

The Portcullis

Shire of Cold Keep

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Being 2009 Gregorian



Royalty

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Vik Vikingsson and Inga the Unfettered

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Officers of Cold Keep

Seneschal
Exchequer
Master of Stables
Branch Seige Marshall
Branch Rapier Marshall
Chatelaine
Chronicler
Arts and Sciences

Lord D'mitri
Bantiarna Sibán
HE Arkill (Arg) MacMillan
Lady Elena Bobrovnikova
Lord Henry Hawkyns
Lady Celeste St Cyr
Lady Caitlin the Rose
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Champions

Heavy
Rapier
Archery
Arts

Viscount Sir Steinn Vikingsson
Lord Henry Hawkyns
Lord Markus Pheilsmid
Lord Markus Pheilsmid

Practices

Heavy

Winter: At UNBC on Thursday starting at 7:00 pm. As the weather allows, outside in front of the Wintergarden. Otherwise, in the research laboratory building rotunda.

Summer: At Fort George Park, Tuesdays and Thursdays at 7 pm. Sunday practices vary in place and time.

Rapier

Current place and time: UNBC, Tuesday nights from 6:30 to 8:00 pm.

Summer: At Fort George Park, Tuesdays and Thursdays at 7 pm. Sunday practices vary in place and time.

Archery

Archery practice during the summer (May - September) is on Sunday at 2 pm

Recent events/activities

March Revel

March 21, 2009

Another enjoyable gathering complete with a potluck dinner, bum wrestling and guests from out of town, including several of our friends from Tir Bannog. Also Jarl Owain and Baron Mark Whitehand joined us. There was also an A & S gathering earlier in the day for banner making

Coming events

May Champions

May 30-31, 2009

Miworth Community Hall

13510 Flint Road

Prince George, BC V2M 7B9

For full details, see http://antir.sca.org/Upcoming/?Event_ID=2083

Fields of Gold

Shire of Tir Bannog

Smithers, BC

July 10-12, 2009

For full details, see http://antir.sca.org/Upcoming/index.php?Event_ID=2290&myDate=0

Misconceptions about the Middle Ages

The Myth of the Mounted Knight

by James G. Patterson

Perhaps no image of the Middle Ages has greater iconic power than that of the mounted knight. Covered from head to foot in burnished steel, the warrior on horseback is the very embodiment of the so-called age of chivalry. Yet contained in this potent image are a number of misconceptions about the nature of medieval warfare. These errors include the impression that from roughly 500 to 1500 armor was an unalterable constant. In reality, protective metal evolved as much during the period as modern aircraft have changed since Kittyhawk. Another fallacy is the belief that knights constituted the majority of the medieval army. The truth is that most armies in the Middle Ages were predominantly made up of infantry, and the knights themselves often fought on foot. Even amongst the mounted element, true knights were in the minority. A related misconception is that the charge of heavily armored cavalry was irresistible to any force not similarly constituted. In fact, when foot soldiers held their ground, something that occurred far more often than is traditionally realized, they usually triumphed over their mounted counterparts unless the latter were supported by infantry, and possibly archers of their own.

Tradition tells us that Charles Martel's epic victory over the Saracens at Poitiers (Tours) in 732 effectively saved the Christian West from Islamic domination. Whether or not this battle played the pivotal role so often ascribed to it is open to debate. What is certain is that the triumph of the Frankish host reveals much about the early development of medieval warfare. Recent work by Victor Davis Hanson demonstrates that we have been laboring under a number of misconceptions about the true nature of Charles "the Hammer's" army. The relevance of this research should not be underestimated, for the mounted Frankish warrior is traditionally seen as the progenitor of the medieval knight and the necessity of maintaining him the very basis of feudalism itself. Simply put, Merovingian cavalry utilizing the technological advantage provided by the recent arrival of the stirrup in the west (which allowed the combined weight of horse and rider to be focused at the end of a couched lance) were able to deliver a charge that was irresistible to those, like the invading Moors, who were not similarly equipped.

The problem posed by Poitiers for this traditional interpretation is the fact that the Franks fought on foot, not on horseback. Wave after wave of Muslim cavalry crashed against the Frankish phalanx and were broken. Indeed, superior armor (both chain mail and scale) and discipline were central in Martel's victory, yet the supposed dawn of the mounted knight must be postponed.

When then can we effectively date the battlefield dominance of the mounted knight? In reality, the answer is never. This is not to say that European cavalry did not come to play a central role in medieval warfare; it certainly did. Armored horsemen could indeed be devastating when encountering untrained levies of feudal infantry, who often fled at their appearance, or when pursuing defeated footmen that had been broken by attacks of combined arms (archers and infantry as well as horse.) Moreover, knights served as officers in armies comprised of sizable foot elements. Yet throughout the Middle Ages, unsupported cavalry suffered severely when confronted by disciplined infantry.

This fact, in turn, begs the question, Why? The answer is remarkably simple. Horses, no matter how well-trained, will not charge head-long into an unmoving wall of men, especially when this monolith is bristling with sharpened steel. In fact, if the infantry hold their ground, no collision as such occurs. Cavalry inevitably pull up short of impact and the riders hack at the mass of men in front of them from

the saddle. The horsemen's advantages in height and reach are more than compensated by the foot soldier's density in numbers and ability to thrust up at the exposed stomachs and limbs of the mounts. This truth is confirmed in example after example, even after the stirrup was firmly established in the west by about the year 1000.

William the Conqueror's victory at Hastings in 1066 brought a series of dramatic transformations to England, including advanced feudalism and the introduction of Norman-French language and culture. This transitional battle pitted the English King Harold Godwinson's Anglo-Saxons against William's mixed army of Normans and assorted adventurers and mercenaries drawn from across Europe. Although Hastings is sometimes viewed as a triumph of horse over foot, in fact William's victory was the result of a well-integrated assault by a force of combined arms comprising archers, infantry and cavalry. Yet despite its inferiority in numbers and technology, the Anglo-Saxon shieldwall (both armies were similarly protected with coats of chain mail and conical open-faced helmets) held out at Hastings for most of a very long day against repeated attacks by William the Bastard's Normans.

The 200-year period between 1100 and 1300 is still characterized by an image of the mounted knight in his role as undisputed master of the battlefield. This image bears qualification. For both in the east, where Europeans were participating in the Crusades, and at home, most military activity of the time focused on the siege of cities and castles. In fact until the advent of effective artillery (c.1420), the tremendous advantage offered by defensive fortifications served to dramatically curtail the willingness of combatants to gamble all in open battle. The weaker, or more cautious side, simply retired behind stone walls until disease, shortage of food or impatience drove off the attacker (of course the besieged was also vulnerable to these forces). Throughout the Middle Ages, the great risks involved in decisive open field battle were the exception rather than the rule.

During the course of the fourteenth century, disciplined infantry repeatedly demonstrated its superiority to armored cavalry. At Courtrai (1302) the well-armed and highly trained civic militias of the Flemish cities administered a crushing defeat to the cavalry of France. Fighting on foot with bow and, more importantly, pike, the Burghers of Ghent and Bruges killed over a thousand of the supposedly invincible French mounted knights. A short time later, the English aristocracy learned the cruel price of class-based military arrogance at the hands of the Scots. At the decisive battle of Bannockburn in 1314, King Robert the Bruce's schiltrons, hedgehogs of well-trained pikemen drawn from the ranks of Scotland's commoners, administered the greatest defeat English cavalry suffered in Middle Ages. Some thirty-four English lords and hundreds of knights (all of whom rode into combat) fell, while nearly one hundred others were captured. This pivotal event insured the survival of Scotland as an independent nation. Further east, Swiss halberdiers (using a halberd, a variation of the pike) destroyed an imperial army consisting primarily of mounted men at arms at Morgarten (1315).

Unlike the French, the English learned from their defeats early in the fourteenth century and radically altered the way in which they waged war. The knights of England gave up their horses, or more accurately, got off them prior to battle. Of greater import, the English (via the Welsh) dramatically modified one of mankind's oldest weapons, the bow and arrow. Six foot "longbows" in the hands of commoners (something the French would never risk) for a time came to dominate the battlefields of Europe. The centrality of infantry during the fourteenth century as well as the decisive advantage offered by combined arms forces is strikingly illustrated by a series of English victories over the French during the Hundred Years War. At Crécy (1346), a vastly outnumbered English army comprised of archers and dismounted men at arms repelled some fifteen cavalry charges mounted by the cream of French cavalry inflicting thousands of casualties in the process. Ten years later at Poitiers, French knights themselves fought on foot, but the English archers again proved the determining factor. Similarly at Agincourt in 1415, Henry V's small English army of 5,000 long-bowmen and 1,000

dismounted men at arms faced a French feudal host of 25,000. Despite their overwhelming superiority in numbers, the French (again fighting on foot) failed to modify their tactics and lost some 1,600 lords and knights as well as uncounted thousands of lower-ranking soldiers. By the end of the first quarter of the sixteenth century, gunpowder insured that the century's long process through which elite European warriors had encased themselves in armor would reverse itself.

A final question remains: if the mounted knight was never the omnipotent force that has been depicted, what are the origins of the myth? Here the answer must by necessity involve some conjecture. But in all likelihood, it has its basis in class. The literature and art on which we base our popular perceptions of the Middle Ages was sponsored by the only elements in society with the means to support it- the nobility and clergy. When combined with the fact that this class also monopolized political power and religious authority it is hardly surprising that we are left with a skewed view of their predominant role in combat. Moreover, the primary justification of the entire feudal system, at least initially, was the maintenance of heavily armored, mounted warriors. It is therefore hardly surprising that the most enduring image left us from the cultural flowering of the High Middle Ages is the physical manifestation of its predominant classes' *raison d'être*. By the fourteenth century when low-born archers and pikemen had established their superiority over the noble horsemen, realistic depictions of the nature of warfare would have been psychologically devastating to the seigniorial class.

For full details, see http://www.the-orb.net/non_spec/missteps/ch3.html

Cover art

Finding pearls in oysters; from Medieval Life Illustrations

<http://www.godecookery.com/clipart/clart.htm>

Disclaimer

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