

War and Conflict in  
Premodern Societies



# DISABILITY AND WAR IN THE LATE MIDDLE AGES

## BECOMING, SURVIVING, MANAGING

Edited by

**NINON DUBOURG** and  
**CHRISTOPHE MASSON**

**ARC** HUMANITIES PRESS



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Introduction

## **DISABILITY AND WAR**

### **BECOMING, SURVIVING, MANAGING**

NINON DUBOURG and CHRISTOPHE MASSON

WAS THERE A better place for sustaining permanent injuries than the battlefield? Was there a worse place for a disabled person than a battlefield? These two questions seem inescapable when we consider the intersection between warfare and disability. Yet, they partly derived from the assumption that no one would dare to yield a sword or fire a bombard if not in entire control of their physical or mental capacities. This may explain why scholars often overlook this intersection. If some valuable studies provide a solid foundation for us to develop our own analyses, they mostly came either from disability historians happening to address a martial context because of their sources, or from military historians who came across injured or disabled warriors while reading chronicles or account books. The aim of this volume is to foster a dialogue between specialists of both topics and to open new interpretative paradigms and research questions. This dialogue first took place in the form of a monthly webinar, hosted by the two editors, where contributors to this book presented their research.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, Giulia Morosini (whose presentation was entitled “The Limping Captain: Injuries, Wounds, and Scars between Praise and Mocking in Renaissance Italy”) could not take part in the editorial process of this volume. The editors have nonetheless relied on her oral presentation to support the present text.

**NINON DUBOURG** is an Alexander von Humboldt Fellow based at the University of Cologne. Her research interests revolve around old age and physical, sensory, and mental disabilities within the framework of material, cultural, and social medieval history. Her first monograph, *Disabled Clerics in the Late Middle Ages: Un/suitable for Divine Service?* (2023), delves into the relationship between the church and disability.

**CHRISTOPHE MASSON** is Permanent Researcher for the Fund for Scientific Research–FNRS based at the University of Liège. His work addresses the social, cultural, institutional, and technical dimensions of late medieval warfare.

They subsequently convened at the University of Liège for an in-person workshop designed to ensure the publication's cohesive nature.

This volume specifically addresses the Latin later Middle Ages, understood as a period ranging from the fourteenth century to the 1530s. On a military level, this whole period expressed the same common patterns. While gaining in size, armies did not consist of more than a few thousand men. Gunpowder weapons appeared in the 1320s in Western Europe, but they did not drastically change the face of battle before the second part of the sixteenth century, when the number of portable firearms significantly increased. Martial culture remained relatively coherent, emphasizing the social importance of chivalry and honour in the conduct of war. In a similar manner, it appears that these centuries did not witness any shift in the perception of disability and disabled people. The following chapters argue for a more relevant division between combatants and non-combatants, instead of the more traditional distinctions between nobles, non-nobles, warriors, soldiers, feudal levies, and standing armies. A wide variety of military scenarios/tactics/operations, such as sieges and razzias (i.e., ambushes and raids) involved individuals who were lacking formal training and had to fight and defend themselves with weapons that, in many cases, were improvised. This commonly resulted in severe injuries. Finally, this volume argues that warfare should not be regarded exclusively as an open and widely publicised confrontation between two major lords focused on political domination or geographical expansion. Rather, it should be considered as a context of organized and sustained violence involving structured groups of individuals. This violence encompassed various forms, including pitched battles, destruction of property or theft, ambushes, and guerrilla tactics, ranging from small-scale local feuds to major continental conflicts.

## State of the Art

In contrast to war, the definition of which did not drastically change since the medieval period, disability is a modern concept crafted by recent scholarship.<sup>2</sup> The 1980s were a period of significant progress for the disability rights movement, with paralleling developments in the interest of historians and other humanities and social scientists in researching disability as a subject.

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<sup>2</sup> See Daniel Blackie and Alexia Moncrieff, "State of the Field: Disability History," *History* 107 (2022): 789–811. When not linked to one of the chapters of this volume (indicated by the author's name in brackets), references to sources and secondary literature are provided by Ninon Dubourg and Christophe Masson.

In this understanding, disability encompasses a multitude of definitions, including economic, social, political, cultural, religious, legal, philosophical, artistic, moral, and medical interpretations, thus establishing itself as a polysemous subject. This compelled historians to contextualize and define the term “disability” as a concept prior to its utilization.<sup>3</sup> In this regard, historians have benefited from the conceptual frameworks developed by activist movements, particularly within English-speaking contexts. Within these movements, the issue of accessibility became a matter of immediate concern: organized groups, such as the UPIAS (Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation), provided the foundation for the development of an analytical framework known as the “social model of disability.”<sup>4</sup> This model highlights a distinction between impairment (as defined in the “medical model,” which looks at individual and biomedical aspects) and disability (as a disadvantage or restriction of activity fostered by the social organization exerting its power over individuals on the grounds of “objective” physical or mental limitations).<sup>5</sup> In this definition, which is largely utilized within the academic domain, disability is no longer considered to be intrinsic to the individual. Rather, it is understood to be shaped by the challenges encountered within the individual’s social and physical environment.

However, activists and academics soon called for a renewal of the social model, which proved notably inadequate for analyzing past societies.<sup>6</sup> This led to the emergence of the cultural model, also referred to as “social constructivism,” which offered greater flexibility than the social model and took into account individuals’ experiences in the definition of dis/ability.<sup>7</sup> It allowed for

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**3** Catherine J. Kudlick, “Disability History: Why We Need Another ‘Other,’” *The American Historical Review* 108, no. 3 (June 2003): 763–93.

**4** See Carmelo Masala and Donatella Rita Petretto, “From Disablement to Enablement: Conceptual Models of Disability in the 20th Century,” *Disability and Rehabilitation* 30, no. 17 (2008): 1233–44.

**5** Len Barton and Michael Oliver, “Introduction: The Birth of Disability Studies,” in *Disability Studies: Past, Present and Future*, eds. Len Barton and Michael Oliver (Leeds: Disability, 1997), i–v.

**6** Tom Shakespeare and Nick Watson, “The Social Model of Disability: An Outdated Ideology?,” in *Exploring Theories and Expanding Methodologies: Where We Are and Where We Need to Go*, eds. Sharon N. Barnartt and Barbara M. Altman (Bradford: Emerald, 2001), 9–28, notably p. 13.

**7** See Bianca Frohne, “Heutige Modelle von Dis/Ability—tauglich für die Vormoderne?: The Cultural Model,” in *Dis/Ability History der Vormoderne: Ein Handbuch = Premodern Dis/Ability History: A Companion*, eds. Cordula Nolte et al. (Affalterbach: Didymos, 2017), 61–63.

the consideration that a phenomenon like disability is not confined to physical conditions and does not have a fixed existence; rather, it changes depending on the period and culture under study.<sup>8</sup> Researchers employing this model redefine concepts such as ability, health, or normality, examining how societies construct their own norms regarding disabled bodies.<sup>9</sup> This analytical framework proposes a holistic approach to disability and impairment as cultural phenomena. While historical sources often describe physical impairments, such descriptions must be distinguished from retro-diagnoses, which risk imposing modern medical categories on historical documents that do not address them in such terms.<sup>10</sup> Thus, impairment and disability are no longer viewed as opposite, but both as constructed concepts. Both thereby enable the study of power structures through the lens of multiple identities (such as gender and disability), which are used to describe social processes.<sup>11</sup>

The 2000s witnessed a proliferation of publication on disability in the Middle Ages.<sup>12</sup> This has resulted in a series of recent publications that *synthesize* prior research and *build on* the knowledge produced over the past two decades.<sup>13</sup> These publications illustrate the shift from a social history of marginality, poverty, and impairment as a physical anomaly to the construction of analytical models, and, among these, from the long-preferred cultural model—insofar as it highlights the changes and evolution of the concept

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**8** Ian Hacking, *The Social Construction of What?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 38. See also Mark Priestley, “Constructions and Creations: Idealism, Materialism and Disability Theory,” *Disability & Society* 13, no. 1 (1998): 75–94; and Tom Shakespeare, “Cultural Representation of Disabled People: Dustbins for Disavowal?” *Disability & Society* 9, no. 3 (1994): 283–99.

**9** Sharon L. Snyder and David T. Mitchell, *Cultural Locations of Disability* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

**10** Jenni Kuuliala, *Childhood Disability and Social Integration in the Middle Ages: Constructions of Impairments in Thirteenth and Fourteenth-Century Canonization Processes* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2016), 33–34.

**11** Ange-Marie Hancock, “When Multiplication Doesn’t Equal Quick Addition: Examining Intersectionality as a Research Paradigm,” *Perspectives on Politics* 1 (2007): 63–79.

**12** Cordula Nolte, ed., *Homo debilis: Behinderte — Kranke — Versehrte in der Gesellschaft des Mittelalters* (Korb: Didymos, 2009); Joshua Eyler, ed., *Disability in the Middle Ages: Reconsiderations and Reverberations* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010).

**13** Christian Krötzel, Katariina Mustakallio, and Jenni Kuuliala, eds., *Infirmity in Antiquity and the Middle Ages: Social and Cultural Approaches to Health, Weakness and Care* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015); Jonathan Hsy et al., eds., *A Cultural History of Disability in the Middle Ages* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020).

across both time and space—to a variety of alternatives.<sup>14</sup> The focus shifted more towards the concept of fluidity<sup>15</sup> and variability,<sup>16</sup> exploring the impact of lived and social environments on disabled individuals. This shift in focus served to debunk the myth that no one cared for disabled individuals before the modern era and that oppression was the only possible answer to disability.<sup>17</sup> In all these cases, medievalists primarily seek today to gain insight into the living experiences of disabled people in the medieval period.

In the field of disability studies, the subject of war emerged as a research topic through the question of the body in battle, first investigated through papers and then through collective volumes, such as the 2015 *Wounds and Wound Repair in Medieval Culture* directed by Kelly DeVries and Tracy Larissa.<sup>18</sup> The main focus has since shifted towards a more comprehensive consideration of mental health issues, taking the history of emotions into account.<sup>19</sup> The first step was towards courage and fear:<sup>20</sup> Amongst the first and few to be involved in the intersection of the history of disability and war, Wendy J. Turner published “Mental Incapacity and the Financing of War in Medieval England” in a volume dedicated to the Hundred Years’ War published in 2008.<sup>21</sup> In this paper, she analyzed the mental state of

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**14** Wendy J. Turner, “Models of Disability: Connecting the Past to the Present,” *Zeitschrift für Disability Studies* 1 (February 2022): 1–18.

**15** Bianca Frohne and Klaus Peter Horn, “On the Fluidity of ‘Disability’ in Medieval and Early Modern Societies,” in *The Imperfect Historian: Disability Histories in Europe*, eds. Sebastian Barsch et al. (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2013), 17–40.

**16** Chris Mounsey, “Introduction: VariAbility: Beyond Sameness and Difference,” in *The Idea of Disability in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Chris Mounsey (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2014), 1–29.

**17** Ninon Dubourg, “European Medieval Disability History: An Overview,” in *Handbook of Disability: Critical Thought and Social Change in a Globalizing World*, eds. Marcia H. Rioux et al. (Singapore: Springer, 2022), 89–106.

**18** Katie K. Walker, “Peril, Flight and the Sad Man: Medieval Theories of the Body in Battle,” in *War and Literature: Essays and Studies*, eds. Laura Ashe and Ian Patterson (Cambridge: Brewer, 2014), 21–37; Kelly DeVries and Tracy Larissa, eds., “*His brest tobrotsten*”: *Wounds and Wound Repair in Medieval Culture* (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

**19** Donna Trembinski, “Comparing Premodern Melancholy/Mania and Modern Trauma: An Argument in Favour of Historical Experience of Trauma,” *History of Psychology* 14 (2011): 80–99.

**20** As encouraged by Chelsea Grosskopf, “Fear and Loathing in *Eyrbyggja Saga*: Combat Trauma in Medieval Iceland,” in *Combat Stress in Pre-Modern Europe: Mental Health in Historical Perspective*, eds. Owen Rees et al. (London: Palgrave, 2022), 151–69.

**21** Wendy J. Turner, “Mental Incapacity and the Financing of War in Medieval

English fighters returning from France after campaigning. In the 2013 volume of the same book series, Aleksandra Pfau also focused on the question in her paper entitled “Warfare, Trauma, and Madness in French Remission Letters of the Hundred Years’ War.”<sup>22</sup> This focus on trauma—defined as a psychological response to extremely stressful events, both physically and mentally—has been illustrated by publications such as *Trauma in Medieval Society*, edited by Wendy J. Turner and Christina Lee in 2018,<sup>23</sup> and *Combat Stress in Pre Modern Europe* to quote another publication from 2022, edited by Owen Rees, Kathryn Hurlock, and Jason Crowley.<sup>24</sup> In addition to addressing subjects such as facial wounds and burn victims (by Patricia Skinner), and mental and physical health (by Michael Livingston), these books deal with the subject of trauma (thanks to papers from Christina Lee, Robert C. Woosnam-Savage, and Kelly DeVries).<sup>25</sup> This growing focus on mental disabilities is reflected in the present volume. Kristina Hildebrand, Sasha Pfau, and Wendy J. Turner indeed chiefly address this issue, while other contributors consider it alongside physical disabilities. Despite the absence of the term in medieval sources, and even though retroactive diagnoses are most often unreliable, the concept of “trauma” has proven to be useful as a tool of inquiry. It facilitates a more profound exploration of our sources, thereby enabling a more precise understanding of the impact of warfare on social groups and individuals. In this theoretical framework, situated at the intersection of emotions and mental disabilities, the issue of a medieval Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) remains.<sup>26</sup>

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England,” in *The Hundred Years War (Part II): Different Vistas*, eds. L. J. Andrew Villalon and Donald J. Kagay (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 387–466.

**22** Aleksandra Pfau, “Warfare, Trauma, and Madness in French Remission Letters of the Hundred Years War,” in *The Hundred Years War (Part III): Further Considerations*, eds. L. J. Andrew Villalon and Donald J. Kagay (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 437–54.

**23** Wendy J. Turner and Christina Lee, eds., *Trauma in Medieval Society* (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

**24** Rees et al., eds., *Combat Stress in Pre-Modern Europe*.

**25** See also Thomas Kristian Heebøll-Holm, “Apocalypse Then? The First Crusade, Traumas of War and Thomas de Marle,” in *Denmark and Europe in the Middle Ages c. 1000–1525: Essays in Honour of Professor Michael H. Gelting*, eds. Kerstin Hundahl et al. (London: Routledge, 2014), 237–54; Maurizio Paciaroni and Valentina Arnao, “Neurology and War: From Antiquity to Modern Times,” in *War Neurology*, eds. Laurent Tatu and Julien Bougousslavsky (Basel: Karger AG, 2016), 1–9; Catherine Clarke, “Signs and Wonders: Writing Trauma in Twelfth-Century England,” *Reading Medieval Studies* 35 (2009): 55–77.

**26** Kathryn Hurlock, “Was There Combat Trauma in the Middle Ages? A Case for

This shift in focus from the body to the mind prompted an examination of the concept of “ableism” in the context of determining an individual’s suitability for the role of a warrior. As researchers continue to examine disability across various cultural and temporal contexts, the pivotal role of defining normality in delineating otherness becomes increasingly evident.<sup>27</sup> From this perspective, studies on disability highlight a certain fluidity between disability and normality,<sup>28</sup> with the emphasis seemingly being placed on the warrior’s practical value, a matter of paramount importance in pre-industrial eras.<sup>29</sup> In a meticulous examination of Sir Thomas Malory’s *La Morte d’Arthur*, Tory V. Perman has demonstrated that in this romance, combatting knights were expected to sustain both physical and mental injuries in order to prove their valour and enhance their reputation.<sup>30</sup> This demonstrates that, although potentially painful and debilitating, a physical or mental limitation did not necessarily preclude an individual from continuing to fulfil their social role, even when this role involved combat.

A number of studies have focused on the aftermath of physical disability. It was not uncommon for soldiers surviving the battlefields to sustain injuries that resulted in amputation of a limb or other injuries. Confraternities such as the one funded by blind veterans of the 1212 Battle of Las Navas de Tolosa could support for impaired soldiers, as evidenced by José Luis Fernández Iglesias.<sup>31</sup> The social interactions of the newly impaired are highlighted in the *Eyrbyggja Saga* in which Onund “Tree Leg” explained how he was affected by the loss of his leg during the Battle of Hafrsfjord, following the analysis of John P. Sexton.<sup>32</sup> These insights have prompted significant

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Moral Injury in Pre-Modern Conflict,” in *Combat Stress in Pre-Modern Europe*, eds. Rees et al., 124–31.

**27** Kudlick, “Disability History.”

**28** Frohne and Horn, “On the Fluidity of ‘Disability.’”

**29** Timothy E. Jones, “‘A lame man can ride...a deaf man can kill...a dead man is of no use to anyone’: When Was a Deformity not a Disability in Early Medieval Europe?,” in *Disability and Impairment in Antiquity*, ed. Rupert Breitwieser (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2012), 131–35.

**30** Tory V. Pearman, *Disability and Knighthood in Malory’s Morte Darthur* (London: Routledge, 2018).

**31** José Luis Fernández Iglesias, “Historia, discapacidad y valía,” in *La imagen social de las personas con discapacidad: Estudios en homenaje a José Julián Barriga Bravo*, ed. Juan Antonio Ledesma (Madrid: CINCA, 2009), 177–210.

**32** John P. Sexton, “Difference and Disability: On the Logic of Naming in the Icelandic Sagas,” in *Disability in the Middle Age*, ed. Eyler, 149–63; see also John P. Sexton,

discussions about the social implications of war injuries, prompting us to further explore how they were perceived and managed in military contexts and their aftermaths. Moving forward, a deeper examination of disability on the battlefield from the perspective of the history of war can shed new light on the experiences of injured soldiers and the evolving responses to their needs.

From the perspective of a military historian, the traditional and outdated model of medieval warfare fails to explain the part taken by disabled people. It is regularly emphasized, especially in the Western Middle Ages, that waging war was the privilege of strong white men. The disabled, just like the old, the youngster, the woman, and the cleric had no part to play in it. However, we also know that this clear-cut division was never fully enacted. During sieges, a large part, if not all, of the population participated in the defence efforts. This participation could take many forms, including throwing stones at the besiegers, feeding the defenders, and maintaining and repairing weapons and fortifications.

It was not until relatively recently that military historians began to consider disabled persons as research subjects. While John Keegan's *Face of Battle*<sup>33</sup> and Philippe Contamine's *War in the Middle Ages*<sup>34</sup> have been instrumental in propelling researchers towards a more embodied approach to military matters, both paid little attention to "marginal" fighters. Military historians initially approached the subject of disabilities through the question of wounds. Their initial concern was to understand how one can hurt and be wounded while fighting.<sup>35</sup> This approach entailed the utilization of literary and, more broadly, textual sources, as well as archaeological evidence. The focus on battlefield archaeology has led to significant collaborative efforts among historians, archaeologists, and forensic scientists, particularly within the context of the Anglo-Saxon world, as evidenced by the studies conducted on the battles of Towton (1461), Visby (1361) and, to a lesser extent, Othée (1408).<sup>36</sup> On a global scale, the primary focus was on the experience of injury

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"Atypical Bodies," in *A Cultural History of Disability in the Middle Ages*, eds. Jonathan Hsy et al. (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 19–34.

**33** John Keegan, *The Face of Battle* (New York: Viking, 1976).

**34** Philippe Contamine, *War in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985 [first French edition: Paris, 1980]).

**35** See for example Alain Mounier-Kuhn, "Les blessures de guerre et l'armement au Moyen Âge dans l'Occident latin," *Médiévales* 39 (2000): 112–36.

**36** Veronica Fiorato, Anthea Boylston, and Christopher Knüsel, *Blood Red Roses: The Archaeology of a Mass Grave from the Battle of Towton AD 1461*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxbow, 2007); Bengt Thordemann, *Armour from the Battle of Visby, 1361*, 2 vols.

and death in medieval battles, as opposed to the experience of living with a disability. This was a plausible consequence of reflections on the highly debated question of the lethality of medieval wars and its effects on human behaviour on the battlefield.

Conversely, historians of medicine approached the question the other way. The military context was selected for study due to its provision of a wide variety of examples of medical practices. However, in this instance as well, the focus was not on the disabled or injured individuals themselves, but rather on gaining insights into the techniques employed in the management of injuries, and on their relative efficiency. This also served to complement the knowledge about hospital practices, which may have been less documented. Secondly, several studies highlighted the careers of the healers active in armies, with eminent figures such as Henri de Mondeville.<sup>37</sup> From this perspective, the disabled were, perhaps unconsciously, disregarded or marginalised as unworthy of the researchers' attention.

The shift towards examining both the consequences of permanent injury to fighters and the potential for disabled individuals to fight alongside able-bodied individuals is very recent. It may be a delayed consequence of the social approach that renewed the military history from the 1960s onwards, as put forward by scholars such as, in France, André Corvisier and Philippe Contamine. This has led scholars to redirect their attention from elite fighters to actors who have traditionally been considered marginal. Following on from the consideration of the roles of women and clerics, the focus has now shifted to the disabled. Obviously, we all know of John the Blind of Luxemburg, King of Bohemia, who died during the Battle of Crécy in 1346 where he was led by fellow knights guiding his horse with chains and possibly warning him where to defend himself or to strike.<sup>38</sup> We also know that he did not survive the day, and despite the fact that numerous other French combatants lost their lives on that occasion, modern authors, including historians, have frequently

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(Stockholm: Almqvist och Wiksell, 1939); Yves Charlier, "Un charnier à Othée," *Activités du SOS Fouilles* 5, 86 à 87 (1988): 232–33; Françoise Cornet, "Étude anthropologique des ossements découverts au lieu-dit Al Savatte à Othée," *Activités du SOS Fouilles* 5 (1988), 228–31; and Jean-Marc Léotard, "Inhumation collective au lieu-dit Al Savatte à Othée," *Activités du SOS Fouilles* 5 (1988), 225–28.

**37** Rabah Ali Bacha, "Les blessures de guerre à la fin du Moyen Âge," 3 vols. (PhD diss., Université Lille 3–Charles de Gaulle, 2010); Jon C. Clasper, "The Management of Military Wounds in the Middle Ages," in *Wounds in the Middle Ages*, eds. Anne Kirkham and Cordelia Warr (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 17–39.

**38** Jean le Bel, *Chronique*, vol. 2, eds. Jules Viard and Eugène Deprez (Paris: Renouard, 1905), 108.

associated his fate with sheer folly. This anachronistic common sense posits John the Blind as the quintessential example of why one should not engage in combat if disabled. In a sense, this interpretation reinforced an unconscious inclination towards “ableism” that has for a long time hindered research in this area. However, John probably saw things in a totally opposite way. It has been convincingly argued that his decision to participate in the battle despite being blind was a means of restoring his honour.<sup>39</sup> One month earlier, at the Battle of Vottem, he had been present alongside his son Charles of Luxembourg, who had recently been elected “King of the Romans” but did not participate in the combat. The battle culminated in a crushing defeat for the prince-bishop of Liège against the rebel towns of Liège and Huy, even though he was supported by an impressive troop, which included German knights. The fact that John’s honour was to be restored implied that the contemporary expectations were to have him joining the episcopal forces, despite being blind. Following this line of thought, it seems more interesting to look at “disabled” or blind people—notwithstanding the fact that medieval authors also used this last adjective to mean partially sighted—who survived battles. In fact, sources are less silent on the subject than what might initially be presumed. In 1325, a local battle was fought in the Liège countryside, involving several hundred nobles from two rival lineages. According to sources, at least two men were honoured with knighthoods prior to the commencement of the fight. The first of these, Guillaume Wilkar d’Awans, was blind. The second one, Alexandre de Saint-Servais, had two hands and a foot *afoleis*, to quote the Middle French word meaning “[more or less largely] broken.<sup>40</sup> “As a chronicler specifically attested, thanks to the effective and purposeful protection of their fellow knights, none of these newly anointed knights perished during the course of the battle.<sup>41</sup> They fought, nonetheless.

In the same vein, the fate of disabled combatants has already attracted attention from early modernists. The existence of such institutions as the French *Hôtel des Invalides*, along with the archival documentation available,

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**39** According to Andrew Ayton, “The Crécy Battle: Context and Significance,” in *The Battle of Crécy, 1346*, eds. Andrew Ayton and Philipp Preston (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2005), 25, no. 103.

**40** Monique Haas, “Affoler (2),” in *Dictionnaire du Moyen Français (1330–1500)*, <http://zeus.atilf.fr/dmf/>, accessed December 21, 2024.

**41** Jacques de Hemricourt, “Le traité des guerres d’Awans et de Waroux,” in Jacques de Hemricourt, *Œuvres*, eds. Alphonse Bayot and Camille de Borman (Bruxelles: Kiessling, 1931), 3:45–46.

has evidently attracted researchers' interest.<sup>42</sup> Since such institutions did not exist during the Middle Ages, medievalists have historically paid little attention to this question, up to this day.<sup>43</sup> Nonetheless, this raises the important question of the development of the state's protective role, both in favour of its military servants and of its subjects who feared the herds of vagrant veterans. Current research suggests that during the Late Middle Ages, this was not a primary concern for rulers and their officers, except for some clearly delimited cases. Even if the latter were then involved in the "Genesis of the Modern State," they did not feel compelled to provide protection to individuals who had been injured in service. The fact that permanent armies only emerged in the second half of the period considered in this book implies that contracts between soldiers and their rulers were mostly temporary. The former may thus rely on other support tools once demobilized or unable to continue to engage in combat, leaving the state or the ruler unencumbered with the responsibility of providing such support.

As demonstrated by these examples, specialists in premodern military and disability studies integrated or exploited diverse disciplinary contributions: history, archaeology, literature, and modern medicine. This combination provides compelling evidence that future research in the field of Disability and War must be interdisciplinary and comparative in nature. At a heuristic level, the papers gathered in this volume argue for the utilization of a wide variety of sources. Although narrative and literary sources are the most readily available, scholars have demonstrated for a long time that they are not enough to support proper research in military or disability history. Their preoccupation with exceptionality and their socially and politically biased interpretation of the events they recall poses significant challenges. Sources more concerned with day-to-day management prove essential to overcome this obstacle. Account books and normative and judicial texts offer regular insights into the attitude towards disability. We discover the methods by which payments of wages or the hiring of surgeons were pursued (sometimes with the mention of the results of their actions), as well as how warriors were selected. Finally, material artefacts—that is to say, bones, prostheses and, although not discussed in this book, adapted weapons—shed light on the lives of people

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**42** Jean-Pierre Bois, "Les soldats invalides au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle: Perspectives nouvelles," *Histoire, économie et société* 1 (1982): 237–58.

**43** They mostly address this question in passing, as did Christophe Masson in *Des guerres en Italie avant les Guerres d'Italie: Les entreprises militaires dans la Péninsule à l'époque du Grand Schisme d'Occident* (Rome: École française de Rome, 2014), 423–26.

expected to have become disabled but who continued to engage in warfare despite their sometimes severe injuries. In this perspective, interdisciplinarity must be associated with a wide range of primary materials.

### **Through Warriors' Lives: How Injuries Became Disabilities, or Not**

Building on the findings of previous research, this volume is structured around three key themes. *Becoming disabled* focuses on how medieval society labelled battlefield injuries and trauma suffered by warriors as disabilities. *Surviving (Heavy) Injuries* highlights the ways in which people physically or mentally marked by their war experience were integrated into their communities, contributed to society at large, and shaped their identities, revealing their agency in the process. It also sheds light on the responsibility of deeming one eligible for campaigning, and the institutional process by which this happened. Finally, *Managing Disabilities* examines the strategies employed by disabled individuals to navigate their post-injury lives, as well as the social and institutional (including religious<sup>44</sup>) supports that allowed them to endure in a challenging environment. These three themes correspond to pivotal moments in the lives of medieval soldiers: the experience of being injured in warfare and combat, the personal and social reaction to such injuries, and the societal management of wounded and traumatized veterans.

#### **Becoming Disabled**

A number of pivotal instances were identified that either precipitated the transition from injury to disability, or impeded such a transition from occurring on a systematic basis. First and foremost, a recurring trend in warfare

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**44** While religion undoubtedly shaped medieval conceptions of the body and suffering, this volume does not aim to apply the “religious model” of disability (as developed by Edward Wheatley, *Stumbling Blocks before the Blind: Medieval Constructions of a Disability* [Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010]) as such. As recent scholarship has shown, theological interpretations were often flexible, situational, and coexisted with other social logics; but people were also able to act and “ascribe new meaning to pain, suffering, and marginalization through their own lived religious experience” (Karen McCluskey, Louise St. Guillaume, and Daniela Da Silva, “Ability and Disability in the Pictorial *Vitae* of Beata Fina in Fifteenth-Century San Gimignano,” in *The Routledge Companion to Disability and Art*, eds. Keri Watson and Timothy W. Hiles [London: Routledge, 2022], 94–114, esp. 95). The essays collected in this volume approach disability as embedded in broader contexts (legal, medical, literary, and material) where religious meaning may be implicit but not necessarily dominant in shaping the treatment of impaired soldiers or their lived experience.

is the care taken in the selection of warriors. Regularly, archival documents thoroughly recorded who was deemed fit to fight (i.e., the “able-bodied” individuals), and who was not. Commanders were allowed to dismiss warriors they deemed disabled, before or during campaigns, as documentation testifies. Such a concern is illustrated by early thirteenth-century normative sources. In 1215, the Fourth Lateran Council reinforced the conditions for fulfilling vows, while in the meantime Innocent III enunciated the reasons for being deemed incapable of fighting when authorizing to commute a vow of—armed—pilgrimage to the Holy Land.<sup>45</sup> A few decades later, by a letter issued on May 31, 1265, Pope Clement IV granted Count Bouchard V of Vendôme the money paid by those deemed “unfit” to join the fight in the Near East, which allows us to understand who they were:

We, moved by your supplications, in order for you to more easily and effectively fulfil your vow, cede to you as a gift, as a financial compensation for the said tithe, the legacies destined to support the said Holy Land and the subsidies coming from certain persons—that is to say elderly people, clerics, sick persons, women, and others who are unfit to fight—who cannot or do not want to personally come to the Holy Land to rescue it, but who nonetheless desire through sending certain sums of money [to be] participants of the indulgence granted by the general council in aid of the said Holy Land.<sup>46</sup>

In this context, with the exception of clerics and women, one was seen as unable to fight when old, sick, or (physically) impaired (as we believe the word *inhabiles* refers to this last situation), which left open the possibility to fight with injuries. As crusades were holy wars, and not mere pilgrimages, and since the Council of Lateran IV in 1215 and Pope Innocent III’s decision

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**45** On the Crusaders’ vows, see Alain Demurger, *Croisades et croisés au Moyen Âge* (Paris: Flammarion, 2011), 70–71.

**46** Our emphasis. Vatican City, Archivio Apostolico Vaticano (AAV), Reg. Vat. 32, fol. 14r. Edouard Jordan, ed., *Les registres de Clément IV (1265–1268): Recueil des bulles de ce pape* (Paris: Thorin, 1893), 20, no. 80: “Nos itaque tuis supplicationibus inclinati, ut facilius et efficacius exequi valeas votum tuum, in recompensationem predictae decime tibi auctoritate presentium indulgemus, ut redemptiones et legata hujusmodi predictae terre sancte subsidio deputata, et obventiones a quibuscumque provenientes, personis videlicet senibus, clericis, valitudinariis, mulieribus, et personis aliis, que sunt inhabiles ad pugnandum, queque non possunt nec volunt in preface terre sancte succursum personaliter proficisci, desiderant tamen, mittendo illuc certas pecuniarum summas, participes fieri indulgentie que subvenientibus predictae terre sancte in generali concilio est concessa.” The addressee of the letter did indeed go on the Eighth Crusade of 1270 alongside Louis IX. He died of the plague in Tunis in 1271. Dominique Barthélemy, *La société dans le comté de Vendôme: De l’an mil au XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Fayard, 1993), 820.

promised salvation to the crusaders through the full remission of their sins,<sup>47</sup> they implied a penitential dimension.<sup>48</sup> The pontifical administration thus had to clearly delineate who could enjoy a full indulgence for past sins despite not actually fighting in the Holy Land. The petition (*petitio*) was the foundational process, where individuals humbly sought the pope's benevolent intervention, acknowledging their own incapacity or weakness. As a hegemonic cultural practice, supplication reinforced papal authority while allowing petitioners to shape their own identities through their appeals. Thus, this substitution process of financial rather than personal support highlights a conception of incapacity linked to physical ability and not associated with economic or social criteria. On the contrary, when unable to fulfil the initial vow to fight the infidels, one purchased crusading vows to secure the indulgence promised to those who go to battle. Consequently, they became advantageous to the crusade, despite their incapacity to engage in combat, as the financial resources were utilized to support the war effort. This was so extensive that the income from the commutation of the crusade vow resulted in numerous monetary transactions and the establishment of the "indulgence trade," as asserted by Alain Boureau.<sup>49</sup> These questions about the "functionality" or "usefulness" of the impaired person are also found in other religious traditions, notably in the Quran, where the person viewed as "unable/disabled" is exempted from going to battle.<sup>50</sup>

It is thus even more striking that normative military sources—as opposed to pontifical decrees regarding indulgences and customary practices—paid no attention to disability. Historians have long recognized the exhaustive nature of the Burgundian ordinances issued in the 1470s by Duke Charles the Bold, through which he established the core of a standing army. However, not a single line of these sources was dedicated to physical or mental status, not to mention disabilities, of the men-at-arms, footmen, and archers whose equipment was so meticulously described.<sup>51</sup> The earlier French ordi-

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**47** Jean Richard, "L'indulgence de croisade et le pèlerinage en Terre Sainte," in *II Concilio di Piacenza e le crociate* (Piacenza: Tip.Le.Co, 1996), 213–23, especially p. 220.

**48** Demurger, *Croisades et croisés*, 132–33.

**49** Alain Boureau, "Le vœu, la dette et le contrôle pontifical des échanges au début du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle," *Annales: Histoire, sciences sociales* 67, no. 2 (2012): 417–49.

**50** Henri-Jacques Stiker, *Corps infirmes et sociétés: Essais d'anthropologie historique*, 3rd ed. (Paris: Dunod, 2005), 22, citing Sura 24, verse 60, and Sura 48.

**51** Fabien Delpu, "Aux sources d'une armée permanente: Édition critique et commentaire des ordonnances militaires de Charles le Téméraire (1471–1476)" (Thèse, École des Chartes, 2013).

nances—specifically those of 1439 and 1445—exhibited a consistent pattern, although the former was never implemented in full, with only certain provisions being adopted.<sup>52</sup> This pattern was also evident in late medieval Icelandic literature (Tirosch) or German autobiographies (Frohne). Similarly, we note that fifteenth-century noble Castilian authors writing about warfare did not mention disabled fighters. This does not mean that they did not exist, but that their physical peculiarities counted less than their ability to fight. However, it also appears that the same writers celebrated the fact of dying “intact.” They also despised the ones who survived injuries and were unable to perform military duties because of the consequences of surgical interventions, such as amputation.<sup>53</sup> More generally, as the cases of Renaissance Italy testify, critics who assimilated injured warriors to incapacitated leaders or fighters were predominantly non-combatants or individuals hostile to the leaders or fighters about whom they spoke or wrote. From their bearers’ point of view, it was imperative that an injury was recognized as such, without any superfluous stigmatizations.

The fundamental question pertains to the precise interpretation of the term “intact.” It seems clear that medieval warriors boasted of their injuries, first to emphasize their experience, but also because facing and overcoming risks constituted an integral aspect of their identity. Fifteenth-century Italian captains exhibited wounds as proofs of valour.<sup>54</sup> The man known as “Towton 16,” thanks to Christopher Knüsel’s work, exhibited through a considerable part of his life the marks of an impressive blow on the left side of his face. Despite the possibility that the individual previously had a beard or subsequently grew one in order to conceal it, the mark was nonetheless unmistakable.<sup>55</sup> This helps us to understand and confirm the veracity of the otherwise intriguing habit of medieval chroniclers to recall the participation

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**52** *Construire l’armée française: Textes fondateurs des institutions militaires*, vol. 1, *De la France des premiers Valois à la fin du règne de François I<sup>er</sup>*, ed. Valérie Bessey (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), 88–105, and Stéphane Péquignot, “De la France à Barcelone: Une version catalane de ‘l’ordonnance perdue’ de Charles VII sur les gens d’armes (1445),” *Revue historique* 317, no. 4 (2015): 824–28.

**53** Daniel Baloup, *L’homme armé: Expériences de la guerre et du combat en Castille au xv<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2022), 244.

**54** We owe these last two elements relating to Italy to Giulia Morosini’s webinar presentation. On her work, see Giulia Morosini, “Manly Virtues, Emotions, and Scars: Competition among Italian Renaissance Soldiers through Bodily Practices,” in *Gender and Status Competition in Pre-Modern Societies*, eds. Martha Bayless et al. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2021), 79–107.

**55** Even though the beard was quite negatively considered at the time. Jean-Marie

of warriors who previously lost the use of an eye, an arm, or a leg. In addition to proving their experience to their peers, it asserted that they were capable of overcoming what would be “disabling” for less worthy people and that they had retain their ability to fight.<sup>56</sup> The fact that the sums of money given/paid by Burgundian princes to veterans was proportionate to the financial losses incurred by their disabilities highlights the pivotal role that the capacity to fulfil one’s duty played in the conceptualization of disability (Depreter). There was thus an evident desire to distinguish oneself from the rest of the population, implying that the latter was less worthy and strong (and thus less masculine?) and more closely associated with the masses than with the military elite (Verreycken).

We argue that medieval warriors, irrespective of their rank, consciously did not associate serious injuries with disability. This also means that they had a clear understanding of what disability was, and that this understanding was precisely why they took great care to describe it as rarely as possible. For the nobility, gentry, and more largely for the commoners who regularly went to war, the quintessential definition of disability was the inability to fulfil one’s rank. It was imperative to demonstrate one’s ability, regardless of the nature and number of obstacles encountered. Premodern armies allowed a wide range of profiles to join them. This changed with the advent of modern armies, which were built on the principle of efficiency, essentially fuelled by uniformity. Pain and prosthesis were thus admissible if they enabled the overcoming of physical deficiencies. We witness the same kind of reasoning in pardon letters. Supplicants emphasized how much they suffered in the service of their prince, while defending the idea that a proper warrior must be able to overcome anything. Cynically enough, we could also consider that by systematically mentioning that they were attacked and did not initiate the fight for which they asked pardon, supplicants not only complied with court expectations but also demonstrated their ability to overcome assaults and injuries.

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Le Gall, *Un idéal masculin: Barbes et moustaches, xv<sup>e</sup>–xviii<sup>e</sup> siècles. Suivi de “Le barbu ou Dialogue sur la barbe” d’Antoine Hotman* (Paris: Payot, 2011).

**56** This follows a common pattern of fear management, see the papers of Benjamin Deruelle, “Contrôler l’incontrôlable: Perception et contrôle du sentiment de la peur au combat chez les hommes de guerre du xvi<sup>e</sup> siècle,” and Christophe Masson, “Des chevaliers irréflichés: Peur et témérité dans les traités d’art militaire (c. 1330–c. 1530),” in *Le feu et la folie: L’irrationnel et la guerre de la fin du Moyen Âge à 1920*, eds. Marion Trévisi and Laurent Vissière (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2016), 101–12, and 113–31.

Another point to address is the permanence of disability. The knight Thibaud de Belozac, who took an active part in Brittany's fourteenth-century civil war, is said to have remained severely and incurably wounded in his shinbone by an enemy sword for twenty years, before being healed by the miraculous intervention of a deceased—yet on his way to canonization—Charles of Blois in 1367. Thibaud might not have had a disability, as his injury and its consequences are not mentioned in his statement gathered in the canonization process.<sup>57</sup> However, medieval authors underlined how fear, as well as chronic or intense pain, may have caused disabilities (Frohne).

Medieval warriors made a significant distinction between their body and soul. While they recognized that any part of the former could be hurt—which could lead to permanent disabilities—they regarded the latter as a completely different matter. As Kristina Hildebrand records, mad knights did not become so because of traumatic battles, but because of love sorrow. A great number of sources have attributed the love-madness experienced by warriors to harsh captivity, rather than to physical injuries. Morally and physically induced disabilities were considered as different, as Honorat Bovet stated clearly in his *Arbre des batailles* (Turner). Most remission letters that argued that war had been a catalyst for mental disturbances referred to cases of non-combatants (Pfau). This implicitly suggests the existence of a specific cultural trait. A warrior should not be moved by what he experiences on a regular basis—i.e., martial context and its accidents—as this would go against his identity and deprive him of his social status. Additionally, one may consider that his social milieu, within which he was intended to share his experience of warfare, could have played a role in processing the events experienced. This difficulty in sharing traumatic experiences within one's family is indeed indicated as one of the elements explaining the high rates of veterans suffering from PTSD in modern times.<sup>58</sup> It is noteworthy that chroniclers placed significant emphasis on the role that military stress and the discomfort of wearing armour played in the first of Charles VI of France's mental crises (Pfau). This possibly served to reinforce the argument for the sovereign's unfitness, particularly in light of his pronounced predilection for chivalric culture. Additionally, human interventions—that is military or knightly solidarity—was to cure the mental distress caused by love, or dramatic social interactions (Hildebrand). On the other hand, in the event of a

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**57** Jenni Kuuliala, "Nobility, Community and Physical Impairment in Later Medieval Canonization Processes," in *Infirmity in Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, eds. Christian Krötzel et al. (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 67–82.

**58** Pauline Maucort, *La guerre et après...* (Paris: Les Belles-Lettres, 2017).

warrior (i.e., a dominant male) becoming “insane,” he was required to relinquish his “natural” authority over his family and earthly possessions, as well as his political and judicial powers, as their legitimacy was questioned on account of the social disturbance that it caused. This explains why the English crown (Turner) and other princely powers acted to protect such landholders from the thirteenth century onwards.<sup>59</sup> Mental disability dissolved the community of warriors on campaigns, social organization “at home,” and even threatens the kingdom when striking the ruler.<sup>60</sup>

Disability was a divisive marker between combatants and non-combatants that contributed to re-establish a social division that the sole possession of a feudal title could no longer generate.

### Surviving (Heavy) Injuries

The juxtaposition of these contrasting situations enables us to understand, and not only from the silence of the sources, that determining who was fit to fight was also a decision made on an individual level. For instance, a papal bull dated January 28, 1306, reveals that Clement V granted Robert, Count of Clermont-en-Beauvaisis (present-day Clermont-sur-Oise), a dispensation from his vow to undertake a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, citing his inability to do so as the reason for the dispensation.<sup>61</sup> Robert was the sixth son of Louis IX and Marguerite of Provence. He suffered from dementia from 1279 onwards, following a blow to the head.<sup>62</sup> Although he could still manage his duchy, Robert still suffered from evident aftereffects, as evidenced by his decision to avoid tournaments and his inability to lead campaigns. He was no longer able to compete with the ideal of crusades that his father, Louis IX, had so fervently promoted. Therefore, he sought to change his vow while

**59** Maud Ternon, *Juger les fous au Moyen Âge dans les tribunaux royaux en France: XIV<sup>e</sup>–XV<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2018), 107–12.

**60** See Bernard Guenée, *La folie de Charles VI, roi bien-aimé* (Paris: Perrin, 2004), who nonetheless underscored how a king’s madness could be and have been used to strengthen the State.

**61** In exchange, the supplicant must pay ten thousand livres of “good money” to those who will fulfil his vow in his place. Paris, Archives nationales de France, P 1377<sup>1</sup>, no. 2760; AAV, Reg. Vat. 52, fol. 106r: Clement V to Robert, Count of Clermont, January 28, 1306 (abstract in *Regestum Clementis papae V* [Rome: Typographia Vaticana, 1885], 111, no. 610).

**62** Jules Roy, “Corrections et additions à l’histoire de Robert de Clermont, sixième fils de Saint Louis, tige de la maison ducale et royale de Bourbon,” *Annuaire de l’École pratique des hautes études* 32, no. 1 (1899): 5–20.

lamenting his inability to contribute to the liberation of the Holy Land from Muslim rule.<sup>63</sup>

The papal chancery proved to be as systematic with granting indulgences and spiritual benefits to those dispensed from going to the Holy Land as it was with addressing the resulting impact on the bodies of combatants who fought for the Christian faith. This is particularly evident in the case of Laurence de Beaumont [*Bellomonte*], a cleric of the diocese of Viviers, who received a letter from the Avignon pope Clement VII, (most probably ante-) dated from November 29, 1378:

*Item* Laurence of Beaumont, a cleric of the Diocese of Viviers—who lost his left hand and one eye while fighting against the Saracens, enemies of the Catholic faith, alongside certain Christian nobles in the overseas territories, as testify letters of witnesses he held with him—is unable to support himself, nor be properly maintained, nor be promoted to sacred orders due to the loss of his hand, having no temporal property from which he can be provided with what he needs. He therefore requests an ecclesiastical benefice without cure of souls, either complete or divided, collated by the archbishop, the dean, the chapter, as well as by each of the canons individually, or the *personatores* of the [Cathedral] Church of Sens, even if this means a hospital, a Maison-Dieu, or a leprosarium, notwithstanding the mutilation of his hand and the loss of his eye. Like above [for the papal agreement procedure and the issue date].<sup>64</sup>

The violence of the confrontations and their impact on the bodily integrity of combatants appear to be a frequent cause of disability. Indeed, the brutality of war led to numerous injuries, approximately a quarter of which affected the upper limbs, as in the case of Laurence, who also lost an

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**63** On the importance of the crusade in nobles' memoirs, see Nicholas Paul, *To Follow in Their Footsteps: The Crusades and Family Memory in the High Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017).

**64** AAV, Reg. Suppl. 55, fol. 223v: "Item Laurencius de Bellomonte, clericus Vivariensis diocesis, qui dudum in societate quorundam nobiliorum Christianorum in partibus ultramarinis exitus contra Sarracenos, fidei catholice dimicos, debelerando manum sinistram et oculum amisit, ut apperet per litteras testimoniales quas secum defert, propter quod victum suum acquerere non potest, nec alias commode sustentari, nec ad sacros ordines promoverit propter amissionem manus predictam, cum in bonis temporalibus non habeat unde sibi necessaria possit ministrari; quot sibi de beneficio ecclesiastico sine cura, specialiter communiter uel divisim, ad collationem etc. archiepiscopi, decani et capituli singulorumque canonicarum et per[sonatorum] ecclesie Senonensis, ectiam si sit hospitale vel domus Dei seu leprosaria dignari providere, non obstantibus dicta sue manus mutilacione et dicti sui oculi amissione ac cum allis non obstantibus, ut supra."

eye.<sup>65</sup> These mutilations represented serious conditions according to medieval surgeons, who found regular descriptions of treatments for injuries in the literature they consulted. As noted earlier, the incapacity of *bellatores* rarely appears in historical works. The sources used to discuss nobility often overlook their disabilities, focusing instead on their war exploits. In the example above, as well as in general, the papal chancery is interested in the daily consequences of injuries, in this case of a person who, despite being associated with nobles, does not appear to belong to the wealthiest strata of lay society. For those who were neither noble nor wealthy, a disability could diminish or even suppress their sources of income. In this case, as the mutilation occurred during a crusade or at least a “saintly expedition,” the cleric sought to recover a stable and sufficient source of income to ensure his daily subsistence thanks to the intervention of the papal chancery.<sup>66</sup> After an assessment of Laurence’s injury, the pope authorized him to receive an income without *cura animarum*, meaning he would not be able to celebrate Mass, but would still have a source of revenue to live with his disability without having to beg for his living.<sup>67</sup> The pope could not admit that a cleric would tarnish ecclesiastical dignity by begging and thus permitted the institution to assimilate individuals who would typically be marginalized within its own ranks.

Upon closer examination of this phenomenon, medieval written sources reveal a preponderance of individuals who, despite having experienced partial or complete healing, continued to engage in military engagements. The veracity of such assertions is corroborated by the findings of archaeology. The capacity of biological anthropologists and bioarchaeologists to differentiate between injuries sustained prior to death (*ante mortem*) and those that result in fatality (*lethal*) has been significantly enhanced. This advancement

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**65** These figures are based on the works of Alain Mounier-Kuhn, “Les blessures de guerre et l’armement au Moyen Âge,” and Pierre-André Sigal, “Les coups et blessures reçus par le combattant à cheval en Occident aux XII<sup>e</sup> et XIII<sup>e</sup> siècles,” in *Le combattant au Moyen Âge: XVIII<sup>e</sup> congrès de la SHMESP (Montpellier, 1987)* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1987), 171–83.

**66** On clerical disability from the point of view of the papal chancery, see Ninon Dubourg, *Disabled Clerics in the Late Middle Ages: Un/suitable for Divine Service?* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2023).

**67** On the physicians’ role in the implementation of pontifical graces, see Ninon Dubourg, “*Expertis medicis videatur*: Legal Medical Expertise in the Assessment of Personal Injury Damages by the Apostolic Chancery during the Avignon Period (1309–1378),” in *Art of Illness: Malingering and Inventing Health Conditions*, ed. Wendy J. Turner (London: Routledge, 2023), 207–44.

is evidenced by the analysis of corpses discovered in the vicinity of a battlefield or in burial sites (Knüsel). However partial they were, pardon letters tend to elicit the supposition that the majority of the injured warriors who were still active were the ones with minor injuries. Those afflicted with more severe conditions are significantly less represented in these sources, meaning they may have been excluded from active social life, and thus from these documents. Consequently, a high degree of caution should be exercised when considering the proportion of warriors who became disabled, despite the narratives presented in the majority of sources. Although it may have appeared to contradict the ideals of noble appearance and strength, for medieval people, an injury was not a disability in the context of warfare, even if it might have been seen as such in other social contexts, such as in relationships with family members, neighbours and strangers.<sup>68</sup>

This observation aligns with the fact that the military or the knightly identity was above all determined by social agreement. Rejecting one man because of injuries anyone could suffer during the next battle would put the whole “military body” at stake, as it would have meant renunciation of the cohesive solidarity amongst warriors. Paradoxically enough, while Icelandic literature has almost no specific vocabulary to denote the injured warriors fighting, it exhibits a preoccupation with men who used physical differences to fight, such as a (fake) hunchback relying on his peculiar back to strike his adversaries (Tirosh). It seems that as soon as they allowed their “owner” to fulfil his social role or aspirations, physical peculiarities did not exclude them from the society to which they belonged; on the contrary, they ensured their continued inclusion within it. This situation is comparable to that of prosthesis bearers. Documented by physical evidence only from the fifteenth century onwards, but most probably older, prostheses were not exclusively the privilege of high-ranking individuals. This question of the interface between prostheses and the human body to which they are attached remains to be the subject of more thorough exploration. Scholars have highlighted that middle class warriors who had lost a hand could be equipped with iron hands that prolonged their ability to continue fighting, or to at least appear “complete” in public events, if they could not play a functional role. They could even be painted to evoke skin and flesh helping their bearers maintain their role and identity within the martial community (Frohne, Gagné). Even though medievalists work on sources which rarely openly address gender,

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**68** Irina Metzler, *A Social History of Disability in the Middle Ages: Cultural Considerations of Physical Impairment* (London: Routledge, 2013), 37–40.

the latter mostly recall male combatants. Their injunction towards overcoming both physical and visual physical limitations to remain able to fight is more likely to be linked with the definition of masculinity. This appears to be a trend common to most of the martial literature of the time, uniting authors such as the fourteenth-century French nobleman Geoffroy de Charny and the early sixteenth-century *landsknechts* (Frohne). Additionally, fighting despite injuries is a statement of one's emotional self-control, a trait that late medieval writers frequently ascribed to men, and more specifically to knights. Conversely, failure to fulfil one's duty was perceived to diminish a man's masculinity (Verreycken).<sup>69</sup> Finally, the social environment for individuals could, for a number of reasons, fail to "cure" disability (Hildebrand) or even exacerbate it (Pfau).

On a comparable level, the chapters of this volume echo another social dimension of warfare. The ability to fight despite being blind, having broken limbs, or exhibiting physical limitations was not exclusive to elite warriors, nor was inability linked to social inferiors. Figures such as Charles VI or Hörðr (Pfau, Tirosh) are two perfect examples of that. This phenomenon is most likely connected to the notable openness exhibited by late medieval military society towards newcomers, provided they aligned with the prevailing chivalric values. In some cases, this went as far as allowing for the literary or actual knighting of commoners.<sup>70</sup> This relative openness also applied to solutions to overcome the consequences of injuries. As the military society apparently recognized the legitimacy and use of prostheses, it promoted a new perception of the body as a machine that could be "restored" through instruments like iron hands (Gagné). This ultimately evokes the mechanization of human behaviour in warfare, a phenomenon which would not be theorized until in the early modern period.

The habit of going into battle when wounded was not proof of sheer folly; it translates the serious concern and interest in one's own health and cures, both before, during, and after a campaign. The Kampen (Overijssel, Netherlands) priest Geert Kuynretorff advised fellow pilgrims in 1520 that "before

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**69** See for example Kim Berqvist, "Performing Chivalric Masculinity: Morality, Restraint, and Emotional Norms in the *Libro del Cavallero Zifar*," in *Affective and Emotional Economies in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, eds. Andreea Marculescu and Charles-Louis Morand Métivier (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2018), 227–46.

**70** Christophe Masson, "Dire l'homme d'armes du xv<sup>e</sup> siècle: L'exemple des mémoires et biographies chevaleresques franco-bourguignonnes," in *Les mots du militaire*, vol. 3, *Dire et se dire militaire en Occident (xv<sup>e</sup> –xix<sup>e</sup> siècle): De la guerre de Cent ans à l'Entre-deux-guerres*, eds. Benjamin Deruelle et al. (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2020), 19–34.

[sailing] from Venice, [they should] go to an experienced physician, who can examine [their] condition properly. And [to] let him prescribe [them] various pills and potions, so that [their] constitution may be armed against whatever fever or diarrhoea, or any constipations may befall [them].”<sup>71</sup> The consequences on the crusaders’ bodies could vary. In another account dated from 1485–1486, Georges Lengherand tells us that: “because of the great heat that day, the pilgrims were so weakened, faint, and thirsty that most of them fell ill, so much so that, upon [the] arrival at Rames, three hours later, two Germans there gave up their spirits to God.”<sup>72</sup> This also applied to warriors. In preparation for his crusade, Duke Philip the Good of Burgundy commissioned two surgeons to compile a comprehensive inventory of surgical instruments and medicinal remedies intended to address the potential diseases that crusaders could face during their undertaking.<sup>73</sup> More largely, retinues usually comprised one or several practitioners, who joined campaigns equipped with their own arsenal of treatments (Knüsel).

### Managing Disabilities

Previous examples show that the determination of one’s fitness for combat or pilgrimage in the Middle Ages was closely tied to physical ability and social status. Papal decrees allowed those physically unable to fight, such as the elderly or disabled, to fulfil their Christian duties through financial contributions. This practice ensured their place in Christian society, recognizing a form of spiritual utility despite their physical limitations. The church adapted its expectations to accommodate these individuals, offering alternatives such as the commutation of vows and the granting of absolution and indulgences, ensuring that they could take part in the collective religious effort even if they could not physically engage in combat. Simultaneously, the church could also provide avenues for maintaining dignity and livelihood

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**71** Geert Kuynretorff, *Jerusalemse Reyse, soe in verganghen Jaren gheschiedt is* (Kampen: Peter Warnersen, 1555), 27 (kindly translated by Maja Perić, University of Zagreb).

**72** *Voyage de Georges Lengherand, mayeur de Mons en Haynaut, à Venise, Rome, Jérusalem, Mont Sinaï et le Kayre, 1485–1486*, ed. Godefroy Ménilglaise (Mons: Masquillier et Dequesne, 1861), 115.

**73** Rabah Ali Bacha and Laurie Baveye, “Le mauvais côté de la croisade? À propos d’un document établi par les chirurgiens de Philippe le Bon,” in “La face noire de la splendeur: Crimes, trahisons et scandales à la cour de Bourgogne aux XIV<sup>e</sup> et XV<sup>e</sup> siècles,” eds. Werner Paravicini and Bertrand Schnerb, special issue, *Revue du Nord* 91, no. 2 (2009): 491–510.

through ecclesiastical benefices for those who were injured in battle and left unable to sustain themselves, even when their physical disabilities prevented them from performing full priestly duties. In this way, the church integrated disabled individuals into its institutional fabric, recognizing both their spiritual contributions and the social implications of their disabilities.

The pontifical institution not only included them but also offered them spiritual compensation for taking part in the hostilities. Indeed, those who managed to reach the Holy Land, after a long and perilous journey, earned spiritual benefits in exchange for their travels. Letters called “letters of absolution *in mortis articulo*” (at the point of death) offered plenary absolution from the most serious sins.<sup>74</sup> In most cases, they contain no mention of the petitioner’s disability, illness, or old age. The request for absolution is made in a concise manner. However, some of these letters go into detail, revealing the petitioners’ concerns about their own salvation. The stakes are high, as these indulgences allow the recipients—living or dead—to quickly save their souls without performing any penance.<sup>75</sup> They were used by the papal chancery to strengthen its ties with the most powerful laymen but also to allow them to die peacefully. These letters could be individual or collective, as in the following case for crusaders dying in the Holy Land. The letter, sent by Urban V to the Hospitallers of St. John of Jerusalem on July 17, 1363, states:

Inclined to your supplications, [we grant] that a confessor [will] be elected to give full remission of all sins at the point of death, to any of you and your benefactors, slaves, and paid men who are in the same region as you, as well as to other believers in Christ who shall be wounded, or otherwise bruised, and maimed, or crippled, or killed by the hands of unbelievers, in defending their lands and places and property, or in persecuting and attacking such unbelievers, or elsewhere in lawful warfare, public or private, against them.<sup>76</sup>

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**74** Michel Mollat, *La vie religieuse aux XIV<sup>e</sup> et XV<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Paris: Les cours de Sorbonne, 1962), 195.

**75** Arnaud Berard, “L’indulgence jubilaire,” *Revue thomiste* 100 (2000): 423–68.

**76** AAV, Reg. Vat. 261, fol. 42v (Reg. Av. 155, fol. 469r), analyzed by François Avril et al., eds., *Urbain V (1362–1370): Lettres communes analysées d’après les registres dits d’Avignon et du Vatican* (Paris: Bibliothèque des Écoles françaises de Rome et d’Athènes, 1954), no. 6 419, of which we give the transcription from the register: “Vestris supplicationibus inclinati ut confessor quam quilibet vestrum ac eorumdem donatorum, servitorum et stipendiariorum qui in eisdem partibus vos et alios christi fideles necnon vos et ipsorum fidelium terras ac loca et bona defendendo aut eosdem infideles persequendo et offendendo, aut alias in bello legitimo, publico vel privato cum infidelibus eisdem commisso vel etiam postea ex ipso tamen bello vulnerati seu alias lesi et debilitati seu infirmitati aut alias in manibus infidelium eorumdem

The letter has a broad penitential scope. It is addressed to the master and brothers of the order, as well as to *conversi* (lay brothers), servants, and warriors in their employ. We learn that they will automatically receive full remission from their sins if they are wounded in the Holy Land at the hands of infidels. The crusade then replaced the usual penances, allowing men, women, children, free or enslaved, to benefit from a broader salvation in exchange for their participation in the liberation of the Holy Land—whether through financial contributions or by making the journey in person and fighting to extend Christian influence in those lands.

This inclusive and “rewarding” attitude towards disability found resonance within secular governments. In 1425, a prince such as Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy, could appoint an amputee veteran as castellan of Beveren to compensate for his inability to continue campaigning.<sup>77</sup> The question remains as to how to what extent these kinds of decisions were customary, and whether they depended on circumstances, such as being closely connected with a lord or being part of potent networks of power. Sources argue that the social and moral protection enjoyed by warriors during their service stopped as soon as the army—if it was not permanent—was demobilized. This is probably also because of those situations in which the petitioners asked for support from the prince after the end of a campaign (Verreycken). This also provides a framework for an inquiry into the self-perception of the state, the principality, or the prince. Did the officers and servants of the institution in question consider their responsibility to ensure the well-being of those who suffered while serving under their prince’s authority? Did this care also serve to strengthen a sense of belonging, and thus contribute to the development of the “modern,” centralized state that is often encountered in institutional developments?

To date, studies have emphasized that late medieval rulers did not organize extensive systems of care for injured fighters but did for injured artists, with the duke of Burgundy paying a pension to an artist because of *sa debilitacion et vieillesse* (“his disability and old age”).<sup>78</sup> However, Wendy J. Turner

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decesseritis seu decesserint duxerit eligendum omnium peccatorum vestrorum et ipsorum de quibus corde contriti et ore confessi fueritis seu fuerint semel tamen in mortis articulo plenam remissionem.”

**77** Latin de Coninglant in 1425. Kevin Poschet and Bart Verwerft, “De Vlaamse burchtvoogd: Een grafelijke pion op het politieke schaakbord? Casus Beveren, Rupelmonde en Saaftinge (ca. 1300–1550),” *Revue belge de philologie et d’histoire* 100 (2022): 941–1004.

**78** Federica Veratelli, *À la mode italienne: Commerce du luxe et diplomatie dans les*

has emphasized the existence of a care system dedicated to certain former warriors in England, and Michael Depreter has highlighted how pensions could occasionally be granted to veterans, especially those belonging to the prince's hotel. Scholars usually attribute this situation to the incomplete nature of a medieval state which would not *yet* assume responsibility for the welfare of its citizens. This is probably too teleologic a view. One should bear in mind that medieval armies were micro-societies of their own. They were built to take care of themselves and their components. A captain's main duty was to keep the people serving him as fit and safe as they could be by ensuring they had access to food, drinks, pastoral care, and thus medical support. In accordance with this, it would make no sense for him to delegate the care of the injured and disabled to the prince he was serving. Additionally, following the conclusion of their military campaign, warriors returned to their regular occupations and social networks. This meant a return to solidarity systems, whether familial or professional. For instance, the Flemish guilds provided surgical care to their members to prevent fatalities and the onset of permanent disabilities, a system Duke Charles of Burgundy seemed to have wished to challenge (Depreter).

A further consideration is that medieval fighters were likely to be reluctant to acknowledge their own disability, even if this entailed their prince providing them with a pension. To a certain extent, it could be argued that a pension for injuries equated to a public mark for disability. This correlation between injuries and money could serve as a venue for future research into theories and practices of early modern disabilities. This was evidently concomitant with the fact that warriors were very much aware how slow princely treasuries could be in paying army wages. No pensions were awarded by princes to disabled warriors—with some exceptions, such as Burgundian or Venetian gunners because one did not wish to see their expertise going to a rival (Depreter, Gagné)—as responsibility for the disabled was considered to depend on guilds. One might consider that it was only once the armies underwent a steady rise in their size and were composed of an ever-larger proportion of commoners that captains had to let the state, or the principality, develop its own system of care for disabled warriors. On a parallel note, it is worth mentioning that archaeology has shed light on a trend towards blows that were deliberately lethal. The battlefields that have been scrutinized are quite rare and distant in place and time, which should preclude

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*Pays-Bas méridionaux (1477–1530). Édition critique de documents de la Chambre des comptes de Lille* (Villeneuve-d'Ascq-Lille: Presses universitaires du Septentrion–Archives départementales du Nord, 2013), 306, no. 120.

excessive generalization. However, figures point toward a progressive diminution of infra-cranial injuries simultaneously with an increase in cranio-facial wounds. This phenomenon may be connected with the evolution of the late medieval “military society,” which comprised an increasing number of non-noble combatants who could not be exchanged for ransoms and were therefore potentially perceived as more expendable than other individuals. Moreover, this may have led to an increase in mental trauma cases (Knüsel). This increased necessity for a care system may explain why such institutions appeared exclusively during the early modern period, and why their absence during the Middle Ages does not signify more rudimentary societal considerations for disability.

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In order to foster dialogue between diverse case studies, we have chosen not to formally divide the volume into sections. It was impossible to assign each chapter to one of the three key themes outlined in the introduction, as all these themes emerge organically across the essays. The complexity of the lived experiences of medieval disabled soldiers rarely allows for the full reconstruction of an individual’s life trajectory to be traced, from the event that caused the impairment to its aftermath and the ways they coped with it in daily life. The collection begins with an exploration of the physical evidence of combat injuries (Knüsel); moves into literary representations of disability in Icelandic sagas (Tirosh) and Middle English Arthurian romance (Hildebrand); and continues with an examination of criminal (Verreycken), historical, legal, and medical archives (Pfau, Turner). The final three chapters cover German-language traumatological and autobiographical narratives (Frohne); the visual, textual, and physical significance of the iron hand prosthesis (Gagné); and the support provided to veterans in the Burgundian Low Countries (Depreter). This arrangement allows for recurring motifs (visibility of wounds, negotiation of identity, role of institutions) to surface across disciplines and documentation. Indeed, by drawing on a wide range of sources (historical, archaeological, literary, legal, medical, and material), the essays collected here not only showcase the methodological diversity required to study war-related disability in the Late Middle Ages but also engage in a sustained conversation across disciplinary boundaries. The structure of the volume thus reflects our intention to foster this dialogue between military and disability history by allowing interpretative paradigms and research questions to emerge from the intersections and resonances between individual contributions, rather than by forcing a rigid thematic compartmentalization onto the subject.

