

Chivalry's Influence on Sport and Physical Training in Medieval Europe

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Some historians claim that use of the term "The Middle Ages" for the period extending approximately from the six through the 15th centuries is actually a misnomer. They argue that the first part of this era has perhaps been incorrectly called part of "The Middle Ages," that it was indeed the "dawn" of a new civilization-an outgrowth of antiquity. Thus, the present Western civilization emerged from what has often been called the "Dark Ages" in Western world history (McNeill, 1963). This fits neatly with the theory that Rome declined more than it fell in exactly 496 A.D. Therefore, the mid-10th through the 14th centuries in the Western world might be designated as "Medieval Europe" or "Feudal Society." Important facts to be remembered about this period are that there was a remarkable unity within Catholicism, and that such fundamental institutions as the structures of the city, the university, and representative government developed from these origins. Yet there were many basic contradictions in this age and in this culture-during the first part of which the Roman Catholic Church and the Germanic Peoples united to bring about the rise of the West. With this as a backdrop, this investigation sought to examine what may be called "the code of chivalry as a social force in medieval Europe" (i.e., in Western Europe in a feudal society that existed between the mid-10th and the 14th centuries). More specifically, the relationship between chivalry and sport and physical training was examined. The term "social force" was used to mean specifically such societal influences as (1) values and norms, (2) political state, (3) nationalism, (4) economics, and (5) religion (Brubacher, 1966). One example of a social force was the *political* structure of the feudal organization (i.e., its division into classes of freemen, serfs, and slaves) that resulted in class distinctions prevailing in all aspects of living including forms of sport and physical activity. Another example was the finding that education and leisure prospered and grew when there was a surplus economy, and declined when the *economic* structure weakened. This meant that those in Medieval Europe who were sufficiently powerful and wealthy were in a position to choose those sports, physical activities, and recreations that met their fancy regardless of the expense of, or the time needed for, the experience itself. These, then, are representative of the social forces that were examined to explain their influence on sport and physical training (Zeigler, 1988). The code of chivalry, is examined as a set of beliefs expressing those *values and norms* of the culture in later medieval Europe that required the knight to fight in private or feudal wars. As a result of this, bravery, fighting skills, and endurance were valued highly as part of so-called chivalry, as were commitments to God and preservation of the knight's honor.

Outline of Presentation

1. Introduction
2. Early Formation of the West
3. Medieval Europe / Feudal Society
4. The Impact of Social Forces on Medieval Europe
5. Historical Perspective on Ethics

6. Chivalry (Values & Norms) as a Social Force
7. Sport and physical Activity in Later Medieval Europe
8. Concluding Statement