Berbice had the highest mortality rate among plantation colonies, largely because of unsanitary water supplies and dependence on plantation managers for subsistence. Violence and white supremacy upheld the regime, but on those counts Browne does not find Berbice to be exceptional. He distances himself from historiography based “on unspoken assumptions that continue to shape the study of slavery, including the notion that enslaved people’s primary goal was freedom and that their lives can best be understood by focusing on the hot and cold wars they waged against their enslavers” (4). His revisionism requires an evidentiary tautology: to gain a voice in the record, enslaved people tacitly had to accept slavery and then explain how they had suffered exceptionally while fulfilling their obligations.

In counterpoint to Browne’s revisionism, it bears remembering that the Dutch mainland colonies were synonymous with profound repudiations of European slave regimes. Upriver regions were heartlands of grand marronage. In 1763–64 enslaved people in Berbice waged the greatest slave rebellion before that on Saint-Domingue. During the 1790s there was a five-year civil war over slavery in Suriname. And in 1723 roughly thirteen thousand enslaved people in Demerara launched a short-lived, initially nonlethal, protest against the government’s supposed withholding of a parliamentary declaration of emancipation.

Browne’s book on Berbice gets us more deeply into the lives of enslaved people in the Caribbean than any other work of nonfiction that comes readily to mind. It bears favorable comparison with Emmanuel Le Roi Ladurie’s Montaillou (1975): a deep microhistory, based on fortuitously rich sources that a gifted historian uses to illuminate a previously obscure world with profound humanity. Accordingly, Surviving Slavery in the British Caribbean won the biannual Elsa Goveia Book Prize for excellence from the Association of Caribbean Historians.

John E. Crowley
Dalhousie University
crowley@dal.ca

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Philip Caudrey, in his new assessment of three well-known Court of Chivalry cases, argues that their collective contribution offers a much broader historical batch of information, with “a host of themes central to gentry studies, whilst simultaneously touching upon unexplored aspects of the cases themselves” (180). To accomplish his goal, Caudrey has reevaluated three cases—Scrope v. Grosvenor (1385–1390), Lovel v. Morley (1386–1387), and Grey v. Hastings (1407–1410)—with an eye toward political and social affiliations and alignments. Previous scholarship has focused on the military and chivalric aspects of the court. Maurice Keen used Court of Chivalry information as a repository of content on military careers, chivalric culture, and identity as defined by heraldry. Keen’s successors, notably Andrew Ayton and Adrian Bell, saw comparable historical value, although they narrowed the focus to issues such as revenue and retinue.

In the first chapter, Caudrey looks at witness testimony from the Grosvenor and Hastings cases to identify familial traditions, generational changes, and attitudes about Edward III and Henry V, respectively. He draws upon similarities between Grosvenor and Hastings and their testators, identifying continuities in the careers and attitudes of all involved. Caudrey also emphasizes the importance of county in the shaping of “vertical and historical ties” in the relationships among men (62).
In the second chapter, he assesses lordship across the three cases, investigating political and military bonds as they transcended regional and class boundaries. The third chapter continues this focus on relationships, delving deeper into personal connections between Scrope, Morley, and their witnesses. Caudrey effectively demonstrates the complex role of lordship at the court while laying out “how the bonds of lordship and inter-gentry solidarity overlapped and intersected” (95). From Caudrey’s perspective, Scrope’s testimony best represents the vertical and horizontal relationships among lords and gentry in localities and shires alike. The Scrope case demonstrates “how far the baronage’s horizons stretched beyond their native localities” and “how deeply rooted their power bases were in their native shires” (131). Morely’s “witness list reveals the importance of the locality” while “Scrope’s underscores how the line between region, county, and locality … inevitably blurred” (131).

In the final chapter, Caudrey uses Nigel Saul’s definition of chivalric memory as a “form of family memory, part of the stock of myths and narratives passed down over the generations, which brought lustre to a family’s name [and] also belonged to the chivalric class as a whole,” to explore attitudes about military service, their relationship to chivalric culture, and implications for the gentry (178, citing Saul, Chivalry in Medieval England [2011], 283). Ultimately, Caudrey identifies a more positive reception for war among the witnesses than previous scholars have gleaned. He also finds a strong sense of military community built upon lore, history, hearsay, and written evidence.

The structure of Caudrey’s work is clear and he acknowledges his limitations, most notably the incomplete nature of the source material itself. The appendices enhance the comprehensive nature of his assessment. The first appendix offers clarity about military service while the second contains information on Scrope and Hastings witnesses applicable to chapter one. The third appendix proves very helpful, with detailed biographies of plaintiffs and defendants from all three cases.

Caudrey identifies previously unexplored traditions of military service during the Hundred Years’ War. Familial consistency indicates a continued “chivalrous gloss” from early and late witness testimony alike. Caudrey also argues that along with familial bonds, long-established regional and county connections served as fundamental networks within the gentry class. With this in mind, Caudrey reasserts the presence of chivalric memory in the court, identifying it as both shire-based and regional in nature. He acknowledges what other scholars have observed as a demilitarization in the fifteenth century, but he points out that the bonds of chivalry continued to link communities and define personal identity through the sixteenth century.

On the whole, Caudrey’s assessment is insightful, and his technique most certainly has applicability in other contexts. His claims about the cohesive nature of a chivalric memory are intriguing, although he contradicts himself by finding no clear evidence against a decline in military service and change in marital attitudes during the fifteenth century. Collective versus individual memory in communities and regions, especially by civilians, as he terms them, would be an avenue worth pursuing, albeit a difficult one in many instances.

Chivalric memory was clearly about the pride with which one viewed his own family’s past, although Caudrey’s contribution to geographic boundaries, or lack thereof, and how they relate to the concept are intriguing. The complexities of local, shire, and personal relationships compound an already multifaceted exploration into the past, with Caudrey offering a cross-sectioned jurisdictional lens through which to view the war, war making, and chivalry during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. His approach opens up areas for additional research, notably assessment of comparable courts and cases.

Melissa Sartore
West Virginia University Institute of Technology
melissa.sartore@mail.wvu.edu