CHAPTER TWO

THE ANATOMY OF MEDIEVAL PIRACY

In this chapter I shall deal with the anatomy of medieval piracy. By anatomy I mean an analysis of the vessels used by the pirates as well as their victims, the geography of piracy, the procedure of a pirate assault, the fate of the victims and their goods and, finally, the collaboration between pirates and their land-based accomplices. It should be noted that these cases are rather hard to disentangle, and it is important to stress the confusion that reigned. Even contemporaries had trouble telling what had actually happened in the reported incidents of piracy. Piracy in practice did not adhere to fixed schemes of crime despite the formal script of the complaints. Thus, the image of piracy provided in this chapter is somewhat impressionistic.

While it may seem as if piracy was omnipresent in the Middle Ages and that mariners and merchants lived in continual danger of being assaulted, it must be noted that sea-borne trade generally functioned and functioned well. On the whole, trading voyages could and would be conducted without any significant disturbances from other sea-folk. Hence, this chapter does not seek to present piracy as an overwhelming problem at sea. Nonetheless, the maritime wars of Bayonne and the Norman ports, and the continual conflicts between the Cinque Ports and Great Yarmouth, at times endangered maritime commerce in general. Furthermore, natural disasters like the Great Famine of 1315–17 and the kings' wars had a stimulating effect on piracy. The 1310s were particularly rife with piracy due to the wars between England and Scotland and between France and Flanders. This chapter, however, deals solely with piracy as an act of personal enrichment, that is, as an inherently opportunistic action. The issues of law, reprisal and maritime wars will be explored in the later chapters.

The Vessels of Trade and War

It is difficult to get a clear picture of the exact types and composition of medieval ships. This is due to the somewhat uncertain source material. It consists of archaeological excavations of shipwrecks, images (for instance, in chronicles and on town seals), and textual sources such as chronicles,

medieval literature and legal, commercial and diplomatic records. These different types of sources often give a somewhat confusing and contradictory presentation of ships. The literary sources were frequently written by people with no knowledge of, or interest in, maritime matters. The legal, commercial and diplomatic records usually only indicate carrying capacities of the ships and sometimes the size of the crew. The archaeological evidence is relatively sparse and often does not correspond with the textual presentations. Finally, since the images frequently followed an iconographic programme, it is unclear how much realism was applied in the portrayal of ships.[1] I will therefore confine myself to some general remarks on the ships, since a detailed analysis is beyond the purpose of this book. I shall specifically focus on the military advantages and shortcomings of the medieval vessels.

In the Middle Ages, there were basically two types of vessels in use, defined by their means of propulsion. One was purely sail-driven ships, the other vessels which relied on oars as well as sails as a driving force.[2]

The sailing ships are usually assumed to be either of the cog type (a flat-bottomed cargo ship with high sides and distinctive straight-angled stem- and sternposts) or a hulk (supposedly a keel-less vessel lacking stem- and sternposts).[3] However, Carsten Jahnke has shown that the name "cog" refers to carrying capacity rather than a specific shape.[4] Yet identification based on the carrying capacity of the ships is deceptive. The sources use the term "tuns" as a designation of the weight-carrying potential of the ship, but tunnage was literally the number of tuns a vessel could carry, and estimations for the Gascon wine tuns are that they could contain from 750 to 900 litres.[5] This discrepancy means that the determination of ship sizes—even when we estimate it by the number of tuns that it could carry—is uncertain. While it is difficult to make generalisations about the size of medieval ships, in the fourteenth century the tonnage of ships as

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[1] Rodger, *Safeguard*, p. 61.

[2] I have borrowed this terminology from Englert, Anton, "Naves magnae—den professionelle søhandels fartøjer. Store lastskibe i danske farvande 1000–1250" in P. Carelli et al., eds, *Ett annat 1100-tallet. Individ, kollektiv och kulturella mönster i medeltidens Danmark* (Gothenburg & Stockholm, 2004), pp. 111–119. For warships, see also Rodger, N.A.M., "The naval service of the Cinque Ports," *The English Historical Review*, 111 (1996), 637–638.

[3] Friel, Ian, *The Good Ship* (London, 1995), pp. 35–36.

[4] Jahnke, Carsten, "Handelsstrukturen im Ostseeraum im 12. und beginnenden 13. Jahrhundert. Ansätze einer Neubewertung," *Hansische Geschichtsblätter*, 60 (2008), 178–181.

[5] Hutchinson, Gillian, *Medieval Ships and Shipping* (Cranbury, 1994), pp. 90–92.

indicator for size shows that about half of all English ships were fifty to ninety-nine tuns, but some ships could be over 200 tuns.[6]

These "cog" ships often had a rather deep hull and sat deep into the waters. Accordingly, they needed quays for the ships to unload and moor. However, as few ports in this period had facilities for these large ships, many of them anchored outside the port and used smaller vessels ("lighters") to freight the goods to the ports.[7] Furthermore, since a ship en route from, for instance, Gascony to Flanders had to make many stops along the way, both for provisions and to take refuge from tempestuous weather or pirates, these small boats were needed for day-to-day operations. The lighters also served the purpose of avoiding paying full customs to the local authorities. For example, if a ship en route to a big trade emporium made a stop in Calais, it had to use lighters in order to avoid paying customs to the French authorities for the whole cargo.[8]

The success of the cog was caused by a large cargo carrying capacity and a very strong hull. It was furthermore cheap to build, and the high freeboard gave the cog an advantage over lower vessels in combat.

While sail-driven ships (cogs, hulks) were the mainstay of long-distance trade, ships of the oar-sail variant were also in use in northern European waters during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. These were the long, slender ships of the Norse tradition, the Mediterranean galleys, the barges, and the balingers.

The Mediterranean galley was not usually built in the North, except by the French kings in the *Clos des Galées*, a royal French shipyard and naval requisitioning centre in Rouen, from the end of the thirteenth century. The main instances where galleys are mentioned in the sources are when they were built by the kings with a specific military purpose in mind[9] or by Mediterranean seafarers either trading in the North or hired by the kings for military service. In the fourteenth century, oar-sail type ships named balingers and barges were also used, but in the terminology neither galley, balinger nor barge seems to have described a specific size, even though the balinger could carry as much as fifty tuns, and the larger barge could carry as much as 100 to 150 tuns. Therefore, they could also be used as

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[6] Friel, *Good Ship*, p. 202, Unger, Richard W., *The Ship in the Medieval Economy* (London, 1980), p. 163.

[7] Hutchinson, *Medieval Ships*, pp. 111–112.

[8] Derville, Alain, "Calais avant 1347. La vie d'un port," in *Les hommes et la mer dans l'Europe du Nord-Ouest de l'antiquité à nos jours: actes du colloque de Boulogne-sur-Mer*, 15–17 juin, 1984 (1984), p. 194.

[9] Friel, *Good Ship*, p. 146.

cargo vessels.[10] The balinger seems to have relied on speed, and it was a valuable addition to the heavier sailing ships, the latter of which became the mainstay of English naval operations in the fourteenth century.[11] Ships of the Norse tradition like knarrs, that is, slender, oar-sail driven vessels with a low freeboard, were probably also in use in this period, even though the kinship between this kind of ship and the barges and balingers is unclear.[12] Despite the *Clos des Galées*, the French naval situation was generally similar to that of the English. Both the English and the French kings relied to a large extent on drafted ships of the merchant marine for naval service. For instance, Gyrart le Barillier's list of wine provisions for French ships mobilised for war in 1295 demonstrates the dominance of *nefs* (223 in total), that is, sail driven ships, in French naval service. While his list also includes *galies* and the smaller *galiot* (fifty-seven in total), it does not seem possible to make a more precise distinction between the actual size and carrying capacity of these vessels.[13]

There was a distinct difference between the military potential of the sailing vessels and the oar-sail type of ship. The galleys were primarily used for convoy duty, for stopping and searching ships, for enforcing customs regulations and for amphibious incursions on land. However, the oar-sail type had distinct disadvantages compared to the sailing ship in combat. The large crews and the narrow shallow hulls of the oar-sail ships entailed low storage capacity, and due to the need for large amounts of drinking water, they only permitted short range operations. Furthermore, the low freeboard meant that most often they were out-matched when they boarded sailing ships. However, this by no means made the sail ships impregnable. During the French naval operations on the south-eastern coast of England in 1315–16 to intercept trade with Flanders, English ships were taken over by smaller French barges and boats (*bargiis et batellis*) because of the numerical superiority of the latter and their apparent

[10] Rodger, *Safeguard*, p. 67, Unger, *The Ship in the Medieval Economy*, pp. 171–172.

[11] Friel, *Good Ship*, p. 150.

[12] Rose, *Medieval Naval Warfare*, p. 135, Rodger, *Safeguard*, p. 589. Traditionally, it has been assumed that the name "balinger" derived from the French baleinier and that originally it was a whaling vessel which eventually proved to be very efficient in war at sea. However, William Sayers has recently challenged this understanding. Through studies of Old Norse and Irish maritime vocabulary, he proposes rather that the balinger was a regional English and French further development of the knarr, sharing some characteristics with the Mediterranean galley while still being a distinct vessel from these. Sayers, William, "Fourteenth century English balingers: Whence the name?," *The Mariner's Mirror*, 93 (2007), 4–15.

[13] *Archéologie navale*, ed. Augustin Jal, 2 vols (Paris, 1840), II, 301–319.

employment of a swarming tactic.[14] In addition, for short spells of time the oar-sail vessel was a faster and in general a more manoeuvrable vessel than sailing ships. In relation to piracy, this made it effective for operations relying on speed, such as scouting and ambush.[15]

It should be noted here that major naval battles were a relatively rare occurrence in the Middle Ages, because it was difficult to acquire accurate information about the enemy's whereabouts before descending upon them. Furthermore, the combatants often seem to have preferred not to fight these battles, as the losses were potentially enormous. For the most part, the ships used in warfare served as logistical support, and therefore were not meant for offensive action.[16] In addition, medieval ships were mainly built for trade. Ships made exclusively for war were very rare.[17]

The inventories for naval campaigns mention large weapons like springals (a heavy torsion weapon on mounting),[18] but these seem only to have been used in wartime on ships specifically equipped for war, not freight. Yet the mariners always seem to have been armed with at least some weapons—crossbows,[19] swords and daggers, and grappling material for closing in but which could also be used for civil purposes when going to a port, and at least for some, armour like haketons[20] and helmets. This was a basic defensive precaution against potential pirate attacks, but obviously it might also be used in assaults. Thus, the mere fact that the mariners were armed did not necessarily imply hostile intent.

In terms of whether a ship had hostile intentions, the real give-away was whether the ship itself was visibly ready for battle with a forecastle, an aftercastle and a topcastle set at the mast-head, and whether they were flying banners signalling hostile intent. The use of castles on the ships gradually became standard in the thirteenth century, but not all were permanent features in this period, and it was presumably only on the largest ships that these were fully integrated with the hull.[21] This means that at

[14] *Foedera 1307–1327*, pp. 279–280.
[15] Hutchinson, *Medieval Ships*, p. 151, Rodger, *Safeguard*, pp. 65–66.
[16] Rose, *Medieval Naval Warfare*, pp. 57–65.
[17] Hutchinson, *Medieval Ships*, p. 88.
[18] Rodger, *Safeguard*, p. 604.
[19] The crossbow was particularly effective on sailing ships. Lane, Frederic C., "The crossbow in the nautical revolution of the Middle Ages," *Explorations in Economic History*, 7 (1969), 166.
[20] "A leather jacket plated with (or worn under) mail." Musson, Anthony, ed., *Crime, Law and Society in the Later Middle Ages* (Manchester & New York, 2009), p. xxi. TNA C 47/31/5/1 mentions Norman mariners wearing "aketonis".
[21] Friel, *Good Ship*, p. 79, Hutchinson, *Medieval Ship*, pp. 153–154, Rodger, *Safeguard*, p. 63.

least for some ships, it was clearly visible whether they had been readied in advance for conflict, thus giving away its hostile intentions. However, most pirates would try to avoid battles. Instead they preferred surprise attacks.

The Pirate Assault

Marc Russon has categorised some of the main occasions when medieval piracy occurred. He notes that piracy could occur:

- By attack, pursuit and hailing of isolated ships, as well as of ships sailing in convoy at high sea.
- While patrolling at unavoidable passage points and capes and along sea-lanes.
- By ambush in the estuaries, the anchorages or the bays by means of maritime or coastal surveillance.
- By observation of the maritime traffic from the ports and the harbours with the attack taking place just outside the ports.
- Inside the ports themselves following either a spontaneous or a premeditated quarrel amongst disembarked mariners, followed by the pirates' rapid escape.
- By fraud where a crew highjacks the cargo of a merchant and sells it for their own profit.[22]

Russon's categories serve as a good guideline for a more detailed analysis of individual cases of piracy from 1280 to 1330.

The typical pirate assault seems to have played out like this: Pirates would try to defeat the victim by a superior number of vessels. During the attack, they would try to halt the prey by using grappling hooks or something similar in order to board the ship. At the same time they would shower the ship with arrows, bolts, stones or javelins to break resistance, to provide cover for the men boarding and to deter the victim from cutting the ropes of the grappling hooks. In principle, the victims could defend themselves, but in practice many seem to have surrendered once boarding commenced, or after a short but brutal combat as the mariners may well have felt required to put up at least a token resistance in order to avoid

[22] Russon, *Côtes*, pp. 65–66.

being accused afterwards of collaborating with the pirates. Fighting to the last man does not seem to have been the normal defensive procedure.[23] Instead, the victims attempted to avoid confrontation altogether by evasion. While this seems like the usual procedure in pirate assault, piracy could, in fact, happen under many different circumstances.

I will use examples mainly from the English complaints over piracy to illustrate the diversity and forms that piracy could take. They show not only how piracy functioned in practice, but also who was involved and what maritime conditions made piracy attractive.

Medieval shipping was essentially a coast-hugging experience,[24] and while some sources state that the attack occurred at high seas, this should probably be interpreted as either sailing along the coast or crossing the Channel from France to England. The uncertainty of the meaning of the term is shown by an example from 1317. That year, a Spanish ship laden in Harfleur and bound for Calais was plundered en route by mariners from Southampton who wounded the men and took the loot to the Isle of Wight.[25] While the sources state that this occurred at "high sea", this should probably still be understood within the context of coastal sailing.

The coastal sailing and the Channel crossing were good places for piracy. By lying in wait, the pirates would have an easy time apprehending their prey, and piracy often happened at isolated places, thereby minimising the risk of being caught. In 1304, two Spanish merchants were bringing a ship to England laden in Seville with goods to the value of 4200 l.t.. As the ship was preparing to make the crossing to England, off Saint-Mathieu (Brittany), eight English ships from Yarmouth, the Isle of Wight, Haversford, Dunwich, Bristol and Shoreham attacked her, took the goods, ropes, anchors and other gear with them to their home counties, and disposed of the booty in the ports along the English coast.[26] In this case, it is not clear whether the English were merchants returning from Gascony, or were lying in wait off Brittany and then pursued the Spanish as they headed for England. The description in the complaint seems to support the latter assumption, and the mariners from these diverse ports may well have planned the ambush in advance. By dispersing the goods in their homeports, they made identification and thus apprehension by the

[23] Hutchinson, *Medieval Ship*, p. 146.
[24] Ward, *Medieval Shipmaster*, pp. 122–123 and 143.
[25] *CPR 1317–1321*, pp. 82, 84, 89 and 95.
[26] *CPR 1301–1307*, p. 286.

authorities almost impossible. This dispersion of goods over a large area seems to have been a tactic favoured by many English pirates.[27]

A case from 1323 further demonstrates the procedure when pirates were lying in wait. In this episode, Rochelais merchants had laden a Spanish ship in La Rochelle with eighty-four tuns of wine, eighteen bales of tallow and ten bacons to be taken to Calais for trade. Off Dover, the ship was attacked by two barges from Somerset and Dorset. They plundered the ship and took the goods to Weymouth, where the goods were divided amongst the pirates. The same year, merchants from Saint Omer complained that their ship with 120 tuns of wine, also going from La Rochelle to Calais, was intercepted near the Island of Guernsey by pirates from Kent (most probably from the Cinque Ports) who took their goods to Winchelsea for partition.[28] The Channel Islands in general seem to have been a favoured spot for Anglo-Gascon pirates to lie in wait, since much traffic passed these islands en route to the trade emporia of England, France and Flanders.

Another example of pirates lying in wait is found in a petition from 1320, when a London merchant had charged a Winchelsea ship to take ninety-four tuns (price £8 per tun, that is, £752 sterling) of wine from Bordeaux to Antwerp. Between Wolpen and Walcheren, the confined strait in the estuary by the Zwin and Sluis, Flemish pirates attacked, and the ship and its crew were taken to the Zwin and detained for seven weeks. After some deliberation the ship was finally released, albeit empty, to the shipmaster.[29]

While piracy could in principle happen anywhere along the coast, certain places seem to have been especially well suited for it. For instance, a number of piracies occurred at the Humber estuary. In 1316, merchants from Bazas in Gascony had chartered an Ipswich ship at Bordeaux to bring eighty-four tuns and four pipes of wine to Kingston-upon-Hull. The ship was attacked and plundered by pirates at the entrance to the Humber—just opposite the town.[30] These examples show a preponderance of piracy in the straits where it was easy to survey the traffic and pick off prey. Indeed, the straits and estuaries along the French and the English coasts were favourite places for attack. The Gironde estuary, the Breton west coast by Saint Mathieu, the *pertuis* between the Charente estuary and

[27] See, for instance, *CPR 1292–1301*, pp. 215–216 and *CPR 1317–1321*, p. 472.
[28] *CPR 1321–1324*, p. 371.
[29] *CCR 1318–1323*, pp. 256–257.
[30] *CPR 1313–1317*, p. 580.

the islands of Oléron, Ré and Aix, the Seine estuary, the Straits of Dover, the Humber and Thames areas and finally the Zwin estuary seem especially dangerous, since these confined waters made it easier for pirates to out-manoeuvre and surprise their prey.[31] These confined areas were particularly attractive, as the sailing ships' manoeuvrability was severely hampered here, and by lying in wait, and perhaps by using oar-sail ships, the pirates could surprise and quickly intercept their prey. If the attacker could get into a position where he was windward of the prey, chances of success were even better, since this permitted the pirates to choose positioning, mode and timing.[32] Since all ships of either type had only one mast and sail, these manoeuvres had great importance in combat situations, as

> With a square sail set on a single mast, necessarily on or very near the centre of resistance, the only force available to turn the ship is the weak effect of the rudder. Oared vessels probably used some oars to push the ship's head round when tacking, but merchantmen must have been unhandy, especially in confined waters.[33]

The Breton Raz was an especially good spot to conduct piracy, since the waters off western Brittany were dotted with small, often uninhabited, islands which were ideal for ambushes.[34] In his book on the Bretons and the sea in the Middle Ages, Jean-Christophe Cassard has stated that piracy off the coast of Brittany would usually only concerned the fishing vessels or merchant ships in distress. According to Cassard, the local Breton pirates were opportunistic fishermen, and some of their actions seem related to wreckers. They were not actively cruising for victims but rather took advantage of others' unfortunate situations.[35]

Hence, claims Cassard, large ships such as Mediterranean galleys or big sailing ships would have little to fear from pirates, since the galleys by definition had a very large crew that was able to fight back. Furthermore, the Italians tended to avoid the Breton Raz altogether. The smaller ships were the main victims, and these were generally disinclined to armed resistance, but chose either to flee in the lighters or to simply surrender. Cassard concludes that at least around 1300, Breton piracy was merely

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[31] James, Margery K., *Studies in the Medieval Wine Trade* (Oxford, 1971), pp. 119–125, Russon, *Côtes*, p. 65.
[32] Friel, *Good Ship*, p. 141.
[33] Rodger, *Safeguard*, p. 64.
[34] Cassard, Jean-Christophe, *Les Bretons et la mer au Moyen Âge* (Rennes, 1998), p. 152.
[35] Cassard, *Les Bretons*, p. 156. See also *CCR 1318–1323*, p. 209.

opportunistic and occasional. It was dependent on favourable maritime conditions, it was not premeditated, it was risky and the gains were uncertain. Thus, the piracy was of an impulsive and hazardous character rather than a coherent project carried out by maritime adventurers.[36]

However, the assumption that pirates would not target large ships and galleys is not solid. Under certain conditions, pirates seem to have been more than capable of conducting attacks on big ships as well, as shown by the French Admiral Berenger Blanc's patrols in 1315–16 on the southeast coast of England. These patrols were officially to enforce an embargo of Flanders, but they often attacked neutral or even friendly shipping. Thus in 1316, Admiral Blanc and the Calaisien mariners captured a Genovese galley called the *Dromund*, a huge 60-oar galley laden with victuals and wheat for Edward II's men in Berwick, to the value of £5,716 sterling. This assault was allegedly carried out by twenty-nine French ships, probably smaller than the *Dromund*, while the *Dromund* was anchored and being unloaded at Les Dunes in the port of Sandwich.[37] The tactics used on these occasions were apparently to overpower the big ship by sheer numerical superiority, combined with an ability to confine and block the ship's further advancement. While this was an operation officially sanctioned by the French king and thus had a naval or a privateering aspect, the actions were akin to those of pirates. In an incident in 1317, twenty-four or more ships from Great Yarmouth, probably sailing in convoy, captured a Winchelsea ship on the English coast.[38] While the ships from Yarmouth may well have been a banding together for protection against Scottish and Flemish pirates, these mariners were not above exploiting their numerical superiority to conduct piracy themselves.

Contrary winds often played a decisive role in piracy, both to the benefit and to the detriment of pirates. In 1304, merchants from Bayonne were sailing from Lisbon to London with a load of wine and spices to the value of 312 marks. These were plundered by Flemish pirates in the sea near Sandwich, and the crew was held captive for ten days on the ship. However, contrary winds drove the Flemings to Faversham, where they were apprehended by the authorities. Yet in order to maintain the peace with Flanders, Edward I released the pirates on condition that the count of Flanders would put them on trial and ensure restitution to the English.

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[36] Cassard, *Les Bretons*, p. 157.

[37] The *Dromund* case is documented in *CCR 1313–1318*, pp. 291, 341, 345–346 and 475–476, *CCR 1318–1323*, pp. 496 and 692, *CPR 1313–1317*, pp. 501–502 and 571–572, *Foedera 1307–1327*, pp. 292, 455–456, 502–503 and 517.

[38] *CPR 1313–1317*, p. 694.

However, the trial did not take place, nor was restitution provided.[39] This would not be the only time when the English authorities apprehended Flemish pirates who had been blown off course. In 1302 the Lombard merchant, William Servate, sent a servant to Provence to buy spices to be taken to London for the king's consumption. The goods were laden onto the Flemish shipmaster Lambert Lebote's ship, but on the sea-coast near Winchelsea, the mariners seem to haven mutinied (or perhaps it was the plan all along) and seized the goods. Unfortunately, contrary winds blew the ship to Winchelsea, where the shipmaster and crew were arrested by the bailiff. However, before the trial, Lambert and some of the mariners managed to break free and escape with the ship, the goods (to the value of £445 2s. 10d.) and the 12-year-old son of William Servate. The case apparently ended well for Servate, with the pirates paying a fine of 2400 l.p. and presumably also the return of Servate's son, for in 1303 he claimed that he had been fully satisfied for his losses. This led to Edward I acquitting the Flemings from further blame.[40] In another unfortunate incident in 1320, Gascon merchants chartered a Norman ship in Bordeaux to take wine to the value of 200 marks to Dieppe. However, a tempest drove the ship to the Scilly Islands. Here it was boarded by pirates, the crew was killed and thrown into the water, and the cargo was taken to Falmouth and Fowey.[41] Thus, winds could sometimes blow the victims directly into the arms of pirates.

Often, ships were attacked in the ports,[42] or just outside the ports when anchored for trade with the locals or waiting for good wind.[43] These piracies were either conducted by locals, people from neighbouring ports or

[39] *CPR 1301–1307*, p. 210.

[40] *CCR 1302–1307*, pp. 3, 8–9 and 48–49.

[41] *CPR 1317–1321*, p. 538.

[42] I use two definitions of ports, Gillian Hutchinson: "those settlements whose economy depended on the operation of ships." Hutchinson, *Medieval Ship*, p. 104, and Mathias Tranchant: "Le terme de port renvoie en effet à celui de porte. En ce sens, l'infrastructure portuaire est un passage entre la terre et la mer, une entrée et une issue permettant la circulation des hommes, des marchandises et des matériels. Elle assure la commutation entre différents modes de transport, maritime, fluvial et terrestre. . . . Mais c'est aussi un havre, c'est-à-dire un abri pour des navires qui soit sont en péril, soit ont besoin de faire relâche sur l'itinéraire de leur destination, ou plus simplement stationnent dans l'attente d'être chargés ou déchargés. La sécurité assurée par le havre tenait à ses qualités naturelles, qui plaçaient les bâtiments hors de portée des brisants et des courants les plus violents, mais aussi aux dispositifs de défense et d'alerte mis en œuvre à ses abords." Tranchant, Mathias, "Les ports maritimes en France au Moyen Âge," in *Ports maritimes et ports fluviaux au Moyen Âge* (Paris, 2005), p. 25.

[43] See, for instance, *CPR 1307–1313*, p. 243, *CPR 1317–1321*, pp. 304, 306, 360–361 and 365–366, *CPR 1321–1324*, p. 160, *CCR 1302–1306*, p. 34.

by foreigners lurking in the port. In 1303, an English merchant had loaded a cog in Fawyk (probably Fowey, Cornwall) with wine and salt (value £300) to be taken to Sandwich. The ship was forcibly taken in the harbour of Portsmouth by Flemish pirates who brought it and its navigators to Flanders.[44] However, locals could also attack their fellow-citizens in port, as happened in 1313, when a Bristol man's ship laden with wine was attacked in the port of Bristol by his fellow citizens.[45]

A variant of the surprise attack while the victim was lying anchored can be seen in an incident from 1308. That year, three merchants from Great Yarmouth had loaded their ship in Rouen with canvas, cables, gold and silver to the value £40 sterling to be brought to England. After sunset during Lent, while the ship was anchored near Chef de Caux by the Seine estuary, Norman pirates from Leure attacked the ship and took it far out to sea, where they plundered the mariners of everything including their clothes.[46] While these types of attack are rarely documented, I suspect that they were quite frequent, since this was one of the easiest ways of identifying a potential victim and then plundering him. In any event, it is interesting that the Normans made the effort of bringing the ship away from the coast to avoid detection. Furthermore, this incident shows that the Normans must have identified their prey well in advance, either by personal observation or through local informants, since Chef de Caux lay just next to Leure.

While many assaults were ambushes where the victim was caught off guard, sometimes the victim managed to flee, and a protracted hunt commenced. For instance, in 1322 the merchant William de Ebbeworth from Tavistock was sailing to Sutton, when he was attacked by pirates from Weymouth and Portland. The pirates pursued him for more than an entire day before at last they boarded his ship in the waters of Lyme. This resulted in the plunder and the sinking of the ship.[47] In another episode, reported in 1303, a Florentine merchant had laden a ship from Sandwich with wool in London to go to the Continent (probably Flanders) to trade. Yet contrary winds blew the ship to Northmouth, where Flemish pirates from Damme, Nieuwpoort and Biervliet chased the ship into the port in their boats. Here, they boarded the ship and stole the wool. Surprisingly,

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[44] *CCR 1302–1307*, pp. 38–39.

[45] *CPR 1313–1317*, p. 134.

[46] *Foedera 1307–1327*, p. 40. Another instance of such a night-time attack occurred in 1323 or 1324. See *CCR 1323–1327*, pp. 156 and 171–172.

[47] *CPR 1321–1324*, p. 151. See also *CCR 1307–1313*, p. 438.

the pirates were apparently still residing in Northmouth when the complaint reached the king, for Edward I ordered Robert de Burghersh, constable of Dover Castle and warden of the Cinque Ports, to inquire into the case and make the necessary arrests if the goods were found.[48] These incidents show the persistence of pirates but also the (potential) rapidity of the government in responding to complaints. It furthermore shows the caution exercised by the authorities in the complaints over piracy. Like historians today, royal officials had difficulty telling the truth in these complaints. The arrest of disputed goods was a standard procedure in claims of piracy, as well as of regular commercial fraud, until the officials had had time to investigate further.

Some pirates were especially notorious. During the thirteenth century, the Cinque Ports figured as one of the pillars of the naval potential of the English kingdom. In this period, the port of Winchelsea seems to have risen to prominence in regard to piracy as well as naval service. In the first three decades of the fourteenth century, one prominent Winchelsea family in particular figures in the sources, the Alards (together with Robert Batayle).[49] In the 1320s, several cases show the Alards as pirates and as admirals as well. On 16 May 1322, a commission of *oyer et terminer* was appointed to settle the complaint of a German merchant that Portsmen, including Gervase Alard (the younger) and the two Henries (sic) Alard,[50] had assaulted and plundered him in the port of Harwich.[51] Interestingly, a few days before, on 6 May, Stephen Alard, Robert Alard and Robert Batayle had been pardoned for all offences on land and at sea, that is, piracy.[52] Robert Batayle had served Edward II against the Scots in 1319,[53] and on 13 May, a week after the pardon, he was appointed admiral of the ships of the Cinque Ports serving the king against the Scots.[54] Robert Batayle apparently continued to trade while he was in royal service, for

[48] *CCR 1302–1307*, p. 5.

[49] Sylvester, "Communal piracy," p. 168. For the Alard family, see Dressler, Rachel A., *Of Armor and Men in Medieval England* (Aldershot, 2004), pp. 45–50. She argues convincingly that the Alards were not nobles, but that they tried to portray themselves as such in their effigies. See also Salzman, L.F., "Some notes on the family of Alard," *Sussex Archaeological Collections*, 61 (1920), 126–141.

[50] *CPR 1313–1317*, p. 509. Salzman, "Family of Alard," p. 140.

[51] *CPR 1321–1324*, p. 160. Possibly the same year, Gervase Alard and other Portsmen were accused of two other piracies on the east coast of England. See TNA SC 8/99/4912 and SC 8/99/4913.

[52] *CPR 1321–1324*, p. 107.

[53] *CCR 1318–1323*, p. 58.

[54] *CPR 1321–1324*, p. 119.

on 9 March 1323, he and Stephen Alard were granted a one-year protection for their ship and men to trade abroad.[55] Later that year, on 18 April, he was appointed admiral again, and on 23 December, a commission was appointed to inquire, through the legal process of *oyer et terminer*, into the case of the assault of Robert Batayle, John Batayle, Stephen Alard, Gervase Alard, Reginald Alard and other Portsmen on a Bayonnais merchant, Bertrand de Vylar (Villiers), who had laden a galley in Sluis with goods destined for Spain when he was pursued by pirates and sought refuge in Sandwich. However, while the galley was anchored at Stonor, the abovementioned men assaulted it, took the galley to Sandwich and divided the goods amongst themselves.[56] When this attack took place is unknown, but since England in May 1323 had agreed to a thirteen-year truce with Scotland and was at peace with Flanders as well, it is most likely that the assault was an act of pure piracy rather than a protection of the coast (Batayle is, for instance, not addressed as admiral at this point), even though they might have tried to claim this.

The above-mentioned Stephen Alard is especially illustrative of the type of merchant-cum-pirate who roamed the seas in this period.[57] In 1317, he was subject to Flemish piracy and complained vigorously to Edward. In 1321, he had obtained at least partial restitution for his losses by arrests conducted by royal officers of Flemish merchants' goods. Petitions from 1319 indicate, however, that he may have taken matters into his own hands and carried out piracy / reprisals on his own, since in 1322 he was pardoned along with Batayle of offences committed at sea. In 1323, he took part in the piracy against de Vylar. Nevertheless, the next year he was appointed admiral.[58] These examples show how difficult it is to distinguish between pirates, merchants and admirals (that is, agents of crime, of trade and of war).

Another good example of the diversity of the background of the pirates is John Perbroun. He was a merchant from Great Yarmouth, but he served as bailiff of Great Yarmouth four times, held the office of admiral in 1322, 1323 and 1327 and acted as judge in maritime cases (amongst them at least one piracy case) in 1325 and 1327. In piracy, he had first-hand experience,

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[55] *CPR 1321–1324*, p. 262.

[56] *CPR 1321–1324*, pp. 264 and 385.

[57] For another example, see Lucas, Henry S., "John Crabbe: Flemish pirate, merchant, and adventurer," *Speculum*, 20 (1945), 334–350.

[58] For the incidents involving Stephen Alard, see *CCR 1313–1318*, p. 461, *CCR 1313–1318*, pp. 258, 283, 400. *CPR 1321–1324*, pp. 107, 262 and 385, TNA: SC 8/233/11625, SC 8/233/11631, SC 8/192/9557, Salzman, "Family of Alard," p. 134.

for in 1316 he had assisted in the piracies on the ships from the Cinque Ports (from which he was pardoned), and in 1317 he and other men of Great Yarmouth assaulted a Winchelsea ship chartered by Rochelais merchants while it was coasting at Shorham.[59] These few examples show how piracy was in no way a hindrance to respectability and royal office. In fact, it may have been a benefit.

Some merchants seem to have been particularly unfortunate. In 1320, the London merchant Stephen Aleyn had loaded his ship, *La Margarete*, in Normandy for trade in England (he did not participate in the journey, however). The ship was pursued by Flemish pirates, and since the English feared that they would be caught if they continued to England, they pulled into Caux, which was under the abbot of Fécamp (whom they might have trusted, since the abbey owned lands in England). Here, they took the goods from the ship and deposited them for safety in the abbot's cell of Saint-Valéry-en-Caux. However, the abbot's men proceeded to confiscate the goods once they had been deposited.[60] And Aleyn's troubles continued. In 1321, while travelling from Sandwich to Berwick-upon-Tweed with victuals for the king's men there, *La Margarete* was captured by pirates on the sea-coast near Saltfleetby and taken to Zeeland.[61] Thus, in two years Stephen Aleyn had been the victim of two different "piracies".

The predicament of five Rochelais merchants, who had chartered a Bayonnais ship to take 200 casks of white wine from Tonnay Charente to Calais, displays another unfortunate circumstance in maritime life. En route, the ship was attacked by Scottish pirates, who killed some of the crew and presumably took the rest captive. Possibly on the way to Scotland, the surviving crew members managed to retake the ship which they brought to Great Yarmouth. However, fortune did not smile on the merchants because at Great Yarmouth, pirates from Norfolk and Suffolk boarded the ship and took the wine.[62] However, this account of events could also be a Bayonnais cover-up for a defrauding action of their own against the Rochelais. Indeed, cases like these demonstrate the problems of identifying exactly what had happened in the reported complaints over piracy.

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[59] *CPR 1313–1317*, pp. 576 and 694, *CPR 1321–1324*, pp. 119, 143, 228 and 325, *CPR 1324–1327*, pp. 87, 136 and 354, *CPR 1327–1330*, p. 101.
[60] *CCR 1318–1323*, p. 259.
[61] *CCR 1318–1323*, p. 398.
[62] *CPR 1317–1321*, p. 186.

Another case of perfidious mariners is an incident from 1317, where Portuguese merchants had chartered a ship from Great Yarmouth in Leure to be taken to Flanders. Yet the shipmaster and the mariners cheated the merchants and set sail for Great Yarmouth instead. They put some of the merchants ashore at Dover, but took the others with them (probably as hostages) to Kirkley. Here the pirates went ashore, leaving only two mariners and a boy to look after the ship. These apparently could not manage the ship, which meant that it was lost ("se perist par defaute de eux"—presumably wrecked). The locals subsequently plundered the remains.[63]

The Fate of Plundered Goods and the Victims of Piracy

In the following I shall present cases illuminating the fate of the plundered goods, how pirates worked actively together with local residents, as well as authorities, and finally some reflections on the lethality of a pirate assault.[64]

A recurrent feature in the complaints over piracy is that the goods were taken to a port and divided or that it was dispersed over a number of ports. This raises the question of how goods were identified by the authorities when inquiries were initiated. The identification of wine is of special interest in this book. In at least one source the tuns were marked, and Robin Ward states that goods were marked by colour[65] when shipped out and when imported and sold on land. Furthermore, the local customs must have registered what came into the port, and the shipmasters or merchants sometimes had a written charter of what goods they had loaded onto the ship.[66] Finally, mariners, stevedores and sometimes the alleged pirates could be questioned by the authorities as to the amount carried on the ships. Nevertheless, trade in contraband and plundered goods still seems rather extensive.

A case illustrative of the confusion over the values stolen, the composition of the cargo of plundered merchants and the unreliability of the recorded losses can be seen in an episode from 1317. In this case, two Gascon merchants, Gauselin Pagani and his brother Reymund, had laden

63 TNA SC 8/238/11866.

64 See also Russon, *Côtes*, pp. 77–80.

65 *CPR 1313–1317*, p. 630 concerns a case of fraud, where it is mentioned that the tuns were marked "with the usual mark", Ward, *Medieval Shipmaster*, pp. 59–60.

66 Ward, *Medieval Shipmaster*, pp. 229–234.

a Goseford ship with forty-five tuns of wine and twenty-two barrels of wheat to the stated value of £300 sterling to be taken to England. While the ship was anchored at Les Dunes near the port of Sandwich, Flemish pirates attacked, plundered and took the ship with them to Sluis, where both ship and goods were sold. However, when the warden of the Cinque Ports, Robert of Kendale, inquired into the case, it turned out that the ship had in fact carried 109 tuns and fourteen pipes of wine at the price of £696 sterling (each tun at £6), seventy-seven quarters of wheat at the price of £77 (each quarter 20s.) and sixteen quarters of wheaten flour, price £16. In addition, the total cargo of the ship did not belong exclusively to the Pagani brothers but was instead divided thus: forty-five tuns and one pipe belonged to the brothers, sixty-two tuns to Grimoard Cardon', the wheat to Laurence de Molyn, and the rest of the wine, the wheaten flour, and other goods belonged to the master and the mariners. Furthermore, the total composition of the cargo and losses were in fact: ship with tackle, value £100; the beds, robes, armour, coffers, silver cups and jewels of the merchants and the mariners, value £20 sterling. The compensation for the damages awarded to the merchants was estimated at £80 in addition to the losses. The restitution due to the Pagani brothers was in the end: forty-five tuns appraised at £273 and £30 14s. of their portion of the compensation of the £80.[67] So, even though what the Pagani brothers claimed in compensation was not all that different to their actual cargo on the ship, this case shows the limitation of the source material in identifying the size of the ships used, as well as the uncertainty of the total value of its cargo, since each merchant could or would petition to the English king individually for restitution of their losses. Even when it looks as if the merchants complained collectively—which was not unusual—we still do not know how much of the cargo and valuables belonged to the crew. Thus, the records are flawed, because we cannot be certain that any given complaint contained all the losses suffered, or sometimes even how much of the cargo belonged to the petitioner.

Another way of identifying the stolen goods was the following: In 1308, an English merchant from Winchester had bought cloth at Ghent and Douai to take to England. As his ship made its passage to England, Flemish pirates attacked it by the sea-coast near Gravenyng (Gravelines?). They stole goods to the value of £1200, which they put into their two ships and then proceeded to Hulst. Apparently, the English had the nerve to

[67] *CCR 1313–1318*, pp. 385 and 456–458.

follow the pirates to Hulst, where they found their goods and demanded restitution.[68] Thus, the victims actually made the effort themselves to find and identify the goods immediately after the assault. However, this case must be considered quite unusual, since normally the crews were probably too scared to pursue the pirates.

Pirates rarely worked alone, yet the details of the relationship between pirates and fences on land are seldom mentioned in the sources. We do have evidence for two cases, however, detailing collusion between authorities on land and pirates. In 1312, Bartholomew de Welle, a merchant and mariner of Lynn complained that John le Clerk, a mariner and merchant of Goseford, had boarded a ship of Bartholomew's charged with wine.[69] In December 1311, the ship was anchored because of tempestuous weather at the Paleis de Reith near the Island of Oléron. John and his armed associates twice entered the ship,[70] violently took some goods, three anchors and the cables of the ship,[71] and then with their own ship broke and wrecked Bartholomew's ship, causing the loss of the wine and cargo to the value of £600. Batholomew immediately complained to the provost of La Rochelle, and he had several shipmasters and mariners who had witnessed the assault to testify and by oath assure that Bartholomew spoke the truth. The provost made a sealed deposition of the event and the witnesses, which he then gave to Bartholomew so that he could take John to court when he located him. Then Bartholomew searched for John along the Breton and French coast, but he did not find him until he came to London. Here Bartholomew summoned John to court with the sheriff Richard of Welleford. The ship was located and identified by the stolen cables and anchors, and the sheriff detained it. During the initial hearings, it was apparent that John had committed a crime against Bartholomew and that, according to the rules of the Law Merchant,[72] he should

[68] *CCR 1307–1313*, p. 130. The merchants were granted partial restitution later, pp. 358–359.

[69] This case is documented in TNA SC 8/149/7441, *The Parliament Rolls of Medieval England*, eds Chris Given-Wilson, et al. (Scholarly Digital Editions, Leicester, 2005), parliament of August 1312, SC 9/17, item 6, *CPR 1313–1317*, pp. 147–148, 231–232 and 323–324.

[70] On the 20th and then during the night of the 25th of December.

[71] Ward notes that it was an absolute necessity to have two or more anchors for the ships to be able to anchor safely. Accordingly, the anchors were extremely valuable, and by taking them, the ship was de facto unable to trade and had to be run aground with all the risks and damages to the ship this entailed. Ward, *Medieval Shipmaster*, pp. 167–170.

[72] Law Merchant—or *Lex Mercatoria* as it was known in the Middle Ages—was a body of customs and regulations for commercial transactions. It was furthermore international in scope and thus not subject to the jurisprudence of a particular kingdom or principality.

pay compensation to Bartholomew. Nevertheless, the sheriff refused to pass judgment. Instead, he led John go and stalled the case for twenty-one weeks. When the day of trial arrived and Bartholomew showed up, he was told that there would be no trial that day since the sheriff was occupied elsewhere.[73] However, when the sheriff was certain that Bartholomew had left, he ordered his clerks to go to the London Guildhall and tell the notary of records that, due to Bartholomew's absence on the day set for court, John was quit of the charge and that Bartholomew was to be amerced for nonsuit. When Bartholomew found out what had happened, he complained to the mayor of London, who refused to help him. Consequently, Bartholomew appealed to Edward II, and the case continued until at least 1315 before Bartholomew finally obtained justice. While the exact details of the case elude us, it shows how a man like John le Clerk, who was on good terms with the sheriff, could be protected by those in power (probably in return for some of the loot). It seems clear that we are dealing with a case of corruption. While it was probably not uncommon, we unfortunately cannot tell how widespread this collusion between pirates and local authorities was.

Another incident further illustrates the fate of stolen goods, as well as collaboration between port officials and pirates. In or before 1318, *La Swalewe* of London, charged with goods by London merchants, was captured by Flemish pirates while it was anchored at Margate. The pirates slew the whole crew, except for a boy who was brought with the pirates and kept in Flanders for a year. The ship and its cargo was taken to the Zwin. Previously, the count of Flanders had promised justice and punishment if the pirates were found in his lands, but later inquiries into the case showed that the pirates, some of whose names were familiar to the English authorities, were in league with John le Gos, who at that time was the count's bailiff at Leschufe. Furthermore, it transpired that the wine had been delivered to the count's household by a middleman. Apparently John had also appropriated a dog found in the ship and the charter of the freight. One of the pirates (?), Quintin Lampescue, had sold the ship to his brother, John Lompesone, who "repaired" it so that it could not be recognised again (perhaps by repainting it?).[74] Apparently, however, the refitting

[73] The 20th of July, 1312.

[74] "repaired it otherwise than it was before in order that it should not be recognised", *CCR 1313–1318*, p. 593. For a similar case of collaboration between pirates and Flemish bailiffs, see *CCR 1323–1327*, p. 175 and Jones, Michael, "Roches contre Hawley: la cour anglaise de chevalerie et un cas de piraterie à Brest, 1386–1402," *Mémoire de la Société d'histoire et*

of the ship did not work, or perhaps the English recognised the dog and drew their conclusion regarding John's role. In any case, they seem to have had evidence enough for their complaint. John Lompesone's "repairing" of the vessel is quite interesting, since it is the only time that I have come across this description of the fate of the taken ships. Despite this single reference, I suspect that it probably was not unusual for captured ships to be treated in this way, since ships were quite valuable. By "repairing" it, the shipmaster could sail out again and continue trading with a diminished risk of identification of the ship by the former owners.

An example from 1318 shows that it was not only port officials who benefitted from collaboration with pirates. In this case, German merchants sailing to Boston were attacked at sea near Ravenser. The pirates killed the shipmaster and the crew and threw the corpses into the sea. The pirates, who were later identified, took the ship and the goods to the land near Ravenser, where they divided the goods and sold part of them to men privy to the trespass. Thus, the royal order to the English officials was to prosecute not only the pirates but also the receivers of the goods.[75]

This last case raises another significant issue in these piracy cases, namely how lethal pirate attacks might be. Popular as well as scholarly perception, founded on the Ciceronean paradigm, has it that pirates are an especially blood-thirsty breed of criminals.[76] While the above-mentioned example indeed supports this notion,[77] the picture is more nuanced in the end. After all, armed robbery is one thing, but wholesale slaughter is quite another, and usually pirates do not seem to have been remorseless killers.[78]

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d'archéologie de Bretagne, 64 (1987), 53–64. In a research note, Francis Davey has investigated who bought the pirates' wine in fifteenth-century Cornwall. He notes that the clergy of Exeter seem to have received large parts of the wine. Davey, Francis, "Who bought the pirates' wine?", *Devon and Cornwall Notes and Queries*, 39 (2005), 242–250.

[75] *CPR 1317–1321*, pp. 284 and 364–366.

[76] See, for instance, Gruffydd, "Piracy, privateering," pp. 24–25, Rodger, *Safeguard*, pp. 115–116.

[77] Another example of this can be seen in 1327, when a Flemish ship was boarded by pirates at Whitby. The master, the mariners, nine Scottish merchants, sixteen Scottish pilgrims and thirteen women were killed. This case is exceptionally brutal though. *CPR 1324–1327*, p. 354.

[78] Indeed, Barbara Hanawalt's and A.J. Finch's research indicate that use of deadly violence was rare amongst the commoners in the Middle Ages. Hanawalt, Barbara, "Violent death in fourteenth- and early fifteenth-century England," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 18 (1976), 297–320, Finch, A.J., "The nature of violence in the Middle Ages: An alternative perspective," *Historical Research*, 70 (1997), 249–268.

This represents something of a paradox. The logical expectation would be that the pirates killed off the entire crew in order not to leave witnesses. However, a good number of the pirate attacks described in the sources was relatively non-lethal. It seems as if those killed in a regular attack were defending themselves in the initial combat, but once the crew had surrendered, they were often either held captive or simply set free.

But this begs the question of why pirates did not kill the crew. First of all, the occasional pirates-cum-mariners were mostly just looking for easy gain. Furthermore, they apparently did not seem to be too worried about repercussions, either by officials or from the friends, families or guilds of their victims. What seems to have prompted the killing of crews was less the fear of identification and prosecution but rather that the crews were the enemy, either of one's country, or more narrowly, one's port. Thus, many of the killings happened in times of war, such as during the conflicts between the Anglo-Bayonnais and the Normans in the 1290s or between the English and the Flemings in the 1310s and early 20s, when Flemish pirates in league with the Scots harassed English shipping.

Pirates sometimes also took prisoners, presumably to obtain ransom. For example, in 1318, the ship of a group of London merchants, anchored at Kingsdown near the port of Sandwich, was plundered by Flemish pirates, who killed the entire crew except for three and then sank the ship.[79] In this example, it appears that the Flemings only spared those whom they thought would be able to pay a ransom. This, at least, was what happened in the case of a pirate attack in 1319, when Lynn merchants, sailing from Lynn to Gascony to trade, were plundered by Flemish pirates near Sheringham (co. Norfolk). The crew was slain except for two, who were taken prisoner and brought to Scotland. Here they were imprisoned in Berwick-upon-Tweed, and one of them was sold to a Zeeland merchant for £20 sterling, while the other crew member was still detained in prison at the time of the petition.[80]

There was an obvious financial interest in the taking and ransoming of hostages, but this practice also shows that pirates were not always bloodthirsty monsters. In 1311, Edmund de Trevelwythe complained to the king that one of his ships was boarded in the port of Fowey by the co-owner, John Stonhard of la Welle, and some mariners. Edmund was expelled from

[79] *CCR 1313–1318*, p. 594.

[80] *CCR 1318–1321*, p. 216. A case from 1324 further clarifies the identity of the imprisoned. Here it is stated the merchant and his son were imprisoned for some time (presumably until ransom was paid). *CCR 1323–1327*, p. 175.

the ship, wounded and then taken to Lostwithiel, where he was imprisoned. Then John sailed away to the Continent to sell his goods.[81] It seems as if he did not have the heart to kill his former partner.

The indiscriminate killing and total destruction mostly occurred in the vicious maritime wars waged by the Portsmen, the Normans, the Bayonnais and the Castilians. These wars will be dealt with more thoroughly in chapter 4, but it is worth noting that the savagery of these wars was due to other concerns besides immediate enrichment.

This chapter has demonstrated the numerous problems with researching piracy. First of all, there is the problem of identifying the ships used. While it would seem that much piracy was conducted by the population along the coasts in small vessels using sails as well as oars for propulsion, the sources show that all kinds of vessels could and were used in these endeavours.

The sources also show that the pirate assaults seem to have occurred mainly along the coasts and the straits where the confined waters gave an advantage to the pirate, since their prey would be easier to apprehend here. Furthermore, the sources indicate that pirates seem to have favoured a swarming tactic, where they aimed at overwhelming and capturing their prey by numerical superiority combined with geographical conditions which favoured surrounding tactics. However, much piracy also occurred in or just outside the ports, since potential prey was easier to locate here than on the open sea. While these pirate attacks often seem premeditated, many mariners and merchants were not above a little occasional piracy when they went on trading voyages abroad. Simply put, if they saw potential prey and felt confident that they would be victorious, little seem have stopped them trying to capture the ship and its cargo.

The chapter further demonstrates that pirates often worked with the local coastal and port communities. The exact details of this relationship often elude us, but some significant examples show the collusion between local officials and pirates.

[81] *CPR 1307–1313*, pp. 424 and 537.