



33. FEUDALISM AND CHIVALRY

Charlemagne (742-814) began structuring the Empire on the basis of the Roman military initiatic organization, an undertaking that was completed by Emperor Henry II the Saint, of the dynasty of Saxony (978-1024). Society was divided into four classes: priests, nobles, free men and servants. The monks were not considered part of the clergy, being in all respects outside and above the divisions of Christian-Latin society.



1. Feudal society

<i>The Emperor & the paladins</i>	<i>The clergy: Pope, bishops & patriarchs</i>	<i>The nobility: vassals, vavasours & vavasour's vassals</i>	<i>The plebeians: merchants and artisans</i>	<i>Servants and peasants</i>
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The priests, after the work of correction of the clergy undertaken first by the Culdean monks, then by Saint Boniface and finally by Charlemagne, were allowed to marry. However, severe punishments were inflicted in case of concubinage with one or more women. In the last two centuries of the first millennium AD, thanks to the progressive establishment of the principle of inheritance, the male offspring of the clerics often pursued priesthood. The constitution of a true priestly caste was thus emerging.



2. Abbas Mitratus

The upper hierarchies, bishops, archbishops and patriarchs¹, were predominantly assigned to unmarried priests, without this constituting any codified rule. The bishops were the heirs of the apostles and, therefore, only they could fully exercise the priestly ministry. In fact, only a bishop could consecrate another bishop and ordain priests². It will be noted, therefore, that in Christianity the distinction between the high and the low clergy is merely structural and not a social-historical

¹ The Latin patriarchs of that period were the pope of Rome, the archbishop of Grado and that of Aquileia. Among these, only the patriarchate of Rome is recognized by the Greek Orthodox Churches.

² We use here the past tense in consideration of the fact that the Catholic Church is currently only a decomposing corpse.



contingency, as claimed from the French Revolution onwards¹. The members of the most humble and poor classes often chose to become priests to find some means of sustenance and a more decent social status², thus swelling the ranks of the low clergy.



3. The high clergy

The second social class, by order of importance, was the nobility. Among the four social classes of medieval Latin Christianity, nobility is the only one constituted as a true caste by right of birth. It is surprising how medievalists have ruffled the documents at their disposal to confound the ideas in this regard. From their studies, nobility emerges as an incomprehensible conception for modern man, even though western aristocracy has been deprived of its powers and prerogatives no more than a few decades ago, although this process began at the end of the 18th century³. The nobility, which represented the backbone of the Holy Roman Empire, was such ‘from time immemorial’ in the true sense of the term⁴. That is to say that no specific historical origin could be attributed to it¹. Two were

¹ Nonetheless, although some bishops and popes came from noble families, the social origin of the high clergy was generally the expression of the lower strata of society, often even of servile extraction.

² As anticipated in the previous chapters, he who pursued a monastic life was usually someone proceeding from a highly educated stratum, seeking a solitary life and renouncing all worldly things. For this purpose, monasteries and hermitages were built in inaccessible places, far from the worldly mass. Only few monks had also access to the priesthood. In this way it was guaranteed the fulfillment of the obligatory external rites in the Monasteries. If the abbot elected by his brothers had also been a priest, which by no means was necessary, he would have automatically assumed also the bishop's dignity (called in Latin *Abbas Mitratus* for the faculty of wearing the miter, the characteristic headgear of the bishops shaped like a fish head, allusive to the piscatorial power (*potestas piscatoria*) of the successors of the apostles), without this charge being conferred to him by any superior authority. It should not be forgotten that it is within the monasteries that the true priestly initiations were transmitted, either of Johannite or Druidic derivation. Differently, the uninitiated exterior clergy (*adīkṣita*) could transmit only the obligatory sacraments, comparable in many ways to the *saṃskāra* of Hinduism.

³ The incapacity or refusal to understand the concept of nobility is in many ways comparable to the absolute incomprehension of the moderns with regards to the caste system. Cf. Jean Flori, *Cavaliere e Cavalleria del Medioevo*, Turin, Einaudi Ed., 2008 (I ed. Paris, Hachette, 1998), pp. 65-76. This cliché finds its origin in both the cultural prejudice of egalitarianism and in the instinctive tendency of recently acculturated scholars and historians of low social origin (Dante explains the meaning of the word *nobilis* with *non vilis*). By considering nobility from a plebeian standpoint exemplified by the eternal question “How could one become noble?”, as if it were an activity or a profession, evolutionist historians continue to confuse 'being' with 'becoming'.

⁴ It is well understood that when it is said that someone has become noble, it logically implies that before a certain defining event he was clearly not. This type of ‘*nobilitatio*’ (ennobling) made its first appearance in the second half of the 13th century, when the princes began to bestow with a letter the recognition of nobility to a plebeian. The first case of ennoblement by letter was that of Raoul, silversmith of King Philip the Bold of France in 1270 (Goffredo di Crollanza, *Encyclopedia araldico-cavalleresca. Prontuario Nobiliare*, Pisa, Giornale Araldico, 1876-77, p.443, ab). Since the most ancient times, the plebeians were the ‘free citizens’ of Rome; known in Middle Ages with the term ‘burgess’. As a result of the ennoblement, the plebeian was then elevated to a superior status ascribed to certain merits. They used to lend money eventually indebting the true nobles, often obtaining the ennobling in exchange for the extinction of the debt. In this way, unfortunately, many families of usurers were, therefore, ennobled. With the passing of the centuries and through marriages



the traditional origins of western aristocracy. The first is represented by the patricians of Roman descent (of Alban, Trojan and Hyperborean origins)². The second was constituted by the Germanic nobility and by the Celtic knightly class, which represented the barbarized continuation of the hyperborean aristocracy. Nevertheless, these two noble groups, which mutually recognized each other and frequently forged marriage alliances, maintained their distinctive traits for several centuries.



4. Villa, città e castello

In general, the patricians were the keepers of the cities and the *villæ*, whereas the nobles of barbaric origin administered the fiefs and castles. Since the Holy Roman Empire was structured on the basis of the initiatory organizations of the noble caste, its administrative, juridical and military offices reflected, since their inception, the three main degrees of warrior initiation. The nobles who took the knightly path, in fact, passed through three phases corresponding to their level of realization. The first step was that of ‘baron’: this term derives from the Latin word *vir*³, setting the baron apart from the *nobilis homo* (later *nobil homo*, or nobleman), that is to say the noble birth, for the latter was not an initiate⁴.

The baron was therefore the grade of ‘apprentice’ in the initiatic path of the Hero. The second step, which already presupposed the attainment of the first inner experiences procured by the constant application of the method (sskrt. *prakriyā*), was that of count (lat. *comes*)⁵, that is to say ‘companion’ of the master. In fact, precisely because of the greater inner experience, by delegation of the master, he could guide the novices in their spiritual journey⁶. The third degree, the one that suitably applied to the master, was that of the prince (lat. *princeps*). Thus the hierarchy that governed the Empire of

with authentic aristocratic families, this new noble class was eventually accepted. In this traditional context, we cannot take account of the frequent ennoblements of plebeians granted in the last two centuries by liberal monarchies or even by popular dictatorships, often embellished with fanciful and bombastic titles. It must be remembered, however, that the plebeians were clearly distinguished from the members belonging to the servile class.

¹ Giandonato Rogadeo, *Del ricevimento de’ Cavalieri e degli altri Fratelli dell’Insigne Ordine Gerosolimitano*, Vincenzo Orfino, Napoli, 1785, p. 98. The ancestor of the family was often identified with a god or a demigod, thus giving rise to the *gens* (sskrt. *gotra*). This pushes back the origin of the clan to an even more immemorial, non-human age.

² After the conversion of the Empire to Christian religion, the Roman patriciate, originally eligible to carry out both the priestly and the regal functions, lost its sacral prerogatives (with the exception of the power of blessing). For this reason, during the Middle Ages the patricians of Roman origin were in fact no longer distinguished from the knights (*equites*), a class reserved exclusively to the warriors.

³ “[...] some believe that *baro* is an alteration of *vir*, and they maintain that its origin comes from the Romanic *varo*, a severe and powerful man. In fact, as agreed by Menage, in low Latin *baro* was the ablative of *vir*, equivalent to *viro*, meaning ‘brave and valiant man’ [...]”. Crollalanza, *Enciclopedia araldico-cavalleresca*, cit., p. 97, a.

⁴ It is no coincidence that in the tantric ways of Hinduism (*vīramārgas*), the term *ārya*, or noble by caste birth, indicated an individual that, in spite of his initiation, was still considered a *pāśu*, a being bound by certain conditions; only later will he become a *vīra* (hero, Lat. *vir*). In fact, this is only the first stage of realization of the tantric *dīkṣita*.

⁵ When this degree was reached by a patrician of Roman origin, the title attributed was that of Lord (Lat. *Dominus*). Lordships and Principalities were therefore part of the feudal system from the very beginning, differently from what has been declared by the official historians who incorrectly relegated these categories of fiefs to the Renaissance period.

⁶ Here the distinction between a simple *dīkṣita* and a *sādḥaka* is easily recognized. The latter in fact is the one who has proceeded in the initiatic path. In the tantric initiatic ways, to the *princeps* corresponds the degree of *divya*, ‘luminous or divine man’. The closest collaborators of the Emperor were the Counts Palatine, the paladins, originally twelve in number. They were truly the peers of the sovereign, mirroring the college of apostles around to the Christ-King or Messiah.



Charlemagne and his successors corresponded exactly to these three initiatory degrees. Each of these degrees allowed for a further development of power. It therefore happened that the baron who extended his full potentialities was recognized as a viscount; the count who had fully developed the faculties inherent in his degree of realization, became ‘count of the mark’ or marquis¹. Thus also the *princeps*, the truly perfect master, could have obtained the title of duke (*dux*, he who leads the disciples)². Obviously the Grand Master, prince of the princes and duke of the dukes, head of all the initiatic warrior organizations (sskrt. *kula*, *saṃpradāya*), was no one but the very Emperor-*Imperator*.



Imperial crown



Crowns of prince, duke and king



Crowns of count and marquis



Crowns of baron and viscount



Crown of nobelman



Crown of patrician

5. Crowns of Imperial nobles and patrician

The Empire was, therefore, structured as a warrior brotherhood. This means that, originally, the barons who administered the baronies, the counts who governed the counties, the marquises who ruled over the borderlands, etc., were indeed initiates of different degrees, to which external responsibilities

¹ It is interesting to observe that in the English Mark Masonry, the fulfillment of the second degree was designated with the title of ‘Mark Man’ (later abusively raised to the rank of Mark Master). In fact, the marquises were those who carried the sovereign’s seal and had the right to coin money on his behalf. It should also be noted that the operative mason apprentice, not being noble by birth, could not be called a *vir*-baron. Instead he received the title of ‘freeman’, identifying him with the third class and not with the servile one. In this clearly traditional perspective we cannot take into consideration the numerous aristocrats and wealthy traders who were ‘accepted’ in Freemasonry from the 17th century onwards. In the Masonic language, ‘accepted’ is he who is recognized as an honorary member. This ‘fashion’ consisted in the entry of a great deal of individuals who did not belong to the masonry guild by birth, resulting in the eventual loss of the operability and the method on which this initiatic way was based, provoking the degeneration of this institution.

² With regard to the Kings, there is no doubt that in the early Middle Ages they were not very different from the princes and the dukes. They were, therefore, vassals of the Empire. It will be only after the eleventh century that the Kings began to identify themselves with a single nation and thus assumed a competitive stance towards the Empire, claiming that “the King is Emperor in his kingdom”. Also in this case, much of the blame must be attribute to the subversive politics of the Papacy. In fact, the popes, pursuing their policy of usurpation of the temporal power, constantly instigated the Kings not to recognize themselves as subordinate to the Empire.



were entrusted for the purpose of raising Catholicism after the barbarian past¹. This explains why at the time of Charlemagne and his immediate successors, at the death of a count (or other noble) the Emperor appointed in his place a count of equal dignity and wisdom, without, however, having any agnate or cognate² relations with his predecessor. On the other hand, it was indeed intention of the Empire to consolidate the external structure of the state in a permanent configuration that followed the model of the caste institutions. Thus, in the short span of a few generations, the principle of inheritance eventually prevailed³. In this way, it happened that the son of a baron was a baron and the son of a duke was duke and so on⁴. Such a change was completed only in few generations. It is evident, however, that this regime no longer guaranteed an effective correspondence between the social function and the inner realization of the feudal lords. On the other hand, it guaranteed a perfectly organic form to the state, based on trust and loyalty, and this was the aim of the externalization of the military initiatic way of Roman origin.



6. Infeudation - Homage and benefit

This objective was widely achieved with the foundation of the feudal Empire. Thus, the initiatic ways of the noble caste returned once again to the domain of esotericism in the form of Chivalry, with which we will conclude this chapter. As it has already been said, Feudalism consisted of a certain number of vassals, great feudal lords, princes and dukes, who swore an oath of loyalty and tribute to the Emperor, receiving in return the *beneficium*, the possession of a fief, as well as, the responsibility of its administration and defense⁵. Under similar conditions, the vassals granted minor parts of their fiefs to some vavasours, counts and marquises. The latter ones could further cut smaller fiefdoms to the vavasour's vassals, i.e. barons and viscounts⁶. In turn, the vavasour's vassals could grant certain *beneficia* to the knights, the low clergy and the freemen. Despite the *leyenda negra* invented during the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, the feudal system worked wonders thanks to the adherence to

¹ The true extension of the degree of Master in the above mentioned Masonry is that of 'Navigator of the Ark' (Ark Mariner), which alludes to the overcoming of the flood of barbarian invasions.

² Familiarity of blood or acquired by marriage alliance.

³ Heredity followed the Salic law promulgated by Clovis. According to this law, the inherited position belonged exclusively to the first-born male, unless the father foresaw that to dispose of the title was another direct male heir. In this case the father called the non-firstborn son to share his office while he was still alive. This last principle was often followed also in India, not only for the family inheritance in the *kṣatriya* caste, but also to ensure continuity to an initiatic *paramparā* of a *kula* or a *pīṭha*.

⁴ Only that of the Emperor never became a fully fledged dynastic office, since his confirmation required the acclamation by the army, the Roman people or his Electoral Princes. This helped to keep the imperial charisma high, although in practice a weakness of the institution was revealed.

⁵ The fief was a possession and not a property. That is to say that the fiefdom was granted in administration and usufruct, whose property belonged to God alone, through the imperial mediation. The assignment of a benefit, or enfeoffment, was ritually represented with the entrustment of a heraldic banner by the prince, whose figures and colors then became the symbol represented on the family's shield.

⁶ It was not uncommon for even Bishops, Archbishops and Mitred Abbots to become enfeoffed with baronies, marquises or principalities. In this case, the fiefdom coincided with the ecclesiastical diocese. However, only members of the high clergy of aristocratic descent were entitled to such right.



strong bonds and to a code of conduct founded on loyalty, fidelity and honor respected not only by the nobility but also by the rest of the population. Contrary to what is commonly believed, the so-called "dark ages" represented one of the periods of maximum splendor of the Tradition in the West. Rather, it was the hypocrisy and the lust for earthly power of the Church, together with the greed of the middle class, to undermine the feudal order.



7. The vigil of weapons

There is a great deal of literature on the Chivalry that attempts to explain its spirit and its historical origins. Unfortunately, these writings have only produced much misinterpretation and misunderstanding. Both the liberal and Marxist interpretations make the establishment of this institution purely dependent on economic reasons¹.



8. Knight with page and squire

On the basis of this assumption, whoever had sufficient money to buy a horse and an armor could have the ambition to become a knight². By ignoring altogether the existence of initiation, they were led to believe that only technological innovations, such as the stirrup and the long spear, can explain the rise of the Cavalry. The explanation, however, is much simpler. In fact, it is possible to set this subject

¹ For inst.: Jean Flori, *Cavalieri e cavalleria del Medioevo*, cit.; Franco Cardini, *Alle radici della cavalleria medievale*, Milano, Sansoni, 2004.

² The cited authors also have in common the tendency to clearly separate Chivalry from nobility, reducing the knights to ordinary men-at-arms of humble birth, skilled in weapons and often devoted to banditry. According to this line of argument, at the end of the Middle Ages, thanks to their amazing feats, these popular figures became recognized as knights, as if they were nobles. Later, near the Renaissance, the nobility allegedly poured into the Chivalry, eventually transforming it into a refined elite circle difficult to access. As evidence of this interpretation, they advance some cases of adventurers of bourgeois or even servile birth armed knights after pretending to be descendants of some noble families. This argument, however, proves exactly the opposite. Why would those boasters pass themselves off as nobles if the Chivalry, as they claim, was open to all social classes?



correctly by simply referring to the traditional record. When the Christian Empire became firmly settled according to the hierarchical structure and the virtues of the warrior initiatic ways of the *patricii* and the *equites* of ancient Rome, these same organizations returned to their original reserve¹. Chivalry was simply this. A noble scion who wished to pursue such initiatic path, had to betake himself to the castle or the *villa* of a Lord who was also a celebrated master or an *upaguru*.

There, after having served (sskrt. *seva*) for a certain number of years as page, he began a hard period of training in arms and the exercise of ‘gentle’² virtues. At this stage the young man became a squire (shield bearer) of his master, also called ‘valet’ (young attendant). When the master, baron or duke thought his apprentice was ready, the initiation rite of the Chivalry was then organized: “The initiate prepared himself to receive the arms with fasting, prayer and penance, dressing in white, often bathing and cutting his hair on the front, to be more at ease in battle, and to dodge the adversary’s slashes in the event his helmet was lost. He then presented himself to the prince or the nobleman who was to arm him, and this was done with a solemn ritual. In ancient times, the King alone could confer the cavalry, but later all the knights had the right to do the same; and the elect remained bound by a kind of kinship, so that in no case should they raise arms against the Lords who had knighted them, otherwise they would have been considered felons and infamous.”³ The investiture was recognized by the Church as a sacramental, with real spiritual effects.



9. Wandering knight

Neither is it true that the knights (lat. *equites* or *milites*) were always the poor cadets of powerful families, condemned to a life of hardships and wanderings due to the fault of the Salic law. Many Lords of castles and *villae* were knights and could thus transmit to young prospects, who served them as pages, the same initiation that they had once received. The cadet brothers who lived in the same mansion as their elder brother could also be knights; or, in alternative, they could pursue the ascetic life of the knights-errant. This case is comparable to that of the monks who retired to hermitic life. The knight-errant passed his life wandering in search of adventure, seeking the opportunity to test his virtues and

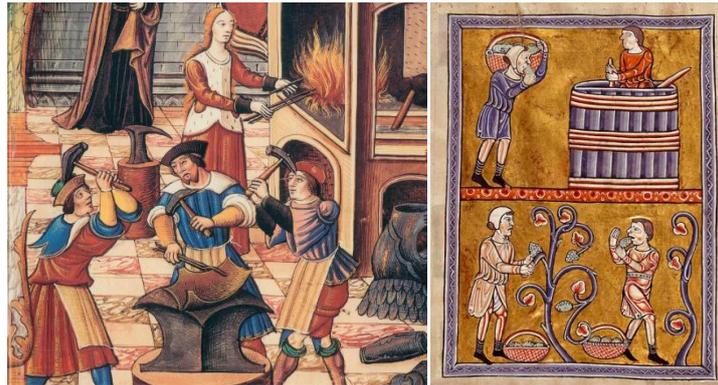
¹After Charlemagne, it is not clear which of his successors, besides being Emperor, were also *Imperator* of the noble initiatory paths. There are various indications to suppose that this was the case of Frederick II Hohenstaufen. On the contrary, thanks to the authority of Dante, we know for certain that the Emperor Henry VII of Luxembourg was also the initiatic *Imperator*.

²In the language of Chivalry, the term ‘gentle’ always refers to something pertaining to initiation. We will return to this when we speak about the late Middle Ages, particularly with regard to the troubadours and the Faithfuls of Love (it. *Fedeli d'Amore*). Therefore, it never assumed the denigratory sense as in the Jewish usage of the word *goyim* (the *gentes*), designating those who do not belong to the “chosen people”; nor does it correspond to the British ‘gentleman’, which indicates those who belong to the middle class and enjoy client patronage with the aristocracy.

³Crollalanza, *Enciclopedia araldico-cavalleresca*, cit., p. 166, a.



his martial skills in defense of the weak, of the widows and the orphans. His name was preceded by the title of ‘Dom.’ (*Dominus*), in the Latin form; or by the vernacular ‘Sire’, ‘Sir’, ‘Monseigneur’. He was the defender of religion and his weapon was the cross-shaped sword before which he prayed. The sword was given a divine name that the knight repeated like a *mantra*, especially when unsheathed in the name of justice. He also had the priestly power to baptize and to bless. The knight, for the rituals of his *sāadhanā*, appealed to the intermediation of a female celestial figure in order to reach the Lord God more effectively. In this way, an unquestionable *sākta* tendency can be recognized in the chivalric initiatic method. We will come back to this topic of primary importance later when we deal with the Orders of Chivalry founded in the late Middle Ages.



10. Artisans and peasants

As already mentioned, the Imperial society included also the class of plebeians, later called bourgeois because they exercised commerce, arts and professions in the villages (the boroughs). Often these free men were able to accumulate a considerable wealth. Some of them carried out activities of great utility for the human consortium of the city or of the fief, such as weaving, architecture and jurisprudence, distinguishing themselves among the population and obtaining from the noble council or from the feudal lord the right to blazon a shield without crown¹. The freemen were grouped by guilds according to their art or craft (sskrt. *śreṇī*), within which existed different initiatic ways corresponding to each single craft form. Nowadays, a pale trace of these medieval corporations remains in the Freemasonry and in the Companionship.

At the base of the social pyramid were the peasants and the servants, generally affiliated to the families of their ecclesiastic, noble or freeman masters.

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¹ The use of the crown was the exclusive privilege of the nobility. Only the British, who have excessively widened the gap between the King and any other noble, attribute the crown only to the sovereign, while to the nobles is reserved the ‘coronet’.