



HAL
open science

Chilvaric cultures in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries

Martin Aurell

► **To cite this version:**

Martin Aurell. Chilvaric cultures in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Karl G. Johansson; Else Mundal. *Riddarasögur: The Translation of European Court Culture in Medieval Scandinavia*, 1, Novus Ferlag, pp.33-56, 2014, Bibliotheca Nordica, ISSN 1891-1315, 978-82-7099-806-7. halshs-01417278

HAL Id: halshs-01417278

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-01417278>

Submitted on 15 Dec 2016

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

MARTIN AURELL

CHIVALRIC CULTURE IN THE TWELFTH AND THIRTEENTH CENTURIES

Culture can be defined in two ways, one broad and one narrow. The term includes, firstly, information, practice and technique that allow mankind to control nature and a specific group to adapt to global society. It refers, secondly, to the erudite knowledge, to the artistic works and to any other form of science or creation of the human mind, considered as superior. Each of these two definitions seems to fit in a specific field of human sciences. More extensive, the first one concerns the sociology and even more 'cultural' anthropology, while the second, smaller, is rather used by historians of literature, of art and of science. This second definition of culture is reserved for the most sophisticated forms of knowledge and should not be confused, for example, with the gestures of manual work, with the structures of kinship or with the feast, which are so essential in the ethnological studies. In the categories, as convenient as misleading, in which each academic science tended to close, barely thirty years ago, the broader definition referred to material, popular and oral culture, and the narrow one to spiritual, elitist and writing culture. Nowadays, however, the interdisciplinary method shows us how these epistemological barriers are artificial and reductive¹. They should be abolished to restore the historical phenomenon throughout its life, its deepness and its richness.

The medievalist studying chivalry would also be as wrong to move away from the anthropological definition of culture than from its elitist definition. He has indeed to apprehend his object as a whole, which includes values, attitudes, representations, ideology or literary and artistic creations, which he should not separate. For him, it is so important to know how the knight read or wrote a novel, made war, educated children, told a story, listen to a sermon or attended Mass. In other words, we need to know how he held his pen or his Psalter, but also his spear, the sleeve of his lover, his hawk or his spoon. Nonetheless, it would not be reasonable for us to level all these gestures, as if they were equally important in the evolution of the group of knights, who, because of their dominant position, acted as a model for lesser social categories. Perhaps a prisoner of the prejudices of his own socio-professional category, the author of this article believes that the intellectual activities of the aristocratic warriors deserve special treatment, mainly because they mark, in twelfth and thirteenth centuries, a shift in the evolution of Europe. Western culture owes much, including in its modernity, to the literacy of knighthood. Therefore, the literate knight (*miles litteratus*) will be particularly in the spotlight here.

Like any historical object, chivalric culture can only be apprehended from documentary evidence that guides widely the researcher. However, for the Middle Ages, these sources are mainly produced by clerics, who describe in Latin, their elitist language of written communication, some practices that, like war, are prohibited to them. But even if they have received the tonsure and the sacred orders, these intellectuals are not strangers to the realities of chivalry. They only approach them according to mental categories and ecclesiastical values that distort necessarily their descriptions and their narrations, and more their judgments about their actors. While thinking and communicating about chivalry, they configure its ideological boundaries, influencing its evolution. Like them, some rare knights took the pen to write in vernacular: Bertran de Born, Robert de Boron, Snorri Sturluson, Wolfram von Eschenbach...

¹ Some excellent studies about these interactions between the literary culture and the so called cultural culture can be found in *Oral Art Forms and their Passage into Writing*, ed. E. Mundal, J. Wellendorf, Njalsgade, 2008.

Others chose to sponsor and guide the work of authors and jugglers. Children of William Marshal fostered John Early to write the biography of their father in his memory and in their service². On an entirely different order, archaeological material learns us a lot about the life of warriors. It is therefore from very different angles that chivalric culture can be illuminated.

Combat techniques and military equipment reserved for the nobility

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, chivalry and nobility are inextricably linked. Knights on horseback, to whom no peon could resist, are masters on the battlefield. A new fighting method spreads among them. Fixing a lance to their right arm, they use the force of the galloping horse, to unseat their enemies while employing their left arm to protect themselves with a shield. Achieved at the cost of a long training, this technique explains their superiority in the war. Only people gently born, who hold power and wealth at the top of the social hierarchy, can afford to fight in such a way. They have indeed riches and leisure to pay the arms and horses and to prepare long time to war.

During this period, an important development occurs. The emergence of a strong kingship, able to control the status of individuals, accelerates the establishment of orders composing society. Each individual belongs to a category with legal privileges, in the etymological sense of *Privatae leges*, 'private law' or specific to a juridical corporation.³ Only members of a noble lineage have henceforth the right to fight on horseback, to receive the dubbing, to pay feudal homage to a free fief or to participate to tournaments. Almost all of them are noble by birth, although some may enjoy, from the late thirteenth century, letters of ennoblement emanating from the royal chancery.

The new legal arrangement, which reserves several rights to the aristocracy in the name of the law, coincides with economic realities, because it is extremely expensive to fight on horseback. During the fighting, the steeds often suffer irreparable injury, and it is necessary for each knight to possess at least three of them in his stable. However, the horse has become much more expensive than in the past. A warhorse is calculated to represent the amount of seven ploughing horses in France at the end of twelfth century, instead of four in the eighth century. The reasons for these increasing of the price are mainly due to investment and work necessary to obtain a breed suited to combat. Since 1172, the term stud (*haracium*) appears for the first time in a charter of the Norman monastery of St. Evroult. It designates the selected flock from which one obtains quality animals by rational crossing of stallions and mares, usually isolated from each other. The Italian merchants then controlled equine luxury trade, where Spanish and Lombard horses were especially popular and expensive.⁴ The marshals thought about the veterinary art. About 1240, Jordanus Rufus, working for Emperor Frederick II, wrote a treatise promised to a broad spreading on equine medicine, inspired by his personal experience and by Arabic works.⁵ Medical advances in the care of men are reflected in veterinary science. At the same time, the harnessing of the horse is improving. Saddlers, blacksmiths, brakemen and other craftsmen work on its different parts. These progresses have mainly to be found on the saddle, enclosing the rider and being more securely attached than in the past. The horse is now protected by the chamfer on the head and a cover reinforced with metal rings. Covered with iron, it is less subject than before to the vagaries of the fray.

² *History of William Marshal*, éd. A.J. Holden, D. Crouch, trad. angl. S. Gregory, Londres, 2002-2006.

³ M. Aurell, « Complexité sociale et simplification rationnelle : dire le statut des personnes au Moyen Age », *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale*, 48, 2005, p. 5-16.

⁴ R.-H. et A.-M. Bautier, « Contribution à l'histoire du cheval au Moyen Âge : l'élevage du cheval », *Bulletin philologique et historique du Comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques (jusqu'en 1610)*, 1978, p. 9-76.

⁵ B. Prévot, *La Science du cheval au Moyen Age : le Traité d'hippiatrie de Jordanus Rufus*, Paris, 1991.

The emotional attachment of the knight to his horse is great. Renaut de Montauban and Baiart, Aioli and Marchegai, William of Orange and Beaucent, El Cid and Babieca represent many inseparable couples, immortalized by the epic. The anthropomorphism of the horse, completely devoted to his rider, is a frequent theme in literature. In his *Recreation for an Emperor*, Gervais of Tilbury (c. 1150-c. 1221) says he has seen, in Arles, Good-Friend, the horse of Guerau, viscount of Cabrera, a Catalan of the court of the king of Aragon. Good-Friend was so strong and swift that he was invincible in fighting. He communicated by sign language with his master, whom he would comfort in sorrow and give most wisely counsel. Guerau would feed him with white wheat bread out of a silver vessel and would do him sleep on a feather mattress. When the viscount died, Good-Friend stopped eating and smashed his own head against a wall⁶. This humanization of the horse, with its passionate affection for his owner, responds well to the close identification between the knight and his steed. It has its roots in paganism, which regarded the horse as a psychopomp spirit, leading the past away warrior to the world of the dead.

So deep is the knight's commitment to his sword. The epic provides an almost human personality to Durandal, Excalibur or Tizona, whose inherent strength contributes significantly to the victory of the hero.⁷ They were forged by legendary craftsmen, who, like Wegland or Trebuchet, worked in fairy islands or in underworld.⁸ Imprecations and prayers are etched into their blade, and relics placed in their hilt. Handed down from father to son for generations, the sword perpetuates the memory of the ancestors who possessed it. Considered as having a magical force, the sword is the most popular weapon of the warrior. Wide, straight, heavy of 1.5 to 2 kg and 90 cm long, it benefits since the twelfth century of the metallurgy progress. His soul, with twisted lamellae, is covered with a steel blade. To get a damask sword, with a beautiful shimmering, solid, thin and flexible, the blacksmith proceeds by successive crushing, pounding it six hundred times while hot.

Perhaps less glamorous than the sword, the spear has yet a great symbolic importance because of new fighting techniques. In ash or apple wood, his stem stretches by then: it reaches 2.7 or 3 m; the tip is an arrow-shaped metal. To use it upon a galloping horse requires a specific skill, obtained only after a long education, begun in adolescence and maintained by constant training. A consummate art of riding becomes like a second nature for the knight, who, welded to the saddle, spends most of his time on horseback. His body bears the traces of those long rides. In 1177, Pierre de Blois, Archdeacon of London, describes his master Henry II (1154-1189), king of England, 'with his arched femurs and equestrian tibias [...]: his legs are horribly injured and covered by bruises from frequent kicking of horses; he never sits down, except on a horse or at the table'.⁹ Modern studies of the tombs of the fighters confirm this testimony: osteological analysis reflects their wide fork and repeated fractures, cured efficiently by physicians. They also demonstrate the breadth of those warriors who bear on their shoulders the heavy weight of armour, while striking powerfully their enemies with heavy spear or sword. A diet, well above the average, maintains their strength and health. Just a glance is enough to distinguish them, because of their muscles and their tall, from peasants and bourgeois.

⁶ *Otia Imperialia: Recreation for an Emperor*, éd. et trad. angl. S.E. Banks, J.W. Binns, Oxford, 1992, III, 92, p. 738-742.

⁷ J.-L. Chassel, « Le serment par les armes (fin de l'Antiquité, haut Moyen Âge) », *Droit et cultures*, 17, 1989, p. 91-121.

⁸ Chrétien de Troyes, « Perceval ou le conte du Graal », ed. and trans. D. Poiron, *Œuvres complètes*, Paris, 1994, I, 3144-3179, 3654-3687, 4712, p. 763-764, 775-776, 801 ; Jean de Marmoutier, « Historia Gaufredi ducis », éd. L. Halphen, R. Poupardin, *Chroniques des comtes d'Anjou et seigneurs d'Amboise*, Paris, 1913, p. 179-80. Voir J. Marx, *La Légende arthurienne et le Graal*, Geneva-Paris, 1952, p. 127-129, 172-181.

⁹ *Epistulae*, PL 207, n° 66, col. 197C.

Powerful defensive weapons protect the knight from head to feet. In the thirteenth century, the helmet in form of a truncated cone or 'bucket', hiding completely the face, replaces the simple iron cap. The coat of mail or hauberk is a long shirt with small rings of wire, interlaced and riveted to each other. It weighs between ten and twelve kilograms; its price is exorbitant, at least double that of a warhorse. Since around 1200, its shortening until mid-thigh is offset by breeches of mail. Mittens and stockings of the same material back up the hands and feet. Joints, so vulnerable, are lined with full metal pads for knee and elbow and gorgets for neck. The belt expands, preserving both the size of the basin. The shield, once almond, adopts a triangular shape: it is now painted with his owner arms, which appear also on the surcoat and coat of arms, a precious and colourful fabric covering the hauberk¹⁰. Since the beginning of twelfth century, heraldry becomes a system, in the semiotic sense of the term, and it spreads throughout the aristocratic hierarchy, from princes to reach the more modest knights. All these protections reduce the risk of injury, but increase the price of military equipment. About 1250, in England, weapons and warhorses cost about twenty pounds sterling, the equivalent of one year of the average income of a manor. Only the rich landowners, levying a high annual rent, can still fight nobly. One must finally insist on the symbolic significance of the arms, which is manifested in the ritual of knighthood, where they are solemnly handed over to the new knight.

Respecting one to each other at war

Chivalry demonstrates a strong consciousness of class. Its members are proud of their high birth and ancient pedigree, their castle and lordship or their power over men. But they may be more proud of their exploits on the battlefield. There they can shine individually, but also collectively in a team. Indeed, they attack together on horseback with they spears, in what is called 'conroi' in Old French, a cohesive and compact group of twenty warriors entering the enemy scrum. Nonetheless, they show some respect to the aristocratic adversary. Only rarely they do kill him or they go after a wounded man.

In his *Ecclesiastical History*, Orderic Vitalis (1075-1142) notes that during the battle of Bremule (1119) between Henry I of England and Louis VI of France, where 900 knights fought, only three were killed and 140 French were captured by Anglo-Normans, the winners. The monk of St. Evroult gives several explanations for this low mortality: 'They were everywhere dressed in iron. They spared themselves both by their fear of God and by their bonds of friendship. They tried to capture the fugitives rather than to kill them. They were Christian warriors, never thirsty for the blood of their brothers. They rejoiced for their legitimate triumph, God helping, for the sake of holy Church and for the peace of the faithful.'¹¹ The three reasons that the text put forward to explain the absence of massacres and mutilations are significant: the effectiveness of the hauberk, the interdependence between knights and the evangelical values. No need to insist again on the protection provided by the defensive armament, which has just been described.

More interesting is the mention of 'bonds of comradeship'. The battle of Bremule opposes Norman and French knights in a border war, as there are so many by then in the West. The social proximity of the two bands may be closer than geographical proximity. It leans on kinship and friendship, which go through the two camps. On both sides, there is an identical value system, which includes solidarity between the members of the same army, bravery in face of the enemy, respect for the defeated nobles, generosity when distributing the

¹⁰ F. Cardini, *La Culture de la guerre (Xe-XVIIIe siècle)*, 1992, p. 46-47.

¹¹ *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*, ed. and transl. M. Chibnall, Oxford, 1968-1980, XII, 18, t. 6, p. 240.

bounty, loyalty to the leader and contempt for non-combatants. Bounding together a companionship of warriors, such behaviour cannot be restricted to one single society. It works similarly to all civilizations. If we take into account cultural anthropology it becomes clear that the way knights triggered off and dealt with conflict was not exclusive to medieval knights. It is indeed similar to the exercise of violence by dominant warrior groups in many primitive and even pre-industrial societies.¹²

Orderic Vitalis mentions, thirdly, the Christian religion of the warriors of Bremule. The undeniable value of the ethnological approach should not prevent the historian from exploring the specific characteristics of twelfth and thirteenth century knighthood. The action of the Church followed the evolution of chivalry. Priests participated increasingly in the liturgy of dubbing. Their texts and sermons provided a framework within which warriors could exercise armed violence. From 1170 onwards, this clerical involvement established the setting up of a code of knightly conduct for several centuries.¹³ The clerics advised the aristocratic warriors to fight only under princely orders, to uphold law and order, to protect the weak, to avoid fighting amongst Christians, not to be cruel and to participate in the crusade. These duties are summarized in the *Policraticus* (1159) of John of Salisbury, a treatise of political philosophy focusing on royal government and on the reform of the habits and customs of the knights and courtiers who advised the king: 'What is the purpose of disciplined knights? To protect the Church, to combat treachery, to venerate the priesthood, to protect the poor from injustice, to pacify the country, to shed their blood to defend their brothers as required by their oath and, if necessary, to pay with their lives.'¹⁴ They were at the top of the social hierarchy, and they placed their arms at the service of ideals formulated by the intellectual clerics. The chivalry was a warrior ethic steeped in Christian values.

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the capacity of Gospel message on changing mores of the warriors is not negligible. Preaching stigmatizes continuously the defaults of knighthood. In particular, the *Sermones ad status* often reminded the warriors their professional duties. First of all, they admonish their covetousness and their tendency to do illegal gains. In the early twelfth century Honorius *Augustodunensis'* *Elucidarium* considers that 'because of others of their pride and their greed, knights steal others property.'¹⁵ Stephen of Fougeres (d. 1178), bishop of Rennes, adopts a similar discourse: 'They steal, tax, oppress and exhaust the hungry, to which they impose corvees [...]. After eating and drinking the rents which law attributes them, they deceive the peasants demanding them more and more [...]. Oh my God, it is a shame to call them lords. Indeed they are not lazy for doing evil!'¹⁶ Their violence against the poor and needy is also pointed by clerics finger. The 'folly' and 'insanity' of 'the corrupt order of chivalry' is explicitly denounced in by a sermon of cardinal Jacques de Vitry (†, 1240), bishop of Acre, recriminating against knights physical attacks on disarmed holy men and women, and even more on peasantry: 'they impose them arbitrary corvees, without letting them bread to eat.'¹⁷ Ramon Llull attacks with much vehemence aristocratic brutality in his *Book of contemplation in God* (1273-1274). He considers knights as executioners of the devil. 'With the same weapons that should destroy the wicked, they kill the righteous and those who prefer peace to war.' Because of them, earth is covered by fire

¹² D. Barthélemy, *La Chevalerie de la Germanie à la France du XIIe siècle*, Paris, 2007.

¹³ D. Crouch, *The Birth of Nobility: Constructing Aristocracy in England and France, 900-1300*, London, 2005, p. 29-95.

¹⁴ *Policraticus sive de nugis curialium et vestigiis philosophorum libri VIII*, éd. C.C.J. Webb, Oxford, 1909, VI, 8, t. 2, p. 23.

¹⁵ Ed. Y. Lefèvre, *Contribution, par l'histoire d'un texte, à l'histoire des croyances religieuses en France au Moyen Âge*, Paris, 1954, II, 54, p. 427.

¹⁶ *Le Livre des manières*, éd. R.A. Lodge, Geneva, 1979, l. 545-556, p. 80.

¹⁷ Ed. A. Lecoy de La Marche, *La Chaire française au Moyen Âge, spécialement au XIIIe siècle, d'après les manuscrits contemporains*, Paris, 1868, p. 357.

and blood. The destruction follows them everywhere. 'The knights kill men, depopulate towns and villages, cut trees and plants, make wives widows and steal in the roads.' By compiling the list of their other vices from adultery to magic and divination, the philosopher stops on their suicidal attitude on the battlefield.¹⁸ Their capital sin of pride quickly degenerates into anger, which unleashes their violent instincts. To follow the rhetoric of Ramon Llull, their thirst for blood will never be quenched. To sum up, for the ecclesiastical writers, pride, greed and anger often subvert knighthood. Therefore, it is no wonder they call its members 'tyrants' and they play on the word *militia* ('chivalry') and *malitia* ('wickedness') to require them to correct their conduct.

A similar pastoral is to be found in the iconography of Romanesque and Gothic churches. The theme of the Massacre of the Innocents is often sculpted. The assassins sent by Herod carry a sword and are covered by a helmet and a coat of mail in the manner of knights. The novel also encourages warriors to follow a Christian ethic. The persuasive speech of conversion is ubiquitous in Arthurian literature, whose authors clearly show their willingness to change the habits of the nobility in arms. The *History of the Holy Grail* (1225-1235) states that Galaad, son of Joseph of Arimathea, gave proof 'of such probity that his prowess, his deeds, his words and his works must be present at the minds of all honest people, so that the wicked depart from their folly and the good, who maintain the order of chivalry, improve themselves towards God and towards the century.'¹⁹

Most romances hatch their narrative with moral digressions. They introduce sermons by bishops, chaplains, anchoresses and especially hermits. Even the voice of God himself thunders from heaven, or angels take human and most unexpected animal form in order to speak to the characters. They constantly quote the Bible, their point of reference, while some of their pages are a cento, piecing together scattered pieces of the Holy Scripture. Other persuasive speeches, pushing to repentance, are less openly expressed. They are reflected primarily in the actions of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, whom immanent justice punishes or rewards already on earth. Some characters, highly successful, as Galahad, Lancelot's son or as the sister of Perceval the Welshman, embodiment of peaceful and generous femininity, behave in a perfect identification with Christ. So the reader needs to imitate them. In sum, besides religious messages explicitly expressed, the authors propose standards of conduct implicitly and therefore in a more subtle and possibly efficient way.²⁰

Professional ethics proposed by intellectuals, mostly of them clerics, to knights is strongly influenced by the Gospels and Christian theology. It is largely based in a speech that the Church still reserved at Carolingian times to the sole king, who was asked to protect the weak, represented in the Old Testament by the widow and the fatherless, and the clergy.²¹ In the mid-twelfth century, the text quoted above from John of Salisbury reflects this transfer of powers from the monarchy to the knighthood. Thus, the clergy accepts the existence and the role of combatants in the Christian society, provided they comply with the requirements of a just war, set long ago by Augustine of Hippo. In particular, to fight according to human and divine law one has to obey the legitimate authority, represented by the crown whose power is increasing at that time. War against the infidel can also be encouraged, since the establishment of a Christian government in Muslim or pagan lands allows the mission of

¹⁸ « Libre de contemplació en Déu », ed. J. Rubió, *Obres Essencials*, Barcelona, 1957-1960, CXII, § 2, 15, 19-25, t. 2, p. 339-368.

¹⁹ « Joseph d'Arimathe », ed. and trans. G. Gros, *Le Livre du Graal*, dir. D. Poiron, Ph. Walter, Paris, 2001, §446, t. 1, p. 413.

²⁰ C. Girbea, *Communiquer pour convertir dans les romans du Graal (XIIe-XIIIe siècles)*, Paris, 2010.

²¹ J. Flori, *L'Idéologie du glaive : préhistoire de la chevalerie*, Geneva, 1983, *L'Essor de la chevalerie (XIe-XIIIe siècles)*, Geneva, 1986.

friars and the conversion of the unbeliever. The point is that this war should be conducted as a crusade, proclaimed by the pope and conducted under the supervision of his legate.

Clerics consider knighthood as an order, in the double meaning, social and religious, of this word. It is entered through the ceremony of dubbing, in the same way that the clergy entered through the ceremony of the tonsure. As for the priesthood, the idea of order, both in the sense of the ordination or initiation and in the sense of a professional category carrying out a particular function, was inherent to the warrior class. In the *Story of the Grail* (1181-1190), the cleric Chrétien of Troyes says that the dubbing confers on Perceval 'the order of the knighthood which is the highest that God has established and ordered'.²² A generation later, the writers who describe Perceval story in their own prose style novels mention 'the holy order of the knighthood' or 'the celestial knighthood', in an attempt to provide a closer description of the supernatural calling of the knights.²³

After having forced knights to adopt a specific ethic, the clergy can only recognize the merits of their mission. Even legitimate and obeying some rules, the use of weapons remains an evil, yet necessary. For medieval thinkers, it follows the original sin that has broken the harmony of creation. It has sowed discord among men, since at least the murder of Abel by Cain. Therefore, the fundamental equality of mankind can no longer be respected. 'If we had not sinned, we would have stayed all the same', wrote Peter Cantor²⁴. The conclusion of the Parisian master resumes a widely diffused idea, found at the beginning of *Lancelot* (1215-1225), in which the fairy Viviane introduces his young protege to chivalry. According to her, the nobility of primitive men, all descendants from Adam and Eve, did not resist the temptation of envy and greed that brought struggle for riches and power at the expense of justice in social relations. The weak and peaceful then had to choose some superior men endowed with moral and physical qualities to defend them²⁵.

In 1275, Ramon Llull begins his *Book on the Order of Chivalry* by the fall of our first parents: 'charity, loyalty, justice and truth failed in the world, and then hostility, dishonesty, injustice and falsehood begun.'²⁶ For restoring order, knights have been appointed. The etymology of *miles*, inspired by Isidore of Seville²⁷, proves this founding event of the human hierarchy. It comes from the 'thousand (*mil*)' men, among whom only one knight is elected because of his courage and his many qualities, so that he imposes justice to them by fear, which is now replacing failing charity. The root of the word *cavaller*, Catalan translation of *miles*, refers, according to Ramon Llull, 'the most noble of beasts and the more able to serve humanity,' which was given to it exclusively. Ultimately, original sin and human evil legitimate the domination of warriors, who are indeed an 'elite' in the etymological sense of 'election, choice, selection'. The fear of weapons obtains justice, that love is no longer able to put on earth. For churchmen, the ideological justification of violence, after all legitimate, exerted by chivalry is not without a moral compensation. Called to a high mission, knights have to obey the Decalogue and their king for the sake of peace and justice.

²² « Perceval ou le conte du Graal », *op. cit.*, l. 1635-1637, p. 726.

²³ C. Girbea, *La Couronne ou l'auréole. Royauté terrestre et chevalerie céleste dans la légende arthurienne (XIIe-XIIIe siècles)*, Turnhout, 2007.

²⁴ P. Freedman, *Images of the Medieval Peasant*, Stanford, 1999, p. 71-79.

²⁵ *Lancelot, roman en prose du XIIIe siècle*, éd. A. Micha, Paris-Geneva, 1978-1983, t. 7, p. 246.

²⁶ *Llibre de l'orde de cavalleria*, éd. A. Soler, Barcelone, 1988, p. 167.

²⁷ *Etimologías*, ed. and trans. J. Oroz, M.A. Marcos, M. C. Diaz, Madrid, 1982-1983, 9.3.32.

Literacy of knights

The twelfth century witnessed an unprecedented intellectual renaissance.²⁸ This movement touches not only the cathedral schools and emerging universities, but it extends also to the aristocratic castles. In his autobiography, the Picard monk Guibert of Nogent (1053-1124) tells that his mother looked long time for a private tutor to teach him Latin at home 'because there were no grammarians at that time in the villages and there were few even in the towns, and their knowledge was slight, even compared to the minor itinerant clerics of the present time'.²⁹ Guibert writes around 1115 and his comparison with the years 1060 of his childhood proves the augmentation of the number of teachers and the improving of their formation.

The prestige of a lettered education among knighthood increases as shown by literature. Lancelot, the most accomplished of the Knights of the Round Table, already has mastery of reading in the first novel where he appears. In the *Knight of the Cart* (1177-1181) by Chrétien de Troyes, he himself reads the names inscribed on the headstones of a cemetery one after another.³⁰ Forty years later, in the prose *Lancelot*, he even appears to be writing a parchment letter in his own hand, 'because he was endowed with knowledge and because there was, in his time, no other knight as knowledgeable as he'.³¹ This was why the German writer Heinrich von dem Türlin claimed in *The Crown* around 1230, that Lancelot was both knight (*Ritter*) and cleric (*Pfaffe*): Heinrich adds that Lancelot also commented on the tales that he read out loud to his comrades in arms.³² A model Christian soldier, Lancelot is described as having perfect mastery of reading and writing. He is, at one and the same time, *miles* and *clericus*.

In reality, there were indeed examples of scholarly warriors, or there were at least examples of individuals considered as such by their contemporaries. Numerous eulogies of the Latin training of the counts dynasties of the kingdom of France have come down to us. The monk John of Marmoutiers considers Geoffrey the Fair, count of Anjou (1129 -1151), to be: 'the greatest by his military achievements, but also by his fortune and other works, having devoted himself to civilian arms and liberal studies'. He describes the first conversation — which was spiritual and 'embellished with the colours or rhetoric' — between the young count and his future father-in-law, Henry I (1100-1135), whose nickname 'Beau Clerc' would appear to be of some significance. He goes on to relate how the king of England dubs his son-in-law during a ceremony, which is of such spiritual depth that it increases his knightly dignity.³³ Even greater praise is to be found in a Latin poem from the same period written by Stephen of Rouen († v. 1170), a monk from the monastery of Le Bec, who was close to Empress Matilda of England (†1167), Geoffrey's widow. Stephen remembers him as 'another Mars as soon as he put on his helmet'. If we are to believe Stephen, the letters of the deceased count matched his military talents: 'Cicero was inferior to him in prose, Virgil in verse, Socrates in logic and Achilles on horseback in the use of arms!'³⁴ Here, the hyperbole provides the utmost praise for the knight who possesses the two supreme qualities of courage in battle and literary instruction.

²⁸ *Renaissance and Renewal in the 12th Century*, dir. R.L. Benson, G. Constable, Toronto, 1982.

²⁹ Guibert de Nogent, *Autobiographie*, ed. and trans. E.-R. Labande, Paris, 1981, I, 4, p. 26.

³⁰ « Lancelot ou le chevalier de la charrette », ed. and trans. D. Poiron, *Œuvres complètes*, Paris, 1994, p. 553, l. 1869-1870.

³¹ Ed. Micha, *op. cit.*, t. 4, p. 346.

³² Heinrich von dem Türlin, *Diu Crône*, ed. G.H.F. Scholl, Amsterdam, 1852, l. 2076.

³³ « Historia Gaufredi ducis », *Chroniques des comtes d'Anjou et seigneurs d'Amboise*, ed. L. Halphen, R. Poupardin, Paris, 1913, p. 176-180.

³⁴ *Chronicles of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II, and Richard I*, éd. R. Howlett (RS 82), Londres, 1884-1889, n° 3, l. 7, 37-38, t. 2, p. 765-779.

Among the following generation, two other counts are showered with similar praise. Two long laudatory letters are written to Henry the Liberal of Champagne. The first letter was sent to him in 1152, by Nicolas de Montiéramey (†1175-1178), a lettered Cistercian monk, who was protected by Henry after Saint Bernard had expelled him from Clairvaux. In this letter, Henry is compared to the philosopher-king, praised by Plato: ‘You sit between the lettered and the equestrian orders, to the greater glory of both, magnificent and liberal towards the two.’³⁵ The second epistle was written by the Premonstratensian abbot Philip of Harvengt (†1183). It provides the most emphatic of praise: ‘Oh you, noble knight and prince of knights, who have as much love and respect for the knights covered in their coats of mail as you have for the clerics and their letters!’ This epistle also claims that Henry is a fine Latin scholar, who makes others look like ‘donkeys eating thistles’.³⁶ In addition, the aforementioned Philip of Harvengt sent a written missive of an identical model to Philip of Flanders (1157-1191), in which he described Philip as the most educated and accomplished offspring of a lineage in which *miles* and *clericus* were but one.³⁷ As excessive as this may seem, such praise corresponds to a definite penchant for letters on the part of the counts of Anjou, Champagne and Flanders which is also attested elsewhere.³⁸

The undeniable patronage of Geoffroi le Bel, Henry the Liberal or Philip of Flanders should not prevent us from identifying the stereotypical elements in the eulogies of the chronicles and epistles written by clerics who are indebted to such patrons. More specifically, they tend to apply to them a discourse which is generally reserved for the ‘scholar king’,³⁹ a very popular character among the intellectuals of the twelfth century renaissance. The images and themes of their sycophantic praise stem, as might be expected, from Greek and Latin Classics. They reproduce the union of ‘strength’ (*fortitudo*) and ‘wisdom’ (*sapientia*), that Homer and his imitators applied to the fine strategists of the Trojan Wars. The cunning of Ulysses and the experience of Nestor, and their eloquence, were of greater importance in the final victory of the Achaeans than the impetuous fury of the younger soldiers. Their wisdom did not prevent Ulysses and Nestor from being excellent combatants, quite the contrary.⁴⁰ Through stoicism, Christianity included these two qualities among the four cardinal virtues, with one difference however since ‘wisdom’ was transformed into ‘prudence’. The celebrated *Etymologiae*, written by Isidore of Seville, picks up these qualities to define the epic, whose ‘heroes’ are named from the ‘air’, in other words from the heavens for which they have made themselves fit through their wisdom and their force’.⁴¹

Out of the milieu of princes, we find some examples of nobles with mastery of Latin. In his *Chronica Majora*, Matthew Paris provides an elegy for one of Henry III’s principal royal officers and advisors, Paulin Piper, who died in 1251, and who was, he writes, ‘a literate knight or a military cleric’ (*miles litteratus sive clericus militaris*⁴²), thus praising his excellent mastery of Latin. If more proof were required, further on in the same passage his secular status is evidenced by mention of his greedy acquisition of land and royal income to build luxurious manor houses, and further on still by mention of his wife who remarried shortly after his death. Elsewhere, Matthew Paris claims that Paulin Piper had solemnly undertaken, in 1250, to join the crusade with other English knights.⁴³ And yet, the table of

³⁵ « Epistolæ », PL 196, ep. 56, col. 1651.

³⁶ « Epistolæ », PL, t. 203, ep. 17, col. 153.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, ep. 16, col. 147-151.

³⁸ J.F. Benton, « The Court of Champagne as Literary Center », *Speculum*, 36, 1961, p. 551-591.

³⁹ For recent publications concerning a later period see: M. A. Rodríguez de la Peña, *Los Reyes sabios: cultura y poder en la Antigüedad Tardía y la Alta Edad Media*, Madrid, 2008.

⁴⁰ E.R. Curtius, *La Littérature européenne et le Moyen Âge latin*, Paris, 1956 [1947], p. 212-221.

⁴¹ *Etimologías*, *op. cit.*, 1.39.9.

⁴² *Chronica majora*, éd. H.R. Luard (RS 57), Londres, 1872-1883, t. 5, p. 242.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, t. 5, p. 101.

contents of a partially preserved manuscript, mentions ‘a written rhyme on Saint George by Paulin Piper’.⁴⁴ Unfortunately the corresponding folios for this hagiographic poem, evoking a martyr warrior, have been lost. The reference to this poem would nevertheless seem to corroborate the literary ability, most probably Latin, of its author.

There are fewer examples attesting to spoken and written use of the language of Cicero by the laity than there are for knights writing songs and novels in the vernacular. This is the case as regards the majority of Occitan poets, for example. Indeed, slightly more than half of the hundred or so known troubadours belonged to the lay nobility, as against less than one tenth who belonged to the clergy.⁴⁵ They speak about chivalry, war and partisan commitment, which appear in the *sirventes*, a poetical genre focused on these political subjects, at the contrary of *cansons*, related to courtly love.⁴⁶ The most famous author of *sirventes* – whom Dante has wandering in Hell, carrying his decapitated head as a lantern, as a punishment for his enthusiastic singing of violence and for fostering so many uprisings – is Bertran de Born (d. 1215), lord of Hautefort, on the Limousin-Perigord border. Most of the forty-seven poems attributed to him contain mentions of the battles he fought in the area in the late twelfth century. Indeed, he often composed them to encourage his side in the struggle against opponents. He seems to have been waging perpetual war, first against his brother Constantin, whom, around 1182, he drove out of the Hautefort family castle he had shared with him until then. Constantin’s next move was to call Aymar, viscount of Limoges, and Richard the Lion-Heart (d. 1199), duke of Aquitaine, for help; the three of them fought the troubadour the following year, Bertran being supported by Richard’s brother Henry the Young (d. 1183), who was unhappy with his inheritance. In order to put an end to the conflict, king Henry II then summoned his sons Richard and Henry in Caen for an assembly where Bertran sat, the latter being then in contact with Geoffrey (d. 1186), duke of Brittany, another of the king of England’s sons. Early in 1183 the troubadour took part in yet another war against Richard the Lion-Heart, beside Henry the Young and Geoffrey of Brittany. Richard, with the help of his father and Alfonso II of Aragon, crushed his foes, in the process taking over Hautefort, which he handed back to Constantin. Bertran, who perhaps had made his peace with his brother, was to come into possession of the castle again later on. In 1185 strife broke out anew between Richard and his brothers Geoffrey and John for the dukedom of Aquitaine; but the troubadour seems to have stood aside this time. After the Christian defeat in Hattin (1187), however, his songs goaded the king of England, his sons and the other princes and lords of the Western world into joining the Crusade. He praised Richard’s bravery in the Holy Land – the two of them had by that time made their peace for good – and rejoiced over his release from captivity by Emperor Henry VI (1190-1197). Yet in 1195, he was to give up society and strife, and became a Cistercian monk in Dalon monastery next to his land, where he died twenty years later.⁴⁷ Like him, many troubadours know how to use together the sword and the pen.

Some authors are proud of their chivalry. Around 1200, Wolfram von Eschenbach, the well known author of *Parzival*, must have come from a milieu of *ministeriales* or lesser knights. In his poems, he praised the counts of Thuringia and Wertheim. Maybe he was a warrior in their army, for he describes weaponry, horses and fights with professional accuracy. It is as a knight that he explicitly introduces himself in *Parzival*: ‘Wearing a escutcheon, such is my natural condition!’ In this particular passage, after foregoing the praise of a lady who had angered him, he claims himself to be ready to love and serve others,

⁴⁴ Cambridge University Library, ms Dd. ii. 78, quoted by J.C. Russell, *Dictionnaire of Writers of Thirteenth Century England*, Londres, 1936, p. 94.

⁴⁵ S. Menegaldo, *Le Jongleur dans la littérature narrative des XIIe et XIIIe siècles : du personnage au masque*, Paris, 2005, p. 144-147.

⁴⁶ M. Aurell, *La Vielle et l'épée : troubadours et politique en Provence au XIIIe siècle*, Paris, 1989.

⁴⁷ G. Gouiran, *L'Amour et la guerre : l'œuvre de Bertran de Born*, Aix-en-Provence, 1985, p. I-XXXVIII.

provided they yield to him not for his poetic talent but for his military feats: ‘Let her not love me for my singing, if I don’t prove valiant, and let me win the prize of her love with escutcheon and spear!’ Wolfram then poses as an illiterate who does not even know his alphabet and recounts his story without any help from books.⁴⁸ He even claims to have heard the Grail story from the mouth of Kyot the Provençal, rather than saying that Kyot handed a manuscript over to him. Indeed, Wolfram presents Kyot as the translator into French of the ‘genuine tale’ kept in Saragossa, which is supposed to give *Parzival* an edge over Chretien de Troyes’ *Story of the Grail*.⁴⁹ In *Willehalm* he brings up the subject again, claiming he ‘knows nothing about the contents of books’.⁵⁰

Wolfram’s self-introduction as a hardly literate warrior, mock-humble and complacent as it is, is just another instance of authorial posture and of the literary *topos* of modesty. It is carried over in his permanent references to what he heard people read out or recount, or to his transmitting his work orally.⁵¹ The crude knight thus raises himself to clerk competitor status, all the more so when ladies’ hearts are at stake. The same polemic attitude towards scholars makes him exaggerate his lack of education while elsewhere he does flaunt, albeit indirectly, his book culture through his medical, astronomical or geological references. By the same token, his directly reciting his work at the court causes him to play down the importance of the written support whenever he has to talk of the creation process. He denies his poem book status,⁵² purporting to voice it before a connoisseur audience, who will shout approval. Nevertheless, he betrays himself in one verse that expresses his wish that many a damsel should ‘see his narrative laid down in writing’.⁵³ This slip of the ‘tongue’, if any, looks revealing. That Wolfram was able to compose *Parzival*, with so consistent a narrative fabric despite its length, and so formally polished, does imply his resorting to reading and writing. He couldn’t possibly have dictated it from memory. His illiteracy is but a pose.

The examples of knight writers could be multiplied. They were to be found at every rung of the nobility hierarchy. The high nobility was well represented among the troubadours, *trouvères* and *Minnesänger*. For counts, viscounts and other princes, composing and interpreting songs was a badge of distinction. The court admired their creations and performances, the newly acquired prestige increasing, in turn, their authority within the aristocracy, and even lower down in the bourgeoisie and peasantry. The real hotbed of writers, however, was to be found in the less prestigious nobility: poor Occitan knights, French *vavasseurs*, armed Italian urban citizens or German *ministeriales* would take to writing more often than their liege lord. They wrote short songs, but also long romances, chronicles and autobiographies. This cultured lesser nobility provides the king with warriors who can write, thus becoming indispensable to lay the solid groundwork for a bureaucratic state. The pragmatic writing of the royal officers became quite naturally literary and historiography creation. The same calamus that recorded acts, minutes, laws and accounts in Chancelleries also serves Literature. Even if political propaganda is always present in the songs, romances and histories of these authors, who would serve their princes or cities in war or administration as well as in literary fiction, this propaganda is not at all incompatible with poetic intuition and aesthetic quest.

⁴⁸ Ed. A. Leitzmann, Tübingen, 1953-1955, §114-116, t. 1 (Nr 12), p. 88-90..

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* §416, 453-455, 827, t. 2 (Nr 13), p. 62, 91-93, t. 3 (Nr 14), p. 196-197.

⁵⁰ Ed. W. Shröder, trans. D. Kartschoke, Berlin, 2003, §2, l. 19-22.

⁵¹ A. Berthelot, *Figures et fonction de l'écrivain au XIIIe siècle*, Montréal-Paris, 1991, p. 105.

⁵² P. Zumthor, *La Lettre et la voix : de la « littérature » médiévale*, Paris, 1987, p. 308.

⁵³ *Parzival*, *op. cit.*, §337, l. 3, t. 1, p. 263.

COURTESY AND CIVILISATION OF MORES

The influence of literacy and literature in aristocratic behaviour is a complex problem. Knowledge and courtesy are inextricably linked during the Middle Ages. Orderic Vitalis associates them, while praising Mathilda of Flanders (†1083), wife of William the Conqueror. Indeed he grants her with 'the science of letters and all the beauty of manners and virtues.'⁵⁴ At a lower social level of the aristocracy, the Lombard Acerbo Morena, co-wrote his *History of Frederick Barbarossa* with his father Ottone, around 1164, also bringing together not only literary and courtly qualities, but also military qualities, in his appreciative description of Conrad of Ballhausen, 'the most powerful adviser' of the Emperor: 'Lettered and scholarly, gentle and affable, wise and courageous in war, learned in German and Italian.'⁵⁵

The graciousness of manners and gentleness of conversation, already remarked upon in Mathilda of Flanders and Conrad of Ballhausen, correspond to the words *curialitas*, *cortiesie*, *cortesia* or *Hövescheit*, but also to the words *urbanitas* or *civilitas* and their vernacular derivations which are frequent in twelfth and thirteenth centuries literature in Latin, French and Occitan dialects, in Castilian, Italian or German. Their antonyms were *rusticitas* or *villenie*, which criticized the alleged brutality and lack of education of rural people and country serfs. In his Latin treatise *On the Eloquence of the Vernacular* (1303-1305), Dante defines courtesy (*curialitas*) as 'a balancing rule in what must be accomplished' and places it at the royal palace.⁵⁶ This interpretation of the term underlines the level-headed, moderate nature of codes of behaviour at the court of a powerful ruler, a place where men and women of the aristocracy and the clergy would meet. 'Court' comes from the classical Latin *cohors* or *cors*, which designates an enclosure for raising livestock, the sixth part of a legion, or a magistrate's personal guard. During the high Middle Ages, *curtis* derived from *cohors* to signify the rural estate, a term which shifted, in turn, at a time when the Romance languages had increased influence, towards the meaning of *curia* (the 'assembly of the Senate' in Rome), the place where royal, princely, or aristocratic power, and those who exercised that power, were to be found. The semantic field of the word 'court' therefore covers the palace where the holder of authority lives and works, but also the advisers who help the holder of authority to govern.⁵⁷ The literary education of the advisers, who were vital for bureaucratic rule, led to the addition of the acceptance of knowledge to the medieval definition.⁵⁸ To a greater extent than knowledge of letters, the derivation 'courtesy' included the norms of behaviour, which provide the entourage of the ruler with manners affirming his political domination to an even greater extent. 'Urbanity' and 'civility' meanwhile, referred to their antonym 'rusticity' to indicate the superiority of the urban mode of life over the rural. It was at court and in town that this distinction resided.

The adoption of codes of behaviour in social life required self-control. Courtesy demanded of the individual, however sociable, a questioning of his or her conscience. It thereby regulated the behaviour of each individual to promote moderation and control of personal desire. More specifically, it increased the moral importance of amorous passion. It applied equally to women and men and should therefore not be confused with chivalry, which was a specifically male ethic of combat. The progressive individual integration of courtly

⁵⁴ *The Ecclesiastical History...*, *op. cit.*, IV, 5, t. 2, p. 224.

⁵⁵ *Annales de Lodi* : « Annales laudenses auctoribus Ottone et Acerbo Morenis a. 1153-1168 », éd. Ph. Jaffé (MGH SS 18), Hanovre, 1863, p. 170.

⁵⁶ *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, ed. and trans. V. Coletti, Milano, 1992, I, XVIII, 4, p. 46-48.

⁵⁷ A. Roncaglia, « Le corti medievali », *Letteratura Italiana*, dir. A. Asor Rosa, t. 1 : *Il letterato e le istituzioni*, Turin, 1982, p. 34-35.

⁵⁸ A. Scaglione, *Knights at Court: Courtliness, Chivalry, and Courtesy from Ottonian Germany to the Italian Renaissance*, Berkeley (Ca), 1991.

values never lost its collective implication, since it provided a means of regulating tensions in the closed and densely occupied milieu of the court.⁵⁹ Even if in theory body should become the mirror of the soul and bodily movements reflect interior morals, in practice the courtier acted too often exclusively in order to please others. The exploring gaze and judgment of people surrounding him met this exterior facet, visible in physical presence and dress. It is interesting to note that the first courtesy books appear during this period.⁶⁰ The same was true for speech, which had to be that of the educated, whose sophisticated education was common to other people of the same rank.

Medieval courtesy was rooted in the ancient ideal of the virtuous citizen in the service of the State.⁶¹ In his person, honesty (*honestum*) and efficiency (*utile*) came together for the advantage of society, in accordance with the pattern set out in Cicero's *On Duty* (44 BC), which medieval writers learnt of through the work of the same title by bishop Ambrose of Milan (d. 397). Again, according to this classic, these two qualities are the attributes of the learned orator (*doctus orator*), the expert who has mastery of rhetoric. The same cult of wisdom at the service of the common good is to be found in the writings of Seneca the Younger (d. 65) and the other Stoics. It should be pointed out that the intellectuals of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries held these two authors in high esteem. In his *Entheticus*, John of Salisbury claims that 'the world has known nothing grander than Cicero'.⁶² A century later, the Franciscan monk and Oxford Professor Roger Bacon (1214-1294) expresses similar admiration for Seneca. In *Opus tertium* (1270), he says that his respect for the pagan Seneca is even greater because he discovered his morals 'without the light of faith and with reason as his sole guide'.⁶³ He goes as far as to suggest that Seneca, alongside Aristotle and Cicero, possesses a natural sense of ethics superior to the Christian morals 'of we who are in the depths of vice, from whence only divine grace may save us'.⁶⁴ The twelfth century Renaissance involves a return to the Stoics and their conception of ethics.

Like chivalry, courtesy must be understood both in the short term and in the long term, synchronically and diachronically. It corresponds, on the one hand to a form of behaviour advocated by the governing elites of centralized and bureaucratic States everywhere in the world since antiquity. But it can also be considered as a value system, which is more present during certain periods. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, it has a capital importance among elites, who compare it to chivalry. Raoul de Hodenc (d. 1234), probably a juggler from Picardie, sets out in his allegorical treatise *Roman des eles* (*Romance of the Wings*), a list of qualities or 'feathers' of the two 'wings' of chivalry, that is to say largesse and courtesy. He says in his prologue: 'Chivalry is the fountain of courtesy that no one will dry up. Courtesy comes from God and the Knights possess it [...]. It grows only in the fief of the knights.'⁶⁵ Created by God, courtesy mingles inextricably to chivalry. At its like, it gives the elite forms of behaviour that distinguish them from the vulgar. As chivalry, courtesy is a code of conduct that facilitates understanding and harmony among the lay nobility, albeit in another context than the conflict in arms.

If the intellectuals of the period insist on the quality of bearing, the excellence of gestures or the highness of conversation, it is because they consider the marks of good

⁵⁹ N. Elias, *Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation*, Bern-München, 1979 [1939].

⁶⁰ J.W. Nicholls, *The Matter of Courtesy: A Study of Medieval Courtesy Books and the Gawain-Poet*, Cambridge, 1985.

⁶¹ C.S. Jaeger, *The Origins of Courtliness: Civilizing Trends and the Formation of Courtly Ideals, 935-1210*, Philadelphia (Pen), 1991 [1985].

⁶² « The *Entheticus* of John of Salisbury », éd. R.E. Pepin, *Traditio*, 31, 1975, l. 1215, p. 174.

⁶³ *Opera quaedam hactenus inedita*, éd. J. S. Brewer (RS 15), Londres, 1859, LXXV, t. 1, p. 306.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, XIV, p. 50.

⁶⁵ *Le roman des Eles. The Anonymous Ordene de Chevalerie*, Amsterdam-Philadelphie (Penn), 1983, l. 12-15, 23-24, p. 31.

breeding to generate empathy, improving society and diffusing peace. In their eyes, good manners weave the social fabric and they harmonize relations between men. They increase the reputation of peaceful and sophisticated people. Based on the esteem obtained by an enjoyable behaviour, such a conception of aristocratic honour contrasts with the dominant idea of the renown that male knights should keep by their violent and vindictive reaction against offensive words and deeds questioning the good repute of the women of their own lineage. In contrast, the treatise of courtesy, written in Latin verses around 1200 by Daniel of Beccles, advised the husband too 'jealous to learn to look at the ceiling'⁶⁶, that is to say to ignore the conversations too gallant, if not more, between his wife and other men. Harmony is to be sought above all.

In twelfth and thirteenth centuries, elegance and distinction give a 'je ne sais quoi' of attractive and debonair ease. At the contrary, elites must not be violent, quarrelsome or vindictive. Obviously, this urbanity is more common in court than in war. It facilitates nonetheless other struggles. To speak like sociologists, the 'symbolic capital', which gives education, could be essential in the 'social field' to conquer and to get power.⁶⁷ In politics, courtesy has perhaps become more efficient than chivalry. Furthermore, manners are inextricably linked to the erudite culture that communicates Latin and books. Both regulate the actions and conversation of the noble, deserving him the esteem of the rulers. Courtesy and knowledge give some knights to move with ease in the curial milieu, to control the bureaucratic tool and to advise the prince. They provide access to the centres of government.

The new sensibility, under which no one can annoy and even less irritate his neighbour, especially if he is powerful, coincides with the more general pacification of the aristocracy. The private wars between lords decrease. Their reduction is related with the resurgence of the monarchy and the development of royal administration, supported by written records.⁶⁸ The courts of kings or princes gradually concentrate the essential of power at the expense of independent castellanies. To succeed, the aristocrats have to go to the royal palace. There, they adopt the regulated conduct, whose rudiments they learned in their childhood from their mother and the tutors of the clergy. Chivalry is thus operating a revolutionary shift. This evolution passes its culture from the study field of the anthropologist to that of the historian of literature, science and religion.

⁶⁶ *Urbanus Magnus Danielis Becclesiensis*, éd. J. G. Smyly, Dublin, 1939, I. 2005.

⁶⁷ P. Bourdieu, *La Distinction : critique sociale du jugement*, Paris, 1979.

⁶⁸ M.T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066-1307*, Oxford, 1979.