A Medieval Pirate's Life: The Role of Piracy in Medieval Life versus Its Role in Modern Historiography

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ITS ROLE IN MODERN HISTORIOGRAPHY

by

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ABSTRACT

Medieval piracy is a mysterious phenomenon that is interwoven within the politics, culture, economic histories of the Middle Ages. Its presence throughout the Middle Ages is not questioned, yet it is rarely researched thoroughly. The subject of medieval piracy falls prey to the biases and assumptions that modern historians carry towards piracy as a whole, making the subject be under researched and improperly utilized. In this thesis, I will be highlighting the role that piracy played in medieval life and the way that modern historiography has neglected it. To do so thoroughly, I have pulled examples from different times, regions, and cultures to be able to show the long term trends and overarching themes attached to medieval piracy. While a large part of the purpose of this thesis is to explore how modern scholars view medieval scholarship, I pull from a wide variety of primary sources to verify and challenge the conclusions that modern scholars have come to. While scholars today tend to take the presence of piracy during the Middle Ages for granted, it played a substantial role in society and the progression of history.

Contents

<u>Introduction</u>

Mankind has a fascination with the illicit unknown, the things that hide just out of view. From magic to prostitution, academics are repeatedly drawn to these subjects in the hope of discovering truths that the light of mainstream academia neglects. Piracy exists in the gray space between licit and illicit, profitable but risky, dangerous yet inviting. While it is pervasive throughout history, its presence in modern medieval historiography is often taken for granted. By exploring how piracy differed throughout the Middle Ages and the impact piracy had on the era, I will make clear that piracy was an important fixture of medieval life that has not been captured by modern medieval scholarship. The lacuna within the modern scholarship highlights the inherent bias surrounding piracy that has led to an overarching lack of engagement and analysis of medieval piracy that needs to be addressed.

Piracy is defined as "action of committing robbery, kidnap, or violence at sea or from the sea without lawful authority, esp. by one vessel against another" by the Oxford English Dictionary, with pirates being those who perpetrate said robbery. However, this concise definition does not fully explain this phenomenon in the medieval era and, in fact, leaves a lot of room for interpretation. If the victims are the political or religious enemy of the attackers—if the attackers' motives are not purely the spoils they might receive—is it still piracy? Or would other terms such as war, corsairing, or religious conflict suffice? To examine this issue, this research focuses on the premise of a slightly longer definition: piracy constitutes any attack made from a ship for *personal gain*.[1] While economic, religious, and political motivations may have influenced the attack, the desired outcome was the loot and spoils acquired by pirates. This definition helps to differentiate between simple raids by

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[1] This is a working definition based on the author's research on medieval piracy. The fluid aspect of piracy and the people who utilize it makes forming one universal definition difficult for the era and the region as a whole.

pirates and attacks by independent ships in the service of a larger entity (such as the Byzantine Empire, or one of the various Islamic emirates). This explanation also allows scholars to examine attacks beyond the religious identity of attackers and their victims to understand the underlying motivations that caused these attacks.

Piracy is as fluid a concept as religious identity or social stratification—while one can use the terminology in any context, the context changes the perception. For example, the piracy undertaken by the Vikings in the ninth century is vastly different from the piratical actions of the Emirate of Crete a century later. Pirate cultures, religion, and goals influenced not only the manner in which they engaged in piracy, but also the manner in which said piracy is perceived in the 21st century. While it is easy to distinguish between piracy in two vastly different societies, such as the Vikings and Islamic Crete, it is more difficult to distinguish the nuances between societies that have a shared culture, but are separated by time and space. For example, the differences in piracy practiced by different emirates within the *dar al-Islam* (the Abode of Islam, or the community of believers that spread by the eleventh century from the Middle East to Iberia by way of North Africa) may be subtle, but these subtleties allow scholars a greater understanding of the time period and Islamic culture as whole. To study the evolution of piracy in the *dar al-Islam*, the *taifa* Kingdom of Dénia is a good example to demonstrate that medieval piracy was an intricate, evolving enterprise that had a profound impact on the events of the era.

To further complicate the issue: what one person calls illicit piracy, another may call a valid act of restitution. In the Middle Ages, governments were in the midst of developing powers and obligations over their citizens; piracy was a tricky tool they were able to utilize over time. To handle the problem of growing piracy, many Christian polities used restitution

and letters of marque. Restitution, or the legal retaliatory seizure of goods, was based on the belief that victims of theft were owed monetary compensation. To ensure victims received this compensation, political leaders would issue letters of marque (*licentia merchandi*), giving victims (whether they were sailors, passengers, merchants, etc.) permission to attack the compatriots of their attackers to make up for their loss.[2] This feature of medieval law codes makes it difficult to discern which attacks were conducted by illicit pirates or which were undertaken by authorized corsairs; complicating it further, as time went on medieval leaders began to employ corsairs as freelance navies for their protection.[3] While some attacks would fall under the political protection of the letter of marque, others would not. To summarize, the Middle Ages was an era when piracy was in the midst of a legal revolution, making it difficult for both its contemporaries and modern scholars to discern which acts were illicit and which were licit.

For the purpose of this thesis, the definition of piracy must be broad and fluid, to match the medieval thinking of the act of piracy. However, while modern scholars can only work with the sources and information that survive, it is vital that they do their due diligence and question not only why something is or is not labeled piracy but also the impact that those labels had on both progression of history and on the modern perception of it. The study of medieval piracy has been shaped as much by modern opinions as it has been by medieval sources.

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[2] Emily Sohmer Tai, "Restitution and the Definition of a Pirate: The Case of Sologrus de Nigro," *Mediterranean Historical Review* 19, no. 2 (December 2004): 34-70, 35. Tai explains that this legal theory originates from Roman and Germanic laws, and can be seen frequently in legal documents pertaining to many polities but especially Genoa and the Crown of Aragon.

[3] Mark Aloisio, "The Maltese Corso in the Fifteenth Century," *Medieval Encounters* 9, nos. 2-3 (2003): 193-203, https://doi.org/10.1163/157006704323211530, 194.

Popular Topics

Piracy is a topic that is taken for granted in the wider realm of medieval scholarship and is a subject that is used in many instances to understand certain aspects of medieval life. There is yet to be a comprehensive study of medieval piracy, but the scholarship available showcases its versatility and wide application as a historical tool. The most common subjects that piracy is used to explore are the economy, politics, and culture. While piracy resides in the shadows of most narratives, its survival in legal documents and travel accounts allows a unique perspective into the medieval world that is hard to ascertain from a traditional political history. However, while this perspective is illuminating in many ways, the niche lens of the research ensures that it does not influence the greater narratives of the Middle Ages.

Piracy and economics have a dark, twisted, intimate relationship. Mediterranean maritime trade should not be studied without including the pirates that shaped it in multi-faceted ways throughout time. Historians have studied the piratical element in many early economies, both the negative and positive attributes, and have begun to paint a picture that only gets clearer with further research. By looking at modern historiography in terms of the positive traits of piracy, historians learn that no matter what kind of association the economy had with it, piracy was at its core. It is easy to equate piracy with disrupted or weak economies. This is a misconstruction: piracy has been shown throughout the medieval Mediterranean as a crucial, encouraged economic venture. Travis Bruce linked piracy to the economic success of the eleventh-century taifa Kingdom of Dénia, which relied heavily on piracy to fill its coffers.[4] Piracy was a common, socially accepted economic venture that

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[4] Travis Bruce, "Piracy as Statecraft: The Mediterranean Policies of the Fifth/Eleventh-Century Taifa of Denia," *Al-Masāq* 22, no. 3 (December 14, 2010): pp. 235-248.

many medieval societies depended on to survive. Marie Kelleher studies this idea comprehensively in her article about the 1311 famine in Barcelona, where piracy was used to ensure the survival of its citizens.[5]

Dénia and Barcelona were not unique examples. In the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, the communities on either side of the Alboran Sea depended on rogue corsairs to receive essential goods that were inaccessible to them due to bans on trade enacted by both governments.[6] While these pirates were technically working at the behest of the Catholic Monarchs, their piracy and active smuggling of illegal contraband worked against the "official prohibition of nearly all forms of trade," making them both corsair and pirate at the same time.[7] Pirates acted as unofficial middle men, ensuring that the tenuous connections throughout the Mediterranean did not break, even during war.

The relationship between piracy and politics is so vast that an entire chapter is dedicated to it in this thesis. Piracy forced governments to consider how their authority was felt amongst their constituents and to their diplomatic neighbors. It raised questions about who was responsible for the victims of violent attacks and who had the sovereignty to issue letters of marque. It was also a vital tool for territorial expansion and military protection, allowing polities to feel protected at sea without having the traditional costs associated with upkeeping a traditional navy. Piracy has been used to study medieval politics from many different angles, such as diplomacy, sovereignty, and expansion.

One of the more under-utilized subjects that piracy has been used to explore is that of medieval culture. Culture is a subject that is ever changing and hard to define, but piracy is a

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[5] Marie A Kelleher, "'The Sea of Our City': Famine, Piracy, and Urban Sovereignty in Medieval Barcelona," *Mediterranean Studies* 24, no. 1 (2016): p. 1.
[6] David Coleman, "Of Corsairs, Converts and Renegades: Forms and Functions of Coastal Raiding on Both Sides of the Far Western Mediterranean, 1490-1540," *Medieval Encounters* 19, nos. 1-2 (2013): pp. 167-192.
[7] Coleman, "Of Corsairs, Converts, and Renegades", 184.

viable tool to help scholars understand it in more depth. Historian Peter Burke chooses to define culture as a "system of shared meanings, attitudes-and values, and the symbolic forms (performances, artifacts) in which they are expressed or embodied;" a definition that he based on the work of A. L. Kroeber and C. Kluckhohn.[8] Culture encapsulates all the material that makes up a society, making it simultaneously extremely difficult to capture and extremely important to understand. To date, modern scholars have used piracy to understand the religious climate of the Middle Ages. Religion is one of the predominant factors of the era, with Church doctrine and religious wars playing pivotal roles in the progression of history; piracy offers a different approach to understanding, allowing scholars to understand how the population interacted with their faith. While a more thorough discussion of this subject will take place in Chapter Two, it is important to note that analyzing piracy to understand medieval religion is a popular subject among scholars who study piracy.

While there are dozens of articles and chapters that use piracy as their subject of choice for exploring the medieval past, there are large lacunae in the way the subject is handled overall. There is an unspoken, unrealized bias against piracy that has prevented its use in more widespread scholarship. This bias has influenced not only how modern scholars approach piracy, but also which subjects are researched. If the idea that piracy is inherently negative and illicit, that it exists in the shadows of society is allowed to continue unabated, then our understanding of the Middle Ages will suffer. Because not only was piracy licit at times, it was also extremely prominent and beneficial in many different ways. By studying the way medieval piracy has been presented in modern scholarship and the way piracy influenced medieval life, it becomes clear that the two do not line up properly.

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[8] Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Harper, 1978), xi: citing A. L. Kroeber and C. Kluckhohn, *Culture: a critical review of concepts and definitions* (New York: Vintage, 1963).

Research Method

        To understand the impact that piracy had on medieval society and history, and the way it has been presented in modern scholarship, and to uncover the common biases that have informed research for centuries, it is essential to take a long-term, broad approach. This thesis will cover the ninth through fifteenth centuries and span across northern Europe to the Mediterranean basin, through the use of four primary examples: the Viking attacks on the Carolingian Empire, the Muslim Emirate of Crete, the Taifa Kingdom of Dénia, and piracy during the Hundred Years War. Other examples will be employed throughout to provide a more well rounded approach to each subject. Some chapters will rely more heavily on one or two examples while others will draw from all of them.

        This thesis will rely heavily on modern scholarship as a way to analyze how piracy is interpreted throughout history and the impact it has on our understanding of the past. I investigate primary sources ranging from annals and chronicles to hagiographies and legal documents to highlight lacunae in the scholarship or analyze a fault in our current understanding. While they are not the primary focus of this thesis, they deepen the analysis of modern historical understanding and bias when used judiciously.

        Each chapter will take a thematic approach to medieval piracy, in the hopes of illuminating not just how it evolved but also how the scholarship approaches each subject. The first two chapters focus on illustrating how piracy is intrinsically intertwined throughout medieval life. The second half of the thesis focuses on uncovering modern biases towards piracy and the way they have shaped the field at large. Chapter One focuses on medieval politics and how piracy interacted with the official governments of the time. Chapter Two moves on to analyze how piracy has been used to research medieval culture and the effect piracy had on it overall. Chapter Three narrows in on the problem of prejudice and bias

against piracy and the impact that it has had on the study of pirate societies. Finally, Chapter Four will look at how the biases, both good and bad, have influenced the making of history in regards to piracy.

Conclusion

Piracy in the medieval Mediterranean has been described as "endemic" and as a "plague" by many Mediterraneanists.[9] However, the historiography of piracy begs modern scholars to rethink these titles. Piracy has not been studied on a large enough scale to earn either of those derogatory names; while it may still earn them, they are preemptive at best. Modern scholarship at the moment points to piracy being an important economic boon to medieval polities, a vital link in early diplomatic ties, and a foundational element to modern state power. These are important, substantive discoveries that need to be considered in the general study of the medieval sea.

Piracy was an important tool during the High Middle Ages, allowing medieval polities to profit off of illicitly captured goods and protect their harbors at little to no cost. As time went on the use of piracy and corsairing helped societies in a different way—instead of offering physical benefits, they allowed medieval governments a chance to develop their laws, both local and foreign, as well as strengthen their power and standing in the world at large. On a cultural level, a deeper understanding of piracy shows that the highly diversified sea was a meeting place and common ground for the people who lived and sailed on its waters. Piracy was a facilitator of trade, cultural exchange, and political relationships.

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[9] Jarbel Rodriguez, *Captives and Their Saviors in the Medieval Crown of Aragon* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 5. See also: Paul B. Newman, *Travel and Trade in the Middle Ages* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2011), 172.

Modern scholarship has only begun to scrape the surface in its understanding of medieval piracy. By looking at piracy as a prevalent characteristic of the Middle Ages, instead of a unique happenstance, historians will learn, not just about pirates and sailors, but about society as a whole. To properly explore medieval piracy, modern scholars must acknowledge and address their cultural biases that influence their perception of the act. Piracy was not wholly negative, nor did it exist in the shadows; the study of piracy can only help further our understanding of many different aspects of the Middle Ages.

Chapter One: Pirates and Politics

Introduction

Piracy, by nature and definition, is an act that falls on the wrong side of the law, even in the medieval era. However, while modern international laws have been codified and ideally agreed upon, the medieval world was still politically fractured and lacked overarching diplomatic communication and rules, allowing piracy to grow and thrive in the gray area between licit and illicit. As time progressed and political powers gained cohesiveness, strength and standing, those powers began to form an ambivalent attitude towards piracy; some piracy helped them form diplomatic ties, strengthen their laws, and increase their territory, while other attacks hindered their economic growth, undermined their treaties, and threatened their political stability.

One significant obstacle to solving the political and legal trouble surrounding piracy is that medieval polities relied heavily on a form of legal piracy, called *corso* or *corsairing*, to solve maritime disputes.[10] If a merchant or traveler was attacked at sea, they could petition their ruler for a letter of marque, or a letter of reprisal, granting them permission to seek restitution from their attackers. Letters of marque or reprisal were issued against whole communities, not against individual pirates or ships, which permitted individual attacks to escalate quickly into diplomatic nightmares. At the same time, letters of marque created a legal loophole for polities to hide in, as governments only had to claim financial responsibility for corsairs carrying their marque. Medieval pirates were able to take advantage of this system by using ever shifting identities and claiming letters of marque

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[10] For more in-depth definitions of *corso* or *corsairing*, see: Aloisio, "The Maltese Corso," 194; Coleman, "Of Corsairs, Converts and Renegades," 182; Emily Sohmer Tai, "The Legal Status of Piracy in Medieval Europe," *History Compass* 10, no. 11 (2012): pp. 838-851, 839. The general consensus is that *corso* was legalized, authorized piracy in the name of a political leader.

under multiple polities, creating even more confusion and room for interpretation. Other polities employed *corsairs* as a cheap, unofficial navy to protect their territory and interests; instead of having to pay them directly or take responsibility for supplying them, they were able to trade their services for allowing them to keep their plunder.[11]

Since some maritime theft was legal, the question of how to control and discipline its practitioners was of utmost importance to medieval polities. The current field of study of medieval piracy is therefore overwhelmingly focused on the relationship between piracy and the political realm. The historiography can be easily divided between the effect piracy had on political territories, diplomacy, and laws. While piracy may have been a thorn in many rulers' side it was also an important political tool that encouraged expansion, both territorially and politically.

Territorial Expansion and Domination

Piracy was a major characteristic throughout the Middle Ages, and while it took many different forms and names, it was unprejudiced about the time, place, or people that it marked. Among the earliest and most well known piratical actions were those of the Vikings throughout the ninth century against the coast and riverlands of the Carolingian Empire. While the Vikings were not the only group to attack the Franks at this time, their piratical modus operandi gave them a distinct advantage that other attackers did not utilize. It is important to bear in mind that in the *Annales Bertiniani*, the Carolingians are careful to note which attacks' are of a piratical nature, while traditional militaristic attacks are identified only by the attackers name or place of origin. This signifies that pirate attacks were of special

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[11] Aloisio, "The Maltese Corso," 195.

interest to the Franks.[12] One reason for this discrepancy is that the Carolingians, who were well versed in the art of war, were at a loss on how to combat pirate attacks.[13] The random swift attacks and quick retreats left the Franks with very few ways to combat and defend against the Vikings. Thus, new methods of defense had to be manifested, some of which had lasting effects on both the culture and political make-up of western Europe.

At the beginning of the ninth century, the Carolingian empire was mostly rural and decentralized. This made the territory a prime target for Viking raids, as the farming communities were undefended and unable to call for aid quickly. The constant fear of attacks made the population itself seek better protection. One way they did this was by giving up their land to live in the manors of lords and farm their lands instead. There were many things drawing people to manors, but most had to do with protection. The manorial system often consisted of a lord, who owned the surrounding farmland and village, and peasants, who lived in the lord's village and were required to farm the lord's land in return for the protection offered by group living.[14] Manors had crude wooden walls and watch towers that helped ward off the Viking attacks. As time went on, necessity led to the improvement and strengthening of their defenses, by means of masonry towers, moats, and the utilization of high ground to claim every advantage when building their cities and manors.[15]

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[12] Janet L. Nelson, ed., *The Annals of St-Bertin* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991); Georg Waitz, ed., *Annales Bertiniani, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores rerum Germanicum,* 5 (Hanover: Hahn, 1883). Throughout this source, pirate attacks are labeled as *pyratae* while traditional attacks are labeled by the ethnicity or political affiliation of the attackers, the most common of which is *saraceni*.

[13] Bernard S. Bachrach, *Early Carolingian Warfare: Prelude to Empire* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2011).

[14] Pierre Dockès, *Medieval Slavery and Liberation*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 107.

[15] Adriano Boschetti, "The Beginnings of Medieval Fortifications in the Late Carolingian Period from a Swiss Perspective," *Fortified Settlements in Early Medieval Europe: Defending Communities of the 8th-10th Centuries,* ed. Eil Chrities and Hajnalka Herold (Oxford: Oxford, 2016) 121-136. This article discusses not only the types of fortifications used in the ninth and tenth centuries, but the reasons behind them as well.

Walls may have allowed the Carolingian society to evolve into something new, but they did not put a stop to the Viking raids on Carolingian territories. The Vikings continued to menace and pillage the coast and riverlands of the Carolingians through the end of the century. However, around 911, Charles the Simple, who ruled the Kingdom of the West Franks, changed the geographical layout of western Europe forever.[16] With a series of three grants over a period of thirty years, the Vikings were granted their own territory on the northern coast of France, which would be known as Normandy. The thought process was twofold: first, Normandy would act as a buffer zone between the Franks and other Viking pirates, and second, the Vikings settled in that zone, hereafter known as Normans, would be too busy defending their new territory to pirate from their neighbors.[17] Another bonus of this grant was the conversion of the Normans to Christianity, which was one of the clauses of the treaties. This strategy was one that the Romans used with the Germanic tribes that threatened their western borders in the third and fourth centuries; there is some amount of irony in the Franks utilizing the same strategy that gave them their entrance into Europe to protect themselves five centuries later.[18] Whether this strategy was effective or not, the Normans were there to stay and changed the face of Europe with their expansions northward to England and into the Mediterranean later in the Middle Ages.

Moving towards the High and Late Middle Ages, Emily Sohmer Tai has coined the term "marking water" to describe the use of piracy to expand maritime control. Tai asserts that it was in the best interest of political leaders, noblemen, and pirates alike to use piracy as

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[16] The Kingdom of the West Franks was one of the many subdivisions and names given to the Carolingian empire as it was divided and united by Charlemagne's descendants.

[17] John Le Patourel, *The Norman Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), chapter 1.

[18] Another contributing factor that will be addressed in more detail in a later chapter is the role that religion played in piracy. In the conflicts with the Vikings, religion was especially important because the Franks viewed them as convertible pagans, and as a punishment from God for their sins.

a way of identifying the boundaries of their control.[19] Pirates and victims would both describe their attacks in terms of whose water the attack took place in. In the absence of official navies, pirates and corsairs were one critical tool medieval polities used to define their power and control over the sea. One example of this is seen on the Island of Malta which, as asserted by Mark Aloisio, relied on pirates for protection and as an unofficial navy.[20] When states could not afford to pay sailors to protect their interests, they instead turned to pirates to "mark their water."

Piracy has been shown to be the cause of territorial expansion, for both defensive and offensive reasons. At the end of our timeline, the populations surrounding the Alboran Sea at the end of the fifteenth century saw piracy as both a bothersome hindrance and a boon to their economies and safety—depending on which side of the piracy they were on. According to David Coleman, corsairs and pirates were one of the leading reasons that Fernando of Aragon called for a wave of conquests into North Africa; the goal of these conquests was to provide Spanish merchants more protections, both at sea and on land.[21] The protection was not just against Muslim pirates, but for Spanish corsairs. Whether it was for protection from or for pirates, expansion was seen as a logical step in dealing with piracy.

Piracy often took place in the shadows of the medieval world, making it hard to trace individual instances and consequences. However, the lasting repercussions become apparent when searched for, especially when it comes to the impact and influence piracy had on political borders and territories. While the Viking duchy of Normandy may be the most visible and long-lasting effect of piracy, it was by no means the only time piracy affected

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[19] Emily Sohmer Tai, "Marking Water: Piracy and Property in the Premodern West," in *Seascapes: Maritime Histories, Littoral Histories, and Transoceanic Exchanges,* ed. Jerry H. Bentley, Renate Bridenthal, and Karen Wigen (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2017), 205-220.
[20] Aloisio, "The Maltese Corso," 193.
[21] Coleman, "Of Corsairs, Converts and Renegades," 182.

policy and borders. Kingdoms such as Dénia, an eleventh-century taifa kingdom on the

eastern coast of Iberia, expanded their territory to increase the influence of their pirates,

whereas other polities, such as Aragon, expanded their territory to protect their ships from

foreign pirates. Thirteenth-century Catalonia resorted to building a navy made of cross-

confessional pirates to during the War of Sicilian Vespers.[22] It is clear that even from the

shadows, pirates were able to impact society and the world substantially.

Piracy and Diplomacy

As the Middle Ages progressed, states began to define their territories and jurisdiction

in more explicit terms. Piracy began to move into the limelight, as leaders were forced to deal

with not only their own subjects' physical and economic well--being, but also with the

diplomatic troubles that pirates brought forth. Treaties and truces did not stop piracy; rather,

they pushed them into the shadows as pirates looked for different excuses and new ways to

attack.[23] Historians have studied the relationship between piracy and government throughout

the Middle Ages, showing that piracy was a common issue that each government had to

contend with, and that the solutions they developed were common among them.

The laws regarding reprisal and letters of marque are generally thought to be a

western Latin invention. While this may be true, it does not mean that the concepts did not

spread east. Daphne Penna's article on piracy and reprisal in Byzantine waters in the twelfth

century highlights that the Byzantine Empire was well aware of how their neighbors dealt

with piracy, but did not find it useful for their purposes. When Genoese and Pisan pirates

attacked a ship carrying goods for the Byzantine Emperor Isaac II Angelos (1156-1204), he

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[22] Lawrence V. Mott, "Serving in the Fleet: Crews and Recruitment Issues in the Catalan-Aragonese Fleets during the War of Sicilian Vespers (1282-1302)," *Medieval Encounters* 13, no. 1 (2007): pp. 56-77, https://doi.org/10.1163/157006707x174014, 59.
[23] Kristine T. Utterback, "Pirates and Pilgrims on the Late-Medieval Journey to Jerusalem," *Medieval Perspectives* 12 (1997): 123-133.

responded with a unique type of reprisal: he held his Genoese residents liable for the damages until the Genoese government could not only pay back the losses, but also punish those involved. While Genoa eventually paid back the losses, and Emperor Isaac II repaid his Genoese citizens, the Byzantines never called for a reprisal again. The concept was known and tested in the East, but the results were more cumbersome than they had hoped, causing the Byzantines to look for more elegant and sophisticated answers to the problem of piracy. They turned to diplomacy to solve problems of piracy, creating treaties and friendships with the Italian cities to protect themselves from pirates.[24]

Another way medieval governments avoided the diplomatic problem of corsairing and piracy was to give them a different title. The city of Venice created the military position of Captain of the Gulf, which Irene B. Katele argues had the same powers and duties of a corsair, with none of the same liabilities.[25] It was the Captain of the Gulf's duty to patrol the Adriatic and protect Venetian interests at sea; they had permission to board any ship they thought was an enemy or attacking against Venice, and if they happened to take merchandise with them when they left, that was fair game as far as Venice was concerned. Since they did not use the same terms as the rest of the western Mediterranean, many historians have claimed that Venetian merchants were mainly the victims of piracy, not the perpetrators.[26] By giving piratical duties to a military commander, Venice not only found a loophole in the accepted diplomatic reasoning, it also fooled history into viewing Venice as innocent.

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[24] Daphne Penna, "Piracy and Reprisal in Byzantine Waters: Resolving a Maritime Conflict between Byzantines and Genoese at the End of the Twelfth Century," *Comparative Legal History* 5, no. 1 (2017): 36-52.
[25] Irene B. Katele, "Piracy and the Venetian State: The Dilemma of Maritime Defense in the Fourteenth Century," *Speculum* 63, no. 4 (October 1988): 865-889.
[26] Frederic C. Lane, "Police and Piracy in the Adriatic," in *Venice: A Maritime Republic* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 22-29.

Piracy may have had a major effect on foreign diplomacy, but the most consequential result was that of the power of sovereignty. The question of who had jurisdiction over pirates and victims was always an issue, but in the fourteenth century it became clearer. Frederic L. Cheyette explored the growing tension between church and state in fourteenth-century France, with both claiming jurisdiction over pirates who were shipwrecked near the episcopal city of Agde. The King of France, Philip of Valois (r. 1328-1350) claimed that he alone had jurisdiction over certain types of violence, such as war, and that piracy fell under that category.[27] After this incident, the state's monopoly on violence began to grow in strength and become clearer, helping to widen the gap between church and state by the early modern era, making secular rulers more powerful.

On the other side of the confessional line than France and Venice, Dénia had strong diplomatic ties with several polities throughout its existence. Created in the dissolution of the Ummayad Caliphate around 1030 CE, the Kingdom of Dénia along the eastern Iberian coast was one of about two dozen smaller Muslim *taifa* kingdoms. It was founded by Mujāhid al-Almiri (d. 1044) and his son ʿAlī (r. 1045-1076), and quickly became known to its contemporaries as a pirate kingdom.[28] While they were known for their pirates, that did not stop them from forming lasting diplomatic relationships throughout the western Mediterranean. Two such relationships that are particularly illuminating are Barcelona and Pisa. Both of these cities were Christian, one in northern Iberia, the other on the Tyrrhenian coast of Italy. Dénia's relationships were unique, forged in very different circumstances, but equally strong. Through examination of these relationships, one can begin to understand the

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[27] Frederic L. Cheyette, "The Sovereign and the Pirates, 1332," *Speculum* 45, no. 1 (January 1970): pp. 40-68.
[28] Bruce, "Piracy as Statecraft," 237.

symbiotic relationship between diplomacy and piracy, as well as gain a deeper

comprehension of the complex dialogue that existed between medieval religions.

Barcelona and Dénia were two of the major powers in the western Mediterranean, and

they clashed accordingly. However, while their differences in religion and their shared desire

to expand their territory (at the expense of the other) kept them adversaries, their mutual

proclivity for profits urged them to find common ground.[29] Both societies took to raiding and

violence in the Balearic Sea and along the eastern coast of Iberia. Travis Bruce has shown

through the analysis of chronicles that Dénia did not avoid Catalan ships when attacking, nor

did Barcelona take the attacks lying down. There are several instances of Barcelona using

force to expel Muslim pirates from their waters, and others of them moving settlements and

monasteries farther inland to protect them from attack.[30] The relationship between them was

hardly peaceful.

Violence may have been a visible, impactful feature of Barcelona and Dénia's

relationship, but their economic goals took precedence in many areas and forced diplomacy

to be a central, defining aspect as well. It is important to note that evidence of their

diplomacy exists today not only in legal documents but also in personal letters and gold

coins. The letters indicate a mutual respect and knowledge of each other across confessional

lines between rulers. The gold coins, found in Catalan economic records, probably came

from Dénia, indicating that a strong economic relationship existed between the two opposing

states.[31] Besides personal letters and coins, legal documentation also indicate the diplomatic

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[29] Travis Bruce, "An Intercultural Dialogue between the Muslim Taifa of Denia and the Christian County of Barcelona in the Eleventh Century," *Medieval Encounters* 15, no. 1 (2009): 1-34, 3.

[30] Bruce, "An Intercultural Dialogue," 10-14.

[31] Bruce, "An Intercultural Dialogue," 15-18. Coinage is a very complex issue, for several reasons. Bruce explains that Dénia's coins are hard to trace, as Mujāhid tried to tie Dénia to Valencia in many ways, including using their mint and coins. Another problem is that Catalan scribes who were unfamiliar with the Kingdom of

relationship between Barcelona and Dénia. When the monastery of Lérins was attacked in

1046, ʿAlī and Ramon Berenguer I, the count of Barcelona, exchanged legates to negotiate a

settlement and release of captives in a peaceful manner.[32] While the interaction included

threats of war, what is of more importance is that the threat was to "break the peace that

existed between them," indicating an official treaty of some ilk existed between the two.[33]

ʿAlī, afraid that war would hinder Dénia's economic prospects, was quick to release the

captured monks. This incident demonstrates the working, diplomatic relationship between

Dénia and its Christian neighbor. To support this diplomatic treaty, letters—surviving only as

fragments today—point to a personal as well as political relationship between the rulers of

the two polities in question.[34]

The most concrete evidence of diplomacy between Barcelona and Dénia is the treaty

they signed in 1058. This treaty comes down to us through a dedicatory document for the

Barcelona cathedral, Santa Eulalia. It explains the episcopal limits of the Bishop and includes

the dioceses of both Dénia and the Balearic Islands, granted to Barcelona via a treaty with

Mujāhid and reconfirmed with ʿAlī.[35] The treaty was religious at its base, explaining that

while Barcelona could claim authority over Dénia's Christian population, the bishop would

instruct Dénian churches to mention ʿAlī in their weekly sermons.[36] Not only did Dénia have

a well established Christian population, their Muslim rulers cultivated a working relationship

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Dénia may have replaced it in sources with ones they were more knowledgeable about, such as Tortosa or Valencia.

[32] Bruce, "An Intercultural Dialogue," 19-22.

[33] Bruce, "An Intercultural Dialogue," 21.

[34] Bruce, "An Intercultural Dialogue," 24. Bruce details the rebellions that were happening throughout the Catalan lands, and argues that the letters were probably about gaining assurances that the *parias* from Dénia were not in jeopardy of stopping.

[35] Bruce, "An Intercultural Dialogue," 25. Bruce claims: "This is the only Treaty of its kind [that we know of] to exist on the Iberian Peninsula."

[36] Bruce, "An Intercultural Dialogue," 27. No contemporary copies of this treaty exist today, but two copies from the thirteenth century do.

with them and their closest religious/secular leaders as well. This helped to solidify Mujāhid and ʿAlī's rule and gave them firm diplomatic allies against their shared enemies, such as Zaragoza. In fact, Bruce states that the 1058 treaty was meant to strengthen their alliance against Zaragoza in particular. While he does not explain this statement further, if it is true, it provides an example of Muslims allying with Christians against their co-religionists. For a period that is usually defined by its religious persecutions, boundaries, and hatred, finding evidence of cross-confessional partnerships is eye-opening to the overall role of religion in their particular societies.

Barcelona was not Dénia's only Christian associate. Mujāhid came into contact with Pisa early in his career when he attempted to conquer Sardinia. During his failed attempt ʿAlī, then a child, was taken and held hostage for sixteen years; when he was finally returned to his father he had to be completely re-acculturated into Islamic society.[37] However, this long captivity bred a strong association between ʿAlī, his successors, and the merchant family that hosted him, the Albizone, who were said to be linked together as brothers.[38] Their close ties would survive the defeat of Dénia's peninsular territories, and continued with the 'Amirid successors in the Balearic Islands until the twelfth century.[39] The connection between the two families encouraged diplomacy and economic relationship, but was by no means a formal alliance. It was not until after the Balearic Crusade of 1113 that Pisa and the successor state of the Kingdom of Dénia, now housed on the Balearic Islands, were able to set aside their differences to form a stronger diplomatic and economic relationship.

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[37] Bruce, "An Intercultural Dialogue," 22.
[38] Travis Bruce, "The Politics of Violence and Trade: Denia and Pisa in the Eleventh Century," *Journal of Medieval History* 32, no. 2 (2006): pp. 127-142, 138.
[39] Bruce, "The Politics of Violence and Trade," 138-141.

Pisa, over the course of the previous centuries, cultivated a reputation as pirate hunters, determined to rout out all Muslim pirates that terrorized the Tyrrhenian Sea.[40] In 1113, they allied with Barcelona to put an end to their pirate problem. With Pope Pascal II's (1099-1118) blessing and backing, Pisa created a coalition of ships from other Italian cities (excluding Genoa, who turned them away) and sailed to attack the Balearics. After a brief mix-up in which they attacked a Catalan town, they finally set out to the islands with their new ally, Ramon Berenguer III.[41] While they succeeded at ridding their sea lanes of Muslim pirates from the Balearics by razing their bases to the ground, they did not conquer and claim the islands under their political dominion.[42] Instead, the Almoravids were quick to settle and start rebuilding the island ports. This would spark a unique evolution which took place in Pisa over the next century.

Pisa spent the next century at constant war with their neighbors, and was quickly beset by economic troubles. With no Muslim pirates to attack and gain loot from, they no longer had the stream of income provided by attacking pirates, making it impossible for them to both defend against their neighbors and attack distant Muslim bases.[43] Instead, they began to ally with their former enemies to secure economic privileges and diplomatic protection. Once they had secured a ten-year truce, they turned their back on the policing of pirates. While they no longer had to worry about pirate attacks, Muslim pirates were still operating in the western Mediterranean and a major problem for Pisa's long-time rival, Genoa.[44] As the twelfth century continued, Pisa signed continuous peace treaties with Islamic polities (1150

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[40] Matthew E. Parker, "Pisa, Catalonia, and Muslim Pirates: Intercultural Exchanges in the Balearic Crusade of 1113–1115," *Viator* 45, no. 2 (2014): pp. 77-100, 82.
[41] Parker, "Pisa, Catalonia, and Muslim Pirates," 86.
[42] Parker, "Pisa, Catalonia, and Muslim Pirates," 96.
[43] Parker, "Pisa, Catalonia, and Muslim Pirates," 97.
[44] Parker, "Pisa, Catalonia, and Muslim Pirates," 98.

with Valencia, 1153 with Alexandria, 1157 with Tunis, and 1161 with Majorca). They consistently sided with their new Muslim trade partners over their Christian neighbors: they did not assist Genoa when they were troubled with piracy, and they did not support Barcelona's plan to reconquer the Balearics, even though it was backed by Pisa's own archbishop.[45] While Pisa's history with Muslim piracy outlasted the Pirate Kingdom of Dénia, its impact on their actions and motivations can be seen within their evolving stance towards both piracy and Muslims.

Dénia had a complex and strategic diplomatic policy. Through examination of its ever-changing relationships with Barcelona and Pisa, it can be better understood that political and economic decisions were not made on the basis of religion alone, nor was piracy a black and white issue. Piracy was a predictable occurrence in the Middle Ages, and it was not cause to blacklist or attack another polity. Instead, secular governments were able to work around the piratical actions of their neighbors when diplomacy suited them better. Dénia's rulers, for example, were savvy leaders, who were able to cultivate strong relationships across religious boundaries despite being infamous for their piratical activities.

Piracy and Law

One of the few piratical topics that have been studied in depth is how piracy was viewed by the law. As medieval polities evolved into kingdoms, empires, or states, their acceptance of piracy and corsairing drastically changed. They began to write laws in order to minimize not only the use of corsairs, but also their own liability. Through examining how governments reformed their laws of reprisal and how they dealt with lawsuits about piracy,

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[45] Parker, "Pisa, Catalonia, and Muslim Pirates," 99.

historians can start to see a marked switch in the fourteenth century; piracy went from a necessary evil to something to be avoided and legislated.

When a medieval sailor was attacked by pirates, provided he survived he would sue anyone and everyone they believed might have control over the pirates, from the pirates' homeland to their employers. Tai has done extensive archival work into different lawsuits made by pirate victims in the city of Genoa. She has found that the state had many tools to avoid paying restitution including: claiming it was a pirate attack, not a corsair attack; that the attackers were not under their jurisdiction; that the attacker had not paid a security deposit with the government, so they had no way of paying for the restitution; or that the attack had been rightful because the victims had been sailing under a false flag.[46] Polities found any loophole possible to get out of paying restitution or being subject to a letter of marque.

Another way governments navigated diplomatic issues connected with piracy and corsairing was to change their approach to reprisals. Instead of granting permission to their merchants to sail *ad corsum* and take justice in their own hands, medieval governments began to charge a reprisal tax on trade going in and out of their borders.[47] In theory, this tax would then go to victims of piracy, to offset foreign problems that might arise on trade routes. While this helped them avoid war and other diplomatic troubles, it failed to help the victims because medieval governments were already adept at avoiding restitution, and used the many tools at their disposal to sideline the victims and keep the tax—a new, legal kind of piracy in itself.

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[46] Emily Sohmer Tai, "Piracy and Law in Medieval Genoa: The Consilia of Bartolomeo Bosco," *Medieval Encounters* 9, nos. 2-3 (2003):. 256-282, 265-266. See also: Tai, "Restitution and the Definition of a Pirate," 35-36.

[47] Kathryn Reyerson, "Commercial Law and Merchant Disputes: Jacques Coeur and the Law of Marque," *Medieval Encounters* 9, nos. 2-3 (2003): 244-255, 244. See also Tai, "Piracy and Law," 266.

Pirates have offered historians a unique view of not only state level diplomacy, but also the importance of local laws and jurisprudence. It is easy to look at medieval monarchs as becoming increasingly powerful within their realm; they created laws, collected taxes, dictated religious beliefs, and controlled their borders. However, where pirates were concerned, city governments could contradict and overrule their monarch. Pisa, for example, formed diplomatic treaties with Muslim pirates in the twelfth century to encourage their new-found trade, going as far as to assert that piracy against allies would be deemed a crime against the city, which was punishable by exile.[48] During Barcelona's famine in 1333, the Council of One Hundred (which controlled Barcelona) ruled that they had the privilege to take any grain shipments in their water, even from other Aragonese cities, and King Alfons III deferred to them.[49] Cities had a large amount of leeway and jurisdiction when it came to addressing piracy.

As piracy slowly continued to evolve within the context of the law, the calamitous fourteenth century began. Between famine, plague, and the Hundred Years War, deaths were on the rise and brought massive change. This led to changes between the Church and the monarchies, as they struggled for ultimate power over society. It is in this era that monarchical sovereignty began to be codified, and violence began to be used to cement the monarchy's power. Fourteenth-century kings began to claim a monopoly over certain types of violence (meaning that they would be tried in the secular court, even if someone involved belonged to a Church order), and piracy was a central tenet of this development.[50] As sovereigns set in motion the legal precedents needed to claim that acts of piracy were under

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[48] Enrica Salvatori, "Corsairs' Crews and Cross-Cultural Interactions: The Case of the Pisan Trapelicinus in the Twelfth Century," *Medieval Encounters* 13, no. 1 (2007): 32-55, 45. See also: Parker, "Pisa, Catalonia, and Muslim Pirates," 98.
[49] Kelleher, "'The Sea of Our City," 10-12.
[50] Cheyette, "The Sovereign and the Pirates, 1332," 41.

their jurisdiction, they commenced policies that utilized piracy for their own political

means.[51]

Scholars such as Thomas K. Heebøll-Holm, Stephen P. Pistono, and Timothy J.

Runyan all explore the role that piracy played in the Hundred Years War. Runyan explains

that at the beginning of the war, the concept of naval warfare was still in the early

development stage; this meant that early naval conflicts in the 1330s and 1340s consisted

mostly of piracy.[52] Heebøll-Holm illuminates the role piracy played in French and English

strategies throughout the War, explaining that both utilized piracy at the beginning before

developing Admiralty Courts and laws meant to control who could act as a pirate.[53] While

these new laws did not hinder piracy, it allowed monarchs a legal means to utilize them

during times of war. In fact, the Admirals—those put in charge of overseeing the sea—often

engaged in piracy themselves.[54] Pistono offers further support by illustrating the vital role

that pirates played during the second half of the Hundred Years War; piracy was more

codified by this point, and rulers knew how to utilize unlicensed privateers to their best

advantage.[55]

Conclusion

An activity that is grounded in violent attacks and shady characters, medieval piracy

had a codependent relationship with political growth. Piracy led to stronger, clearer law

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[51] C. J. Ford, "Piracy or Policy: The Crisis in the Channel, 1400–1403," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 29 (1979): 63-78, 64.

[52] Timothy J. Runyan, "Naval Power and Maritime Technology during the Hundred Years War," in *War at Sea in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, edited by John B. Hattendorf and Richard W. Unger, 69–79. Warfare in History. Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: Boydell Press, 2003. 63.

[53] Thomas K. Heebøll-Holm, "Law, Order and Plunder at Sea: A Comparison of England and France in the Fourteenth Century," *Continuity and Change* 32, no. 1 (2017): pp. 37-58, 38-43.

[54] Heebøll-Holm, "Law, Order and Plunder at Sea," 47.

[55] Stephen P. Pistono, "Henry IV and the English Privateers," *The English Historical Review* 90, no. 355 (April 1975): pp. 322-330, 322.

codes pertaining to sea violence and revenge and different strategies in diplomacy. Stronger

government oversight, in turn, led to the legitimizing of different types of piratical activities.

It would be impossible to try to quantify the effect that piracy had on the medieval political

field, but it would be equally difficult to imagine how medieval politics would have evolved

without pirates to push it along.

One of the easiest consequences of piracy to trace historically is that of the Vikings.

The Vikings' attacks were so detrimental to Carolingian society and so unstoppable, that they

led to the gifting of the northern coast to the Normans, creating the territory known as

Normandy. The reach and influence of the Normans cannot be overstated: they began to

conquer southern Italy in 999, Sicily in 1061, England in 1066, and even claimed kingship in

the Holy Land during the crusades. While the impact of other pirates may be harder to trace,

they are just as instrumental in structuring the Middle Ages as the Viking attacks were.

Since the definition of piracy is grounded in the licit or illicit nature of maritime theft,

it is impossible to study it without looking at its troubled relationship with the law. It would

be impossible to make an overarching statement that piracy was either beneficial or

detrimental to medieval governments: it was both. Piracy provided a scapegoat for territorial

expansion, cheap protection, and governmental overreach. It helped medieval law systems

define not only their jurisdiction but also their limits. However, the influence of piracy was

not just on the official, political level of society; piracy was embedded into the foundation of

many medieval societies, from the ninth-century Carolingian Empire to the Hundred Years

War during the fourteenth century. Piracy was a core element of the Middle Ages that must

be brought into the light to see the era as a whole.

<u>Chapter Two: Piracy and Culture</u>

Introduction

It is perhaps easiest to examine the relationship between piracy and politics because that is where piracy has largely survived in the written record, recorded as disputes, treaties, and laws throughout the medieval world. However, politics is not the only sector of medieval life where piracy left its traces; it also had a profound impact on local and shared culture throughout the medieval world. Piracy was a crucial characteristic which influenced how societies were arranged, how certain territories were viewed, and how they interacted even over long distances. Piracy is an important tool in the investigation of the cultural boundaries of medieval societies, especially religious and gender boundaries.

As many types of piracy as there are, there are just as many cultural consequences to it. To explore these ramifications of piracy one must examine it through various lenses. These lenses will examine it first at a micro level and then at a macro: beginning with an analysis of how pirate attacks affected Carolingian culture; then looking at the types of culture that arose from piracy and finally through examination of the impact that piracy had on the collective medieval culture. From here, piracy will be used to look at the religious culture of the Middle Ages, with the goal of achieving a more thorough understanding of the boundary that is believed to have existed between the medieval Abrahamic religions. Piracy did not exist in a bubble, it snaked its way into the very foundations of life, making piracy the ideal tool to gain insight on medieval culture.

Culture is a subfield of history that is constantly expanding, as new directions, points of view, and influences are discovered; as culture is made up of many unique characteristics, such as language, religion, politics, economics, and many more, historians are constantly finding new aspects to explore. Piracy is one such tool that has, so far, been underutilized as

a way to gain greater cultural insights. There is a common misconception in modern popular culture and academia that piracy is inherently a bad thing, a destructive force that leaves damage in its wake; the portrait of a pirate is synonymous with that of a vagabond or ruffian. However, these assumptions do not fit the medieval pirate culture. In the Middle Ages, scholars do not find pirates whose sole identity or career was piracy–instead, piracy was a tool that any person at sea could pick up at will. Furthermore, the cultures that grew out of piracy were not the dangerous illicit places that popular belief associated with piracy. Piracy was an unspoken fact of life, affecting not just sailors, but anyone linked to the water: traders, pilgrims, travelers, and coastal societies of all kinds. While it may be difficult to track the impact of piracy on medieval culture, due to its illicit nature, that same illicit nature is able to give historians a broad, bottom-up view on society that other narratives are unable to provide.

Viking Ramifications

The ninth century began with the crowning of Charlemagne as the Holy Roman Emperor by Pope Leo III. Western Europe was the home of the stable and growing Carolingian Empire Charlemagne had so painstakingly acquired. However, the ascendancy of Charlemagne's empire would soon be put to the test in many ways. The Franks practiced partible inheritance, or the practice of dividing their land between their sons; this practice made their realm unstable as the internal borders and leadership were constantly contested and changing.[56] Another impact of the increasing political division was a period of general stagnation; at this time, Western Europe was mostly rural, localized, and decentralized, as the

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[56] Bachrach, *Early Carolingian Warfare: Prelude to Empire*, 37: in this book partible inheritance is called by the Latin term *divisio.*

higher political functions were not stable enough to support the rural populations. The

Carolingians were determined to restore the boundaries that their Germanic ancestors

defended during the fourth and fifth centuries; however, once they succeeded, their new

borders were vulnerable to attacks from foreign cultures. These continuous attacks would

have a profound effect on the empire, ushering in the crucial changes that laid the

groundwork for the advancements of the High Middle Ages.

  The Carolingians had two main types of adversaries during the ninth century.

Northmen, otherwise known as the Vikings, came by ship from Scandinavia and attacked the

coastline and river valleys of the European continent randomly and at will beginning as early

as 820. Muslims, called Saracens or Moors by the Carolingians, had conquered much of the

Iberian Peninsula beginning in 711 and continued to try to expand in various directions

intermittently for the next several centuries, specifically in this context by moving north into

the Pyrenees and spreading up through southern Italy. While both groups have been studied

individually, there is a lack of synthesis in the research pertaining to them currently which

this chapter hopes to rectify. While these groups were attacking the Carolingian Empire

simultaneously, oftentimes forcing the Carolingians to defend themselves on multiple sides,

the impact on their opponents was vastly different. The Vikings and the Muslims were two

completely different groups, who had unique motivations and who employed different

methods of attack. Because of this variance, the opinion and response from the Carolingians

was also tailored to their attackers. Through this synthesis, one can gain hidden insights into

the Carolingians' reactions to piracy.

  The Vikings were commonly referred to as *pyratae*, the Latin term used to describe

the style of attack typical of sea-based robbers, by Carolingian sources such as the *Annals of*

St. Bertin. Conversely, their Muslim adversaries are only spoken of as *saraceni* or *mauri*, both of which are ethno-religious terms which do not speak to the nature of the attacks themselves. By analyzing sources such as the *Annals of St. Bertin* and pulling from the historical scholarship pertaining to each of these ninth-century people, it becomes clear that the Carolingians did not view their attackers as identical. What is not clear is why, or what their opinions of each attacking group actually were. The two invading factions were vastly different, from their religion to their political organization, to their motivations for attacking and their modes of attack. For this reason, the response required of the Carolingian defenders varied, not only in military strategy, but in efficiency as well. While the Muslims were a tangible enemy that threatened their physical borders, the Vikings were troublesome pirates whose mode of attack made them difficult to stop. This distinction, between pirate and invader, is an important historical paradigm that has yet to be fully explored. By looking at how the later Carolingian Empire interacted with these two enemies, it becomes clear that Carolingian opinions of them shaped their responses to both. Whereas the Muslim invaders may have seemed to be the true threat, the unpredictable piratical attacks of the Vikings had a greater, long-lasting effect on Frankish society as a whole.

The Vikings attacked the continent almost annually, using longboats to ravage the coast and countryside at will. However, their goal was not to conquer land nor to gain political power; instead, they sought material goods, often phrased as "*praedas*" (spoils) in the *Annals of St. Bertin*.[57] They are stated to have occasionally built settlements to winter in, as they did in 843 after attacking the city of Nantes:

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[57] Waitz, *Annales Bertiniani*, 31: "*..praedas, rapinas, neces passim facientes.*"

ad postremum insulam quandam ingressi, convectis a continenti domibus, hiemare velut perpetuis sedibus statuerunt.

Having at last landed on a certain island, having brought structures with them from the continent, they decided to overwinter as though in permanent dwellings.[58]

There is no discussion of permanent Viking settlements in the *Annals of St. Bertin*, only savage attacks and short occupations during the winter. While this example speaks of "permanent dwellings," these winter settlements are not mentioned year to year, indicating that they did not stay long term, also demonstrating that *velut perpetuis sedibus* is being used to describe the type of buildings (sturdy and built like permanent dwellings), not the intended use of them. This lack of permanent settlements highlights the difference between pirates and invaders, as invaders would have been trying to inhabit the land they took, while pirates usually plan to return home after they attack.

As time went by, the population grew due to walled defenses and advances in farming, and people began to move from the rural manors into urban cities. There are several reasons for this evolution. The population growth meant that there was a surplus population, which allowed not only for more people to learn a trade, but also for the ability to begin trading their wares farther away. Another motivation for moving to cities was the security that was available in the richer urban centers, such as stronger walls and more defenders. This shift, from rural to urban, changed society to its core. People became more centralized politically as monarchs began to claim more power over their territory. With cities coming back into dominance for the first time since the fall of the Roman Empire, the return of long-distance trade connected not only different regions of the empire, but also the different empires of the western world. This connection would change not only the political and

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[58] Waitz, *Annals of St. Bertiniani,* 29.

religious worlds of the Carolingians, but also their daily lives as they had access to more and more luxury goods. This shift, from rural and divided to urban and connected, has been coined the tenth-century commercial revolution, due to its vast impact on the western world.[59]

The cultural changes brought forth by the piratical attacks of the Vikings cannot be overstated. The foundation and organization of their society changed in response to the attacks, in ways that would impact their culture for centuries to come. It is here, in the ninth century with the Viking attacks that Western Europe begins to shift and grow into a more urban society; here, that the first seeds of manorialism and the cultural shifts that came with it are planted. Many aspects of medieval western culture can be traced to the actions of pirates in the ninth century.

Thriving Societies

There is a common perception about pirate lands as being unlawful, uncouth, and dangerous to all, because of the pirates who reside there. The term "pirate nests," as these shadowy dens are often called, will be covered more in depth in the next chapter, but it is important to take a moment to clarify that the accepted narrative about the culture that arose from piracy is based more on fiction than fact. The impact that piracy had on the societies it touched is not to be underestimated; in many places, piracy was a main factor in allowing the polity to gain legitimacy and grow overall. To study this phenomenon, I use the term "thriving society," which I use several factors to determine. First, to qualify as a thriving society, a polity must be recognized by outsiders as having a legitimate authority

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[59] For a detailed discussion of this subject see: Robert S. Lopez, *The Commercial Revolution of the Middle Ages: 950-1350* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). This is an accepted term in the historiography of the medieval era and can be found in summary in many Western Civilization textbooks.

economically and diplomatically; second, the society must have something that acts as a draw for intellectuals; and finally, the polity must have an established hierarchy within its culture. These are all characteristics that are rarely assumed to exist in a pirate nest, but that scholars find continuously within the medieval context. By examining some of the places that had the greatest relationship with piracy, historians can determine that the cultural impact of piracy was more positive than negative.

While the impact of the Viking pirates has already been discussed earlier in this chapter, they are not the only pirates to change the culture around them. Two of the most notorious "pirate nests" of the Middle Ages are that of the Kingdom of Dénia, mentioned extensively in the previous chapter, and the Muslim Emirate of Crete. The island of Crete, located at the southern edge of the Aegean Sea, straddled the Byzantine and Islamic worlds in the early Middle Ages, making it a source of contention for centuries. Originally under Byzantine control, the island was conquered by Islamic refugees from Spain in the 820s.[60] From here, Islamic Crete acted as an independent emirate within the Islamic world, until it was recaptured by the Byzantine general, and future Emperor, Nicephorus Phocas in 960.[61] During this time period, between ca. 823 and 960, the Muslims of Crete raided widely throughout the eastern Mediterranean, earning a reputation as Muslim Pirates from their Byzantine victims.

Support to refute Crete's designation of a "pirates' nest" relies on religious doctrine, material remains, written sources from within the Islamic world, and heavy interpretation of

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[60] Vassilios Christides, *The Conquest of Crete by the Arabs: A Turning Point in the Struggle between Byzantium and Islam* (Athens: Academy of Athens, 1984), 85-87. The dating of the conquest is contested, due to discrepancies within the surviving sources. Some sources claim Crete was conquered early, between 823 and 824, while the latest dates given for it are after 830. Christides argues that the most believable dates are the earliest, because of the weakening of the Byzantine navy by Thomas's Revolt (821-823).
[61] Christides, *The Conquest of Crete*, 172-173.

Byzantine sources. These sources paint a rich picture of the eastern Mediterranean during the Emirate of Crete; however, modern scholars have often stretched them to signify more than they should logically denote. Analyzing these sources, it becomes clear that the Emirate of Crete was an official polity, with a recognized government and educated populace. These facts do not immediately discount the presence or impact of pirates.

One of the most vital indications of an official government on Crete are the coins minted by its emirs. The Cretans utilized a three-metal coin system, all of which survive today in varying amounts.[62] While the bronze coins are not dated, all the coins name the emir who minted them.[63] This alone shows that the emirs on Crete had enough authority and control to mint coins in their own name. Their widespread circulation, attested by the varied locations in which they have been found, confirms that this authority was respected within the greater medieval world.[64] The Islamic Cretans were active within the legitimate trade system of the time, otherwise their coins would not be found in many of the places they have been. If they had been mere pirates, they would not have minted their own coins; an official government and a place within the legitimate trade system are needed prerequisites for the minting of coins.[65]

Coins were not the only evidence of the Emirate of Crete being a legitimate, thriving society (versus an underdeveloped pirates' nest). Islamic sources from Baghdad, Egypt, and

[62] George C. Miles, "Byzantium and the Arabs: Relations in Crete and the Aegean Area," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 18 (1964): 1-32, 15.
[63] Peter Warren and George C. Miles, "An Arab Building at Knossos," *The Annual of the British School at Athens* 67 (1972), 290. See also: George C. Miles, *The Coinage of the Arab Amirs of Crete*, Numismatic Notes and Monographs 160 (New York: American Numismatic Society, 1970), 2.
[64] Ulla S. Linder Welin, "The First Known Dirham of the Amirs of Crete" *The Numismatic Chronicle and Journal of the Royal Numismatic Society* 15, no. 45 (1955), 211-214. Welin attests that Cretans coins have been found in Scandinavian Viking Hoards, linking them to an important trade route that stretched throughout medieval Europe. See Also: Christides, *Conquest of Crete*, 119, for the widespread nature of Cretan coins.
[65] For more on these arguments see: Christides, *Conquest of Crete*, 122; Warren and Miles, "An Arab Building," 296.

Spain all mention Crete regarding to the quality of its intellectual.[66] These intellectuals drew

students from the Islamic world who wanted to learn under their tutelage.[67] This signifies two

important facts pertaining to the argument of this chapter. First, that the Emirate of Crete was

a place of high culture and learning, and therefore not simply a pirates' nest. Second, that this

fact—that Crete was home to many intellectuals—was well known and accepted throughout

the Islamic world, indicating that, in the Islamic world, Crete was not associated with piracy

as a general rule.

The final argument made against the role that "piracy" played on Islamic Crete is that

of *jihad of the sea* and conquest. *Jihad,* or holy war, by this time had evolved from that of a

war led by the Caliph to a more philosophical idea with a fluid definition that makes it hard

to differentiate between what was and what was not *jihad*.[68] In the ninth and tenth centuries,

the concept of holy war had trickled down to lay not only on the Caliph's shoulders, but also

on holy men and volunteer fighters.[69] Many modern scholars have taken this fluidity to argue

that the raids undertaken by the Islamic Cretans were not simple piracy, but holy war. The

main source of evidence used for this argument is the Byzantine sources, some of which were

discussed earlier in this chapter.

Vassilios Christides argues two believable and interconnected points to support this

theory. He states that the Byzantine islands were not raided completely at random, but for

their strategic value as well. He also argues that these were not just pirate raids, but

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[66] Christides, *Conquest of Crete*, 133-135. See also: Miles, "Byzantium and the Arabs," 16.

[67] Christides, *Conquest of Crete*, 133, cites the following Arabic sources, which I have not been able to find translations of yet: A. Taybi, "Imarah 'Arabiyah Andalusiyah fi Jazirah Iqritish," 80-82; Yaqut, *Mujam al-Buldan*, I, ed. F. Wustendfeld, 336; Qadi 'Iyad, *Tartib al-Madarik*, IV (Rabat, n.d.), 262.

[68] Michael Bonner, "Some Observations Concerning the Early Development of Jihad on the Arab-Byzantine Frontier," in *Arab-Byzantine Relations in Early Islamic Times* ed. Michael Bonner (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 401-427, 418.

[69] Deborah Tor, "Privatized Jihad and Public Order in the Pre-Seljuq Period: The Role of the Mutatawwi'a," *Iranian Studies* 38, no. 4 (2005): 573.

conquests.[70] His sources waver between hagiographical texts, historical accounts, and logical reasoning, to varied effect. For example, he cites John Cameniates to prove that "by 904 the island of Naxos paid tribute (*jizyah*) to the Moslems of Crete."[71] Less believably, he cites hagiographical works such as the "Life of St. Theodora," which talks about the abandonment by the Byzantines of certain islands, to testify to the occupation of said islands by the Cretans.[72] He also claims that the conquest of the island of Paros is attested to within "The Life of St. Theoktiste"; however, while the *vita* does mention that her captors stop on Paros to count and divide their captives, it does not definitively say that it is under Muslim control. In fact, it says that the Muslims left the island the next day, making it implausible to assume they occupied it permanently or even semi-permanently at that point in time.[73] This is a logical fallacy that is unsupported (at this time) by concrete evidence. While it might make logical sense that the Emirate of Crete would claim the islands they raided under the guise of *jihad*, there is no evidence to support this theory for most of the islands. *Jihad* in this context is easy to see, but the surviving evidence does not point to the Cretans conquering, inhabiting, or converting the places they are attacking; instead, the sources point to strategic attacks to collect spoils and slaves for the attackers' personal financial benefits.

Crete is not alone in its dependence on piracy to support a legitimate government and culture. On the other side of the Mediterranean, Dénia was known as a Pirate Kingdom but still attracted highly sought-after scholars, minted coins, and formed lasting diplomatic

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[70] Vassilios Christides, "The Raids of the Moslems of Crete in the Aegean Sea: Piracy and Conquest," *Byzantion* 51, no. 1 (1981): 75-111, 81.
[71] Christides, "The Raids of the Moslems," 95.
[72] Christides, *Conquest of Crete*, 166-167.
[73] Niketas Magistros, "The Life of Our Blessed Mother Theoktiste of Lesbos Who Practiced Asceticism and Died on the Island Paros," trans. Angela C. Hero, in *Holy Women of Byzantium: Ten Saints' Lives in English Translation*, ed. Alice-Mary Talbot, Byzantine Saints' Lives in Translation (Washington DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1996), 111.

treaties.[74] Christian polities such as the later medieval societies on Rhodes and Malta, which

will be discussed in the next chapter, depended heavily on piracy not only for revenue but as

freelance navies as well, while having a thriving legitimate economic system and being major

political powers of their times.[75]

       The assumption that piracy originated in the shadows of society, in unknown,

ungoverned corners of the sea, does not fit the historical narrative of medieval piracy, which

existed at front and center in many cultures. Piracy was a leading factor in the growth and

spread of polities, including, but not limited to, the ones mentioned here. From the changes

that were ushered into Carolingian society due to the Vikings to the influence of Crete and

Dénia, piracy created societies that grew and thrived. While a more in-depth analysis on

pirate nests will be given in the following chapter, it is vital to acknowledge that the impact

of piracy on medieval culture was as beneficial to its perpetrators as it was detrimental to its

victims.

Widespread Culture

       Surprisingly, for the subject, the majority of scholarship on piracy and religion

focuses not on the division piracy created but on the cohesion that existed in spite of it. Pirate

crews were mixed, both ethnically and religiously, and their victims were chosen by chance,

not by faith. In fact, protections were granted across confessional lines to commercial allies.[76]

The suspicion of false flagging (the flying of the flags not associated with the ship) made any

merchant a viable target: there were no firm boundaries or identities on the sea, so pirates

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[74] Bruce, "Piracy as Statecraft," 245; Parker, "Pisa, Catalonia, and Muslim Pirates," 83.

[75] Aloisio, "The Maltese Corso," 194; Anthony Luttrell, "The Earliest Documents on the Hospitaller Corso at Rhodes: 1413 and 1416," *Mediterranean Historical Review* 10, nos. 1-2 (1995): 177-188, 180.

[76] Salvatori, "Corsair Crews," 40.

were able to attack almost any ship they wanted with no repercussions.[77] Modern

historiography shows that piratical attacks were often against their coreligionists, not against

their religious adversaries.[78]

The act of piracy was a universal trait in the Middle Ages at sea: anyone could be a

pirate if they had the proper tools and opportunity, from a trader or a sailor to priests or

aristocrats. It did not matter who the pirate was, nor who his victims were, the attacks were

opportunistic—the attack would look the same throughout the sea. Maritime culture was one

that was shared on the water: the sailors' native identity only served as an excuse for the

attack after the fact.[79] This fact is highlighted by the prevalence of false flagging; while it

gave pirates and corsairs cause to attack, merchants and sailors still utilized it immensely.

False flagging also shows that there were other identities, such as nationality, that mattered

more to pirates than which religion their victims claimed.

Identity was a mercurial concept in the Middle Ages, something that a person could

change as quickly and fluidly as they changed their clothes. Merchants and sailors and

travelers were adept at this game of masks, switching between roles at ease.[80] Religious

identity was one such role that sailors drifted between; sailors could change their appearance

and actions to fit into whatever the situation called for.[81] The amount of knowledge needed to

successfully blend into a foreign culture illustrates that the line between religions was not

carved in stone. Sailors and pirates of this era cultivated a deep enough understanding of the

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[77] Tai, "Piracy and Law," 265.
[78] Tai, "Restitution and the Law," 34.
[79] Coleman, "Of Corsairs," 185-187.
[80] One of the most infamous examples of this is the life of Leo Africanus. One of the most comprehensive studies done of his life is: Natalie Zemon Davis, *Trickster Travels: A Sixteenth-Century Muslim Between Worlds* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006).
[81] Kathryn Reyerson, "Identity in the Medieval Mediterranean World of Merchants and Pirates," *Mediterranean Studies* 20, no. 2 (2012): 129-146, 139.

many religions they interacted with that they could blend into many different cultures, religions, and settings.

Religion was integral to medieval life, but piracy has been proven to be just as essential. By analyzing these two paradigms together, the maritime culture can be better understood. The sea cannot be seen as a region defined by religious conflict alone, because piracy ignored confessional lines consistently. Not only were pirate crews mixed religiously, they picked their victims by chance, nationality, or profitability. Religion was used inconsistently as a reason for pirate or corsair attacks, with governments reversing their holy edicts when the flow of money changed in their favor. The violence and conflict that was endemic to piracy was not grounded in religion.

Religious Identities

Piracy permeated every aspect of medieval life—not just economics and politics, but religious life as well. The Middle Ages is often viewed as a religious battleground between Christianity and Islam, an era defined by conflict. However, modern historiography about piracy paints a different picture. Historians would be remiss to state that religion was not an issue in piracy, but the subject needs a closer look. By looking at the pirates themselves and their victims, the water gets murkier.

Religion was one cause of piracy, especially in the High Middle Ages (tenth through twelfth centuries). *Jihad of the Sea* and the Balearic Crusade, as well as Pisa's war against Islamic pirates, all point to a sea full of violence for religious reasons.[82] Religion provided an easy, accepted excuse for pirates to conduct attacks. In some instances, the Christian church

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[82] Bruce, "Piracy as Statecraft," 237-238; Parker, "Pisa, Catalonia, and Muslim Pirates," 84; Francesco Gabrieli, "Greeks and Arabs in the Central Mediterranean Area," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 18 (1964): 57-65, 59.

itself acted as pirates, as Robert Burns discussed in his article about thirteenth-century

religious interaction: the archbishop of Tarragona would go on raids himself, causing

political problems for multiple polities.[83] While the Crown of Castile had a standing call for

"Wars with the Saracens" which allowed for pirate attacks against their religious enemies,

Burns points out that their Islamic economic allies on the coast of North Africa were excused

from that mandate.[84] This demonstrates that while religion was a good excuse for piracy, it

was just that: an excuse.

On the other side of the Mediterranean, religion was a hot topic in the Aegean Sea,

where Muslim pirates from Crete were set against Greek Christians from Constantinople

during the tenth century. It has been argued that the actions of the Muslims of Crete should

not be deemed as piracy, but as *jihad of the sea*. However, Greek sources are clear to

differentiate between those attacks that they thought were based on religious expansion and

those that were piracy.[85] While it would be easy to see all cross-confessional violent

interactions in the light of religious conflict, expansion, or war, that is simplifying medieval

lives and motives to revolve solely around their beliefs, which is an unfair and dangerous

practice to partake in. Medieval actions and lives were as complicated as modern ones; while

religion played a role in many decisions, not every conflict originated from spiritual

discontent and piracy is an excellent tool for highlighting this disparity. Some maritime

violence can be traced to religious war, but not all; other attacks sprouted from political and

economic motives.

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[83]Robert I. Burns, "Piracy as an Islamic-Christian Interface in the Thirteenth Century," *Viator* 11 (1980): 165-178, 169.

[84] Burns, "Piracy as Statecraft," 170.

[85] For Greek evidence see: "Life of St. Theoktiste of Lesbos," ed. and trans. by Angela C. Hero, "Life of St. Athanasia of Aegina, " ed. and trans. by Lee Francis Sherry, and "Life of St. Theodora of Thessalonike, " ed. and trans. by Alice-Mary Talbot in *Holy Women of Byzantium: Ten Saints' Lives in English Translation*, ed. Alice-Mary Talbot, Byzantine Saints' Lives in Translation (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1996).

Some societies used pirate attacks to strengthen their subjects' faith. Nicholas M. Parmley uses the *Cantigas de Santa M*aría*, as well as the *Siete Partidas,* to highlight how pirate attacks reinforced the Christian populace of Santa Maria do Porto beliefs.[86] The power of Mary was shown in storms ascribed to her and defeating pirates that came to attack "her namesake city." Interestingly, Parmley emphasizes that Mary's defense was for the *city* not the religion: her spite was against any enemy of Santa Maria do Porto, even if those enemies were Catalan pirates.[87] This demonstrates the unconventional way religion was used to justify and explain piracy; it was not as simple as Muslim pirate against Christian sailor. Instead, it was simply pirate against sailor, and those titles could morph and change at a moment's notice.

Piracy also strengthened religious beliefs in a more straightforward way through pirates' attacks on pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem. Kristine T. Utterback has compared different pilgrim accounts, looking to see the effect piracy had on deterring the holy travelers.[88] She has concluded that piracy was one of the tribulations that pilgrims looked to overcome on their journey. Going on pilgrimage was about proving a believer's faith and dedication to God; danger and inconvenience were an important aspect of that journey. Pilgrims knew where pirates would attack, and where they would be in the most danger, but did not try to avoid them, instead putting their faith in God to the test. To further demonstrate that religious lines were malleable, while the Christian pilgrims greatly feared being attacked by Muslim pirates, when they were attacked, it was usually by their fellow Christians.[89] Utterback also points out that pilgrim ships were not often attacked by pirates of either

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[86] Nicholas M. Parmley, "Alfonso Xs Imagined Mediterranean Empire: Shipwrecks, Storms, and Pirates in the *Cantigas De Santa María*," *Hispanic Review* 85, no. 2 (2017): 199-221.

[87] Parmley, "Alfonso X's Imagined Mediterranean Empire," 214-215.

[88] Utterback, "Pirates and Pilgrims," 124.

[89] Utterback, "Pirates and Pilgrims," 129.

religion, because they did not represent an adequate financial gain.[90] While religion may

have been a good excuse to attack, it was not reason enough for pirates to look their way.

Conclusion

Culture is a large, ever evolving subject that provides one of the most important, if

elusive, perspectives a historian needs in order to understand the past. Piracy is one aspect of

culture that scholars need to examine on more heavily to develop a deeper, more

encompassing understanding of medieval culture. The act of piracy touched many aspects of

medieval life, such as: trade, traveling, religious and political identity, social make-up,

societal organization. It influenced who was in power, what polities thrived, who did

business together.

This chapter has examined some of the largest impacts that piracy had on medieval

culture. From changing the population layout of the Carolingian Empire and laying the

groundwork for the manorial system that would usher in feudalism in the centuries to come,

to enabling polities such as Dénia and Crete to become bustling hubs of trade and high

cultural exchange, piracy influenced medieval society in substantial ways that are still easily

visible to scholars today. While the large-scale impacts are profound, piracy offers a more

subtle lens to view social issues such as religious and political identities or gender roles.

While the traditional view of the Middle Ages is that of firm religious boundaries, this is a

very top-down view that relies heavily on religious and political doctrine to make

assumptions about the beliefs and stances of the population at large. This traditional view is

being challenged by many modern scholars from many points of view, and piracy is one

perspective that should be utilized for this endeavor. Already it has been shown through

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[90] Utterback, "Pirates and Pilgrims," 126.

piracy that there was a large amount of understanding and connection across confessional lines, to the extent that pirates were able to pass as insiders in many different settings.

By looking at culture through the lens of medieval piracy, scholars can to see society in a different light that fills in many of the blanks that have troubled scholars for decades. One of the problems that hinders the study of piracy is the modern view on pirates and pirate nests. Scholars go into their studies with a negative bias that is not often addressed, that piracy is inherently bad, violent, and illicit; these biases will be discussed in more detail in the upcoming chapters. While piracy was certainly violent and illicit in nature, its impact on medieval culture was nowhere near as negative.

Chapter Three: Pirate Nests

Introduction

        "Pirate Nest" is a derogatory term that is used thoughtlessly in modern scholarship. Often used to designate a place as violent, uncouth, and uncivilized, many areas in the Middle Ages have suffered from this terminology. The term creates an unsubstantiated bias against pirate communities and through its negative imagery depicts fiction as facts that require no further investigation. The harmful repercussions of this phrase have yet to be explored thoroughly in the context of the Middle Ages, but it is essential for scholars to rethink their biases and assumptions about what they think they know based on connotations.

        "Pirate Nests" are often based on islands or coastal polities, which means that most of the evidence for this discussion will be skewed towards the Mediterranean; while there may be polities in northern Europe that carry the same reputation, the most prominent "nests" lay within the same waters. The Muslim Emirate of Crete and Taifa Kingdom of Dénia are two examples of polities that are often labeled as "pirate nests." Existing in the tenth and eleventh centuries respectively, both locales were Muslim polities that relied heavily on piracy for multiple reasons. However, neither of them fit the traditional picture of "pirates' nest," which begs the scholar to question whether the label is accurate or just the outcome of bias and prejudice that has been passed down unchecked throughout history.

        On the other side of the confessional line, fifteenth-century Malta and Barcelona (throughout the Middle Ages) shared many of the same characteristics of their earlier Muslim compatriots, but are rarely described as "pirate nests" despite their reliance on piracy to fulfill many different roles in their societies. While religion may or may not have played a role in the piratical actions of the Middle Ages, it is likely that religious bias has influenced

the way that history has been studied and written. This disparity demands a deeper look into the history itself and the historiography surrounding these pirate-heavy polities, to discover if the given accounts and perspectives are being fair and truthful to the past.

Societies that benefited from and relied on piracy to thrive existed and can be an important part of the historical narrative of the Middle Ages. But, before they can be utilized to their fullest extent, scholars must uncover and own the deeply prejudicial and detrimental connotations that the words carry. Once the bias is examined and set aside, it is clear to see that there were pirate societies in the Middle Ages, but they do not fit in the picture that modern culture and scholarship have made of them. Piracy was a versatile tool that many medieval people knew how to employ for their personal, religious, and political benefits. Instead of the dens of iniquity that the term "pirate nests" portrays, they were often thriving societies, connected with many of their neighbors, centers of trade and learning.

Crete

One example of the impact of this historical bias is the Muslim Emirate of Crete in the tenth century. While it is certain that Crete was home to many pirates, the term "pirate nest" that it has carried for decades is an unfair blanket statement that does the island a great disservice: the picture the term paints causes scholars to glance over it without further thought, leaving much to be discovered. There have been modern scholars, such Vassilios Christides, who argue vehemently against this designation. Their arguments against deeming the raids as piratical range from the thriving culture on the island to the fact that the raids should be considered under the theme of *jihad*—Islamic holy war—instead of as piracy. However, this argument is as unfair and unrealistic as the term "pirate nest," for many reasons. There is not a firm dichotomy between these realities: between "pirate nest" and

"thriving society," or "piracy" and "religious warfare." By studying the island of Crete, the actions of its communities, and their reputation among their contemporaries, it becomes clear that piracy is not a precursor to stagnation or the antithesis of religious action. A thriving, educated place can depend on piracy economically, and religious warfare can easily descend into common piracy. Piracy was, above all else, a tool that medieval people of all types knew how to use efficiently; viewing it as merely attacks by renegades and outlaws perpetuates an imperfect narrative of how piracy was viewed and used within the Middle Ages.

Pirates and pirate societies have long been recognized as being present throughout the Middle Ages. By looking at the pertinent example of Islamic Crete between the years 823 and 960, it becomes clear that these terms often hide a more complicated history. However, modern scholars would be doing the era a disservice to disqualify piracy based on religious or political undertones. Piracy played an important role in the events of the medieval Mediterranean, and to comprehend its impact, scholars must see it for what it was. Islamic Crete, like many of its predecessors and successors throughout the Sea, may have been home to pirates and it may have profited greatly from their acts of piracy; this does not mean it was not as civilized and advanced as other Mediterranean ports.

When it comes to widely accepted terms, such as "pirates' nest," modern scholars usually use one of two methods to address it. On one hand, scholars can embrace the term and either A) use it as fact with little substantiating evidence or B) defend their use of it as accurate by citing sources written by the victims of the pirates. On the other hand, some scholars throw out terms such as "pirates' nest" and "pirates" altogether as inaccurate and offensive, by citing sources pertaining to the pirates themselves. Both approaches have their

merits, but neither is without major flaws. The historiography of Islamic Crete has been subjected to both, making it a prime case study for the perceptions of pirate societies.

"For the Byzantines, as well as for a number of modern Byzantine historians, Moslem Crete was the meanest Moslem state, a nest of bloodthirsty pirates," Vassilios Christides states in the preface of his book *The Conquest of Crete by the Arabs (ca. 824): A Turning Point in the Struggle between Byzantium and Islam*, where he endeavors to argue against this perception.[91] The belief that Crete was a pirates' nest is so pervasive that scholars feel confident enough about their claims that they do not need to provide sources or evidence.[92] The fact that there were pirates on Crete during the Islamic occupation is enough to label all actions taken by Muslims in the Aegean as piracy. The Muslims are seen only for the outcomes of their actions—such as destruction, abandonment, or the capture of slaves—and the differences between the acts are not discussed. For example, Hugh Kennedy claims that Crete was a pirate base that "never developed into a fully fledged state."[93] Another example of Crete being designated a pirates' nest is Youval Rotman's *Byzantine Slavery and the Mediterranean World*, in which he explores the relationship between the Cretan "piracy" as he terms it and the lively slave trade that was happening between Constantinople and Crete.[94]

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[91] Christides, *The Conquest of Crete*, xii.

[92] Michael McCormick, *The Origins of the European Economy: Communications and Commerce, c.700-c.900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 202, 519, calls the raiders from Crete pirates based on Byzantine hagiographical sources with no further comment on the accuracy of the statement. See Also: Warren T. Treadgold, *A History of the Byzantine State and Society* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 495; Hugh Kennedy, "The Mediterranean Frontier: Christianity Face to Face with Islam, 600-1050, " in *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, ed. Thomas F.X. Noble and Julia M.H Smith, vol. 3 (Cambridge University Press, 2018), 189; A. A. Vasilʹev, *History of the Byzantine Empire*, 2nd ed., vol. 1, 2 vols. (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1958), 279; Jonathon Shepard, "Byzantine Relations with the Outside World in the Ninth Century: An Introduction, " in *Byzantium in the Ninth Century: Dead or Alive?*, ed. Leslie Brubaker, Society for the Promotion of Byzantine Studies 5 (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 1998), 170. All of these sources mention Crete as being a pirate nest to further their arguments without providing evidence or citation for their claims.

[93] Kennedy, "The Mediterranean Frontier," 189.

[94] Youval Rotman, *Byzantine Slavery and the Mediterranean World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 47-52.

While he is more equitable than other scholars, and applies the term "pirates" to both the

Cretans and the Byzantines, he still paints the island of Crete as the home of pirates and slave

traders. Rotman argues that the main motivation behind the attacks was to capture slaves to

be sold at auction, held for ransom, or used in captive exchanges; if his argument is correct,

these reasonings would fall under our definition of piracy, as the motivation spurring the

attackers into action was the financial windfall behind the slave trade.[95]

Rotman does not question whether or not the Muslims of Crete were pirates, but

looks at the outcome of the raids they undertook to show that above all else, the monetary

benefit was what was behind the attacks on both sides.[96] His discussion on the importance of

slavery in both the Byzantine and Islamic worlds is detailed and compelling. At face value,

his assertions that the Arab Cretans were practicing piracy is both believable and well

argued. However, through analyzing his works further, it becomes more apparent that the

majority of sources that he utilizes as the foundation of his argument hail from the Byzantine

point of view. The Byzantine sources, primarily hagiographical in nature, are taken at their

word that the raids and attacks were solely the actions of pirates, who had no other goal but

to loot and destroy their victims. This dependency on Byzantine sources causes gaps to

appear in his argument, as the actions of the Muslims are not analyzed from their own

perspectives.

On the other side of the argument, several modern scholars argue that Crete was not,

and should not be considered, a "pirates' nest" at all. Scholars such as Christides and George

C. Miles have focused on the refined culture in Crete to argue against the designation of

"pirates' nest" to depict it as a thriving, legitimate society. While no written records survive

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[95] Rotman, *Byzantine Slavery*, 48.
[96] Rotman, *Byzantine Slavery*, 47.

from the Cretan Emirate, it was mentioned in other Islamic literature that it was a place of

learning that attracted students from throughout the Islamic world, even as far away as al-

Andalus.[97] Another example that proves Crete to have an official government, not a hidden

pirate nest, are the Islamic coins that have been found which were minted in the name of the

Cretan Emirs.[98] These coins point to a legitimate society with an accepted political entity that

carried authority not only with their own people, but with the wider economic world around

them. A pirate nest, which is usually seen as an illegitimate and violent place, would not have

been an education center nor had the means to mint its own coinage; therefore, Islamic Crete

cannot be described as such.

Another prevailing argument *against* the designation is the role that *jihad* played in

the Cretan raids, which might have been significant. *Jihad*, or the holy war undertaken by

Muslims, is a main tenet of Islam, and by the era of the Cretan Emirate, *jihad* had evolved

from a war initiated and undertaken by political and religious leaders to a more personal,

hard-to-follow, war made up of volunteers.[99] Instead of being an official war that the Caliphs

called to order, *jihad* had transitioned to a religious act that political authorities could declare,

or to take it a step farther, something that Muslims could undertake on their own if they saw

fit. This loose definition makes it easy to see *jihad* within many Islamic contexts, and hard to

refute its application.

Christides makes a persuasive argument for the case of Cretan raids being *jihad* by

claiming that the raids were not simple hit-and-run attacks for loot, but actually a war of

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[97] Miles, "Byzantium and the Arabs," 15-16. Miles mentions several different sources, but perhaps the most intriguing is Ibn al-Faradi's *Kitab Ta'rikh Ulama al-Andalus*, found in *Bibliotheca Arabico-Hispana*, VIII, ed. by F. Codera (Madrid, 1890-1892), 1, 411-412; 2, 6, 54.

[98] Miles, "Byzantium and the Arabs," 15.

[99] For this evolution see: Bonner, "Some Observations, " 401-427; Robert Haug, "Frontiers and the State in Early Islamic History: Jihād Between Caliphs and Volunteers," *History Compass* 9, no. 8 (2011): 634-643.

attrition and consolidation of power.[100] He states that Crete was actually conquering certain

islands and claiming authority over them, based on Byzantine sources discussing their

abandonment of islands within the Aegean.[101] If this argument is believed, then *jihad* is a

clear factor in the raids, as the Cretans were furthering the influence of the Dar al-Islam with

their attacks. In this line of thinking, questions of an official call to war or permission do not

factor into the overall feasibility of the thesis, because the outcome is clear and falls under

the goals of *jihad* as a whole.

Byzantine sources from the ninth and tenth centuries are a main proponent of

arguments pertaining to Crete's pirate status. Hagiographical texts make up the bulk of these

sources because they provide literary descriptions of attacks and the consequences of the

attacks throughout the Aegean Sea from the Byzantine perspective. However, as

informational as these sources may be, they are not as detailed as scholars would like to

think. Through analysis of the texts in question, it becomes clear that a lot of theorizing and

extrapolation has taken place within modern scholarship. The texts that will be analyzed in

this section are: "The Life of St. Theoktiste of Lesbos," "The Life of St. Athanasia of

Aegina," and "The Life of St. Theodora of Thessalonike."

"The Life of St. Theoktiste of Lesbos" is actually a "story within a story" within

Niketas Magistros' account of his own travels to Crete in 910 as an envoy of the Byzantine

Emperor Leo VI (r. 886-912).[102] Because of the similarities between this story and that of an

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[100] Christides, "The Raids of the Moslems," 94.

[101] Christides, "The Raids of the Moslems," 95-96: Christides mentions that Naxos, Paros, and Ios can be assumed to be Cretan tributaries, while Aegina, Neon, and Elaphonesos might have been semi-permanent bases. More discussion on the merit of his argument below.

[102] Angela C. Hero, "Introduction to the Life of St. Theoktiste of Lesbos," in *Holy Women of Byzantium: Ten Saints' Lives in English Translation*, ed. Alice-Mary Talbot, Byzantine Saints' Lives in Translation (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1996), 95-96. See also: Kenneth M. Setton, "On the Raids of the Moslems in the Aegean in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries and Their Alleged Occupation of Athens," *American Journal of Archaeology* 58, no. 4 (1954) 313.

earlier *vita* (that of St. Mary of Egypt), it is unclear if the tale is purely a legendary work or

an accurate story that borrows from a legend for its prose.[103] As the modern scholars

discussed here base their use of it on the understanding that it is factual, this chapter will

continue in the same regard. Theoktiste's story, told to Niketas by a hermit named Symeon,

begins when she is taken captive by "Arab pirates from Crete" on her native island of

Lesbos at eighteen years old. She manages to escape on the island of Paros, where she spends

the next thirty-five years as a hermit.[104] George C. Miles uses this information and claims

that the attack in question must have happened around the year 837.[105] Her saintliness would

become known when a hunter visits the island and convinced her to share her story; when he

later returned and found her dead, he tried to take her hand with him as a relic only to be

unable to leave the island until returning the hand to its place, thus cementing her status as a

saint.[106]

This source has been cited throughout the historiography concerning the Emirate of

Crete and early medieval Byzantium. However, it is more useful to view it as evidence of the

cultural beliefs of the time than as solid evidence of events. Its similarities with other saints'

lives calls into question the authenticity of what actually happened; nonetheless, it is

accurately set within its own time period and setting. This detail allows historians to use it as

a tool to learn about the common assumptions and beliefs within the author's culture.

Therefore, scholars can easily assume that raids undertaken by the Arabs of Crete against the

islands of the Aegean were commonplace, but that names and places given may just be

placeholders. Interestingly, Niketas never refers to the Arabs as pirates, instead stating:

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[103] Hero, "Introduction to St. Theoktiste," 96.
[104] Hero, "Introduction to St. Theoktiste," 96.
[105] Miles, "Byzantium and the Arabs," 8
[106] Hero, "Introduction to St. Theoktiste," 95.

But one night, Arabs from Crete under their leader, the notorious Nisiris, raided <the village> and took everyone prisoner. At dawn, after chanting the song of victory, they set sail and came to anchor at this island <of Paros>. They brought out the prisoners, and started to assess and settle the price <of each prisoner>.[107]

While acquiring slaves was their motivation, this source does not give us any indication of a greater goal behind the Cretans' attacks, making it easy to categorize it as a pirate attack: they attacked to get slaves, left when they had taken all they could, and quickly set about making a profit for themselves. Although this source highlights the Byzantine views and knowledge of the raids, it should be viewed in a hesitant fashion due to the inherent biases and propaganda that are common in this type of text. Hagiographies are, above all else, religious texts written to achieve religious goals, meaning that the events described in them must be analyzed for both their literary stories and their historical truths. From this story, scholars can therefore conclude that the *Byzantine* victims—as opposed to the Muslim attackers—viewed the raids as random piratical attacks and not as attacks of conquest or holy war.

The "Life of St. Athanasia," written by an anonymous source at the beginning of the tenth century, offers a more detailed look at the Byzantine perspective of the Muslim raids. A saint who is believed to have lived in the first half of the ninth century, this account details her unwanted marriages and her eventual life as a nun.[108] At the beginning of her story, she is unwillingly married only for her husband to be killed in a raid by "barbarian Maurousioi"

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[107] Magistros, "The Life of Our Blessed Mother Theoktiste of Lesbos Who Practiced Asceticism and Died on the Island Paros," in *Holy Women of Byzantium,* trans. Angela C. Hero, (see note 73), 110-111.

[108] Lee Francis Sherry, "Introduction to the Life of St. Athanasia of Aegina," in *Holy Women of Byzantium* (See note 73), 137.

sixteen days later.[109] This is an ambiguous term for several reasons. Its literal meaning is simply "barbarian Moors," which could signify a number of different groups; modern scholars have interpreted it in several opposing ways that should be discussed at length.

Lee Francis Sherry notes in his translation that while it traditionally is used to describe "North African Moors or Berber… here by a Byzantine literary metonymy [it means] Spanish or African Muslims."[110] Sherry dates the attack to shortly after the Muslim conquest of Crete in the 820s, and implies that "barbarian Maurousioi" in this context is referring to the Spanish Muslims who were then residing on Crete. George C. Miles takes it one step further and claims that the attack in question must have happened around the year 837, by back dating from the information given within Niketas' account.[111] However, other scholars date the attack earlier: Vassilios Christides puts the attack as happening as early as between 805 and 807, and claims the perpetrators originated from North Africa. While he provides evidence that Muslims from North Africa were raiding and attacking the northern islands and coasts of the Mediterranean at this time, his description of the attack described in the vita of St. Athanasia is incorrect.[112] He states that "They (the African Muslims) killed Saint Athanasia's brother, and she along with her husband decided to move to the mainland" which, in fact, describes "The Life of St. Theodora of Thessalonike."[113] Unlike the "Life of St. Athanasia," Theodora can be firmly dated as living between 812 and 892 based on the facts included in her *vita*, making it impossible for the attacks in her life to have happened as

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[109] Anonymous, "The Life and Conduct of Our Blessed Mother, Anthanasia, and a Partial Narration of Her Miracles," trans. Les Francis Sherry, in Talbot, *Holy Women of Byzantium* (See note 73), 143.

[110] Sherry, " The Life of St. Anthanasia," 143, n. 21.

[111] Miles, "Byzantium and the Arabs," 8.

[112] Christides, *Conquest of Crete*, 158; Christides cites in particular attacks on the island Patras and Bari on the southern coast of Italy.

[113] Christides, *Conquest of Crete*, p. 158.

early as Christides claims.[114] Therefore, it is much more likely that Sherry's assertion that the attack took place within the 820s and that the attackers originated from Crete is closer to the truth.

Finally, "The Life of St. Theodora" is the sole hagiographical tale analyzed in this chapter with confirmed dates, calculated based on information given on events such as that of her death, and events the author includes throughout the work, as well as the level of detail he takes in his descriptions of her life.[115] Written in 894, just two years after her death, by a cleric named Gregory, her *vita* is the longest biography of a Byzantine holy woman to survive today.[116] Spanning the whole of her life, the Cretan raids only appear twice throughout the work: one small comment in the third chapter about her home island of Aegina and the entirety of chapter six. These references detail how the island was raided so frequently by Muslims that the residents abandoned it to move to safer locations on the mainland. Analyzing these sections allows scholars a chance to see the lasting effect the Islamic raids had on Byzantine society.

When stating where Theodora was born and raised, Gregory notes:

> Thus the birthplace of the Blessed <Theodora> was one of the islands of Hellas, Aegina by name. It was formerly illustrious in lands of the west, but after falling into the hands of the Ishmaelites, through the will of God, it has now been left deserted and obscure.[117]

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[114] Alice-Mary Talbot, "Introduction to the Life of St. Theodora of Thessalonike," in Talbot, *Holy Women of Byzantium*, 159.

[115] Alice-Mary Talbot, "Introduction to the Life of St. Theodora of Thessalonike," 160.

[116] Alice-Mary Talbot, "Introduction to the Life of St. Theodora of Thessalonike," 160-161.

[117] Gregory, "Life and Conduct of Our Blessed Mother Theodora of Thessalonike," in Talbot, *Holy Women of Byzantium,* 165-166.

This should be an infuriatingly vague comment for modern historians. There is no information given for the date of the abandonment, nor is the terminology specific enough to know exactly who the attackers were. During the ninth and tenth centuries, Aegina was home to many Islamic ships, not all of them belonging to the Emirate of Crete.[118] It would be unfair, and unrealistic, to make the Cretans the perpetrators of every raid made by a Muslim ship, since so many were active at the same time and place. Furthermore, this quote states that the island was abandoned, not conquered or settled by the attackers; the emigration of one set of people does not immediately signify the immigration of another.

In chapter six, Gregory goes into more detail about the attack that influenced Theodora to move to the mainland. While it is vague about the attackers, calling them only Saracens and not mentioning their place of origin or political affiliation, it does give us more details about why the Muslims attacked Aegina. "... and they took most of the inhabitants prisoner, but some they put to the sword," indicates that the motivation behind the attacks was primarily for captives that could be used as slaves or for ransom.[119] The frequency of the attacks, stated as occurring "unexpectedly on a daily basis," is the reason that Theodora, her husband, and her father left Aegina and moved to Thessalonike; the source does not state that the island had been abandoned, so one can assume that the attacks persisted and the full abandonment took place at a later time.[120] This source indicates that Aegina had a serious pirate problem, with frequent raids that were motivated by the trade in slaves that would eventually cause the population to migrate to safer shores.

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[118] Christides, *Conquest of Crete*, 158-161, details the other Muslim parties actively raiding with the Aegean area, specifically from North Africa and the different emirates of Syria.
[119] Gregory, "Life of Theodora," 168.
[120] Gregory, "Life of Theodora," 168.

The sources analyzed in this chapter are by no means the full scope of the sources

pertaining to the subject of Cretan raids against Byzantine islands. To do this subject justice,

a much longer work is needed to encompass all the texts that speak on the matter. However,

the three saints' lives mentioned above are some of the most common and most cited sources

in modern scholarship regarding the raids. They are wonderful sources to begin with but are

overall lacking in enough detail to stake a real claim about whether the Cretans were solely

pirates or something else. The Byzantine islands in the Aegean were raided heavily by

Muslim sailors; to begin to understand the situation fully, scholars must consider other

sources as well.

Dénia

Perhaps one of the most powerful of the taifa kingdoms of the eleventh century,

Dénia was located on the eastern coast of the Iberian Peninsula. Claiming much of the prime

trading ports and having been one of the main locations for the Cordoban navy, Dénia

quickly realized the utility of maritime economic activity.[121] However, instead of relying

solely on shipping and trade, taxation on piratical loot became a main source of income for

the Dénian kingdom. Known as a Pirate Kingdom by both its contemporaries and modern

scholars, Dénia's piratical prowess would become known throughout the western

Mediterranean after it conquered the Balearic Islands—which it used as pirate bases from

which to attack the seas from the coast of Iberia to the coast of Italy. Dénia is a prime

example that pirate societies do not all fit in with the negative reputation that "pirate nest"

carries.

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[121] Bruce, "Piracy as Statecraft," 238.

While Dénia's first rulers, Mujāhid al-Almiri (d. 1044) and his son ʿAlī (r. 1045-1076), did not employ pirates personally, they enacted pro-pirate laws to ensure their ports were pirate friendly and the tax on loot was reasonable—small enough to not negatively impact pirates' trade and sales of their goods, but large enough to be a major part of the Dénian economy.[122] Dénia's predilection for piracy may have led scholars to label it a Pirate Kingdom, or Pirate Nest, but Dénia is much more complicated than those terms imply. By studying Dénian actions and relationship with her neighbors in conjunction with the eleventh-century Islamic viewpoint of piracy and the greater historiography of medieval piracy, it becomes clear that Dénia and her pirates were an important piece in the greater medieval narrative. Dénia illuminates not just the evolution and utility of piracy in the Middle Ages, but also the influence it had on the overarching culture and history of the Western world. This further nullifies the term "pirates' nest".

To support its licit trade network, Dénia also had a robust diplomatic strategy. Travis Bruce explores the diplomatic relationship between Barcelona and Dénia in multiple articles. Mujāhid crafted a careful rapport with the Counts of Barcelona that did not halt or hinder Dénia's piratical policies.[123] One factor that allowed for both piracy and diplomacy is that the violent maritime action was not one-sided—Barcelona used similar tactics as well.[124] While their relationship will be discussed more in depth later in this chapter, it is important to note that evidence of their diplomacy exists today not only in legal documents but also in personal letters and gold coins. The letters indicate a mutual respect and knowledge of each other

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[122] Bruce, "Piracy as Statecraft," 237.

[123] Bruce, "An Intercultural Dialogue," 4.

[124] Bruce, "An Intercultural Dialogue," 4-5. It is my belief that Barcelona could also be considered a pirate nest during the eleventh century, based largely on Bruce's discussion of their violent actions in this article. While this theory still needs to be researched, the concept begs the question of prejudice and how different localities are given derogatory labels such as "pirate nest."

across confessional lines between rulers. The coins, found in Barcelonian economic records, probably came from Dénia, indicating that a strong economic relationship existed between the two opposing states.[125] Diplomacy was an activity that the rulers of Dénia took very seriously and their dedication to it is still visible in records today.

Furthermore, while bustling trade and foreign relations can offer one portrait of a society, nothing can illuminate a society more than its culture can. Today, pirate nests have a reputation of being violent, hidden, dens of depravity; the negative connotation associated with them has been transposed directly into the Middle Ages. However, examples like Crete and Dénia prove that this is a misnomer. Dénia's cultural value can be seen by tracking the travelers and academics that passed through or made their homes there. Mujāhid and ʿAlī made a conscious effort to build a reputation of Dénia having the best scholars—and Dénia did draw in some of the best.[126] The scholars attracted to Dénia crossed religious lines and included many different subjects of expertise, such as educational training for physicians, administrative personnel, and *'ulamā* (Islamic religious scholars).[127] Dénia purposefully created a relatively safe environment for Jewish scholars, which not only brought the kingdom much prestige throughout the Mediterranean but also gave Dénia an ample source of credibility because many of the scholars drawn to the Dénian court had previously lived and worked at the court of the Cordoban Caliphate.[128]

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[125] Bruce, "An Intercultural Dialogue," 15-18. Coinage is a very complex issue, for several reasons. Bruce explains that Dénia's coins are hard to trace, as Mujāhid tried to tie Dénia to Valencia in many ways, including using their mint and coins. Another problem is that Catalan scribes who were unfamiliar with the Kingdom of Dénia may have replaced it in sources with ones they were more knowledgeable about, such as Tortosa or Valencia.

[126] Travis Bruce, "The Taifa of Denia and the Jewish Networks of the Medieval Mediterranean: A Study of the Cairo Geniza and Other Documents," *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies* 10, no. 2 (July 2017): 147-166, 153.

[127] Bruce, "The Taifa of Dénia and the Jewish Networks," 152.

[128] Bruce, "The Taifa of Dénia and the Jewish Networks," 154.

It would be impossible to deny the fact that Dénia and Crete were both central hubs for piratical activity that derived much of their success from the actions of their pirates; however, neither of these "pirate nests" fit the modern bill of violent, reclusive places filled with outlaws. They were both highly connected with their neighbors and trade partners, and were centers for learning and scholarship in their own right. They both boasted of a legitimate government that was able to not only enforce laws and taxation, but form diplomatic relationships. In these cases, piracy was not a detriment to society, but a boon.

Christian Pirate Nests

So far, we have analyzed two places that have been recognized as "pirate nests" by their contemporaries and modern scholars alike. However, "pirate nest" is not the only label that Dénia and Crete share: they were both Muslim polities as well. In fact, the term is most commonly used to describe Muslim territories and actions, and not those of their Christian contemporaries. There are many reasons that this discrepancy may exist, from bias in the sources themselves to a predilection for using Latin over Arabic sources. While it may be easy to see and understand where this disparity originates, that does not excuse modern scholars from challenging the status quo. The question that must be asked, therefore, is whether are Christian polities that fit the same descriptions as their Muslim counterparts. If scholars can accept that medieval "pirate nests" are not, by definition, shadowy dens of depravity, but just places that rely more heavily on piracy to meet their economic and military goals, more Christian territories begin to look like "pirate nests." Some examples of such places are the city of Barcelona on the northeast coast of Iberia and the islands of Malta and Rhodes in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Barcelona has come up in this work several times in relationship with Dénia. However, its piratical actions deserve an in-depth analysis that at this time has not been done. While Travis Bruce states that Barcelona's role on the coast was "characterized by raids, exacting tributes, and conquest," the city's piratical actions have yet to be explored fully.[129] Marie Kelleher adds to the field of the city's use of pirates in her article about the 1311 famine. When faced with a grain shortage, the city turned to piracy to feed its citizens, going so far as to attack grain shipments meant for other Iberian cities.[130] Barcelona used many legal strategies during this time to protect its citizens, but the economic demand for piracy was paramount. With no other way to survive, Barcelona used whatever tools it could, even if that tool depended on violent seizures of goods at sea. These are two examples that piracy originating from Barcelona was commonplace at some level, yet the term "pirate nest" is not used to describe it or its actions.

On the other side of the Mediterranean, Malta and Rhodes slowly became centers of maritime violence. Home to the Knights Hospitaller, the activity coming out of these islands was labeled as holy war, with their corsairs ordered to attack any enemy of Christianity, from infidels to "schismatic Greeks."[131] Mark Aloisio has published a thorough discussion on how this actually played out in regards to Malta: the Maltese corsairs quickly became the ruling class aristocracy of the island and used their fleets for their own personal gains.[132] The Hospitallers located on these islands were indicted in multiple lawsuits pertaining to illicit piracy, to the extent that King Marti of the Crown of Aragon issued a letter of marque against

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[129] Bruce, "An Intercultural Dialogue," 3.
[130] Kelleher, "The Sea of Our City, " 1.
[131] Luttrell, "The Earliest Documents on the Hospitaller Corso at Rhodes," 178.
[132] Aloisio, "The Maltese Corso," 194-196.

them in 1400 and 1401.[133] To further cement the argument that these islands could be defined as "pirate nests," Molly Greene's book *Catholic Pirates and Greek Merchants: A Maritime History of the Early Modern Mediterranean* studies the actions the Hospitallers engaged in from their base on Malta. Greene shows that the Knights, while claiming to be fighting holy war, actually attacked in a piratical fashion any ship that looked like a good target, oftentimes attacking Greek Christians as well as their non-Christian targets.[134] This points to a society that is organized around and funded by piracy, yet the term "pirate nest" has not been connected to them in any substantial way.

It is clear that the same circumstances that exist in Muslim polities that are labeled as "pirate nests" are shared in Christian societies. The discrepancy surrounding which places receive the derogatory label cannot be reasoned away by a difference in their actions or legitimacy. It must be called out for what it is: a prejudice in sources and in scholarship. If scholars are able to utilize the term in a more judicial way, where it is applied equally across confessional lines, the actions of these societies begin to become clearer. If piratical actions can be found at the base of legitimate societies in the Christian world, perhaps the term "pirate nest" should not carry the negative connotation it does for Muslim lands.

The Dichotomy of a Thriving Society

Medieval piracy, like all things, does not exist in a vacuum. It is therefore important to situate Dénian piracy within the historiography of Islamic piracy as a whole. The most infamous Islamic "pirates' nest" is that of tenth-century Crete; however, the lead scholar on the subject would urge us not to consider it a pirates' nest at all. Vassilios Christides has

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[133] Tai, "Restitution and the Definition of a Pirate," 50-51.
[134] Molly Greene, *Catholic Pirates and Greek Merchants: A Maritime History of the Mediterranean* (Princton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 40.

published extensively about Crete and is passionate about it being mislabeled as a "pirate nest." His overarching argument is that "pirate nests" are undeveloped, uncivilized places that are dependent on piracy. If a location has an elite culture, diplomatic ties, legitimate trade, etc. it should not be labeled a pirate nest at all.[135]

Recently, Christides published an article comparing the maritime actions of Crete and Dénia, to minimum effect.[136] His argument is that while Dénian maritime actions can accurately be labeled piracy, because they misuse *jihad of the sea* for purely economic and not religious purposes, Cretan maritime actions should not be seen as piracy for a handful of reasons.[137] First, the actions of the Cretans were not aimless raids but strategic attacks to further the reach of the *dār al-Islam*, as seen in hagiographical sources.[138] Second, unnecessary violence was not permitted—and any violent action taken by the Cretans was mirrored, and inspired, by their Byzantine adversaries as well.[139] Third, Crete had a legitimate trade network, where Byzantine ships were free to call at ports (when they had special permission) and Cretan ships traveled to Constantinople. Christides argues that there could not have been piracy because it would have made their legitimate trade unprofitable.[140] Finally, and perhaps most illogically, he argues that the exchange of prisoners outweighed the profitability of slavery: i.e. the exchange of prisoners between the Byzantine Empire and

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[135] Christides, *The Conquest of Crete.* This book provides the best example for Christides' argument and evidence, as it details the history of the Emirate of Crete from start to finish, and explores many aspects of its society. For other scholars who share the idea that Crete had an established Islamic society, see: Miles, "Byzantium and the Arabs," 1-32.

[136] Vassilios Christides, "Piracy, Privateering and Maritime Violent Actions: Maritime Violent Activities of the Taifa of Dénia in Spain (11th c.) vs. the Arab Maritime Jihād in the Eastern Mediterranean from the Middle of the 7th to the 11th Century," *Seeraub im Mittelmeerraum: Piraterie, Korsarentum und maritime Gewalt von der Antike bis zur Neuzeit*, ed. Nikolas Jaspert and Sebastian Kolditz (Paderborn: C.H. Beck, 2013) 199-208.

[137] Christides, "Piracy, Privateering and Maritime Violent Actions," 200.

[138] Christides, "Piracy, Privateering and Maritime Violent Actions," 201.

[139] Christides, "Piracy, Privateering and Maritime Violent Actions," 203.

[140] Christides, "Piracy, Privateering and Maritime Violent Actions," 203-204.

the *dār al-Islam* ensured that Crete would not have had a large slave trade.[141] He summarily

states that Bruce's article "Piracy as Statecraft: The Mediterranean Policies of the

Fifth/Eleventh-Century Taifa of Dénia" is flawed for stating that Dénia used its piracy to

legitimize its government, as it was only a "small Arab state" that supported its "poor

economy" by "maritime plundering raids."[142]

However, Christides fails to cite any of the other works in Bruce's extensive

bibliography pertaining to Dénia. Bruce has been studying Dénia and its piracy since the

early 2000s and has approached the subject from a wide variety of angles. He uses Dénia's

interactions with the greater Mediterranean world to explore not only its piracy, but also its

politics, economics, statecraft, and culture. By analyzing the entirety of Bruce's work, it

becomes clear that Dénia had a thriving society, even while it relied heavily on piracy to fill

its coffers.

Piracy was a main source of income for Dénia, but it was by no means its only

enterprise. Dénia also had a large, widespread trade network that stretched from Barcelona to

Egypt. Bruce uses documents from the Cairo Geniza and the interactions of the Dénian Jews

throughout the Mediterranean to illuminate Dénia's legitimate shipping endeavors. ʿAlī's

personal ship appears in ledgers multiple times, reporting normal trade activities. Bruce

points out that ʿAlī is not mentioned as an emir, ruler, or pirate, but is treated as just another

merchant, belying a status quo where one can be both merchant and pirate in different times

and places.[143] Beside the personal mentionings of ʿAlī's mercantile activities, Dénia itself

was highly represented in the Geniza—Bruce claims it was the "Andalusi port that figures

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[141] Christides, "Piracy, Privateering and Maritime Violent Actions," 206-7.

[142] Christides, "Piracy, Privateering and Maritime Violent Actions," 208. For the article in question: Bruce, "Piracy as Statecraft," 235-248.

[143]Bruce, "The Taifa of Dénia and the Jewish Networks," 158.

the most often in the Cairo Geniza," indicating on a broader level the legitimacy of Dénia as market place and port.[144] Its prominent place within the Geniza also illustrates the working relationship that Dénia had with its *dhimmi* populations, especially with the Jewish community. Dénia provided the ships for the Jewish merchants to sail on, while the Jews provided the expertise and connections that they had in distant ports.[145]

Christides may have a point with his argument that pirate nests cannot also be thriving societies, but it is not the one he is trying to make. Bruce's research has exposed the pirate kingdom of Dénia thoroughly and paints a picture of a thriving society because of its piracy. Therefore, it may be better stated that the use of modern prejudices does not translate correctly into the Middle Ages; the strength of Christides' research is not so much in his argument, but in what his argument exposes about scholars' views on the subject as a whole. In the modern world, a pirate nest may not be able to be a thriving society, but Christides' insistence that the same idea can be transposed on the medieval Mediterranean is anachronistic. However easy it is to see this problem, reconciling the two points of this scale is quite difficult from a logical viewpoint. If a place is known to rely on piracy, how then can it also be seen as a legitimate government? How can piracy not have a negative effect on foreign relations?

Conclusion

Modern views of pirates are both overly romanticized and unfairly negative. Receiving the designation "pirates' nest" almost guarantees that a location will be relegated to the shadows and passed over as non-consequential. The Muslim Emirate of Crete and the Taifa Kingdom of Dénia are perfect case studies to highlight the problems inherent in this

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[144] Bruce, "The Taifa of Dénia and the Jewish Networks," 159.
[145] Bruce, "The Taifa of Dénia and the Jewish Networks," 160.

term; across the confessional line, Barcelona, Rhodes and Malta all share of many characteristics of a "pirate nest" but do not suffer the label. The sources are often contradictory and hard to interpret accurately, making it easy for scholars to form a limited viewpoint based on the evidence that they have studied. However, by studying the primary sources and the modern paradigms revolving around these polities and the actions of their residents, the picture becomes much more vibrant and complex.

"Pirate Nest" and "Thriving Societies" are, on the surface, considered to be diametrically opposed terms; one could not be the other. However, this mindset has made it impossible to see the whole picture. Crete and Dénia were thriving civilizations which also had a lively piratical economy that bolstered their economies with the slaves and treasure it brought to the polities. They were not seen as only a pirates' nest by their contemporaries, even if that was one of the characteristics they were known for. Barcelona, Malta, and Rhodes have all the same characteristics as other medieval "pirate nests" but are considered to be legitimate thriving societies in their own rights. It is the inherent biases and prejudice that have been born from the passing of history surrounding the term "pirate nest" that continue to push these places into the shadows of academia. These examples call into question the other so-called "pirate nests" of the Middle Ages and the way history has remembered them. When scholars are able to put aside the prejudice of the terms, it becomes clear that pirate societies are places that thrive with all of the aspects that historians investigate: culture, politics, economics, religion, education. By relegating pirate societies to the backgrounds of history, scholars are forfeiting ample sources of evidence that could be able to illuminate the Middle Ages in new ways. If the bias surrounding a simple term can have such a profound influence, it is imperative that scholars look at the impact that the

reputation surrounding piracy has had on the study and making of the greater history of the

Middle Ages.

Chapter Four: Pirates and the Making of History

Introduction

There is a gripping historical tale that has become popularized in recent years that goes something like this: Jeanne de Clisson: wife, mother, pirate. Taking place against the backdrop of the beginning of the Hundred Years War between the coasts of England and Brittany, Jeanne's story is one of heartbreak and revenge. After her aristocratic husband is killed under false pretenses by the French king, Jeanne turns her heartbreak into a decade-long reign of piracy and treachery, going as far as to ally herself with the King of England, Edward III. It's a moving tale, believable because of the large number of sources that have circulated it since her death. However, while it is portrayed as historical fact, the reality is that it is a byproduct of the circular citation and romanticization, pushing it into the realm of myth and fiction.

Piracy is a beloved trope in modern literature. It has been romanticized and mythologized for generations. A desired aspect of a good pirate story is that it is, seemingly, grounded in historical fact. The daring battles and treasures are contextualized into the historical narrative, making the fictional stories appear real. While many of the most famous pirate tales have elements of truth, they also carry the baggage of their legends—the aggrandized tales of daring and brutality that make people listen and spread the tale. However, the popular beliefs surrounding piracy bias the academic study of it, making it hard to discern what is fiction and what is fact. This is not because researchers aren't doing their due diligence, but because the topics they choose and the sources they rely on are all shrouded in biases that have yet to be addressed. This makes piracy a uniquely positioned

tool that can allow historians to study the influence of popular culture on the making of history.

In today's culture, piracy carries with it a fluid reputation that is often at odds with itself; it is romanticized in popular culture and denigrated in real life situations as violent and subversive. This dual reputation is easily apparent in the scholarship pertaining to medieval piracy. While piratical tales may keep some historical facts alive, they also ensure that other facets of history remain unstudied. This reputation must be acknowledged and analyzed to truly understand the impact it is having on the study and understanding of history; it is not simply pushing topics to the shadows, it's the assumption that our modern understanding of it is universal and therefore does not require further exploration.

To begin to understand the phenomenon of the evolution from historical fact to legend, the idea and progression of piracy can be immensely helpful. Jeanne de Clisson's story is perhaps the easiest example to follow and research, but her reputation is not the only one to have been transformed under the pirate label. The histories of the Muslim Emirate of Crete and the Taifa Kingdom of Dénia were similarly impacted by their piratical labels, while the blatant lack of piratical regarding to polities such as Barcelona and Malta ensured them a more favorable light as time has gone by. In this chapter, a dual approach will be taken to understand the impact that piracy has had on the study of history. First, a look at the negative connotations that follow the label and the outcomes of these long-held, inaccurate beliefs; next, an examination into the positive effects of piracy on society and how enhanced study of it may help the collective modern understanding of the medieval past; finally, a thorough examination of the slippery progression from fact to legend will take place to emphasize the need to re-evaluate common opinions and facts regularly.

Legends can be as useful a tool to historians as political treatises, religious doctrines, or economic records—if scholars are able to discern which parts of the story have been embellished. If scholars accept the status quo as it is, many factors that rely on legend and preconceived modern ideals will be taken as fact. By looking at medieval piracy and the common beliefs that surround it, this cycle of legend into fact is discernible to the critical eye. Once a legend is traced back to its origin, scholars can to learn more about the past that created the story and about how history has been created before our time.

The Legend of Jeanne de Clisson

Telling tales of wonder, adventure, and revenge is a beloved pastime of many cultures, modern ones included. The daring rebel seeking justice is an archetype that is repeated throughout many genres and settings. The modern telling of the story of Jeanne de Clisson fits firmly in this paradigm of wonder, adventure and revenge. Through examination of both the aspects of her legend which have become accepted and retold as truth, coupled with which media and scholarship have perpetuated her tale, we can begin to understand the lure of her story and the problems inherent in its retellings.

The beginning of her story is widely accepted and grounded in historical evidence. In 1343, Olivier III de Clisson was beheaded by the French King Philip VI for treason. While there are some generalized differences in the lead-up to his death, concerning whether or not he was a traitor and whether he was arrested prior to his arrival in Paris or unexpectedly at a festival upon his arrival, his ultimate demise is the same across all accounts.[146] His head or

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[146] Laura Sook Duncombe, *Pirate Women: The Princesses, Prostitutes, and Privateers Who Ruled the Seven Seas* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2019), 47. Duncombe claims that de Clisson was thought to be a traitor, though it is unclear whether he was one or not, due to the low amount of his ransom and that he was captured as soon as he reached French soil. See also: Ulrike Klausmann, Marion Meinzerin, and Gabriel Kuhn, *Women Pirates and the Politics of the Jolly Roger* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1997), 122, who state that de Clisson was hung from the gates rather than beheaded.

body, in some accounts, was displayed from the castle walls of Nantes as a warning to deter

other traitors. Following his death, accounts begin to twist and change in various ways.[147]

Jeanne's response to the news of her husband's death is dramatic in all accounts.

Several portray her rounding up her men, and attacking and capturing the castle of their

former ally, Charles de Blois, before taking to sea.[148] Other stories have her first taking her

young sons to see their father's head/body on the walls of Nantes, to cement the pain and the

need for revenge in her sons, before continuing on to attack an unsuspecting castle.[149] After

being pushed from that mysterious holding, Jeanne and her men took to the sea in three ships.

In most accounts she sold her land and possessions to pay for the ships; a few outliers have

her receiving her initial ships from the King of England, Edward III.[150]

Once at sea, Jeanne attacked the coast of France indiscriminately and violently for the

next decade or so.[151] Tales of her personally killing every person in her path and leaving only

one messenger alive in each town are popular features of her legend.[152] The gruesomeness of

her attacks challenge modern delicacies, as she was not only the first to attack and to kill,

indiscriminate of the victim's age or gender, but she did so with her young sons at her side.

Her family's plight is a common theme among the tales, as is the death of the younger boy by

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[147] Klausmann et al., *Women Pirates*, 122.

[148] Jason Porath, *Tough Mothers: Amazing Stories of History's Mightiest Matriarchs* (New York: Dey St., an imprint of William Morrow, 2018).

[149] Duncombe, *Pirate Women*, 48. See also: Klausman et al., *Women Pirates*, 122.

[150] For Jeanne selling her goods: Duncombe, *Pirate Women*, 48; Klausman et al., *Women Pirates*, 122; Philip Gosse, *The History of Piracy* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2007), 97. For Jeanne being gifted the ships: Jessica Amanda Salmonson, *The Encyclopedia of Amazons: Women Warriors from Antiquity to the Modern Era* (New York: Paragon House, 1991), 132. For information about the Hundred Years War: Kenneth Alan Fowler, ed., *The Hundred Years War*, (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1971); Desmond Seward, *The Hundred Years War: The English in France* (New York, NY: Atheneum, 1982).

[151] Duncombe, *Pirate Women*, 50, claims that "Jeanne's piratical career lasted for a total of thirteen years," which would have put her as pirating from around 1343 to 1356. The other accounts cited in this paper are more vague and do not give set time periods.

[152] Duncombe, *Pirate Women*, 49.

exposure when the three of them are lost at sea after a storm.[153] The dramatics of her antics

only increase with each retelling.

Jeanne's piratical revenge attacks did not remain a personal vendetta for long. At

some point in the first years following her husband's death, she met and allied with Edward

III, who funded a fleet of ships known as the "Black Fleet" for her, and supported her actions

against his French enemies.[154] This is an important detail of her story, as it connects her

actions with that great medieval conflict, the Hundred Years War. Her actions become not

those of a grieving widow, but those of a shrewd general. While her pain and revenge are

always the center focus in the story, the alliance paints her as an important historical figure,

who not only contributed to the war effort but also demonstrated a level of personal agency

that is not often assumed for women in the fourteenth century. She is depicted as an

important ally of King Edward, and her attacks on both land and sea are portrayed as having

a significant multilayered impact on France. Jeanne's accolades include helping the English

war effort, disturbing the shipping lanes, and creating a culture of fear among the coastal

residents. Some popular sources go as far as to claim that Jeanne not only assisted the

English with her piratical attacks, but also used her fleet to smuggle goods into the island

kingdom during wartime.[155]

The tale of the "Lioness of Brittany," with her fleet of black ships with blood red

sails, is dramatic and full of suspense. Its details are grounded just enough in history to make

its listeners believe in her escapades. Widows avenging their husbands' wrongful deaths,

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[153] Duncombe, *Pirate Women*, 50; For more dramatic retellings, see Klausman et al., *Women Pirates*, 121-125, and Porath, *Tough Mothers* .

[154] Duncombe, *Pirate Women*, 50; Salmonson, *The Encyclopedia of Amazons*, 132; Porath, *Tough Mothers*.

[155] Samantha Henman et al., "Vengeful Facts about Jeanne De Clisson, 'The Lioness of Brittany,'" Factinate, August 17, 2020, https://www.factinate.com/people/34-vengeful-facts-about-jeanne-de-clisson-the-lioness-of-brittany/. See also: Daniel Rennie, "How Female Pirate Jeanne de Clisson Terrorized the King of France," All That's Interesting (All That's Interesting, August 7, 2018), https://allthatsinteresting.com/jeanne-de-clisson.

mothers protecting their children, pirates interacting with nobility—these literary tropes are just some of the elements that endear her story to modern audiences. However, as entertaining and memorable as her tale is, the inherent problem of its dissemination is palpable, but not considered. Jeanne de Clisson's story is told not as a fairy tale, nor as legend, but as historical fact. The narrators of her story provide sources for their facts, convincing their readers of their authority and legitimacy. While a good bibliography is usually one of the telltale signs of good scholarship, for the story of Jeanne de Clisson, a long bibliography does not equal fact.

The Negative Impact of Labels

Piracy today carries with it a dark and violent reputation of illicit actions taken at will. This reputation, coupled with the belief that it was a widespread and common occurrence in the Middle Ages, often regulates it to the shadows of academic inquiry: while piracy is mentioned in many, if not a majority, of works dedicated to the Middle Ages, it is rarely analyzed or given more than a footnote to acknowledge its presence. The questions of why, who, and how the outcomes shaped history are often left unspoken. When they are explicitly stated, it is usually in the pursuit of understanding a different factor of history, such as politics, economics, or culture. However, if medieval piracy was as widespread and common as scholars claim, it needs to be clearly understood. Furthermore, the negative reputation that piracy carries has impacted not only the historical narrative, but also the scholarship pertaining to it. Through analysis of the histories of Crete and Dénia and how they have been studied in modern scholarship, it becomes clear that the relationship between piracy and history is overtly negative.

It is telling to the critical mind that these two polities have not only been dismissed into the shadows as "pirate nests," but have also been neglected by the larger academic community. Both these polities played a significant role in their political environment, influencing economic habits and diplomatic relationships in turn; however the amount of scholarship dedicated to them is lacking compared to other polities that have not been dismissed under the guise of piracy. Generalized searches on the *International Medieval Database* show a marked disparity in modern scholarship between the locations discussed so far in this thesis. While Barcelona has over 2400 articles and chapters exploring its history in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and Malta over 39,000 for the same time period, ninth- and tenth-century Crete only has 24 and eleventh- and twelfth-century Dénia only has 30.[156] On closer examination of the scholarship, the biases against piracy become even more transparent; of the 15 English sources pertaining to Crete, one is about the Muslim Emirate of Crete, two about primary source materials, and the rest explore Crete under Byzantine or Venetian influence. With broader search parameters, researchers can find more information about Muslim Crete, but the number is still in the lower single digits (this thesis cites only seven sources that focus primarily on Crete after significant research, four of which were written by Vassilios Christides).[157]

This lacuna in the scholarship is not only in the amount of research dedicated to "pirate nests" themselves, but in the perpetuation of piracy as a given, as an ever present, ever negative fixture of medieval life. Scholars including Michael McCormick andWilliam Chester Jordan have included piracy in their foundational works without questioning its

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[156] International Medieval Database Search Engine. Numbers given are for all languages, searches done on February 17, 2023.
[157] Dénia has also suffered under the label of piracy: of the eight sources written in English, seven pertain specifically to the Taifa Kingdom itself. However, of the seven relevant sources, six were written by Travis Bruce highlighting the lack of engagement by the field at large.

impact or exploring whether all piracy was the same.[158] Piracy is always generalized and

dismissed due to preconceived negative connotations. By assuming that piracy took place in

the shadows and was illicit throughout the medieval world, modern scholarship fails to see

all the benefits not only of medieval piracy but also of *studying* medieval piracy.

The Positives of Piracy

The positive impacts of piracy have been explored in immense detail throughout this

thesis, from its impact on the economy to its role in building a flourishing culture. Piracy was

an important tool for medieval people of all tracts of life, from sailors to travelers,

churchmen to aristocrats, popes to kings. Modern scholars have shown how medieval people

used piracy to further diplomacy, strengthen their political authority, and protect their borders

and merchants.[159] It is clear that in the Middle Ages, piracy was a tool that was widely used

and had many different applications.

When proper care and logic are applied to it, piracy also provides a uniquely versatile

lens for the modern scholar. Through proper research and unbiased understanding of piracy,

scholars are able to provide transparency on characteristics of medieval life that are often

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[158] McCormick, *The Origins of the European Economy*: McCormick mentions piracy less than ten times throughout his monumental work. While his discussion is more substantial than other works, given that he provides sources and discusses the situations in detail, there is no analysis pertaining to the causes or effects of piracy. William Chester Jordan, *Europe in the High Middle Ages* (London: Penguin Books, 2002): Jordan mentions piracy no less than eleven times throughout his work, but it is never discussed, proven, or analyzed further than stating that it was happening.

[159] For sources pertaining to Diplomacy: Bruce, "Piracy as Statecraft," 127-42; Tiago Viúla de Faria, "Maritime Conflict among Hundred Years' War Allies," in *Conflict Management in the Mediterranean and the Atlantic, 1000-1800: Actors, Institutions and Strategies of Dispute Settlement*, ed. Louis Sicking and Alain Wijffels, Studies in the History of International Law, 15 (Leiden, NL: Brill, 2020), 198-216; Penna, "Piracy and Reprisal in Byzantine Waters," *Comparative Legal History* 5, no. 1 (2017); 36-52. For sources pertaining to Sovereignty: Cheyette, "The Sovereign and the Pirates, 1332," 40-68; Trevor Dean, "The Sovereign as Pirate: Charles II of Anjou and the Marriage of His Daughter, 1304," *The English Historical Review* 111, no. 441 (1996): 350-356; Thomas K. Heebøll-Holm, "Towards a Criminalization of Piracy in Late Medieval England," in Sicking and Wijffles, *Conflict Management in the Mediterranean and the Atlantic* Sicking and Alain Wijffels, 165-186; Kelleher, "The Sea of Our City," 1. For sources pertaining to Borders: Coleman, "Of Corsairs, Converts and Renegades," 167-192; Parker, "Pisa, Catalonia, and Muslim Pirates," 77-100; Katele, "Piracy and the Venetian State," 865-889.

harder to discern from other sources and angles. For example, by examining piracy Kathleen Reyerson was able to explore the fluidity of medieval identity and show that medieval people were able to don multiple hats depending on their environment and situations.[160] Molly Greene used piracy to explore the rigidity of religious lines, exploring how Catholic pirates justified their attacks on their Greek Orthodox neighbors.[161] Matthew Parker utilized piracy to explore the Balearic Crusade and the deeper implications surrounding it.[162] These are just several topics that an unbiased knowledge of piracy has allowed modern scholars to develop deeper, more thorough understandings of the Middle Ages as a whole. History is a subject that relies heavily on approaching subjects from multiple viewpoints; piracy is a lens that allows scholars a new and underutilized view.

Tales of piracy, like those of famous brigands and rebels, can also do much to further our understanding of the past. While the story of Jeanne de Clisson has been transformed from the truth into a legendary tale, it is able to illuminate portions of her reality (and the reality of the stories' authors) that wouldn't have been memorialized without the fictionalization of her tale. She may not have been the fearsome pirate that her legend makes her out to be, but the fact is that she was able to command ships at all points in a society that may not have been as sexually discriminatory as modern scholars and the general public may assume. The fact that Jeanne de Clisson is one of three Jeannes throughout the Hundred Years War to influence the political scene by acting in a way that is usually associated with men points to a cultural dynamic that does not relegate women to the background. Without the legend surrounding Jeanne de Clisson, the cultural implications of this might have been

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[160] Reyerson, "Identity in the Medieval Mediterranean," 129-146.
[161] Greene, *Catholic Pirates and Greek Merchants: A Maritime History of the Mediterranean*.
[162] Parker, "Pisa, Catalonia, and Muslim Pirates," 77-100.

lost. It is through the aggrandizement of her piracy that modern scholars are able to study it

more thoroughly.

The Truth of Jeanne's Legend

While her story may have taken on mythical attributes, the foundation of Jeanne de

Clisson's story is based on historical facts. The problem, therefore, is not that she did not

exist, but that scholars and authors in the centuries since have embellished facts, in some

cases, and believed fiction for fact in others. Careful study of Jeanne in the surviving

historical records proves which aspects of her story are true, and which aspects require a

more analytical eye.

Jeanne was born sometime at the end of the thirteenth or beginning of the fourteenth

century as Jeanne de Belleville, the second child of Maurice IV of Belleville and Letice of

Parthenay.[163] She was supposedly married three times in the first four decades of the century

(1312, 1328, 1330); two of which ended with the death of her spouse, the other in a

mysterious annulment by the pope.[164] While the many narrators of her story take for granted

her second marriage to Guy of Penthièvre, which was annulled quickly by the Pope, Katrin

E. Sjursen adds more historical details to the story. Apparently, Penthièvre not only sued the

Pope for an annulment on the grounds of consanguinity, but he also petitioned the court to

have Jeanne stop saying they were married in the first place.[165] This paints a very confusing,

albeit intriguing, event in which scholars can have no clear understanding of what happened.

Sjursen argues that this episode shows that Jeanne was an astute, cunning woman, out to

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[163] Katrin E. Sjursen, "Pirate, Traitor, Wife: Jeanne of Belleville and the Categories of Fourteenth-Century French Noblewomen," in *Medieval Elite Women and the Exercise of Power, 1100-1400: Moving beyond the Exceptionalist Debate*, ed. Heather J. Tanner (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), pp. 135-156, 137.
[164] Guillaume Mollat, *Études et documents sur l'histoire de Bretagne (XIIIᵉ-XVIᵉ siècles)* (Paris: H. Champion, 1907), 49-50.
[165] Sjursen, "Pirate, Traitor, Wife," 142.

better her standing and protect her children.[166] If they were married, why not tell people? If they were not, why ask for an annulment? While this does not pertain to her legend as a pirate, it is one example of the mystery intrinsic to the sources.

In 1330, Jeanne married Olivier III de Clisson. Theirs seemed to be a passionate, if somewhat unconventional, union. They had five children together, but there is at least one lawsuit surviving today that shows Jeanne taking her husband to court for breach of their marriage contract. In 1334 King Philip VI sided with Jeanne, and Olivier quickly agreed to uphold his original agreement.[167] This incident, while just a small account in the record books, is a substantial source for understanding Jeanne's character: she was independent and confident enough to take her husband, traditionally the person expected to represent women, to court. And she won, receiving praise from King Philip for standing up in the first place.

The next time Jeanne and Olivier appear in the legal records is in 1342, just months before Olivier's death. These records were letters sent by both Jeanne and Olivier about the running of their estates; detailing things like receiving and sending goods, and asking about debts.[168] This slice into their normal life is juxtaposed against their next appearance–the records of Olivier's betrayal and execution. This incident has been recorded in several well-known chronicles, but not in any surviving legal documents.[169] All of the chronicles in which Jeanne is present state that Olivier was beheaded after being declared a traitor to the king and kingdom, and that his body was displayed at the city gates of Paris and Nantes; however,

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[166] Sjursen, "Pirate, Traitor, Wife," 143.

[167] Sjursen, "Pirate, Traitor, Wife," 141-142; *Archive historiques du Poitou, XIII*, (Poitiers: Imprimerie Oudin, 1883), 108-10. These sources detail Jeanne's lawsuit against Olivier, arguing that he was not preserving enough land for her and their children.

[168] Hyacinthe Morice, *Mémoires pour servir de preuves a l'histoire ecclésiastique et civile de Bretagne: tirés des archives de cette province, de celles de France & d'Angleterre, des recueils de plusieurs sçavans antiquaires, & mis en ordre par Dom Hyacinthe Morice, prêtre, religieux bénédictin de la congrégation de S. Maur, V*ol. 6 (Paris: Imprimerie Charles Osmont, 1742), cols. 1432-1434.

[169] That this author has found; she acknowledges that legal records may exist that she has not been able to gain access to.

each source offers slightly different minute details.[170] Froissart states that the beheading took place on August 2, 1342, while Moranvillé claims that King Philip received a letter confirming Olivier's treason before the execution.[171] Molinier describes how King Edward received and reacted to the news of Olivier's death (by throwing the letter and dismissing the messenger).[172] Jean le Bel includes rumors that he was executed so that King Philip could seize his lands.[173] While chronicles may be less trustworthy than other historical sources, due to the inherent narrative style, the similarities between these three prominent chronicles testify to some type of shared origin. The shared characteristic between them makes them easier to believe, for the information is validated by the repetition.

Olivier's death is not the only event recorded in chronicles: Jeanne's response is recorded in the two volumes the author could read personally. The works of Molinier and Moravanvillé both state that Jeanne assembled 400 men-at-arms and attacked the castle at Brest, which belonged to her former ally Charles de Blois.[174] She then took to the sea, where she attacked the coastlines of Brittany and France for some time. At this time, the chronicles attest to King Philip declaring her a traitor and seizing her lands—making the tale of her selling her lands and jewels to finance a fleet of ships most improbable. While modern sources have her pillaging and haunting the English Channel and Bay of Biscay for the next

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[170] There is one Chronicle the author has found that fails to mention Jeanne in any capacity: Jean de Venette, *The Chronicle of Jean de Venette*, ed. Richard A. Newhall, trans. Jean Birdsall, Records of Civilization Sources and Studies, 50 (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1953). While the War of Breton Succession is discussed in detail, as well as the events of the Hundred Years War, Olivier, Jeanne or her piracy are not mentioned at all. This omission calls into question the accuracy of the other chronicles.

[171] Jean Froissart, *Chroniques*, ed. S. Luce *et al.* (S.H.F.), 15 vols. (Paris: 1869-1975), cited in: S. H. Cuttler, *The Law of Treason and Treason Trials in Later Medieval France*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought, 3rd ser., 16 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 147. Henri Moranvillé, ed., *Chronographia Regum Francorum* (Paris: Librairie Renouard, 1891), 204-5.

[172] Auguste Molinier, *Chronique normande du XVIᵉ siècle* (Paris: Renouard, 1882), 59-60.

[173] Jean le Bel, *Chronique de Jean le Bel*, ed. Jules Viard and Eugène Deprez, vol. 1 (Paris: Renouard, 1904), 250; cited in Cuttler, *The Law of Treason*, 147.

[174] Molinier, *Chronique Normande*, 60; Moranvillé, *Chronographia Regum Francorum*, 205.

thirteen years, the historical sources are more non-distinct in their description of her actions.

Where her raiding is described, it is never described in the French chronicles as lasting for

long—it is not mentioned except for the initial description of her actions.[175] If she had

attacked the coast for an extended period of time, in the brutal fashion that her legend

portrays, there would be some trace of her in the chronicles and legal records of the extended

time.

Jeanne next appears in sources on the other side of the Channel, in relation to her

work with King Edward III. The earliest source is a treaty dated to 1347, leaving four years

unaccounted for. The 1347 Treaty of Calais was made between Kings Edward and Philip to

try to put an end to their war. It lists all the people and places that were required to follow the

terms of peace. That list ranges from the Kings of Castile and Aragon to individual lords and

ladies and their progeny; Jeanne, listed as "the Lady of Clisson," is one of the last listed by

name.[176] However, while Sjursen states that Jeanne is the only woman listed as an ally, there

is no way to confirm this; the list is not divided by king, making it very difficult to know

whose side each person is linked to. She is also not the only woman listed, as several other

Countesses and Duchesses are listed with their children as well.[177] Since Jeanne could have

been listed by either king, and is not the only woman, this document is harder to analyze.

Scholars may generally accept that she was an important figure in the war, but cannot

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[175] This is true throughout all the chronicles this author has been able to study thus far.

[176] *Adæ Murimuth Continuatio chronicarum; Robertus de Avesbury De gestis mirabilibus regis Edwardi Tertii*, ed. Edward Maunde Thompson (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1889), 397-403. See also: Thomas Rymer, *Foedera, conventiones, literae, et cujuscunque generis acta publica: inter reges Angliae et alios quosvis imperatores, reges, pontifices, principes, vel communitates, ab ineunte saeculo duodecimo, viz. ab anno 1101, ad nostra usque tempora habita aut tractata: ex autographis, infra secretiores archivorum regiorum thesaurarias, per multa saecula reconditis, fideliter exscripta: in lucem missa de mandato nuperae reginae*, vol. 5 (London: Per J. Tonson, 1727), 589.

[177] Sjursen, "Pirate, Traitor, Wife," 148; *Adæ Murimuth Continuatio chronicarum*, 403; Rymer, *Foedera*, 589.

confirm what role she played. The idea that she was included because of her piracy cannot be anything more than conjecture at this point.

Jeanne continued to appear in English legal documents for the following decade until her death in 1359. In the late 1340s and early 1350s, she appeared in both the Gascon and the Patent Rolls, receiving lands and incomes from King Edward as a reward for her support and a payment for her losses.[178] Membrane 1, 23 Edward III part III, 1350, January 20, Westminster mentions that Jeanne was given an income specifically because of the losses she endured during the war in Brittany in 1345, indicating she played a significant role in the English campaign.[179] However, it does not specify what type of role this was: it could have been political, economic, or, as modern sources would have it, piratical. In the ten entries that mention her in these Rolls, Jeanne is guaranteed salaries and lands, given men to protect her land, and is commended on her service and loyalty. However, there is no mention of piracy, military action or the gift of a fleet of ships anywhere to be seen. While she could have used her income to buy ships, and could have served Edward as a pirate, the sources do not prove these things conclusively.

The last mention of Jeanne de Clisson in a source that originated from her lifetime is in 1359, almost a decade after her last appearance in legal documents. She is mentioned in regards to her son receiving her lands and incomes due to her death. It was stated that if he was truly her son and swore loyalty to King Edward, the king would grant him the same "*brefs* and customs" that had been afforded to her.[180] Nowhere in the Rolls is her cause of

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[178] *Gascon Rolls Project*. 1317-1468. Oxford University/Liverpool University/King's College, London. 188 Membrane 20, 22 Edward III (1348-1349) states that Jeanne should be given the *brefs* for the city of Bordeaux, because they belonged to her family historically.

[179] *Calendar of the Patent Rolls Preserved in the Public Record Office: Edward III,* Vol 8: 1348-1350 (London: HMSO, 1905), 483.

[180] *Gascon Rolls Project*, C 72: 92 Membrane 1, 33 Edward III (1359-1360).

death listed, nor is piracy or military action implied in any of her legal entries. While it may seem easy to chalk this omission up to the illicit nature of piracy or women's military action, neither of these explanations fit the time or truly explain what she was doing. Based on the sources available, modern scholars may never know for sure what she was doing in the gaps between her dealings with the law. Her pirate legend is unsubstantiated.

Modern sources, both scholarly and those aimed at the general public, perform their due diligence. Jeanne's story is well cited, from encyclopedias to scholarly articles about the role of women in society, and each author adds to her tale. While primary sources are always in evidence, the difficulty of accessing and utilizing them correctly means that most additions to Jeanne's legend rely only on one or two sources from the fourteenth century and depend heavily on sources written in the nineteenth century which give the appearance of authority. The source most cited is the epic poem written by Émile Péhant entitled *Jeanne de Belleville*. However, while Péhant claims to have consulted all the records and sources available, he does not cite them. It is from that poem that many of the more legendary characteristics of her story originate. The idea of a "Black Fleet" and the dramatic death of her son can be traced directly to this poem, as well as the majority of details often cited today.[181] Other sources that contributed to her legend were the lectures of Lola Montez in the late nineteenth century and the writings of Richard Bentley in the early twentieth century—neither of which provided citations of any kind.[182] While lack of citation does not confirm falsity, when the facts cannot be corroborated, the uncertified facts must be thrown out.

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[181] Émile Péhant, *Jeanne de Belleville*, vol. 2 (Nantes: V. Forest et Grimaud, 1868).

[182] C. Chauncey Burr and Lola Montez, *The Lectures of Lola Montez: With a Full and Complete Autobiography of Her Life: As Well as Her Celebrated Lectures on "Beautiful Women," "Gallantry," "Comic Aspect of Love," "Heroines of History," "Wits and Women of Paris," "Romanism," Et Cetera* (Philadelphia: Rudd & Carleton, 1858); Richard Bentley, *A Brief Note upon the Battles of Saintes and Mauron, 1351 and 1352* (Guildford: Toronto, 1918).

However, where Montez and Bentley painted Jeanne in a romantic role (Bentley in particular referred to her as "the most beautiful woman of her day"), Péhant uses his poem to set the stage for her more famous son, Olivier IV.[183] Olivier, who was raised in England and granted his mother's lands upon her death, would later become constable to the King of France and play a great role in the Hundred Years War. While he has garnered several monographs, they do not focus on, nor even mention, his infamous mother.[184] Péhant's verse portrays Jeanne as a tragic, emotional woman, whose actions shaped Olivier into the courageous man he became. Montez and Bentley, while more kind to Jeanne, still highlight her emotional responses to the events around her. However brave she may have been, she was still a woman and her actions were seen in that light.

More recent stories accept these sources as truth, calling into question the facticity of their narratives. While the facts presented may be less than accurate, they are still valuable for the way they illuminate their particular context. Instead of focusing on her feminine traits, accounts written in the last fifty years betray the political nature of the time. Instead of focusing on all the ways she appears feminine, sources now illustrate her conviction, the strength of her voice, and her ability to lead. The Jeanne who is portrayed in the newest works is offered up as the epitome of what women can do, and have done throughout history.

Conclusion

Piracy is a motif that is familiar to most people; the problem lies in the fact that that motif influences scholars when they approach the past. If our modern assumptions influence not only how history is studied, but also *what* is studied, our overall understanding of the past

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[183] Bentley, *A Brief Note*, 3.
[184] John Bell Henneman, *Olivier de Clisson and Political Society in France under Charles V and Charles VI* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996).

will always be slightly flawed. Dénia and Crete have been relegated to the shadows due to their piratical status, but the amount of history and information waiting to be discovered in the study of them is astounding. The fact that Jeanne de Clisson's story has survived as a pirate legend gives scholars a chance to rectify a historical error while building their understanding of the fourteenth century.

Jeanne de Clisson's story has been dramatized by modern authors, but by looking at it from a different point of view, she can still be an illuminating figure. While authors today hail her as a dramatic pirate, out for revenge, the historical record is only strong enough to support some of those adventures. Her presence in primary sources is enough to conclude that Jeanne was an active, politically astute widow, whose influence and name were known on both sides of the English Channel. Her piratical career, however short, was significant enough to earn her a place in history.

By tracing the evolution of her story, scholars can understand the period from where she materializes—not just the fourteenth century, but from the nineteenth century to now. Authors of the nineteenth century demonstrate their cultural biases and beliefs about women in the way they portray and embellish Jeanne's story. To them, she is single-minded and fueled only by her emotions to her own detriment and her son's eventual benefit. Current authors use Jeanne as a testament to women's strength, devotion, and leadership skills because women's rights and agency are popular issues today.

The lack of evidence should not be seen as a detriment against legends: as Jeanne has proven, the sum is greater than the parts; her one season of piracy has led to centuries of discussion and influence, a grand legend of inspiration. The legacies of the past, like Jeanne de Clisson's, can be difficult for historians to work with. Discerning fact from fiction is a

long process that can leave many disheartened and even more disillusioned. However, places like Crete and Dénia and the story of Jeanne de Clisson illustrate the importance of researching these legends for their truth. The past is understood not only by the evidence it leaves behind, but by the people who study it. The study of piracy has the unique capability to explain more than just the events or time period itself—it is able to cast a light on the places and times that have added to their narrative.

Bias is something that all scholars must grapple with while researching the past. While modern scholars are getting better at addressing their biases, it is the underlying cultural beliefs that no one acknowledges that can hinder scholarship the most. Piracy is a subject that has suffered under such prejudices. The illicit nature and negative reputation that piracy holds in modern society has painted how medieval piracy has been studied and what subjects it is linked to. This paints an inaccurate picture of the subject of piracy as a whole.

Medieval piracy was violent and destructive, to be sure. It was at times illicit and destructive. However, it was also immensely beneficial to the societies that utilized it fully, such as Muslim Crete and Dénia. The consequences of piracy were far-reaching and deeply ingrained in the making of the Middle Ages, as the creation of Normandy and the outcome of the Hundred Years wars attest. Piracy provides a lens that allows scholars to add color and depth to the picture of the Middle Ages historians have already painted: it allows us to understand political relationships more in depth, explore religious identities more vigorously, and illuminate locations that had previously been shoved to the background.

The potency of piracy as a historical tool has yet to be fully seen. While it has thus far been used to explore politics, economy, and culture, that should be considered only the starting line of its utility. Piracy can be used to develop further understanding in medieval

gender roles, travel tendencies, and personal identities. Questions about gender roles have yet to be asked in terms of piracy of any kind, even about infamous female pirate Jeanne de Clisson; her tale is used by modern sources to present her as a feminine icon, but further questioning of how she existed in her time and society is few and far between. Were there other female pirates or sailors? What were the experiences of female victims of piracy? Is there a difference depending on location, political affiliation, or religious identity?

While this thesis has drawn attention to the discrepancy between how Muslim and Christian pirate societies are portrayed in modern scholarship, this prejudice is not one that has been acknowledged by the field. This is a major lacuna in the modern historical understanding of the Middle Ages that needs to be explored thoroughly and in depth. Why Christian actions are not put in the same negative terms as those of Muslims may seem like a straightforward issue of bias, but in today's climate, that assumption cannot be made.

If scholars accept that piracy happened throughout the Middle Ages, then we need to spend more time understanding it. Current scholarship is disjointed and spread unequally throughout time and space. It is easy to read an article devoted to piracy in a specific time and place and assume that it is a unique phenomenon and not part of an overarching system because most of the research about piracy is focused not on the piracy but on explaining its setting. If we turn this on its head and use piracy to understand the Middle Ages as a whole, it is clear that piracy played a vital role in medieval society.

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