

Comitatus in Beowulf

The first century Roman historian Tacitus coined the term *comitatus* in his observations of Germanic tribal culture in Germania. The comitatus was a gathering of warriors under one governing lord, representing a strategic interweaving of family threads so as simultaneously to enlarge and secure tribal identity and allegiance. This became known as the Code of Comitatus. The comitatus and intermarriages among tribes were physical representations of intertribal treaties -- or rather the pre-literate versions of treaties, called *friths*, in which physical objects of value that represented the tribe were exchanged. This interweaving of families and groups is also reflected in the art and armor of the day, as evidenced by the woven pattern on the gold buckle shown on page 22 of your textbook. Similarly, warriors would also create woven vests of strong leather to protect themselves from injury during battle if they could not afford mail shirts.

In much the same way, blood-money (*wergild*, or literally 'man-money') is offered by one tribe as payment for those of another tribe whom they kill. And tributes of swords and rings, necklaces and battle gear are offered as seals of good faith -- physical objects in place of (non-existent) written contracts. They are markers of agreements which, without writing, have no other physical representation.

Do the following:

1. Using sections 1-9, how do you find "comitatus" present in *Beowulf*? Explain.
2. Using the same sections, in what way(s) how do you see Beowulf and his men deviating away from and/or breaking this code? Explain.

Source:

<<http://teacherweb.com/TX/McNeilHS/DebbiePalmer/BeowulfPacketofActivities.doc>>
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