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978-1-107-01094-9 - Prisoners of War in the Hundred Years War Ransom Culture in the Late Middle Ages

Rémy Ambühl

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PRISONERS OF WAR IN THE HUNDRED YEARS WAR

The status of prisoners of war was firmly rooted in the practice of ransoming in the Middle Ages. By the opening stages of the Hundred Years War, ransoming had become widespread among the knightly community, and the crown had already begun to exercise tighter control over the practice of war. This led to tensions between public and private interests over ransoms and prisoners of war. Historians have long emphasised the significance of the French and English crowns' interference in the issue of prisoners of war, but this original and stimulating study questions whether they have been too influenced by the state-centred nature of most surviving sources. Based on extensive archival research, this book tests customs, laws and theory against the individual experiences of captors and prisoners during the Hundred Years War, to evoke their world in all its complexity.

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Ransom Culture in the Late Middle Ages

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To my mother and to the memory of my father.

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I crossed the Channel for the first time in October 2003. I wanted to improve my English and research skills by doing a Masters in History at the University of Nottingham, and I did so. But what was supposed to be a one-year-long interlude in my Franco-Belgian education ended up more like a turning point in my academic life. Nine years later, my adventure in the UK is still running. It has even been given a new impetus thanks to the Leverhulme Trust and the University of Southampton which generously agreed to fund a new research project on the capitulation of castles and urban communities in the Hundred Years War. I hope that the future holds many other good surprises like this one. British academia has been as welcoming as inspiring. Along the years, I have had the chance to meet leading scholars without whom this adventure would have been much shorter, and without whom this book would almost certainly not have seen the light. I owe them a great deal.

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NOTE ON CURRENCY

There was a distinction between money of account, used as ‘measure of value’ and real money, that is, the actual coins, used as ‘medium of exchange’ in the late Middle Ages. Many a ransom or grant appears in *livres tournois* (*lt*) in the sources; this money of account was widely used in late medieval France.¹ The pound sterling (£), which was the English equivalent, was worth 6 *lt*. The actual coins which circulated in late medieval Europe were made of gold, silver or billon (silver–copper alloy). Gold coins were used not only for costly ‘international’ transactions but also for the payment of ransoms, whatever their rate. France was the main theatre of war in the Hundred Years War, and most ransoms were set and paid in French gold coins. The *franc d’or* (*fō*) was the principal gold coin in France from the 1360s to the 1380s. It was progressively replaced by the *écu d’or* (*eo*) in the fifteenth century. From 1422 to 1453, the English government issued a rival gold coin to the *eo* in northern France: the *salut d’or* (*so*). The reader will also come across other currencies in this book. Given the wide fluctuations in the value of the different coins (especially in the first half of the fifteenth century), it has been deemed appropriate to leave all the amounts in their original currency. The following table, based on Peter Spufford’s *Handbook of Medieval Exchange* (London, 1986), gives an idea of the comparative value of the different currencies in that period.

	Pound sterling (£)
Livre tournois (<i>lt</i>)	£1 = 6 <i>lt</i> (ratio: 0.167)
Livre parisis (<i>lp</i>)	£5 = 24 <i>lp</i> (ratio: 0.21)
Mark sterling	£2 = 3 marks (ratio: 0.66) – fixed rate
Écu d’or (<i>eo</i>)	£2 = 9 écus d’or (ratio: 0.22)
Salut d’or (<i>so</i>)	£2 = 9 écus d’or (0.23) ²
Franc d’or (<i>fō</i>)	£1 = 6 francs d’or (ratio: 0.167)
Florin (Rhine)	£1 = 6 florins (ratio: 0.167)

¹ 1 livre = 20 sous or shillings (*s*) = 240 deniers of pennies (*d*).

² BNf, Ms. Fr. 25772, no. 925 (December 1434).

ABBREVIATIONS

ACO	Archives Départementales de la Côte d’Or
ADN	Archives Départementales du Nord
AN	Archives Nationales (Paris)
BEC	<i>Bibliothèque de l’École des Chartes</i>
BIHR	See <i>HR</i>
BJRUL	<i>Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library</i>
BL	British Library
BnF	Bibliothèque Nationale de France
CCR	<i>Calendar of Close Rolls</i>
CGEB	<i>Comptes généraux de l’état bourguignon entre 1416 et 1420</i> , M. Mollat, ed., 3 vols. (Paris, 1965–69)
CPR	<i>Calendar of Patent Rolls</i>
DKR, 44, 48	‘Calendar of French Rolls’ in <i>Reports of the Deputy Keeper. Appendix to 44th Report of the Deputy Keeper of the Public Records</i> (London, 1883), pp. 543–638; <i>Appendix to 48th Report of the Deputy Keeper of the Public Records</i> (London, 1887), pp. 217–450.
EHR	<i>English Historical Review</i>
eo	écu(s) d’or
fo	franc(s) d’or
Foedera	<i>Foedera, conventiones, litterae, etc.</i> , T. Rymer, ed., 20 vols. (London, 1704–35).
Foedera (PRO)	<i>Foedera, conventiones, litterae, etc.</i> , T. Rymer, ed., 7 vols. (London, 1816–69), new edition ordered by the Public Record Office.
Froissart (KL)	J. Froissart, <i>Oeuvres</i> , J. M. B. Kervyn de Lettenhove, ed., 28 vols. (Brussels, 1867–77).
Froissart (SHF)	J. Froissart, <i>Chroniques</i> , S. Luce, G. Raynaud, L. and A. Mirot, 15 vols. (Paris, 1869–1975).

List of abbreviations

HR (BIHR)	<i>Historical Research</i> (formerly the <i>Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research</i>)
JMH	<i>Journal of Medieval History</i>
KBR	Koninklijke Bibliotheek van België/Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique (Brussels)
KLW	M. Keen, <i>The Laws of War in the Later Middle Ages</i> (London, 1965).
lp	<i>livres parisis</i>
lt	<i>livres tournois</i>
NMS	<i>Nottingham Medieval Studies</i>
ODNB	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i>
Poitiers	F. Bériac-Lainé and C. Given-Wilson, <i>Les Prisonniers de la bataille de Poitiers</i> (Paris, 2002).
POPC	<i>Proceedings and Ordinances of the Privy Council of England</i> , N. H. Nicolas, ed., 7 vols. (London, 1834–7)
PP	<i>Past and Present</i>
PROME	<i>The Parliament Rolls of Medieval England</i> , C. Given-Wilson et al., eds., 16 vols. (Woodbridge, Suffolk and Rochester, 2005).
RDP	<i>Recueil des documents concernant le Poitou contenus dans les registres de la chancellerie de France</i> , vol. IV: 1369–76; vol. V: 1376–90; vol. VII: 1403–30; vol. VIII: 1430–47, vol. X: 1456–64, P. Guérin, ed. (Poitiers, 1888–1906).
so	<i>salut(s) d’or</i>
st	<i>sou tournois</i>
TNA	The National Archives (London)
TRHS	<i>Transactions of the Royal Historical Society</i>
TSLME	The Soldier in Later Medieval England (online database: www.icmacentre.ac.uk/soldier/database)