Knighthood During the Late Middle Ages: The Process, Responsibilities, and Lifestyle

**Introduction**

**The Meaning of Knighthood**

The task of being a knight during the medieval times was not only a respectable but a privileged position to hold in the society, this is mainly because combative knowledge and skills that the professional knights had (Mohamed, 2011). Being called a knight was a hard earned title because earning it meant going through a lot of intensive and painful training. This was the process an individual had to go through in order to become a fully qualified and accepted Knight. Becoming a Knight also comes along with several political, as well as social duties in the respective society (Crowther, 2013). These responsibilities included; giving protection and security to the king, the lord and the larger Society. On the social aspect, they had several assignments as specifically dictated in the code of conduct that guided all knights in the society (Mohamed, 2011). Normally, the Knights originated from rich, elite and respected families because the process of training a Knight with a horse and weapons was considered costly for most the average members of the society (Mohamed, 2011). In order to become a Knight, the training for knighthood began as a process. It normally started early when one was still very young. Normally, the potential knight was taken to live with a relative or lord who had the resources to train the young boy how to handle a combat and a horse, as well as the use of weapons during war or any other assignment that the king ordered them to perform. In those early times and ages, the
responsibility and process of knighthood were majorly associated with a code of conduct and with the ideals of chivalry for the perfect courtly warrior of Christianity (Mohamed, 2011).

**The Process, the Training and Stages of Becoming a Knight**

A Knight is an individual who adhered to the codes of conduct of Chivalry of the middle age period. As discussed by Mohamed (2011), one of the methods of becoming a Knight was through natural or family inheritance. This is whereby the son of a king or a noble could be trained and made to be a fully grown and a qualified Knight. Hierarchically, after the lord on the social ladder the knights followed (Crowther, 2013). The entire procedure of growing into Knighthood starts at the early age of seven years, when a vassal sends his son to the lord's household in order to serve and grow as a page. It took a duration of as long as seven years over which a page was cared for and treated by the women present in the house. It was the duty of these women to instruct him cleanliness, religion, comportment and courtesy inside the lord’s house (Mohamed, 2011). When the page turned fourteen years of age, he became a close and a personal helper to the Knight, at this stage the page is known as a squire. At this stage, the page’s main duty was mainly to help the lord make ready his fighting equipments, namely; the horse, his armor and make ready his war weapons. From there, the knight, learned horse riding and all the skills of war, as well as hawking, combative, hunting and other game activities (Mohamed, 2011). When the squire reaches between the age of eighteen and twenty one years old, he is viewed as fit and efficient to become a knight in the society (Crowther, 2013). In addition to this, becoming a Knight involves several stages full of a lot of hardships, struggles and suffering as a page in the lord’s house (Mohamed, 2011). Usually, the first stage towards becoming a professional Knight is for one to have the necessary connections. As Mohamed explains, one had to come from a noble or a rich family in order to afford the necessary requirements of becoming a Knight in the society. This is because the expense involved in the entire process of becoming
a knight. It was very expensive since one had to buy costly weapons and own a horse. The second stage involved the right upbringing where the Knight to be would be taken through intensive training and a special care as from seven years of age (Mohamed, 2011). At that specific age of seven years old, the squire boy who is to become a Knight had to be nurtured and grown up in a manner that is right by his guardian or parents. In this period, the squire was expected to learn the basic good manners and understand the function of a knight, chivalry to his liege lord as well as loyalty. A lot of plays and games imitating the actual roles of knighthood would be played. They would use toys, for example, a wooden shield and a sword. A boy who aspired to become a knight would carry out certain routines. For example, he would attend story telling sessions in order to hear stories of brave knights as well as attending tournaments of combative actions in order to get fighting skills (Mohamed, 2011). The next stage is the known as the Page. This is where the young boy is presented to an elite family in order to help in taking care of the lord’s clothes and in his dressing. Another duty of a page was to work as a servant of the ladies of the castle or court he was sent to. The Page was dressed in a uniform made up of the colors preferred by the Lord (Crowther, 2013). As Crowther explains, in this stage, the Page would start to obtain the skills that were required of a Knight by watching the expertise of his seniors as they train, and also by practicing how to tilt a lance. During their training, they practiced horsemanship skills in collaboration with the use of a lance (Mohamed, 2011). As they practiced, the page would mount a wheeled wooden horse that held a lance. At a distance, the page would aim at the lance mounted on the wooden horse, which was pulled by two boys towards the target. They would also engage in practices using wooden shield and swords. Piggyback fighting activities also acted as a means of orienting the young knights towards gaining the necessary combat skills and balance on a horse. The page would go to watch their seniors during tournaments. This was considered as a great occasion for the pages in their Middle Ages. (Mohamed, 2011).
The fourth stage is where the page graduates to a squire. This starts at the age of fourteen years where the page has several duties, for example, he was supposed to learn the Heraldry rules, horsemanship, Chivalry and any other skill required of a Knight as well as the practice on the use of weapons. They also had a duty and a responsibility to learn the courtly/castle’s social life of jousting, singing, etiquette, dancing and music (Mohamed, 2011). These duties took a period of seven years of the squire. In order to be a full Knight, a ceremony was held to pass him (them) over to the next stage of Knighthood. The squire went through a ceremony known as dubbing. In those years, this was done with a short blow to the neck, which would follow by an admonition to conduct himself with bravery, skill and loyalty (Crowther, 2013). Some knights prayed alone in church on the eve of the ceremony to prove how humble they were in front of God by wearing simple clothes. The swords would be consecrated and prayed for and be blessed by the priest. As the priest did this, the knight kissed the hilt, which had religious meaning in the society. It is in a religious ceremony they are passed over, after a whole night of guarding their armors before the altar. The squire has to swear to the codes of conduct governing the Knighthood. The code required the knights to fight for the general welfare of all members of the society, and this included activities like, defending the defenseless, help the helpless and also to protect the weak (Crowther, 2013).

**Responsibilities of the Knights**

Knights had several responsibilities that came along with their status. Among the responsibilities as given by Mohamed are the following. The first responsibility of the Knights is to train and equip the sons of the king with combat skills as they grow up. The second responsibility of the Knights is to go to protect the king. Knights are members of the king’s army, and therefore, have a responsibility of going to war or any other fight when the king asked them to do so. The third responsibility of the Knights is to be a good steward over the properties that they are given by the noble king (Crowther, 2013). The fourth
responsibility of the Knights is to use his strength to do good deeds. Mohamed gives examples of the good deeds expected from the Knights to include, helping the poor, old women, the weak as well as the orphans. The fifth responsibility of the Knights is to stand for justice, morality and honor in the society (Crowther, 2013). Lastly, apart from training had to be the best warrior present; the Knights were bound by the chivalry codes which guided their behaviors.

**Lifestyle a Knight Had During This Era**

The lifestyle of a Knight followed a specific routine and schedule. The schedule is similar to that of the king or the lord that they are assigned to give protection (Crowther, 2013). In addition to that, they spent most of their time practicing and training hard in order to improve on their skills and maintain their physical fitness. They also spent most of their time preparing their weapons of war. Another major aspect of their life is to go to war and fight for the king any time that the king asked them to. However, Mohamed highlights their daily routine as the following. They would wake up to a morning mass, after which they had their breakfast. After that they would go for weapon practices, where they would then discuss matters and strategies of war, for example, strategies of siege warfare and types of weaponry (Crowther, 2013). In the afternoon, the Knights further would go to increase their horsemanship skills. In order to do this, they accompanied their lord in hawking, hunting or inspecting the estate (Crowther, 2013). Later in the evening, they would go for evening prayers and then have supper either in Hall of the Castle or the Manor house. After supper, there might have been some entertainment where they would listen to music, engage themselves in dancing, watch acrobats, jesters, jugglers, etc. At the end, they attend evening prayers and retire to bed (Crowther, 2013).

**How Knights Influenced Europe Thereafter**
The continent of Europe was largely influenced by the era of the Knights. According to the article *The Dynamic Culture of the Middle Ages*, in the World History Project website (2013), it was an era that shaped the European development and identity, evident in major parts of the world, brought about through Europe’s dealings with other societies. Most of the social and political institutions, later associated with European history, were created during that era (World History Project, 2013). Major cultural identities and political boundaries that occurred in the British protectorates, Italy, Germany, France, Iberia, eastern Europe and Scandinavia are associated with this era, as kings and their Knights created their boundaries, which they protected during wars (World History Project, 2013). It is also in this era that developments in the European society, economy and political life had an impact on religion, literature, scholarship and other arts, which are the fields that formed European culture to the present day. Innovations in territorial expansion, agriculture, cities’ development and trade caused Europe to undergo a fast economic transformation (World History Project, 2013). The interaction between rural and urban classes led to the establishment of new political organizations and laws designed to balance the needs of competing classes (World History Project, 2013). In Europe, there developed stable political identities, usually under a central ruler, for example, the royal control of England (World History Project, 2013).
Works Cited

