

Primary and Secondary Sources on Knighthood in Medieval Europe

Training for knighthood began early in childhood. Sons of nobles would be sent to live in the household of some lord of higher rank or greater reputation. He began as a page, running errands and serving the lord to whom he had been sent. After seven or eight years he became a squire with more responsibilities, including following his lord into battle. Finally, after many years of hard work, he would become a knight, in an elaborate ceremony. The knight's job was to defend his lord and his property in times of war. In times of peace, many knights participated in jousting tournaments in order to practice their skills and bring glory to their lords.

- As a **squire**, a young man wanting to be a **knight** began his apprenticeship, often in the household of his father's lord, cleaning out stables, currying horses, cleaning armor, and serving at the table, while he learned to ride a horse and wield sword and lance. (LMC, p. 172)
- He was taught to say prayers, and to have respect for the church and for religion. (WKWB, p. 4)
- Part of his education was practice in composing **love songs**. He was expected of course to declare his ladylove, for whom he must be ready to endure all hardships and meet all dangers. (WKWB, pp. 9–10)
- A most important part of the boy's instruction was **hunting**, or "the mystery of the woods," and **hawking**, or the "mystery of the rivers," so called because it was often pursued on the banks of streams....He had to learn the different kinds of falcons, how to train the birds to throw themselves upon their prey, how to feed them and what calls to use with them. (WKWB, pp. 7–8)
- "A Spanish horse of wonderful beauty was provided (to each knight), swifter than the flight of birds. He was then armed with a corselet of double-woven armor which no lance or javelin could pierce, and shod with iron boots...golden spurs were

girded on; a shield with golden lions was hung around his neck; a helmet was placed on his head gleaming with many precious stones...and finally from the royal treasury was brought an ancient sword. (chronicler Jean of Tours, LMC, p. 166)

- The **ceremony** of knighthood took place in the open air on a platform, amid flourishes of trumpets and the music of minstrels...the climax was the *colee* or buffet, given by the knight's father...an open-handed whack that often knocked the young knight off his feet...“Go, fair son! Be a true knight, and courageous in the face of your enemies. Be thou brave and upright, that God may love thee—and remember that thou springest from a race that can never be false.” (LMC, p. 168)
- Great lords and princes organized **tournaments** (exhibitions of knights fighting on horseback) for their own entertainment and that of their friends, and to show off their wealth. The principal feature was a mock battle between two groups of knights from different regions. Heralds were sent around the countryside to proclaim the tournament and on the appointed day the knights donned their armor, mounted their horses, and lined up at opposite ends of a meadow. At a flourish from the herald, the two bands of horsemen charged at each other...the tournament was essentially **training for war**. . .and resembled a real battle....Serious and even fatal injuries were common. (LMC, pp. 178–179)
- A castle guard would report that a **herald** (announcer) with trumpets and escort was making his way to the castle gate. The gate was straightaway thrown open, and the trumpeter blew a blast to call the attention of the folk of the castle. Long before this, **lords and ladies**, knights, squires, pages, and servants, even down to the scullions in the kitchen, had hurried into the courtyard...where they could hear what the herald had to say. Then came the proclamation of the tournament, addressed to all who would show their right to knighthood and their respect for ladies. The place, the hour, the prizes, the armor, and weapons required. (WKWB, p. 34)
- The herald blew his trumpet and gave his announcement not only at castles, but wherever markets were held. Sometimes if the tournament was to be of unusual splendor, invitations were sent not only throughout the land of the giver, but even into neighboring countries. (WKWB, pp. 35–36)
- “If a knight had been false to any woman or had broken his word or had shown cowardice or ingratitude...he would be forbidden to take part in the tournament and his banner would be torn down in disgrace.” (WKWB, p. 37)

- When all was ready, the heralds cried, “Come forth, knights, come forth!” and a glittering cavalcade made its way into the lists....The horses, bridles blazing with jewels, pranced....The **armor** gleamed and flashed in the sun....From jeweled helmets and from lances fluttered gloves or ribbons belonging to the ladies watching eagerly. (WKWB, p. 43)
- The knights were in two groups separated by a rope....Behind them rode their squires, often as many as three to a knight. “Let go,” cried the ladies. The trumpets sounded. The rope was snatched aside. The knights bent low, put spurs to their horses, and with lances in rest dashed forward to meet their opponenents each one calling the name of his ladylove. “The eyes of the beautiful behold you! Onward, onward, ” cried the **spectators**. The minstrels played, the trumpets blared, the plain was shaken with the trampling of the horses; the din of arms and the cracking of stout ashen spears filled the air. Men were thrown from their horses, blood mingled with the dust. (WKWB, pp. 43–44)
- “The next day the **jousts** continued until only three knights were left, the others all being wounded....At the first pass the Castellan knocked down his adversary’s helmet into the dust, and blood ran from his mouth and nose....On the third try both men were disarmed and fell unconscious to the ground. Valets, sergeants, and squires laid them on their shields and carried them from the field....But it was only, thank God, a passing unconsciousness; neither man was dead. Everyone thanked God and the saints.” (from The Castellan of Coucy, LMC, p. 121)
- “Then the Sire of Coucy invited the knights and ladies to dine...More than twenty tents were set up between the castle and the forest, in fields full of flowers. The Sire and all the court were dressed in green cloth studded with golden eagles. They came to the tents leading by the finger the ladies of their country. The men and their ladies were dressed in gold embroidered with black lions; they arrived singing two by two.” (from The Castellan of Coucy, LMC, p. 121)