

Chivalry

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What is Chivalry?

The word “Chivalry” derives from the French word chevalier meaning a horseman; a knight or a gallant young man. The definition of Chivalry can be described as a term often related to medieval institution of knighthood referring to the codes of conduct, including courtly love, adhered to by Medieval knights with gallant knightly values including honor, bravery, courteousness and honesty. Chivalry was the honor code of the knight.

Knights Code of Chivalry

A knight was expected to have not only the strength and skills to face combat in the violent era of the Middle Ages but was also expected to temper this aggressive side of a knight with a chivalrous side to his nature. There was not an authentic Code of Chivalry as such - it was a moral system which went beyond rules of combat and introduced the concept of Chivalrous conduct - qualities idealized by knighthood, such as bravery, courtesy, honor, and gallantry toward women.

The Code of Chivalry and the legends of King Arthur and Camelot

The ideals described in the Code of Chivalry were emphasised by the oaths and vows that were sworn in the Knighthood ceremonies of the Middle Ages and the Medieval era. These sacred oaths of combat were combined with the ideals of chivalry and with strict rules of etiquette and codes of conduct towards women. The Dark Age myths of Arthurian Legends featuring King Arthur, Camelot and the Knights of the Round Table further strengthen the idea of a Code of Chivalry. Chivalry was adhered to by the Knights of the Round Table - Honour, Honesty, Valour and Loyalty.

Chivalry toward Women - The Knight in Shining Armor

Chivalry was the honor code of the knight and great importance was placed on courtesy towards women leading to the concept of a “Knight in Shining armor.” In modern times the terms chivalry and chivalrous are used to describe courteous behavior, especially that of men towards women.

The Code of Chivalry and Courtly Love

There were strict rules of courtly love. Surprisingly the romance, rules, and art of Courtly Love allowed knights and ladies to show their admiration for each other regardless of their marital state. It was a perfectly acceptable and common occurrence for a married lady to give a token to a knight of her choice to be worn during a Medieval tournament. Courtly love was acceptable as long as the rules relating to chastity and fidelity were strictly adhered to.

Chivalry in the Middle Ages

Written by Simon Newman

Chivalry in the Middle Ages was a moral, religious and social code of knightly and courtly conduct. The code varied, but it often emphasized honor, courage and service. Chivalry in the Middle Ages may also refer to an idealized life and a knight's manners while among his court.

History

The term chivalry was derived from several different languages. The French term chevalier, the Spanish term caballero, and the Italian term cavaliere, all meaning "warrior on horseback" came together to form "chivalry." While the term was originally used the same as it had been previously (for warriors on horseback) it became known as a broad term for the code of conduct followed by knights.

Three types of knightly chivalry

These three areas intertwined often and were sometimes hard to distinguish.

- Duties to countrymen
Sometimes referred to as "warrior chivalry," this area of chivalry deals with a knight's virtuous traits such as valor, honor and protecting the poor. To the knights, this was the most important type of chivalry.
 - Serving the lord faithfully
 - Aiding orphans and widows
 - Refusing monetary awards
 - Living for glory
 - Guarding the honor of fellow knights
 - Never retaliating upon a foe, but never refusing a challenge from an equal
 - Completing any task or challenge that has been started
 - Always speaking the truth
- Duties to God
A knight's duty to God under chivalry included being faithful to God, being faithful to the church, always being a proponent of good against evil, and putting the worship of God above all others, even the feudal lord. This was known as "religious chivalry."
- Duties to women
Today, the most commonly recognized form of chivalry in the Middle Ages is chivalry towards women. Chivalry towards women included honoring one woman before all others, as well as a general graciousness and gentleness towards all women. This was known as "courtly love chivalry."

Courtly Love

Courtly love was the practice of chivalrously expressing love. It was usually secret and not expressed between husband and wife. Generally, only nobility participated in courtly love.

- Andreas Capellanus, The Art of Courtly Love
 - Marriage is no real excuse for not loving.
 - He who is not jealous cannot love.
 - It is well known that love is always increasing or decreasing.
 - When made public love rarely endures.
 - Real jealousy always increases the feeling of love.
 - When a lover suddenly catches sight of his beloved his heart palpitates.
 - He whom the thought of love vexes eats and sleeps very little.