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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Since the 1960s historians studying gift giving have significantly deepened and nuanced our understanding of social, political and religious relations in medieval Europe.[1] From the outset, historians have tended to see gift giving in terms of 'folk models'. In this they have been following in the footsteps of the social anthropologists from whom we have inherited the analytical apparatus of 'gift giving'. The founding father of gift-studies, Marcel Mauss, in his *Essai sur le don*, presented reciprocal gift exchange as a characteristic feature of archaic societies, found in its clearest form in 'primitive' cultures like that of ancient *Germania*.[2] Pioneers in the field of medieval gift giving, such as Aaron Gurevich and George Duby, inherited the assumption that gift exchange and the rules of reciprocity that governed it were part of the cultural heritage passed down from the medieval elite's Germanic ancestors.[3] More recently, as we shall see below, historians have been more cautious about explaining medieval gift giving through its supposed archaic roots. The assumption that gift exchange was based on folk traditions of reciprocity deployed in a difficult encounter with Biblical injunctions to charity, has, however, remained widely influential. In this book I suggest that this analytical tradition has led us to overlook or underestimate the influence exercised on medieval gift giving by a very different tradition:

[1] For a valuable introduction to the historiography of medieval gift giving, see A. A. Bijsterveld, *Do ut des: Gift Giving, memoria, and Conflict Management in the Medieval Low Countries* (Hilversum, 2007), pp. 17–39.

[2] M. Mauss, 'Essai sur le don: Forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés archaïques', *L'Année sociologique*, 1 (1923–4), 30–186, reprinted in M. Mauss, *Sociologie et anthropologie* (Paris, 1973), pp. 145–279, 145–7, 250–55, trans. J. I. Guyer, *The Gift: Expanded Edition* (Chicago, 2016), pp. 55–7, 169–75.

[3] G. Duby, *The Early Growth of the European Economy: Warriors and Peasants from the Seventh to the Twelfth Century*, trans. H. B. Clarke (Ithaca, 1992); A. J. Gurevich, 'Wealth and gift-bestowal among the ancient Scandinavians', *Scandinavica*, 7 (1968), 126–38; repr. in A. J. Gurevich, *Historical Anthropology of the Middle Ages*, ed. J. Howlett (Padstow, 1992), pp. 177–89.

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classical literature and philosophy.[4] When writing about or engaging in gift giving, clerks and aristocrats of the central Middle Ages were engaging not just with popular traditions and scriptural injunctions to charity, but also with a highly moralised, literary tradition inherited from Greek and Roman antiquity.[5] Only when medieval writings on the gift are read in the context of this intellectual background will it be possible to understand what central medieval writers were trying to do when they described, praised or criticised acts of generosity, or what their contemporaries sought to achieve through their generosity.

The ethics of gift giving had been the subject of philosophical debate in the societies bordering the Mediterranean since the fourth century BC. Aristotle and Stoic philosophers had discussed the attitudes that ought to govern the giving and return of presents. In later centuries, the topic was picked up by Roman philosophers, most importantly by Cicero in his *De officiis* and Seneca the Younger in his *De beneficiis*. Both of these works were to have an enduring impact on medieval ideas about generosity.[6] In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries they were widely copied and commented upon in monasteries and cathedral schools, but their influence was not, as we shall see below, limited to these centres of learning. Both *De officiis* and *De beneficiis* were quoted and excerpted in *florilegia*, collections of quotations from classical authorities, courtesy texts, directed at both clerical and lay aristocratic audiences, and even romance literature. Engagement with this literary tradition meant that gift giving in the

[4] For examples of studies that notes, if briefly, the influence of classical literature in the context of rituals and gift giving, see E. Köhler, *Ideal und Wirklichkeit in der höfischen Epik: Studien zur Form der frühen Artus- und Graldichtung*, 2nd edn. (Tübingen, 1970), p. 26; S. D. White, 'The politics of exchange: gifts, fiefs, and feudalism', in E. Cohen and M. B. de Jong (eds.), *Medieval Transformations: Texts, Power, and Gifts in Context* (Leiden, 2001), pp. 169–88, 170; H. Vollrath, *Gestes, paroles et emportements au moyen âge* (Ostfildern, 2003), p. 30; F. Lachaud, *L'Éthique du pouvoir au Moyen Âge: l'office dans la culture politique (Angleterre, vers 1150-vers 1330)* (Paris, 2010), p. 600; P. Haugeard, *Ruses médiévales de la Générosité* (Paris, 2013), pp. 75 n. 1, 238. More generally on the classical influence on chivalric ideas and courtesy, see G. Ehrismann, 'Die Grundlagen des Ritterlichen Tugendsystems', *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur*, 56 (1919), 137–216 and the extensive debate this sparked, the most important contributions are printed in G. Eifler (ed.), *Ritterliches Tugendsystem* (Darmstadt, 1970), and C. S. Jaeger, *The Origins of Courtliness: Civilizing Trends and the Formation of Courtly Ideals, 930–1210* (Philadelphia, 1985).

[5] See, J. Hanning, 'Ars Donandi: Zur Ökonomie des Schenkens im früheren Mittelalter', *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht*, 37 (1986), 149–62, reprinted in R. van Dülmen (ed.), *Armut, Liebe, Ehre: Studien zur historischen Kulturforschung* (Frankfurt am Main, 1988), pp. 11–37, 19. For studies of charity in medieval England, see J. T. Rosenthal, *The Purchase of Paradise: Gift Giving and the Aristocracy, 1307–1485* (London, 1972); M. Rubin, *Charity and Community in Medieval Cambridge* (Cambridge, 1987); S. Dixon-Smith, 'The image and reality of alms-giving in the great halls of Henry III', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, 152 (1999), 79–96.

[6] See M. T. Griffin, *Seneca on Society* (Oxford, 2013), pp. 15–29. Gift giving in the ancient world has been the subject of two recent anthologies, M. L. Satlow (ed.), *The Gift in Antiquity* (Malden, MA, 2013) and F. Carlà and M. Gori (eds.), *Gift Giving and the 'Embedded' Economy in the Ancient World* (Heidelberg, 2014).

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Middle Ages differed in important ways from similar traditions found in the small-scale societies studied by Marcel Mauss.

This study investigates how classical ideas about gifts and generosity were utilised by medieval writers and agents. It is not primarily interested in gathering quotations from classical authors, although that too will occasionally be relevant, but in trying to read medieval writings on generosity in light of the classical background, and examining how this influenced the role that gifts came to play.[7] The context for this discussion is England in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, although I will frequently venture beyond it to include examples from the wider Latin and Francophone world that the English elite participated in. This book does not aim to provide a comprehensive overview of all the ways in which gifts were used in that society.[8] The gifts that come into focus below are chiefly gifts of movables, jewellery and precious plate. The book will not deal with the much-studied subject of grants of land, to monasteries or among lay aristocrats, or appointments to office. There is a flourishing debate on this and the role of 'patronage' in central and later medieval England, and the degree of importance that material rewards played in motivating service.[9] Some of the results from this study may be useful in

[7] See reflections in K.-D. Nothdurft, *Studien zum Einfluss Senecas auf die Philosophie und Theologie des Zwölften Jahrhunderts* (Leiden, 1963), pp. 47–51.

[8] For some studies of gift giving in twelfth- and thirteenth-century England, see S. Schröder, *Macht und Gabe: Materielle Kultur am Hof Heinrichs II. von England* (Husum, 2004); D. A. Carpenter, 'The meetings of King Henry III and Louis IX', in M. Prestwich, R. Britnell and R. Frame (eds.), *Thirteenth Century England X: Proceedings of the Durham Conference, 2003* (Woodbridge, 2005), pp. 1–30; D. A. Carpenter, 'The household rolls of King Henry III of England (1216–72)', *Historical Research*, 86 (2007), 22–46; N. Vincent, 'An inventory of gifts to King Henry III, 1234-5', in D. Crook and L. J. Wilkinson (eds.), *The Growth of Royal Government under Henry III* (Woodbridge, 2015), pp. 121–48; A. Spencer, 'Royal Patronage and the Earls in the Reign of Edward I', *History*, 93 (2008), 20–46; B. L. Wild, 'Secrecy, splendour and statecraft: the jewel accounts of King Henry III of England, 1216-1272', *Historical Research*, 83 (2010), 409–30; B. L. Wild, 'A gift inventory from the reign of Henry III', *EHR*, 125 (2010), 529–69; B. L. Wild, 'Emblems and enigmas: revisiting the 'sword' belt of Fernando de la Cerda', *Journal of Medieval History*, 37 (2011), 378–96; C. M. Woolgar, 'Gifts of food in late medieval England', in L. Kjær and A. J. Watson (eds.), *Journal of Medieval History: Special Issue, Feasts and Gifts of Food in Medieval Europe: Ritualised Constructions of Hierarchy, Identity and Community*, 37 (2011), 6–18; L. Kjær, 'Food, drink and ritualised communication in the household of Eleanor de Montfort, February to August 1265', in Kjær and Watson (eds.), *Journal of Medieval History: Feasts and Gifts of Food in Medieval Europe*, 75–89.

[9] K. B. McFarlane, 'Bastard feudalism', in K. B. McFarlane, *England in the Fifteenth Century: Collected Essays* (London, 1981), pp. 23–43, 36, 39; K. B. McFarlane, *The Nobility of Later Medieval England: The Ford Lectures for 1953 and Related Studies* (Oxford, 1973), pp. 120–21, 161; C. Carpenter, *Locality and Polity: A Study of Warwickshire Landed Society, 1401–1499* (Cambridge, 1992), esp. pp. 352–4; C. Carpenter, 'Political and constitutional history: before and after McFarlane', in R. H. Britnell and A. J. Pollard (eds.), *The McFarlane Legacy: Studies in Late Medieval Politics and Society* (Stroud, 1995), pp. 175–206; C. Carpenter, *The Wars of the Roses: Politics and the Constitution in England, c.1437–1509* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 21–2, 38, 43–4; E. Powell, 'After 'after McFarlane': the poverty of patronage and the case for constitutional history', in D. J. Clayton, R. G. Davies and P. McNiven (eds.), *Trade, Devotion and Governance: Papers in Later Medieval History* (Stroud,

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illuminating the intellectual background to this, but it is not a debate in which the current work will intervene directly. Some of the best work on medieval generosity has focused on the early Middle Ages, and this book is deeply dependent on their findings. Although it will on occasion engage in dialogue with some of these studies, the focus here is on the twelfth and thirteenth centuries: the high-point of medieval engagement with classical literature. Engagement with classical literature did not, however, emerge out of nowhere with the so-called twelfth-century renaissance, and more work is needed to explore whether (and, if so, how) classical ideals influenced early medieval ideas of generosity.[10]

The assumption that medieval gift-giving traditions originated in the lands north of the Roman Empire has had an enduring impact on scholarship. Modern historians have tended to see, for instance, thirteenth-century kings of England handing out gifts as acting in the tradition of their Anglo-Saxon ancestors, continuing a custom stretching back to the hall of Hrothgar.[11] The assumption that central medieval gift giving grew out of Germanic culture has passed into wider historical conscience. One recent, best-selling study of early modern religious history suggested that the particular popularity of almsgiving for the souls of the dead in Germany and Northern Europe may have been 'a by-product of the culture of mutual gifts that underpinned early medieval Germanic society'.[12] We should note, however, that historians of the early Middle Ages are increasingly sceptical about the degree of Germanic influence on post-Roman society. Instead, they tend to see early medieval practices as developments of existing Roman ideas and forms of behaviour in new contexts.[13]

A search for the origins of gift giving may now seem old-fashioned.[14] Twenty-first-century historians are increasingly reluctant to explain practices in terms of their roots. In his introduction to the anthology,

1994), pp. 1–16; R. Horrox, *Richard III: A Study of Service* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 1–5, 26; A. M. Spencer, *Nobility and Kingship in Medieval England: The Earls and Edward I, 1272–1307* (Cambridge, 2013).

[10] On the classics in the early Middle Ages, see L. Ness, *A Tainted Mantle: Hercules and the Classical Tradition at the Carolingian Court* (Philadelphia, 1991); R. Stone, *Morality and Masculinity in the Carolingian Empire* (Cambridge, 2012), pp. 6, 214–16.

[11] D. A. Carpenter, 'The burial of King Henry III, the regalia and royal ideology', in D. A. Carpenter (ed.), *The Reign of Henry III* (London, 1996), pp. 427–59, 429; M. Howell, *Eleanor of Provence: Queenship in Thirteenth-Century England* (Oxford, 1998), p. 79.

[12] D. MacCulloch, *Reformation: Europe's House Divided, 1490–700* (London, 2003), p. 14.

[13] See, among a vast body of work, G. Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West, 376–568* (Cambridge, 2007), chap. 14 and C. Wickham, *The Inheritance of Rome: A History of Europe from 400 to 1000* (London, 2009), chap. 8.

[14] Against the 'idol of origins', see the classic critique in M. Bloch, *The Historian's Craft*, trans. P. Putnam, introduction by P. Burke (Manchester, 1992), pp. 24–9.

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Negotiating the Gift, Gadi Algazi argued that historians need to move away from the idea of the gift as a remnant of an 'archaic' world. The meaning and role of gifts were never universally agreed upon and were constantly negotiated and redefined in new social contexts.[15] Rather than apply a universalising model of 'the gift', Algazi suggests that historians need to look to 'given cultural repertoires of models for shaping interactions, on available vocabularies and recognised modes of applying them'.[16] Arguing in a similar vein, the contributors to the *Languages of Gift* anthology question the traditional conception of the early Middle Ages as an uncomplicated 'gift economy' and draw attention to the variability and complexity of the ways in which early medieval actors used, spoke and wrote about gifts.[17] These two anthologies have done important work in demonstrating the malleability of gift practices. Interpretations were always limited, however, as Algazi notes, by 'available vocabularies and recognized modes of applying them'. The classical tradition is important, not first and foremost because it lay at the roots of medieval ideas of the gift, but because of the renewed engagement with it that took place in the central Middle Ages. From the twelfth century onwards it provided one of the most influential and authoritative models for shaping gift exchanges available to medieval audiences.

Medieval historians have thus begun to move 'beyond Mauss' for some time and now use his famous essay as 'a heuristic model, not as a hermeneutic imperative'.[18] But moving beyond deeply ingrained assumptions and methodological traditions is not easy, and heuristic models can also condition both the way we read sources and the types of sources we choose to investigate.[19] For our purposes here, two effects of our Maussian heritage are particularly important. First, medieval historians, like social anthropologists, tend to see the gift first and last as an instrument for the manipulation of inter-personal relationships. This was an important aspect of the role of gifts, but medieval writers, like the Stoics before them, were at least as interested in gift giving as a test of the relationship of giver and recipient to the given; their attachment to the alluring material world. Secondly, the assumption that the gift had its roots in Germanic or 'folk' culture has meant that historians have tended

[15] G. Algazi, 'Introduction: doing things with gifts', in G. Algazi, V. Groebner and B. Jussen (eds.), *Negotiating the Gift: Pre-Modern Figurations of Exchange* (Göttingen, 2003), pp. 9–27, 12. See also N. Z. Davis, *The Gift in Sixteenth-Century France* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 11–16.

[16] Algazi, 'Introduction', p. 13.

[17] J. L. Nelson, 'Introduction', in W. Davies and P. Fouracre (eds.), *The Languages of Gift in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 1–17 and C. Wickham, 'Conclusion', in ibid, pp. 238–61.

[18] Bijsterveld, *Do ut des*, p. 40.

[19] See P. Buc, *Dangers of Ritual: Between Early Medieval Texts and Social Scientific Theory* (Princeton, 2001), part two.

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to look not at intellectual life as a context for gift giving, grounded as it was in the inheritance of Rome, but at the fragmentary evidence for popular practices and values. The contributors to *Negotiating the Gift* and *Languages of Gift* have abandoned the idea of a monolithic, archaic Gift Culture but still suggest that gift practices are to be explained by uncovering indigenous traditions that were rarely if ever explicitly stated and formulated. Algazi speaks of a 'family of folk models for perceiving and shaping acts of exchange'.[20] But, as we shall see, the 'folk models' we encounter in the central Middle Ages were deeply dependent on the example of classical philosophy and literature.

The association of the gift with folk traditions bears a great deal of responsibility for the neglect of the intellectual contribution. Another contributor is the abiding idea in the classic anthropological literature that societies' own claims about the gift obscure, rather than reveal, the reality of the practice. Marcel Mauss was interested in the '*formes très solennelles*' that the act of giving took on in the societies he discussed: the 'etiquette and generosity' with which gifts were given among the Native Americans; the way that the gift was scorned and thrown down at the recipients' feet in the Trobriand islands. The aim of this was to give a display '*de la libéralité, de la liberté et de l'autonomie*' as well as of greatness. Mauss' attention, however, quickly moved on the general rules of reciprocity and obligation that his essay aimed to formulate. Having spent a short paragraph on the performance of generosity in Polynesia, he concluded that 'yet, deep down, it is mechanisms of obligation . . . that are at play'.[21] The gifts are 'in theory voluntary, in reality obligatorily given and received'. The conspicuous generosity is only '*fiction, formalisme et mensonge social*' – fiction, formality and social lies.[22]

Some of Mauss' successors have had even less time for the 'solemn forms' of gift exchange. Claude Lévi-Strauss deplored the great master's fascination with 'native theory' and applauded the way Mauss moved beyond it in the later sections of the *Essai sur le don*.[23] Attacking Lévi-Strauss' reductive statement that the 'primary, fundamental phenomenon' in the giving of gifts 'is exchange', Pierre Bourdieu drew attention to the qualitative difference between the certainty of reciprocity implied by Lévi-Strauss' 'automatic laws' and the actual uncertainty experienced

[20] Algazi, 'Introduction', p. 24.
[21] Mauss, 'Essai sur le don', pp. 177, 202, trans. Guyer, *The Gift*, pp. 91, 117.
[22] Mauss, 'Essai sur le don', pp. 147, 151, trans. Guyer, *The Gift*, pp. 57, 61. See J. Ladilaw, 'A free gift makes no friends', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 6 (2000), 617–34, reprinted in M. Osteen (ed.), *The Question of the Gift: Essays across Disciplines* (London, 2002), pp. 45–66, 57.
[23] C. Lévi-Strauss, 'Introduction à l'oeuvre de Marcel Mauss', in Mauss, *Sociologie et anthropologie*, pp. ix–lii, xlvi; J. Parry, 'The gift, the Indian gift and the "Indian gift"', *Man*, 21 (1986), 453–73, 456.

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by actors who could never be completely certain of how their gift would be received, or whether it would be reciprocated.[24] As Ilana F. Silber has pointed out, however, Bourdieu's analysis of the gift 'quickly takes on a critical and debunking tone'. The time-lag between gift and counter-gift makes it possible to 'sustain the fiction of spontaneous, disinterested giving while repressing the actual truth of exchange', and Bourdieu throughout prioritises the social consequences of the hard 'truth' of the obligation to reciprocity over that of the 'fiction' of the free gift.[25] For Bourdieu, there is a double truth to the gift, but it remains unspoken. Gift giving is governed by 'common miscognition' a 'game in which everyone knows – and does not want to know – that everyone knows – and does not want to know – the true nature of the exchange'.[26] Whether structuralists or students of practice, sociologists and anthropologists have, as Jonathan Parry has commented, tended to conclude that 'the notion of a 'pure gift' is mere ideological obfuscation' that masks the truth of interested reciprocal exchanges.[27]

Medieval historians have sometimes been just as impatient with their informants' pious pretensions: Bernhard Jussen advises suspicion of medieval writers' 'consciously worked-out' concepts of the gift, 'about which Lévi-Strauss already warned us – not without reason – in his introduction to Mauss's *Oeuvres*'.[28] This, however, raises a more fundamental methodological problem: how does the medieval historian move beyond texts reflecting the 'consciously worked-out' models of gift giving? Unlike anthropological field workers, medievalists can only rarely contrast the ideological statements of our informants with evidence of actual practice. These methodological challenges have recently been the subject of considerable debate within a closely related sub-field of medieval history, the study of rituals. In an important article on this, Timothy Reuter noted: 'we necessarily have only skeletons or abstractions of complete rituals, and we can often not be sure that we are being told everything'. The standard defence – that it does not matter whether the specific historical event is accurately reported, since the details of the lie reveal general cultural truths – does not necessarily hold for medieval Europe. So Reuter:

[24] P. Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. R. Nice (Cambridge, 1977), pp. 3–9, 195; P. Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, trans. R. Nice (Cambridge, 1990), 98; P. Bourdieu, 'Marginalia: some additional notes on the gift', trans. R. Nice, in A. D. Schrift (ed.), *The Logic of the Gift: Towards an Ethic of Generosity* (London, 1997), pp. 231–41, 231.

[25] See the analysis in I. F. Silber, 'Bourdieu's gift to gift theory: an unacknowledged trajectory', *Sociological Theory*, 27 (2009), 173–90, 177.

[26] Bourdieu, 'Marginalia', p. 232.

[27] Parry, 'The gift', 455.

[28] B. Jussen, 'Religious discourses of the gift in the Middle Ages: semantic evidences (second to twelfth centuries)', in Algazi, Groebner and Jussen (eds.) *Negotiating the Gift*, pp. 173–92.

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In a world pregnant with symbolism and familiar with multiple layers of meaning and exegesis in its dealings with the texts which had come down to it, it would be dangerous to assume that in its own production of texts the details which to us seem merely incidental to the narrative flow were offered simply to add verisimilitude to an otherwise bald and unconvincing *topos*.

Therefore, to read medieval narratives of rituals 'like anthropological field workers' notebooks is . . . to take some risks'.[29] The same warnings apply to medieval descriptions of gift giving: details of how the gift was given, the disposition of the giver and the recipient were pregnant with meaning to medieval writers. In order to understand the role of gift giving in the central Middle Ages we will first have to understand the role of gifts within medieval texts.

Developing a similar critique in his controversial *The Dangers of Ritual*, Philippe Buc argued that texts describing rituals were themselves 'forces in the practice of power', written in order to direct and control the interpretation of rituals. As such they cannot simply be 'decrypted for (elusive) facts about rituals and then set aside'.[30] According to Buc, medieval writings on ritual were not innocent accounts of what actually happened, but pedagogic and politicised constructs created by a clerical class trained in exegesis. In order to unpack the meanings implied in their descriptions of rituals it is necessary first to explore their intellectual background and the models it provided for the description and evaluation of rituals.[31] This aspect of Buc's work has not received the attention it deserves in the vociferous debate about *Dangers of Ritual*. Instead, the debate has tended to focus on whether Buc is right to be so sceptical about whether descriptions of rituals in texts can be used to reconstruct rituals in practice, a subject I shall return to in Chapter 7.[32] Building on Buc's approach, this book argues that medieval chroniclers' descriptions of gift giving need to be read in the context of the models of interpretation presented by classical texts before we can attempt to analyse them through the lenses of socio-anthropological theory.

[29] T. Reuter, 'Pre-Gregorian mentalities', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 33 (1994), 347–74, reprinted in T. Reuter, *Medieval Polities and Modern Mentalities*, ed. J. L. Nelson (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 89–99, 95–98.
[30] Buc, *Dangers*, p. 259.
[31] Buc, *Dangers*, pp. 2–4, 79, 82; P. Buc, 'Ritual and interpretation: the early medieval case', *Early Medieval Europe*, 9 (2000), 183–210, 186.
[32] G. Koziol, 'Review article: the dangers of polemic: is ritual still an interesting topic of historical study?', *Early Medieval Europe*, 11 (2002), 367–88; J. L. Nelson, 'Review: *The Dangers of Ritual*', *Speculum*, 78 (2003), 847–50; A. Walsham, 'Review article: the Dangers of Ritual', *Past and Present*, 180 (2003), 277–87; Buc's response 'The monster and the critics: a ritual reply', *Early Medieval Europe*, 15 (2007), 441–52. For an overview of the debate, see C. Pössel, 'The magic of early medieval ritual', *Early Medieval Europe*, 17 (2009), 111–25.

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Marcel Mauss was aware of the impact classical culture had had on the tradition of gift exchange in European culture. Although he identified 'traces' (*vestiges*) of the tradition of reciprocal gift exchange in modern societies, including the France of his own day, and hoped that Western civilisation would return to such reciprocal structures in the future,[33] he also made it clear that his model of gift exchange, developed from the study of small-scale, oral societies around the Pacific, could not be straightforwardly applied to the complex, literate cultures of the Mediterranean world. It had been 'precisely the Romans and the Greeks, who . . . separated sale from gift and exchange, [and] isolated moral obligation from contract'. In that way they divided what had been (and still were in 'archaic' societies) one. Unlike archaic societies, 'our own civilizations, dating back to the Semitic, Greek, and Roman civilizations, strongly distinguish between obligation and nonvoluntary prestation, on the one hand, and the gift, on the other'.[34] It is not, however, a point that has given medieval historians much pause.

Mauss' evocation of great lineages of civilisation now feels old-fashioned, and today many anthropologists question the evolutionary implications of his essay. Alain Testart suggested that the confusion between interested exchange and gift that Mauss attributed to the natives actually originated in the widespread assumptions of Mauss' time about the simpler intellectual life of primitive societies.[35] Anthropologists such as Jonathan Parry, Maurice Godelier and Nicholas Thomas meanwhile have shown how gift giving and market exchange co-exist, rather than replace one another, in most societies.[36] There are, however, good reasons to take seriously Mauss' emphasis on the differences between small-scale, oral societies like the Trobriand Islands and the complex, urban and literate societies that have dominated European and Asian history.

As Buc has reminded historians, ritualised action, to which we should add the exchange of gifts, in medieval Europe, was systemically subjected to moral evaluation by a clerical 'class of specialists in textual interpretation', conditioned by scripture and patristic works to beware of the ways

[33] Mauss, 'Essai sur le don', pp. 229, 258–79, but in the opening of the work he seems more certain of finding the system functioning in his own time '*de façon constante*', ibid, p. 148, trans. Guyer, *The Gift*, pp. 59, 146, 177–98.

[34] Mauss, 'Essai sur le don', pp. 228–9, 239, trans. Guyer, *The Gift*, pp. 146, 157.

[35] A. Testart, *Critique du don* (Paris, 2007); chap. 1 is available in English translation by S. Emanuel and L. Perlman, 'What is a gift?', *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, 3 (2013), 249–61.

[36] J. Parry and M. Bloch, 'Introduction: money and the morality of exchange', in J. Parry and M. Bloch (eds.), *Money and the Morality of Exchange* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 1–32; M. Godelier, *The Enigma of the Gift*, trans. N. Scott (Cambridge, 1999); N. Thomas, *Entangled Objects: Exchange, Material Culture, and Colonialism in the Pacific* (Cambridge, MA, 1991).

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in which rituals could be abused by hypocritical, worldly actors. These traditions meant that 'early medieval political culture stands at an uncommensurable distance from many of the societies on which social scientists have based their theories'.[37] This point is particularly important for the study of gift giving. Unlike the 'archaic' societies from which Mauss drew his data, medieval writers were the heirs of a long-standing literary tradition of subjecting gift giving to debate and moral evaluation. As we shall see below, this tradition had a deep impact on the way in which they conceived of and wrote about gifts.

Rather than looking at Polynesia, historians may, as Silber has argued, be better off searching for inspiration in studies of other complex, literary societies in which social life has been the subject of deliberate philosophical and religious moralisation.[38] For medievalists, the most important contributions to the debate over gift exchange is the anthropologist Jonathan Parry's article 'The Gift, the Indian Gift, and the "Indian Gift"' from 1986.[39] Here Parry argues for the 'evolutionary' reading of Mauss' essay presented above. Parry suggests that

> Mauss's real purpose . . . is not to suggest that there is no such thing as a pure gift in *any* society, but rather to show that for many the issue simply cannot arise since they do not make the kinds of distinction that we make. So while Mauss is generally represented as telling us how *in fact* the gift is *never* free, what I think he is really telling us is how *we* have acquired a *theory* that it should be.[40]

In societies characterised by market exchange and text-based religions with professional priesthoods like Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity, 'gifts come to *represent* something entirely different' from their role in small-scale societies. Rather than declining with the emergence of market exchange, gift giving changes, as 'the ideology of a disinterested gift emerges in parallel with an ideology of a purely interested exchange'.[41] Placed in opposition to interested, mercantile exchange, gift giving becomes a way of showing one's moral character, a 'lay exercise in asceticism', demonstrating that the giver is not interested in mundane return, but has his eyes fixed on higher goals: the joy of virtuous action carried out for its own sake; charity; salvation.[42] One of the most important new directions in Parry's article is its explicit focus on ideologies of the gift. Gift giving may in practice tend to be reciprocal in a given society, but it makes a great difference, as Testart

[37] Buc, *Dangers*, pp. 245–7.
[38] I. F. Silber 'Gift-giving in the great traditions: the case of donations to monasteries in the medieval west', *European Journal of Sociology*, 36 (1995), 209–43.
[39] Parry, 'The gift'. [40] Parry, 'The gift', 458, author's italics.
[41] Parry, 'The gift', 458. For the idea that gift is defined in opposition to commodities, see also C. A. Gregory, *Gifts and commodities* (London, 1982).
[42] Parry, 'The gift', 467–8.

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