Eustace the Monk: Banditry, Piracy and the Limits of State Authority in the High Middle Ages

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Abstract: Bandits have been popular 'heroic' individuals throughout history. Many of them also proved to be quite useful figures, allowing interested parties to fill in gaps in their capacities on the quick by way of co-opting them. Such 'interested parties' even included kings, whose authority still was a rather limited one. A particularly glaring gap in their authority existed at sea: keeping a fleet at ready was quite expensive, and affordable only for a few rich exceptions. Everyone else had to make use of naval mercenaries – pirates with a license. One of the most illustrious medieval examples of such maritime entrepreneurs is Eustace the Monk. His colourful life includes being a monk, the seneschal of the Count of Boulogne, a bandit and pirate after he fell out with the count, and finally naval mercenary first for King John of England, then for King Philip Augustus of France. This contribution focuses on Eustace the Monk's maritime career. It will do so by assessing the political constellation and culture of his days which made it possible in the first place.

Keywords: Banditry, Piracy, Privateering, Medieval Naval Warfare, Eustace the Monk

Introduction

Bandits have been popular and disputable/disreputable 'heroic' individuals throughout history, both on land and at sea. Many of them also proved to be quite useful 'men for hire', allowing interested parties to fill in gaps in their capacities on the quick, albeit not necessarily on the cheap, by way of co-opting them. Such 'interested parties' included numerous power holders and political entities of premodern times, whose authority still was rather limited. A particularly glaring gap in premodern states' authority existed at sea: keeping a fleet at ready was quite expensive, and out of reach for most of them. One way to fill this gap was to make use of "mercenary mariners" (Stanton, 2020, p. 222), mainly in the shape of pirates, hired to fight naval wars on behalf of their paymasters.

In Northern waters, one of the most illustrious and earliest of such mercenary mariners was Eustace the Monk (aka Eustace the Black Monk). Born in 1170 as a son of a minor French nobleman, he cut his teeth as a corsair in the Mediterranean before ordaining as a monk. The murder of his father saw him leave the monkhood and eventually turn bandit, later to be celebrated in ballads as a French equivalent of Robin Hood. Probably due to his prior expertise as a corsair, he soon took his activities to the sea, harassing maritime traffic in the English Channel so efficiently that he came to the attention of King John of England who desperately needed a fleet for his protracted wars with King Philip II (Philip Augustus) of France. Eustace served King John for about seven years between 1205 and 1212, until the changing mood at the English court made him shift his allegiance to King Philip. It was in the service of this French king that Eustace the Monk finally met his fate: he was killed in the Battle of Sandwich on 24 August 1217. This contribution explores the career of Eustace the Monk as one of the most successful medieval pirates as well as one of the earliest examples of what became known

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much later as 'privateers.' It will do so by focusing on the socio-political constellation and culture of his days which made this career possible in the first place, with the aim to show how and why the limits of Medieval states' authority made them dependent on such actors.

The contribution has been divided into five sections. First, a brief literature review on bandits and pirates and their importance in the political and social life in the Middle Ages will lay the theoretical groundwork, while the second section provides the relevant historical background. The third section discusses the limits of state authority in the 13th century's England and France. The fourth section explains why the control and governance of sea and naval warfare were important factors to preserve power and how Eustace the Monk played a key role, and the fifth section offers some insights into ships and naval tactics in the days of Eustace to illustrate why pirates like Eustace could actually play such a key role. Finally, the contribution concludes with some final remarks on pirates and state capacity.

Pirates, Dependencies, and the Limits of States

"These things would be better known if they had been more often studied." This remarkable observation can be found in the introduction of N.A.M. Rodger's seminal book *Safeguard of the Sea* (Rodger, 2004, p. xxiii). Although Rodger refers to British naval history in general, it can also be used to reflect on a more specialized topic: the relationship between pre-modern states and mercenaries – in this contribution, on states and mercenary mariners in the High Middle Ages. While many sources discuss Medieval maritime warfare or Medieval pirates, only very few of them focus on the use of the latter as maritime mercenaries by the authorities of the day to avail themselves of a modicum of seapower in lieu of a professional navy. Currently, Janice Thomson's *Mercenaries, Pirates, and Sovereigns* (Thomson, 1994) is the only authoritative book-length study shedding light on this. However, even this impressive work gives short shrift to the Medieval period, reducing it to nothing but a two-pages prelude of 16th and 17th century privateering and the 'usual suspects' such as the Mediterranean corsairs. This is a pity because there are some illustrious individuals of the Medieval period active in Northern waters who also serve as great examples of 'banditry at sea', even 'social banditry at sea' following Hobsbawm (2012). More work certainly should be conducted on the use of Medieval pirates as tools of a state using them as cheap alternatives to an expensive professional navy, and thus as early examples of what became later known as 'privateering'. This is the gap that this contribution intends to fill by exploring Eustace the Monk's career.

But first, some theoretical reflections are required on the key terms used here: banditry, social banditry, and piracy. According to the Collins Online Dictionary, banditry can be defined as "acts of robbery and violence in areas where the rule of law has broken down." As regards its more noble variant, social banditry, Hobsbawm (2012, p. 20) defines social bandits as "peasant outlaws whom the lord and state regard as criminals, but who remain with peasant society, and are considered by their people as heroes, as champions, avengers, fighters for justice, perhaps even leaders of liberation, and in any case as men to be admired, helped and supported." He further notes that banditry and social banditry tended to become epidemic in times of pauperisation and was basically "a form of self-help to escape it in particular circumstances" (Hobsbawm, 2012, p. 27). This self-help was, quite obviously, resorted to without having been authorized by a legal power-holder. Thus, banditry is intrinsically different from irregular warfare even though targets and tactics were the same: citizens, peasants, merchants on the one hand, and their violent exploitation on the other. Finally, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, piracy can be defined as an "action of committing robbery, kidnap, or violence at sea or from the sea without lawful authority." Hence, piracy can be seen as banditry at sea.

Interestingly, the Greek roots of the term 'pirate' covered both banditry on land and at sea without distinction (Heller-Roazen, 2009, p. 35). The restriction to banditry at sea only emerged during Roman times (Souza, 2014, p. 49). Likewise, the definition of banditry provided above also does not specify as to where such acts of robbery and violence are to take place to qualify as banditry – whether such acts are committed at sea or on land does not matter. This also implies that Hobsbawm's concept of 'social bandits' can be extended to pirates as well. Of course, whether a bandit on land or, as pirate, at sea, should be celebrated as a 'noble' social bandit fighting against injustice by way of taking from the rich to give to the poor or vilified as a common criminal lies in the eyes of the beholder – their victims surely took a different view than the balladeers writing about their deeds. There is however no doubt that Eustace the Monk was indeed seen as a 'social bandit' and lauded as such. Together with his contemporary, the Anglo-Norman knight Fouke Fitz Waryn, and also the Anglo-Saxon Hereward the Wake active during the reign of William the Conqueror roughly one hundred years earlier, Eustace may even have influenced the story of Robin Hood – probably the most famous, albeit fictitious, social bandit (Holt, 1982, p. 62). Eustace's life is a fascinating one, well told – sometimes in verifiable historical detail, sometimes with tantalizing vagueness – in the Romance of Eustace the Monk, composed soon after his death by an unknown author. The relevant parts of it will be woven into the subsequent chapters of this contribution, which follows Eustace's transition from a monk to a social bandit to a pirate and finally to a maritime mercenary in the service of two kings.[1]

'May You Live in Interesting Times': Politics in the Days of Eustace the Monk

'May you live in interesting times, and may you come to the attention of people in high places' – so goes the famous, but probably apocryphal, Chinese curse. For individuals looking forward to a peaceful life, this saying may indeed sound like the curse it is meant to be – after all, interesting times, in particular as regards history, usually are associated with times of war; while coming to the attention of people in high places, that is the authorities of the day, has its own perils, and usually implies at least a temporary end to the quiet life. For adventurers like Eustace the Monk however, times of war and the attention of people in high places come with great opportunities, such as a meteoric rise and a splendid career as well as notoriety and fame.

As regards the first half of the curse, it can be said without too much hyperbole that the times in England, and in France on the other side of the Channel, had been quite interesting ever since the end of the Roman empire. In particular, the incessant Viking raids from the late 8th century onward resulted in equally incessant warfare, and also in the emergence of various Nordic kingdoms and fiefdoms on both sides of the Channel, connected with each other via feudal ties and ever-shifting alliances. Hence, when King Edward the Confessor unexpectedly died on 5 January 1066, several contenders laid claim to the English throne: King Harold Hardrada of Norway, Harold Godwinson, Earl of Essex, and Duke William of Normandy. The first one to gain it was Harold Godwinson, who had the additional advantage of having been recommended by the dying king. But he was king only for nine months: although he decisively defeated the troops of King Harold Hardrada in the battle of Stamford Bridge on 25 September 1066, he and his still exhausted army succumbed to the fiercely attacking forces of William two days later in the battle of Hastings. William, "both the lawful successor of Edward and a foreign conqueror" (Barlow, 1988, p. 86), was duly crowned king in Westminster Abbey on Christmas Day 1066. As Barlow (1988, p. 85) notes, "with him came the intrusion of the Norman way of life into many spheres of activity." But since both sides of the Channel now were under the control of one king, this intrusion worked both ways: gradually, English ways of life, and especially English administrative practices, found their way into the French

domains that fell to William's successors, so that one can well speak of a fusion of English and Norman systems into a new one (Bates, 2016, pp. 210-211).

This blended system reached its peak during the times of the Angevins, in particular during the reign of its first king, Henry II (r. 1154-1189). The Angevin empire included the bulk of the British islands on the one side of the Channel and vast swathes of French territory on the other, forming what Hallam (1980, p. 180) calls "an elegant geographical bloc stretching from Northumberland to the Pyrenees." It proved to be a short-lived empire however, and did not survive the reigns of Henry's sons, Richard I (Lionheart, r. 1189-1199) and John (Lackland, r. 1199-1216). Under the relentless pressure of French King Philip II (Philip Augustus, r. 1180-1223), the empire began to shrink during the reign of Richard I Lionheart, partially due to his long absence first as a crusader in the Holy Land, and then as a prisoner of the German emperor Henry VI. It collapsed at the end of the reign of John Lackland, accelerated by a severe financial crisis which ultimately led to the loss first of the Normandy and then all other French parts of the Angevin empire between 1202 and 1204. Hence, and despite some daring raids in 1206, King John was reduced to a king of England (Warren, 1978, p. 100 passim).

The loss of the northern coast of France also resulted in a loss of control over the waters of the Channel, with the effect that "the Channel became a naval combat zone as the English court sought to retrieve lands lost and the French throne threatened invasion to impose its perceived sovereign rights" (Stanton, 2020, p. 219; see also Rodger, 2004, p. 51). A war fleet to protect English ports, English Channel islands and English seaborne trade against raiders on the one hand and to keep the sea lines open to the few remaining possessions in the Aquitaine as a prerequisite for a potential reconquest (Turner, 1995, p. 115) hence became a necessity – in particular when King Philip's son Louis launched a challenge to the Angevin throne, supported by a number of influential English earls and barons (Turner, 1995, pp. 252-253). King John's own naval forces however were not nearly enough for the daunting task of re-establishing control of the sea. This, basically, is the background story to Eustace the Monk's transition first into Eustace the Bandit, then Eustace the Pirate and finally Eustace the Sea Commander. But to understand the 'whys and hows' of Eustace's career, a brief look is required at the limits of state authority in this era.

'A Time of Undisciplined and Passionate Men': The Limits of State Sovereignty

In his magnum opus on England between 1042 and 1216, Barlow (1988, p. 330) wistfully states that this was "a time when men were still undisciplined and passionate [while feudal family] discord was a commonplace of the age." The three Angevin kings, Henry II, Richard I and John, all three of a "hot temper which sometimes prejudiced their calculated schemes" (Warren, 1987, p. 1), are typical examples: both Richard and John rebelled against their father Henry while plotting against each other (Warren, 1978, pp. 29-33). Discord within one's family did not exactly facilitate a king's rule, in particular not over an empire as vast as the Angevin one. Ruling it, and keeping it together, posed at least three problems for the king.

Firstly, the empire was not a unified state under the unchallenged control of the king and his bureaucracy but a heterogenous construct composed of a number of separate semi-independent principalities which had their own languages, cultures, and legal traditions. This state of affairs is known as a 'composite monarchy' (Elliott, 1992). It also implies that in these days, there was no such thing as a Weberian 'monopoly of power' wielded by the state. To render the situation even more confusing, the Angevin kings themselves owed allegiance to other rulers: as Dukes of Normandy, all Angevin kings were vassals of the French Capetian kings, first Louis VII (r. 1137-1180), then Philip II (r. 1180-1223), while for political reasons, Richard I became vassal of the Holy Roman Emperor Henry VI (in 1192, one of the conditions for Richard's release from German captivity), and John the vassal of Pope Innocent III (in

1203, to raise the pope's interdict and to secure his political support). Secondly, an effective and centralized bureaucracy required for the smooth administration of such a vast empire did not exist (Barlow, 1988, p. 330): it had disappeared with the Roman empire and would reappear only in the mid-17th century. Hence, whether the kingdom prospered or not depended on the king himself. Henry II as an energetic monarch was quite successful and thus powerful and rich, while Richard I and John squandered away much of these riches as well as Henry's accumulated political capital – Richard mainly due to his long absence because of his crusading activities but also due to his reckless spending and borrowing (Warren, 1978, p. 62), John mainly due to his continuing financial problems as well as a rising discontent within the ranks of the English barons (Turner, 1995, p. 175 passim), which also contributed to the collapse of the empire as such. Thirdly, the king's problems were further aggravated by the fact that the earls, counts and barons ruling their own fiefdoms as semi-independent overlords also tended to be 'undisciplined' and 'passionate': driven both by their chivalric code of honour as well as much less chivalric jealousy and greed, they seemed to be constantly embroiled in small wars, feuds, duels and murder, jostling for power and influence, and for their place in history (Brown, 2011). Not surprisingly against this backdrop, murder is where Eustace's rise to fame and notoriety began: when his father was killed by a rival nobleman, Eustace left the monkhood to take revenge for this deed.

Burgess (1997, p. 8) deems it likely that in his youth, Eustace was trained not only in chivalry as usual for the son of a noblemen, but also in seamanship in the Mediterranean. This unspecified 'seamanship' probably also included first-hand experience as a corsair, which is of importance for the later stages of his career. The writer of the Romance however skips all this and commences his story with the tall tale of Eustace traveling to Toledo to learn necromancy: "He had spent a whole winter and summer in Toledo […] in an abyss where he spoke to the Devil himself, who taught him the tricks and the ruses by which everybody is deceived and taken in. He learned a thousand spells, a thousand magic tricks and a thousand incantations" (Romance, in Burgess, 1997, p. 50; see also Azuela, 2017). After his return, Eustace ordained as a Benedictine monk – his alternative nickname 'Black Monk' thus rather refers to the black habits of the Benedictines than to his prowess in necromancy. Readers are told that Eustace "performed many devilish acts before leaving the abbey", and also that he gambled away all the earthly possessions of his fellow monks playing backgammon: "Eustace wagered everything, the crucifixes and the statues. Not even a pair of monk's boots was left. Eustace the Monk stole everything" (Romance, in Burgess, 1997, pp. 52-53).

Eustace's decidedly un-monkish behaviour would have resulted in him being defrocked rather sooner than later in any case, but around 1191 or 1192 something happened that made him leave voluntarily: his father Bauduin was ambushed and murdered by a rival nobleman: "Hainfrois de Heresinghen had killed him and put to death […], because he wanted to get hold of his property" (Romance, in Burgess, 1997, pp. 53-54). Since Eustace, like his father, was vassal of the Count of Boulogne, Renaud de Dammartin, this is where Eustace went to seek justice. A judicial combat in the shape of a duel was arranged in which neither Eustace nor Hainfrois fought for themselves – Eustace probably due to his residual religious status as monk, and Hainfrois due to his age. Although Eustace made known in advance that he would not honour the outcome if his champion were to lose, the duel took place and Eustace's champion got killed (Burgess, 1997, p. 11). Nevertheless, Eustace decided to enter the service of Count Renaud, vassal of Capetian King Philip but also of King John (Warren, 1978, pp. 55-56). Count Renaud eventually appointed Eustace seneschal in 1203. The enmity with Hainfrois obviously endured however, since the latter alleged that Eustace as seneschal "was fiddling with the accounts" (Burgess, 1997, p. 13). When Count Renaud ordered him to his castle to explain himself, Eustace fled – either because he suspected treachery, as Burgess thinks, or because the allegations were justified. Thus, probably in early 1204, began Eustace's spell as a bandit,

even a social bandit if one accepts the motive of self-help mentioned by Hobsbawm. This episode however did not last much longer than one year and a half, since in November 1205, he presented himself to King John in London – another stage in his life that will be discussed below.

Eustace's quarrels first with Hainfrois, then with Count Renaud, are typical for these violent times. They also highlight again that in feudal systems such as the Angevin empire and the French Capetian kingdom, violence was essentially private, and there was no difference yet between what nowadays is seen as 'public' and 'private'. The lack of a monopoly of power combined with the absence of a clear distinction between public and private also implies that the kings tended to be quite dependent on these quarrelling lords as their vassals, especially in a case of war: since on their own, the kings usually could muster only comparatively small forces, they had to draw upon the levies of their vassals to fight their wars. The only feasible solution for the kings to deploy professional soldiers independent from the political interests of powerful vassals was to employ mercenaries, ranging from highly skilled specialists (such as crossbowmen or archers) down to low-quality irregulars forming what Barlow (1988, p. 335) characterises as "a monstrous fringe to the more reputable forces" and a "denationalized scum." Still, they were vastly superior to feudal levies (Warren, 1978, pp. 59-60) – which is why Henry II, Richard I and John chose to employ such units. Warren describes the mercenaries employed by Richard I as follows: "[These] ruffianly thugs hired from the over-populated Low Countries […] were despised by all true knights, condemned by the Church, and regarded with horror by the country people upon which they would descend like a swarm of locusts" (Warren, 1978, p. 30). This is also a fitting description for John's mercenaries – their brutality and wanton destruction made many of King John's French subjects abandon him and defect to King Philip. Seen from a victim's perspective, mercenaries were indistinguishable from bandits. And if the victim lived at the coast, they would have been indistinguishable from pirates.

'Whoever Commands the Sea': Points on a Continuum

"Whosoever commands the sea commands the trade; whosoever commands the trade of the world commands the riches of the world, and consequently the world itself" (as quoted in Till, 2018, p. 11). Most readers are familiar with this remark of Sir Walter Raleigh, one of Queen Elizabeth I's gentlemen adventurers. It was not always thus, however: prior to the Tudors, a professional standing 'Navy Royal' did not exist (Rodger, 1997, pp. 117-130; cf. Warren, 1978, p. 125). This does not mean that there were no English fleets patrolling the waters dividing the British islands from the European continent – after all, as Warren (1978, p. 120) quips, "[t]he existence of the Channel, of course, obliged rulers of England and Normandy to some limited concern with the sea." King Aethelred II (r. 968-1016) for example possessed a substantial war fleet, and so did Edward the Confessor (r. 1042-1066). Thus, it is fair to say that "in the mid-eleventh century, England was a formidable naval power" (Wilson, 2013, p. 25). This naval power however came in the shape not of royal fleets under the command of the king, but of feudal levies controlled by the respective king's vassals who may or may not have agreed with his strategies or may even have supported a contender for the crown. Hence, Wilson (2013, p. 25) notes that "a large navy was a dangerous, perfidious beast in the eleventh century." In the case of Edward the Confessor, it was Godwin, Earl of Wessex, who had the largest naval force, using it astutely to reduce Edward to the status of a 'puppet king.' His son, Harold Godwinson, inherited this formidable naval power. Still, in 1066 he required the support of two of his most powerful vassals, Edwine, Earl of Mercia, and Morkere, Earl of Northumbria. While their naval forces were tasked to defend the coasts of their earldoms against the invasion fleet of Harold Hardrada, Harold concentrated his own fleet from May 1066 onward at the Isle of Wight to

intercept William of Normandy's expected invasion fleet. Apparently however, he deployed his forces too early, with the effect that his fleet of part-time sailors rapidly disbanded in early September because the fleet had run out of supplies. In the words of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles: "Then when it was the Nativity of St Mary [8 September], the men's provisions were gone, and no one could hold them there any longer." (as quoted and amended in Stanton, 2020, p. 223). This enabled William's invasion army to cross the Channel uncontested. Interestingly, after his victory, William seemed to have allowed his fleet to decay: there is no further mention of it after his coronation. As Stanton comments: "The newly minted Norman king of the English had clearly abandoned naval capability as an instrument of policy and a means of defence [with the consequence that] England's shore remained vulnerable to seaborne assault" (Stanton, 2020, p. 225). Not only that, one should add: the absence of a naval capability resulted in rampant piracy in the three seas surrounding the British Isles: the Irish Sea, the Channel, and the North Sea.

Two lessons can be learned here: firstly, just like feudal levies on land, feudal levies at sea were not under the direct command of the king but under the control of powerful vassals who played their own power games; secondly, and also just like feudal levies on land, naval levies could not be kept in the field (or at sea) for long. This of course did not escape the attention of the kings of the day. Due to the huge expenses involved not only constructing and then manning a fleet of warships, but also victualizing this fleet and keeping it in good repair, a standing fleet usually was out of the question. King John who desperately needed one, nevertheless embarked on an ambitious ship-building program from 1205 onward. This program also included Mediterranean-type galleys adapted to Northern sea conditions (Warren, 1978, p. 123). The costs were exorbitant, however: they amounted to no less than one quarter of the royal annual revenues (Rodger, 2004, pp. 51-53). And still, his galley fleet (50 in 1206, only 20 in 1212) was inferior in numbers to the French fleet. One way to redress this situation was to marshal the resources of a confederation of powerful seaports and their pool of "mercenary mariners" (Stanton, 2020, p. 222): the *Cinque Ports* of Hastings, Dover, Hythe, Romney and Sandwich. Ever since the times of William the Conqueror, the Cinque Ports had been the go-to places when ships were required. However, even here the time constraints remained: "They were traditionally required to provide fifty-seven ships for a service of fifteen days a year, an adequate time for the simple needs of the Norman kings, but insufficient for the more extensive operations of their Angevin successors. When kings required a fleet […] they hired or commandeered merchant ships." (Warren, 1978, p. 121).

While commandeering merchant ships may well have been an adequate stop-gap measure, the crews of these vessels quite understandably were not keen to fight the king's battles, and thus of dubious value. There was however a third option for King John: co-opting battle-hardened pirates as yet another form of mercenary mariners. Usually, the co-option was a rather passive one in the sense of tolerating one's own pirates as long as they mainly preyed on the maritime traffic of one's enemies. The boundaries between legitimate maritime commerce and pirating was a fleeting on in these days in any case: the crew of a merchant vessel could turn into pirates as soon as an opportunity arose, for example in the shape of a heavily laden but ill-crewed vessel that would not be able to offer much resistance. However, King John went one step further and took a pirate leader in employ – a pirate leader who possessed ships of his own. And with that, it is time to return to Eustace, as this is the one King John hired.

The author of the Romance does not offer any explanation why and how Eustace became a pirate – but he offers a rather tall story in which Eustace presented himself at King John's court:

> "In the guise of a Hospitaler he went and prostrated himself at the feet of [King John], who asked him why he was doing this. […] Eustace said: 'Hear my business. Eustace the Monk sends word to you and begs you, with pleas for mercy, to retain him in your household.' The king replied without delay: 'He will be retained, if he is willing to swear that he will serve me in good faith and never let me down. I shall want hostages from him.' Eustace said: 'If you wish, you will have my daughter as a pledge, or my wife, if you like.' The king said: 'Are you the Monk, you who are speaking about this matter?' 'Yes, lord, my name is Eustace.' The king said: 'By St Edmund, who is my true lord, I shall retain you willingly. You are very welcome.' So Eustace was retained and the king gave him galleys." (Romance, in Burgess, 1997, p. 73)

It is unlikely that this story played out as told by the author of the Romance. But it is quite interesting that according to the Romance, it was Eustace who made the first move, thus presenting the king with an option that went further than the usual passive toleration of one's own pirates' activities. It can be assumed that Eustace by then already had a reputation as a formidable pirate leader (Burgess, 1988, p. 16; Stanton, 2015, p. 228): since the time span from his fall-out with Count Renaud in early 1204 to his entering King John's service in November 1205 was too short to develop mariner skills from scratch, this seemingly smooth change from banditry on land to banditry at sea is only plausible if Eustace learned the art of pirating or corsairing in the Mediterranean, as suggested in the introduction. This would also explain why King John readily accepted Eustace's services: as Warren (1978, p. 120) explains, "[i]f, in the late 12th century, an expert on naval affairs or a skilled navigator were wanted he was fetched from the Mediterranean." Malo's comment supports this: "it was [Eustace] who implanted in the Channel the methods of naval combat used by the Italians" (as quoted in Burgess, 1997, p. 8).

Malo is quite right: the practice of employing such maritime entrepreneurs became widespread only after the outbreak of the Hundred Years War at the end of the 13th century when galley squadrons from Castile, Genoa and Monaco operated in the Channel, usually in the pay of the French king (Rodger, 2004, pp. 92-108). Hence, King John's decision to make Eustace 'his pirate' (to echo Queen Elizabeth I's famous quip to Sir Francis Drake) can be seen as a novelty. It also highlights the significance of Eustace: he was not just one social bandit of many whose exploits make for great anecdotes but nothing else – rather, he was the first of a long line of private maritime entrepreneurs later known as privateers: seafaring mercenaries who provided all those who could pay for their services with an instantaneous navy. If one sees naval warfare and piracy as polar opposites, these privateers (in the Mediterranean: corsairs) would sit somewhere in between as 'pirates with a license' since they held a privateering commission that legalised their otherwise entirely piratical activities.[2]

Apart from the fact that King John handed over some of his galleys to Eustace, the terms agreed between both parties are unknown. However, Eustace's activities during his service for King John, in particular his piratical instinct to plunder all ships he came across, and also to conduct raids on lucrative coastal settlements with a certain insouciance when it came to distinguish between friend and foe strongly indicates that he operated on a 'no plunder no pay' basis. As Thompson points out for later periods, "[s]tates did not pay privateers[3], but allowed them to retain some or all of the prizes they seized" (Thomson, 1994, p. 41). Hence, operating on a 'no plunder no pay' basis would strengthen the argument that Eustace should be seen as an early privateer active before the term was coined.

King John's decision to employ Eustace did not sit well with other powerful English maritime actors. Some of them, in particular the Cinque Ports, were influential enough to finally turn the mood at the king's court against Eustace. As per tradition, they had also been asked by the king to contribute ships and crews to his war against French King Philip and could

thus be seen as direct competitors of Eustache. The Cinque Ports certainly became alarmed when Eustace took control of the Channel Islands, making the Isle of Sark his basis from which he attacked merchant shipping in the Channel while raiding the coasts of the upper Normandy as well as the Seine estuary (Stanton, 2020, p. 228). They began to complain about him at court when he started to attack their merchant vessels as well, and even to raid the coasts of southern England, including villages under their control. Finally, they became Eustace's implacable enemies when, after briefly declaring him an outlaw for his piratical raids on the English coast, King John swiftly pardoned him again.

Pardoning Eustace made eminent sense for King John: retaining Eustace as his sea commander despite all complaints about his piratical behaviour meant that he had a fleet at the ready – a fleet of professional sailors that, unlike the part-time squadrons of the Cinque Ports, allowed him to keep the waters and the coasts of the Channel at least under indirect control throughout the year. That Eustace also preyed on English ships and on English coastal villages was a venial sin compared to that. Eustace on the other hand profited from this relationship because he gained control of the Isle of Sark, from which he could prey basically on all cross-Channel traffic, to either capture merchantmen or to force them paying for a safe passage. In sum, while King John could extend his naval reach indirectly via Eustace, Eustace could expand his piratical activities under the protection of King John. Hence, their patron-client relationship was a mutually beneficial one.

Then, suddenly, at the end of 1212, Eustace defected to France. The main reason that made Eustace defect was, according to the Romance, the appearance of Count Renaud at King John's court: "Whilst the Monk was in England, the Count of Boulogne arrived. He had quarrelled with the King of France and come quickly to King John. When he saw Renaud of Boulogne, the Monk made up his mind to come back home" (Romance, in Burgess, 1997, p. 76). This turn of events sounds plausible, although the Cinque Ports' efforts to get rid of him certainly also played a role. It is unclear whether he defected alone as the Romance has it, or whether he took at least parts of his formidable fleet with him. Be that as it may, King Philip gladly accepted the service of this experienced pirate and immediately let him loose on his English enemies. In the words of the author of the Romance: "Eustace was very bold and fierce, and later he performed many devilish acts in the islands on the other side" (Romance, in Burgess, 1997, p. 77). Apart from incessant raids on villages and towns including Folkestone, Eustace's activities included naval support for King Philip's son Louis, who embarked on an attempt to capture the Angevin crown. Fortunately for the English coastal population, and in particular for the Cinque Ports, Eustace's successful service for the French king was brought to a premature end in August 1217 in the battle of Sandwich.

Ships and Busses: Naval Warfare in the Times of Eustace

One important question still remains to be answered: why exactly would a pirate, even a 'bold and fierce' one like Eustace, be of interest for a king looking for an auxiliary navy? After all, piracy and naval warfare seem to be polar opposites. In the times of Eustace however, and up to the advent of broadside artillery in the early modern era, the difference between merchantmen, pirate vessels and warships was a gradual one only. Also, the tactics used by pirate fleets and war fleets were quite similar.

To start with the ships, war fleets usually consisted of a mix of light and fast vessels on the one hand, and heavy transports on the other. The heavy transports, known from the Latin term *buzae* as 'busses', were ordinary merchantmen hired or pressed into service, and converted to warships simply by adding fighting platforms (see below) and shipping a more numerous and better armed crew than normal. The most frequent transport ship type of this period was the cog, used by merchants, pirates and war fleets alike. The light vessels either

were Viking-type longships well known in Nordic waters, or Mediterranean-type galleys. The author of the Romance's explicitly states that "the king gave him galleys" (Romance, in Burgess, 1997, p. 73) when Eustace entered King John's service. This assertion is borne out by facts: as mentioned above, King John financed an ambitious ship-building program which included galleys as well (Warren, 1978, p. 123). Hence, as regards ships, Eustace's pirate fleet was indistinguishable from King John's 'official' royal squadrons, for example those which fought the battle of Damme, a port of Flanders, on 30-31 May 1213 against French forces (see for example Brooks, 1930).

Concerning tactics, it should be noted that in the High Middle Ages, high seas operations were very rare: since maritime traffic in these days still was a coast-hugging one, the bulk of operations, be it ship-to-ship engagements or coastal raids, took place in littoral waters. As regards naval warfare as such, Stanton (2020, p. 219) explains that the "technology and tactics of the era dictated that this warfare on the waves took the form of what was essentially a battle over logistics: fleets were either used to transport invasion forces and supplies or to interdict them. Pitched battles were rare and often indecisive." In case battle could not be avoided, it was usually fought by way of boarding and counter-boarding – which is why merchantmen, warships and pirate vessels alike featured excessively large crews armed with daggers, swords, axes, pikes, halberds, bows and crossbows. Pots filled with combustible material or unslaked lime also were frequently part of the arsenal. A few vessels even had catapults (sea mangonels or onagers) to bombard enemy ships with heavy stones as a prelude to boarding. The fore and stern castles as well as a large crow's nest or 'fighting top' were used as fighting platforms for the bow and crossbow men whose main task was 'softening up' the enemy's defences. On the defender's side, anti-boarding nets were kept at the ready to prevent boarding, or to at least render it more difficult. Often, the decks were made slippery with liquid soap as a further obstacle. On the attacker's side, an arsenal of iron grapnels and hooks were held at the ready to be thrown into the targeted ship's rigging and over its gunwales to prevent it from escaping, and also to tear down the anti-boarding nets (Lehr, 2019, p. 74).

The author of the Romance vividly describes the merciless nature of the close-quarter battles fought during the battle of Sandwich on 24 August 1217 (on the battle itself, see Cannon, 1912; McGlynn, 2017; Wilson, 2013, pp. 34-36):

> "Eustace and his men defended themselves by hurling and throwing missiles and firing arrows. They slaughtered a great many Englishmen and defended themselves courageously. Eustace knocked down a good number of them with an oar which he was holding. Some had their arms broken, others their heads smashed. […] But the enemy attacked him from all sides and tormented him very severely […] Then they began to hurl well-ground lime in large pots, which they smashed to pieces on the ship's rails. The powder rose in great clouds, and it was this which caused them the most damage. After that, they could no longer defend themselves, for their eyes were full of powder. [The Englishmen] jumped on to Eustace's ship and treated his men very cruelly. All the barons were captured and Eustace the Monk was killed. He had his head cut off and at once the battle ended" (Romance, in Burgess, 1997, pp. 77-78)

The battle is an excellent example for Stanton's argument that in this period, fleets were used either to carry an invasion force and its supplies, or to counter an invasion: while Eustace's fleet transported soldiers, horses and siege engines to support Prince Louis' siege of London, the English fleet tried to prevent these forces from landing, and quite successfully so: even though the bulk of the French ships managed to escape and to reach their destination, Eustace's heavily laden ship which carried a bulky siege engine was surrounded and captured, and after the death of Eustace, the whole plan fell apart. It was also an exceptional one, as Stanton (2020,

p. 232) notes: "For the first time in northern waters a decisive battle of naval tactic and manoeuvre was fought on the open sea." It also illustrates the importance of just one person: the role of Eustace the Monk as sea commander and "probably the greatest sea captain of his age" (Keen, 1987) was so central that after his death, his organized fleet dissolved. In modern terminology, the killing of Eustace was an eminently successful 'decapitation strike.'

Be that as it may, it should be well understood by now that both naval squadrons and pirate fleets alike employed the same tactics: either raiding enemy coasts or ambushing enemy ships. This explains why hiring Eustace was such an attractive option for King John: it did indeed provide him with an instantaneous additional navy with similar capabilities as his 'real' navy, led by a charismatic commander greatly admired by his men and greatly feared by his enemies.

'Most Spectacular Pirate': Conclusion

In conclusion, it is fair to say that Eustace the Monk was a typical product of the unsettled times he lived in. Like many other noblemen, and certainly like the barons both of King John and King Philip, he was embroiled in feuds, and shifted his allegiance depending on the political winds. Had he survived and won the battle of Sandwich, he would have probably risen through the ranks of the nobility, perhaps even winning the Isle of Sark as his fiefdom either from King Philip or from King John's successor, Henry III. But this is mere speculation. Historical fact is that banditry on land and at sea, and also social banditry on land and at sea, flourished in times that were violent and unsettled – times in which the authority of the state either still was limited, or challenged by competitors from outside of the realm or from within. In the times of Eustace, and the twilight of the Angevin empire, both were the case: King Philip from the outside, and John's truculent barons from the inside of the empire. While his father Henry II and his older brother Richard I routinely employed mercenaries on land, the loss of the Normandy and Brittany forced John to also look for maritime mercenaries. This provided the opening for Eustace's career as the King's pirate – an eminently successful career that lasted seven years from 1205 to 1212 before he defected to King Philip to equally successfully fight for him for another five years.

Judging Eustace's activities obviously depends on one's perspective: for King John, he certainly was a hugely effective maritime mercenary harassing the French and successfully contesting command of the sea. For everyone else, he simply was a pirate – not only for the French as his foremost victims until he changed sides in 1212, but also for the Cinque Ports whose maritime interests also suffered from his piracy, so much so that they temporarily supported the claim of Philip's son Louis for the Angevin throne, to rally to the English cause again only after King John's death on 19 October 1216. It is telling that most of the ships defeating Eustace's invasion fleet in the battle of Sandwich belonged to them (Stanton, 2020, pp. 230-232). Hence, as noted in the beginning, whether an outlaw is seen as a base criminal or as a noble 'social bandit' as defined by Hobsbawm lies in the eyes of the beholder.

Soon after Eustace's death, there were many such beholders who celebrated him as a social bandit. Nowadays, he is largely forgotten. Eustace however seems to enjoy the grudging admiration of those few historians mentioning him in their works. Keen (1987) for example describes Eustace as "probably the greatest sea captain of his age", while Mitchell (1976) celebrates him as "the most spectacular pirate of the early Middle Ages." Wilson (2013, p. 33) is rather critical and describes him as a "dangerous, useful sort of man, hated by the Channel merchants and fisherman [sic] but prized for his depredations on French shipping," to finally dismiss him as "a man for hire." The writer of the romance of Eustace also did not shy away from a rather harsh final judgement: "No one who is always intent on evil can live for a long time" (Romance, in Burgess, 1997, p. 87). Burgess (1997, p. 16) is the most balanced of all,

and probably nearer to the historical truth. After surmising that King John "was sufficiently impressed with Eustache's efforts […] to reward him with a gift of land in Norfolk", he dryly states that "many others, particularly the authorities of the Cinque Ports and a host of unwary sailors in the waters around Britain, whom Eustace managed to antagonize or terrify in the course of his activities […] were far less impressed by him."

In sum, Eustace can be characterised as 'probably the greatest sea captain of his age, the most spectacular pirate of the early Middle Ages, a dangerous and useful sort of man for hire who terrorised his enemies and impressed his employers.' In the light of Eustace's successful maritime career in the service of two kings, it is not surprising to note that in a time when keeping a standing royal navy was prohibitively expensive and the authority of coastal states at sea thus was limited, the idea of hiring maritime entrepreneurs later known as 'privateers' swiftly took hold on both sides of the Channel from the outbreak of the Hundred Years War onward, thus importing a model of private maritime warfare from the Mediterranean where it had emerged much earlier and under different circumstances. Many more illustrious figures cut from the same cloth as Eustace followed in his footsteps. Some of them still are household names, and their exploits the topics of many publications: Sir Francis Drake (c.1540–1596) and Sir Walter Raleigh (1552–1618) in the case of Elizabethan England, or René Duguay-Trouin (1673-1736) and Robert Surcouf (1773-1827) in the French case, to name but a few. It is unlikely that they had ever heard of Eustace the Monk – but he certainly should be seen as one of the earliest examples of their profession in Northern waters. And that makes his story worth exploring as well.

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[1] For simplicity's sake, the English annotated translation of Burgess 1997 will be used (for the French version, see Conlon 1972). The translated text will be quoted as 'Romance, in Burgess 1997', while Burgess' comments will be quoted as 'Burgess 1997'.'
[2] The first known letter of marque was issued by King John's successor Henry III in 1243
[3] It should be noted however that the term 'privateer' is an anachronism in the current context since it gained currency only from the 17th century onward.