The character of chivalric culture in Western Europe, 1250 – 1415: dynamism and new approaches?

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Abstract

This article examines the moral discipline and culture of chivalry (defined here as the shared values and ethos of the martial aristocracy of Latin Europe) as they existed in Western Europe, with a primary focus on France and England, in the long 14th century. A long tradition of scholarship has viewed the 14th century as a period of degeneration and decline for chivalry in Western Europe, with images of court decadence, Courtrai, Crecy and failed crusades looming large. Though recent scholarship has complicated this picture, moving away from the opposing extremes of romanticism and sceptical empiricism that together generated it towards a more critically nuanced, flexible and dynamic understanding of chivalry, it still has not received much by way of direct challenge. Here, I will argue that chivalry, which was never a clear-cut prescriptive code nor mere empty ceremonial, did not experience decline during the long 14th century but rather saw a range of dynamic and innovative responses, largely generated from within, to moral and pathological problems, more often old than new in origin, and that many aspects of it remained as vital as ever, such as the culture of crusading. This will be accomplished by studying an array of sources that enable 14th century chivalry to be reconstructed on its own terms, including chivalric manuals like that of Geoffroi de Charny, biographies of knights like Boucicaut, the religious devotional texts that began to be written by knights themselves in this period and some works of vernacular literature.

Introduction

"God has ordained two things in this world to act, as it were, as pillars to uphold those divine and human ordinances that govern mankind and permit them to live in peace and according to the dictates of reason, and that promote and nurture the human mind in wisdom and virtue while precluding ignorance; those pillars moreover defend and uphold and increase personal and public good; indeed, without them the world would be a place of confusion and disorder … they are, indisputably, Knighthood and Learning." So begins the *Livre des fais de mon bon messire Jean Le Maingre dit Boucicaut, Marechal de France*, a remarkable work of both traditional chivalric biography and vernacular humanism written by

an anonymous layman[1] before the end of the first decade of the 15th century.[2] Such an opening brilliantly sets the tone of the rest of the book. Boucicaut (1366 – 1421) is portrayed as a chivalric hero in the conventional mould, displaying all the standard virtues (prowess, courage, largesse, courtesy etc), performs great deeds for love of an anonymous lady and embarks on crusades and pilgrimages. Yet he is also depicted as a kind of neo-Roman soldier who physically trains himself as rigorously as Vegetius would recommend, is likened to Scipio Africanus for abhorring gambling, drunkenness, consorting with prostitutes and foppishness, possesses the eloquence of a Classical statesman and strives tirelessly to cultivate his own virtue and serve the public good.

But how does such a work, which is in so many respects thoroughly unique, relate to the general nature and trajectory of chivalric culture in Western Europe in the long 14th century? I am going to argue that the long 14th century was a period of great vitality and dynamism in the history of chivalry. In this period, chivalry's very practitioners were highly creative, reflected above all in their incorporation of new cultural and intellectual trends and influences into chivalric culture. They were also very self-critical, reflected in their preoccupation in this period with their own interiority, which is highly significant since so many aspects of chivalric culture were traditionally centred on the external, above all honour and prowess. This will be examined by looking at three areas of chivalric culture. The first will be moral reform, where I will explore how knights tried to resolve the tensions within the chivalric ethic and create more self-disciplined and civic spirited knighthood. This they did by making use of classical history and moral philosophy, which was becoming more readily available to the laity in this period. The second will be crusading and adventurism, where it will be shown how, coinciding with Europe's growing contacts with the wider world, there

[1] The author of the biography will remain unknown, and palaeographical study will not resolve it for, as is well-known among medievalists, authorship need not imply penmanship. I suspect that Boucicaut himself wrote it, perhaps to defend himself after his time in office as governor of Genoa (1401 – 1409) proved to be disastrous. This is because the author of the text, while clearly literate in French, eloquent and highly interested in classical antiquity, all of which was clearly true of Boucicaut himself as the text itself suggests, appears to be deriving his knowledge of the ancients from Nicolas de Gonesse's translation into French of Valerius Maximus' *Facta et dicta memorabilia* as well as French translations of the Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and St Augustine's *Civitate Dei,* and so did not possess the Latin befitting a clerk. Furthermore, the writing of a chivalric biography for a knight still-living and the weirdly elaborate backstory stated in chapter 2 is highly suggestive that this is an attempt at covert self-justification for recent political failure. Even if Boucicaut was not the author then, as Craig Taylor in his introduction to the recent edition of the work used in this essay has suggested, it was likely authored by one of the knights in his circle, the soldier and diplomat Jean d'Ony being a highly likely candidate given his insider knowledge of things Boucicaut's diplomatic negotiations with the King of Cyprus, or indeed as a collaboration among them with a learned clerk like Nicholas de Gonesse on the side offering advice.

[2] *The Chivalric Biography of Boucicaut, Jean II Le Maingre*, edited and translated by Craig and Jane Taylor (Woodbridge, 2016), p23.

was a growing fascination among Europe's chivalric nobility with exotic lands and peoples. This had a huge impact on chivalric adventurism, in the form of crusades, pilgrimages or otherwise. The third will be on religion and piety, where I shall demonstrate how knights were developing a deeper, more rigorous and Bible-centric form of piety and the potential tensions between the chivalric ethic of pursuing honour and fame and Christian teaching this could attempt to resolve. The definition of chivalry that I am using is that it was the culture and ethos of the lay aristocracy of Latin Europe, though it was held in high regard/ seen as aspirational by other social groups. It was based on shared concepts and values, such as the importance of honour, loyalty, courage, prowess, largesse and courtesy, yet ridden with contradictions, giving it plenty of space to develop/ go down new directions. The geographical focus of the present study will mainly be on France, since the political, military and intellectual circumstances of the crisis of the Valois monarchy meant that the most extensive and lively debates on chivalry in this period took place there,[3] yet attention will be paid to the Empire and England too.

The historiographical state of play regarding the nature and development of chivalry in the long 14th century is thus. For Johan Huizinga, a cultural formalist-cum-sceptical empiricist, chivalry was an "aesthetic ideal assuming the appearance of an ethical ideal" that revolved around celebrating the individual knight as a paragon of honour and virtue through courtly literature and spectacle. Huizinga saw chivalry as being, by the 14th century, a stale and ossified cultural phenomenon which existed almost entirely to promote an increasingly irrelevant social class.[4] At best it could be exploited in princely propaganda and at worst, when its increasingly militarily impractical ideals were taken seriously to heart, could lead to Quixotic blunders like at Crecy in 1346 and Nicopolis in 1396.[5] The second approach, which has become influential recently, has been to see chivalry as a serious warrior code consisting of a set of largely unwritten self-regulating conventions to control violence and limit brutality in warfare, especially among one's fellow Christian mounted warriors. Such a code had developed in response to the political, military, religious and economic conditions in post-Carolingian Europe.[6] Under this approach, the long 14th century is also seen as a period of decline for chivalry, reflected by growing indiscriminate brutality in warfare, occurring early as the 1260s with the horrific slaughter of the Montfortian knights at Evesham

[3] Craig Taylor, 'English writings on chivalry and warfare during the Hundred Years' War,' in Peter Coss and Christopher Tyerman (eds), *Soldiers, Nobles and Gentleman: essays in honour of Maurice Keen* (Woodbridge, 2009), p65.

[4] Johan Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages* (London, 1924), p48.

[5] Ibid, pp82 – 84.

[6] Nigel Saul, *For Honour and Fame: Chivalry in England, 1066 – 1500* (London, 2011), 10 – 12.

but becoming more apparent in the Anglo-Scottish wars and the Hundred Years' War. Such a change is attributed to political structural shifts, towards more centralised and authoritarian monarchical nation states in Western Europe, whose rulers found mercy no longer necessary and international aristocratic camaraderie undesirable.[7] The third approach is to see chivalry in a much broader, more holistic, perspective than the previous two, as a common culture, revolving around a broad set personal qualities and ethical values as well as a sense of *esprit de corps*, upheld by the warrior aristocracy of Latin Europe, yet held in high esteem by other social groups. The most influential proponent of this approach has been Maurice Keen, whose magisterial work *Chivalry* (1984) has been the point of departure for many a subsequent study, including those of his former pupil Craig Taylor. Keen challenged the picture of the later medieval period as experiencing a decline of chivalry, arguing that it showed no sign of losing vigour even at the so-called "close of the Middle Ages" around 1500. Emphasising its adaptability to changing political, military and social circumstances, he argued that chivalry survived in transmuted form through the *ancien regime* and beyond – the knight errant simply evolved into the officer and a gentleman.[8] The present essay will be standing in opposition to the previous two perspectives. The approach to chivalry that I follow is the broad cultural one of Maurice Keen. I intend to add to Keen's insights on chivalry's continuing dynamism in this period, by exploring how 14th century chivalry's practitioners creatively made use of new influences, namely the Roman classics and new inward-looking forms of religious devotion, to resolve old ethical and spiritual problems in chivalry whilst taking chivalric adventurism down new directions as a result of a developing fascination with the wider world. I am, of course, reacting against Huizinga's characterisation of late medieval chivalry as stale and ossified, not least by arguing that contrary to his assertion "in the minds of the fourteenth century, a vision of antiquity had hardly disengaged itself from the fairy-land sphere of the Round Table,"[9] late medieval knights tried to look to the ancient Greeks and Romans for moral guidance whilst appreciating the gulf between the ancients and their own time.

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[7] Ibid, pp. 348 – 353, for a view in a very similar vein, see John Gillingham, "1066 and the introduction of chivalry to England," in George Garnett and John Hudson (eds), *Law and Government in Medieval England and Normandy: Essays in honour of Sir James Holt* (Cambridge, 1994), p33.

[8] Maurice Keen, *Chivalry* (London, 1984), pp. 238 – 248. Craig Taylor takes the same approach as his former tutor in defining chivalry as a broad lay aristocratic ethos and set of values but, much like the American historian Richard Kaeuper, does more than Keen to emphasise how chivalric ideals, though undoubtedly practical, could be highly contested in their relative importance to each other and were often contradictory, see Craig Taylor *Chivalry and the ideals of Knighthood in France during the Hundred Years' War* (Cambridge, 2013), pp1 – 11.

[9] Johan Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages* (London, 1924), p59.

It would of course be impossible to give a comprehensive treatment of the sources on chivalry in the long 14th century. I have chosen to focus on a group of contributions rather distinctive to the post-1250 period, namely those contributions offered by knights themselves. That we have these writings is in part a consequence of the improving standards of aristocratic education in the 12th and 13th centuries which were in turn a response to administrative and social changes. By contrast, we have very few works of chivalric self-perception from before the 13th century. Whilst there had been a number of literate lay noblemen, a few of whom had written literary, moral and historical works, in the Carolingian and Anglo-Saxon past, it was only by the mid-13th century that it became the norm for men of the knightly aristocracy to be fully lettered in their native vernaculars and have a basic knowledge of Latin.[10] Thus, I will not make any grand claims for the long 14th century seeing the birth of a self-critical dialogue among chivalry's practitioners for the sources act as a mirage in that respect. Nor can our knightly authors be taken as representative of what all of chivalry's practitioners thought on the subject at the time. Rather they offer us a valuable insight into how knights themselves were capable of articulating their thoughts about chivalry in a highly creative, self-reflexive and critical manner, through a diverse array of media ranging from chivalric manuals to devotional treatises to contemporary history. Besides the Biography of Boucicaut mentioned at the beginning of the introduction, the following texts will form the primary material for this study. One of them is the *Life of St Louis* by Jean de Joinville (1224 – 1317), a knight and hereditary seneschal of the County of Champagne who accompanied Louis IX on the Seventh Crusade (1248 – 1254). Joinville was commissioned to write the hagiography of the recently canonised king by Queen Jeanne of France and Navarre, though by the time the work was completed in 1309 Jeanne was dead. Thus Joinville dedicated it instead to the Queen's son, the future Louis X, "so that you and your brothers and others that hear it might heeds its good lessons and put those lessons into practice, and thereby make themselves pleasing to God."[11] Yet given the disproportionate weighting of the book towards the Crusade and the fact that it is told from a very intimate, first person perspective, it is possible that Joinville may have originally written a crusade memoir, most likely in the 1270s. He would have then added on the chapters at the beginning and end about Louis' sanctity, good governance and death after he got his commission from Queen Jeanne. Another will be the *Book of Chivalry*, as its modern editors have chosen to call the originally untitled work, by Geoffroi de Charny

[10] Nicholas Orme, *From Childhood to Chivalry* (London, 1984), pp143 – 150.

[11] John de Joinville, *The Life of St Louis*, in *Chronicles of the Crusades*, edited and translated by Caroline Smith (London, 2008), p144.

(c.1304 – 1356), the grandson of Jean de Joinville who, as we will see had a lot in common intellectually with his grandfather. Charny was, however, a highly distinguished knight in his own right, who wrote his *magnum opus* for the Company of the Star, an order of knights tasked with reforming French chivalry founded by King Jean II in 1351, as a guide of conduct for its members and French knighthood more broadly. With regard to German sources, attention will be given to *In the Service of Ladies*, a burlesque, arguably satirical autobiographical poem concerning the author's purported youthful adventures performed for love of an anonymous older lady, by the Austrian knight and courtier Ulrich von Liechtenstein (c.1199 – 1276). As for the English ones two works will be examined. First is the *Scalachronica*, a history of Britain from the Creation written by the constable of Norham castle Sir Thomas Gray (c.1310 – 1369), which he began in 1355 while imprisoned in Edinburgh castle by the Scots. For the events of the reigns of Edward I, Edward II and Edward III, Gray drew on the reminiscences of his father and his own observations, thus giving a measure of chivalric perspective to a non-chivalric chronicle. The other will be the *Two Ways*, a religious devotional treatise by Sir John Clanvowe (1341 – 1391), a soldier, diplomat and prominent courtier of Richard II's, who was one of the 10 "Lollard knights", a group of highly respected and intellectual knights at the court of Richard II, mentioned by Thomas Walsingham. Yet, in the treatise Clanvowe aims his polemical punches not at the typical Lollard targets, Papal power and clerical wealth, but at the morals of lay society, with passages specifically devoted to men of the knightly classes making it undoubtedly relevant for our purposes. Together, the sources offer not a comprehensive but a sufficiently representative sample of the writings produced by knights in this period, given their diverse media and authorial contexts, and they are well suited to examining both the common trends and the striking diversity in late medieval chivalric thought.

Chapter 1: Moral reform and discipline

Chivalry had always faced a set of tensions regarding the motivation of its practitioners, between, on the one hand, doing virtuous acts to win external things such as honour, fame and the love of women, and on the other hand, doing them for their own sake and to cultivate the self. Demonstrative of how the former could be taken too far, in a possibly satirical fashion, is Ulrich von Liechtenstein's *Service of Ladies*. Towards the end of the poem, Ulrich has completed the epic *Venusfahrt,* and Ulrich's lady thus at last acknowledges his service and grants him a private audience with her. Here, Ulrich proclaims to her "If I could lie with you tonight then I'd possess all that I've dreamed of happiness. My life will gain by your assent a lofty spirit and content more and more until it ends. Its you on whom my joy depends." When the lady resolutely refuses to have sex with Ulrich twice and Ulrich is cast out from her castle, he descends into a state of nihilistic depression and

threatens suicide, the fear of Hell apparently not daunting him, until his page tells him his lady might grant him another chance.[12] This is undoubtedly a comic and overblown example from a poem whose plot may have little to no relation to the life the author, whose autobiography it purportedly is, actually lived yet the tension it touches on was real all the same. To truly demonstrate how difficult the tension was, we must look to the reformist knight of the mid-14th century, Geoffroi de Charny. From him we get a sense that he, unlike Ulrich, saw chivalric deeds as having intrinsic value within them, and saw it as more important to have acted morally irreproachable than to have garnered fame. Speaking of men-at-arms who go on military expeditions in foreign lands at great expense and with great hardship and are beyond reproach in their display of chivalric virtue there "but it so happens that few learn of their exploits but are only aware of the fact that they have been there", Geoffroi de Charny argues that such men deserve to be praised and honoured. Whilst they have not managed to acquire fame, they have acted according to an exemplary ethic of sacrifice in the pursuit of chivalric virtue and noble deeds of arms.[13] Still his emphasis on how such men deserve praise and honour reflects how he assumes that such things are what a man-at-arms ultimately desires for performing chivalric deeds, and with good reason. Even more telling is how de Charny envisioned the best knights. Such men, de Charny argues, are those who strive constantly towards greater achievement and self-improvement. Such men are self-critical, almost by instinct they, "reflect on, inform themselves, and inquire how to conduct themselves most honourably in all circumstances. They do this quickly and gladly, without waiting for admonitions or exhortations," and they constantly strive towards greater perfection and achievement, deriving happiness from their deeds of arms, adventures, trials and tribulations as things in themselves – "the more they achieve, the less they feel they have achieved; this stems from the delight they take in striving constantly to reach greater heights."[14] Though Geoffroi de Charny is emphasising a great degree of focus on the interior by encouraging his knightly readers to engage in constant self-reflection and self-criticism, and is in a way trying to treat chivalric deeds and virtues as ends in themselves, he still nonetheless has to frame them in terms of the external honour accumulated from them.

[12] Ulrich von Liechtenstein, *In the Service of Ladies*, translated by J.W Thomas (Chapel Hill, 1969), pp189 – 199.

[13] Geoffroi de Charny, *A knight's own Book of Chivalry*, translated by Elspeth Kennedy and with an introduction by Richard Kaeuper (Philadelphia, 2005), pp54 – 55.

[14] Ibid, p64.

We find this tension explored in new and creative ways by chivalry's practitioners over the course of the long 14th century and the Greek and Roman classics were fundamental to this. In many ways, Greek philosophers and Roman moralists and historians further reinforced the notion that honour was the right and worthy end goal for virtuous deeds. Drawing from Valerius Maximus, Boucicaut or whichever of the knights in his circle wrote his biography, when defending the exercise of writing the biography of a man still living, writes of how "every man of valour wants to receive and should receive praise for good deeds, that is not something to be condemned but rather to be celebrated is endorsed by Aristotle himself, the great incomparable philosopher and moralist: did he not wish to attain glory and honour?"[15] This was no chivalric misreading of the ancients – scholastics like Thomas Aquinas, under the same Aristotelian influence and drawing from the Greek philosopher's observations, paraphrased by Valerius Maximus in the quote from Boucicaut's biography, had placed honour as the highest of the external goods for that very reason.[16] Aquinas had also argued that there was nothing prideful in expecting praise for one's good deeds provided it was proportionate.[17] Likewise, the great warriors and generals of Republican Rome pursued individual honour and fame, having their exploits feted in much the same way as contemporary knights. Thus, in the biography of Boucicaut it is mentioned that Scipio Africanus "was most grateful to the poet Ennius who had recorded his noble deeds, and accorded him much gratitude and reward" and how Caesar did everything to save his Memoirs when he had to abandon his ship during a sea battle against Pompey.[18] The importance of external honour as a source of motivation for virtuous deeds was, therefore, going to remain an hugely important part of chivalric culture, and an exploration of the philosophy of Aristotle or the lives of the great generals and statesmen of Republican Rome only served to show just how important honour was in inspiring great deeds. Yet the study of the writings of the ancients could, at the same time, help create models of motivation that gave emphasis somewhat more towards the side of virtue as an end in itself and self-cultivation. John de Joinville says of St Louis' generosity, which he displayed towards all who suffered from financial hardship, that it made him "happier than the Emperor Titus, whom ancient writings record was greatly saddened and distressed on any day when he had not

[15] *The Chivalric Biography of Boucicaut, Jean II Le Maingre*, edited and translated by Craig and Jane Taylor (Woodbridge, 2016), p212.

[16] Alexander Murray, *Reason and Society in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1978), p351.

[17] Craig Taylor, *Chivalry and the Ideals of Knighthood in France during the Hundred Years' War* (Cambridge, 2013), p66.

[18] *The Chivalric Biography of Boucicaut, Jean II Le Maingre*, edited and translated by Craig and Jane Taylor (Woodbridge, 2016), pp211 – 212.

performed an act of kindness."[19] Joinville had clearly drawn this comparison from the way in which the 1st century AD Roman Emperor was described in Suetonius' *Lives of the Twelve Caesars*. From the saintly yet still thoroughly chivalric exemplar of St Louis, Joinville was thus trying to encourage the virtue of generosity not just as an honourable display of aristocratic largesse but as something that should be done for its own sake and the happiness felt deep within oneself from having done virtue. Similar classically inspired ideas with a much broader and more explicitly chivalric focus are found in Boucicaut's biography when its subject matter is described as, following after the teachings of the Greek philosopher Anaxagoras as expressed in Valerius Maximus, "a philosopher of arms: he loved to cultivate and to improve the science of arms, and preferred to nurture his own valour, courage and high reputation than to acquire lands, riches or mansions." Though "high reputation" is of course mentioned here, there is still a sense that Boucicaut is pursuing the path of martial virtue both as an end in itself and for his own self-cultivation.[20] Therefore, chivalry in the long 14th century, as in earlier centuries, suffered from a tension between external goals and internal ones as motivation for virtuous deeds, with the Roman classics in many ways helping reinforce emphasis on the former by stressing the importance of honour and fame to inspiring virtue. Yet it was also in this period, as can be seen in the writings of John de Joinville and Boucicaut , that the tension explored in new and creative ways using classical Roman authors like Suetonius and Valerius Maximus. This led to Joinville and Boucicaut, whilst not rejecting the importance of honour and reputation, nonetheless proposing that one should try to pursue virtues, such as generosity, primarily for their own sake and one's own happiness, and that the focus of ones martial deeds should be on self-cultivation as a more perfect knight rather than on external rewards, exemplified by Boucicaut as "philosopher of arms."

Closely related to the problem of motivation was this question – how should one celebrate and reward the feats of arms and martial virtues of an individual knight? To do so was essential – how can a warrior culture sustain itself if it does not value the martial virtue and prowess of its warriors? At the same time, to glorify an individual knight's achievements might steer him away from Christian humility towards pride and vainglory, sins most deadly for his soul. Meanwhile, as far as more earthly affairs were concerned the military disasters at Courtrai in 1302, Crecy in 1346 and Nicopolis in 1396 had been attributed to the brash

[19] Jean de Joinville, *The Life of St Louis*, in *Chronicles of the Crusades*, edited and translated by Caroline Smith (London, 2008), p325.

[20] *The Chivalric Biography of Boucicaut, Jean II Le Maingre*, edited and translated by Craig and Jane Taylor (Woodbridge, 2016), pp195 – 196.

arrogance and overconfidence of French knights.[21] Such a problem called for neo-Roman solutions. In the Biography of Boucicaut, after having recounted Boucicaut's investment as Marshal of France on Christmas Day 1391, its knightly author glosses that such an episode "might have emerged from the annals of Roman chivalry." The author then goes into a comparison between Boucicaut and Pompey the Great (106 – 48 BC), as both men had been given high offices at remarkably young ages, with Pompey being made a consul in 71 BC after crushing the revolt of Spartacus despite being only 35 and thus under the normal age of eligibility for such an office, as recognition for highly distinguished youthful military careers beginning in their teens. As the author points out, the comparison does not end there either. Just as Pompey, after being elevated to his first consulship, went on to conquer the East for Rome in the Third Mithridatic War, Boucicaut's "young age was no bar to his living up to the honour conferred on him" and so "he persisted in the same admirable ways thereafter."[22] Yet this classicising gloss is not simply to glorify Boucicaut by likening him to one of the Late Roman Republic's finest generals and statesmen. Rather it is using this moment in Boucicaut's life as a springboard from which to explore, via an analogy between Boucicaut and Pompey, how the military superpower that was the Roman Republic was able to honour its great men without making them too self-satisfied or complacent. The solution the author presents through his study of Roman history is thus: good, skilled and sensible young men-at-arms should be rewarded for their great virtues and accomplishments by acclamation and the granting of offices from the state. On the one hand, this will mean that they will receive the honour that is due to them. At the same time, they will be encouraged to strive towards cultivating even greater personal virtue and winning greater glory, both for themselves and for the state they serve. Even if they don't such celebration does not revolve purely around the individual but on their service to the wider civic community from whom they are receiving the honour. Similar ideas were expressed by non-knightly authors under the patronage of the Valois monarchy attempting to find solutions to the same problem posed in the wake of the Hundred Years' War. For example, Nicole Oresme, in the commentaries he gave for his French translation of Aristotle's *Politics*, argued that the Roman triumph exemplified the best way to inspire Aristotelian civil courage, acts of martial valour done out of a desire to serve the common good. A generation later, Christine de Pizan thoroughly agreed, arguing that the French knights were being treated as if they were not worth an apple, unlike in Rome where, as she saw it, generals and soldiers were given

[21] Craig Taylor, *Chivalry and the Ideals of Knighthood in France during the Hundred Years' War* (Cambridge, 2013), p65.

[22] *The Chivalric Biography of Boucicaut, Jean II Le Maingre*, edited and translated by Craig and Jane Taylor (Woodbridge, 2016), pp55 – 56.

due celebration for their victories.[23] Yet the same widely available sources on classical Roman history, such as Suetonius, Lucan and the early 13th century Old French paraphrasing of their works in the form of *Li Fait des Romains*, showed the latent danger of such methods. For if great warriors and generals came to expect honour and celebration in the form of public spectacles and high offices for great virtue, valour and victories yet did not receive them, might their loyalty to the state be compromised? Geoffroi de Charny drew on the example of Julius Caesar, "who was such a very good knight and engaged in so many great and wonderful battles and made so many fine conquests for those of Rome." Yet after Caesar had conquered Gaul and Spain and attempted an invasion of Britain, he realised that "the people of Rome did not show him as much honour as they were wont to do to honour other men who had conquered and fought for the honour and profit of Rome and who had not done as much as he had." Caesar of course then crossed the Rubicon, fought and won a civil war against the Senate, declared himself dictator for life and then was assassinated in 44 BC by "wicked traitors." Caesar's story, according to Geoffroi de Charny, goes to show that "no one should become so annoyed and full of such ill will if he is not given the honour he should receive for such feats of arms."[24] Thus, Roman history appeared to 14th century French intellectuals, both knights and non-knights, to offer a solution to the problem of celebrating martial virtue and achievement in chivalric culture. However, as one prominent mid-14th century French knight knew from his study of Roman history, that solution was not without its problems for the martial heroes of the Roman Republic were just as fallible as contemporary French knights. Perhaps it was better after all to find a way to make men-at-arms contented with their achievements as ends in themselves.

Perhaps the biggest and oldest problem in late medieval chivalric culture, one that indeed reached back into chivalry's prehistory,[25] was the question of how one could reconcile the aristocratic life, which celebrated conspicuous display, liberality and leisure, with Christian moral teachings. At the same time, there was a parallel tension, going back to at least the 12th century, between the rigours of the martial lifestyle and the refinement

[23] Craig Taylor, *Chivalry and the Ideals of Knighthood in France during the Hundred Years' War* (Cambridge, 2013), pp67 – 68.

[24] Geoffroi de Charny, *A knight's own Book of Chivalry*, translated by Elspeth Kennedy and with an introduction by Richard Kaeuper (Philadelphia, 2005), p87.

[25] Resolving the tensions between the lay aristocratic life and the Christian life was one of the central objectives of the Carolingian reform programme, which offers an interesting range of parallels to chivalric reform in late Capetian and Valois France explored here. Not least among them would be the active involvement of the martial aristocracy, who were responsible for devising at royal assemblies much of the moral legislation to this end issued by Charlemagne and his successors. For a fairly comprehensive treatment on this subject, see Thomas F.X Noble "Secular Sanctity: forging an ethos for the Carolingian nobility," in Patrick Wormald and Janet Nelson (eds), *Lay Intellectuals in the Carolingian World* (Cambridge, 2007), pp8 – 37.

expected of a courtly knight.[26] The solution to both problems, as far as the more intellectual knights were concerned, came in the form of a cultural and intellectual third party, the Greek and Roman classics, which they used to develop a new vision of a virtuous and rigorously self-disciplined yet still thoroughly noble life. Three big concerns loomed large to them – clothing, consumption of food and drink and romance and sex. Each of these will be considered in turn.

Clothing was fundamental to how a late medieval nobleman marked out his social status in public. Most indicative of this was how a murderer at Chateau Landon in 1336 was described as "wearing the clothes of a knight."[27] Yet catching up with the rapidly evolving fashions of the 14th century, which were also becoming very commercialised, could lead to noblemen engaging in un-Christian vanity, as well as wasting their money when it could be directed towards either Christian charity or martial pursuits. Such concerns are clearly articulated by Geoffroi de Charny, who criticised his fellow knights for profligately spending their money "on adorning their wretched bodies and on decking themselves out with precious stones, pearls, fine work, and embroidery, which cost so much and are worth so little", and for embracing the new fashion for short, tight-fitting tunics which he saw as vain and prideful, demonstrative of their immodesty being how they made their buttocks very well defined.[28] The more practical military and political implications of this are explored in a manner informed by a study of ancient history by the author of Boucicaut's biography. In the section describing the Marshal of France's way of life, the author recounts how King Antiochus VII (reigned 138 – 129 BC) of the Seleucid Empire, suffered many a military setback at the hands of the Roman Empire because "they abandoned military discipline and the chivalric way of life that they had cultivated for so long" as reflected in their extravagant fashions. The author then uses this to point out how those ancient authors shocked by the decadence of the kings and emperors of Graeco-Roman antiquity would be even more shocked by "the excesses and the vices that nowadays run riot in France and elsewhere: not merely in royal or aristocratic circles, but also among the administrators and office holders of their households."[29] Perhaps Boucicaut might have been anticipating the disasters that would befall France following King Henry V of England's crushing victory at Agincourt, which

[26] Craig Taylor, *Chivalry and the Ideals of Knighthood in France during the Hundred Years' War* (Cambridge, 2013), p34.

[27] Gareth Prosser, *The Late Medieval French Noblesse*, in David Potter (ed), *France in the Later Middle Ages, 1200 – 1500* (Oxford, 2002), p184.

[28] Geoffroi de Charny, *A knight's own Book of Chivalry*, translated by Elspeth Kennedy and with an introduction by Richard Kaeuper (Philadelphia, 2005), pp101 – 102.

[29] *The Chivalric Biography of Boucicaut, Jean II Le Maingre*, edited and translated by Craig and Jane Taylor (Woodbridge, 2016), p199.

would take place only 6 years after the biography was written and would lead to yet another slew of moral condemnation of the French nobility. The solution, by which nobles could amply express their status without engaging such decadence, profligacy and vanity, lay in adopting an Aristotelian golden mean for fashion. Thus, Geoffroi de Charny suggests that knights should dress "elegantly and in good fashion" so far as they avoid vanity or neglecting the better uses on which such money could be spent.[30]

Lavish banquets were a hugely important part of noble life, the hosting of them being a social obligation for any lord who wanted to demonstrate his largesse and, through his hospitality, forge strong bonds with other nobles of equal or lesser status.[31] Yet like with fashionable clothing, indulging in such things came with the risk of engendering decadence contrary to both the martial and the Christian way of life. The solution came yet again in advocating for classically inspired ideals of moderation for, as Jean Gerson pointed out towards the end of our period, Roman history showed how living frugally and eating and drinking in moderation played no small role in enabling the Roman legions to conquer most of the known world.[32] Thus Geoffroi de Charny argued "if it so happens that you find good food and drink, partake of them gladly and sufficiently but not to excess, for men of worth say that one should not live in order to eat, but rather eat in order to live, for no one should eat so much that he is too full, or drink so much that he is drunk. And one should do all these things in moderation and so live without too much discomfort."[33] Likewise, Boucicaut is praised for his restraint in his dining habits –"although his table is very generous, he never eats more than one dish and that is the first he takes – so it might be a dish of boiled meats, or one of roasted meats, or poultry, or beef, or mutton", his wine is always watered by at least a quarter and he never has his food seasoned with "strange spices."[34]

Finally, regarding sex, there was a latent erotic element in the courtly romances embraced by many knights in this period which could easily lead to service being perverted into seduction. When Ulrich introduces one of his jousting opponents, Sir Reinprecht von Murecke, he describes him as "a name that all fair ladies should acclaim for he made all of

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[30] Geoffroi de Charny, *A knight's own Book of Chivalry*, translated by Elspeth Kennedy and with an introduction by Richard Kaeuper (Philadelphia, 2005), p103.

[31] Alan Murray, "Contrasting Masculinities in the Baltic Crusades," in Natasha Hodgson, Katherine Lewis and Matthew Mesley (eds), *Crusading and Masculinities* (Abingdon, 2019), pp120 – 121.

[32] Craig Taylor, *Chivalry and the Ideals of Knighthood in France during the Hundred Years' War* (Cambridge, 2013), p42.

[33] Geoffroi de Charny, *A knight's own Book of Chivalry*, translated by Elspeth Kennedy and with an introduction by Richard Kaeuper (Philadelphia, 2005), p61.

[34] *The Chivalric Biography of Boucicaut, Jean II Le Maingre*, edited and translated by Craig and Jane Taylor (Woodbridge, 2016), p197.

them his own, and seldom ever slept alone."[35] At the same time, knights would have undoubtedly been aware that fornication and adultery were mortal sins, and from a more practical standpoint the study of classical history showed how sex and romance were often the source of the downfall of great men. The author of Boucicaut's biography points out how Antiochus' aforementioned downfall began because of a "foolish love affair", and likewise blames the beginning of Julius Caesar's fall from grace on his love affair with Cleopatra.[36] The solution, as presented in Boucicaut's biography, where its subject matter is rigorously praised for being not only being outwardly chaste but "his inward and real self surpasses this: he keeps his marriage vows faithfully and lovingly" and having done everything to avoid fornication even "to his great credit, in his early youth."[37] Boucicaut is an active participant in the culture of courtly love, pursuing a youthful love affair beginning in adolescence with an unnamed noblewoman but he does this to cultivate greater virtue and courtesy, not for "bodily gratification" which the author regards as an abuse and perversion of the purpose of love.[38] Boucicaut, or whoever wrote his biography, was certainly not giving a unique perspective on the sexual morals befitting a knight. In an earlier generation and on the other side of the Channel, Sir Thomas Gray wrote of how, after making peace with the Scots in 1322, King Edward II "gave himself over completely to that which completely debarred him from chivalry, delighting himself in avarice and in the delights of the flesh."[39]

Therefore, it seems that with regard to knightly writings on moral reform and discipline, the long 14th century was a period of great dynamism, reflexiveness and creativity for chivalric culture. Through their study of the histories and moral thought of the classical Greeks and Romans, knights were able to creatively explore the old tensions and paradoxes within chivalric culture and, so far as they were able, devise new classically inspired solutions for them. The role of the Greek and Roman classics in the continued vitality of chivalry has had some appreciation in recent scholarship. As Maurice Keen has pointed out, the classics provided a far richer seam of material from which to derive moral exempla, which was only gradually unfolding itself to the lay nobility through the vernacular translations, than the Arthurian and Carolingian cycles, which by this period had developed

[35] Ulrich von Liechtenstein, *The Service of Ladies*, edited and translated by J.W Thomas (Chapel Hill, 1969), p111.

[36] *The Chivalric Biography of Boucicaut, Jean II Le Maingre*, edited and translated by Craig and Jane Taylor (Woodbridge, 2016), p199.

[37] Ibid, p198.

[38] Ibid, p33.

[39] Sir Thomas Gray, *The Scalachronica, 1272 – 1363*, edited and translated by Andy King (Woodbridge, 2019), p197.

something of a canon and so had limited flexibility.[40] Thus references to the Arthurian heroes are only occasionally made by Geoffroi de Charny, while Roland and the other Frankish paladins are nowhere to be found in any of the works studied here. The present study, however, has hopefully shown that this wasn't simply a matter of potential, as reflected by the classically-based models, envisioned by 14th century knights themselves, of highly self-disciplined men-at-arms inspired to perform deeds of virtue and valour by their desire to cultivate themselves and serve the public good.

Chapter 2: Crusading and adventurism

At the beginning of his Book of Chivalry, Geoffroi de Charny describes the different types of deeds of arms and the men who perform them. One of the categories he examines are those men-at-arms who undertake "distant journeys and pilgrimages in several far-away and foreign countries; they may thereby see many strange and unusual things at which other men who have not travelled abroad would wonder because of the strange marvels and extraordinary things described by those men who have seen them." He then expresses his disapproval at those who dismiss their stories as "all lies" by urging them to instead go see these places and what exotic things they have on offer for themselves and exhorts his readers to "honour those who have been on distant journeys to foreign parts, for indeed no one should travel so far without being many times in physical danger."[41] What was the context and meaning behind all of this? By the 14th century, Latin European knowledge of the wider world had been transformed as a result of various exciting encounters. Most well-known among these are the ventures to the East, namely the sending of diplomats and missionaries to Inner Asia and China in attempt to forge alliances with the Mongols against their common Islamic foes, and potentially convert their khans to Catholicism. But ventures to the West, into the Atlantic, were also made, as Genoese mariners attempted to find a sea passage round Africa to India and, by 1350, had rediscovered the Canary Islands – the so-called Fortunate Islands of Classical Antiquity.[42] All this new knowledge was challenging long-held geographical ideas originating with classical authors like Pliny and Solinus and early Christian ones like Macrobius and Isidore of Seville. One of the sources through which this new knowledge was disseminated was popular travel literature, and Western European chivalric nobilities were enthusiastic patrons of it. In 1307 the French knight Thibault de Cepoy commissioned a translation into French of Rusticello of Pisa's account of Marco

[40] Maurice Keen, *Chivalry*, (London, 1984), p112

[41] Geoffroi de Charny, *A knight's own Book of Chivalry*, translated by Elspeth Kennedy and with an introduction by Richard Kaeuper (Philadelphia, 2005), pp50 - 51.

[42] J.R.S Phillips, *The Medieval Expansion of Europe* (Oxford, 1998), p238.

Polo's travels, and it was shortly afterwards recopied for Thibault's master Charles of Valois, the brother of King Philip IV the Fair. A generation later the travels of Sir John Mandeville in Ethiopia, India and China were widely disseminated, having been translated from the original Anglo-Norman French into 8 other European languages. Demonstrative of how western European knights were absorbing this new knowledge was how, in a tournament hosted by King Edward III in 1344, the participating knights dressed as Mongol warriors.[43] In the meantime, the traditional outlets for long-distance travel in the form of crusade and pilgrimage remained. As has been generally accepted by crusades historians in recent decades, the fall of Acre to 1291 did not mean the end of crusading, which by then, at any rate, had long-since diversified to include Spain, the Baltic and *Romania* (what Latin Europeans called the Balkans and the Aegean), all of these theatres remaining active until quite some time beyond the end of our period. As is also clear from recent scholarship, the practice of crusading had changed a lot from being a once-in-a-lifetime military pilgrimage to being a form of adventurism that noblemen would engage in whenever they were not burdened with either fighting in public wars for their sovereigns or conducting domestic administrative duties.[44] As is apparent from his Biography, Boucicaut exemplified this new way of crusading. He went on two *Reise* with the Teutonic Order against the Lithuanians in 1384 and 1391, attempted a crusade by proxy when he and his companion Renaud de Roye visited the court of the Ottoman Sultan Murad I in 1388[45] and offered to fight for him against any Saracen enemies and, perhaps most notably of all, was a survivor of the disastrous crusade of Nicopolis in 1396. In this section I will argue that the growing curiosity about the geography of distant and exotic lands and quasi-anthropological interest in non-Latin Christian peoples combined with the new patterns of crusading and pilgrimage to create some highly dynamic new forms of adventurism among Western European knights in the 14th century.

What were these "distant journeys" that Geoffroi de Charny was writing about? Most likely not the highly disappointing crusade he himself attended to Smyrna in 1345 – 1346 under the leadership of Humbert II, Dauphin de Viennois, which culminated in the crusaders sailing back to Venice early due to disease and lack of supplies.[46] More likely, what he had in mind were experiences of his grandfather, Jean de Joinville, in Egypt and the Levant

[43] Ibid, p186 – 193.

[44] Norman Housley, *The Later Crusades* (Oxford, 1992), p395.

[45] *The Chivalric Biography of Boucicaut, Jean II Le Maingre*, edited and translated by Craig and Jane Taylor (Woodbridge, 2016), p46.

[46] For an account of the crusade to Smyrna see Norman Housley, *The Later Crusades* (Oxford, 1992), pp60 – 61.

during the Seventh Crusade. Charny would undoubtedly have had some familiarity with them, given how significant family traditions of crusading were to the identity of late medieval nobles. Not least among them would be Jean de Joinville himself, who wrote an epitaph in 1311 to his great-grandfather Geoffrey III de Joinville (died 1188), who had fought on the Second Crusade, in which he also mentioned his grandfather, uncle and father who had fought on the Third, Fourth and Fifth crusades respectively.[47] Its conceivable, not to mention heart-warming, to imagine that Jean de Joinville, who was still alive for the first 13 years of Geoffroi's life, told his grandson fireside stories about his adventures in Outremer with St Louis. Joinville certainly had seen some "strange and unusual things", as he intimately recounts with deep personal interest in the *Life of St Louis*. For example, when describing the campaign in Egypt leading up to the great crusader defeat at Mansurah in 1250, Joinville pauses his narrative to tell his reader about "the river [Nile] that flows into Egypt from the earthly paradise." He is fascinated by how the Nile's annual flooding in October makes the soil so light that the peasants need not use a heavy-plough and the wheat, barley, cumin and rice "grow so well that no one would know how to do it better", yet if it weren't for it "no good thing would be produced by this land, because since it never rains in this country, the sun's great heat would burn everything." Joinville is also intrigued by how "such goods as are sold by weight when imported into this country [France], by which I mean ginger, rhubarb, aloe-wood and cinnamon" can be fished out of the Nile like dry wood back in his native Champagne. He also tells of how he was fascinated by a tale of how one Sultan of Egypt sent some Arab explorers to find the source of the Nile, which led them to eventually reach a great waterfall where "they had found marvellous varieties of wild beasts of different kinds: lions, snakes and elephants" – by the sounds of it these explorers had reached Uganda.[48] Similarly, when recounting the return of Louis IX's emissaries to the court of the regent of the Mongol Empire, Oghul Qaimish, Joinville is intrigued not only by the story of Genghis Khan (who Joinville interestingly does not mention by name) but also hearing of the Mongols place of origin, "a vast sandy plain in which nothing good would grow" in the

[47] The scholarship on family traditions of crusading is fairly extensive, and though much of it, perhaps naturally, focuses on the 13th century, a fair amount of work has been done on the continued vitality and importance of family traditions of crusading in the 14th and early 15th centuries. See Norman Housley, *The Later Crusades,* (Oxford, 1992), p398, and Christopher Tyerman, *England and the Crusades* (London, 1988), pp180 – 181. However, much of the scholarship has come in the form of prosopographical studies of kinship ties between crusaders and the appeals to family traditions of crusading in sermons and vernacular poetry, and not on the more difficult question of how the memories of crusading ancestors were passed down the generations. Nicholas Paul has recently tried to rectify this problem, see Nicholas Paul, *To Follow in Their Footsteps* (Ithaca, 2012), pp1 – 16, yet since his study is focused on the 12th and 13th centuries he gives Jean de Joinville consideration but not Joinville's grandson.

[48] Jean de Joinville, *The Life of St Louis*, in *Chronicles of the Crusades*, edited and translated by Caroline Smith (London, 2008), pp192 – 193

furthest eastern reaches of the known world, immediately before the wall of rocks at the very eastern end of the known world behind which Gog and Magog are imprisoned, and of their nomadic pastoralist way of life – "the Tartars' lifestyle was such that they did not eat bread at all, and lived off meat and milk. The best meat they have is horsemeat, which they steep in a marinade before drying it, until it can be sliced like black bread. The best drink they have, and the strongest, is mare's milk infused with herbs."[49] Though Joinville was very much a traditional crusader who saw the crusade as pilgrimage and penitential warfare, it is thus clear that he had a deep interest in the geography of the exotic lands he visited on the crusade, reflected by his comments on the river Nile, and in the cultures of the peoples he encountered, as indicated by his fascination with the Mongols' nomadic pastoralist way of life. This combined with the patterns of literary patronage mentioned earlier are indicative of the strong geographical and quasi-anthropological fascination with exotic lands and peoples among late medieval noblemen, yet if we are to fully understand what Geoffroi de Charny was talking about we must now consider how, in the generations after Jean de Joinville's, such interests animated the practice of crusading and adventurism. Whether or not Boucicaut was motivated by a desire to see exotic places in his various travels we cannot know, for its author is far less interested in Boucicaut's experiences than in glossing over his exploits and presenting him as a paragon of chivalric virtue. Yet for other knights it seems very clear that it was a fascination with exotic lands and cultures that both played a significant part in motivating them to embark on their adventures and defined their experiences of them. Guillebert de Lannoy (1386 – 1462), a Burgundian knight, who expressed in his memoirs how as a young man he had strongly desired "to see the world", visited Granada in 1410 and spent 9 days visiting the Alhambra and other palaces and pleasure gardens "which are beautiful and marvellous things to behold." Then when he visited Novgorod, at the other end of the European continent, in 1413 he observed "another marvel" when the cold of the Russian winter was so intense that a pot of water on the fire boiled at one side while freezing at the other.[50] Where such a desire to "see the world" and adventurism in the form of crusading very clearly come together is in the figures of Friedrich of Kreisbach, an Austrian knight who from 1346 to 1351 travelled across the Holy Land, Armenia, Russia and the Baltic whilst en route participating in the Swedish crusade against Novgorod in 1348 and a Teutonic *Reise* in Lithuania, and of the Poitevin knight Gadifer de La Salle (1340 – 1415). Gadifer was a veteran of Louis de Bourbon's Tunis crusade of 1390, who in 1402 made an attempt to conquer the Canary Islands in the name of the Castilian

[49] Ibid, pp263 – 266.

[50] Norman Housley, *The Later Crusades* (Oxford, 1992), p399

crown that has led some historians to identify him as a kind of proto-conquistador.[51] Therefore, what Geoffroi de Charny was describing was how a very widespread phenomena among the aristocracies of Western Europe, that being a profound fascination with the geography and culture of the lands beyond Latin Christendom that was so clearly reflected both by the memoirs of his grandfather and more broader patterns of aristocratic literary patronage, translated into patterns of adventurism of all kinds. This adventurism came in many forms, be it the largely peaceful journeys of Guillebert de Lannoy, crusading interwoven into far from exclusively martially focused journeys like Friedrich of Kriesbach's or crusade fused with voyages of exploration and colonisation as in the case of Gadifer de la Salle. All considered, this is further demonstration of the vitality and dynamism of late medieval chivalric culture as what we have been discussing here is essentially how traditional knight-errantry and crusading in the long 14th century came to be shaped by new fascinations. That those new fascinations came in the form of a desire to see and learn more about the wider world is perhaps further indication of the importance, in a somewhat different sense to in the previous chapter, of interior self-cultivation in late medieval chivalry.

Chapter 3: Religion and piety

In the *Service of Ladies*, Ulrich's aunt advises her nephew when he is planning to get the equivalent of plastic surgery on his lip in a putative attempt to please the anonymous lady that he loves not to do it, not simply because it might kill him but because he should "live as God wanted you to live and take whatever He may give as being best for you and right; this is the spirit of a knight. To want what God does not ordain reveals a spirit much too vain."[52] On the one hand, this shows that knighthood had, by Ulrich's day, long since been accepted as a divinely ordained vocation within Christian society, and that chivalry was associated with piety. On the other hand, the chivalric world that the poem presents is a profoundly worldly one, in which Ulrich, who ignores such advice, and the other knights are depicted as being preoccupied with the pursuit of external worldly things, honour, fame and love of women; references to God and the spiritual are largely invoked by Ulrich in his futile quest to win the love of his lady. Obviously, it could be easily contrasted to the portrayals of knights in the pious service of God pursuing the spiritual quest in the stories from a generation earlier of Joseph of Arimathea, Galahad and Perceval. Still all of these 13th century literary examples raise the question of what would genuine yet attainable knightly piety and spirituality look like? How would late medieval trends shape perceptions of it as

[51] Ibid, p396.

[52] Ulrich von Liechtenstein, *The Service of Ladies*, edited and translated by J.W Thomas (Chapel Hill, 1969), p66.

envisioned by its creative and critically minded practitioners? Lay piety certainly took some new and interesting directions in the late medieval period. From the 1370s, we find ordinary lay townspeople in the cities of Holland, Flanders and Northern Germany practicing a pioneering and distinctively lay form of Catholic spirituality which was known, both to contemporaries and modern historians, as the *Devotio Moderna*. Its practitioners never took any kind of religious vows and lived in townhouses alongside ordinary urban neighbours and worked in the textiles industry and in the bookmaking and copying trades. Yet they practiced a form of piety that distinguished them both from, on the one hand, clerics, monks and anchorites, and on the other hand, regular lay parishioners. Their piety revolved around rigorous moral discipline (though not full-blown asceticism), study of the Bible and other religious texts (more often than not in vernacular) and constant self-examination and self-criticism. The aims of their way of life could be summarised by the classic phrases found in their writings like "progress of the virtues", "becoming imperious rulers in your own universe," "care for yourself" and "doing what you could" to attain God's grace and salvation.[53] But for our purposes, we need to be asking, was there parallel currents among the lay nobility? Historians of late medieval England have of course long known about the Lollard knights, and so in this chapter I will be investigating the only substantial religious treatise to have survived from one of them, Sir John Clanvowe, to see what their supposedly distinctive piety and spirituality was like, and what kind of implications it had for the chivalric culture to which they belonged. Yet the Lollard knights, not least because of the accusations of heresy levelled against them, have often been regarded as a marginal case among the 14th century English nobility. This had led some scholars, especially when arguing against attempts to trace the swift success of Henry VIII's Dissolution of the Monasteries in the 1530s to a growing individualism in aristocratic piety, to protest that the piety of the landed elites in late medieval England remained thoroughly conventional, embodied above all in their generous endowment of splendid perpendicular chantry chapels and collegiate churches.[54] Meanwhile very little systematic scholarly attention has been given to the religious views and practices of continental nobilities in the late medieval period, yet by looking at the example of Geoffroi de Charny, I shall show that among certain French knights a very intimate, inward-looking, morally rigorous and Bible-centred spirituality, not too distant from those of the practitioners of the *Devotio Moderna*, was emerging.

[53] The best modern scholarly introduction to the *Devotio Moderna*, and one of very few written in English, is John Van Engen's *Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life* (Philadelphia, 2014). See especially for this section pp1 – 5, pp266 – 274 and pp294 – 295.

[54] This view is exemplified in Christine Carpenter, *England: Nobility and Gentry* in S.H Rigby (ed), *A Companion to Britain in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2003), p275.

Geoffroi de Charny, when outlining the different types of moral characters possessed by men-at-arms, distinguishes between two types of knightly piety. There are those knights who "give alms freely and like to be in church and attend mass frequently and say many paternosters and other prayers and fast in Lent and other recommended fasts" and so outwardly act like good Christians, yet "there may be concealed in their hearts greed or envy of others or hatred and ill will or many other things that detract from a great part of the good characteristics mentioned above. They are held to be men of worth for the characteristics which are apparent in them, but nevertheless one can do better as far as being a man of worth is concerned." Then there are those knights who "love, serve and honour God and His gentle Mother and all His power, and refrain from actions by which they might incur Their wrath, and who have within them such steadfast qualities that their way of life cannot be criticised for any vile sins nor for any shameful reproach, and they thus live loyally and honestly. And these should be held to be men of worth."[55] From such statements, it is clear that Geoffroi de Charny expects truly pious knights not simply to be outwardly and conventionally pious in regularly partaking in the seven sacraments and performing good works, but rather to also feel a strong intimate love for Christ and the Virgin Mary, to fully internalise Christian moral teachings and live in lay society under rigorous moral self-discipline. How should the kind of piety that Charny has described be incorporated into chivalric practice? In conjunction with the rigorous self-discipline regarding food, drink, clothing and sexual activities that has already been outlined in the first chapter, Geoffroi de Charny suggests that all good knights must "don their amour in as pure and devout a way and with as good a conscience as should priests don the armour of Our Lord to sing the mass and conduct the divine service … having confessed all their sins and repented them." There is then the added challenge that knights, "have no rule or ordinance to observe in relation to their way of life and their position except to love and fear God always and to take care not to anger Him."[56] As part of that deepfelt love and fear of the Lord, that will keep their consciences pure and lead them towards virtue and salvation, knights must acknowledge the debt they owe to God for all their positive qualities, and in doing so he shows a fair amount of engagement with the Bible. Geoffroi de Charny uses the examples of Samson who "through despair and through hatred he tore down the pillar of a building to kill himself and all the others who were inside, and through this he greatly misused his strength" and King Solomon, who failed with his great wisdom and intelligence when "because of his wife's admonitions he began to adore idols, and in this way seemed to abandon the worship of

[55] Geoffroi de Charny, *A knight's own Book of Chivalry*, translated by Elspeth Kennedy and with an introduction by Richard Kaeuper (Philadelphia, 2005), pp80 – 81.

[56] Ibid, pp98 – 99.

God." By contrast, St Peter mortally sinned thrice yet because he "steadfastly loved and believed in Our Lord as His true disciple and apostle" he was able to repent on all those occasions. Judas Maccabeus, who Geoffroi de Charny sees as being the epitome of the perfect knight, "conducted himself according to the true belief, trust, and hope in Our Lord, thanking him devoutly for all the benefits and honours which came to him", knowing that his strength, prowess, wisdom, courage and handsomeness all came from God, and so God helped him triumph over his enemies in this world and gave him a place in Heaven.[57] This raises the question of how does Geoffroi de Charny reconcile the honouring and celebration of knights who do great deeds, since it is clear that they owe their positive qualities and virtues to God alone and they must at any cost avoid pride and vainglory. What Charny does to avoid this contradiction is stress on how the human free will, effort and meritorious suffering make the man-at-arms worthy of being honoured and revered, yet he must know how to maintain humility and that is purely up to him.[58] Therefore, Geoffroi de Charny presents a piety that is certainly more than basic and conventional, being based around an intimate love of God and intense moral discipline and personal humility. This combined with the emphasis on the study of the Bible, reflected in the diverse examples Charny uses for exemplifying pride and humility, and Geoffroi de Charny's emphasis on self-reflection and striving towards perfection that has been identified already in the first chapter, makes his piety in some ways a sort of chivalric version of the *Devotio Moderna*. Of course, following this deeper more Bible-centred piety, unlike the *Devotio Moderna* as practiced by urban artisans and scholars, did come with a paradox, yet Charny does try his best to find a way of reconciling chivalric honour with Christian humility.

John Clanvowe's *The Two Ways* takes its title from Matthew 7:13-44 "the gaate is wyde and the way is brood that leedeth to los and manye goon in that wey, and how streit is the gaate and the way nargh that leedth to the lyf and few fynden that way."[59] Such a quote brilliantly encapsulates the text that Clanvowe intended to write – an evangelical tract on how to attain true faith, God's grace and salvation. It is thus, unlike Charny's *Livre*, not an explicitly chivalric text. As part of aiding his readers in attaining salvation, Clanvowe, following from St Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians, identifies three enemies of the soul – the Devil, the Flesh and the World.[60] When it comes to his treatment of the latter, Clanvowe claims that "before God, that is verrey treuth … alle vertue is worsshipe and alle synne is

[57] Ibid, pp86 – 89.

[58] Ibid. p79.

[59] John Clanvowe, *The Two Ways*, in *The Works of Sir John Clanvowe*, edited by V.J Scattergood (Cambridge, 1975), p59.

[60] Ibid, p61.

shame" yet in earthly society it is the opposite, and gives as an example "ffor the world holt hem worshipful that been greete werreyours and fighters and that distroyen and wynnen manye loondis." Clanvowe expresses horror at how "of swyche folke men maken books and soonges and reeden and syngen of hem for to hoolde the mynde of here deedes the lengere heere upon earth, ffor that is a thing that worldely men desiren greetly."[61] This is why an ostensibly non-chivalric text, yet still written by a knight, has made its way into the present study – it raises the question of whether a knight, in his quest to find a spiritually deeper piety informed by a profound and extensive study of the Bible, ends up going too far and end up rejecting the foundations of the culture to which he belonged. Prowess seeking honour was only a part of chivalric culture, yet it was a crucial foundation of it, and Clanvowe rejected it as contrary to the ethic he identified in the Gospels and the Pauline Epistles. That Clanvowe would go that far, way beyond the almost puritanical yet still fundamentally orthodox and chivalric piety of Geoffroi de Charny, or his English equivalent Henry Grosmont who wrote the *Livre de Seyntz Medicines*, has perplexed historians.[62] What makes it all the more paradoxical is that these statements of Clanvowe's seem utterly inconsistent with the life he lived. He had fought in the retinues of such highly esteemed figures of 14th century English chivalry as John Chandos and Robert Knollys in the Breton expedition of 1364 and the chevauchees of the 1370s respectively, and he had made an incredibly lucrative career as a public servant tasked with keeping the peace in Wales and the Marches in the early 1380s, for which he won generous pensions and the offices of custodian of Haverford castle and keeper of the forests of Snowdon and Merioneth. After he wrote the treatise, he went on the crusade to Tunis of Louis de Bourbon and after he returned from that disaster he travelled to Constantinople where he died, presumably hoping to fight for the Roman Emperor against the Turks. The only evidence of him trying to curb militarism is his role in negotiating the Treaty of Leulinghem with France in 1389, a necessary measure for a war-weary nation.[63] Thus Clanvowe comes across less as a traitor to chivalry, but at the price of making his writing seem hypocritical and disingenuous. How did he intellectually reconcile his beliefs and the life he led together? This we cannot know, neither for Clanvowe nor for his fellow Lollard knights, because unlike Lutheranism in 16th century Germany, Lollardy always remained a marginal and anti-establishment force. Thus it never had to create an intellectual balancing act between promoting an ethic of *imitatio Christi* and upholding the very social and political forces that supported it – the Lollard knights did not amount to a

[61] Ibid, pp69 – 70.

[62] Richard Kaeuper, *Holy Warriors* (Philadelphia, 2009), pp203 – 205.

[63] All the biographical information on Clanvowe has been taken from V.J Scattergood's introduction, see pp25 – 27.

critical mass of support among the nobility, and John Ball in 1381 did not have the same effect as Thomas Muntzer in 1525.[64] But what does seem clear, and is most relevant to our purposes, is that Clanvowe, in his own paradoxical way, exemplified the vitality and creativity of late medieval chivalric spirituality. This is in the sense that he, like the more orthodox Catholic knights Henry Grosmont and Geoffroi de Charny extensively studied the Bible and pursued moral and spiritual rigour, even if it led him to intellectual conclusions that fundamentally contradicted his earthly vocation and the value system it was based on.

Conclusion

To conclude, Huizinga's vision of late medieval chivalry as the ossified "aesthetic ideal assuming the appearance of an ethical ideal" of a decadent and self-satisfied noble class could not be further from the truth. That this view is outmoded is, itself, not news, but the present study has tried to add to the already existing scholarship on the continued vitality of chivalry in the long 14th century. It has done this by looking at the intellectual creativity, constructive self-criticism and interesting new directions taken on the part of chivalry's practitioners in this period. With regard to moral reform, it has been demonstrated that French knights, informed by a deep and wide-reaching study of the moral thought of classical authors like Aristotle and Valerius Maximus and of the history of republican Rome, tried to resolve the tensions inherent in chivalric culture, namely the tensions between external honour and internal virtue and between the aristocratic life and the Christian life. This they did by envisioning, based on Aristotelian and neo-Roman example, a more rigorously morally self-disciplined knighthood orientated less exclusively towards honour and fame and more towards self-cultivation and serving the public good. In the second chapter, it has been demonstrated that the growing fascination with the geography and cultures of lands beyond Latin Europe resulting from a greater knowledge of the wider world combined with the continued vitality of crusading and pilgrimage, led to a new kind of adventurism motivated by a desire to "see the world" as Guillebert de Lannoy put it. Finally, in the third chapter it has been shown how, reflecting the creative currents in the piety and spirituality of late medieval laypeople more generally, late medieval knights attempted to further resolve the tensions between chivalry and Christianity by developing more intimate, morally and spiritually rigorous and biblically informed forms of lay aristocratic piety and spirituality. Yet with the first and third chapters in mind one may be asking, "well this was all very good of them, but did it really make much of a practical difference?" Lofty ideals appearing to yield only modest results in the face of the surviving empirical evidence is the problem which all

[64] Richard Kaeuper, *Holy Warriors* (Philadelphia, 2009), p210.

historians studying moral and religious reform in the Medieval West have to come across.[65] Yet our knightly authors were neither naïve idealists nor cynical propagandists for their class. Rather they were acutely aware of human imperfection, as any reader of Geoffroi de Charny will notice, and proposed programmes of rigorous yet still fairly practical programmes of reform, knowing that few would successfully attain all their ideals yet still exhorting their readers to do their best. Their proposed moral and spiritual reforms for chivalric culture were inspired by a love of Classical Greek and Roman and Biblical learning, and thus I will conclude by saying that, before John Tiptoft and Ulrich von Hutten, there were knightly humanists.

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[65] Thomas F.X Noble "Secular Sanctity: forging an ethos for the Carolingian nobility," in Patrick Wormald and Janet Nelson (eds), *Lay Intellectuals in the Carolingian World* (Cambridge, 2007), p35.

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