Chapter 1. The Notion of “Chivalry” as the Social Code of the Later Medieval Nobilities: A Modern Construct and Why it Should be Abandoned

D’Arcy Jonathan Dacre Boulton

1. The Notion of “Chivalry” in Modern Historiography

What follows is an essay on the history and validity of the concept of “chivalry” as a cultural phenomenon, which I undertook to compose at the request of the editors. At the time I accepted this charge, I rather unthinkingly shared with most historians of the periods commonly called in North America the “High” and “Late Middle Ages” a set of four beliefs – most of them rather ill-defined, and all of them held entirely on the basis of long-established and unquestioned usage.

The first of these beliefs was that the word “chivalry” represented, among other things, a reasonably well-defined set of ideas and related practices, variously described by historians in recent decades as a “code,” “ethos,” “ideology,” or set of “ideals,” which was generally understood and accepted, at least in principle, by noblemen of all ranks from at least the thirteenth to at least the fifteenth century. The second belief was that the classic form of this set of ideas either comprised (if conceived of as a code) or promoted (if conceived of as an ethos, ideology, or set of ideals) a set of normative qualities and related behaviors of several types, always thought to include courage and courtesy (especially to ladies), and usually thought to include in addition loyalty, a sense of “honor,” and an obligation to protect the Catholic church and its domain, and the weaker members of their society. The third belief I shared with most historians was that this set of ideas and practices had been closely associated with the formal status whose occupant had borne the title chevalier in Old and Middle French and knyght in Middle English, and the fourth that the whole set of ideas and practices had actually been designated in these languages by an abstract noun related to the former title: in Old and Middle French the noun chevalerie, and in Middle English by an early form of the modern English “chivalry”.

On reviewing the literature on the subject of the profession and status of knights1 for this essay, I found that the idea that a behavioral code of the sort just sketched had been associated with (if not at first designated by) those words since the very beginning of the modern historiographical tradition.2 This tradition had been inaugurated in France by Jean-Baptiste La Curne de Sainte-Palaye in his Mémoires sur l’ancienne chevalerie, published in 17593 and in England and the Anglophone world by the Anglican cleric Richard Hurd in his Letters on Chivalry and Romance, published in 17624 and based almost entirely on Sainte-Palaye’s Mémoires. Hurd’s definition of “chivalry,” given in the first of the letters that make up his book, was

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1 In this essay I shall use “knighthood” to designate the profession or vocation of the cabellerii, chevaliers, or knyghtes of the period before about 1450, “knighthip” to designate their individual position or status, and “knightage” to designate knights collectively: all concepts represented in French since c. 1100 exclusively by chevalerie.


3 Jean-Baptiste La Curne de Sainte-Palaye, Mémoires sur l’ancienne chevalerie, considérée comme un établissement politique et militaire (Paris, 1759).

4 Richard Hurd (v. 1720-1808), later Bishop of Lichfield and Coventry (1774-81) and of Worcester (1781-1808). Richard Hurd, Letters on Chivalry and Romance serving to Illustrate some Passages in the Third Dialogue [of Tasso’s Gerusalemme Liberata], 4 (London, 1762; repr. in The Works of Richard Hurd, 8 vols., 1811) pp. 237-350. Most of the work (Letters VII-XII) is concerned with the incorporation of the ideas of “chivalry” into the works of Tasso, Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton; his discussion of “chivalry” itself is confined to Letters I-V, which occupy pp. 237-279, and include no more than 8000 words.
essentially that of Sainte-Palaye: “a distinct military order, conferred by way of investiture, and accompanied with the solemnity of an oath and other ceremonies, as described in the old historians and romancers ....”\textsuperscript{5} In his third letter, Hurd went on to describe “chivalry” – a word that he effectively revived after two and a half centuries of general disuse, and employed throughout his letters in place of its only surviving indigenous English equivalent “knighthood” – as a “singular profession,” marked by a number of distinctive “characteristics,” which he finally summarized under the words “prowess, generosity, gallantry, and religion.”\textsuperscript{6}

On proceeding through the early literature on the subject I found that these ideas and usages had been maintained and elaborated over the next sixty years or so in both France and England, and that Hurd’s revival of the word “chivalry” had set in motion a slow but general process of reviving much of the dual lexicon for ideas related to knights – one based on the indigenous word kniught and the other on the Anglo-Norman word chivaler – that I found to have been uniquely characteristic of Middle English in the period between 1292 and about 1530. It also became clear to me that this process of revival had soon led to a tendency to differentiate between the semantic ranges of the words of the “knight” family (including the obsolete adjective “knightly” revived in 1813 and the neologism “knightage” introduced in 1840), and the words of the “chivalry” family (including the obsolete adjective “chivalrous” revived in 1774 and the neologism “chivalric” introduced in 1797), and to associate those of the latter family primarily with the distinctive and admirable qualities and behaviors that Sainte-Palaye and Hurd had declared to be characteristic of “medieval” knights. This association is traceable to 1774, when it appeared in Wharton’s treatise on English poetry,\textsuperscript{7} and seems to have developed over the next forty-odd years in the usage of novelists and political commentators like Edmund Burke – who in 1790 declared that “the age of chivalry is gone.”\textsuperscript{8} So far as I could discover, it was only introduced in the context of serious historiography in Henry Hallam’s pioneering survey View of the State of Europe in the Middle Ages of 1818 (of which the last edition appeared in 1900),\textsuperscript{9} but was consolidated in Charles Mills’ two-volume monograph The History of Chivalry of 1825\textsuperscript{10} and George James’ The History of Chivalry of 1830 (last edition 1900).\textsuperscript{11}

Partly under the influence of these three works – which continued to dominate the field in Anglophone historiography into the early years of the twentieth century – but also under the influence of ordinary speech, the word “chivalry” came to be used by Anglophone historians

\textsuperscript{5} Hurd, Letters, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed., p. 242.
\textsuperscript{6} Ibid., p. 252.
\textsuperscript{7} Thomas Wharton, The History of English Poetry (London, 1774-81; 1840).
\textsuperscript{8} Edmund Burke, Reflections on the Revolution in France (London, 1790).
\textsuperscript{9} I have consulted the last edition, published under the title History of Europe during the Middle Ages (New York, 1900). Hallam’s work was the first general survey in English of “medieval” European history, and dealt with “chivalry” in an unnamed section of twenty pages (112-131 in the edition of 1900). He used “chivalry” quite loosely in several senses, including those of the status and profession of knight from the time of Charlemagne, but he used it especially to represent what he called “the principles of knighthood,” (which he saw as including valor, loyalty, courtesy, munificence, and a sense of justice), and he declared that “It was the principal business of chivalry to animate and cherish the spirit of honor,” p. 112.
\textsuperscript{10} Charles Mills, The History of Chivalry, or Knighthood and its Times, 2 vols. (London, 1825; 5\textsuperscript{th} ed., Philadelphia, 1849). Mills’ massive work (which was partially based on Johann Gustav Gottlieb Büsching’s Ritterzeit und Ritterwesen of 1823, itself inspired by Sainte-Palaye’s Mémoires of 1759) was the first substantial monograph on knighthood in English, and the first in any language to present a survey of the subject throughout Europe. Like Hallam, Mills often used “chivalry” to mean “noble heavy cavalry,” and declared that in this sense “the knighthood and the feudalism of Europe were synonymous and coexistent.” He preferred, however, to discuss what he called “the chivalry within this chivalry; a moral and personal knighthood...” and opined that “… the gallant and Christian chivalry of Europe, was purer and brighter than any preceding condition of society; for it established woman in her just rank in the moral world, and many of its principles of action proceeded from a divine source....”
\textsuperscript{11} George Payne Rainsford James, The History of Chivalry, 14\textsuperscript{th} ed. (New York, 1900).
primarily (though never exclusively) to designate the moral and social code attributed to the noble knights of the later Middle Ages, and the behaviors that naturally arose from it. This practice was most clearly expressed by Francis Warre-Cornish, Vice-Provost of Eton College, in his *Chivalry* of 1901:

The words Chivalry and Knighthood are strictly speaking identical, since Chevalier and Knight are synonyms; but in common usage “chivalry” denotes the whole group of ideals and customs which prevailed among the noble and gentle caste: “knighthood” the estate itself: an estate within which all who were admitted to it were equal, whatever differences of descent or rank might exist among them.\(^\text{12}\)

Both the centrality of the notion of a “code” or “law” in the idea of “chivalry” that prevailed between 1818 and 1918, and the decidedly Romantic interpretation of the nature of that code, can be seen in the longer definition of “chivalry” given earlier in the same work:

Chivalry, then, may be defined as the moral and social law and custom of the noble and gentle class in Western Europe during the later Middle Ages, and the results of that law and custom in action. It applies, strictly speaking, to gentlemen only. Its three principal factors are war, religion, and the love of ladies: its merits and faults spring from those three heads, and all the side influences which attend its growth and decay may be summed up under these. The whole duty of a gentleman was included in the idea of chivalry; and his life from his early childhood was regulated by it. The principle of service to God, his lord, and his lady underlay everything.\(^\text{13}\)

In fact, after about 1790 the imagined “code of chivalry” was itself increasingly regarded as a model of conduct that could justify the continuing social and political preeminence of the ancient nobilities in the face of the new revolutionary ideologies, and continued to play that role in much of Europe down to the end of the First World War in 1918. After World War I – a disaster for the chivalrous nobilities of Europe and their ideals – the evaluation of “chivalry” as a contemporary moral code fell off sharply in all but the most conservative of social circles, and for the next two decades the few historians who took any interest in its “medieval” model concerned themselves largely with its imagined decline from an imagined height at some point between about 1100 and 1300. Despite this, I found that two fundamental notions were maintained by virtually all historians with relatively little modification down to about 1980: (1) that a body of ideas at least broadly comparable to, or including in some manner, a code of laws or customs, and comprising most or all of the elements I listed above, had actually governed the behavior of the later medieval nobilities of Latin Christendom; and (2) that this body of ideas, because of its close association with knighthood, could reasonably be called “chivalry”. Since 1980, when scholarly interest in the subject of knighthood that had been rising since about 1960 finally reached the high plateau on which it still remains,\(^\text{14}\) various new and ever more radical interpretations of the nature, origins, and precise elements both of “chivalry” in this cultural sense, and of the institutional “knighthood” to which it is still commonly contrasted in Anglophone historiography, have been proposed by historians writing in several languages. Nevertheless, the use of “chivalry” and its cognates and equivalents in all other languages at least partly (and in English primarily) to designate a body of nobiliary ideals is still very much alive.


\(^{13}\) Ibid., p. 13.

\(^{14}\) The number of scholarly books and articles dedicated to knighthood and related matters that I have identified rose from eighteen in the first half of the twentieth century to sixteen in the single decade 1961-70, twenty in the decade 1971-80, thirty-one in the decade 1981-90, and thirty-three in decade 1991-2000.
The continuing vitality of this practice in Anglophone historiography, as well as the variety of the ways in which “chivalry” has come to be reconceived by historians since 1980, can be seen in the following quotations from three of the more recent studies of the subject: (1) Maurice Keen’s Chivalry of 1984 – still the most widely-read and respected survey of the theme – which attaches the word “chivalry” both to what is best termed an “ethos” and to a “code of values”; (2) David Crouch’s The Birth of Nobility of 2005, which proposes that the term “chivalry” be restricted to the true “code” associated with knighthood as such only from about 1220, in contrast to the more generalized and inchoate nobiliary “habitus” of the preceding couple of centuries, which he called by contrast preudommie; and (3) Richard Kaeuper and Montgomery Bohna’s article “War and Chivalry” of 2009, in which they argue for the predominance of military qualities in what they call the “chivalric ideology,” which itself included “chivalric ideals” that constituted a “code” to which they attach the name “chivalry”. Here is Keen’s general statement on the meaning of the word (with expressions of particular interest here boldfaced):

Chivalry is an evocative word, conjuring up images in the mind … It is also, for that very reason, a word elusive of definition. One can define within reasonably close limits what is meant by the word knight, the French chevalier: it denotes a man of aristocratic standing and probably of noble ancestry, who is capable, if called upon, of equipping himself with a war horse and the arms of a heavy cavalryman, and who has been through certain rituals that make him what he is – who has been “dubbed” to knighthood. But chivalry, the abstraction from chevalier, is not so easily pinned down. It is a word that was used in the middle ages with different meanings and shades of meaning by different writers and in different contexts. Sometimes chivalry is spoken of as an order, as if knighthood ought to be compared to an order of religion: sometimes it is spoken of as an estate, a social class – the warrior class whose martial function, according to medieval writers, was to defend the patria and the Church. Sometimes it is used to encapsulate a code of values apposite to this order or estate. Chivalry cannot be divorced from the martial world of the mounted warrior; it cannot be divorced from aristocracy, because knights commonly were men of high lineage; and from the middle of the twelfth century on it very frequently carries religious or ethical overtones. But it remains a word elusive of definition, tonal rather than precise in its implications.\(^\text{15}\)

Towards the end of the same chapter, however — after a summary discussion of the more important of the many treatises on chevalerie produced between the later eleventh and the early fifteenth century — Keen proposed the following definition:

On the basis of the treatises that we have examined, chivalry may be described as an ethos in which martial, aristocratic and Christian elements were fused together. I say fused, because the compound seems to be something new and whole in its own right, partly because it is clearly so difficult to completely separate the elements in it.\(^\text{16}\)

Crouch began his more recent book with the following statement:

There was once a thing called chivalry. Unlike “feudalism,” for instance, it is not an invention of scholars; men once knew it, felt it, explained it to each other and practised it, after their fashion. When they did so, and what it was that they practised, are proper questions for historians. And the historical debate on chivalry is an ancient one … What

\(^{15}\) Maurice Keen, Chivalry (New Haven, 1984), pp. 1-2.

\(^{16}\) Ibid., p. 16
was the basic impulse that created noble conduct? Chivalry was certainly a self-conscious medieval concept, but not until the first quarter of the thirteenth century. 17

Finally, Kaeuper and Bohna began their article with the following declaration:

Chivalry and war marked the literature and culture of medieval England as of northwest Europe generally. Lay folk of privileged status shaped their sense of their rights and their social and cultural role through chivalric ideas. In a complex, hierarchical, religious and turbulent society, knights negotiated their connections with violence, piety, honor, and gender relationships through chivalry. ... The great danger in the study of chivalry as a force in society and a theme in literature is the all but irresistible tendency to reading history backwards. ... Thus we may erroneously come to view medieval chivalry through Victorian lenses, imagining it to be the sort of social force Victorians wanted it to be, a pure force for good in the world ... If we actually study the literature that conveys chivalric ideals before we decide what chivalry was, a more complex and interesting picture emerges. The chivalry of the Middle Ages may not even consist entirely of qualities we can admire. It was the tough warrior code of the lay aristocracy. 18

It should be noted that, though differing in their conception of its precise nature and contents, all four historians accept the traditional idea that “chivalry” – in contrast to “feudalism,” with which it was long associated by historians, but which is now generally regarded as a false construct of modern historiography 19 – was a real historical phenomenon, however difficult it might be to define. They also support the idea that it constituted – within the broader context of what the third pair call the “chivalric ideology” that explained and justified the place of the knight or nobleman in the social order – a code of some sort (an expression used by three of them in the passages quoted, and by Crouch later in his chapter 20) that for some time governed the behavior not only of knights as such, but of noblemen more generally, in a large area of Latin Europe between c. 1100/1220 and c. 1500/1600.

In addition, like their predecessors and most of their colleagues, all four historians seem to regard the Modern English word “chivalry” as a word that can be treated as fully synonymous not only with its Middle English predecessor chyvalrie (whose history, from its late appearance in 1292 to its virtual disappearance around 1530, they like most historians simply ignore), but with its Old and Middle French source-word chevalerie 21 (first attested in three passages of the oldest surviving major work in Old French, the Chanson de Roland, composed in stages between about 1040 and 1115 22) and its Modern French descendant chevalerie – though on

17 Crouch, Birth of Nobility, pp. 7-8.
20 Crouch, Birth of Nobility, pp. 46-56.
21 I shall employ the spelling with the diaeresis on the ‘i’ to distinguish the Old and Middle French word from its Modern French derivative, especially as a term of historiography, and for the same reason shall use distinctive contemporary spellings of Middle English words like knyghthode and chyvalrie, which should also be pronounced in the contemporary manner. I have set out my general policies with respect to the distinction between historical and historiographical terms in the last section of this essay.
what basis they believe in these exact equivalences (inherently unlikely to anyone familiar with historical semantics), they failed to indicate.

Finally — although Keen and Crouch, at least, acknowledge in their works the existence of some of the many other senses represented by chevalerie and its cognates and derivatives — the treatment by these historians of “chivalry” as a phenomenon strongly suggests that they still believe that the principal historical sense of all of these words was that of an “ethos” (presumably in the modern sense of a “characteristic spirit”), and (or) an “ideology” (presumably in the usual modern sense of “a systematic scheme of ideas, usually relating to politics or society, or to the conduct of a class or group, and regarded as justifying actions”), and (or) a “code” (again presumably in the modern sense of “a system or collection of rules and regulations”). Because of this belief, they seem to have felt that the other senses can be either dismissed as rare or secondary (as Keen does), or ignored completely (as the others, like most historians, effectively do). Indeed, Keen’s treatment of the word “chivalry” as one “elusive of definition” on the grounds that it was used “with different meanings and shades of meaning by different writers in different contexts,” and his use of the expression “sometimes chivalry is spoken of as ...,” implies that he understood “chivalry” as representing a single phenomenon that could be seen and described from different perspectives, rather than as a modern representation of several different words that — like most words of their type — acquired a number of quite distinct and easily definable meanings, and in the process came to represent a number of distinct phenomena.

As my observations to this point suggest, long before I had completed my survey of the literature and the primary sources on which it was based, I had begun to suspect that most of the received beliefs of historians about “chivalry” were built on a foundation of sand, and that like their coeval and closely-related concepts of “feudalism” and the “Middle Ages,” they have been maintained by historians only because they are familiar and convenient, and because their origins in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries have been effectively forgotten.

More specifically — while I found good reason to believe that the nobilities of the more westerly lands of Latin Christendom did come to share, at least after about 1220, both an ethos and a theoretical general ideology in which the status of knight occupied an important place, I soon began to doubt both the dominance of distinctively knightly qualities within that ethos and ideology, and the actual fusion of knightly, nobiliary, and Christian values in anything that could be regarded as an effective (rather than theoretical) code governing nobiliary behavior. To be sure, as Keen indicated in his introductory chapter, a significant number of more or less elaborate codes of conduct aimed at noble knights were proposed at various dates between the later twelfth and the early fifteenth centuries, but pace Keen, I found on examining them not only that they proposed enormously varied sets of ideal qualities and behaviors, but that their authors in no case actually designated their code by a name either related or equivalent to “chivalry”.

Indeed, so far as I could discover, no “ethos,” “ideology,” or “code” so named existed even in theory before about 1790, when the French Revolution gave rise among the members of the threatened nobilities of Europe to an urgent need for a code of behavior that could provide them with a moral foundation for their privileges, and was at the same time acceptable to contemporary society at large, and relevant to their own distinctive traditions. The Romantic counter-revolutionaries found the code they needed in the works of Sainte-Palaye and Hurd, and in the numerous purely fictional poems and novels they inspired. Their cause was soon abetted by sympathetic historians, who promoted versions of the nature and origins of the imagined code that had only the flimsiest of foundations in the evidence. The most influential of

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23 These definitions are taken from the latest edition of the Oxford English Dictionary, for which a full citation is give below in n. 96, along with those for the other dictionaries on which I have based my definitions and dating of all other words in Old and Middle French, and Old, Middle, and Early Modern English.
these historians was surely Léon Gautier, whose La Chevalerie of 1884 was transparently intended to support the cause of the Catholic Right in the early days of the French Third Republic, and whose greatly exaggerated view of the role of the Catholic Church in the formulation of the knightly value-system he effectively invented still dominates the popular understanding of chevalerie in France to this day.²⁴

Nevertheless, it seemed likely to me that neither Gautier himself, nor any of the subsequent historians who took up his theme, realized that the whole idea of the existence and general acceptance by nobles, in some or all of the period between 1100 and 1600, of a single, elaborate code of behavior of the sort they all described, was itself a fiction based on a naïve and selective reading by Sainte-Palaye of a small selection of the substantial body of genuine “medieval” works written for similar propagandistic reasons — and therefore equally suspect as mirrors of real contemporary thought and practice. Indeed, I found that until very recently historians had continued to draw almost exclusively on the four wholly or partially didactic works known to Sainte-Palaye (all composed between 1210 and 1275), and had not systematically compared the codes they proposed even with one another, let alone with the various other codes proposed in the numerous additional works identified and published since about 1850. Furthermore — and just as importantly — historians had failed to examine in anything like a systematic manner the semantic histories of the word chevalerie and its cognates and equivalents to see how they were actually used by contemporaries between 1200 and 1600, and had similarly failed to examine the histories of the various other words used by contemporaries to represent many of the qualities associated with those cognate with or (in non-Romance languages) equivalent to the Old French word chevalerie.

For these reasons, then, and for others I shall explain below, I came to suspect that the traditional idea of a nobiliary “code” associated with knighthood and called by a name equivalent to “chivalry” rested on the ill-informed and politically-interested analyses of pre-scientific historians, and was unlikely to be sound. My own knowledge of the history of nobiliary culture in the period further suggested to me that it was inherently unlikely that the noble lords of France and adjacent regions would have identified by a word associated with an essentially subordinate and military status their entire complex value-system — whose origins long preceded their adoption of knightship as an expression of the military aspect of their traditional status, and which continued to include many non-military elements of a variety of origins and natures. In addition, while a number of the individual qualities and behaviors included in the theoretical codes proposed for noble knights by contemporary writers undoubtedly formed part of the nobiliary value-system, it remained to be proved both that any set of these qualities or behaviors constituted a generally-recognized nobiliary ‘code’, or that such a code was associated in any special way with knighthood, even by those nobles who admired and attempted to live by them.

My initial review of the scholarship made me ever more suspicious of the validity of both of these traditional ideas. It seemed increasingly likely to me, indeed, that that the attempts to reconstruct such a comprehensive knightly-nobiliary code that have continued to be an important element of the historiography of nobiliary culture in recent decades have all been inherently misguided and doomed to failure, and should be abandoned in favor of an approach based on a more careful and less prejudiced reading of the full range of the evidence.

Having come to these tentative conclusions on the basis of a rapid preliminary survey of the evidence, I set to work both to determine and to demonstrate their validity to the extent that the sources, both primary and secondary, would permit. I began my critique of the notion of “chivalry” with a detailed comparative examination of the primary sources on which the notion of the code of chivalry had been created by Sainte-Palaye, developed by his successors down to Gautier, and thereafter maintained with progressive modifications. This soon revealed that the proposed codes were so varied in their contents that the existence of a generally-recognized

code of any sort appeared extremely unlikely. I then turned to a similar examination of the history of the practice of identifying knighthood with nobility, beginning again with the late twelfth and thirteenth-century works in which this idea had first been proposed and developed, and proceeding to the various treatises in which the word chevalerie in particular had been used to designate the central theme of the work. I found that the association of knighthood with nobility in these works had in fact been both loose and partial, and that not only were chevalerie and its equivalents rarely used to represent the nobility collectively outside works discussing the Three Estates (where the identification was required by the theoretical model), but that these words (generally treated as vernacular equivalents to the Latin militia) were often employed to designate both the military profession quite generally, and the related art of war — ignoring in both cases any special relationship either to nobility or even to knighthood as a formal status.

Finally, I conducted the first systematic examination by a historian of the linguistic evidence for the history of the conception of knighthood, nobility, and their respective ideals between 1200 and 1600, in the various languages of Latin Christendom, especially as described by historical lexicographers. This revealed first that Middle English was unique among European languages in eventually adopting not one but a whole set of words to represent the Old French chevalerie — knyghtshipe alone before c. 1290 and knyghthede, knyghthode, and chyvalrie thereafter — and furthermore that all four of these words were fully synonymous both with the French word and with one another. My linguistic research also revealed not only that all of the words equivalent to chevalerie came to bear a number of quite distinct senses of roughly equal importance, but also that those senses did not include — either then or at any later date before 1774 — anything like a comprehensive code of nobiliary conduct. In fact I found that the only sense of these words in all of the languages in question that was even related to such a code was that of “the qualities of a good knight”, best represented in Modern English by “knightliness”, and that only two such qualities were ever attached to this sense, both them strictly military: (1) courage and (2, by implication, at least) prowess. Finally, my broader researches in the history of the words used to characterize the qualities and behaviors actually admired by contemporary nobles made it clear to me that in practice most of these qualities and behaviors (including what in Middle English were called trowthe and honor) were normally mentioned separately, while others were often summed up in overlapping sets under such abstractions as Old French corteisie and franchise, and the majority were most commonly summed up in abstractions related to gentil, whose primary functions in both French and English were to indicate nobility of status and ancestry.

As the limitations of space and theme imposed by the present volume do not permit me to set out at length either my evidence or my general argument in any of these areas — which I shall reserve for future publications — and as my research is still incomplete, I shall devote the remainder of this essay to a brief sketch of the various approaches I have so far taken to the subject and the conclusions I have drawn from each of them. I shall place a special emphasis on the two where my research was most original: the comparative analysis of the codes proposed in works of the period under investigation, and the study of the historical lexicon of knighthood. Before my account of the latter, I shall insert a brief excursus on the nature of the conceptual-terminological problem just mentioned, and how exactly I feel it ought to be solved.

2. A Comparative Study of the Qualities and Behaviors promoted in the Treatises on Knighthood

I shall begin, then, with a discussion of the principal types of source from which Sainte-Palaye derived his original idea of a chivalric code, and upon which his successors over the next two centuries have largely constructed its successive incarnations. I shall concentrate on works composed in vernacular languages — as they alone might reasonably have been either known to or understood by lay noblemen — and on works written in the period of three and a half
centuries between 1155, when the *Roman de Brut* of the Anglo-Norman writer Wace\textsuperscript{25} laid the foundations for the later Arthurian cycle of romances (in which noble knighthood was first fully visualized in a generally accessible and attractive manner), and 1494, when the tradition of composing and translating treatises on knighthood came to an end with the translation into Middle Scots of Llull’s famous Catalan treatise of 1270/5.\textsuperscript{26} This period corresponds quite closely with what most North American historians call the “Late Middle Ages” and I prefer to call the “Early Traditional Period,” and I shall henceforth refer to it by the latter name.

I should nevertheless say something at this point about the growing number of works in Latin composed by clerical authors from the 1080s to the 1180s which at least touched upon the proper role in the divine plan of society of the *miles* — the normal word for “knight” in the Latin of that period, though a word that also meant “soldier,” “minister,” and “monk,” just as its abstraction *militia* could designate the position, occupation, and qualities of the occupants of all four statuses, and any set of them as well. As Jean Flori has shown in a series of studies,\textsuperscript{27} the authors of these works progressively transferred to the lay *milites* in general — in their theoretical capacity as the armed agents of kings and princes, whom the same theorists increasingly saw as being themselves the political agents of the episcopate — the originally royal duties of protecting the land, the Church, the clergy, and the weaker members of society (especially widows and orphans) from their enemies or oppressors, and increasingly after 1090 from heretics, schismatics and infidels. These writers — whose number included canonists, historians, moralists, and political philosophers\textsuperscript{28} — also suggested a growing number of virtues that were appropriate to *milites*, and while rare, could be found in the best of them.

The earliest and most generally-promoted of these virtues was the unquestioning obedience to their superiors always desirable in soldiers. To this, the political philosopher John of Salisbury (who in his *Policraticus* of 1150\textsuperscript{29} was the first to discuss the role of the contemporary *militia* or knighthood in a systematic way) added those of discipline, sobriety, frugality, austerity of dress and accouterments, strength, endurance, and courage: the traditional virtues of humble soldiers as distinct from noble warriors. By contrast, most of the other virtues or virtuous practices promoted in the period before 1170 that came eventually to be associated with knights were originally adopted or proposed either for the noble princes and barons whom ordinary knights served as soldiers, or for Christian laymen in general, regardless of rank or function. In his *Historia ecclesiastica* of 1135,\textsuperscript{30} for example, the Norman monk Ordericus Vitalis was the first to praise the recent nobiliary practices of refraining from killing captured opponents and keeping one’s word if released by one’s captor on the promise to pay a ransom — probably the basis of the later, more general nobiliary obligation to keep one’s

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{28} The more influential of them were Anselmo di Baggio, Bishop of Lucca, in Book 13 of his *De vindicta et persecutione justa* of c. 1082 (discussed in Flori, *Essor*, pp. 182-3); Bonizio Bishop of Sutri in his *De vita christianae* of 1090/5 (ibid., p. 184); Yves, Bishop of Chartres in his canonical works of 1092 (ibid., pp. 184-8); Honorius Augustodunensis in his *Elucidarium* written before 1105; Gero of Reichersberg in his *Liber de ordine donorum* of 1126 (ibid., pp. 257-63); and the Italian canonists Ruffino, Simone of Bisignano, and Buguccio, who developed Gero’s ideas in the second half of the twelfth century (all discussed in ibid., pp. 249-267)
\textsuperscript{29} Clemens C. I. Webb, *Ioannis Saresheriensis episcopi Carnotensis Policratici: sive De nugis curialium et vestigiiis philosophorum libri 8; recognovit et prolegomenis, apparatus critico, commentario, indicibus instruxit* Clemens C. I. Webb (Frankfurt am Main, 1909?, 1965)
\end{footnotesize}
solemn promises. In his *Moralium dogma philosophorum* of c. 1190, by contrast, Guillaume of Conches promoted among laymen generally such virtues as liberality, giving and seeking good counsel, avoiding excess in speaking, eating, and drinking, and defending just causes — all of which were primarily relevant to contemporary noblemen. Most of the virtuous qualities and practices promulgated in these Latin works would find their way into vernacular works in which they would be associated especially with knighthood — though as I have already noted, different authors would promote quite different sets of them, along with others often peculiar to their own works. Furthermore, there is little reason to believe that most knights were even aware of the ideas about their proper role and virtues promoted in these learned works themselves, so such impact as they might have had could only have come from their vernacular successors.

The vernacular sources on which the earliest historians of “chivalry” relied fell into three distinct categories: (1) the general narrative lines of the numerous (mainly) Arthurian romances composed from 1170 in Old French, from about 1180 in Middle High German, and from about 1225 (though mostly after 1290) in Middle English; (2) the discourses on knighthly or nobiliary qualities included in romances and comparable literary works, including the poetic romance the *Conte del Graal* or *Perceval* of Crestien de Troyes (left unfinished in 1182/5), the *Conte dou Baril* of Jouham de la Chapele de Blois (composed c. 1220), two of the romances of the standard or “Vulgate” Cycle of prose romances, composed in 1210/20 (*Lancelot do Lac* and 1225/30 (*Queste del Saint Graal*), and such didactic poems as Baudoin de Condé’s *Li Contes dou Bacheler*, *Li Contes dou Mantel*, *Li Contes dou Preudome*, and *Li Contes de Gentilleche*, all composed between c. 1240 and c. 1280; and (3) the better known of the formal treatises on knighthood and nobility that were composed at various dates between 1174/8 (when the first vernacular treatise, the *Livre des Manieres* of Estienne de Fougères, was completed) and about 1475 (when the anonymous *Boke of Noblesse* was probably published). I have myself identified ten distinct original treatises ostensibly on *chevalerie*, twenty-four dealing at least in part with the nobility as an estate, and about a dozen translations and adaptations of the more successful of these texts.

A substantial majority of the texts of the two latter categories (including twenty-two of the thirty-six treatises) were composed in dialects of Old and Middle French (including the Anglo-Norman dialect of England) between c. 1175 and c. 1450, and especially between c. 1175 and c. 1250, when fifteen of the twenty works produced were written in that language; the more important of these were eventually translated into one or more other languages, increasing still further the dominance of French works in this field. Nevertheless, one of these works was probably composed in Italian (the lost original of Thomasino di Zirclaria alias Thomasin von

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32 On the French Romances as a genre, see Douglas Kelly, *Medieval French Romance* (New York, 1993), and *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*, ed. Roberta L. Krueger (Cambridge, 2000). The founder of the Arthurian division of the genre or “Matter of Britain,” dominant by 1200, was the poet Crestien (Modern French Chrétien) de Troyes (d. a. 1190), whose first work of this type, *Erec et Enide*, was completed c. 1170. The earliest romances in Middle High German were Hartmann von Aue’s *Iwein* of c. 1180 and Eilhart von Oberg’s *Tristram* of 1170/90. The most important was Wolfram von Eschenbach’s *Parzifal* of c. 1210. All three were based on French originals.
39 J. Gough Nichols, ed., *The Boke of Noblesse: Addressed to King Edward IV on his Invasion of France in 1475* (Roxburghe Club 77 [1860]).
Zerclære’s Welsche Gast of c. 1210/14); two in Middle High German (the Welsche Gast itself in 1215/6, and Johannes Rothe’s Ritterspiegel c. 1410); three in Catalan (Ramon Llull’s Libre del Orde de Cavayleria in 1270/5, Bernabé Assam’s Tractat de noblesa (1474/9) and Tractat de cavalleria (1474/9); four in Castilian (Alfonso X’s Titulo XXI of the second Partida of c. 1260, Juan Manuel’s lost Libro de Cavalleria of c. 1325 and his de Libro del Caballero e Escudero of 1326/7, and Diego de Valera’s Espejo de Verdadera Nobleza of c. 1440); and finally two in Middle English (Thomas Wimborne’s Redde rationem villcationis tue in 1388 and the anonymous Boke of Noblesse of 1450/75).

Most of these treatises dealt with knighthood only as part of a larger theme, and often in passing. In fact, as I noted above, only ten of them – the first five of which were composed in Old French between 1210/15 and c. 1265 and the sixth in Catalan in 1270/75 – were entirely devoted to explicitly knightly qualities and behaviors, and only seven others (including the earlier works in German and Castilian, composed between 1215/6 and 1327) contained comparably extensive treatments of such matters. What is of particular interest here, however, is that all of the fifteen works of the last two categories either suggested, or set forth in quite explicit language, a more or less extensive set of qualities and behaviors a noble knight ought to possess or practice. If the word “code” is taken to mean, in the social contexts with which these works were concerned, a clearly-delimited set of rules, customs, qualities, or behaviors applicable to all members of a no less clearly-defined category of persons, then many of the works in question may reasonably be regarded as proposing qualitative and behavioral codes for knights – both as such, and as representatives of what was in fact a much broader social category. What I found on analyzing their contents, however, is that the codes proposed by the theorists in these works included extremely disparate sets of qualities and behaviors, that not a single quality or behavior was actually common to all of them, and that only a handful were common even to a bare majority of them.

41 Henrich Rückert, ed. Der Walsche Gast des Thomasin von Zirclaria (Quedlinburg & Leipzig, 1852; repr. with a new introduction by Friedrich Neumann (Berlin, 1965); Thomasin von Zirclaria, Der Welsche Gast (The Italian Guest), trans. with intro. and notes by Marion Gibbs and Winder McConnell (Kalamazoo, Michigan, 2009). The existence of an earlier didactic poem in Italian on the manners and morals of the lay and clerical élites is implied by several references in the author’s German-language poem, which may well be an adaptation of it.

42 Der Ritterspiegel, ed. and comment. Christoph Huber and Pamela Kalning (Berlin, New York, 2009)

43 (Catalan original) José Ramón de Luanco, ed., Libro de la Orden de caballeria del B. Raimundo Lulio. (Real Acad. de Buenas Letras de Barcelona, 1901); (Middle French translation) V[icenzo_] MINERVINI, ed. Ramon Lull, Liere de l'ordre de chevalerie (Bari, 1972)

44 Treatises mentioned by Martí de Riquer, Heràldica Catalana des de l’Any 1150 al 1550 (2 vols., Barcelona, 1983), I, p. 64, and then unedited.


46 José Manuel Blecua, ed., Obras completas, Juan Manuel (Madrid, 1982-1983); Reinaldo Ayerbe-Chaux, Cinco Tratados: Libro del cavaliero et del escudero, Libro des las tres razones, Libro enfernto, Tratado de la asunçion de la Virgen, Libro de la caçal Juan Manuel; edición, introducción y notas (Madison, 1989)


48 Ione Kemp Knight, ed., Wimborne’s Sermon Redde Rationem villcationis tue: A Middle English Sermon of the Fourteenth Century (Pittsburgh, Pa., 1967), esp. pp. 63-4

49 J. Gough Nichols, ed., The Boke of Noblesse: Addressed to King Edward IV on his Invasion of France in 1475 (Roxburghe Club 77 [1860])
2.1. The Disparity in the Content of the Theoretical Codes

Space does not permit a comprehensive listing, let alone an extensive discussion, of the qualities and behaviors proposed by all of the authors who did so, but in order to give the reader some sense of the variation I discovered in their proposed codes, I have set out in Table 1 a complete list of the fifty-seven mentioned in the six most original or influential of the theoretical works composed after 1200, including the second but most extensive and influential discourse, the first three and the last of the six dedicated treatises in French, and the one dedicated treatise in Catalan. In chronological order these are: (1) the romancier Raoul de Hodenc’s allegorical poem Roman des Eles (or Romance of the Wings) of 1210/15, which I shall refer to briefly as “the Eles”;

(2) the closely contemporary Discourse of the Lady of the Lake in the anonymously-composed prose romance Lancelot du Lac (which I shall call briefly “the prose Lancelot”);

(3) the poet Guiot de Provins’ allegorical poem L’Arméure du Chevalier (The Armour of the Knight) of 1215/20, (which I shall call “the Arméure”);

(4) the anonymously-composed poem L’Ordene de Chevalerie (or The Order of Knighthood) composed c. 1220 and copied to c. 1360 (which I shall call “the Ordene”); (5) the Livre del Orde de Cavayleria, composed as I noted above by the Catalan knight-turned-missionary Ramon Llull in 1270/5 (which was by far the most widely-read and translated of the treatises, especially in Britain between 1456 and 1484, and which I shall call “Llull’s Orde”); and finally, (6) the Livre de Chevalerie of the heroic French knight Geoffroy de Charny, composed at the request of King Jehan II of France for the knights of his new Order of the Star in 1352, and representing a new, more pragmatic approach to the promotion of knightly conduct. I shall refer to it as “Charny’s Livre”.

The authors of the six works in question mingled the forty-one qualities or virtues they wished to promote quite randomly with sixteen forms of behavior, and sorted both into two or more series of related types that were themselves in no particular order. I have listed all of these qualities and activities in Table 1 below, along with the works in which they are mentioned. While retaining in general the order and groupings established in the earliest works, I have divided them on the basis of their dominant character into nine numbered sets, from physical to religious, and then numbered them continuously in the first column, distinguishing behaviors from qualities by setting them in italics. To save space, I have in some cases listed several closely related qualities or behaviors on the same line, but numbered them separately. The numbers in the first five columns under the titles of the works represent the place of the quality or behavior in the list in that work, but the very different organization of the sixth work made such an enumeration impossible, so I merely indicated the presence of the quality or behavior in question with an x. In the Ordene, three qualities were implied but not actually mentioned by name in the text, so I have indicated their implicit place in a grayed cell, and shall count them separately.

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50 The first was that pronounced in the Conte del Graal of 1182/5 to the newly-knighted Perceval by the vaissor who had knighted him, and included only four obligations: (1) to spare the life of any knight he had rendered defenseless; (2) to avoid excessive speech and gossip; (3) to give counsel and aid to any noble woman who seemed disconsolate; and (4) to go gladly to church to pray for constancy in his faith and mercy on his soul. (Chrétien de Troyes, Le Roman de Perceval ou Le Conte du Graal, ed. William Roach (Geneva, 1959), pp. 48-9.


54 Busby, Le Roman des Eles, pp. 105-119.

55 Ramon Llull, Obres Originals, 21 vols. (Palma de Mallorca 1906-1950), 1, Doctrina pueril; Libre del orde de cavalleria; Art de confessió (Ciutat de Mallorca, 1906).

Table 1. Ideal Qualities and Behaviors Associated with Knighthood in Six Important Works

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ideal Qualities of a Knight</th>
<th>Hodenc Eles 1210/15</th>
<th>Lancelot do Lac 1215/25</th>
<th>Provins Armëure 1215/20</th>
<th>Ordene c. 1220</th>
<th>Lull Orde 1270/5</th>
<th>Charny Livre c. 1352</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I Physical qualities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 size, 2 health, 3 strength, 4 agility</td>
<td>1, 2, 8, 4</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5 beauty</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6 cleanliness of body</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1c</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>II Military qualities</td>
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<tr>
<td>7 prowess</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 readiness to exercise in hunting/hastiludes</td>
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<tr>
<td>*9 courage or boldness</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7f, 7g</td>
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<tr>
<td>III Vassalic qualities</td>
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<tr>
<td>*10 loyalty, refusal of treason</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2b</td>
<td>7e</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 loyalty to his temporal lord</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9e</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>12 readiness to defend temporal lord</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>13 readiness to serve as a judge, overseer</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>IV Courtly qualities and behaviors</td>
<td>*14 generosity (largesse)</td>
<td>1a-g</td>
<td>12a</td>
<td>7h</td>
<td>x (28)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>*15 humility (avoidance of boasting)</td>
<td>2b, 2c</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>7c, 9a</td>
<td>x, x</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>16 patience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9c, 9d</td>
<td>x, x, x</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>17 avoiding idleness, 18 lechery, 19 gambling</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2e</td>
<td>x, x</td>
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<tr>
<td>20 avoidance of envy, 21 of quarrels</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>22 love of joy</td>
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<td>2d</td>
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<td>23 truthfulness (keeping promises)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1d</td>
<td>7d, 9b</td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>24 courtesy, good manners</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7g</td>
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<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>25 avoidance of mocking</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2f</td>
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<tr>
<td>26 courtesy or honor to ladies, damsels</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2c</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 sincerity, 28 patience, 29 discretion in love</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2g</td>
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<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 speaking, 31 dressing as befits a nobleman</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>7j, 7k</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>32 participation in courtly singing, dancing</td>
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<tr>
<td>V Honoral qualities and behaviors</td>
<td>33 nobility of spirit</td>
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<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>34 prizing honor highly</td>
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<td>8</td>
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<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>35 avoiding shameful conduct, 36 situations</td>
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<td>17</td>
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<tr>
<td>VI Protective qualities</td>
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<tr>
<td>37 readiness to defend ladies and damsels</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2d</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38 support for the good</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1c</td>
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<tr>
<td>39 readiness to aid a. weak and b. poor</td>
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<td></td>
<td>12b</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>40 readiness to aid a. widows and b. orphans</td>
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<tr>
<td>41 readiness to defend the Church, 42 the Faith</td>
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<td>1d (Ch)</td>
<td>1 (41)</td>
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<tr>
<td>43 unwillingness to harm the Church</td>
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<tr>
<td>VII Conciliar and judicial qualities</td>
<td>44 wisdom, prudence (mesure)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7a</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>45 righteousness in judgment (droiture)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7a</td>
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<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>46 unwillingness to accept false judgment</td>
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<td>2a</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>47 righteousness in action against evil</td>
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<td>15, 16</td>
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<tr>
<td>48 opposition to traitors and felons</td>
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<td></td>
<td>18</td>
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<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>VIII Charitable qualities and behaviors</td>
<td>49 goodness of heart, charity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7b</td>
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<tr>
<td>50 pity for suffering</td>
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<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td>51 support for the pitiful</td>
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<td>19</td>
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<tr>
<td>IX Religious qualities and behaviors</td>
<td>52 faith</td>
<td>53 piety</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>54 purity from sin (chastity)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1, 1a</td>
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<tr>
<td>55 resisting lust</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>1b</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>56 attending mass daily</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2e, f</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A glance at the table is sufficient to suggest the disparity among the six lists, especially in the number of qualities or behaviors they include: respectively nine, twenty, eight, nine (plus three implied), eighteen, and twenty-three. These numbers alone mean that no single list included as many as half of the total set of fifty-seven, and that four of the six included less than one in five. The arrangement of darkened cells on the Table further indicates how unevenly distributed the qualities and behaviors were among the nine classes I identified.

The six qualities of the first class listed, which I have called “physical,” are largely peculiar to the prose Lancelot and Charny’s Livre, though the sixth such quality (cleanliness) is found only in the Ordene. The first four of the six are obviously qualities needed to be an effective warrior, but they would be just as useful to an athlete in any period, and the fifth and sixth are more appropriate to a noble courtier. Rather surprisingly, the closely-related qualities of the second class, which I have called “military,” are explicitly mentioned in only three of the works (the prose Lancelot, Llull’s Orde, and Charny’s Livre), and merely implied in a fourth (the Ordene). The key qualities of prowess and courage or boldness – essential to the effectiveness of a knight as a warrior, and actually central to the effective notion of knighthood throughout the period, as we shall see – are explicitly mentioned as a pair only in the prose Lancelot and Charny’s Livre. Llull omitted prowess in his Orde, substituting for it the quite different quality of a readiness to exercise in hunting and hastiludes (that is, “spear-games” like tournaments), and only Charny – who clearly knew both the Ordene and Llull’s Orde – mentioned all three qualities. It is striking that qualities of this class, like those of the first, were entirely absent from the Roman des Eles (which was essentially concerned with promoting courtliness) and the Armêure du Chevalier (which was primarily concerned with promoting Christian moral values).

The four qualities I have called (for want of a better general term) “vassalic” were no less unevenly distributed among the six works, and were once again wholly absent from the Eles and the Armêure, though in this case found in all four of the others. The qualities in question (all related to loyalty to a temporal lord) were clearly desirable because they secured the reliable and effective service of the knight as vassal, retainer, or subject to his lord. Nevertheless, only loyalty in the abstract, or its negative expression, refusal of treason, are mentioned in all four of the works that include any such quality, and only Llull’s Orde and (following it) Charny’s Livre mention any of the other three qualities: the former all three, and the latter the first two. As usual, this distinction in specificity between the earlier and the later works reflects in part the different concerns of their authors and their times.

No fewer than ten qualities and nine behaviors of a broadly courtly nature were mentioned in the six works – the largest number by a considerable margin in any of the nine classes – and every author mentioned at least one such quality, making this class the most widely included as well. The number of desiderata of both types (nineteen) is indicative of the importance of courtliness to some of the six authors, but their interest was again quite uneven and their choices of qualities and behaviors as usual quite inconsistent. In fact, a marked difference in the level of interest can be seen between two sets of three. The second, third, and fourth writers, who were clearly uninterested in courtliness, each mentioned only one or two courtly qualities, and none of these corresponded with a quality mentioned by either of the other two. The other three writers listed many more qualities and behaviors of a courtly type: Hodenc seven, Llull six (with a number of subtypes), and Charny over twenty. This suggests a high level of interest in courtliness among these writers, but this was actually true only of two of the three. Charny – whose list was the longest, but was almost entirely derivative – devoted very little space to courtly qualities and behaviors in his treatise, as they were peripheral to the central, military, theme of his work. Hodenc, by contrast, was almost entirely concerned with promoting courtly qualities (especially generosity to poets like himself), and Llull – whose concerns were as much political as military – was clearly concerned with promoting moral and orderly behavior rather than courtliness in general. As a result of these variations in interest and emphasis, only two courtly qualities (generosity and humility) were common to as many as four of the six works (the former to all but the Armêure and the Ordene, the latter to all but the prose
Lancelot and the Ordene, while only two others (courtesy in general and truthfulness) were common to three (different combinations of the Eles, Llull’s Orde, and Charny’s Livre). Six of the remaining qualities were common to two works, and five were peculiar to one work or another. This hardly constituted a unified code of courtliness for knights.

The four qualities I have identified as “honorial,” because they are concerned with honor and its maintenance, are found in only three of the works (the prose Lancelot, Llull’s Orde and Charny’s Livre), and only two are common to as many as two of these works, different in each case. The first quality, “nobility of Spirit,” is probably to be identified with high-mindedness, while the second, “prizing honor highly,” was indeed a characteristic of nobles generally – though as we shall see, it was high esteem and its manifestations that were really prized, not the worthiness thereof. The remaining honorial behaviors of avoiding shameful conduct and situations, mentioned only in the prose Lancelot and Charny’s Livre, were both negative, and supplemented the comparable courtly behaviors of avoiding idleness, lechery, gambling, envy, and quarrels mentioned by Llull and Charny. That these authors felt a need to mention such behaviors at all suggests that they were all common among knights throughout the period, and that idea is supported by the complaints of clerical writers from the eleventh to the fifteenth centuries.

By contrast with these honorial qualities, at least one of the seven qualities I called “protective” – which all took the form of a readiness to protect or support some particular group or entity in Latin Christian society – was recognized in five of the six works (all but the Armëure), no doubt in deference to the contemporary clerical doctrine that protection was the primary function of the knightly-noble estate. Once again, however, there was no agreement among the authors as to which group(s) or entities were particularly deserving of knightly protection, and only one group (ladies and damsels, mentioned in the Ordene and Charny’s Livre — but not in the treatises of the earlier clerical tradition) was common to as many as two of the six works. By contrast, the weak, the poor, and the widows and orphans of the clerical tradition, like the group described as the “good,” were each mentioned only in a single work. Similarly, only one author (that of the Ordene) mentioned the traditional obligation to protect the Church (Hodenc having proposed the much more modest obligation not to harm it), only one other author (Llull, the preacher to the Infidel) mentioned the traditional obligation to protect the Faith, and none of them mentioned the traditional obligations to protect their country and Christendom as a whole. The almost complete failure of the six authors to agree on the identity of the groups or entities deserving knightly protection suggests that they had little real interest the function in question, at least in relation to those outside the noble order.

The five qualities I have grouped under the heading “consiliary and judicial” – which were all supportive primarily of the services owed by knights and other noblemen as counselors, judges, and administrative officers of their lords, rather than as vassals or soldiers – are even more scattered, at least one being mentioned in five of the six works (all but the Roman des Eles), and as many as three in one work (the prose Lancelot). Only the virtue of wisdom or prudence was included in as many as three of the five (the Armëure, Llull’s Orde, and Charny’s Livre), while two others (droiture or righteousness in judgment, and opposition to traitors and felons) are found in two (the Lancelot and the Armëure and the Lancelot and Charny’s Livre respectively), and the remaining two are peculiar to individual works. Yet again our authors had very different ideas about which qualities of this type were worthy of inclusion in the canonical list.

The remaining nine qualities or behaviors fall into the closely-related classes I have called “charitable” and “religious”. The two qualities (charity and pity for the suffering) and one behavior (support for the pitiful) of the former class were promoted in only three of the six works (the prose Lancelot, the Armëure, and Llull’s Orde), and only the first, which promoted all three of the desiderata, mentioned more than one of them. Furthermore, only one desideratum of either type (charity in general) was common to all three works. The three qualities and three behaviors of the religious class seem to have been thought of by two of our authors as alternatives to the charitable ones, as they are included in two of the three works that neglected
charity: the *Ordene* and Charny’s *Livre*. The qualities of faith and piety are mentioned only in the *Armëure* (by far the most Christian work in its general tone), purity or chastity only in the latter and the contemporary *Ordene* (which uniquely mentioned the corresponding negative behavior as well), and the particular pious practices of attending mass daily and fasting on Fridays are mentioned only in the *Ordene* and Charny’s *Livre*. Once again, the most that can be said is that five of our six authors felt obliged to mention at least one quality or behavior of a broadly Christian nature, but only three authors felt obliged to mention more than one, and only three of the nine desiderata (charity, chastity, and attending daily mass) were mentioned by as many as two authors.

Thus, of the fifty-seven characteristics promoted in the six works I have analyzed, only three (loyalty, liberality, and humility) are common to as many as four works, and only five others (courage, truthfulness, courtesy, charity, and prudence) are common to as many as three. The other forty-nine are found only in one or two of the six works. Given this level of variation among them, and the facts that only three qualities or behaviors (about five percent) were common to as many as two thirds, and another five to as many as half of the five works (for a total of fourteen percent), and that even those characteristics were distributed very differently among those works, it cannot be said that the principal treatises and discourses on knightly qualities established – even on a theoretical level – anything resembling a generally recognized “code” of the sort associated with “chivalry” since the Romantic revival. For such a list to constitute a true code, it would have not merely to include but to consist entirely of characteristics that were almost universally recognized as requisite for proper knightly behavior. Clearly, none of the lists in question came close to achieving either of those characteristics.

Nevertheless, most of the qualities and behaviors listed in these works — along with a surprising number of others left out of them — probably did form part of a set whose constituent elements were all actually admired and emulated by some members of the Early Traditional nobilities of France and England, but no substantial set of which was actually admired by all of them. For that reason these qualities and behaviors cannot be said to have constituted even the sort of proto-code called a “habitus”, introduced into the literature of “chivalry” by David Crouch as a typological term for the virtues of the *preudome*. I propose to refer to them henceforth the “value-set” of the nobilities in question, using that compound word to represent any comparable set of qualities and behaviors valued by substantial proportions of the membership of any social category or group, but selected by individual members according to their personal inclinations.

### 3. The Nature, Authority, and Didactic Genres of the Treatises

In addition to overlooking the extreme inconsistency of the codes proposed by contemporary theorists, historians until very recently either forgot, or chose to discount several equally important aspects of the nature and intended function of these codes. The first is that these works were not meant to be descriptive of current reality, but either laudatory or prescriptive or both. For those reasons most of them – like the Arthurian romances composed by the authors of several of them – presented exalted pictures of ideal forms of noble knighthood, past or present, which cannot be supposed to have borne a very close resemblance to the realities of either time. In fact, most of those codes that were either imbedded in romances (like *Lancelot do Lac* and its successor the *Queste del Saint Graal*), or composed by men who were primarily poets (like Crestien de Troyes, Raoul de Hodenc, Guiot de Provins, and all of the other authors of such works before 1265), were clearly intended primarily to appeal to the amour propre of their intended audience – the relatively literate and courtly high to middle nobility – by attributing either to them collectively, or (in the case of the romances) to their remote ancestors, virtues and behaviors that they would find admirable (if not necessarily personally attractive), and that would present the noble estate in a highly favorable light.
In addition, however, most historians have failed to notice or recognize the implications of the fact that all of the works in question were clearly products of the general fashion for didactic literature in the vernacular that took off from an older Latin tradition in the same period – the later twelfth and thirteenth centuries – and that they should be interpreted in the light of that association as well. Most of them may be seen more particularly as products of the distinct but related fashions for social commentary and for moralizing, both of which were often aimed, as were the works in question, at a particular social category. Like most of the earlier treatises on knighthood, the moralizing works of the period usually included more or less extensive lists of virtues and vices, and were frequently expressed in an allegorical form comparable to that found in four of the earliest works on knighthood: the Roman des Eles, Armëure du Chevalier, Ordene de Chevalerie, and Conte du Baril,57 all written between 1210 and 1220. And like most moralizing works, several of the early treatises on knighthood – the Armëure, Queste, and Traite del Chevalier De of 1230/6558 – were primarily concerned with promoting among knights the moral qualities ideally characteristic of all Catholic Christians, rather than qualities particularly appropriate to knights or noblemen. Nevertheless, more personal concerns could often be detected in social treatises, so it is not surprising that the author of the Roman des Eles – a poor poet in need of patronage – seems to have been concerned largely with encouraging generosity among knights towards poor poets, or that a similar concern can be seen in several of the other works, including the trouvé Robert de Blois’ poem L’Ensoignemant des Princes et d’Autres Genz Communemant of 1235/65.59

A number of the discourses and treatises dealing with knighthood belonged primarily to a particular subcategory of didactic work that flourished in this period: one which is now called the “mirror of princes” (Latin speculum regis/ principis, French miroir aux princes), whose general object was to provide a textbook for the moral education of the sons of rulers, on the theory that only a good man could be a good ruler.60 In its standard form, aimed at kings and princes, this genre — which first flourished during the Carolingian “Renaissance” of the ninth century — was revived on a small scale in the second half of the twelfth century with the publication of the Policraticus in 1159, and finally took off again in the middle decades of thirteenth century —when a rapidly growing number of works of this type were composed, especially by friars, both in Latin and in the vernacular languages.

The treatises in this tradition that were ostensibly aimed at “knights” in general – but were in reality aimed at those knights who were also members of the higher nobility – promoted many of the same virtues as those aimed at future and present rulers and lords. Among the earlier works, the Discourse in Lancelot do Lac, the Ordene, the Welsche Gast of the Italo-German poet Thomasin von Zerclære,61 and the Ensoignemant des princes all fell mainly in this class of treatise, as did the Des quatre tens d’age d’one of Philippe de Novara, composed c. 1265.62 The most fully-developed works in the speculum tradition, however, were composed in Spain towards the end of the creative period: first the legal tract on the duties of knights that constituted Titulo XXIII of the Second Part of the Second Partida composed at the command of King Alfonso “the Learned” of Castile around 1260,63 and later translated into both Catalan and Portuguese and adopted for similar purposes in the domains of the Crowns of Aragon (c.

1380/7) and Portugal; and second, the Orde de Cavayleria of Ramon Llull, composed in 1270/5 as one of a vast sequence of treatises on almost every important subject, intended mainly to support his program of converting the Muslims to Christianity. Both works represented the status of knight as the embodiment of the functions of the high nobility, and explained the qualities ideally promoted by knightly education in terms of the duties all lords owed both to their king and their own subjects.

Most of the treatises purporting to deal with chevalerie composed before 1330, and all of those composed before 1284, belonged to one or another of these three general genres, or to some hybrid of them. Of the treatises composed between 1284 and 1409, by contrast, the majority belonged to yet another genre well-represented in that period – the practical manual whose object was to teach a particular art – and more particularly to the general subgenre devoted to teaching the art of war or some aspect thereof. The older and more common of the three particular subtypes of that subgenre that were written in this period for knights and noblemen were either straight translations or abridgements of a single fourth-century manual of warfare: the De re militari of Flavius Vegetius Renatus. This work was well known to learned clerics by the time of the philosopher-bishop John of Salisbury, who in his highly-influential Policraticus of 1159 was the first to urge the principles and practices it taught on contemporary knights. Beginning around c. 1270, no fewer than five distinct translations of the De re militari were made into French, including the one called Art de Chevalerie by Jehan de Meun (famous as the continuator of the Roman de la Rose) completed in 1284, and an abridgement of that translation called L’Abrejance de l’Ordre de Chevalerie made by Jehan Priorat in 1286/90.

Elements of these translations were later included in a variety of other works on the subject, so that its influence was considerable throughout and beyond our period.

The works of the second subtype of military manual, including the cleric Honoré Bovet’s similarly influential Arbre des Batailles of 1387, were intended to instruct their lay readers not so much in the art as in the laws of war, and included material drawn from a much wider range of works. Christine de Pizan combined both approaches in her Livre des Fais d’Armes et de Chevalerie of 1409, which drew on both the translations of Vegetius and Bovet’s Arbre, and was eventually translated into English by Caxton as The Book of the fayttes of armes and of chyualrye in 1489. Significantly, in the works of both of these subtypes of military manual, the word chevalier (whose military sense was “heavy-cavalryman”) was simply equated with the Classical Latin miles, “soldier, especially a heavy-infantryman,” and the word chevalerie was used to render the Classical Latin militia in both its collective sense “the soldiery” and its abstract senses “the military profession” and “the military art.” By contrast, in the three isolated works of the remaining subtype of military manual – the Livre de Chevalerie, its poetic rendering the Livre Charny, and the accompanying questionnaire Demandes pour la Joute, le Tournois, et la Guerre, all composed by Geoffroy de Charny in or about 1352 – the word chevalerie is more commonly employed in the narrower senses “the profession” and “the art of the heavy-cavalryman.” As that would suggest, the object of these works was to provide instructions for soldiers of that particular type – by then generically called gens d’armes or “men at arms,” and including both

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knights and permanent squires. Nevertheless, they too borrowed heavily from Vegetius, and should be regarded as practical manuals for young men who wished to rise in that profession, and achieve both the income and the honor that could come from it.

Clearly quite different sets of qualities would have been desirable in the men associated with these very different types of chevalerie, and historians ought not merely to recognize this fact, but to note it explicitly when writing about the categories so-named, and to look for patterns within works of each genre separately.

Furthermore, historians should recognize and note clearly the fact that, like the other works in all of these traditions, the treatises on chevalerie represented the peculiar concerns and ideas of their authors, rather than any sort of consensus even among theorists about the ideal qualities chevaliers in any of these four senses ought to possess – let alone a consensus among the various types and ranks of chevalier for whom they were writing. For these reasons the lists of qualities and behaviors proposed in the works of every genre cannot reasonably be regarded as representing anything more than the view of the author, or indeed a position that the author merely chose to take in that work for some reason of his own.

Finally, historians should take note of the fact that only one of the authors or initiators of the treatises in which codes were proposed for knights, nobles, or soldiers – King Alfonso “the Learned” of Castile – had any sort of authority to impose his code upon the knights to whom it was directed, and even his code was not officially promulgated until long after his death, and only small parts of it were ever enforced. Most of the others lacked even a moral authority to impose their ideas, and there is reason to believe that only a handful of their works reached more than a small and local audience. And as even the codes set out in this handful of works proposed very different sets of qualities and behaviors, it is difficult to believe that any of them had a major influence upon knightly or nobiliary behavior, especially in the period before about 1300, when the more successful of the early works – the Ordene and Llull’s Orde – began to be translated into other languages.

4. The Positional and Collective Senses of Chevalier and Chevalerie in the Didactic Genres, and Their Misleading Character

As we have just seen, not only did the treatises on chevalerie on which much of the original notion of “chivalry” was based belong to a number of distinct didactic traditions, but each of these had its own distinctive aims and its own distinctive audience. Furthermore, the authors of each of these traditions employed both the abstract noun chevalerie and its equivalents (ultimately including the Middle English knyghthode), and the concrete nouns on which those words were based, to designate three distinct social categories: two of them military and one of them civil. It will be useful to look at these more closely, as they have contributed to the confusion of terms and concepts with which this essay is especially concerned.

4.1. Chevalier as a Military Designation: Knight, Man-at-Arms, or Soldier

The first of the military categories was that composed of chevaliers in the original, technical sense of that word: that of a heavy-cavalryman armed and supported militarily on the highest level, and (by some date after 1100) formally admitted to the status in a more-or-less standard rite of adoubement or “arming” performed by someone who had the authority to do so. This remained the normal sense of chevalier and its equivalents in all legal documents throughout the period before about 1430, including lists of noblemen compiled for civil purposes as well as military musters, and it is worth noting that in such contexts the title was applied particularly to those who had no higher, lordly status. The same words were employed in this sense in all but the most generalized of the military treatises, primarily to distinguish dubbed from undubbed noblemen. Chevalerie is not attested in the sense “the position or status of knight” in any context before 1200, but in the treatises of all traditions composed from 1210 onward it was often used in that sense, and more rarely used in the narrow collective sense of “the knighthage, or whole body of knights.”
Nevertheless, both words and their equivalents were more commonly used in treatises in extended senses, to designate broader categories either overlapping with or including the knightage *strictu sensu*. The authors of the military treatises usually employed *chevalier* and its equivalents in their technical sense, but used the abstract noun *chevalerie* and its equivalents quite consistently as synonyms of the Classical Latin *militia*, and used them to designate either the militarily active members of the noble Estate who fought as a heavy cavalrymen or *gens d’armes* (which included all of the greater lords and knights, but many more who were neither one nor the other), or all men committed to the profession of soldier – including, in addition to the noble *gens d’armes* of all ranks, many who merely aspired to admission to the noble Estate. Needless to say, both usages, and the parallel use of *chevalerie* in the sense of “the art of war,” were misleading even to contemporaries, and have given rise to numerous misleading translations in works of modern historiography. Nevertheless, they have had much less impact on the latter than the equally misleading use of the same words in the treatises in the social and moral traditions.

4.2. Chevalier as Social Designation: Nobleman

In the treatises proposing social and moral codes, beginning in the very first vernacular work of the genre – the *Livre des Manières* of Estienne de Fougères,

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predecessors, the proto-classic nobility of the eleventh and twelfth centuries was a very small status-group, set above all other strata of the laity not merely by the distinguished ancestry they came to call gентиле, but by the combination of wealth and political power contemporaries came to call richee, the magnificence and refinement they came to call by variants of nobilité, nobloi, and noble, and the various forms of quasi-patriarchal authority over others they called seignourie. Like their ancestors, the members of this status-group derived much of their wealth from the exploitation of lands worked by peasant tenants, and organized by 1090 into localized estates or “manors” that constituted the basic form of territorial seignourie, and derived the rest of their income from the rights of government or justice they enjoyed over their tenants and subjects, and the spoils of the wars in which they were constantly engaged, including both booty and — by the 1120s — the ransoms of captives.

Like its classic successor, the proto-classic nobility was divided into three distinct strata: (1) an upper stratum of principes, princes or “princes”; (2) a middle stratum of castellani, chastellains, or “castellans”; and (3) a lower stratum of minor lords most distinctively called vassors or “vassors”. The princes— heirs of the appointive dukes, marquis, and counts of the Carolingian régime — exercised a relatively extensive set of rights over the duchies, marquisates, and counties which their ancestors had converted into hereditary principatus, principautés, or principalities. Between 987 and 1204, the greater of the princes — including all of those of the rank of duke, marquis, and count palatine — were richer and more powerful than the king, and having first usurped his authority within their principalities, between about 1050 and 1200 usurped many of the attributes of his dignity as well. These included the honorific title dominus or dans, a seal bearing their own image, a large departmentalized household suitable for supporting a court, and in some cases a more or less elaborate arming-ceremony by which their eldest sons were declared to be worthy of undertaking the duties of princeship: duties that, like the ceremony itself, was identical to those undertaken by all Greater Francian kings since Carolingian times, and included the protection of the church, the clergy, and defenseless lay people, especially widows and orphans.

By 1100 the castellans (the greater of whom were in many regions called barons or “barons”) exercised a similar but more limited authority over the much smaller chastellanes or “castellanies” that either they themselves or their fathers or grandfathers had carved out by force within the principalities: dominions centered on the castles these men had built, and manned with chevaliers they had recruited and armed to serve in their private armies or osts. The princes had responded by building many more castles and recruiting larger forces of chevaliers, which they also used in their struggles with rival princes, but the castellans retained much of their autonomy in most principalities down to at least 1180, and the greater of them imitated their households and ceremonies on a smaller scale.

Below the castellans in the hierarchy were the minor nobles or vassors, whose only lands were their private estates, largely held down to c. 1200 in full ownership, and by 1100 organized into more or less nucleated manors. They had always enjoyed rights of the type coming to be called “low justice” over the peasants who worked their lands, and during the course of the twelfth century the richer and more ambitious of them would in their turn usurp the castellanial rights of “middle” and “high justice” within their manors. In addition, they would gradually adopt the other attributes assumed by nobles of the two higher strata in the period between about 1050 and 1170, including a fortified house suggestive of a castle, a kinship structure in the form of a dynastic patrilineage modeled on that of the royal house, and the practice of marking membership in their patrilineage both through the use of a common surnames, and through the display on their shields, flags, and seals of a personalized variant of a distinctive patrilineal emblem. This new type of emblem, by 1170 called simply armes, had first
appeared among the princes only in the 1130s, but by the 1230s was in virtually universal use among nobles of all ranks in many contexts, and thereafter served as the most visible and (at least in its primary, military forms) distinctive mark of membership in the noble order.

It should finally be noted here that, by 1100, most of the nobles in all three substrata had also become vassals — in effect either allies or clients — of several other nobles or prelates, from whom they held some of their lordly domain as a sort of proto-fief, and they owed their various lords both political counsel and military service — the latter performed by the princes and castellans, and eventually by the richer vavassors as well, at the head of their personal ost or "host".

The principal goals of noble lords of all levels seem to have been the establishment or maintenance of a stable patrilineal dynasty, and the maintenance or increase not only of the wealth, power, rank, and independence they could enjoy and transmit to their descendants, but of their personal claims to honor in their lifetime and after their deaths. Nevertheless, those of different ages, ranks, and situations inevitably pursued different sets of these goals in different ways, each of which required them to have different qualities.

The lives of most young noblemen between about 1050 and 1300, at least, seem to have been devoted largely to feasting, hunting, fighting, and learning the various skills and values they would need in the household of the greater lord to whom their fathers had entrusted them for fosterage. In the time between their completion of their education and their acquisition of a seignourie to govern — which could be mere days or many years — they often spent much of their time traveling in search of opportunities to display their courage and prowess both in the knightly games called tournaments and jousts, and in wars wherever they could find them.

The lives of those noble men who had inherited or otherwise secured the lordship of a domain, by contrast, were largely taken up with the administration of that domain, with playing the complex game of dynastic politics both within and beyond its borders, and on the levels of the greater barons and princes, and with maintaining their authority and military reputations by leading their hosts in both defensive and offensive wars and tournaments, and projecting their prestige and influence through the size and magnificence of their household and court. The successful performance of these roles required considerable stamina, self-confidence, courage and leadership in battle, and political sagacity of a distinctly Machiavellian character.

It also required the quality of liberality or largesse — for the loyalty and service of noble vassals could only be maintained through the frequent distribution of valuable gifts (including offices, benefices or fiefs, and those lordly dignities called honores), and meanness in this area was both resented and despised. For the same reason the greater lords were also expected to provide lavish feasts and entertainments to their courtiers, and partly to contribute to the latter goal, and partly to enhance their reputation in other ways, most of them also extended their liberality to jogleors, troubadors, or menestrels who composed and sang or read aloud poetic works of a growing number of genres — many of which heaped praise on the lord, his land, and his kindred. The jogleors who called themselves hiraunts or heraunts d'armes — "heralds of arms" in Modern English — had a special claim on the generosity of nobles of all ranks, as they specialized in identifying (through their emblematic arms) and singing the praises of those who participated in tournaments and other hastiludes. Nobles of all ranks also extended their liberality to various churches with which they had acquired some sort of association, primarily to secure or maintain mausolea for themselves and their kinsmen, and perpetual prayers for the progress of their souls through purgatory, but also to assure the good will and political support of the more important members of the local ecclesiastical hierarchies, both clerical and monastic.

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73 One of the best contemporary descriptions of the ideal behavior of a noble man in both youth and maturity is that given in Les Quatre Ages de l’Homme by Philippe de Novara, completed c. 1260/5. This work, presented as a mirror of the Estates organized by the four stages of human life, often extends to men and women of all social ranks the virtues and behavior most appropriate to those of Philippe’s own noble Estate.
In keeping with an old royal tradition, princes and castellans even founded religious communities and gave generously to those founded by their ancestors, at least partly to provide suitable positions for their supernumerary children — who usually became their spiritual rulers — and those of their vassals.

The distinctively lordly quality of liberality was closely linked to the general Christian qualities of charity and piety, both of which were promoted by the authors of treatises on nobility and knighthood, and both of which displayed to one degree or another by the majority of noble lords in distinctively lordly ways. The most common expression of charity was the distribution of the leftovers from lordly banquets to local paupers who assembled at the gate, but at least a substantial minority of lords went beyond this by founding or contributing generously to charitable hospitals and almshouses. Piety could be expressed by lords in a variety of ways, ranging from daily attendance at mass to participation in pilgrimages to local shrines or major centers like Compostela, Rome, or even Jerusalem, and even to participation in the armed pilgrimage that was called a “crusade”, but there was nothing distinctively lordly or nobiliary about any of these activities, and nobles were no more likely to participate in most of them than simple folk. What distinguished lordly from normal piety on a daily basis was the size of its typical contexts and supporting staff, and the splendor of the vestments, furnishings, and music that accompanied the liturgies in which they participated. All but the poorest lords maintained a physical chapel in their house and a corresponding department in their household, and the greater lords lavished considerable sums on maintaining the quality of both, both to demonstrate their adherence to the Faith and to display their wealth and taste to those who visited their court.

But while very few nobles were given to religious skepticism or heresy, their adherence to the moral code imposed by their Faith (especially the parts related to chastity) was rarely more than sketchy, and many were given to every sort of sin and vice — as those clerics who urged on them their defensive obligations constantly complained. Indeed, despite undertaking by oath to protect the Church and the defenseless, most princes seem to have ignored these obligations almost completely. Instead, like the lords and nobles below them in the hierarchy who took no comparable oath, they were more likely to oppress, exploit, and even pillage the unarmed members of their society, than they were to protect them from such actions by others. Even worse, in the context of the numerous local wars in which princes and castellans engaged throughout the period before about 1450, they and their vassals and soldiers often laid total waste to the lands of their opponents, looting and burning the villages and religious houses, and raping or slaughtering their inhabitants without a qualm of Christian conscience.

It was loyalty that was always regarded as the most desirable quality in vassals of all ranks, and as we have seen, it would eventually be promoted in most of the treatises on knighthood. In the real world, however, loyalty to one’s lord was all too frequently abandoned when the flow of largesse slowed or dried up, or when other economic or political considerations made disloyalty more attractive. Loyalty was also undermined by the primal nobiliary quality of franchise, francheté, or fredom, at least in the senses of those words that reflected their etymology. The literal sense of both of the originally French words (which also came to represent various more admirable qualities, as we shall see) was ‘freedom’ or ‘liberty’, and along with the adjective franc on which they were based, they were commonly employed to represent the unique and all but absolute degree of freedom that noblemen claimed to enjoy with respect to all other powers: a freedom which could be constrained only by their own choice, and only to the extent that, and for as long as they felt bound by their promise to do so. Loyalty to their lords was also in constant tension with the desire of all nobles to maintain and increase their claims to honor — for while most were happy enough to receive the material and promotive honors distributed by their feudal lords, they were even more concerned to maintain and enhance their reputation for courage and strength, and to defend both that reputation and the rights they and their ancestors claimed in other areas against all those who might challenge them.
Nevertheless, in their capacity as the vassals of the greater of their own feudal lords, most territorial lords were also obliged to spend part of every year serving both as the counselors of their seignours and also as the captains of divisions of their hosts and (by 1150) of their tournament teams as well. In these roles (in both of which the level of vassalic competence and enthusiasm varied significantly) not only the military quality of valiance (already indicated around 1100 by the adjectives valliant, proz—later preus or preux—vassal, hardi, and more rarely chevaleros) but the qualities of prudence, competence, experience, loyalty, and restraint were not only useful, but generally admired by noble lords of all ranks. By about 1150 they came to be come to be attached to the designation pro(z)dome or preudome—a “proz or preus of a man”—which had originally meant only “man of proësce or valiance,” but thenceforth to some time after 1400 (probably through a false association of preus with prudent) was used to designate those noble men who at least approached this ideal type of lord and vassal. The principal literary embodiment of what by 1313 was called prodometé or preudommeté and by 1374 prudhommie was probably Arthur’s nephew Gauvain or Gawain, who was introduced into the classic literary tradition in its foundational work, Geoffrey of Monmouth’s Historia regum Britanniae of 1135. For much of period between 1150 and 1400, of course, the ideal type of the preudome would be in competition in theoretical works, at least, with the quite distinct type of the chevalier, to which all of the qualities of the preudome would eventually be attached by theorists, as we have seen. Despite this, in the middle of the thirteenth century the minstrel Baudoin de Condé could still associate most of the qualities treated as knightly by many of his contemporaries with the condition of preudome in his Contes dou Preudome,74 and Charny could do the same a century later in his Livre de Chevalerie of 1352.

In the course of the twelfth century the civil qualities admired in the preudome were augmented by a growing set of complementary qualities and behaviors associated with a more sophisticated notion of courtly refinement or corteisie, as it came to be called in both Old French and Middle English. The qualities in question included humility (at least in self-presentation), moderation, polished manners pleasing both to princes and to noble ladies, a familiarity with the latest fashions and with the plots and characters of the latest romances, and an ability to engage in such activities as playing chess, dancing, singing, and even composing poetry and music—all of which served not only to reduce conflict in the court, but to mark those who displayed them as members of the highest stratum of society. Perhaps the most distinctive element of the new culture of courtliness was the cult of the noble lady associated with the doctrine of fin’amors or “courty love.” This had been invented in the princely courts of southern France in the decades before 1100, and introduced into the courts of northern France and England through the marriages to the French king and other northern princes first of the heiress to the greatest of the southern principalities (Aliénor de Poitiers, Duchess of Aquitaine and queen, first of France from 1137-52, then of England from 1154-1204), and later of her daughters (especially Marie de France, Countess Palatine of Champagne from 1145-98, one of the patrons of Crestien de Troyes). The core idea of this cult—first introduced in Occitan love-lyrics, but promoted after 1170 primarily in Arthurian romances—was that noble knights could perform truly great feats of arms only if they were inspired by their love of a worthy noble woman, who (like Guinevere in the Arthurian tradition) was normally both married to another man, and of higher rank than her lover. Guinevere’s lover Lancelot of the Lake, introduced in 1177/81 by Crestien, at the behest of Marie of Champagne, in Li Chevalier de la Charette, was thereafter the principal literary embodiment of this idea. In the real world, noble men down to the early seventeenth century often acted as if they really believed in this peculiar doctrine, but it was never more than a courtly game that provided—in addition to opportunities for mainly harmless but sometimes dangerous flirtation—yet another sphere of competition in both courtly and military contexts.

74 On these works, see above, p. 00.
Because the romances were essentially tales of adventure and combat rather than government and politics, Gawain, Lancelot, and the other noble men who formed part of the fictional court of Arthur in those works were all represented almost exclusively in their roles as chevaliers rather than as noble seigneurs; indeed, the best of them were presented as embodiments of the ideal qualities of chevalerie. Nevertheless, as I noted near the beginning of this essay, the word chevalerie was never used even in the romances to designate the whole set of qualities with which a noble knight was ideally imbued, but restricted to the purely military qualities traditionally associated with the knightly profession: courage and prowess.

As the title of Baudoin de Condé’s mid-thirteenth-century poem *Li Contes de Gentilleche* suggests, the whole set of qualities admired in noblemen (or any relatively substantial set of them) was in fact represented between 1100 and 1500 by the words most commonly used to indicate the condition or status of nobility, and particular sets of them were attached to the words less commonly used for the same purpose. This is not at all surprising, for as we shall see in the final section of this essay, the sense of words designating social positions were very commonly extended to designate the ideal qualities associated with those positions. It was therefore to be expected that the adjective gentil in both French (by 1080) and English (by 1297) would come to mean “having the ideal qualities of a nobleman.” In Old French first gentilletshe and gentilise (from c. 1180) and later gentilité (from c. 1230) would come to represent those qualities collectively, while in Middle English the words gentrise (from 1225), gentilnesse (from c. 1374), and genterie (from 1380) would serve the same purpose.

Smaller sets of nobiliary qualities came to be associated with other words used to indicate nobility of social rank. Frankness, sincerity, magnanimity, and sometimes loyalty came to be associated with a second pair of abstract nouns whose basic senses we have just noted: the Old and Middle French franchise, introduced into English c. 1300, and its indigenous Middle English equivalent fredom. This association arose from the attachment of the words in question to the general notion of nobility of condition (so that franc became partially synonymous with gentil), and the subsequent extension of their meaning to include this particular set of qualities associated with that condition. Chaucer actually summed up the moral qualities of nobility by pairing franchise with gentillesse in his “Franklin’s Tale” of c. 1395 (I. 808), and listed fredom and curteisie among the qualities loved by his gentil knyght in the General Prologue to his Canterbury Tales. The abstract nouns of the nobilis family itself in both French and English — including noblece, noblesse and nobleté — seem to have indicated the very different set of qualities represented by the modern English words “dignity,” “stateliness,” “splendor,” and “magnificence,” all of which referred to aspects of external appearance rather than to internal virtues. The same set of qualities was also represented by the analogous words of the sire, seigneur and laverd or “lord” families, which suggests the close connection in the minds of contemporaries between nobility and lordship.

Chevalerie, by contrast, represented a much smaller set of qualities, characteristic of noblemen only in their character as warriors, and equally characteristic of non-noble knights and non-knightly men-at-arms. Thus, if historians wished to adopt a truly appropriate term to designate the whole value-set of the Early Traditional nobilities, it should be one related to gentilis rather than caballerius: gentillesse or gentilité in French, for example, and “gentility” in English.

4.2.2. *The Emergence of Noble Knighthood and its Association with the Second Estate*  
This brings me to the question of the true origin and nature of the relationship between nobility and knighthood, which have recently been found to be very different from those imagined by the founders of the historiographical tradition. It is true, of course, that both the goals and the duties of noble lords had always required them to be both effective warriors and commanders of armies, and the various episcopal and monastic authors who from the 1020s had proposed theoretical schemes of the proper organization of society had increasingly associated first the princes and then the castellans with the originally royal duties of defense that they attached to the societal ordo or “order” whose members they called pugnatores or bellatores: “fighters” or
“warriors.” In addition, as historians have long known, the core of the “host” such noble warriors actually commanded in battle was composed of the heavy-cavalrymen called *cabellerii, milites*, or *chevaliers*, the noble commanders themselves fought in the same manner and using the same arms, armor, and skills as those under their command, and from about 1050 they normally had themselves represented on their new seals in this military guise.

Despite all this, however, the research of Georges Duby, his student Jean Flori, and others specializing in the history of particular principalities or regions, has shown that before about 1100 only nobles of the lowest substratum in a few small regions of France (like Duby’s Mâconnais) seem to have seen themselves as a superior sort of *chevalier*, and that even the theorists distinguished sharply between the noble *bellatores* whose duty was to protect, and the humble *milites* whose duty was merely to obey their superiors. By 1100 noble warriors were sometimes called *guerrier* or *guerreier* (each of which appears once in the *Chanson de Roland*), but preferred to represent both their status as warrior and their status as noble vassal by the new designation *ber(s)*: *barons* (which appears 93 times in the *Roland*) and its abstractions, including *barnage* and *barnet* (both of which appear several times in the *Roland*) and later *baronie*. Most of these words — whose underlying senses were “true man” and “manliness” — would continue to bear the qualitative senses “courageous or heroic warrior,” “heroic courage,” and “heroic” well into the thirteenth century. Significantly, the same ideas were represented in the same period by analogous words of the *vassal* family, including *vassal* used as an adjective, *vassalment*, and *vasselage*, all employed in this way a number of times in the *Roland*, and even applied to the Emperor Charlemagne himself — who was not a vassal at all in the usual sense of the word.

Nevertheless, by 1100 a few writers, including both poets and clerical theorists, had begun to extend to noble warriors of all ranks the lexicon previously restricted in surviving works to ignoble knights. This can be seen in the *Roland* itself, in which the designation *chevalier* (about a dozen times), its newly-created abstraction *chevalerie* (three times), and its newly-created derivative adjective *chevalerius* (once) are all employed in this way, in phrases like “*le arcevesque est mult bon chevaler*” (“the archbishop is a very good knight,” l. 1673), “*E! chevaler, gentilz home de bon aire*” (“Hey, knight, noble man of good manners,” l. 2252), and “*Ses filz Malpramis mult est chevalerus*” (“His son Malpramis is very knightly,” l. 3176). Despite these early attestations, the lexicographical work of Flori and Burgess has shown that application of such words to noble lords remained relatively rare in both Latin and Old French before 1160/5, when *chevaleros* is first attested in continental Old French, and the association of nobility and knighthood began to crystallize in its classic form as a result of a number of developments in the cultures of both the nobility and the knightage and of the relationship between them.

I shall consider these developments first from the perspective of the nobility. The most important were the emergence and development of a formal ceremony for admission to the status of knight within the noble order, and of the tournament as a form of sport in which nobles and knights participated on terms of near equality. The evidence for the former comes from a variety of sources, including financial records, histories, epics, romances, and treatises setting out the theoretical duties of lords and knights. Flori, who has studied with admirable thoroughness the history both of the older royal and princely arming ceremony and of the new

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75 For a useful review of the relevant research down to 1985, see Flori, *Essor*, pp. 20-42 (for the period up to 1100) and 223-230 (for the twelfth century).
76 Duggan, *Concordance*, ll. 2242 and 2066, referring respectively to Charlemagne and Roland
77 Duggan, *Concordance*
ceremony introduced around 1100 for admission to knighthood, argued convincingly against the older views that the latter ceremony grew out of the former, that it was an essentially religious rite involving the blessing of the arms conferred, and that it included a comparable oath to protect the various categories considered by leading clerics to be in need of protection. Flori found to the contrary that the rite that came eventually to be called _adoubement_ (literally “arming”) was normally in practice wholly secular in nature before the end of the thirteenth century (when the first full _ordo_ appeared in the pontifical of Guillaume Durand), and that until the last decade or so of the twelfth it consisted exclusively of the delivery to the candidate for knighthood, in an increasingly formal manner, of the whole set of arms, armor, and other equipment required for the practice of the knightly profession.

Other elements of the classic form of the ceremony — like the strapping on of one or both spurs by sponsors or their squires, and the delivery of the _colee_ or blow to the neck by the lord conferring the status — seem to have been added only in the decades around 1200. The former practice is first mentioned by Crestiën in his _Conte del Graal_ of 1182/5, and might have been invented by him, and the latter appears only around 1220, in the _Ordene de Chevalerie_ and the _Histoire de Guillaume le Marechal_. Despite the claims to the contrary by such theorists as Johan of Salisbury and Estienne de Fougères, there is no evidence whatever that normal knighting ceremonies ever included an oath of any sort, and even the blessing of arms seems to have been limited before the late thirteenth century to ceremonies involving youths of high rank. Thus knighthood as such — even when conferred in the highly ceremonious manner that finally came into vogue among high-born nobles and their humbler classmates in the last third of the twelfth century — was not in practice treated as a status imposing any obligations beyond the basic one of being an effective warrior, and its fundamental values — contrary to the beliefs of historians of the school of Léon Gautier — had nothing whatever to do with those ascribed to it by clerical theorists.

Nevertheless, there is reason to believe that these ceremonies were initially instituted primarily for the benefit of noble youths, whose fathers had not only decided that their sons ought to be initiated into manhood by a rite bearing some resemblance to the arming rite of kings and princes, but had also (and more surprisingly) decided to associate their traditional status of _bellator_ or “warrior” with the titles of _miles_ and _chevallier_, which down to 1090 had been exclusively applied to their ignoble soldiers. As I observed above, the principal cultural development lying behind the latter decision would appear to have been the emergence in the first half of the twelfth century of the sport called the _tournoiement_ or “tournament,” in which large teams of knights led by their noble lords competed on terms of near equality for honor and booty. Just as importantly, the teams of knights led by young noblemen in such contests seem to have been composed largely of the group of recently-knighted youths who had been _nourri_ or fostered with them in the court of the lord to whom their father had sent them, including many of lesser birth whose highest status would be that of knight. In such an environment, it was only natural that young nobles (the _jeunes_ studied by Duby in a famous

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80 See Boulton, “Classic Knighthood”, p. 95.
article would come to see themselves — at least in the military role that was central to their existence before they came into their inheritance or acquired a domain by some other means — as knights of a superior sort, and would identify strongly with the military skills and values associated with knighthood. Such youthful knights were distinctively referred to by contemporaries (along with others of their age-group) as bachelers, and their qualities were summed up in the abstraction bachelerie.82

For most noble knights who had acquired a domain, however, knighthood ceased to be their highest or most important status, and its importance would decline as their lives progressed. That this was true is suggested by the fact that nobles of princely rank almost never employed their knightly titles in association with their names, and those of baronial or castellanian rank did so regularly only after about 1300, when knighthood had come to be restricted to relatively rich noblemen, as we shall see. Furthermore, as I have already observed, the linguistic evidence indicates beyond a shadow of a doubt that the status of knight continued to be thought of by the noble knights themselves (or at least by those who wrote for them in non-didactic works) as a purely military status, and in addition that neither the title chevalier nor its abstraction chevalerie implied nobiliary virtues unrelated to warfare. In fact, as I have already noted, the words most commonly used to designate or indicate the possession of noble qualities in general in Old French were those derived from the Latin gentilis “(well-)bred.” In Old French, the adjective gentil was used from the beginning of the written record to the end of our period to indicate the possession either of noble ancestry or of the personal qualities currently associated with it. The derivative nouns gentillece and gentilise were introduced by Crépin de Troyes in his romances of the 1170s and 1180s to designate the same condition and qualities, and they were joined around 1230 by gentilité. In Middle English, as we have seen, these pairs of ideas would come to be represented by the related words gentrise (from 1225), gentilnesse (from c. 1374), and genterie (from 1380).

Why, then, did the authors of those treatises choose to use chevalier and chevalerie to represent noblemen, their estate, and their qualities? The simple explanation is that it was because they fit perfectly into the final form of the ideology of the Three Orders or Estates that crystallized in the 1170s.83 In its original eleventh-century forms, summarized above in the preface to my discussion of the vernacular treatises, the Second Order of Christian society had been conceived of as composed of the warrior-protectors of the church and the unarmed, in keeping with the coeval doctrines of the Peace and Truce of God. The theoretical duty of protection had first been extended from the king himself to the princes as his regional agents, and then to the castellans who had usurped their authority. Beginning in the 1090s — when the new doctrine of the Crusade led to the replacement of the traditional doctrine that killing was always sinful with the new doctrine that killing the enemies of Christ and the Church was a path to sainthood — a growing number of theorists had extended the theoretical duty of protection (along with the new duties of combating infidels, heretics, and schismatics that arose in the context of the First Crusade) to the knights: immediately as the obedient agents of good kings and princes, but indirectly as agents of the episcopate, whose counsel the secular powers were bound to follow. In the didactic literature on this subject, the old ordo bellatorum or “order of warriors” was increasingly identified with the originally distinct ordo militum or “order of knights,” no doubt at least partly because the noble warriors had effectively done the same. This theoretical fusion of nobles and knights was still effectively rejected as late as 1159 by John of Salisbury (who, using the model of the Roman army portrayed by Vegetius, argued that milites should all be recruited from the classes of peasants and artisans, as most of them had been), but

was fully accepted by Estienne de Fougères in the *Livre des Manières* of 1174/8: the first didactic work to use the word *chevaliers* to designate lay nobles in general, and the expression *ordre de chevalerie* to designate them all collectively.

The theoretical identity of the nobility with the “order of warrior-defenders” and of the latter with the “order of knights” as a whole was thus established in the didactic tradition because it served the fundamental political goal of the episcopate to subject all lay rulers and their agents to its own service, and because it was just close enough to reality to be plausible to those who did not examine it too closely. In the real world, however, the identity of nobility and knighthood was never even close to perfect, and the defensive functions it was intended to promote were never accepted as normative by the vast majority of those who were supposed to carry them out — most of whom were probably unaware of them. This was especially true of the ignoble knights, who probably continued to make up the majority of the order before the 1220s.

4.2.3. The Ennoblement of the Knightage and the Qualities Admired by Knights as Such

The doctrine of the essential unity of nobility and knighthood is now recognized as a complete fiction, but combined with the related use of *chevalier*, *chevalerie*, and their equivalents in the senses of “nobleman” and “nobility” in the social and moral treatises, it actually misled the founders of the modern historiographical tradition and all of their successors to about 1975 into thinking that knighthood and nobility were from the origin of the former, at least, so closely associated that knighthood could be effectively treated as the profession of the classic nobility throughout its history. It also seems to have contributed to the idea still commonly held even among specialists that the noble knight, whose virtually indelible status was acquired by an arming rite, could be treated as the only real knight — as Keen’s definition quoted above suggests. Nevertheless, historians effectively demolished both of these ideas in the 1970s and 1980s, and, to put the final nails in their coffin, it will be useful here to supplement my sketch of our new understanding of knighthood seen from the perspective of the old nobility with one seen from the perspective of the original, mainly ignoble, knightage, and the process by which a small segment of the ignoble knightage succeeded in raising itself into the nobility, while at the same time excluding from the knightage itself the heirs of their unsuccessful brethren.

It has long been known that the *chevaliers* of the eleventh and later centuries had their institutional origins in the type of heavy-cavalrymen called *caballerii* introduced into the Frankish armies by Charlemagne around the year 800 on the model of the Byzantine *klibanarioi* he had recently encountered in his conquest of the Lombard kingdom. What has only recently become clear is that, from that date to about the year 1100, most of those to whom the name *caballerius* or any of its vernacular derivatives or equivalents had been applied (including from c. 970 the Latin *miles*) had been men of low social standing, recruited from among the free peasantry on the basis of their aptitude. It has also been found that their position had not only been conferred quite unceremoniously, through a simply handing-out of arms and equipment, but could be lost by a simple act of dismissal by their lord or employer, and was not automatically transmissible to their sons. Furthermore, historians have determined that, while it is likely that from their first appearance the majority of knights were retained as the vassals of a noble lord of at least castellanial rank or its equivalent — giving them something in common with their noble betters — from the late eleventh century onwards a substantial proportion of the knightage was made up of mercenaries serving for wages. Historians have also found that, even among those knights who were vassals, before about 1180 a high proportion were maintained like servants in their lord’s household, and had no land of their own — and that even among those vassal knights who were housed separately on benefices or fiefs, the great majority held little more land than a prosperous peasant, and had no vassals of their own. It is also likely that only those knights who were the vassals of castellans were actually called upon to give counsel to their lords, for the greater lords (who alone maintained great households and courts) took counsel primarily from their household officers, local prelates, and lay vassals of higher rank. Thus, most ignoble knights remained little more than soldiers in the service of
noblemen, and had no more in common with them off the fields of combat than common soldiers had with commissioned officers in the nineteenth century.

Nevertheless, the twelfth century saw a steady rise in the prestige of the highest stratum of the knightage: mainly no doubt because of the growing identification with knighthood among their noble lords that I have just sketched, but probably in part because of the new doctrine on killing the enemies of the Church, which allowed those knights who took up the cross as “crusaders” to see themselves as at least temporary milites Christi: a title previously restricted to monks. In practice only that tiny minority of knights who joined one of the new orders of monk-knights that took form in the 1120s received the full benefits of this doctrine, but their prestige probably shed a pale reflection on their brethren in knighthood who remained in the world. The class of ignoble knights who really benefited from these changes seems initially to have included the more successful of the mercenary knights, but it was ultimately restricted to those knights who managed by one means or another to secure a sufficient estate in land both to emulate the customs and lifestyle and assume the attributes of the noble vassalors (with whose sons their sons were increasingly fostered, and presumably fought together in tournament teams). It was the interests of these knights that were best served by the mid-twelfth-century restrictions of knighthood (either by social pressure or royal edicts) to the sons of knights, and it was their sons and grandsons who came to constitute a new class of elite knights who were at once landed and dubbed, and enjoyed both an indelible form of their status and an hereditary right to admission to the knightage. These were all qualities they shared only with men of their own class and with those of noble ancestry, to whom they were also bound by ties of military and sporting fellowship, an increasingly common set of values and attributes, and probably at least a modicum of courtly polish. It is not really surprising, therefore, by about 1250 this hereditary knightly class had been effectively annexed in France to the old nobility as a sort of lower substratum, made up of men for whom knighthood was their highest rather than their lowest dignity.

From that time to c. 1430, the vast majority of knights in France, England, and other neighboring regions seem to have been of noble ancestry in this new, broader sense, and when the Kings of France began to issue letters of ennoblement in the 1280s, what they formally conferred was the right to be knighted. By 1270, however, the numbers of knights in both France and England had fallen to a small fraction of what they had been before 1170: first as a result of an initial falling out of the sons of non-noble knights who could not accumulate sufficient wealth to make the transition to the hereditary, but non-noble knightage, and then from about 1190 as a result of a second wave of defections from the knightage proper, among the sons of those hereditary and self-ennobling knights, and no doubt many of the poorer noble knights as well, who found knighthood itself too expensive to undertake. By 1270 roughly half of the latter had chosen to serve next to their dubbed kinsmen either as mounted serjeants or “sergeants,” or (from about 1250 in France and about 1350 in England) perpetual escuier or “squires”: a title formerly applied to young men training for knighthood. Together, the knights and sergeants or squires constituted the military category of gens d’armes or men-at-arms mentioned above – a category that by 1270 was itself only about half as large as that of the chevaliers alone a century earlier. In England, where in 1170 there had probably been about five thousand knights, by 1270 there were only about twenty-five hundred men-at-arms, of whom only twelve hundred were knights. After about 1380 the numbers of knights began to fall once

again, to under a thousand in England by 1436, and only about half that by 1500 (when the number of squires or “esquires” had itself fallen to about eight hundred). As the numbers of the nobility as a whole had risen by the latter date to about sixty-four hundred, the knights constituted less than eight percent of the total, and the whole class of knights and esquires constituted only about twenty percent.

It should finally be noted here, that between about 1430 and 1530, as a result of the growing practice of conferring knighthood as a mere honor on men who served their kings and princes in administrative and financial rather than military capacities, that growing numbers of knights ceased to function as heavy-cavalrymen. In the same period, as a result of changes in the organization of armies, even those knights who did continue to serve in the traditional way came to be treated in military contexts as simple men-at-arms, of the same rank and with the same wages as undubbed esquires and even simple gentlemen. Thus, in that century – despite the continuing attempts of kings, princes, and regional societies to celebrate its traditions in active ways, and the persistence of the literary and didactic traditions that promoted its theoretical values – knighthood was finally deprived of its original military function, and converted into a pure dignity whose sole function was to convey to its occupant both honor and a formal rank in the hierarchy of the nobility. It cannot be surprising that the last decades of that period saw the abandonment in ordinary speech of most of the vocabulary associated with knighthood, along with the very notion of specifically knightly qualities that had come to be represented by the abstract nouns of the families of both chevalier and “knight”.

The process by which the knightages of France and England were ennobled thus involved a complete dislocation upwards of the status of knight. Whereas before 1100 the “order” of knights had been composed almost exclusively of men of humble birth entirely outside and below the nobility, by 1250 it had come to be composed entirely of men of noble birth, and actually excluded the majority of men who belonged to the lowest substratum of the noble estate. Thenceforth the knighthood would become an increasingly exclusive order, and only the sons of kings and the greater princes, and the eldest sons of the lesser princes and greater barons, could be certain of admission to it — often at a very early age. It was to this noble knightage, utterly different from its predecessor, that the treatises on chevalerie were principally directed in the period between 1220 and 1450: an aristocratic knightage, among whose adult members the status of knight was commonly the least important of their dignities, and whose knightly function (when it was exercised at all) was shared with many lesser nobles who could not even afford to undertake its full burdens.

Rather surprisingly in these circumstances, both the primary and secondary literature in the field indicates that the principal qualities admired by knights in themselves and their fellows both before and after their ennoblement were those common to elite warriors in all cultures and periods of history: reckless courage or boldness of the sort that leads to heroic actions, and the strength and skill necessary to make such actions effective. Lancelot was represented as the best knight in the world despite his betrayal of his lord and friend, and his many mendacious denials of that betrayal, for the simple reason that his prowess (inspired by his adulterous and treasonous affair) was such that he could easily defeat any other knight in any sort of combat.

Despite this, it was courage that was emphasized throughout the period of active knighthood: a quality represented in Old and Middle French and Middle English by a number of different words, significantly including not only proesce and pruesse, but chevalerie, chivalrie, knyghtshipe, and the other abstractions based on kynight. Surprisingly, “prowess” in the Modern English sense of “superior skill” was merely implicit in these words and their Old French adjective proz, Middle French preus, and Middle English prow, and in their growing set of synonyms in both languages (including hardement and vasselage in Old French, hardiesce, vaillance, courage, and valeur in Middle French, and hardiesse, doughtinesse, valour, and boldnesse in Middle English). The French adjectives proz and preus seem to have expressed the highest form of approbation possible for a knight or any rank, because from 1369 the nine greatest heroes of
pagan, Jewish, and Christian history (all of them kings or military leaders) were called in French the *Neuf Preus*.85

Most of the partial synonyms of *proesce* and *pruesse*, including *chevalerie* and *knyghtshipe*, could also be used to designate a particular act demonstrating both courage and prowess – more distinctively called a *fait d’armes* in Middle French and a *fayt or dede of armes* in Middle English. The accomplishment of notable feats or deeds of this sort seems indeed to have been regarded as the highest goal of knightly endeavor throughout the period of functional noble knighthood, and therefore the one that conveyed the highest claim to esteem and honor based on behavior rather than status. Christine de Pizan’s treatise of 1409, the last major work of the type, was called the *Livre des fais d’armes et de chevalerie*, and as we have seen, that title was represented quite literally by Caxton in his printed translation of 1489, *The book of fayttes of armes and of chyualrye*. The performance of such feats obviously required the health and strength characteristic of a warrior or athlete, and these qualities – promoted in treatises both by the author of the prose *Lancelot* in 1215/25 and Charny in 1352 – were accordingly valued and actively pursued by those who undertook *chevalerie* either as a profession or an element of their nobiliary way of life.

It is clear from Charny’s *Livre de Chevalerie* that feats of arms were most highly valued (and therefore honored) when performed in the context of a real battle, where the risk of death or maiming was the highest and the prize of victory the greatest. Nevertheless, it is equally clear that comparable feats were almost as highly valued when performed in the knightly contests generically called *hastiludia* or “hastiludes,” whose earliest form, the tournament (mentioned above in several contexts), emerged in northern France at some time between 1070 and 1120,86 and is best known to us after 1170 from the descriptions included in virtually all of the romances of the Arthurian tradition inaugurated in that year. These contests – in which most active knights in France and England seem to have participated at least occasionally – constituted the most distinctive element of the active side of knightly culture, and one without real precedent or parallel in comparable warrior societies.

From an early date (and certainly by 1150) tournaments were commonly preceded by a series of much simpler hastiludes called *joustes*, fought between pairs of young knights. *Joustes* or “jousts” had the advantage of allowing the most accomplished knights to display their prowess in a more conspicuous manner than was possible as part of a team of hundreds. They became increasingly independent of the tournament during the course of the thirteenth century, and between about 1270 and 1400 seem first to have superseded it entirely, and then fragmented into a growing number of specialized types that survived in an increasingly ritualized form down to the first decades of the seventeenth century in England and a century later still in Germany.

The original form of joust had in the meantime inspired the creation of a variety of comparable forms of hastilude, including the initially individual type associated with the *emprinse d’armes* or “enterprise of arms,” in which a single knight announced that he would take on all comers at a particular time and place. The *emprinse* themselves (in the years around 1400 sometimes involving teams of knights bound by a common vow) were directly modeled on the quests for “adventures” through which – according to all of the authors of romances from Chrestien onward – the Arthurian knights had sought to increase or maintain their honorable reputations, and which had occupied most of the plots of such works in all languages.

What is significant about all of this in the present context is that it suggests that, in real life as in the romances, knighthood was primarily expressed through and associated with such essentially martial activities and actions, and that the merit of individual knights was evaluated

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85 The expression first appears in Guillaume de Machaut’s *Prise d’Alexandrie*, a biography of King Pierre II of Cyprus. In English they were called the Nine Worthies by 1417, and later the Nine Nobles.

– like that of a modern star athlete – very largely on the basis of their personal success in them, regardless of the overall outcome of a larger conflict of which they might have formed part. Furthermore, the martial activities themselves seem to have been judged not on the basis of any moral necessity or social utility they might have had, but – like modern sports – on the basis of the degree of their danger and their difficulty to the knight. The notorious tendency of knights to treat real battles like tournaments, and their equally notorious lack of discipline in both forms of conflict – which led directly to the crushing defeats suffered by the French hosts at Crécy in 1346, Poitiers in 1356, Nicopolis in 1396, and Agincourt in 1415 – seem to have arisen directly from their tendency to see all forms of combat as contests in which they might increase or regain their personal honor by performing notable feats of arms.

So far as I could discover, the only knights who were bound by an oath bearing any resemblance to those proposed by the early theorists just cited were those admitted to one or more of the various corporate orders or societies either composed of or dominated by knights, and commonly called *ordres de chevalerie* or “orders of knighthood”. After the hastiludes (which some of the later orders were founded specifically to organize, and which they ultimately replaced) these extremely varied bodies were the principal institutional embodiments of the values of the knightly nobilities of Latin Christendom, and are therefore of some interest to anyone seeking to understand the nature of those values.

As one might have expected, the statutes of the orders of the older type mainly founded between 1120 and 1230 to contribute to the various crusades against the infidel neighbors of Christendom – in which the functions of the twelfth-century knight were combined with those of the contemporary monk – made no reference whatsoever to the non-military values of the nobility, but sought to promote the military skills and related qualities of their knightly brethren, and to impose upon them a degree of military discipline quite alien to comparable bodies of lay knights. It is true that the Order of the Hospital of St. John and the orders modeled upon it also maintained charitable hospitals, and devoted many of their corporate resources to this function, but the function itself was mainly carried out by brethren who were not in the military division of the order, and represented the religious rather than the knightly aspect of their character.

The orders of the later, curial type, founded by kings and princes in the years between 1325 and 1469, had a very different character. Taking as their model not the monastic order but the pseudo-historical Company of the Round Table, they were restricted to lay noblemen – in most cases of knightly condition but in some cases including squires — and were attached to the court (and usually the throne) of their founder. As my own research has demonstrated, these orders – the most successful of which were the Garter of England (whose foundation by Edward III in 1348/50 I have already mentioned) and its Burgundian imitator the Golden Fleece, founded in 1430 – were primarily intended to promote loyalty among the more distinguished members of the regnal or domanial nobility of all ranks to the crown of their founder. The emphasis of their statutes on loyalty and the clearly political basis of the choice of their greater companions are clear indications that loyalty – one of the qualities most commonly associated with “chivalry” though actually independent of knighthood — was never to be taken for granted among noblemen of any rank, whether in their capacity as knight, vassal, or subject.

It is significant in the present context, however, that the only other goal common to most of the founders of these orders was to reward or promote the military virtues of knighthood – both to the end that their “companions” in the order would regard them as promoters of their

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common knightly values, and also to the end that the companions would be more effective defenders of their founder’s domains, and instruments of his own aggressive policies towards his neighbors and rivals. Knightliness thus remained essentially military to the very end of its active existence, and involved no qualities not directly related to the knight’s role as a warrior.

5. The Term and Concept of “Chivalry” as Products of a Standard Defect in the Methodology of Historians

I shall now turn to the general questions I raised in my introductory section on the relationship between historical and historiographical language. The key piece of evidence for the preservation, in the minds of contemporaries other than the authors of treatises, of the essentially military character of knighthood and its ideals, was the history of the words used to represent the status of knight and the phenomena related to it in the languages of Latin Europe. For reasons I shall indicate below, the history of words was a field that had been almost entirely neglected by historians until very recently, and still remains seriously underdeveloped. Before the 1980s, when the scholarly study of knighthood finally began to take off, historians generally failed to read contemporary works of all types with sufficient attention to the wide and changing range of ideas actually represented in them by the words chevalerie and chevaleros/chevalereus and by their various cognates and semantic equivalents and derivatives in the languages of Latin Europe (including the Latin militia and militaris, the Middle English knyghthode and knyghli, and the German ritterschaft and ritterlich). Indeed, they have still failed entirely to do so for the period after 1200 — when most of the literature in which these words appear was composed, especially in English. Had they paid more attention to the literature in this field, they would have discovered that the words of what may be called the “chevalerie lexical and semantic family” not only represented a number of quite distinct phenomena of both a military and a socio-political nature — related in various ways and degrees to the status of chevalier in its core sense of “knight” — but that none of these words was ever used before 1530, when most of them fell into disuse, to designate anything that could reasonably be called a code, ideology, or ethos of any of the kinds historians have long associated with those words. Thus, even in the unlikely event that a code of this sort did exist outside the works of theorists either contemporary or modern, that code was not in practice designated or described — either by them or by anyone else in the period when knighthood was still a functional status — by a word of the chevalerie lexical and semantic family.

Although I actually conducted my study of the historical vocabulary or “lexicon” for knighthood in the languages of Latin Christendom before 1759 quite early in my general investigation of the notion of “chivalry,” I have reserved my detailed comments on this subject for the end of this essay. I have done this in part because the history of the lexicon is much easier to understand against the background of the history of knighthood I have already presented, and in part because it is the most compelling basis for my argument that “chivalry” lexical and semantic family not only represented a number of quite distinct phenomena of a both a military and a socio-political nature — related in various ways and degrees to the status of chevalier in its core sense of “knight” — but that none of these words was ever used before 1530, when most of them fell into disuse, to designate anything that could reasonably be called a code, ideology, or ethos of any of the kinds historians have long associated with those words. Thus, even in the unlikely event that a code of this sort did exist outside the works of theorists either contemporary or modern, that code was not in practice designated or described — either by them or by anyone else in the period when knighthood was still a functional status — by a word of the chevalerie lexical and semantic family.

I must first set out my overarching explanation for the persistent failure of historians to recognize four distinct facts: (1) first that the Modern English word “chivalry” cannot be treated as a simple semantic equivalent of its Middle English predecessor chyvalrie, which lost most of its original senses soon after 1500, and fell into general disuse between 1530 and 1762;
(2) second, that _chyvalrie_ itself is unattested before 1292, and its earlier meanings were represented in English exclusively before that date – and largely after it as well – by words related to the English word _knight_ ancestral to the modern “knight”; (3) third, that even the latter words cannot be treated as exact equivalents of or substitutes for the French _chevalerie_ or any other cognate word in its full semantic range; and finally, (4) that the concept the modern English word “chivalry” has long been used to represent – that of a comprehensive nobiliary or “aristocratic” code – was itself almost certainly an artificial construct of nineteenth-century historiography. Indeed, despite the disclaimers of its historians, the construct “chivalry” is in fact closely comparable in both its nature and its origin to the now discredited “feudalism” and the equally discreditable (though not yet fully discredited) “Middle Ages’– with which both “feudalism” and “chivalry” have been closely associated from the time of their introduction.

I believe that all four of these particular failures have persisted for more than two centuries now primarily because of the more general failure of historians – even after their adoption of a “scientific” methodology for research and argument in the decades after 1870 – to adopt a comparably scientific approach to the establishment of general classificatory concepts, and the adoption and definition of appropriate terms of discourse to represent them. It has long been clear to me that this failure itself derives from the persistence in my discipline of the deep prejudice against anything redolent of “jargon” that was characteristic of all narrative historians in the long centuries when historiography was a form of literary exercise intended to entertain, instruct, and inspire the members of a political elite to appropriate actions.

Of course, historians have from time to time found a need for generalizing terms. In keeping with their prejudice against “technical jargon,” however, they have almost always borrowed these terms from ordinary usage, beginning with that of their own language in their own time. This was the source of such misleading historiographical terms as “aristocracy” used in its abusive late-eighteenth-century sense of “a social elite of some sort” rather than as the name of a type of polity governed by such an elite, and the terms “nobility” and “gentry,” sometimes equated with and sometimes contrasted to “aristocracy” in different ways. The last two words have been most commonly used without explanation and regardless of the period under examination in the peculiar senses they have borne in England since the late sixteenth century, corresponding roughly to _haute_ and _basse noblesse_ in modern French – ignoring the fact that before 1585 they had been largely synonymous words, with much broader semantic ranges, and had also shared those ranges with whole families of related Middle-English words like _nollesse_, _noblay_, _gentilrie_, _gentilite_, and _gentrise_, themselves entirely ignored by most historians.

When the current lexicon of their own language failed them (as has often been the case), historians have borrowed their terms from the ordinary usage either of some other country in their own period, or of their own, or of another country, in some earlier period, in which the phenomenon to be named was more common. In most of these cases (including that of “chivalry,” which in Middle English was both spelled and pronounced quite differently from the modern word, as we shall see), the language from which the term was borrowed was either wholly foreign or archaic or both. Nevertheless, that fact was rarely acknowledged, and indeed largely ignored in practice, and no clear distinction was ever drawn between its meaning or meanings as a term of discourse, and its semantic ranges in the language from which it was borrowed. Both “fief” and “feudal” were introduced as quasi-technical terms of English historiography in this careless manner, as were such derivatives of the latter as “feudality” and “feudalism”. The senses of these words, once adopted, were progressively extended in various different directions, rendering them ever more ambiguous, and muddling to ever greater degrees our understanding of the phenomena they were used to represent.

Like other historians, the men who introduced these words and extended their meanings seem also to have been indifferent to the problems inherent in the use of all words of ordinary usage, whether current or historical, as terms of discourse. These problems arise from a number of different characteristics of most such words, and also of the concepts they represent. The first of these characteristics (which linguists call “polysemy”) involves a multiplicity of senses. Most words in ordinary usage bear – either at the same time
This branching type of polysemy can and does affect words of any formal type or original meaning, but the second type of polysemy of particular interest here – which may be described as “common-notional” – is particularly characteristic of abstract nouns formed like chevalerie, heraudie, barnage, noblesse, gentilité, knyghthode, and the like, through the addition to the stem of a noun like chevalier or knyght (which serves as the title of the holder of a particular position or status) of a general-purpose suffix of abstraction. In Latin the more important of these suffixes were –ia, –ilia, –itas, –aticum, and –atus; in Old French their derivatives –ie, –ice or –esse, –été or –ité, –age, and –ë; and in Middle English (in addition to all of those originating in French) the Germanic suffixes -ship(e), -dom(e), -hod(e), -hed(e), and –nes(se).

The users of such abstract nouns based on positional titles like chevalier or knyght have tended to employ them to represent as many different ideas associated with the type of position in question as seemed useful to them. Because most of these ideas have been common to many different positions, this process has given rise to perhaps a dozen common-notional types of sense, some of which are peculiar to particular types of position. Of those senses of this type associated with highly esteemed positions or “statuses” (including that of knight after 1100), five have been particularly common: (1) the positional sense, designating the position or status of the status-holder as such; (2) the collective sense, designating some group or collectivity of such status-holders; (3) the functional sense, designating the general function or profession of the status-holder, conceived of more or less abstractly; (4) the actional sense, designating the particular actions and activities regarded as characteristic of the status and its functions; and (5) the qualitative sense, designating the personal qualities regarded as at least ideally characteristic of the status-holders in question.

Unfortunately, even these common-notional types of sense have been attached to such abstract nouns to an unpredictably varied extent, and in an unpredictable chronological progression, so it cannot be assumed without evidence that any particular abstract noun bore any one of these senses, or did so in any particular period of its history. Nevertheless, it has been normal for such words to possess at least two or three meanings of this common-notional type, distinguishable from one another only from context, and some words (like “heraldry,” introduced only in 1572) have come through careless usage to possess many more. In the case of the words of the chevalerie family, of particular interest to us here, no fewer than twelve distinct senses of this type are recorded from the period before 1400, most of them eventually common to French and English, but some peculiar to either one language or the other.

Not surprisingly, senses of the common-notional type frequently cut across the different semantic branches that such words may also acquire, so that a word might come to have three or four distinct collective, functional, or qualitative senses, each related to a different general sense of the word produced by branching. This, as we shall see, was in fact the case with most
of the words related to chevalerie, with the result that both the French and the English words
came to bear in the region of thirty more-or-less distinct meanings. In any case, polysemy of
varying types and degrees is a very common characteristic of words in ordinary usage, and
makes them unsuitable for use as technical terms without radical semantic pruning.

The second of the unfortunate characteristics of words in ordinary usage is that most of
the meanings they have been given have been conceived with considerably less than the kind of
rigor and precision desirable in the definition of a technical term. In most cases, indeed, their
semantic ranges have been extended either carelessly or poetically in various directions – often
through synecdoche (the use of a more general term to represent a narrower concept or vice
versa) or metonymy (the representation of a phenomenon through a word properly designating
something merely associated with it), both of which tend to be misleading. This makes it
essential for scholars who wish to employ a word borrowed from ordinary language as a term
of discourse not only to indicate which of the many current or historical senses of that word
they mean to employ, but to choose its most characteristic or historically important sense.

Of course, it is almost as important to choose the appropriate word to represent a concept
as it is to choose an appropriate sense of that word. This is not as easy as most historians seem to
believe because of the second problem presented by the lexicon of ordinary usage – which is in
effect the reverse of the first. In addition to being represented by words with many meanings,
many historical concepts have been represented even in a single language by two or more
distinct words, each with its own distinctive semantic range. This characteristic may be called
“polylexy,” and contrasted to “monolexy,” the representation of an idea by a single word.
Concepts related to “distinguished birth or ancestry,” for example, were represented in both
Old and Middle French and in Middle English by words derived from gentil, noble, franc, pair,
and (in French alone) debonaire – all essentially synonymous in this part of their semantic range.

This sort of superabundance of words for the same idea is more common that one might
imagine, and often makes it impossible to state that any particular phenomenon or concept was
or is distinctly represented by any particular word in the ordinary usage of any language.
When combined with the polysemy of many such words (including both chevalerie and vasselage
– both commonly abused by historians), such polylexy effectively created complex networks of
partially synonymous words and the concepts they represented. Furthermore, on a translingual
level the delays of decades or centuries that separated the appearance of a word in one
language from the introduction of its reflex into another gave such lexical networks a temporal
dimension that further complicates historical generalizations. Finally, in many cases the
transmission of senses from a word in one language to its cognate or derivative in another was
not only delayed but merely partial, and the subsequent loss of one or more senses in either or
both languages could further reduce the semantic correspondence between the words to the
point where they no longer had any common meaning.

As my earlier observations suggested, the abstract nouns based on words meaning
“knight” were affected by extreme polysemy in all of the languages of western Europe, and this
varied both synchronically and diachronically within and among those languages over the
whole period when knighthood was a functional status. Furthermore, though the abstract
notions associated with knighthood were monolexous before 1292 in English (when chyvalrie
was introduced), and throughout the period before 1600 in most of the languages of continental
Europe (in which a single abstract noun and a single adjective served to represent the whole
range of senses accumulated over the years), after 1292 the ideas related to knighthood came to
exhibit a significant degree of polylexy in English – which ended up with two sets of words of
different origins bearing the same range of meanings, one of which came to include four distinct
abstract nouns. For all of these reasons, no single modern word can reasonably be treated as a
simple representative or synonym of any of the words of the chevalerie family in their character
as elements of ordinary historical languages, and historians who have done so without
explanation (the usual case) have inevitably misrepresented historical reality at least in
concealing the complexity both of the semantic history of that word, and of the lexical history of
the concept it represented.
The sort of distortion involved in such an unexplained adoption for historiographical purposes of a single historical meaning of a word, and the equally unexplained exclusion of all of its other meanings, is at the very least misleading. In the case of the treatment of such words as “fief,” “feudal,” and “chivalry,” however, the effects of this practice have been exacerbated by the adoption of the word in a sense that was not in fact part of its semantic range in any language in any part of the period under examination, but arose at a much later date – usually as a result of a misunderstanding of the historical phenomenon to which it was applied. This version of the practice is misleading in a much more serious way, as it suggests that contemporaries conceived of the phenomenon represented by the word in essentially the same way, when in fact they thought of it – if they recognized it at all – in a quite different way, and represented it by different words indicative of different associations. In the case of the English words “chivalry” and the related adjective “chivalrous,” their unexplained use by historians in contrast to the historically synonymous words “knighthood” and “knightly” further misrepresents their semantic history, and implies the historical existence of a set of words primarily or exclusively related to a knightly code of conduct – when in fact no such words existed in any language before 1825, and no comparable lexical contrast was even possible in any language before 1292, or in any language other than English even after that date.

In contrast to most historians, since I came to recognize the nature of this general terminological problem of my discipline in the 1990s, I have done my best to take a more scientific approach to the identification and definition of general historical phenomena, and to the selection of terms to designate them. Among other things, I have attempted to maintain as much as possible a one-to-one relationship between phenomena, concepts, and terms, and to maintain a sharp distinction between terms of historiographical discourse – which should always be in the modern form of the language of the historian – and words of historical usage, which to mark them as such, should always be represented in a form characteristic of the language of the society under examination, normally printed in italics, and pronounced when spoken as they would have been pronounced at the time. This makes it possible to distinguish clearly in both print and speech even between such homonyms as (1) fief (the historical term, pronounced fyeff, interchangeable with fié, fée, féop, feo, and various other derivatives of the Old Frankish fehu, and equivalent to its Latin derivatives feus, fevus, feodum, and feudum); and (2) “fief” (the term of discourse, pronounced feeff, and as such without any synonym in English). Of more importance in the present context, this practice (combined with the adoption, when possible, of distinctive standardized spellings for archaic words88) makes it possible to distinguish unambiguously between the Old and Middle French chevalerie (pronounced chevalureeuh), Modern French chevalerie (pronounced shuvaluree), Middle English chivalrie (pronounced chivalureeuh), and Modern English “chivalry” (pronounced since shortly after its revival in 1762 shiwalree). It also makes possible similar distinctions between Middle English knyght and knyghthod and their Modern English derivatives “knight” and “knighthood,” and to covert the latter into useful terms of historiographical discourse.

The creation of a truly useful term of this sort ideally involves not only the selection of the most appropriate word for a concept but the definition of that word in a stipulative way that excludes all but the most useful of the senses it has acquired in ordinary speech, and the further

88 The discussion of historical words is still further complicated by a complete lack of standard orthography or spelling in most vernacular languages before about 1600, and the tendency of scribes to write most words in as many different ways as they could think of. As a result, the word now written “chivalry” was represented between 1297 and various dates down to about 1660 in at least twenty-one other spellings: chyvalerie, chivalerie, chivalerie, chevalerie, chywalrie, chivalrye, chevelry(e), chevelry, chevalry, chevalrie, chevalry(e), chivalrye, chevally(e), chevalry, chevalree, chivalrye, and chivaltry. I have chosen chivalry from this list (regularizing the u of the fifth spelling to “v”) because it is at once sufficiently similar to its Old French and Modern English equivalents to be easily recognizable, and sufficiently different to represent the Middle English word as distinct from its Modern English derivative. The Middle English ancestor of “knight” had a comparable array of spellings between c. 1100 and c. 1600, and for similar reasons I have chosen from them the spelling knyght, whose central “y” marks its period.
refinement of that sense in keeping with the principles of scientific taxonomy. These principles require that the definition should be of a precise and monothetic nature—that is, it should list all of the characteristics that a particular phenomenon must have to be designated by the term—and should normally be conceived as part of a hierarchy of concepts representing phenomena related to one another in different ways and on different levels.

Another of the principles that should be followed in choosing terms is that of transparency, which involves whenever possible the choice of a word whose etymology and general form suggest its meaning. I have attempted to clarify the senses of the abstract terms I have created on the basis of personal titles of most types (including that of “knight”) by establishing a standard suffix or set of suffixes to represent each of the principal common-notional senses: (1) -ship for the positional sense, (2) -age or -iate for the collective, (3) -hood or -ry for the functional, (4) -(li)ness for the qualitative, (5) -dom, -y, or -ate for the jurisdictional, and so on. In keeping with this scheme, I adopted in the four relevant senses the terms (1) “knightship,” (2) “knightage,” (3) “knighthood,” and (4) “knightliness” respectively (all attested in some form and in some period or other in the sense in question); the actional sense I shall represent by the phrase “knightly deed,” as Modern English, unlike Middle English, does not normally represent this type of idea with a suffix of abstraction.

It is of course the qualitative sense that is of particular interest here, as it was effectively the foundation on which the whole edifice of “chivalry” as a code, ideology, or ethos was erected by historians in the early nineteenth century. The obvious word to adopt in English for the specifically knightly set of values is in fact “knighthood,” which was introduced by Spenser to represent this idea in 1596, and whose meaning is completely transparent from its form. It is preferable to “chivalry” because the latter word is not only ambiguous but too closely associated with the ideas of code and ideology to serve in this narrower sense. “Knighthood” is also easily translatable into most other languages, in some cases by an existing word (like the Castilian caballerosidad and the German Ritterlichkeit), and in others through an analogous neologism (like chevalerosité in French and cavallerosità in Italian). For the same reasons, I also propose the general replacement of the misleading adjective “chivalrous” with “knightly,” which is much more suggestive of knighthood.

No particular general name is needed to represent the set of status-groups, institutions, behaviors, and values associated primarily with knighthood as such, let alone the ideology of knighthood or the imagined “code” associated with it. All of these phenomena, to the extent that they can be shown to exist, can be designated in the usual way either by describing them as “knightly” (as in “knightly values” or “value-set”) or by setting them before the phrase “of knighthood” (as in “ideology of knighthood”). I propose that “knighthood” itself be used exclusively to designate the essentially military function or profession of knights in the period when they still had such a function, and to contrast it both to the revived word “knightship” in its sense of “the status or dignity of knight” and to “knightage” in its principal existing sense of “a definable body of knights, especially one associated with a particular territorial entity.”

I should finally observe here that my use of all of these practices has depended to a considerable extent on the work of a set of scholars who until recently have been almost invisible to academic “historians”: the historical linguists and lexicographers who—beginning with the French antiquarian Charles Du Fresne, sieur Du Cange (v. 1610-88) in the middle decades of the seventeenth century—have studied with increasing thoroughness the history of the words used in a growing number of languages, in part or all of my period, from the first appearance of some form of those words in writing to the present, and have set them out in the form of historical dictionaries. It is ironic that the first person to compile such a dictionary for a

89 The first dictionary to present in a scientific manner the history of any language was probably Du Cange’s Glossarium mediae et infimae Latinitatis (Paris, 1678), which traced the evolution of Old French from Vulgar Latin.
vernacular language – the eighteenth-century French antiquarian La Curne de Sainte-Palaye\textsuperscript{90} – was also the founder of the modern study of knighthood, as his successors in the latter field have until very recently paid almost no attention to the discoveries of his successors in the former. Sainte-Palaye was well ahead of his time; however, as historical lexicography really took off only in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, when scientific scholarship in general finally began to take its modern form, and to find its modern home in the new-model research-university.\textsuperscript{91} Since that time lexicographers have produced vast historical dictionaries of the vernacular languages of Europe, often in numerous volumes published over many decades.

On the basis of these works, it has been possible since at least 1928 to reconstruct a reasonably accurate picture of the history of the use of the word “chivalry” and its cognates, equivalents, and adjectival reflexes in Middle English; possible since at least the 1930s to do the same in continental (Old and Late Middle) French; and since 1977 to do so in Anglo-Norman, the French spoken in England from the Conquest of 1066 to about 1400. By the 1860s (when the modern, scientific study of knighthood began in continental Europe, two-thirds of a century before it began in any Anglophone country) some notion of the history of such words could also have been derived from the examination of the dictionaries of contemporary usage published for both English and French since the seventeenth century. In practice, however, historians have to date almost completely ignored the evidence presented in these works, and to my knowledge only one historian (Jean Flori) has independently examined the history of the words related to knighthood in any language, even for a single century and in a single type of source.\textsuperscript{92} This disdain for what the Germans have come to call Begriffsgeschichte, or the history of words and the ideas they represent,\textsuperscript{93} has by no means been either peculiar to or novel in the historiography of knighthood established by Sainte-Palaye in 1759; on the contrary, for the reasons I mentioned above, it was already a long-established element of the tradition of narrative historiography that goes back to Thucydides. Nevertheless, in a world in which most historians write primarily for other historians, this practice is no longer defensible, and must be abandoned before it does any more damage to the state of our understanding of historical phenomena not confined to a single country or century.

6. The Words related to Knighthood in the Languages of France and England to 1759

Having completed this general discussion of how historians ought to approach the history of words and the adoption of terms, I must turn at last to the question of the actual meaning of the antecedents of the word “chivalry” and its cognates and equivalents in the vernacular languages of France (Old French c. 1050 – c. 1300, Middle French c. 1300 – 1600) and England (Anglo-Norman 1066 – c. 1400, Middle English c. 1100 – c. 1470, Early Modern English c. 1470 – c. 1610), in the period when knighthood was still a functional status. Limitations of space oblige


\textsuperscript{91} The years between 1881 and 1928 saw the publication, in volumes or fascicles, first of the second historical dictionary of French (the Dictionnaire de l’ancienne langue française of Frédéric Godefroy, published between 1881 and 1902, and limited to the stage called Old French of the period c. 1000-c. 1300); and second the first historical dictionary of English (the first edition of the Oxford English Dictionary or OED, published between 1884 and 1928, and covering the history of the language from the emergence of Middle English c. 1150 and the time of publication). Since that time, many other such dictionaries of both languages have appeared.

\textsuperscript{92} Flori, “La Notion de Chevalerie dans les Chansons de Geste du XIIe siècle: Etude historique du vocabulaire,” Le Moyen Age 81 (1975), 211-244, 407-445

\textsuperscript{93} Begriffsgeschichte (or concept-historiography, as it may best be termed in English), is a relatively new field of historiography, founded in the years immediately following the Second World War. On this field, see especially the essays in Hartmut Lehman and Melvin Richter, eds., The Meaning of Historical Terms and Concepts: New Studies on Begriffsgeschichte (German Historical Institute, Occasional Paper N. 15).

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me to represent this in the form of a table, distilled from a wide variety of sources. This is organized according to the semantic categories explained in the previous section, using the common-notional senses as the primary basis for ordering them, in blocks numbered from one to thirteen, and dividing each of their semantic ranges on the bases of the senses produced by branching and sub-branching, marked with letters and Roman numerals respectively. The dates of the appearance of the different senses of Old French chevalerie and its reflexes in Anglo-Norman and Middle English are set in the first three columns to the right of the table, followed in the fourth by the four abstractions based on the English word knyght, identified by the letters a-d. The primary common-notional senses are themselves arranged in the order of their first appearance in Old French, and divided into a set attested before and another attested after 1220. Senses attested after 1220 in the first set are italicized.

As the table indicates, between their first attestation at dates between c.1100 (for chevalerie in Old French), 1139 (for chivalrie in Anglo-Norman), 1175 (for knyghtshipe in English), c.1300 (for chivalrie, knyghthed and knyghthode in English), and 1390 (for knyghtlihede in English) down to c.1450, all of these words represented a wide and largely overlapping range of ideas related to the status of knight. I have identified a total of twelve common-notional senses attested before 1600, seven of which are attested in Old French by 1220 and nine by 1280, and all of which are attested in at least one of the languages in question by 1386. The first two – the actional and qualitative – are attested c. 1100 in the Roland, while the collective and functional senses are attested from c. 1150, the supportive (designating the material rewards of knighthood) and premial (designating a knightly prize) from c. 1176, and the positional from between 1200 and 1220. The last two continental French senses (admissional and celebratory) appeared only in 1252 and c. 1280, and the three remaining ones in England between 1290 and 1375.

As a result of semantic branching, five of these senses – 1 (actional), 2 (qualitative), 3 (collective), 4 (functional), and 7 (positional) — acquired among them twelve subsenses, five of which in turn acquired respectively five, two, two, four, and two infrasenses, for a total of fifteen. As my observations on attestation in the previous paragraph suggest, only the first nine of the twelve primary senses are attested in standard Old French, the last three being restricted to words peculiar to England. Senses 5, 6, 8, and 9, by contrast, seem to have been restricted to continental Old French, and therefore unknown in England. Thus, the semantic ranges of the continental French chevalerie, and the equivalent words in both of the vernacular languages used in England, corresponded in only five of the twelve common-notional senses attached to these words. Furthermore, eight of the infrasenses remained peculiar to the languages of England, and two to those of France, so the correspondence on that level was even lower. Finally, as the table indicates, most of the senses common to continental French and either of the languages of England appeared on the continent decades or even centuries before they appeared in England, and in Anglo-Norman appeared decades or centuries before they did in English, so it was not until well after 1300 that most of them were established in the latter language. Nevertheless, the five shared common-notional senses corresponded to the five with multiple sub-senses, and were clearly the most important of the twelve.

The numerous subsenses and infrasenses into which these five major senses came to be divided were themselves the result of branching and sub-branching along lines related to the

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A different use of the word chevalier by social and military theorists that I examined above. In the light of what I have already said there and elsewhere in this essay, it should not be surprising that all five of the major common-notional senses of chevalerie and its equivalents had at least one military subsense, and that six of the remaining seven independent senses had at least a strong military element. Nor should it be surprising that only four of those five senses – the actional, qualitative, collective, and positional – ever acquired even one social subsense, or that thirteen of the fifteen infrasenses they did acquire were wholly military in nature, while one other was partially military. The military senses themselves fell into the three broad branches I have already identified, and it can only be striking to the modern student that the members of the chevalerie word-family came to be used to represent, without distinction, almost every kind of military phenomenon recognized by contemporaries.

Table 2. The Lexicon of Knighthood and its Semantic Range in France and England, c. 1100-1611

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concepts represented by the Old French noun CHEVALERIE or one of its reflexes or synonyms in Anglo-Norman and Middle English.</th>
<th>OF chevalerie</th>
<th>AN chivalerie</th>
<th>ME chivalrie</th>
<th>ME a. knyghtship b. knyghthed c. knyghthood d. knyghtled</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. CONCEPTS ATTESTED BY 1220</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. (actional) The actions and activities typical of knights</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. (military actions or activities)</td>
<td>1080/1100</td>
<td>1150</td>
<td>c. 1180</td>
<td>a. 1225, c. 1382</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. A military exploit or feat of arms</td>
<td>1080/1100</td>
<td>1150</td>
<td>c. 1180</td>
<td>a. 1225, c. 1382</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii. A military a. expedition, b. campaign, or c. battle</td>
<td>1150</td>
<td>c. 1180</td>
<td>a. 1439</td>
<td>a. 1400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii. Military service, the military life</td>
<td>c. 1150</td>
<td>c. 1180</td>
<td>c. 1375</td>
<td>c. 1450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iv. Warfare, combat in general, literal or metaphorical</td>
<td>c. 1150</td>
<td>c. 1180</td>
<td>c. 1375</td>
<td>c. 1450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v. Warfare metaphorically conceived as against sin</td>
<td>c. 1150</td>
<td>c. 1180</td>
<td>a. 1398</td>
<td>c. 1450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. (social and moral acts or activities)</td>
<td>1176/84</td>
<td>c. 1180</td>
<td>c. 1385</td>
<td>a. 1200, b. 1300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. Activities char. of noble knights, the noble way of life</td>
<td>1176/84</td>
<td>c. 1180</td>
<td>c. 1385</td>
<td>a. 1200, b. 1300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii. Acts of moral courage and sacrifice</td>
<td>1280</td>
<td>c. 1350</td>
<td>c. 1377-1383</td>
<td>b. 1377-1383</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. (qualitative) The qualities ideally associated with the profession or status of knigh</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. (military qualities)</td>
<td>1080/1100</td>
<td>1175</td>
<td>1300/25-1530</td>
<td>a. 1200, b. 1300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. 1. Courage (2. prowess)</td>
<td>1080/1100</td>
<td>1175</td>
<td>1300/25-1530</td>
<td>a. 1200, b. 1300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. (non-military qualities- implied)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>c. 1377-1383</td>
<td>b. 1400-1450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. 1. Courtesy</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>c. 1382</td>
<td>a. 1225, c. 1382</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii. Honorableness</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>c. 1382</td>
<td>a. 1225, c. 1382</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii. knyghtliness 1596</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>c. 1382</td>
<td>a. 1225, c. 1382</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. (collective) A body of knights, men-at-arms, soldiers, or noblemen</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. (military-narrow)</td>
<td>c. 1150</td>
<td>c. 1174/5</td>
<td>1300/25</td>
<td>b. 1375, c. 1377</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. A host dominated by knights or men-at-arms</td>
<td>c. 1150</td>
<td>c. 1174/5</td>
<td>1300/25</td>
<td>b. 1375, c. 1377</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii. A military-religious order</td>
<td>c. 1150</td>
<td>c. 1174/5</td>
<td>1300/25</td>
<td>b. 1375, c. 1377</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. (broadly conceived)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. Army host or army</td>
<td>1349/8</td>
<td>c. 1377</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>b. 1375, c. 1377</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii. The Christian host, literal or metaphorical</td>
<td>1349/8</td>
<td>c. 1377</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>b. 1375, c. 1377</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii. The heavenly host (holy kind, kind of heaven)</td>
<td>1349/8</td>
<td>c. 1377</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>b. 1375, c. 1377</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iv. The host of Hell (knighthood of the devil)</td>
<td>1349/8</td>
<td>c. 1377</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>b. 1375, c. 1377</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. (social)</td>
<td>1174/8</td>
<td>1415/22</td>
<td>1390</td>
<td>c. 1377/90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. (functional) The knightly order knyghtes 1388</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. The knightly order knyghtes 1388</td>
<td>1174/8</td>
<td>1415/22</td>
<td>1390</td>
<td>c. 1377/90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. (supportive) The rewards of knighthood activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. (narrowly conceived)</td>
<td>1150</td>
<td>1180</td>
<td>c. 1300/7</td>
<td>a. 1175, c. 1300, b. 1375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. (broadly conceived)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. The military profession</td>
<td>1122</td>
<td>1128</td>
<td>c. 1330</td>
<td>a. 1440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii. The military art: tactics and strategy</td>
<td>1122</td>
<td>1128</td>
<td>c. 1330</td>
<td>a. 1440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. (premial) A knightly prize</td>
<td>1176?</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. (positional) The position or status of knight</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. (military) The military position or rank of knight</td>
<td>1200/20</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1297-1430</td>
<td>a. 1205, c. 1300, d. 1325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. (social) The societal dignity of knight (received, taken)</td>
<td>1200/20</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1300/25</td>
<td>c. a1398</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. (ordinal) The status of knight as an “order“</td>
<td>1200/20</td>
<td>1415/22</td>
<td>1440</td>
<td>c. 1393</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. CONCEPTS FIRST ATTESTED AFTER 1220</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. (admissional) The rite of admission to knighthood</td>
<td>1252</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>(c. 1711)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The four social subsenses of the chevalerie family – one qualitative, one collective, and two positional (a simple and an ordinal type) – were at once much more limited in number and semantic range than those of the military type, and more unevenly distributed among the three languages, and were also adopted at significantly later dates. What is most interesting is the extreme lateness, paucity, and restriction to English of the qualitative social senses traditionally associated with the word “chivalry”. These senses were identified only by the lexicographers of the Middle English Dictionary, who obviously expected to find evidence for the kind of code that historians have long identified with the word “chivalry,” and in consequence “found” many more dubious than convincing examples of normative qualities. While none of the passages they quote contains an example of any of the five Middle English words used to designate anything like a code, a number of the passages do clearly suggest that, at least in literary contexts, certain non-military qualities did come to be associated with knyghthode (from 1377-1523), chivalarie (from 1385-1534), and knyghthede (from 1400-1450), all of which may be seen as representing the status of knight. The only knightly qualities clearly suggested by the passages in question, however, are courtesy (especially towards noble ladies and corpses), clemency (towards ladies in distress), and an honorable respect for promises made. All three of these qualities were of course among those long promoted by the authors of romances and treatises alike, and the first two, at least, had since 1225 been represented collectively in English by words of the gentil family: two of which, gentilnesse and genterie, came into use between 1374 and 1380. As all knights by then were gentil in the social sense, it was natural enough to attribute to them on occasion the social and moral qualities especially associated with that status, if only to appeal to that side of their character. The lateness, rarity, and confinement to English of this sort of lexical transfer, however, suggest that the association of nobiliary qualities with knighthood was equally late and rare, and largely confined to England.

Thus, as I have emphasized at various points in this essay, the only qualities represented by chevalerie and its equivalents not only throughout that period but in both of the countries I have examined, and all of their languages, were those of reckless courage and military prowess, and as all of the evidence for the actual behavior of knights indicates that these were in fact the qualities that knights most admired and strove to achieve, it is those qualities that must be regarded as the sole distinctive qualities of chevalerie in the narrow senses of that word: that is, the status and profession of knights as such.

This does not mean, of course, that many noble knights did not admire and aspire to other qualities, appropriate to their other statuses as noblemen, lords, and courtiers, but it does mean that these qualities did not constitute anything like a general code attached to the status of knight, or that knights were required to display them. Chaucer’s gentil knight – described in the first entry on a particular pilgrim in the General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales – loved not only chivalarie, but trouthe, honor, fredom, and curteisie.53 These were all qualities widely admired among the gentils of his day, as we have seen. Nevertheless, the contemporary evidence suggests that the relevant sense of chivalrie here was “the profession of knight or man-at-arms,” and that while the knight’s contemporaries would have thought him much less gentil (in the qualitative sense of that word) if he had disdained all four of the other qualities, they would not have considered him less knighli or chevalrous.

Indeed, the continuing predominance of the primitive military senses of chevalerie and its equivalents even after the disappearance of functional knighthood can be seen in the definitions given for that word and its adjective in the first French-English dictionary, that of Randle

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Cotgrave, published in 1611. The former word is therein glossed, “Knighthood; th’order of Knighthood; also, cheualerie, doughtinesse, valour, provwesse; also, a bold attempt, hardie enterprise, manlie, or gallant act,” while the adjective _cheualereux_ is defined as “Cheualrous, doughtie, valorous, valiant, courageous, manfull, stout[,] bold.”96

For all of these reasons, then, I believe that Anglophone historians should abandon altogether the use of the word “chivalry” when discussing periods before about 1775 — the time when the Romantic notion of chivalry began to emerge. As I believe I have demonstrated, the use of the word before that date, in addition to being wholly anachronistic in English before 1292, implies a false contrast with words of the “knight” family in English in use by 1200. More importantly, it is too closely tied to the false notions that noblemen between about 1100 or 1200 and 1500 saw themselves collectively as an order of knights, and adhered to a single integrated code of behavior, whether or not associated with knighthood.

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96 Cotgrave, _Dictionarie_.

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