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Pamela J. Stewart , Andrew Strathern  
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# Cambridge Elements

Elements in Religion and Violence  
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## SACRED REVENGE IN OCEANIA

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**ABSTRACT:** Revenge is an important motivation in human affairs relating to conflict and violence, and it is a notable feature in both egalitarian societies and hierarchical societies within Oceania. In many of these societies revenge is traditionally a sacred duty to the dead whose spirits demand retributive action. Revenge is also sacred because it instantiates a norm of reciprocity in the cosmos, ensuring a balance between violent and quiescent sequences of action, marked by ritual. Revenge further remains an important hidden factor in processes of violence beyond Oceania, revealing deep human propensities for retaliatory acts and the tendency to elevate these into principles of legitimacy. Our study also explores ways in which sacred revenge is transcended through practices of wealth exchange.

**KEYWORDS:** sacred, revenge, Oceania, violence, reciprocity, warfare

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