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Storia Militare Medievale

a cura di
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Società Italiana di Storia Militare

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Sigillo di Leszek I di Polonia detto il Bianco (Leszek Bialego)

Battle and Humanitarian Warfare in Europe, 1000-1300?

John France[1]

Abstract. In recent years we have come to a better understanding of the nature of medieval warfare which used to be thought of as a totally shapeless sequence of events with little purpose or end. In particular, it has been argued that in western Europe in the period c.1000-1300 battle was rare and that chivalry brought about some amelioration of the horrors of war. This article argues that economic development rather than chivalry softened warfare - to the limited extent that it was softened, and that battles happened. Broad generalisations about warfare are difficult because medieval economy and political society changed.

Keywords. Medieval Battles. Humanitarian Warfare. Vegetian Strategy. King's Military Households. Chivalry. Italian Communes' warfare. Militarized Societies. Violence.

Modern understanding of war rests on a kind of Manichaean contrast between peace and war. This is matched by a firm conviction that civilians are distinct from soldiers and not to be harmed by military operations. There is an accompanying understanding that soldiers are identifiable as such and should be held responsible for their actions. Now what is strange is that these ideas, which came to fruition in the 19th century and have been frequently affirmed through the 20th and into the 21st century, have also coincided with ever heavier civilian casualties. An obvious manifestation is the bombing of German cities in WW2 which has produced a savage controversy and much argument about numbers – estimates of the resultant German dead vary between about 400,000 and 650,000 or even, in some cases, higher. Or consider that in Iraq and Afghanistan during the period 2001-07 the US army paid out some $32M in compensation for injury inflicted upon civilians, with $7500 being

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typical for death with a $2500 condolence sum. Interestingly, the Taliban in Afghanistan also made payments, but details of their scale are not available. It is, of course, much easier to establish blame in the case of regular troops than irregulars – hence Israel gets most of the blame for horrors particularly in Gaza. There is an acute mismatch between how we think of war, and how it is.

But medieval (and indeed ancient) people did not enjoy this Manichaean distinction between soldier and civilian. It is, of course, very difficult to generalize about 'medieval people' and how they experienced war. Theirs was a violent society. When a group of foreign merchants appealed to Henry III (1216-72) that they had been robbed, his advisors told him:

> ...we know that all parts of England are similarly suspect. For travellers here are very frequently despoiled, wounded, kidnapped and murdered.[2]

And, of course, the limitations of the sources make understanding war difficult. Record documents do not commonly deal in feelings and attitudes, while almost all chroniclers wrote for the social elite from which they were themselves drawn; even if they were not writing about their own fathers, brothers and sons (and they had them!) they would have been very conscious of the commonality between them. I have quite recently looked at ethical attitudes to war in some chronicles of the period 1000-1300 – they are almost all enthralled by the crusade as righteous war, but beyond that special case usually disinclined to censure or judge in any way the behaviour of kings and great lords, or even to discuss in detail questions of *ius in bello*.[3] Yet the horrors of war are commonly reviled: writing in the 1030s the monk, Rodulfus Glaber, wrote that as a result of the wars of the French kings in Lorraine "a terrible scourge again fell upon the people of Gaul," while in 1250 Matthew Paris complained that "The whole of Christianity was troubled by thee wars which arose from the hatred and discord between the pope and Frederick" (II of Hohenstaufen).[4] One common consequence in twelfth century sources was to blame mercenaries who were stigmatised as dogs of war, although almost everyone knew they were acting on behalf of their paymasters.[5] In time Canonists

2 *The Illustrated Chronicles of Matthew Paris*, ed. R. Vaughan (Stroud: Sutton, 1993), 92.

3 J.T. Johnson, *Ideology, Reason and the Limitation of War; Religious and Secular Concepts, 1200-1740* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 1-36.

4 Rodulfus Glaber, *Historiarum Libri Quinque* ed. J. France (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), 38-39; Matthew Paris. *Illustrated Chronicles*, 202.

5 Geoffrey of Vigeois. "Chronica Gaufredi coenobitae monasterii D. Martialis Lemovicen-

would start to suggest limitations on the conduct of war, perhaps because the notion of holy war demanded it. But it took a long time and remained very generalised, especially in comparison to the discussions amongst Muslim jurists on whom the doctrine of *jihad* imposed a real need for specific thinking.[6] In Europe it was not doctrine or rational analysis of Christian thought which was applied to perceptions of warfare, but the dictates of birth, wealth and class. These impacted massively upon those who recorded the history of their times.

Just how uninterested chroniclers could be in the doings of those beyond the elite is nicely illustrated by the *Chronicle of Hainaut* of Gilbert of Mons.[7] This work, which covers the period 1070 to 1196, was written by a cleric who was also the Chancellor of Baldwin V count of Hainaut. This county was one of a group sandwiched between the monarchies of France and Germany. In this contentious area there was an intense experience of diplomacy and conflict. As a result, this chronicle is an excellent source for the history and nature of war in the twelfth century. But what struck me, in assessing it, is that the author praises what we would broadly call the chivalric values of courage and loyalty, and is indifferent to ethical questions about the wider human consequences of warfare. In 1185, in revenge for the treachery of Jacques of Avesnes, who was one of his vassals, Count Baldwin of Hainaut:

> ... devastated Jacques of Avesnes' land...by doing much looting and setting of fire. In this devastation, he burned 110 towns and devastated that land.[8]

No thought of the sufferings of the inhabitants here. The rationale of this kind of devastation is clearly expressed by the author of the life of William Marshal:

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sis, ac prioris Vosiensis coenobii." In *Novae bibliothecae manuscriptorum librorum tomus secundus: rerum aquitanicarum*. . . . Edited by Philippe Labbe, 279–342. Paris: Sebastian Cramoisy, 1657. There is a new edition *La chronique de Geoffroy de Breuil, prieur de Vigeois*. Ed. Pierre Botineau, Jean-Loup Lemaître, Bernadette Barrière, Stéphane Lafaye. Paris: Société de l'histoire de France, 2021 and a translation into French *Chronique de Geoffroy, prieur de Vigeois*, traduite par François Bonnélye, précédée d'une étude par J. Sage, Tulle, impr. de Vve Detournelle. He is clearly aware of who directed the mercenaries but avoids directly blaming any major lord while excoriating the mercenaries.

6 Compare Nesrine Badawi, *Islamic Jurisprudence on the Regulation of Armed Conflict* (Leiden: Brill,2020).

7 Gislebert de Mons, *Chronique* ed. L. Vanderkindere (Bruxelles: Kiessling, 1905) tr. L. Napran, *Gilbert of Mons, Chronicle of Hainaut* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2005). References will be to the subsections which are identical in both.

8 Gilbert, §118.

> For when the poor folk can produce nothing and are unable to pay their rents they're forced to leave the land and seek a living elsewhere – so the lords, too, find their wealth declining and many are in serious want.[9]

This disinterest in the welfare of the mass of the population is very evident in a different way when Gilbert discusses the raising of armies and their make-up. He gives fairly precise figures for the numbers of knights involved in the forces he mentions, and, indeed, is at pains to distinguish between them and, for example, mounted sergeants. Yet his figures for infantry are sheer fantasy: in 1182 he records that Baldwin of Hainaut raised 400 knights and 60,000 foot in alliance with the Count of Flanders who had 1000 knights and 200,000 foot.[10] This may be because he oversaw contracts with nobles and knights which did not specify infantry numbers but simply assumed that they would be brought, as it were a job lot, and disdained any particulars about them – except he is more precise on crossbowmen who were, I suspect, expensive. This reflects much the same attitudes amongst lay leaders. Before joining battle at Axspoele on 21 June 1128 William Clito looked at the army of his rival, Thierry of Alsace "to see how much of it was a band of auxiliaries and how much a real army."[11]

Gilbert was a cleric, and far from alone amongst his kind in disliking war yet being indifferent to the ethical questions its conduct raised. This attitude arose from two things:

a. The general disinterest, centuries old, in ethical discussion of warfare. This might seem odd in the light of Christian teaching and the growth of the 'Peace of God' in the eleventh century. But the "Peace Movement" is a misunderstood phenomenon. It was designed to protect the church and its wealth, and it developed in cooperation with lay lords concerned to protect and define their power.[12] Churchmen often deplored war, of course, but attempts to regulate its conduct, *ius in bello*, were limited. Gratian suggested that violence towards pilgrims, clerics, monks, women and the unarmed

9 *The History of William Marshal. The True Story of England's greatest Knight* tr. N. Bryant (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2016), 34.

10 Gilbert, §99.

11 Galbert of Bruges, *The Murder of Charles the Good* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 297.

12 This is my view of the "Peace Movement", for a survey of thinking on which see F. S. Paxton, "The Peace and Truce of God in Modern Historiography: Perspectives and Trends," *Historical Reflections / Réflections Historiques* 14 (1987), 385-404.

poor was wrong, but detailed consideration of its regulation is rare.[13]

b. The practical result was an acceptance of war as a fact of life, to be treated much like any other, except in cases of exceptional cruelty. Ordericus Vitalis censured the Conqueror over the 'harrying of the North' and suggested he was punished by a lingering death for the sack of Mantes.[14] But clearly this event was regarded as exceptional, which raises the question "What is exceptional"?

The brute fact was that harrying, murder, massacre and rapine, were vital components of medieval warfare. There were no standing armies in the medieval west. This was a relatively poor society in which anyone with property needed arms to defend it because the state was exiguous and poorly articulated. Kings and lords might have a small permanent household about them which formed the nucleus of an army, but if that was inadequate for a particular occasion greater forces had to be raised by negotiation with others, or by paying mercenaries. The English crown had a developed military household by the end of the 11th century, and it had established quotas of knights which each vassal had to supply at time of need, but this was unusual.[15] By contrast the French monarchy did not establish quotas of service owed by the magnates of the realm until the 1270s.[16]

Moreover, men had to bring their own arms to war, and on campaign were obliged to feed themselves. Since the raising of a large army was politically and financially expensive armies could not be kept in being for long periods, so centralised administration was limited. In such conditions ravaging was essential, because it enriched the attacker, fed his soldiers and impoverished his enemy. In political terms it also cast doubt on his foes' ability to defend his people, the ultimate justification of authority. From the point of view of individual soldiers, ravaging provided food and opportunities for enrichment. This was, inevitably, at the expense of ordinary people but that seems to have counted for little. On

13 *Corpus Iuris Canonici*, ed. A. Friedberg, 2 vols. (Leipzig: Tauchnitz, 1879-81), 1: *Decretum Magistri Gratiani*, C. 24, q. 3 cc. 22-5.

14 P. Dalton, *Conquest, Anarchy and Lordship: Yorkshire, 1066–1154* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Ordericus Vitalis, *Historia aecclesiastica* ed. M. Chibnall 6 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969-79) 4:78-81.

15 M. Prestwich, 'Military household of the Norman Kings', *English Historical Review* 96 (1981),1-37.

16 J. France, *Medieval France at War. A Military History of the French Monarchy, 885-1305* (Leeds: ARC, 2022),190-93.

his deathbed William Marshal, the greatest knight of his age, protested that the demands of the clergy that he should restore all that he had taken was excessive: "Unless the clergy want to see me damned they should stop their harrying!"[17] But the demand related only to what he had taken from knights!

Ravaging, destruction of the economic base of an enemy, was the staple of war. It is sometimes referred to as "Vegetian Strategy" because it was strongly recommended by the late Roman writer, Vegetius whose *De Re Militari* was the only manual of war known to medieval people:

> It is preferable to subdue an enemy by famine, raids and terror, than in battle where fortune tends to have more influence than bravery.[18]

But war was not waged in this way because Vegetius recommended it. Few soldiers seem ever to have read his work.[19] And, as Morillo has shown, armies in parts of the world where his work was unknown and unknowable habitually waged economic war.[20] Rather, this mode of war was adopted because it was effective and peculiarly suited the limitations of the armies of the age. Western armies were incoherent forces, usually gathered only for short periods. From about 1000 the countryside in which they operated was increasingly studded with fortifications. Battle might seem to offer a quick solution to a problem, but everyone knew it was very chancy, and it was very difficult to force an enemy to accept it. Moreover, the enemy, if defeated, might take refuge in his fortresses. If this happened any sustained siege or sieges of strong places would make heavy demands on military organization and supply. The alternative to blockading a fort or town was assault which was likely to be very bloody. Both methods were costly in political and financial terms. And it has to be said that " famine, raids and terror" remain part of war; the Lancaster bomber and the missile simply represent its implementation by a new technology. What is undoubted is the suffering inflicted on the mass of the population and the moral indifference to it of rulers and clergy.

It seems paradoxical, therefore, that in the last thirty years influential histo-

17 *History of William Marshal*, 219.

18 Vegetius, *Epitome of Military Science* tr. N. P. Milne (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press,1993), 110.

19 C. Allmand, *The De Re Militari of Vegetius: The Reception, Transmission and Legacy of a Roman Text in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

20 S. Morillo, "Battle Seeking: the Contexts and Limitations of Vegetian Strategy," *Journal of Medieval Military History* 1 (2002), 21-41.

rians, most notably John Gillingham and particularly Matthew Strickland, have argued that by the end of the 12th century war in Europe was becoming more humane.[21] An important part of the argument is the famous statement by Ordericus Vitalis who condemned William the Conqueror's harrying of the North, and the same chronicler's remark *à propos* of the minimal knightly casualties at the battle of Brémule in 1119:

> As Christian soldiers they did not thirst for the blood of their brothers but rejoiced in a just victory given by God, for the good of holy Church and the peace of the faithful.[22]

But more importantly, it is argued that the absence of massacre and mass slavery in the period 1000-1300 mark an important change in warfare. Strickland, indeed, suggests that 1066 was the first time a conquest resulted in a reduction in slavery. This may very well be true, but the decline in slavery was nothing to do with warfare. From Carolingian times the increasing reliance of great men on their landed resources rather than imperial and royal patronage had accelerated the adoption of a particular form of agricultural exploitation.

Charlemagne had seen how important it was to ensure income from royal lands, issuing two documents, the *Brevium exempla* dated to 801 and his *Capitulare de Villis* of about the same time. These suggested how estates should be organised. The *Polytique of Irminon* of c.823 followed the model they had laid down in describing the lands of the abbey of St Germain des Prés in some detail, and thereafter a whole series of similar works were compiled by ecclesiastical landlords.[23] They pointed to a division of estates between lands held and directly exploited by the owner (*demesne*), but worked by free or fairly unfree peasants who were thereby paying (at least in part) by their labour for the lands they held. There were estates worked by slaves in Carolingian times, but henceforth this system was simpler and more efficient because the peasants supported themselves. From this in time emerged, at least in arable areas, the nuclear village which offered new opportunities for disciplining the population who are general-

21 M. Strickland, *War and Chivalry. The Conduct and Perception of War in England and Normandy, 1066-1217* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); J. Gillingham, 'Christian Warriors and the Enslavement of Fellow Christians', in M. Aurell and C. Girbea (eds), *Chevalerie et christianisme aux xii et xiii siècles* (Rennes, 2011), pp. 237-56.

22 Ordericus 6:240-41 and Strickland, *War and Chivalry*, p.132.

23 R. Fossier, *Polyptiques et censiers* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1978); N. J. G. Pounds, *An Economic History of Medieval Europe* (London: Longman, 1974), 49-53.

ly called by the term *villanus* which could be applied to the free and the unfree.[24]

But if the roots of this new economic and social structure of agriculture lie outside warfare, they nonetheless did have a considerable influence upon it. The expanding agriculture of the ninth and tenth centuries produced the wealth that supported the upper class. Rodulfus Glaber, writing in the early eleventh century remarked:

> Just before the third year after the millennium, throughout the whole world, but most especially in Italy and Gaul, men began to reconstruct churches, although for the most part the existing ones were not in the least unworthy. But it seemed as though each Christian community were aiming to surpass all others in the splendour of construction. It was as if the whole world were shaking itself free, shrugging off the burden of the past, and cladding itself everywhere in a white mantle of churches. Almost all the episcopal churches and those of monasteries dedicated to various saints, and little village chapels, were rebuilt better than before.[25]

This passage is often cited as revealing the depth of Christian feeling by about 1000, but it equally reveals the prosperity of the region, and the vast infrastructure of building skills which could only have been built up over generations. The same wealth permitted the building of castles and the exponential growth in the number of armed followers, the knights, and their improved equipment which has been much remarked upon by historians.[26] More directly, the rewards of harrying and plundering became very obvious. But where warfare was within a common economic and cultural sphere where all important people shared in this wealth, nobody desired to rule a desert. That imposed a limit, albeit a flexible one, on massacre and destruction. Not all of Europe shared in this development. Wales and Scotland, for example, were poor, producing very different societies. English writers scorned them as barbarians because of their killing and enslaving.[27]

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24 T. Williamson, "Agriculture, Lords and Landscape in Medieval England," in H. Hamerow and M. McKerraker (eds), *New Perspectives on the Medieval Agricultural Revolution. Crop, Stock and Furrow* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2022), 211-34.

25 Glaber, 114-17.

26 Notably G. Duby, *The Three Orders. Feudal Society Imagined* tr. of a 1978 French original (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

27 Strickland, *War and Chivalry*, 291-316; John Gillingham, "Conquering the barbarians: war and chivalry in twelfth-century Britain and Ireland", in *The Haskins Society Journal*, 4, 1992, p. 67-84; F. Suppe, *Military Institutions on the Welsh Marches: Shropshire, 1066-1300* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1994).

Strickland is essentially writing about the broadly "French world", the lands between the Loire and the Rhine and, most particularly, those of the Anglo-Norman monarchy, where a large number of small political entities were ruled by interrelated families. War between them was largely about territorial adjustments. This was not the immediate post-Roman world when the fate of whole peoples could be at stake in the conflicts of armies. Nor do we see the great Carolingian conquests, or even the kind of long-term struggle for the crown France had witnessed in the tenth century between the two great houses of the Carolingians and the Robertians.[28] Rather, the consequence of that and other struggles was fragmentation. Moreover, the new agricultural wealth enabled substantial landowners to build castles which anchored their lands. In 1184 the lands of Baldwin of Hainaut were invaded by the allied forces of the count of Flanders, the duke of Brabant and the archbishop of Cologne. Count Baldwin could not face them in battle, but he ordered his men to take refuge in their castles:

Take comfort and be strong, because our enemies will withdraw at some time and leave our lands to us because they cannot take the lands with them.[29]

Since the men of Hainaut had stripped the land of food, the invaders duly went away! This was war fought between relatively small groups of elite men who might, in other circumstances, embrace one another as cousins, truly a conflict of what Strickland has called 'brothers-in-arms'.[30] Out of this violent bickering arose chivalry, an expression of the commonality of culture, endorsing violence, yet at the same time, at least within the social elite, limiting it. Instead of fighting to the death the winner could accept ransom. This endorsed the notion of honourable surrender, and was intensified by the rise of tournaments across northern France, which served as training grounds and practice for those in the comradeship of the broadly noble elite. This ethos certainly protected noble women from attack, and it probably served to mitigate, at least to a degree, violence against peasants because nobody wanted to rule a desert. But the contempt of the elite for those below was always manifest. In 1178 a townsman of the Limousin, John of Casana and his family, captured Raymond viscount of Turenne at Martel, presumably to settle some grievance. Bishop Sebrand of Limoges and many barons swore to accept the

28 G. Halsall, *Warfare and Society in the Barbarian West, 450-900* (London: Routledge, 2003); France, *Medieval France at War*, 73-112.

29 Gilbert, §114.

30 Ibid. §132-49

(unspecified) demands of John and his family if they freed Raymond. However, once Raymond was released the barons put out the eyes of all John's family.[31]

Nor should we be overimpressed by the apparent moderation, even in the French heartlands. In 1143 Louis VII of France (1137-80) ravaged Champagne, in the course of which his men burned down the church of Vitry with, allegedly, 1500 people inside. It is said that the king's conscience over this massacre drove him to join the Second Crusade, but it did not prevent him repeating this kind of savagery in other wars.[32] Moreover, the brotherhood of chivalry spread comparatively slowly, and even in much of France war remained cruel. Henry II of England (1154-89) was Duke of Aquitaine within whose borders the Limousin was a particularly turbulent area whose lords, a modern authority has suggested, were in 'permanent rebellion'.[33] During the conflict unleashed by the revolt of Henry's sons in 1173 we are told that at an assembly Gilbert of Malemort wore a coat of many colours, and Archambaud of Comborn joked that he looked like a parrot. Geoffrey remarks that "This jest cost him and his brother Aymar the sight of their eyes and the life of their brother Peter Clalaseus." Apparently, as a consequence, the people of Graulière rebelled against Gilbert to avenge their lord, but Gilbert hired Basque mercenaries who devastated the countryside and carried off many people who Gilbert ordered to be thrown into the frozen river, before then dragging their bodies out again. When Gilbert ran out of money these very mercenaries defected to Archambaud and seized both his castle and his father. [34]

In time chivalry spread across the European from France, England, the Low Countries and Western Germany to exert a considerable influence on relations amongst the elite in peace and war. But its beneficial results were largely confined to the elite, to "chaps like us". In 1203-04 Philip Augustus besieged Château Gaillard. Many local people had fled there but as the garrison ran short of food they were expelled: Philip refused to let them through his lines and they starved in the cold of winter between the armies.[35] The Western settlements in the East, the crusading states, were exposed to particularly savage war as William of Tyre,

31 'Chronica Gaufredi', 324; *The Chronicle and Historical Notes of Bernard Itier* ed. A. W. Lewis (Oxford: Clarendon, 2013), 50-51.

32 France, *Medieval France at War*, 93-94.

33 M. Aurell, *The Plantagenet Empire 1154-1224* tr. D. Crouch (Harlow, Pearson, 2007), 187.

34 'Chronica Gaufredi', 323. This is very much the view of chivalry taken in Kaeuper (1999).

35 France, *Medieval France at War*,128.

a native and chronicler of their history, remarked:

> For in conflicts of this nature, resentment inspired by sacrilege and scorn of laws always acts as an incentive to bitter hatred and enmity. War is waged differently and less vigorously between men who hold the same law and faith. For even if no other cause for hatred exists, the fact that the combatants do not share the same articles of faith is sufficient reason for constant quarrelling and enmity.[36]

Noone doubts the intensity and savagery of the fighting in the east, but even here truces were frequent and prisoners were exchanged and ransomed.[37] The Islamic states of the Middle East were relatively wealthy, but maintaining permanent standing forces imposed terrible burden, which had crippled the power of the Abbasid Caliphs and caused grave difficulties for the Fatimids of Egypt.[38] The lesser powers kept only relatively small permanent forces which could be expanded when greater armies were needed. As in Europe this imposed limits on warfare, though here the practise of slavery was very widespread and was often the fate of captives.

The long confrontation between Muslim and Christian in Spain produced in the Christian kingdoms highly militarized societies whose very existence was geared to war.[39] The vast open spaces and distances between cities meant that even the peasantry were organised and armed.[40] But here too war was episodic with raids and sieges its main staple.[41] While war was often savage its long-drawn out nature and the need of both sides for people gave birth to the institutionalisation of ransom in religious orders, notably the Mercedarian and Trinitarian. What was particularly notable about the Trinitarians was their concern with poor captives. They left the ransom of the rich to others in order to focus their attention

36 William of Tyre, 13.16, *A History of Deeds done beyond the Sea by William of Tyre* tr. E. A. Babcock and A. C. Krey, 2 vols (New York: Columbia University Press,1943) 2. Book 13, Chap 16).

37 Y. Friedman, *Encounter between Enemies. Captivity and Ransom in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem* (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

38 H. Kennedy, *The Armies of the Caliphs. Military and Society in the Early Islamic State* (London: Routledge, 2001),148-67; Y.Lev, *State and Society in Fatimid Egypt* (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 81-92.

39 E. Laurie, "A Society organized for War: Medieval Spain," *Past & Present* (1966), 54–76.

40 J. F. Powers, *A Society organized for War: The Iberian Municipal Militias in the Central Middle Ages, 1000-1284* (Berkeley: University of California, 1988).

41 On the character of war in Spain see F. Garcia Fitz and J. Gouveia Monteiro (eds), *War in the Iberian Peninsula* (London: Routledge, 2018).

on ordinary people who, too often, had been forgotten. This was a new impulse, perhaps connected to that which saw the birth of the Franciscans as God's poor.[42] Or it may be more simply that in Spain there was always a shortage of people and the local power holders saw such activities as necessary and in their interests.

In Italy warfare is often seen as different, conducted by city people amongst whom infantry predominated. In fact, the nobles of the countryside moved into the cities and led the people in war. The symbols of their dominance were the great towers they built in the cities, but they did not neglect their rural estates from which they drew military supporters. They never seem to have adopted chivalry but nonetheless remained an entitled group, drawing into their society many of the richest city merchants, while remaining somewhat contemptuous of lesser mortals.[43] But while their leaders were nobles and knights, often including wealthy townspeople attracted into the noble orbit, the city armies were heavily dependent on infantry, men whose discipline sprang from devotion to their homes and solidity with their neighbours.[44] However, leadership was in the hands of the nobles, so that Italian armies were not so very different from those of France and Germany. And these nobles were turbulent, and their enjoyment and profit from raiding, *cavalcate*, undoubtedly increased tensions between and within cities.[45]

War between the city communes of the Plain of the Po was complicated because they remained part of the kingdom of Italy which had been annexed to the German Empire since the later tenth century. Because of the long struggle between empire and papacy they had come to enjoy a high degree of autonomy. But this did not bring peace. The cities were deeply concerned to control the area around them, the *contado*, from which they drew food and troops, while

42 Friedman, *Encounter between Enemies*, 187-200.

43 G. Tabacco, 'Northern and Central Italy in the eleventh century' and 'Northern and Central Italy in the twelfth century' in D. Luscombe and J. Riley-Smith (eds), *The New Cambridge Medieval History IV Part 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 72-93 and 422-41 ; J. France, "The Character of Warfare and Society in the Lombard Cities in the later 12th and early 13th Centuries,» (forthcoming).

44 A.A. Settia, 'Fanti e cavalieri in Lombardia (secoli XI-XII)' in *Communi in Guerra* tr. Valerie Eads, 'Infantry and cavalry in Lombardy (11th-12th centuries)', *Journal of Medieval Military History* 6 (2008), 64; Settia, 'I giochi militari e l'addestramento delle fanterie' in *Comuni in Guerra*, 29-52 tr. Valerie Eads, 'Military Games and the Training of Infantry', *Journal of Medieval Military History* 11 (2013), 1-24.

45 J-C Maire-Vigueur, *Cavaliers et citoyens: Guerre, conflits et société dans l'Italie communale 12e-13e siècles* (Paris, 2003), *passim*.

trade routes, like the link between Genoa and Milan, were vitally important. In consequence war between cities was a commonplace and it led to alliances. And inevitably larger cities tended to dominate lesser ones.

For the most part fighting consisted of raids, but these were often elaborately organised. Cities on the offensive constructed strong camps and carried siege weapons, aiming to pick off enemy fortresses or even cities.[46] On occasion such tactics precipitated battle. In 1159 a great Cremonan raid against Brescia led to a defeat, bitterly recalled by the Cremonans as the *malamort*.[47] When Frederick I Barbarossa (1155-90) tried to reassert imperial power in the plain of the Po Milan formed the Lombard League to resist, but other cities, notably Cremona, rallied to the imperial cause, precipitating a long war. But even when Barbarossa's efforts failed after his defeat at the battle of Legnano in 1176 the cities continued to wage intensive warfare. Siege and ravaging were commonplace and often led to battle. In May 1213 Cremona established a strong camp at Castelleone 4 miles south-east of Crema. This attempt to subordinate Crema provoked a major effort by Milan which brought out its *carroccio* and dragged along the allied cities of Piacenza, Lodi, Brescia and Novara to attack the Cremonan camp on 2 June. They suffered a terrible defeat and the loss of the *carroccio*.[48] In 1217 Piacenza and Milan were again on the march, but suffered a severe defeat at the hands of an alliance of Cremona and Parma at Pontenure, the Piacenzans losing 60 *milites et pedites* plus 300 *scuderios et rusticos*.[49]

In fact, war in northern Italy across the twelfth and thirteenth centuries was remarkably intense and often very bitter. When Frederick I called the Diet of Roncaglia in 1158 the men of Piacenza killed delegates from their enemy city of Cremona.[50] Following the breakdown of peace between Milan and the emperor in the following year, Trezzo, which Frederick had made an imperial fortress, was seized by the Milanese who killed the Italians in its garrison, but ransomed

46 J. France, "Thirty Years of War: the cities of the Lombard Plain", in R. G. Khamisy, R. Y. Lewis, V. R. Shotten-Hallel (eds), *Exploring Outremer I Studies in History in Honour of Adrian J. Boas* (London: Routledge, 2023), 127-41.

47 Sicard of Cremona Chronicon, Migne, *Patrologia Latina* 213: 530.

48 Codagnellus, *Annales Placating Guelfi* ed. G. H. Pertz (MGH SS. 1863), 43-44.

49 Codagnellus, 58-59; Sicard, 540.

50 Otto of Freising and Rahewin, *The Deeds of Frederick Barbarossa (*New York: Columbia, 1994), 243.

the 80 German knights.[51] At the siege of Brescia in 1238 the Emperor Frederick II (1214-50) ordered prisoners to be tied to his siege machines to deter enemy archery - to no effect.[52]

The history of Italy in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries is dominated by war with very little sign of and moderation of its cruelties. And certainly it cannot be said that:

> The majority of commanders were anxious to avoid pitched battle whenever possible.[53]

In Southern Italy the death of Frederick II signalled a period of intense violence as the papacy backed what was effectively a crusade led by Charles of Anjou to replace the Hohenstaufen in the kingdom of the two Sicilies. This produced two terrible battles with heavy losses, at Benevento in 1266 and Tagliacozzo in 1268. Manfred, the ruler of Sicily was killed in the former, while after his defeat at the latter Conradin, Frederick II's grandson, was executed. Subsequently Charles' dominion was shattered by the revolt of Sicily and the outbreak of a war with King Peter of Aragon (1276-85) which featured numerous sea-battles.[54]

Strickland has produced a shining analysis of the culture of war and its consequences. Gillingham's analysis made sense of the nature of warfare in this same period and demonstrated that many commanders pursued a strategy of deliberately avoiding battle in favour of other means of achieving their ends.[55] Both were discussing war in the essentially French world between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries. However, this notion of deliberately avoiding battle has been given a wider currency, not least because of the popularity amongst military historians of the Middle Ages of the dictums of Vegetius strongly urging this kind of warfare.[56] And this notion has been the more acceptable because since the 1960s historians

51 Ibid.272-73.

52 G. Masson, *Frederick II of Hohenstaufen. A Life* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1957), 286.

53 Strickland, *War and Chivalry*, 43.

54 S. Runciman, *The Sicilian Vespers* (London: Pelican, 1961),113-33, 251-64.

55 John Gillingham, 'Richard I and science of war in the Middle Ages', in J. Gillingham and J. C. Holt (eds), *War and Government in the Middle Ages: Essays in Honour of J. O. Prestwich* (Woodbridge: Boydell,1984),78-91, 'William the Bastard at War', in C. Harper-Bill, J. Holdsworth and J. Nelson (eds), *Studies in History presented to R. Allen Brown* (Woodbridge: Boydell,1986) 141-8, 'War and Chivalry in the *History of William the Marshal*' in P. Cos and S. Lloyd (eds), *Thirteenth Century England II* (Wood bridge: Boydell,1988), 1-13.

56 See above p.5 and n.17.

have reacted strongly against the old view that medieval warfare was a kind of random and pointless affair to which little thought was given, as Thompson remarked.[57] But there was no doctrine of avoiding battle: whether a commander sought such a confrontation or was anxious to avoid it depended on circumstances.

In wars of limited ambitions, such as those of the "French" world of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, avoidance was generally a good idea, but as greater states arose protagonists were prepared to take its risks. Elsewhere in Europe battle was rather commoner, though never a commonplace. One of the most radical critics of the notion of war without battle, Clifford Rogers, pointed out that there were battles in medieval warfare and that while circumstances might favour evasion of such a confrontation by one party or the other, there were numerous examples of battle-seeking.[58] The trouble is that many of the examples Rogers uses actually appear to prove Strickland's point that battle was rare, because they are late medieval and largely taken from the 'Hundred Years War'. This underlines the simple fact that war was profoundly influenced by changing circumstances in politics and society.

The Europe of 1000-1300 was certainly not that of the early middle ages. But by 1300 well organized states were emerging. As already noted it was only in the 1270s that the French monarchy defined who owed how much military service, and made arrangements about pay and logistical support.[59] In England the long experience of the Welsh and Scottish wars at the end of the thirteenth century revealed the value of bowmen acting in concert with men-at-arms. The royal administration effectively enabled leading soldiers to recruit suitable men, and the coming together of both kinds of warrior created a tactical system which made possible a battle-seeking strategy which underlay the English success in the long wars with France which dominated the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.[60] And these new circumstances, as Rogers points out, made battle more frequent, and to

57 A.H. Thompson remarked that "European warfare in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries shews (sic) a somewhat bewildering variety of practice behind which lies no constructive idea": *Cambridge Medieval History* 6 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911-36), 6:796.

58 Clifford Rogers, 'The Vegetian 'Science of Warfare' in the Middle Ages', *Journal of Medieval Military History* 1 (2002), 1-20.

59 See above 5,n.16.

60 C. Rogers, *War Cruel and Sharp. English Strategy under Edward III, 1327-1360* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2000).

a degree at least, all war more cruel. The individual English bowman was not necessarily wildly accurate, but volleys of arrows could seek out chinks in armour, wounding and killing at a distance long before surrender and ransom could be negotiated. The clash of masses of armoured infantry equipped with pole weapons, swords and knives likewise created a very dangerous environment for surrender. And a technical innovation enhanced the savagery of war. Gunpowder extended the killing range: at the siege of Orléans John, earl of Salisbury, the English commander, died from cannon fire: it was a lesson for the future.

Medieval states could not afford to wage intense warfare over long periods because they simply lacked enough wealth to sustain armies continuously and they lacked the organization which that required. There was no standing army in the European continent until the later fifteenth century, and even when the French kingdom began to develop one, they turned to mercenaries and contractors to provide much of the force they ultimately put in the field.[61] The emergence of something like standing armies in the sixteenth century was made possible by the growing wealth of Europe which supported strong administrative government which could find, pay and support them.[62]

But prior to 1300 none of this was possible. When large armies were raised they were precious objects whose destruction would have serious consequences. Armies which came together for short periods by negotiation between kings and lords were uncertain instruments within which individuals had their own objectives. In his first real fight the famous William Marshal fought well, but was mocked by his comrades for not taking booty when he could.[63] In the first phase of the battle of Tagliacozzo the supporters of Conradin routed a division of the French cavalry, and then fell to plundering their bodies and horses, allowing Charles of Anjou to rally his troops and defeat them.[64] In these circumstances a healthy scepticism about risking battle was not unreasonable and the attraction of economic warfare, crudely put ravaging, was obvious.

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61 S. Gunn, "War and the emergence of the state: Western Europe 1350-1600," in F. Tallett and D. J. B. Trim (eds), *European Warfare 1350-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 50-73.

62 G. Parker, *The Army of Flanders and the Spanish Road* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,1990).

63 *History of William Marshal*, 39.

64 M. Citarelli, M. Cozza, P. Riccetti, M. Ruggeri*, La battaglia di Tagliacozzo 1268* (Trezzano: Isomedia, 2017), 17-25.

On the other hand all armies were equipped for battle because it could not always be avoided. And skirmishing, the inevitable accompaniment of ravaging, meant that soldiers were practised in the arts of war. This encouraged a particular culture which we call chivalry. It rested on an admiration for the military virtues; after his deeds noted above, even his French enemies admired the Marshal. This culture of a "band of brothers in arms" certainly modified the violence of warfare, at least amongst the noble classes but only in limited areas at limited times. For chivalry also embodied a real sense of the autonomy of the noble and their entitlement to perform acts violence without answering to others.[65] The real limits on warfare were imposed by economic development and especially the growth of agriculture and the means to exploit it which became very evident by c.1000. But on occasion even this was not a curb on violence which could easily run out of control.

And the European elite were well aware that battle could bring advantages. Lisoius (Lisoie), Seneschal of Geoffrey Martel, Count of Anjou, advised Geoffrey to confront in battle the army of Blois advancing to the relief of his siege of Tours in 1044:

> Leave the city [of Tours] which you are besieging. Summon your men from the fortifications, and you will be stronger to defend yourself. I shall hasten to you when you want to fight a battle. It is certainly better for us to fight together than to fight separately and get beaten. Battles are short but the victor's prize is enormous. Sieges waste time, and the town is rarely taken. Battles overcome nations and fortified towns, and an enemy beaten in battle vanishes like smoke. Once the battle is over, and the enemy beaten, there is a great domain waiting for you around Tours.[66]

And in an age which believed God handed out judgement in court the outcome of a battle could be seen as an expression of His will, as the same author asserted of his victory over his own brother in a succession battle for the county of Anjou:

> I fought with him a pitched battle in which, by God's Grace, I overcame him; he was captured and handed over to me, and a thousand of his men with him.'

Ideas about the moderation of warfare expressed by Strickland, have illuminated our view of medieval warfare, and, in particular, have revealed how cul-

65 R. W. Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 129-60.

66 Fulk Réchin, *Fragmentum Historiae Andegavensis* tr. J.F. Verbruggen, *The Art of Warfare in Western Europe during the Middle Ages* tr. S. Willard and R. W. Southern (Woodbridge: Boydell 1997), 280

ture affected the way medieval people fought and thought about fighting. Rather specifically Gillingham's analysis of campaigns without battle brilliantly made sense of warfare in the period 1000-1300. And in this same period there was, as Strickland has argued, some amelioration of the cruelties of war, though it is suggested here not primarily because of humanitarian or even religious concerns but as a result of economic development. It was limited and spread unevenly. But one aspect of this view of amelioration is the view, now very widely held, that not only was battle rare, but that it was positively eschewed by military leaders in these years. There were certainly campaigns when this was true and all recognised the risks. But, as Bouvines illustrates, battle could not always be avoided and a number of factors, many of them cultural, could work against caution.

At Brémule Louis VI simply seems to have become exasperated and sought a decision by a hastily assembled charge - which was a disaster. Ravaging, the universal staple of war, could not be indefinitely sustained and when great issues, in the Middle East the very existence of the Jerusalem state, were contested, there was a greater readiness to resort to battle. For Clausewitz battle was the very essence of war: "There is no factor in war that rivals the battle in importance." [67] In the period c.1000-c.1300 almost nobody would have disagreed, for it was the ultimate test of a warrior, but the substance of war was quite different - it was ravaging and destruction. As Henry V of England may have said "war without fire is like sausages without mustard."

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