

BECOMING A KNIGHT:
THE SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION OF
COMMON MOUNTED SOLDIERS INTO NOBLE WARRIORS

By

Jared Dane Johns

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ABSTRACT

Between the years of 1066 and 1119 CE, knights and their families in Western Europe rose from the highest stratification of the common folk to be included as the lowest incarnation of the nobility. This occurred primarily due to an emerging collective warrior identity among the nobility, the Catholic Church's attempts to contain and sanction violence, and the implementation of the Three Estates political philosophy. This timeline challenges the dominant historical narrative on when knighthood transformed from a military rank into a social rank of nobility, which is usually placed sometime around the end of the 13th Century.

To justify this re-periodization, this study analyzes the accuracy of commonly-accepted translations of words used to describe knights and knighthood, arguing that historians have anachronistically applied modern ideas of noble knighthood to common warriors of the past. Utilizing primary sources such as histories of the First Crusade by contemporary chronicler's Robert the Monk, and Guibert of Nogent, and other documents including the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles, Carolingian Chronicles, and papal bulls, this study places knights and knighthood into a more accurate historical framework. This study is limited to where knighthood originated and flourished, primarily Western France and England and the surrounding areas.

Overall, this project puts the social transformation of knights and their families from commoners to nobles in its proper context. This thesis traces that change from the

origins of knighthood, around the year 1,000, to its importation to England in 1066, and its important impact on the First Crusade, primarily in the form of the foundation of the military orders of the Knights Hospitaller and the Knights Templar, which ultimately resulted in the elevation of knights from common soldiers to noble warriors.

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INTRODUCTION

The early morning sun brought with it a sense of trepidation. Perhaps subtle winds blew out of the North and caught the assembled banners, snapping them to attention in spurts before returning them to the limp form of inaction. The assembled men of war likely imagined that wind brought with it smells of home, or at least the comforts of the city of Calais. Forty kilometers south of that city, in the province of Artois, the flower of French Chivalry was mustered under the banner of King Charles VI. Each man of high birth jostled for the right to lead the vanguard, leveraging noble position and deeds in the name of the crown. The French nobles present brought with them tens of thousands of household knights and men at arms, all intent on ending the English threats to their homes. Arrayed across from them were the forces under command of English King Henry V. Numbering less than ten thousand men, the English knights, nobles, and fighting men looked no less the part of a chivalric fighting force. The morning of October 25th, 1415, Saint Crispin's Day by the liturgical calendar, brought with it one of the most important military engagements of the high Middle Ages. The Battle of Agincourt rocked the feudal world as a small force of men, mostly made up of common soldiers and warrior peasants, defeated the noble force of France.

Modern people remember this event so well they have made it a part of their own story by staging a reenactment of the battle every year. Stories of this engagement and others like it, such as tales of Bannockburn, the Horns of Hattin, and Bosworth Field, combined with Hollywood depictions of the medieval era, have created a glamorized

contemporary image of the noble knight in western collective memory. This portrayal is highly idealized, stemming from modern depictions and medieval writings like *Le Morte De Arthur*, the *Song of Roland*, and Geoffroi de Charny's treatises on chivalry. This image is sadly inaccurate. Knights were not always as virtuous as de Charny would have willed them, and their humble origins belied the noble status they eventually gained by the thirteenth century. Prior to the invasion of England by Duke William of Normandy in 1066, the warriors that would become knights had different iterations on the continent and in the British Isles, but they were universally of the common class. The journey from common mounted soldier to blessed warrior of God fighting for king and country represents an instance of sudden upward mobility by an entire rank of people. Between the years of 1066 and 1119 CE, primarily due to an emerging collective warrior identity among the nobility, the Catholic Church's attempts to contain and sanction violence, and the implementation of the Three Estates political philosophy, knights and their families in Western Europe rose from the highest stratification of the common folk to be included as the lowest incarnation of the nobility.

The geographical regions of this study have been limited to France and England and the surrounding kingdoms and other lands that they influenced such as Scotland and Flanders. These areas were the birthplace of knighthood, and their inhabitants were the first to lay claim to such status. This region also served as knighthood's primary developmental region, and this region was influenced heavily by the societies and cultures that occupied it. Once this study is complete, it would perhaps be useful to look further at other places that adopted knighthood, such as the Germanic Principalities or the

kingdoms of Spain after the Reconquista, but it is of primary importance to limit this study to these regions that served as principal homes for the institution.

This thesis takes a form similar to what one might see in a formal debate. First, the problem inherent in current, idealized understandings of knighthood must be identified. The first chapter will present a set of historiographical cases that either wrongly or insufficiently frame the current understandings of the origins and transformation of knighthood. Focusing primarily on the challenges of the timing, language and translations, and perceptions of knightly status, these issues set the stage for the necessity of this study. Tied up in this are the words, and meanings of the words, used to describe knights, so Chapter One will also clearly outline the definitions for this argument by tracing the etymology of the words used to describe warriors, both noble and common, during the period in question: 1066 to 1119 CE. Chapters Two and Three will seek to alleviate these errors, both historiographical and translational, by placing commoners, nobles, and knights in their proper historical context and more fully examining the people, institutions, ideals, and events that shaped their wider world. I will argue that the transition of common warrior knights to knightly nobility occurred earlier than historians have previously recognized. Chapter Four will demonstrate the nature of status and power sharing and will give the foundation for how the status of knighthood and nobility changed due to changes in power sharing. Chapter Five will deal with the final major factor that led to this change: the involvement of the Catholic Church and the call for Crusade. Chapter Six will deal with the ultimate expression of these changes in the world of Crusade, the formation of the Military Orders, specifically the Knights Hospitaller and the Knights Templar. These chapters will be summarized in a conclusion

that will demonstrate why this impact is meaningful, and how a new, more nuanced understanding of this transformation can aid in the more perfect understanding of the period.

To accomplish this, primary documents from the time have been utilized and re-interpreted to give new understanding of this change in status of knights, from the highest ranks within the peasantry to the lowest rank of the nobility. Drawing primarily on documents written by churchmen during and prior to the First Crusade, authors such as Robert the Monk, and Bernard of Clairvaux, and the anonymous knight who took the crusade and penned the *Gesta Francorum*, the transformation of knights from common to noble can be seen in the events surrounding the Crusades. Unfortunately, these authors tend to be overly hagiographic, giving their subjects undue adulation, at times, which means that these sources must be approached with a critical eye. For example, although Robert the Monk tended to overly praise figures like Bohemond I, Prince of Antioch, and depict the enemies of Christ as somehow less than human, his account still has much it can lend to this study on the evolution of knighthood so long as both author and reader keep this in mind. This thesis also draws heavily from anonymous chronicles to set the stage for this transformation, such as the *Carolingian Chronicle*, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, *The Domesday Book*, and others. Finally, writings from knights themselves, before, during, and after the First Crusade, help to fully demonstrate this transition of knights from common warriors to members of the noble military elite and the far-reaching impacts on society of this change.

CHAPTER 1

Historiographical Inconsistencies Concerning Knighthood



Figure 1: *The Accolade* by Edmond Leighton, 1901

The above figure is the 1901 painting by Edmond Leighton called *The Accolade*. It is representative of Leighton's works at the early part of the twentieth century, many of which depict romanticized medieval scenes. The image clearly shows a royal woman, perhaps a queen but most likely a princess, raising a man of means, his official origin unknown, to the rank of knight during a ceremony known as dubbing. While this image is beautiful, it is rife with historical inaccuracies. Leighton's works seem to capture and perpetuate common misunderstandings of the medieval world, and knighthood and nobility more specifically. They do not depict historical reality. For example, as women did not typically wield the power to elevate a man to knighthood, the odds are against this scene taking place. But when people today, especially people who do not have formal historical training, look at this image, they are led to believe that this scene is more or less the way knightings happened in the Middle Ages. This misunderstanding is further bolstered by movies, television, historical fiction novels, and video games, all of which present a version of what their creators think the medieval world was like. Sadly, this leaves most people with an irrevocably flawed view of the past.

When seeking to make a substantive change in the understanding of the knighthood, historians are up against a set of challenges wrought from two distinct, dominant narratives. The first narrative is one derived from a common, if inherently flawed, understanding of historical events influenced by fictive accounts meant to entertain, watered-down assessments of historical events made accessible to the public, and, in some cases, blatant attempts to dress up historical events to make them more exciting to audiences. While this challenge is the least academically relevant, it is perhaps the most stubborn obstacle a scholar faces when attempting to adjust the understanding of

the development of knighthood. For example, when discussing knights and knighthood, the average reader's mind jumps immediately to *King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table*, *Saint George and the Dragon*, *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, and, perhaps for current audiences, *Game of Thrones*. While these stories are admittedly fiction, they do carry with them a sense that the past must have been similar to these stories, and therefore those people who read, listen to, and watch them presume they have some understanding of historical knighthood. This can be a particularly difficult presumption for historians who seek to challenge these stories, particularly when no figure more fully encapsulates the Middle Ages in the modern imagination than the knight.

The second challenge comes from academic historians who, through their work, have built a mostly agreed-upon version of the development and characterization of knighthood. This dominant narrative can be changed, but as increasingly more voices have joined in agreement with said narrative, the task becomes increasingly difficult. Therefore, anyone seeking to change the dominant narrative, or in truth even to adjust it slightly, must first demonstrate a flaw in the current mode of thinking. This thesis argues that both dominant narratives—those of popular culture and of professional historians—have enough flaws to make the current understanding of the evolution of knights from common warriors to members of the nobility distorted and misconstrued.

The first source of the flaws in both dominant narratives can be traced back to incorrect translations of ancient and medieval documents by early twentieth-century historians. One of the most egregious and far-reaching examples of this misstep is the prolific number of mistranslations of texts written by the Roman historian Livy. While

Livy wrote long before the Medieval Period, mostly likely around the year 30 B.C.E., the translations of his works still have an influence on the way people thought about the Medieval era. On one hand, students' study of Rome in most history curriculums, especially at the secondary education level, comes before studying Medieval Europe. On the other, some European societies attempted to claim some of the glory of Rome for themselves, as evidenced by the adoption of the Justinian Code and the formation of the Holy Roman Empire. Also, as the translation errors that will be highlighted will show, some scholars have attributed medieval concepts to the Classical era. Reverend Canon Roberts' translation from 1905 is chief among these offenders, and his translation of Livy's *History of Rome* seems to be the go-to translation for most universities, thus spreading a misunderstanding of knighthood. Roberts' translation can be found as the standard text for universities across the English-speaking world including Boise State University, Tufts University, University of Arizona, University of Georgia, Reed College, and even Cambridge.¹ In this work, Roberts incorrectly translates the Livy's

¹ Livy, *The History of Rome*, trans. Reverend Canon Roberts. University of Arizona, accessed July 17, 2017, <http://www.u.arizona.edu/~afutrell/republic/livylinks.html>. An exhaustive list of the institutions that carry the same translation of this document would take up far too much space but a sampling to prove that this is not isolated can be found at the following websites:

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.02.0026>

<http://web.archive.org/web/20080719001908/http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/Liv2His.html>

<https://clas.franklin.uga.edu/sites/default/files/TeacherMaterialsSarahSchmidt.pdf>.

terms *equites* and *ordo equester* as knights.² While the *equites* of ancient Rome were horsemen of some means, that is where their commonality with medieval knights ended.

In the early twentieth century, translators sought to translate all the text within a document, even if words in the original language did not have direct equivalents in the language into which the document was being translated. Rather than admit the challenge, they just used whatever word they thought was close enough for modern readers to get the gist of the meaning, which is what Roberts did. In so doing, he has washed away many layers of nuance that are important to the understanding of the status of fighting men in the medieval period. Knighthood was a wholly Medieval invention, and blurring the lines of the origins of knighthood makes studying fighting men in both periods more difficult, obscuring the historical reality of their lives. As the study of linguistics and translations has matured, translators have become more comfortable leaving terms that cannot be perfectly translated into the new language in the document, while providing as full a definition of the term as is possible in their notes. This better preserves the meaning of original terms, rather than altering their meaning in what, at the time, may seem minor ways but that could turn out to be quite significant.

In sum, by translating Livy's term *equites* as *knights*, these translators promoted a fundamentally flawed understanding of the term and thereby have obfuscated historical reality. This obfuscation would not be so nearly egregious if it were not still affecting the dominant narratives of both Rome and Medieval Europe. Students all over the country

² Roberts mistranslates *equites* as knights in the following sections of Livy's work: 1.13, 1.36, 5.7, 5.12, 33.26, 22.13, 22.14, 22.15, 23.12, 23.31, 24.8, and so on throughout the document.

are using mistranslated documents to form their understandings of what knights were. While these misunderstandings likely aren't coming from classes on Medieval history, anyone who has taken an Ancient or Roman history class prior to taking coursework on the Medieval period are coming into those classes with the idea that knighthood and knights existed a thousand years before they did. Moreover, students who stop their study at the ancient world, never have those misperceptions countered by the historical facts of the Medieval era.

These translation mistakes are not limited to Roman documents. Translations from the early twentieth century of church documents, legal documents, and even Roll Calls, which are lists of military forces mustered, also contain such errors. Furthermore, any secondary work that uses these translations uncritically perpetuates the problem, which in turn makes tracing the origins of knighthood and the transformation of knights from common soldiers to ennobled warriors that much more difficult. For example, historian H.E.J. Cowdrey in his book *Popes, Monks, and Crusaders* makes many references to knights, and depending on the period he is referencing, they have varying degrees of appropriateness.³ Cowdrey is not the only historian to make such errors. Even

³ H.E.J. Cowdrey, *Popes, Monks and Crusaders* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1984), VII 43.

Cowdrey paginates using both Roman numerals for chapters followed by Arabic numeral page numbers. Throughout the course of this paper, I will attempt to mark where previous historians have erred in the use of their terminology. Here, specifically, Cowdrey missteps in his use of the word knight. He is referring to secular, common fighting men who are of some means but have yet to have the elevation of status we come to think of with the word knight. While within his writing, which concerns the church primarily, the word gets his meaning across, he fails to acknowledge the nuance of the social structures of the nobility and

renowned medieval historians like Georges Duby, F.M. Stenton, and Marc Bloch are not completely immune. These errors rest partly in the mistranslations of documents from the time, and partly in erroneous understandings of the timeline associated with the emergence and social rise of knights. These errors and their impacts on the understanding of knights and their evolution will be further explored in subsequent chapters.

By addressing these errors head on, this study will do several things. First, it will set the record straight on translations and contexts of translated words during this time. Second, once the proper context of how knights rose from the rank of commoner to that of noble is better understood, we will be able to build better models of social mobility during the Middle Ages. This may lead to a greater understanding of how other groups, such as wealthy merchants, also achieved noble status outside of birth. Third, it will aid popular audiences in understanding the past more accurately, rather than having their views colored by fanciful imaginings. And lastly, it will aid historians in building a more accurate narrative of the past. This final aim, which should be the goal of all historians, of telling as complete and accurate a narrative as possible, is perhaps the most valuable. The best place to start then, in designing a good narrative, is to look at words. Words are the sources that allow historians to weave their narratives, and therefore an understanding of those words is the foundation of any good history.

fighting commoners. Those distinctions are important and should remain at the forefront of the reader's mind.

As in a formal debate, definitions of words must be stated and agreed upon before any real argumentation can take place. For this case, the words used in primary documents that described the status, and shift in status, of warriors during the early Middle Ages must be traced, accurately translated, and correctly contextualized if the transformation that this study is advocating for is to be understood. Qualifying that change, when in fact some of the people to whom it was happening were unaware of the far-reaching alterations to social status occurring around them, is a difficult task.

First, the generally-accepted academic narrative of knighthood, in its simplest form, contends that knights arose sometime in the mid- to late-tenth century.⁴ The current narrative, however, does not do an adequate job of framing their reality. Prior to 1066, these early knights were common men of means who lived in Western Francia. For these men, being of means meant they had enough money to own more than one horse, for being a horse soldier was their primary occupation, and that they could afford their own arms and armor and maintain the lifestyle associated with being primarily a cavalryman.

I argue that after 1120 these men had undergone a change in social status, elevating them to the status of nobility in most places and something akin to noble status in others. The dominant narrative says this change takes place over the course of hundreds of years, culminating around the end of the twelfth century. The timeline here is problematic, as are the causes. According to renowned historian Georges Duby, the line between knight and noble “seems to have vanished quite abruptly,” around the year 1200

⁴ This narrative can be seen in works by the majority of historians writing about the period, including Georges Duby, HEJ Cowdrey, David Crouch, Maurice Keen, and more.

CE.⁵ He goes on to claim that it's a muddling of the line between social ranks, specifically the distinction between men who owned castles and fighting men who manned them and the attitudes of the aristocracy towards knighthood that facilitated this sudden change.⁶ This narrative and timeline are what this study seeks to change. The idea that knights suddenly became noble with little mechanism other than a sudden change of attitude is erroneous. As this study will show, this change happened much faster and had identifiable mechanisms by which this change happened. Second, and perhaps most important to keep in mind for this study, there must be a clear definition of what counts as nobility, especially since that is the end goal for knights. This study is demonstrating the timeline and methods by which knights became noble. For this study, nobility is best defined as a ruling class, typically associated with land ownership and governance, marked by hereditary or honorary title, and owing service to either a more powerful lord or a member of royalty.⁷

Now that the preliminary definitions are in place, a modern assimilation of the contemporary writings and chronicles of the time reveals these changes and when they began and ended. Historians have the benefit of hindsight and a wide, sweeping view of history across many regions and interconnecting events to highlight these changes. Using the documents people wrote about their own time can reveal not just social changes, but

⁵ Georges Duby, *The Chivalrous Society*, trans. Cynthia Postan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 178.

⁶ Duby, 159.

⁷ This is my definition but fits well with those used by historians cited in this thesis, including Georges Duby, Constance Bouchard, and H.E.J. Cowdrey.

also how the people who lived them felt about those changes, or if they noticed them at all. The writings of people of the past have one further clue to offer us: the words themselves. No analysis of the shifting social climate among the nobility and the rise of knights would be complete without first analyzing the etymology of the words used to describe them.

On the French side of things, the evolution of the words used to describe knights has already been traced by Georges Duby, and on the Anglo-Saxon side by F.M. Stenton and David Crouch. It is appropriate then to include here a summarization of their work, before explaining their relevancy. Georges Duby traced the evolution of the words used to describe knights in his book *The Three Orders: Feudal Society Imagined*, published originally in 1978. Using language from charters, Duby says historians can set two very clear chronological markers for tracing the emergence of knights in society. In 1025, the Latin word *miles*, which is the word used to refer to knights, began to appear with regularity in French charters. In these early uses, the word describes a common warrior of means, who has a horse, arms, and armor. Mounted cavalymen were not noble in their own right at this time nor did they have any trappings of nobility, like coats of arms or titles, that set them apart initially. This, according to Duby, is the benchmark for the etymological shift in how French people both wrote and thought about knights, moving from this concept of a common mounted soldier to the noble horseman that most modern people think of when they hear the word *knight*.⁸ Despite the fact that the word *miles*

⁸ Georges Duby, *The Three Orders: Feudal Society Imagined* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 294.

appears in legal documents earlier (at least as far back as 971 and possibly even earlier) French legal documents from 1025 onwards contain some of the most complete instances where the term *miles* arises in a context that describes the type of common people who had not yet made the social transition into the knighthood we recognize today.⁹ The second marker is the year 1170. By this time in France all knights, according to Duby, were stylized as *miles*, and all of them had an additional form of address attached to their name: *dominus*. The direct English translation of this word is “lord,” but context lends some clues in this instance about how the word should be translated. In these cases, the Latin translates to the French *messire*, or in English: sir.¹⁰ This is the same period when the word *armiger*, or squire, came into use to describe men who ought to be knights, due to their training and birth, and were not, either due to age, particularly among the very young sons of nobles and other knights, or simply because they had yet to be dubbed. It is Duby’s contention that this word’s rise in usage corresponded directly with a desire by those using the word to describe themselves to ensure that they, although title-less, were not in any way confused with the common people.¹¹

⁹ Duby, *The Chivalrous Society*, 159. Duby discusses the charters in the body of his texts but does not cite them in notes or bibliography, making them difficult to track down. In an attempt to locate the charters Duby references, all that could be located are other historians simply quoting Duby instead of the charters themselves. For instance, in *Knights at Court*, by Aldo D. Scaglione, University of California Press, 1991, in his notes for Chapter 1 on page 330, the author simply quotes the exact passage from Duby and moves on.

¹⁰ Duby, *The Three Orders*, 294.

¹¹ Duby, *The Three Orders*, 294-5.

Looking at both the words used in these documents and, perhaps more importantly, how they were used, we can trace a line between the legal adoption of the term *miles* in 1025 and its full adoption, meaning its common use in other types of writing like church documents, letters, and diaries, in France by 1170. Duby's research, especially around the important abbey of Cluny, shows that only seven years after *miles* began appearing more frequently in legal use around 1025, it had replaced or at very least mingled with other previously common legal terms for vassals subordinate to nobles, such as *vassus* or *fidelis*. It also took on similar contextual meaning to the word *nobilis*, which is a cognate for the word noble and carried with it the context for assigning office by virtue of birth.¹² In the years leading up to 1075, it increasingly appears legal documents and charters by those who could claim the title, by means and occupation, and who were attempting to set themselves apart from the commoners, and particularly in its formal address form of *messire* or sir. During this time, scribes "acquired a habit of applying it systematically to all men who occupied a certain position."¹³ That position was of status elevated and set apart from peasants and other commoners, if not quite to the status of noble.

Regardless of its use in legal documents, according to Duby, the word *miles* was not used in non-legal writings or common documents until around 1075. After the Norman conquest, however, the use of the word suddenly ballooned. In the closing years of the eleventh century, Duby notes three important changes in the way *miles* was used

¹² Duby, *The Chivalrous Society*, 159.

¹³ Duby, *The Chivalrous Society*, 159.

by contemporary writers and those they were writing about. “On the one hand, the very highest lords of the region began at that time to personally call themselves knights in the charter which were drawn up in their name.”¹⁴ This indicates that at the highest rung of nobility, those assuming the title of knight sought to evoke the meaning of the word in relation to themselves. Here, then, we see nobility willingly and eagerly adopting the idea of knighthood into their ranks simply by naming themselves knights and thus granting other knights a form of nobility by association. “On the other hand, in certain contexts, the description comes henceforth to refer not so much to an individual’s position as to that of an entire family unit. The implication is that the social distinction bestowed by the title was from then onwards considered to be the attribute of a family through whom it could be transmitted from one generation to the next,” Duby contends.¹⁵

This second step in the later part of the eleventh century shows an adoption and ennobling of the position of “knight.” The inclusion of knights among the members of prominent noble families combined with the granting knighthood as an inheritable form effectively made the title of knight part of nobility. “Lastly, from that time on, scribes, when drawing up lists of witnesses, took care to contrast two groups of laymen—on one side the knights, *milites*, and on the other the peasants, *rustici*.”¹⁶ Duby goes on to say that the uses of the words included in the charters in the last part of the eleventh century paint a picture of “knighthood as a coherent body, compact, closely defined by family

¹⁴ Duby, *The Chivalrous Society*, 160.

¹⁵ Duby, *The Chivalrous Society*, 160.

¹⁶ Duby, *The Chivalrous Society*, 160

and hereditary characteristics, and a group which had attached itself to the higher echelons of the nobility and, as a consequence, had identified itself with the entire lay aristocracy.”¹⁷

At least in France, the words, and the meaning of the words, used to describe knights had changed by the outset of the First Crusade in 1096 CE. Duby took his study of the records in Cluny and applied his conclusions across the French kingdom as a whole. His findings generally told the same story of the use and propagation of the term *miles*, even if some areas were slightly slower to adopt the new terms than others. Duby also tracked other words used to describe knights, such as *cavallarius*, *bellator*, and the French word *chevalier*, and in all cases, he found that the meanings of those words changed the same way as *miles*, and in roughly the same period.¹⁸ The nobility had identified themselves in concert with the mounted warriors that, a century before, would simply have been vassals in their service. By association, they elevated those warriors and in doing so, granted them a piece of their nobility in turn.

In France, it took longer for the everyday reality of knights and nobles to catch up to their newly found legal identity. In practice, the dissemination of things like coats of arms and banners and the like took the better part of the first half of the twelfth century.¹⁹ However, just because these new knights did not have all the visual accoutrement of nobility did not mean that their noble status was any less real in their own eyes or in the

¹⁷ Duby, *The Chivalrous Society*, 160.

¹⁸ Duby, *The Chivalrous Society*, 161-9.

¹⁹ Duby, *The Chivalrous Society*, 173.

eyes of their contemporaries during the early years of the twelfth century. Their offices, roles, and responsibilities attached them to the nobility and demonstrated their shared identity markers with the nobility.²⁰

The English story is far more complicated. For one, there are more languages that need to be reconciled. Documents in Danish, early English, and other Germanic and Celtic languages, as well as Latin, need to be tracked before the Norman conquest. Then, when William the Conqueror invaded England, he added French, and a stronger focus on Latin to the mix. So, while Duby's tracking of French etymological uses of the words that described knights and knighthood is relatively straightforward, F.M. Stenton and David Crouch had their work cut out for them when addressing Anglo-Saxon England. In addition to the languages being more numerous and diverse, there were two different political systems at work that clashed violently from 1066 to 1070, and it is only after the dust settled from the Norman invasion that anything approaching a cohesive system of knighthood, imported to England from Normandy, can be recognized as being in place.

Before 1066, England had its own form of nobility structured in a far looser manner than did the powerful duchies and counties that made up France, and Normandy in particular. It was into this society that William the Conqueror brought the concept of knighthood. England had men that the invaders, and perhaps later scholars, might call "knights", but using that word would be improper. Knighthood, especially as we know it, in the common, if flawed, image of the noble knight in shining armor, did not develop in

²⁰ Duby, *The Chivalrous Society*, 174-77.

England, but was rather imported to England by William in a relatively mature form.²¹ Crouch does not agree with Duby's overall assessment of the development of the French social standings of knights, which will be discussed more later, but he does agree that that all of the warriors who came to England with William who identified as knights shared a collective culture. The basis for this culture centered around the vocation of making war and carried with it a status that elevated them above other common warriors but not yet to noble status. Crouch also goes on to say that this pervading knightly culture was likely what gave the invading Norman army its observable level of cohesion both on and off the field of battle.

According to Crouch, the words that the native Anglo-Saxons used to grapple with this foreign concept of knighthood are telling. For example, in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, there appears to be a struggle to qualify the meaning behind the future Henry I's coming of age ceremony in 1086. The chronicle describes him as being dubbed a *ridere*. This word makes a brief appearance in Anglo-Saxon writings to attempt to describe French knighthood, and its cognate *ritter* is the word that the German states eventually used, once the concept of knighthood spread there in the latter half of the twelfth century.²² Crouch goes on to say that "earlier there is a reference to the building of castles across England and the filling of them with objectionable 'castlemen', which might well be another attempt to make sense of knightly garrisons. But in the end the

²¹ David Crouch, *The English Aristocracy 1070-1272: A Social Transformation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 3.

²² Crouch, *The English Aristocracy*, 6.

word that came to denote what we call the ‘knight’ was its onomastic ancestor, the Old English ‘*cniht*’.”²³ The adoption of this word to label mounted fighting men of status demonstrates how the late eleventh century English thought about, and understood, knighthood. Prior to 1066, *cnihtas* were paid retainers maintained by great men. These retainers were paid to fight, and to lead forces comprised of less professionalized common soldiers. These great men, who can be identified as Anglo-Saxon equivalents of French nobles, gave their retainers status by association in the same way that serving a particularly powerful noble in France would, but they had no special social standing beyond this. They were, for the most part, like the men of *Beowulf*, who accompanied their lord out of a close friendship or kinship and fought for him in return for monies or glory.²⁴ But while such warriors may have gained wealth and fame, their roles did not inherently entitle them to any sort of noble standing. The knights that William brought into England with him certainly reflected aspects of the Anglo-Saxon retainer tradition, but the English did not yet have a frame of reference for this uniquely French social standing of the knight.²⁵

William’s importation of a form of feudalism to the island changed the way the English saw, and fulfilled, oaths to their lieges. When looking at England in a post-conquest framework, the immediate source of information that comes to mind to consult is *The Domesday Book*. Georges Duby and other scholars have mined this work for what

²³ Crouch, *The English Aristocracy*, 7.

²⁴ *Beowulf*, trans. Seamus Heaney (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 2000), 15.

²⁵ *Beowulf*, 15.

it might tell us about the English adaptation and integration of knights. Crouch, on the other hand, disputes *The Domesday Book's* usefulness in this area precisely due to the challenges inherent in the language used. He instead looked to other writings, including those of an Italian physician living in England named Faricius. In Faricius's writings from the 1080s, he describes knights as being neither common nor noble, but rather occupying some kind of middle ground.²⁶ Additionally, roll calls from 1100 show that free English landholders were being increasingly placed in the *chevalier* category by the clerics who scribed them. Many of these landholders attempted to change their lifestyle and outward appearance to match this new, more French identity. By as early as the 1070s, Englishmen were serving their new king militarily in France, indicating that some had rapidly integrated into this new identity.²⁷ And while its wholesale integration across England took more time, it took no more than a generation for the words *chevalier*, *miles*, and *cniht* to permeate writings on the island. This adoption and integration of these words by writers of the time was done by the time Pope Urban called for his crusade in 1095, as evidenced by use of the words *chevalier* and *cnihtas* to describe Englishmen serving under William prior to the call for Crusade.²⁸

Clearly, the words used to describe knights show us the evolution of the social rank of a knight, both in England and in France, from a common military man to a low-ranking noble. In most cases, the meanings of the words used to designate a knight start

²⁶ Crouch, *The English Aristocracy*, 8.

²⁷ Crouch, 8-12.

²⁸ Crouch, *The English Aristocracy*, 8-12.

to shift before new words are required to describe something that the old words do not quite encapsulate. The notable exception to that is England, where the new words are imported, and ultimately, they end up changing an old word's (*cniht*) meaning to fit the new office. This peculiarity is due to the importation of the French language into England, its use in administration, and its adoption by the English nobility. Since William replaced almost the entirety of the ruling class of England with Normans loyal to him, the language spoken by the ruling rank of England took a sudden, and dramatic turn towards French. For hundreds of years following the Conquest, the English nobility spoke French as a symbol of their status. The lay people on the other hand, continued to develop English as their native language. It would not be until the later part of the Hundred Years War that attitudes among the English elite would begin to change to reject French language and culture. In the interim the people needed a word to describe their supposed protectors. And thusly, we have the word "knight" showing up in the varying ranks of the nobility, both in England and in France as nobles started calling themselves knights.

CHAPTER 2

Stratifying the Noble Rank

In most political systems, it is common for people to struggle to establish a hierarchy among offices and individuals, even among those who formally enjoy equal rank. Tensions can become elevated when one's position within that hierarchy impacts opportunities for governance and power. This was no different during the middle ages, when nobles all over western Europe sought to establish and gain rank among their peers. This was intentional, if not by political design, then surely by those who sought to distinguish themselves from their social peers. On occasion this stratification was violent, as it was when William the Conqueror invaded England and brought with him a more continental form of social organization and governance. More often though, those nobles with the will and the means to improve their standing pushed for such stratification.

Initially this stratification can be seen in its base form right from the establishment of the Medieval monarchies of western Europe. This bifurcation of the ruling rank came from the simple, perhaps obvious, split between royalty and nobility. Royalty are direct family members of the king. The king and queen, their children, and the king's parents and siblings all were considered royal by association. The king's children and siblings were addressed as prince or princess and often also held other noble titles beyond their royal rank. Any extended family members, such as cousins of the king or his in-laws, were granted noble holdings as a matter of course. This was repeated in a traceable pattern across most of western Europe, for the duration of each kingdom's

monarchies, and is even present in England today.²⁹ The inter-royal tensions were only an issue when the throne was at stake. For instance, when King Pepin the Short of the Franks died in 768, his kingdom was split in half by his successors. King Charles, known better as Charlemagne, took half and the other half was taken to Charles' younger brother, Carloman. This splitting of the kingdoms was an early answer to establishing dynasties and ensuring smooth transitions of power, but it was not a sustainable solution, despite being the most common tradition of male inheritance, which pre-dated the Carolingians. Eventually this system was replaced by the ruling class with primogeniture, where the oldest son inherited the kingdom, and the rest only enjoyed the rank of prince. Separate from royal titles were the other myriad of noble titles that made up the rest of the ruling class of medieval Europe. This designation, the split between royal and noble, goes even farther back than the Carolingian Empire. There was not yet the variety of titles and rigid structure that came to separate the ruling ranks farther at that time. Nobles instead are referred to in the *Carolingian Chronicles*, specifically the *Royal Frankish Annals*, simply as magnates.³⁰ Magnates was a simple term, that referred to nobles as a whole as great men. This is in stark contrast to later writings, especially

²⁹ For example, the sons of William the Conqueror held multiple titles, and his daughters married powerful nobles, such as his daughter, Adele, who married Count Stephen of Blois. At the same time in France, Philip I's son Philip was made Count of Mantes. In France this pattern continued down to Napoleon, who made his brother, Joseph, King of Spain.

³⁰ *Carolingian Chronicles*, trans. Bernhard Walter Scholz and Barbara Rodgers (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1970), 47.

during the crusades, when chroniclers painstakingly labeled every noble with their proper titles and honors.

In contrast, England's form of ruling class had a similar structure, but a markedly different application of the structure. England had yet to be unified under a central powerful ruler in the way that the Carolingian Franks had been. At roughly the same time, during the early parts of the 9th century, England was still divided into the seven kingdoms of the Heptarchy. The kingdoms of East Anglia, Essex, Kent, Mercia, North Umbria, Sussex, and Wessex all maintained their own small, individualized systems of political hierarchy. The places where the Danish form of government reigned were known by the Anglo-Saxons as the Danelaw. The Danelaw occupied the Eastern and Northern parts of England, including the Kingdoms of East Anglia, North Umbria, Essex, and part of Mercia. They were all governed in a similar manner, with each king appointing a series of *ealdormen*, the noble rank that would eventually come to be known as earls, as local governors under royal authority.³¹ This two-step, very direct, dissemination of royal authority worked on the smaller scales of the Anglo-Saxon Heptarchy.

As kingdoms in England got bigger and the areas that kings controlled got larger and more diverse, a larger, more codified bureaucracy was necessary. When Alfred the Great unified England, around the year 880, he became High King of England in title and had to work very hard to maintain it in practice. This required not only keeping the other

³¹ David Pelteret, "The Ealdormen of Alfred's Reign." (Leeds: International Medieval Congress University of Leeds, 2004), 2.

kings happy and on his side but also making sure that their direct nobles enjoyed much the same benefits as they did before the unification. The *ealdormen* were responsible for leading the local armies, which made it doubly important for Alfred to keep on their good side when the Danes and Norwegians were constantly invading England.³² The Anglo-Saxon English had been fighting the Danes and other Scandinavian peoples for control of the island for centuries. From well before Alfred unified England until Harold Godwinson defeated Harald Hardrada in 1066, control of England see-sawed back and forth between the two factions: Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian.³³

The heavy Danish influence, especially in the north-eastern parts of England known as the Danelaw, led to an etymological transformation in the word *ealdormen*. The Scandinavians had among them a chieftain rank they called *jarl*, which to them would have meant something like the *ealdormen* of England. A *jarl* was by dictionary definition a Norse or Danish chief, and in that role a man served as a form of Scandinavian noble. *Jarls* certainly would have recognized their similarities to the *ealdormen* when they came across them. Due to the close nature of their political systems, these men would have felt a kinship of title, if not of blood. These titles mixed, and *ealdormen* was shortened to *eorl*, which eventually became earl. These men surrounded themselves with common soldiers who served as their direct body guards and warrior companions. Called a *comitatus* in Latin, such a warband served to give each *jarl* or *thegn* a dedicated set of warriors he could rely on to share his glory and keep him safe.

³² Pelteret, "The Ealdormen of Alfred's Reign," 3.

³³ David Howarth, *1066: Year of the Conquest* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), 31-36.

These retainers were men of elevated status due to their association with nobility, but they carried no noble status of their own. This was similar to the functions household knights served in European noble houses and will be discussed more fully in later chapters.

The Latin term used for noble men like the *jarls* and *ealdormen* men was *comes*, which was also used to describe French counts. While counts and earls had similar standing among the English and the French, these are distinct titles particular to a region. This makes trying to parse out some of the chronicles difficult, but once the nomenclature is settled then establishing the stratification of noble rank among the English and primarily the French model on the continent becomes much easier.³⁴

After the invasion of England in 1066, England and France shared additional noble titles that moved beyond the royal family. The Latin word *dux* (leader), and its cognate duke, carries with it an implied importance that places dukes at the top of the noble hierarchy. Dukes were the nobles with the best land and the most power. Some dukes in France even had more effective power than the French kings they served, even if they did not wield more public authority. While this was not explicit in the early middle ages, the men referred to as *duces* quickly used their increased social standing to increasing their land holdings and their land's importance to stratify themselves above those called *comes*, *eorls*, or *jarls*. William himself was a *dux* of a large and important piece of French land: Normandy. Normandy was granted to his grandfather by the French

³⁴ Contrary to previous translators, I have allowed the words to stand on their own in historical context rather than attempting to make words fit where they do not match.

king, and the privileges that came with it allowed William to sit at the royal court among other *duces* and *comes* exercising the authority that came with the implicit superiority attached to his title.³⁵ The second title William brought with him to England was baron. This title formed the lowest stratification of nobility in William's native France and was imported as such to the English. Men who acquired the title of baron initially came up into the noble rank through military service and due to their proficiency were granted a noble title, and land associated with it, that could be handed down to their descendants as a reward.³⁶

As noble titles in Western Europe developed, the distinctions between those noble ranks became more clearly defined. While this was reflected fully in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the social instability of the eleventh century kept this hierarchy of rank from solidifying earlier. Constant combat, both at home and especially in the Holy Land, kept powerful men's status shifting. The relative power of nobles and royals both internally in emerging collective societies, and externally between them, meant that, year to year, wieldable power and authority changed, which stands to reason that the status of those in the system changed as well. As the stratification became more rigid, more noble titles were added by royals and powerful nobles to fill the widening gaps in power and authority. Over time we see titles like *marquis* (or marcher lord), baronet, and viscount enter the noble lexicon as members of the Second Estate.

³⁵ Howarth, *1066: Year of the Conquest*, 64-7.

³⁶ Crouch, *The English Aristocracy*, 48-51.

This instability within the hierarchy of nobility was the societal reality that allowed the knights to gain entry into the nobility. Danes, Anglo-Saxons, Normans, and a myriad of other peoples were plunged into roiling social upheaval by the repeated invasions of England. Social instability followed on the continent as William's new-found role as a king as well as a duke caused a drastic rise in anxiety among William's fellow French nobles. William also used the invasion of England to elevate thousands of his men, all loyal to him, to nobility by granting them land tenureship in England. It was a time when the social ranks of many kingdoms were in turmoil. New noble titles were being introduced to both England and the continent, both from cultural exchange as was the case for Baron, and by intentional creation by royals and more powerful nobles like the *marquis*, and men on both sides of the channel were attempting to find a niche for themselves. If societal structure had been more rigid, there may not have been room among noble rank to include the base fighting men that became knights. But turmoil was the order of the day, and room was made by those with the will to move, and the intelligence and cunning to see and seize their opportunity.

CHAPTER 3

Peasant Warriors and Common Soldiers

The service of common soldiers in early and high medieval societies is a well-documented reality. Drawing from pre-medieval traditions like those of Ancient Rome and the tribes and peoples such as the Gauls and the Goths, the kingdoms of the Middle Ages that succeeded Rome used a similar format of common warriors being led by a commander who enjoyed special status because of his successful command. Before delving into the elevation of military elites to the status of social nobility, there are several issues that must be addressed to clearly define station and rank prior to this upward mobility. As discussed previously, translators and historians of earlier generations, frequently used words anachronistically that lent fighting men inappropriate connotations of social rank. Additionally, there must be a more nuanced distinction made between the two terms, commoner and peasant, since they are normally used interchangeably. The difference is fundamental to understand the social reality of the elevation of knights to nobility, by placing them in their proper initial context. In the context of medieval military service, this cannot be done as the connotations of both words obfuscate the reality of station and service.

Distinguishing between peasant and commoner in the context of medieval military service is the first step towards a better understanding of the emergence and elevation of the knight. Both the dictionary definition and the implied connotation of the word “peasant” describes a person who works the land. Peasants are defined in the

Merriam-Webster dictionary as poor farmers who typically engaged in subsistence farming and occupied a low social rank. A commoner, however, is any non-clergy member not of high birth. This describes anyone occupying what Johan Huizinga called the Third Estate.³⁷ Huizinga described the medieval European social structure as being made up of distinct social ranks, known as the Three Estates. The First Estate, or those who pray, was made up of members of the Catholic Church and its subsidiary organizations. The Second Estate, or those who fight, was made up of the ruling nobility and their families. Finally, there was the Third Estate, or those who work. This final rank of people included a wide range of identities throughout the Middle Ages, but is most commonly associated with peasant farmers. While this characterization is mostly correct, it lacks a nuance that is important. The Third Estate also included merchants, craftsmen, administrators, early medical professionals, and every other individual that was not lucky enough to be included in the First or Second Estates. Most important to this discussion is that the Third Estate included common warriors in the form of guards, soldiers in the employ of nobles and royals, and mercenaries. While these men were certainly

³⁷ Johan Huizinga, *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*, trans. by Rodney Payton and Ulrich Mammitzsch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 62-63. Huizinga's popularization of the Three Estates wasn't a new concept nor was he alone in recognizing it. Duby called this division The Three Orders. Nor were they ascribing a modern look back at the past. At the beginning of the first chapter of Duby's *The Three Orders*, he quotes two eleventh-century Frenchmen as having described the world in the same way. These two, Adalbero, Archbishop of Rheims, and Gerard, Bishop of Cambrai, both saw the world divided into three categories: *orare, pugnare, and agricolari-laborare*, or those who pray, fight, and work (13).

commoners, they lacked the essential connection to farming that would have made them peasants.

After the collapse of Roman imperial authority in Gaul, which is modern-day France, the Merovingian Empire took control. The Merovingians ruled over the Franks from the withdrawal of the Romans until their empire collapsed and gave way to the Carolingian Empire of Charlemagne's family. Frankish armies during this time set the model that later medieval kingdoms would follow. Gregory of Tours describes an event in his *History of the Franks* in 585 CE when Merovingian King Guntram laid siege to the city of Poitiers, which was rebelling against him.³⁸ King Guntram's army was made up of men who owed service to the local lords, usually identified by their town of origin. Gregory of Tours paints a picture of a large army of men made up of peasant levies who only fought when called by their lord to do so. These men provided their own weapons and were led by professional commanders who held high official military or administrative office, like that of count.³⁹ Here we see the formation of armies of mixed men. Some titled men were present, but most of the fighters were commoners who owed military service to their lord who governed their land. This model was tweaked in the following centuries, but medieval armies, at their core, closely resembled these early Frankish fighting forces.⁴⁰

³⁸ Gregory of Tours, *The History of the Franks*, trans. Lewis Thorpe (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974) quoted in Helen Nicholson, *Medieval Warfare: Theory and Practice of War in Europe 300-1500* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 39.

³⁹ Gregory of Tours, 39.

⁴⁰ Gregory of Tours, 39.

The Frankish Empire of the Carolingians, which succeeded the Merovingian dynasty as the dominant power in Western Europe, continued to develop and use common soldiers as the backbone of their military might. The *Carolingian Chronicles*, document a century of Frankish history, from 741-843 CE and are an excellent source of information regarding the makeup of Frankish armies. The *Royal Frankish Annals* are an unadorned chronicle, mostly likely by multiple authors, and many historians believe they are of an official nature, written by people close to Charlemagne's court.⁴¹ They were likely written as, and meant to be, an account of the deeds of Charlemagne and his nobles during the time the chroniclers were writing. The larger source, by the Carolingian historian Nithard, Charlemagne's grandson by his daughter Bertha, is a history of the war between the sons of Louis the Pious. Nithard's account is somewhat unusual, in that it is self-contained, follows a distinct theme, and he openly admits that he's writing with a bias and is attempting to control the narrative.⁴² The entries in the *Royal Frankish Annals* are relatively short and chiefly concern the actions of members of the royal family, and the content lends some insight as to how military campaigns were conducted. In the first entry from the year 741 CE, for example, the brothers Carloman and Pepin, who were Charlemagne's uncle and father respectively, "quickly gathered an army and besieged Laon."⁴³ In this passage the phrase "quickly gathered" is telling. It implies that Carloman and Pepin either did not have an army at hand or that they did not have much of a

⁴¹ *Carolingian Chronicles*, trans. by Scholz and Rogers (Ann Arbor MI: University of Michigan Press, 1970), 4-5.

⁴² *Carolingian Chronicles*, 22.

⁴³ *Carolingian Chronicles*, 37.

fighting force at all. As princes of the Franks, one might think they would have a regular fighting force under them. Nobles at this time maintained at least some fighting men on hand, even if they didn't have an entire army at their call. As princes, especially considering the amount of campaigning the Franks engaged in during this time, it makes sense to assume that Pepin and Carloman had at least some form of a standing army. If this had been a planned campaign, Pepin and Carloman would likely have issued summonses to their nobles to come, or send a proxy, with a certain number of fighting men to make up a campaigning force. For example, one of the oldest preserved examples of a royal calling on nobles for support for a planned campaign is the letter from Charlemagne to Abbot Fulrad of Saint Quentin. In this letter, Charlemagne called for the abbot to "come to the aforesaid place, with all your men well-armed and prepared."⁴⁴ Charlemagne further ordered the abbot's men "Come, accordingly, so equipped with your men to the aforesaid place that thence you may be able to go well prepared in any direction whither our summons shall direct...so that each Horseman shall have a shield, lance, sword, dagger, bow and quivers with arrows."⁴⁵ This shows a great amount of forethought and planning in assembling troops when appealing to vassals for aid.

The context of the *Carolingian Chronicle* indicates that Pepin and Carloman's outing was not a planned campaign but rather a fighting force gathered in response to a sudden need. This passage does not indicate that they needed to call on fellow high-

⁴⁴ Charlemagne, "Letter to the Abbot of Saint Quentin," trans. by D.C. Munro, in *The Medieval Record: Sources of Medieval History*, ed. by Alfred J. Andrea (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co, 1997), 144.

⁴⁵ Charlemagne, "Letter to the Abbot of Saint Quentin," 144.

ranking nobles to gather their fighting forces, but rather they could summon one up from whomever was available. Based on the characteristics of the makeup of militaries of the time, this points directly toward a military force made up of commoners, whether those commoners were full-time soldiers or part-time fighters who typically had other jobs. This stands to reason if for no other reason that the distribution of nobles compared to commoners in any given area would be highly out of balance in favor of the common people. Any army raised in a given spot would by this reasoning be made up mostly of commoners. This contention is supported by the fact that in the year 747 CE, Grifo, Pepin's younger brother, "raised an army of natives" in Saxony.⁴⁶ In this case, raising an army of natives seems to imply that they were taken from the countryside from men that were readily available. If this is the case, which is highly likely, then it follows that those men would be predominately commoners. This army and dozens more like it were levied during Pepin's time on the Frankish throne. According to the *Carolingian Chronicles*, Pepin conducted a military campaign of some kind nearly every year he was king. In fact, between 742 when he and his brothers succeeded his father, and 768 when he died, the chronicles only detail six years of peace. Of his twenty-six-year reign, Pepin only spent six of them not actively campaigning. One year he only took off because his brother Carloman was retiring from political life to become a monk, and Pepin was assuming command of all his lands peacefully rather than by force. The time spent mustered in the army was a lot of time for commoners to spend away from their other work. To that end,

⁴⁶ *Carolingian Chronicles*, 38.

we see the necessity of the establishment of a more professional military made up of men who were still commoners but who left peasantry behind.

Pepin's son, Charlemagne, followed in his father's footsteps, spending more time out on campaign than he did in his home. The *Carolingian Chronicles* show the period of his reign in Western Europe to be violent and full of conflict both on the continent and in England. The Anglo-Saxon and Danish armies fighting over England were made up almost entirely of common warriors.⁴⁷ These societies did not yet have the rigid lines drawn between nobles and commoners, but, as discussed above, they observed similar social class standings to their continental counterparts. This means that, much like the Franks, many of the Danish and Anglo-Saxon armies were made up of commoners. However, these forces relied less on professional common warriors and more on the peasant soldiers than their Frankish counterparts. This is particularly true of the Anglo-Saxons.⁴⁸

This reliance on peasant warriors can be seen in the invention of the Anglo-Saxon *fyrð*. The Anglo-Saxon *fyrð* was a political invention well ahead of its time and was the start of an English military tradition that continued well through World War II. The *fyrð* was a fighting force made up almost entirely of peasants who were part-time soldiers when the need arose.⁴⁹ *Fyrð* service was owed to the local *thegn* and was to be given by what F.M. Stenton describes as "every able-bodied freeman" who would "fight, or

⁴⁷ Nicholson, *Medieval Warfare*, 39-40.

⁴⁸ Nicholson, 40.

⁴⁹ F.M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* (New York: Oxford at The Clarendon Press, 1947), 287.

attempt to fight, when their country was invaded.”⁵⁰ These peasant soldiers were only called upon in necessity to defend their homeland. During the early formation of the *fyrð*, it was extremely uncommon to see men fighting beyond the borders of their shire. However, as threats evolved, the men of the *fyrð* were forced to go farther afield. During several Danish invasions, many *fyrðs* from different shires combined to create a fighting force that could potentially stop an invading army. These peasant warriors did not adhere to the common image of the aristocratic warrior who was the companion of kings and *thegns* but never the less served as the backbone of the home guard of Anglo-Saxon England for centuries.⁵¹ Records suggest that while these warriors lacked most of the professional training that members of *comitati* warbands received, they could be quite effective under the leadership of their *ealdorman*.⁵²

Among the peasants of the *fyrð* were prosperous free land holders that Stenton says “possessed an equipment for war comparable with that of the undistinguished knight.”⁵³ This statement is problematic considering the period he was writing about. Stenton is one of the preeminent Anglo-Saxon historians and certainly the most renowned of his generation. However, drawing this comparison between the Anglo-Saxon freeholder and the “undistinguished knight” is fraught with complications. Chief among these problems is a sense of chronology. At the time Stenton is writing about, after

⁵⁰ Stenton, 287.

⁵¹ Eminent historians of Anglo-Saxon England, such as Stenton, do not give a date of origination for the *fyrð*.

⁵² Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 287-8.

⁵³ Stenton, 287-88

Alfred's unification of England in 878 but before the conquest of 1066, knights had yet to rise to noble status anywhere, essentially making them all undistinguished. However, he could be attempting to draw a comparison of the freeholder of the ninth and tenth centuries to the lowest levels of knights in the twelfth or thirteenth centuries.⁵⁴ This has its own problems, as the technologies and expectations of war gear for fighting men changed drastically over those three hundred years. Perhaps this is an innocent statement, simply meant to impress upon the reader that the Anglo-Saxon freeholders were capable warriors and held their own in the arms and armor department. Regardless, it is statements like these, and the above references to the *equites*, that demonstrate a need for parsing out exactly when and how knights rose through the social and military ranks. Regardless of ill-conceived comparisons, the freemen of means that accompanied the peasants in the *fyrð* were ready and able to fight and had their own equipment.

Eventually, *fyrð* service evolved from getting every able-bodied man out for a fight to a more selective call for service.⁵⁵ The *fyrð* developed into a system by which a third of its total number could be summoned, leaving the other two thirds of men at home in the fields until their rotation came up. This allowed the kings of England to keep a non-professional fighting force on hand without totally sacrificing the peasant's capacity

⁵⁴ Stenton's work is about England as a whole, so comparison between centuries could mean he is simply trying to show commonality between fighting men, or change over time. Most likely he was attempting to paint an unfamiliar personage, the Anglo-Saxon freeholder, in the same light as something familiar, a low-ranking knight.

⁵⁵ C. Warren Hollister, *Anglo-Saxon Military Institutions: On the Eve of The Norman Conquest* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1962), 23.

for producing food. The change allowed for a very rapid deployment of troops that were well supplied and knew the area in which they fought to combat whatever immediate threat arose against England. Kings and *thegns* could always call upon their entire *fyrd* in the less-common case of a large-scale invasion, but in most smaller-scale situations, they could be selective in calling up the best fighters from among a shire.⁵⁶ Ultimately this made these fighters better equipped and, in a way, more professional than those who were not selected and who only served in the great *fyrd*. Therefore by 1066, the *fyrd* that the king of England could call on would be equal to almost any single foreign invasion force.⁵⁷

What they were not equal to was the improbability of two near-simultaneous invasions. The *fyrd* proved more than a match for the Norwegian invasion of Harald Hardrada, King of Norway, in September of 1066. King Harold II of England, called Harold Godwinson, defeated Harald Hardrada and his English and Scottish allies at the battle of Stamford Bridge on September the 25th. This was to be the last successful engagement of an Anglo-Saxon king of England. The northern *fyrd* worked exactly as it should have, allowing King Harold Godwinson enough time to bring his southern levies north of York to engage the Norwegians. The combined *fyrd* and other more professional soldiers riding with Harold defeated the invading army and slew its leaders. The

⁵⁶ Hollister, 23. Hollister referred to the whole *fyrd* as the Great *Fyrd* and the more selective force gathered from the best men as the Select *Fyrd*.

⁵⁷ Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 573-5.

challenge the *fyrð* did not meet was the Norman invasion far to the south less than three days later.⁵⁸

There are a lot of historical counterfactuals that postulate the what-ifs of William of Normandy's famously tenuous invasion of England. When reading historical accounts of the voyage from Normandy to England, the timing of Harald Hardrada's invasion, and the circumstances by which William gained a foothold in England, it seems like it was made for fiction. However, history is sometimes better than a novel, and historians know that those things went just so for William. At the Battle of Hastings on October 14th, 1066, William defeated Harold Godwinson (who was killed by an arrow some historians believe was fired by one of his own men) and won the first decisive battle in his conquest of England. William brought with him Norman customs, forms of power sharing, feudalism, castle building, and perhaps his most important import, knighthood.

As discussed previously, the new noble ranks that William imported mixed with the old Anglo-Saxon titles and terms to create a unique stratification of nobility in England. Fighting for inclusion among the noble ranks was England's newest title: knight. In a previous chapter, the words that described knights were traced, and we saw that when these systems were mixed the definitions of those words shifted subtly to reflect a new social reality. Here we see Anglo-Saxon freeholders who owned land and war gear—common men—attempting to make their presence felt in this new structure.

Knighthood became the avenue by which the very best and most affluent of the common professional soldiers rose to be included among their social betters. There are

⁵⁸ Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 582-4.

records that show that soon after the conquest, native Englishmen were serving alongside Norman knights and likely in the same capacity, doing the same jobs and enjoying the same status, as those knights.⁵⁹ Despite the introduction of knights and feudal service to England, William kept the *fyrð*, seeing its usefulness should anyone attempt to wrest control of his kingdom from him. Nor did knighthood preclude military service for professional common soldiers. Rather, on both the island and the continent, noble ranks were shifting, and the need for more warriors was increasing as rapidly as noblemen could raise armies.

In the thirty years following the conquest of England, notions of military service and employment only grew in the hearts and minds of the common people who sought to leave toiling in the mud behind for greater opportunity serving in the armies of their lords. Change was coming, though people living during these thirty years did not know it, and a final series of events were about to be launched that would blow open the need for fighters who were willing to fight not just for their lord but soon for their own salvation.

The separation of status between knight and common warrior becomes apparent in the writings dating from the early part of the First Crusade, just thirty years after the Norman Conquest. Perhaps the best primary source of the First Crusade is the *Gesta Francorum et aliorum Hierosolimitanorum*, or *The Deeds of the Franks and Other Pilgrims Bound for Jerusalem*. The source of the document is unknown, as the author is never identified, but the most commonly accepted answer to the authorship points to it being the second son of a Norman noble house. Evidence does point to the authorship

⁵⁹ Crouch, *The English Aristocracy*, 8.

having been contemporary to the First Crusade or at least within living memory of the events described.⁶⁰ While there are varying theories on who may have written the *Gesta*, and even one that suggests it was possibly written by a production team distilling a variety of accounts, it is clear when looking at the vernacular that it was composed in Latin, which further speaks to the account's Western origin.⁶¹ The account itself comes in ten parts, or books, and begins with the initial call to crusade by Pope Urban II and culminates with the taking of Jerusalem. The prose itself is relatively devoid of flowery language and employs an economy of word choice. For this study, the lack of ornamentation is helpful in that it allows the historian to clearly see those who were elevated in status, since any mention of greatness or importance is not over-inflated.

For instance, in an account from the *Gesta Francorum*, the anonymous author describes Bohemond, a Norman prince in Italy, "taking to the cross," which is what contemporary people called pledging to go on crusade.⁶² Bohemond, who was helping his uncle, Count Roger of Sicily, besiege a rebellious town when he heard of crusade in June or July of 1096 CE., was greatly interested in the campaign to Jerusalem. When he first heard of the crusader armies, he asked some telling questions of the Franks who were passing through on their route to the Holy Land. "He then diligently inquired as to what type of weapons they fought with, what emblem of Christ they carried as they went their

⁶⁰ *The Deeds of the Franks and Other Jerusalem-Bound Pilgrims: The Earliest Chronicle of the First Crusades*, ed. and trans. by Nirmal Dass (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2011), 1-2.

⁶¹ *The Deeds of the Franks*, 6.

⁶² *The Deeds of the Franks*, 30.

way, and what war cry they shouted in battle.”⁶³ These questions show solid scrutiny of a military leader towards what we can assume was a hastily assembled force comprised mostly of commoners. Considering that most medieval armies were comprised of common fighting men, even when they had time to organize, it makes sense that any force gathered quickly would contain at least as many commoners as nobles, but likely more commoners.

Especially important is Bohemond’s question about the weapons carried. Arms and armor were symbols of status, and the better equipped a soldier was, the more likely he was to be of means and status. At this time, being of means did not automatically include one in a higher social rank, but at the outset of the First Crusade the boundaries between social ranks were breaking down, allowing for those who could to elevate themselves. Bohemond was satisfied with the answers he received, especially that the weapons they had would be sufficient, and he ordered his most expensive cloak to be turned into crosses. He took his men, both feudal vassals and his military force of commoners, to the Holy Land.⁶⁴

It is important to note here, that there are several translations of *Gesta Francorum*, and they differ in the translation of the French word *milites*. Most traditional translations translate this word to knight, as the translation by Rosalind Hill does.⁶⁵ In the most recent translation, the translator, Nirmal Dass, chooses to translate *milites* as

⁶³ *The Deeds of the Franks*, 30.

⁶⁴ *The Deeds of the Franks*, 30.

⁶⁵ *The Deeds of the Franks and Other Jerusalem-Bound Pilgrims: The Earliest Chronicle of the First Crusades*, ed. and trans. by Rosalind Hill (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1967), 21.

warriors, saying in a note that using knight would be inappropriate since that word carries with it a connotation that is still a century away from being a reality.⁶⁶ It seems that Dass falls into the same camp as historians Cowdrey, Crouch, and others who believe that knighthood did not fully come into nobility until the end of the twelfth century. But my contention is that in the context of the First Crusade it is appropriate to use the word “knight”, since so many of the writers of the time, as will be fully discussed later, seem to place knights in a separate category from both common foot soldiers and nobles.

Before this transition can be fully understood, we must look at one final piece, and that is the methods of power sharing between the varying levels of social rank. These methods of power sharing shed light on how the eventual transition of knights from commoner to noble was conducted. They explain how knights gained additional status to start with that allowed that transition to happen by the time of the Crusades.

⁶⁶ *The Deeds of the Franks*, trans. Nirmal Dass, 125.

CHAPTER 4

Pre-Chivalric Forms of Power Sharing

In the Middle Ages, those with power and authority drew men of lesser status to them through various modes of power sharing. This sharing of power took a variety of forms. Occasionally it was simply sharing of wealth, which has always formed a base for power. Sharing of wealth was actualized in many ways, from gift giving, to land grants, lowering of taxes, or waiving of fees, and on the largest scales the granting of fiefs and incomes. Power also was shared in the forms of fosterage, or the exchanging of noble children to be raised in other households, the sharing of privilege, and the raising of upcoming men to noble status.

Prior to the Norman invasion in 1066, England was under Anglo-Saxon control. Years of vying for control of the island with the Danish kings led to a blended form of government unique to England. Anglo-Saxon England was largely decentralized. Even after Alfred the Great unified England and was called High King of England, the kings of the Heptarchy retained local control. The kings of Mercia, East Anglia, Kent, Wessex, Essex, Sussex, and North Umbria maintained their own nobles and their own fighting forces. Under these kings, nobles called *thegns* controlled their own smaller regions of land and employed their own local warriors. These bands of trusted warriors were called the *comitati*. The warriors of a *comitatus* share some aspects of their organization with that of the knights that followed them. They were directly tied to a nobleman, by either

blood ties or oaths of fealty and service, and the nobles engaged in methods of power sharing with them.

One of the clearest examples of power sharing came in the form of gift giving. *Thegns* would give the members of their *comitatus* prime pieces of wealth captured in battle as tokens of loyalty and in thanks for their service. One of the best surviving examples of this process is from the epic poem *Beowulf*, likely written between 975 and 1025. While this account is fictive, it is nonetheless accurate in its portrayals of power and wealth sharing among the Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon *comitatus*. Early in the poem, King Hrothgar, who waged many successful campaigns, grew a mighty force through his actions, and so he built a grand hall where he would “dispense his God-given goods to young and old.”⁶⁷ In this great hall, which he called Herot, he “doled out rings and torques at the table.”⁶⁸ The king of the Danes was so prolific a gift giver that he earned the title “Ring giver.”⁶⁹ After Beowulf defeated Grendel in Herot, Hrothgar announced that he counted Beowulf as a son and presented him with many gifts. “Then Halfdane’s son presented Beowulf with a gold standard as a victory gift, an embroidered banner; also, breast-mail and a helmet; and a sword carried high, that was both precious object and token of honor.”⁷⁰ Gift giving shared wealth, which is a form of power sharing all its own, but more importantly, gifts given in public explicitly recognized the deeds of

⁶⁷ *Beowulf*, 7.

⁶⁸ *Beowulf*, 7

⁶⁹ *Beowulf*, 25.

⁷⁰ *Beowulf*, 69.

the recipient. This recognition, especially from those who held high status, elevated those who were recognized by association.

Stephen Evans notes that *Beowulf* further demonstrates the importance of gift giving and treasure sharing by going as far as to condemn those who fail to do so. In the section where Hrothgar gives Beowulf advice, he tells him a story of a particularly loathsome lord who, among his other faults, “never a ring did he give to Danish men for glory.”⁷¹ Evans notes that everything this unseemly lord, called Heremod, did should be interpreted as the antithesis of what a good lord should be and how they should act. Hrothgar also gave a hypothetical example of a covetous king who, instead of giving out treasure and sharing his wealth with his people, kept it all to himself and saw the vitality of his kingdom wither away to nothing. Further, according to Evans, we can see the importance of treasure sharing reflected in the way the locations are represented. In Hrothgar’s hall, everyone was happy, and until Grendel attacked, mead and mirth were the order of the day. In contrast, Grendel’s lair and the dragon’s horde were seen as dank, joyless places. While they were filled with the treasure of conquered foes and slain enemies, there was no happiness to be found. Compared with the hall of that hypothetical king who kept his treasure close, both the lair and the horde were diminished places where evil has taken root, rather than any kind of great place.⁷²

⁷¹ Stephen Evans, *Lords of Battle: Image and Reality of the Comitatus in Dark Age Britain* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1997), 113.

⁷² Evans, *Lords of Battle*, 113-4.

Power sharing in Anglo-Saxon England took another, more familial form. Fosterage of young members of noble houses was a common way of cementing alliances between *thegns*. This was done both internally among noble houses of the same chiefdom or, more commonly, between allied chiefdoms.⁷³ A typical fosterage would start at age seven or eight. A young boy would be sent to an ally or kinsman, and there he was raised as a member of their court. He would be educated and trained in customs and manners. He would also learn the art of war alongside other fostered boys of similar age. This would continue until age fourteen or fifteen, when the boy had been deemed a successful study. He would then be given weapons appropriate for his status, and he would enter military service in a warband. According to Evans, this is reflected in a myriad of sources, including the writings of the chronicler Bede and our epic hero Beowulf, who entered fosterage at age seven.⁷⁴ This practice was incredibly important for the formation of a *comitatus*. Foster brothers often formed deep bonds of loyalty and at a young age learned to watch out for each other on the field of battle.⁷⁵ With this system in place, it is reasonable to see how Anglo-Saxon warriors, raised in the tradition of *comitatus* bonds, adopted and fulfilled the social expectations inherent in knighthood. These expectations in the early days of knighthood would have been maintaining their lifestyle, ensuring they were ready to fight for their lords, whether they be tied to them through oath or by contract, and to protect those afforded protection by their lords. After their social

⁷³ Evans, 118.

⁷⁴ Evans, 119.

⁷⁵ Evans, *Lords of Battle*, 120.

transformation into men of noble rank after 1120, these would have also included trappings of feudalism and the extra expectations placed on them by their noble status and connections to the Catholic Church, as will be discussed more fully in a later chapter.

Another common method of power sharing was the gifting of lands for service. In both Anglo-Saxon England and the Frankish Carolingian Empire, service to the king of an extraordinary nature was often rewarded with grants of land. This typically carried with it entrance to the noble rank, since nobility was tied directly to land ownership and service to a royal. As feudalism coalesced in French lands, as discussed in a previous chapter, so too did the stratification and entrance requirements to the noble rank. The chief method of hierarchizing within the noble ranks was tied to the ownership or stewardship of land. Without this connection to the land, even those who managed entrance of the lower ranks of the nobility were considered inferior, and they almost never climbed to a higher rank. While they might have enjoyed influence due to a close relationship to a higher-ranking noble or perhaps even a royal, it was unlikely they would ever wield increased power in their own right.

In pre-chivalric France, power sharing looked quite similar, with a few notable differences. One of the major differences was in their methods of oath taking. When Anglo-Saxons took oaths, they were typically for deeds in the immediate future. This is shown in *Beowulf* when he swears to “prove myself with proud deed or meet my death here in the mead-hall.”⁷⁶ When Franks took oaths, they were typically oaths of allegiance of a feudal nature, ensuring military service and loyalty from those lower on the ladder,

⁷⁶ *Beowulf*, 43.

and protection and privilege of station from those higher. They were more drawn out affairs and had the force of law. This is evidenced by one of the oldest recorded feudal oaths of vassalage, given to King Pepin the Short by Tassilo, Duke of Bavaria, in the year 757 CE.⁷⁷ Tassilo came before King Pepin and his sons, Charlemagne and Carloman, and swore to be loyal all his life, and with him came the nobles in his service, referred to in the *Royal Frankish Annals* as magnates, or great men.⁷⁸ The passage of the *Annals* that describes this ceremony says that these oaths are “in accordance with the law,” and are, “as a vassal should to his lords.”⁷⁹ In both societies, the reputation of the men giving the oaths was prime currency. If one kept his oaths and was trustworthy then he typically had a much easier time navigating the social waters. Once a man was labeled an oath breaker, almost nothing could repair his reputation. While the political reality often required nobles to continue to work with those who broke oaths, trust mostly likely was damaged, and just like today, took a long time to rebuild. This was even true of kings who proved false, as the king in Hrothgar’s story was regarded as a poor example of a ruler.

Feudal oaths were lengthy and involved promises on a multitude of issues. These included taxation, the promise to mete out justice, and, of course, military service. In France, these oaths were even made by men of adjacent levels among the noble rank. Each king had oaths with his direct vassals, and then the *dux* would have them with *comes* and knights under them, and so on down to the barons and their knights. This

⁷⁷ *Carolingian Chronicles*, 42.

⁷⁸ *Carolingian Chronicles*, 42.

⁷⁹ *Carolingian Chronicles*, 42.

pyramid, while nice and neat on paper, rarely worked the way it was supposed to. Although the legal authority of the French king stipulated he could compel his vassals, in time, to act according to his wishes, the reality was that several of the French dukes wielded more actual military power than the king, even if they lacked more official authority. This created an imbalance of power that often prevented France from following the king, while instead, powerful internal factions often acted in their own interests. This made it extremely time consuming for a French king to call up military might that extended beyond his direct control. Therefore, during the First Crusade, it was not the French King who went to war, but rather four of his vassal lords independent of him and each other. When William invaded England, he took his opportunity to take the feudal system into England, but with one major improvement. As he systematically replaced most of the old Anglo-Saxon aristocracy with his own men, he took that opportunity to take direct feudal oaths from every noble he installed in England and from the few remaining Anglo-Saxon nobles as a condition for them keeping their lands. This precedent made the Norman-English king far more effective as a ruler and ensured that challenges from his powerful nobles could not go unchecked, because he could simply call on a feudal oath further down the chain.

Power sharing between the Three Estates is an even more complicated matter. In theory, the power is shared between the Three Estates based on each Estate's primary purpose. The First Estate prays and looks after the spiritual wellbeing of everyone, constantly working to ensure the salvation of all. The Second Estate protects defenseless members of the First and Third Estates from worldly threats and ensures that temporal justice is done. The Third Estate feeds, houses, and equips everyone so that they can

enjoy an acceptable quality of life here on Earth, before going to enjoy their secured eternal salvation in Heaven. Unfortunately for almost everyone in the Middle Ages, things did not quite work out as neatly as the Estates model indicated. As is human nature, temporal pleasures won out over divine salvation, and the ruling ranks quickly moved to exploit their physical power base. A system of power sharing called Manorialism was put in place by the ruling class to govern relations between the Second and Third Estates. In this system, peasants agreed to long term contracts, usually for around a hundred years, which in practice locked in at least three full generations of people to these agreements.⁸⁰ They agreed to stay on a piece of land owned by a noble and work it for enough food to feed their families. They provided the lord a part of the harvest, some assorted fees, and work done on the communal areas of the lord's lands to improve it. This typically took the form of working on roads, working the fields of the nobleman that were reserved for him, working in the mill, and building improvement projects like a mill or bridges. In exchange, members of the Third Estate supposedly got to be covered under the rule of law and physically protected from brigands, invading armies, and even the occasional marauding wild animal. In practice, these promises were routinely unfulfilled, and the agreements were rarely adjusted for things like what modern economists might recognize as inflation from increased production and

⁸⁰ Werner Rosener, *Peasants in the Middle Ages*, trans. by Alexander Stutzer (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 196-8.

population.⁸¹ All told, power sharing between the Second and Third Estates would be more accurately described as power hoarding.

Power hoarding, and the desire to protect that hoarded power, is partially what gave rise to knights. Accolades were an essential form of power sharing in the Middle Ages. Whenever someone did a great deed, proclaiming it in public was one of the easiest, and perhaps most important, ways to show appreciation. Conceptualizing it in modern terms, this would be like getting a new title at work, with perhaps increased responsibilities and authority, but without commensurate pay. In a time where one's reputation was of immense importance, being able to point toward public proclamations of good service by your betters was a currency all its own. It is in this manner that the first people to stylize themselves as knights came to do so.⁸² They typically were rewarded by those they served for military deeds, and became trusted advisors or protectors to a noble. Perhaps they even governed some small section of land in the noble's name, but this was a rarer occurrence. The office of castellan was exactly this: a person who managed and oversaw a castle and the immediate surrounding area for a noble, either while they were away on campaign or at court, or more permanently if the noble lived elsewhere. Knights were not quite the close *comitatus* warband of the Anglo-Saxons, but neither were they Arthur's Knights of the Round Table. Instead they were something in between. They were men who had received a bump in title, but with nothing

⁸¹ For more reading on the conditions of peasants during the Middle Ages Werner Rosener's book *Peasants in the Middle Ages* does an excellent job of giving an in-depth and complete look at the rise and development of peasantry during the time of this study.

⁸² The emergence of the words used to describe knights is discussed in the first chapter.

else to go along with it in the form of income or authority. In a time when a man's reputation was everything, public recognition by a person in authority was enough to set him apart. Sharing status eventually needed to carry the official dissemination of authority, rather than just an increased notoriety that public recognition of deeds would confer.

As knights got closer and closer to being included among the nobility, simple public recognition mattered less. Early in the First Crusade, as will be discussed in detail later, members of the First and Second Estates started to separate knights out from the commoners on paper by referring to them by title and by deeds in chronicles and letters sent home by people like Stephen of Blois and Guibert of Nogent. These authors attribute to knights some additional level of status but not quite enough status for them to be included in the nobility outright. This is a transitional step on their eventual road to full nobility, as the crusades changed the very nature of nobility for those involved. After the transition, what was once simply an accolade or public recognition for exemplary deeds transformed as well, into elaborate dubbing rituals that signified a man's entrance into knighthood.

Once the methods of sharing power and authority are understood, one can see how knight employed or benefited from power sharing between the Second and Third Estates to rise in status. All that was required was a push. In this case, an outside force, the Catholic Church, got involved. In the absence of royal authority or justice, the Church attempted to intervene to direct and potentially control violence. Through their involvement in these efforts, knights would have the final piece of what they needed to elevate themselves.

CHAPTER 5

The Church's Role in Sanctioning and Directing Violence

During the early part of the eleventh century, nobles and warriors in England and France were largely occupied with wars, both against outsiders, such as the 1015 invasion of England by Cnut the Great, and against each other. This violence often spilled over onto local clergymen and non-fighting peasants. Neither the First nor Third Estate had any real means of defense against the highly trained and hyper-aggressive members of the emerging Second Estate. To combat this rise of violence, the clergy struck back with their greatest weapon. The Church and her members held those doing the violence accountable by threatening their eternal salvation. In a time when the chief concern of most people in western Europe was with the status of their immortal soul, anything that threatened their place in Heaven was taken very seriously.

Knights were caught up in this conflict. From the very moment a knight was made, his duty was to warfare and violence.⁸³ Stephen Howarth says: "In theory this

⁸³ Stephen Howarth, *The Knights Templar* (New York: Harper Collins, 1982), 23. Howarth rightly distinguishes between nobles and knights as this time. He shows that while knights were slowly making their way into the noble rank, the violence being controlled came from both noble and knightly sources. His arguments do not specifically address a time line or method by which this change occurred, as mine do, but rather they correctly make the distinctions and then move on to the focus of his book, which is the formation and history of the Knights Templar.

meant the defense and protection of the unarmed populace against a hostile foreign army. In practice, since invasions were not a daily event, it meant fighting practically everyone within sword's reach."⁸⁴ Knights had only one occupation, and their symbols of status, such as their arms, armor, and warhorses, clearly placed them above the majority of other commoners. In this transition period, between the Norman Invasion of 1066 and the formation of the Orders Militant, knights were increasingly separated from commoners by the symbols of their status and their proximity to the noble rank. They were increasingly included with the nobility by people writing at the time, like Count Stephen of Blois and Robert the Monk. The economy of the late eleventh century was on the rise due to advancements in agricultural tools and practices, as well as the growth of artisanry and city economies.⁸⁵ In response to this prosperity, the populations of all three estates were on the rise as well. Knights increasingly had larger families, as their upward mobility allowed them access to better food and a higher quality of living. This also meant that there were more sons who did not inherit a father's holdings yet received the same training in arms and armor that their older brother—their father's heir—did. This left many young men with few financial prospects who sought to make lives for themselves the only way they could, through war.⁸⁶ Without an outside threat to provide them with purpose, they quickly turned on each other, and in turn the members of the First and Third Estates they were supposed to be protecting. This left much of western

⁸⁴ Howarth, 23.

⁸⁵ Rosener, *Peasants in the Middle Ages*, 14.

⁸⁶ Howarth, *The Knights Templar*, 23-4

Europe, and especially France, with a large, violent problem on their hands. In the early part of the eleventh century, Carolingian power had all but collapsed. This left local, powerful nobles free of royal justice. This meant that they were able to govern as they saw fit, without fear of reprisal. They could jealously, and violently, defend their interests. This was especially true for those who had the means to do so, meaning those nobles who owned castles and had the means to employ and support fighting men. Having a group of nobles unrestrained by royal authority and both willing and able to perpetrate violence to further their own ends meant that bystanders within the First and Third Estates could get caught up in violence.

With the decline of strong royal justice, the Church stepped in to fill that role and employed several tactics to attempt to control the violence inherent in the Second Estate. The Church's first tactic was to attempt to make the warriors the Church's advocates, by making it their duty to protect the Church and her lands, creating an inexorable link between the faith and the fighting. This created a mutually beneficial relationship where the souls of the fighting men were cared for and where the churchmen were protected from violence from other warriors.⁸⁷ This effort was only marginally effective. It only worked if the noble to whom a particular church was connected had fighting men available to protect it. It left many churches and people vulnerable.

The Church recognized that its own property and clergy were still unprotected, and to that end monks and clergymen next attempted to re-direct the aggressive

⁸⁷ Constance B. Bouchard, *Sword, Miter, and Cloister* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1987), 250.

tendencies of the Second Estate. “While the bishops recognized that nobles could not be stopped from fighting, they hoped to restrict whom the nobles would fight, and urged all knights and nobles to swear to refrain from attacks on churchmen and the defenseless, and even to restrict their wars on each other to certain periods.”⁸⁸

This was first embodied in the Peace of God and the Truce of God movements. These movements began in the early eleventh century in Burgundy. The Peace of God was first preached at a council held in Verdun-sur-le-Doubs in the county of Chalon. It was hosted by Hugh, Count of Chalon and Bishop of Auxerre, sometime between 1016 and 1020. In the documents that survive are the oaths that nobles and knights swore. Nobles, knights, and anyone who bore *arma seacularia*, that is arms and armor, swore “not to invade any church, or a church’s courtyard, except to catch a malefactor; not to assail a cleric or monk, nor those walking with them, not to take their goods; not to seize anyone’s ox, cow, pig, sheep, lamb, goat, or ass.”⁸⁹

According to H.E.J. Cowdrey, the “purpose of the Peace of God, in its original form, was to place under special ecclesiastical protection certain categories of persons, such as monks, the clergy, and the poor; and certain categories of material things, like church buildings, church property, and poor people’s means of livelihood.”⁹⁰ Protection of the lay people was supposed to be the duty of the king. In the height of the Carolingian dynasty of the Frankish Empire, royal law provided protection for these ranks of people.

⁸⁸ Bouchard, 250.

⁸⁹ Bouchard, 250.

⁹⁰ Cowdrey, *Popes, Monks, and Crusaders*, VII 42.

In an 857 *missus* of King Charles the Bald, the king placed under his protection “clergy and church lands, together with nuns, widows, orphans, and the poor, he provided for just such needs as did the later Peace of God.”⁹¹ As discussed above, Carolingian authority was basically non-existent, due to the emergence of powerful nobles that rivaled the king and the growing violence inherent in the feudal system. If the king could not protect the Church and people, the Church would use their traditional power of excommunication to hold sway over would-be invaders and perpetrators of violence.⁹² Church writings in the tenth century called for members of the Church at all levels to exercise their authority to excommunicate those who “sacrilegiously seized church endowments.”⁹³ Cowdrey discusses a representative example from the 994 CE Burgundian council of Anse. Eleven church members, two archbishops and nine bishops restricted members of the Second Estate from threatening Cluny, or from building castles that might threaten it, and specifically from stealing their livestock.⁹⁴ Failure to comply could see those responsible placed under interdict, or exclusion from the sacraments. This would make it so that sins could not be forgiven, ultimately damning souls to Hell. This could also lead to excommunication, which similarly removed souls from the protection of the Church, but in a much more public and grand way while ultimately resulting in the same damnation. These sanctions and the penalties associated with them laid the foundation for the implementation of the Peace of God and the Truce of God.

⁹¹ Cowdrey, VII 42-3.

⁹² Cowdrey, VII 43.

⁹³ Cowdrey, VII 43.

⁹⁴ Cowdrey, VII 43.

While the formal Peace of God was first formally preached in Chalon around 1020, the foundations for it were laid in earlier church meetings. Bishop Guy of Le Puy assembled an open meeting in 975 CE. This gathering was attended by nobles, fighting men Cowdrey calls knights, and peasants of the diocese in Saint-Germain so the Church could hear from them any ideas they may have about how to keep the peace.⁹⁵ It is important to note that while Cowdrey uses the word “knight” to describe some of the attendees, it may convey an inaccurate impression of who these attendees were. While the *miles* on the continent at this time were certainly closer to the modern ideal of knighthood than their English counterparts, French fighting men had yet to fully embody that role. They were still members of the Third Estate, not fully ennobled. They were powerful and respected members of the Third Estate, but they lacked any inherent authority beyond their own status and means. They also lacked some of the common accoutrements that mark our modern understanding of knights, such as banners and heraldry. Cowdrey’s use of the term “knight” reflects the common misunderstanding of the *miles*’ role discussed earlier, lacking the nuance of the social reality of their status and function.

More church councils followed, principally in and around the province of Aquitaine. Between 989 CE and 1031 CE, councils at Narbonne, Le Puy, Limoges, Poitiers, Charroux, Bourges, Anse, and of course in Burgundy at Verdun-sur-le-Doubs, all reaffirmed, extended, and finally formalized the Peace of God movement.⁹⁶ This was

⁹⁵ Cowdrey, *Popes, Monks, and Crusaders*, VII 43.

⁹⁶ Cowdrey, VII 44.

the first widespread, formal step the Catholic Church took towards controlling internal violence in western Europe. By protecting the First and Third Estates from the aggression of the Second Estate under penalty of excommunication, European clergy clearly set boundaries on the Second Estate's use and direction of violence. The effectiveness of these boundaries is up for debate, but what is clear is that they were not as effective as the monks, bishops, and other clergy members had hoped. This led to the Truce of God movement in the first part of the eleventh century.

The Truce of God was an attempt by French churchmen to propagate peace, starting with a plea to “enable every man to show proper respect for the Lord's Day,” but it grew to be far more expansive. “Whereas the Peace sought to protect certain classes and their goods at all times, the Truce was an attempt to stop all violence at certain times.”⁹⁷ Between its first appearance at the council of Toulouges in 1027 to its fully articulated version present in the canons of the council of Norbonne in 1054, the Truce of God grew from an attempt to ban violence on the Sabbath to an extensive attempt to curtail violence during a range of days and seasons.⁹⁸

These two movements worked in concert to provide a measure of security to those who could not defend themselves. The Truce and Peace of God relied on bishops to enforce and proclaim them so that people understood what the Church required of them. While monks, priests, and legates, along with what the eleventh-century French monk and historian Adhemar of Chabannes called “*princeps, nobiles, and vulgaris plebs*” were

⁹⁷ Cowdrey, *Popes, Monks, and Crusaders*, VII 44.

⁹⁸ Cowdrey, VII 44.

all present at Peace and Truce councils, it was the bishops who enjoyed both political and ecclesiastical standing. As Carolingian authority crumbled, it was the Church that remained to give the lay people a sense of stability. With the collapse of royal authority, lay nobles, particularly local lords with their own castles, were left unchecked to govern as they saw fit, and by that, violently defend their interests. This violence led directly to the Peace and Truce council's formations, and drove churchmen of every stripe to attempt to wield the authority given them by God to curtail and control the violence that was levied against them.⁹⁹

The Peace and Truce of God movements marked an important step on the way to the societal rise of knights from the upper ranks of the Third Estate to the lower ranks of the Second. In western Europe, these were the first official steps toward putting a religious seal of approval on violence.¹⁰⁰ During the collapse of the royal authority, particularly in the crumbling Frankish Empire, the Church took on increasingly responsibilities over secular affairs. Bishops became nobles as well, blending their oaths of faith with feudal oaths made with other lords, and eventually the kings of France.¹⁰¹ In their dual identities, they were in the perfect position to aid in the rebranding and ascension of the common mounted warriors to noble knights. As the Church continued to

⁹⁹ Cowdrey, *Popes, Monks, and Crusaders*, VII 47-48.

¹⁰⁰ While religious writers had tackled the idea of justified violence before, specifically St. Augustine's discussion of the Just War, the Church as an institution had not previously encouraged its members to go to war for a specific, sanctioned purpose.

¹⁰¹ In the previously cited "Letter to the Abbot of Saint Quentin," we see a clergy member as a vassal to the King of the Franks.

use its powers of excommunication and interdict to direct and contain violence, they gained a set of secondary legal powers through their feudal oaths. For those who had become nobles as well, they had the ability to dispense royal justice, maintain their own fighting forces, and collect incomes and taxes associated with the land they governed. By wielding both temporal and spiritual authority, bishops were able to provide security for themselves when they designated a common enemy threatening both the Church and the State.

The late eleventh century was a time of change for western Europe. New royal authorities replaced old, derelict empires. Both France and England had new, more authoritative royal lines—the Normans in England and the Capetian Dynasty in France—that provided for greater political unity. The *Reconquista* had begun, and the northern coast of Spain had been recovered by Spanish Christians from the Moors. More important than the political climate in the west was the rise and spread of the Islamic Caliphates in the East. Muslim dominated Asia Minor, occupying the holy city of Jerusalem, and threatening the eastern-most Christian kingdom: The Byzantine Empire.

The kings of the Middle Ages went to war for a variety of reasons. The most common reason, at least the most common given to those who followed them, was to protect their royal rights. Medieval royals and nobles saw the prosecution of warfare as an extension of judicial process. Ostensibly, that is why both Alfred the Great and William the Conqueror embarked on their great military campaigns. The former went to war to ensure his kingdom's survival and the latter to fulfill a promise supposedly made to him by Edward the Confessor, even if justice was an excuse to mask a land grab. This pattern is easily found in many other conflicts throughout the Middle Ages. It formed the

basis for both halves of the Hundred Years War, the War of the Roses, and the Scottish Wars of Independence. Furthermore, nobles and royals waged war to secure economic interests. France, or at times various French nobles, often went to war in the Low Countries to ensure economic success and to protect their wine trade; England fought to ensure that it had markets for its massive wool production. Rarely before 1095, despite what epic poems might hope to instill in their audiences, did men go to war for their ideals. But that changed when Pope Urban II began to preach the need for crusade.

Few authoritative or reliable records exist of Urban II's speeches, despite how often he spoke and the size of the crowds to which he spoke. But we do have several partial accounts, including an anonymous chronicle that has survived, written by a man who by my definition of knighthood was a fighting knight who took the crusade. The *Gesta Francorum*, as discussed above, is perhaps the best chronicle of the events of the First Crusade. The *Gesta Francorum* details the anonymous author's journey from hearing Urban II's message to taking the crusade. This man was a common soldier, as would be expected from knights who were just then breaking into the noble rank, and he had little in the way of formal education. He could obviously read and write but had little education beyond what was required for fighting. Even so, it is still one of the most valuable pieces of primary documentation about the First Crusade.

The opening of the *Gesta Francorum* describes the fervor with which the Church's calls for crusades gripped the nobility. Nobles had been, up to this point, corralled by the Church's edicts against violence. Now they suddenly had not only the blessing of the Church to fulfill what, in their minds, was their primary function, but they had a common enemy to do it against. The *Gesta Francorum* opens with the statement

that there was a great stirring of the heart throughout all the Frankish lands, so that if any man, with all his heart and all his mind, really wanted to follow God faithfully to bear the cross after him, he could make no delay in taking the road to the Holy Sepulcher as quickly as possible.¹⁰² The author quotes Urban II as saying that if anyone would save his soul let him humbly take the path of the Lord, and if he lacked the deniers, divine mercy would provide.¹⁰³ This statement suggests that Urban II's call wasn't just to the Second Estate, but really to anyone capable of fighting. This would include the knights, who in 1095 were still occupying an amorphous middle ground between common and noble rank. The author also quotes Urban II as promising that the Christians would "suffer for the name of Christ" but that "great shall be your reward."¹⁰⁴

The Church had, at least on the large scale, succeeded in re-directing violence in the western-most part of Europe. While Urban II's call for Crusade didn't automatically spell an end to violence between Christian nobles, it at least changed its target. This was a master stroke in both political and religious terms. If Christians could regain Jerusalem—one of their most holy sites—it would demonstrate the primacy of the Christian faith.

There was also the potential added bonus of putting one of the wealthiest Christian kingdoms in the debt of those farther west. During the century prior to the call to Crusade the Byzantine Empire, which occupied modern day Greece, Turkey, and most of the Balkan states and beyond, had seen a dramatic change in fortune.¹⁰⁵ A tribe to the

¹⁰² *The Deeds of the Franks*, trans. Nirmal Dass, 25.

¹⁰³ *The Deeds of the Franks*, trans. Nirmal Dass 25.

¹⁰⁴ *The Deeds of the Franks*, trans. Nirmal Dass 25.

¹⁰⁵ Jonathan Harris, *Byzantium and The Crusades* (New York: Hambleton and London, 2003), 33.

north of the Byzantine Empire, called the Pechenegs, began raiding along the northern border. Raids by the Seljuk Turks into Armenia were seemingly unstoppable, and a treaty signed in 1055 failed utterly to stop them. To the west, the Normans were conquering the formerly Byzantine provinces of Apulia and Calabria.¹⁰⁶ To help stem the tide of these invasions, and after a couple key military losses such as at the Battle of Manzikert in 1071, the Byzantine Empire began to recruit mercenaries in greater numbers than ever before.¹⁰⁷ These mercenaries were increasingly from Western Europe, due primarily to the increase in pilgrimage traffic to Jerusalem, which usually took people through the Byzantine capital of Constantinople. The passage through Constantinople by powerful European nobles, (who the Byzantines called Latins), gave Byzantine rulers many opportunities to solicit warriors from among the pilgrims. For example, Count Robert I of Flanders was on his way home from pilgrimage to Jerusalem in 1090 when he met with Emperor Alexios I Komnenos and promised to send him 500 horsemen to serve under the emperor's direct command.¹⁰⁸ This is just one example of the Byzantines recruiting warriors and mercenaries from the west, which by the close of the eleventh century had proven to, far more often than not, work out in the Empire's favor.¹⁰⁹

By 1095, when Urban II was preaching Crusade in the west, the real Muslim threat to the Byzantine Empire had faded. Alexios I, who had previously had problems facing the Seljuk Turks, had mostly weathered that storm. He no longer desperately

¹⁰⁶ Harris, 33.

¹⁰⁷ Harris, 35-37.

¹⁰⁸ Harris, *Byzantium and The Crusades*, 37.

¹⁰⁹ Harris, 38.

needed large-scale Western forces to stem the Muslim advance. The last great sultan of the Seljuk Turks, Malik Shah, died in 1092, and all the Byzantine Emperor wanted afterwards was a small cadre of mercenaries to back his renewed diplomatic efforts to regain territory and establish peace.¹¹⁰

The Muslim regimes that had conquered previously Christian and Jewish lands had a relatively benign approach to governance. Members of other faiths could practice freely so long as they paid their taxes. Christian and Jewish pilgrims seeking out Jerusalem and other holy places often had no undue difficulties from Islamic rulers in reaching their destinations, despite facing robbers on the way. In fact, Islamic businesses profited greatly from tolls, lodging, and the sale of supplies to pilgrims in the Holy Land. As far as dedicated revenue streams went, allowing members of other faiths to worship unhindered in your lands by paying a tax was just about as reliable a source of income as you could get in the Middle Ages.¹¹¹ Of course, none of those facts are reflected in Urban II's call for crusade or in the anonymous knight's account of his sermon in the *Gesta*. Contained therein is a reflection of a perfectly crafted call for war attributed to a pope that on the surface would please God and benefit all.

Urban II's call for the First Crusade succeeded in changing the nature of knighthood, by sending warriors of all stripes to the Holy Land, where they would find opportunities to advance. Royals and nobles had been claiming divine approbation for

¹¹⁰ Cowdrey, *Popes, Monks, and Crusaders*, XIII 12.

¹¹¹ Cowdrey, XIII 12-3.

centuries, and it certainly was not anything new to humanity.¹¹² Most civilizations that came before had called out to their deities in a plethora of ways to assist and bless them in battle. Nor was holy war a new idea. In the Bible, the Israelites went to war for God, and the Christians in the late 11th century were following their example.

Knights were a new thing, however, having only been around as they were at the outset of the Crusades for less than 60 years, and the Church further pushed and legitimized their transformation from commoner to noble. Urban recognized that instead of trying to “curb the belligerent western knights, he could actively encourage them – and get rid of them.”¹¹³ It’s doubtful Urban II had their social transformation in mind when he sent the nobles and their knights eastward, but nevertheless their activities in the Holy Land would elevate the status of knights.

Robert The Monk’s account of Urban II’s sermon at Clermont, discussed in his work, the *Historia Iherosolimitana* or *The History of the First Crusade*, is one of the best-known sources for information on the preaching of the First Crusade. Robert claims

¹¹² Anonymous of York, “Sacred Kingship,” in *The Medieval Reader*, ed. Norman Cantor (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1994), 105. Anonymous of York was writing in response to Pope Gregory VII’s writings during the Investiture Controversy that the Church, and by extension the Pope, superseded royal authority on Earth. Anonymous’ response, that God had chosen the temporal kings that ruled on his Earth and as such they were God was in the tradition of the way rulers thought of their right to rule in Christian France and England.

¹¹³ Howarth, *The Knights Templar*, 27.

to have been present when Urban II gave his famous sermon.¹¹⁴ Robert claims he was asked to write his account of the First Crusade by his abbot, in obedience to his monastic vows. According to translator Carol Sweetenham, Robert's Latin was straightforward, which helps explain the work's popularity.¹¹⁵ According to Sweetenham, this likely means that Robert's goal in writing the work was simply to document the actions and successes of the Christian soldiers in the Holy Land. While he certainly portrayed the Westerners as the "good guys" and the Muslims in the Holy Land as the "bad guys," his bias towards Christian Europeans isn't necessarily a reason to discard his account as false, but it should be kept in mind as his account is analyzed. Robert the Monk quoted Pope Urban II as saying, "So let all feuds between you cease, quarrels fall silent, battles end and the conflicts of all disagreement fall to rest. Set out on the road to the Holy Sepulcher, deliver that land from a wicked race, and take it yourselves."¹¹⁶ This reflected how Robert, if not Urban II, recognized that inter-Christian violence, particularly in France where Urban spoke, was a problem that had gotten out of hand. Previously in that same account, Robert stated that Urban II even mentioned reasons as to why the Christians fought amongst each other, including the fact that there was not enough land to go around.¹¹⁷ This suggests that the Church was attempting to direct violence in a way that benefited itself, instead of allowing fighting men to cause destruction on the home

¹¹⁴ Robert the Monk, *History of the First Crusade*, trans. Carol Sweetenham (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Co., 2005), 2.

¹¹⁵ Robert the Monk, 69.

¹¹⁶ Robert the Monk, 81.

¹¹⁷ Robert the Monk, 81.

front. This meant pointing the nobles of France and other Christian realms such as England, Flanders, Scotland, and eventually the Germanic Principalities away from war with each other and at a common enemy condemned by the Church.¹¹⁸ Once the Christian kings and nobles went to war for God, then it stands to reason that their greatest warriors would follow suit. If their leaders' cause was just and right, then surely knights must be blessed and righteous in joining their war for God.

And, so, the armies of Christ and the Church went on crusade. The stories of the crusades have been told many times, and in greater detail, than could be outlined here. What is important is that during the years of the First Crusade, the knights, at this time in the transitional stage of being elevated commoners who had arms, armor, and horses, added more trappings of faith to their liveries. It is during this time that the formal dubbing ceremonies to celebrate a man's entrance into knighthood became common.¹¹⁹ During this period, we also see warriors start to treat their swords like crosses and view them as extensions not only of their prowess as warriors but as embodiments of God's wrath.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Robert the Monk, 81. Robert didn't use the word "nobles," but he did quote Urban as saying that the wealthy among the pilgrims to Jerusalem should help those without money to go equipped to fight. This seems to imply the nobility, since they had most of the wealth, and making war was a part of their stated duty.

¹¹⁹ Duby. *The Three Orders*, 296-98.

¹²⁰ Although the conflation of military and religious symbolism began centuries earlier, I see this as the beginning of the popularization of seeing cruciform swords as a stand in for the Cross.

It is in the accounts of the First Crusade that we see examples of authors explicitly attributing some nobility to the rank of knight for the first time. Robert the Monk and other First Crusade chroniclers, such as Guibert of Nogent, speak of a “noble knight” named Raymond Pilet.¹²¹ Raymond was the son of Bernard, a former Viscount of Narbonne who had lost that title by the time Raymond was only two years old. While Raymond was of noble birth, it is unclear if he himself held any title other than knight while on crusade. Robert the Monk is very careful to call the members of the Second Estate by title, as he does with Duke Godfrey, Prince Bohemond, and the other noble crusaders. It is telling then, that while he ascribes nobility to Raymond Pilet, he calls him nothing other than a knight.¹²²

Also, during his description of Raymond, Robert tells of a military action which Pilet led, comprised of “a considerable force of knights and footsoldiers,” and the minor nobles who led those men.¹²³ This speaks to an emerging delineation between fighting men, in part due to one of the main trappings of knighthood: the horse. While not all cavalry men were knights, the ownership of a horse, and especially a warhorse, was one of the main symbols of status and a necessary prerequisite for the title that elevated the common soldier to the rank of knight. Raymond took this mixed force of minor nobles, knights, and commoners and took several castles from their Muslim occupants before the summer heat finally drove his group back to a place with water. Robert the Monk praised

¹²¹ Robert the Monk, *History of the First Crusade*, 177.

¹²² Robert the Monk, 177.

¹²³ Robert the Monk, *History of the First Crusade*, 177.

Raymond Pilet for his bravery and his tactics, all without ever referred to him as anything other than a knight. Robert says the following of Raymond: “Amongst the knights of the Count of St. Gilles was Raymond, surnamed Pilet, brave and physically impressive.”¹²⁴

Thus, before the nobility of the knightly rank was firmly established, in the summer of 1098 when Raymond was out campaigning, writers of the time seem to be ascribing some level of nobility to the rank.¹²⁵ Guibert of Nogent also mention Raymond Pilet in his work *Dei Gesta per Francos*, or *The Deeds of God through the Franks*, which was his account of the First Crusade. Guibert wrote that Raymond Pilet was a “man remarkable for Sternness as well as for eagerness in battle.”¹²⁶ Raymond survived the Crusade and eventually returned to France, where at some point he was made Lord of Alés. It is unclear when or how he gained this title, but the fact that Robert never mentioned it while extolling all Raymond’s virtues suggests that this grant of title took place after both Crusade and his military actions as a noble knight. Even if he were the Lord of Alés before the crusades, the importance of Robert’s and Guibert’s focus on his knighthood, rather than his lordship, demonstrates the importance of the title in a way that it had not been viewed before.

Robert was a cleric, and he wrote his account towards the end of the First Crusade, no later than 1106, after most of the Holy Land was under Christian control.¹²⁷

¹²⁴ Robert the Monk, 177.

¹²⁵ Robert the Monk, 177.

¹²⁶ Guibert of Nogent, *Dei Gesta per Francos*, trans. Robert Levine (Teddington, Middlesex: Echo Library, 2008), 109.

¹²⁷ Robert the Monk, *History of the First Crusade*, 7.

Perhaps even more telling than Robert's words are those from one of the leaders of the Crusade, a noble and knight himself, Count Stephen of Blois, who wrote several letters home to his wife, Adele. In a letter from June 24, 1097, just after the siege of Nicaea, Stephen recounted the details of the event and its participants.¹²⁸ He described many people from a variety of social stations. He specifically mentioned the noble leaders by title, as when he named Baldwin of Flanders, Count of Ghent.¹²⁹ When talking about the gifts he and the other crusaders received from the Byzantine Emperor he said, "He has generously enriched all our leaders, he has given gifts to every knight, and has refreshed all the poor people with great meals."¹³⁰ Here Stephen seems to set knights apart from the upper nobility leading the crusades and the lower rank of common soldiers. So, while in 1097 knights had yet to join the full rank of nobility, it appears that some nobles who led them, such as Count Stephen, began to regard knights as something more than the average, common soldier. This reflects that period of transition discussed above.

In another letter from the following year describing the siege of Antioch, Count Stephen referred to some of the men he fought against as knights.¹³¹ This may mean that he did not have another word to describe them and simply used the word he used in his

¹²⁸ Stephen de Blois, "From Constantinople to Nicaea: A letter from Count Stephen of Blois." In *The First Crusade: A Brief History with Documents*, trans. Heinrich Hagenmeyer (New York: Bedford/St. Martins, 2015), 94.

¹²⁹ Stephen de Blois, "From Constantinople to Nicaea," 95.

¹³⁰ Stephen de Blois, "From Constantinople to Nicaea," 94.

¹³¹ Stephen de Blois, "The Siege of Antioch: A letter from Count Stephen of Blois," in *The First Crusade*, 104.

writings to refer to his own knights: *milites*. It is likely that these enemy horsemen fit the emerging idea of what a knight should be: a warrior of some means with a horse, arms, and armor who carried some elevated status. Either way, his use of the word “knight” to describe some of his Turkish foes is telling, implying that he recognized similarities between some of the enemy and those among his party who had some status, considering the growing connotation of the word. In this same letter, Stephen told of a battle against the Saracens at a place called Iron Bridge. In this battle, Stephen recounted that “we went out to meet them, going about three leagues with seven hundred knights onto a plain near the Iron Bridge.”¹³² Here it seems likely that Stephen is describing cavalry men of some means. Stephen mentioned no foot soldiers, which was the usual parlance when talking about the common warriors in crusader armies, so it appears this action was undertaken exclusively by men on horseback. This could be due to the distance he identified, three leagues being about nine miles. While not an insurmountable distance for a walking army, the urgency implied by Stephen’s letter makes it probable that the mounted knights left the men on foot behind to close that distance quickly. It is possible, and even likely, that the horsemen were of some means, since horses were quite expensive and symbols of status. Since knighthood had not by this time become synonymous with nobility, it is conceivable that this group of seven hundred horsemen were of varying degrees of means. Some were certainly nobles, but the majority were probably just starting to cross over into noble status.

¹³² Stephen de Blois, “The Siege of Antioch,” 105. *Milites* is the word Stephen de Blois used to describe knights in his letters.

Stephen described a few other military engagements in this letter in which he chronicled the activities of knights, distinguishing them from nobles and common soldiers. For example, he wrote of two men he termed “princes,” Bohemond and Count Raymond of Saint-Gilles, who, in a skirmish on March 29, 1098, went out with sixty knights and a contingent of foot soldiers to protect people who had gone to sea.¹³³ They were attacked by enemies that Stephen again referred to as “Antiochene knights” and some enemy foot soldiers.¹³⁴

Just like Robert the Monk, Count Stephen of Blois was careful in his descriptions of people. During this period, it would have been an insult to refer to a man of nobility by less than his proper title. Stephen, being a fairly high-ranking noble himself, was supremely aware of this. Therefore, when he made the separations between nobles, knights, and commoners in his letters, he acknowledged that knights had moved beyond the social ranks they once occupied, but he did not quite place them among their social superiors. It is possible that Stephen, not knowing these men, simply used terms from his own frame of reference to describe what he saw, but the actual status of the Muslim warriors he was fighting is not what is important about Count Stephen’s letters. What is important was that he chose to use words to describe warriors that stood out from the common rank and file that matched his own understanding of the structure of society. Whether or not the warriors from Antioch were actually knights as either Stephen or a modern reader would understand them is irrelevant. What is important is that the count

¹³³ Stephen de Blois, “The Siege of Antioch,” 105.

¹³⁴ Stephen de Blois, 105.

recognized them as something close to the men in his own army and afforded them the courtesy of addressing them by rank in his letters, as was proper for him to do.

Crusading promised a wealth of opportunities to those Christians from Europe who chose to embark on the journey. In the Holy Land, there were new fiefdoms being created from conquered lands, all of which required rulers, and by extension there was need for more than just knights and fighting men, but also administrators, artisans, and peasants. This also provided the basis for thousands of knights, who earned accolades from their valor, to be awarded small land holdings for their service. Grants of land to these fighting men further tied knightly status to nobility through the management and tenureship of land. The effort to impose Western social, religious, and administrative structures on the Holy Land called for all manner of people to bring established ways of life east, and most importantly fighting men to ensure those ways of life were protected. The Holy Land proved to be fertile ground for those who sought to increase their status. In France and England, armies were tied primarily to men of noble or royal status who could afford to keep an army together. Religious figures, unless they also shared Second Estate titles, did not have their own forces to protect them or fight for God. The success of the First Crusade seems to have demonstrated to the Church that they had need of their own warriors to maintain the gains that the First Crusade had secured, and also served as a perfect direction for those unruly knights and nobles who had previously caused violent problems back home. To this end the Church sanctioned several Orders Militant throughout the Crusade, but three of those orders rose to major prominence in the Holy Land, and in doing so provide the final step for the social ascension of knights to noble status.

CHAPTER 6

Formation of the Orders Militant

The formation of the Military Orders during the crusades served as the final step in the transformation of knights from common fighters to noble warriors. The Church sanctioned Orders based in France, England, Spain, the German Principalities, and other areas throughout the course of the crusades. Three orders in particular rose to major prominence: those we now call the Knights Hospitaller, Knights Templar, and the Teutonic Knights. For this study, it is appropriate to limit the discussion to the Knights Hospitaller and Knights Templar. While the Teutonic Knights were arguably the most successful of the crusading orders, their foundation in 1190 postdates the period of this study, 1066 to 1120, and their location in the German Principalities puts them outside the geographical bounds of this study. The Minor Orders, such as The Order of Calatrava or the Order of Saint Michael of the Wing, also can be omitted since their foundations were predominately modeled on the major orders, and their foundations and headquarters were far outside the time period and geography of this study. It is also important to take a chronological, rather than a thematic, approach to this section. The chronological markers will show the effect the formation of these orders had on how knighthood was viewed and understood by those both in and out of the system. They reveal the final stage of transition of knights from the top of the Third Estate to the lower levels of the Second Estate.

The Sovereign Military and Hospitaller Order of Saint John of Jerusalem, Rhodes, and Malta, or Knights Hospitaller as most people now refer to them, was founded sometime between 1065 and 1070 in Jerusalem.¹³⁵ The Hospitaller's do not know for certain who founded the order or exactly when it was founded. This made it difficult to promote their work, especially to those in Europe who viewed a long and storied history as a reflection of the legitimacy of the work. To combat this, the Order of St. John began to embellish their origin story, and at one point even claimed their order originated around the time of the apostles.¹³⁶ The first official recognition of the Order came from Pope Paschal II in his bull, or formal edict, called *Pie postulatio voluntatis* or the most pious request. He named Blessed Gerard as the "institutor" or "founder" of the Hospital.¹³⁷ Blessed Gerard, sometimes referred to as Gerard Thom in later accounts, was Master of the Hospital during the First Crusade but was certainly not its founder. Gerard was put in charge of the Hospital of St. John in or near 1080 CE, after the order was already in existence.¹³⁸ Most likely Paschal II was referencing the recognition of the already-extant Hospital as an official and independent organization. This bull officially recognized the Hospital and placed it under the official protection of the papacy. It exempted the Hospital from taxes, saying, "All things whatsoever, therefore, which by

¹³⁵ Helen Nicholson, *The Knights Hospitaller* (Rochester: The Boydell Press, 2001), 3.

¹³⁶ Nicholson, *The Knights Hospitaller*, 3.

¹³⁷ Pope Paschal II, "Pie Postulatio Voluntatis." *Order of Malta*. Accessed 12/28/17.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20150910180520/http://www.orderofmalta.int/pie-postulatio-voluntatis/65473/pope-paschal-ii-to-his-venerable-son-gerard/?lang=en>.

¹³⁸ Nicholson, *The Knights Hospitaller*, 4-5.

your preserving care and solicitude have been collected for the benefit of the said Hospital ... we hereby decree shall be retained by you and undiminished.”¹³⁹ The bull also ensured that the Hospital would elect its own leadership: “We ordain furthermore, that at your death no man shall be appointed in your place, as chief and master, by any underhand subtlety, or by violence; but him only who shall, by the inspiration of God, have been duly elected by the professed brethren of the Institution.”¹⁴⁰ And finally the bull made it illegal for anyone to attack the Hospital or to attempt to take from them their possessions anywhere. It granted them, “Hospitals or Poor Houses in the Western provinces, in the Borgo of St. Egidio, Asti, Pisa, Bari, Otranto, Taranto and Messina, which are distinguished by the title of Hospitals of Jerusalem, we decree that they shall forever remain, as they are this day, under the subjection and disposal of yourself and your successors.”¹⁴¹ Pope Calixtus II, Paschal’s successor, confirmed this edict in 1119.¹⁴²

In this bull, the first official recognition of the Hospital of St. John, there is no mention of military responsibilities. This means that the Hospital was just a hospital, providing medical care of the sick and the poor and lodging for travelers. They had yet to become the Knights of the Hospital. As later documents will show, this will change, and quickly, during the years following the First Crusade, largely due to the development of the Knights Templar.

¹³⁹ Pope Paschal II, *Pie postulatio voluntatis*, Accessed 12/28/17.

¹⁴⁰ Pope Paschal II, *Pie postulatio voluntatis*, Accessed 12/28/17.

¹⁴¹ Pope Paschal II, *Pie postulatio voluntatis*, Accessed 12/28/17.

¹⁴² Nicholson, *The Knights Hospitaller*, 6.

In the Holy Land, after the capture of Jerusalem in 1099, Godfrey de Bouillon, Duke of Lower Lorraine, was made Advocate of the Sepulcher. Godfrey refused the mantle of King of Jerusalem, thinking it inappropriate to wear a crown in Christ's city. By all accounts, Godfrey was a good man, but a poor ruler. He died in Jerusalem less than a year after its fall.¹⁴³ His younger brother, Baldwin, who had been made Prince of Edessa for his efforts in the First Crusade, went to Jerusalem to succeed him. He was crowned Baldwin I, King of Jerusalem, on November 11th, 1100 CE.¹⁴⁴ Baldwin reigned until 1118, and he expanded Christian control over the Holy Land, adding many key ports, especially that of Acre, to his domain. Stephen Howarth suspects that it may have been the death of Baldwin that prompted the original eight or nine knights that formed the Knights Templar to come together.¹⁴⁵ The founder of the Knights Templar was a French knight named Hugh de Payens. He originally came from Champagne, but had spent the 22 years prior to the formation of the Templars in the Holy Land. He gathered around him a small band of men initially, all dedicated to the protection of the Holy Sepulcher. Of those original knights, Howarth says, "There was Geoffrey of St-Omer, a Flemish knight; Payen de Montdidier; Achambaud de St-Agnan; André de Montbard; Geoffrey Bristol or Bisot, and finally, two men whose Christian names only are recorded: Rossal or Roland and Gandemare. Tradition says there were nine in this original brotherhood, but tradition does not give the name of the ninth."¹⁴⁶ Their stated goal in

¹⁴³ Howarth, *The Knights Templar*, 41.

¹⁴⁴ Howarth, 41.

¹⁴⁵ Howarth, 42.

¹⁴⁶ Howarth, *The Knights Templar*, 43.

their formation documents was to protect the land routes that pilgrims to Jerusalem traveled, which were far less expensive, far more popular, and far more dangerous than the sea routes that took pilgrims through Acre—eight or nine men to police hundreds of miles depending on their route.¹⁴⁷ Baldwin II, a cousin of the first king Baldwin, saw the worth of the group of knights, all of whom were distinguished men and, according to Howarth, capable leaders.¹⁴⁸ None of these men were explicitly identified as noble. Baldwin II gave this new group an important accommodation, near the Dome of the Rock, on what was supposedly the site of the Temple of Solomon, from which these new knights drew their revised name. These knights swore the threefold quasi-monastic oaths of poverty, chastity, and loyalty, and they had already given themselves the name The Poor Fellow-Soldiers of Jesus Christ. Once they gained this new accommodation, they became The Knights of the Temple of Solomon, or simply, the Knights Templar.¹⁴⁹

Unlike the Hospitallers, their new cousins, the Templars, did not originate with a civilian purpose. The Templars were specifically founded in response to violence by men who were called, and saw themselves as, knights. While they shared the basis of monkish lifestyle, the Templars were dedicated to both faith and martial pursuits.

¹⁴⁷ According Google Maps, there are 105 miles between Acre and Jerusalem, and 410 miles between the northern city Aleppo in Syria and Jerusalem. This would have been an impossible amount of territory for nine men to cover effectively.

¹⁴⁸ Howarth, 43.

¹⁴⁹ Howarth, 43.

It is after the foundation of the Templars that records associated with the Hospital begin to use militant language. The first official record that connects the Hospital to military action comes from between 1139-1144 in the form of Pope Innocent II's bull *Quam amabilis Deo*.¹⁵⁰ In this bull, Innocent states that the Hospital is responsible for hiring and maintaining its own *servientes*. According to historian Helen Nicholson, this word sometimes means ordinary household-type servants, but in the context of the bull it most likely meant non-knightly fighting men. In French, this word would translate to *sergeants*.¹⁵¹ This would seem to mean that the Hospital was responsible for hiring men to fight for, and protect, the sick, the poor, and the pilgrims staying at their facilities, and possibly, escorting pilgrims and members of the Order in the same way the Templars were. This militarization was likely a response to the increasing violence in the Holy Land, the same stimulus that prompted the Templars to form in the first place.

While the militarization of the Hospital is technically outside the timeline stated for changes in knighthood, it should be looked at as a consequence of those changes, rather than a cause. The Hospital reacted to the violence inherent in the lands of the Crusades. According to historians like Nicholson, the Hospital's mission and activities evolved to protect itself.

This need for protection, along with the Hospital's rapidly increasing reputation and wealth, attracted members of status. This meant, in the context of Crusading, that the Order began to attract knights. The speed by which the Hospital went from being passive

¹⁵⁰ Nicholson, *The Knights Hospitaller*, 10.

¹⁵¹ Nicholson, 10.

keepers of the sick and poor to the fully militarized order that is now called the Knights Hospitaller is staggering. Between 1142 and 1144 Count Raymond II of Tripoli entrusted a series of important castles along the frontier of his county to the Hospitallers, who by this time were referred to as the Knights of the Hospital, including the famous *Crac des Chevaliers*, which translates to castle of knights, and was renamed such because of their occupation of the castle. They were specifically entrusted to them to protect against Muslim attacks.¹⁵² This is remarkable on its own, that in thirty years the order transformed into a fully-fledged fighting force capable of defending one of the major Christian holdings in the Holy Land, but even more telling is that two of the castles granted to them, *Felicism* and *Mardabech*, were in Muslim hands when they were granted.¹⁵³ They had been conquered by Zenghi of Mosul in 1137. The truth is, Raymond II would not have given the Hospitallers these lands if they couldn't have held them, and in the case of the last two, retaken them. This speaks to the Order having developed into a military force, one capable of manning and besieging castles. This meant that their order had to have contained individuals whose profession was making war, which, again, meant knights. Raymond even said that he would make no treaties with the Muslims

¹⁵² Nicholson, *The Knights Hospitaller*, 11.

It appears that no paper copies of the grant, if they existed, have survived. This event is preserved in the collective memory of the Crusades, and appears in a number of other books, and even in the Wikipedia article about *Krak des Chevaliers*. While we're unlikely to know the exact words that Raymond II used when he granted the Hospitallers the castles, it makes sense that by the time the castles were granted, they would have been militarized, and therefore described as Knights of the Hospital.

¹⁵³ Nicholson, 11.

without the consent and advice of the Hospitallers. This, perhaps more than anything else, shows that Raymond II was respectful of the status that the Order had gained.¹⁵⁴

Considering that nobles normally got their advice from the clergy and other nobles, taking the Hospitallers into his council lends further credence to the idea that the Knights of the Hospital had gained increased status approaching or equaling that of other members of the nobility.

The post-militarization Hospital and the Temple, both of which put their roles as knights first increased greatly in status. So much prestige was added to the title of knight that we may reasonably view this as the final step toward the full ennobling of the title of knight. Further evidence of the effects of this change, beyond the vast estates and castles granted to both Orders in the Holy Land, were the reactions of those back in Europe. Prominent French clergyman Bernard of Clairvaux wrote extensively in favor of the Templars. Bernard extolled the virtue of the crusading knight who struck blows for Christ in his work "In Praise of the New Knighthood." He stated that if a knight killed an evil-doer he was "not a man-killer, but, if I may so put it, an evil-killer."¹⁵⁵ He went on to say that these new knights, those who fought for Christ, were basically immune to sin and that the violence they perpetrated in God's name was free from the mark of sin. To those knights who did not act this way, Bernard of Clairvaux submitted the Knights of the Temple as an example of proper Knightly living.¹⁵⁶ He described how the Templars lived

¹⁵⁴ Nicholson, 11.

¹⁵⁵ Bernard de Clairvaux, "In Praise of the New Knighthood," in *The Crusades: A Reader*, trans. C. Greenia, ed S.J. Allen and Emilie Amt (New York: UTP, 2004), 197.

¹⁵⁶ Bernard de Clairvaux, 198.

and how they went to war, saying that it was a blessing that they recruited the best men to this cause and that they were all “superbly trained to war.”¹⁵⁷

The knights of both the Temple and the Hospital were knights first and foremost, despite counting many nobles of higher social rank as members of both their order and their order’s confraternity. This contributed to this final shift in how these professional warriors saw themselves and how those around them saw them. If nobles were knights and knighthood was the crux of their identity, knighthood now must be noble by association. This marked the fundamental change in the status of the title “knight” from common to noble. Nobles saw that these knights had the capability of engaging in the noble profession of making war on their own terms, as evidenced by Raymond II’s grant of castles directly to the Order. The clergy saw them as noble, as evidenced by the multitude of papal bulls and Bernard of Clairvaux’s writings specifically addressing and extolling the virtues of the Temple. This shift in attitudes towards knights, in both the Holy Land and in Western Europe, fully realized in the formation and militarization of the Militant Orders, marked the official transformation of those fighting men from common warriors to noble knights, decades earlier than previous historians have recognized.

¹⁵⁷ Bernard de Clairvaux, 200.

CONCLUSION

Considering the gathered evidence, the narrative and timeline concerning when knights left their common status behind and joined the nobility certainly demands an update. Many of the historians cited in this paper, such as H.E.J. Cowdrey and Georges Duby, believe that this evolution was incremental and took the entirety of the twelfth century to become fully realized. Even David Crouch, whose research concerns the English aristocracy after the Norman Conquest, holds this to be the accepted truth, despite the evidence he presents to the contrary in his own work. For example, he states that by 1180, there were numerous writings from titled nobles who were concerned that the inclusion of knights among the nobility was ruining their status. These nobles objected to knights' inclusion in the noble rank simply because they were knights.¹⁵⁸ If those writings appear in the 1180s, then surely the impetus behind writing them had to occur earlier. This means that knights, in England at least, had to have been recognized as part of the lower nobility at least a generation earlier than historians have believed, no later than the 1150s. Crouch also compares the attitudes about knights in England with those in France, saying those writings can be found even earlier, sometime in the 1160s.¹⁵⁹ This means that the inclusion of knights amongst the lowest nobility in France

¹⁵⁸ Crouch, *The English Aristocracy*, 37-9.

¹⁵⁹ Crouch, 37-9

must have occurred by at least the mid-1140s. This coincides with the militarization of the Militant Orders discussed in the previous chapter.

We know that due to the Church's involvement, through directing and sanctioning violence in the forms of the Peace and Truce of God and, ultimately, in the Crusades, that the Church had put their stamp of approval on at least all crusading knights in 1119, fully supporting their efforts in the Holy Land and back in Europe. Considering that the ideas behind the formation of the Three Estates came from writings of the Church, it follows that the sanctioning of a shift between those estates should have the approval of the First Estate. Between the Rules of the Templars and the Hospitallers, the preaching of Popes Urban II, the bull of popes like Paschal II, and the writings of clergymen like Bernard of Clairvaux, we know that any knight who took the crusade had, on the face of it, God's approval. Since the Church had long been in the business of legitimizing noble rule and royal authority, and noble violence, this was the last stamp of authorization that knights needed to be considered noble. Elevating the knights into the nobility meant that the Three Estates would remain in balance, and that their designated functions would remain true to their designated purposes.

Originally preached by churchmen, the Three Estates system gave over the right and responsibility of temporal protection to the noble rank. This made the Second Estate, or those who fight, responsible for the temporal protection of the other two Estates. This group could not have legitimately claimed to be "those who fight" without including the best fighters in the land, the knights, in their rank. To those churchmen preaching the Three Estates, the slow elevation of knights into the Second Estate seemed to be a natural reflection of the way the world was meant to work. Certainly, the traced etymologies of

the various words used to describe them seems natural, and not at all forced, barring, of course, the sudden import to England. The evolution in meaning of older words like *milites*, *miles*, *ridere*, *ritter*, and *cniht* and the creation of new words like *chevalier* to describe a new reality all served to further delineate the knights' roles in context of the Three Estates.

Knights, then, were a part of the noble rank much earlier than the established narrative would have us believe. When looking at the chronicles, we can see churchmen, nobles, and even knights themselves writing about knights and knighthood in a way that would stylize them as nobles much earlier than even the mid-point of the twelfth century. This shift in recognition of status is important for two reasons. First, it sets the proper historical context for several narratives during the Middle Ages. While it might seem a shallow distinction, clarity in identity and social roles can change the entire discussion for both academics and lay people. Secondly, social evolutions are fascinating, and understanding how they happened in a historical context has serious repercussions on the historical narrative, which extends beyond the simple study of this period. This goes beyond one historical narrative in one time and extends beyond the study of history into other disciplines. This is difficult, because unless one has solid primary writings about how someone felt or saw themselves, gaining an understanding of an individual's identity is tenuous at best. Luckily, the Middle Ages is an era where reputation was everything, and there are a variety of sources, when properly utilized, that can help reconstruct social identities for groups of people that previously have been misunderstood or understudied. In this case, there is an extraordinary example of social mobility, and a shift in social identity between rungs on the social ladder, by an entire group of people as knights made

the jump from commoner to low ranking noble in less than three generations. Looking back to the popular depictions of knighthood, proper context strips away misplaced romanticism and replaces it with a far more compelling, and more accurate, depictions of how those men who still fascinate us really developed into the nobles they eventually became. Instead of a shiny, unobtainable ideal, complete as if drawn out of a painting, proper context will ultimately make knights more human and by extension allow us a much greater chance of feeling some commonality with them.

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