, of course, must be whether the skills of the surgeon Kritoboulos were lost in the early Middle Ages, along with other medical knowledge from antiquity.

15 Peregrine Horden, “Medieval Medicine,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Medicine*, ed. Mark Jackson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 51–2, comments that our knowledge of medical practice pre-1200 is “all mutability;” that is, there is no overarching scheme to mirror later scholastic medicine, but early medieval medicine “is, to some

field of early medieval osteoarchaeology, however, is beginning to suggest quite sophisticated levels of response to serious head trauma manifested in skull remains, although it is less useful for judging the effects of flesh wounds.¹⁶ Assuming that the victim survived his injuries, the issue of social response to the wounded and/or maimed individual is difficult to determine: a battle-scarred or disfigured face might be viewed with ambivalence by contemporaries. Were scars a sign of honor or did they stigmatize the individual and lower his status within the group? These last questions are by far the hardest to answer since early medieval texts rarely give insight into the responses of peers or the psychological outcome for the victim. Evidence gathered from contemporary and later literary portrayals of the warrior offer an insight into contemporary attitudes towards the maimed man through their portrayals of individual combat and associated codes of honor.

Drawing examples from often terse reports in early medieval sources, wounds seem to have resulted from illegal, interpersonal violence (whether using weapons or not); from warfare (both hand-to-hand combat and wounds acquired through missiles, such as arrows, spears, and stones); from accidents arising from weapons practice; and from other accidents such as falls and collision with moving objects. Narrative sources also provide something of a filter in that most of the wounds recorded are serious (exceptional?) enough to threaten life – a glancing blow with the fist or nick to the skin with a bladed weapon, for all that it might break a nose or cause a scar, were mentioned only if they had effects beyond the health of the recipient. These less serious injuries are precisely the ones that the archaeological record, concerned with mainly skeletal remains, cannot easily pick up. Moreover, the lack of concern by medieval artists to render a naturalistic or detailed likeness of their subject much before 1200 means that there is little likelihood of finding iconographic representations of scarred or disfigured people.¹⁷

Early medieval law codes, issued by kings in the nascent states of Western Europe after the fall of Rome, are by far the most detailed in their accounts of

extent, ancient medicine (e.g. Dioscurides) continued by other means." When doctors (*medici*) do appear in the narrative sources, it is all too often in the context of a rejection of their skills in favor of God's help, e.g. GT, 3.36 and 8.31.

16 See: M.R. Geldof, "And to describe the shapes of the dead': Making Sense of the Archaeology of Armed Violence" and Robert Woosam Savage and Kelly DeVries, "Battle Trauma in Medieval Warfare: Wounds, Weapons and Armor," in this volume 57–80 and 27–56, respectively.

17 Herbert Kessler, *Seeing Medieval Art* (New York: Broadview, 2004), 139.

face and head wounds, but they are also the most problematic to interpret.¹⁸ Patrick Wormald has suggested that the lengthy lists of compensation payments for injuries to the head and body contained in most of the codes issued from the sixth to ninth centuries across Western Europe were more concerned with providing a memorable reminder of the king's authority over his people than with the injuries per se.¹⁹ Taking this cautionary note into account, it is nevertheless interesting to explore the form that "injury" took in these collections of clauses. On the head, attention was focused on breaking the skull (and degrees of exposure of the brain),²⁰ striking out or damaging eyes and eyelids,²¹ cutting off or maiming the nose,²² cutting off or maiming ears,²³ and causing wounds to other facial features such as the chin and the lips.²⁴ Almost all early medieval codifications of law in the West contain such lists of injuries: in all cases, the perpetrator of the injury was fined rather than physically punished. The early ninth-century *Lex Frisionum*, "given" by the Carolingians to the Frisians soon after Charlemagne's imperial coronation, is a positive panoply of personal injury, with the head and face covered by nearly thirty individual – but possibly not original – chapters.²⁵ It is distinct in breaking down the separate areas of the face into even more specific parts, such as wrinkles of the

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- 18 Law codes discussed here include the laws of Aethelberht of Kent, ed. L. Oliver at <<http://www.earlyenglishlaws.ac.uk/laws/texts/abt/>> [hereafter Aeth.] (accessed 5 June 2014); *Pactus Legis Salicae*, ed. K.A. Eckhardt, in *MGH LL Nat. Germ.* IV.1 (Hanover: Hahn, 1962) [hereafter *PLS*]; the *Lex Baiwariorum*, *Pactus Alamannorum* and *Lex Alamannorum*, ed. J. Merkel, in *MGH LL III*, ed. G. Pertz (Hanover: Hahn, 1868) [hereafter *LBai*, *PA* and *LA*]; the *Leges Langobardorum*, ed. F. Bluhme in *MGH LL IV*, ed. G.H. Pertz (Hanover: Hahn, 1868) [hereafter *LL* followed by the name of the king to whom the laws are attributed].
- 19 The purpose of the laws is discussed in Patrick Wormald, *The Making of English Law: From Alfred to the Twelfth Century*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 46 and 124. Wormald explicitly updated his earlier essays on the subject in his book and in his collection *Legal Culture in the Early Medieval West: Law as Text, Image and Experience* (London: Hambledon, 1999).
- 20 E.g. Aeth. 36 and 36.1; *PLS* 17.4–5; *LL Rothari* cc.47, 79 and 103; *LBai* 4.4–6, 5.3–5, 6.3–5; *PA Fragmentum Primum* 1; *LA* 59.3–7.
- 21 E.g. Aeth. 42–43; *PLS* 29.1; *LL Rothari* cc. 48, 81 and 105; *LBai* 4.9 and 15, 5.6, 6.6 and 9; *PA Fragmentum Secundum* 1–2; *LA* 60.4–7.
- 22 E.g. Aeth. 44, 45, 46; *PLS* 29.13; *LL Rothari* cc. 49, 55, 82 and 106; *LBai* 4.13 and 6.8; *LA* 60.8–10.
- 23 E.g. Aeth. 39–41; *PLS* 29. 1 and 14; *LL Rothari* cc. 53, 83 and 107; *LBai* 4.14, 6.9 and 11; *PA Fragmentum Secundum* 3–4; *LA* 60.1–3.
- 24 E.g. chin: Aeth. 47; lips/mouth: *LL Rothari* cc. 50, 84 and 108; *LBai* 4.15 and 6.9; *LA* 60.11–12.
- 25 See: Rolf Bremmer, "The Children He Never Had, the Husband She Never Served: Castration and Genital Mutilation in Medieval Frisian Law," in *Castration and Culture in the Middle Ages*, ed. Larissa Tracy (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2013), 108–130, on a later version of this code.

forehead cut by an assailant, nose components, and areas of the cheek and jaw, detailing a penalty of twelve shillings for leaving a “sunken scar which is called a *sipido*.”²⁶

Many other “injuries” listed in the codes, however – such as cutting and pulling of hair²⁷ or damage to the teeth²⁸ – might literally be termed superficial. It is clear from other provisions that what is at stake is not the health of the victim but her/his (usually his) honor, and that of the king whose peace is being breached by violent episodes of this type. Honor in the codes was explicitly linked to unblemished personal appearance, and damage to this carried with it a penalty to be paid to avoid reprisal (the Lombard King Rothari's Edict, *LL Rothari*, c. 19, “Si quis pro iniuria sua vindicanda ...” [whoever in order to avenge his injury ...], makes the threat of revenge explicit). The Alamannic law code of the seventh century punished any facial injury that could not be covered with hair or beard (*LA* 60.21, similar to *LL Rothari* c. 46) while *Lex Frisionum Additio Sapientum*, by far the most explicit on this matter, included a clause (3.16) punishing with a fine of 4 *solidi* any mutilation of the face that was visible at a specific distance: “Si ex percussione deformitas faciei illata fuerit, quae de 12 pedum longitudine posit agnoscī ...” [If through the blow a deformity of the face is caused which can be seen from 12 feet away]. Such concerns were echoed outside the Frankish world: the Irish laws imposed a fine for a lasting blemish or disability and demanded further payments from the perpetrator

26 *Lex Frisionum*, ed. K. de Richthofen, in *MGH LL III*, ed. G. Pertz (Hanover: Hahn, 1863), 673–691 [hereafter *LFrīs.*]. Sunken scar: *LFrīs.*, *Additiones Sapientum III*, 34. The remarkable similarity of some head-related clauses from the Frisian lawcode, dating to the early ninth century, to others in earlier compilations of the Alamans and Lombards suggests also that the Carolingian jurists borrowed older laws when compiling their newer codes.

27 Pulling: Aeth. 33; *Pactus Legis Salicae Capitula Addita* 3.104; *Rothari's Edict* c. 383; *Lex Frisionem* 22.65, *LFrīs. Additio Sapientum III*, 39–40; *Laws of Hywel Dda (The Book of Blegywryd)*, trans. Melville Richards (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1954), 64. Cutting: *PLS* 24.2–3; *Laws of Hywel Dda*, 64. Shaving: Lombard Laws, Liutprand 80 (dated 726) and 141 (734) and Aistulf 4 (dated 750). Not just hair, but beards, moustaches and even eyebrows were featured – damage to which incurred a penalty: *Rothari's Edict*, c. 383 (beard); *LFrīs.* 22.17 (moustache); *LFrīs.* 22.14 (eyebrows). See, on these issues: Robert Bartlett, “Symbolic Meanings of Hair in the Middle Ages,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6.4 (1994): 43–64; and Paul Dutton, *Charlemagne's Mustache and Other Cultural Clusters of the Dark Ages* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

28 Aeth. 48.1–3 (canine teeth, teeth next to canines, back teeth); *LL Rothari*, c. 85 (front teeth); *LFrīs.* 22.19 (front teeth) and 21 (back teeth). There were six classes of teeth in early Irish law the *Bretha Déin Chécht*: cited in F. Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1988), 132.

every time the victim had to attend a public assembly.²⁹ The tenth-century compilation of Welsh laws made under Hywel Dda, similarly, was concerned with compensation for the “conspicuous scar” to the face, which is one that would elicit inquiry as to what had happened.³⁰ Healing to a scar is recognized in Lombard laws about ear and nose injuries – while the healing (*resolidare*) is clearly a positive outcome, compensation was still required because the injury remained visible.³¹

Indeed, the laws do not seem to consider how serious a wound might be in medical terms. In Ireland, the disfiguring blemish took on a supernatural significance, disqualifying kings as taboo if they were even accidentally injured.³² The Frankish group of laws levied similar fines whether an injury was superficial and medically more serious – fines for cutting off noses and ears, gouging eyes, or hitting the head so hard that skull and brain were exposed and/or broken were at similar levels to the “superficial” group, such as knocking out a tooth. This suggests that the actual affront – and potential for revenge – contained in an action was at the core of legislators’ priorities rather than the medical after-effects of specific injuries on the victim.³³

Laws, therefore, sought to keep the peace: the potential head and facial injuries listed there seem to be envisaged as the result of inappropriate, interpersonal insult, and violence. They do not, however, exhaust the types of wound that might be suffered to the face and head, especially in battle situations.³⁴ In his study of early Carolingian warfare, Bernard S. Bachrach discusses the main types of weaponry that a soldier might use and face in combat. Basing his discussion on the treatise *De Procinctu Romanae Militiae* of Rabanus Maurus (d.856), Bachrach suggests that infantry soldiers were trained to jab short swords and cause puncture injuries, first at the head and face of the

29 Bretha Crolige, c. 42 for the blemish, *Bretha Déin Checht* c. 31 for the repeated payments: cited in Kelly, *Guide to Early Irish Law*, 129 and 132 respectively. See: Charlene M. Eska, “The Mutilation of Derbforgaill,” in this volume, 252–64, and Eska, “Imbrued in their owne blood’: Castration in Early Welsh and Irish Sources,” in *Castration and Culture*, ed. Tracy, 149–173.

30 *The Laws of Hywel Dda*, 64.

31 *LL Rothari* cc. 55 and 56.

32 Kelly, *Guide to Early Irish Law*, 19–20.

33 Exceptions here are the gradation of injury to specific parts of the face that involve sensory loss e.g. ears, eyes and nose. I disagree, however, with Lisi Oliver’s assessment (examining the Anglo-Saxon laws) that such fine-tuning was linked to medical knowledge: Lisi Oliver, *The Beginnings of English Law* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 100.

34 Woosnam-Savage and DeVries analyze the battle-wounds inflicted on the recently discovered skeleton of Richard III in “Battle Trauma in Medieval Warfare,” in this volume, 44–5.

enemy, and then at other parts of his body. This, he argues, was a more effective means of disabling and killing than using a slashing motion with the sword, which risked hitting only bone and shield and possibly one's own comrades.³⁵ Archaeological studies, too, seem to concur that the "primary target on the body" in close combat was the head that, if the individual was lacking or had lost his helmet, was the least protected part of his body.³⁶ A blow to the head would also temporarily incapacitate an opponent, leaving him vulnerable to a kill stroke.

However, Bachrach seems to take Rabanus's idealized view on trust when he states that (Roman-style) short swords were the preferred weapon of the Carolingian phalanx, despite substantial archaeological evidence that spears were also used. Dismissing the idea of a row of spearmen, Bachrach remarks: "Such a melange of armaments [spears, broken shafts, some swords used once the spear was thrown] seems less effective than ranks of men armed uniformly with short swords that ostensibly are unbreakable."³⁷ Here, the ideal is mistaken for the reality of warfare: archaeological remains quite commonly display blunt-weapon injury to the skull (such as might have been made by staves or spear shafts) alongside blade injuries, and it seems that the elite commanders of such ranks might have used double-edged, longer swords, whose primary aim was to slash down or across an enemy's face and body.³⁸ Another type of head wound that does show up in the evidence is a direct hit by a projectile, whether an arrow in the face, often in the eye area, or missiles such as stones either thrown from above or shot by machine.³⁹ Arrow wounds were particularly difficult to treat and those recorded in the written evidence

35 Bernard S. Bachrach, *Early Carolingian Warfare: Prelude to Empire* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 89.

36 Quote from E.T. Brødholt and P. Holck, "Skeletal Trauma in the Burials from the Royal Church of St. Mary in Medieval Oslo," *International Journal of Osteoarchaeology* 22.2 (2012): 201–208, at 213; vulnerability: Piers Mitchell et al., "Weapon Injuries in the Twelfth Century Crusader Garrison of Vadum Iacob Castle, Galilee," *International Journal of Osteoarchaeology* 16.2 (2006): 493–505, at 153.

37 Bachrach, *Early Carolingian Warfare*, 95.

38 Nicholas Brooks, "Weapons and Armour," in *The Battle of Maldon, AD 991*, ed. D. Scragg (Oxford: Basil Blackwell in Association with The Manchester Centre for Anglo-Saxon Studies, 1991), 208–219, at 212.

39 In a moralizing tale of an impious man named Constantine who threw a stone at an icon of the Virgin, Theophanes reports that he was killed at the siege of Nicaea in 725/6 by a stone which broke his head and face: *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor: Byzantine and Near Eastern History, AD284–813*, ed. and trans. C. Mango and R. Scott, with the assistance of R. Greatrex (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), AM6218, 559–60.

were usually fatal, compounded, in many cases, by the difficulty of removing an arrowhead that might be barbed or poisoned.⁴⁰ The potential for bruising and superficial cuts and lacerations was greater than is revealed by the archaeological evidence, which mainly picks up the blows that hit home to the bone in a fatal, or near-fatal, manner.⁴¹ Earlier sources rarely describe these injuries in much detail,⁴² but the later poets make much of such glancing blows, emphasizing the dangers of hand-to-hand combat.

The epic *Raoul de Cambrai* (hereafter *Raoul*), as Sarah Kay has demonstrated in her edition, was written in two main parts in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, but the oral tradition underpinning the poem seems to extend back to the anarchic period in Flanders following the collapse of Carolingian power in the late ninth and early tenth centuries.⁴³ It is a rich source of detail for potential injuries, including glancing blows (here mitigated by the recipient's helmet): "Del cercle d'or li a molt recolpé, et del nazel qan q'en a enconré, et el visaige l'a un petit navré ... A icest colp fu l'enfes estouné" [... he has cut off a great section of the gold circlet and all the nose-guard that lay in the path of his blow, wounding him slightly in the face ... The boy was stunned by the blow] (194, 3906–7, 246–7). This is echoed by a scene in the slightly earlier *Song of Roland* (again harking back to the Carolingian period), in which Thierry is injured on his forehead and cheek before defeating his opponent Pinabel (laisse 292, ll. 3919–20). While the elaborate set-pieces of combat contained in the poem clearly belong to its later textual community (such scenes, for example, are not found in the earlier Anglo-Saxon poem

40 Poison: *LBai*. 4IV.21. But the later development of streamlined mail-piercing arrowheads, ironically, may have made them easier to remove, even by the victim himself: Mitchell et al., "Weapon injuries," 152. Michael Livingston gives a detailed account of the treatment of the facial wound Prince Hal (later Henry V) received as a young man when he was shot with an arrow. "Prince Hal's Wound," in this volume, 215–30.

41 See, e.g.: P. Patrick, "Approaches to Violent Death: A Case Study from Early Medieval Cambridge," *International Journal of Osteoarchaeology* 16.4 (2006): 347–354, who comments that the individual under scrutiny, who had suffered three weapons injuries from sword blows to the cranium, did not long survive the attack. Contrast, however, the cases from early medieval Maastricht (NL) discussed by Raphael Panhuysen, "Het scherp van de snede: sporen van geweld in vroegsmiddeleuwse Maastricht," *Archeologie in Limburg* 92 (2002): 2–7, where two cases of blade injuries to the skull showed signs of healing. (I thank Professor Panhuysen for assisting me in gaining access to his valuable article.)

42 The ninth-century Byzantine chronicler Theophanes, however, highlights the spear injury picked up by Emperor Heraclius in a battle against the Persians in AM6118 (625/6CE): *The Chronicle of Theophanes*, 449.

43 *Raoul de Cambrai*, ed. and trans. S. Kay (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992). Chapter, line, and page numbers are given in parentheses in the text.

The Battle of Maldon), their accounts of wounding echo the themes met already in earlier material of individual honor and combat, targeted at the head.

Raoul is also useful for its emphasis on how an enemy might be killed – the numerous references to *espandue cerevele* “brains dashed” (49, 841, 66–7), or *en iert mainte froide cerevele* “many brains lying cold” (57, 1022, 76–7), or *sa cerevele desor ces oils gesir* “brains spilling over his eyes” (158, 3010–3012, 194–5) again suggest that the head was a major target in close combat, and that removal of, or damage to, a helmet was key to many deaths. Early medieval Welsh poetry, such as the ninth-century *Llywarch Hen Saga*, includes similar scenes: “Briwytrac Pyll penngloc ffer” [A brave man’s skull was smashed before Pyll...].⁴⁴ The apparent vulnerability of the face and head in early medieval culture raises a question about protection. The laws of the Lombard King Aistulf include a clause dating to 750 (*LL Aistulf* c. 2) that deals with the arms that men of different status were required to have. While armor (*lorica*) and weapons are mentioned, there is no reference to headgear. Nicholas Brooks uses evidence of Anglo-Saxon heriot payments to suggest that helmets may not have been a regular piece of equipment, even at higher social levels, prior to the eleventh century in England.⁴⁵ The Anglo-Saxon poem *Beowulf* does feature descriptions of helmets, however, with facemasks, decorative boars, and protective bands of silver.⁴⁶ Perhaps head protection was so self-evidently necessary that it simply does not feature as a special requirement.

However the wound was acquired, it might or might not require medical attention: several early medieval laws draw a distinction between a wound that could or could not be staunched, and recommended that the latter should be cared for by a doctor.⁴⁷ The length of time that a wound might take to heal was uppermost in these texts, and both Saxon and Irish laws made provision

44 The Welsh appears in *Canu Llywarch Hen*, ed. Ifor Williams, 2nd ed. (Cardiff: Cardiff University Press, 1953), section 1, verse 35, l.1; the translation is from *The Earliest Welsh Poetry*, trans. Joseph P. Clancy (London: Macmillan, 1970), 71. [Our thanks to Joe Eska for providing the Welsh reference.]

45 Brooks, “Weapons and Armour,” 216–217.

46 *Beowulf*, trans. M. Alexander (London: Penguin, 1973), e.g. ll. 335 and 2487 (masks), 1030 and 1448–54 (rims/bands and boars). Line numbers are given in parentheses in the text.

47 *PLS* 17.7; *Lex Salica Carolina*, ed. K.A. Eckhardt, *MGH LL Nat. Germ.* IV.2 (Hanover: Hahn, 1969), 22.4. Doctors’ fees are mentioned in *LL Rothari* cc. 79, 81, 82, 83, 84, 103, 106, 107. *LL Rothari* c. 128 states that “he who struck the blow should seek the doctor; if he was neglected to do this, the man struck or his lord should find the doctor [and the perpetrator pays the bill].” A head wound down to the brain was one of only three injuries for which the court physician was able to receive payment for his services in early Welsh law: *The Laws of Hywel Dda*, 41.

for the incapacitated victim to receive financial remuneration from her/his assailant.⁴⁸

The actual availability of care may have varied by region. Chief among the obstacles to reaching early medieval surgeons in Christian Europe is that they have left no written record of their practice outside. Surgery was, after all, conceived as a separate branch of medicine in antiquity,⁴⁹ a distinction that is visible in texts from the Muslim world. The Egyptian physician Ibn Ridwan (d.1068) commented:

I divide the teaching of medicine into two parts: one is theory, which is to be studied either from the books of Hippocrates or those of Galen... The other is practice, by which I mean the study of bone-setting, the restoration of dislocations, incision, suturing, cautery, lancing, eye remedies and all other manual procedures.⁵⁰

Put simply, then, surgery was the care of the external body, a response to trauma, wounding, or the visible lesions caused by disease. In the eyes of “rational” western writers such as Theoderic of Bologna, active in the mid-thirteenth century, surgical intervention was a last resort after diet, regime, and medicines had been tried, and even then, its practitioners needed, in Theoderic’s words, to be “well-read”; that is, to be able to link their treatments of the wound to knowledge of the internal workings of the body.⁵¹ Influenced by such texts, medical historians have tended to dismiss earlier practice, which in Stanley Rubin’s opinion was “based more upon empirical and traditional ideas than on pathological knowledge.”⁵² Yet empirical skills were precisely

48 The victim in Irish law was eligible for sick maintenance by his/her assailant if s/he did not recover quickly: Kelly, *Guide*, 130. On early Anglo-Saxon provision, see: Lisi Oliver, “Sick Maintenance in Anglo-Saxon Law,” *Journal of English and German Philology* 107:3 (2008): 303–326.

49 The preface to *Celsus, De Medicina* states that medicine is made up of regimen (*rictu*), remedies (*medicamenta*), and operations (*manu*): cited in Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 3: Care of the Self*, trans. R. Hurley (London: Penguin, 1990), 100.

50 Ibn Ridwan, *Useful Book*, 103, 5–9, trans. A.Z. Iskandar, “An Attempted Reconstruction of the Late Alexandrian Medical Curriculum,” *Medical History*, 20 (1976): 235–58, at 243, quoted in Peter E. Pormann and Emilie Savage-Smith, *Medieval Islamic Medicine* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 84.

51 *The Surgery of Theoderic, c. AD 1267*, trans. E. Campbell and J. Cotton (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1955), 4 and 5.

52 Stanley Rubin, *Medieval English Medicine* (London: David and Charles, 1974), 57. See also: Michael McVaugh, *The Rational Surgery of the Middle Ages* (Florence: SISMELE-Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2006).

what were required in treating wounds and their after-effects; Clare Pilsworth's work on the apparent prestige of medical experts in Lombard Italy suggests that competent practitioners existed long before the advent of the "rational" surgical profession in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries.⁵³ The existence of surgical procedures in the Anglo-Saxon *Leechbook*, copied in the tenth and eleventh centuries, supports this view.⁵⁴

In the absence of early medieval surgical texts per se, the search for ideas about wounds must trawl a little more widely. In fact, early medieval literature is full of metaphorical uses of wounds and wounding, be it Charlemagne's biographer Einhard reflecting on whether the wound of his wife's death will ever heal over to a scar with the medicine of consolation,⁵⁵ or Fulbert of Chartres (c. 970–c. 1030) envisaging a more robust surgical intervention to bring Bishop Hubert of Angers, whom he had excommunicated, to penitence. Fulbert refers to *falce discretionis* "the scalpel of prudence" to cut away the bishop's sins, instructing him to

Deinde amputationis illius vulnera recentia, ne aliquam aliam passionem generent, penalis cauterio timoris ustulabis; quam usturam ne frigus impietatis tangat, caritatis ardore et oleo fovebis misericordiae ... Post hoc autem has virtutis species, humilitatem, patientiam, et obedientiam, in unum melle divinorum eloquiorum confities, et in buxtala tuae mentis hoc antidotum diligenter recondes.

[cauterize the raw wounds ... with the hot iron of holy fear so as to prevent their fostering some other disorder; and keep the places you have cauterized warm with the fire of charity and the oil of mercy that they may not be chilled by the touch of impiety. ... Then take the virtues of humility, patience and obedience, and mix them with the honey of the

53 Clare Pilsworth, "Could you just sign this for me John?: Doctors, Charters and Professional Identity in Early Medieval Northern and Central Italy," *Early Medieval Europe* 17 (2009): 363–388.

54 Exemplified by the procedure in *Leechbook 1* for hare lip correction: "For hair lip: pound mastic very small, add the white of an egg and mingle as thou dust vermilion, cut with a knife the false edges of the lip, sew fast with silk, then smear without and within the salve, ere the silk rot. If it draw together, arrange it with the hand; anoint again soon." *Leechdoms, Wortcunning and Starcraft of Early England*, ed. O. Cockayne, 3 vols. (London: Longmans and Green, 1864–6), 2:59. The *Leechbooks* are also concerned with facial appearance, to judge by the number of remedies for the head: *Leechbook 1*, 19–26 (17 recipes); eyes, 27–38; facial blotches, 53–4; pustules and blotches, 77–81; and hair loss or excess hair, 155.

55 Einhard, *Letter to Lupus* 836, in *MGH Epistolae Merovingici et Karolingici Aevi*, IV (Berlin: Weidmann, 1925), 10.

divine word, and carefully store this remedy in the cupboard of your mind]⁵⁶

A metaphor, certainly, but it hints at some very simple wound management open to those less well-educated than Fulbert and his circle: cutting away bad flesh, cauterizing but then applying emollients to the wound, before adding honey, which both protected and healed with its antiseptic qualities.⁵⁷

So who might undertake such tasks? At the highest social level, kings were clearly attended by physicians, who might treat even their most superficial injuries. For example, when a fragile wooden arcade collapsed on Emperor Louis the Pious and his attendants in 817, the king's wounds – a bruised chest, an injury to the back of his right ear, and an injury to his groin from a piece of flying wood – were quickly dealt with “through the diligence of his physicians (*medicorum*),” and he was able to go hunting less than three weeks later.⁵⁸ Louis's eponymous son, Louis the German, also met with misfortune, falling from a second story; not giving his physicians enough time to heal him, however, he then had to have rotting flesh cut out from his (unspecified) wounds and remained laid up at Aachen.⁵⁹

Beyond the court, however, personal surgeons were rare. Given the access to culinary ingredients, knives, and needles mentioned in texts about wounds, however, it may not be too far-fetched to suggest that the healers for most cuts and abrasions were the wives and daughters of injured men, but even they might not have tackled more serious head and facial injuries.⁶⁰ The German chronicler Thietmar of Merseburg (d.1018) commented, for example, that he was made permanently “ridiculous” by his childhood broken nose and the damage caused by a fistula on his cheek.⁶¹

56 *The Letters and Poems of Fulbert of Chartres*, ed. and trans. F. Behrends (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), *Letter* 71. Such metaphors predate the medieval period of course: Foucault, *Care of the Self*, 55, quotes Seneca's *Letters to Lucilius* 64.8, outlining much the same scalpel and soothing procedure.

57 For a detailed discussion on the use of honey in healing wounds, see: Ilana Krug, “The Wounded Soldier: Honey and Late Medieval Military Medicine,” in this volume, 194–214.

58 *Annales Regni Francorum*, for the year 817: *MGH SS rer. Ger. VI*, ed. G.H. Pertz (Hanover: Hahn, 1895).

59 *Annales Bertiniani*, for the year 870, *MGH SS I: Annales et Chronica Aevi Carolini*, ed. G.H. Pertz (Hanover: Hahn, 1826): “minus necessario curari a medicis sustinens, computrescentem carnem ab eisdem medicis secari fecit.”

60 Discussing a much later period, Camporesi attributes surgical skills to tailors and furriers, but he does not explore the gender dimension (*Incorruptible Flesh*, 152).

61 Thietmar of Merseburg, *Chronicon*, IV.75, in *Ottonian Germany: The Chronicon of Thietmar of Merseburg*, trans. D.A. Warner (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 203–4.

Where surgical expertise was required, however, was with more serious cranial injuries. The *Leechbooks* feature several recipes for a broken head, mainly consisting of applied remedies, but there is also concern to remove bone fragments, suggesting some confidence that a patient might be saved.⁶² Other evidence supports the idea that such injuries, often caused by blows with blunt instruments or the impact of thrown stones, were considered treatable. Turning to the early medieval law codes again, the Alamannic code of the seventh century assumes that a physician will be called to treat the injury and, more pertinently in a legal context, to testify to its severity. The law continues that if the brain is exposed “ut medicus cum pinna aut cum fanone cervella tetigit” [so that the medic touches/treats it with a cloth],⁶³ the fine is heavier, and that if brains are spilt “ut medicus cum medicamentum aut sirico stupavit et postea sanavit, et hoc probatum est” [so that the medic plugs it with medicines and silk and afterwards it heals and this is proven] (LA, 60.6–7), a still heavier fine will ensue. The apparent “care” of the wound here is tantalizing. The high-value cloth used by the medic to bind the head may indicate the severity of the wound (and the price for mending it), or the use of “silk” might imply suturing. Either way, the incredulity that might greet survival is underlined by the “if this is proven” at the end of the clause. Surviving such a serious wound, undergoing treatment, and being capable, thereafter, of bringing a case for assault was probably so rare as to arouse both wonder and suspicion.

Early archaeological evidence suggests, however, that even serious head wounds were survivable, and that some must have been treated. Literary sources, too, portray survivors, such as Wulf Wonreding in *Beowulf*, who, though injured by a “keen wound” from a sword to his head through his helmet, was, nevertheless, “bound up” and recovered from it (ll. 2973–6). Exploring the later world of Crusader surgeons, Piers Mitchell cites a survey of cemetery evidence from early medieval Germany, in which approximately thirty of the deceased had cranial fractures and three-quarters of these had healed, indicating survival. Similarly, two warrior burials recently found in central Italy showed severe, but partly healed, head traumas.⁶⁴ Had these men received

62 *Leechbook I*, 38, at 91; *Leechbook II*, 33, at 327. Also see: Banham and Voth, “The Diagnosis and Treatment of Wounds,” in this volume.

63 *Pinna* and *fanone* are both translated by the editor of the laws as “cloth” (*pinna* being read as *panna*), but *Leechbook II*, 33, does include application of a salve to a shoulder wound using a feather, and a skull injury might, therefore, be treated just as delicately. In *Chirurgia* (c. 1180), Roger Frugard recommends just such a procedure for treating skull fractures. See Tracy, “Into the hede, throw the helme and creste,” 509–10.

64 Piers Mitchell, *Medicine in the Crusades: Warfare, Wounds and the Medieval Surgeon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 112; M. Rubini and P. Zaiio, “Warriors from

care from a surgeon? Certainly there would have been a need to remove splinters of skull, and in the German cases, there was some evidence of additional trepanation (drilling, lifting, or scraping of surrounding bone to remove impacted fragments), which appears in other early medieval contexts.⁶⁵ As Mitchell comments, further work on archaeological sites can only expand the sample of remains to inform our knowledge of the survivability of head injuries sustained in warfare. The geographical distribution of the archaeological samples, however, does point to the availability of surgery across a wide area.

But how was a survivor treated? Ironically, a healed hole in the skull was probably the least noticeable injury: the scalp would, eventually, cover the site, and provided that the trauma had not affected the brain (one of the major reasons why trepanation took place was precisely to relieve the pressure of depressed fractures on the cerebrum), the victim might not appear permanently disfigured. However, facial injuries and other visible wounds, such as maimed or missing ears, seem to have attracted the comment of writers who then felt compelled to provide the rationale for the victim's appearance. This is clearly linked to the judicial punishments mentioned earlier. A mutilated ear, whether accidental, acquired in battle, or removed as penalty, offered the potential for misinterpretation. The Bavarian code of the early seventh century, for example, discusses several injuries to the ear which, if maimed, would *exinde turpis appareat* "appear shameful" (LBai 4.14). This particular sign of shame extended beyond the western European kingdoms. The ninth-century Byzantine chronicler Theophanes reproduces a story relating to the fifth-century patrician Illos, whose right ear was cut off in an assassination attempt: "ἰαθεὶς δὲ τὴν πληγὴν ἐφόρει καμελαύκιν. καὶ ἤτήσατο τὸν βασιλέα ἐπὶ τὴν ἀνατολήν ἀπελθεῖν διὰ τὸ τοὺς ἀέρας ἀλλάξαι, ὅτι ἤσθην ἐκ τῆς πληγῆς"⁶⁶ [When he was cured of the wound, he used to wear a cap. He asked the emperor to send him to the East so that he could enjoy a change of air because he was weak from the wound].⁶⁷ This story is told as a prelude to a later rebellion by the same man.

the East: Skeletal Evidence of Warfare from a Lombard-Avar Cemetery in Central Italy (Campochiaro, Molise, 6th-8th century AD)," *Journal of Archaeological Science* 38 (2011): 1551–1559.

65 Stuart Mays, "A Possible Case of Surgical Treatment of Cranial Blunt Force Injury from Medieval England," *International Journal of Osteoarchaeology* 16.2 (2006): 95–103, reports a case from the site of Wharram Percy in Yorkshire from the tenth/eleventh century, in which the skull surrounding the injury hole had clearly been scraped to permit lifting of the damaged bone.

66 *Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae: Theophanes volumen 1*, ed. B.G. Niebuhr (Bonn: Weber, 1839), 198.

67 *The Chronicle of Theophanes*, AM5972 (479/80CE).

It seems pretty clear that Illos was dishonored by his wound (and the circumstances in which it was acquired) and actually withdrew, not for health reasons, but to render his lack of ear, which he tried to hide with a cap, even less visible. Already without honor, the text implies, and, thus, precisely the sort of man who would betray the emperor.

That this potential association persisted in Western as well as Eastern thought is suggested by a passage from Thietmar of Merseburg's *Chronicon*, in which he comments that Bishop Michael of Regensburg had lost an ear in battle, but "his mutilation brought him no shame but great honor."⁶⁸ The bishop's lack of an ear would have been apparent (unless, of course, he wore his hair long, unlikely in a cleric). But since he acquired the injury in battle, it may have been important to emphasize this. *Raoul* attests to the continued power of the lack of ear to signal shame. Deprived of his ear by Gautier, Bernier exclaims: "Dex vrais peres, qe ferai qant sor mon droit l'orelle perdu ai? Se ne me venge, ja mais lies ne serai!" [Oh God our true father what shall I do now that I have lost my ear even though I am in the right? If I don't avenge myself I'll never be happy again!] (232, 4832–4, 298–9). This episode might be played out in the late-twelfth century section of the text, but the equation of loss of ears with loss of honor had a long history, which may explain why the apparently minor injury to Louis the Pious' ear was, nevertheless, mentioned and explained.

While the link with possible criminality might be a reason to conceal some head and face wounds, the key to understanding seems to be the implied loss of dignity, honor, and masculinity. Being beaten or disfigured suggested a humiliating inability to defend oneself. Mutilating defeated enemies – such as Cnut's apparent cruelty to his Anglo-Saxon hostages in 1014 – was simply an extreme end of the continuum, and, in this case, interpreted as the unjust action of a foreigner against defenseless men.⁶⁹ At the other end, losing a fight was just as shameful. In the words of Law 41 of the Lombard King Rothari: if a man who was essentially minding his own business (literally, "standing or walking along") was seized and beaten up without the king's permission, a fine of half what would have been paid had he been killed was payable, since "in turpe et inde risiculum ipsius eum male tractavit" [he drags that man evilly into shame and derision].⁷⁰ That is, a man with visible signs of being beaten

68 Thietmar, *Chronicon*, 2.27, in *Ottonian Germany*, 112. "...et fuit eiusdem mutilation non ad dedecus, sed ad honorem magis," *MGH SSRG* n.s. IX, ed. Robert Holtzmann (Berlin: Weidman, 1935), 72.

69 *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, tr. G.N. Garmonsway (London: Dent, 1972), s.a. 1014 (E), 145. The E version says Cnut cut off the hands and noses of his hostages, the C and D versions that he took their ears as well.

70 *MGH LL IV: Leges Langobardorum, Edictus* 41, 20.

would suffer humiliation, which required a hefty monetary compensation to prove that the attack was not the result of some fault of his. *Raoul* underscores the need for restoration or retribution in its presentation of Raoul's treatment of Bernier: "Il a saisi un grant tronçon d'espié ... par maltalent l'a contremont drecié – fiert Berneçon qant il l'ot aprochié, par tel vertu le chief li a brisié, sanglant en ot son ermine delgié" [Raoul seized a big spear shaft ... angrily raised it up high and hit young Bernier as he approached, fetching his head such a powerful crack that his delicate ermine was showered with blood] (84, 1535–40).

Bernier, desperate to avenge this assault with a blunt weapon, "... d'un siglaton a la teste bende. Il vest l'auberc don't la maille est feree, et lace l'elme, si a çainte l'espee" [bandaged his head with a piece of fine cloth. He puts on his coat of iron mail, then laces on his helmet and girds his sword] (88, 1620–22), and with *de la face ... le sanc raier* "the blood pouring from his face" (89, 1665–7) tells his father what happened: "Me geri il d'un baston de poumier/Tous sui sanglans desq'al neu del baier" ["Raoul hit me with a stick of apple-wood, I am all bloody down to the clasp on my belt"] (89, 1680–1). Ultimately, Bernier's injury leaves him with a recognizable scar, an important plot device in a later romantic interlude (299, 6921), but his impetuous refusal of his father's advice (91, 1760–1) to rest and receive medical care for the injury (echoing Louis the German's impatience) may offer further insight into a medieval mentality in which even temporary incapacity and inability to perform as a warrior was to be feared.

It is, therefore, not surprising to read ambivalence about cases of disfigurement also in historical narratives, with a need to recount its circumstances. For example, the Annals of St. Bertin record for the year 864:

Carolus iuvenis ... noctu rediens de venatione in silva Cotia iocari cum aliis iuuenibus et coaevis suis putans, operante diabolo ab Albuino iuvene in capite spatha percutitur pene usque ad cerebrum; quae plaga a tempore sinistro usque ad malam dextrae maxillae pervenit.

[Young Charles ... while he only meant to enjoy some horseplay with other young men of his own age ... was struck in the head with a sword by a youth named Albuin. The blow penetrated almost as far as the brain, reaching from his left temple to his right cheekbone and jaw...]⁷¹

71 *Annales Bertiniani*, s.a. 864, in *MGH SS 1: Annales et Chronica Aevi Carolini*, ed. G.H. Pertz (Hanover: Hahn, 1826), 462. English translation in *The Annals of St Bertin*, tr. J.L. Nelson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), 111–112.

Charles was the grandson of Louis the Pious, but despite the account recording the injury (and its after-effects: Charles was said to have suffered a “disturbance of the brain” and to have had epileptic fits for the remaining two years of his life), it has nothing at all to say about the care he received. However, two elements of the report need to be highlighted: first, that the major injury Charles received was presented as accidental – there was no hint in the source that his assailants intended to injure him (and, thus, no reference in the annals to compensation being demanded); and second, Charles appears not to have been dishonored by his injury – in fact his father made provision for him to receive an honorable position, as sub-king of Aquitaine, for the two remaining years of his life. Yet contemporaries disagreed on this: while the St. Bertin annals present the injury as accidental and remain silent on the issue of honor, Ado of Vienne (d. 870) reports that Charles was *molestatus et dehonestatus* “troubled and dishonored” by his injury.⁷² Moreover, Regino of Prum (d. 915) tells a rather different story of the incident, saying that Charles provoked Albuin’s attack “out of the levity of youth” and that his assailant struck him on the head with his sword, leaving him half-dead with a *vultu deformatus* “deformed face.”⁷³

Young warriors were, it seems, expected to practice their skills even in peace time – *The Song of Roland* mentions young warriors practicing their swordplay in passing (laisse 8.113) – but the results of over-exuberance (as in Charles’s case) or perhaps of inexperience in feinting blows meant that this could be as dangerous as real warfare. *Raoul* features another scene of practice/horseplay with fatal results:

Cil chevalier commencent a jouer a l'escremie por lor cors deporter. Tant i joerent a mal l'estut torner – apres lor giu lor covint aïrer : les fix Ernaut i covint mort jeter, cel de Doai qi tant fist a loer.

[The knights started a round of fencing to amuse themselves. They played so eagerly things were bound to go wrong – their fun inevitably turned to sorrow. The sons of Ernault, the praiseworthy lord of Douai, were fated to meet their deaths there] (27, 370–375).

72 *Ex Adonis Archiepiscopi Viennensis Chronico*, ed. I. de Arx, *MGH SS II* (Hanover: Hahn, 1829), 323.

73 *Reginonis Abbatis Prumiensis Chronicon* s.a. 870, ed. F. Kurze, *MGH SS rer. Germ.*, vol. 50 (Hanover: Hahn, 1890), 101.

Accidents, however, always had repercussions, as William Ian Miller has illustrated using examples from Icelandic sagas.⁷⁴ It is clear that accidents could be misinterpreted as intentional acts, and that even if they were not, they still damaged honor.

According to the evidence, many wounds to the head and face injuries seem to have been a source of shame or humiliation, and they demand a different way of looking at battle scars, which are traditionally associated with heroic behavior.⁷⁵ The latent or open reciprocity of masculine violence in early medieval European society meant that, far from being markers of a warrior's prowess, scars bore testimony to being hit or failing to defend oneself. And the younger a man was, the longer he would have to bear the stigma of his wounds.⁷⁶ The only way out of such disgrace was to be able to point to the worse fate (preferably death) of the victim's assailant – "you think this is bad? You should see the other guy!" Hence, Charles's dishonor at the hands of Albuin may have been compounded by the fact that his assailant (according to Regino) fled, well aware of what he had done. Emperor Heraclius, caught on the lip by a Persian spear, dispatched his opponent, thereby maintaining (in Theophanes' text, at least) his heroic reputation. The fictional Thierry, nicked on the cheek and forehead, killed his opponent, Pinabel. And the life (and honor) of Wulf Wonreding, seriously wounded and, thus, unable to kill his attacker, was saved by his brother Eofor. Despite the best efforts of legislators to encourage or impose financial compensation, physical revenge was still, it seems, a preferable marker of the man.⁷⁷

74 William I. Miller, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking: Feud, Law and Society in Saga Iceland* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1990), 51–68. Rachel Kellett examines the lethal potential for arranged duels in medieval fencing manuals. See: "...Vnnd schüß im vnder dem schwert den ort lang ein zu^o der brust": The Placement and Consequences of Sword-blows in Sigmund Ringeck's Fifteenth-century Fencing Manual," 128–49, in this volume.

75 R. Sowerby, "The Wounded Man: Battle Scars and Corporal Punishment in Anglo-Saxon England" (paper presented at the International Medieval Congress, University of Leeds, Leeds, UK, 2009), came to a similar conclusion.

76 Irina Metzler, *Disability in Medieval Europe* (London: Routledge, 2006), 31, makes the parallel point about the greater negative impact of physical impairment on the young. Gregory of Tours recounts an episode of violence between a father, Waddo, and his son, as the son tries to persuade his father not to pursue a feud. Waddo, "calling him soft and cowardly, threw his axe and nearly struck his brain, but he partly parried the blow and escaped injury": GT 9.35. What would have happened had Waddo inflicted a scarring but not fatal blow?

77 But it was not entirely driven by uncontrolled, irrational emotion, as the essays in *Vengeance in the Middle Ages: Emotion, Religion and Feud*, ed. S.A. Throop and P.R. Hyams (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), illustrate.

Early medieval sources are certainly not lacking in references to serious and superficial head and facial wounds, but their concern is less with the medical after-effects than with the social responses that such wounds might elicit. Legal texts in the West are remarkably consistent in their view of the wounded man – he was shamed and would want revenge unless compensated financially. Moreover, his shame was often linked to his social status – the higher a man's social standing, the more damaging (and costly) an injury to him would be. Narrative sources, too, take care to explain visible blemishes and disfigurements, both to dissociate such injuries from similar, contemporary judicial punishments, and to save the face – literally – of the victim. Many of the examples in such sources feature rulers and clerics, groups for whom physical blemishes could provoke a challenge to their authority (and who were most likely to have access to “professional” medical care). What is conspicuously absent from the sample discussed here is any sense of the battle-scarred hero – neither *Beowulf* nor *The Battle of Maldon* include this motif, nor do later epic poems such as *Roland* or *Raoul*. It is unclear why this should be, given the prestige that bearing scars conveyed in later, masculine cultures such as the dueling culture of early modern Europe. Since head (and particularly facial) injuries were survivable, there must have been a significant number of scarred men living in medieval communities – the archaeology supports this view. The reticence of early medieval writers on the subject, and the concomitant lack of written evidence for surgical intervention, suggests either that face wounds were a delicate subject (at least at the level of the elite) and/or that they were so commonplace that they, and the care they received, merited little comment.⁷⁸

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