

**NOBLES, KNIGHTS AND
❖ MEN-AT-ARMS ❖
IN THE MIDDLE AGES**



❖ **Maurice Keen** ❖

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THE MIDDLE AGES

MAURICE KEEN

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- 4 *The Writing of History in the Middle Ages: Essays Presented to R.W. Southern*, ed. R.H.C. Davis and J.M. Wallace-Hadrill (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1981), pp. 393-414.
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- 11 Creighton Lecture, 4 November 1985, University of London (1985).

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- 13 *Henry V: The Practice of Kingship*, ed. G.L. Harriss (Oxford, University Press, Oxford, (1985), pp. 181-99.
- 14 *England and her Neighbours, 1066-1453: Essays in Honour of Pierre Chaplais*, ed. Michael Jones and Malcolm Vale (Hambledon Press, London and Ronceverte, West Virginia, 1989), pp. 297-311.

Foreword

The essays in this volume were written over a period of more than thirty years. The two earliest were published in 1962, before I had quite finished my doctorate; the most recent appeared just two years ago, in 1993. The military vocation in the time of the Hundred Years War and the late medieval culture of chivalry have through all that time been my principal historical interests, as they still are. If these papers say nothing else, they tell how little my tastes have changed over the years. Whether that is a good thing or a bad thing I cannot know.

What is more sure is that over the period in question other people's interest in the sort of subjects that have fascinated me has grown. At the time when I started out as a researcher I was more than once given the impression that chivalry was not, among my elders and betters, regarded as a very serious topic for historical study, and I supposed that I might find myself ploughing a lonely furrow. What I did not know (and I doubt whether any of the others knew either) was that at about the same time a whole series of other young, aspirant historians were setting out to research into comparable and related areas; most importantly Philippe Contamine in France, in England Kenneth Fowler, Christopher Allmand, Malcolm Vale, John Palmer, and others as well. Since then their work has made the subject of chivalry what I had not expected it to prove, a lively and vigorous branch of late medieval studies. In the USA. there has even appeared what is in effect a teacher's handbook – and a very good one: *The Study of Chivalry*, edited by Howard Chickering and Thomas H. Seiler, which appeared in 1988 as a Medieval Institute publication from Kalamazoo. The interest in the subject that has been thus generated must be the justification for bringing these essays of mine together.

I have not made any serious revisions of the papers here from the form in which they first appeared. Unsurprisingly, those which now seem to me most in need of modification are those which were written longest ago; but the trains of thought, and more importantly the detail of the research that prompted them, have become too remote from me for there to be much prospect of attempts at revision resulting in real improvement. So for better or worse I have left them as they first stood.

I have however tried to arrange the essays in an order more rational than that of their chronological appearance. The first seven are all concerned with what I would call the culture of chivalry, with such topics as war and peace, courtly love, heralds and knight errantry. After these I have placed three essays concerned more technically with military and heraldic law, the aspect of the same broad subject that was my earliest preoccupation. These are followed by two essays on nobility, a topic that was of particular interest to the same great medieval jurists as wrote about the laws of war. The last two essays concern the later stages of the Hundred Years War; I have placed them last because the end of that war rings down the curtain on the period – the only period – where my teaching and my research have over the years overlapped.

Over those years I have accumulated many debts of scholarly gratitude. The first two that I must acknowledge are to Dr Juliet Barker, co-author of the paper here reprinted on 'The English Kings and the Tournament', and to Dr Michael K. Jones, who read the proofs of this volume and made vital corrections. From both I have learned much more than that says. I must also acknowledge debts to Professor Christopher Allmand, to Malcolm and Juliet Vale, to Mr Peter Lewis, Dr Jonathan Powis, Dr Jeremy Catto and Dr Gerald Harriss, colleagues and friends whose views and advice have been generously given and constantly stimulating. I must especially thank the publisher, Mr Martin Sheppard of the Hambledon Press for suggesting the collection of these essays and for the hard work that went into bringing them into a single format. My deepest debts of all are to my college, Balliol, and to those who in my youth there and elsewhere taught me to be interested in history and encouraged me to follow that interest further.

Maurice Keen

War, Peace and Chivalry

Anna Comnena, in her account of the First Crusade, tells the story of a knight who, when the crusading leaders were taking their oaths to the Emperor Alexius in Constantinople, went and sat down in the emperor's chair. He had been annoyed at the emperor remaining seated when so many brave captains were standing. Alexius noted him, and as the leaders were leaving his presence, he called over this 'haughty minded, audacious Latin', and inquired of him his country and lineage. 'I am a Frank of the purest nobility', the knight replied:

All that I know is that at a crossroads in the country whence I come there stands an old sanctuary, to which everyone who desires to fight in single combat goes ready accoutred, and there prays to God for help while he waits in expectation of the man who will dare to fight him. At those crossroads I too have tarried, waiting and longing for an antagonist, but never has one appeared who will dare to fight me.¹

In reply to this the emperor said, 'If you did not find a fight when you sought for it there, now the time has come which will give you your fill of fighting.' Anna tells later how he did get his bellyful of fighting, and was wounded seriously in a rash charge against the Turks in the plains of Dorylaeum.²

I quote this story for two reasons. The first is that it is illustrative of the influence, in the time of the First Crusade, of a cult of war and of belligerence that was deeply embedded in the traditions of the medieval west, being part of its heritage from the warrior ethos of the barbarian

¹ *The Alexiad of the Princess Anna Comnena*, trans. E.A.S. Dawes (London, 1967), p. 264.

² *Ibid.*, p. 270.

past, and which was fundamental to what we call chivalry. It is emphatically a chivalric story. It offers a vivid glimpse from actual history of what lay behind the many scenes of single combat at appointed spots that we meet in chivalrous romances, of which Chrétien de Troyes' account of the encounter of Calogrenaut and Yvain with the fierce knight Forré at the spring under a tree by an old chapel is perhaps the classic example.³ Calogrenaut's description of how he came to the chapel 'in quest of some adventure whereby to test my prowess and bravery' echoes neatly Anna's knight's story of how he waited, longing for an antagonist. By the late twelfth century, when Chrétien was writing, the cult of chivalry was becoming more formal, more ritualised and more literary; Anna shows one of its rituals in the process of formation. Later texts will speak of 'seeking adventures' or 'chance encounters' as a more or less formal activity, akin to tourneying and, like tourneying, an expression of the martial exuberance of chivalry.⁴ Her story reminds us that the culture of chivalry had its origin in the violent *mores* of a violent society.

The context of her story is also significant. For the first crusade gave a new edge to the idea of the function of the warrior in Christian society, and its triumph at Jerusalem in 1099 set the standard for what came to be recognised as the highest goal of chivalry, the defence of the Holy Places. The crusade, as has often been laboured, gave a newly specific religious orientation to the role of knighthood, that helped to put the estate of chivalry on a par with the priesthood in its Christian service. 'Behold', wrote the crusader poet Aymer de Pegulhan, 'without renouncing our rich garments, our station in life, all that pleases and charms, we can obtain honour down here and joy in paradise.'⁵ That is the knightly version of Guibert de Nogent's declaration that 'in our own time God has instituted a Holy War, so that the order of knights . . . may now seek God's grace in their wonted habit, and in the discharge of their own office, and no longer need to be drawn to seek salvation by utterly renouncing the world in the profession of the monk.'⁶ In course of time, the whole elaborate aristocratic education and apprenticeship to knighthood came to be viewed by writers on courtesy and chivalry as preparation toward the supreme endeavour of the crusade. Thus for

³ Chrétien de Troyes, *Yvain*, lines 269-580, 747-906.

⁴ These terms are repeatedly employed in, for instance, English royal writs prohibiting tourneying, e.g.: *CCR*, 1237-42, p. 483; *CCR*, 1261-64, p. 133; *CCR*, 1296-1302, pp. 373, 408, 583; *CPR*, 1232-47, pp. 20, 148, 188. I owe these references to Dr. Juliet Barker.

⁵ Quoted by S. Painter, *French Chivalry* (Baltimore, 1940), p. 87.

⁶ *Patrologia Latina*, 156, p. 685.

instance Baudouin de Condé, in his *Dit dou baceller* (written in the late thirteenth century) bids the young knight, starting on his career, to throw all his energies into tourneying – because it is preparatory to higher things; none will be able to call himself a true *preudhomme*, Baudouin says, until his sword has struck a blow against God's enemies. It behoves the bachelor, he concludes, to mount step by step in price and prowess toward this peak of achievement.⁷ The idea was a very enduring one. A hundred years after Baudouin's time and more than two hundred after the First Crusade Philippe de Mézières would still write that 'the first and principal glory of the dignity of true chivalry is to fight for the faith.'⁸

Anna Comnena's story of the knight who sat in the emperor's seat was not introduced, though, in order to illustrate the holy martial zeal of her Frankish nobleman, but rather his haughty belligerence, and this brings me to my second reason for quoting her story. In the minds of the ecclesiastical propagandists of the First Crusade, the objective of delivering Christian Europe from the miseries which were consequent upon the violent way of life of haughty and belligerent noblemen was at least close to par with the hope of delivering the Holy Places from the infidel. All the sources agree that this pacific goal was a principal theme in Urban II's great speech at Clermont. These are the words that Robert the Monk puts in his mouth:

This land which you [knights] inhabit . . . is too narrow for your large population, nor does it abound in wealth, and it furnishes scarcely food enough for its cultivators. Hence it is that you murder and devour one another, that you wage war and that so frequently you perish by mutual wounds. Let therefore hatred depart from among you, let your quarrels end . . . take the road to the Holy Sepulchre, and wrest that land from the wicked race.⁹

Baudry de Dol is perhaps more oracular:

You, who await the pay of thieves for the shedding of Christian blood . . . either lay down the girdle of such knighthood, or advance boldly, as knights of Christ, and rush as fast as you may to the defence of the Eastern church.¹⁰

⁷ B. de Condé, *Le Dit dou Baceller* in A. Jubinal (ed.), *Recueil des contes, fabliaux et autres pièces inédites* (Paris, 1839), i, p. 327f.

⁸ P. de Mézières, *De la chevalerie de la passion de Jesus Christ*, Arsenal, MS 225, fo. 5r.

⁹ A.C. Krey, *The First Crusade* (Princeton, 1921), p. 31.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

Fulcher of Chartres pictures the pope calling on those 'who have for a long time been robbers to now become soldiers of Christ: let those who once fought against brothers and relatives now fight against barbarians.'¹¹ It was to drive home the need for peace on which all these passages focus that Urban II at Clermont proclaimed anew the Truce of God at the same time that he promised absolution of their sins to those who would make the pilgrimage to fight the Turk.¹² The two themes, of canonical truce and of holy war, were inextricably connected in his thinking and in that of those who reported his launching of the First Crusade; and canonical truce was in his mind because it was broken by men of the stamp of Anna's nobleman so often that it seemed that 'peace was altogether discarded by the princes of the world, who were engaged in incessant warlike contention and dispute among themselves.'¹³

The crusade enduringly focused chivalry's fighting spirit toward an ideally supreme objective, the defence of the holy places. The coupling with that objective of the quest for peace in Christian society also proved a lasting one. Naturally however, shifts of emphasis from the themes of Clermont appeared as, over the course of ensuing times, ideas about the role of the clergy in the political direction of Christendom that were born in the Gregorian age crystallised more clearly. In the thirteenth century particular emphasis came to be given to the role of the clergy, and of the papacy in particular, in encouraging the lay powers and knighthood generally toward the task of establishing within Christendom a good and religious peace, a task which came to be seen as a requisite step on the way to bringing Christendom's full force to bear in the east. In a parallel way, the ideas of knights and of those who, for the benefit of knights, wrote about chivalry in the vernacular, developed more articulate approaches both to crusading and toward knighthood's service to secular authority – which had its own particular role in keeping peace – and about the relation between the two. The resulting shifts of emphasis, in both cases as it seems to me, were such as to underline the moral standing of the warriors' Christian role which the propagandists had stressed in the age of the First Crusade; but their effect was also, I am afraid, to somewhat reduce emphasis on the value of peace, in and for itself, at the human level.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 30.

¹² D. Mansi, *Sacrum Conciliorum amplissima collectio* (Venice, 1759), xx, p. 816.

¹³ Fulcher of Chartres, translated in E. Peters, *The First Crusade* (Philadelphia, 1971), p. 26.

The so-called 'political crusades' of the thirteenth century offer good illustrations of the presentation of the armed endeavour to impose holy peace in Christendom – and in Italy especially – as the necessary prelude to pressing forward with the Holy War in the Levant. At the very beginning of their history we find Innocent III, when he directed the crusade against the excommunicate Markward, explaining that there would be no hope of recovering the lost lands in Syria if Sicily continued in Markward's hand.¹⁴ Urban IV and his successor Clement IV both took the same line in the time of Charles of Anjou's invasion of Italy. In 1263 Urban assured St Louis, who was hesitating over whether he should license his brother's expedition, that the conquest of Sicily would be but the stepping stone to a crusade to the east.¹⁵ The main body of the French knights who had come with Charles into Italy to wrest Manfred's kingdom from him intended, once they had achieved this, to proceed in the east, so Clement IV told the Christians of Outremer on the eve of the battle of Benevento.¹⁶ Boniface VIII expressed a similar hope in 1300 with regard to Charles of Valois, that when he had settled the disputes of Italy he would go on to lead the crusaders in a 'general passage' to the orient.¹⁷ In a comparable way, and perhaps a little more respectably, the Avignon popes linked their efforts to restore peace in Christian Europe by diplomatic means in the period of the Hundred Years War with their hopes of being able to organise a Syrian crusade. On the eve of the Schism, when in 1375 English and French negotiators were debating peace in the presence of papal representatives at Bruges, Gregory XI believed that this long-cherished aim might be on the point of achievement, and that a peace or a solid truce would soon provide the opportunity for a general passage that would have a good chance of success.¹⁸

The way in which the association between the ideas of peace and of worthy war was developed in secular chivalric ideology was rather different, and less crusade orientated. Amongst the knighthood, that contrast between the illegitimate violence of secular quarrels and the

¹⁴ N. Housley *The Papal Angevin Alliance and the Crusades against Christian Lay Powers, 1254-1343* (Oxford, 1982), p. 66.

¹⁵ S. Runciman *The Sicilian Vespers* (Cambridge, 1958), p. 69; E. Jordan, *Les origines de la domination Angevin en Italie* (Paris, 1896), p. 398.

¹⁶ Jordan *Les origines de la domination angevin*, p. 404 n.3.

¹⁷ Housley, *The Papal Angevin Alliance*, p. 69.

¹⁸ N. Housley 'The Mercenary Companies, the Papacy, and the Crusades, 1356-78', *Traditio*, 38 (1982), p. 277.

justified violence of Holy War, which was laboured by ecclesiastical writers at the time of the First Crusade and by St Bernard in his famous sermon to the Templars, never really took hold. The overwhelming claims of secular lordship on the loyalty of the vassal was a dominant theme in the early *chansons de geste*, which give us our first glimpse of chivalric culture; even the call to crusade could not quite establish a definitive priority over it then or later. Rather the crusade was seen as offering an alternative of noble and redemptive service – that a vassal, great or small, might hope to discharge in his lord's company, or in times when his lord had no need of him. In the context of peace, it was in consequence the role of chivalry as the armed support of the ruler's magistracy and his commonwealth, rather than crusading, that came to receive the strongest emphasis in manuals of knighthood like Ramon Lull's *Order of Chivalry*. 'Every knight ought to be a governor', Lull wrote; and again 'the office of a knight is to maintain and defend his worldly lord, for a king or high baron has no power to maintain righteousness in his men without aid and help, and if men go against the commandment of the prince it behoves the knights to aid their lord . . . by the knights ought justice to be maintained and kept'.¹⁹ Even the writing of such an enthusiast of crusading as Philippe de Mézières is permeated with this idea of the role of knighthood. Let the knights of France study the laws of true chivalry; let them stand for justice, for widows and orphans and all the oppressed, and above all and 'singularly for the common weal of the kingdom of France',²⁰ he says. In passages in chivalric writing such as these, it is not so much the peace of Christendom that is associated with the 'laws of true chivalry' as the internal peace of particular Christian kingdoms, the task of upholding which included resistance against the secular violence of national but Christian enemies – in the case of de Mézières' France, the English. The place to which on this view crusading could easily come to be relegated is nicely illustrated in Guillaume Machaut's advice to King Charles of Navarre in the *Comfort de l'ami*; the time for crusade, he says, is when your kingdom is not at war.²¹ The implication that the times when there is an opportunity to turn attention to Holy War will only be intervals is very clear.

¹⁹ R. Lull, *The Book of the Ordre of Chyvalry* (Caxton's translation), ed. A.T.P. Byles, EETS (London, 1926), pp. 27-30.

²⁰ P. de Mézières, *Le songe du vieil pèlerin*, ed. G.W. Coopland (Cambridge, 1969), pp. 531-32.

²¹ G. Machaut, *Le confort de l'ami*, lines 3272ff, *Oeuvres de G. de Machaut*, ed. E. Hoepffner (Paris, 1921), vol. iii.

According to this sort of view, too long a peace might indeed be dangerous, sapping the vigour of the warrior class in slothful prosperity, if they did not use the time of peace to seek adventures – such as crusades – to keep them in trim. The *Alliterative Morte Arthure*, written at much the same time as Machaut's *Comfort*, puts into the mouth of Duke Cadour of Cornwall a splendid speech welcoming the coming war between Arthur and the Romans, which promises to deliver the Britons from becoming listless and cowardly in their prosperity and forgetting their name for great martial deeds.²²

Consistently with this sort of approach, works like those of Lull and Machaut, and secular handbooks of chivalry, tend to give more space to the worldly honour that is due to knights than they do to that crown of salvation that ecclesiastical propaganda held out to the crusader. The effect, I must make clear, was not to displace crusading from its position as the supreme expression of chivalrous virtue and commitment – not as yet anyway. The effect was rather to relate crusading to a kind of scale of precedence among chivalrous activities, whose degrees were measured in terms of the honour that men – and women – should accord to participants in them. This scale is well described by Geoffrey de Charny in his *Book of Chivalry*, written *c.* 1350. Young men who distinguish themselves in the joust deserve praise, he says, but those who excel in the more dangerous *mêlée* of the tournament deserve higher praise, and these in turn must give way before those who have won renown in the wars of their countries, for war is a graver business and more honourable. Still more to be honoured are those who have seen service in strange and distant lands – which of course included the eastern Mediterranean, where Geoffrey himself served on the crusade of the Dauphin of Vienne in 1347.²³ This conception of a scale of chivalrous activities we find expressed again, rather vividly, in the statutes of some of the fourteenth-century secular orders of chivalry. Thus the statutes of the Poitevin Order of the Tiercelet list a series of augmentations that the companions were permitted to add to the claws and dew claws of its falcon badge in what seems to be descending order of precedence; the most dignified being for service against the heathen, the next for service in the king's war, either at a pitched battle or at a royal siege: the next for

²² *Morte Arthure*, ed. E. Brock, EETS (London, 1871), lines 249ff.

²³ G. de Charny *Le livre de chevalerie*, in *Oeuvres de Froissart*, ed. E. Kervyn de Lettenhove, i, pt iii (Brussels, 1873), pp. 464-72.

presence at a skirmish (*rencontre*) in royal service; then last come augmentations permitted for service under the seigneurs of the province and for emerging victor from a single combat in the lists.²⁴ Charles of Durazzo's Order of the Ship, which had the most complicated augmentation regulations of any order I know of, observed an essentially similar order of value. The humblest augmentation is again for victory in single combat, entitling the companion to add a banner to the castle of the mast of his ship. For every major battle with banners displayed in which he fought as a good knight he might add a rope of rigging – of gold, if more than 700 were engaged on either side, of vermillion if more than 600, of blue for 500, green for 300, grey for 200, and of 'iron' for upwards of 100. For being among the first to enter in the assault of a fortified place he might add an anchor, above the water if the population were Christian, in it if they were Saracen. For a part in a major battle against the Saracens he might add a tiller; and if he were among those who took part valorously in the future conquest of Jerusalem, he might add a great tiller of gold.²⁵ In all these texts, Holy War remains for knighthood the supreme service. But the apprenticeship in arms in the lists and in the tournament and that attention to gaining experience in arms that Geoffrey de Charny stressed in his book are related not just to crusade service but to useful war service anywhere, and were seen as likely to be particularly useful – as the Tiercelet's augmentation rules in particular remind us – in 'royal war', in the wars of a knight's own commonwealth. I think these rules should make clear what I had in mind when I spoke earlier of the progressive formalisation and ritualisation of chivalric culture, and perhaps also what I said about a reducing emphasis on the value of peace, in and for itself at the human level. Indeed, in the augmentation rules of the Order of the Ship, the value of peace seems in danger of being suffocated in a welter of dreams of military glory.

The two different lines of approach to the association of the role of chivalry and the need for peace that I have been trying to outline – the one relating to the crusade, the other rather to the internal peace and defence of individual Christian communities – are both illuminatingly relevant to reactions to what I think may be called the crisis of chivalry in the fourteenth century, when the overspill of military manpower generated in the wars of Italy and in the Hundred Years War of England and

²⁴ M.G.A. Vale 'A Fourteenth-Century Order of Chivalry: The Tiercelet', *English Historical Review*, 83 (1967), p. 340-41.

²⁵ D'A.J.D. Boulton, *The Knights of the Crown* (Woodbridge, 1987), pp. 320-22.

France erupted in the form of the Free Companies. The phrase 'crisis of chivalry' seems to me justified because I think that contemporaries perceived things this way. Writers like de Mézières and Bonet described the pillaging of the companies and their maltreatment of churchmen and civilians in terms of the abandonment of the law of true chivalry. Chroniclers like Froissart and Du Guesclin's biographer Cuvérier wrote of the companies, and of their deeds both black and noble, using a vocabulary that was essentially chivalric. The companies' most famous leaders, men like Du Guesclin and Hugh Calverley and John Hawkwood, were undoubtedly knights in the fullest sense, dubbed as such; and, though their conduct was often anything but knightly in the ideal sense, these successful leaders won respect and dignity and riches as chivalrous men. But above all, the period can be called a crisis of chivalry because the devastation, misery and social dislocation caused by warfare focused such general and widespread attention on the problem of the violence of the knightly order, and so on the relation between the ideals of chivalry and the value of peace.

As Norman Housley has pointed out in a very perceptive article, the papal reaction to the problem of the Free Companies in this age of Urban V was very strongly reminiscent of the reaction to the problem of secular aristocratic violence in the age of Urban II.²⁶ The interlude in the great Hundred Years War of England and France, between the signing of the treaty of Brétigny in 1360 and the reopening of the war in 1369 (which roughly corresponded with Urban V's pontificate), brought to a new climax of prominence the problem of the companies, now deprived of most of the colour of justification in their fighting but still on the rampage. As it happened, it was also a period that seemed to offer serious crusading potentialities, and so a chance of siphoning off the military energy of the *routiers* into war that would have some relish of salvation in it. Between 1362 and 1365 Peter, king of Cyprus, was in the west, seeking support from the Latin princes for a major crusade that would enable him to follow up his initial success in wresting Adalia from the Turks (1361).²⁷ When, on Good Friday in 1363, John the Good of France took the cross along with Peter in Pope Urban's presence at Avignon, new vistas seemed to be opening.²⁸ Peter's appeals were also

²⁶ N. Housley, 'The Mercenary Companies, the Papacy, and the Crusades', pp. 253-80.

²⁷ *History of the Crusades*, ed. K.M. Selton and H.W. Hazard, iii (Madison, WI, 1975) pp. 354-60.

²⁸ R. Delachenal, *Histoire de Charles V*, ii, pp. 323-24.

sympathetically received by the Count of Savoy and by King Louis of Hungary, and soon after we find the Byzantine emperor putting out tentative feelers in the hope of obtaining western aid in clearing the Turks from Thrace.²⁹ It really did look as if there was a possibility that France and Italy might be delivered from the scourge of the companies by redirecting them to the east in a major crusade, and of so turning these 'heathenish tormentors', as Urban V called them (echoing the phraseology of Clermont), into the 'defenders and prize fighters of mother church'.³⁰

In all and any of the crusade plans in the 1360s, the companies were necessarily a vital element. In the first place, it was clearly otiose to expect King John of France or his nobles or neighbours to be serious about embarking for the east if they would have to leave their patrimonies at the mercy of the free soldiers' ravages. Perhaps more important, the companies seemed to offer a chance of bringing together for a 'general passage' a force that militarily could be really formidable. They were autonomous martial societies, already mustered as miniature standing armies, and internally well organised, with their own governing councils, treasuries and secretariats. Their leaders were experienced captains who had earned reputations in hard fighting and who well understood the business of war. If they could be brought together under cohesive leadership they would undoubtedly be able to give a good account of themselves in the east – or so it seemed. The Catalan companies that earlier in the century had overrun Frankish Greece had shown what soldiers of this stamp could be capable of achieving in a traditional crusading area. The problem was how to persuade the companies to muster to the desired end, when they were making rich and easy pickings nearer home, in Languedoc and Lombardy.

I do not need to say that the 1360s witnessed no 'general passage' to the east, in spite of much excited correspondence, the licensing of the preaching of crusade and promises of indulgences. Nevertheless, the efforts of Urban V and others in this period to 'export the brutality of Christian knighthood', as Housley puts it, were by no means entirely without effect, and deserve more appreciation than they have often received. Peter of Cyprus did recruit successfully among the companies for the army at the head of which he took and sacked Alexandria in 1365. Arnaut de Cervole, better known as the Archpriest and famous

²⁹ *History of the Crusades*, ed. Setton and Hazard, iii, p. 74.

³⁰ Housley, 'The Mercenary Companies, the Papacy, and the Crusades', p. 270 n.77.

for his part in putting the Comtat Venaissin to ransom in 1357, mustered a large force which it was intended should march across the Empire to aid the king of Hungary. They got no further than Metz, it is true, and turned back westward when Charles IV, incensed by their ravaging, raised an army to bar their further way;³¹ but some at least among them were subsequently recruited into the crusading army that Amadeus VI of Savoy, the Green Count, assembled in 1366 and led to Thrace.³² Many more were recruited into another army, that which Du Guesclin under the auspices of Charles V assembled from among the companies and led into Spain, to aid Henry of Trastamare in his bid for the throne of his half brother, Pedro of Castile. Formally at least, at the time when it was gathering, even this expedition had a crusading purpose.³³ The justification for the papal taxation that Urban licensed in order to help meet its expenses was that, after passing through Castile, it would go on to fight the Moors in Granada. Indeed, the idea was probably not entirely cynical, at any rate as an ultimate objective. At Burgos in March 1366, soon after his own coronation, Henry of Trastamare conferred the crown of Granada on Du Guesclin;³⁴ and at much the same time Hugh Calverley, commanding the English contingent in the army, was negotiating with the king of Aragon for galleys to support the crusade against the Moors once Castile was effectively conquered.³⁵ Cuv  lier, the verse biographer of Du Guesclin, made much of the crusading side of the venture, presenting his hero's bitter disappointment that he was not in the end able to carry on the war into Granada and beyond, to Cyprus and Jerusalem.³⁶ Very likely these dreams were not very sincere; even if they were, the English intervention in Spain, Pedro's brief recovery and the subsequent reopening of the Anglo-French war certainly put paid to them.

Under cover of the renewal of the Hundred Years War after 1369 the companies in France recouped their strength anew and in consequence the 1370s and 80s again saw wide areas of southern France subjected to their ravages. The crusading projects of the 1360s had however come

³¹ Ibid., pp. 274-75; A. Cherest *L'Archipre  tre:   pisodes de la guerre de cents ans au xive si  cle* (Paris, 1879), pp. 304-24.

³² E.L. Cox *The Green Count of Savoy* (Princeton, 1967), p. 204ff.

³³ On this see P.E. Russell, *The English Intervention in Spain and Portugal in the Time of Edward III and Richard II*, esp. ch. 2; and R. Delachenal *Histoire de Charles V*, iii, chs 8, 9, 11.

³⁴ Housley, 'The Mercenary Companies, the Papacy, and the Crusades', p. 276; Delachenal, *Histoire de Charles V*, iii, p. 281.

³⁵ Russell, *The English Intervention in Spain and Portugal*, p. 42.

³⁶ Cuv  lier, *Chronique de Bertrand du Guesclin*, ed. E. Charri  re (Paris, 1839), i, pp. 240, 270, 411.

near enough to achieving some measure of success to keep alive the hope that their energy might yet be channelled off into holier war, and to keep alive also projects for crusade to the east, which remained very much to the forefront of European diplomacy continuously down to the great disaster at Nicopolis in 1396, when the largest crusading army raised in the fourteenth century went down before Sultan Bajazet on the border of Hungary.³⁷ Up to that point the same factors – the renewed activities of the companies and the continued discussion of crusading projects – also kept this traditional means of winning a measure of peace for Christendom, by directing the attention of her knighthood to the war against the infidel, in the forefront of the minds of chivalric writers of this period. To this I must return shortly.

First, though, I must draw attention to an alternative means of dealing with the problem of the companies that was also tentatively explored in the period, and which related rather to that view of chivalry that stressed the role of knighthood in maintaining domestic peace and defence and laid less emphatic emphasis on crusading. In the period after 1367, Charles V of France made strenuous efforts to reorganise the French royal forces, on the basis of standing companies whose soldiers were paid by the royal treasurers of war out of the proceeds of taxation, and whose leaders were made responsible for the discipline of their men and were liable for the indemnification of those they plundered.³⁸ On these terms, a quite substantial number of leaders of Free Companies were with their troops enrolled into the royal hosts. The appointment of their old leader, Bertrand Du Guesclin, as constable of France no doubt facilitated for many their transfer from free to royal service. The expeditions which, in the 1380s, some of the greater French princes organised, with royal connivance, in order to further their own dynastic ambition, also recruited a good many free soldiers into more regular hosts. Quite substantial numbers for instance joined the army that Duke Louis of Anjou led into Italy in 1384 in his bid to make good his claim to the throne of Naples (an expedition which, in the circumstances of the Schism, was given crusade status by the Avignonese pope, Clement VII).³⁹ The army that the count of Armagnac recruited in 1390 for his campaign in Lombardy against Gian Galeazzo Visconti was very largely

³⁷ On the Crusading projects of the period see also J.J.N. Palmer, *England, France and Christendom, 1377-99* (London, 1972), esp. chs 8, 10, 11.

³⁸ P. Contamine *Guerre, état et société à la fin du moyen âge* (Paris, 1972), pp. 135-50, 162-68.

³⁹ N. Valois, *La France et le grand schisme d'Occident*, ii (Paris, 1896), pp. 23ff.

recruited from among the companies; and Froissart tells us that one of his explicit aims in recruiting them was 'so that the country might be at peace'.⁴⁰

These two approaches to the problem created by the uncontrolled violence of the Free Companies, the one looking to deliverance by means of a 'general passage' on crusade, the other seeking to control their activity by recruitment into regular hosts, appear as twinned themes in the writings of that extraordinary, eccentric and extravagantly verbose figure, Philippe de Mézières, one time chancellor of Cyprus, counsellor of Charles V and tutor to his son, and self-appointed herald to all Christendom of the crusading cause. The crusading ideal, the desire to deliver the Holy Places, was the driving force behind his writing, indeed in his whole life. His dream was of founding a new crusading order of chivalry of the Passion, in which the princes of Christendom and their chivalries would be enrolled and which would spearhead a campaign to revive Latin fortunes in the east.⁴¹ This was a martial dream worthy of one who had been brought up to chivalry and had taken the arms of knighthood at the Holy Sepulchre itself. But de Mézières was also, and clearly, stirred by the misery and dislocation which he saw everywhere about him and which he recognised as consequent upon the misdirection of chivalry into pillage and tyranny. In a lurid passage in his *Letter to King Richard II*, he allegorised the woes of this condition in his picture of the horrible garden of war, watered by fifteen foul smelling streams, in which flourished the weed *sanguinolence*, which the inhabitants ate with all their food, gorging themselves on blood:

and further in the said streams were many leeches, large and small, which sucked the blood of those who lived in the garden . . . so much so that many of these leeches burst asunder . . . in this parable the leeches represent the commanders and their men at arms, who suck the blood of the poor, that is to say the substance of their livelihood, by ransom, pillages, taxes, and oppression without measure.

The garden was plagued also with gigantic locusts, which gnawed the corn, the fruit and all the green things of the garden down to the roots, which too represented 'the captains, men at arms and robbers . . . before

⁴⁰ Froissart, *Oeuvres*, xiv, pp. 160-62; D.M. Bueno de Mesquita, *Grangaleazzo Visconti* (Cambridge, 1941), pp. 124-25.

⁴¹ On de Mézières' life and writing generally, see N. Jorga, *Philippe de Mézières et la croisade au XIVe siècle* (Paris, 1896).

whom nothings survives save what is too hot or too heavy'.⁴² With this garden de Mézières contrasted the idyllic orchard of peace, 'filled with all manner of trees and plants, bearing fruit and giving out a pleasing scent', where there was no frost or mist or floods or thunder, and the people lived in health and joy 'until they died in God's good time'. De Mézières' message through these allegories, to the kings of England and France, was that they must first seek the beautiful orchard, shunning the garden of *Perilous Guard* in which their chivalries had been trained – that is to say that they should establish peace between their two nations, preparatory to leading their hosts to crusade in the east.⁴³ The interlocked ideas, or bringing peace to Europe by means of the crusade, was thus central to de Mézières' thinking, as it had been to Urban II's, back in the 1090s.

De Mézières' hopes for his Order of the Passion were visionary and chimerical: the conception of a single order bringing together 'from the eight languages of Christendom' such a vast polyglot corps of knights as he envisaged was far too grandiose. But if this special version of the crusading solution to the contemporary problem of military violence was impractical, his diagnosis of what was amiss was in many ways very sure and perceptive. He saw that a major element in the problem was that there were far too many men who had been brought up to the martial calling and to think of it as an honourable one, and who knew no other way of sustaining themselves; men who, as Sir John Chandos put it, 'cannot live without war and do not know how to'.⁴⁴ He saw, and clearly, the dilemma of those who thought of themselves as chivalrous but 'who by the custom of the land have little or no portion in the inheritance of their fathers and who by poverty are often constrained to follow wars that are unjust and tyrannical so as to sustain their estate of *noblesse*, since they know no other calling but arms and therein commit so much ill that it would be frightening to tell of all the pillaging and crimes with which they oppress the poor people'.⁴⁵ He saw the relevance of these practical perceptions to his crusading plans;

Any worthy knight who is bound for Outremer will want to know, firstly, how he will be sustained with food and drink and in the natural needs of the body;

⁴² P. de Mézières, *Letter to King Richard I*, ed. and trans. G.W. Coopland (Liverpool, 1975), pp. 56-60.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 61-63.

⁴⁴ Froissart, *Chroniques*, ed. S. Luce, vii, pp. 154-55.

⁴⁵ Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 865, fo. 423.

secondly, how he shall be supported with clothing, armour and horses to defend himself and to fight the enemies of the faith: thirdly, he will wish to be assured that in fighting for the faith he will be able to acquire just riches and true honour.⁴⁶

And these same practical considerations also prompted him, when he turned to the problem of the companies specifically, to offer an answer that was quite independent of his crusading schemes.

Many of them [he advised the King of France] are your own subjects and may be brought back to decent behaviour . . . knights and squires who form part of the companies should be taken into your service and given suitable wages . . . the first muster need not be oversearching, but after three or four months it would be possible to dismiss a third or a quarter of them, those who were plainly not soldiers but professional pillagers. Gradually, the chiefs of the companies, to obtain your favour, would reduce the number of their followers, and even become useful soldiers, paid by the taxes of the towns.⁴⁷

This is, in another form, the same advice that de Mézières gave elsewhere and that I have already quoted: 'Let the knights of France study the laws of true chivalry, and stand for . . . the common weal of the Kingdom of France.'

This second way of reforming the ways of knighthood, not through crusade ideology but rather by imposing better discipline, by arranging for regular payment of wages, and pointing chivalry toward the service of the common weal, was very much in the air in de Mézières' time. Honoré Bonet, in his famous book, the *Tree of Battles*, was like de Mézières much concerned with the outrages committed by men at arms, and like him he considered this to be a consequence of the neglect of the rules of 'worthy chivalry' by men seeking not the public good but to enrich themselves by pillaging.⁴⁸ This he considered to be a reversal of the role of the true soldier, who should remember that 'he does all that he does as the deputy of the king or of the lord in whose pay he is'.⁴⁹ War is the business of the prince, he says, fought for the common weal which always overrides private interest, and the rights of soldiers in matters of

⁴⁶ Arsenal, MS 2251, fo. 2v.

⁴⁷ *Le Songe du Vieil Pelerin*, ed Coopland, ii, pp. 408-09.

⁴⁸ *The Tree of Battles of Honoré Bouvet*, trans. G.W. Coopland (Liverpool, 1949), p. 189. On the whole question of the attitude to war and chivalry of Bonet (alias Bouvet), see N.A.R. Wright, 'The *Tree of Battles* of Honoré Bouvet and the Laws of War', in C.T. Allmand (ed.), *War, Literature and Politics in the Late Middle Ages* (Liverpool, 1976), pp. 12-31.

⁴⁹ *The Tree of Battles*, trans. Coopland, p. 135.

wages, booty, prisoners' ransoms and such like depend on their agreement with this superior lord, not on private right.⁵⁰ Christine de Pisan echoed Bonet, quoting at length and verbatim from his work in her *Book of Deeds of Arms and Chivalry*, and extolling the discipline of the Romans, as explained by Vegetius: thus she too firmly placed chivalry in the context of service of the common weal.⁵¹ When she treated of peace in her *Livre de la paix*, it was of the internal peace of France that she wrote; and she included a passage on the need to maintain its chivalry as a bulwark against outward enemies, a vital aspect of the preservation of its peace.⁵² Her hero Charles V had sought to forge the unruly chivalry of France into just such a bulwark; and she lived in her old age into the reign of his grandson Charles VII who succeeded more permanently than he did in the same aim.

It was this approach, that focused on the interconnection of the martial function of the chivalry and peace in the limited context of the royal and regional commonwealth, which in the end proved to offer the best solution to the problems of the age of the Free Companies, not the crusade. The civil wars of the last decade of Charles VI's unhappy reign, and the confusions of the first decade and a half of that of Charles VII, when there were two governments in France, the Anglo-Burgundian government centred on Paris and the Valois government of the so-called kingdom of Bourges, brought to birth a new generation of free companies, the notorious 'skinners' (*égorcheurs*) – so called because it was said that they would leave neither man nor woman with more than a vest upon them.⁵³ The brutal marginalia in the *cahiers de doléances* which record investigations into their ravaging give a picture of their methods of screwing money out of a miserable civil population: *gens crucifiez, femme violee, homme roty*.⁵⁴ Rodrigue de Villandrando, the Spaniard who was perhaps the ablest and the most infamous of their captains, earned himself the title of 'Emperor of the Pillagers'.⁵⁵ They fought nominally in the cause of the king of France – Charles VII, king of Bourges, that is:

⁵⁰ See Wright, *The Tree of Battles* of Honoré Bouvet', esp. pp. 22-23, 28-30.

⁵¹ On Christine's debt to Bouvet, see *The Tree of Battles*, trans. Coopland, pp. 24-25.

⁵² C. de Pisan *Le livre de la paix* ed. C.C. Willard (La Haye, 1958), esp. pp. 134-35.

⁵³ *La Chronique de E. de Monstrelet* ed. L. Douet d'Arcq, v (Paris, 1861), pp. 317-18. The fullest treatment of the *égorcheurs* is that of A. Tuetey, *Les égorcheurs sous Charles VII*, 2 vols (Montbéliard, 1874).

⁵⁴ These examples come from the report of the excesses of the *égorcheurs* in Luxueil and Faucongy, 1439; AD de la Côte d'Or, B11881.

⁵⁵ Contamine, *Guerre, état et société*, p. 446 (quoting from the *Marguerites Historiales*, BN, MS Fr. 955, ch. 137). On Roderique see also J. Quicherat, *Roderique de Villandrando* (Paris, 1879).

but it was his subjects rather than the enemy who suffered most brutally at their hands. There was hardly a province of France that was not exposed to their depredations, and they extended their activities into the borders of the empire, into Alsace, Lorraine and Savoy. The situation in France around 1440 was in fact very similar to that of the 1360s, which I have already described, and Charles VII's efforts to deal with it were very similar to those of his predecessor Charles V – and also to that prescription of Philippe de Mézières for dealing with the Free Companies that I quoted earlier. This time, however, the crusade does not come into the picture; as a way of ridding the land of robbers it had finally lost conviction.

The interlude in the Anglo-French war provided by the truce of Tours in 1444 gave Charles his opportunity. As a first step a large force of *routiers* was mustered under the Dauphin Louis who led them out of the country to fight as the allies of Frederick of Hapsburg against the Swiss, much as Du Guesclin had led the Free Companies out of France into Spain in an earlier generation.⁵⁶ Thereafter Charles VII followed fairly closely the example of his grandfather Charles V and the advice of de Mézières. Substantial numbers of the old *écorcheurs* were mustered in some fifteen *compagnies d'ordonnance*. Provision was made for their regular payment out of royal taxation, and they were quartered on specific towns. In just the way that de Mézières had suggested, Charles concentrated on recruiting into his service those captains who were of some solid standing, knights and esquires of noble blood, eschewing the bastards and the men of no means who had risen to command from nothing but their strength and the shrewdness of their pillaging.⁵⁷ With the aid of these leaders and their soldiers, other companies of men at arms were disbanded and the men – or some at least of them – escorted home to their native provinces. The commanders of the new *compagnies d'ordonnance* had most of them a rather chequered career behind them; but men like Dunois, La Hire, Anthoine de Chabannes and Robert Floques were sound soldiers, and they became the chivalric heroes of the last campaigns of the Hundred Years War, in 1450 and 1451, when the English were driven first out of Normandy and then out of Gascony.

In the mid 1440s when the *compagnies d'ordonnance* were first mustered, many observers supposed that, when the English war was over they would be disbanded, and that the taxes raised to support them

⁵⁶ Tuetey, *Les écorcheurs*, i, pp. 135ff.

⁵⁷ Contamine, *Guerre, état et société*, p. 401.