6   D. Crouch, 'Chivalry and Courtliness. Colliding Constructs', in: P.R. Coss and C. Tyerman, ed., *Soldiers, Nobles and Gentlemen. Essays in Honour of Maurice Keen* (Woodbridge, 2009) 32-48.

7   D. Crouch, *The English Aristocracy, 1070-1272. A Social Transformation* (New Haven, 2011) 247-250.

8   For examples see C. Burt, 'A "Bastard Feudal" Affinity in the Making? The Followings of William and Guy Beauchamp, Earls of Warwick, 1268-1315', *Midland History*, XXXIV (2009) 156-80; C. West, 'Count Hugh of Troyes and the Territorial Principality in Early Twelfth-Century Western Europe,' *English Historical Review*, CXXVII (2012) 523-548.

New Departures in the History of Medieval English Aristocracy

David Crouch, *The English Aristocracy 1070-1272. A Social Transformation* (New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 2011, xviii + 348 p., ill.); Nigel Saul, *For Honour and Fame. Chivalry in England, 1066-1500* (London: The Bodley Head, 2011, xiv + 416 p., ill.)

For those concerned that medieval history may be devolving into a series of stale sub-disciplines, impenetrable to non-specialists and patrolled by the militias of theory, the two books under review supply cause for optimism. Both are written by prose stylists at the very height of their game. Both are intended to entertain as well as to inform. Both grapple with large and important issues. Neither would claim to be a definitive 'solution' to a series of problems. Rather, they open up their subject to debate. That subject is what David Crouch himself defined, in a ground-breaking monograph published in 1992, as *The Image of Aristocracy*. Both authors agree that, from some time in the second half of the twelfth century, aristocracy was transformed. A new ethos pervaded the lay elite. The category of 'nobleman', 'magnate' or 'prudhomme' was widened to include the more significant of the English knights, previously regarded as subservient mechanicals of the English war machine. At the same time, a barrier was established, severing the upper levels of earls, barons and knights from those of lower status. Knighthood itself became a 'noble' phenomenon, and the number of men in England defined as knights declined from more than two thousand to perhaps as few as four or five hundred. The losers in this process of stratification devolved into that most English of social phenomena, 'the gentry'. The winners were henceforth 'the aristocracy'.

Part of this transformation was acknowledged by an earlier generation of English historians, albeit that its causes and processes were interpreted in rather different ways. As Nigel Saul reminds us, there has long been a debate over the emergence of 'chivalry', accompanied by detailed studies of the arts of war, of the expression of knightly piety, of crusading, and of a supposed upheaval in the relation between landholding and military service. Through to the 1980s, this debate was dominated by ideas of 'feudalism' (a word now banned from polite discourse), in which a 'proto-feudal' tenth and eleventh century yielded place to a 'high' feudal twelfth, and in turn was succeeded, from roughly the 1280s onwards, by something for which Charles Plummer, and later Bruce McFarlane, coined the term 'bastard' feudalism. This tripartite system was of politico-economic construction, heavily influenced by the ideas of Marx and Engels, and in England firmly tethered to those bastions of political history, the Norman Conquest of 1066 (which ushered in knights, castles and the knight's fee, the chief symptoms of 'high' feudalism), and the military revolution of Edward I's reign (geared towards warfare in Wales and Scotland, producing the indentured contract for service, the decoupling of military service from landholding, armies serving for wages rather than honour, and all of the other characteristics of 'bastard' feudalism).

As Crouch and Saul are both aware, the periodisations and categorisations here have long been ripe for revision. The Aristotelian formalism of 'proto', 'high' and 'bastard' feudalisms will not survive detailed frontier inspection, any more than it is possible these days to draw clear and precise distinctions between other such tripartite systems, between the 'Palaeolithic', 'Mesolithic'

William Marshal (c. 1147-1219) unhorses Baldwin Guisnes at a joust. Thirteenth-century illustration from Matthew Paris's 'Chronica maiora' II *(coll. Corpus Christi College Library, Cambridge; photo Wikimedia)*

and 'Neolithic' periods of prehistory, between 'pre-capitalist', 'capitalist' and 'communist' societies, or indeed between the historiographical trinity of 'medieval', 'early modern' and 'modern'. If 'high' feudalism is defined as a system in which military service was proffered in return for land and honour, then it is troubling to find a large number of the knights of William the Conqueror, high feudalism's high steward, serving in return for wages. If 'chivalry' was one of the defining features of late medieval warfare, then what are we to make of the debts owed by chivalry to the classical virtues as transmitted via Cicero or the court culture of Charlemagne and the Ottonians?

Nigel Saul attempts an answer here. 'Chivalry', he argues, was not merely virtue redefined for 'chevaliers' (those whose horses or 'chevaux' helped define their status as chevaliers or 'knights'), but (59) 'developed into a code of manners defining a civil elite no longer composed of men exclusively of military experience, but embracing lawyers, civil servants and others of professional origin who sought respectability in the partial embrace of aristocratic culture'. Crouch's birth of the 'gentry' is thus the same process that witnessed Saul's birth of the 'gentleman'. Yet both Crouch and Saul admit that these categories themselves are too rigid to pass muster. Crouch acknowledges that 'the gentry' is an exceptionalist concept beloved of the English but of no other European historical tradition, undefined by medieval as opposed to modern writers. By the same token, the word he himself favours, 'aristocracy', is Greek, lacking any western medieval resonance. Nor does it necessarily have a static meaning across cultures or nationalities. Meanwhile Saul, by the end of his survey, has retreated to a definition of chivalry as 'the set of humane virtues governing the conduct of war based on the principle of self-preservation among knights'. Judged by this test, chivalry was not so much at its height in the thirteenth century but already in decline (348): 'The erosion of chivalric values began in the very period considered by many to have been its heyday'. Where then do our new authorities lead us? What new geography do they map? Let us begin here with Crouch.

Crouch writes with two enormous advantages. He is the leading authority in his field and has himself defined many of the difficulties that he here sets out to explore. He is also informed by a life-time's study of the archival and literary sources. Since the chief subject of his enquiry is social 'Transformation' (and note the capital letter and the lack of interrogative here), his command of detail allows him to trace stratifications and distinctions with a masterly touch. He has a way

with words. The tournament field (59) was 'the cat walk of military nobility'. In their approach
to aristocracy, English historians (65) have displayed a distressing tendency 'to make an insti-
tution out of a reflex'. The most sustainable definition of a medieval nobleman (193) 'is of a man
who acted in a noble manner and was not laughed at by his neighbours'. He poses interesting
questions, often from an oblique angle, and he is never blind to the intellectual architecture
amidst which he moves. For all the prevailing prejudice against feudal 'violence', itself one of the
intellectual legacies of Voltaire, no previous historian has noticed that in the *Histoire de Guil-
laume le Maréchal*, the greatest contemporary authority for aristocratic mores, the Marshal is
recorded as killing not a single adversary (121-122). Old sources are reassessed: Matthew Paris's
account of the death of Gilbert Marshal (217), for example, is transformed into an object lesson
in social commentary. New sources are constantly brought to bear: the southern French trea-
tise on manners by Arnaut-Guilhem of Marsan (196), or a previously neglected formulary from
the 1230s (92-93, 125) recording the emotions of a lord confronted by his enemies. Enmity is
itself a significant theme of an author who can be waspish, and whose sting can hurt. Not even
the greatest authorities escape censure. Stenton is flayed for supposing that military tenure and
the baronial 'honor', rather than self-representation and the 'region', were the chief building
blocks of the England's 'First Century of Feudalism'. Maitland (208) 'reduced the position of
women in the middle ages to that of an animated title deed'. Duby was wrong about pretty much
everything.

As for the overall argument, as Crouch himself declares 'social distinction is the theme of this
book' (226). Around 1170 or so, the English began to construct for themselves a more precisely
defined 'aristocracy'. Hence the 'Transformation' of Crouch's title. Manners and *mentalités*, not
land tenure, were the defining features of change, so that behaviour, appearances, political or
religious sentiment were increasingly redefined and recategorised as noble or ignoble. Chivalry
was not itself the spur to these developments, but (194-195) merely a symptom: 'a self-conscious
way of erecting an additional barrier to those who would claim nobility in a time when other
social barriers were being put up in the increasingly stratified society'. Transformation was the
result in part of self-defense by an elite threatened by the rise of the more successful knights to a
status previously reserved for barons and earls. But the phenomenon as a whole was self-
propelling, and owed as much to belief as to economics. Men who behaved ethically (200) were
encouraged to believe that God would sanction their authority. In the process, they absorbed
at least some of the *mentalité* of a clerical elite obsessed with virtue but previously mistrusted for
its lack of masculinity (217-218). By these means, an 'ancien régime' was brought to birth,
destined to last in England until as recently as 1832 (xvi, citing Jonathan Clark). In the process,
there was a tectonic shift in relations between king and subjects: a tendency towards regionalism
and the centrifugal dispersal of lordship. Against this, the kings of England fought a rearguard
action through their sponsorship of such centralizing concepts as English law, royal justice and
national pride. This overall thesis of 'Transformation' is played out across a dozen chapters,
exploring such themes as knighthood and warfare, enmity and friendship, violence and domina-
tion, lordship and justice, the relations between men and women, regional power versus central
royal authority. As this suggests, there are remarkable insights here and an entire stable of horses
being ridden: not just a reformulation of social categories, but a political narrative, combined
with a thematic study of piety, violence and much else besides.

This is a phenomenally rich and subtle survey, informed by a dialogue with French as well as
with English historiography, dissolving many past rigidities. Its readers, however, can hardly fail
to note that Crouch is inclined to rigidities of his own. In his reading, self-belief and self-defini-
tion in competition with others were the engines of a social transformation self-generated rather
than provoked by outside agencies. Out goes the tripartite Aristotelianism of the old 'feudalisms',
but in comes a no less Aristotelian delight in shaving distinctions: between 'aristocracy' and
'nobility', between *optimates* and *prudhommes*. Out go the old Marxist economic mechanisms:
the idea of classes defined by land-tenure, or of social change propelled by material causes such

as the 'great inflation' of the late twelfth century, trumpeted by economic historians from the 1970s onwards as an agency of change. In comes a theory that Crouch himself dubs 'habitus', derived from Max Weber, Pierre Bourdieu and the social-anthropologists, in which a man is defined by what he and his neighbours are prepared to believe him to be, and in which adherence to particular self-authenticating social norms becomes the defining feature of class. The hobby horse named 'Habitus' is ridden hard and frequently in this book. But despite its claims to parthenogenesis, one may well question whether Crouch's 'Habitus' is itself a mechanical beast constructed and still performing its tricks within a Marxist, or at least Marxisant, arena.

One does not have to be a Marxist to appreciate that 'class' is a distinction that has been applied to ancient as well as to more modern societies. To proclaim its birth at any subsequent period is a distinctly perilous exercise. Indeed, to proclaim any 'first' in history is always to invite contradiction. Thus (68) to state that the accession of Henry I in 1100 marks 'the first time in English history' that we find 'a political platform generated out of the complaints of the national élite' is merely to provoke the counter-examples of 1014-16, 1042 or 1051-2. The social stratifications that Crouch identifies from the 1170s onwards are indeed precise, but, were our sources for the eleventh century as rich as those we possess for the twelfth and thirteenth, would thirteenth-century categories necessarily appear more subtle than those that divide the *eorls*, *ealdormen*, thegns, *ceorls*, *gebura* and other strata of pre-Conquest society? Are they necessarily finer than those to be drawn between the ranks of the *paroikoi* or *pronoias* of Byzantine 'feudalism', or indeed between the classically marbled stratifications of the *patricii* who ruled Rome? Is there not a risk here of confusing a new precision in language, itself the product of the scholastic encyclopedianism of the twelfth-century, for a transformation in social categories? To put this in nominalist terms that the twelfth-century not only understood but encouraged, are new names for things necessarily the same as new realities?

From Crouch's perspective, the twelfth century was dominated by the fall out from the violence of 1066. As a result, his narrative remains anchored in the traditional political bedrock. An alternative narrative could be supplied. Robin Fleming, for example, has argued that the real revolution amongst the English élite occurred not in 1066, or after 1170, but in the 1020s, with Cnut's destruction of the old West Saxon hegemony. In political terms, the power of the aristocracy after the 1170s might be regarded not so much as a new departure but as a return to former ways. By placing vast swathes of land at the King's disposal, the Norman Conquest artificially disrupted the balance of power between the King and his subjects. This imbalance persisted for perhaps a century, with even King Stephen, no matter how hard pressed, capable of mustering the financial resources to wage war. Year by year, for thirty-four years, Henry II led campaigns in Wales, Ireland and large parts of France financed from his own resources and with only minimal demands for baronial 'subsidy'. Even as late as the 1190s, his son, Richard I, could tap the riches of England to bankroll a two-year expedition to the East. His subsequent ransom not only tested England's wealth but paid for the German conquest of Sicily. By 1200, however, the river of gold that had flowed from the Norman Conquest was beginning to run dry. To this extent, the rising power of the aristocracy, and the division of English society into regional lordships, after 1200, was not the product of any self-generating aristocratic belief-system but a natural consequence of the financial problems of the English crown. Nor was this a phenomenon confined to England.

Crouch is rightly wary of the exceptionalism and Anglocentricity that have characterised English historical writing since at least the time of the Protestant Reformation. Yet, the emergence of the judicial and tax-gathering machinery of the English 'state', and the devolution of authority from king to regional power brokers were surely not so much responses to the rise of a new English aristocracy as common solutions to a transnational, European 'problem'. To take just one example, the personal authority of individual popes declined across the thirteenth century in direct proportion to the growth of a papal bureaucracy intended to ease underlying financial and administrative pressures. Papal authority as exercised by Eugenius III and described

by John of Salisbury is as distinct from that exercised by Celestine V or John XXII as the king-ship of Cnut or King Stephen from that of Edward II. Moreover, it evolved in tandem with new powers in the Italian peninsula, aristocratic and urban, in appearance every bit as regionally centrifugal as England's political elite. To this extent, the slow rebuilding of the Behemoth state-machinery of classical Rome, and with it the emergence of resistance from a political community comprising subtle gradations of *optimates* and *milites*, was a European phenomenon, not a response to the particular self-authentication of the English aristocracy. To present the birth of aristocracy as the catalyst to social and political change is perhaps to mistake the singer for the song. To present 'chivalry' as a development contingent upon social changes from the 1170s onwards is to ignore the fact that, as early as the 1140s, John of Salisbury was blaming a new knightly ethos for the failure of the Second Crusade. And why allow the particular exceptions that Crouch is prepared to allow? When social distinctions applied, as Crouch demonstrates, to such matters as prayer or the handling of the pax tablet, why not go the whole Marxist hog and assume that religion itself was not a cause of change, but like chivalry, merely a reactionary social convenience?

Superficially, Nigel Saul's book is a lighter vessel, intended for passengers lacking the back-ground knowledge necessary for those who set sail with Crouch. Saul adopts a narrower and more Anglocentric approach, supplying fewer examples from France let alone from other parts of Europe. Set against this, he attempts a much broader chronological span, from the eleventh through to the sixteenth century. In the process, he is obliged to rehearse a considerable part of the narrative of English history, albeit with vigour and intelligence. Crouch is a master of the archives, Saul of material culture. Many of his most telling examples derive from gentry tombs, the arts of heraldry, and from the use of the built environment to broadcast social pretension. It might be wondered what can be added to a subject dominated by Maurice Keen's great book on *Chivalry* (1984). In fact, Saul greatly extends our understanding. He has important remarks to make on the relationship between ideal and practice in the arts of war: chivalry, he suggests, was more than an organized hypocrisy, but operated on the battlefield to cement loyalties and protect the vanquished. There is not only a subtle appreciation of the shifts that have occurred since the 1980s in theory and knowledge, but a willingness to explore the processes of change over time not always allowed for in Crouch's obsession with a single 'transformative' epoch. Like Crouch, Saul has a subtle appreciation of words, of the distinctions, for example, between 'chivalry', 'honour' and 'courtesy'. Like Crouch, he is historiographically alert, with a fine synthesis of debates over whether chivalry died in the 1480s, in 1789 or as recently as 1914. His grasp of the *longue durée* allows for a process of evolutionary rather than immediate or perma-nent change. Moreover, and here returning to a more traditional approach, this is an evolution with essentially materialist causes.

In England, the economic circumstances of the later twelfth century, and in particular the effects of monetary inflation, encouraged the greater landholders to bring back into direct demesne cultivation estates previously leased for fixed annual rents or 'farms'. For those with the largest resources, the profits were commensurately huge, just as today it is the greater investors who reap the largest rewards from the privatisation of state or other assets. This in itself would explain why knights tended to divide between the richest, able to profit from the new bonanza, and those ('the mere gentry') whose resources were modest in the 1180s and therefore (and thereafter) remained so. By these means (64-68), Saul suggests a conventional materialist explanation, albeit *post hoc propter hoc*, for a transformation that Crouch attributes to quite other causes.

Equally important, the transformation of the 1180s led to no permanent realignment of society, no fossilization into an 'ancien régime' destined to survive for six centuries or more. On the contrary, a transformation of aristocracy was effected not just in the 1180s by economic pres-sures, but a century later from the political consequences of Edward I's experiments with Parlia-ment. The creation of a parliamentary peerage, with the right to be summoned to the greater meetings of the king's council, established an English equivalent to the tax immunities obtained

by the 'Fürsten' of Germany or the 'nobles' of France. It set the peers and great barons in a cate-gory entirely distinct from that of the mere knights and commoners (72-74). In the process, it encouraged those centrifugal tendencies towards regionalism and aristocratic faction that Crouch prefers to attribute to the rise, a century earlier, of a new aristocratic *mentalité*. Saul allows for further changes after 1300, particularly in warfare as a result of the indiscriminate slaughter meted out, not by gunpowder (a relatively ineffective agent) but the longbow. He describes, but avoids any explanation for, the further collapse of royal authority after 1400, from the region-alism of a John of Gaunt to the civil wars of Richard of York. Paradoxically, his overarching narrative of social development, so convincing for the period before 1350, is weakest for precisely that period when his knowledge of politics and social detail reaches its height. Here, it seems there is a third period of transformation ripe for scholarly enquiry. The old verities of Stubbs, Plummer and McFarlane have still to be tested using the reagents of European rather than purely Anglocentric enquiry.

To read these two books in conjunction is to enjoy a dialogue between two powerful and inquis-itive minds. Saul's empirical lucidity helps illuminate Crouch's more penetrating command of theory. Crouch's feast of anecdote and incident adds depth to what, superficially, can seem a more pedestrian approach by Saul. These are both excellent books. They can be enjoyed alike by students and by experts, by those in search of a basic narrative of English social history, as by those seeking new theoretical models to explain the development of English, as of European social elites. By contradicting one another on essential points of interpretation, they transform debate. Herein lies a 'Transformation' for which both authors deserve not only our admiration but our thanks.

Nicholas Vincent

De adel in laatmiddeleeuws Vlaanderen in kaart gebracht

Frederik Buylaert, *Eeuwen van ambitie. De adel in laatmiddeleeuws Vlaanderen,* Verhan-delingen van de Koninklijke Vlaamse Academie van België voor Wetenschappen en Kunsten, Nieuwe Reeks, XXI (Brussel: Koninklijke Vlaamse Academie van België voor Wetenschappen en Kunsten, 2010, 338 p., ill.); Frederik Buylaert, *Repertorium van de Vlaamse adel (ca. 1350-ca. 1500)*, Historische monografieën Vlaanderen, I (Gent: Academia Press, 2011, 867 p.)

Frederik Buylaert (1981) verdedigde in 2008 zijn magistrale dissertatie tot het behalen van de graad van doctor in de geschiedenis aan de Universiteit Gent met de titel 'Eeuwen van Ambitie. Edelen, steden en sociale mobiliteit in laatmiddeleeuws Vlaanderen'. Beide voorliggende werken bevatten de gepubliceerde versie van dit onuitgegeven werkstuk. In *Eeuwen van ambitie* bestu-deert de auteur de Vlaamse adel in de late middeleeuwen; het tweede boek bevat een repertorium van 450 families die de auteur over een periode van ruim honderdvijftig jaar rekent tot de Vlaamse adel (in feite beperkt tot het Dietstalige gedeelte van het graafschap Vlaanderen; Waals-Vlaanderen, bestaande uit de kasselrijen Rijsel, Douai en Orchies, is buiten beschouwing gelaten). Beide publicaties vullen elkaar dus aan.

De auteur stelde zich in de eerste studie tot doel om na te gaan hoe het geheel van adellijke families in laatmiddeleeuws Vlaanderen werd gevormd en hoe het evolueerde. De studie valt in feite uiteen in twee delen. De eerste twee hoofdstukken vormen een soort inleiding: hier komen de elementen aan bod die bepalend waren voor de conceptualisering van de adellijke status. In de vier volgende hoofdstukken wordt dan de evolutie van de Vlaamse adel bestudeerd in relatie