

Richard W. Kaeuper, *Medieval Chivalry*, Cambridge (Cambridge University Press) 2016, XVI–428 p. (Cambridge Medieval Textbooks), ISBN 978-0521-13795-9, GBP 19,99.

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The idea of chivalry, or rather the diverse bundle of ideas associated with the term chivalry, achieved enormous popular attention during the 19th century through the impetus of Victorian neo-medievalism. By the end of the 19th century, popular conceptions of knights in shining armor coming to the rescue of damsels in distress were being subjected to analysis by scholars, who, however, were inspired no less by romantic ideas and ideals than were the more popular purveyors of chivalry. Over the course of the 20th century and up to the present day, chivalry has continued to benefit from considerable scholarly attention from specialists in various European literary traditions and, to a lesser extent, from historians, particularly those focused on elite culture. In large part, however, the romantic tendencies of the earlier traditions continue to haunt scholarly treatments of chivalry, especially in literary studies. No scholar has been more prominent over the last half century in the investigation of chivalry or in debunking many of the wilder fantasies of romantics than Richard Kaeuper, professor emeritus of the University of Rochester. It is fitting, therefore, that he was selected to author a synthesis of the immense scholarship on chivalry for the »Cambridge Medieval Textbook« series.

As is the case for many of the volumes in this series, Kaeuper has provided an overview of scholarly approaches and conclusions combined with an introduction to the wide range of source materials that have been used to illuminate his topic. This work is not simply a survey, however, as the volume clearly is thesis-driven. Kaeuper's main point, reiterated in every chapter, is that chivalry was both a real phenomenon in the world of living men, playing a central role in elite culture, as well as an important model for those below elite society throughout medieval Europe.

After a brief introduction in which he argues for the reality of chivalry as a practical element in the lives of elite laymen, as contrasted with the fantasies concocted by romantics, Kaeuper divides the volume into eleven chapters that are organized in five parts. Part one, consisting of chapters 1–2, provides a survey of approaches to understanding chivalry, and whether it actually was a real phenomenon. In the first chapter Kaeuper asserts that the wide use of the term chivalry by medieval writers in a variety of European languages leads inexorably to the conclusion that this term had importance and meaning to them. However, Kaeuper does not provide a definition for chivalry, observing that medieval writers, themselves, did not offer a definition. Instead, he offers »three clusters of medieval meaning in surviving sources« that scholars have recognized as important for understanding the concept: deeds

of valor performed by arms bearers, the collective body of »knights« present for an action, and an accepted or desired set of ideas and practices (p. 9).

In the second chapter, Kaeuper offers five paradigmatic models in an effort to show what chivalry meant and entailed. These are the 13th-century posthumous and poetic biography of William Marshall, the »History of William Marshall«, the 14th-century posthumous and poetic biography of Robert Bruce, »Barbour's Bruce«, the 14th-century treatise by Geoffroi de Charny titled »Book of Chivalry«, the 15th-century contemporaneous biography of Pero Nino, »El victorial«, and finally the 15th-century literary work »Morte Darthur« by Thomas Malory. Kaeuper draws on these five texts throughout this chapter, and in the remainder of the volume, to illuminate what they had to say about the core values of those whom he consistently denotes as knights and the proper balance between chivalry and pragmatism.

Part Two, consisting of chapters 3–5, provides a model of the chronological development of chivalry from the early medieval period up through the early modern era. In the introduction to this section Kaeuper argues that the history of chivalry can be divided into three phases: the period before c. 1050, the period between 1050–1300, and the period after 1300. In chapter three, Kaeuper describes what he sees as the transformation of an amorphous mass of fighting men into an *ordo* of knighthood during the 11th century that provided the host in which chivalry could take root. Essential to his model is the idea of the emergence of mounted fighting men as the most important if not exclusive element on the battlefields of Europe. Problematically, not only has this idea long-since been rejected by medieval military historians, but Kaeuper also leaves unmentioned the centrality of sieges to medieval warfare, a topic also largely ignored by the authors of medieval literary works.

Also central to Kaeuper's argument is the idea that mounted fighting men developed a conception of themselves as essentially different from and better than the great mass of the population. Again problematically, in reality the great majority of mounted fighting men were drawn from the lowest levels of society and there is no evidence for their self-conception or for their elevated social or economic status. In this chapter, Kaeuper also draws upon the work of Matthew Strickland and John Gillingham, who have argued that during the 9th and 10th century, elite enemies began to receive better treatment if captured on the battlefield. Kaeuper interprets these findings as evidence for proto-chivalric practices even before the development, as he sees it, of the true emergence of knighthood.

In chapter four, Kaeuper focuses on the 12th and 13th centuries, a period that he denotes as the classical age of chivalry. Drawing upon a range of literary works, Kaeuper argues that military prowess was an essential aspect of elite identity in this period. In this context, Kaeuper argues that participation in »knighthood«, which he does not define, became the essential connection among elite men, extending down from monarchs to relatively minor members of the aristocracy. In order to show the expansion of what he consistently denotes as a knightly identity to broader elements of secular society, Kaeuper points to the diffusion of seals with images of mounted fighting men, the

representation of the dead in armor and arms on tomb covers, and the expansion of the use of heraldic devices. Drawing largely on English evidence, but also providing limited information about elsewhere in Europe, Kaeuper also discusses the development of a knightly legal status. However, here as elsewhere in the text, he elides periods so that, for example, explicit references to the legal status of a *miles* in 13th-century England are used to imply a similar legal status in the early 12th century for men denoted as *milites* (p. 111).

The final chapter in this section treats the concept of chivalry in the later Middle Ages when, Kaeuper argues, royal and princely governments sought to limit entry into knighthood, but also when knighthood was becoming less formal. He wishes to show that the emergence of stronger central governments across much of Europe led to the absorption of chivalry by governmental structures. Throughout this chapter, Kaeuper equates knighthood, which remains undefined, with both chivalry and the elite practice of arms. In the latter case, Kaeuper is aware that men with legal knightly status comprised a tiny percentage of fighting men, but does not allow this central fact of military history to impinge upon his narrative.

The third section of the book, which includes chapters 6 and 7, is focused on what Kaeuper terms the »privileged practice of violence«. Here again he consistently conflates knighthood with military service, although a great many men with the legal status of knights never went to war, and the great majority of men who went to war, whether through military obligation or because they were professionals, were not and never became knights. In chapter six Kaeuper does a valuable service of demonstrating that romantic visions of courtly knights refusing to stain their honor by attacking the poor and defenseless are inconsistent with the realities of medieval warfare. However, in making this case, he exaggerates both the level of violence directed at non-combatant populations and also the lack of control exercised by military commanders. One simply cannot take the *chevauchée* campaigns of King Edward III in France in the 14th century as the model for all warfare. When rulers such as Charlemagne, Otto the Great († 973), or Frederick Barbarossa († 1190) campaigned, they took great care to protect populations that they hoped to incorporate within their realms. Chapter seven treats the question of tournaments and the roles that they played in elite identity and the practice of chivalry. Kaeuper provides a brief and useful overview of the development of tournaments from the first half of the 11th century onward. He also makes clear the general disapproval of tournaments by royal authorities, which tends to counter the long-cherished view that these sporting events were viewed by governmental authorities a useful means of training men for war.

In the fourth section of the book, which includes chapters 8 and 9, Kaeuper turns his attention to the relationship of chivalry with royal government and the church. In chapter eight Kaeuper begins from the assumption that royal government and administrative institutions emerged in the course of the 12th and 13th century, thereby leaving aside the considerable evidence for the administrative sophistication

of governments in earlier eras. He also contends that these supposedly newly emerging institutions of royal governance were not in conflict with the goals of knights because of the symbiotic relationship between the two. But Kaeuper does not mean by this the »political community« of knights and gentry identified by scholars such as Christine Carpenter that operated on the basis of mutual benefit and the maintenance of the public peace, but rather an imagined community of shared chivalric ideals. Indeed, the entire concept of public obligation is entirely missing from Kaeuper's discussion of the interplay of royal government and chivalry. The next chapter takes as its central premise that knights both needed and knew that they needed religious ideals. Again conflating knighthood with military service, Kaeuper argues that knights along with clerics developed a religious framework to suit their particular needs. In order to justify the claim that knighthood was essentially military in nature, as contrasted with social representation, Kaeuper asserts that knights formed an *ordo* with a military function that was ordained by God (p. 286). However, from the perspective of military history such an *ordo* cannot be seen to have existed.

In the final section, consisting of chapters 10 and 11, Kaeuper turns his attention to chivalric emotions. Drawing upon the research by Barbara Rosenwein on emotions in the Middle Ages, Kaeuper identifies knighthood as an »emotional community« (p. 315). He also emphasizes that secular elites presented themselves, or had themselves presented as uniquely capable of emotions in a manner that distinguished them from the great mass of the population. Chapter ten treats love and amity of men for women, and of men for each other. In chapter eleven, Kaeuper turns to the violent emotions of anger, wrath, fear and the desire for vengeance. Here as in the previous chapter, Kaeuper points to literary works that emphasized the difference between the emotional capacity of the elite and the lesser orders.

In the brief conclusion to the book Kaeuper reflects on the main themes of the text and reiterates his view that literary works, which provide the great majority of information about medieval chivalry, served not only to flatter but also to instruct their audiences. He also returns to the idea that there were common bonds of chivalry among all members of an international knighthood that were preeminent in their lives. The volume includes an apparatus of footnotes, and a select bibliography of both sources and scholarship that will provide readers with useful starting points for further research. The volume also is equipped with an index, and offers thirteen black and white images that are keyed to particular concepts in the text.

Treated simply as a textbook, this volume achieves its purpose of providing readers with an introduction to the numerous strands of scholarship that have shaped current understanding of the concept(s) of chivalry. An additional highlight of the text is Kaeuper's demonstration that the more egregious aspects of the traditional romantic view of chivalry were not consistent with the lived experience of high-ranking fighting men. They saw no problem in staging ambushes, shooting the

enemy with crossbows, or, if necessary, burning down churches and towns filled with women and children. Moreover, Kaeuper has done an excellent job of illuminating the values presented in literary works patronized by the highest echelons of elite lay society. Indeed, through his analysis of seals, effigies, heraldry, and literary works, Kaeuper has demonstrated that many members of the elite liked to think of themselves as better than members of the lower social orders, and that they also liked to be seen and thought of in military garb. It is likely that this text will be prized by readers who are already convinced that chivalry was both a real aspect of the lived experience of members of the lay elite, and played a central role in their self conception, their understanding of their role in society, and also in driving their behavior.

However, Kaeuper has done very little to make his case to those who were not already convinced about the centrality of chivalry to elite secular society. He leaves unanswered numerous questions that skeptics are likely to ask. Why, for example, is it reasonable for historians to accept literary works as illuminating either the self-conception or, more importantly, the behavior of elite secular men? How should literary texts be interpreted when they tell stories that are in conflict with historiographical works that also appealed to elite secular audiences? Why is it proper to see the legal status of a layman as a knight as central to his identity, and more important than the myriad other factors that impinged upon him such as family connections, occupation, social circle, the office he held, his membership in an affinity, or his loyalty to his king? How are we to interpret the fact that very large numbers of men had to be compelled to become knights through distraint of knighthood, and many other men with high economic and social status sought to avoid military service altogether? What does it mean for the idea that chivalry represented the highest ideals of military service for elite men when the vast majority of men who sought a profession in arms were drawn from the lower echelons of society, and the great majority of elite secular men did not seek a professional career as soldiers? What does it mean for the conflation of knighthood and chivalry that once the term *miles* came to designate a legal status rather than a military occupation it became necessary to develop new terms for mounted fighting men such as *servientes*, *scutiferi*, and *armigeri* to designate men of non-knightly status? Overall, Kaeuper has provided little reason to conclude that chivalry played any role in the conduct of war in the Middle Ages, but great reason to conclude that men who had limited or no part in war sought to gain reflected glory from those who did.