

## **The Emergence and Formation of the Second Estate as the Knightly Class in France, 814-1230**

By Christopher Connor

The knight is one of the most prominent archetypal figures of the medieval period; he not only dominated warfare, but the political and cultural spheres of society as well. The knightly class began to emerge in the splinter kingdoms of the Carolingian empire during the ninth century. The general decline of central royal authority during the early middle ages led to increasingly powerful local lords and endemic private warfare. Localized political authority and private warfare continued to characterize medieval France in the following centuries and allowed the knightly class to coalesce into a self-aware group within society. The knightly class was defined by their function in war, their landed wealth, their titles, their lineage and in the high middle ages chivalry. This self-awareness and sense of identity only became fully defined as “chivalry” at the end of the eleventh century and grew more defined in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. A significant reason for chivalry developing when it did was the slow acceptance of the second estate by the church. It was this gradual acceptance by the church that allowed the knightly class to develop its culture and identity as a class, integrated within medieval culture as a whole.

In defining the second estate as a class it is important to understand what is meant by the term “class” in medieval history. The knightly class was a group of people who shared a common function, that is warfare, as well as a developing culture built around the concepts of honor, service, loyalty, prowess, bravery and later courtesy and mercy. Economically they were a heterogeneous group, although they were at least moderately well off within the standards of medieval society. Even the poorer landless knights could expect to live much better than the

vast majority of medieval society. Similarly, they varied in their degree of political power; though all knights were at some level involved in medieval lordship. A count or duke could not rule without the authority and power that he gained from his followers. The sense in which the knightly class was a class arises from their shared institutions, whether they were political, military, cultural or economic.

The variety of nomenclature of the knightly class requires some explanation and definition. The terms knight (from the old English *knict* meaning servant), the French *chevalier*, vassal (from the Latin *vassus* meaning servant), and Latin *miles* (plural *milites*, meaning soldier) were all used to describe members of the knightly class. For most purposes these words meant the same thing, a member of the knightly class, however their use changed over time with some becoming more common and others less common. These terms also had more specific meanings that used to indicate certain relationships.

*Miles* is perhaps the oldest of these terms to describe knights. The original Latin term simply meant soldier and denoted a rather low social status. During the ninth century however it began to be adopted by the nobility as a title, used both describe themselves and their military men. Latin documents used it to describe knightly service, as in *servicium militum*. *Miles* persisted in medieval Latin as a specifically knightly title. *Chevalier* and knight began to become common titles in the later middle ages as French and English became more common written languages. For all intents and purposes they mean the same thing as *miles* during the medieval period in that they are titles denoting knightly status.

The term vassal had both a cultural definition as a title as well as a legal definition. A vassal was someone who had sworn military service to someone, usually in exchange for land. Like *miles* it dates back to at least the ninth century if not earlier. The term vassal could also be

used to describe just about any member of the knightly class, from counts and dukes, who were at least nominally vassals of the king, to the petty aristocracy such as landed knights who were vassals of the counts and dukes. Another form of vassal, vavassor, meant specifically the vassal of a vassal and was used irregularly, mainly for those knights who were vassals of wealthier knights who could afford to give lands in order to obtain followers.

The terms nobility and aristocracy also require some clarification within the context of this paper. The term nobility is particularly controversial in early medieval historiography and will be elaborated on below. For the purposes of this paper however it will refer to the elite of the knightly class, that is the counts, dukes and other important territorial lords. The term aristocracy will be used synonymously with the knightly class, as the knightly class is the aristocracy of early and high medieval France. Knights were the elite, and even the poorest possessed a social status that elevated them within early and high medieval French society.

In discussing the emergence of the knightly class a number of issues that have been controversial in the historiography of the early and high medieval periods. The first of these issues is the origin and composition of the medieval aristocracy. Some have attempted to define the the aristocracy along lines of social status and rank, others have viewed it as a more functional class, inclusive of not only the aristocracy but also their armed retainers (*Milites Ordine*). There is little doubt that these two groups lived together quite closely due to their shared function. Some historians have claimed that they did not view themselves as a class until the formalization of the title of knight and the common ethos of chivalry emerged. The conflict is a divide between a cultural view of the second estate and a functional view of the second estate. The key to reconciling these approaches is to understand that the culture of the knightly class emerges from its function both in lordship and warfare. The historians cited below are

representative of the general trends in the historiography of early medieval nobility and the concept of chivalry. While by no means exhaustive, their methodology and conclusions exemplify the various ways in which historians have approached these subjects.

The second major issue concerning the emergence of the knightly class is the emergence of chivalry. Certain historians have claimed that there is a great distinction between the knight of the high middle ages (generally considered to begin at the end of the eleventh century, around the time of the first crusade) and the “proto-knight” of the early middle ages. This distinction however is difficult to make because neither the constituents nor the function of the class in question changed. This is not to say however that important developments concerning the second estate did not take place during the high middle ages. The idea that there is something essentially different between the fighting men of the early middle ages and those of the high middle ages is a fallacy. A class of warrior elites emerged in the ninth and tenth centuries, chivalry emerged as this class became increasingly formalized during the high middle ages.

The concept of a feudal revolution taking place in the eleventh century has fueled much of the historiography concerning these two issues. This idea of a break in political and social institutions from the early medieval to the high medieval period has helped fuel the idea that the knight only truly emerged in the high medieval period. Recent scholarship however has attempted to re-evaluate this particular thesis. A trend towards viewing the medieval period as a continuous progression rather than a series of periods marked by contrasts. Furthermore many of the issues concerning the knightly class have been addressed in a more nuanced view. The integration of ideas like the new versus an old nobility into a more complete picture, as well as a new focus on the functional role of chivalry as opposed to its purely cultural aspects has characterized the modern historiography. This newer historiography based on continuity and

integration of old theories allows for an approach to studying the knightly class that involves both the early and high medieval periods and views the emergence of the knightly class as a continuous progression.

There has been considerable discussion of the origins of the early medieval nobility and whether it was comprised of a “new” nobility composed of the ancestors of humble *milites ordines* or whether it was a continuation of an “old” nobility which consisted of the counts and dukes of the eighth century. Both of these interpretations have difficulties in explaining the exact nature of nobility, however this debate provides a base from which to discuss the class of professional soldiers who did occasionally rise into the ranks of the nobility. While there is little written on this group of men their occasional rise into the ranks of nobility provides some information as to who they were. The primary difficulty here is that the feudal system had not become as formalized as it would be in the later middle ages, and the status of the *milites* could vary widely. However, during the ninth to eleventh centuries it is apparent there was a class of men who were defined by their function in warfare, called *milites*.

Marc Bloch, the author of *Feudal Society*, states there was no clear nobility in the early middle ages, and that it only began to arise in the ninth and tenth centuries, during which the title was quite vague and ill-defined.<sup>1</sup> This conclusion is supported mainly by Bloch’s narrow definition of nobility: “First, it must have a legal status of its own ... In the second place, this status must be hereditary—“<sup>2</sup> The nobility of the early middle ages of course did not fall under such a definition, as during the Carolingian era only the legal codes of the Saxons made such distinctions. Bloch also views the poverty of genealogies and the shortness of those that exist as

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1 Marc Bloch, *Feudal Society* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1961), 283.

2 Bloch, *Feudal Society*, 283

another sign of the lack of a nobility, as Bloch views these as necessary to a true nobility.

Furthermore, Bloch states that the short length of noble genealogies implies that during this period the so-called 'nobles' were recently descended from men of humble origin.<sup>3</sup>

Bloch also discusses the various and different ways the word *nobilis* was used throughout the early middle ages. Occasionally it was used to describe those who were not subject to feudal obligations, holding only allodial lands, although these are used primarily in chronicles describing the so-called noble entering into a feudal obligation, and this definition disappearing by the eleventh century. The other definition that Bloch cites is a somewhat obscure Italian chronicle stating that nobility is derived from having no slaves among their ancestors.<sup>4</sup> Bloch goes on to describe how the term nobility became connected to military vassalage and the distinction between peasant levies and the professional well-equipped soldiers and lords, and how combat came to define the nobility.

Much of this interpretation of the nobility is correct, but Bloch makes a mistake in defining the term *nobilis* and the nobility so narrowly. The requirement for the nobility to possess a unique legal status excludes a semi-cohesive class of wealthy and powerful people who did consider their ancestry to bestow upon them a special status, even if it was not defined in strict legal terms. Bloch, is however quite correct when he interprets the aristocracy's military status in the early middle ages. These men had either gained power through military achievements or had held on to it by displays of the same ability. The problem remains however that there is ample evidence of a self-aware nobility quite capable of drawing its ancestry back to the early Carolingian era present throughout the ninth and tenth century. Furthermore this

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3 Bloch, *Feudal Society*, 286.

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interpretation denies the continuity of a noble class, that existed during the Carolingian era and would during the ninth and tenth centuries become the progenitors of the knightly class.

Jane Martindale's article, "The French Aristocracy in the Early Middle Ages: A Reappraisal", advances the idea that there was a real nobility that was very aware of its privileged status even if legal codes did not define it. She begins by citing the chronicler Thegan who described the attacks on the royal serf Ebo who was made archbishop by Louis the Pious and the nobility promptly rejected Ebo. While this evidence mainly provides the conclusion that the lower classes (especially the servile) were unfit for the higher offices, Thegan does view nobility as a matter of birth that no earthly authority could alter.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore Martindale asserts that the chroniclers of the Carolingian period used language very conscious of hierarchical differences. The nobility were described in a variety of terms: *primores*, *proceres*, and *potentes*, which makes it clear that power was the chief characteristic of the aristocracy in the Carolingian era. However, Martindale then goes on to state that it is misleading to suppose there was no value attached to "noble blood."<sup>6</sup> Martindale concludes contrary to Bloch that the French aristocracy never derived their status from legal stratification but that birth was an important element in attaining social and political rank and was distinguished from wealth and power.

Moreover, Martindale states that under the late Carolingians and early Capetians that *milites* were often introduced into the nobility by means of inter-marriage, which in her interpretation shows that the status of the old aristocracy was heavily involved in the status of a

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5 Jane Martindale, "The French Aristocracy in the Early Middle Ages: A Reappraisal," *Past and Present*, 75 (1977): 5.

6 Jane Martindale, "The French Aristocracy in the Early Middle Ages: A Reappraisal," *Past and Present*, 75 (1977): 15-16.

woman, and that a wife to a less exalted soldier she brought that status with her. This of course supports Martindale's conception of a highly self-aware nobility, because women, who held no title or power, could only be described in terms of their lineage.<sup>7</sup>

Martindale's article is in many ways a reply to Bloch's assertion of the lack of a coherent definable nobility. Martindale overstates the case for social differentiation in terms of ancestry, her evidence of social differentiation does not always entail status by birth, and that evidence which does tends to describe it does so more as an honor than strict class-consciousness. The ease with which some rather humble families climbed the social ladder in the early middle ages implies a much more fluid class structure. While great jumps in social status may have been viewed negatively, the lesser *milites* often joined the ranks of the upper aristocracy within one or two generations. While the knightly class certainly placed importance on noble birth and heredity it by no means was strictly separated along those lines.

Martindale's primary disagreement with Bloch is based upon one of the difficulties in defining feudalism itself, being whether feudal society was hierarchical, as Martindale asserts, or whether it was merely unequal, as Bloch claims. Martindale deals primarily with ecclesiastical cultural sources, which often attempted to describe stratification in terms of class, even when such classes recalled the classical world much more than the medieval one. In many ways however Martindale makes even greater interpretive leaps than Bloch, often insisting that when texts make mention of someone's social rank they are inherently being placed within a strict stratification. More importantly, Martindale views the cultural materials as important because they include the influence of noble women. This is quite clear when she interprets a letter

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7 Jane Martindale, "The French Aristocracy in the Early Middle Ages: A Reappraisal," *Past and Present*, 75 (1977): 43-45.

discussing the problem of a consanguineous marriage, where she states that it implied that the ancestry of women was of high importance.<sup>8</sup> This also leads her to conclude that just because there is so little evidence for the activities of aristocratic women they should not be considered to be unimportant. Martindale's interpretation of *nobilitas* as something separate from function within society leads her to incorrectly view early medieval society as heavily stratified and class conscious.

Constance Bouchard's book, *Those of my Blood*, deals with the issue of how families were constructed among the aristocracy in the early middle ages. Bouchard primarily deals with medieval genealogies and is aware of the difficulties in constructing them. She tackles the question of the origins of the French nobility and answers by proposing a middle road, that the "old" nobility was heavily intertwined through marriage with the "new" nobility. Bouchard states that previous attempts to classify the origins of the nobility have been too simplistic and that most noble families not only had counts and dukes in their ancestry but viscounts, castellans, and ordinary soldiers. Furthermore, it was quite possible to "join" the aristocracy in the early middle ages, especially during the strife of the ninth and tenth centuries, and that the "new" nobility pointed not to the marriage with an older noble line but to their first male ancestor to attain the status.<sup>9</sup> More importantly the older noble families viewed these new nobles as suitable marriage partners, not only due to concerns about consanguinity but also to the openness that characterized certain classes of early medieval society.

Bouchard does not deny that a nobility existed during the early middle ages and at the same time does not characterize it as overly differentiated. The interpretation avoids pre-

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8 Jane Martindale, "The French Aristocracy in the Early Middle Ages: A Reappraisal," *Past and Present*, 75 (1977): 39.

9 Constance Bouchard, *Those of My Blood* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 38.

defining the nobility or the early medieval concept of the family and thereby avoids both Bloch's and Martindale's difficulties in characterizing the nobility of the ninth and tenth centuries. The other important thing to take from Bouchard's analysis is the status of those men who attained noble status. These men who became counts were not peasants, but were clearly soldiers. Upward mobility, including into an aristocracy that was defined by birth, was prevalent during this period. This implies that there was a distinctive class, defined by function in warfare, in at least as much as the wealthy and powerful soldiers of the aristocracy viewed those of less distinguished birth and wealth as suitable marriage partners for their daughters. This theory of an integrated nobility ultimately provides a clearer understanding of how the knightly class emerged as compared to Bloch and Martindale's interpretations. The previous views of the early medieval nobility do not sufficiently explain how a knightly class, that was both conscious of distinctions in prestige, defined by birth, and socially mobile came into being.

Chivalry became the defining ethos of the knightly class in the high middle ages, and is often considered to be a social revolution. Generally regarded by most historians to emerge at the end of the eleventh century at about the time of the first crusade, it was a distinctly martial tradition and more importantly it was distinct from ecclesiastical texts concerning the second estate written during the early middle ages. The reason chivalry is often viewed as distinguishing the knight from the earlier mounted warrior is that there is no recorded tradition equivalent to it in the earlier medieval period. The term chivalry in and of itself is a notoriously difficult term to define, and the historical sources for it are less than ideal. The literary works, most famously the *chansons de geste* and the romances of the twelfth century, are highly idealized and must be approached carefully, which most authors acknowledge. The other class of texts about chivalry are ecclesiastical in origin and often portray a strong bias, and are

therefore equally problematic, although by no means unimportant. This problem of sources is not however the primary difficulty in dealing with chivalry. While there is little doubt as to various social and cultural phenomenon associated with the term, its application as a code of conduct in battle is a different problem. The largest difficulty in a discussion of chivalry is whether or not it truly represented an ethos for a new cohesive military class that did not exist prior to the development of Chivalry.

Richard Barber, in his book *The Knight and Chivalry*, argues that a distinct transition took place and that the knight of the high middle ages enjoyed a social status that separated him from the mounted warrior or 'proto-knight' of the early middle ages, Barber states "the knight was not merely the soldier of an earlier age in a new guise."<sup>10</sup> It is however exactly the elusiveness of a definition for the term knight that makes Barber so determined to make the above distinction. The complexities of determining what makes a knight as opposed to merely a mounted warrior are immense and Barber addresses these issues in thorough manner, however the methodological problem of trying to create a solid definition leads him to make the same errors as Bloch in attempting to define the nobility. The value of his work is in his deep understanding of the development of chivalric culture and practice which provides particular insight into the mind set of the second estate in the high middle ages.

After Barber discusses the transition from mounted warrior to knight he analyzes the chivalric literature and its cultural implications. This discussion is once again focused on distinguishing the knight from a purely military figure; chivalric literature had a civilizing influence on the knightly class, expanding upon the old virtues of the Germanic warrior ethic that valued courage, prowess, loyalty and generosity, adding courtesy and piety. As chivalric

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10 Richard Barber, *The Knight and Chivalry* (Woodbridge, Boydell Press 1970), 14-15.

literature changed from heroic poetry like the *chansons de geste*, glorifying skill and bravery, to the romances which glorified courtly love, Barber sees a sea-change concerning the medieval view of women coinciding with the emergence of knighthood and chivalry.<sup>11</sup> Despite Barber's careful and insightful analysis of chivalric literature he fails to place it into the greater context of chivalry as a whole, and in doing so places a greater emphasis on its civilizing effects than is appropriate.

The chapter dealing with the martial aspects of chivalry is in some ways quite short, with a single section of the chapter devoted to actual warfare and the rest dealing with tournaments. Once again reiterating his claim of a change taking place in the late eleventh century in regards to the second estate, Barber views the tournament as a unique development, wholly separate from the mock combats of the early middle ages instead of a development and formalization of them.<sup>12</sup> His analysis of tournaments, reaching into the fifteenth century when they had become idealized affairs of pageantry, recalling a nostalgia for the romances of the twelfth century clearly demonstrates his interpretation of chivalry as a primarily cultural institution. This is reinforced when he characterizes the warfare of the middle ages as diverging considerably from the cultural values which he has emphasized.

Taken as a whole Barber's account of chivalry is primarily concerned with the cultural aspects of chivalry and is a product of his cultural interpretation. His first chapter which attempts to make a clear distinction between the chivalric knight of the high middle ages and the 'proto-knight' of the early middle ages clearly leads him to focus on culture because it is the primary distinction between the two. This distinction however is problematic because in many

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11 Barber, *The Knight and Chivalry*, 73.

12 Barber, *The Knight and Chivalry*, 155.

ways Barber divorces the culture of chivalry from the functional definition of the knightly class that spawned the culture in the first place. The thesis that the cultural ideals of chivalry had no place in the reality of medieval warfare is not new, but has become increasingly challenged by more complex and careful interpretations.

Maurice Keen, the author of *Chivalry*, on the other hand deals with chivalry in a broader context, including all its aspects, cultural and military. Keen places chivalry firmly in the military realities that created it, carefully assessing its societal and political role. Keen's interpretation is best described by his statement that "chivalry may be described as an ethos in which martial, aristocratic and Christian elements were fused together."<sup>13</sup> It is precisely Keen's approach emphasizing continuity and chivalry as a fusion that lets him make a much more complete interpretation of matters at hand. Furthermore Keen is explicitly concerned with the limitations of literary and ecclesiastical sources, something Barber is much more reluctant to admit. Finally, Keen is also careful not to make too strong a distinction between the early and high middle ages, often tracing chivalric customs to their roots in the early middle ages. Keen views chivalry as truly emerging in the late eleventh century, yet he is careful to interpret it as process originating from earlier practices that only coalesced in the political and social climate of the high middle ages as a historian of continuity.

Likewise, Keen is highly critical of the interpretation of the realities of medieval warfare that has long been propagated by historians that it had little to do with the chivalric ideals espoused within literary sources. Keen is careful however not to idealize medieval warfare, but rather explains how it did reflect chivalric values, albeit in often subtle and complex manifestations. Ultimately, it is Keen's emphasis on continuity and fusion that allow him to

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13 Maurice Keen, *Chivalry*, (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1984) 16.

approach chivalry in a carefully nuanced manner. By carefully examining the underlying context of chivalry his insights provide a much more complex and organic interpretation of chivalry. His use of a wide variety of sources also makes it a much more complete work that does not suffer from the difficulties of preconceived definitions or attempts to make artificial distinctions.

Matthew Strickland's book, *War and Chivalry*, is much more limited in its scope than either Barber's work or Keen's, dealing specifically with the military aspects of chivalry in eleventh and twelfth centuries in England and France. Because Strickland is dealing only with the martial aspects of early chivalry he is quick to point out the limitations of his sources, primarily chronicles, which are prone to exaggeration, as well the limitations of secular chivalric biographies like the *Histoire de Guillaume le Marechal* (the History of William the Marshal). The focus on martial chivalry is an important part of Strickland's interpretation, who states that "warfare was the *raison d'être* of the Anglo-Norman aristocracy, and the ultimate justification for its social dominance in a world profoundly influenced by the resonances of war."<sup>14</sup> Moreover he views chivalry as an outgrowth of the increasing importance of the class of elite military retainers (*milites*) who emerged in the late Carolingian era. This view is unsurprising in light of his praise of Keen's work. Like Keen, Strickland views the knights of the eleventh and twelfth century as the continuation of the development of the second estate instead of a distinctive new class.

Strickland's focus on early chivalry, and particularly its military aspects leads him to compare it to the earlier Germanic warrior ethic described in *Beowulf* and in its embryonic stages in Tacitus' *Germania*. This is taken even further by Strickland when he states that aspects

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14 Matthew Strickland, *War and Chivalry* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 1996) 17.

of chivalry, and in particular prowess, courage, loyalty and generosity, are almost universal throughout many warrior ethics. He supports this view by citing instances in which the Norman invaders and Anglo-Saxons appear to share conceptions of honorable battlefield behavior. Strickland continues in this line by discussing the interactions between the Frankish warrior elite and their Turkish counterparts, who, during the crusades often treated each other with great respect. In particular he cites the fictional *ordene de chevalerie*, in which a Christian must perform the dubbing ceremony for Saladin in order to gain his freedom.<sup>15</sup> Strickland can make these comparisons more easily because of the limited scope of his study, although a more complete study of western European chivalry would restrict these comparisons considerably. However, Strickland is careful to state that these comparisons did not result in any sort of universal code of war, and in fact ethnic and cultural differences often resulted in terrible atrocities.

While generally discussing various recorded military incidents, it is clear that Strickland correctly views chivalry as an integral part of a martial ethos of a specific class defined by their military function, and that the cultural aspects of chivalry are incidental. This functional view allows him to deal with the realities of medieval warfare in a manner that does not necessarily separate the ideal from the reality.

These works, taken collectively, attempt to deal with a wide range of issues in characterizing the knightly class. The older historians like Bloch (originally published in 1940), Martindale(1977) and Barber(1970) have been quicker to create distinctions concerning the knightly class and therefore lose sight of the continuity of its development. The more recent historians, Bouchard (2001), Strickland (1996) and Keen (1984) have tended toward

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15 Matthew Strickland, *War and Chivalry*, 23-27.

constructing more organic interpretations concerned with continuity. The more recent scholarship has shown that this class of warrior elites, while stratified by lineage, emerged as a cohesive class in the ninth and tenth centuries and that chivalry represented a continuation of the development of its particular culture.

The emergence of the knightly class began in the early medieval era. In order to understand the why the knightly class emerged in this particular period it is important to understand the political realities underlying this emergence. The ninth, tenth and eleventh centuries were witness to the decline of the Carolingian empire and royal authority. Louis the Pious' reign, beginning in 814, began well but his subsequent division of the Carolingian empire between his three sons Lothar, Louis and Charles began years of war that ultimately brought about the decline of the Carolingian Dynasty. These fraternal wars, combined with the incursions of the Vikings, Magyars and Saracens caused nearly constant warfare. The kings were unable to protect their lands and subsequently local lords began to take on the responsibilities of the kings. Whereas the counts and dukes of the early ninth century had been the direct officials of the kings, these same nobles now acted independently, exercising authority on their own instead of at the behest of their monarch. In many ways these counts and dukes emulated royal authority and privilege, albeit on a smaller scale. They held their own courts, granted land to their followers and made war and peace with one another. This was a slow process driven by necessity; the old model of powerful royal authority was deteriorating and the local lords were replacing that authority with their own.

This new model of lordship was significantly less juridical and legalistic and based strongly on concepts of interpersonal relationships between lords and vassals and on honor and prestige. Richard E. Barton's book *Lordship in the County of Maine, c.890-1160* presents an

excellent case for the existence of such informal concepts of lordship. Of particular interest is his discussion of the comital entourage: “a lord was only so powerful as the aggregate of those men who followed him.”<sup>16</sup> The importance of the noble entourage is of course highly important as it represented the lord's military and social status. Furthermore military exploits were a method of reinforcing and establishing honor. An example of this how Duke Odo, a Robertian, ascended to the throne by saving Paris from a viking siege in 866.<sup>17</sup> This victory allowed Odo to ascend to the throne of France, becoming the first non-Caroloingian king. Similarly on a smaller scale, many members of the petty aristocracy as well as various soldiers would also attain enough honor through military exploits to be admitted into the ranks of the titled aristocracy. This aristocracy and their soldiers were the first knights, men defined within society by their elite fighting skills, their titles and honor, their lineage and their wealth.

The second estate of the ninth, tenth and eleventh centuries comprised a large group of people, varying widely in status and wealth, and belonging essentially to three main sub-groups; the very powerful kings, princes, and great counts, the petty nobility (which was composed of lesser counts and viscounts, and in the tenth century the castellans), and the humble soldiers who made their living as either the retainers of greater lords or as adventurers. The lines distinguishing these sub-groups are blurry at best, as a formerly minor count or viscount might attain prominence within a decade and a humble retainer might easily be appointed viscount, while some soldiers might become quite wealthy and powerful and yet hold no title other than vassal. Furthermore, the humble soldier might not have any chance of marrying into the aristocracy, but once that same soldier had become a viscount or castellan he would have been

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16 Richard E. Barton, *Lordship in the County of Maine, c.890-1160* (Woodbridge, Boydell Press, 2004) 77.

17 Barton, *Lordship in the County of Maine*, 80.

considered eligible.

The concept of vassalage, that is military service in exchange for a gift of some sort, had finally emerged in culturally codified form in the Carolingian era. There were two primary forms of vassalage, one wherein the lord would bestow gifts of horses, arms and armor but no land, maintaining the vassal in the lord's manor, and the second in which the vassal would be given land with which he was supposed to maintain himself and acquire the needed equipment from its income.<sup>18</sup> Vassalage had actually become a legal term under the Carolingians. A vassal could not break a tie with his lord if the vassal had received the value of a gold *solidus*.<sup>19</sup> The term vassal was used to describe those warriors who held no official title as well the dukes and counts.

The term vassal is used frequently in the *Annals of Fulda* in a military and political context. Some examples are Gundachar and Guntobold, treacherous vassals of Carloman who fought against their lord (Guntobold even led an army).<sup>20</sup> These men are only mentioned once, and their description as vassals may have been a way to characterize their treachery as the breaking the tie of vassalage. However, they are not referred to by any other title, as are all the other named individuals, so it can be concluded that these men (Gundachar and Guntobold) were powerful soldiers but did not hold a comital or ducal title. There is also a singular reference to a vassal named Farold, who guarded Rome for king Arnulf in 896, who like Gundachar and

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18 Bloch, *Feudal Society*, 163.

19 *Capitularies*, 245.

20 *Annals of Fulda*, Trans. Timothy Reuter, (Manchester University Press, 1992), 55,59.

Guntobold is only mentioned once and is otherwise entirely unknown.<sup>21</sup> Farold is placed in a position of military authority, the guarding of Rome, and as he is not referred to as a count or duke he must have been merely a soldier of some merit.

There is also an instance where some Bavarian *duces* become vassals in the annals, but they are called vassals only when they are first submitting to Louis the German.<sup>22</sup> While vassalage applied to the great lords as well as to the more common soldiers, the lords are described as vassals only when entering into the contract itself. Outside of the ceremony of entering into vassalage these men of higher title are never referred to as vassals as it is implied in their title. Therefore those who are referred to merely as vassals are clearly professional soldiers who have sworn homage to a lord. The fact that a soldier's service to his lord and a lord's service to his king used the same terminology and ceremony indicates that vassalage was part of the shared ethos of the whole warrior elite. While it is impossible to know how wealthy or powerful vassals like Gundachar, Guntobold and Farold really were, the fact that the first two led armies and the last was put in charge of guarding Rome further blurs the distinction between noble warriors and common warriors. It would seem likely they were either wealthy or powerful.

Titles like *comes*, *duces*, and *vassus* were important for a number of reasons, primarily because it distinguished those men who held them from the rest of society as professional fighting men. However, as has been seen in *The Annals of Fulda* there was a distinction made

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21 *Annals of Fulda*, 134.

22 *Annals of Fulda*, 110-111.

between those vassals who held no other title and the aristocracy who were vassals but also held more important titles like count or duke. There were the vassals of vassals, those soldiers who were bound to serve counts and dukes and vassals of the king, specifically the counts and dukes. These lesser vassals (*vassus vassorum*) held no authority except perhaps over the peasants who worked their lands. These lesser vassals had no vassals of their own. The counts and dukes however held vassals in their service and had legal authority over their lands, which was important as the balance of power shifted from the kings to the local lords during the political instability of the ninth and tenth centuries. The title of vassal, often times referred to as peer, held other benefits, and specifically legal ones. A ‘peer’ had the right to be tried for crimes in his lord’s court and the decision was to be made on the advice of his fellow peers.<sup>23</sup> The title of vassal in of itself brought with it a certain status that distinguished these soldiers from the rest of the mass of freemen.

While Charlemagne’s laws did call on all freemen to fight in his campaigns, his subsequent revisions in 807 and 808 raised the requirement for military service to owning three and four manses respectively, evidence that the equipment of warfare was becoming increasingly costly.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, the capitularies state that counts, bishops and abbots were required to supply *homines* equipped with expensive armor.<sup>25</sup> These men equipped with expensive armor, likely at the expense of their lords, were retainers or *scarae* (an ancient Roman term for a unit of cavalry). These men were raised from a young age, probably adolescence, in

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23 Bloch, *Feudal Society*, 333.

24 Pierre Riché, *Daily Life in the World of Charlemagne* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1973), 77.

25 *Capitularies*, 244.

the court of their lord alongside their more aristocratic companions. While they were socially differentiated according to birth they still practiced their military exercises together.<sup>26</sup> These soldiers however were not peasants, and when they are referred to they are described either as *vassalus* (vassals) or as *mediocris* (which meant middle-class or in between peasants and the nobility), like the warrior Ingo who slew a Norman chieftain, an act of bravery befitting “noble” warriors.<sup>27</sup>

The peasantry, the *labores* or *minimi*, while not excluded from warfare, were generally only employed as a *lantwer* or levy, primarily for regional defense. The peasants moreover were not trained soldiers and had little wealth to spend on the equipment that the professional soldiers possessed. Marc Bloch states, “The improvements introduced in the warrior’s equipment from the Frankish period onwards had made it more costly (and also more difficult to handle), with the result that it became less and less possible for anyone who was not a rich man—or a vassal of a rich man—to take part in this form of warfare.”<sup>28</sup> While the cost of military arms certainly limited the role of the peasantry in warfare the complex training involved in handling weapons and riding also made the professional soldiers stand apart.

Hrabanus Maurus, commenting in the ninth century, stated “Today we see that in the houses of the great, children and adolescents are raised to support hardship and adversity, hunger, cold, and the heat of the sun. They are familiar with the popular proverb that ‘He who

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26 Jane Martindale, “The French Aristocracy in the Early Middle Ages: A Reappraisal,” *Past and Present*, 75 (1977): 24.

27 Jane Martindale, “The French Aristocracy in the Early Middle Ages: A Reappraisal,” *Past and Present*, 75 (1977): 22.

28 Bloch, *Feudal Society*, 290.

cannot achieve knighthood at puberty will never do it, or only with great difficulty, at a more advanced age.”<sup>29</sup> Nithard’s account of the military games held at Worms in 842 give a rare example of what this training may have looked like, albeit on a much larger scale:

Everyone participating in a particular spectacle assembled in one place with the rest of the crowd ranged on each side. Soon, Saxons, Gascons, Austrasians, and Bretons in equal numbers flung themselves into a swift gallop, one against the other as though straining to come to grips. Then one group made an about-face and, protected by their bucklers, feigned a desire to fly from their pursuing comrades. Next, reversing their roles, they in turn, took up the pursuit of those from whom they had fled before. Finally, the two kings, with all the youth on horseback, threw themselves into the midst of the clamor, and brandishing their lances, charged among the fugitives, striking first one and then another.<sup>30</sup>

This particular passage provides a wealth of evidence for the cohesiveness of the warrior class, even if this event was unique (this being the one of very few examples of such an event recorded in the early period) it displays an amount of tactical sophistication that would have required extensive training. The fact that the two sides charge at each in formation and practice the famed “feigned retreat” maneuver shows that these warriors were accustomed to utilizing difficult maneuvers. Furthermore, the lack of class language when referring to the soldiers, and especially the reference to “all the youth on horseback” is reminiscent of the common military training shared by both the less exalted warriors and those of noble birth. This shared upbringing, between the children of the more common soldiers and their social betters undoubtedly fostered a sense of identity, even if it was not the only identity these men held.

The process for a common soldier to rise into the ranks of the aristocracy involved the

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29 Riché, *Daily Life in the World of Charlemagne*, 74.

30 Riché, *Daily Life in the World of Charlemagne*, 75.

soldier attaining those things that were part of being noble, specifically landed wealth, title, and ultimately lineage. Any soldier with ambitions of bettering his rank had to first gain landed wealth, which was not particularly difficult in an era where war was common. The practice of rewarding soldiers with lands for important military services was quite common during the ninth and tenth centuries. One explicit example of this practice comes from Notker the Stammerer's *Life of Charlemagne* (the *De Carolo Magno*). While Notker, who wrote in the ninth century some seventy years after Charlemagne's death his work cannot be considered to be an accurate account of historical events, however it is valuable as a source for ninth century customs and attitudes. This particular anecdote describes two soldiers who mount a daring assault on the fortifications of the Saxons, consequently Charlemagne "made the first of them commander from the Rhine to the Italian Alps, and he greatly enriched the second with grants of land."<sup>31</sup> A fascinating side note to this episode is that before Charlemagne rewards these soldiers he asks the permission of their lord, emphasizing the idea that the king did not have necessarily have any direct authority over his lord's vassals, reflecting the increased independence of the ninth century nobility. Similarly many of the humble families that rose to prominence during this period also gained their land through military service and exploits.

The next important step in rising into the nobility was the attainment of a title. Titles were an important part of being or becoming a member of the aristocracy as titles conferred authority and the ability to take on vassals of their own, raising the soldier from merely being a

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31 Notker the Stammerer, *Charlemagne*, trans. Lewis Thorpe (Penguin Books, 1969), 137.

vassal to being a vassal-in-chief. The process of attaining a title went hand in hand with gaining lands. Soldiers were often given a minor title like viscount or castellan along with lands gained through military service. An example of this practice was Richard the viscount of Blois, who after defeating a force of Vikings was given the title viscount.<sup>32</sup> The titles of viscount and castellan were in many ways similar to the title of count in the eighth century; that is a sort of assistant charged with maintaining the lands of his lord and they were not yet hereditary titles. Viscounts and castellans were generally not as independent as the counts and dukes had become in the ninth, tenth and eleventh centuries. These viscounts and castellans, often within a generation or two, declared themselves counts and often got away with it. Sometimes a soldier who had significant lands could make himself a count without even becoming a viscount or castellan, as was the case of St. Gerald, the count of Aurillac. These men, despite their lands and titles had not yet gained an important part of becoming ennobled, being a member of a noble family.

It was exactly this issue of lineage that created the final dividing line between the soldiers and their lords. In the *Life of St. Gerald*, St. Odo of Cluny his biographer is careful to state that “He was so illustrious by the nobility of his birth, that among the families of Gaul his lineage is outstanding both for its possessions and the excellence of its life.”<sup>33</sup> This is further emphasized by St. Odo’s claim that St. Gerald’s ancestors included St. Caesarius and the Abbot Aredius. Another important instance is that St. Odo, writing in the tenth century, claims that St.

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32 Bouchard, *Those of My Blood*, 34.

33 St. Odo of Cluny, *The Life of St. Gerald*, Trans. Gerald Sitwell (Sheed and Ward, 1958), 94.

Gerald exercises his comital power as a hereditary right,<sup>34</sup> clearly demonstrating that the Frankish counts considered their titles as hereditary. This is important for two reasons, first it is illustrative of the extent to which the counts had become independent of the central royal authority and secondly it attests to the importance of heredity in the tenth century. While the *Life of St. Gerald* describes St. Gerald as a count who lived like an extraordinarily saintly monk and is therefore not a useful characterization of the actual life of a lay aristocrat it does reveal certain societal attitudes about the political role of counts during the period.

Another interesting fact about St. Gerald is that he is the only recorded count of Aurillac, his father, also named Gerald, never appears anywhere else either as a count or vassal. The translator suggests that St. Gerald most likely adopted the title on his own. This practice was not entirely uncommon, the viscount Lambert of Chalon also “made” himself a count merely by referring to himself by that title in official documents.<sup>35</sup> St. Gerald certainly possessed all the wealth and power of a count, holding extensive lands and possessing numerous retainers or vassals mentioned throughout the text.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, his lineage, as described above, certainly entitled him to claim such authority.

A conscious distinction was made between those people belonging to the second estate who were considered noble by birth and those who possessed no exalted ancestry. While the problematic and unspecific terms *primores* and *potentes* are used predominantly in contemporary texts the term *nobilis* is also used on occasion, and the idea that nobility was

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34 St. Odo of Cluny, *The Life of St. Gerald*, 98.

35 Bouchard, *Those of My Blood*, 29.

36 St. Odo of Cluny, *The Life of St. Gerald*, 125, 127, 145.

merely a synonym for wealth and power is facetious. While the *Annals of Fulda* uses the term leading men (*primores*) almost exclusively the word nobility shows up once, “In this battle fell Hugh the Abbot, Charle’s maternal uncle, Abbot Rihboto, Hrabanus the standard bearer, with many others of the nobility.”<sup>37</sup> The fact that the term nobility only appears once throughout the annal is curious, because in most cases when describing the outcome of a battle the writer(s) either identify the important dead by name or lump them together in an anonymous group of counts or dukes. To state that the particular passage from the annal described a unique situation in which the only important people who were killed came from an important family appears absurd. The fact that the term was used indicates that there was a consciousness of class by birth.

In Martindale’s article she states that the accounts of Louis the Pious’ search for a second wife confirm the impression that the term “noble” tended to be used only in situations where it was important to emphasize familial origins.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, the idea of nobility is more clearly seen in noble women, who were not described in terms of power and could only be described by familial relations. While the Carolingian nobility did possess power and wealth in abundance there remained a sort of final distinguishing line between the noble and the merely powerful and wealthy. This is demonstrated by the fact that up and coming families sought marriage to more prestigious noble families.

While lineage was highly important to the aristocracy common soldiers were often able

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37 *Annals of Fulda*, 22.

38 Jane Martindale, “The French Aristocracy in the Early Middle Ages: A Reappraisal,” *Past and Present*, 75 (1977): 16.

to enter the ranks of the ruling nobles through marriage. Upward mobility, including into the aristocracy defined by birth, was prevalent during this period. This implies that there was a distinctive class, defined by function in warfare, in at least as much as the wealthy and powerful soldiers of the aristocracy viewed those of less distinguished birth and wealth as suitable marriage partners for their daughters. These “new” men, the viscounts of the ninth century and castellans of the tenth century, were often formerly soldiers of fortune or the retainers of counts who won their wealth and offices through battlefield exploits. Bouchard uses the counts of Anjou, Chalon, Mâcon, and Nevers as typical examples of this rise to power, whose families can be traced back to soldiers of older families.<sup>39</sup> More importantly the older noble families viewed these new nobles as suitable marriage partners, not only due to concerns about consanguinity but also to the openness that characterized the military estate of the early middle ages.

The nobility often married their daughters to ambitious soldiers who had attained landed wealth and titles, this is characterized by the chronicler Thegan’s comments deploring men who had married their sons to women of noble birth and their daughters to the sons of nobles.<sup>40</sup> There were a variety of reasons for this but chief among them was the growing concern over consanguineous marriages. During the ninth and tenth centuries the church began to take an increasingly strict stance on consanguinity, with the Frankish kings going as far afield as Russia and the Byzantine Empire to find royal brides whom they could marry. The church had stated that no marriage could take place within seven degrees of separation (that is sixth cousins). The

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39 Bouchard, *Those of My Blood*, 27.

40 Jane Martindale, “The French Aristocracy in the Early Middle Ages: A Reappraisal,” *Past and Present*, no. 75 (1977): 17.

aristocracy had little choice in some circumstances than to seek new men to marry their daughters.<sup>41</sup> The obvious choice of who as to elevate into their ranks was of course their vassals, and particularly those who had significant wealth and titles. It was the daughters of the nobility who ennobled the common soldiers, and it is through these marriages that the importance of lineage is most clearly seen. While a family only recently ennobled did not point to the woman who had made them so but rather to the man who had married her it was clearly her status that had gained them entrance into the aristocracy

The shared culture and status only made it easier for the nobility to allow common soldiers into the ranks of the aristocracy. It was during the ninth and tenth centuries that the nobility began to consciously refer to themselves as *milites*.<sup>42</sup> An example of this trend appears in Notker's work, a young boy of noble birth was said to have stated to his father after being taken into the service of Louis the Pious: "When I was your inferior, I stood behind you, among my fellow soldiers, as was proper. Now that I am your comrade and your fellow soldier, I claim equality with you and have every right to do so."<sup>43</sup> While the aristocracy certainly distinguished between themselves and their soldiers of humble birth they also viewed themselves as soldiers and as part of a cohesive military order.

This estate and the nobility that led it emerged in the ninth and tenth centuries and became the dominant political force throughout the middle ages. They were characterized by professional military service, landed wealth, titles and lineage. They were unified by the

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41 Bouchard, *Those of My Blood*, 73.

42 Bloch, *Feudal Society*, 444.

43 Notker the Stammerer, *Charlemagne*, Trans. Lewis Thorpe, 150.

military service and training that defined their culture and lifestyle and stratified according to their landed wealth, titles and lineage which defined the nobility of the early middle ages. This stratification was characterized by the fluidity with which the members of the second estate could rise into the upper ranks of the aristocracy.

The class of professional military men who emerged in the late and post-Carolingian early middle ages became an increasingly defined, if still widely heterogeneous, professional class in the high middle ages. The title of knight slowly became a hereditary title. The knightly class of the late eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth centuries was characterized by the common activity of warfare and the shared identity of knighthood, just as they had been in the earlier middle ages. The high middle ages saw an increasing formalization of the identity of knighthood. Historians consider the high middle ages to represent a significant change within medieval society taking place during the mid to late eleventh century. While the knightly class emerged during the early middle ages it changed with the rest of medieval society. The major development for the knightly class during this period was the emergence of chivalry. Chivalry represented a new cultural identity that integrated the factors that had formerly defined the knightly class.

Two primary texts provide a clear picture of the knightly class of the high middle ages. The first text, *The History of William Marshall* describes the life of William Marshall, a knight who lived during the eleventh century. Few other texts from this period give such a clear and detailed picture of the life of a knight errant, specifically tourneying and warfare. It is also important because William Marshall's life is an example of the social mobility that existed for the knightly class. Similarly *The Murder of Count Charles the Good* is particularly illustrative of the political instability of the high middle ages as well as the knightly class. It tells the story

how the count of Flanders was murdered by his vassals due to threats over their social status as well as the count's suppression of private warfare. Both of these texts are particularly useful for studying the knightly class because they deal specifically with the affairs of knights.

Furthermore, both these texts deal with issues of class and social mobility, making them particularly relevant to the discussion of the knightly class in the high middle ages.

Geographically speaking the knightly class arose in France and the nearby territories such as Flanders and Hainaut. This was due to the prevalence of private warfare and a strong nobility that maintained large private armies of knights. The other regions of western Europe did not develop this class for a variety of political and geographic reasons. England, however, provides the most useful comparison for establishing why this class did not become distinct and prominent within the rest of western Europe. Despite England's close ties with France it did not develop the same sort of knightly class that emerged in France. Interestingly English knights seeking their fortune spent most of their time in France fighting in Normandy and the other English holdings in France.

It is important to compare the circumstances of France to England, a kingdom closely tied to France both politically and economically, and why England did not develop a knightly class similar to France, especially since William Marshal was such a major figure in the history of the knightly class. England, unlike France, did not suffer from near constant warfare during the twelfth century. The only major conflict fought on English soil during this century was the war of succession between King Stephen and Empress Matilda. In Jean Scammell's article "The Formulation of the English Social Structure: Freedom, Knights, and Gentry, 1066-1300" he demonstrates how the knightly class was generally defined more by its landed wealth than its

association with the common practice of warfare.<sup>44</sup> Jean Scammell describes how in England there was a variety of knights, often quite different from one another in their possession of land and arms.

In England the title of knight was not commonly a hereditary one and came only with the possession of arms, something that could only be given by a lord, and subsequently taken away. Often English knights were only knights for a short period of time; sometimes for only a few months in their entire lifetimes. The concept of English knighthood as dependent upon being armed by one's lord is implied in *The Life of William Marshal* where it states that: "Three hundred knights in his [John the Marshal, William Marshal's father] retinue the noble knight had, all wearing livery supplied by him, in his pay, with their horseshoes, nails, livery, their fine appearance paid for by him."<sup>45</sup> Those knights who were lucky enough to own their own arms, what Scammell terms "professional" knights, were primarily utilized by the English monarchs as soldiers for their military adventures in France.<sup>46</sup> These "professional" knights generally tended to lack land. These "professionals" who made their living by fighting in wars and tourneying were an exception within England; their travel to France placed them within the framework of the French knightly class and instilled the sense of identity that came with belonging to the knightly class.

The other two categories of English knights were the significant semi-free landholders and the knights who possessed villein land. The semi-free landholders were not readily accepted by the English aristocracy and were often at odds with each other and were used by the English

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44 Jean Scammell, "The Formulation of the English Social Structure: Freedom, Knights, and Gentry, 1066-1300," *Speculum*, vol. 68, 3 (July, 1993): 592.

45 A.J. Holden, ed. and S. Gregory, trans., *The History of William Marshal*, (London: Anglo-Norman Text Society, 2002), 5.

46 Jean Scammell, "The Formulation of the English Social Structure: Freedom, Knights, and Gentry, 1066-1300," 598-600.

monarchy to temper the aristocracy.<sup>47</sup> The strong English monarchy had the effect of preventing the English aristocracy from creating standing knightly armies by reinforcing the knightly class's role as subjects of both the aristocracy and the king. The English aristocracy therefore did not need to possess armies of knights in order to reinforce their lordship. Furthermore the strength of the English monarchs helped to prevent the endemic violence common to the continent.

The endemic warfare that characterized France during this period, combined with a stronger aristocracy meant that there was a greater knightly class. Moreover the French tradition of upward social mobility for the knightly class into the ranks of the aristocracy meant that the knightly class of France was much more socially cohesive. The fact that the English professional knightly class spent most of its time in France is attested to in *The Life of William Marshal* which states: "The Marshal [William Marshal's father] decided that he would send William to Tancarville in Normandy ... as is fitting for a nobleman setting off abroad to win an honorable reputation."<sup>48</sup> In another passage when William Marshal wishes to return home to England to visit his family:

The Chamberlain granted him leave, but he begged and prayed him insistently and not to stay too long in that country, for it was in no way a fitting place to stay, except for the minor gentry and those who had no wish to travel the world. He said that any man wishing to devote his time and effort to travelling [*sic*] the world and tourneying was usually sent to Brittany or Normandy to frequent the company of knights, of, indeed, anywhere where tournaments were held; for any man who seeks to increase his renown in combat must always do as you have heard me tell.<sup>49</sup>

This indicates how little opportunity there was within England for knights errant, and how the

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47 Jean Scammell, "The Formulation of the English Social Structure: Freedom, Knights, and Gentry, 1066-1300," 606.

48 A.J. Holden, ed. and S. Gregory, trans., *The History of William Marshal*, 39.

49 A.J. Holden, ed. and S. Gregory, trans., *The History of William Marshal*, 104.

lack of warfare and tournaments made France the only place in which English professional knights could hope to make a living or gain lands. England did not possess the circumstances that led to the flowering of the knightly class in France during the twelfth century and therefore the knights that were mostly closely tied to the identity of knighthood spent their lives in France.

While the knightly class was certainly a distinct and important social group within French medieval society there was significant hierarchy within the class itself. Wealth and social status could vary greatly between two different knights. It is important to note that upper echelons of medieval society, the kings, princes, counts and dukes all considered themselves knights and are frequently referred to as *milites* and *chevaliers*. The knightly class can be roughly divided into six groups, although any such divisions are abstract at best and mildly misleading at worst. Many individuals straddled the lines between these six groups, and many more moved between them during their lifetimes due to the rather remarkable social mobility of the knightly class. The six categories of the knightly class are: the great lords or peers of the realm (as they are referred to in *The Murder of Charles the Good*) who comprised the counts, dukes and barons of France and those English lords who also held land in France. The next group within this hierarchy were the high officials. These were the castellans, seneschals and marshals, who not only held significant landed wealth but considerable political power as well. Following the high officials in status and wealth were the landed knights who generally held numerous fiefs and often had vassals of their own. The next category was composed of the landless household knights, who were the retainers and vassals of the preceding categories and who were generally provided with their equipment, room and board by their lords. The fifth category were the landless knights errant, who were generally little better than well equipped and well trained mercenaries but nonetheless held the title of knight. These were generally the

second sons of the preceding categories. Finally there are the somewhat elusive serf-knights who were primarily a German type, known as ministeriales in the Holy Roman Empire and are seen only rarely if at all in French sources.

The upper aristocracy of the twelfth century was defined by their titles, lineage, power, both political and military, and wealth. The counts, dukes and barons were almost always descended from either royalty, nobility or at the very least castellans; many had all three in their family trees. They ruled vast lands, possessed large armies of both knights and common foot soldiers and had immense wealth which they used to live in splendor and give gifts to ensure the loyalty of their vassals. Examples of this category are easy to find in most medieval sources, Count Charles the Good is an excellent example, as are his direct vassals the barons of Flanders. Charles' lineage was as exalted as any member of the nobility. He was the cousin of the preceding count of Flanders, who died without an heir and the son of king Canute of Denmark. Up until his murder he managed to rein in the violence of his vassals with an extensive legal system. He was even asked to take the throne of the Holy Roman Empire and the kingship of Jerusalem.<sup>50</sup> Count Charles represents the very highest strata of the knightly class. Other examples of this category are the barons of Flanders, referred to as the peers of the realm: Baldwin of Aalst, Robert of Bethune, Daniel of Dendermonde, and William of Ypres; who at first covertly supported the traitors and murderers of the count and later took vengeance upon them, and eventually elect the new count.<sup>51</sup> While these men enjoyed great social status and extravagant wealth far beyond that of most members of the knightly class they were still a part of that social order. They participated in tournaments and led their knights into battle; fighting

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50 Galbert of Bruges, *The Murder of Charles of the Good*, trans. James Bruce Ross (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 81-82, 90-93.

51 Galbert of Bruges, *The Murder of Charles of the Good*, 196.

in the same manner as their followers. They referred to themselves both by their titles of count and baron and also by the title knight. They intermarried and were related to the high officials, and were often descended from them.

The high officials, the castellans, the lord of a castle and the surrounding land, the seneschals, advisers to the kings and great lords, and marshals, military commanders, were defined less by lineage, although they often belonged to noble families, and more by their title and function. Examples of this class are Wenemar of Ghent and Ivan of Lille (the brother of Baldwin of Aalst),<sup>52</sup> both of whom are referred to as peers of the realm like the barons of Flanders. Their power and wealth was nearly as great as the barons. Another example of this category is John the Marshal, the father of William Marshal, who is referred to in *The Life of William Marshal* as “a brave and trustworthy knight called John the Marshal; he was so enterprising, his affairs on such a scale, that he surrounded himself with many worthy men. And yet he was no earl, no baron with fabulous wealth, yet his generosity so increased that all were amazed by it.”<sup>53</sup> In this passage his generosity and reputation are being compared to that of the nobility. In fact he was not far from the being a member of the nobility as his wife was the sister of the earl of Salisbury. These top two categories within the knightly class were intimately connected through marriage and blood relation. These relationships illustrate the general feeling of solidarity among the knightly class. Moreover it was not uncommon for knights of lesser origins to rise to the rank of castellan or marshal.

In the category of the landed knights there are two prominent examples in *The Murder of Charles the Good*: Thanemar and Borsiard (a member of the Erembald clan), the knights who

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52 Galbert of Bruges, *The Murder of Charles of the Good*, 157.

53 A.J. Holden, ed. and S. Gregory, trans., *The History of William Marshal*, 3.

fought the private war that drove count Charles to take judicial action against the Erembalds. Both are described as possessing significant lands, Thanemar even has a tower which Borsiard besieged.<sup>54</sup> Both of them have their own vassals who fight for them; Borsiard's knights are the ones who actually carry out the murder of Charles, and Thanemar leads his knights in the siege of the castle of Bruges.<sup>55</sup> Borsiard however appears to have attained his rank from rather humble origins as the main motivation for the Erembald's murder of count Charles was that he was attempting to discover whether or not they were actually descended from serfs. If this was the case they would still be his serfs and Charles could seize their lands from them. The Erembalds are perhaps, if their servile origins were true, a marvelous example of the social mobility of the knightly class.

The knight Gervaise is a prominent example of a household retainer, the chamberlain to count Charles. After the murder of the count, Gervaise, despite his humble rank within the knightly class, gathers a small group of knights and foot soldiers and begins the siege against the traitorous Erembalds where he is later joined by the Barons.<sup>56</sup> He is representative of perhaps the largest portion of the knightly class, men who hold the title of knight but hold no lands. These were the knights who garrisoned the castles and served their lords both as soldiers and servants; albeit respected and important servants. They were equipped, clothed, housed and fed by their lords. Gervaise, however, does not remain a household retainer for long; after the castle of Bruges is retaken he is made the castellan of Bruges, yet another example of the social mobility of the knightly class.<sup>57</sup> While most household knights did not make such great social

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54 Galbert of Bruges, *The Murder of Charles of the Good*, 103.

55 Galbert of Bruges, *The Murder of Charles of the Good*, 119, 182.

56 Galbert of Bruges, *The Murder of Charles of the Good*, 150.

57 Galbert of Bruges, *The Murder of Charles of the Good*, 199.

strides it does illustrate it could be done.

One of the most famous knights errant was William Marshal, who spent most of his life traveling around France fighting in various wars and participating tournaments. His success is one of the most impressive examples of the social mobility of the knightly class. He eventually became the marshal of three different kings of England, Henry II, Richard I and John I, and the regent for Henry III. He accomplished all this through his skill at arms and his reputation for prowess and bravery. The knights errant were nearly the lowest members of the knightly class and yet if they were successful in war they could hope to attain some degree of wealth and status.

Finally there were the serf-knights. They are somewhat elusive in the French sources, one of the very few examples being the Erembald clan who appear at least to be descended from serfs (although count Charles is murdered before their actual status is determined). If they were descended from serfs they had certainly risen in status considerably. Bertulf, the ringleader of the traitors was the provost of the count (a clerical position in charge of the finances of the county), his brother Hacket was a castellan (although apparently a very minor one), and Borsiard was a landed knight.<sup>58</sup> If it was discovered that they were indeed serfs they could have been stripped of their titles and lands by the count. The most convincing argument for their servile status is that they take the threat of being reduced to serfs so seriously that they murder count Charles. However, in *The Life of William Marshal* serf-knights are never mentioned. The historian Jean Scammell concludes that serf-knights did exist in England,<sup>59</sup> but the English knights (or at least the non-professional English knights) did belong to the same knightly class

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58 Galbert of Bruges, *The Murder of Charles of the Good*, 96-98.

59 Jean Scammell, "The Formulation of the English Social Structure: Freedom, Knights, and Gentry, 1066-1300," 599.

that French knights did. Furthermore, if such a class of serf-knights did exist in France they were probably not a part of the knightly class as their servile origins would have crippled their social status. The evidence for the existence of servile knights in France is not definitive but it appears that such a group may have existed in Flanders.

There are several reasons for the existence of a knightly class in France during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. First was the power of the regional princes of France, the semi-autonomous counts and dukes who in many ways were more powerful than the kings of France during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. An example of the power that the counts and dukes enjoyed as compared to the kings of France is the relative number of effective knights that they possessed. For example it was estimated in the early twelfth century the counts of Flanders had one thousand knights whereas the king of France had somewhere between five hundred and seven hundred knights in his personal service.<sup>60</sup> The reason these counts and dukes maintained such large private armies was the nearly constant threat of private warfare with one another and the threat of the Holy Roman Empire to the eastern regions of France. This warfare took two primary forms: siege warfare, often with the aim of capturing the besieged castle for territorial expansion and raiding which was primarily aimed at disrupting economic interests by pillaging the countryside and undefended, meaning without a castle, towns.

Typical battles as described within the primary sources of the twelfth century tended to be conflicts between small armies of knights and foot soldiers (who are not referred to by the terms *milites* or *chevalier*). An example of the distinction made between knights and other soldiers is illustrated by Galbert of Bruges who states that “he would either cause grave injury to

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<sup>60</sup> Galbert of Bruges, *The Murder of Charles the Good*, 9.

the unarmed or put to flight those who were armed,”<sup>61</sup> the armed, a term used to describe those who wore mail coats, were invariably knights as they were the only ones who could afford armor or were given armor by their lords. This distinction between knightly combatants and the non-knightly fighters is typical throughout the text. The person to whom Galbert is referring in the above citation as the one causing the wounding is a mercenary bowman named Benkin whom Galbert identifies as a *coterellus* (non-knightly mercenary).<sup>62</sup> These *coterelli* became increasingly common during the later twelfth century but did not replace knights until much later. It is important to note that knights were distinguished from other types of combatants, including other types of professional soldiers. Galbert of Bruges continues this throughout his text: when he discusses the army of Gervaise, a knight and the chamberlain of the late count Charles and one of the heroes of Galbert's narrative, which Galbert describes as “a fierce army of footsoldiers, a circle of knights.”<sup>63</sup> The author of *The History of William Marshal* makes similar distinctions between knights, men-at-arms and archers.<sup>64</sup> This demonstrates that the knightly class was defined by more than just its participation in combat, but that they were elite combatants with a distinct social group, albeit a heterogeneous one, that made them different from others who participated in warfare.

These two sources, *The Murder of Charles the Good* and *The Life of William Marshall*, provide a vivid description of the endemic warfare of the twelfth century that necessitated the existence of the knightly class. Specifically the constant sieges and raiding of private warfare that required the nobility to maintain large standing armies of professional soldiers. Furthermore

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61 Galbert of Bruges, *The Murder of Charles of the Good*, 165.

62 Galbert of Bruges, *The Murder of Charles of the Good*, 165.

63 Galbert of Bruges, *The Murder of Charles of the Good*, 148.

64 A.J. Holden, ed. and S. Gregory, trans., *The History of William Marshal*, 23.

they demonstrate how warfare was an important economic force within this period of medieval history and how it was important to both the upper aristocracy and the lower echelons of the knightly class. The concept of violence as a legitimate function of the knightly class was crucial to the identity of this class. Lords and knights were expected to maintain their honor through the violence of warfare; it provided both their wealth and because participation in warfare was a necessary component of knightly status.

Examples of siege warfare are common, such as Galbert's description of Gervaise's attempts to exact vengeance on the traitors responsible for the murder of Count Charles; Gervaise first "hastened to lay siege to a stronghold named Raverschoot, which was well fortified by the traitors for their defense."<sup>65</sup> Gervaise later on begins the siege of the castle of Bruges itself where the primary conspirators are residing.<sup>66</sup> This siege is one of the pivotal events of Galbert's narrative, and is significant because it illustrates how Gervaise immediately felt the need to avenge his lord because it would reflect poorly on his honor if he did not. Other sieges within this text include the private war between the Erembald clan (the principal traitors and those directly responsible for the murder of Count Charles) and the knight Thancmar, which consisted of them besieging each other's towers.<sup>67</sup> These sieges threaten the status and property of both Thancmar and the Erembalds and therefore within the knightly milieu reprisal was not only expected but considered a legitimate action. The intervention of Count Charles is an example of interference in what most of the knightly class would have considered legitimate actions. The dishonor placed upon the Erembalds by their subsequent punishment for the conflict would have been another reason for the Erembalds to take vengeance on Count Charles.

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65 Galbert of Bruges, *The Murder of Charles of the Good*, 148.

66 Galbert of Bruges, *The Murder of Charles of the Good*, 151.

67 Galbert of Bruges, *The Murder of Charles of the Good*, 102-104.

In *The History of William Marshal* sieges are a common occurrence, the most prominent of which is King Stephen's siege of the castle of Newbury. This castle is one of the castles John the Marshal (the father of William Marshal) ruled. When John the Marshal made a treaty with King Stephen and then continued to fight against him, King Stephen was advised to kill the young William Marshal, who had been given as a prisoner to guarantee the truce. While King Stephen's lords advise him to kill William Marshal, Stephen refuses to kill his prisoner, much to the chagrin of his lords. This is yet another example of how violence, even the murder of children, was considered legitimate. These sieges are all examples of the acceptability of violence within the knightly class.

The other common type of warfare during this period was raiding, which was often the precursor of a siege. The objective of raiding was to destroy agricultural crops and pillage lightly defended towns. Raids, like sieges, are common throughout *The History of William Marshal*, which covers a wide span of time including several periods of conflict. In *The Murder of Charles the Good* raids never play any sort of central role, although they do appear in the background; primarily as a practice that count Charles attempts to deter in order to keep the peace.<sup>68</sup> One of the few specific examples of raiding in *The Murder of Charles the Good* is during the war between the Erembalds and the knight Thanemar: “first the squires and then the knights began to plunder the peasants, even seizing the flocks and cattle of the country people.”<sup>69</sup> Raiding appears more often in *The History of William Marshal*. The first battle that William takes part in is as a defender against an army determined to burn and pillage the town of

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68 Galbert of Bruges, *The Murder of Charles of the Good*, 83.

69 Galbert of Bruges, *The Murder of Charles of the Good*, 104.

Drincourt.<sup>70</sup> Later in the text William joins an army led by King Henry II with the purpose of defeating an army from Poitou that was raiding his land: “for he[Henry II] was sorely pressed by the need to rescue his lands, since the men of Poitou were waging war on him; they had devastated, laid waste, and ravaged his lands. Often they rode in a violent manner through all the King's domains; they left nothing alone they could find, wherever it was, with the exception of the castles.”<sup>71</sup> The motivation for raiding was primarily to reduce the income that could be derived from the land, and therefore it was necessary for lords to defend against these raids, necessitating the need for large standing armies of elite mobile soldiers (knights).

The motivation for this all this warfare was both a matter of honor, identity and economics; warfare during the middle ages was both an expected activity for the knightly class as well as one of the primary economic activities of the period. It was important economically to the upper echelons of the knightly class (counts, dukes and barons) because it was an opportunity to expand their territory and therefore attract more followers. It was equally important to the lesser members of the knightly class as well because the plunder gained from warfare could significantly increase their wealth as well as increase their status if they were particularly successful.

Looting and pillaging were other forms of violence considered to be legitimate activities by the knightly class. Examples of pillaging are scattered throughout the texts such as: “when Gervaise made his attack on Raverschoot, he carried off a great amount of plunder.”<sup>72</sup> There is a fascinating passage in *The Murder of Charles the Good* when the barons of Flanders arrive to lay siege to the castle of Bruges which attests to the knightly predilection for plunder: “Now after a

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70 A.J. Holden, ed. and S. Gregory, trans., *The History of William Marshal*, 45.

71 A.J. Holden, ed. and S. Gregory, trans., *The History of William Marshal*, 81.

72 Galbert of Bruges, *The Murder of Charles of the Good*, 149.

meeting with our citizens [the people of Bruges], and also summoning all the leaders of the siege, they all took an oath, before they were permitted to enter the town, to respect as inviolate the area and property of the town out of consideration for the safety and welfare of our citizens.”<sup>73</sup> This demonstrates just how concerned the citizens were that the armies of the barons would set about pillaging the town if they were allowed to enter without taking an oath specifically forbidding them from doing so. Furthermore after the castle of Bruges is stormed the citizens as well as the knights of the baronial armies set about looting the castle; even the burghers understood the acceptability of pillage as a legitimate right of conquest.<sup>74</sup>

Another way in which the knightly class profited from warfare was the looting of horses and equipment from the enemy dead and captured prisoners. An interesting example of the importance of this practice is illustrated in *The Life of William Marshal* after William Marshal's first battle:

Thereupon the lord of Mandeville, that valiant and worthy William [not William Marshal], who had not as then become count, said: “Marshal [William Marshal], make me a gift, out of friendship, and you will get your reward.” “Willingly. What will it be?” - “A crupper or, failing that, an old horse collar.” The Marshal, hardly a man of words, and neither crafty nor arrogant, replied: “Upon my soul, I never owned one of those in my life.” “Marshal, what's that you say? It's a trifling thing you refuse me. Today you got forty of them before my very eyes, or even sixty, and now you intend to refuse me one!”<sup>75</sup>

This is an example of young William Marshal's naïveté, in that he had forgotten in the heat of battle to secure the loot from the knights he had defeated. In this instance William of Mandeville saw him defeat forty knights (probably an exaggeration) and yet William Marshal came away from the battle empty handed, a serious mistake for a young knight attempting to

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73 Galbert of Bruges, *The Murder of Charles of the Good*, 158.

74 Galbert of Bruges, *The Murder of Charles of the Good*, 176.

75 A.J. Holden, ed. and S. Gregory, trans., *The History of William Marshal*, 59-60.

make his fortune. The loot from a battle, particularly horses and armor were incredibly valuable, especially to landless knights like the young William Marshal.

Like warfare, its mock equivalent the tournament was another way in which poor landless knights could gain wealth and fame. William Marshal, in his early years of knighthood spent most his time traveling from one tournament to another: “He spent his life in tournaments and at war and travelled [sic] through all the lands where a knight should think of winning renown.”<sup>76</sup> The description of William Marshal's first tournament experience illustrates how quickly a good performance can reverse a poor knight's fortune: “Only that day had the Marshal been a poor man as regards possessions and horses, and now he had four and half, fine mounts and handsome, thanks to God.”<sup>77</sup> Count Charles of Flanders, who had immense wealth as the ruler of one of the most powerful and prosperous regions of the French kingdom, attended tournaments as well: “So he [count Charles] undertook chivalric exploits for the honor of his land and the training of his knights in the lands of the counts or princes of Normandy or France, sometimes even beyond the kingdom of France; and there with two hundred knights on horseback he engaged in tourneys, in this way enhancing his own fame and the power and glory of his country.”<sup>78</sup> Tournaments were of course a useful way for the knightly class to gain not only fame and fortune but also as training and preparation for war. The rise of the tournament, was not only as a means for training for war and economic gain, but also as a valuable recruiting ground for promising young knights. The reputation gained at tournaments had much greater benefits than mere praise.<sup>79</sup> . The tournament was an intrinsic part of knightly culture and an

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76 A.J. Holden, ed. and S. Gregory, trans., *The History of William Marshal*, 79.

77 A.J. Holden, ed. and S. Gregory, trans., *The History of William Marshal*, 71.

78 Galbert of Bruges, *The Murder of Charles of the Good*, 92.

79 Maurice Keen, *Chivalry*, 89.

activity that only knights could participate in; it was yet another activity that helped solidify the knightly class as a distinct unit of medieval society.

It was during the eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth century that the culture of chivalry emerged. Chivalry was a combination of the martial culture of the knightly class, combined with a programmatic literature espousing the ideal of courtesy and the increasing influence of the church within the aristocratic sphere. The cultural ideals of chivalry had only limited effectiveness in its penetration of the reality of chivalry; often the ideal did not reflect the reality of chivalry. These were not an outright betrayal of chivalry but complexities and contradictions inherent in all human idealologies. The most important effect of chivalry however was that it allowed to the knightly class to develop a cohesive cultural identity. Before Chivalry emerged the knightly had a military, social and political identity but no significant cultural Identity.

The origins of chivalry can traced back to the early middle ages. The origins of the dubbing ceremony are an example of how old the traditions of chivalry are that brings in a number of customs. First among them is the ancient Germanic custom of bestowing arms on a young man as a sort of coming of age ceremony, recorded first in Tacitus, and remaining a prominent custom throughout the development of Frankish culture. Another example of the development of the dubbing ceremony was the belting of the sword in the coronation ceremonies of the Carolingian kings and the blessing of swords during the Carolingian campaigns against the various non-Christians.<sup>80</sup> This illustrates not only deep roots of the chivalric tradition but also how the church began to bring its influence to bear on the second estate by co-opting a formerly secular practice.

What was new about chivalry was the religious influence. The process began with the

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80 Maurice Keen, *Chivalry*, 64-77.

ninth and tenth century invasions of the Vikings, Magyars and Saracens during which the church began to see a very real need for the military class that it had been critical of for so long.<sup>81</sup> This changing view in the church ultimately influenced the preaching of the first crusade, a major event in the development of chivalry. It is important to avoid conflating chivalry with the ecclesiastical ideal of the Christian knight. While Christianity played a significant role in the development of the culture of chivalry it should not be overstated. The crusades were highly popular among the knightly class, who like most members of Christian medieval Europe, were afraid of Hell. Knights, who spent their lives fighting and inevitably killing, were heavily criticized by the Church. The crusades represented a way for knights to redeem themselves. Clerical writers like Bernard of Clairvaux attempted to present these new ideals to the knightly class, often with some amount of success as in the case of the crusades.

Bernard of Clairvaux's *In Praise of the New Knighthood*, offers a model of this Christian knighthood. Although it is specifically addressed to the Order of the Templars it addressed issues of what the church deemed legitimate violence. While this model is very limited it leaves a certain ambiguity as to what might constitute legitimate violence. Obviously the violence inherent to the knightly class undoubtedly found Bernard of Clairvaux's model far too restrictive as it states that: "What else is the cause of wars and the root of disputes among you, except unreasonable flashes of anger, the thirst for empty glory, or the hankering after some earthly possessions?"<sup>82</sup> Anger, glory and possessions were all viewed as perfectly acceptable reasons for violence within the knightly class. Bernard also states that "If he fights for a good reason, the issue of his fight can never be evil; and likewise the results can never be considered good if

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81 Maurice Keen, *Chivalry*, 47.

82 Bernard of Clairvaux, *In Praise of The New Knighthood*, Greenia, Conrad Trans., Werblowsky, R.J. Zwi Ed., (Kalamazoo, Cistercian Publications, Inc., 1977) 133.

the reason were evil and the intentions perverse.”<sup>83</sup> Clerical authors of chivalric literature would expand upon these good reasons to include upholding justice, protecting the innocent<sup>84</sup> and defending the church.<sup>85</sup>

The changing view of the church towards the knightly class during the high middle ages allowed the knightly class to become more fully integrated with medieval society. They became the second estate, those responsible for fighting the enemies of justice and the church. Clerical authors such as Chretien De Troyes attempted to direct the knightly class in the direction of these ideals. Chivalric literature, primarily written by ecclesiastical writers, was important by the mere fact of its existence. The popularity and prevalence of this literature represented the knightly class's adoption of this culture. Chivalry, however, in its functional existence remained focused on glory and possessions.

Those aspects of chivalry that impacted the function of the knightly class most were represented in the empathy knights showed one another on the battlefield. While violence was an integral part of the knightly identity and warfare was common, knights showed each other a significant “professional” respect on the battlefield. The practice of ransom is an example of how the culture of chivalry produced a sense of identity and empathy within the knightly class. William Marshal took ransoms from those he defeated in tournaments as well as those knights he captured in battle.<sup>86</sup> Furthermore it was not considered dishonorable to surrender if there was no hope of victory; “Roger Torel put up a stout resistance and made every effort he could to

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83 Bernard of Clairvaux,, *In Praise of The New Knighthood*, 131.

84 The knightly class's predation upon the peasantry meant that this particular reason for violence was not often seen during this period, it would however remain a significant theme of chivalric literature, particularly the protection of women.

85 This was the only good reason that Bernard of Clairvaux describes *In Praise of the New Knighthood*.

86 A.J. Holden, ed. and S. Gregory, trans., *The History of William Marshal*, 443.

defend the castle, but he was obliged by force to surrender it and surrender himself up as a prisoner; for this he was held in great esteem.”<sup>87</sup> Even knights who were not rich enough to afford ransoms were often provided with ransoms from their lords. In a charter of William the Conqueror bestowing honors upon the lord of a lay abbacy the lord is provided with the following aids: “the lord may have an aid for his ransom from captivity... or for ransoming his son if captured in service of the duke.”<sup>88</sup> The practice of ransom epitomized the professional camaraderie of the knightly class as well as providing another source of income for knights. The practice of ransom however was by no means universal and often depended on the circumstances of the conflict; if taking prisoners was either inconvenient or the enemies had particularly bitter cultural or political differences terrible atrocities could be committed. The realities of chivalry were often highly practical, although Matthew Strickland states that “Rather, the fact that a significant proportion of such acts accrued little or no tactical or financial gain emphasizes their essential quality as expressions of professional empathy, respect and magnanimity among the warrior class.”<sup>89</sup>

Chivalry, moreover, was often defined in terms of martial prowess. The *History of William Marshal* often uses the phrase “feat of chivalry” to denote particularly brave actions in combat.<sup>90</sup> This connotation of chivalry was used as a reference to the function of the knightly class, that is to fight. This concept of chivalry as prowess or bravery is clearly illustrated in this description of a tournament: “Each man strove to perform well, with the result that there were so many feats of arms that no one witnessed them without saying for a fact that it was chivalry that

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87 A.J. Holden, ed. and S. Gregory, trans., *The History of William Marshal*, 425.

88 Charles H. Haskins, “Knight-service in Normandy in the Eleventh Century,” *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 22, 88 (Oct., 1907): 648.

89 Matthew Strickland, *War and Chivalry*, 333.

90 A.J. Holden, ed. and S. Gregory, trans., *The History of William Marshal*, the phrase “feat of chivalry” is used so often it would be impractical to list the various pages in which it is used.

drove the participants on.”<sup>91</sup> Once again chivalry is equated with a desire for honor gained from prowess (feats of arms). To be a chivalric knight meant to be a brave and skilled knight. In this sense chivalry was merely a new word for the old traditions of the knightly class and yet it became a part of medieval culture and took on a cultural meaning.

The development of chivalry as both a functional code, a representation of knightly values and new clerical ideals was the culmination of the knightly cultural identity. Chivalry and knighthood became inseparable concepts despite the complexities of both terms. To be a knight meant to be chivalrous, something only someone born into the knightly class could be. Chivalry was a cultural identity that defined what it meant to be a knight and subsequently the word knight took on a cultural definition in the high middle ages. With the development of chivalry we have a complete picture of the knight.

The knight emerged in the turbulent ninth century, characterized by endemic warfare and the decline of royal authority. The necessity of the ruling elite for a standing professional military force loyal to their interests caused these great lords to increasingly identify with their vassals. Moreover these vassals were given significant opportunities to rise in rank within the knightly class because their superiors viewed them as part of a common societal institution. The twelfth century represents a turning point for the knightly class in that it witnessed the emergence of a cohesive identity for the knightly class of France. The knight was a man defined by his skill in battle and by his social status based upon his lineage, prestige and wealth. He embodied the chivalric ethos of bravery, prowess and Christian knighthood; at least when it suited their purposes or when they were inspired by religious zeal. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the knightly class had emerged as a cohesive if heterogeneous social group defined by

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91 A.J. Holden, ed. and S. Gregory, trans., *The History of William Marshal*, 189.

the common practice of warfare, the culture of chivalry and a shared title that imparted a sense of cultural identity if not a specific social status.

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