**Chapter One:**

**The State of Play: Medieval Hostageship and Modern Scholarship**

**Matthew Bennett and Katherine Weikert**

Holding hostages in the medieval west was not an uncommon state of play. Hostages were taken and held as surety for various reasons: the holding of property, the promise of paying off debts, the securement of peace. Hostages could be taken for social reasons, if broadly read. The fostering of sons is a form of social contract involving the holding of a boy by another family to strengthen a network of alliances. Betrothals and marriages of daughters and sisters, especially in the cases of making treaties between warring factions, served much the same purpose as a hostage or a fostered son: a promise of peace held in the body of a person. Wardships of various kinds, of either minor children or widows, could equally be read as a form of social caretaking, a polite–and profitable–form of hostage. Of course, hostages were also taken and ransomed in wartime under martial conditions, and provided a tidy income for the keeper. Hostages under martial conditions could extend beyond the expected situation of the holding of knights and affect the vulnerable, for example, wives or children being held for the actions of husbands and fathers. And of course, hostageship could turn ugly. Hostages were killed, starved, mutilated and 'disappeared.' In social, political and military terms, hostages and hostageships were, if not common, then a regular occurrence.

Despite this, the secondary materials available on medieval hostages are surprisingly slim. In the last few years we have fortunately seen two solid monographs exploring the topic,[1] but

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[1] Gwen Seabourne*, Imprisoning Medieval Women: The Non-Judicial Confinement and Abduction of Women in England, c. 1170 – 1509* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011); Adam Kosto, *Hostages in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

this is merely a beginning. Gwen Seabourne and Adam Kosto have provided a foundation as well as a set of terminology, definitions, parameters and examples from which scholarship will spring. Previous to this, work exploring hostages or hostageship could be found in a handful of articles, but largely more in the mention of the action of taking or being a hostage as a part of another discussion. Medieval hostageship has undeservedly suffered from a lack of attention. If medieval hostageship was a regular state of being in the past, whence then this lack of secondary material?

There could be as many reasons for this as there were reasons for hostages in the middle ages. For one, the state of taking or being a hostage can all too easily be reflected in the modern mind as a part of the modern constructions of hostages. Our world has all too many circumstances in which hostages have been taken that make us recoil with horror and anger when we come across upon the word. Perhaps we think of the Israeli athletes at the Munich 1972 Olympics, of the Iran hostage crisis of 1979-81, of Daniel Pearl's death in 2002, of French journalists in Syria in 2014, of ISIL's beheadings of military and civilian hostages in the Middle East happening today as we write this chapter.[2] The taking and detaining of hostages is a regular occurrence in the modern world; we have these often horrific examples at the cusp of our media cycles and within our collective memory to call to mind at the word. Medieval scholars may not give another thought to stumbling upon the word *obses* in our

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[2] Kareem Shaheen and Ian Black, 'Beheaded Syrian Scholar Refused to Lead ISIS to Hidden Palmyra Antiquities,' *The Guardian*, 19 August 2015, accessed 20 August 2015, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/aug/18/isis-beheads-archaeologist-syria. Khaled al-Asaad, head of antiquities at the site, was beheaded in front of the town's museum and his body hung from a column at the ancient site after being held hostage for more than a month.

manuscripts; unfortunately, for a wider audience the term hostage has a negative meaning.

Today we know all too well what hostage means.

However, there is a significant difference between 'knowing' what hostage means in our own world, and understanding it the medieval context, which was seldom a reflection of current mores. Modern hostage situations are always crises with a clear expectation of violence, bodily harm and force;[3] medieval hostage situations were often a long-term social contract. As outlined above, a medieval hostageship could be undertaken for a variety of reasons, not all military or aggressive in their outlook, and hostageship in the middle ages could be as much about strengthening social ties as breaking them.

There is also a practical reason for our lack of attention to medieval hostages: it can be difficult to track them in the available evidence. When *obses* comes up in a record, we might assume that we 'know' what this means; but beyond that, this mention may be the sole piece of direct evidence for this *obses*, with little, if any, follow-up on the ins-and-outs of a particular hostageship. It is not always possible to trace individual hostages through the available records, particularly ones who are not famous or of high status. As opposed to doing more than reconstructing some of the more famous and extraordinary medieval

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[3] The United Nations International Convention against the Taking of Hostages specifies a part of the situation of hostageship the '[threat] to kill, to injure, or to continue to detain another person (hereinafter referred to as the "hostage")': UN Doc. A/RES/34/146, 17 December 1979, 1§1, accessed 30 October 2015, http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/34/a34res146.pdf.

hostageships, such as that of Eleanor of Brittany or Richard Lionheart, it remains easiest to simply see our *obsides* as hostages we might see in the modern world. In fact, the more extraordinary hostages that we have taken the time to know, such as Eleanor or Richard, are probably just that: out of the ordinary, and not necessarily standing as a paradigm for the larger phenomenon of medieval hostages. Beyond that, *obsides* are merely mentioned in our primary sources, and so we follow that mention with a mere mention of it in our own work.

Finally, there is a more ideological or even typological reason for our inattention to medieval hostages: it is incredibly difficult to simply *define* a medieval hostage in the first place. Can prisoners be considered hostages? Are hostages in groups different from individual hostages? Was the defining feature of a hostage being specifically called by that name, or can we see hostages outside of our *obsides*? How can we talk about medieval hostages if we have not yet come to a consensus about what constituted this status or position?

This last question is the hardest as it strikes true: there are indeed many ways of seeing and defining a medieval hostage. However, the question begs to be asked: by defining hostageship, will scholarship then be liable to ignore those that might fall outside of this definition? Too narrow a definition is undesirable for just this reason, but too broad a definition may dilute the field with examples of those whom do not truly fall into the category. But there is still more at stake in the definition of a medieval hostage: a hostage or a state of hostageship in the medieval world was seldom a static situation but one that could be, and frequently was, fluid and changing. Hostageship was a state of being as much as a legal or social category; a state of being can be flexible and malleable. A man, woman or child

taken as a hostage in the medieval past would be liable to a shifting status, and one that could be altered in many ways, during the time the hostageship continued or was terminated.

The research in this book extends the concept of medieval hostages and hostageships from previous legal definitions of the hostage. Indeed, this book overall is more concerned with the social and political impact of hostages than with legal definitions and categorization. And indeed in attempting to see beyond narrow bounds of named *obsides*, two major themes emerge in the study of medieval hostages, moving into social and cultural reality in addition to legal parameters. The first is that a hostage, and the use of a hostage, could often be as much of a symbol or statement for the hostage-keeper as a position for the hostage. The second, more loosely, is that a hostageship could shift in its purpose and thus also its status and definition. Beyond this, though, there are a number of emerging themes that are built around medieval hostages: the possibilities of violence to a hostage, implied, threatened, or enacted; the gender and status of the hostage affecting their personal situation; the economics of taking, holding, caring for or ransoming a hostage; and, in many situations, the individual politics surrounding the situation of the hostage. All of these areas, and in many cases multiple intersections of them, are part of seeking to understand medieval hostageships.

The hostage as a symbol or statement is not an idea that has gone unnoticed, but the case studies in this volume represent new understandings and new exploration of the symbolic importance of the hostage. When momentarily setting aside questions of legal definitions, it becomes obvious that taking and being hostages created a new hierarchical structure between people in addition to the already-stratified medieval social structures in place. The state of hostageship itself creates a new social structure of authority, a social hierarchy between the

hostage and the hostage-taker. Indeed, the state of being a hostage could many times serve to create a structural relationship between people rather than an actual, defined status for both. Within this hierarchical structure, the new power positions provided new opportunities of symbolic displays of these new social rankings. The hostage, then, was not only a form of personal surety but a way for the hostage-taker to display his or her new ability to exact control over not just a person, but the greater societies or peoples that a hostage represented. The hostage became a symbolic representation for a greater whole, and the display of this symbol in the form of a person was a display of a new hierarchy, a new structural relationship between a lord and a subjugated people.

Thus, the importance of symbolism in medieval hostageship should never be underestimated. During a period of poor communications, when seeing the ruler's head on the currency might be the closest many royal subjects got to understanding who was in power, physical representations of authority were essential. In part this could be done by impressive buildings, both secular and ecclesiastical, or by royal progresses and the presence (when available) of royal officials, but for something as intangible as political influence, the presence of a personage spoke volumes. Hostages were literally paraded in front of both the political elite and the wider population. In 1064, Earl Harold,  in fact if not de jure a hostage in Normandy,[4] was made to swear oaths across the duchy asserting his support for Duke William's claim to the English throne. After William's victory in battle and his coronation he took many of the leading men of England, 'velut obsides,' on a tour of continental possessions to demonstrate his newly-won authority, although the actual conquest of England

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[4] K. Cutler, 'The Godwinist Hostages: The Case for 1051,' *Annuale Mediaevale* 12 (1972): 70-7.

lay years in the future.[5] Similarly, as Katherine Weikert explains, the Treaty of Norham in 1209 handed over the daughters of William I, king of Scots, to King John of England, as a demonstration of the vassalic relationship between them. A display of the princesses of Scotland, Margaret and Isabella, as a part of his court indicated John's dominance over not just Scotland, but also the Scottish king and family.[6] In Christian Ispir's words, the symbolism of hostage giving and taking was 'communicative' of political relationships, noting as well John's display of his Scottish hostages at the Feast of St John in 1213 as an exhibition of his post-Norham dominance over Scotland.[7] As Gordon McKelvie points out, Henry V used a similar tactic in making visual use of his captive James I of Scotland at Henry's marriage to Catherine de Valois and again at her coronation as queen;[8] in Alex Brondarbit's chapter, we see Edward V riding alongside his uncle-captor Richard, Duke of Gloucester, giving Richard both the veneer of respectable companionship as well as the display of his control over the young king.[9]

Alice Hicklin speaks of a 'mind-world' in which hostages represented political relationships, whilst doing harm to them awakened a remembrance of past betrayals and served as kind of penance for wrong-doing. In such situations hostages after their hostageship could retain powerful visual reminders of the power structure that they had endured: the hostages of Swein, disfigured by his son Cnut, served as a powerful reminder of the cost of breaking

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[5] Bennett, this volume, 00.

[6] Weikert, this volume, 00.

[7] Ispir, this volume, 00.

[8] McKelvie, this volume, 00.

[9] Brondarbit, this volume, 00.

oaths in a society wherein physical disfigurement carried very particular meanings.[10] Ryan Lavelle speaks of early Anglo-Saxon hostages as a part of the 'material culture of kingship,' as visible symbols of power and 'humiliated props' of performances of royal dignity.[11] To Katherine Barker, the symbolism could lie in a name alone: a 'helmet hostage' carried implications that the named person embodied an ancient contract which could also be found in the land itself.[12] Matthew Bennett also stresses the symbolic nature of hostages found in poetic sources as they were often in fact ephemeral, disappearing once the point of their mere existence was made: it was understood that sureties to agreements were required, but if the hostages were not necessary to the narrative then they could be dispensed with once establishing their presence.[13] Hostage exchange, even across religious boundaries, was simply such a natural activity that required no further exploration in the poem itself.

The symbolic nature of the person held hostage could and certainly did take on a great many political aspects throughout the medieval period. In the case of a crowned king, the royal body was held to be sacred and inviolate. This is true for the earlier part of the medieval era at least. But it is striking that from the fourteenth century onwards, in the British Isles at least, kings or nearly-kings such as Edward V were susceptible to covert execution. Edward II, Richard III, Henry VI, and the sons of Edward IV were all 'disappeared' when in the custody of a usurper. Indeed, to Brondarbit 'captive kings without a purpose were always killed,' a

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[10] Hicklin, this volume, 00.

[11] Lavelle, this volume, 00.

[12] Barker, this volume, 00.

[13] Bennett, this volume, 00.

concept which would have been inconceivable to an earlier generation.[14] The question then is: what was the purpose of high-status captives? This must lead to a discussion of the political utility of hostageship.

For Brondabit, the purpose of managing an imprisoned king was political influence. This might mean the broad possibilities of directing policy, the narrower one of distributing patronage, or a specific interest, such as 'controlling Lancastrian supporters still operating in France and the Low Countries.'[15] McKelvie's view of James I of Scotland is that: 'Once he was a prisoner it was political considerations that determined his life as prisoner;' control of James enabled Henry V to justify the killing of a Scottish garrison in France in 1420, since they could be declared traitor to their lord.[16] Ispir suggests that King John's hostage policy was 'menacing' to his barons, both on account of the number which he took and potential punishment by fining or imprisonment.[17] Hicklin even sees Norway controlled by a hostage policy that threatened life and limb if there was opposition to Danish rule.[18] By way of contrast, Lavelle proposes that the loss of status and particularly honour was more of a threat than physical attack, though within this chapter hostages are still seen as a part of a construction of early medieval kingship.[19]

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[14] Brondarbit, this volume, 00.

[15] Ibid, 00.

[16] McKelvie, this volume, 00.

[17] Ispir, this volume, 00.

[18] Hicklin, this volume, 00.

[19] Lavelle, this volume, 00.

Alongside the symbolic importance of the hostage highlighted above and throughout this volume, the research here also defies attempts to strictly confine the definition of a hostage, as the role and status of a medieval hostage was often shifting, ill-defined, and overlapping with other roles that a person could play. Indeed as Gwen Seabourne points out, medieval hostageship, never having 'a completely watertight and separate status,' was often a sea of shifting sands for the hostage and the hostage-taker, with statuses changing in both legal and social ways.[20] When viewing a medieval hostage as a social status, rather than a legal one, parallels and comparisons to other roles become a necessity. Captives and prisoners are the most obvious examples; as Rémy Ambühl discusses, at times the statuses could morph from one to the other with relative ease,[21] but as Annette Parks demonstrates, at times the two offered very distinct sets of treatment.[22] Being able to differentiate between the two statuses could at times be crucial, but at others the two would be nebulous and hard to define with any certainty. The social importance or social capital of the hostage can also be considered as hostages would not simply be a political tool. Bennett's comparative sources in the twelfth century demonstrates that hostages would 'regulate relationships within conflict,' and also, probably surprising to a modern audience, that the military elites of Christian and Muslim societies shared values and hostage practices, demonstrating that the ethos of medieval hostageships was not only a western/Christendom concept.[23] Ispir considers hostages as a

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[20] Seabourne, this volume, 00.

[21] Ambühl, this volume, 00.

[22] Parks, this volume, 00.

[23] Bennett, this volume, 00.

'symbolic capital of a baron.'[24] Weikert's chapter on Margaret and Isabella of Scotland examines the princesses' travel with court as a social demonstration of power.[25]

Interestingly, the practice of fosterage, which could be functionally similar to hostageships at times, also served as an important means of assuring allies, developing kin links and avoiding conflict through feud. This was exactly the experience of William Marshal, who served his apprenticeship in the household of Patrick, earl of Salisbury. This is not to say he was a hostage as his sojourn was entirely voluntary, but his role was certainly that of building a beneficial political relationship between his father and a wealthy relative. The *Histoire de Guillaume le Marechal* represents the ties of loyalty which such service produced. When Earl Patrick is killed in a Poitevin ambush, William fearlessly risks his own life and is severely wounded defending his temporary lord. Interestingly, according to the poem, William is then rescued by Eleanor of Aquitaine, and in the time spent recovering from his injuries begins to form a profitable relationship with the royal family. [26]

Again functionally similar to hostageship at times, another aspect of such childhood experience was the practice of wardship. While intended to protect young heirs and heiresses through their minority, the system could have more exploitative aspects. Both Ispir and Weikert deal with these issues in the reign of King John, providing examples of how

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[24] Ispir, this volume, 00.

[25] Weikert, this volume, 00.

[26] Bennet, this volume, 00: *Histoire de Guillaume le Maréchal*

wardship could be managed by the king in order to benefit royal finances by running a competitive market for lords who wished to gain them and by fining those who refused the responsibility. More specifically, in Weikert's case of the Scottish princesses, the role of ward, honoured guest, hostage and 'marriage fodder' overlap intriguingly and, as in so many circumstances, almost defy categorisation.[27]

Female hostages had their marital state as an additional status forming their overlapping identities, and again the two areas could be difficult to define with certainty; high-status women given to high-status men in varying guises as surety, to keep peace, or for fosterage as a child in a potential long-term marriage arrangement was commonplace in the medieval world,[28] and these practices muddies the water in viewing female hostageships and confinements. Indeed Adam Kosto has pointed out that the situation of hostageships runs 'parallel to that of individuals involved in marriage alliances,'[29] while Parks has noted the similarities in 'the practices and ambiguities which governed both marriages and

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[27] Weikert, this volume, 00.

[28] Fiona Harris Stoertz, 'Young Women in France and England, 1050-1300,' *Journal of Women's History* 12:4 (2001), especially 24-5; Annette P. Parks, 'Prisoners of Love: Medieval Wives as Hostages,' *Journal of the Georgia Association of Historians* 17 (1996); Annette Parks, 'Rescuing the Maidens from the Tower: Recovering the Stories of Female Political Hostages,' in *Feud, Violence and Practice: Essays in Medieval Studies in Honor of Stephen D. White*, eds. Belle S. Tuten and Tracey L. Billado (Burlington, VT: 2010).

[29] Adam Kosto, 'Hostages in the Carolingian World (714-840)', *Early Medieval Europe* 11, no. 2 (2002): 146.

hostageships.'[30] In seeking to draw a strong boundary over what constitutes a medieval hostage, scholars can miss the nuances and vagaries of medieval hostageship, which often did not represent a static state of being but a fluctuating, shifting state dependent on a variety of options available to the hostage-taker. In the case of women, their statuses as the female sex, their place in the life-cycle, e.g. unmarried or not, and their social status could deeply affect their role in custody of another.[31]

Indeed, this volume addresses strong issues of gender and status as emerging frameworks to consider hostages in the middle ages. As considerations of intersectionalties in gender studies have grown throughout historical studies, here too we see the fruitfulness of approaching the medieval hostage through this lens. Seabourne maintains that gender was always a consideration when it came to hostages, and in female hostages, varying statuses of marriage could further impact the female experience of being a hostage.[32] Parks clearly outlines the variations at play in being a male or a female high-status hostage or captive.[33] Brondarbit

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[30] Parks, 'Prisoners,' 72.

[31] D. Jenkins, ed. and trans., *The Law of Hywel Dda: Law Texts from Medieval Wales* (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 1986), 58, refers to the rights of a woman 'given as hostage into a country of strange speech, if she becomes pregnant by her kin and lord,' implying sexual or marriage roles as well as the shifting statuses according to women due to the vagaries of life-cycle. Our thanks to Ryan Lavelle for drawing this example to our attention.

[32] Seabourne, this volume, 00.

[33] Parks, this volume, 00.

carefully explores the meaning of confining the king's body, the highest-status male hostage

in the medieval world, and how status was delicately negotiated.[34]

Another emerging theme from the volume is violence, though not in a way that would be

expected to a modern audience accustomed to modern hostageships, In fact, violence as a tool

against medieval hostages was both rare and very strategically used, though as Colleen Slater

has previously noted, even 'the implicit threat [to the hostage] was likely to produce results

[with the hostage-giver].'[35] But the wide difference between a constant if implicit threat and

the actuality of violence perpetrated against hostages is highlighted by the exceptions

explored in the volume. Ambühl's prisoners might expect a lengthy activity in order to 'take

them out of the game' of both war and politics, although they would not expect to be

harmed.[36] Ambühl stresses the aspect of tolerance with which the victors conducted surrender

negotiations with fortified places over which they won control, and this is consistent with

approaches throughout the medieval period.[37] There was nothing to be gained by brutalising

military opponents, or a wider civilian population unnecessarily–although the situation was

different when a castle or city fell by assault; then the laws of sack applied. The story of the

Burghers of Calais (1347) is often misrepresented in this regard. By requiring the hostages to

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[34] Brondarbit, this volume, 00.

[35] Colleen Slater, '"So Hard was it to Release Princes whom Fortuna had put in her Chains":

Queens and Female Rulers as Hostage- and Captive-Takers and Holders,' *Medieval Feminist*

*Forum* 45:2 (2009): 14-15.

[36] Ambühl, this volume, 00.

[37] Ibid., 00.

appear in sack-cloth with halters around their necks, Edward III was humiliating them, but not harming them.[38]

Only rarely in this volume will the reader find examples of harshness of treatment of those who were kept in long captivity. Parks' study of the tragic experience of the children of Manfred of Sicily and Helena Angelina Doukaina, detained for life by Charles of Anjou, demonstrates that Charles considered them a strong political threat needing to be confined against their will.[39] The maltreatment and violence–or the rumours of violence–against the boys in particular sustain much of the unusual nature of the children's captivity; though an awkward concept for a modern audience, it could even be argued that Charles had been merciful in not killing Manfred's sons, especially in the light of Emperor Henry VI's apparent blinding and castration of the heir to the Kingdom of Sicily two generations earlier. However, although Manfred's sons were never to be allowed to emerge again, the queen and her daughters were treated more honourably. More specifically in the case of one daughter, Beatrice, the possibility of her being used in a marriage alliance made her a valuable asset.[40] Ispir also provides examples of similar long-term imprisonments, even unto death, at the hands of King John, although he was considered a tyrant at the time.[41] Hicklin's examination of the hostages of Swein and Cnut's English and Norwegian campaigns demonstrates that

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[38]  Matthew Bennett, 'Legality and legitimacy in war and its conduct, 1350-1650,' in *European Warfare 1350-1750,* eds. Frank Tallett & D.J.B. Trim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 264-77.

[39] Parks, this volume, 00.

[40] Parks, this volume, 00.

[41] Ispir, this volume, 00.

their mutilation, while possibly a part of a greater cultural understanding of the use of hostages, was also a strategic decision, a 'calculated act with multiple layers of meaning.'[42] Violence, though thought of in modern terms as an inherent part of hostageships, was not necessarily a given to a medieval hostage, and the level of violence inflicted on a hostage would depend on complex layers of their particular social and political needs and contexts.

The economic underpinning of hostage arrangements and its overlap with concepts of status and hierarchy is also made clear by a number of studies in this volume. Ispir, in his analysis of King John's exploitation on the system, considers hostages as 'The symbolic capital of a baron [sons and heirs]…[being] seized and kept in a state of uncertainty.'[43] The sufficiency of the pledge also springs out from this aspect of a hostage relationship. Again, in John's case, his demands 'pro securitate de fino predicto' clearly represents this as a financial security. Unsurprisingly for such a suspicious individual, John was concerned that donors would provide hostages of little value, which undermined the value of such agreements, or even rendered them valueless.[44] Bennett also notes the significance of understanding value in the context of Christian-Muslim encounters.[45] Weikert and McKelvie both consider the actual cost of hostage-holding, especially in the context of hostages who were high-status and royal, and thus expensive to care for within a household.[46]

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[42] Hicklin, this volume, 00.

[43] Ispir, this volume, 00.

[44] Ispir, this volume, 00.

[45] Bennett, this volume, 00.

[46] Weikert, this volume, 00; McKelvie, this volume, 00.

It is in the fifteenth-century examples that the financial expectations come most strongly to the fore, though. This is partly because of the overlap between the categories of hostage and ransomable captive, or the shift from one to the other. For example, although it was normal throughout the centuries under discussion for surrendering towns or fortresses to provide hostages as surety, the fiscal value of such individuals is much more clearly defined in the later era. So, for McKelvie, the distinction between hostage and prisoner was mutable and on a shifting scale. In the case of King James, his status was recognised by the money spent on his captivity, while his role as hostage had implications for the non-payment of ransom; that was not necessarily the outcome required when negotiated peace was at stake.[47] Ambühl's analysis of the English surrender of Rouen, replete with details about the men who served as surety to the agreement, also brings the role of finance into even sharper focus. He demonstrates that there was a commodity market in the hostage-captives of Rouen, resulting in the selling-on of individuals to entrepreneurs who considered that their ransoms were a useful investment (although it turned out that some were not).[48]

Finally, and as should be apparent from this chapter alone, many studies in this volume have also played upon the difficulties and the questions of defining a medieval hostage. It should be apparent from the above that there was far from just one static category of hostageship in the medieval west. How hostages were understood and treated depended upon the period under discussion, the cultural and historical background to the situation, and most often on more immediate political concerns. Parks and McKelvie both examine the difference between

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[47] McKelvie, this volume, 00.

[48] Ambühl, this volume, 00.

a captive and a hostage, and the treatment that one could expect under both statuses.[49] Ambühl's hostages of Rouen interestingly change their particular status during their course of hostageship, necessitating a shift in treatment and a shift in perceptions about them.[50] Weikert and Seabourne both caution against defining too closely the term 'hostage' in the Middle Ages. Indeed, in the study of medieval hostages it is worth remembering that through the great portion of the period there were no set standards for hostages, nor a legal definition of either what constituted a hostage or how a hostage should be treated.[51]

This does not undermine the contention that the giving, taking, exchange and holding of hostages (even into the role of captives) was a near-universal activity in the medieval era in a number of political, military and social contexts. Hostageship was such a central part of life and politics that it in no way resembled modern understanding of 'hostage situations.' It also developed over time, bringing about different emphases in the hostage relationship. In the eight-hundredth year of Magna Carta it is especially worth remembering this, for while King John had abused the system, the barons abjured it. In the security clause, which established a counsel of twenty-five barons to bring the king to account, there is no request for hostages.[52] As Ispir points out, the charter, a written document witnessed both by signatories and a public ceremony, was considered sufficient: this was to be the future. Of course, John did renege on

[49] Parks, this volume, 00; McKelvie, this volume, 00.

[50] Ambühl, this volume, 00.

[51] For a treatment of captives and prisoners of war as a separate entity in the later middle ages, see Rémy Ambühl, *Prisoners of War in the Hundred Years War: Ransom Culture in the Late Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

[52] Ispir, this volume, 00.

Magna Carta and hostages continued to have an important role for centuries to come, but the possibility of alternatives was never absent.

When viewing medieval hostages, all attempts to set boundaries, parameters and definitions have tended to be filtered through a modern framework in our best attempt to understand what being a medieval hostage meant to medieval society. This is, of course, assuming that there was a general understanding throughout the medieval world of what constituted a hostage, and how they were to be treated. By and large, though, this defies categorization. Many of the records of hostages are scant, as outlined above. It is possible that what it meant to be a hostage in the medieval world was so well understood by the rulers, the government and the administration that no further details were needed; as now, the state of hostages and hostageship might have been implicitly understood. But it is equally possible that the state of hostageship was also a transitive one in the medieval world, one that was even then ill-defined and shifting. Further social considerations beyond the legal would have also affected the label of 'hostage' in the Middle Ages; high-status women, for example, might have been slow to be given a label of hostage due to an uncertainty about the appropriateness for the label. The concepts of being a hostage, captive and prisoner were also transmuted and fluctuating, and the differences between the three, at times, not sharply delineated. Perhaps the reticence of the medieval records could be not always from a simple, general understanding of the status of being a hostage, but more from the uncertainty about what the term meant when it came to confining men, women and children.

Seeking, viewing and, crucially, understanding medieval hostages is never an easy task. The issues of record-keeping, in favouring the high-status male hostage over all others in addition

to the scant records kept, has long affected our ability to 'see' hostages. But beyond that, a modern world in which we instinctively 'know' what it means to be or take a hostage has greatly coloured our ability or even our willingness to attempt to understand the state of being a medieval hostage. But we do not know what it means to be a medieval hostage. We have only just started to attempt to understand this state and this status. Previous works have built a foundation; monographs such as those from Seabourne and Kosto give a platform from which we can both view higher and dig deeper into the realm of the medieval hostage. A plethora of individual articles, found in various places over many years, give us case studies or ideas to examine individually.[53] In moving forward in hostageship studies, it is time to further consider conflicting roles, transient states of being, and intersecting power structures

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[53] In addition to already cited materials, for a selection see also Helena Sobol, 'Use of Writing Space on the Franks Casket: Editorial and Linguistic Issues', *ANGELICA-An International Journal of English Studies* 23:2 (2014), 113-123; Lahney Preston-Matto, 'Queens as Political Hostages in Pre-Norman Ireland: Derbforgaill and the Three Gormlaiths', Journal of English and Germanic Philology 109, no. 2 (2010), 141-161; Christopher Lowe, 'Image and Imagination: The Inchmarnock "Hostage Stone,"' in *West Over Sea: Studies in Scandinavian Sea-bourne Expansion and Settlement Before 1300*, eds. Beverly Ballin Smith, Simon Taylor and Gareth Williams (Leiden: 2007), 53-68; Dmitri Starostine, 'Hostage by Agreement and the Language of Dependence in the Eleventh Century: Mutation or Corruption?', *Bibliotheque de l'ecole des chartes* 115 (1997), 119-148; Sean Duffy, 'King John's Expedition to Ireland, 1210: The Evidence Reconsidered'*, Irish Historical Studies* (1996), 1-24; Carol Neuman de Vegvar, 'Images of Women in Anglo-Saxon Art: I. Hostages: Women in the 'Titus' Scene on the Franks Casket,' *Old English Newsletter* 24:1 (1990): 44-5, to name but a few.

at play in medieval hostageships in order to more fully develop an understanding of the social, political, legal, economic, and military uses of human surety in the medieval west. As opposed to finding solid ideas and definitions, the nuances of medieval hostageships are being brought to light. A medieval hostage was not a simple surety or a promise of good behaviour; a medieval hostage was also a strong symbol of a new hierarchical power structure that had been put into place. The visual symbol of hierarchy in the form of a person was a powerful one. But a medieval hostage also seldom a static thing; the shifting statuses of the hostage into prisoner, captive, ward, or even wife demonstrates that the boundaries modern scholarship has attempted to place around medieval hostageships are false ones. Ultimately, becoming or being a hostage was a multi-faceted status and state in the medieval west.

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