

Aitire, 人質, тали, ὄμηρος, رهن, obses: Hostages, Political Instability, and the Writing of History c. 900 - c. 1050 CE

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The medieval hostage stood as a surety given by one party into the custody of another, with the understanding that hostages bound their donors to a particular obligation or set of terms outlined by the hostages' recipient. The practice is attested on a global scale, and much can be said about the narrative function of hostages as a foil for writers to construct stories of victory, defeat, piety, mercy and cruelty. This article adopts a broad geographical focus, from Ireland to eastern China. By looking at periods both of political turbulence and stability in the tenth and eleventh centuries CE, it examines how writers depicted hostage-giving in times of political fragmentation and change, and in what way was this reflected in narrative and documentary texts. By including authors writing about recent and more distant pasts, it explores how this practice operated both within and without the boundaries of legal custom, and considers how attitudes towards those who granted and received hostages might be shaped by politico-social transitions.

Keywords: Diplomacy; hostages; narrative; Old English; Latin; Greek; Georgian; Chinese; prose; medieval literature

Introduction

In 1015 CE Muğāhid al-ʿĀmirī (مجاهد العامري), ruler of the taifa of Dénia, took a large fleet from the Balearics to attempt a conquest of Sardinia. His forces were almost completely destroyed by military defeat and then shipwreck. Subsequently a combined army of Pisans and Genoans captured his mother, son, and relatives, and although Muğāhid successfully ransomed some of his family, an agreement was made that his son, ʿAlī (علي إقبال الدولة), would be kept as a hostage. Brought first to the court of the western emperor Henry II, the prince then spent the remainder of his hostageship in Pisa following the intervention of a merchant. After some fifteen years as a hostage, ʿAlī travelled first to the Zirid court in Ifriqiya (modern-day Tunisia) and then to his home of Dénia. There, the prince had to re-learn both his language and religion in preparation to rule, having converted to Christianity whilst serving as his father's hostage.¹ Although records of his travels survive only in twelfth-

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1 *Liber maiolichinus*, ed. Calisse 40-41; Ibn al-Abbār (ابن الأبار), *Al-takmila* (كتاب التكملة للكتاب الصلة), ed. Bel and Cheneb, 52; Thietmar of Merseburg, *Chronicon* 7.31, ed. Holtzmann, 435-436. See Fierro, *Hostages*, 74; Bruce, *Politics of violence*, 136.

century sources, 'Alī's hostageship conveys to the modern reader something of the extraordinary cultural contacts that could be made both by hostages and by those who gave and accepted them in the medieval world. Nor was 'Alī alone. Visitors to royal or imperial courts from Ireland to China in the tenth and eleventh centuries CE would have found the sight of hostages amongst those in attendance a familiar one: individuals, groups and polities have given and taken individuals as a form of guarantee for as long as the written record stretches.²

The medieval hostage was a form of surety given by one party into the custody of another, with the understanding that the hostages bound their donors to a particular obligation or set of terms outlined by the hostages' recipient. Most scholars to have worked on this particular type of diplomatic transaction agree on the broad strokes of a definition, though there is naturally difference on the finer points. For John Gilissen, the medieval hostage was »*un garant qui est privé de sa liberté pour assurer un comportement déterminé ou l'exécution d'une obligation*«,³ while Annette Parks states that »hostages are defined as persons who are demanded or offered by one person or group to another person or groups for the purpose of securing an agreement ... with the stated or implied understanding that a breach of the agreement on the part of the hostage-giver will result in retaliation against the hostage.«⁴ Adam Kosto, responsible for much recent scholarship on hostage-giving, describes the hostage as »a form of surety, a person ... deprived of liberty by a second person in order to guarantee an undertaking by a third person.«⁵

Yet despite these recent definitions, hostages were polysemic, able to carry within them multiple and sometimes contradictory meanings. Nor did this semiotic complexity only apply to the hostage in the present moment, but extended both forwards and backwards in time. A hostage represented an arrangement made in the past; their physical presence reflected current politico-social relationships; their fate, often dependent upon the actions of their family, completes the tripartite nature of their temporal identity. This triptych naturally impinges upon the accounts of those who wrote about hostages given and accepted, whether a day or a thousand years later. Hostages could at once represent past, present and future relations between kings, parties or even empires, and formed an important part of textual constructions of power, its gain and loss.

2 Kosto, *Hostages*, 199-226.

3 Gilissen, *Esquisse d'une histoire*, 52: »a guarantee that deprives one of their liberty to assure a determined behaviour or the execution of a particular behaviour.«

4 Parks, *Living Pledges*, 22.

5 Kosto, *Hostages*, 9.

Hostages in the Ancient World

References to hostages survive in some of the oldest extant written languages we have on earth, revealing a practice with origins rooted in ancient and near-global concepts of surety and guarantee. From c. 700 BCE individuals described as hostages appear regularly in the written record in diverse cultures and contexts, including classical Greece, the Neo-Assyrian Empire, and the Zhou (周朝) and Qin (秦朝) dynasties of China.⁶ Such records often privileged transactions conducted by those in the highest societal echelons; many who went on to rule had themselves experienced hostageship, either serving as a hostage, or giving, exchanging and receiving such individuals.⁷ These earliest accounts of hostage practices reverberated through historical writing for centuries, connecting the receipt of hostages with political dominance.

In China, hostages are continuously attested from c. 700 BCE, and their numbers peaked during the Han dynasty's (漢朝) rule, when its members extracted noble hostages from client kingdoms in the Western Regions as a matter of course.⁸ The expansion of the practice's geographical range and cultural permeation is revealed by notices of so-called *hostage hostels* (質館) built to accommodate those held at central points.⁹ The great emphasis commentators placed on the political currency hostages offered is in evidence from the Han to the Song dynasty (宋朝) of the mid-tenth to thirteenth centuries, with only minor lapses.¹⁰

Though more rare than in other historical contexts, hostages do appear in records dating from ancient and classical Greece, including frequent exchanges made to ensure those negotiating treaties stuck to their word during the process,¹¹ and in accounts of the Peloponnesian war.¹² Hostages in Islamic texts are a more nebulous phenomenon, but much of our earlier evidence comes from this region, whether involving the Roman and Persian empires or, according to some scholars, pre-Islamic tribal practices.¹³ Better attested are transactions made

6 For China, see Yang, *Hostages in Chinese history*, 507-521. For Ancient Egypt: Feucht, *The Hrdw n k3 reconsidered*, 38-47; Feucht, *Kind im Alten Ägypten*, 266-304. For the Near East: Zawadzki, *Hostages in Assyrian*, 449-458; Radner, *After Eltekeh*, 471-479; Morschauser, »Hospitality«, 461-485.

7 Famous examples include Philip of Macedon: Diodorus Siculus, 15.67.3-4, Dio Chrisostom, *Discourses* (Λόγοι), 49.5, Plutarch, *Pelopidas* (Πελοπίδας), 26.4, Justin, *Epitome*, 6.9.7, and 7.5.1-3; Theoderic the Great: Jordanes, *De origine actibusque Getarum* 52.271; the hostages exchanged between Chou and Cheng in 720 BCE: *The Commentary of Zuo: Zuozhuan* (左傳), 17, ed. Miller; and Shoshenq, a likely member of the Delta dynasties and relation of Sennacherib, king of Assyria, mentioned in the sale document recorded at Nineveh in 692 BCE: Kwasman and Parpola, *Legal Transactions*, 142, discussed in detail by Radner, *After Eltekeh*, 471-479. Nevertheless, the practice also impacted upon many lower down the social scale, in local contexts and transactions, e.g. Amit, *Hostages in Ancient Greece*, 129-142.

8 See for instance *Book of Han* (*Han shu*, 漢書) 94.2 (*Traditions of the Xiongnu*, 匈奴傳; *ibid.*, 96.1-2 (*Traditions of the Western Regions*, 西域).

9 Fan Ye, *Book of the Later Han* (*Hou-Han shu*, 後漢書) 90: Treatise on the Wuhuan, Xianbei, 卷九十 烏桓鮮卑列傳. See also Selbitschka, *Early Chinese diplomacy*, 61-114.

10 Yang, *Hostages in Chinese history*, 510-512.

11 Amit, *Hostages in Ancient Greece*, 129-142; Panagopoulos, *Captives and Hostages*, 189.

12 Especially that of Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* 1.56.1-2, 1.57.6, 1.82.4, 1.91.2, 1.108.3, 1.115.3-5, 1.117.3, 2.26.1, 2.56.2, 3.90.4, 3.101.2, 3.102.1, 3.102.3, 3.114.3, 4.42.1, 4.57.4, 5.61.4, 5.77.1-3, 5.84.1, 6.43.1, 6.61.3, 7.83.2, 8.31.1.

13 For an early instance, see e.g. Strabo, *Geographica*, 16.1.28, ed. Jones, 7.236-237. See Greenfield, »Kullu nafsīn bimā kasabat rahīnā«, 221-227; Kosto, *Hostages during the crusades*, 5-6; Ryckmans, *Inscriptions historiques sabéennes*, 329-342; Schacht, *Foreign elements*, 137-138.

by the raiding fleets that settled in the Balearics and then established the territorial units that came to be known as al-Andalus.¹⁴ It is nevertheless a curious feature of the evidence that references to hostage donations between Christian and Islamic parties are something of a rarity in western Christian sources, despite numerous accounts of diplomatic-military engagement. Hostage donations do appear in seventh-century records of diplomatic negotiations between the Byzantine Empire and Islamic powers, however, and are intermittently attested from c. 650 until the period under scrutiny here.¹⁵

Turning our gaze to Rome, almost all recorded major politico-military interactions that occurred during the Republic and Principate eras involved hostages.¹⁶ It is important to convey that almost without exception Roman sources record the donation of hostages *from* Rome's neighbours or subject peoples to the empire: from the centre to the periphery.¹⁷ After the Second Punic war, victorious generals paraded high-profile hostages down the *Via Sacra* in triumph for the first time,¹⁸ and as the empire continued to expand, Rome amassed hostages from the furthest edges of its influence.¹⁹ By the time of the first emperor Augustus (27-14 BCE), hostages were given from virtually every territory in the empire, all of whom were brought to Rome. Hostages became synonymous with hegemonic rule over foreign territories in both text and practice, and Roman practices impacted on behaviour from Britain to Syria, and continued to have significant influence on those who performed similar transactions into the tenth and eleventh centuries CE.

The Current Paper

This paper seeks to explore representations of hostage-giving written in times of political fragmentation and change, and to consider how the authors of narrative and documentary texts alike portrayed such turbulence by engaging with the history of their own peoples, their neighbours, and their rivals. By selecting case studies from a global stage, including authors writing about recent and more distant pasts, it will examine how versions of the practice operated both within and without the boundaries of legal custom,²⁰ and how attitudes towards those who granted and received hostages might be shaped by politico-social transitions.

14 On terms for hostages in Arabic sources: Jansen, *Hostages*, 2.454; Corriente, *Diccionario* »reenes«.

15 Kaplony, *Konstantinopel und Damaskus*, esp. 23-32, 37-46 and 99-113; Kosto, *Hostages during the crusades*, 6, nn. 10-13.

16 E.g. donations from Etruscans: Livy, 5.27.4, Dionysius Halicarnassensis, 9.17.3, Frontinus, *Strategemata*, 4.4.1; Volsci: Livy, 2.16.9, 2.22.2, Dionysius Halicarnassensis, 6.25.2; 6.30.1; Samnites: Livy, 9.16.1, 9.20.4, 10.11.13.

17 For the exception of Sassanian Persia see Lee, *Role of hostages*, 366-374.

18 Livy, 30.37.6; Polybius, 15.8.8; Moscovich, *Hostage regulations*, 417-427. On triumphal processions in Late Antiquity, see McCormick, *Eternal Victory*, 35-79 and 84-90.

19 Some examples: Appian, *Historia Romana: Mithridatic Wars*/ΜΙΘΡΙΔΑΤΕΙΟΣ, 103 and 117; Caesar, *Bello Gallicum*, 2.13, 2.15.2, 2.28.2, 2.31.2, 2.34, 3.21.3, 3.7-8.3, 3.10, 4.22.2, 4.37, 5.47.2, 6.4.4, 7.11, 7.55.2 and 7.63.3; Dio Cassius, *Historia Romana*, 37.2.5-7; Plutarch, *Pompeius*, 45.4. See Allen, *Hostages*, 11; Moscovich, *Obsidibus traditis*, 122-128.

20 Hostages appear in a number of Roman law codes, which distinguished between hostages given as part of a personal promise, and those given to Rome by other kingdoms. See Kosto, *Hostages*, 212-213; Kosto, *Hostages in the Carolingian world*, 128-129. Hostages appear only rarely in medieval legal or documentary texts, for instance in the *Lex Frisionum*, 21.1: »[He] who kills a hostage, pays [for] him ninefold« (»*Qui obsidem occiderit, novies eum componat*«), ed. Eckhardt and Eckhardt, 64. See also Siems, *Studien zur Lex Frisionum*, 321-322.

Despite evidence for hostage-giving on a near-global scale, only a small number of studies have considered early or central medieval hostages outside western Europe, and consequently the historiography is heavily skewed towards Britain, Ireland and continental western Europe prior to the later eleventh century.

Historians traditionally interpreted the medieval practice as a legal mechanism, distinguishing between the public and the private, despite the limited number of medieval legislative texts that concerned hostages.²¹ More recent work instead encourages us to view hostage-giving as a socio-political phenomenon, a distinct type of diplomatic interaction that can reveal much about power and its contemporary distribution. Kosto, Parks, Ryan Lavelle and others have advanced hostage-studies in three crucial aspects.²² Firstly, they have established the logic of the practice, communicating its essence and purpose to modern audiences. Secondly, they have shown that the process was a specific if overlapping form of politico-military transaction distinct from captive-taking or gift-giving, routinely and consistently distinguished through terminological and contextual cues in early medieval western Europe. Finally, and most importantly, they have demonstrated that the value of hostage-giving lay both in the provision of politico-military security, and in its ramifications for cultural interaction and diffusion across polities, intimately connected to the prestige that custody of elite hostages conveyed: the political value of certain hostages may have outweighed their function as a guarantee.²³

This contribution seeks to argue that, while study of the mechanics and political symbolism of the practice has been vital, we now need to look more closely at the narrative function of hostages as a foil for writers to construct stories of victory, defeat, piety, mercy and cruelty. While in the heyday of the Carolingian Empire hostages in the written record were fundamentally phenomena of the external, an echo of Roman texts and practices delivered to the centre by those from without its borders, this is an impression produced by its frequently triumphalist sources. I want to set accounts from early medieval western Europe against a broader canvas and question if we as readers are witnesses to the collision of the twin impulses of political instability and historiographical development. In other words, does political fragmentation result in a greater numbers of hostages, or an increased tendency to reveal the complexities of such transactions, as writers of different kinds of texts and histories operated within increasingly varied cultural milieux? In posing such a research question I have approached records of hostage transactions not as events we have to accept or reject as historical reality, but instead as expressions of the reification of internal narratives that might provide insight into how contemporary writers of history conceptualised the present, the past, and hostages in their social imaginaries.

21 For instance Lutteroth, *Der Geisel im Rechtsleben*, esp. 15-17. See also Hoppe, *Geiselschaft, passim*; Hammer and Salvin, *Taking of hostages*, 20-21; Berger, *From hostage to contract*, 281-292; Holmes, *The Common Law*, 247-250; Weber, *Economy and Society*, ed. and trans. Roth and Wittich, 2.679-680.

22 As well as the publications mentioned above, n. 20, see Kosto, *First century of the crusades*, 3-31; *id.*, *Hostages and the habit*, 183-196; *id.*, *L'otage, comme vecteur d'échange*, 171-181; *id.*, *Otages conditionnels*, 387-403.

23 Lavelle, *Use and abuse*, 269-296.

Hostages, 900-c. 1050 CE: an Overview

Between c. 900 and c. 1050 CE, to possess hostages remained synonymous with dominance, whether expressed via multitudes of hostages drawn from disparate locations, or the receipt of individuals of particular standing.²⁴ Unfortunately, those narrating such events rarely included the terms or duration of the agreement, or the identity of those given. What is generally consistent, however, particularly in longer accounts of triumphalist expansion or political dominance, is that these unilateral donations were made from those outside a kingdom or polity to those at the centre. Despite the different political landscapes of the tenth and eleventh centuries and the ebb and flow of dynasties, rulers and territories, such accounts continue to be written frequently.

Some illustrative examples set the scene, beginning with instances of larger quantities of hostages drawn from multiple locations. We hear of sites built specifically for the custody or housing of hostages, including an imperial decree issued by the Song dynasty in 1017 to establish a court for this precise purpose.²⁵ Similarly, the tenth-century Andalusian historian Ibn al-Qūṭīyya (ابن القوطية) referred to the *dār al-rahā'in* (hostage quarters) established in Cordoba, housing those who provided living proof of the emir's martial successes.²⁶ The *droungarios* of the watch John Skylitzes (Ἰωάννης Σκυλίτζης), who lived in Constantinople in the second half of the eleventh century, wrote that in 998 Emperor Basil II received the son of the Armenian ruler David the *kuropalates* as hostage, and also received hostages from the emirs [of Tripoli, Damascus, Tyre and Beirut], to ensure their loyalty before taking those in his custody to Byzantium.²⁷ In his account of the Danish king Swein Forkbeard's 1013 conquest of England, an anonymous chronicler used multiple hostage donations to cement the various regional submissions made to the Danish king: »Hostages were given to him from every shire« north of Watling Street, and then from the residents of Oxford and Winchester. In the south-west, the ealdorman Æthelmær and the thegns of western England came to Swein at Bath and submitted with hostages, before, finally, Swein received hostages from London and became king.²⁸

24 Kosto states the most frequent across the Middle Ages as a whole was »submission following military defeat«: *Hostages*, 25.

25 Hsü Sung *et al.*, *Sung hui-yao chi-kao*, 6.7a. See Yang, *Hostages in Chinese history*, 511.

26 Ibn al-Qūṭīyya, *History of Islamic Spain*, 7, *The reign of the Emir Muhammad*, ed. Ribera, 94; trans. James, 121; Ibn Ḥayyān, *al-Muqtabis fī akhbār ahl al-Andalus*, ed. Chalmeta, Corriente and Subh, 186.

27 John Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum* (Σύνοψις Ἱστοριῶν), 16.20, ed. Thurn, 340.

28 *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* CDE, a. 1013: »7 him man sealde gislas of ælcere scire«, ed. O'Brien O'Keeffe, 97-98; trans. Whitelock, 92-93.

Cases that involved high-status hostages reveal similar textual messages of political dominance expressed through smaller-scale transactions, the power of which stemmed from the importance of those in custody. Examples include the eleventh-century Georgian ruler Bagrat IV (ბაგრატ IV), who served as a child hostage in Byzantium after his father was defeated in battle by Emperor Basil II in 1022.²⁹ Bagrat succeeded his father at age 8, and in due course sent his own daughter to Constantinople as a hostage: Mart'a (მარტა), known as Maria in her new home, married the Byzantine emperor Michael VII Doukas some years after her hostageship ended.³⁰ Joseph Genesios (Γενέσιος), writing in the earlier tenth century for the Byzantine emperor Constantine VII, included an account of the hostageship of a man thought to have been the author's grandfather. Genesios claims that Constantine Maniakes was sent to Emperor Theophilos »as a hostage and ambassador« (ἐπικηρύκεινσις ομηρον), so distinguishing himself that he was elevated to considerable responsibility and the high office of *droungarios* in Constantinople.³¹

Evidence also survives of this type of transaction from beyond the borders of the Byzantine Empire. The tenth-century *Chronica Albeldense* records a donation made by the consul of Spain, Abuhalit, of his son and nephew to Alfonso III, king of Léon, Galicia and Asturias, in 877.³² In 1038, Pandulf IV, *dux* of Capua, reportedly gave his son and daughter to the western Roman emperor Conrad II: although the son fled, the daughter remained at court.³³ Finally, although not explicit, it seems likely that following the battle of Lamghan in 986, Sukhapāla, grandson of the Hindu Shah Jayapala, was left amongst other kinsmen as a hostage to Abū Manṣūr Sabuktigīn (ابو منصور سبکتگین), founder of the Persianate-Muslim Ghaznavid dynasty. Sabuktigīn sent these royal hostages to Nishapur to be placed in the custody of Maḥmūd (محمود), then governor of Khorāsān, where Sukhapāla converted to Islam and, despite being transferred into the custody of others on several occasions, rose through the ranks to become the first governor of India under the Ghaznavids.³⁴

29 *Georgian Chronicles: The Chronicle of K'art'li (matiane kartlisaed, მატიაანე ქართლისა)*, ed. Qauxč'išvili, 1.288-289, trans. Thomson, 284; Sumbat Davit'is-dze, 62-63, ed. Qauxč'išvili, 1.384-385, trans. Rapp, 365. Bagrat's hostageship is also mentioned by John Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum* 45, ed. Thurn, 366-367. The term »Georgian« is here used with the usual cautionary note regarding the existence of a polity of »Georgia« prior to the Bagratid dynasty's ascension in the eleventh century, e.g. Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History*, xx.

30 Michael Psellos, *Chronographia*, 6.145-147, 151-156, ed. Reinsch, 172-178; trans. Sewter, 173-178; Garland and Rapp, *Mary »of Alania«*, 91-124.

31 Joseph Genesios, 4.3, *Reigns of the Emperors*, ed. Lesmüller-Werner and Thurn, 58; trans. Kaldellis, 74.

32 *Chronica Albeldense* 15.12, ed. Fernández, Moralejo and Ruiz de la Peña, 27.

33 *Chronica Monasterii Casinensis*, 2.63, ed. Hoffman, 292.

34 Al-Utbi, *Tarikh-i-Yamini*, ed. Ghulam Rasul Ibn Ahmad, 223, trans. Elliot and Dowson, II.32; See Jabir Raza, *Hindus under the Ghaznavids*, 213-225.

Logic and Benefit: Positive Depictions of Hostage-Giving

Perhaps as a consequence of changing political boundaries, medieval commentators began to present the donation, receipt and release of hostages as positive qualities more frequently, or conveyed to their audiences the importance of the hostages involved in greater processes such as conflict resolution, or the maintenance of stable governance. Connected to this tendency is a demonstrable increase in narrative sources that outline the logic of hostage-giving as a means to achieve these goals; arguably such discussions are themselves endorsements of the practice. This new development may be as much the result of changes in the way history was written as it was a response to political turbulence and fragmentation. But either way, it offers a number of case studies that include far greater detail on the logics and connotations of hostage-giving than accounts from the preceding centuries.

Richer of Reims, writing at the end of the tenth century, paints just such a picture in his account of hostages demanded by Duke Gislebert of Lotharingia from his followers in preparation for their rebellion against the reigning West Frankish king Charles the Simple. Though Gislebert's rebellion is the subject of censure, Richer nevertheless demonstrates the logic of extracting hostages. »Reckoning, however, that his troops might desert him if he did not bind them to himself with an oath ... [Gislebert] had them all swear an oath of loyalty to him, but he also received whatever hostages he wanted from them[,] and shut them up in the seemingly impregnable stronghold of Harburc.«³⁵ Writing in similar terms in the opening decades of the eleventh century, the Saxon bishop, chronicler and prince Thietmar of Merseburg framed advice proffered to the western emperor Henry II by Gero, archbishop of Magdeburg, in such a way that suggests Thietmar perceived hostages to be an effective means of political control. Gero recommended that Henry should extract hostages from the Polish duke Boleslav Chrobry: »Now, however, Boleslav is exceedingly hostile towards you because of your long custody and imprisonment of his son. I fear if you send Miesco back to his father, without hostages or some other surety, neither of them will be inclined to render loyal service in the future.«³⁶

Narratives could also reinforce this concept by presenting the reverse: that a lack of hostages indicated a lack of control. On the death in 919 of Niall Glúndub, king of Tara, himself a descendent of the legendary Niall »of the nine hostages« (*Niall Noígíallach*), the eleventh-century compiler of the *Annals of Ulster* lamented: »Mournful today is virginal Ireland/ Without a mighty king in command of hostages.« The poem acts as a corollary to the above, suggesting that an absence of hostages not only reflected limited political power, but was unkingly.³⁷

35 Richer of Reims, *Historiae*, 1.40: »Ratus vero milites a sese deficere posse si iureiurando sibi eos non annecteret, fidem ab inimicis ex iureiurando, sed et obsides quos vult accipit, eosque in oppido Harburc quod pene inexpugnabile videbatur ...«, ed. and trans. Lake, 100-101, with minor emendations in italics. On Richer's idiosyncratic attitude to his role as historian, see both Lake's introduction to the edition and translation, and his *Richer of Saint-Rémi, passim*.

36 Thietmar of Merseburg, *Chronicon*, 7.12: »Nunc a vobis est mens Bolizlavi ob longam filii retentionem et custodiam aversa, et vereor, si hunc sine obsidibus aut aliis confirmationibus remittitis, ut in posterum fidelis servitii in ambobus careatis«, ed. Holtzmann, 410, trans. Warner, 316.

37 *Annals of Ulster*, a. 919: »<Bro>nach indiu Heiriu huag / cen rurig ruag rigi giall«, ed. and trans. Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill, 370-371.

We also find accounts that implicitly praise the logic of hostage-giving further east, in Islamicate and eastern Christian territories. In an era when Byzantine imperial power arguably reached its height, writers exhibited greater interest in the welfare of hostages. In the famous manual written by the emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus for his son, *De Administrando imperio*, Constantine advised that hostages formed an essential component of the empire's relationship with their allies the Pecheneg Slavs:

»It is always greatly to the advantage of the emperor of the Romans to be minded to keep the peace with the nation of the Pechenegs and to conclude conventions and treaties of friendship with them[,] and to send every year to them from our side a diplomatic agent with presents befitting and suitable to that nation, and to take from their side sureties, that is, hostages and a diplomatic agent, who shall be collected together under charge of the competent minister in this city protected of God, and [who] shall enjoy all imperial benefits and gifts suitable for the emperor to bestow.«³⁸

In Arabic texts, interest in the welfare of hostages and their protection begins to appear in the later ninth and earlier tenth century. The eleventh-century jurist Al-Māwardī (المأوردی) used two historical agreements – one dated to 658 and made between the Byzantine emperor Constans and Mu'āwiya I (معاوية), first caliph of the Umayyad dynasty, and another between the two territories from five years earlier – to argue that in the event of conflict, parties from the warring polities must return hostages unharmed before violence broke out:

»If they break their pledge, the hostages we hold from among them should not be killed. The Byzantines did break their pledge during the reign of Mu'awiya, who held some of them hostage, but the Muslims unanimously refrained from killing them, and indeed set them free, claiming that it was better to repay treachery with kindness than to pay back in kind... Although hostages should not be killed, neither should they be released unless he has fought against them; if he has, the hostages should be set free and then considered for further action. The men should then be granted safe conduct, while the women and children must be delivered to their people.«³⁹

Al-Māwardī wrote at a time when the Abbasid dynasty was in a vulnerable position after decades of decline, though at their commission. He was concerned to convey the importance of the caliphate through a juridical lens, and as such the *Ordinances of Government* was intended to provide practical examples for those engaged in governance.⁴⁰ Emphasis on the safety of hostages in his work should therefore be treated as a contemporary concern as much as it was a representation of prior judicial agreements from some four hundred years earlier.

38 Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, *De administrando imperio* (Προς τον ίδιον υιόν Ρωμανόν): »Ψπολαμβάνω γὰρ κ ατὰ πολὺ συμφέρειν αἰεὶ τῷ βασιλεῖ Ρωμαίων εἰρήνην ἐθέλειν ἔχειν μετὰ τοῦ ἔθνους τῶν Πατζνακικῶν καὶ φιλικὰς πρὸς αὐτοὺς ποιῆσθαι συνθήκας τε καὶ σπονδὰς καὶ ἀποστίλλειν καθ' ἕκαστον χρόνον ἐντιῦθεν πρὸς αὐτοὺς ἀποκρισιάριον μετὰ ξενίων ἀρμο-ζόντων καὶ πρὸς τὸ ἔθνος ἐπιτηδείων καὶ ἀναλαμβάνεσθαι διείθεν ὀμήρους, ἧτοι ὄψιδοις καὶ ἀποκρισιάριον, οἵτινες ἐν τῇ θωφυλώστῳ ταύτῃ πόλει μετὰ τοῦ καθυπουργοῦντος εἰς ταῦτα συνελεύσονται, καὶ βασιλικῶν εὐεργεσιῶν καὶ φιλοτιμιῶν τῶν ἐπαξίων πάντων τοῦ βασι-λεύοντος ἀπολαύσουσιν« ed. Moravcsik, 48 and 50, trans. Jenkins, 49.

39 Al-Māwardī, *Al-Ahkam al-Sultania*, 4.5, ed. Abu Hasan Ali, trans. Yate, 78.

40 Mattson, *Al-Ahkam Al-Sultaniyyah*, 398-399.

In his commentary considering the same episode, the jurist al-Sarakhsī (السرخسي) also wrote that killing hostages was prohibited for three reasons: they were under safe conduct; one cannot kill one person for another's crime; and agreements allowing for the execution of hostages were contrary to Islamic law, and therefore invalid.⁴¹ Both al-Māwardī and al-Sarakhsī therefore privileged the safety and importance of hostages over the agreements they represented, using a pivotal example from centuries earlier to cite prior law that bolstered their case.⁴²

Narrative chroniclers writing in Arabic support the view of the practice presented in these treatises, and the western European accounts mentioned above also serve as a corollary. For example, Ibn Al-Qūṭiyya reports that the rebels 'Umar ibn Ḥafsūn (حَفْصُون) and Ibrāhīm ibn Ḥajjāj (إبراهيم بن حجاج) made hostage donations to the emir 'Abdallāh (عبدالله بن محمد الاموي).⁴³ After their subsequent rebellion, 'Abdallāh ordered the execution of the son of Ibn Ḥafsūn, but his advisor Badr ibn Aḥmad (بَدْر) counselled against the execution of a second hostage: »If we also kill the son of Ibn Hajjāj [,] that will unite the two of them against you until they die. There is hope that Ibn Hajjāj will return to obedience, while there is no hope that Ibn Hafsūn will ever do so.«⁴⁴ As will be explored below, Badr's advice is praised universally and he is greatly rewarded for his merciful attitude to the hostages.⁴⁵

Criticism of Hostage-Giving

If the *receipt* of hostages connoted political stability and success, and the preservation of their safety demonstrated magnanimity, what about their donation? It is striking that when the attention of medieval authors turned to hostages given by those from their own socio-cultural imaginary, such narratives often recounted periods of political turbulence. In the process of the Carolingian Empire's fragmentation, a number of writers pointed to the limitations of hostage-giving, lamenting the inefficacy of the practice as a means of securing peace or obligations. This criticism could take many forms, from overt denunciation of the practice as a whole, to the implication that other modes of peace-making or military action represented a more effective alternative. Within such accounts we see, often for the first time in the written records of western Europe, accounts of rulers and elites *giving* or exchanging hostages rather than simply receiving them.

In c. 951 Atto, bishop of Vercelli, wrote to his Italian brother bishops in response to a request for hostages from kings Berengar II and Adalbert. Atto asserted that bishops should not be required to give hostages as proof of their loyalty, as many alliances had been successful without this security, whilst agreements sealed by grants of hostages had been broken despite these guarantees: »We have seen and heard many cases in which a promise is broken

41 Al-Sarakhsī, *Sharh al-siyar al-Kabir* (شرح كتاب السير الكبير), ed. al-Munaḡḡid, esp. 3502, 3529, 3537, 3547, 3552; trans. Hamidullah, 3:282-305.

42 Kosto, *First century of the crusades*, 5-6.

43 Ibn al-Qūṭiyya, *History of Islamic Spain*, 9 [The reign of the Emir 'Abdallāh], ed. Ribera, trans. James, 137.

44 Ibn al-Qūṭiyya, *History of Islamic Spain*, 9 [The reign of the Emir 'Abdallāh], ed. Ribera, trans. James, 137.

45 See below, 000.

after hostages have been given, and even some where faith is kept [to the] death without hostages.«⁴⁶ Atto further declared that there was no precedent for bishops giving hostages in the writings of the Holy Fathers, a rather contrived argument given that bishops and the papacy were closely involved in hostage transactions from the Late Antique period onwards.⁴⁷ Atto concluded that anyone who insisted on hostages was »stupid, twisted, and not mindful of God«, a damning condemnation that seems to reflect the political fragility of the Lombard kingdom better than the practice itself.⁴⁸ Similar attitudes can be found in a letter attributed to Pope John VIII written to Lambert, *dux* and margrave of Spoleto, in the second half of the ninth century. In it John rejected Lambert's request for hostages, and justified his position by arguing that the residents of Rome had never in history been expected to give hostages: »We do not find anywhere that the sons of Romans – let alone Romans who have remained faithful to the Empire in their minds and, with God's help, in their works – have been given as hostages.«⁴⁹ As Kosto remarks, Roman inhabitants in fact had a long history of sending hostages to neighbouring territories. What unites both Atto and John's letters is not simply their manipulation of history, which they were surely aware of, but the opportunity presented by turbulent and fragmented politics that presented the opportunity to oppose requests made for hostages without fear of reprisals.⁵⁰

A polemical account of the siege of Asselt by the emperor Charles the Fat in 882 by Liutbert, archbishop of Mainz, railed against the decisions made by the emperor and his advisers during a period of extreme political instability, but nevertheless simultaneously criticises and celebrates hostage-giving. Liutbert claimed that although Charles had almost destroyed the besieged Viking army at Asselt, two of the emperor's counsellors, the *pseudoepiscopus* (»false bishop«) Liutward of Vercelli and the *fraudentissimo* (»most treacherous«) Count Wigbert, convinced Charles that he should make peace with Godfrid's army. Liutbert writes as though scandalised that

»[They] presented the enemy *dux* Godfrid to the emperor. Like Ahab the emperor received him as if he were a friend and made peace with him, and hostages were exchanged ... what was still more of a crime, he did not blush to pay tribute to a man from whom he ought to have taken hostages and exacted tribute, doing this on the advice of evil men and against the custom of his ancestors the kings of the Franks.«⁵¹

46 Atto of Vercelli, *Epistolae* 11: »Multos quoque audivimus et vidimus post datos obsides irritam fecisse sponsonem. Quosdam vero etiam absque datis obsidibus usque ad mortem servasse«, ed. PL 134, 123C, trans. Kosto, *Hostages*, 209.

47 E.g. Gregory the Great, *Registrum Epistolarum*, 2.28 and 3.62, ed. Ehwald and Hartmann, 1.129-130 and 1.222; *Codex Carolinus*, 7, 57 and 64, ed. Gundlach, 493, 582 and 592; *Annales regni Francorum*, a. 781: »These hostages were received from the hand of Bishop Sinbert at the villa of Quierzy«, ed. Kurze, 58; *Annales Mettenses*, a. 781, ed. von Simson, 69.

48 *Ibid.*: »[stolidi] et [perversi] Deumque non [curantes]«.

49 John VIII, *Letter*, 63: »Romanorum filios sub isto celo non legitur fuisse obsides datos, quanto minus istorum, qui fidelitatem augustalem et mente custodiunt et opere Deo iuvante perficiunt«, ed. Caspar and Laehr, 56, trans. Kosto, *Hostages*, 210.

50 Kosto, *Hostages*, 210.

51 *Annales Fuldenses*, a. 882 (Mainz Continuation): »Atque Gotafridum ducem illorum imperatori praesentavit; quem imperator more Achabico quasi amicum suscepit et cum eo pacem fecit, datis ex utraque parte obsidibus ... et quod maioris est criminis, a quo obsides accipere et tributa exigere debuit, huic pravorum usus consilio contra consuetudinem parentum suorum, regum videlicet Francorum, tribute solver non erubuit«, ed. Kurze, 100, trans. Reuter, 92-93.

Liutbert therefore asserted that correct, kingly behaviour required the extraction of hostages, not their donation.⁵² That he used evidence of hostages given by the king to discredit his enemies at court is indicative of how useful the practice, with its strong connotations of honour and dishonour, could be to the polemicist or opinionated chronicler.

Some criticism is more subtle, suggesting instead that contemporaries were aware of the potential dangers of the practice. This could be particularly acute when holding individuals with little loyalty or fondness for their warders. In his *Histories*, Al-Qūṭīyya describes just such dangers, in an account which recounts how hostages given to the emir Muhammad from the Banū Qāsi people were seated outside their quarters with a teacher, reciting aloud the heroic poetry of the sixth-century 'Antarah ibn Shaddād.⁵³ Enraged, Umayya ibn Šuhayd, one of Muhammad's most trusted ministers, declared that this material should not be taught to them: »You have gone to demons who have sorely grieved the emirs and taught them poetry which will give them an insight into real courage! Stop doing it! Teach them only poems like the drinking songs of al-Hasan ibn Hāni' and similar humorous verses.«⁵⁴ The story suggests that hostages given the »wrong« education, that is, one privileging the qualities of martial activity, might present a danger to their hosts. But it also suggests that the acculturation of such individuals might prove formative, and indeed was expected. As Maribel Fierro has shown, many of Al-Qūṭīyya's anecdotes about Umayya ibn Šuhayd, himself an immigrant to Arabic culture, reflect on the importance of Arabisation and the integration of Arabs and non-Arabs alike within the Umayyad emirate. The Banū Qāsi hostages form a piece of this puzzle, reflecting Umayya's nuanced conceptions of acculturation: individuals must be treated equally, but violence discouraged and exposure to Islam and Arabic culture alike controlled.⁵⁵

Yet the dangers involved in hostage-giving were indisputably more pressing to those given as hostages, rather than to those holding them. Again, we see spikes in records during times of particular turbulence. A handful of records survive from tenth-century China, describing transactions during the political instability and turmoil of the period of the five dynasties.⁵⁶ In the biography of the hereditary house of Wu-Yue, Ouyang Xiu (歐陽脩) writes that Qian Yuanguan (錢元瓘), later known as King Wenmu of Wu-Yue (吳越文穆王), served as a hostage of the warlord Tian Jun (田頴) in the early tenth century. Writing in the middle eleventh century, Ouyang's critical attitude towards the warlords of this period is well known, and in his monumental work he sets the political stability of his own times in stark contrast to the chaos and instability of what came before.⁵⁷ The following unflattering account of Tian Jun's irascible behaviour is typical of this attitude: »Whenever suffering defeat, Jun would

52 MacLean, *Kingship and Politics*, 30-37.

53 On the Banū Qasi, see Lorenzo Jiménez, *La dawla de los Banu Qasi*.

54 Ibn al-Qūṭīyya, *History of Islamic Spain*, 7, The reign of the Emir Muhammad, ed. Ribera, 94, trans. James, 121.

55 Fierro, *Hostages*, 75-77.

56 Ouyang Xiu, *Wudai Shiji*, 36: *Biographies of Righteous Sons* (義兒傳), trans. Davis, 300.

57 Davis, *Historical Records*, xliii-lxxvi.

return with the intent of murdering Yuanguan, only for Jun's mother to intervene, shielding the youth. Jun finally departed for battle and promised aides upon leaving, »if we are not victorious on this day, we must decapitate the Youth Qian«. Jun died in battle on that very day, enabling Yuanguan to return home.«⁵⁸

The majority of accounts of the mistreatment or execution of hostages in Europe attribute the violence to Viking warbands, symptomatic of broader criticism of these groups' behaviours. Some of these contain within them, too, broader dismissals of the efficacy of hostage-giving. The earliest such case is recorded by Asser, the Welsh bishop and biographer writing at the turn of the tenth century in the West Saxon court. Asser claims that after King Alfred of Wessex made peace with the great Viking army at Wareham in 876, the latter reportedly broke their agreement and executed the hostages in their custody: »Practicing their usual treachery, after their own manner, and paying no heed to the hostages, the oath and the promise of faith, they broke the treaty, killed all the [hostages] they had, and turning away they went unexpectedly to another place, called Exeter in English.«⁵⁹ Asser therefore directly connected the harm of West Saxon hostages to the Vikings' treacherous nature, with the implication that such attempts to secure the cessation of conflict with innately duplicitous peoples would only ever end in failure. When in the late tenth century the nobleman Æthelweard produced a Latin version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, he added historical material local to the south-west, including a similar report. Æthelweard claims that in 877 a Viking army beached off Swanage offered hostages and peace whilst nevertheless intending to break their agreement: »The barbarians made peace treacherously, being in the same frame of mind as before [.] Hostages were given[,] more than were asked, and the leaders promised King Alfred to withdraw from the jurisdiction of his boundaries. They acted accordingly.«⁶⁰

A contemporary continental account presents a similar picture. Decrying the futility of attempted negotiations with a Viking army in Gaul, an anonymous annalist wrote that in 884 »The northmen ... became bolder, and demanded 12,000 pounds of gold and silver from the region as tribute, and even after that they did not keep the faith which they had promised, for they killed their hostages and did not cease at all from plundering.«⁶¹ Nor were such accounts limited to the first »Viking age«. In 994 an uncle of Thietmar of Merseburg escaped his Viking captors on the Elbe; the warband responded by executing those who remained in

58 Ouyang Xiu, *Wudai Shiji*, 67: *Hereditary House of Wuyue* (吳越世家): 元瓘字明寶，少為質於田頔。頔叛於吳，楊行密會越兵攻之，頔每戰敗歸，即欲殺元瓘，頔母嘗蔽護之。後頔將出，語左右曰：「今日不勝，必斬錢郎。」是日頔戰死，元瓘得歸。 trans. Davis, 300.

59 Asser, *Vita Alfredi regis*, 46: »*More suo, solita fallacia utens, et obsides et iuramentum atque fidem promissam non custodiens, nocte quadam, foedere disrupto, omnes equites, quos habebat, occidit, versusque inde [Domniam] ad alium locum*«, ed. Stevenson, 36-37, trans. Keynes and Lapidge, 82-83.

60 Æthelweard, *Chronicon*, a. 877: »*Fraude constituunt iterata oacem barbari mente, obsidesque dantur plusquam quaerebantur, Elfredi quippe regi opimi de potestate finium sua promittunt abstrahere pedem; sicque fecere*«, ed. and trans. Campbell, 72-3.

61 *Annales Fuldenses*, a. 884: »*Normanni ... audaciores effete duodecim milia librarum auri et argenti ab illa regione tribute nomine exegerunt et tamen fidem pollicitam nequaquam servarunt. Nam et obsides occiderunt et a praedationibus minime cessaverunt*«, ed. Kurze, 102, trans. Reuter, 109.

their custody: »They cut off the noses, ears and hands of my cousin the priest, and all the other hostages who were thrown outside into the harbour.«⁶² Twenty years later, the Danish royal pretender and eventual successor to Æthelred II, Cnut, mutilated a group of hostages the English elite had given to his father Swein Forkbeard.⁶³ In all these cases, whether explicit or implicit, criticism of those harming hostages is built into the above narratives. The noble action was to be honourable in the treatment of hostages. It is a striking feature of such accounts that they tend to appear during periods of political instability, and focused on those *outside* the perceived boundaries of society. That we find no opprobrium present in the tiny number of accounts that portray Christians harming hostages in the tenth and eleventh centuries therefore acts as a corollary.

The period under consideration here is nevertheless marked by a small increase in the (admittedly tiny) number of references to the potential and actual harm of hostages by Christians, another aspect of the visible diversification of written narratives concerning hostages present in this period. Further, such accounts, like those above, contain explicit comments on the contemporary *logic* (or otherwise) of the practice. While writers tended to connect the harm of hostages to those whom they already sought to vilify, this evidence, in contrast, reveals that Christians might equally harm hostages, or at least threaten to, if their donors' behaviour was not perceived to be satisfactory.⁶⁴ In the Irish compilation known as the *Annals of the Four Masters*, for instance, we hear of just such harm perpetrated by and against Christians, without criticism. In 1048, Garbith Ua Cathassaig, ruler of Brega, had been captured by Conchobar Ua Maíl Shechnaill of Mide, securing his release in return for seven hostages. In the following year, a joint army comprising Ulstermen, Leinstermen and Vikings campaigned in Mide, and as a punitive consequence, »their hostages were put to death by Conchobar [Ua Maíl Shechnaill], together with Toirdelbach Ua Cathassaig; after which the forces burned the country, both churches and fortresses«.⁶⁵ Yet accounts of such retaliatory harm are vanishingly rare.

Others feared the harm of hostages. The chronicler Flodoard of Rheims wrote that in 939 a group of Lotharingian bishops delayed alliance with the West Frankish king Louis IV (d'Outremer) because they had already given hostages to the Saxon ruler Otto the Great of East Francia, and feared reprisals against those they had handed over.⁶⁶ Such narrative constructions do not just reveal that in such cases there was genuinely a perceived risk to hostages (at the very least on the part of the author), but such passages can also be used within narratives to explain particular political decisions made by groups. In Flodoard's case, Edward Roberts

62 Thietmar of Merseburg, *Chronicon* 3.25: »*Tali furore omnes succensi crastino clericum et nepotem meum cum caeteris obsidibus universis naribus ac auribus et manibus obtruncant, foris eos proicientes in portum*«, ed. Holtzmann, 160-161, trans. my own.

63 *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, a. 1014 CDE, ed. O'Brien O'Keeffe, 74-75. The episode is discussed alongside evidence for the possible execution of another hostage by Cnut in 1016, in Hicklin, *Role of hostages*, 60-78.

64 See also Flodoard of Reims, *Annales*, a. 960, ed. Lauer, 148; and a possible allusive reference in *Abbo, Bella Parisicæ Urbis*, 430b-435, ed. and trans. Dass, 86-89. This latter possible piece of evidence has thus far attracted no attention, but would repay more in-depth analysis.

65 *Annals of the Four Masters*, a. 1049: »*Do cuingid aittire fer móregro marbhtha imorro a naittere lá Conchobar im Toirdhealbhach Ua Cathasaigh. Ro loiscset na sluaig an tír etir cealla 7 dúine iar sin*«, ed. and trans. O'Donovan, 2.854-857. I am grateful to Tom O'Donnell for his assistance in exploring this evidence.

66 Flodoard of Reims, *Annales*, a. 939, ed. Lauer, 36.

has argued more broadly that Flodoard sought to promote the claims of the archdiocese of Reims to Otto, and simultaneously to convince his own *familia* of the worthiness of the Ottonian dynasty as their new rulers.⁶⁷ It may therefore be that Flodoard sought to explain the apparently vacillating attitude of his fellow clerics through their concern for those they had granted as hostages.

We see a similar narrative construct during a period of flux in mideleventh-century Sicily. According to the Norman chronicler William of Apulia, the citizens of Giovinazzo refused to submit to their sometime count Amicus, despite his custody of their hostages. Responding to this act of bravery, the Norman duke Robert Guiscard assured them that their children would be unharmed and that they would be rewarded for their loyalty: »He praised them all for placing their sworn fealty above even their dear children. He embraced them all and then said, ›Don't be afraid. Amicus will not harm any of your lads, because he is begging to be allowed to return to my good graces.«⁶⁸ William is here suggesting that Robert Guiscard's political dominance over Amicus was such that hostage donors might openly rebel against the person who held their sons in custody, because other hierarchies external to the agreement would preserve their safety. For such narratives to have resonance, harm to hostages must have been a possible outcome to such arrangements, even if it occurred only rarely. In the case of the residents of Giovinazzo, their fidelity to Robert in the narrative is such that they would willingly risk the lives of their own children.

William's story echoes some of the themes written in a text only a few decades earlier, but geographically in a very distinct context. The author of the eleventh-century Georgian compilation known as the *Book of K'art'li* recorded that the Mt'iuls (a people from the mountains of modern northern Georgia) gave three hundred hostages to the Abbasid caliph's general Bughā al-Kabīr. The story is unique to this account of the campaign; its author states that the Mt'iuls' sacrificed their hostages to undermine Bughā's eventual attack on Ossetia. Whether or not the hostages were executed is left implicit. But the author states that their noble decision was repaid by God, who caused snow to fall and Bughā's army to be defeated.⁶⁹ Although we do not know the fate of the hostages, the loyalty expressed here is reminiscent of how William and others frame loyalty expressed through hostage donation, despite, in this case, the otherwise fairly opaque nature of the political relationships described.⁷⁰

67 Roberts, *Hegemony, rebellion and history*, 155-176.

68 William of Apulia, *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* 3.592-597: »*Ne temeatis, ait; non deformabit Amicus / Quemlibet ex pueris, omni quia postulat arte / Ut mea reddatur sibi gratia*«, ed. Mathieu, 196, trans. Loud, 42.

69 *Chronicle of K'art'li*, ed. Qauxč'išvili, 1.258. The episode has not attracted a great deal of attention as recorded in the Georgian texts, but see Vacca, *Conflict and community*, 84-85, who argues that the passage shows no unified concepts of group belonging in response to the attacks. On Bughā al-Kabir: Gordon, *Bughā al-Kabir*, 117-118.

70 Vacca posits three reasons for the account: that the author did not understand the loyalties of their ninth-century subjects, that the alliances during the period fluctuated, which might also explain why no Armenian sources include a similar anecdote, or finally, that the author sought to place distance between Bughā and the caliph, who counted the Georgian king amongst his allies: *Conflict and community*, 85.

Refusal and Negotiation

In periods of political fragmentation, just as we hear more about donations made from protagonists or from the centre, so too do we begin to see more accounts of refusals to give hostages: writers no longer framed hostages as simply moving from the borders to the centre, but now such transactions involved multiple centres, peripheries and power balances. Writers began to question, or perhaps reveal, the more complex negotiations that occurred prior to a donation.

Describing the capture of the West Frankish king Louis d'Outremer in 945, Flodoard of Reims claims that the Viking warband who held the king demanded of his wife Gerberga both their sons as hostages to secure Louis' release. Gerberga, according to Flodoard, agreed to send her younger son but refused to send the elder, and so Bishop Guy of Soissons volunteered to replace the elder son Lothar as a hostage.⁷¹ A natural point of comparison is a short notice in the Carolingian court-centric text known as the *Royal Frankish Annals*, which tells how Charlemagne in 787 demanded hostages from the Beneventans, but of the two princes sent, elected only to keep the younger son.⁷² Where the annalist's narrative might be intended to be read as an expression of the emperor's power, Flodoard's narrative, written at a time of far greater political instability, gives a fuller sense of the negotiations that might attend such transactions. Adapting Flodoard's narrative, Richer of Reims details further his view of the risks inherent in the arrangement:

»The queen sent her younger son under oath, but she could not be prevailed to give up the elder; for she had only two sons. The younger son was thus offered to the Northmen as a hostage, but this did not satisfy them, and they continued to demand the older one. But because those who remained loyal to the king could see that the nobility of the royal line was at risk of being completely extinguished if Louis and all of his sons were held by the rebels, they refused to do so. They would only hand over the younger son, and in place of the elder they would send whichever one of themselves the Northmen asked for.«⁷³

Richer emphasises both the lengthy negotiation process and the potential danger to the hostages perceived by their donors.

We might compare the above negotiations to a very different context, found within a fragmentary text outlining negotiations between two rulers: the Uyghur king and the chieftain of the Longjia (龙家) people of the western Guizhou (贵州) province. Thought to have been written c. 884, it recorded that the Uyghur ruler had made a public demand for sixteen hostages: »It is necessary that the younger brother of the king of the Long tribe and fifteen

71 Flodoard of Reims, *Annales*, a. 959, ed. Lauer, 146.

72 *Annales regni Francorum*, a. 787, ed. Kurze, 74-78.

73 Richer of Reims, *Historiae* 2.48: »At reginam rem necessariam cognoscens, sub sacramento minorem dirigit, maiorem mittere evinci non valens. Nam duo tantum erant. Minore ergo obside oblato, Nortmannis non satis fuit, maiorem admodum petentes. Sed quia iis quibus fidelior mens inerat visum est regiae stirpis nobilitatem posse penitus absumi si desertoribus omnes filii cum patre teneantur, id sese non facturos responderunt; minorem tantum daturus, et pro maiore ex se ipsis quemcumque petant dimissuros«, ed. and trans. Lake, 270-274.

people be sent as hostages, only then can a peace agreement be concluded.«⁷⁴ While the Longjia king was ready to acquiesce, his brother refused to serve as a hostage: »If you send me as a hostage to the Uigurs, then I will rather kill myself.«⁷⁵ The king had no choice but to send another envoy, claiming that his younger brother had lost his mind and could not serve as a hostage. »May I send my next younger brother you prefer, together with fifteen I await the Uigur khan's decision.«⁷⁶ Unfortunately we do not know how the situation was resolved, if at all, due to the fragmentary presentation of the text. Yet it still reveals that negotiations concerning which individuals would be sent underlay such arrangements, and furthermore, provides a very rare instance of a narrative which records a hostage's own opinion about being sent. The historical context in which the text was written bears similarity to that of Gerberga and her sons, too. The 880s were a period of considerable political turbulence for the Uyghur, whose *khaganate* had fallen apart in the 840s and who subsequently sought to reassert themselves amidst their new and former neighbours despite a much-weakened position.

Elsewhere, refusal to accept hostages, rather than refusal to give them, could be used to demonstrate good faith and good character, though such examples are unusual. Writing at the turn of the millennium for the Norman *dux* Richard, Dudo of Saint-Quentin presents several hostage transactions imbued with narrative significance, all of which bolster the reputation of the Norman dynasty for whom he wrote. His patron Richard, for instance, praised the bravery of his rival Tetbold in the following terms: »Without a hostage or an oath from me you have come here, wavering at nothing; whatever you require you will obtain.«⁷⁷ Nor was this incident isolated. As well as praising the actions of Richard's grandfather Rollo, discussed below, Dudo claimed that Richard's father, William Longsword received a high-status hostage from King Henry I of East Francia. After Duke Conrad of Saxony proved his worth and fidelity to William, the Norman *dux* brought his hostage to meet with Henry as a gesture of his faith in Conrad and bravery to reject the security the hostage offered, indicative of William's strength and noble nature.⁷⁸

The Release of Hostages – A Magnanimous Act?

Narrative sources also begin to conceptualise the release of hostages in new ways in this era: showing overriding power, magnanimity, or mercy. The eleventh-century encyclopaedic compilation *Outstanding Models from the Storehouse of Literature* (*Ts'e-fu yüan kwei*, 冊府元龜) contains events from the heyday of the Tang dynasty, and records that in the second year of his reign (714 CE) Emperor Xuanzong (唐玄宗) issued a decree to return all hostages since they were no longer necessary, such was the dynasty's dominance, though it was not to last.⁷⁹

74 S 389, *An appeal to the jiedushi of the guiyijun*: 其迴鶻王稱：「須得龍王弟及十五家只（質），便和為定。ed. and trans. in Rong, *Mthong-Khyab*, 283.

75 *Ibid.*: 「若發遣我迴鶻內入只（質），奈可（何）自死。

76 *Ibid.*: 「更有迫次弟一人，及見二人內堪者，發遣一人及十五，trans. 284.

77 Dudo of Saint Quentin, *Historia Normannorum*, 4.117: »*Sine obside et sacramento fidei meæ hic nihil tu titubans accessisti; quaecumque requiris impetrabis*«, ed. Lair, 279.

78 Dudo of Saint Quentin, *Historia Normannorum*, 3.52, ed. Lair, 196, trans. Christiansen, 72.

79 T'ai-tsung and Chen-tsung, *Outstanding Models from the Storehouse of Literature* (*Ts'e-fu yüan kwei*, 冊府元龜), cited in Yang, *Hostages in Chinese history*, 510.

In the west, Dudo of Saint-Quentin is again a vital source for new representations of hostage release. In a rather fantastical section of *his* Gesta, Dudo claims that in the early 920s Rollo of Normandy saved the English king »Alstemus« from rebellion, after which he offered Rollo half the kingdom in return.⁸⁰ Hostages play a prominent role in Dudo's construction of Rollo within these passages: »... when the English saw that they were not prevailing against the king, but failing, they lost heart and came to Rollo and bowed the knee and said, ›O most powerful of Danes, reconcile us to *King Alstemus* ... We will give him hostages to guarantee that we keep faith.«⁸¹ Alstemus then asked for advice, to which Rollo replied, »My lord, you must take hostages so that they remain faithful to you. I am a foreigner, unacquainted with the customs of the English, and I will [also] take hostages so that they continue in their fidelity to me.« Each English count then gave one hostage to the king and another to Rollo.⁸² Despite his entitlement to half the kingdom, Rollo elected instead to return to Normandy. »[He] led the hostages which had been allocated to him before the king, and declared in a tranquil manner: ... ›The hostages which are mine by right, and which are here present: order them to be taken back, with a warning.«⁸³ As we saw above, Dudo's stories often align with his broader aim to show the dynasty's prowess in battle and personal qualities; the hostages they refused to accept or agreed to release are one way in which he expresses such arguments.⁸⁴

The release of hostages could be a sign of bravery and a willingness to play by the rules of the game, but it could also signify political canniness and an ability to discern the best course of action. In the tumultuous first decades of the Later Tang dynasty, who were ascendant between 923 and 937, Li Congshen (posthumously Li Congjing, 李從璟), the eldest of four biological sons of Li Siyuan (李嗣源), served as a hostage and member of the imperial guard in the reign of his father's predecessor, Zhuangzong (後唐莊宗). Though his father had rebelled, Zhuangzong placed his faith in the hostage, first deploying him as a mediator and then returning him without punishment in the hope that Li Congshen could improve the deteriorating relationship between the pair.⁸⁵ To return to an earlier episode discussed above, after Emir 'Abdallāh ordered the execution of two hostages, his advisor Badr counselled the emir to release the son of Ibn Ḥafsūn rather than execute him. The latter option would damage their relationship irreparably, while the former would ensure Ibn Ḥafsūn's loyalty. Al-Qūṭīyyah wrote that this was a wise policy for which Badr received universal praise; the released hostage benefitted too, and was later promoted to rule Seville on behalf of the emir.⁸⁶

80 The identity of the king is not known, but see Howorth, *Criticism*, p. 239; Pohl, *Dudo*, 137.

81 Dudo of Saint Quentin, *Historia Normannorum*, 2.18: »*Videntes ... Angli quod non prevalerent contra regem, sed deficientes affligebantur, venerunt ad Rollonem flexisque genibus dixerunt: ›Dacorum potentissime, nos regi Alstemo pacifica et concordare ... Nos ei obsides conservandæ fidei dabimus«*, ed. Lair, 159, trans. Christiansen, 40-41.

82 Dudo of Saint Quentin, *Historia Normannorum* 2.19: »*Tu, domine, obsides perseveraturæ tibi fidei recipe. Ego vero advena, non cognoscens mores Anglorum, permansuræ fidelitatis mihi obsides recipiam«*, ed. Lair, 159, trans. Christiansen, 41.

83 Dudo of Saint Quentin, *Historia Normannorum*, 2.19, ed. Lair, 159, trans. Christiansen, 40-41.

84 See also Thietmar of Merseburg, who praises the emperor Henry II for his return of Boleslav Chrobry's hostages: »His hostages were thereupon released, with honour, and in a friendly manner«, (»*Obsides suos cum honore et laetitia remisit«*), *Chronicon*, 6.91, ed. Holtzmann, 382, trans. Warner, 298.

85 The case is discussed in Davis, *Warhorses to Ploughshares*, 19-20, 47, 125.

86 Ibn al-Qūṭīyya, *History of Islamic Spain*, 7: The reign of the Emir Muhammad, ed. Ribera, 94, trans. James, 121.

Other individuals reportedly released hostages because of their piety and sense of mercy. The famed author Liudprand of Cremona incorporated into his panegyric of Emperor Otto I just such an account, in which Pope Leo VIII begged Otto to release the hostages of defeated Roman rebels in 964.⁸⁷ These hostages functioned as an effective means of controlling the rebels, and in Liudprand's text Otto feared that their release would endanger Leo, but he nevertheless freed them as an obedient son to the pope: »He entrusted the same pope to the trust of the Romans just as a lamb might be entrusted to wolves.«⁸⁸ Shortly after Otto's departure, however, Leo's opponents expelled him from Rome. Liudprand thus depicts the pope as a figure whose piety led him to value mercy over the security offered by hostages, an image that is contrasted within Liudprand's text with the dissolute actions of Leo's rival John XII, whose death at the hands of the devil whilst cuckolding another man's wife is the sole act of supernatural intervention recorded by the author.⁸⁹

We find another compelling case for the connection between the release of hostages, honourable behaviour and Christian piety within the *Historiae* of Richer of Reims. The episode is chronologically problematic and appears to stem from Richer's failure to reconcile his sources, but its didactic message is nevertheless clear.⁹⁰ Richer claims that after Duke Robert of Neustria defeated a Viking army, the most important men were held captive, while others were permitted to return to their ships once the duke had received hostages.⁹¹ Robert ordered those in his custody to receive baptism and education in the Christian faith. Yet Robert not only converted these groups, but the original hostage donors too: »And after they had received back from the duke the hostages whom they had handed over, they were brought to the sacraments that bring salvation.«⁹² Elsewhere in the work Robert is a complex figure, criticised for his role in the deposition of his king; the implicit praise here of Robert's strategies of conversion is therefore striking. Writing shortly after 1080, the monk Amatus of Montecassino presented the release of hostages as merciful: like William of Apulia above, Amatus commemorated Robert Guiscard within his work, and claimed that the duke returned hostages given by the inhabitants of Salerno after being moved by *pitié* (»pity«).⁹³

Finally, the texts collectively known as the *Georgian Chronicles* show considerable interest in hostages and their connotations in both the near and distant past. As we saw above, diverse cultures reported the release of hostages as a sign of political stability and dominance, which in this compilation is evident across centuries. In *The Conversion of K'artli by Nino* (ცხოვრება წმიდა ნინოსი), an account of the conversion of the Georgian dynasty first composed in the later ninth or tenth century, the text's author looked back to the rule of

87 On the demolition of the reputation of Pope Leo's adversary and Pope John XII, see Grabowski, Liudprand, 67-92.

88 Liudprand, *Historia Ottonis*, 18: »Romanorum fidei eundem papam, quemadmodum lupis agnum, commisit«. ed. Becker, 173; trans. Squatriti, 234.

89 Garbini, *Scrittura autobiografica*, 479-486.

90 Lake, *Richer of Saint-Remi*, 101-102. Richer's account closely follows that of Flodoard of Reims in his *Historia Remensis ecclesiae*, 4.14, ed. Stratmann, 407, though this does not mention any hostages.

91 Richer, *Historiae*, 1.30, ed. and trans. Lake, I.84-85.

92 Richer, *Historiae*, 1.30: »Et hi quoque per predictum virum instructi, receptis a duce opsidibus quod dederant, ad salutaria sacramenta deducti sunt«, ed. and trans. Lake, I.84-85.

93 Amatus of Montecassino, *L'ystoire de li Normant*, 4.4, ed. De Bartholomaeis, 186. Note that the text survives only in a fourteenth-century French translation, the accuracy of which is debated but has been defended: Wolf, *Making History*, 89.

Emperor Constantine and his conversion. They claimed that after his Christianisation, Constantine wrote to Mirian III (მირიან III), the alleged founder of the Georgian dynasty, stating that he had released the latter's son Ba'kar (ვაჩაგ-ბაკურ) from hostageship because of his new Christian faith: »I, Constantine, autocrator, new servant of the Lord of Heaven ... no longer need a hostage from you, but Christ is sufficient as a mediator between us.«⁹⁴ In the eleventh-century *Chronicle of K'art'li* (მატიანე ქართლისა) we hear of the release of a hostage by King Giorgi I (გიორგი I) on the Day of Lamps. Lastly, despite the conflict between the Georgian kings and the Byzantine emperor Basil II, the latter nevertheless swore an oath that he would release the Georgian prince Bagrat IV after three years, and did as he promised.⁹⁵ Bagrat IV, meanwhile, held as a hostage Ivane (ივანე), the son of his most powerful ally and sometime rival Duke Liparit of Kldekari (ლიპარიტ), and duly released him seven years later despite the vicissitudes of the pair's political relationship.⁹⁶

Conclusion

Medieval hostages bore little resemblance to their modern counterparts, and instead operated as guarantees, binding their donors to particular obligations. Yet they could be used to convey diverse political contexts and didactic messages. While the above comparative study can only scratch the surface of the hundreds of records that survive from the tenth and eleventh centuries, I hope to have shown that many of the key tenets of the narrative role of hostages transcended political, societal and cultural boundaries. Near universally, to hold another's hostages indicated dominance over their donor, while exchanges of hostages might demonstrate commitment to alliance. Hostages could be displayed at court, travel in the retinue of their warder, or be transferred to a recipient's followers, demonstrating both the objectification of those serving and their political value. The tenth and eleventh centuries were a time of political flux for many peoples and territories, from the gradual unification of the English kingdoms in the west to the growing stability secured by the Song dynasty in the early eleventh century in the east. At the same time as this political upheaval, many writers experimented with new modes and models of approaching their past, responding to their present.

Acknowledgements

Research for this article was conducted at the Freie Universität Berlin and funded by the »After Empire: Using and Not Using the Past in the Crisis of the Carolingian World, c. 900–1050« HERA project, receiving funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement no. 649307. I would like to thank Steven Baguley, Archie Hicklin, Erik Niblaeus, and the audience of the Vienna conference held in May 2019 for their assistance, and helpful comments, and the editors of *Medieval Worlds* for their patience and judicious editing. Any errors that remain are naturally my own.

94 *Georgian Chronicles: The Conversion of K'artli by Nino (ts'xovreba ts'mida ninosi, ცხოვრება წმიდა ნინოსი)*, ed. Qauxč'išvili, 128, trans. Thomson, 143.

95 *Georgian Chronicles: The Chronicle of K'art'li (matiane kartlisaed, მატიანე ქართლისა)*, ed. Qauxč'išvili, 269 and 288-289, trans. Thomson, 270 and 284.

96 *Georgian Chronicles: The Chronicle of K'art'li (matiane kartlisaed, მატიანე ქართლისა)*, ed. Qauxč'išvili, 300, trans. Thomson, 293.

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Abbreviations

MGH, SRG = Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum
 MGH SRG NS = Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum, Nova series
 MGH SS = Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores
 MGH Epp. = Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Epistolae
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