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Chivalry and the Knight

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Chivalry and the Knight: An Examination of Five Popular Chivalric Sources

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Introduction

What does it mean to have honor? Cultures from across the world have asked this question for millennia, and most of them have come up with very violent answers. For example, in college, it's considered honorable if you pull an all-nighter to not even finish the paper you were supposed to be working on this whole time, but didn't because twenty-five to thirty pages of pure text confused and frightened you. Or maybe that's just dumb and I need to take better care of myself. But I choose to believe that it's the former, because I need to justify the ill-treatment I give myself on a regular basis.

Probably the most recognizable form of honorable conduct that we see in history is the idea of chivalry. Born in the Middle Ages, this idea bloomed in a troubled time, when wars were a pretty common occurrence, and the upper class was starting to need to justify their existence-- or distract the population with another shiny crusade. This is where chivalry comes in. At first, it was little more than a descriptor; someone who was "chivalrous" (or, in French, practiced *chevalerie*) was someone who was very good at fighting on horseback, particularly in formation. Because they tended to be in need of top-tier arms and armor for this style of fighting, the *chevalier* (or *cniht*, if you want to be Anglo-Saxon about it) either needed to be rich, or work for someone who was rich. And of course, chivalry being born out of a burgeoning warrior class that

was the knight (ca. 1066-Forever in our hearts), it fit this role of justifying the bourgeoisie's existence quite well.

But chivalry is one of those fun ideas that turns into more than the sum of its parts. You'd think that one knight, plus one chivalry, equals one guy who's just justified his existence, right? Wrong. Chivalry evolved. And like a bunch of little Eevees running around Europe (which is simultaneously terrifying and adorable), it evolved to fit into whatever culture it lived in. This means that, while there is a lot of overlap in the vague and general ideas of chivalry, it was mainly a product of the culture. You live in France? That's chivalry's hometown, my dude; you're probably gonna be spending a lot of time on a horse, and also doing your best not to die. You live in Spain? No need for a big, expensive crusade, my man; you have a crusade on your doorstep! Retake the Iberian peninsula! You live in England? You're falling behind, bucko; you may have started out French, but by the end of this period, you'll be so thoroughly insulated from the rest of the world that you'll decide the rest of the world should be English too.

So if all that was too long and you didn't bother reading it, here's the short version: chivalry was an evolving concept that very much meant different things to different people, yet had some general, overarching themes that ran through it wherever it landed. This paper will explore some of those themes, and in the end, see if any of them still apply today. Because to fully kill an idea, it has to be replaced by another idea, and chivalry is so inherently unique that to replace it would be a tall task indeed. Herein, we will have a look at the ideal of chivalry from the perspective of the knight himself and the Church, and contrast that with the reality of chivalry seen in the Middle Ages. Finally, we will look at Medieval chivalry and see if it can be properly applied to the modern day.

Methodology

On the topic of methodology, there are a few things to be noted. For the reasons listed above, chivalry is a topic that is really very difficult to study and state that you have done an acceptable job of studying. As a result, I will not claim to have studied every single source that can possibly be studied on the topic of chivalry. That would take more time than exists in a semester, because for an age that is proclaimed time and again to have such a low literacy rate, the people of the Middle Ages sure did a lot of writing. And I do mean a lot; the documents written in Edward I's England alone would be enough to occupy a scholar for his whole life. Though books on ideas were certainly less common than chronicles and payment records and laws, they were definitely still a thing, and still very popular among the upper class who could afford them[1]. This is evidenced by the fact that almost as soon as William Caxton's printing press came to England, some of the first books printed on it were The Bible, Mallory's *Morte D'Arthur*, and a translation of Ramon Llull's *Book of the Order of Chivalry*.

This being the case, I decided that I would take only a few books from the different parts of the Middle Ages in which chivalry was relevant (the High Medieval and the Late Medieval periods, respectively), and treat those in their own contexts, seeing what interplay they had, how they build on each other, how they contradict each other, et cetera. The works I have chosen are meant to be those works which epitomize that culture's idea of chivalry. For example, in the heavily-Christian Spain, Ramon Llull's ecclesiastical take on the knight and chivalry makes

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[1] Sidenote: it's actually not that peasants couldn't read; the Church provided basically free education. Most peasants could read enough to be able to read their own laws and know how to abide by them, and argue their case before a judge if they were accused of infringement of one of those laws. But actual books were kinda pricey, and the average peasant wouldn't be able to afford the handwritten manuscript that was pretty much the only way to fly back then. Hence why the printing press was such a big deal.

sense, as he was both a knight and a monk (though, of course, at different times). Similarly, from a secular French point of view, Charny's Late Medieval text is a good deal more pragmatic and focused on actions rather than symbolism. It's less about the things a knight's equipment stands for and more about what a knight ought to do with that equipment.

So what I did was I took one book from four different cultural settings that I believe exemplifies that setting's idea of chivalry best, and I used it as a sort of microcosm in which to distill the ideal of chivalry for that culture. In doing this, I intend to give each book a thorough treatment, explaining why it is the book I chose and why it seems to be indicative of the cultural idea of chivalry. These four books are *In Praise of the New Knighthood* by Bernard of Clairvaux, *The Chronicles of the Crusades*, a compilation work of *The Siege of Constantinople* and *The Life of Saint Louis* by Geoffrey of Villehardouin and Jean of Joinville, respectively, *The Book of the Order of Chivalry* by Ramon Llull, and *A Knight's Own Book of Chivalry* by Geoffroi de Charny. The idea is that these works will present us with a sort of distilled image of chivalry in that culture, and what it meant to have chivalry. While this paper will be covering a broad swath of time, the broadness should be mitigated by the fact that it will be focused on a single idea.

Historiography

But before we get into all that, let's talk historiography. After the flower of chivalry had bloomed, faded, died, and rotted in the ground, there were several attempts to keep it (or at least, the version that was convenient at the time) alive. The study of these attempts and the studies of Medieval chivalry in particular that they gave the world are interesting, to say the least. The mad scramble for meaning in a discipline that is largely thought to be irrelevant is always fun to look into, and interesting to see how it changed over time.

Unfortunately, the majority of relevant sources on chivalry come from the past two centuries, so there is nothing particularly old. Indeed, I was able to find little even from the nineteenth century, despite its penchant for Medieval nostalgia. Most of what I found dated from around 1910 at the earliest to 2018-19 at the latest. On the bright side, these sources cover a wide range of topics for the application of chivalry. For instance, there was an entire article (which I intend to discuss) about how to use Medieval chivalry as a guide to introducing university students to the Middle Ages at large. But, of course, we ought to start at the beginning before we get into the modern revival of chivalry.

In its own day, chivalry was studied as a novel phenomenon, and a sort of subculture within the wider context of Medieval European culture. It was a subject of much debate just where knights even fit into society. It was obvious that they were classified among the First Estate, but wherein? Were they on the same level as barons, counts, dukes? Were they to be treated as kings? A warrior caste was nothing new, but a warrior caste with its own emerging culture was more novel than one might think. Specifically, it was hotly debated how they fit in with the Church at large. Christian kings and lords now had a new way to kill one another, which the Church was getting increasingly nervous about. The pontifical vision of a united Europe was a real headache to get going already with everyone having their own private army; now they had a whole new subculture to deal with that was going to divide the world up even more. It wasn't until the twelfth or thirteenth centuries, with the Crusades in full swing, that knights were set up in the culture as defenders of the Church. The one thing about knights and chivalry that so alarmed the Church--their military nature--had finally been harnessed, and turned to the Pope's advantage.

So chivalry eventually found its place in the Middle Ages, but as they started petering out into the Early Modern Period, certain things made chivalry more complicated to hold onto. Armor was still relevant (indeed, it would be seen in smatterings until the First World War), but more and more the place of the knight was being taken by other warriors of lower birth. When chivalry began to grow irrelevant, it became more and more insular. With the rise in popularity of the Humanist worldview and the Early Modern preoccupation with classical Greece and Rome, it is safe to say that chivalry as an idea was pretty thoroughly replaced. By the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, chivalry and its study was considered to be irrelevant in light of the more appealing study of the ancient world.

But that was not the end of chivalry. Ideas are thankfully not killed so easily. Particularly in England, a chivalric nostalgia came underway in the later half of the eighteenth century, and was in full swing in the nineteenth. Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* was an instant classic, and the product of a new mania for knighthood and chivalry. Of course, it wasn't real chivalry as it would have been in the Middle Ages; such was founded upon the necessity of differentiated classes. But the Victorians held a very romantic view of chivalry, predicated on a disdain for the perceived foppery of the previous century and a longing for "the good old days," so to speak. You know the sort of thing: "Oh, the days when men said what they meant!", or, "Oh, the days when men were men, galloping about in search of truth, justice, adventure and romance!" The romanticism of chivalry had gone thoroughly to their heads. But we ought not to blame them. Who can pick up a book on King Arthur and not long for such days?

Sadly, the First World War put paid to those thoughts. Suddenly, men were dying in droves for reasons they hardly knew, and none of them ever really returned home. The men who went to

the trenches died there, and the men who came back were largely broken and shellshocked. Unsurprisingly, there was a bit of a lull in the study of chivalry. It's really not until more recent times that the study has picked up again, and has covered such a variety of topics that it's rather hard to list them all here. But I'll do my best to list as many as I can.

In the first place, Cold War politics of the 1950's placed a larger emphasis on math and science than most other parts of curriculum, and as a result, history largely fell through the cracks. Of course, those who knew history in all its glory and shame bemoaned this growing loss. What history was taught from about middle school to high school was largely survey, painting broad strokes over a large swathes of time. Sadly, the Middle Ages was largely granted the short shrift by this system-- an oversight that continues to this day. But the academic community was not idle in the meanwhile. Chivalry as an idea to be studied began to resurface, and began to turn people's heads. One very excellent article suggested the study of chivalry as a sort of primer to the study of the Middle Ages in universities. The class might discuss the different ways that chivalry was played out in the Middle Ages themselves, and draw connections to their own time, with the rise of Jihadists and the War on Terror being compared (rather unfairly, I think) to the Crusades.

Of course, this was not the only part of the resurgence of interest in chivalry. In recent years, the subject has been subject to pages upon pages worth of scrutiny, from how chivalry related to masculinity in the nineteenth century to how knighting ceremonies in Middle English literature differed from what we can know about knighting ceremonies in real life. The modern trend seems to be to look at chivalry from a distance, to put it in context of what we know about the Middle Ages, and see if we can make sense of it from there. So far, there has been a great deal of

progress made. Chivalry has been treated in more areas than can be recounted here, all in the context of the Middle Ages. From what chivalry meant for women in the Medieval period to how it relates to the modern criminal justice system, chivalry doesn't seem to be either mocked or praised; it's just treated as an idea and a subculture that was popular among a very specific group of people a very long time ago.

Book the First: Ramon Llull's *The Book of the Order of Chivalry*

With all this historiographical content in mind, let's get into the fun part: the sources. In general, a few common threads run through all four sources that I chose: the knight as a man of violence, the knight as a man of manners, and the knight as a man of God. As a man of violence, the knight was expected to be the protector of those under his rule-otherwise, he'd make for a pretty terrible ruler. He was expected to keep the best equipment on him as much as he possibly could, including the most up-to-date armor he could afford. Of course, all this newfangled armor and armament is useless unless you actually know how to use them, so the knight was expected to know how to use the weapons and armor he had bought to his advantage. As a man of manners, on the other hand, the knight was expected more and more as the Middle Ages went on to be the sort of man who tells it like it is, and the sort of man whom you could trust not to make a fool of himself. So he had to be up to date on the latest fashions, the latest manners at court, and the latest dances. He had to be gentle as well as a man. Finally, as a man of God, the knight was fully expected to be a pious man who would bow to the Church's wishes. If the Church called on him for aid, he would come, even if he was the only one. These three parts of the knight come together beautifully in the first work we'll have a look at: Ramon Llull's *Book of the Order of Chivalry***.**

First, a little bit about the author. Ramon Llull was a Catalan knight turned monk in the thirteenth century, born around 1232. His young life was that of a troubadour, living in the court of King James I and II of Majorica in modern-day Spain. The story goes that he received several visions of Christ on the cross at about the age of thirty, after having married. After seeing these visions, Llull could no longer bear his life of flippancy and turned hermit/missionary, going through Al-Andalus and North Africa and preaching the gospel, trying to convert the Islamic population to Christ. (We assume he didn't get very far.) But while he was off hermiting, he had yet another vision around 1271, this time reducing the whole universe down to a few guiding principles. How many joints he was smoking at the time will remain forever a mystery. Regardless of the influence of the jazz cabbage, he wrote a book (not the one I'm talking about) called *Ars Magna*, or "The Great Art," in which he used logic, symbology, and the sciences to prove that the Christian God was the real God and the Muslim god was fake. What a guy. No wonder he got stoned to death.

Of course, Llull wasn't writing in a vacuum; no writer ever is. He just happened to be born in the middle of the Reconquista, a period in Spain's history in which Christian Spain was at almost constant war with the Muslim Al-Andalus. This period lasted from about 711 to 1492, and saw some of the most brutal fighting in the Middle Ages. Next time you wonder why Spain didn't show up for the Crusades, try to remember that they kinda had their hands full. In Llull's time, King James I of Spain was making massive headway from the kingdom of Aragon, expanding his power into Majorica and Valencia in his lifetime. He was known as "the Conqueror," with good reason; his manifold victories on the battlefield led to the major expansion of the Spanish

crown. In this atmosphere of warfare and conquest, Llull wrote his work, *The Book of the Order of Chivalry.*

The book opens with a bit of a narrative of a young squire seeking out a hermit who used to be a knight, asking him what it meant to be chivalrous. The hermit is reluctant to speak up at first, but eventually gives in and tells the young squire exactly what it means to be chivalrous, which makes this scene an interesting (if entirely forgettable) backdrop to the rest of the book. The few times that it crops back up are a bit jarring, but not enough to take away from the rest of the book. In the first chapter, Llull writes about the mythic origin of chivalry. He makes it known that, of all the beasts, one was chosen as the worthiest, most noble beast of all: the horse. And from a thousand men, one man was chosen to be the one the horse answered to: the knight. It is interesting to note the connection here. From the word "go," Llull makes no attempt to separate the knight from his mount. It's almost as if these two things are inextricably linked. And of course, they were. Who can afford to keep a good warhorse but the wealthiest of men? And of course, they are only wealthy (in this line of thought) because God has made them so. If God made them so, then they must be in positions of power for a reason, and are therefore inherently going to be followed, whether they like it or not. For this reason, they had better act like men worthy of being followed. From this line of thinking, Llull goes into the fine detail of his idea of chivalry, leaving no stone unturned.

In the first place, he states "the office of the knight": to defend the Church. Just as God called the clergy to preach to the enemies of God, He called knights to fight against the enemies of God. But it is not enough, according to Llull, that a knight loves the Church and his own order; he must love the members of other orders of chivalry as well. It's a bit like Christian

denominations are encouraged to love those of other denominations; we disagree on the minutiae, but we agree on the fundamentals. In addition to this order to love the members of the Church and the other orders, the knight is supposed to be totally loyal to his lord or king. The knight, as the noblest of men, must provide an exemplary style of service to his lord, else he is no true knight. And he goes on to list many other offices of the knight: judgement, fighting in tournaments, participating in hunts, and managing his estate well are all part of the knightly life, and therefore all part of the order of chivalry. In essence, a knight is expected to act with almost perfect virtue. Any knight in whom vice is found is not practicing the order of chivalry to the fullest extent.

Llull then goes on to discuss the training and making of a knight from a squire. In the first place, a squire ought to be examined by a knight who is a truly chivalrous man. This being the case, the chivalrous man can examine the squire more carefully for defects in character and habits, and expunge those from him before he makes him a knight. A squire with bad, vicious habits cannot be made a knight, for knights are undone by viciousness and malfeasance. Then he can be properly knighted. He must first, according to Llull, schedule his knighting on a feast day ordained by the Church, and spend the night before that feast day in a vigil, honoring the saint for whom the day is named. The next day, he can present himself to the priest of the church he held his vigil in, and recite the Apostles' Creed, the ten commandments, the seven sacraments, and a few other things. Then the lord or baron who is to knight the squire will gird on the squire's sword belt as the squire is kneeling, and after a kiss and a hard slap from their investor, the squire is a knight.

All of these pieces of the knighting ceremony are so symbolic that they can hardly be seen without the symbolism that accompanies them. As a man of God, the knight is knighted with the Church in mind, and as a man of manners, he is knighted almost as a mendicant. Of course, as a man of violence, he is knighted with the sword, a weapon designed for the sole purpose of killing another human being. But, of course, Llull doesn't see the sword that way. In fact, it too is deeply symbolic of a knight's religious duty. So too is the rest of his equipment. The sword (the typical Medieval variant of which is usually cruciform in shape) is meant to represent Jesus on the cross. The lance is for truth, the helmet is for humility, the maille hauberk represents protection from misdeeds, the maille chausses represent that the knight will keep the roads safe, the spurs represent diligence, the maille collar is for obedience, the mace is for courage, the dagger signifies trust in God,the pourpoint or doublet represents travail, and the shield represents the knight's duty. Not even the horse and his trappings were immune to this symbolism. The saddle represented the burden of chivalry, the horse itself meant nobility, the bit meant control over the tongue of the knight, the shaffron (head armor for the horse) stood for reason, and the maille bardings stood for the knight's protection of his possessions.

Why all this symbology? Llull was a devout Catholic, which meant that he was primarily interested in the knight as a man of God. As such, he focused mainly on this part of the knight's person. It makes sense, of course; his whole schtick was the order that God placed into the universe, and the knight should be no exception. But it is interesting to think about the fact that Llull did not really do much with the idea of the knight as a man of violence. Indeed, he doesn't touch on the violence much at all, aside from mentioning that it is part of a knight's office. This is something of a trend that continues in our next writer, actually. Bernard of Clairvaux being a

man whose entire life was dedicated to the Church, can we really be surprised when he plays up the Knights Templar's godliness?

Book the Second: Bernard of Clairvaux's *In Praise of the New Knighthood*

Bernard of Clairvaux was born around 1090 to a family of minor nobility. His father and mother were apparently a good influence on him, because he's said by most accounts to have been a pretty great guy from the very get-go. He became a Cistercian monk at about the age of twenty-three, and was one of the best monks in the monastery, despite being sick all the time. He was eventually moved to the abbey of Clairvaux, where he became the abbot and one of the most influential writers of the twelfth century. It is here that he wrote his book, *In Praise of the New Knighthood*, at the request of his friend, a major player in the newly-founded Poor Fellow Soldiers of Jesus Christ and the Temple of Solomon (the Knights Templar). Bernard says in the book that it took him so long to come out with it because he really didn't feel like he had much to say, and that it definitely wasn't because he didn't much want to touch the subject of knighthood with a ten-foot pole.

In the 1100's, knighthood was still a relatively new phenomenon, but it was starting to find its place in Medieval society. However, chivalry didn't exactly have the same meaning it did in Llull's day; back then, it just meant that you could stab someone, but on a horse. It was still mostly pomp and stabbiness. But the Church saw a use for all that stabiness, saying, "Hey, guys, if you help this neighbor of ours and also take back the Holy Land, all your sins will be erased!"And it worked. However, this crusade wasn't quite enough to get most knights off the "oh look at me" wagon. But a few hopped off, creating this little thing called the Knights Templar. Founded as both a monastic order and a military order, the Knights Templar were

charged with bringing pilgrims safely from Europe to Jerusalem, and killing those who would interfere with that. So, of course, the actual city of Jerusalem being in Catholic hands was great news for the pope. But most knights weren't super convinced, and just kinda stayed the course of being pompous jerks with a penchant for stabiness. It's here that this book comes into play.

The main point of this book is to commit verbal murder on the knights of this period for acting like what Bernard of Clairvaux saw as vain morons, telling them to be more like the Knights Templar-- holy, righteous, and monkish. Bernard saw the Templars as the epitome of chivalry: they were utterly loyal to the Church, they were the sorts of people who didn't relish in violence but did it to protect, and they were monks, which gave them huge ups in his book. Bernard makes their struggles and violence out to be an almost holy calling, with God as the one doing the real protecting. He actually says that, win or lose, the Templars will be more Godly for their combat. If they lose, they'll be dead, and therefore with God; if they win, they will have defeated the enemies of God, and that is inherently Godly. But in the end, it's mostly just a way of telling the other knights of the era to get on their level. Chivalry, according to Bernard, was meant to be a holy calling, and these guys were using it to stroke their own egoes.

Book the Third: Geoffrey de Villehardouin's *The Siege of Constantinople*

So there is the ideal of the Crusader: holy, righteous, and pure. But what did these crusades eventually lead to? Well, unfortunately, not a whole lot of good. After the First Crusade, it all started to go downhill-- so much so that crusading was almost seen as a form of quasi-martyrdom. But one crusade topped the cake off as probably the most derailed crusade of them all: the Fourth Crusade. What is there to say about this crusade? It was utterly cursed from the start, for one. Leaders of the crusade were dying of illness before they even got going in

earnest, and the group ran out of money almost as soon as they got to Venice, where they were supposed to embark for Abbasid Egypt. Instead, they were stuck in Venice until they could pay the Doge for the ships they needed to cross the Mediterranean. As if by divine circumstance, the exiled prince of Constantinople was living in Venice at this time, and begged the Crusaders for their aid in recapturing his city from the man who usurped it from him. They were hesitant--until he offered to pay them. Then even the Doge wanted in on the fight. Byzantines are usually good for the money they promise you.

So off they went to Constantinople--nowhere near the Holy Land, you might be thinking. But it's okay, really, because they were going to help a Christian emperor to regain his throne. It's what God would have wanted. Except that when they did help him retake Constantinople, he couldn't pay all of them. So, what's a good Christian boi to do when he can't get paid for fighting this great big war that totally derailed his crusade? Why, sack the city that didn't pay him, of course! Yep, this is the crusade that ended in the sack of Constantinople. Though the crusaders were driven out, the city never really recovered, contributing to its fall to the Ottomans centuries later.

But what did the crusaders think about this crusade? Well, we know what one of them thought, because he wrote it all down. Geoffrey de Villehardouin, a knight and a chronicler from France, wrote out a little ditty known as *The Siege of Constantinople*. I'm going to be skipping over this author's life, though, because there's actually not a whole lot about him that we know. Basically everything that I just mentioned, he wrote down, but it's all colored through a very interesting lens. Villehardouin presents the events of the crusade as ordained by God and required by the demands of chivalry, and that those who oppose the crusade from within their

ranks are malfeasant knights as well as enemies of God. Helping an exiled prince reclaim his kingdom is quite the chivalrous action in his mind, and it is in service of a fellow Christian who will back their crusade into Egypt later. Devotion to lord and Church, however, quickly gives way to the underlying cause of such a crusade: lust for money and power. This is perhaps the most damning evidence that the reality of chivalry did not live up to the ideal.

Book the Fourth: Jean de Joinville's *Life of Saint Louis*

So much for the disaster that was the Fourth Crusade. After that, crusades were mostly confined to the Holy Land and Egypt itself, not really bothering with Constantinople if they could avoid it. But one of these crusades was written about in one of the most interesting ways one can write about a crusade: as a backdrop to a character's life. Jean of Joinville's *Life of Saint Louis* is a fascinating take on the crusade narrative that comes out of France at the tail end of the High Middle Ages. It reads primarily like a war memoir, with many of the details perhaps embellished, as it was written a while after Louis IX's crusade actually happened (the book was finished in 1309, perhaps started as early as 1270, while the actual events recounted happened around 1248). Interestingly enough, Joinville doesn't make any attempt to oversell his devotion to Louis, or his devotion to his crusade.

During their expedition, Joinville and Louis became good friends, and Joinville shows a simple affection for his friend that is rarely seen elsewhere in Medieval chronicles. Joinville is shown to seriously look up to Louis as well, painting a picture of the king-saint that highlights the knight's own worldliness and humanity. He is up-front and honest about his own shortcomings, putting them forward as a sort of contrast to Louis' rumored holiness. Whereas Joinville gets bogged down in the worries of the world, Louis never seems to be that worried by

battle or politics. When Joinville goes into battle, he recounts the many times he was wounded, and even the fear he held in his heart throughout the battle; when he describes Louis, he describes him in an almost angelic manner, painting him as a warrior unafraid of death. While much of this is likely speculation on his part, no reader can deny that Joinville was one of the people most likely to advocate for his friend's canonization as a saint.

Joinville himself was the son of major nobility in France, and heir to a sizable inheritance already. But through his time with Louis in the crusade, his power grew even larger, even becoming the seneschal of Champagne after he returned from the Middle East. He wrote other works, including the work known as *Credo*, but his most famous work is his *Life of Saint Louis*> Despite (or perhaps because of) their friendship, Joinville refused to accompany King Louis on his final crusade, saying to his friend that it was an unwise decision. Turns out, he was right; Louis died in Tunis in 1270 on this crusade, leaving his son Philip king of France. The history Joinville wrote afterward was therefore made in memory of his friend and monarch, in order that those who read it might admire Louis almost as much as he did himself.

The theme of this book seems to be loyalty, righteousness, and excellence in deeds of arms. Though Joinville describes the crusader army as so many riff-raff, he has nothing but praise for the men who commanded them. Many times, he speaks of situations in which he and his comrades were boxed in by Muslim forces, and from which there seemed no way out. Of course, there was no easy way out-- not without significant harm and travail, and being wounded on Joinville's part. This is where the "man of violence" part of chivalry comes into play. In order to be effective on the battlefield, Joinville and his compatriots had no real choice but to be men of

violence. Many times, they found themselves in situations where a violent solution was really the only option.

For example, at the Battle of Mansurah, Joinville described himself and his men as being utterly surrounded by the enemy, unable to escape unless by hacking their way out--and even then it would have been a dubious affair. Much better in his eyes was the decision they actually came to: to be smart about things and send for reinforcements. He and his men held out as long as they could against the foe, and held their ground until the reinforcements led by Louis and his brother arrived. The enemy was then made to flee, and Joinville and his men were given a path of escape back to a bridge, which was a much more suitable battleground. In order to secure a path for their supplies and men to make it to Mansurah, they needed to hold this bridge, and they did so valiantly, only needing a contingent of knights to make certain that no enemy came across. While the knights here are depicted as rough and ready soldiers whose swords were far sharper than their wits, they are yet portrayed as brave men, with a might in their arms to rival a landslide of steel.

This is the ideal of chivalry presented to us by Joinville: deeds of arms done in loyalty to what the knight thinks is right. Joinville is under no illusion that he is a holy man just because he is going on crusade, but he does think that this crusade is the right thing to do. (Whether he's right or not is a different story.) The point is, he knows himself to be imperfect, flawed, and dreadfully human, but he is doing everything he can to be the sort of man he sees in Louis: holy, pure, and strong. In doing so, he recounts the deeds of arms he engages in in the Middle East as a trial by fire. It was not easy, not a simple, heroic affair, and certainly not fun, but he never killed

anyone who didn't try to kill him first, and he was constantly trying to improve as a result of his exposure to Louis and his ideal.

Book the Fifth: Geoffroi de Charny's *A Knight's Own Book of Chivalry*

From wars in the Middle East to wars in Europe, chivalry transformed dramatically from the time of Jean of Joinville to the time of our next author. And out of all the men we've discussed so far, it is my personal opinion that Geoffroi de Charny has quite possibly the most fascinating life story. Born around the year 1300 to the daughter of Jean of Joinville, Charny was known in his day as the exemplary knight. He was the sort of man that all the squires aspired to be like, and that all the knights of France wanted on their team. The foremost chevalier of his time, Charny won victory after victory in the first phase of the Hundred Years' War, but suffered many defeats as well.

Perhaps his most relevant defeat is the one he suffered at Calais, when he paid off a Lombard spy to infiltrate the English ranks. The only reason he lost, and his underhanded deed was found out, was because of this particular Lombard's treachery of him. He was being paid by the English commander behind Charny's back, and his treachery gained him a castle--and Charny a capture. Charny was taken to London under the watchful eye of King Edward III, and held under very favorable conditions. Edward seemed to have a sort of respect for Charny, for his words to him upon seeing him in his captured state almost sound like reproof:

> "Messire Geoffroy, messire Geoffroy, I rightly owe you very little love since you wanted to take from me by night what I have won and what has cost me much money: so I am pleased to have put you to the test. You wanted to get it more cheaply that I, for 20,000

ecus; but God aided me so that you failed in your attempt. He will yet aid me, if it pleases Him, in my greater endeavor."

This scathing remark apparently left a lasting impression on Charny, because for the rest of his career as a knight, we hear no more of him being underhanded, no more of him paying off other men to do what he could do by himself.

This, unfortunately, got our friend into a spot of trouble later on down the line. After he returned from his capture, he rose ever higher in the ranks of the French army until he became the keeper of the Oriflamme, the French ancestral war-banner. When this banner was raised on the battlefield, it was the signal to give no quarter if winning, and to fight to the last man if losing. Of course, he never got to use it on the battlefield itself until his final hour, in 1356 at the Battle of Poitiers.

In a classic case of the French snatching defeat from the jaws of victory, King John II of France was in the process of attempting to starve out the heavily-outnumbered English forces--in short, he was making the smart choice. But many of his nobles were displeased with this, and wanted to face the English in open battle. John had just come away from a civil uprising, and knew all too well what happens when you displease your nobles, so he obliged, drawing up battle plans for a quick, decisive victory. But (surprise surprise) one of his generals flubbed the plans, and the French advance ended up happening in several smaller sections, rather than the united front that John had been intending on presenting. Because of this, the English were able to take the French army apart in a piecemeal manner, only revealing the ace up their sleeve (a sneaky cavalry charge from the English left flank) when the situation got truly dire. The final phase of

the battle saw the French losing, the Oriflamme raised, and Charny fighting side-by-side with his king, only to be cut down by the English.

The book itself is written as one would expect a book by a man of action to be written--that is to say, it is incredibly pragmatic, sometimes going off onto a tangent, but quickly coming back around again once the author realizes that he has strayed. Charny leaves little to interpretation; when he says that there is a way for a knight to win glory, that is the way he thinks a knight should win glory, and that's that. Of course, there are many ways for a knight to win glory, and Charny's style shows him to be a man of manners as well as a man of action. He freely admits that the act of being a knight at all ought to be honor enough, but that, as a knight, one ought to seek out opportunities for honor wherever he can. And that's kind of the point of the book: win honor and glory and fame wherever you can. For the most part, this honor and glory goes to God when you get it, but you improve your chivalrous reputation even by doing that. And where was this fame meant to be won? Why, on the battlefield, of course!

For Charny, the less risk there is in a situation, the less honorable it is to engage in. Therefore, the amount of honor a knight can gain from an endeavor is directly proportional to how risky it is. This means that the first place that a knight can prove his worth is on the tournament field. It's not much, but a knight who proves himself in the tournament (especially in the melee) is on his way to bigger and better things; just you watch. Next there's the joust. The knight who honors himself and his peers by participating in the joust is a knight indeed, and well on his way to becoming a great warrior, ripe for exploits and mighty enterprises.

Then there's the local wars. This is where the actual risk is involved. Sure, the tournament and the joust could go wrong, but the idea of them "going wrong" proves that such things are the

exception, not the norm. In actual armed conflict, there are so many factors that constantly have to be at the front of the mind that risk just becomes part of life. But even local wars have some measure of safety; you're fighting on your home turf, for and against the people you see every day. National wars, on the other hand, pit two nations' forces against one another. This means that, all going well, you'll be fighting in foreign territory, thereby increasing the risk factor by a large margin. This makes national wars even more honorable than local ones.

All the while, of course, the knight who wishes to see himself honored ought not to only use his brawn, but his brains. Which is better: open battle, a skirmish, or a siege? What is the latest siege technology? What is the best way to lay an effective siege? If the enemy sallies forth, how shall we repel him? How is the enemy arrayed? What sort of armor do they have? Is it better than ours, and if so, by what sort of margin? How does one defeat armor? How does one prevent the enemy's weapons from defeating one's own armor? All of these things must be studied by the man who wishes to achieve the highest honor that chivalry has to offer.

Of course, it's not just the battlefield that can win a knight honor. How battle mentality works with personal relationships is also a large factor in the knight's observation of chivalry. A knight isn't going to be in battle all the time. When he's not fighting, how should a knight live in order to honor his status? In Charny's opinion, to live worthily of the ideal of chivalry is to spend time in worthy company. This means love for friends and relentlessness toward enemies; mercy to the oppressed and mercilessness toward the oppressor. A knight is meant to be a man who can be followed, and so, in Charny's opinion, it makes sense for a knight to be the sort of man that is worth following. His practical nature leads him to suggest a simplicity of living that would be

scandalous to his fellows of earlier centuries. Overall, it seems as though Charny's ideal of chivalry is a man who knows his station, and acts accordingly.

Application: Is Chivalry Dead?

So what can we learn from all of this? How does any of this apply to readers today? Is chivalry really dead, or does it live on in some way? It is my opinion that chivalry, even if it is dead, ought not to be. The reasons for this are a few-fold. In the first place, it is in the nature of the large majority of human beings to be violent. To deny this idea is to deny the entire history of the human race. Humanity's history is that of one conqueror after another; wolves conquering sheep until they turn into sheep themselves, and get conquered by the next wolves, and so on. Though this is a bleak view of history, I do not believe it to be that way by necessity. True monstrosity exists in the heart of every man, and unless it is overcome, it will consume us. The hope is, of course, that it can be overcome. That is why these honor codes exist, and why they have existed across time. Those who can fight are too often those who will fight only for themselves; those whose compassion outweighs their desire for justice ought not be asked to fight, as it will surely break them. There has to be a synthesis; a person who has the ability and will to put himself into harm's way, and to harm another person, for the sake of those whom the other person would oppress or exploit.

In the second place, chivalry is meant for a certain type of person: those who are intending to lead. Class is no longer the determiner of leadership; a man can now go from the streets to the oval office, if he tries hard enough. What sort of a man comes to power through the gullibility of the masses and stays there for more than a few years after proving himself no more than a beastly cad or a pitiful milksop? They are certainly not guaranteed their position, especially if they got

there by democratic processes. Therefore, those in power ought to be held to a higher standard than those who follow them, so that they can not only lead by ordering, but by showing and doing. It's a lot of pressure to put on a man, but so is the act of leadership; if he is to lead well, he must be a principled man, or else allow himself to be just like all the other tyrants across history. Whether a man is leading his own household or leading a nation, the ideal of chivalry--being a man of action, a man of manners, and a man of principle--will aid him in leading it well.

Finally, engaging in the act of attempting to follow an order of chivalry is an exercise in constant learning. The texts that I have chosen for this argument are but a few of the manifold books that can and have been written on the topic of chivalry, though they are by far some of the best-known. If anyone follows the ideal of chivalry, they are likely to find more books that I have not even thought to look at, and learn even more along the way. Those who practice the path of chivalry are those for whom history is not a corpse to be studied, but a system to be engaged with. Chivalry can be a gateway for some to actually study history.

Conclusion

In the end, chivalry is not necessarily a code to live by; it is an ideal to strive for. That's what it was throughout the Middle Ages, though that ideal did change quite a bit, even within that time frame. Chivalry, like many ideals, is what you make of it, as it never really meant one thing to one person. But the common threads were there: battle-readiness and loyalty were always part of the ideal, from 1066 onward. In many ways, these common threads are like the base of a building; they are not what is seen on the surface, but everything else is built on them. Whether it

was a cathedral, a castle, a grammar school, or an architectural eyesore that was built on that foundation was mostly tackled on a case-by-case basis.

The reason for this foundation is simple: the Middle Ages were a violent time. However, that's not saying much; the whole history of humanity is a violent time. The Middle Ages just brought out a certain systematic mode of thought in its people; a mode of thought that structured the entire universe, and saw the lives of people and the structures of nations as no less a part of that universal structure. Which, of course, makes sense; in times of crisis (like after the fall of the Roman Empire), people crave structure. But this structure is one that can actually outlive its contemporary setting and prove useful even today.

Whether you wish to know about chivalry for the use of practicing it, for gaining inspiration for living, for the sake of giving a backdrop to your favorite stories, or for its own sake, there is something there for just about everyone. If it's not your thing, I can understand that, and respect it; chivalry was never meant to be a universal practice, or even the most honorable form of conduct there was. It was simply meant to be the way some people wanted to live; the ideal that they saw and strived for. If it is helpful to you for that reason, brilliant; if not, there's no necessity that you practice it. But as those who practice chivalry respect your decision not to practice it, be patient with those who do choose to practice it; they're striving after an ideal, same as you. Of the many things Medieval nobility did that we roll our eyes and slap our foreheads at, we cannot fault them for doing their best to follow an ideology that they truly believed would make their harsh and changeable world a little more stable.

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