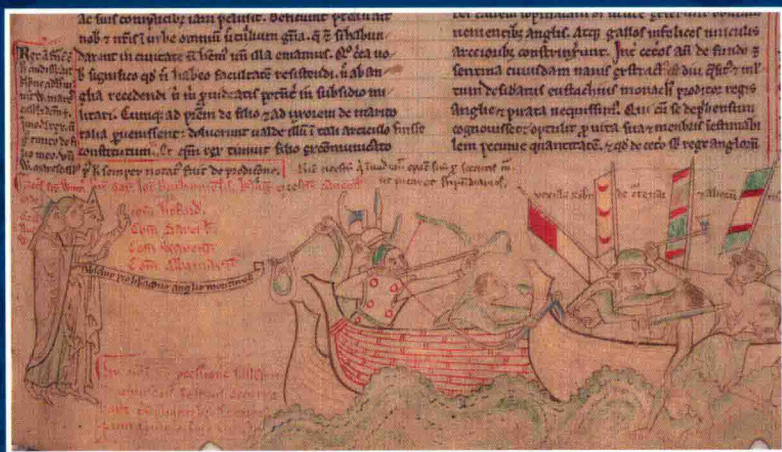


# Ports, Piracy and Maritime War

*Piracy in the English Channel  
and the Atlantic, c. 1280–c. 1330*

Thomas K. Heebøll-Holm

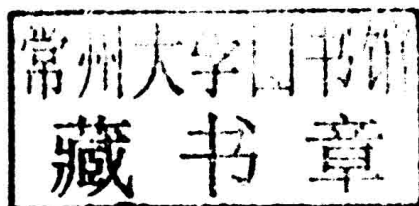


# Ports, Piracy, and Maritime War

Piracy in the English Channel and the Atlantic,  
c. 1280–c. 1330

*By*

Thomas K. Heebøll-Holm



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## Ports, Piracy and Maritime War

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## PREFACE

I have never been a big fan of pirates. Yet here I am having written a doctoral dissertation and now a book on medieval pirates. How did that come about? Well, my *Magister artium* dissertation at the University of Copenhagen was about Danish warfare in the twelfth century. A major source for that dissertation was Saxo Grammaticus' *Gesta Danorum*. To my astonishment in that chronicle (and other twelfth century Danish sources), Saxo happily described both enemies and protagonists as pirates. Indeed, even Saxo's patron and one of the main protagonists of the chronicle, Archbishop Absalon of Lund, was described as conducting piracy. This collided with my basic understanding of pirates as bandits at sea diametrically opposed to the state and its agents of order, justice and peace. It turned out that Saxo's use of the term pirate was contingent on the Danes' past as victorious Vikings. Thus Saxo's pirate terminology might be perceived of as a Scandinavian particularism isolated to a specific time and situation in Scandinavian history. Yet when I turned to French and English sources from the twelfth and thirteenth century I discovered to my astonishment that chroniclers from these countries also used the term pirate in a more ambiguous way than one would have expected.

Furthermore, I found the literature on the subject somewhat lacking. So, like Marc Bloch's ogre I felt that I had caught the scent of a meaty prey and I engaged the subject with voracious appetite. After having finished my *magister artium* in 2007, I decided to follow my "gut" and apply for a PhD. position to explore how piracy and pirates were perceived of in medieval England and France. A fortnight after having applied for the position and a stipend to finance the research, Somali pirates hijacked the Danish cargo ship, *Danica White*, in the Gulf of Aden. The media attention and the public uproar were immense. In Denmark—as well as globally—piracy was thought a thing of the past, yet here was a true piratical hijacking at the beginning of the twenty-first century. In the ensuing years, piracy has regrettably become an increasing scourge on maritime life. Thus my research for the dissertation and its revision which became this book was done on the backdrop of the global rise of piracy. The analyses and conclusions of the book do not claim universal application, nor were they intended to. It is a study of a practice in the Middle Ages that has traditionally received scant attention, but which seems to have had more

importance than hitherto acknowledged. Nevertheless, it is my hope that this book will contribute to an understanding of the phenomenon that is piracy, how it emerges, what causes it, what its mechanisms are, how it is perceived by victims, governments and the pirates themselves and, lastly, how one prevents it.

I owe a debt of gratitude to a number of people and institutions. Firstly, I would like to thank the Danish Research Council for Culture and Communication (FKK) for funding this research. Throughout the course of the writing of the dissertation which eventually became this book, I have relied on the advice and support of several people. First and foremost I would like to thank my supervisor, Nils Hybel, who during my studies at the University of Copenhagen has always given me very sound advice, while granting me the freedom to pursue my own research interests. His longstanding confidence in my abilities has been a source of real solace. I would also like to thank Michael H. Gelting with whom I have spent many inspirational nights discussing topics of medieval history. I would especially like to thank him for his invaluable assistance in transcribing various documents for this book. Needless to say, any errors in the transcriptions are completely my own. I would also like to thank the evaluation board of my dissertation and especially the chairman, Vincent Gabrielsen. During the preparation of this book, Gabrielsen offered very sound and valuable advice on how to understand and treat pirates and piracy in a theoretical perspective. His advice has much improved that part of my analysis. Marcella Mulder and Marjolein Schaake at Brill should also be thanked for guiding me with sure hands through the publication process.

My own special thanks go to my friends and colleagues, Lasse Sonne and Mia Münster-Swendsen whose critical and valuable advice has been a huge help in the discussion of various complex aspects of this dissertation. Likewise I would like to thank Guilhem Pépin who was kind enough to provide me with extracts from the online Gascon Rolls' project prior to their publication. David Bloch should also be thanked for his help with the interpretation of various Latin texts, and Tiffany D. Vann Sprecher for her help in checking my translations from Latin and French into English. I should likewise thank my old English teacher, Peter W. Carlsen, for his corrections of my English. Of course, all remaining linguistic errors are my own. I owe a debt of gratitude to my family, whose encouragements over the years have been immensely important to me. I would especially like to thank my parents for their generous financial support, which provided

me with the opportunity to learn French, an indispensable proficiency for the making of this study. Finally, I owe my greatest debt of gratitude to my wife, Ulla, and my daughters, Alicia and Elina. Their love and patience with me in the sometimes very difficult life of the writing of this book cannot be praised enough. This book is dedicated to them.



## ABBREVIATIONS

### MANUSCRIPT DOCUMENTARY SOURCES

TNA	The National Archives, London
C 47	Chancery Miscellanea
C 61	Gascon Rolls
SC 8	Special Collections
ANF	Archives Nationales de France, Paris
J 631	Layettes des Trésors des chartes

### PRINTED SOURCES

<i>Actes du Parlement</i>	<i>Actes du Parlement de Paris</i> , 2 vols, ed. Edgard Boutaric (Paris, 1863 & 1873).
<i>Annales Dunstaplia</i>	<i>Annales Prioratus de Dunstaplia</i> in <i>Annales Monastici</i> , vol. 3, ed. Henry R. Luard (London, 1866).
<i>Annales Londonienses</i>	<i>Annales londonienses</i> in <i>Chronicles of the reigns of Edward I and Edward II</i> , vol. 1, ed. William Stubbs (London, 1882).
<i>Annales Oseneia</i>	<i>Annales Monasterii de Oseneia</i> in <i>Annales Monastici</i> , vol. 4, ed. Henry R. Luard (London, 1889).
<i>Annales Wigornienses</i>	<i>Annales Prioratus de Wigornia</i> in <i>Annales Monastici</i> , vol. 4, ed. Henry R. Luard (London, 1889).
<i>Bury St. Edmunds</i>	<i>The Chronicle of Bury St Edmunds 1212–1301</i> , ed. & transl. Antonia Gransden (London, 1964).
CCR	<i>Calendar of Close Rolls</i> (London, 1892–1963).
Champollion	<i>Lettres de rois, reines et autres personnages des Cours de France et d'Angleterre, depuis Louis VII jusqu'à Henri IV: tirées des archives de Londres par Bréquigny et publiées par M. Champollion-Figeac</i> , 2 vols ed. Jacques-Joseph Champollion-Figéac (Paris, 1839–1847).
<i>Chronica Majora</i>	Matthew Paris, <i>Chronica Majora</i> , 7 vols, ed. Henry R. Luard (London, 1872–1883).
<i>Chronographia</i>	<i>Chronographia Regum Francorum</i> , 3 vols, ed. H. Moranvillé (Paris, 1891).
CPR	<i>Calendar of Patent Rolls</i> (London, 1891–1916).
DuCange	DuCange, <i>Glossarium Mediæ et infimæ latinitatis</i> , 6 vols (Paris, 1840–1846).
EMDP	<i>English Medieval Diplomatic Practice Part I, Documents and Interpretations</i> , 2 vols, ed. Pierre Chaplais (London, 1982).
Flores	<i>Flores Historiarum</i> , 3 vols, ed. Henry R. Luard (London, 1890).

- Foedera* *Foedera, Conventiones, Litterae et Acta Publica*, 4 vols, ed. Thomas Rymer, rev. ed. by A.F. Clarke, F. Holbrooke & J. Coley (London, 1816–69) (TannerRitchie Publishing electronic version, 2006).
- Froissart *Froissart, Oeuvres de Froissart*, vols 3, 6 & 10, ed. Kervyn de Lettenhove (Osnabrück, 1967).
- Geffroi de Paris *Geffroi de Paris, Chronique Rimée in Recueil des historiens de Gaule et de la France*, vol. 22, eds Natalis de Wailly & Léopold Delisle (Paris, 1865).
- Guiart *Guillaume Guiart, La Branche des Roys lignages in Recueil des historiens de Gaule et de la France*, vol. 22, eds Natalis de Wailly & Léopold Delisle (Paris, 1865).
- Guisborough *Walter of Guisborough, The Chronicle of Walter of Guisborough*, ed. Harry Rothwell (London, 1957).
- Langtoft *Peter Langtoft, The Chronicle of Pierre de Langtoft*, ed. T. Wright (London, 1868).
- Nangis *Guillaume de Nangis, Chronicon in Recueil des historiens des Gaules et de la France*, vol. 20, eds Pierre C.F. Daunou & Joseph Naudet (Paris, 1840).
- Olim* *Les Olim*, 3 vols, ed. Jacques-Claude Beugnot (Paris, 1839–1848).
- ORF* *Ordonnances des Roys de France de la troisième race*, vols 1 & 2, eds Eusèbe de Laurière and Denis-François Secousse (Paris, 1723).
- Rishanger *William Rishanger, Chronica et annales*, ed. Henry T. Riley (London, 1865).
- RG* *Rôles Gascons*, 4 vols, eds Francisque Michel et al. (Paris & London, 1885–1962).
- Saint-Sardos* *The War of Saint-Sardos (1323–1325)*, ed. Pierre Chaplais (London, 1954).
- Trevet *Nicolas Trevet, Annales sex regum Angliae*, ed. T. Hog (London, 1845).

## A NOTE ON CURRENCY

Money in England was normally counted in pence, shillings (each worth 12 pence) and pounds (each worth 20 shillings or 240 pence). A coin called the *mark* was also in use. A *mark* was worth two-thirds of a pound, i.e., 13 shillings and 4 pence.

Sums are given in the form £ for pounds, s. for shillings and p. for pence.

In France, several currencies were in use. For this book only the *livres tournois* and the *livre paris* are important. 4 *livres paris* was equivalent to 5 *livres tournois*. It should be noted that the value of the French coins varied somewhat in the period studied due to governmental devaluations.

In the book, the sums for these monies are given in *l.t.* for *livres tournois* and *l.p.* for *livres paris*.

In the period from c. 1280–c. 1330, 1 pound sterling was roughly equivalent to 4 *livres paris* or 5 *livres tournois*.

Sources: Prestwich, Michael, *Plantagenet England 1225–1360* (Oxford, 2005), Strayer, Joseph R., *The Reign of Philip the Fair* (Princeton, 1980), Sumption, Jonathan, *Trial by Battle* (London, 1999), and Vale, Malcolm, *The Origins of the Hundred Years War* (Oxford, 2004).

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Piracy was an endemic problem in the waters of northern Europe in the Middle Ages. This phenomenon has traditionally been included in studies of military and commercial history of medieval northern Europe. However, pirates and piracy as an isolated subject has received very little attention. For military historians, piracy and pirates were auxiliaries to the royal navies during wars, where they supplied man-power to the warring kings and harassed enemy traffic, especially supply lines. In peace time, they were criminals who had to be exterminated for peace and trade to resume. Thus, military historians have primarily been interested in pirates from the viewpoint of the military institutions. In commercial history, piracy has been treated as a "natural" hazard at sea akin to storms. Both were potential natural disasters which had to be included in the risk assessment of a commercial endeavour. However, all other things being equal, this subject was not of great concern for commercial historians, since it was assumed that piracy had little over-all impact on maritime trade.

Furthermore, both disciplines of medieval history have viewed the phenomenon of piracy strictly from the perspective of rulers and governments. The study of piracy and pirates in northern Europe in the Middle Ages from the perspective of the pirates themselves has received scant attention. However, to understand the phenomenon and its implications for military, commercial and other disciplines of medieval history, one has to study the pirates themselves. In this book, I argue that piracy and pirates can only be understood and interpreted in relation to the functions they supplied to their local maritime communities. I hope to demonstrate that piracy and pirates were not criminals who ought to be eradicated, nor were they merely a "natural" hazard. Rather, pirates and piracy were an intricate part of both the military and the commercial world in the Middle Ages. Indeed, the traditional state-based view of pirates as criminals or potential privateers obscures the much more nuanced phenomenon of piracy and its relationship with society, war and trade. I thus hope to break new ground by analysing the pirates on their own terms, rather than through a governmental perspective.

## CICERO AND SAINT AUGUSTINE

In *De Officiis*, Cicero wrote that: “a pirate is not included in the number of lawful enemies, but is the common foe of all the world; and with him there ought not to be any pledged word nor any oath mutually binding”, and in *The Verrine Orations* he likewise stated that: “You [Verres] behaved just as the pirates are wont to behave. They are the general enemies of all mankind”.<sup>1</sup> The sum of these quotations is that pirates are the enemy of all. In many studies of piracy, Cicero’s remarks on pirates are quoted as evidence of the inherent inhumanity of the pirate from Antiquity to the present. Accordingly, they were literally outlaws, meaning unprotected by law, and one was not bound to keep a promise given to them. The significance of this condemnation of the pirate is explained by Daniel Heller-Roazen thus:

some ... fall outside of this collectivity [of the fellowship of the human species]. They are individuals strikingly unlike all others: people who, while capable of speech and reason, may not be said to unite in any lawful community; people who, while committing acts that are wrong, may not be defined as criminals: people, finally, who, while often foreign and aggressive may not be accorded any of the many rights of enemies. Cicero names such people ‘pirates’ ... For a pirate is not included in the number of lawful enemies, but is the common enemy of all. With him there ought not to be any pledged word nor any oath mutually binding. ... ‘The common enemy of all’ (*communis hostis omnium*), he cannot be considered a criminal, because he does not belong to the city-state; yet he also cannot be counted among the foreign opponents of war, since he cannot be ‘included in the number of lawful enemies’. He moves, as Cicero presents him, in a region in which duties no longer hold.<sup>2</sup>

The studies which promote this view are primarily those concerned either with the Roman Empire or the emerging global European empires in the seventeenth century.<sup>3</sup> This is no coincidence, since Cicero’s condemnation

<sup>1</sup> “nam pirata non est ex perduellium numero definitus, sed communis hostis omnium: cum hoc nec fides nec ius iurandum esse commune”, Cicero, *De Officiis*, ed. William Miller (London, 1968), Book III, 29, “Fecisti item ut praedones solent; qui cum hostes communes sint omnium.” Cicero, *The Verrine Orations*, ed. L.H.G. Greenwood, 2 vols (London, 1935), vol. 2, II. IV. 9 (§21).

<sup>2</sup> Heller-Roazen, Daniel, *The Enemy of All* (Cambridge, 2009), p. 16.

<sup>3</sup> For instance, Andersen, Lars E., “Piracy in the Gulf of Aden: Reflections on the concepts of piracy and order,” in N. Hvidt and H. Mouritzen, eds, *Danish Foreign Policy Yearbook 2009* (Copenhagen, 2009), pp. 87 and 91, Ormerod, Henry A., *Piracy in the Ancient World* (Liverpool, 1978), pp. 54–55, to a certain extent Mollat, Michel, “De la piraterie



of pirates was formulated at a time of an emerging hegemonic power in the Mediterranean, namely the Roman Empire. Cicero's condemnation was repeated by philosophers during the emergence of another hegemonic power, collectively speaking, the European states in the seventeenth and especially the eighteenth century. Eventually, the thoughts of these philosophers, in combination with the increasing strength of the state, became the norm for the view on pirates. In this view pirates are parasites on the international trade.<sup>4</sup> This entails a water-tight separation between the peaceful merchants and the ruthless pirates. However, like "the pirate as the enemy of mankind", this dichotomy is a result of the emerging "global" European states and is not really detectable before the eighteenth century.

I shall term this the "Ciceronean paradigm", where pirates and piracy are objectified as inherently criminal. This is a category created by a hegemonic and durable regime in a region with the power to define right and wrong and where the pirate is cast as the enemy of the commonality. Emily Sohmer Tai, a historian on late medieval piracy in the Mediterranean, argues that the force of this Ciceronean paradigm stems from "characterizations of maritime theft as piracy have often been applied to campaigns of maritime predation undertaken in the context of imperial systems in pragmatic ... ways, in order to de-politicize the political identity or objectives of those who practised maritime theft".<sup>5</sup> From a different perspective, the historian of Antiquity, Vincent Gabrielsen, has argued that the problem with modern scholarship on the subject of piracy is that it "subscribes to the nineteenth-century historicist assumption that there is a full correspondence between 'legitimacy' (usually vested in only one historical category, the righteous acting state), on the one hand, and rational or ethical behaviour, on the other hand".<sup>6</sup>

However, in the latter days of the Roman Empire, another famous quotation on pirates was formulated by St. Augustine in his dialogue between Alexander the Great and a captured pirate:

sauvage à la course réglementée (XIV<sup>e</sup>-XV<sup>e</sup> siècle)," *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome*, 87 (1975), 7-8.

<sup>4</sup> See, for instance, Anderson, John L., "Piracy and world history," in C.R. Pennell, ed., *Bandits at Sea: A Pirates Reader* (New York, 2001), p. 82.

<sup>5</sup> Tai, Emily S., "Marking Water: Piracy and Property in the Pre-Modern West," <http://www.historycooperative.org/proceedings/seascapes/tai.html> accessed on 31 January 2012.

<sup>6</sup> Gabrielsen, Vincent, "Economic activity, maritime trade and piracy in the Hellenistic Aegean," *Revue des Études Anciennes*, 103 (2001), 222.