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Exercises in Arms: the Physical and Mental Combat Training of Men-at-Arms in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries

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The concept of knights and men-at-arms leisurely sparring against each other in the middle of a castle courtyard to pass the time of day is one which has often been taken for granted in modern fiction, yet a contradictory view that knightly combat was clumsy and brutish has arguably persisted within scholarship and amongst the general public for even longer.[1] Such conflicting notions arise from problems regarding the veracity of when, where, and how men-at-arms trained for combat and practiced their fighting skills. Indeed, there remains significant doubt over whether or not military men actually did practice individual combat skills outside of battle or tournaments, reflected in the scant discussion of training and practice within the corpus of research on medieval warfare. This uncertainty is reflected in Michael Prestwich's comprehensive study of medieval warfare, which offers only brief comments about the training of archers in the fourteenth century, noting that practice was not necessarily highly regarded.[2] John Beeler and John Carter have also expressed skepticism, asserting that for the early Middle Ages at least, the only training a knight usually engaged in was the practical business of actual battle.[3] Further doubts have been raised by the observation that some men, particularly John Hawkwood and Robert Knollys, began their military careers as archers, presumably developing their skills in arms through a combination of talent and practical experience rather than regular exercise in knightly combat.[4]

This lacuna in the study of chivalric training practices has largely stemmed from a lack of firm evidence in medieval sources for regular training, a problem

1 Steven Muhlberger, *Deeds of Arms: Formal Combats in the Late Fourteenth Century* (Highland Village, 2005), p. 21. See also John Clements, "Wielding the Weapons of War: Arms, Armour and Training Manuals during the Later Middle Ages," in L. J. Andrew Villalon and Donald J. Kagay, eds., *The Hundred Years War: A Wider Focus* (Leiden, 2005), pp. 447–75, at 452–53.

2 Michael Prestwich, *Armies and Warfare in the Middle Ages: The English Experience* (London, 1996), p. 137.

3 John Beeler, *Warfare in England, 1066–1189* (New York, 1966), p. 278; John Carter, "Sport, War and the Three Orders of Feudal Society: 700–1300," *Military Affairs* 49 (1985), 132–39, at 134.

4 Adrian R. Bell, Anne Curry, Andy King, and David Simpkin, *The Soldier in Later Medieval England* (Oxford: 2013), p. 69.

that Helen Nicholson, Sydney Anglo, and Richard Barber have explored in some detail.[5] However, the idea that men of the military elite were indifferent as regards regular training, even though their pride, status, or livelihood were closely related to martial prowess, has sat uneasily with a number of scholars. James Hester and John Clements have both sought to overturn this belief in the last decade, pointing out that the regular training of men-at-arms is an area that has long been neglected.[6] Steven Muhlberger has remarked that "warriors in the fourteenth century must have talked endlessly and in detail about combats they had witnessed or about famous fights that had involved their friends, companions or relatives," suggesting the popularity and importance of battle skills to men-at-arms.[7] Clifford Rogers also notes that although regular training exercises among soldiers are rarely mentioned in surviving evidence, "this may reflect more the interests of our sources than the absence of any drill," and we should not assume, therefore, that the limited evidence is indicative of a lack of interest in or value placed upon combat training.[8] Rogers further contends that it may be "difficult to assess (or to generalize about) the prevalence of continuing weapon practice … in the daily lives of older noblemen, but it seems likely that many engaged in these activities on a daily or near-daily basis throughout their lives, as befitted those pursuing 'the most noble and illustrious science and profession of arms.'"[9] Given the importance that chivalrous society in the Middle Ages placed upon martial skill, it would be unwise to assume that the ongoing cultivation of these skills would have been neglected.

This paper aims to reconstruct the role that training could play in the lives of men-at-arms, that is to say, men who were at least of the rank of knight or esquire, across Western Europe in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries by considering a range of evidence, including romances and biographies, manuscript illustrations, chronicles, and combat manuals, as well as medieval treatises on politics, culture, warfare, and chivalry. In doing so, it confirms the suspicions of some scholars that the combat skills of men-at-arms must have involved "early training and a lifetime's practice."[10] The study will begin by discussing "training" in the sense of a young boy's education in arms and military pursuits, before moving on to an exploration of men-at-arms' routine practice of military skills in adulthood. This itself will include a consideration of individual and collective physical practice, and also factors influencing the mental "training" of these warriors.

5 Helen Nicholson, *Medieval Warfare: Theory and Practice of War in Europe, 300–1500* (Basingstoke, 2004), pp. 11–12; Sydney Anglo, *The Martial Arts of Renaissance Europe* (New Haven, 2000), p. 18; Richard Barber, *The Knight and Chivalry* (Woodbridge, 1995), p. 206.

6 James Hester, "Real Men Read Poetry: Instructional Verse in 14th-Century Fight Manuals," *Arms and Armour* 6 (2009), 175–83, at 175; Clements, "Wielding the Weapons," p. 448.

7 Muhlberger, *Deeds of Arms*, p. 3.

8 Clifford J. Rogers, *Soldiers' Lives Through History: The Middle Ages* (London, 2007), p. 69.

9 Ibid., p. 7.

10 Dennis Showalter, "Caste, Skill and Training: The Evolution of Cohesion in European Armies from the Middle Ages to the Sixteenth Century," *Journal of Military History* 57 (1993), 407–30, at 408.

Training at an Early Age

There appears to have been little formal structure in a youth's military education until boys reached the age of fourteen or sixteen.[11] Christine de Pisan pays some attention to the martial instruction of youths in her *Livre du corps de policie* and *Livre des fais d'armes et de chevalerie* from 1407 and 1410 respectively, in which she describes ancient Roman practices of encouraging an interest in warfare, fostering an immunity to hardship by abstaining from comfort and luxuries, and having noble boys engage in mock battles or practice wielding weapons against target posts.[12] Although she is referring here to the ideas of classical authors, including Vegetius, and appears to regard them as aspirational ideals rather than contemporary commonplaces, it is nonetheless apparent that methods such as these were familiar in medieval Europe. In their earlier years, boys were instructed in more informal ways: receiving practice swords and model knights or castles as gifts to play with, being advised to read or listen to stories about great deeds of arms, and being encouraged to observe the practice of the grown men were typical. Indeed, Robert Woosnam-Savage suggests that the giving of a sword to noble or royal youths may have been a "rite of passage," marking a transition towards more adult martial pursuits.[13] Ruth Mazo Karras also refers to boys in households being given special training sessions in arms, and even engaging in special tournaments designed for their participation.[14] It also appears that wrestling and unarmed fighting formed a part of training from boyhood onwards: youths are mentioned as learning by observing men in such contests, and Anglo also points to the inclusion of a variety of unarmed techniques in the fighting manuals of the late Middle Ages, suggesting that these formed a fundamental part of combat skills.[15] Aside from this, riding and hunting were also essential components in a knight's education. As warriors traditionally expected to fight on horseback, a high degree of proficiency in horsemanship was required. Consequently, practice at riding and wielding sword and lance formed a significant part of boyhood training.[16] Hunting also provided an opportunity to develop military skills, testing not only horsemanship but also skill

[11] Nicholas Orme, *From Childhood to Chivalry: The Education of the English Kings and Aristocracy, 1066–1530* (London, 1984), p. 182.

[12] Christine de Pisan, *The Book of Deeds of Arms and of Chivalry*, ed. Charity Cannon Willard, trans. Sumner Willard (University Park, PA, 1999), pp. 29–32 and 35; see also Christine de Pisan, *Le livre du corps de policie*, ed. Robert Lucas (Geneva, 1967), pp. 104–06.

[13] *The History of the King's Works*, ed. H. M. Colvin, vol. 1, ed. R. Allen Brown, H. M. Colvin and A. J. Taylor (London: 1963), p. 202; Robert Woosnam-Savage, "*He's Armed Without that's Innocent Within*: A Short Note on a Newly Acquired Medieval Sword for a Child," *Arms and Armour* 5 (2008), 84–95, at 88. See also Orme, *From Childhood to Chivalry*, pp. 183–4; Ruth Mazo Karras, *From Boys to Men: Formations of Masculinity in Late Medieval Europe* (Philadelphia, 2003), pp. 29–30.

[14] Karras, *From Boys to Men*, p. 30.

[15] Sydney Anglo, "How to Win at Tournaments: The Techniques of Medieval Combat," *Antiquaries Journal: Journal of the Society of Antiquaries of London* 68 (1988), 248–64, at 249–51.

[16] Matthew Bennett, Jim Bradbury, Kelly DeVries, Iain Dickie, and Phyllis Jestice, *Fighting*

with weapons, strategy and the analysis of the surrounding terrain, and boys from across the spectrum of noble and gentle society are known to have joined in with hunting parties.[17]

From the age of fourteen onwards, more direct combat skills were practiced. Participation in jousts and tournaments has long been recognized as a means of developing the skills of war: Prestwich among others has noted its similarities to actual battle, at the very least providing practice in horsemanship and use of weapons, while David Crouch informs us that as early as the twelfth century tournaments included contests between squires where they could gain experience and catch attention.[18] The use of special blunted weapons also indicates that these events were treated as battle simulators, lowering the risks – though still considerable – of injury, but emulating the heavy blows and exertion to be expected in actual warfare.[19] The significance of tournaments in knightly martial training is also attested in literary texts from the Middle Ages. Barber mentions a number of works that refer to tournaments as a means of training knights, as well as Richard I's decision to allow tournaments in England so that English knights could train and refine their combat skills.[20] There is also the case of Pope John XXII's stated reasons for the Church abandoning its opposition to tournaments in 1316, as reported by Noel Denholm-Young, due to a need for crusading knights who were sufficiently trained, something that might suggest that without such gatherings most knights would not have engaged in any kind of martial practice.[21]

The Case for Informal Training

In spite of this, it seems unreasonable to assume that tournament events, not necessarily frequent, formed the only opportunity to practice combat skills. Juliet Barker has mentioned that although many "apologists" justified tournaments and hastiludes as valuable training, frequent royal prohibitions, themselves often caused by impending war or fear of political insubordination, meant that knights could not have relied exclusively on tournament gatherings as the

Techniques of the Medieval World AD 500–AD 1500: Equipment, Combat Skills and Tactics (Staplehurst, 2005), pp. 107–08.

17 Orme, *From Childhood to Chivalry*, pp. 191–93, 198; Rogers, *Soldiers' Lives*, p. 4.

18 Prestwich, *Armies and Warfare*, pp. 224, 227; Bennett, *Fighting Techniques*, pp. 108–09; Philip Warner, *The Medieval Castle: Life in a Fortress in Peace and War* (London, 1971), p. 92; David Crouch, *Tournament* (London, 2005), pp. 118–19. See also Barber, *The Knight and Chivalry*, p. 206.

19 Juliet Barker, *The Tournament in England 1100–1400* (Woodbridge, 1986), pp. 178–79.

20 Ibid., pp. 17–20.

21 "De torneamentis," *Titulus* 9 in *Constitutiones Joannis Papae XXII: cum apparatu Zenzelini de Cassanis* [Decretales extravagantes], in *Corpus juris canonici* (1582) vol. 3, UCLA Digital Library, http://digital.library.ucla.edu/canonlaw/toc.html [accessed 17 January 2018]; see also Noel Denholm-Young, "The Tournament in the Thirteenth Century," in *Collected Papers of N. Denholm-Young* (Cardiff, 1969), pp. 95–120, at 95–98.

sole opportunities to practice fighting.[22] Juliet Vale's provisional list of tournaments from the reign of Edward III identifies a total of fifty-five tournaments from 1327 to 1355, with three or four sometimes occurring in a single year.[23] However, in order to inculcate the instincts and muscle memory desirable for a career in arms, knights would surely have needed to sharpen their skills on a very frequent basis, and it is questionable whether only engaging in practice up to once every few months via tournament bouts would suffice for this, particularly since we cannot assume that all knights attended every event.

A similar observation can be made for the early fifteenth century. Between 1412 and 1414 Christine de Pisan lamented that French noblemen "ne se exercitassent plus" in the use of weapons during times of peace, and it is evident she is referring here to the development rather than simply the display of skills.[24] Part of her proposed solution was to hold tournaments up to three times a year across the kingdom so that men-at-arms could become "excitéz et apris."[25] Again we might question whether this, on its own, would provide ample practice to cultivate technique. A possible explanation may be that such events, which de Pisan labels *festes*, would have incentivized knights to practice regularly because they presented an opportunity to win honor through a public demonstration of skills that had been refined in more private settings.[26] In his commentary on a combat manual from the mid-fifteenth century, Mark Geldof has rightly pointed out that prowess was a widely celebrated virtue in chivalrous society, meaning that knights were likely motivated to practice ahead of such events in order to avoid embarrassment and better distinguish themselves.[27] Certainly the existence of informal or private training prior to important events is evidenced in the preparation for duels: when Humphrey of Gloucester and Philip the Good agreed on such a contest for St. George's Day 1425, the latter reportedly began a period of intensive combat training, even having an assistant teach him strategies in the art of fencing.[28]

Consideration of other evidence further indicates that routine practice was regarded as important, and that knights and other men-at-arms may well have engaged in personal training outside of tournaments and warfare. Although writing before the period in question, Roger of Howden's comments on the importance of practice are still applicable for the late Middle Ages; in describing the martial habits of Henry II's sons, he remarks that it is not possible to handle weapons effectively "si non praeluditur."[29] His use of the

22 Barker, *The Tournament*, pp. 43, 48–49 and 61.
23 Juliet Vale, *Edward III and Chivalry: Chivalric Society and its Context 1270–1350* (Woodbridge, 1982), pp. 172–74.
24 Christine de Pisan, *Livre de la paix*, ed. Charity Cannon Willard (The Hague, 1958), p. 134.
25 Ibid., p. 134.
26 Ibid.
27 Mark R. Geldof, "'*Strokez off ij hand swerde:* A Brief Instruction in the Use of Personal Arms," *Opuscula* 1 (2011), 1–9, at 1.
28 Richard Vaughan, *Philip the Good: The Apogee of Burgundy* (London, 1970), pp. 38–39.
29 Roger de Hoveden [of Howden], *Chronica magistri Rogeri de Houedene*, ed. William Stubbs, 4 vols. (London, 1868–71), 2:166.

verb *praeludere*, literally to "play beforehand," would indicate that he refers to practice outside of earnest fighting encounters like tournaments and battles. Nicholas Orme highlights this importance in an anecdote about the premature death of John Hastings, who was fatally wounded in 1386 while riding "to prove his horse before the next tournament." The incident demonstrates that men-at-arms and their companions did in fact engage in activities that would allow them to perform better in chivalric encounters.[30] It is also telling that in *The Bruce*, John Barbour has Ingram Umfraville advising Edward II to form a long truce so that the seasoned Scottish yeomen will fall out of practice with fighting; the reasoning here is presumably that the English men-at-arms will gain an advantage in skill because they will maintain their regular training as part of their martial calling.[31] Moreover, Clements mentions that medieval combat manuals advocate regular practice; the fourteenth-century fencing master Hanko Döbringer, for instance, asserted that regular practice was more important than talent, while Hester similarly argues that the terminology in Middle English fight manuals reflected generations of study and continuity.[32] We can also find evidence for the importance of frequent practice in the medieval reception of Vegetius's *De re militari*, with Christopher Allmand highlighting that passages asserting the importance of physical fitness and training were seemingly well noted in surviving medieval manuscripts of the treatise.[33]

Furthermore, we may consider the possibility that many men-at-arms participated in combat practice purely for entertainment. Given that shooting a bow is noted as a pastime of even aristocratic males, though it was not a typically knightly weapon, it appears probable that such men would have also practiced with their more traditional equipment.[34] Moreover it is worth remembering that as the tournament has its origins in the informal "knockabouts" recorded as taking place in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, casual practice fighting almost certainly predates the invention of the tournament.[35] If there is a predilection in contemporary sources to describe training in the context of tournaments, this may be because they were prestigious occasions of great interest, easier to observe because of their public nature than any one man's personal training activities. Moreover, it is apparent that tournaments were not the only occasions where deeds of arms could be practiced or "shown off," and we may suppose that many men-at-arms would have possessed both the opportunity and inclination to exercise their skills frequently.

30 Orme, *From Childhood to Chivalry*, p. 189.
31 John Barbour, *The Bruce*, ed. and trans. A. A. M. Duncan (1997; repr. Edinburgh, 2007), pp. 706–08.
32 Clements, "Wielding the Weapons," p. 456; Hester, "Real Men Read Poetry," p. 178.
33 Christopher Allmand, *The* De Re Militari *of Vegetius: The Reception, Transmission and Legacy of a Roman Text in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 17–18.
34 Joseph Gies and Frances Gies, *Life in a Medieval Castle* (London, 1975), p. 111. See also Orme, *From Childhood to Chivalry*, pp. 198–202.
35 Nicholson, *Medieval Warfare*, p. 117.

Methods of Individual Physical Training

It is possible to discern some details of what activities men-at-arms may have carried out in routine training, though this is not without some uncertainty. In this matter we may differentiate between practices for physical training among individuals and groups and, less frequently considered, measures related to mental training. In the following discussion, physical aspects will be explored first before investigating the mental conditioning of knightly warriors.

As Allmand has shown, the military treatise of Vegetius was widely embraced in the Middle Ages as a staple textbook on military matters, and that his work was influential: medieval translators tended to render Vegetius's *milites* (soldiers) as *chevaliers* (knights), hinting that his instruction was regarded as practical and practicable for medieval warriors.[36] One translator's remark that some of the Romans' practice was misguided by their worship of pagan demons is also telling, as it implies medieval people were discerning readers of Vegetius, disregarding some ideas while employing others.[37] In his treatise, Vegetius devotes some attention to the training of warriors: the martial curriculum involved the physical exercise of running and jumping, wielding weapons against mock targets, varying strikes against body parts, sparring in enclosures, wearing armor and practicing leaping on and off horses.[38] Although it is interesting that similar advice is given by Ghillebert de Lannoy, who asserts that a young man should "juer de l'arc, saillir, luiter et jouster, aprendre **à** juer d'une hache et d'une espée," there remain doubts as to whether the advice of Vegetius was consciously employed by the medieval nobility.[39] It is not apparent that the stipulated training was closely followed by his medieval readership; certain aspects of his curriculum such as swimming are not commonly mentioned by medieval commentators, and the above-mentioned belief that the Romans were misguided in some respects would suggest that some teachings were not considered necessary.[40] As a result, there is some uncertainty about how far the recommendations of Vegetius can be taken as a rule of thumb for the physical education of men-at-arms in the late Middle Ages, and for further details we must look elsewhere.

Evidence from biographies and literature throws little light on this area. Jehan de la Saintré's confrontation with an abbot contains an interesting reference:

[36] For the popularity of Vegetius, see Allmand, *The* De Re Militari *of Vegetius,* p. 3; Malcolm Vale, *War and Chivalry: Aristocratic Culture in England, France and Burgundy at the End of the Middle Ages* (London, 1981), pp. 95 and 129; Brian Todd Carey, Joshua B. Allfree, and John Cairns, *Warfare in the Medieval World* (Barnsley, 2006), p. 202; Prestwich, *Armies and Warfare*, pp. 152, 186. For doubt about the conscious influence of Vegetius, see Stephen Morillo, "Battle Seeking: The Contexts and Limits of Vegetian Strategy," *Journal of Medieval Military History* 1 (2002), 21–41, at 21.

[37] Orme, *From Childhood to Chivalry*, pp. 187–88.

[38] Orme, *From Childhood to Chivalry*, pp. 187–88.

[39] Ghillebert de Lannoy, Œ*uvres de Ghillebert de Lannoy, voyageur, diplomate et moraliste*, ed. J. C. Houzeau (Louvain, 1878), p. 450.

[40] Orme, *From Childhood to Chivalry*, p. 188.

following an unarmored wrestling contest, the knight insists on fighting the abbot in armor because it is what he is accustomed to, something the abbot is reluctant to do due to his own inexperience with such equipment.[41] The episode suggests that the wearing of armor in itself was unnatural enough to require practice, and men-at-arms must presumably have spent much time growing accustomed to simply moving in their protective gear.

Aside from this, training is usually unmentioned or only referred to in passing. The author of the *Fouk Fitz Warin* provides no mention of martial training in the early life of the protagonist. Instead he is depicted as a newcomer to battle at the age of eighteen, rushing to protect his lord after donning an old hauberk "a mieux qu'il savoit," and of course distinguishes himself as a natural at fighting.[42] A similar trend can be seen in the *Roman de Silence*, though the story provides some detail about physical education: a seneschal trains the gender-morphed protagonist by running with "him" through woods and streams, even in scorching heat (ll. 2469–74), and they also take part in wrestling, jousting, and "skirmishing" by the time he reaches the age of twelve (ll. 2494–6).[43] No further details about an education in arms or routine training are given, but when Silence is dubbed a knight at seventeen, he distinguishes himself and wins the tournament held for the newly-dubbed knights (ll. 5137–44).[44]

Pero Niño is a further example from the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. His biographer depicts him as a martial prodigy even at fifteen, and elsewhere describes him as superior to others in many respects, including lance-thrusting, dart-throwing, and other "juegos de armas," a term which seems to imply a range of informal combat-related pastimes designed both for entertainment and competition.[45] This tendency for protagonists to possess a natural and prodigious aptitude for fighting appears as a trope across much of chivalric literature. Richard Kaeuper likewise gives numerous examples of how noble youths in literature such as Gareth and Perceval are "drawn almost mystically to the armor and weapons of knighthood," but that "nobility or worth is proved by … hearty strokes in battle." Thus we are presented with the notion that nobility can grant an inherent superiority in the pursuit of arms, and that proven prowess can legitimize nobility.[46]

41 Antoine de la Sale, *Jehan de Saintré*, ed. Jean Misrahi and Charles A. Knudson (Geneva: 1978), p. 295.

42 Louis Brandin, ed., *Fouk Fitz Warin: Roman du XIV^e Si*ècle, Les Classiques français du Moyen Âge 63 (Paris, 1930), p. 14.

43 Heldris De Cornuälle, *Silence: A Thirteenth-Century French Romance*, trans. Sarah Roche-Mahdi, Medieval Texts and Studies 10 (East Lansing, 1999), p. 117.

44 De Cornuälle, *Silence*, p. 241.

45 Gutierre Diaz de Gamez, *The Unconquered Knight: A Chronicle of the Deeds of Don Pero Niño, Count of Buelna*, ed. and trans. Joan Evans (1928; repr. Woodbridge, 2004), pp. 30, 40–41; see also Gutierre Diez de Games, *El victorial: crónica de don Pedro Niño, conde de Buelna*, ed. Juan de Mata Carriazo (Madrid, 1940), p. 86.

46 Richard Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe* (Oxford, 1999), p. 130; Nicholson, *Medieval Warfare*, p. 115.

However, this heroic aptitude could also apply to men from less illustrious backgrounds. The biographer of Bertrand du Guesclin provides an example of this when describing Bertrand's early belligerent habits: "Les enfans fait combatre et il mesmes s'i prent / Et fasoit la bataille durer si longuement / C'on ne savoit li quelx avoit amendement" (ll. 308–10).[47] The author also states Bertrand's precocious physicality, even at seventeen years old: "fors fut et ossuz et formez grossement" (l. 450).[48] Taken at face value, the early life of Bertrand would indicate that a propensity and aptitude for fighting in general could prove sufficient on its own, although here we might also consider that the author wanted not only to portray the hero in a flattering light, but also to assert his legitimacy within the ranks of knighthood by following literary convention and depicting him as a natural talent in the noble art of war.

The best source of information from texts of this kind is certainly the biography of Boucicaut the younger, whose training habits are described by the author. Similar to Pero Niño's aforementioned participation in martial games, the author describes how "quant il estoit ou logis, s'essayoit avec les autres escuiers a getter la lance ou a autres essaiz de guerre, ne ja ne cessast," indicating a remarkable energy and alacrity in combat activities.[49] Of even greater interest, we are told that Boucicaut made great effort to build physical strength and endurance, running for extended periods of time to develop stamina and practicing with training weapons that were heavier than real ones: "autre fois feroit de une coignee ou d'un mail grant piece et longue, pour bien se duire en harnois et endurcir ses bras."[50] The biographer's choice of words on these pages suggests that these activities were performed periodically rather than occasionally. Indeed, in order to have any meaningful effect they must have been completed regularly. Although this might appear to be purely a strength-building exercise, it should be noted that handling overly heavy practice weapons would greatly improve skill with manipulating those of ordinary weight, a practice with a long-established history in other martial traditions, such as the use of *tanrenbo*, heavy wooden practice weapons in Japanese sword arts.[51] Boucicaut's biographer claims that none in his time equaled his diligence, and while we may assume that the author inclines towards exaggeration in his praise, it is unclear whether the exaggeration lies in his description of Boucicaut's deeds or in his claim that others did not practice as rigorously. Some of the details certainly corroborate the advice of Vegetius, who also mentions training with excessively heavy weapons, so it

47 Cuvelier, *La Chanson de Bertrand du Guesclin de Cuvelier*, ed. Jean-Claude Faucon (Toulouse, 1990), p. 11.

48 Cuvelier, *Chanson de Bertrand*, p. 13.

49 Denis Lalande, ed., *Le livre des fais de bon messire Jehan le Maingre, dit Bouciquaut, mareschal de France et gouverneur de Jennes* (Paris, 1985), p. 26.

50 Ibid., pp. 24–25.

51 Nakamura Taisaburo, *The Spirit of the Sword: Iaido, Kendo, and Test Cutting with the Japanese Sword*, trans. Gavin J. Poffley (Berkeley, CA, 2013), p. 107.

appears likely that at least some of Boucicaut's activities were part of more widespread practice.[52]

Another useful source type to consider here is knightly treatises, such as those written by Geoffroi de Charny and Ramon Llull. In his *Book of Chivalry*, de Charny's prescriptions for the formation of knightly careers provide interesting insights into what measures he considered important for knights to develop their fighting skills. He perceives deeds of arms in terms of a "scale of prowess," moving from jousts to tournaments to war, reasoning that these activities increase both in danger and difficulty with war encompassing the skills of the former two.[53] De Charny also advocates young knights travelling beyond their home territories and the lands they own, which could be looked after by trusted friends and subordinates, in order to seek deeds of arms and war, as well as stating that glory, riches, or status should not diminish a knight's desire to continue winning honor.[54] Interesting reflections of this can be seen in the careers of real military men: for example, the earl of Warwick Thomas Beauchamp was remarkably active in both tournaments and war despite already being a man of great status, while Walter Mauny rose from being a simple knight to a baron thanks to his martial endeavors.[55] This model is also reflected in some of the paragons discussed above, as men like Boucicaut and Pero Niño are depicted as tirelessly seeking to enhance their martial honor, regardless of danger or the praise they have already won.[56]

Ramon Llull's *Book of the Order of Chivalry* is of similar value, as he enumerates a range of suitable activities that knights should pursue to develop their martial abilities: tilting against a quintain, participation at tournaments and Round Tables, hunting wild and dangerous animals, and interestingly, *esgremir*, which would seem to denote "fencing" in the loose sense of general fighting and self-defence rather than exclusively swordplay, quite separate from tournaments and other formal events.[57] Nonetheless, it is curious that these texts do not give more specific advice about how knights should practice, such as techniques to develop weapon skills or coordination. De Charny speaks of learning broader skills like strategy and command via observation and experience, listening to and asking

52 Orme, *From Childhood to Chivalry*, pp. 187–88.

53 Geoffroi de Charny, *A Knight's Own Book of Chivalry*, ed. Richard Kaeuper, trans. Elspeth Kennedy (Philadelphia, 2005), pp. 47–50.

54 Ibid., pp. 51–52, 58–59, 64.

55 For the warlike interests of Thomas Beauchamp, see John A. Wagner, *Encyclopedia of the Hundred Years War* (London, 2006), pp. 45–46; Prestwich, *Armies and Warfare*, pp. 124, 160–61, 315; Vale, *Edward III and Chivalry*, pp. 58, 87, 90. For the career and exploits of Walter Mauny, see Prestwich, *Armies and Warfare*, pp. 51, 104, 154, 219, 276; Wagner, *Encyclopedia of the Hundred Years War*, p. 213.

56 Diaz de Gamez, *The Unconquered Knight*, pp. 14–15, 33, 65, 151, 204; Muhlberger, *Deeds of Arms*, pp. 17, 165–66; Lalande, ed., *Le Livre des fais*, pp. 57–58.

57 Ramon Llull, *The Book of the Order of Chivalry*, trans. Noel Fallows (Woodbridge, 2013), p. 47; see also Ramon Llull, *Llibre de l'orde de cavalleria*, ed. Albert Soler Llopart (Barcelona: 1988), p. 177.

others, but although he alludes vaguely to physical practice when he describes how the increase of years also increases a knight's prowess, he gives no more detailed instruction on how they should practice fighting.[58] Comparable observations can be made regarding Llull's treatise, as his description of desirable habits for knights pertains more to philosophical and spiritual virtue.[59] Kaeuper gives a convincing explanation for this absence, reasoning that de Charny would have regarded such technicalities as being best learned in the field, from the best practitioners, rather than from a book; both de Charny's and Llull's works were written for the purpose of reforming the behavior of contemporary knights by promoting a strict martial ethos, reigniting chivalric pride and enthusiasm and channelling it into useful endeavors.[60] In this sense, their texts act as a call to arms for chivalrous society rather than an attempt to standardize training practices on a fine scale.

Visual evidence from manuscripts is another potential source of information about training habits, and Oxford's MS Bodley 264 in particular is an intriguing case. The manuscript is a cycle of romances about Alexander the Great written in French, initially produced between 1338 and 1344 at Tournai, and features several marginal illustrations that seem to depict knights and squires practicing their martial skills in a variety of ways.[61] Fol. 56r shows three youths, apparently naked, running together at a barrel attached to a post (see Figure 1); one marginal illustration, fol. 82v depicts a man, unarmored, running at a target while another holds a counterweight attached, while in another a would-be jouster sits atop a wheeled wooden frame and is towed towards his target by several peers (see Figure 2); fol. 89r also depicts lance practice, though this time the youth is being rowed towards his target in a small boat; fol. 91r. shows one pair duelling with wooden cudgels and shields while in another illustration two pairs engage in "pickaback" wrestling (see Figure 3); fol. 113r depicts more familiar scenes, with two pairs of armored men jousting on horseback.

Although these depictions have been interpreted as knightly training habits, specifically as adapted illustrations for Christopher Gravett's work on English knights of the fourteenth century, the question of how we are to receive marginal images like these is challenging.[62] Sometimes they are meant to depict genuine scenes from everyday life that would have been recognizable to contemporaries, and at other times their content is deliberately absurd or parodic.[63] It would

58 De Charny, *Knight's Own Book*, pp. 56–58.

59 Llull, *Book of the Order of Chivalry*, pp. 71–79.

60 De Charny, *Knight's Own Book*, pp. 22, 24–25; Llull, *Book of the Order of Chivalry*, pp. 1–2, 9.

61 Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodl. 264, fols. 56r, 82v, 89r, 91r, 113r. The full manuscript can be viewed online at https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/inquire/p/90701d49-5e0c-4fb5-9c7d-45af96565468 [accessed 17 January 2018].

62 Christopher Gravett, *English Medieval Knight 1300–1400*, Warrior 58 (Oxford, 2002), pp. 34 and 59.

63 S. K. Davenport, "Illustrations Direct and Oblique in the Margins of an Alexander Romance at Oxford," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 34 (1971), 83–95, at 86. See also Mark Cruse, *Illuminating the* Roman d'Alexandre*: Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 264* (Cambridge, 2011), p. 33.

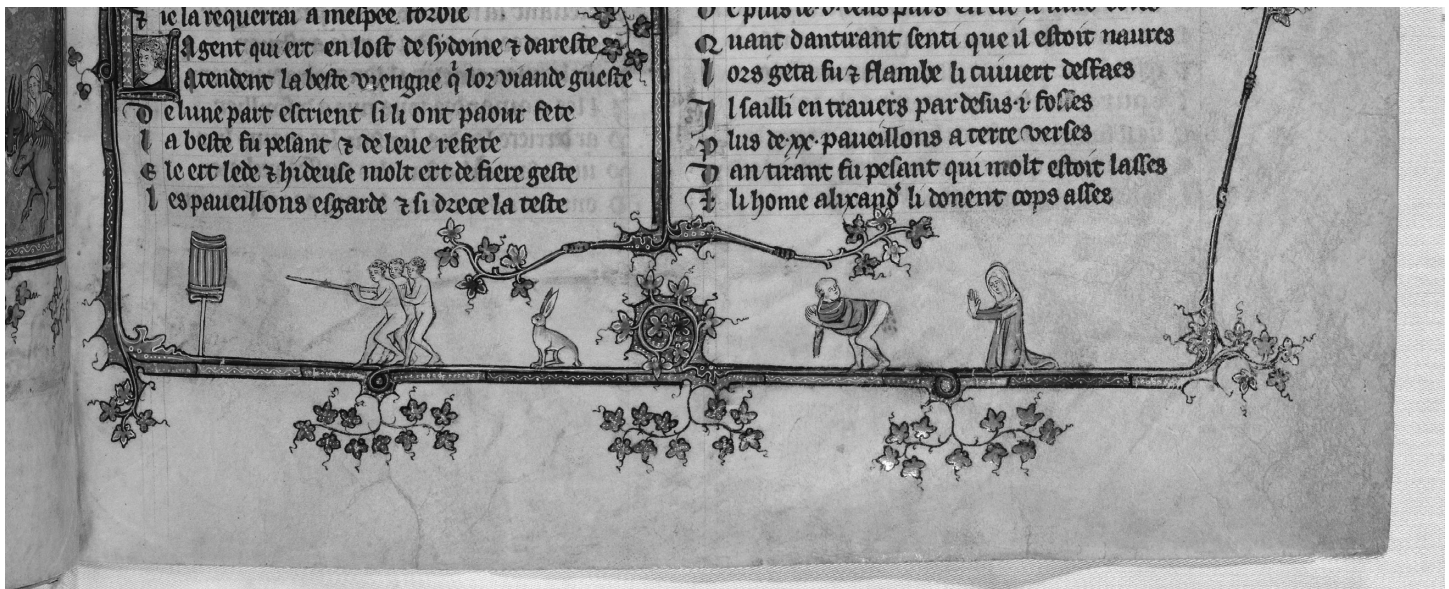

Figure 1: Oxford, MS Bodley 264, fol. 56r

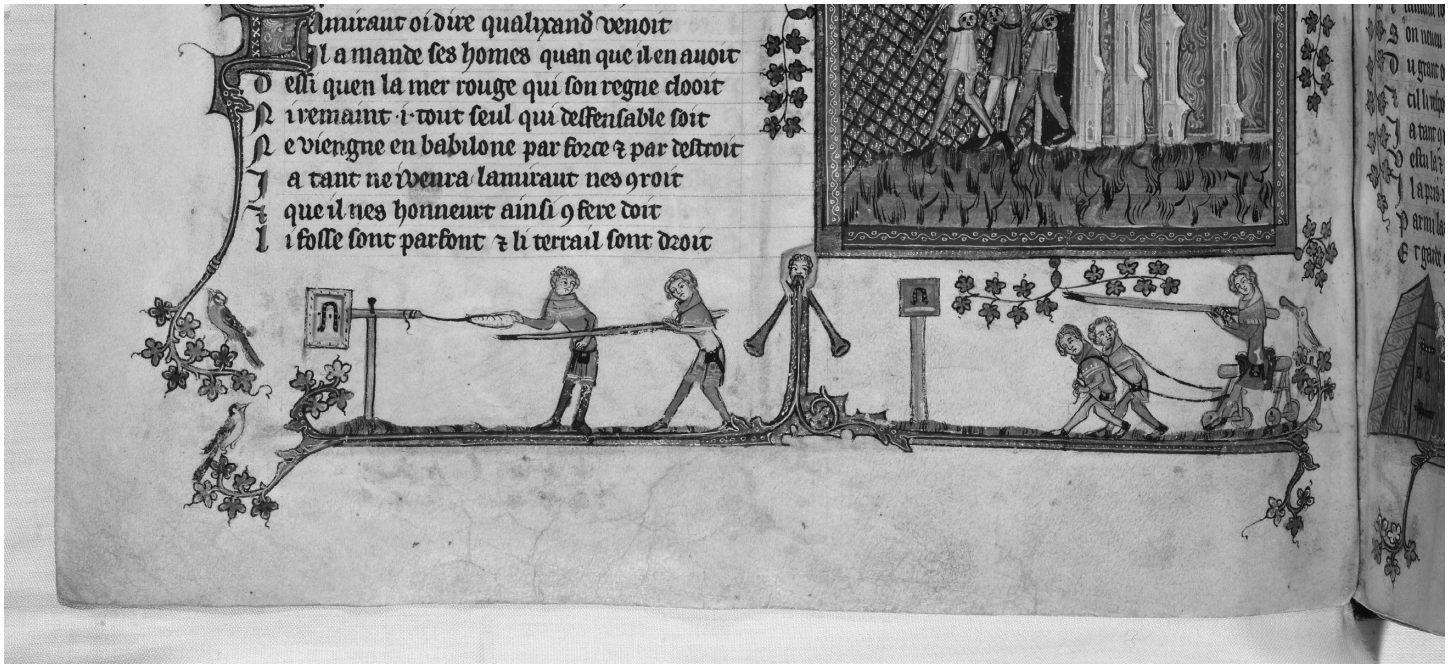

Figure 2: Oxford, MS Bodley 264, fol 82v

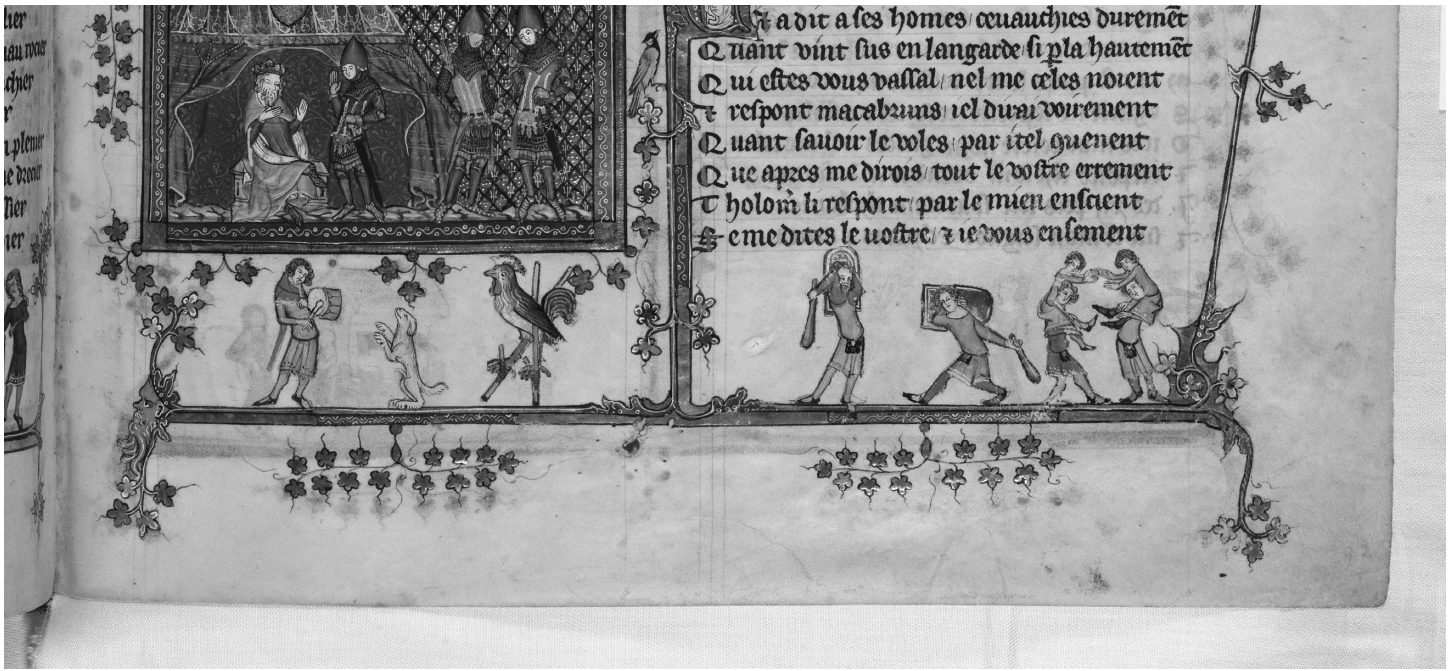

Figure 3: Oxford, MS Bodley 264, fol. 91r

be unwise to dismiss the marginalia as mere idle doodling; in her study of marginal illustrations in Flemish and northern French manuscripts, Elizabeth Hunt explains that a planner organizing the workshop of scribes and illustrators was sometimes responsible for determining the content of the margins, and that this was very likely the case for this cycle of Alexander romances.[64] It has also been noted that there is certainly a relationship between the marginalia and the text here, as the more martial images tend to accompany "episodes of struggle" in the story.[65] This certainly seems to be the case for the practices depicted on fol. 82v, at which point in the text Alexander and the emir of Babylon are preparing for war against each other; likewise, the practicing warriors on fol. 91r appear in a martial context, with characters discussing the prospect of single combats.[66]

However, this still leaves the uncertain issue of how literally we are to interpret these images, and therefore how seriously we can take them as examples of knightly practice. Whereas the fol. 82v scene of running at the quintain is believable, the three men charging at a target naked seems very strange, and rowing a lancer to a target might seem less a method of serious practice and more of a stunt to show off excellent balance. The towed youth's appearance alongside the more familiar image of the quintain lends it credibility, though it is uncertain why a substitute for a real horse would be necessary if men-at-arms were accustomed to riding from an early age, unless it was a measure to prevent unnecessary damage or fatigue to a valuable mount during training. It may also be that learning to couch the lance while managing a live steed was considered too demanding for neophyte men-at-arms, and so the two skills were introduced separately. It is possible to discern more valid practice in the images of fol. 91r; the "pickaback" wrestling would likely have aided in teaching how to seize an opponent from horseback and drag him to ground, while the fighting with shields and cudgels could have provided an alternative means of practicing foot combat.

Medieval combat manuals, which have received attention in a handful of significant studies in the last decade, are another promising source for this topic. Discussion here will focus on three late medieval texts: the two English manuals preserved in the British Library's MS Harley 3542 and MS Cotton Titus A xxv, both from the early to mid-fifteenth century, as well as the so-called "Döbringer Codex," containing instruction from various masters-at-arms, including passages by the recognized grandmaster Johannes Liechtenauer believed to date from 1389. Several scholars have pointed out the uncertainty over the latter date, but while we cannot guarantee that its content informs us of practice in the late fourteenth century, it remains probable that 1389

64 Elizabeth Moor Hunt, *Illuminating the Borders of Northern French and Flemish Manuscripts, 1270–1310* (Oxford, 2007), p. 5.

65 Davenport, "Illustrations," p. 87.

66 I must thank Professor Helen Nicholson for her assistance in reading and analyzing the text on the relevant folios of MS Bodley 264.

is a date of some significance for the techniques described therein.[67] These manuals typically depict participants training either alone or with partners, most commonly with the longsword and on foot, practicing isolated strikes and stances or working through short sequences where a specific attack is answered by a specific defence and counter. This would necessarily involve extensive repetition in order to develop skill and reflexes to a level where the moves became instinctual. It therefore indicates that the combat training of men-at-arms involved a carefully considered and methodical approach, rather than being purely a matter of brawls or freestyle sparring.

There may be some skepticism over whether these texts are indicative of knightly practice, given that they include the use of weapons untypical of men-at-arms on the battlefield and that both their authors and audience could include men who were not of knightly station.[68] However, Muhlberger makes a compelling point that the content in these volumes is a reliable indication of the techniques and practices of these men when he states that "the profound and diverse knowledge of the teaching masters could have been developed nowhere else but among men at arms," adding that while a number of authors discuss fighting in full armor, such equipment was unlikely to be affordable for many below gentle rank.[69] Clements further explains the value of these sources for giving insight into the training of men-at-arms across western Europe when he asserts that while many of the surviving texts were produced outside of the theaters in the Hundred Years' War, "they reflect both training and practices of contemporary warriors throughout most of western Europe."[70] This is because, he reasons, the arms and armor of the period were largely similar across the region, and so the techniques used against them would have shared many common features.[71] Clements further notes that some of the texts have knightly authors, and in the "Döbringer Codex," in which Hanko Döbringer provides a gloss of an earlier Lichtenauer treatise, the latter addresses the reader as "Jung Ritter," while other masters recorded in the codex also refer to the *ritterlich* pursuit of the longsword, clearly associating it with the combat techniques employed by

67 Dierk Hagedorn, "German Fechtbücher from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance," in Daniel Jaguet, Karin Verelst, and Timothy Dawson, eds., *Late Medieval and Early Modern Fight Books: Transmission and Tradition of Martial Arts in Europe (14th–17th Centuries),* History of Warfare 112 (Leiden, 2016), pp. 247–79, at 256; Eric Burkart, "The Autograph of an Erudite Martial Artist: A Close Reading of Nuremberg, Germansches Nationalmuseum, Hs. 3227a," in Jaguet et al., eds., *Fight Books*, pp. 451–80, at 451, 456.

68 For non-knightly weapons, see London, British Library, MS Cotton Titus Axxv, fol. 105; Geldof, "*Strokez off ij hand swerde*," p. 5; Jeffrey Forgeng and Alex Kiermayer, "'The Chivalric Art': German Martial Arts Treatises of the Middle Ages and Renaissance," in Barry Molloy, ed., *The Cutting Edge: Studies in Ancient and Medieval Combat* (Stroud, 2007), pp. 153–67, at 154. For the audience and authors of combat manuals, see Forgeng and Kiermayer, "'The Chivalric Art,'" p. 161 and Burkart, "The Autograph," pp. 455, 475–77.

69 Muhlberger, *Deeds of Arms*, pp. 24, 29.

70 Clements, "Wielding the Weapons," p. 450.

71 Ibid.

knights.[72] As a result, although it might be expected that the audience of such texts should include men who were not members of the chivalric elite, aspiring knights were also among the expected readers of the same combat manuals prescribing regular training, and the techniques described therein could not have differed greatly from the skills used by the military aristocracy.

One of the most striking features of the combat manuals is the priority they give to skill over brute strength. One section of Döbringer's gloss of Lichtenauer describes the attacker as a *Peuffel*, "buffalo," referring contemptuously to a peasant; the association is a curious one, and it is tempting to read into it a scornful reference to practitioners with no skill who relied only on their strength to win combats.[73] Clements also provides compelling arguments for the sophistication of medieval longsword techniques, and Geldof and Hester both underline the scientific, methodical approach present in the manuals, reflecting a system of combat that was carefully considered and required diligent practice.[74] A closer look at the chivalric literature of the period also bears out this emphasis on skill. Although many examples refer to pure strength, there are similarly many comments made about the speed, agility, or swordsmanship of knights in literature; among Kaeuper's many examples, he mentions a knight in the *Lancelot* lauding the swiftness of the titular hero's technique, as well as Joinville's praise for the deftness of a Genoese knight in dodging a blow before striking off a limb.[75] This demonstrates that the intricacy of late medieval men-at-arms' fighting techniques was such that they could and often did take the learning and practice of their skills seriously.

The fight texts reveal other activities that likely formed a part of wider practice. Geldof notes that the surviving Middle English manuals feature a kind of activity not found in continental counterparts: using a set of systematic drills which practitioners could complete individually as part of their exercise, and which would help to instill a familiarity with fighting techniques over time.[76] Geldof is primarily referring to the fifteenth-century English fight manual preserved in the British Library's MS Cotton Titus A xxv, but the same appears to be true as well of the late fourteenth-century text in MS Harley 3542: the text in Harley focuses on the practice of sequential drills, detailing cuts and footwork, analogous to the *kata* of Japanese martial arts.[77] This approach is apparently unique to the Middle English texts, and potentially indicates a common convention particular to men-at-arms in England in the late Middle Ages.

[72] Ibid.; Nuremberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum [NGN], Cod. HS. 3227a, fols. 18r, 43r, 43v, 44r. See also Geldof, "*Strokez off ij hand swerde*," p. 2.

[73] NGN, Cod. HS. 3227a, fol. 28v. See also Clements, "Wielding the Weapons," p. 454.

[74] Ibid., p. 458; Geldof, "*Strokez off ij hand swerde*," p. 2; Hester, "Real Men Read Poetry," pp. 177,182.

[75] Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence*, pp. 137, 141. See also pp. 139, 142, 148.

[76] Geldof, "*Strokez off ij hand swerde*," pp. 4–5.

[77] London, British Library, MS Harley 3542, fols. 82r–85r. See also Hester, "Real Men Read Poetry," p. 179.

Another intriguing feature of these texts is their inclusion of verse. Hester explains that the use of verse is a common feature in the utilitarian texts that proliferated in the late Middle Ages, and served the dual purpose of enumerating important facts and providing practical instruction, as is the case with the fight manuals.[78] The existence and nature of this verse is significant for a number of reasons. Firstly, while the versification of language can make it more memorable for the practitioner, this typically only holds true with sufficient repetition, suggesting that men-at-arms may have been required to frequently repeat the fighting techniques described in the manuals in order to absorb the verse instruction, particularly as reciting the lines in time with the actions they describe would make for more effective learning. Secondly, Hester and Geldof illustrate that much of the language in the combat texts is impenetrable to the modern reader, utilizing as it does various technical terms in such a way that the complete meaning could only be understood by demonstration. The manuals were thus not stand-alone guides, but a complement to real-life instruction, and for men-at-arms this may have formed a part of boyhood tutelage under a master-at-arms.[79] Thirdly, the use of verse to make knowledge and techniques memorable could well indicate a need for practitioners to rehearse the skills alone and in their own time, away from the inspection of a master or indeed the battlefield.

Methods of Collective Physical Training

Although discerning practices for collective physical training in surviving sources is yet more difficult, it is worth briefly considering this area. We can be reasonably confident that medieval military minds recognized the value of bodies of troops working as a collective, as evidenced by the appreciation of Vegetian comments that men from different places and backgrounds "could not learn to act together without rigorous training carried out in common."[80] Nonetheless, actual examples of medieval armies adopting this approach before the late fifteenth century are difficult to identify. This is particularly true of men-at-arms, as Rogers indicates when he states that it is unlikely that landowning warriors were "put to any sort of formal drill" when attending their lord, though he does note it is likely they engaged in martial activities purely for entertainment.[81]

The most obvious opportunity for collective physical training is participation in tournaments, as explored above. It has been established that the effective actions of grouped warriors were essential for success in battle, and although early tournaments frequently involved displays of reckless individual courage, the rewards and prestige to be gained by acting as a cohesive team must surely

[78] MS Harley 3542, fols. 84r–85v; also Hester, "Real Men Read Poetry," pp. 176, 178.
[79] Hester, "Real Men Read Poetry," p. 181; Geldof, "*Strokez off ij hand swerde*," pp. 2, 6.
[80] Allmand, *The* De Re Militari *of Vegetius*, p. 28.
[81] Rogers, *Soldiers' Lives*, p. 7.

have provided knights with an incentive to use these events for practicing group maneuvers and tactics.[82] This would seem all the more likely at least from the early fourteenth century, because lords were likely to lead the same men in tournaments as well as on military campaigns; Juliet Barker gives the example of Lord Berkeley's household men travelling with him to tournaments at Hertford, Coventry, Exeter, and Bristol, all in 1328.[83] However, Muhlberger notes that the tournament was already in decline during the fourteenth century, with changes in battle tactics making the skills of knightly mounted combat in groups slightly less relevant than before.[84] Aside from this, it may be that mixed knights and infantrymen were put to practice together by their commanders while on campaign, but examples of this are difficult to locate.

Methods of Mental Training

Much of the mental "training" of men-at-arms took the form of wider cultural conditioning, though some individual practices can also be discerned. There can be no doubt that contemporaries were aware of the need for men-at-arms to be mentally prepared for the stresses of fighting and killing. De Charny makes frank reference to "great distress and strong emotion" for knights when they had to endure punishing physical hardship and witness the loss of friends, and Allmand is clear that Vegetius's emphasis on morale and fostering psychological resilience "struck a chord with medieval readers."[85] We can therefore be confident that various measures, both general and individual, existed to help men-at-arms face the perils of their calling.

Barry Molloy and Dave Grossman have noted that the members of the "warrior class" of any given society tend to be conditioned, culturally and psychologically, to foster aggressiveness and develop their capacity for violence.[86] As noted earlier, evidence for this in the Middle Ages is apparent in the early training of young boys from knightly backgrounds. Yet Molloy and Grossman also make an important point in emphasizing the psychological difficulty involved in killing another person; they remark that while social conditioning may have changed throughout history, human physiology has remained essentially the same, meaning that medieval warriors would still have been susceptible to the brain changes induced by the stress of combat situations, and many may have struggled to overcome biological "programming" that discourages intra-species

[82] Steven Isaac, "Cowardice and Fear Management: The 1173–74 Conflict as a Case Study," *Journal of Medieval Military History* 4 (2006), 50–64, at 55. See also Muhlberger, *Deeds of Arms*, p. 59.

[83] Barker, *The Tournament*, pp. 22, 26, 27.

[84] Muhlberger, *Deeds of Arms*, p. 59.

[85] De Charny, *Knight's Own Book*, p. 61; Allmand, *The* De Re Militari *of Vegetius*, p. 258.

[86] Barry Molloy and Dave Grossman, "Why Can't Johnny Kill?: The Psychology and Physiology of Interpersonal Combat," in Barry Molloy, ed., *The Cutting Edge: Studies in Ancient and Medieval Combat* (Stroud, 2007), pp. 188–202, at 189.

slaughter.[87] Although Steven Isaac reasons that medieval people were more inured to violence than is typical today, he nonetheless agrees that combat in the Middle Ages must still have been a fearful experience and that medieval combatants were not only aware of the potential for cowardice in battle, but that it was in fact expected.[88] Jan Verbruggen has likewise discussed a range of convincing examples from across the medieval period, particularly the First Crusade, that illustrate how knights and other warriors were susceptible to fear on the battlefield.[89] As a consequence we may expect that in addition to the cultivation of an aggressive mental attitude among men-at-arms, measures were taken, either by individuals or society, to help men-at-arms manage the fear of death and the stress of combat situations.

We may again turn to de Charny and Llull for an indication of these measures. Both commentators place importance on the need to cultivate discipline and virtue through asceticism. De Charny states that self-discipline, abstaining from fine food and wine or soft beds, as well as persistently embracing hardships such as cold and limited sleep, enhances the courage of a man-at-arms and leads to a better military career.[90] Llull makes similar assertions, denouncing vices such as gluttony and envy specifically because they prevent a knight from being an effective soldier.[91] Religion and spirituality also feature very strongly in the writing of both chivalric commentators. De Charny makes it clear that honoring God through deeds of arms should always be a knight's first priority, and that any success he enjoys in his martial pursuits is only through God's grace and permission.[92] Virtue and the glory of God are also at the centre of Llull's vision of chivalry; he frequently emphasizes the necessity for fine personal qualities in a would-be knight, and advocates regular attendance at mass and sermons in order to further refine these virtues.[93] A knight's relationship with God was therefore regarded as one he needed actively to maintain because it was a fundamental part of his mental preparation for battle, concentrating on thoughts of spiritual glory in order to overcome the natural instincts of fear. The significance of God, heaven, and righteousness for medieval soldiers is also remarked on by Rogers, but interestingly he observes that although some men derived comfort from mass and Holy Communion before battle, this was not as pervasive as might be expected.[94] It is hence worth considering what other measures prepared men-at-arms mentally for combat.

Other actions taken by individuals include participation in tournaments. Isaac states that while success in earnest battle would have required the coordinated

87 Molloy and Grossman, "Why Can't Johnny Kill?," pp. 190, 196–99.
88 Isaac, "Cowardice and Fear Management," pp. 51, 62–63.
89 J. F. Verbruggen, *The Art of Warfare in Western Europe: From the Eighth Century to 1340*, trans. Sumner Willard, 2nd ed. (Woodbridge, 1997), pp. 40–41.
90 De Charny, *Knight's Own Book*, pp. 61, 68–69.
91 Llull, *Book of the Order of Chivalry*, pp. 73, 76.
92 De Charny, *Knight's Own Book*, pp. 96, 106.
93 Llull, *Book of the Order of Chivalry*, pp. 56–60, 77.
94 Rogers, *Soldiers' Lives*, pp. 167–69.

actions of groups, the tournament was good training for individual bravery.[95] Tournaments would also have provided suitable mental training, because they gave knights an opportunity to increase their skill and experience, factors that Steven Morillo rightly identifies as significant in helping soldiers better assess any dangers they face, and therefore have less fear of their opponents.[96] This chimes well with the comments of Molloy and Grossman, that more highly trained or specialized soldiers were probably required to remain in the high Condition Yellow or low Condition Red brain states they identify for combat situations, where humans still retain the ability to exercise fine motor skills.[97] As we have established that skilled execution was necessary for the fighting techniques of men-at-arms, it would no doubt be very important for them to retain this capability in the traumatic conditions of the battlefield, so we might assume that many knights sought or were expected to participate in tournaments and similar actions as part of their mental training, as this could facilitate an "inoculation to the stresses of a combat environment."[98]

However, beyond this it is easier to identify measures of mental training on a socio-cultural level. While Verbruggen notes the merit of exploring soldiers' mental preparation for battle, his explanations of this focus more on general attitudes that overruled fear rather than individual activities designed to suppress it. These include interest in opportunities for personal gain, the influence of a good commander, and a sense of duty.[99] In addition to these, Morillo outlines a range of other strategies that may have mitigated the influence of fear upon knightly combatants. One of these is the simple mental trick of assuming a greater level of skill and bravery than the enemy, paralleled by Anglo's observation that knights were advised to bolster their flagging stamina with the mental trick of assuming their adversary is even more tired, while another strategy involves the sense of surety provided by the depth and density of a closely-packed formation.[100]

A further preventative measure is that of group bonding. Morillo explains that the tendency towards the "flight" reaction could be mitigated by soldiers being reluctant to abandon comrades they were close to and with whom they had shared experiences.[101] This seems probable in the case of men-at-arms, who would likely have spent much time in the company of their lord and fellow retainers, typically fighting in the same company in warfare and tournaments. Furthermore, the experience of fighting alongside relatives, neighbours, and friends would have enhanced "the motivational powers of glory and shame,"

95 Isaac, "Cowardice and Fear Management," p. 55.
96 Steven Morillo, "Expecting Cowardice: Medieval Battle Tactics Reconsidered," *Journal of Medieval Military History* 4 (2006), 65–73, at 67.
97 Molloy and Grossman, "Why Can't Johnny Kill?" p. 194.
98 Ibid., pp. 190–91.
99 Verbruggen, *The Art of Warfare*, pp. 49–57.
100 Anglo, "How to Win," p. 251; Morillo, "Expecting Cowardice," p. 68.
101 Morillo, "Expecting Cowardice," p. 67.

especially for men belonging to chivalrous society who were necessarily concerned with family honor and reputation.[102]

Two more dynamics which could have reduced fear on the battlefield for men-at-arms were the use of armor, and the cultural convention of surrender and ransom. Rogers notes that the armor typically worn by men-at-arms offered such extensive protection that men could go into battle confident that only the most powerful or unlikely blows would threaten their lives.[103] Although death was not impossible, defeat would more likely entail capture, in which circumstances a warrior of gentle rank could reasonably expect to be spared for the prospect of a profitable ransom.[104] As a result, it is apparent that even if no organized regime prevailed for the mental training of men-at-arms, there existed a range of strategies that individual warriors could employ, as well as social and cultural factors intended to encourage aggressiveness, inoculate against battle stress, and reduce, if not remove, the fear of death in combat.

Conclusion

A number of uncertainties remain regarding the formative and routine training of men-at-arms, as several aspects are still unclear: the training of horses, training apparel, and questions of when and where they practiced may all be areas that warrant further exploration. Nevertheless, we should be more confident about the importance of regular combat training to men-at-arms in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and if we consider various sources of evidence some very interesting details emerge about this aspect of their lives. From childhood, boys from knightly backgrounds were encouraged to take an interest in military culture, from weapons and fighting to horses and armor; they were instructed to closely observe the actions and techniques of their elders, both in tournaments and presumably in more informal contexts; they received tutelage from knightly masters in handling weapons, practiced with lance and quintain both on foot and mounted, participated in specialized tournaments, and accompanied hunting parties.

A range of possible physical and mental practices for established men-at-arms can be discerned from surviving evidence. Aside from the widely recognized hunting, jousts, and tournaments, other possible training activities included the use of excessively heavy practice weapons, wrestling, running, hurling javelins, sprinting or riding at a quintain, and agile mounting and dismounting from horses. Training methods of these sorts not only functioned as genuine combat preparation but could also serve the purposes of entertainment and competition, as is apparent in their frequent description as "games" in the writing of the period, particularly in the works of biographers depicting their subjects as fine competitors. In addition, repetition of techniques with various weapons, both with a

[102] Rogers, *Soldiers' Lives*, p. 171.
[103] Ibid., pp. 171–72.
[104] Morillo, "Expecting Cowardice," p. 72.

partner and alone, appears to have been relatively common, and one feature that was possibly unique to English chivalry was the execution of sequenced weapon drills like the *kata* of Asian martial arts. Chivalric commentators like de Charny and Llull inform us that informal "fencing", venturing abroad for military adventures, and improving one's skills gradually from jousting to warfare were also advisable practices. Their works describe an ideal of always striving for greater honor in a knightly career, and this can be clearly seen in the lives and exploits of real military men, from captains of the Hundred Years' War like Thomas Beauchamp and Walter Mauny to the subjects of chivalric biographies like Boucicaut, Pero Niño and Bertrand du Guesclin.

Mental training, while far less formalized, also seems to have existed. On an individual level, men-at-arms might endeavor to improve their effectiveness as warriors by living a strict ascetic life, limiting the luxuries of food and drink or comfort. Remaining mindful of God and virtue was considered important for a warrior's spiritual wellbeing, as well as to bolster his courage in battle. The use of mental "tricks" is also sometimes evidenced; maintaining a positive mindset by assuming greater strength or skill than the enemy, even in the middle of battle, was believed to improve performance. On a broader cultural level, the fostering of aggression among boys, exposure to combat situations in the form of tournaments, weapons training, group bonding, and the convention of surrender and ransom all served to help men-at-arms cope with the stress of battle conditions and control the inevitable fear induced by combat scenarios.

Some evidence would suggest that formal training in arms, either in boyhood or later, was not necessarily essential for men to become successful knights. The careers of Hawkwood, Knollys, and du Guesclin indicate that it was possible for men to combine natural aptitude with practical experience. Nevertheless, it is clear that other men-at-arms did engage in regular practice, and we might reasonably expect that levels of diligence and motivation must have varied from one individual to the next, as reflected in comments by de Charny and Muhlberger about the differing levels of ambition among men-at-arms to achieve honor.[105] What emerges, then, is a stronger conviction about the importance of regular combat training for men-at-arms in the Late Middle Ages, along with a clearer image of how this might have looked in their daily lives.

[105] De Charny, *Knight's Own Book*, pp. 51–59; Muhlberger, *Deeds of Arms*, pp. 155–56.