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Mittelalter – Moyen Âge (500–1500)

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David Crouch, Jeroen Deploige (ed.), Knighthood and Society in the High Middle Ages, Louvain (Presses universitaires de Louvain) 2020, XII–317 p. (Mediaevalia Lovaniensia. Series I. Studia, 48), ISBN 978-94-6270-170-0, EUR 59,50.

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Both knighthood and chivalry remain exceptionally popular topics of academic study, embodying as they do much of the romantic spirit with which many modern scholars as well as the general reading public wish to endow the Middle Ages. It is this very romanticism, however, which has led so many scholars astray in their efforts to identify putatively fundamental shifts in European culture and society in the long 12th century. Several pitfalls have ensnared numerous scholars in their efforts to describe this putatively new era of the high Middle Ages. The first of these is an unwillingness or perhaps inability to define their terms within the epistemologically sound requirements of necessity and sufficiency. As a result, the words »knight«, »knighthood«, »chivalry«, and the various adjectival forms of the latter are used promiscuously in a vast array of contexts without providing a clear understanding to the reader of what is actually being discussed.

A second methodological error seen in a great many studies of knighthood and chivalry is the tendency to treat the long 12th century as a *tabula rasa*, without any antecedents in the early Middle Ages. As a consequence, the vast corpus of literary and historical works composed in the preceding half millennium, which provide enormous quantities of information about aristocratic self-consciousness, martial values, morality, appropriate courtly conduct, and a whole host of other matters that would appear to be of intrinsic concern to the study of knighthood and chivalry, is simply ignored.

A third, and equally problematic sin of omission is the tendency to divorce the reality of military organization and the conduct of war from discussions of the supposed rise of knighthood and the concomitant practice of chivalry. In this context, historians of knighthood have assiduously ignored the reality that the vast majority of men who earned their living through the practice of arms from the end of Roman imperial rule through the end of the medieval millennium were of low social and economic status. Concomitantly, the vast majority of aristocratic men were not professional soldiers, nor were they »warriors« to use a term beloved by modern devotees of chivalry. Nevertheless, such aristocratic men, along with all other landowners of whatever social and economic status, were required throughout the medieval millennium to serve in the army of the *res publica* and were summoned to do so by the legitimate ruler. Indeed, such

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levies provided the numerically preponderant element of the military forces of rulers well into the early modern era. Moreover, the great majority of these landowners served on foot in the ruler's army, and there never was a time when mounted »warriors« dominated warfare in medieval Europe either numerically or tactically.

In this context, the editors of the text under review, David Crouch and Jeroen Deploige, take as their starting point the assumption that something new and special took place in the course of the long 12th century in the context of which an undefined »knighthood« developed in conjunction with the model of *preudhommie*, which Crouch, in particular, has discussed at length in other publications. The subsections in the introduction dealing, respectively, with »Chivalry as a Historiographical Construct« as well as »Knighthood and Nobilisation«, both focus on the long 12th century and do not consider any early medieval antecedents. Nor do the editors provide epistemologically sound definitions of either knighthood or chivalry. Rather Crouch and Deploige identify the different ideologies of the various national scholarly traditions as the key stumbling blocks to moving forward in our understanding of these two supposedly defining characteristics of the high medieval period. The goal of the volume, therefore, is to begin the process of bringing together these national traditions, with studies that focus on England, France, and the German Empire.

The first section of the volume, »Noble Warriors, Warring Nobles«, comprises three essays, which consider, in turn, the kingdom of France, the German Empire, and the Anglo-Norman Realm. The first of these, by Dominique Barthélemy, largely reprises the arguments that this scholar has made in numerous previous studies regarding the relationship between chivalry and warfare in early and high medieval France. Of particular importance is Barthélemy's assertion that warfare both before and after the year 1000 was dominated by small numbers of aristocratic horsemen, and concomitantly that participation in war was central to a noble manner of life. In this context, Barthélemy does not address the well-established scholarly tradition that warfare was dominated by sieges, which required the mobilization of large numbers of men on foot, most of whom were members of expeditionary levies of the various principalities that emerged from the erstwhile kingdom of Charles the Bald.

Barthélemy also does not address the fact, well known to specialists in medieval warfare, that most mounted troops, whether paid professionals, e. g. mercenaries, or wealthy landowners, dismounted for combat. Nor does Barthélemy address the need by rulers to impose fines on landowners to compel them to take up arms in service of the *res publica*, a reality that calls into question just how central armed combat was to aristocratic self-identity. Perhaps most striking is Barthélemy's continued insistence on using the terminology of »feudal warfare« almost thirty years after the publication of Susan Reynolds' »Fiefs and Vassals«, and the nearly universal recognition, at least outside of France, that the

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feudal construct has no value for understanding the reality of early and high medieval Europe.

In the second essay, Jörg Peltzer addresses the broad topic of knighthood in the German Empire, with a focus on the lands north of the Alps. Peltzer does not define either knight or knighthood in this essay, but rather relies on the now outdated studies by Josef Fleckenstein and Franz-Reiner Erkens to assert that the Latin term *miles*, going back to the 10th century, meant both »vassal« and »warrior«. However, as the present author has demonstrated in several published works, up through the late 11th century, the term *miles* in the German kingdom was used exclusively to denote men who made their living as professional soldiers, most of whom were drawn from the lower social and economic strata of society. The term *miles* never was used in this period as a synonym for »vassal«, and only a small number of *milites* received *beneficia* rather than pay or basic sustenance for their military labor. Notably these *milites* included men denoted in 10th and 11th century charters as *servi*. Peltzer does cite the works of Joachim Bumke, who demonstrated in an analysis of both vernacular and Latin texts that *miles* and the German equivalent *Ritter* retained their essential meaning as »soldier« into the later 12th century, and particularly into the reign of Emperor Frederick Barbarossa (1153–1190). However, he does not address Bumke's central argument that the patronage of literary works by Barbarossa's court and the adoption of the »identity« of the *miles* by Barbarossa, himself, led to the expansion of the semantic field of this term, and ultimately to the diminution of the number of men, who were included within this semantic field. In short, many men of the lower social and economic strata who made a living as professional fighting men no longer were denoted by the term *miles* in the course of the 13th century. As a consequence of missing this crucial aspect of the way in which the semantic field of the term *miles* changed, Peltzer's conclusion that the creation of knighthood in Germany was a social process over the course of the 13th century ultimately misrepresents what actually happened. There was no underlying change in the social and economic status of the men who engaged in war, or the basis on which they performed this service. Rather, what we are seeing is a change in the terminology used to denote different groups of combatants.

In the third essay in this section, Eljas Oksanen argues that there was a fundamental change in the contemporary perception of paid soldiers and mercenaries over the course of the late 11th through the 13th century as the result of the emergence of knighthood. In this context, Oksanen correctly observes that the legal category of knighthood was established in the later 12th century by King Henry II of England (1154–1189), although he downplays the specific connection between wealth and knightly status set in motion by this ruler. However, Oksanen does not follow this insight by observing the way in which terminology used by the English royal government to denote various types of fighting men changed over the course of the 13th century. In particular, men with the legal status of knight, with concomitant legal rights and responsibilities,

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were exclusively denoted as *milites*. By contrast, fighting men of lower social and economic backgrounds, whether they served on horseback or on foot, who were denoted as *milites* in all manner of texts in the 11th and earlier 12th century, in the 13th century were denoted with a range of other terms. These included *armigeri*, *servientes ad arma*, *scutiferi*, and ultimately *soldarii*. Consequently, what we see happening in the Anglo-Norman realm parallels quite closely the contemporary terminological shift that took place in Germany. However, just as was true in Germany, there was no change in the underlying military institutions. It was still the case that wealthy men had the responsibility to serve the *res publica* militarily, and that the vast majority of men, who served the Anglo-Norman and Angevin kings militarily, were neither wealthy aristocrats nor did they possess high social status. In short, there was a new category in England beginning in the later 12th century, but this was a legal category tied to wealth with concomitant rights and obligations, and not a new military category with a new military-social culture.

The second section, »Knighthood and Lineage«, includes two studies. The first of these, by Sara McDougall, offers a sustained critique of the model of aristocratic family structure identified most closely with Georges Duby. Rather bracingly, McDougall describes Duby's conception of the creation of aristocratic dynasties based on primogeniture in the male line as a »fiction« (p. 99). In place of a patrilineal and primogeniture-based model, which she says is anachronistic before the late 12th century, McDougall offers a much broader model of the aristocratic family that drew on relationships on the maternal and paternal sides. She also emphasizes the importance of investigating the impact of second marriages, divorces, and the production of illegitimate children on the shape of the aristocrat family, which she casts as acting in the manner of an interest group pursuing a collective goal of acquiring and keeping lands and offices. McDougall makes a number of important points, and her critique of the older patrilineal model is both compelling and overdue. What is less clear is why such an expansive view of the aristocratic family makes it »chivalric« as McDougall has it in the title of her essay. Generations of German scholars have presented much the same model of the aristocratic family in the Ottonian and Salian periods of the tenth through the early 12th century, that is to say before the supposed birth of chivalry.

The second essay in this section, by Jean-François Nieus, offers a narrower focus on just one family, beginning with the career of a man named Sigard, who served in the retinue of Count Arnulf II of Flanders (965–988), and tracing his descendants into the late 11th century. Nieus' starting assumption that the noble class »must have been the backbone of the Flemish armies« in the 11th century is not sustainable; nor is his suggestion that the 1000 *milites* mentioned in the Anglo-Flemish military contract of 1101 were »knights«. The armies of the counts of Flanders, like those of all of their neighbors, were tripartite in organization, comprising the military household of the count, the military households of his magnates,

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and most importantly the levies of landowners. Almost none of these men, other than the magnates, themselves, and their highest ranking officers were aristocrats, much less nobles. Despite this problematic start, Nieus offers a compelling interpretation of the documentary record regarding the steady rise of Sigard's family culminating in Sigard III gaining control over the comital fortress at Chocques in the late 11th century. Nieus also is undoubtedly correct in his conclusion that the original Sigard was a high-ranking military commander in the service of the count of Flanders. This is certainly the proper conclusion to draw from the description of Sigard in the late tenth-century »Liber Traditionum« of the monastery of St. Peter at Ghent as *militaris cingulo laboris innexus*, i. e. »a man fastened with the belt of military service«. However, the service of a small number of aristocrats as professional soldiers in command roles cannot be seen to transform the great mass of *milites* into aristocrats in Flanders or anywhere else.

The third section of the text, »Martial Ideals in Crusading Memories«, includes articles by John Hosler and Nicholas Paul. Hosler takes as his starting point that the discussions by the authors of four early 13th century texts regarding the military behavior of »knights« on the Third Crusade can be used to deduce the socio-political influence of »knighthood« in this period. In particular, Hosler argues that these authors offer »moral« lessons within the context of battle narratives. The basic methodology that Hosler employs is sound. Military historians frequently use discussions of successful and unsuccessful, as well as appropriate and inappropriate behavior of combatants to draw conclusions about contemporary military *mores*. One problem with this approach with respect to the question of knighthood is that treating every use of the term *miles* as a reference to a socially, politically, and economically elevated individual, even in the early 13th century, is likely to lead the reader astray. Hosler, himself, concedes this point observing that scholars ought to resist the temptation to equate *milites* with knights too readily (p. 153). Rather more problematic is the underlying assumption that authors in the 13th century and after were part of a new tradition that was hyper-conscious of the need for those engaged in war to exhibit appropriate moral qualities, as well as martial expertise. Such concerns were an intrinsic part of historical writing from the early Middle Ages onward. Indeed, they drew upon a Roman literary tradition that also was concerned with these very same issues. It was tropes of this type that have led scholars such as Karl Leyser, Janet Nelson, and Eric Goldberg to describe a Carolingian »knighthood« in the 9th century.

Paul's essay offers a narrower focus with an examination of the accounts of the life and career of Manasses of Hierges, whose memory was preserved in two texts produced at the monastery of Brogne at Namur. Manasses spent more than a decade in the east serving the rulers of Jerusalem between ca. 1140 and 1152 before returning home with what many contemporaries accepted as a piece of the true cross. Paul argues that the texts written about Manasses' life and career by the monks at Brogne, at some

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point between his death in 1177 and 1211, were intended to provide a didactic model for local »knights« and noblemen. Paul's discussion of the Brogne texts is useful and provides many insights regarding what the monks saw as important about Manasses' life. However, Paul's interpretation of the text as a primer for »knights« is based on the a-priori assumption that the period 1180–1220 »was a crucial time for the codification of the ideals of knighthood« (p. 187). It is in this context that Paul, for example, translates the Latin phrase *virtute militari* as »knightly virtues« rather than »military valor«. But in the absence of any compelling definition for either »knight« or »knighthood«, it is not clear how one can speak of the codification of ideals for such slippery categories. Indeed, scholars working in this tradition have not even asked, much less answered, the question of whether the supposed ideal of »knights« in this putative »chivalric« age were different from the ideals urged upon arms-bearing aristocrats in earlier ages.

The fourth section, »Women in Chivalric Representations«, includes essays by Louise Wilkinson and Nicolas Ruffini-Rozani. In the first, Wilkinson reprises the argument, which she has made elsewhere, that women could be understood as chivalrous if they embraced the chivalric values of the male members of their families. Like several of the other authors in this volume, Wilkinson starts from the assumption that there was something new about the values associated with aristocrats in the 12th and 13th centuries. This model is highlighted in Wilkinson's brief discussion of association of nobility with virtue, where she jumps from Cicero directly to the 13th century (p. 197) without consideration of the ways in which the value systems of the later period built upon earlier medieval traditions. Wilkinson is undoubtedly correct that contemporaries had expectations for the behavior of aristocratic women, just as they did for aristocratic men. However, Wilkinson's argument that women could participate in chivalry would have been better supported had she presented examples of contemporary authors actually describing women as chivalrous.

Ruffini's essay focuses on a satirical treatment of a tournament, written by Hugh III, lord of Oisy, castellan of Cambrai, and viscount of Meaux, in the months before this magnate departed on the Third Crusade. Ruffini shares the assumption that the long 13th century was a period in which a »new knightly culture gradually emerged in northern France and Lotharingia – a culture the values and behaviors of which were widely shared within their warring elites« (p. 229). The article as a whole, however, does not depend upon these assumptions but rather offers a detailed political analysis of Hugh's text, on the basis of which Ruffini concludes that the lord of Oisy was seeking to expand his circle of friends and allies to include important men at the court of the French ruler Philip II (1180–1223).

The final section of the book, »Didactics of Chivalry«, considers in turn genres of didactic texts in the German Empire and England during the 12th and 13th centuries. In the first essay Claudia

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Wittig examines vernacular texts, particularly early 13th century poetry written by clerics, which she argues was intended for an audience of lower ranking lay aristocrats, who were engaged professionally in military careers. Like Peltzer, discussed above, Wittig assumes that the 12th century saw the emergence of a new class of »warriors« denoted in Latin texts as *milites*. It is this group of warriors, including the legally unfree but sometimes socially and economically superior *ministeriales*, whom Wittig identifies as the audience for the emerging vernacular literature. She argues that this literature offered a model of a »chivalric identity« for an elite group that was defined by its military service and dependency on greater lords. This new chivalric identity, Wittig argues, allowed *ministeriales* to experience their service in an ennobling manner. She does not, however, make clear that if such ennobling took place, this was merely a psychological phenomenon and not a legal one.

In the final essay of the volume David Crouch argues that the study of chivalry must be joined with an examination of »conduct literature«. In this context, Crouch offers a typology of three types of conduct literature: the schoolroom tradition, the biblical tradition, and the vernacular instructional tradition. Drawing on his own prodigious scholarship in this area, Crouch argues the later 12th century saw the emergence of a tradition of vernacular instructional texts that were intended to define proper courtly conduct as a *preudhomme* for aristocratic youths. He ties this vernacular tradition to a model of an emerging sense of knighthood in which knights were expected to demonstrate moral excellence because the 12th century was particularly »obsessive« about moral, right and superior conduct (p. 282). He concludes that chivalry emerged as a fully formed reality in the first decade of the 13th century, when the vernacular tradition began to incorporate the moral lessons of the school room and biblical traditions to instruct aristocratic youths in the norms of proper conduct.

Many of the articles in this volume provide useful information about specific texts and individuals. The essay by Sara McDougall is particularly strong and offers a necessary corrective to the long-standing state of the question regarding the aristocratic family. Overall, however, this volume is significantly less than the sum of its parts. Conceptually, the volume as a whole and many of the individual essays do not avoid the pitfalls discussed in the introduction to this review. The lack of definitions of terms, a determined lack of curiosity about the underlying military organization of society, and the lack of attention to earlier periods has led to numerous unsustainable assumptions and conclusions. If chivalry were a real and, particularly, a new phenomenon in the 13th century, it is necessary to show how it was different from the models of aristocratic behavior in earlier periods. If knighthood really was anything other than a specific legal status based on wealth, then it is necessary to demonstrate, rather than assume, that aristocratic participation in warfare was different in the 13th century than it had been in the 10th or 11th. Until these issues are

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addressed, devotees of knighthood and chivalry will continue to run in circles.

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