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Chivalry and Knighthood

A Overview

The self-conception of the medieval ruling elite was that of the professional warrior. Chivalry, combining the ideas of *militia* (military service), *chivalry* (the physical skills, notably horsemanship), and *courtesy* (an aristocratic way of life), was the code by means of which members of this elite related to one another. It thus had very real political, social, and military repercussions. Emerging from the confluence of classical values, barbarian culture, and Christian piety, ideas of chivalry and knighthood raise issues of conduct in war, class and *habitus*, and problems of Christian warfare. Though its importance was somewhat downplayed by the emphasis placed on common experience by the social-historical turn of the late twentieth century, a new generation of historians is rediscovering the significance of the *mentalité* of chivalry and knighthood for our understanding of the Middle Ages. The business of knighthood was, after all, the business of war—"politics by other means" as Clausewitz put it—and is critical for understanding not only medieval culture, but understanding the making of modernity.

Historiographical controversies abound. Many scholars have debated the reality and effect of such an idea, from Johan Huizinga calling it "an *aesthetic ideal assuming the appearance of ethical ideal*" and accusing its practitioners as being out of touch with reality (1919; Huizinga 1924, 58), to Malcolm Vale (1981) and Maurice Keen (1984) rehabilitating the idea, to Matthew Strickland, in his landmark *War and Chivalry*, arguing that, at least in the Anglo-Norman world, it was more observed in the breach than the observance (Strickland 1996). More recently, historians such as Steven Muhlberger (2002; 2005) and Richard Kaeuper (2009) have used the texts of chivalry to illustrate dynamic conversation within societies.

To write on such a fraught and significance-laden subject as chivalry is no easy matter. The sources themselves are difficult to contend with: fantastic romances, anti-knightly clerical harangues, ideological tracts by knights and churchmen alike, chroniclers' accounts that may or may not be filtered through the lenses of idealism and patronage. Added to this is the fact that the study of chivalry reaches into many categories of concern to modern historians—power structures, religious observance, gender, and violence, to name a few. My aim in this brief article is not to discuss the definition or role of the nobility (for this, see Nadia Pawelchak's article on "Courts and Aristocracy" in this handbook), but

rather to limit myself to the major points made in the scholarly literature and major issues in the history of chivalry and knighthood. I shall begin with a historiographical overview, then proceed to discuss secular and religious conceptions of chivalry, the transformations of the late Middle Ages, the role of tournaments and deeds of arms, regional variations, and, finally, the afterlife of chivalry in the early modern period.

B Historiography

Nineteenth-century scholars saw chivalry through the lenses of both romanticism and historical positivism. While there was never any doubt as to the reality of such a code, it was seen as a figment of irrational barbarism, a symptom of the benighted feudal age from which Western civilization would need to awaken. Sir Charles Oman, for instance, called chivalry an “absurd perversion of the art of war” (Oman 1885, 125). While writers such as Scott and Hugo and painters such as Waterhouse, Leighton, and Rossetti might romanticize the days of old when knights were bold, and certainly chivalry could make for picturesque (or picaresque) literary scenes, insofar as the science of war went, a strategy based on notions of chivalry was seen as a fundamentally unsound idea.

This critical perspective of the military historians was continued in a cultural vein by Johan Huizinga in his *Waning of the Middle Ages* (1919 Dutch: *Herfsttij der Middeleeuwen*; 1996 *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*), the Dutch historian eloquently argued that late medieval society was a time of decadence and decline. Whereas the high Middle Ages had been a time of high culture and ideals made manifest, by the fourteenth century the eloquent language of chivalry and courtly love was a fair skin concealing a rotten core. In many ways, the sense of decay and the worthlessness of norms found in Huizinga is typical of post-World War I thinkers such as Spengler; Huizinga participated in Hegel’s idealistic impulses, but the dominant theme in his narrative is decline, not progress.

While Huizinga’s pessimism was echoed by Kilgour in his *Decline of Chivalry* (Kilgour 1937) and Ferguson’s *The Indian Summer of English Chivalry* (Ferguson 1960), Malcolm Vale, in his *War and Chivalry* (Vale 1981), and Jean Flori, in his *L’idéologie du glaive* (Flori 1983) did a great deal to rehabilitate the idea of chivalry. Not only does the idea of *jus in bello* seem to be a human universal (even if one more honored in the breach than the observance), but chivalric orders were integral to the development of the state. Similarly, for Maurice Keen in his seminal monograph *Chivalry* (Keen 1984), chivalry was not only the self-conception of the elite, and thus valuable to study in its own right, but a means through which Christian ethics could be absorbed into society at large. Amongst its legacies was

that it provided the currency for an economy of honor. For Vale, Flori, and Keen, chivalry was something real, meaningful, and valuable to later ages.

Matthew Strickland (1996, 19), looking at “chivalry” as overwhelmingly something that happens on the battlefield, has questioned Huizinga’s assumption of a golden age. While not disputing the essential utility of a code of chivalry, Strickland argued that the pragmatic and often savage actions wartime of the Anglo-Norman aristocracy rendered it a code more honored in the breach than the observance: “The tensions between ideals of conduct and actual behavior in war itself were present *ab initio* in the Anglo-Norman period, if not indeed existing as a universal paradox within the culture of any warrior aristocracy.”

More recent historians have sought to resolve contradictions by looking more closely at the ideology and internal logic of chivalry. In his several works, Steven Muhlberger (2002; 2005; 2012; 2014) has examined tournaments and deeds of arms as activities integral to the identity and performance of the medieval elite. Malcolm Vale has identified the lordly court as the locus of advancement as one of the reasons behind the growth of courtesy (Vale 2001), while C. Stephen Jaeger has identified its origins with neo-classical virtues in tenth-century German episcopal courts (Jaeger 1985). For his part, Richard Kaeuper has stressed the knights’ own role in recognizing and debating the various paradoxes that so concern modern historians (Kaeuper 1999a) including the religious ideology of chivalry (Kaeuper 2009). In his forthcoming *Medieval Chivalry*, Kaeuper will provide a capstone to his work by emphasizing the practicality of chivalry for its practitioners and how it affected, and was affected by, the emerging ideals and institutions of modernity (Kaeuper, forthcoming).

C Secular and Sacred Chivalry

Secular Chivalry

Knighthood emerged from the disorder of the post-Carolingian world. In the tenth century, Europe was in a state of anarchy: There was no central authority, but rather local powers claiming legitimacy by building fortresses in a process known as encastellation. Magnates, exercising “bad lordship,” oppressed, extorted, and bullied the peasantry. Underlying this was an economic malaise and endemic violence and feuding between the various local powers. The manner in which these magnates and their followers fought, as the word for “knight” in most European vernaculars reveals, was as mounted warriors. This was the Frankish way of war, developed in the Carolingian era (see “Weapons, Warfare, Siege Machinery, and Training in Arms” in this handbook). (It is worth mentioning here

that we are speaking of the Anglo-French conception of chivalry, which we will take as the normative one.)

In its most basic form, we can see the emergence of a code of chivalry as a series of rational choice decisions amongst the members of this fighting elite: If you spare my life today, my people will spare yours tomorrow; you can profit from capturing me, if you trust me to ransom myself. Likewise, in civil life, the feudal relationship of vassal to lord was essentially one of service. This included personal service, such as carving at table and pouring wine. In time, this *courtesy* (“how one behaves at court”) became an elaborate code of behavior specifying the ideal behavior of the knight to all he might encounter, friend or foe—the *habitus* of the ruling class. Chivalry was, in other words, the self-conception of the Frankish warrior-elite. To be a *miles* was not just the profession of soldiering, but part of ruling-class identity. Thus, while not all knights were high nobles, high nobles thought of themselves as knights.

However, to take such a reductionist view would be to ignore the ethical and religious qualities of chivalry. The Transformation of the Year 1000 resulted from a conflux of factors ranging from agricultural innovation to the institution of primogeniture to the reform of the Church. For our purposes, the crucial element in this cultural revival was the Peace of God—the assertion of moral authority by ecclesiastical leaders, the condemnation of internecine war between Christians, and the insistence on the idea that the rights of the Church and of non-combatants should be respected (Landes and Head, 1992; Contamine 1987, 270–77). Not only was the Christianization of the *miles* a crucial step in the transformation from “soldiers” to “knights,” but it introduced the idea that the life of the *militia* could be a sanctified one. Chivalric ideology became intimately bound up with religious service, and fighting could become a path to salvation. So successful was this that by 1096, Urban II could issue a call for the European nobility and have it received with mass enthusiasm.

D Knighthood in Christian Society

The discourse of chivalry existed in dynamic relation with other social symbolic discourses, especially those of the Church. Richard Kaeuper (2009), in his *Holy Warriors*, takes a broad synthetic overview of the religious ideology of secular chivalry, examining how knights appropriated symbols, rituals, and forms of practice; accepted those ideologies and rituals laid out for them by churchmen; and invented their own meanings. In short, they exhibited considerable creativity in formulating an ideology and set of symbols meaningful and useful to their profession. Chivalry could become a form of lay independence, a way to appro-

priate and establish norms of belief and practice independent from the Church. Such analysis brings the study of chivalry into the broad historiography of the roots of the Reformation and thus, of modernity.

While many of the aspects of this mentality, such as toughness, a taste for the rigors of the campaign, and a disdain for luxury are to be expected, knighthood also developed its own ceremonies and symbolism similar to those of the priesthood. This can be seen in the late thirteenth-century *Rationale divinatorum officiorum* (*Order of the Divine Office*) of Guillaume Durand, Bishop of Metz; the anonymous thirteenth-century *L'Ordène de Chevalerie* (*The Order of Chivalry*) and an allegorical painting in Harleian MS 3244 discussed by Richard Kaeuper (Kaeuper 2009, 1–5); the Catalan mystic and polymath Ramon Llull's early fourteenth-century *Llibre de l'orde de cavalleria* (*Book on the Order of Chivalry*); the *Livre de chevalerie* (*Book of Chivalry*), and *Demands pour la joute, les tournois, et la guerre* (*Questions on the Joust, Tournaments, and War*) of the French knight Geoffroi de Charny (ca. 1300–1356); and Christine de Pizan's early fifteenth-century *Fais d'armes et de chevalerie* (*Deeds of Arms and Chivalry*). These works share a common interest in the elements of the knightly panoply, and, through these symbols, the virtues of the knight.

Though the symbols often vary between sources, what we find in common amongst all is that there is something sacramental about being dubbed, akin to the sacrament of ordination, and the knight's equipment participates in this. The candidate stands vigil, he is cleansed physically and spiritually, and he is girded with a two-edged sword to administer justice and a white belt for chastity. This, of course, is chastity within lawful marriage: Medieval writers were concerned about how nobility is passed on through the generations (Keen 1984, 158–60), and Geoffroi de Charny even called marriage, that sacrament so key to maintaining the secular world and continuing a lineage, an “order.” This, in some ways, foreshadows Reformation thought and gives us an additional example of the independence lay piety in the Middle Ages.

The writings of these various authors also give us a further anatomy of ideology. From them, it is apparent that a set of knightly virtues arose not in opposition to, but in dynamic conversation with, those espoused by theologians. Virtues such as courage, fortitude, and prowess, or skill at arms, are of course to be expected amongst military men. Others were aimed at constructing social difference: Largesse was magnanimity of spirit, the willingness to sacrifice not just one's body, but one's substance, which we can contrast with the ideology of an elite of commerce. Courtesy was not just etiquette, but literally the culture of the court—the habitus of the ruling class.

Good counsel, which a vassal owes to his lord, was often considered as a virtue. This is shown in the concept of the *preudhomme*, which may be translated

literally as “a trustworthy man” or “man of judgment,” but which carried the connotation of knightliness. This, as the name implies, had as much a connotation of behavior as of lifestyle: “*Car grant difference disoit estre entre preuhomme et preudhomme*,” as Jean de Joinville has St. Louis put it—“there is a great difference between a *preuhomme* [man of judgment] and *preudhomme* [warrior].”

Finally, there was the rather diffuse virtue known as *franchise*—literally, to act as a free man (the term for which is, interestingly, etymologically derived from the “Frank”). This was not just the idea of political enfranchisement—in other words, lordship—but also that which was concomitant with it—the right to administer justice and the right to lawful violence. Ultimately, in Scholastic legal theory, this was derived from the prince. In other words, to wield the secular sword was to exercise franchise—but this was more than an office, an entire way of being that encompassed an idea of *gravitas*. Thus, a single term encompassed both classical ideas of the state—for the knight, in theory, serves a prince—and Germanic warrior-culture.

E The Military Orders

The military orders were perhaps the most explicit linking of Christianity and violence. These were, in the most general terms, monastic orders of knights and their retainers founded to aid in the defense of the Holy Land. Though the Crusader states were definitively lost by the late thirteenth century, military orders figured large in the Baltic Crusades of the later Middle Ages and in the struggle against Ottoman dominance of the Mediterranean in the early modern era.

The first of these orders to be founded, the Hospitallers (also called the Knights of St. John) actually began in the 1020s, before the First Crusade, in order to provide aid to sick and injured pilgrims journeying to the Holy Land. Prominent early orders included the Order of St. James of Altopascio, which may have been the first order to have a military wing; the Spanish Order of Santiago, and the Teutonic Knights. The Templars, founded by Hugues de Payens, originated ca. 1120. At the time, Bernard of Clairvaux was preaching a *militia Christi* to aid the Holy Land, and the idea quickly gained popularity. The Rule of the Templars, attributed to Hughes and Bernard, was confirmed in 1129, and firmly established the knight-monks as a disciplined group of soldiery. The loss of the Holy Land weakened the rationale for the Knights Templar and, combined with the inordinate wealth the order had acquired, contributed to the rationale for their dissolution in 1312.

The Crusading orders were marked by their discipline, but more importantly, they prominently linked military service and service to God. The Christianization

of the *milites* was complete: Fighting on behalf of the Church could be seen as meritorious and even a path to salvation.

F Transformations of the Later Middle Ages

By the end of the fourteenth century, the diffuse lower limit of who belonged to the chivalric class had become a subject of contention. The realities of the Hundred Years' War meant that thousands of armed men claimed the right to lawful violence and a successful soldier could assemble all of the accouterments of knighthood, from armor to horses to followers. Likewise, the Black Death enabled unprecedented social mobility while imperiling the landed class as the price of grain plummeted, with a corresponding reduction of income from estates.

Much of the discussion hinged on idea the *gentilhomme*—that is, someone who literally came from *gens*, “people” but having the connotation of “good family.” This amorphous boundary was a zone of anxiety; the general understanding was that, much as with the Paston family of Norfolk, only the passing of generations could distinguish nobility from common ancestry (see “Time and Timekeeping” in this handbook). It is also true, as Contamine points out, that a certain stratification took place in England between the high nobility and what would become the “gentility” such that an earl would be insulted to be called a mere *gentilhomme*, whereas in France, to be *gentilhomme* was unquestionably part of the *noblesse* and thus was regarded as having more in common with a count or baron than this English counterpart (Contamine, 1987). A *gen d'armes* (man at arms), even if not a knight, if properly and lawfully clad in full armor, was fit to contest with even a king on the field of battle. Yet, in civil life, we also see the lowest rungs of the *noblesse*—those who could only be called *gentilhommes* in France, and, later, the *hidalgos* or “sons of someone” in Spain—regarded as almost a parody of knightliness, poor country cousins desperately holding onto claims of status that, from the point of view of the true *grandees*, were all but imaginary.

It is also in the late Middle Ages that we begin to see, in association with the consolidation of modern states, high chivalric orders come into being. Notable early orders include the Garter in England (1348) and the Star in France (1352), though most, such as the Order of the Golden Fleece in Burgundy (1430) and the Order of St. Michael in France (1469), are fifteenth century. The goals of these orders were rooted in politics—to tie the high nobility to the monarch, and to bind him, in turn, to them in mutual obligation (Vale 1981). The Duke of Burgundy, for instance, had to consult with the members of the Order of the Golden Fleece before going to war. We can thus recognize in them a step toward the creation of the nation-state and parliamentary government.

G The Role of Tournaments and Deeds of Arms

The origins of the tournament likely lie in late Roman military exercises, filtered through Carolingian military drill. By the eleventh century, it had taken the form of nominally friendly battles that nonetheless ranged over hill and dale and often employed archers and foot soldiers. These rough-and-tumble events strongly shaded into internecine war and drew condemnation from the Church and secular rulers alike.

The tournament was also a useful way to gather together the notables of the land, and thus politically expedient. In time, these activities became more regulated, with accepted rules and often an emphasis on state-theater, such as in the round tables held by Edward I and his grandson Edward III. Conversely, the earls who murdered Edward II's favorite Piers Gaveston used the pretense of a tournament to organize their forces. As prizes were awarded and other participants could be captured for ransom, tournaments were also a path to upward mobility: William Marshal began his career as a successful veteran of the tournament circuit. In addition to politics, personal aggrandizement, and, of course, combat training, such events were also an opportunity to evaluate horses under the stresses of combat and exchange equine breeding stock.

Besides the political and economic uses of tournaments, an argument can be made that tournaments helped to define class and gender difference. Participation in a tournament—or one's ancestors having done so—was *prima facie* evidence of nobility and of the right to bear a coat of arms. Ruth Mazo Karras, in her *From Boys to Men* (2002, 21–66), discusses the performative aspect of the tournament: In a sense, one only becomes male under the gaze of others, displaying prowess—skill at arms—in front of both men and women.

Combat-by-convention transformed along with the anxieties and needs of the knightly class. The early-to mid-fourteenth century tournament as described by Geoffroi de Charny in the early fourteenth century was still primarily a *mêlée*, albeit one that had become civilized, with defined boundaries and rules. However, Froissart, in his late fourteenth and early fifteenth-century *Chronicles*, concentrates more on “deeds of arms” which took the place of individual combat, interspersing scenes of the destruction of society—the realities of war—with its reaffirmation, that is, men-at-arms meeting in idealized combat. These encounters were quite different from tournaments proper. They could be conducted with sharp weapons and were often more antagonistic than agonistic, taking on more the character of judicial duels, or, as with the Combat of the Thirty in 1351, Homeric contests of champions. Others, such as the St. Inglevert Jousts of 1390, were troublesome to royal authority, but helped to reassure both the participants and audience (both first- and second-

hand) of their common social status despite the reality of war between their kingdoms. Because they were so troublesome to royal authority—for the issuing of challenges to the English without royal permission bordered on *lèse majesté*—the obvious solution was to put them under royal control, with Charles VI paying the expenses from his own pocket. Thus began the royal, centralized sponsorship of tournaments that would become the norm over the next two centuries.

Normative writings on chivalry also give us insights into the elite concept of *jus in bello* and an elite concept of war as, ideally, a sort of grand (if potentially lethal) tournament with expected norms. Charny, in his *Questions Concerning the Joust, Tournaments, and War* (Muhlberger 2002; 2014), is very much concerned with how knights should conduct themselves in the liminal regions of expected behavior, offering questions, but no answers, to his reader. The central issue in his questions on the tournament and jousting is interpreting the rules of the tournament to determine “who gets the horse?,” while many of his questions on war center on when, and if, someone has broken their word. This at first seems at odd with the Vegetian nature of fourteenth-century warfare (see my article on “Weapons, Warfare, Siege Machinery, and Training in Arms” in this handbook). However, it was a way of negotiating between the realities of war and the ordained structure of medieval society.

In the same way as the deeds of arms of the fourteenth century resolved the disorder of the Hundred Years’ War, we can see the class anxiety of the fifteenth century played out in tournaments. Jousting, with its greater emphasis on individual performance and display, began to replace *mêlée*, though this latter form continued to be popular—most famously, in the ca. 1460 tournament book of René of Anjou (1409–1480), who also specifies that if anyone who is not of unimpeachably gentle descent comes to be lightly beaten by the great princes as a sort of ritual welcoming into the company. The Burgundian court was particularly famous for its theatrical, allegorical *pas d’armes*. This form of deed of arms, sprung from the custom of a knight holding a bridge or gate against all comers, is attested as early as the eleventh century and probably has Germanic roots. In the fifteenth century, such deeds took on the form of state theater—though the combat was no less real or intense.

Noel Fallows, in his excellent *Jousting in Medieval and Renaissance Iberia* (2010), gives a detailed description of expected behavior in similar events in fifteenth-century Iberia. Jousting manuals detailed all elements of comportment, from the manner of riding to the quality and type of armor used to the handling of the lance. By the fifteenth century, the tournament may thus be called a “martial performance”: a means of demonstrating, through learned gesture, acquired taste, and carefully practiced skill, one’s class and status.

René's sumptuous book detailing plans for a tournament that was probably never actually held, also shows the decreasing role of and increasingly dependent nobility, from sponsor of tournaments to arbiter of taste. From the other end of the social scale, burghers and others whose estates were rising were also becoming increasingly interested in the tournament and martial performance. Early civic jousts are ill-attested, but probably took place in the Low Countries by the thirteenth century. By the later Middle Ages, fencing schools were flourishing, jousts and civic festivals were commonly held in Italian town squares, and several German cities kept jousting equipment for loan to the sons of the burghers in the municipal armory. One early sixteenth-century jousting, Walther Marx of Donauwörth, Bavaria (1456–1511), even made light of his humble origins by bearing a helmet crest of three sausages on a spike.

H Regional Variations of Chivalry

The preceding passages referred to the Anglo-French understanding of knighthood and chivalry. This was not, however, the only understanding of the concept, though a case might be made that, as they were a Frankish ideas, they were the normative one. Nonetheless, substantive variations of ideas of chivalry and knighthood existed in other parts of Western Europe.

I Chivalry in the Germanic World

The institution of knighthood was different in German-speaking lands. As nobles were not inclined to take service under other nobles, a class of *ministeriales*, or unfree knights, arose in the eleventh century. Such status was passed on in matrilineal line. These knights could perform valuable administrative tasks, including holding castles, judgeships, and stewardships, could enjoy high social rank, and even had vassals of their own. Others found themselves in dire financial straits and even reduced to banditry. Yet, these *ministeriales* all shared common legal status: They were unfree, not able to marry without their lords' consent, nor, in theory to pass on their holdings to their spouses and heirs. This last, of course, was not universal, and *ministeriales* could and did enjoy both heritable fiefs and social mobility. Since holding castles and performing a knight's military role meant having access to considerable wealth, the status and lifestyle of this group tended toward that of the nobility of the rest of Europe, and their unfree status tended to serve the purpose of binding them to their liege lords (Arnold 1985).

By the fourteenth century, this class had come under two types of stress: the contraction of the manorial economy, which further bifurcated the divide between rich and poor knights, and the consolidation of what Arnold calls “more state-like territorial lordships” (Arnold 1985, 252). Further, the ties of personal unfreedom had become legally outmoded. Arnold, who interprets the *ministeriales* in the light of classical feudal models and state-formation, holds that those who survived the crisis formed the basis for the *Freiherren* who “carried over the *ministeriales*’ tradition of military and administrative service into the princely territories and states of early modern and more recent times” (Arnold 1985, 253).

II Chivalry and Chivalric Performance in Italy

Knighthood in Italy was a more malleable idea than in northern Europe, as a semipermeable membrane existed between those born to the purple of commerce and those risen from the ranks of the aristocracy. This was complicated by the omnipresence of successful mercenaries, favored bastards, nobility exiled in internecine conflict, occasional imperial grand tours, and burghers placed in charge of communes and endowed with landed estates. As William Caferro points out, in the late fourteenth century the term “sir” could equally be applied to the English mercenary John Hawkwood (ca. 1320–1394); Ambrogio Visconti (1344–1373), bastard son of the ruler of Milan; and Francesco Carmagnola (1380–1432), son of a cowherd (Caferro 2006, 9). Political events such as the Ciompi revolt of 1378 were likewise accompanied by frenzies of knight-making. Many of these “knights” were highly unmartial: The fourteenth-century writer Franco Sacchetti (ca. 1335–ca. 1400) tells a comic story of a meek knight who is chosen *podestà* of Padua and, to make himself seem more impressive, has a crest of a ferocious bear made for his helmet. On his journey to the city he has been elected to govern, he encounters a gigantic and bellicose German knight who happens to carry the same crest of a bear. Rather than fight, the Italian knight sells his crest at a profit, and each man departs thinking he got the better of the bargain.

Leonardo Bruni, in his *De Militia* (1440), called for a reform of knighthood and cast it in a return to classical values. The knight, in this humanist rendition, was the defender of the city-state or body politic. But, in fact, most of the performance of chivalry in Italy took in a conventional form: the splendid pageants of the d’Este and Visconti were echoed by Lorenzo de’ Medici (1449–1492), and Italian knights such as Galeazzo da Mantova (d. 1406) took part in deeds of arms with no less gusto than their northern counterparts. And, while the elite of the communes liked to imagine themselves as chivalric warriors, mercenaries, including both scions of noble houses and those of lesser birth, ruled the battlefield.

I Chivalry in Literature

The subject of chivalry in literature, and the chivalric romance, is far too vast a subject to give a proper account here (see the contribution to this handbook by Cristian Bratu on “Literature”). Chivalry and chivalric themes can be found in all genres of medieval literature: history, poetic epics, didactic works, satire, travel accounts, etc. Certain characters occur and reoccur over the centuries, altered, from the *Chanson de Roland* at the very beginning of the formation of the chivalric ethos to Boiardo’s *Orlando Innamorato* (published in 1495) and Ariosto’s *Orlando Furioso* (1516–32), written to flatter Renaissance despots. Biblical heroes such as David were recast in a chivalric light as the Nine Worthies.

Most famous, of course, is Arthur, King of the Britons, who went from a reference in the ninth-century *Historia Brittonum* to Geoffrey of Monmouth’s fanciful twelfth-century *Historia Regum Britanniae*, to Chrétien de Troyes’s romances a generation later. In his train we find agglutinated other characters, such as Lancelot and Gawain, Catalan stories of the Grail, and Provençal ideas of courtly love. The German tradition of *Minnesang* (“love-songs”) began in the late twelfth century and is best exemplified by works dated from that century such as the poems and verse narratives of Wolfram von Eschenbach, Gottfried von Strassburg, and Hartmann von Aue. Though the *Minnesänger* were clearly influenced by the Provençal *troubadours* and northern French *trouvères*, the *minnelieder* were clearly designed for a court milieu, matching the importance of courts as centers for social advancement east of the Rhine (see Albrecht Classen’s contribution on “Love, Sex, and Marriage”). Similarly, in the late fifteenth century, Thomas Malory’s *Le Morte D’Arthur* reflects the anxieties of the chivalric class in the rapidly changing early modern era. In short, what we can say for the Matter of Britain is what we can say for chivalric literature in general: It bears the imprint of its times.

J The Sixteenth Century and After

Most authorities see the decline of chivalry as brought by the military revolution and the increasing emphasis on large, state-sponsored infantry armies (Keen 1984). The economic, social, and military justification for the knight was ended; his modern descendent is the military officer. As for the performance of social role at sword’s point, factional conflicts and the desire to prove oneself with arms were channeled into the private duel (Anglo 2001, Neumann 2010). Even as ritualized tournaments became sundered from military realities during the course of the fifteenth century, private quarrels became matters carried out in shirt-sleeves, decried by traditionalists such as the fencing master Pietro Monte in 1509

as fit for “pimps, blasphemers, and shopkeepers” (Anglo 1989, 266). The private civilian duel, not requiring a field granted by the ruler, became firmly established by the Chataigneraie-Jarnac debacle in 1547 and the condemnation of the Council of Trent in its twenty-fourth session.

Nonetheless, concepts of knighthood and chivalry remained important to early modern statecraft, and jousts became a *de rigueur* state ritual. Elizabeth I’s (r. 1558–1603) official program of propaganda included the Accession Day jousts and other chivalric spectacles in which the nobility vied for her favor, as well as literature such as Edmund Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* and the works of Philip Sidney. In *ancien régime* France, equestrian carousels, jousts, and other state theater had distinct chivalric overtones (van Orden 2004). In Italy, such efforts were attempts by regional princely rulers to bolster their images even as they became increasingly marginalized. For instance, in the 1560s Alfonso II d’Este attempted—disastrously—to imitate the French show-tournaments in order to improve the status of his regime and city (Marcigliano 2003). Likewise, Cervantes’s picaresque humor in *Don Quixote* relies on his readers’ familiarity with tropes of chivalric literature. Long after the armored knight lost his place of honor on the battlefield (if he ever held it—see my article in this handbook, “Weapons, Warfare, Siege Machinery, and Training in Arms”), chivalry as an ideology and a cultural touchstone remained very much alive in Europe.

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