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## Some Aspects of the Evolution of the Medieval Tournament Up to the Reign of Maximilian I: An Introduction

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SOME ASPECTS OF THE EVOLUTION OF THE MEDIEVAL TOURNAMENT  
UP TO THE REIGN OF MAXIMILIAN I:  
AN INTRODUCTION

by

Kathryn L. Woodruff

A Thesis  
Submitted to the  
Faculty of The Graduate College  
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Western Michigan University  
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Kathryn L. Woodruff

SOME ASPECTS OF THE EVOLUTION OF THE MEDIEVAL TOURNAMENT  
UP TO THE REIGN OF MAXIMILIAN I:  
AN INTRODUCTION

Kathryn L. Woodruff, M.A.

Western Michigan University, 1996

An introductory exploration of the evolution of the medieval tournament up to the reign of Emperor Maximilian I (1459-1519) is the subject of this study. This exploration begins with the eleventh-century origins of the tournament in northern France as a military training exercise and continues with a discussion of the evolution of the tournament, by the sixteenth century, into a sporting event and public spectacle with a number of variations including the *mêlée*, *béhourd*, round table, and passage of arms.

Some of the influences of the Church and of chivalric literature upon the tournament and upon the knightly class are explored as part of this discussion, together with information on outstanding medieval tourneyers, including Emperor Maximilian I, and on prominent armorers employed by the Emperor. Also included is a brief discussion of the evolution of armor and weaponry specifically for the tournament and the differences between these and their battlefield counterparts.



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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Words such as "tournament" and "joust" bring to the mind of the modern reader images of opulence, festivity, and good sportsmanship. Beautiful ladies watch from high balconies and an appreciative audience of commoners looks on, roaring encouragement to their favorite knights as the latter, clad fully in gleaming plate armor and shining silk surcoats, easily win rich prizes while no one receives any serious hurt. Twentieth-century novels, films, and Renaissance fairs have served to reinforce this audience-pleasing misconception. But the historical reality of the tournament was vastly different.

The tournament was one of the most popular sports of the European upper classes for over five hundred years.<sup>1</sup> Not even hunting and falconry could eclipse the charms it held for knights, nobles, kings, and those who wished to impress them. Unlike hunting, the tournament also became extremely useful as a political and economic tool. Tournaments enabled monarchs to keep an eye on the actions and military strengths of their nobles and sometimes generated revenue for the crown. As a sport, the tournament evolved gradually from the twelfth-century *mêlée*, a martial free-for-all that was practically indistinguishable from actual war (with a correspondingly horrendous casualty rate), into more and more specialized forms of

combat which, with numerous innovations designed to increase comfort, safety, and ostentatious display, became in the sixteenth century a lavish and carefully pre-arranged public event.

The purpose of this thesis is twofold. The first aim is to trace the evolution of the tournament and of tournament equipment across their half-millennium history and to explore some of their more elaborate variations during the reign of Maximilian I, Holy Roman Emperor. He, while a poor administrator of his Empire, was an experienced military commander, an excellent jousting, and an industrious planner and presenter of tournaments. The second goal of this thesis is to demonstrate the religious, socio-economic, and literary influences that led to the transformation of the tournament from a quasi-military exercise to a form of pure entertainment in the sixteenth century.

Sources consulted for this thesis include biographies of Maximilian I and of other historically well-known tourneyers, modern works on the evolution of European knighthood and of the knightly orders, and contemporary medieval texts (both fiction and non-fiction) that deal with tournaments.

## CHAPTER II

### THE HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE TOURNAMENT AND OF TOURNAMENT ARMOR

The tournament originated in northern France at about the time of the Norman conquest of England during the latter half of the eleventh century.<sup>2</sup> This French origin is reflected in one of the earliest recorded terms for the sport in medieval sources, the *conflictus gallicus*.<sup>3</sup> The development of the tournament was apparently due to one late eleventh-century innovation in the techniques of waging war: the couching of the spear under the mounted knight's right arm. Up until that time, men on horseback had either thrown their spears like javelins or had employed them with an overhand or underhand jabbing motion. The Bayeux Tapestry depicts this transition, showing some Norman knights using the underhand or overhand thrust or throw and others holding their spears in the couched position.<sup>4</sup> Couched spears struck with greater impact than and were not as easily lost as the spears used with the earlier techniques. In addition, the new technique was spectacularly successful when used by a group of knights charging at equal speed in a united formation. However, couching the spear or lance firmly under one arm was more difficult to learn than the earlier techniques and required a great deal more practice. Thus the tournament began as a response to the need for this practice; it was originally nothing other than a series of intense training sessions unadorned by female spectators or by prizes from the hands of a

noble host or hostess.<sup>5</sup>

The earliest form of the tournament was the *mêlée*, which took place over several miles of countryside, usually between two towns.<sup>6</sup> Its characteristics included the use of forests, rivers, farm buildings, and other features of the landscape as locations for ambushes and sorties.<sup>7</sup> It was not considered unfair for several knights to attack a single opponent at once.<sup>8</sup> Participants consisted of two opposing teams of knights (sometimes augmented by squires and foot soldiers); often the teams were unequal in the number of members. Armor and weapons for the *mêlée* were the same as those used in real warfare, and other than for the participants themselves, there were no audiences. Scores of warriors were killed or crippled in *mêlées*, which did nothing to decrease the popularity of the sport among the upper classes. Rules were minimal and included the respect of small, roped-off areas called "refuges" where the participants could go to rest and re-arm.<sup>9</sup>

One other rule that began with the *mêlée* and continued as part of the framework for later types of tournament was the practice of forfeiture.<sup>10</sup> This meant that a knight who was unhorsed and overpowered in the *mêlée* had to forfeit his mount and armor to his vanquisher and then ransom back his possessions at a handsome price. Often the conquered knight would be taken prisoner as well and had either to ransom himself or to wait in captivity while his friends, relatives, and vassals amassed the amount of money demanded by his captor.

The rule of forfeit and ransom in the *mêlée* had a profound effect on the

economic status of members of the knightly class between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries. Many younger sons of the nobility faced the prospect of no inheritances, thanks to the custom of primogeniture, and discovered that they could earn comfortable incomes by going on the tournament circuit. In addition, tournaments during these centuries served as job fairs to some extent, where wealthy lords looking to augment their retinues with extra knights could go to observe the abilities and behaviors of these men in a moderately controlled setting.

The most spectacular example of upward mobility within the fourteenth-century knightly class, as provided through the financial opportunities of the *mêlée*, is found in the life story of William Marshal. He lived from circa 1144 to 1219.<sup>11</sup> William was the fourth son of John Marshal, a low-level official at the courts of England's Kings Henry I, Stephen, and Henry II. John was a minor landholder in Wiltshire, and with three older brothers, William stood little chance of inheriting any of his father's lands. In 1156, at the age of twelve, William was sent to the home of his father's kinsman, William de Tancarville, in Normandy in order that he might begin training as a squire.<sup>12</sup> Tancarville was chamberlain to the duke of Normandy.

At age twenty, William Marshal was knighted. Shortly thereafter, Tancarville gave him a fine destrier so that William could take part in his first tournament, one held near Le Mans. It proved to be a wildly successful experience for the young knight; from there William embarked on a long career of lucrative tourneying. In 1177 he entered into a two-year tourneying partnership with Roger de Gaugi, a

Flemish knight. They traveled together from tournament to tournament, and within the space of a year they captured and won ransoms from no fewer than one hundred and three knights.<sup>13</sup> One amusing anecdote of William's tourneying activities has survived in his biography, *L' Histoire de Guillaume Maréchal*, written by William's squire, John d'Erley with help from a nameless troubador.<sup>14</sup> In it, William is recorded as having won a particularly hard-fought *mêlée*, but when the time came to present the prize, he was nowhere to be found. After some little time he was located at a nearby forge. There he had placed his head on the anvil while the blacksmith attempted to beat the dents out of his helmet so that William could remove it!<sup>15</sup>

William's skills in the *mêlée*, together with his reputation for generosity to his followers and for his good sense, brought him to the attention of King Henry II. The monarch engaged William's services as a counselor for his son, Henry the Young King. Following the younger Henry's death, William served as a trusted advisor to King Henry II, King Richard I, and King John in turn. He was rewarded with a royally approved marriage to Isabel, heiress of Pembroke, in 1189. In 1194 William gained the office of king's marshal, and in 1199 he became earl of Pembroke. King John died in 1216, and William's career was crowned with the office of regent of England during the minority of King Henry III.<sup>16</sup> At William's funeral in 1219, the officiating bishop eulogized him as "the best knight who ever lived."<sup>17</sup>

Despite such possibilities for tournament participants, the Church was quick to express its displeasure regarding these knightly competitions. One of the earliest

recorded examples of the Church's condemnation of tournaments dates from 1130.<sup>18</sup>

Added to the Church's disapproval were the voices of the non-noble classes of medieval society, who vehemently protested the destruction of their fields, crops, and homes. The trampling of crops and damage to houses, huts, barns and livestock had by now become a regular occurrence during these events.<sup>19</sup>

Abbot Bernard of Clairvaux was an especially outspoken opponent of the tournament. In the second chapter of his treatise *Laus novae militiae* ("In Praise of the New Knighthood") written circa 1128, he bitterly condemned all knights who took part in the sport, especially those who clothed themselves and their destriers flamboyantly. Bernard's acid disapproval was evident in his words:

You cover your horses with silk, and plume your armor with I know not what sort of rags; you paint your shields and your saddles; you adorn your bits and spurs with gold and silver and precious stones, and then in all this glory you rush to your ruin with fearful wrath and fearless folly. Are these the trappings of a warrior or are they not rather the trinkets of a woman?<sup>20</sup>

However, Bernard, like the Church, frowned upon tournaments not only for their wasteful display and brutality, but also because they encouraged knights to exalt their own reputations at the expense of others. This self-aggrandizement, in Bernard's view, was extremely sinful; the knight should instead be humble and eager to focus his energies on serving God, the Virgin Mary, and the Church rather than earning wealth and renown by his martial skills.

Bernard's views against the excesses of secular knighthood, were echoed in the



efforts of his kinsman Hugh de Payens to found the Order of the Knights Templars at the time of the Second Crusade. The Templars were trained warriors; at the same time they were monks who had taken the three monastic vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience.<sup>21</sup> The establishment of a religious order of fighting men was an astonishing innovation in the Europe of the early 1100's, where already for centuries feudal society had been sharply divided between the three groups of those who fought, those who prayed, and those who worked.<sup>22</sup> It was an innovation for which there was a great need also; the original purpose of the Templars' existence was the protection of Christian pilgrims in the Holy Land.

Hugh de Payens was a middle-aged widower and a knight in the service of the count of Champagne when he chose to leave this noble's household to go to Outremer on the Second Crusade in about 1118. The seed of the idea for the Templars was planted when Hugh and another Crusader decided to hide themselves near a resting place on one of the pilgrim roads through Outremer in order to ambush a group of Turks who were in the habit of attacking travelling Christians there.<sup>23</sup> Their ambush caught the Turks off guard and proved extremely successful. Before long Hugh had gathered a band of knights and other fighting men to his cause. They subsisted at first on alms of food and clothing from pilgrims and Christian settlers in the Holy Land. Eventually King Baldwin of Jerusalem offered them permanent lodgings in his palace on Mount Moriah, the site on which Solomon's Temple had once stood. Hugh and his followers chose for themselves the name *Pauperes commilitones Christi templique*

*Salomonis* ("The Poor Fellow-Soldiers of Christ and the Temple of Solomon").<sup>24</sup> The order's methods of survival gradually shifted from living hand-to-mouth on small donations to acquiring parcels of land all over Europe and the revenues these generated. The Templars received official recognition from the Church at a synod held on January 14, 1128 at Troyes, the capital of Champagne,<sup>25</sup> and became an international order with branches in many countries and an unusually complex, ascetic Rule. The Templars' Rule prescribed frequent military training sessions (but no tournaments), regular periods of rest for the men and their mounts, hours of worship, dietary regulations, and strict penalties for boasting or complaining, among other restrictions.

This Order of the Temple had a far-reaching effect on Europe's knightly class. It gave men who were ruthless warriors, murderers, plunderers, rapists, thieves, and even the excommunicate an opportunity to redeem themselves by becoming servants of Christ while at the same time remaining the professional soldiers they had spent their formative years learning to be.

The Templars' influence also focused public attention on an older, more low-profile knightly order, that of the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem, also known as the Knights Hospitallers, as they were often called, and later the Knights of Malta. The Order of the Knights Hospitallers was established during the late 1090s at the time of the First Crusade.<sup>26</sup> It was based at a hospice for impoverished pilgrims at the Benedictine monastery of St. Mary of the Latins in Jerusalem, on Mt. Zion Street near

the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. This monastery had itself been founded in the mid-eleventh century by a group of merchants from the Italian port of Amalfi, who were already at that time engaged in international trade in the Palestinian market. The pilgrim hospice, or hospital, was constructed upon what was believed to be the site where an angel announced the conception of John the Baptist; hence it was called the Hospital of St. John.

Within a generation of the Templars' founding, the Templars and the Hospitallers were in fierce competition for new members and resources. This rivalry increased the fame of each order and helped to spread knowledge of their ideals, which in turn played a role in transforming the European concept of knighthood and of the tournament.

These twelfth-century innovations in the idea of knighthood were aided by secular developments, most notably the flowering of courtly literature with its emphases on polite behavior, fairness to one's foes, and the respect accorded to ladies. Illustrious women such as Eleanor of Aquitaine and her daughter Marie de Champagne maintained courts where writers of the new literature could thrive. A particularly influential author who enjoyed their support was Chrétien de Troyes, whose romances *Perceval*, *Yvain*, *Lancelot*, *Cliges*, and *Erec et Enide* were widely read and imitated.<sup>27</sup> The popularity of Arthurian legends was revived and increased as these stories were disseminated throughout Britain, France, and Germany in new and fascinating versions such as Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival* and Hartmann von Aue's *Erec* and *Iwein*.

The fictional Arthur and his companions were held up as chivalric ideals to courtly audiences, and knights who wished to better themselves by impressing wealthy patrons hastened to pattern their behavior after that of such inspiring role models. Some knights, including Germany's Ulrich von Lichtenstein, even went so far as to attempt to recreate the travels and adventures of Arthur and his followers in their own lives. Ulrich undertook his *Venusfahrt* ("Venus Journey") in 1226, expressly in honor of the chivalric ideal of courtly love, and embarked upon his *Artusfahrt* ("Arthurian Journey") in 1240.<sup>28</sup> His comments on these adventures are recorded in the Manesse Codex, an invaluable resource for twelfth-century German attitudes towards the chivalric ethos.<sup>29</sup>

The changes wrought upon the institution of knighthood by the knightly orders and the proponents of courtly literature contributed to the development of various new types of tournament. Gradually melees were moved from the open countryside to specific, previously designated locations, either in fenced-in fields or in town squares temporarily roped off and covered with sand for the purpose. The increase in measures of control placed upon the melee in the early 1100s led to the joust, an individual combat between two knights instead of two factions in an out-of-control brawl. The supremacy of the joust over the melee was firmly established by the late 1200s in Germany, England, Italy, and the Low Countries, although the melee continued to be the more popular of the two in France for quite some time. The joust also gave knights the chance to gain recognition for individual prowess in arms, an

advantage quickly smothered in the melee. Room was made for appreciative civilian audiences, especially women. Jousts sprang up in places where there was a lack of or even a temporary lull in real warfare, especially at protracted sieges of castles and of fortified towns.<sup>30</sup>

Papal condemnations of the sport were issued in 1193, 1245, and 1312.<sup>31</sup> Although the Church continued its unrelenting ban on all tournaments (or hastiludia -- "lance games" -- as many Church potentates, unfamiliar with the sport's terminology, called them), the prohibition was usually ignored by kings, princes, dukes, and other nobles who quickly came to appreciate the unique benefits of these events.

One instance in particular is striking: King Richard I of England developed the idea of using tournaments as a source of funding for his Crusade and for other costly military expeditions overseas.<sup>32</sup> In 1194 he created a system of licensing for tournaments and authorized only five locations in England as royally approved tournament sites: between Blyth and Tickhill in Nottinghamshire, between Brackley and Mixbury in Northamptonshire, between Stamford and Warinford in Suffolk, between Warwick and Kenilworth in Warwickshire, and between Salisbury and Wilton in Wiltshire. Richard decreed that all participants had to pay a licensing fee, that no one lower in rank than a landless knight could participate, and that those who broke these or the other tournament rules he established would have to pay heavy fines. The licensing fees were on a sliding scale based on rank: twenty silver marks for an earl, ten marks for a baron, and four marks for a knight.<sup>33</sup>

Richard was the first sovereign in European history to turn the tournament into a money-making government venture. His licensing system gave all of his English subjects the chance to see the new sport despite the Church's ban, and soon tournaments became a reliable gauge to measure the military strength and political leanings of his English and French vassals. Richard's successors continued to keep English tournaments under royal patronage.

In Germany, France, Italy, and the Low Countries, tournaments were sponsored by individual nobles, by city governments (which used the sport as a revenue-generating tourist attraction), and by organized clubs of tourneying knights; these tournament societies were an exclusively German phenomenon which appeared in Bavaria in the mid-1300s.<sup>34</sup>

The tournament evolved as warfare and the concept of knighthood changed. From the twelfth through the fifteenth centuries, further variations of the tournament emerged. These included the *béhourd*, the round table, the passage of arms, the foot combat, and several specifically German types of joust which will be discussed in Chapter III.

The *béhourd*, alternately known as the *bohort* or *buhurdicum*, originated in the mid- 1100s and was contemporary with the earliest appearances of the joust.<sup>35</sup> The *béhourd* was an informal, outdoor, and often impromptu event, almost always connected with celebrations of some kind: one is recorded in association with outdoor dancing at the marketplace in Verona in 1242;<sup>36</sup> and Spanish and Portuguese *béhours*

sometimes took place in conjunction with bullfights.<sup>37</sup> The behourd's rules were stricter than those of the *mêlée*, and it was characterized by several safety measures, usually including leather or padded linen armor and whalebone swords as opposed to the *mêlée's* usual mail hauberks and iron blades.<sup>38</sup>

The introduction of the round table tournament was directly inspired by twelfth- and thirteenth-century Arthurian literature. One of the earliest known examples of a round table was arranged as part of the celebrations for Henry of Cyprus' coronation as king of Jerusalem; this tournament took place at Acre in 1286.<sup>39</sup> Round tables were jousts that were complemented by role-playing and elaborate banquets. Both men and women of the court would dress as characters from the Arthurian stories and were expected to maintain their roles all through such events, even at the evening banquets and dances that followed the jousts.

The passage of arms, which evolved in the fourteenth century,<sup>40</sup> was also influenced by themes expressed in courtly literature. It consisted of a joust or series of jousts held for a specific goal, often the ceremonial defense of a predetermined feature of the landscape, such as a bridge or a fountain or a spring, for a stipulated period of time. The event would be announced by heralds hired by one or a few defenders, known as the *tenans*, who would hold the spot against all comers, the *venans* or challengers. Passages of arms were usually arranged for a few days but could last up to a month.<sup>41</sup>

A well-known example of a passage of arms is one that took place at St.

Inglevert near Calais, France in 1390.<sup>42</sup> It was hosted by Jean le Maingre, Maréchal of France (d. 1421), who was also known as de Boucicaut.<sup>43</sup> He was the most famous and accomplished jousting of his generation. His fellow *tenans* for the passage included the Seigneur de Sampi and the Seigneur de Roye.

The passage of arms of St. Inglevert was also financed by de Boucicaut, who oversaw all aspects of the preparations for this event.<sup>44</sup> The challenge issued was against all non-French knights and squires to joust five courses with lances either sharpened (*à outrance*) or blunted (*à plaisance*), according to the preference of the *venans*. It was an event that lasted for thirty days and was characterized by lavish hospitality. Food and drink were distributed to the participants from a large main tent, and weapons and armor were provided without cost to any *venans* who required them. De Boucicaut jousted with opponents on each of the thirty days and was reported to have sustained no injuries at all.<sup>45</sup> He was challenged to a joust more often than either of his fellow *tenans*.<sup>46</sup>

The foot combat was a late development in the history of the tournament. It appeared by the sixteenth century and consisted of two knights or squires fighting with swords, pikes, or other elongated weapons over a hip-high wooden barrier. It was most popular in Italy, where merchants and other non-nobles sometimes joined in, and in England, where King Henry VIII found great enjoyment in it. Several of his suits of foot combat armor have survived and are found today in the Tower of London.<sup>47</sup>

Evolving along with the tournament itself was the development of tournament



armor. Tournament armor at the time of the earliest such games in the late eleventh century was the same armor used for battle. But over the next three hundred years, a number of innovations were introduced until armor for the joust became highly specialized and diverged greatly in form and purpose from battle armor. Plate armor gradually evolved from the mid-thirteenth century onwards; most European armor prior to this period had been made of mail or *cuir bouilli* (boiled leather shaped to the wearer's body and hardened in hot wax), with the exception of the *pot helm* or *pot de fer*, a flat-topped iron helmet that completely encased the warrior's head. The pot helm was contemporary with the First and Second Crusades and weighed between twelve and fifteen pounds. Its flat top was the ideal location for the innovation of *crests*, heraldic figures of fabric, linen, wood, or leather that helped to identify the helmeted knight and that became important accessories of a knight's costume as the pageantry of tournaments grew more and more fanciful over time.

Improved metalworking methods, especially among Italian and German armorers who were recognized as the best in Europe in Renaissance sources,<sup>48</sup> led to the addition to the *hauberk* (a loose mail shirt) of metal plates covering knees and elbows and, later, shins and forearms. Articulated gauntlets of riveted metal plates were also developed to replace the earlier mail mittens. Eventually the breastplate was added to the hauberk and, when combined with the backplate, became the *cuirass*. The cuirass was rigid enough to support a plate metal neckguard, the *gorget*, and this in turn was sturdy enough to support a round-topped *bascinet* that deflected blows

better than the earlier pot helm and eventually gained a moveable visor. Since the bascinet was now supported by the gorget, its weight no longer rested wholly on the wearer's skull, and he found it much easier to turn his head. Mail was still used under the plate to cover areas such as the armpits and groin, but full suits of plate armor were in use by the late fourteenth century.<sup>49</sup>

European warfare underwent a number of gradual but significant changes during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. One important change was the introduction of gunpowder to the battlefield. Invented in China centuries earlier, knowledge of gunpowder traveled westward via trade routes through India and Africa to Italy, where it was used in primitive and ineffectual cannons in 1340 at the siege of Terni.<sup>50</sup> However, by the late 1400s, various types of cannon had been much improved, including small hand cannons of only a foot or two in length. These were elevated on narrow wooden stands in front of the gunners and could be moved about the battlefield with relative ease compared to the larger horse- or oxen-drawn cannon. A group of mounted knights, however well-trained to charge in unison with lances couched, was hardly effective against cannons unless they could manage to trample the gunners before they fired, a risky proposition even under the most favorable conditions.

Another significant development in late medieval warfare was the increased competence of the infantry, combined with their improved weaponry. Since the reign of Charlemagne in the late eighth and early ninth centuries, the cavalry had been the

most important component of medieval European armies.<sup>51</sup> On some occasions it was the only component. The infantry, if they were included at all, consisted of large numbers of untrained serfs, slaves, and peasants with no armor other than *gambesons* or padded cloth jackets and no weapons aside from farming implements clumsily adapted for the purpose. Military commanders were accustomed to using the infantry as servants for the cavalry or as a temporary distraction for the enemy cavalry until their own cavalry was prepared for its initial charge.

The Swiss struggles for independence from their Austrian overlords, with the resulting rise to prominence of the Swiss pikemen, gradually eroded the battlefield supremacy of mounted knights in southern and southeastern Europe.<sup>52</sup> These groups of infantrymen were drawn from the lower social classes and were armed with wooden staves up to sixteen feet in length. These staves or *pikes* were topped with metal spikes and axe blades. The pikemen quickly learned that if they held ground or moved in a disciplined "hedgehog"<sup>53</sup> formation (in which they formed a closely-packed square with their pikes bristling outwards at several angles and heights), they could tear apart and unhorse whole ranks of charging knights. This change in infantry techniques led to improvements in the knights' leg armor, with special protection for the exposed outer sides of the knees.

The waning importance of heavily armored cavalry, however, was not the only reason for the tournament's transformation from battle training into purely public entertainment. Other factors included the increasing thickness, heaviness, and

expense of plate armor and the growing difficulties in breeding and buying horses large enough and strong enough to carry their riders, their riders' armor and weapons, and their own armor, a combined weight that could total several hundred pounds.<sup>54</sup> A few surviving medieval letters and chronicles deal with requests between friends and relatives to borrow tournament horses and armor.<sup>55</sup> By the early 1400s, tournaments were taking place not as events in their own right but as spectacles held in conjunction with various public or private celebrations: noble or royal weddings, the births or christenings of princes or princesses, military victories, international alliances, the visits of foreign dignitaries, and so forth.<sup>56</sup> By this time tournaments did not emphasize military prowess as much as the power and prestige of the presiding monarch; England's King Henry VIII and Queen Elizabeth I both used the tournament to great political advantage.<sup>57</sup> Tournaments also served as public displays for the lavishness of costumes and pageant cars, the royal or noble ancestry of the participants, the celebration of the rules of chivalry, the attendance of ladies, and the generosity of prizes. They were events at which those who wished to gain the attention or favor of the presiding host or hostess could do so.<sup>58</sup>

The distinguishing characteristics of later medieval and early Renaissance tournament armors as opposed to battle armors were numerous. Tournament armor was thicker in the front than in the back, as it was assumed that the tourneyer would be attacked only from the front if his opponent(s) were following the rules. The armor was also reinforced more strongly on the left side, where the shield was carried

as a target for the lance, than on the right.<sup>59</sup> In contrast, plate armor for the battlefield had become thickened on all sides, so that the shield became unnecessary. The tournament shield itself, unlike earlier battle shields that were convex and curved slightly around the knight's body, became concave, so that lance tips would more easily glance off its surface. At the close of the fourteenth century, armorers also introduced a small, rounded notch in the upper right corner of the jousting shield in which the lance could rest.<sup>60</sup>

Tournament helmets sometimes had breathing holes only on the right side of the face, as opposed to field helmets made with perforations over a larger area of the visor's surface. Gauntlets for the battlefield were generally a matched pair, but tournament gauntlets would be highly articulated on the right hand for flexibility in wielding the lance, sword, or mace, and quite stiff on the left hand in order to keep the shield steady.<sup>61</sup> The lance hook or *arret* was an important addition to the tournament breastplate and one of its most recognizable features. This hook or lance rest was often adjustable and removable. It helped the tourneying knight to strike his opponent's shield with greater force; he could win extra points if he managed to splinter his lance in this way. Sixteenth-century German armorers created elaborate, two-part lance rests or braces: one part on the front of the cuirass supported the lance from underneath, while the second part or *queue*,<sup>62</sup> which could be either on the front or on the back of the cuirass, curved downwards from above, preventing the lance butt from moving upwards on impact.

German tournament saddles were especially distinguished by their high, wrap-around pommels and cantles that helped to keep a jouster from being unhorsed and which protected the groin area and legs. Fifteenth-century examples of this type of saddle are preserved at the Museum der Stadt Regensburg, Germany, and at the Schweizerisches Landesmuseum in Zürich.<sup>63</sup> Battle saddles were characterized by low pommels and cantles that enabled the knight to slip off his horse easily if the animal fell.

A full suit of plate armor for the horse was in itself characteristic of the late medieval tournament. Around the early 1200s mail coverings for horses were sometimes used, such as those worn by the horses of the Crusaders who captured Constantinople in 1204.<sup>64</sup> However, later medieval pictorial sources show horses on the battlefield usually with no armor or protected only by a *chanfron* (forehead plate), occasionally augmented by a *crinet* (a long row of slightly overlapping plates stretched along the crest of the horse's neck). A horse ridden in a tournament would have, in addition to these pieces, a *peytral* (breastplate) and *crupper* (covering the hindquarters) connected to each other by a couple of metal sidepieces or *flanges*. Horses did not have armor under their saddles. The full set of horse armor, including the chanfron, crinet, peytral, crupper, and flanges, was termed the *barding*.<sup>65</sup>

### CHAPTER III

#### BIOGRAPHY OF MAXIMILIAN I (1459-1519) AND HIS INFLUENCE ON THE TOURNAMENT

Born in 1459, Maximilian was the son of Frederick III, Duke of Austria and Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, and of Eleanor, Princess of Portugal.<sup>66</sup> From his father, Maximilian inherited a tendency towards procrastination and a marked lack of financial common sense. The traits he inherited from his mother included a taste for fine clothes and for festivities;<sup>67</sup> from his Portuguese grandfather King Duarte, Maximilian inherited a lively, lifelong intellectual curiosity and a great love of books that, although not in evidence during his youth, became most apparent in his later life. Maximilian's great interest in tourneying was very likely influenced by *The Art of Good Horsemanship*, written by King Duarte in about 1434.<sup>68</sup> It is a richly detailed text that deals comprehensively with techniques for carrying one's lance and controlling one's horse during the joust.

The Empire in the 1450s and 1460s was not unified and provided its Emperor with neither an army nor a treasury. There was no common law and no national police force to enforce such laws as were in existence. As a child, Maximilian lived through two sieges of the city of Vienna while residing in the castle there. At one time during the second siege, he and his father were standing on the castle walls and were narrowly missed by a cannonball.<sup>69</sup> It is no surprise, therefore, that the Emperor-

to-be grew up quite accustomed to a martial atmosphere.

Maximilian was interested in armor and weaponry from the time he was a very small child. His favorite toys included a set of miniature jousting knights;<sup>70</sup> two of these are preserved in Vienna's New Museum. At his request, he was also provided with a set of play cannons that fired with real gunpowder. But when he and a friend smuggled some of his father's powder from the royal stores, a servant caught wind of the plan and narrowly prevented the two boys from blowing themselves up,<sup>71</sup> as Maximilian recalled with gratitude much later in life. When slightly older, he took lessons in riding and fencing, organized mock battles with other boys of the court, and is even reputed to have led his friends through the castle halls and courtrooms on horseback now and then. It is recorded that he was scolded and punished repeatedly for hunting the castle's chickens with his bow and arrows.<sup>72</sup>

As a young man, Maximilian came to excel at all aspects of knighthood. He was an excellent rider and thoroughly enjoyed hunting, falconry, and jousting. His contemporaries recorded that he could speak half a dozen languages, including Latin, with relative fluency<sup>73</sup> and that he sometimes dictated letters to scribes in several different languages at once.

In 1477, at the age of about nineteen, Maximilian married Mary, daughter of the Duke of Burgundy,<sup>74</sup> and with a German army rescued the duchy of Burgundy from constant attacks from France after the death of Mary's father. Although it was a political marriage, Mary and Maximilian came to love one another deeply. They had two children, Margaret and Philip. Mary adored sports as much as Maximilian did



and enjoyed hunting and hawking with him. In the early spring of 1482, she and her husband were hawking near Bruges when Mary was thrown from her horse as it attempted to leap a ditch.<sup>75</sup> She was fatally injured and died a short time later after summoning the nobles of her duchy and swearing them to Maximilian's allegiance so that he could rule as regent for their young son. (Burgundy's domains at this time included Flanders and the Netherlands.) Although Mary had loved and welcomed Maximilian wholeheartedly into her life, the citizens of her duchy did not. They did not wish a foreign prince on their throne, and for years afterwards, Maximilian had to fight the Flemish and the Dutch to maintain his son's claim to the Burgundian lands. He also continued to grieve for his wife until his own death. Although he remarried twice, neither his second nor his third wife meant much to him other than as a source of income.

Maximilian spent the remainder of his life avoiding the responsibilities of leading the Empire. Instead, he focused on strategically planned marriages for his children and grandchildren, which vastly increased the power and holdings of the Hapsburg family, and on his patronage of the arts and of the tournament.

As a young man, Maximilian was inspired by the richness and variety of tournaments he saw at the court of the duke of Burgundy. He studied them avidly and worked to recreate them at his own court. In his semi-autobiographical, semi-fantastical *Triumph of Maximilian*, he lists the several types of tournaments he encouraged and in which he participated.<sup>76</sup> These included the *Gesteck*, a rather plain sort of joust with the object of unhorsing one's opponent, and the *Pfannenrennen*, an

extremely dangerous type of joust in which no armor was worn except for a small metal plate strapped to the jouster's chest. The goal of this variation was to hit only the metal plate with the lance while avoiding the unprotected remainder of the knight's body.

The Emperor's patronage of the tournament also included his efforts to exert influence on development of innovations in plate armor. In the late fifteenth century, the Emperor established imperial armor workshops at Innsbruck and engaged the finest German armorers and engravers of his time to work there, along with a few Italian craftsmen of exceptional ability. Maximilian was eager to have his establishment surpass the internationally renowned armor making families of Milan, particularly the Missaglias and their relations, the Negrolis.

Various master armorers were in the Emperor's employ at various times.<sup>77</sup> These men included Lorenz Colman (d. 1516 or 1517), often referred to as Colman Helmschmied; Hans Grunewalt (1440-1503); Gabriel and Francesco Merate (active from about 1494-1529); the Seusenhofer family, which included the brothers Conrad and Hans and the latter's son Jorg (active collectively from 1470-1555); and Hans Burgkmair (1473-1531).

Lorenz Colman was the son of an armorer from Augsburg. His name appears in that city's records as early as 1467. Ten years later he was in Maximilian's service, and in 1491 the Emperor appointed him *Hofplättner* (court armorer), enabling Lorenz to purchase his own house in Innsbruck. Around 1480, at Maximilian's urging, he devised an astonishingly complex suit of horse armor that included articulated leg

pieces that reached all the way down to the animal's fetlocks. Lorenz is also credited with the invention of the *garniture*, a suit of plate with many additional, interchangeable parts with which the owner could adapt his armor either for battlefield or for tournament usage.

Lorenz was followed in his service to the Emperor by his son Coloman, who became known as Coloman Colman Helmschmied. In 1516 Maximilian ordered a suit of silver-plated steel armor from Coloman. But by 1519 the suit was apparently still incomplete, because the Emperor had fallen behind in his payments.<sup>78</sup>

Hans Grunewalt was the grandson of a bell founder in Nuremberg and eventually owned several houses in that city. While employed by the Emperor, he maintained an intense rivalry with the Missaglia armorers. Several of Grunewalt's pieces have survived and are in the *Waffensammlung* in Vienna.<sup>79</sup>

Gabriel and Francesco Merate were Italian armorers summoned by Maximilian to his service in 1494. They were from the town of Merate, close by the ancestral home of the Missaglias. The Emperor gave them a three-year contract according to which they were required to work only for him. Under his direction, they set up an armor mill at Arbois in Burgundy. In 1495 Max sent a letter to Ludovico il Moro in which he praised the Merates as "excellent armorers."<sup>80</sup>

The most well known armorer associated with the Emperor Maximilian, however, was Conrad Seusenhofer. He was born sometime between 1450 and 1460 and was appointed *Hofplättner* in 1504 with a contract for six years and a lifelong pension of 50 florins per year after that.<sup>81</sup> The fact that Conrad was a cousin of the

imperial secretary who created Maximilian's *Weisskunig* may well have helped to bring him to the Emperor's attention.

Working in conjunction with Maximilian, Conrad developed the distinctive style of fluted armor that to this day is called "Maximilian armor."<sup>82</sup> Conrad was also famous for halting delivery of his armors when Maximilian neglected to pay him on time. In one instance the Emperor persuaded Conrad to see matters from the imperial viewpoint by issuing orders to have him and several other armorers taken to the front line of battle without armor. The craftsman capitulated at once. Conrad Seusenhofer died in about 1517; one surviving example of his work is in the collections at the Tower of London.<sup>83</sup>

° In addition to establishing the imperial armor workshops, Maximilian is known to have had a particular interest in special effect tournament armor. This is the part of tournament history for which he is especially well remembered. The *Triumph of Maximilian* describes his beloved *Geschiffentrennen*, in which spring-loaded shields, when properly struck by an opponent's lance, flew up into the air in pieces, much to the delight of audiences. With this armor created only for entertainment purposes, Maximilian in the early sixteenth century helped to bring the tournament into the final phase of its history, that of a carefully choreographed and stage-managed theatrical presentation. His lifelong affinity for the tournament and its accompanying chivalric panoply earned him the nickname, "last of the knights."<sup>84</sup>

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSION

This discussion has explored some aspects of the medieval tournament. Jousts, *béhourds*, round tables, *mêlées*, and other types of tournaments reflected important social, cultural, economic, political, and technological changes in Europe between the eleventh and sixteenth centuries. The tournament shape-shifted fluidly from training exercise to business endeavor to job marketplace to public festival and framework for the exploration of chivalric ideals. In the final era of the tournament, especially under the direction of Emperor Maximilian I, this sport was transformed once again into an elaborate fantasy world and a showplace for the works of some of the finest Renaissance artisans.

However, this discussion serves as only a brief introduction to a very broad and complex subject. Further research is called for, particularly in the areas of the chivalric ethos and its effects on the tournament, as well as more complete explorations of Bernard of Clairvaux's views in their cultural context and of other German tournament variations at the court of Maximilian I besides those described in this work.

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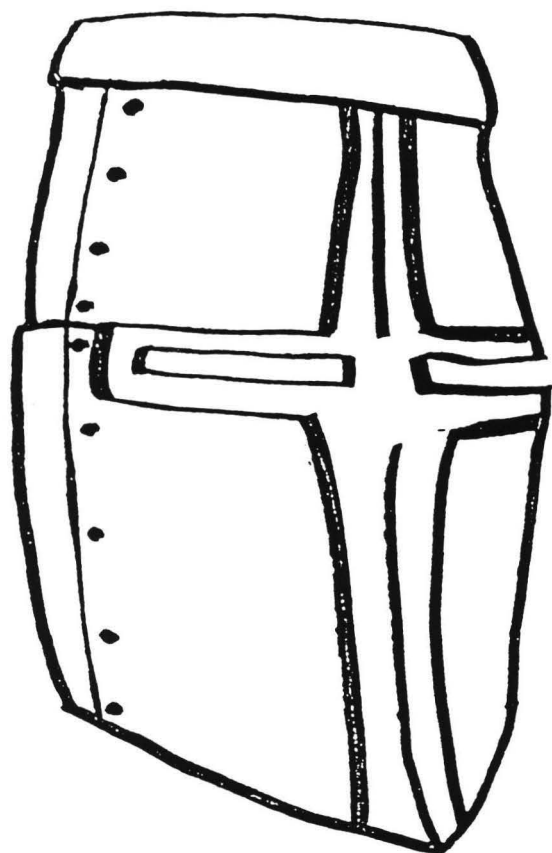
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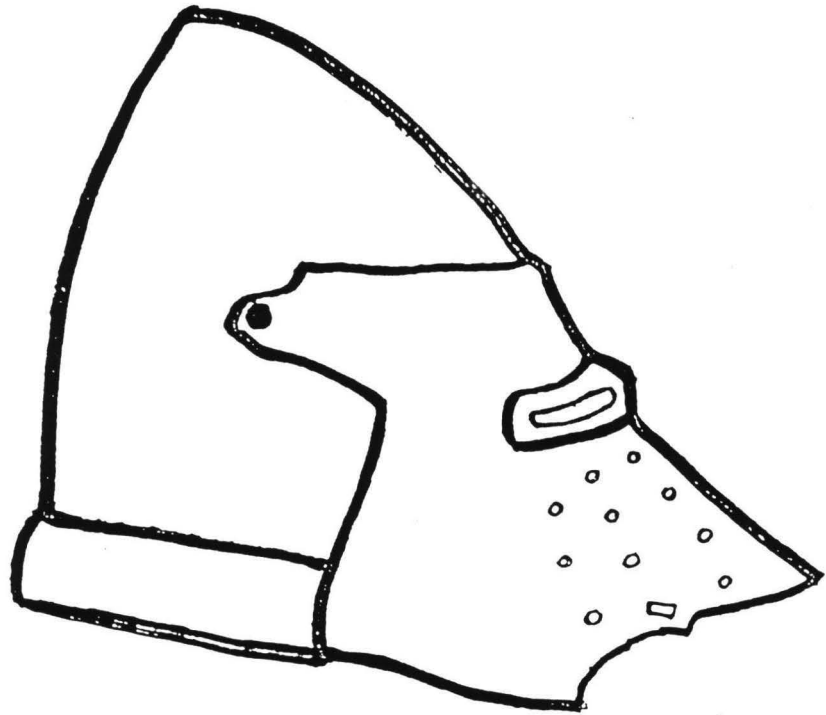
Appendix A

Helmets and Barding

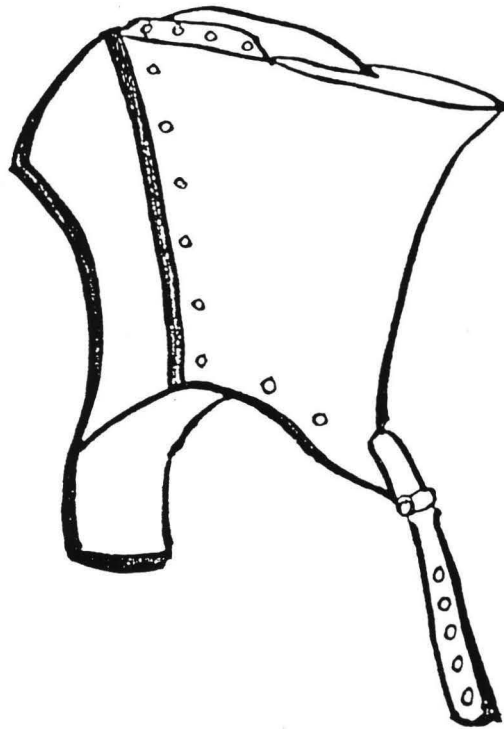


Pot helm  
(Great helm)

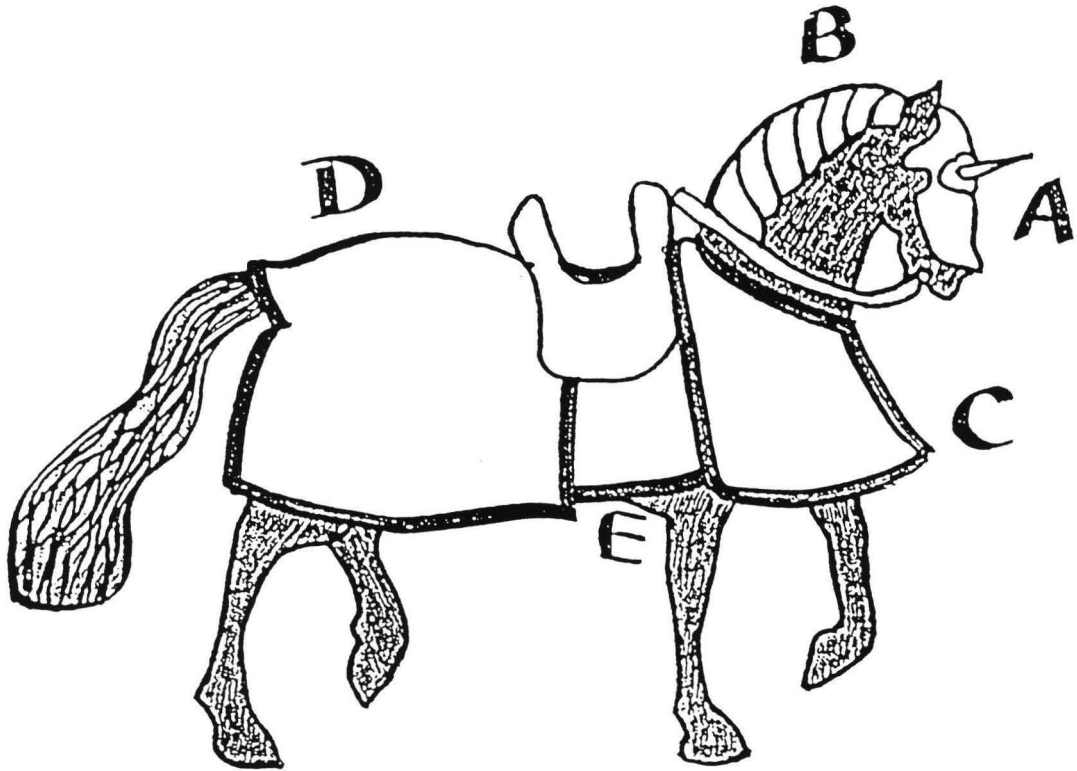
11<sup>th</sup> ~ 13<sup>th</sup>  
centuries



Italian  
bascinet  
late 14<sup>th</sup>  
century



German jousting helm  
(Frog-mouth helm)  
15<sup>th</sup> century



# Barding

## 16<sup>th</sup> century

- A. Chanfron
- B. Crinet
- C. Peytral
- D. Crupper
- E. Flange

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