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978-1-107-04221-6 - Chivalry and the Ideals of Knighthood in France during the Hundred Years War

Craig Taylor

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Chivalry and the Ideals of Knighthood in France during the Hundred Years War

Craig Taylor's book examines the wide-ranging French debates on the martial ideals of chivalry and knighthood during the period of the Hundred Years War (1337–1453). Faced by stunning military disasters and the collapse of public order, writers and intellectuals carefully scrutinized the martial qualities expected of knights and soldiers. They questioned when knights and men-at-arms could legitimately resort to violence, the true nature of courage, the importance of mercy and the role of books and scholarly learning in the very practical world of military men. Contributors to these discussions included some of the most famous French medieval writers, led by Jean Froissart, Geoffroi de Charny, Philippe de Mézières, Honorat Bovet, Christine de Pizan, Alain Chartier and Antoine de La Sale. This interdisciplinary study sets their discussions in context, challenging modern, romantic assumptions about chivalry and investigating the historical reality of debates about knighthood and warfare in late medieval France.

CRAIG TAYLOR is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of History at the University of York. A fellow of both the Société de l'histoire de France and the Royal Historical Society, his publications include *Debating the Hundred Years War* (2007) and *Joan of Arc: La Pucelle* (2006).

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Preface

This book is a study of French debates on the ideals of chivalry and knighthood during the period of the Hundred Years War (1337–1453). In the context of a succession of stunning military disasters and the widespread collapse of public order, the martial norms, values and qualities expected of knights and soldiers came under intense scrutiny and discussion. The ideals of knighthood were presented as the most important solution to the devastating problems afflicting France and the French people. This was certainly not a new response, but it is also true that these ideals and norms were subject to much greater debate than modern audiences often imagine, conditioned by the romantic way in which the word ‘chivalry’ is used in modern English. There were some medieval writers who upheld the ideal of the young knight, adventuring and questing for the love of his lady, and always fighting in an honourable and noble fashion. From the earliest days of what historians define as the age of chivalry, however, writers such as Chrétien de Troyes, Bernard de Clairvaux and John of Salisbury had offered complex and often quite different opinions about how knights ought to behave, both towards one another and towards those who were not members of their elite society. Their views were shaped by the genres in which they were writing, the audiences that they were addressing and the deeper goals that they sought to achieve. Moreover, long before the advent of the Renaissance and humanism, medieval intellectuals were inspired by classical authors from Aristotle to Cicero to ask difficult questions about the moral obligations and the ideal behaviour of not just the aristocracy but all members of society. Most important of all, changing military and social contexts inevitably affected the reflections and commentary of medieval intellectuals. In late medieval France the views of authors were shaped by military disaster, as royal armies suffered one defeat after another and public order collapsed in the face of English invasions, civil war and the militarization of the countryside.

As a result, French writers asked crucial questions about when men-at-arms should resort to violence, the true distinction between courage,

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cowardice and rashness, the relative merits of mercy or anger, and the importance and value of prudence, experience and even the reading of books themselves. Many of their answers, emphasizing notions of prudence, discipline and responsibility to the commonweal, and in particular using the Romans as models, echoed ideas that were being expressed in Italy during the same period, and foreshadowed the debates that have previously been associated with humanist writings in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. This must call into question simplistic attempts to divide the age of chivalry from that of the Renaissance, at least in terms of intellectual and cultural responses to warfare.

Many of the individual writers discussed in this book have received a great deal of attention in recent years, most notably Jean Froissart, Guillaume de Machaut and Christine de Pizan. Yet, since Raymond Kilgour published *The Decline of Chivalry as Shown in the French Literature of the Late Middle Ages* (Cambridge, MA, 1937), there has been no large-scale survey in English of the full range of texts and genres in which martial culture and knighthood were discussed in France during this period. His important book remains of great interest, though it does suffer from a number of flaws, not least his unwillingness to recognize that medieval writers had always complained about the failure of the aristocracy to live up to the ideals of knighthood, and his wish to imagine that those ideals were relatively simple to define. In contrast, I wish to explore the complexity of debates about the different qualities praised by French writers, and also to link these intellectual and literary discussions in an interdisciplinary manner to the historical context in which the writers lived. Rather than proceed by means of individual case studies of authors, I offer a thematic approach built around the central pillars of the key martial qualities that were celebrated within chivalric culture, namely honour, prowess and loyalty, courage, mercy and wisdom. My hope is that this will more clearly expose the debates of the period, and allow greater attention to be paid to the relationship between the diverse genres of writing, from romance, chronicle and biography to more overtly didactic works.

This book is, first and foremost, an interdisciplinary study of intellectual culture, ranging across different genres that are rarely put into dialogue with another, and that are often treated as the separate fiefdoms of history, political thought and literature. In exploring the ideals of knighthood, my study also contributes to modern scholarship on masculinity – or, at least, its cultural norms, which must then be measured and understood in relationship to social practice and behaviour. Finally, this book engages with the complex questions raised recently by military historians regarding the relationship between culture and war. In this

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context, I must emphasize two crucial points. Above all, my aim is not to argue that culture was a more important engine than, for example, technology in driving military history. Indeed, more careful thought is needed about the impact, or sometimes the lack of impact, of technological change upon cultural representations of knighthood in the Middle Ages. Second, debates about the impact of chivalric culture on warfare have effectively been scuppered by naïve and simplistic views about what the ideals of knighthood actually were in the Middle Ages. Searching for evidence that medieval soldiers were either inspired by love or treated warfare as some kind of a game and extension of the tournament list is a fruitless task that has naturally led many military historians to denounce chivalry as an irrelevance. Indeed, it is striking how many important recent books on the political and military history of the late Middle Ages do not even cite the term ‘chivalry’ in their index. It is my hope that this book will offer an opportunity for military historians to reconsider what was actually being said about the ideals of knighthood in late medieval culture, thereby enabling a more careful consideration of the impact and importance of such debates. Furthermore, to turn the question posed by the debate on cultures of war on its head, it is equally important to think about the impact of military, social and political contexts upon high culture and intellectual debate during the Middle Ages. Too often, chivalry is studied in a vacuum, with the evidence derived solely from the literature of the age, without consideration of the reality that existed around it. In this book, my concern is not only to position late medieval French writers in the longer chain of intellectual debate about martial culture, but also to understand their debates within the changing historical context of the time.

It is important that I acknowledge the limitations of my study. It has taken me a very long time to understand how the extraordinary range of subjects and themes covered by our modern use of the term ‘chivalry’ actually fitted together in the medieval world. For this book, I have had to focus on one specific strand of that subject. This is a study of the martial values associated with knighthood and aristocracy, so I inevitably have a limited opportunity to discuss more courtly ideals, or to explore carefully the practical and ideal relationships between chivalric men and women. These will be more prominent themes in my next book, a detailed case study of the writings of Christine de Pizan.

My original aim for this project was to offer a comparative study of both French and English texts, but Maurice Keen wisely dissuaded me from my youthful overenthusiasm and ambition. I will therefore have to explore the full range of English and French debates about not just knighthood but also warfare and national identity in a future project.

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Here, I have largely confined my discussion to writers and texts produced in France up to and sometimes just beyond the end of the Hundred Years War. In selecting these dates, I am very conscious that I could be seen as suggesting that the wars with the English were the defining influence upon French culture; in truth, I would be extremely anxious at any analysis that ignored the importance of private and civil wars within France, as well as the impact of mercenaries and garrisons upon public order. Indeed, I have not been ruthless in enforcing the year 1453 as a boundary line, given the remarkable interest offered by the works by Antoine de La Sale and Jean de Bueil, for example. I have focused upon writers and works associated with the Valois crown and the court, so that experts in Burgundian intellectual and aristocratic culture may justifiably feel short-changed. In terms of historical context, I have drawn upon English as well as French examples because of their involvement in the wars in France, but perhaps paid too little attention to the changing martial culture in Burgundy and other regions, such as Brittany. Finally, I have made very modest comments on the surviving evidence for the use and influence of these texts, only too aware of the work that would be required to collect together comprehensive data on manuscript circulation and annotation.

For reasons of space, I have had to keep quotations to a minimum. I have consistently used and cited the best available editions of the primary sources in their original languages (or at least in the languages in which they were available to late medieval French readers), rather than in modern English translations. To provide a detailed introduction to each of these works would have transformed this book into an encyclopaedia, so I would instead recommend invaluable reference tools such as the *Dictionnaire des lettres françaises: le moyen âge*, ed. G. Hasenohr and M. Zink (Paris, 1992), *La librairie des ducs de Bourgogne: manuscrits conservés à la Bibliothèque royale de Belgique*, ed. B. Bousmanne, F. Johan, T. Van Hemelryck and C. Van Hoorebeeck (8 vols., Turnhout, 2000–) and *Translations médiévales: cinq siècles de traductions en français au moyen âge (XIe–XVe siècles): étude et répertoire*, ed. C. Galderisi (2 vols., Turnhout, 2011). In a few cases, the best editions of the sources exist in unpublished doctoral dissertations, including Christine de Pizan's *Le livre des fais d'armes et de chevalerie* and Honorat Bovet's *Arbre des batailles* (which will be published soon by the Société de l'histoire de France, edited by Hélène Biau). In these cases, I have also provided references to chapters, so that readers can navigate through editions that may appear in the future.

I owe a great debt to a number of people for their help with this project. My studies of late medieval European history were initially shaped and

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influenced by James Campbell and other tutors, led by Jean Dunbabin, John Maddicott and Maurice Keen. I was extremely lucky to have been supervised for my DPhil by Peter S. Lewis, who shared with me his passion for late medieval French intellectual culture, and inspired me with his quiet dignity and confidence. During a year as an exchange fellow at the University of Rochester, I had the pleasure of working with Richard W. Kaeuper and Alan Lupack. Indeed, I can make what must be a unique claim to have studied with the two most important voices in the recent historiography of chivalry, Maurice Keen and Richard W. Kaeuper.

I was appointed to a lectureship at York before I had completed my DPhil, so, instead of enjoying the time afforded by a research fellowship, my work was shaped at a very early stage by extensive conversations and collaborations with a number of colleagues at the Centre for Medieval Studies and in the Department of History, including Alan Forrest, Alastair Minnis, Felicity Riddy, Gabriella Corona, Guy Halsall, Gwilym Dodd, Heather Blurton, Helen Fulton, Jeanne Nuechterlein, Jeremy Goldberg, Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Judith Buchanan, Katherine Wilson, Linne Mooney, Mark Ormrod, Mark Roodhouse, Nick Havely, Nicola McDonald, Peter Biller, Peter Rycraft, Richard Bessel, Sarah Rees Jones, Sethina Watson, Stuart Carroll and Tom Pickles. I also owe a very great debt to countless undergraduate and graduate students, including Carolyn Donohue, Catherine Nall, Chris Linsley, Debs Thorpe, Emily Hutchison, Erika Graham, Justin Sturgeon, Kristin Bourassa, Laura Barks, Lauren Bowers and Rachael Whitbread.

Over the years I have presented my ideas at conferences and research seminars across Europe and North America. To thank everyone who has helped me in those contexts would be impossible, but I must acknowledge in particular the following scholars for their help and guidance: Adrian Armstrong, Andrew Taylor, Anne Curry, Anne D. Hedeman, R. Barton Palmer, Biörn Gunnar Tjällén, Catherine Batt, Chris Fletcher, Claude Gauvard, Cliff Rogers, Daisy Delogu, Emma Cayley, Françoise Autrand, Frédérique Lachaud, Godfried Croenen, Graeme Small, Helen Swift, Jean-Philippe Genet, James Hankins, Joanna Bellis, Joël Blanchard, John Gillingham, John Watts, Justine Firnhaber-Baker, Karen Fresco, Kathleen Daly, Kelly DeVries, Laura Ashe, Malcolm Vale, Matt Strickland, Michael C. E. Jones, Michael Hanly, Michael Leslie, Michelle Szkilnik, Nick Perkins, Nicole Pons, Norman Housley, Peggy Brown, Peter Ainsworth, Philippe Contamine, Rebecca Dixon, Rémy Ambühl, Rory Cox, Ros Brown-Grant, Steve Muhlberger, Steve Rigby, Susan Dudash, Susan Foran and Sverre Bagge.

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Finally, I owe a great debt of gratitude to the anonymous readers and to the staff at Cambridge University Press. When I completed the first draft of this book, in September 2011, my editor was Liz Friend-Smith. During her maternity leave, I was helped initially by Maartje Scheltens and then Michael Watson, who has shepherded the book through to production.

Abbreviations

| | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| AASF | <i>Annales Academiae Scientiarum Fennicae</i> |
| ANTS | Anglo-Norman Text Society |
| BL | British Library |
| BNF | Bibliothèque national de France |
| Bovet, <i>L'arbre des batailles</i> | Bovet, Honorat, <i>L'arbre des batailles</i> , in Biu, H., 'L'arbre des batailles d'Honorat Bovet: étude de l'oeuvre et édition critique des textes français et occitan' (PhD dissertation, 3 vols., Université Paris IV Sorbonne, 2004), vol. II |
| CFMA | Les classiques français du moyen âge |
| CHFMA | Les classiques de l'histoire de France du moyen âge |
| CRAL | Centre de recherches et d'applications linguistiques |
| DNB | <i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i> , online edition (Oxford, 2008) |
| EETS | Early English Text Society |
| Froissart (Amiens) | Froissart, Jean, <i>Chroniques, livre I: Le manuscrit d'Amiens: Bibliothèque municipale no. 486</i> , ed. G. T. Diller (TLF 407, 415, 424, 429 and 499, 5 vols., Geneva, 1991–8) |
| Froissart (Rome) | Froissart, Jean, <i>Chroniques: dernière rédaction du premier livre: édition du manuscrit de Rome Reg. lat. 869</i> , ed. G. T. Diller (TLF 194, Geneva, 1972) |
| Froissart (SHF) | Froissart, Jean, <i>Chroniques de Jean Froissart</i> , ed. S. Luce, G. Raynaud, L. Mirot and A. Mirot (SHF, 15 vols., Paris, 1869–1975) |
| GLML | Garland Library of Medieval Literature, series A |
| ITRL | I Tatti Renaissance Library |
| MRTS | Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies |

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| OMT | Oxford Medieval Texts |
| PL | <i>Patrologiae cursus completus Latina</i> , ed. J.-P. Migne (217 vols., Paris, 1844–55) |
| Pizan, <i>Fais d’armes et de chevalerie</i> | Pizan, Christine de, <i>Le livre des fais d’armes et de chevalerie</i> , in Laennec, C. M., ‘Christine “Antygrafe”: authorship and self in prose works of Christine de Pizan with an edition of BN fr. ms 603 <i>Le livre des fais d’armes et de chevalerie</i> ’ (PhD dissertation, 2 vols., Yale University, 1988), vol. II |
| Pizan, <i>Corps du policie</i> | Pizan, Christine de, <i>Le livre du corps de policie</i> , ed. A. J. Kennedy (Paris, 1998) |
| PRF | Publications Romanes et Françaises |
| RS | Rolls Series |
| SATF | Société des anciens textes français |
| SHF | Société de l’histoire de France |
| TLF | Textes littéraires françaises |
| TNA | The National Archives (UK) |
| <i>Translations médiévales</i> | <i>Translations médiévales: cinq siècles de traductions en français au moyen âge (XIe–XVe siècles): étude et répertoire</i> , ed. C. Galderisi (2 vols., Turnhout, 2011) |