



Robert W. Jones, Peter Coss, eds. *A Companion to Chivalry*. Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2019. 400 pp. \$99.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-78744-542-0.

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A Companion to Chivalry, edited by Robert W. Jones and Peter Coss, stands as a unique collection. Appropriately named, the work pays homage to the foundational and still-influential writers of the genre, none more central than Maurice Keen, best known for his magnum opus, *Chivalry* (1984). As a “companion” to Keen’s magisterial work, *A Companion to Chivalry* surveys the field in a blended historiographical tour by topic, usefully updating the field. In addition to the editors, David Simpkin, David Green, Helen J. Nicholson, Peter Sposato, Samuel Claussen, Richard Barber, Ralph Moffat, Oliver Creighton, Joanna Bellis, Louise J. Wilkinson, Megan G. Leitch, Matthew Bennett, Matthew Woodcock, and Clare Simmons read like a “who’s who” of historical writing on chivalry.

Writing on chivalry spans a delicate balance of historical and literary sources, also touching surviving artifacts and artwork. Tensions within the historical chivalric community, between the idealistic and romantic on the one hand and the rough violence and societal striation on the other, are reflected in modern writing on the subject. Writers disagree sharply on the role and importance of violence. The enduring popular influence of the nineteenth-century romantics created both a body of translations and an analytic shadow that Keen and these scholars, among a cadre of others referenced in *A Companion to Chivalry*, la-

bor to set aright. Historians and literary scholars take very different approaches to chivalric writing, while the ideals remain foundational within the Western literary corpus, enduring in sagas like *The Avengers* and *Star Wars*. Scholars struggle to isolate and understand the medieval concepts, made all the harder for chivalry’s enduring resonance, through popular culture, reenactment, and modern chivalric sport.

This work can serve as a roadmap for students new to the field and a useful summary of “recent” work for the veteran. Each essay examines a key aspect of the literature, blending historiographical survey with an introduction to key concepts. This work is firmly anchored within the English-language tradition of chivalric scholarship, touching little on German, French, Italian, or Spanish-language writing.

In the first essay, “The Origins and Diffusion of Chivalry,” Coss pens a superb historiographical survey, breaking “early” scholarship down into two schools, the Anglophone and the Francophone. Paying due respect to the titans upon which most modern chivalric studies have rested (Sidney Painter, Maurice Keen, Georges Duby, and Jean Flori), he takes an unusual chronological approach looking at the development of “chivalry” from its earliest beginnings through the Hundred Years’ War (though the emphasis is on the twelfth and

thirteenth centuries) but hitting in the process the vast majority of the writers in the field. This useful essay will stand as a new entry portal into the study, required reading for serious students seeking to understand the field.

Simpkin contributes “The Organisation of Chivalric Society,” discussing the relationship between the crowns and their chivalry, characterizing relationships as “organization,” and arguing that in the late medieval period, chivalry contributed a crucial aspect to royal legitimacy. Knights and nobles formed key social networks, and in order to manage and to a degree harness those networks, crowns found it necessary to be seen as *part of* those networks—they themselves needed to embody the chivalric ethos. Simpkin offers an excellent analysis of how the cultural aspects of the chivalric communities were understood and employed by the monarchs as members of that community, helping to channel and direct knightly energies toward their royal goals. This can be seen as a component of the larger discussion of “modernization” and the rise of the modern state, and equally, as the ways chivalric culture adapted and was adapted by its practitioners.

In “Secular Orders: Chivalry in the Service of the State,” Green builds on D’arcy Boulton’s groundbreaking work (*Knights of the Crown: The Monastic Orders of Knighthood* [2000]) to survey the crown-serving functions of the “royal” confraternities, mainly the Order of the Garter, Order of the Star, and Order of the Golden Fleece, though he does touch on others as well. Green’s cogently argued point is that these orders served as an important channeling mechanism for the crowns and some princes to gather the strength of their chivalry around them, a seeming concurrence with Simpkin’s position. In the case of the French Order of the Star, the effort was not successful, but it was in the case of the Garter, Golden Fleece, and King René d’Anjou’s Order of the Crescent. This is not to diminish the orders’ chivalric intent, and Green artfully fuses the chivalric features, discussing po-

litical legitimacy while not losing the orders’ cultural importance.

Nicholson’s “The Military Orders” gives an excellent overview of the Templars, Hospitallers, and Teutonic Knights that could well serve as the best introduction available for new students and a handy reminder for the experienced. Nicholson draws important distinctions between the orders, drawing on wide-ranging scholarly sources but incorporating scholarship of the last twenty years. This is important in a field blurred by advocacy works seeking to establish connections between the modern orders and their historical counterparts. She discusses the more military literature of the Teutonic order, contrasting it with the more religious character of the Templars and Hospitallers. This too is an important essay, not so much for breaking new ground as much as clearly synthesizing recent scholarship.

In “Marshalling the Chivalric Elite for War,” Jones synthesizes an important body of scholarship built around local and muster records, as well as Anne Curry’s groundbreaking database, *The Soldier in Later Medieval England* project (<https://research.reading.ac.uk/medievalsoldier/>), where detailed records on many English participants in the Hundred Years’ War have been collated and made available to a new generation of scholars. Leveraging this work, and earlier studies, Jones paints a clear picture of the importance of variability within the medieval retinue, variously known as the *mesnie*, *conroi*, *eschieles*, and other names, noting that the medieval cavalry “units” are quite different from their eighteenth-century counterparts. In doing so, he offers a necessary corrective while also illuminating fresh scholarship.

The important interdisciplinary debate over the role of violence in chivalric society is introduced in “Chivalric Violence” by Sposato and Claussen. This important perspective revolves around the seminal work of Richard W. Kaeuper in *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe* (1999), where he argues that prowess was the key virtue

necessary for understanding the chivalric community. Sposato and Claussen first survey the broad strokes of the “problem of violence” literature, introducing many useful works, before going on to look at the relatively unexplored chivalric terrain of late medieval Florence and Castile. As with the body of “problem of violence” studies, the essay offers an important counterpoint reminder about the centrality of violence as a counter to purely romantic notions.

Barber, himself an icon of chivalric studies, contributes “Chivalry in the Tournament and *Pas d’Armes*,” something of an introductory survey that takes David Crouch’s *Tournament* (2005) and the impressive work of Noel Fallows into account while summarizing Barber’s own work written with Juliet V. Barker, *Tournaments* (1989). The piece includes a tantalizing forthcoming reference to an edition of René d’Anjou’s *Livre de Tournois*, the astoundingly beautiful fifteenth-century tournament treatise. Barber argues that “the tournament lies at the heart of chivalry,” because it is within the tournament that the collision of the romantic and the realities of chivalric violence may be most clearly seen (p. 137). It is an excellent summary essay, especially for those unfamiliar with the Barber and Barker survey or Barker’s *The Tournament in England, 1100-1400* (1986).

In “Heraldry and Heralds,” Jones surveys the history and place of the medieval herald, characterizing him as an “aficionado” of the tournament, present at the edge of the field, “focused on their particular lord’s activities, main record of noteworthy actions, and sharing opinions on the swordsmanship of individual combatants” (p. 156). Concurring with recent scholarship by Crouch, he concludes that heralds’ origins, “like that of heraldry, lay in the tournament field” (p. 157). Jones finds Crouch’s argument about this tournament origin compelling, advancing it in opposition to the popular idea—almost a dominant myth—that the origin of heraldry was to identify combatants in war. Starting the essay, Jones quickly surveys in-

teresting new literature concerning the rise of heraldry, useful especially given the obscure publications in which many of the most recent heraldic writing has been found. Overall this is another excellent introductory essay that usefully updates our historiographical knowledge, and, like Keen’s work, serves as a pointer to other sources the intrigued reader can follow up on.

Moffat’s “Arms and Armour” essay takes a different tack, breaking from the usual approach within the arms and armor field by focusing mainly on manuscript references rather than comparative studies of surviving artifacts. In this he provides an immense service to students of arms and armor, at once displaying his wide command of primary source literature and providing hints as to what clues remain to be found within archival sources. Moffat’s writing is less historiographical and more a subtle call for more archival studies, building on his own work in his dissertation and another tantalizing and very welcome addition to the literature, *Medieval Arms and Armour: A Sourcebook* (forthcoming).[1]

The last five essays focus on “new” (or post-Keen) approaches. The first of these, Creighton’s “Constructing Chivalric Landscapes: Aristocratic Spaces between Image and Reality,” introduces the study of constructed spaces. This approach leverages a blend of landscape history and archaeology, overlaid with more traditional archival and literary records. Using this overlay, Creighton first introduces the field, then looks at castles and tournament fields as exemplary foci. He notes that “the chivalric landscape was on the one hand a construction of the mind but, on the other, simultaneously rooted in experiences of the real world” (p. 217). He notes a parallel between a nested series of spaces, ever more private and restricted, corresponding with the striated social structure of the medieval community, while calling for more study.

Bellis and Leitch’s contribution, “Chivalric Literature,” argues that chivalric literature, composed of romance fiction, biographies of knights,

and chronicles, “reflected and reflect on, their [chivalric] society and its ideals” (p. 251). They take the same tack as Craig Taylor, who in *Chivalry and the Ideals of Knighthood in France during the Hundred Years War* (2016), argued that chivalric writing formed a “dialogue,” of discussion and debate that shaped and was shaped by the same community. The authors’ wide scholarship is well reflected here, taking a much broader perspective than Bellis’s *Hundred Years War in Literature, 1337-1600* (2016). As with most of the other essays, this survey captures much new scholarship, yet it takes a historical view, distinct from Arthurian scholars who approach the material from the spectrum of perspectives within literary criticism. As instructional texts, Bellis and Leitch argue, “what was important about stories focusing on the wars and quests of kings and knights was not always their factual truth-value, but the moral or instrumental truth they conveyed” (p. 252). In short, chivalric texts were learning vehicles. This may be the best introduction to romance literature ever presented—thorough, yet readable, an excellent introduction.

In “Manuals of Warfare and Chivalry,” Bennett takes a wide view, offering useful summaries and connective tissue ranging from Vegetius’s *De Re Militari* (fifth or sixth century), and into the Byzantine, such as Maurice’s *Strategikon* (582-602), but also including interesting and unconventional sources, such as the Norman Penitential Ordinances. Surveying the Templars, Bennett surveys the Rule of the Temple, moving on to the *Chansons de Geste*, the numerous medieval adaptations of Vegetius, as well as ordinances of the secular chivalric confraternities. While this inclusion of wide-ranging types of texts stretches the usual definitions for a “manual,” Bennett notes that all of these texts were intended to instruct and guide, “part of a professional approach to a career in arms which was introspective and character-developing as much as a demonstration of physical prowess” (p. 279). Chivalry adapts, a point made

also by several of the other authors, including Woodcock and Bellis/Leitch.

Wilkinson takes a modern approach in “Gendered Chivalry,” focusing on “violence, power and knighthood,” making a good case for the essential centrality of women in chivalric culture, countering “the attention of a growing body of scholars over the last fifty years, in ways that have marginalized their social importance” (pp. 219, 220). She makes a good counter-case, reminding readers that the literature frequently discusses the impact of love and the important role of women at tournaments and in war. This is a useful counter-narrative, one that I think better reflects medieval—as opposed to modern—mores.

Woodcock, writing in “The End of Chivalry? Survivals and Revivals in the Tudor Age,” carries the theme of adaptation forward, challenging the early to mid-twentieth-century thesis that the chivalric “excess” of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries represented a baroque distortion, a sign that chivalry had lost its medieval vitality, a perspective taken by Raymond Kilgour, Johannes Huizinga, Arthur Ferguson, and Sydney Anglo. Noting that chivalry was always at once backward-looking toward a mythical time when chivalry was in full-flower, Woodcock argues that it instead adapted to the needs of the Tudor era, “recognising that the concept of chivalry itself is always a site of synchronic contestation containing within itself both the promise of an ideal and the need to actively attain or preserve that ideal” (p. 285). This “medievalism,” Woodcock argues, remains associated and adaptive through the ages, partly accounting for its durability.

Finally, Simmons sums up the resonating impact of chivalric ideas and impressions in her contribution, “Chivalric Medievalism.” She traces what she sees as idealized and selective expressions of chivalric ideas through literature, art, and architecture of the nineteenth century. In this she perhaps continues Woodcock’s ideas about chivalric adaptability, as ideas were bonded into a social

force—at least in England—during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, up until World War I. At that point she sees “the last time when the term ‘chivalrous’ was unequivocally a compliment” (p. 317). Touching briefly on twentieth- and twenty-first-century reenactment, chivalric brotherhoods, and film, she brings this superb collection appropriately to a close.

Overall this is a superb collection, a suitable companion to Keen’s 1984 masterpiece, *Chivalry*. It usefully updates and expands Keen’s work, highlighting subsequent scholarship and serving as a roadmap for students and scholars interested in chivalric ideas.

Note

[1]. Ralph Moffat, “The Medieval Tournament: An Edition and Analysis of Three 15th Century Tournament Manuscripts” (PhD diss., University of Leeds, 2010).

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