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EUROPEAN CHIVALRY IN THE 1490S

JENNIFER R. GOODMAN

This paper calls to remembrance an older world of the 1490s, one not often revisited by students of the Age of Discovery. This excursion offers a new path towards the better understanding of the Europeans of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries through the reexamination of the international chivalric culture of Christian Europe. In the case of chivalry, pejorative judgement has distracted us from a striking process of creative adaptation. This paper’s first goal is to give some idea of the atmosphere of the decade, of the pervasiveness of this chivalric element. Chivalry functioned as a medium for international understanding and communication, a common social, cultural, political, and even religious language. It also provided an arena of competition between individuals and groups. This study stresses the international character of this literature, and of this European chivalric ideology, with, of course, important national variations. To appreciate the wide geographic range of the evidence, broad international studies and discussions are needed. Here, attention is really focused on a subspecies: the European, Christian chivalry of the 1490s. The broadest international study would also touch upon the contemporary chivalries, or warrior codes, of the Islamic world, Japan, China, India, Africa and the Americas that were then in the process of encountering one another (Huizinga, 66; Adams, 51). While comparative feudalism received some attention from historians in the 1970s, the comparative study of chivalry has received far less consideration than it deserves. The age of discovery, when military aristocracies across the globe confronted one another, in many cases quite unexpectedly, provides a critical moment to examine these warrior codes as they experienced each other. It is tempting to assert that in no other period is a comparative approach more appropriate on historical grounds. Not perhaps coincidentally, the earliest comparative study of two chivalric systems that I have encountered so far was undertaken by that problematic historian, the Inca Garcilaso de la Vega (1539-1616), who set out in Book Six of his Comentarios...
reales to draw explicit parallels between the knightly codes of his Spanish and Inca ancestors (Garcilaso de la Vega, *Primera parte de los comentarios reales* 6:22; *The Incas*, 185-191). Because of the formidable language barriers that impede most modern scholars, such a project demands exchanges between specialists in African, American, Asian, and European cultures of this period. Only through such discussions can any parallels and distinctive features of each system be appreciated.¹

One of the fondest illusions of western civilization from the Renaissance to the present is that it has escaped the Middle Ages unscathed. We owe the desire to escape in part to the humanists, beginning with Petrarch, who named, defined and repudiated the “middle ages.” The notion of an intervening stagnant age of barbarism, separating them from an Edenic ancient world, was vital to their humanistic vision of history, a vision largely unquestioned today. The current view of the relationship between these periods was further complicated by the Romantic invention of an idealized Middle Age, a pastoral Age of Faith and of social stability in which to take refuge from the Industrial Revolution (Chandler). The polarized vision of history that has resulted is perhaps most damaging to our understanding of the complex transition from the fifteenth to the sixteenth century. As modern scholars forge a new vision of history, they need to acknowledge the presence, vitality, and impact of key “medieval” elements throughout the era we have been taught to think of as “the Renaissance.”

Franco Simone argued in 1960 for a more accurate investigation of the relationship between the Middle Ages and Renaissance in the fifteenth century, demolishing the artificial barriers created between the two periods by humanist polemic and Romantic historiography. To arrive at a more sophisticated view of the period, he advocated a careful reexamination of the evidence, decade by decade (Simone, 154). This paper adopts this decade-by-decade approach to reconsider the role of chivalry as a concept still essential for the understanding of the Europeans of the 1490s.

The 1490s tend to be omitted from studies of medieval or Renaissance chivalry, most of which end earlier or begin later, in deference to established period divisions. What results from this avoidance is an apparent historical gap, reinforcing the illusion of a spatial division between two alien eras. It seems useful for this

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reason to assemble a collection of chivalric materials from 1490-99, evidence of transition, change, and continuity, in order to reassess the character of the period. Such a study can help to create a bridge linking specialists from either side, a starting point for exchanges that may build a more flexible and realistic view of the complex historical dynamic at work throughout this period.

In the study of chivalry the old characterization of the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as an era of declension from an earlier medieval ideal lingers the longest. This view comes out of Léon Gautier’s *La Chevalerie* of 1884, and has found persuasive advocates up to the present day in Huizinga, Kilgour, Ferguson, and, recently, Sydney Anglo. The present study contends, conversely, that late medieval chivalry remained a viable system of ideals in the Europe of the 1490s. In fact numerous historical studies over the past two decades have reemphasized the creative role of chivalry into the seventeenth century. This reconsideration of later medieval and Renaissance chivalry springs from the work of such scholars as Richard Barber, Larry Benson, William Henry Jackson, Maurice Keen, John Leyerle, Martí de Riquer, P. E. Russell, and Juliet and Malcolm Vale. Leyerle in fact asserts that “the golden age of chivalry came at the end of the Middle Ages and was characterized by complex, traditional interconnections between aristocratic literature and aristocratic life, especially by the aristocratic ceremonies of feasts and tournaments” (Benson and Leyerle, 142; Adams, 67-68; cf. Benson, 141). The implications of this positive reevaluation of later medieval and Renaissance chivalry have not been fully appreciated, either by medievalists or by specialists in later periods. In particular, the usefulness of recent studies of the relationship between aristocratic life and literature for the chivalric and exploration literature of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries has yet to be established, although key scholars like Keen, and P. E. Russell have been suggesting this angle of approach throughout the 1980s (Keen, 251-52; Russell, “Prince Henry the Navigator,” 25-26).

Any discussion of chivalry needs to begin by defining its subject, as Jeremy Adams masterful article has made clear. Much disagreement between scholars is rooted in conflicting definitions of the term “chivalry.” Some studies define “chivalry” professionally, as the military skills of the medieval mounted warrior. This is one of the word’s early meanings. For others, like Georges Duby,
“chivalry” is a social class, the knights, mounted warriors who offer their feudal overlords military service in return for land tenure. Other studies extend their definition of the term to encompass the code of conduct developed by and for the knight. It is this last definition that seems most useful for students of the fortune of chivalry in the later Middle Ages (Adams).

The debate over definitions is related to a second area of disagreement over the historical limits of the concept. Both the beginning point and the end of chivalry remain problematic issues. V. G. Kiernan goes back as far as the Ramayana for her earliest example of a cadre of warriors who fight to defend the wretched (Kiernan, 42). European chivalry by any definition does seem to have crystallized by the end of the twelfth century. Its point of conclusion, or indeed whether it should be assigned any clear point of conclusion at all, depends on the initial definition. If “chivalry” is seen as a specific set of military skills, or as a feudal class, it will terminate at a different point in history than if it is seen as an aristocratic code of conduct. For the purposes of this essay, chivalry is envisioned as a code of conduct originally developed for a tightly defined professional group, but later appealing to figures beyond the boundaries of the original chivalric world: the prince, the landed gentry, the professional soldier, sometimes even the merchant. Because of its prestige as a system of values, the European chivalric ideal in fact outlasts the social class that created it.

Two issues, then, need to be pursued in any investigation of this kind. First, did chivalry still exist in the 1490s, or is the term already anachronistic? Second, if something that can be called chivalry did still exist, how does it compare with the chivalry of earlier and later eras? Was it in decay? Fifteenth-century chivalry inevitably differs to some extent from that of the twelfth century. Internal and external factors constantly alter the picture. In the age of discovery, the rapid expansion of the European’s contacts to the east and west provided an array of new challenges for the practitioner of chivalry, in some ways endorsing the wildest fantasies of chivalric romance. Should these changes be identified as decadence? Decadence is always relative. It depends on the evaluator’s view of a period by comparison with the surrounding historical eras. It is always a judgement not of one but three ages. This essay’s reexamination of a selection of primary sources from
the 1490s also offers me the chance to reexamine the criteria by which late medieval and Renaissance chivalry have been evaluated and too often found wanting.

Among the most obvious symptoms of the continuing interest in the medieval chivalric tradition into the 1490s is the vitality of the tournament, as military exercise, sport, theatrical display, political tool, and social event. Possibly the most conspicuous European tournament of the decade may be the passage of arms (pas d'armes) held at Sandricourt, near Pontoise, between 15 and 21 September 1493 by Louis de Hédouville (1462-1503), then squire of the stables to Charles VIII of France. There, ten knights volunteered to encounter all comers in a sequence of four martial exercises. Louis de Hédouville was identified by contemporary historians among the circle of courtiers closest to Charles VIII. He was even more closely associated with Louis of Orleans, Charles's successor as Louis XII; two months after the event, Louis paid him 100 crowns, possibly to help defray the expenses of this pas. Louis de Hédouville went on to an active career in the royal service, both as a military officer and as a governor. He was one of the casualties of the 1503 Italian campaign, during which he had served with some distinction (Vayssière, xxii-xxiv; xxix-xxx; Barber and Barker, 124-25).

The most striking feature of the passage of arms at Sandricourt may be its series of locations evocative of chivalric fiction. The participants competed first before the chateau at the barrière perilleuse, the “perilous barrier” on foot, armed with blunted lances and swords. They were to reappear the next day, at the carrefour ténébreux, “the shadowy crossroads,” for a mass conflict, replaced by single combat after the first day’s jousting proved sufficiently ferocious. A third encounter in single combat with blunt lances and sharp-edged swords took place at the champ de l’espine, the “field of the thorn.” Finally, the knights were to wander off into the forest desvoyable “the misleading forest,” to “pursue adventurous quests,” later reporting their adventures under oath. There all the members of the defending team would be found ready to oppose all comers, like knights errant seeking their adventures there, just as did the Knights of the Round Table once upon a time.2

The wandering knights were pursued, in turn, by umpires, male and female spectators, and by two maitres d’hôtel with ser-
vants bearing refreshments. The record commends the whole operation as the closest thing to the Round Table that has yet been recorded.

And it seems to me that since the days of King Arthur, which are still remembered today, he who first founded the Round Table, when there were so many noble knights who are still remembered and forever shall be, like Sir Lancelot of the Lake, Sir Gawain, Sir Tristram of Lyonesse, Sir Palomedes, who were all once of the Round Table, I can well say that one has never seen nor read in any history, that since that time there was ever made for the love of ladies any passage of arms, jousts, tournament nor behours that approached them in the skill of arms as was the passage of Sandricourt, nor came closer to the deeds of the aforementioned knights of the Round Table. And I think that all noble men, full of virtue, whether of this kingdom of France or of other lands and Christian kingdoms, ought to be sad and sorry that they did not witness the combats that took place at the castle of Sandricourt.

The author notes that the unexpected number of competitors who responded to the invitation placed some stress on the home team (Vayssière, 66-67). These selections stress the writer's continuing admiration of Arthur and his Round Table as the gold standard of chivalry, in the teeth of much contemporary criticism of the historicity of that British monarch. At Sandricourt, according to this recorder, life strove to emulate art, and came closer to succeeding than ever before. This is a statement of chivalric self-confidence, in no way expressive of disgust with contemporary performance.

This particular pas d'armes has been recently criticized as "trop courtois," "too courteous" or perhaps "too courtly." In her biography of Charles VIII of France, Yvonne Labande-Mailfert remarks that Charles disdained such elaborate events as the pas d'armes of Sandricourt in favor of the more austere, religious, historically-based "chivalry of the age of St. Louis," (Labande-Mailfert, 163-64). Here Charles VIII's biographer seems to be distinguishing between two chivalries of the 1490s, one anachronistic, but faithful to the best thirteenth-century standard, and a second reflecting the degeneracy of its own era. Labande-Mailfert depicts Charles VIII's chivalry as the morally superior thirteenth-century variety, while all around him his friends and contemporaries are luxuriating in theatrically decadent fifteenth-century chivalric activities. These are both questionable assumptions. This characterization isolates Charles VIII from his own period, while overstat-
ing both the transcendence of St. Louis's knighthood and the
fatuity of the fifteenth-century tournament. Nonetheless,
Labande-Mailfert moves in the right direction by noting a clear
discrepancy between the character of the chivalry of Charles VIII
as it appears in the primary sources and the twentieth-century
characterization of fifteenth-century chivalry as decadent. The
next step should be to apply these primary materials to question
the currently accepted interpretation of chivalry in the fifteenth
century.

The "serious business" of this or any tournament tends to be
seen by contemporary theorists and later scholars as the develop-
ment of technical skill in equestrian combat and the manipula-
tion of weaponry. Indeed, one popular way of testing for "deca-
dence" is to question the utility of the military skills called for by
the event. When the tournament becomes more pageant than
combat, according to this approach, it is in decay. In this respect
the later tournament of Nozeroy (1519-20), where the offensive
team brought on grosse artillerie of some unspecified sort to bom-
bard the defensive team's tower, might be viewed as the "cutting
dge" (Prost, 235-59). For defenders of the later medieval and
Renaissance tournaments as military practice, one should look to
the recent work of Malcolm Vale (Vale, 62-87). Barber and
Barker see the fifteenth century tournament as the high point in
the history of such events, a period when theatre and combat
were evenly balanced (Barber and Barker, 209-211). At
Sandricourt the combatants were able to practice under a variety
of conditions: the pas demanded offensive and defensive combat,
as a group or individually, in isolation or before an audience, on
foot and on horseback.

A cruder test is also applied: how violent was the combat? The
more bloodthirsty analyst tends to equate gore with sincerity.
Were knights still willing to maim or kill themselves in the cause
of professional training, or had they become too squeamish, or
too pragmatic? The modification of rules and the addition of
protective equipment in order to prevent accidental injuries in
modern athletic competition parallels the development of regula-
tions for combat and of rebated weapons and specialized tourna-
ment armor through the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. As
the tournament became an arena for diplomatic communication
or royal celebration, as reigning monarchs insisted on jousting in person, the stakes rose, and organizers became increasingly concerned to prevent inconvenient or disastrous fatalities. Alan Young points out that in spite of all this, the tournament remained hazardous: in 1559 Henri II of France would die as a result of a joust (Young, 11-16). It should be noted that the level of violence was a fifteenth-century test of the tournament’s success as well. The herald of Sandricourt praises the combatants for the vehemence of their attack, while the English knights of 1494, to be discussed below, were assessed by their audience on the basis of their enthusiasm. The combat was avid, scores were recorded by heralds and details of technique scrutinized. In the English record one competitor is criticized for flinching: "butt then Thomas Rider sumwhat meved or declyned from the strokkiis; wether hit was for the fault of his sight, or to voide the strokkiis I can noott say, butt he was noott preysed for the voidying" (Gairdner, Letters, 399). The Inca Garcilaso de la Vega’s sixteenth-century account of Incan practice combats, to be quoted below, similarly insists upon the ferocity of the combatants.

The passage of arms strengthened the rapport between men who might well go on to fight alongside one another in earnest. It also fostered social encounters between male participants and female onlookers: readers of the records note that dancing almost invariably occupied the evenings.

The joust’s economic impact could also be considerable. The published version of the Sandricourt record catalogues the many ancillary professions involved in this single event: “doctors, surgeons, apothecaries armorers, saddlers, plume makers, tailors and folk of all trades,” and of course cooks and waiters to serve between eighteen hundred and two thousand people at all hours of the day (Vayssière, 64-65). From the organizer’s viewpoint it was an expensive undertaking, a display of personal magnificence that enhanced one’s social status. From the tradesman’s point of view it could represent a potential economic opportunity.

Perhaps most memorable in the case of Sandricourt may have been the effect of participation in a series of tests. This immersion in an artificial reality might well prepare the knight for later military and social experiences. The hazardous barrier, the shadowy crossroads, the field of the thorn and the obscure forest are land-
scapes of chivalric fiction, whether romance or allegory. They are also ways of envisioning the world.

For the younger knights of Charles VIII’s court who took part, the tournament of Sandricourt could also have functioned as a rite of initiation. Here they could display their military skills before influential and technically knowledgeable spectators, under a variety of conditions, functioning both as solitary individuals and as members of a team. Tournaments are portrayed as playing this role in the life of Pierre du Terrail, Seigneur de Bayard (1473?-1524), le chevalier sans peur et sans reproche. Jacques de Mailles, Bayard’s chivalric biographer describes how Bayard advanced from the rank of page to squire through an escalating series of tournaments, the earliest being Claude de Vauldray’s 1494 joust at Lyons. For Bayard’s biographer, an important feature of the event is that young Bayard was able to hold his own against such a celebrated jouster as Claude de Vauldray himself, the hero of the great Burgundian Pas de la Dame Sauvage of 1470. Once proven, Bayard could proceed to military action in Italy with the army of Charles VIII. Far from remaining the province of nostalgic veterans, these chivalric spectacles could operate as showcases or testing grounds for the younger chivalric talent of the court. Louis de Hédouville was about thirty-one when he hosted the passage of arms at Sandricourt; Bayard’s biographer depicts him as an organizer of a joust when only in his twenties, soon after his first experience of 1494 (Mailles, 23-54). It seems notable that the Inca military exercises described by the Inca Garcilaso take place in the context of a period of initiation and military training for a group of young men of royal blood. One exercise, centered on a fortress, cries out to be compared with the first day of the tournament at Sandricourt.

Another time they were divided into two camps, the first of which took up quarters in the fortress, while the second tried to dislodge them from it. The struggle lasted all one day, and started again on the following day, with the roles reversed, that is to say, the attackers becoming the defencers and the defencers, the attackers; in this way, each group could show its good qualities in both situations. Although they were given special weapons, less dangerous than those used in actual war, there was no lack of wounded, and, sometimes, even dead, during these exercises, so ardently and determinedly did these young men compete for victory.

(Garcilaso, *The Incas*, 186)
Tournaments remained indispensable accompaniments to major princely occasions across Europe throughout the 1490s and into the sixteenth century, royal weddings and coronations in particular. This can be depicted as the automatic continuation of an ancient tradition, or, alternatively, as evidence of the continuing appeal and political importance of these expensive forms of entertainment. Once again, examining a specific event can help to clarify the nature of the evidence. An attractive example of a three-day tournament affixed to a specific royal ceremony is the joust Henry VII held at Westminster on the occasion of the future Henry VIII's creation as Duke of York, between October 29 and November 13, 1494. This event is much less often discussed than Henry VII's more flamboyant efforts of 1501, when he welcomed Katherine of Aragon to England. To appreciate the distinctive character of the 1494 event, the student needs to know that the central figure, Prince Henry, was three years old at the time. His sister, Princess Margaret, the future Queen of Scotland, who presented the prizes to the winning jousters, was six (Gairdner, Letters, I:396-400; Young, 46, 104, 124).

One cannot help suspecting that the true subject, or target, of the event was the twenty-year-old pretender to the English throne, Perkin Warbeck (1474?-1499), then being acclaimed by the court of the newly crowned Emperor Maximilian as the rightful Duke of York and the true King Richard of England. In December 1494, a month after the tournament, Henry VII arrested his step-uncle, Sir William Stanley, for conspiring to support Warbeck (Chrimes, 85). In 1495, after the first of a series of abortive invasions of England, Warbeck would travel to Scotland, where that Arthurian enthusiast James IV would welcome him more warmly still, and marry him off to one of his cousins, Lady Catherine Gordon. A tournament took place on that occasion as well (MacDougall, 122-23).

In the formal rites in which Prince Henry was first dubbed Knight of the Bath and then created Duke of York, Henry VII drew national and international attention to the existence of his young family—not one but two sons, and a daughter. It seems to have been no coincidence that the two principal defenders of the tournament, the Duke of Suffolk and the Earl of Essex, represented two rival English royal houses. Suffolk, Edmund de la Pole (1472?-1513), was a son of Edward IV's sister Elizabeth. His elder
brother had been killed in 1487 at the battle of Stoke, fighting for another pretender, Lambert Simnel. Here, at age twenty-two, Suffolk appeared at the joust as a vigorous public supporter of the new Tudor line. By 1501, seven years later, he had found it prudent to leave the country and was working on his own reconquest of England with the assistance of Maximilian. His unimpeachable claim to head the House of York would prove especially troublesome to the Tudors in the future. Henry VIII found it prudent to have him executed before leaving the country on his first campaign ( Chrimes, 72, 92-94). Suffolk’s fellow defender was the Earl of Essex, Henry Bourchier. Essex, a cousin of John Bourchier, Lord Berners, the future translator of Froissart, could claim descent from Edward III, while his mother was a sister of Elizabeth Woodville, Henry VII’s own mother-in-law. Knowing the identity of the participants helps to reveal the character of the 1494 event as a proclamation of Tudor dynastic stability. Knightly heirs of the rival houses of York and Lancaster are united at the Palace of Westminster to honor Henry VII and his offspring. One language spoken here is that of the livery. The four knights made their first appearance on the field in the king’s colors, green and white, the next day in those of Prince Henry. This is a clear public statement of national unity and legitimacy. Henry VII saw to it that his own appearance as the presiding figure attracted notice: “First to see the kyngis grace and the qwenys soo richely empairelled, his house and stage couvered with riche cloth of Aras blew, enramplisshed with fleurs de lis of gold accompened with the subsance of the great astatys of this realme, as the duc of Yorc, the duc of Bedford” (Gairdner, Letters, I:394).

In its visual style the event attractively combined old and new motifs. Its procession of ladies leading knights onto the field can be traced back more than a century in England, to 1381 (Barber and Barker, 36). The appearance of four principal knights beneath their decorative pavilions repeats a form of pageantry seen earlier in the fifteenth century in Burgundy and pioneered in England in 1470 by the late Earl Rivers, Anthony Woodville, Caxton’s patron and Edward IV’s brother-in-law. Henry VIII would process under a similar canopy himself in 1511, as the Great Tournament Roll of Westminster records. The mottoes displayed by the jousters look back to fifteenth-century Burgundy and forward to the elaborate impresa of the sixteenth-century tour-
nament (Young, 123-43). On this occasion the knights' successive mottoes link in a sentence: “For to accomplish” “Our promise made” “Thereto we be redy” “In every thing” (Gairdner, Letters, 396-97). Taken together, they read like a slogan for the occasion, not like a group of assorted personal mottoes. One might perhaps contrast them with their contemporary Olivier de la Marche’s motto, *Tant a souffert La Marche*, apparently a genuine personal statement. This suggests that the 1494 mottoes functioned as another expression of unity, further evidence of central control over the event.

On the third day of the tournament, two gentlemen of the court ventured a comic interlude. The record raises the possibility that they may even have improvised it while one of their fellows was hunting a lost helmet. One horse’s trapper was of paper: “ther apon peynted ij men pleyng at dyse & certain othes writtyn not worthey her to be rehearsed. That was doon, as hym selff told me, to cause the kyng to laugh” (Gairdner, Letters, 399). The effect produced here might seem to a later reader to approximate that of the antimasque, as it was to be confected by Ben Jonson early in the seventeenth century. Yet the introduction of comic incidents into a literary tournament was as old as the chivalric romance, witness Chrétien’s *Le Chevalier de la charrette*, (c. 1180) where Lancelot’s combats are ridiculously complicated by the exigencies of his love for Guinevere. There a single knight enacts in turn the serious and comically inept roles depicted in Henry VII’s tournament. Comic episodes occur in a record of an actual tournament as early as 1278 (Barber and Barker, 39). The prose romances circulating in the fifteenth century preserve the same tradition, with variations. The knights of Henry VII’s court could have known Malory’s version of the Tournament at Surluse, drawn from the prose *Tristan*, which ends farcically with Lancelot’s entering into the lists with a maiden’s garment slipped over his armor, pretending to lead another knight onto the field, and then suddenly unhorsing Sir Dinadan (Malory, II: 669). Literary burlesques like the Middle English *Tournament of Tottenham* also developed the possibilities of parody. The event, then, should be taken as a fresh development within a long-lived chivalric tradition, rather than as evidence of fifteenth-century boredom with the tournament. The “rodeo clown” might be seen as the modern descendant of these comic knights. Young sees
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their costumes as forerunners of Renaissance tournament devices, and notes the comic figure of the postboy who enlivened a joust of 1595 (Young, 124, 173-74).

Another feature of the Renaissance tournament in development here, as in France, is the virtuoso display of horsemanship. This variety of performance first brought the page Bayard to the attention of Charles VIII. At Henry VII’s event “There shuld you have seen the good riders, the well doing horses, what gambades, the changelyng of bellis, the glistening of spangils and especialle among oder the lord Bourgavenny had a small blake hors whiche in montyng soo high above grounde did merveilles, and soo often tyme” (Gairdner, Letters, 394). Caxton’s 1483 demand that the English knight of the later fifteenth century should be concerned with developing the equestrian skills demanded by his profession, “to know his hors, and his hors hym” “that euery knyght shold haue hors and harneyes / and also the vse and craft of a knyght” would seem to find a response here. It is notable that this joust, with its prizes of diamond and ruby rings, conforms closely to the royally sponsored “Iustes of pees” called for by Caxton in his celebrated epilogue (Caxton, epilogue to Lull, Book of the Ordre of Chyvalry, 124). The knight in his original role as a mounted warrior was finding new forms of elaboration on the way to haute école, the Spanish Riding School, and modern dressage. Barber and Barker consider this development contrary to the original spirit of the tournament, expressing special scorn for the Renaissance “horse ballet,” but it should also be seen in the context of a long history of training horses for combat, stretching from Xenophon to the Duke of Newcastle, if not further (Barber and Barker, 209).

Certain elements of the 1494 record do identify some failures to live up to the chivalry of the past, real or imaginary. Horses given by the twenty candidates for knighthood who accompanied Prince Henry as a fee to the King’s Marshalls, the herald complains, “wer simple and soo lyttill of valore, and nott to the worshipp of knyghthood” (Gairdner, Letters, 391). The economic impact of surrendering a horse of real value renders this attempt to reduce the financial stress of the event understandable, especially considering the nine other occasions during the festivities when the new knights were expected to display their noble virtue of generosity. Malcolm Vale points out that the price of horses, as
of armor and other military equipment, had risen substantially since the 1350s, even when considered in relation to income (Vale, 125-26). In the analysis of this episode, should the stress be placed on the effort to minimize this fee, on the knights' unanimous resistance to giving up a good horse, or on the seriousness with which the recorder still regards "the worship of knighthood?"

For lack of space, this essay must leave the tournament of the 1490s without discussing other equally interesting events in England and France, nor the Italian tournaments of the decade, some with décor by Leonardo da Vinci, nor the jousts of such prominent enthusiasts as Ferdinand of Castile, the Emperor Maximilian, or James IV of Scotland. Anglo's introduction to the Great Tournament Roll of Westminster and Barber and Barker describe some of these enterprises. The vitality and utility of the tournament across Europe through the 1490s can be clearly established from the primary sources.

In turning to the chivalric literature of the 1490s, students of the period need to notice two intertwined literary phenomena: first, the revision, translation, and dissemination of older texts in both manuscript and printed editions, and, second, the composition of new chivalric works under the influence of this body of existing literature. Neglecting either element, whether the continuing attraction of older works, or the appearance of new ones, can easily warp the portrayal of this transitional era. Of these two approaches, the failure to note a continuing interest in earlier literature has been the more common. The specialized training of scholars and the reflection of traditional period divisions in bibliographical sources, reference works, and physical facilities all encourage the segregation of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. At the same time, most scholars now recognize and deplore the artificiality of the picture this creates while simultaneously failing to do much about it. Taken together, new presentations of older works, the first appearances of new compositions, and chivalric works in progress all reveal a continuing fascination with the world of chivalry through the 1490s.

The "older literature" is in most cases newer than might at first be supposed. A key instance of the problem of locating the proper historical context of a fifteenth-century chivalric work is provided in English literature by Malory. Sir Thomas Malory's
**Morte Darthur** translated and adapted French thirteenth-century prose and earlier fifteenth-century English poetry into a new prose work, completed in 1469, first printed in 1485, reprinted with the addition of a celebrated set of woodcut illustrations in 1498, and then in successive editions to 1634. One of the primary difficulties this history presents for Malory specialists is the need to study this major work as both old and new, traditional material in a new form, disseminated by means of both old and new technologies, in print and in manuscript copies. The chivalric publications of the 1490s are in many cases the *mises en prose*—prose reworkings—of earlier medieval verse romances studied by Georges Doutrepont. Many of them date from the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Editions and translations of these chivalric prose romances are too often omitted from bibliographies as irrelevant to the future history of literature. Shorter works like Philippe le Camus’ *Olivier de Castile et Artus d’Algarbe* (c. 1454; printed Geneva, 1482; rpt. 1492-4; Orgelfinger) *Paris and Vienne* (c. 1400?; printed Antwerp, 1487) and Jean d’Arras’ *Mélusine* (1. 14th century; printed Geneva, 1478) have proven especially vulnerable to this dismissive treatment. Their relative compactness differentiates them from the new wave of chivalresque romances that were just beginning to appear over the horizon, Garci Rodriguez de Montalvo’s *Amadís de Gaula* and its offspring. Perhaps, Clive Griffin suggests, the shorter romances “may have been particularly popular as children’s literature.” (Griffin, 152 n.19; Griffin follows Eisenberg, *Romances of Chivalry*, 89). The label “children’s literature” conveys unfortunate pejorative implications here. Surely a literature read extensively by a young audience should be recognized as a key formative influence upon the imagination of the youth of the 1490s. “Perhaps no other literature so profoundly affects us as the tales read in childhood.” (Hearn, 27). Humanist educators like Juan Luis Vives would indeed view this chivalric fiction in precisely this way, with alarm. In his celebrated 1523 list of *pestiferis libris* hazardous to female readers, Vives associates *Amadís, Lancelot, Tristan, Paris and Vienne, Mélusine, Floris et Blanchefleur* without distinction (Vives, 87). Georges Duby and Derek Brewer have theorized that the chivalric romance itself was devised in the twelfth century as a fantasy literature for the *juvenites*, the younger generation of knights (Duby). The evidence that medieval chivalric literature
appealed mainly to a young audience, while Renaissance literature was being read by mature individuals, is not in any case overwhelming. Probably these works attained a mixed readership of children and adults, as they did in the family of Edward IV. In the case of Olivier, Gail Orgelfinger has pointed out some specific fifteenth-century chivalric and political issues taken up by this widely-read mid-fifteenth century Burgundian romance—usurpation, invasion, reconquest, crusade, the holding of Christian hostages by Islamic rulers. Yvonne Labande-Mailfert has proposed the little-known fifteenth-century prose romance of the Trois fils du roi as a blueprint for Charles VIII’s 1494 invasion of Italy (Orgelfinger, xi, 244; Labande-Mailfert, 168). Both of these studies depict shorter chivalric fiction addressing mature audiences of the late fifteenth century and being received in all seriousness by those auditors.

Keith Whinnom pointed out that students of cultural history need to differentiate between what people are supposed to be reading, according to received literary history, and what they actually did read. While evidence of publication is not evidence of reading, I think reprinting and recopying is. Several of the books mentioned above, and not the most famous, have been continuously in print since the late fifteenth century. All of the prose romances cited earlier were reprinted at least once in the 1490s, and all of them were translated into two or three other languages at least. Among the notable enterprises of chivalric publication that deserve mention here are Antoine Vérard’s magisterial Parisian volumes of the prose Lancelot (1494) and Tristan (1494, reprinting Jehan le Bourgoys’ Rouen edition of 1489). They may serve to remind students of the period that the prose romance of the 1490s still ranged in scale from compact narrative like Paris et Vienne to long, interlaced narratives that required three folio volumes for their presentation.

In trying to describe this literature, then, one should resist the impulse to categorize the later medieval prose romances reductively. The character of this literature varies widely. Some, like Paris et Vienne, stress believability, creating a chivalric love story that clings tightly to the contemporary world and to plausible plot development. Others, like Valentine et Orson, revel in the fantastic. Many display clear affinities with the verse romances from which a good proportion of them were developed. Prose gave the narra-
tive a different stylistic environment, certainly creating a different aural and visual experience. It may possibly help the authors to convey a greater illusion of historicity. In reading verse, an audience is acutely aware of the poet's role as shaper of the narrative. Prose had become, by convention, the vehicle of the historian. Many carry strong didactic messages, although this feature has been much overstressed at the expense of other features. Many of the newer works are "composite romances" built from eclectic collections of motifs and often explicitly linked to established works or cycles of Arthur or Charlemagne. Hagiographic plot elements often surface, especially in their conclusions: Malory, Jean Baignon's Fierabras, Valentine et Orson, Les Quatre fils Aymon all offer examples of this. The fifteenth-century hero is far more likely to die as an ascetic hermit or crusading martyr than he is to "live happily ever after."

Up to this point the discussion has focused on chivalric fiction. There was, besides, a massive body of medieval vernacular chivalric history extant. Two distinguished examples still familiar today are William of Tyre's account of the First Crusade and Jean Froissart's chronicle of the Hundred Years' War, both available during the 1490s in French, English, and Spanish. This class of literature continued to develop, as fifteenth-century chroniclers devoted much of their attention to the depiction of their patrons as patterns of chivalry. History and fictional prose tend to reinforce one another throughout the period, sharing motifs and materials. The two classes of literature meshed most completely in pseudohistory, as in the romans d'antiquité and romanticized biographies of Charlemagne like Jean Baignon's Fierabras, a prose reworking of a popular late twelfth-century chanson de geste with added biographical material, or Pedro del Corral's Crónica sarrasina (c. 1430) of the fall of Spain to the Visigoths. In this branch of literature, too, chivalry functions as a viable system of ideals, possibly less often questioned than it had been in the thirteenth century. For the student of comparative chivalry, it is worth observing that two celebrated non-European works also fall into this class of heroic fiction inspired by history. One is the Ottoman collection of stories recounting the exploits of the thirteenth-century dervish Sari Saltuk, the Saltuknâme (Book of Saltuk), gathered between 1473 and 1480 by order of Prince Cem (alternatively spelled Djem or Jem). Saltuk is depicted preaching
the Holy War and infiltrating western Europe disguised as a monk to propagate Islam through his eloquence and martial skills. He also flies across the seas and slays a dragon (Inalcik, 187). Cem would become a hero of romance in his own right (Vaughan, 86, 89 n.5.). In Japan, the cycle of stories that make up the Heike monogatari portrayed courtly intrigue and samurai combat of the twelfth century, refined in the fourteenth century into a massive work of poetic prose that continued to be popular in oral presentation into the nineteenth century. This may prove a key work for comparative study in that it depicts the rise to power of a new Japanese warrior class who would develop a new code of ethics (Kitagawa, xxv). In the Europe of the 1490s, old and new chivalric manuals were also being propagated. In 1490 excerpts from Ramon Llull's late thirteenth century Catalan Libro del orde de cavayleria reappeared, somewhat renovated, as chapters twenty-eight through thirty-six of Joannot Martorell's Tirant lo Blanch. Among the new work underway in the 1490s, Matteo Maria Boiardo (1440?-1494) was busy composing the third canto of his Italian chivalric romance epic, Orlando Innamorato, amalgamating the Arthurian and Charlemagne cycles of romances. The Emperor Maximilian was meditating this three autobiographical chivalric romances, Der Weisskunig, Theuerdank, and Freydal (Jackson). Garci Rodriguez de Montalvo was, like Malory, reworking older narratives more radically to produce his Amadis de Gaula and its sequel, Las Sergas de Esplandian. None of these major chivalric projects would be widely available until after 1500, providing a kind of delayed impact for the chivalrous writers of the 1490s. But the great Catalan prose romance Tirant lo Blanch was to be printed for the first time in 1490. At the simplest level, these new enterprises spring from a creative response to extensive reading in the earlier literature.

On the level of actual warfare one dominant theme of the period is the continuing prestige of the crusade. This is partly a response to historical pressures, in particular to the rise of the Ottoman empire as a new Islamic superpower. The taking of Constantinople (1453) and the continuing threats against Rhodes and Italy leave their mark in historical and literary sources through the end of the 1490s. Papal crusading projects continued to be announced throughout the decade. Innocent VIII and Alexander VI did somewhat compromise their role as
preacher of the crusade by their diplomatic and financial inter-
changes with Bayezid II (1481-1512). Some of this commerce cen-
tered around Prince Cem (d. 1495), the patron of the Saltuknâme,
Bayezid’s rebellious younger brother; Bayezid was paying the
Pope forty-five thousand ducats a year to keep Cem in custody
(Inalcik 30-31: Vaughan, 85-89). Still, even before the fall of
Granada in 1492, the successes of the Christian forces of
Ferdinand and Isabella against the Moors in Spain had generated
international emulation. After Granada fell, Charles VIII of
France adopted the competitive motto, Plus qu’autre, “More than
Another”—or perhaps, “More than Somebody Else,” somebody
else being Ferdinand of Aragon. In a speech of circa 1490 Charles
VIII’s ambassador to England, Robert Gaguin, described the “pi-
ous and honorable” wars of the Spanish monarchs as partial inspi-
ration for the French project of a conquest of Naples as the first
step towards a crusade against the expanding Ottoman Empire.
The text of the speech reflects an interesting combination of pi-
ety, pragmatism, and the quest for personal glory (Labande-
Mailfert, 168). Maximilian cherished similar aspirations. Later in
the decade Columbus envisioned his expeditions to the Americas
in the same way, as essential preludes to the Christian recovery of
Jerusalem. In England that devout patron of learning Lady Marg-
aret Beaufort, the Queen Mother, herself expressed a wish to go
on crusade, “and do their laundry, for the love of Jesu” (Fisher).

The high prestige of the crusade derived in part from chivalric
theory. The ideal of the knight as a defender of the church had
been stressed since the twelfth century. Combat between fellow
Christians was discouraged, except of course for practice, while
combat against an unbeliever of any kind was recognized as the
highest form of knighthood. It had become established as the top
rung in the ladder of chivalric activities (Keen, 252). The dubious
theological premises behind this notion were continually de-
bated. After all, killing an unbaptised opponent consigned his
soul to eternal torment. Nevertheless, the crusade continued to
be endorsed throughout the fifteenth century, notably by Prince
Henry the Navigator of Portugal (Russell, Prince Henry, 22-23).
Military conquest had long been seen as a vital prelude to any
permanent evangelization of non-Christian lands (Kedar, 202-
203). Combat in defense of Christian territory, or to extend
Christian control, was to be sought out as desirable. For the late
sixteenth-century knight, the role of crusader combined two powerful chivalric concepts: the ideal of combat for a higher spiritual purpose rather than for personal, political, or economic motives, and the image of a long, testing journey to a distant, alien location—a pilgrimage or a quest. The obvious applicability of all this to the activities of European adventurers in Africa, India, the Americas, and the Far East has been noted already (Keen, 250; Russell, *Prince Henry*, 23-26). Labande-Mailfert has indicated how an announced intent to lead a crusade might be used to justify military enterprises within Europe, as in Charles VIII’s Italian invasion (Labande-Mailfert, 168). Comparative study of this ongoing crusading interest in relation to the parallel contemporary Islamic theory and practice of *jihad*, especially as part of the official policy of the Ottoman empire, can contribute much to our understanding of this subject.

In this connection, more attention should be given to the links between chivalry and Christian missionary activities. In 1493 Columbus returned from the Caribbean with six natives, whom he presented to the court of Ferdinand and Isabella. A plaque above the font in Barcelona Cathedral records that:

> “Mense aprili AD MCDXCIII in huius almae cathedralis choro catholico rege Ferdinando filioque Joanne principe eosdem e fonte levantibus sex primi indiani ex america a christoforo columbo abducti sacro baptismate renati sunt. Qui dehinc in patriam reversi missionarorum instar extiterunt. Ita Barcinonensis civitas primum christianorum semen novis contulit mundi plagis quibus mater hispania et linguam et leges suas erat datura.”

The Latin text stresses that Ferdinand and Prince Juan actively participated in the baptism of the six Indians, *eosdem e fonte levantibus* (“raising them from the font with their own hands”). Their rival João II of Portugal had been engaging in similar activities in the late 1480s, in his relations with the kingdom of the Kongo as depicted c. 1492 in the chronicle of Rui de Pina (c. 1450-1522) (Russell, “White Kings.”). It should be remembered that mass conversions had been as much desired as mass expulsions in 1492, when the Catholic Monarchs imposed the alternatives of Christianity or exile on their Jewish and Moorish subjects.

What is not often appreciated is the extent to which these Iberian princes were conforming to a model prominent in medieval
chivalric literature since the thirteenth century at least. The Arthurian tradition had its own instance in the baptism of Sir Palamedes, presented as the crowning achievement of Sir Tristram in the prose Tristan. Much stress is placed upon the knights' missionary efforts as accompaniment to crusader combat in Les Trois Fils du Roi (The Three Kings' Sons) and Enrique Fi di Oliva. This emphasis on the accompanying evangelism seems to have been a necessary response to criticism of the crusade as a theologically illegitimate enterprise. Probably the clearest parallel to the baptism of the Indians appears in Jean Baignon's Fierabras, a popular French publication of the 1490s, soon to enter the history of Spanish and Latin American literature (Peter Burke, "Chivalry in the New World," in Anglo, ed., Chivalry in the Renaissance, 252-62). The culminating scene of the central book depicts the baptism of the glamorous Saracen heroine, Floripas, following a strenuous but unsuccessful effort on the part of Charlemagne and Floripas's brother Fierabras to convert their father, the captured emir Balan. The emir is executed directly following his refusal. This interest in promoting or enforcing conversion strengthens the parallels between the orders of secular knighthood and of the clergy that Lull had promoted in the Libro del orde de cavayleria. In this, too, European monarchs strove to match themselves against models from chivalric history and mythology. Most of all, this pious energy elevated their activities in the realm of exploration and conquest to a higher moral plane. These rival princes do seem to have been struggling to achieve a religious chivalry. After all, they hoped to attain eternal glory among the Christian Worthies, not simply a position in a secular, military pantheon. The continuing history of medieval chivalric literature in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries suggests that it did not prove easy to dispense with its models of Christian heroism. Their Christianity gave Charlemagne, Arthur, and Godfrey an attraction as models of religious chivalry that the ancient Greek and Roman heroes of the New Learning could not supply. First encounters with non-Christian peoples appear to reinforce rather than blunt this aspect of the European chivalric heritage, enhancing the Europeans' sense of their own identity as Christian warriors, fighting for the propagation of the true faith.

As the case of Perkin Warbeck demonstrates, chivalry could also play a role in the European politics of the 1490s. Perkin
Warbeck’s imposture allowed the rulers of Europe to give one another a hard time while simultaneously experimenting with the conventions of chivalric narrative. Some attention to the sequence of events reveals a political competition carried out using the language of romance. Maximilian’s reception of Perkin Warbeck as Duke of York and rightful King of England at a series of state occasions, notably the funeral of his father and the creation of his son Philip as Duke of Brabant, presented the new Emperor as the noble protector of a romantically exiled prince. In August of 1494 Henry VII sent Garter King of Arms to the imperial court at Mechlin to reveal the true identity of Warbeck as a French imposter. Rebuffed by the court, the herald resorted to a public announcement in the streets. When Warbeck displayed his coat of arms, labeled as those of Edward IV’s son and heir, two outraged English supporters of Henry VII pelted it with mud, in a scene reminiscent of Arthurian romance. (Gairdner, 283, citing Molinet). A group of maidens deface Sir Marhalt’s shield similarly in Malory. Perkin Warbeck’s letter of appeal to Ferdinand and Isabella describes his escape from the Tower of London and his piteous wanderings across Europe as a lost prince. Like some of the tournament records, this narrative should rank as a sort of custom-made chivalric romance. The good-looking son of the town controller of Tournay visualized himself there as a chivalric hero, presumably with some assistance from the Yorkist community in exile. The venture of the recapture of an usurped kingdom by its rightful prince was a staple of romance, easily recognized by readers of works like Olivier de Castile, the prose Tristan, and the Morte Darthur. Warbeck certainly provided the monarchs of Europe with a weapon to use against Henry VII in case of need. He also offered them an appealing fantasy, one with strong family resemblances to the scraps of romance that lend color to the contemporary tournament. In the long run, Warbeck discredited himself precisely because he could not bring himself to live up to his chivalric pretensions in the field of combat. His successive invasions of England and successive prudent retreats exposed his reluctance to participate in military action as an evident lack of physical courage (Chrimes, 81-92). In other words, he failed partly because his chivalry did not hold up in practice; the 1490s could indeed tell the difference between real and make-believe knighthood.
How much of this chivalric material should be dismissed as mere propaganda? Without question, there is certainly a great deal of hot air being blown around. No historian is capable of testing the sincerity of the 1490s with absolute accuracy from the vantage point of 1991. It would probably be truest to see a complex mixture of belief, pretence, and the exploitation of deeply entrenched fantasies. The existence of chivalric propaganda in quantity bears witness to the broad appeal of chivalric models of action among the population at large, as well as within a courtly elite. It seems notable that European princes of the 1490s still liked to depict themselves as traditional chivalric heroes, and intended their subjects to admire them in his role. If names are a signal of aspirations for the future, it seems significant that Henry VII had named his eldest son Arthur, and that in 1492 Charles VII caused a minor scandal by proposing to christen his son and heir Roland. He had to settle in the end for “Charles-Orland” (Labande-Mailfert).

The chivalric pattern depicted in late fifteenth-century narrative could gratify the fantasies of every class of society. Princes could compete to become the “tenth Worthy,” joining the chivalric pantheon that already included those Christian princes Arthur, Charlemagne, and the crusader Godfrey of Bouillion (Keen, 119-124). The lowliest apprentice could imagine himself, perhaps, as a lost prince—like Perkin Warbeck, the pretender to the throne of England—or perhaps of rising through personal prowess to a social pinnacle of power, international renown, and perhaps even of sainthood. The most devout female readers of this period, like Isabella of Castile or Margaret Beaufort, could entertain active chivalric aspirations as well, extending well beyond stereotypes of ladylike passivity. The propensity of historical figures of this period to behave like characters out of romances has been noted by more than one scholar (Michael, 111-112). The idea of a feminine chivalry was clearly attractive and perhaps essential in the Italy of the 1490s: Boiardo had been developing the figure of his female warrior, Bradamante, in the final sections of his epic. In 1499 Caterina Sforza put on her own suit of armor to defend the castle of Forlì against Cesare Borgia.

European chivalry responded to the social mobility of the 1490s in two contradictory ways. One can observe, first, a conservative tendency to restrict admission to the chivalric world to the
true aristocrat. Only a nobleman by birth can hope to achieve chivalric distinction: the *parvenus* will infallibly fail (Malory, II:712; Keen, 143-48). Other texts demonstrate that chivalry had been identified as a possible route of entry to the exclusive, privileged world of the aristocracy. In *Valentine and Orson* a merchant attains noble rank by defeating the Empress of Constantinople's evil accuser in a judicial duel. Chivalric literature presented its socially diverse audience both with fantasies and specific programs of social advancement, step by step, through a series of physical, mental, and moral tests to social prominence, earthly and heavenly bliss, and even spiritual authority. One can see how the opposing views reinforce one another. The more exclusive the upper echelon becomes, the more fascinating it is (Keen, 156-61).

It seems appropriate to return for a moment to the question of chivalric decadence at this point. The idea of decadence presupposes a decline from an earlier period of greater vitality, most probably prior to disappearance from history. This demands the idealization of an earlier period of the Middle Ages. The chivalry of the twelfth century was young (Duby). In the 1490s we find a mature, lively, well-entrenched, sophisticated culture, a living thing. A dearth of new chivalric ideas does not take hold, according to Keen, until the mid-sixteenth century (Keen, 238-39). Does the primary evidence from the 1490s reflect a moral failure relative to the chivalry of Godfrey of Bouillon and his contemporaries or the devout thirteenth-century "chivalry of St. Louis," as Labande-Mailfert and Anglo have suggested? This, I think, is also questionable. From the start, chivalric morality always had clear limits. Like its godparent, the church, it offered little sympathy for non-Christians, and indeed could be used to justify their oppression and murder in the cause of Christian heroism. Here Louis XI does not come off better than Ferdinand and Isabella (Jean, Sire de Joinville, in Marcus, 41-42). Do the knights of the fifteenth century betray new lapses in social responsibility or personal morality that differentiate them strikingly from the knights of the twelfth, thirteenth, or fourteenth centuries? Chivalric morality as an historical factor seems clearly impossible to quantify. Is there widespread contemporary testimony deploring a decay of knighthood, barring examples of the perennial and conventional chivalric complaints that knights of today are not up to the
Knights of the Round Table? If so, they are countered by records like that of the Sandricourt *pas d'armes*, insisting that never before had the precepts of King Arthur been so gloriously fulfilled. This topos must be weighed against the vitality of chivalric activities, culture, and modes of thought that pervades the Europe of the 1490s and was being actively disseminated at this period into the furthest reaches of the globe. As in the England of Edward III, the 1490s come across as a period of chivalric self-confidence that continues into the era of François I, Henry VIII, and Charles V.

The chivalry of the fifteenth century contributed to European ventures of exploration on many levels. Chivalric literature helped to shape the vision of adventure that propelled the traveler into unknown territories and helped him make sense of his unexpected experiences. Chivalry shaped the explorer’s self-image. It offered a clear reward structure, tangible and intangible, and it set out distinctive patterns of conduct for the wandering European warrior. While recent histories have emphasized the brutality and greed of the conquistadores and their contemporaries, it is important to consider, as well, that at least in their own minds they were the heirs of Charlemagne and Amadis. It seems equally important to recognize that the European chivalry of this period did not exist in a vacuum. The European adventurer imported chivalric fantasies along with horses, firearms, and viruses, but he was met time after time by traditional warrior aristocracies of great sophistication. The history of the age of discovery is, in part, the history of the violent reactions and ingenious adaptations that ensued as each civilization struggled to hold on to its own beliefs.

This introductory essay can only begin to suggest the surprising variety of European chivalric material that survives from the 1490s, the nature and range of the sources, and the magnitude of the problem that remains to be investigated. A still larger enterprise, that of the comparative study of the global warrior cultures of the age of discovery and their interrelationships, has only been sketched here as a suggestion for future collaborative investigations. Before any such study can be undertaken, though, European chivalry needs to be recognized as a vital factor in the landscape of the 1490s. As an historical entity it needs to be handled with greater sensitivity and awareness of its potency. We see it in the 1490s, in this outline, inspiring a new generation of European
society, drawing on literary and historical sources to perpetuate a traditional warrior code. Contemporary exploits, perils, and opportunities reinforced early literary and visual stimuli to propel a distinctly medieval mythology and code of conduct on into the sixteenth century. One may detect minor changes. Humanist instructors like Erasmus preferred classical sources of chivalric examples—the life of Alexander or Julius Caesar, for instance—over King Arthur, when they were not issuing wholesale condemnations of military culture. King Arthur retained his hold on the European imagination in spite of these educated objections. For James IV of Scotland, the knights of Sandricourt, and Henry VII he remained a seductive role model. Indeed, the deeds of European adventurers far afield were lending a new plausibility to the most implausible chivalric fictions of the past. Their experiences in Africa, India, and the Americas, far from dampening their contemporaries' enthusiasm, were giving a new generation fresh impetus to enact their own chivalric fantasies on a vast, global stage. Contrary to the hopes of its humanist critics, chivalry was proving remarkably difficult to kill and reluctant to die. The European chivalry of 1499 was still powerful as a system of belief, and as a vision of the world. It should also be said that it was still perilous.

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References


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NOTES

1. This article is an introductory section of a larger study of chivalric literature and exploration literature of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. An initial version of this paper was presented at the 1991 ISCSC convention in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. This revised version has benefited significantly from the stimulating discussions and contacts I enjoyed at that time. A NEH Summer Stipend for 1991, from the Columbian Quincentenary Initiative, enabled me to visit libraries in Spain and England. Unless otherwise noted, translations cited in this article are those of the author. Regarding comparative chivalric studies, I should note that in 1987 Mikiko Ishii of Kanagawa University organized a special session on "Comparative Studies in Chivalry for the International Congress on Medieval Studies at Western Michigan University (Kalamazoo, Michigan). Additionally, the new display of arms and armor in the Pierpont Morgan Wing of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, opened November 8, 1991, points up certain technological and

2. "La quarte & derreniere place deputee pour faire armes estoit la fourest desvoyable, & là se trouverent tous ceulx de dedens pour tenir le combat à tous venans de dehors, comme chevalliers errans querans la leurs adventures, ainsi que jadis firent les chevalliers de la Table Ronde." (Vayssière, 14-15). The translation is my own.

3. "Et me semble que depuis le temps du roy Arthus, dont est encore a present memoire, qui fut commanceur de la Table Ronde, dont il y avoit de si nobles chevaliers dont est memoire a present & sera a tousjours, comme de messire Lancelot du Lac, messire Gauvin, Messire Tristan de Lyonnois, messire Palamedes, qui tous jadis estoient de la Table Ronde, puis bien dire qu'on n'a point veu ne leu en histoire quelconque, que depuis ce temps là se soit fait pour l'amour des dames pas, joustes, tournois, ne behours qui se doivent tant approchier de l'exercicté d'armes que fait le pas de Sandricourt, ne au plus pres des faictz desdizt chevalier, de la Table Ronde. Et m'est advis que tous nobles hommes plains de vertus, tant de ce royaulme de France que d'autres pays & royaulmes crestiens, doivent estre dolans & marriz de ce que n'ont veu lesdizt armes qui se sont faictes audit chasteau de Sandricourt." (Vayssière, 66)

4. My own transcription and free translation: "In the month of April, A.D. 1493 in the choir of this bountiful cathedral, with the Catholic king Ferdinand and his son Prince John themselves raising them from the font, the six first Indians brought from America by Christopher Columbus were reborn through holy baptism. They returned from here to their native land, where they were prominent as missionaries. Thus the city of Barcelona brought the first Christian seed to the regions of a new world, to which her mother Spain was to give both her language and her laws."