

In Roman times, defeated enemies were generally put to death as criminals for having offended the emperor of Rome. In the Middle Ages, however, the practice of ransoming, or returning prisoners in exchange for money, became common. Though some saw this custom as a step towards a more humane society, the primary reasons behind it were economic rather than humanitarian.

In those times, rulers had only a limited ability to raise taxes. They could neither force their subjects to fight nor pay them to do so. The promise of material compensation in the form of goods and ransom was therefore the only way of inducing combatants to participate in a war. In the Middle Ages, the predominant incentive for the individual soldier to participate in a war was the expectation of spoils. Although collecting ransom clearly brought financial gain, keeping a prisoner and arranging for his exchange had its costs. Consequently, several procedures were devised to reduce transaction costs.

One such device was a rule asserting that the prisoner had to assess his own value. This compelled the prisoner to establish a value without much distortion; indicating too low a value would increase the captive's chances of being killed, while indicating too high a value would either ruin him financially or create a prohibitively expensive ransom that would also result in death.

A second means of reducing costs was the practice of releasing a prisoner on his word of honor. This procedure was advantageous to both parties since the captor was relieved of the expense of keeping the prisoner while the captive had freedom of movement. The captor also benefited financially by having his captive raise the ransom himself. This "parole" was a viable practice since the released prisoner risked recapture or retaliation against his family. Moreover, in medieval society, breaking one's word had serious consequences. When, for example, King Francois I broke his word to the Emperor Charles V in 1525, his reputation suffered immensely.

A third method of reducing costs was the use of specialized institutions to establish contact between the two parties. Two types of institutions emerged: professional dealers who acted as brokers, and members of religious orders (a community under a religious rule; especially: one requiring members to take solemn vows) who acted as neutral intermediaries. Dealers advanced money for the ransom and charged interest on the loan. Two of the religious orders that became intermediaries were the Mercedarians and the Trinitarians, who between them arranged the ransom of nearly one million prisoners.

1. The primary purpose of the passage is to
  - (A) discuss the economic basis of the medieval practice of exchanging prisoners for ransom
  - (B) examine the history of the treatment of prisoners of war
  - (C) emphasize the importance of a warrior's "word of honor" during the Middle Ages
  - (D) explore three ways of reducing the costs of ransom
  - (E) demonstrate why warriors of the Middle Ages looked forward to battles

2. Which of the following best describes the change in policy from executing prisoners in Roman times to ransoming prisoners in the Middle Ages?
- (A) The emperors of Rome demanded more respect than did medieval rulers and thus Roman subjects went to greater lengths to defend their nation.
  - (B) It was a reflection of the lesser degree of direct control medieval rulers had over their subjects.
  - (C) It became a show of strength and honor for warriors of the Middle Ages to be able to capture and return their enemies.
  - (D) Medieval soldiers were not as humanitarian as their ransoming practices might have indicated.
  - (E) Medieval soldiers demonstrated more concern about economic policy than did their Roman counterparts.
3. The author uses the phrase “without much distortion” (paragraph 3) in order
- (A) to indicate that prisoners would fairly assess their worth
  - (B) to emphasize the important role medieval prisoners played in determining whether they should be ransomed
  - (C) to explain how prisoners often paid more than an appropriate ransom in order to increase their chances for survival
  - (D) suggest that captors and captives often had understanding relationships
  - (E) to show that when in prison a soldier’s view could become distorted
4. All of the following are mentioned in the passage as actions that were taken to ensure that ransoming prisoners was a profitable operation EXCEPT
- (A) each prisoner was made to designate the amount of ransom to be paid for his return
  - (B) prisoners were released on the condition that they guaranteed that their ransoms would be paid
  - (C) professional intermediaries were employed to facilitate the smooth exchange of prisoner and ransom at a price to the prisoner
  - (D) religious orders acted as impartial mediators by arranging the trade-off of ransom and prisoner
  - (E) medieval rulers promised to aid soldiers in their efforts to collect ransom
5. In the author’s opinion, a soldier’s decision to spare an adversary’s life be linked historically to
- (A) the economic relationship of the warring states
  - (B) the case with which a soldier could capture and subsequently imprison his enemy
  - (C) the economic gain from taking an enemy prisoner rather than killing him in combat
  - (D) technological advances in weaponry
  - (E) the desire for soldiers to uphold their word of honor

6. Which of the following best describes the organization of the passage?
- (A) An assertion is made, briefly explained, and then several examples that refute the assertion are given.
  - (B) A hypothesis is offered, carefully qualified, and then supporting data is analyzed.
  - (C) A generally accepted historical viewpoint is presented in order to introduce discussion of its strengths and limitations.
  - (D) A historical analysis is made of a phenomenon and supporting details are offered.
  - (E) A historical dispute is introduced, and the case for one side is examined in detail.