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“Ever since words existed for fighting and playing, men have been wont to call war a game.”

—Johan Huizinga, Homo Ludens

Sport, War, and the Three Orders of Feudal Society: 700-1300

by John Marshall Carter
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Statue of Alfred the Great, Winchester.
(Photo courtesy of the author.)

THE famed Dutch medievalist Johan Huizinga, modern anthropologist Stanislav Andreski, and eleventh-century bishop Adalberon of Laon, among others, have perceived the interrelationship between sport and war. Their perceptions form the three themes of this investigation: 1) that the great majority of medieval sports, whether those of the nobility, the clergy, or the peasantry, revolved around the institution of war; 2) that the warrior class, whose primary purpose was fighting, influenced the other two classes significantly; and, 3) that all three classes, or orders, of feudal society were integrated into a holistic community.

Bishop Adalberon of Laon, who wrote his “Poem to King Robert the Pious” in c. 1025, is of indisputable value for modern investigators who seek to understand how the medieval literati perceived society, particularly that segment of medieval society known as feudal society. Feudal society for our purposes here will be c. 700 to c. 1300, between the late Merovingian, early Carolingian world and the late thirteenth century when feudal institutions began to wane.

As is well known, fighting was endemic, and those who monopolized the martial arts also controlled society. The feudal epoch witnessed the interaction of sport and war in a way that lends credence to Huizinga’s insightful remark: “men have been wont to call war a game.” It is my contention that the best line of approach to the study of sport in medieval society is to

I wish to thank Professor John Beeler for his timely comments. However, all errors in this paper, maybe more than usual, are mine alone.
view sport within the obvious military context. Therefore, in this paper, I shall view sport within a military context and as a necessary concomitant of war. Furthermore, in viewing sport within a martial context, it is also necessary to try and understand sport within the "orders" of medieval society and, subsequently, how sport affected the three orders of society. If we are to understand peasant pastimes or the church's role in the development of sport, to cite a couple of examples, we must try and understand the relationship to sport of all classes in medieval society.

1. Sport, War, and the Three Orders

Between the eighth and the thirteenth centuries, the period corresponding roughly with the age of feudalism, the tripartite schema for the orders of society appeared and, finally, crystallized into an accepted worldview. The most precise delineation of the tripartite division of society was given by Bishop Adalberon. He used words such as oratores and clerici to describe "those who pray"; "those who worked" were described as laboratores and agricola; finally, the warrior class was called bellatores and agonistae (which, as is well known, has a particularly interesting link to the study of sport in society). Other medieval writers between the ninth and thirteenth centuries used this schema of society to explain the way the world worked. By the late eleventh century, the tripartite division of society had become the best way to describe medieval society. It might be useful, then, to try and understand sport and pastimes within the tripartite division medieval people possessed and perceived. Yet there are many problems associated with this approach. One of the chief problems for a spirited search into the field of medieval sport is the difficulty of establishing a working definition of sport. Can we use the definition of Huizinga? Can we use the definition given by the scholar of ancient sport, H.A. Harris? Is sport for the nobility the same as for the peasantry? Before proceeding further, it would be useful to attempt working definitions for the three orders of feudal society.

"By derivation, the word "sport" covers every diversion by which a man disports or amuses himself in his leisure time; it is essentially the antithesis of work," H.A. Harris concluded. His definition is certainly useful but does not take into account the class distinctions so apparent in medieval society. Problems such as class distinction, chronology, religious beliefs, and geography become manifest in an attempt to define sport.

During the Middle Ages, the various strata of society probably perceived sport differently (as well as work and other institutions). Indeed, to construct definitions for the three orders of society is to limit what one can learn about sport in medieval society because there were always those who did not fit into the traditional model of feudal society. These exceptions present a great problem for the investigator. Nevertheless, to give stability and meaning to any investigation, certain definitions must be attempted.

Johan Huizinga's definition of play, that it is pre-cultural and permeates all facets of society, that it is the opposite of work, can be a useful tool in our present undertaking. In addition, Roger Caillois' contributions to the study of sport can also be used in an understanding of sport in medieval society. But, can medieval sport be defined simply as the antithesis of work? Again, the difficulties of differing social classes and differing perceptions of sport arise. First, we have to understand what the concept of work meant to medieval people of all classes and at various times from c. 700 to c. 1300. It is well known that the warrior class performed little in the way of manual labor. On the other hand, peasant society existed because of its manual labor (and a good case has been made that "those who fight" existed because of the manual labor of the peasantry). Monasticism generally and the Rule of Saint Benedict specifically helped to create a new, ignoble image of the manual laborer. Though the noble's status prohibited him from engaging in manual labor himself, he had sympathy for those who worked because of their station in society. That work should not be despised by the educated, the affluent, and the powerful Christians became an important part of the ethos of the High Middle Ages. Nonetheless, . . . the limited ancient political ideal of the city-state appears, which assumes that a decent human being lives on an income derived from land or business, and that he has a great deal of leisure." Christianity, even if it did not ennoble work, emphasized the duty of manual labor and tolerance for those who performed it. Work for feudal society was an activity of production, usually agricultural production, performed by those in peasant servitude, which was imbued with the Christian sense of duty. Moreover, mention ought to be made of the merchants and artisans, particularly after c. 1100, who form exceptions to my definition of work. Their exceptionality, unfortunately, is beyond the scope of this study.

Huizinga's definition, that play is the antithesis of work, is quite useful when looking at peasant pastimes. Many of their diversions were, simply, the opposite of work.

When we move from a study of peasant pastimes to a study of the sports of the nobility, we are faced with another paradoxical situation: the evidence for the nobility is voluminous compared to that of the peasantry, but there is no simple, easily-employed definition of the warrior's sport. Since the warrior's idea of work was somewhat negative (and since the warrior did not engage in manual labor), we cannot simply say that sport for the nobility was the antithesis of work. We must try to define sport for the medieval nobility in another way. The knight's training—shooting a bow, wielding a sword, or tilting at the quintain—may have been conceived of as sport, but not necessarily so.
Surely the nobleman, with his competitive nature, appreciated the opportunity to outdo his peers. Records of great ability, such as the exploits of a tournament professional like the Anglo-Norman knight, William Marshall, were kept in the chronicles of the times as well as in the minds of men. But whether training in the arms dictated by the class of “those who fight” constituted sport remains to be seen.

Persistent questions in my mind have been these: How and why did the church’s view of sport change? Were peasant diversions seen as the sinful irresponsibility of a blighted class? Answers to these questions, unless answers to the questions regarding what constituted sport, will be found in the proceedings of ecumenical councils, in the treatises of monks, such as those of Bernard of Clairvaux and Ailred of Rievaulx, in papal decrees, in royal prohibitions, and in saints’ lives and biographies such as William Fitzstephen’s Life of St. Thomas (Becket). To understand the role of sport in medieval society, one should employ a variety of primary sources. One cannot rely solely on legal and economic documents; fictional literature must also be used. Indeed, if one is seeking to understand the way in which sport was a refection of the ethos of the period, one has to sift through the fictional literature of the period.

For the peasantry, we have a working definition of “sport as play,” but little information about peasants. For the nobility, we have many activities which appear to be sport, but no handy definition. The main problem of defining sport in medieval society, then, appears to be one of class.

When a noble was not engaged in warfare (or in domestic duties, such as holding court), he was at leisure, free to do what his class dictated. T. A. R. Scotus (c. 1260) praised worthy laymen for their comeliness, courtesy, ability to compose songs, and their ability to excel in war and sport.

The various sporting activities of the social classes of medieval Europe (some of which we will discuss in the latter part of this study), such as the tournament, hawking, hunting, and other diversions, help us to define medieval sport. Sport is more than a playful game (Huizenga). Certain rules must be established and adhered to. Certain boundaries are fixed on a playing field or court. Sport is an activity which is competitive, where the outcome is determined by physical skill, strategy, or chance. It touches ordinary life and oftentimes stands outside of it (good-natured scuffling provided the peasant with a diversion from work). But simple peasant diversions would not do for the nobility. Complex rules of conduct and elaborate paraphernalia accompanied knightly sports. The royal forest of medieval England and its many sporting implications and the Liberate Rolls of Henry III demonstrate fully the social and economic sophistication of the sports of kings and the nobility. Yet, as separated as the three orders were in their sports, certain noble, peasant, and ecclesiastical institutions — such as war and, I believe that the evidence suggests, sport — integrated the three orders into a whole.

II. Sport, War, and “Those Who Fight”

War was the business of the nobility, but war was a common ground for all three orders of medieval society. The knights fought the wars, the clergy attempted to regulate war, and the peasantry supported the other two orders in their martial activities. It seems plausible to look for sport where one looks for war. To understand how sport and war interacted might enhance our overall understanding of sport.

From the time that a son of the warrior class was born, he was expected to pursue the business of war. As early as the Carolingian epoch, Hrabanus Maurus wrote in his commentary on Vegetius’ On the Military Art:

Today we see that in the houses of the great children and adolescents are raised to support hardship and adversity, hunger, cold, and the heat of the sun. They are familiar with the popular proverb that, “He who cannot achieve

knighthood at puberty will never do it, or only with great difficulty at a more advanced age.”

The young noble was destined from infancy to go to war. Learning to ride a horse was the first of the young noble’s training. Being the best at the use of arms motivated the juvenis to aspire for a warrior ideal. Geraud of Aurillac, for example, “... became so agile that he would leap onto the back of his horse with an easy bound,” in a fashion similar to the Lone Ranger. After mastering riding, the knightly youth received his sword from his father, at age 14 or 15. The sword represented his rite of passage into the world of the bellatores, the warriors. The young man soon immersed himself in the accoutrements of the warrior class: archery, tilting at the quintain, simulated combat. The constant preparation for war which culminated in the tournament and war itself excluded the warriors from the rest of society except in certain circumstances (including war and sport, although we must cite exceptions such as the class of German ministeriales, who did not fit into the feudal perception of Adalberon of Laon). Wrnt von Gravenburg, in his Wigaílos written between 1204 and 1210, for example, emphasized:

May God strike down those who ever give a sword to him who cannot measure up to the knightly life, who from his origins is not born to it.

Once the juvenis became a knight, his involvement in war was a proving ground for his martial training. In times of intermittent peace, however, the knight was still surrounded by the paraphernalia and activities of war. The literature of the feudal age extolled knightly prowess with arms. The knight’s status was constantly reinforced by ballads, poems, tapestries, and other visual and aural stimuli. The chansons de geste praised the knight and glorified war; trouvères and troubadours spun tales of knightly activity; and embroideries and tapestries such as the famous Bayeux Tapestry entertained the warrior with the subject he knew best — war. In peacetime, the knight turned to martial activities to hone his skills. Peacetime diversions reflected the knight’s business.

The knight’s training was either an individual or a group experience and, as John Beeler and others have emphasized, was usually “on-the-job-training.” The consensus of opinion is that much of the knight’s training for war was conducted at the royal and noble courts. Furthermore, it appears that this peacetime training for war actually comprised the sport of those who fight. Sport, seen by medieval writers as a preparation for war, often occupied the peacetime of the knight. In Carolingian times, “Sport occupied a central position in the schedule. Charlemagne was an excellent swimmer and brought all his palatines with him into the pool at Aix (Aachen).” Einhard, the biographer of Charlemagne, says that Charlemagne “took frequent exercise on horseback and in the chase, accomplishments in which scarcely any people in the world can equal the Franks.”

Hunting and hawking were also warlike sports which, while diverting the warrior from his peacetime duties, helped him sharpen his martial skills. Kings from Charlemagne to the English Henry III and the various segments of the nobility throughout the feudal age engaged in and enjoyed the mock-war in hunting and hawking. Hunting is depicted in the literature and art of the feudal epoch. Hawking is portrayed in the visual arts and is probably described best in the famous treatise by the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II of Hohenstaufen (1215-1250), the De arte venandi cum avibus. According to Frederick II, falconry and hawking are sciences to be mastered as a king or knight masters the art of war. Yet, without exception, the sport which best combined the realities of war, of man against man, was the tournament.

The medieval tournament has been the subject of some impressive scholarship since the fifteenth century. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, writers sought to find the origins of the
tournaments. An acceptable beginning point has not yet been found, but there is evidence that the martial games of the Germanic societies dating back to the time of the Roman writer Tacitus contain the germ of the tournament. Medieval writers believed that a French knight, Godfrey de Preuilly (killed in 1066) had founded the tournament. A century and a half before 1066, there is a detailed account of tournament-like games staged by Louis the German and Charles the Bald in 842 at Strasbourg, in which the participating warriors headed straight for each other with leveled lances but did not strike each other. Whatever its origin, the medieval tournament was apparently a Germanic preparation for war. It spread over Europe in the eleventh and twelfth centuries against the protestations of kings and popes. This mock-combat was first and foremost preparation for war. Noel Denholm-Young articulated this idea most clearly in “The Tournament in the Thirteenth Century,” even though other scholars had already suggested the idea. Denholm-Young believes that the tournament was primarily a military activity because it put the baronial household on a war footing by doubling the retinue of warriors. The practice of arms, so important to the medieval warrior, took precedence over every other motivation and institution. Furthermore, as Francis Cripps-Day has suggested, the tournament was a sport which played a very important part in the martial development of the warrior caste of England, France, and Germany: “His games were meant to be the image of war, just as war was the image of games.”

Roger of Hoveden, writing in the early thirteenth century, emphasized the importance of sport for war: “... a youth must have seen his blood flow and felt his teeth crack under the blow of his adversary and have been thrown to the ground twenty times ... thus will he be able to face real war with the hope of victory.”

Nowhere is it more evident that the tournament is a preparation for war than in the period of the Crusades. Long protested by the clergy (or so it seems), tournaments were perceived rationally by some clergymen as a necessary training for crusaders — the protectors of the church.

As Richard Barber has pointed out so clearly, the tournament would eventually become an end in itself — in the fifteenth century. But between the development of the feudal warrior caste and the fifteenth century, when certain signs point to a dissolution of the feudal world order, the tournament was a necessary sport for the warrior caste. It was mock-combat, but mock-combat of the most realistic variety. Sidney Painter’s exposition on the nature of twelfth century tournaments which such famous knights as William Marshall participated in would be hard to improve upon. Things were just as rough in the thirteenth century, according to the English chronicle Matthew Paris. Paris elaborates graphically on the death of Gilbert Marshal at a tournament at Hertford on 27 June 1241. The tournament then, was a sporting activity which kept war ever in the minds of those who monopolized the business. Conversely, the tournament, as mock-combat, demonstrated the interpenetration of sport and war among the warrior elite.

III. Sport, War, and “Those Who Pray”

THROUGHOUT the late Merovingian and Carolingian periods, the medieval church had a distinctly personal relationship with the state (the medieval state being represented by the rex Francorum or the Carolingian emperors). Especially after the coronation of Charlemagne on 25 December 800, the pope and the emperor were perceived as the two swords which protected Christianity. The emperor’s role was that of peacemaker. Coronation oaths indicate what was expected of medieval rulers. And, in keeping peace, the emperor often had to resort to war against the church’s enemies. The church accepted the fact that medieval rulers had to keep their armies in fighting shape in order to protect the church from its enemies (which, according to Einhard and Asser, the biographer of Alfred the Great, were many).

With the downfall of the Carolingian Empire in the ninth century, feudalism began to engulf major portions of medieval Europe (although exceptions to the feudal order persisted). The feudal elements of fief and vassalage merged in the Carolingian period to forge a new unifying principle in western society. The church’s response to this new unifying principle, which involved a transition from Carolingian rulership to the feudalism of local lords, the acquisition of public authority by private land-owning warriors, represents part of a fundamental transformation in the history of sport.

The transformation in the perception of sport by the medieval ecclesiastical community coincided with, and was part of, the general transformation of church/state relations epitomized by the so-called Investiture Controversy, the international ideological conflict between the lay rulers of medieval Europe and the ecclesiastical community. This veritable world revolution had an impact on almost every sphere of life: politics, the economy, warfare, and, I believe, sport. This world revolution, which is partially a reaction to the realignment of power structures brought on by the onset of feudalism, was even characterized by such a serious matter as the questioning of the roles of medieval aristocrats, both lay and ecclesiastical. The conflict that was epitomized by the famous meeting at Canossa in 1077 of the Holy Roman Emperor Henry IV and Pope Gregory VII, involved deep-seated societal tremors to the extent that there occurred a veritable paradigm shift in Western society.
One of the first medievalists in the twentieth century to perceive the dramatic change in the clergy’s opinion about the warrior class, which was one of the many repercussions of the paradigm shift, was Carl Erdmann, in his pioneering work, *The Origin of the Idea of Crusade*. As the warrior nobility gradually absorbed the political power once exercised by the Carolingian emperors, the church’s relationship to the nobility changed. Erdmann explains it this way:

At around the turn of the millennium, the attitude of the church toward the military class underwent a significant change. The contrast between *militia Christi* and *militia sanctae* was overcome and just as rulership earlier had been Christianized (best illustrated by the coronation of Charlemagne in 800 and the sacrosanct nature of the kingship of Hugh Capet, who became king in 987), so now was the military profession; it acquired a direct ecclesiastical purpose, for war in the service of the church or for the weak came to be regarded as holy and was declared to be a religious duty not only for the king but also for every individual knight.34

Erdmann also explained that the church created a closer relationship with the military class and made certain concessions to this class that had formerly been denied. That the clergy accepted the sport of the knightly class as a necessary preparation for holy wars, appears to have been a logical step in this general transformation process. Yet there are problems. The rhetoric of the church was still anti-war and pacifist throughout the latter feudal epoch, 1100–1300. However, the ecclesiastical rhetoric does not always fit the reality of the period. Bishop Adalberon, writing in 1025, sketched the clergy’s image of the warrior: *verum omni sauciatis expugnant adversarios sanctae Dei Ecclesiae*. The warrior nobility, interestingly described as *agonistae* by Bishop Adalberon, were expected to use their martial skills against enemies of the Christian community. The church, if it expected skilled defense of the *res publica Christiana*, had to concede that sport was a vital preliminary to war. Nevertheless, the irony of pacifist rhetoric and the encouragement of martial skills is interesting. In addition to the church’s two well-known attempts to limit warfare (and, subsequently, sport), the Peace of God and the Truce of God, there were other protestations against sport which are noteworthy: 1130, Council of Clermont, Innocent II prohibited the tournament; 1131, Council of Reims, prohibition of tournament under penalty of excommunication; 1139, Second Lateran Council prohibited tournament; 1148, Eugenius III at the Synod of Reims prohibited the tournament; 1179, Third Lateran Council prohibited the tournament (and the crossbow). Richard the Lionheart’s licensing the English tournament in 1194 and Pope John XXII’s reallowing the tournament in 1316 are obvious contrasts to the litany of protestations cited above.35 But these two contrasts appear to be public acknowledgment of what was already accepted privately. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, there were a number of churchmen in general agreement that knightly sport is justified if it prepares warriors for their military tasks and if it is a *ludus* and not a *bellum*. Among those churchmen who appeared to accept sport are Roland of Cremona, Alexander of Hales, Peter the Chanter, Albertus Magnus, Thomas Acquinas, and Matthew Paris. Matthew Paris, the monkish chronicler of St. Albans, described the Walden “Round Table” joust of 1252 as a *ludus*.36

In addition to the evidence of the acceptance of sport by the ecclesiastical community in the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries, there is another type of evidence which should be considered. Great churchmen such as Odo, the warlike bishop of Bayeux, Abbot Samson of Bury Saint Edmunds in England, Thomas Becket, and numerous other clerics and monks reflect an ecclesiastical understanding and appreciation of sport. In many instances, this understanding of sport is due to the churchman’s warrior background. Odo, for example, albeit the bishop of Bayeux in Normandy, was as much a warrior as his half-brother, William, the Duke of Normandy. Becket, according to his biographers, had been quite a sportsman before assuming the duties of the archbishop of Canterbury. Many other examples of the *militia Christi* abound. Take, for instance, the Yorkshire priests who led their parish levies to the battle of the Standard (1138), or the bishop of Durham, who commanded the English leftwing at Falkirk (1298) (I am grateful to Professor J. Beeler here for many useful illustrations of the “church militant” in the literal sense). These examples, and many others, are illustrations of the transformation in medieval society in the period c. 1000 to c. 1300, a transformation that had a tremendous impact on sport. I am presently at work on a more detailed investigation of the ecclesiastical attitudes toward sport in Anglo-Norman and Angevin societies between 1000 and 1300. At this time, it might be convenient to reiterate that between c. 700 and 1000, the ecclesiastical community accepted the martial sports of medieval rulership. Then, in the period c. 1000 to c. 1300, when feudatories absorbed the political power of the Carolingian rulers, the church responded in a paradoxical way. Rhetorically, the church, as an agent of peace, condemned sport which, oftentimes, resulted in death or serious injury. Yet in practice, the church appears to have been more tolerant of the warrior’s sport than the papal prohibitions of the twelfth century would indicate. To prepare for the “just war,” the warrior had to engage in the “just sport.”37

**IV. Sport, War, and “Those Who Work”**

Along with “those who fight” and “those who pray” were the largest (and least well known to the modern investigator) class of medieval society, “those who work.” Bishop Adalberon described this worker class as, “... agricolae quedam insulsam agriculturae et diversis artibus in opere rustico.” The peasantry supported the other two classes; however, this support, according to the evidence, was not limited to agriculture and other manual labor. Sometimes the workers were described as *agricolae*; at other times, *ministratores*: at still others, *rustici*. As Lynn White has shown in “The Life of the Silent Majority,” the peasant’s image was usually pejorative. Jacques Le Goff has demonstrated that the peasant’s lot was merely to “... set off the character of the military and cultivated elite.”38 However, part of the peasant’s plight was his involvement in warfare. Though not a trained warrior and not a cultivated commentator on war, the peasant nevertheless was affected by war. In many cases, he was a participant. I believe that this participation in war, as a peasant fighter or as a support for the warrior class, had a great impact on peasant pastimes.

As early as Carolingian times, all classes of society were drawn into warfare. The Capitulary of Arstolf of 750 decreed, “... and those men who are not able to have them [armor and sculated weapons] and do not have the means by which to acquire them, they should have a shield and a quiver (of bow and arrows).” The *Capitulaire Missorum* of 802 is emphatic: “That no one should venture to ignore the call to arms of our lord the emperor.”39 All men had a responsibility to defend the community. As the great historian of western warfare, Hans Delbrück, pointed out, the general people’s levy never died out, even during the height of the feudal warrior. The Carolingian *bannum* exacted a military obligation from the Frankish people. The exploits of the Anglo-Saxon fyrd, the general militia, are a well-known part of the Anglo-Saxon army up to 1066 and, subsequently, as part of the Anglo-Norman force after 1066. In a very real way, war had an impact on the medieval peasant and his world. Part of the peasant’s world was sport, play, and pastimes. War was related to many of the peasant’s diversions.

The peasant, for example, emulated the warrior aristocracy. What was sport for the warrior elite became play for the peasantry. William Fitzstephen, who wrote near the end of the
twelfth century, perceived this peasant apeing of the military elite:

The lay-sons of the citizens of London rush out of the gates in crowds, equipped with lances and shields, the younger sort with pikes from which the iron head has been taken off, and there they get up sham fights, and exercise themselves in military combat.43

But even apeing in mock-combat can become more than play. As Roger Caillios suggested, “...games of skill may quickly become games of competitive skill.” The repetition and practice of what began as a pastime probably led to the creation of peasant sport. However, we do not have time here to trace that development. If, however, Caillios’ idea is true, then the peasantery of the feudal age, ever involved in warfare, engaged in many martial sports. Some of these diversions, which developed into sports, were hunting, fishing, running, wrestling, quoits, and becoming proficient in the weapons of war.42

In addition to evidence in prose narratives that peasant diversions were closely related to war, there is also ample evidence in other media. For example, the records of medieval kings bristle with evidence about peasant sport and pastimes. In England in the thirteenth century, the forest eyre, the general eyre, and the coroners maintained records about crimes against the state. Much can be gleaned from these records about peasant pastimes. The incidence of sport-related crime underscores the idea that a majority of peasant pastimes were offshoots of war. Archery contests, wrestling matches, ball games, even chess games occasionally got out of hand, and the participants became engaged in a brawl. The pugnacious nature of peasant pastimes is illustrated in a case from the Wiltshire Eyre of 1249: “Two strangers travelling through the town of Eston’ were shooting arrows in sport so that by misadventure Alice daughter of John was hit by an arrow so that she died eighteen days later.”44

Judging from the evidence, it appears that relating peasant pastimes to war is a logical, useful line of approach. Needless to say, a very logical line of approach to peasant sports and pastimes is to contrast peasant pastimes with peasant labor (laboratores). As mentioned in my introduction, the order of workers lends itself best to a work/leisure dichotomy. Be that as it may, I believe that looking at peasant pastimes within the context of war and in comparison to the other two orders is a profitable undertaking — even if the profit is the knowledge that the work/leisure approach is better. Many peasant pastimes are war-related. A peasant’s archery practice, for example, prepared him to fight more efficiently in his lord’s army or in the king’s army. As is well known, the English victories at Crecy, Poitiers, and Agincourt in the Hundred Years War are partial proof that peasant archers practiced their skills to a highly efficient level. Yet the bow was not the sole monopoly of the peasantry. Alfred the Great (871-899), for example, was an accomplished bowman according to his biographer, Asser. Furthermore, many peasant sports and pastimes were indirectly related to war because the peasant was in the role of supporter of the warrior class: “agricolae . . . unde sustentatur totius Ecclesiae multitudo” [Farmers/"those who work” sustain the whole ecclesiastical community]. Peasants, when massed as the peasant levy, put their martial-sport skills to the test as supporters of the feudal levy. As houndsmen and busheaters in the lord’s hunting party, a scene well illustrated in the Bayeux Tapestry and in the Hours of the Duke of Berry, and an activity which was surely repeated over and over again throughout the feudal age and beyond, peasants were indirectly involved in the knight’s martial sport. The peasant’s sports and pastimes, like those of the warrior class, were directly (or, sometimes, indirectly) influenced by the endemic warfare of the feudal epoch.45

To separate social classes is to do the artificial. Life, even medieval life with its harshness, is a continuous ebb and flow of interrelationships.46 In an attempt to understand the sporting life of the social classes of medieval Europe, one is bound to oversimplify. In this study, no attempt has been made to deal with those who did not fit neatly into Bishop Adalberon’s “three orders of society.” The German minsteriales, the Spanish caballeros villanos, and the milites pro communis of the Italian cities are examples of non-feudal groups within medieval Europe and are reminders of the work that lies ahead by those who would seek to understand the sports and pastimes of the Middle Ages.

As Bishop Adalberon explained, each social class supported the other. War and sport provided two of the common grounds for the interaction of the three orders of medieval society (and, possibly, the sport/war correlation might be used to understand the relationships of non-feudal groups to feudal society). Those who fight, those who pray (and write about those who fight), and those who work reached periodically the nexus of “those who play.”47

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6. Bishop Adalberon used the term *agoniastae* to describe “those who fight”; the word conveys the athletic side of the medieval warrior; Huizinga, 30-31, has asserted the athletic nature of warfare. Alfred the Great, in his translation of Boethius’ *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, used the terms “gebedmen, yrhdmen, and weorcmen,” men for prayer, men for war, and men for work in the ninth century; Georges Dumézil has written brilliantly on the tripartite image in Indo-European societies in works such as *Mythe et Épopée* (Paris, 1968). Needless to say, I have left uncovered the period in medieval
history from c. 300 to c. 700: see Charles Homer Haskins, “The Latin Literature of Sport.” *Speculum*, II (1927), 235-252. Sub-infeudation, the subdividing of feudal estates, was one of the causes of the breakdown of feudalism in the thirteenth century. The tripartite view is a distorted one, as most models are, but it was used by medieval people.


13. Carter, *God’s Athletes: The Ecclesiastical Acceptance of Sport in Anglo-Norman Society, 1050-1200.* "In Studies in the History of Medieval Sport, 61-73; that there was a change in perception of sport is indisputable; the question is how and why the change occurred. See, for example, Vita Bernardi, *Monumenta Germaniae historica Scriptores* 26, 126; on Ailred, see *Vita Ailredi* by Walter Daniel, ed. F.M. Powicke (London: Nelson’s Medieval Texts, 1950). Walter Daniel was a Cistercian monk living under Abbot Ailred at Rievaulx. For Becket, an outstanding biography is that by William Fitzstephen, itinerant justice and commentator on sport in London in the late twelfth century: *Vita Sancta Thomae*, in *Materials for the History of Thomas Becket*, ed. J.C. Robertson and J.B. Sheppard (Rolls Series, London, 1875-1885), III.

14. An outstanding collection is G.C. Boyce’s *Literature of Medieval History, 1930-1975: A Supplement to Louis J. Paetow’s “A Guide to the Study of Medieval History”* (New York, 1981); Paetow’s classic should also be consulted; Charles Gross’ *Sources and Literature of English History to 1485* will provide an abundance of information about English medieval history.


16. Perhaps sport to the aristocrat was the antithesis of these peacetime duties. Then, however, we have to deal with the problem that all members of the knightly class had the means or the power, and thus the responsibility, to engage in peacetime duties. Jacques Paul, “L’eloge des personnes et l’ideale humaine au XVe siecle, d’apres la chronique de Fra Salimbene,” *Le Moyen Age* 1 (1967), 1-18; and G. G. R. Crookes, “A bishopric concept of Nobility in ‘the Gifts of Men’ and ‘Beowulf’,” *Speculum*, 53 (January 1978), 1-15; many aspects of medieval lordship are covered in Frederick L. Cheyette, ed., *Lordship and Community in Medieval Europe: Selected Readings* (New York: Holt, Rhinehart, and Winston, 1968).


20. A member of the knightly class might be called a “youth” into middle age if he had not received his inheritance. See also Russell, 13-5. An interesting study of the formations of chivalry in America is John Fraser’s *America and the Patterns of Chivalry* (Oxford, 1979). See also Riche, Chapter 14.


26. John Marshall Carter, “Medieval Sport: A Forgotten Element of Medieval Social History,” in *Ludi Mediævī*; *Studies in the History of Medieval Sport* (Leicester University Press, 1979). Frederick II’s treatise was translated as the *Art of Falconry* (Vatican MSS Pal. Lat. 1071, ff. 68 r-69v). The text reads, “Whoever desires to learn and practice the art of hunting with birds... should have with him the science of this book, ... and when he has this in sufficient measure from one worthier may receive the title and name of falconer.” The early twenty century studies of F.H. Crisp, *The Church of the King’s Day, The History of the Tournament in England and in France* (London, 1918), and R.C. Clepham, *The Tournament: Its Periods and Phases* (London, 1919) are still valuable; Richard Barber’s chapter, “The Tournament as Sport,” is the best recent account; I am now working on a book entitled *Tournament: Microcosm of Medieval Society*.

27. Clepham, *Cripps-Day*, and Barber contain useful bibliographies. See also Clepham, 1-10; Tacitus, *Germania*, and Delbrück, 242. In the Bayeux Tapestry, figures are gripping the lance in the old way (holding it in a throwing position over their heads) and in the new way (held in place under the arm: in the “jousting position”). Barber, “The Tournament As Sport,” 159-183. “Les jeux favoris étaient, au moyen âge, ceux qui se rapprochaient de la guerre, et parmi eux, pour l’aristocratie francaise, celui de tous qui ressemblait le plus à une bataille, le tournoi,” in J. Jusserrand, *Les Sports et Jeux D’Exercice Dans L’Ancienne France* (Paris, 1901), 41. See also Denholm-Young, 240-265; Marc Bloch, *Feudal Society*, tr. L.A. Manyon (Chicago, 1961) II, 304-320; and Cripps-Day, 10.


30. Barber, 159-183.


32. Ganshof. The brief, but clear, explanation of the terms of feudalism by Carl Stephenson, *Medieval Feudalism* (Cornell University Press, Paperback, 1956) is extremely useful: vassal
33. The so-called Investiture Controversy, although we can trace its roots deeper into Christian history, became a definable force about 1049, with the papacy of Leo IX, and reached a very tentative conclusion in 1122 at the Council of Worms. Possibly the best study is Gerd Tellenbach, *Church, State, and Christian Society at the Time of the Investiture Contest* (Oxford, 1940). An interesting discussion of the interpenetration of lay and ecclesiastical society is found in Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theory* (Princeton, 1957). I am indebted to the landmark book by Thomas Kühn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962); see also the discussion of similar works in Marilyn Ferguson, *The Aquarian Conspiracy* (Los Angeles, 1980); George Leonard’s *The Ultimate Athlete* (1974) is very useful in understanding athletic and psychological transformations.

34. Carl Erdmann, *The Origin of the Idea of Crusade*, tr. Marshall Baldwin and Walter Goffart (Princeton, 1977), 57. A paradigm shift is the appearance of a new world view, such as the Copernican, Newtonian, and Einsteinian. A study of the metaphorical language of churchmen in the eleventh and twelfth century, particularly such terms as *militia Christi* and others which carry athletic and military meanings, would be useful. Duby, *The Chivalrous Society*, tr. Cynthia Postan (Berkeley, 1977) is excellent on the eleventh and twelfth century development of the knightsly class.

35. Frederick Russell, *The Just War in the Middle Ages* (Rutgers University Press, 1975), 243. Bernard of Clairvaux, a leading light of the twelfth century, is a good example of ecclesiastical doublespeak: he refers to the monastic orders as “god’s athletes” and condemns the secular habits of his monks; see, for example, Bernard’s “An Apologia to Abbot William of Saint-Thierry,” in *Treatises I* (Cistercian Fathers Series, Number 1) (Massachusetts, 1970), 66. Adalberon of Laon, 464. Again, I am interested in the athletic connotation. Russell, 277. In England, Richard’s licensing of the tournament might be seen as an early monarchical attempt to regulate the tournament without actually prohibiting it (as Richard’s father had done). Denholm-Young, 240-265.


38. I am using “those who work” to mean all those engaged in manual labor. See Adalberon of Laon, 464. The word “ministers” is used to describe workers in the Bayeux Tapestry; see Carter, “The Bayeux Tapestry, Bishop Odo of Bayeux, and the Pastimes of the Medieval Silent Majority.” See also White; LeGoff, 95.


43. See, for example, John Marshall Carter, “The Public Records As Indirect Sources for Medieval Sport: England in the Thirteenth Century,” in “Ludi Medi Aevi,” 92-102. See also Charles Gross, *Select Cases from the Coroners' Rolls*, 1265-1413 (London, Selden Society, 1896); needless to say, the royal records indicate that feudal society is waning in the thirteenth century; the manorial records are more tedious to acquire and analyze. See, for example, the *Berkshire Eyre of 1248*, ed. M.T. Clanchy (London, 1973), case 1002, p. 384; and C.A.F. Meekings, ed., *Crown Pleas of the Wiltshire Eyre*, 1249 (Devizex, 1961), case 349, p. 218.


45. This is the overriding theme in Bloch.