

## Chaucer's Knight, the Alliterative *Morte Arthure*, and Medieval Laws of War: a Reconsideration

Chaucer's account of the Knight in the General Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales* has long been regarded as a celebratory portrait of one who represents the quintessence of chivalry. Recently, however, that long-established view has been challenged by Terry Jones whose lively and provocative book on the Knight is subtitled 'Portrait of a Medieval Mercenary'.<sup>1</sup> According to Mr Jones Chaucer's intention was not celebratory but condemnatory, his account of the Knight's appearance and career a devastating ironic attack on a disturbing phenomenon of late fourteenth century English society, the freebooting mercenary soldier created by the conditions of the Hundred Years War. If we read the account of the Knight in the light of late fourteenth century attitudes to war and soldiering, as Chaucer's first audience would have read it, argues Mr Jones, then we would realise that its subject is no 'gentyll knyght' but a man whose pretensions to chivalry are wholly without foundation. Chaucer's Knight has spent his entire military career abroad rather than patriotically engaging in wars in defence of his own country, and the campaigns in which he has taken part were notable for their ruthlessness and brutality. In particular, Mr Jones singles out as proof of the Knight's ruthless and mercenary character his presence at the massacre that followed the taking of Alexandria by the crusading army of Peter of Cyprus in 1365, arguing that by the end of the fourteenth century men of conscience saw the crusades not as idealistic ventures in defence of the Christian religion but as 'appalling massacres, scenes of sadism and pillage' undertaken from shabby political and mercenary motives.

Perhaps it is not so surprising that this radical reassessment of Chaucer's Knight should appear. Mr Jones's arguments and conclusions were anticipated some years ago by William Matthews in his study of the alliterative *Morte Arthure*, *The Tragedy of Arthur* (1960). There Matthews argued that far from being a poem in celebration of the martial successes of King Arthur (and hence of Edward III), as earlier commentators had supposed, *Morte Arthure* was in fact a resounding condemnation of Arthur for his brutal imperialistic warmongering, and by analogy a criticism of the martial ambitions of Edward III. Since the publication of Matthew's book this has become the accepted interpretation of the *Morte Arthure*,

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<sup>1</sup>T. Jones, *Chaucer's Knight: Portrait of a Medieval Mercenary* (London, 1980).

followed in large measure by John Finlayson<sup>2</sup>, Valerie Krishna<sup>3</sup>, and most recently in the collection of essays on the poem edited by Heinz Goller<sup>4</sup>. Not all these critics are as convinced as is Matthews that Arthur is intended as a critical portrait of Edward III, but all stress the poem's contemporary reference and see it as reflecting the anti-war sentiments of its author.

A key issue in the interpretation of both works is the brutality of the wars in which their heroes participate. In the case of the alliterative *Morte Arthure* the many unsparing accounts of the suffering and devastation caused by Arthur's army have seemed to critics proof positive of the author's critical attitude to Arthur. In particular, attention has been focused on Arthur's siege of Metz and his *chevauchée* through Lombardy and Tuscany because these seem to be additions of the author which are not to be found in the major chronicle versions of Arthur's war against the Romans. These episodes, it is argued, were added by the author to show Arthur departing from the path of justice to undertake unjust wars of aggression prosecuted with unusual ferocity. Chaucer, Mr Jones argues, works to the same end but by a different method. The mere mention of the Knight's campaigns abroad and the absence of any mention of service with English armies in the war with France would, he argues, have been sufficient to alert a contemporary audience to his ironic intentions.

It is my contention that Chaucer's account of the Knight in the General Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales* and the portrait of Arthur in the alliterative *Morte Arthure* are indeed celebratory, as they were once taken to be, and not condemnatory as has recently been claimed. It is helpful to look at these two examples together, not only because they have both suffered the same kind of adverse criticism, but also because both raise the same central issues about fourteenth century attitudes to war and soldiering. Furthermore, although the date of the alliterative poem is still a matter of debate and in the absence of other kinds of proof can only be judged from internal evidence, there are grounds for arguing that it dates from the same period as the General Prologue. One purpose of this article will be to propose that both works can be related to the political situation in England and Europe in the closing decades of the fourteenth century and that Chaucer and the unknown author of the *Morte Arthure*, far from being pacifists as recent critics suggest, both subscribe warmly to the crusading ideal.

<sup>2</sup>*Morte Arthure*, ed. J. Finlayson (London, 1967), pp.12-13.

<sup>3</sup>*The Alliterative Morte Arthure*, ed. V. Krishna (New York, 1976), pp.21-2. All references to *Morte Arthure* are to Krishna's edition.

<sup>4</sup>K. H. Goller, *The Alliterative Morte Arthure: A Reassessment of the Poem* (Cambridge, 1981).

Surprisingly, little or no attention has been paid by critics of *Morte Arthure* to Arthur's announcement, at the moment of his triumph over Rome, of his intention to go on crusade, 'To reuenge the Renke that on the Rode dyede' (3127). Yet this too, like the account of the siege of Metz and of the campaigns in Lombardy and Tuscany, is an addition of the poet, unparalleled in any of the major chronicles that are his likely sources. It is a very significant addition, I suggest, that helps to date the poem and establishes an important link with Chaucer's account of the Knight. There are two important areas for exploration: the laws governing the conduct of war, and the status of the crusading ideal in the latter part of the fourteenth century.

In respect of the first of these we are fortunate in having available important modern studies that help us to place the conduct of the Knight and of Arthur in the appropriate historical and cultural context. F. H. Russell's *The Just War in the Middle Ages* (1975) is a detailed study of the attempts of theologians and canon and civil lawyers from Augustine to the thirteenth century to define the nature of the just war and the way in which it was to be conducted. M. H. Keen's *The Laws of War in the Later Middle Ages* (1965) concentrates on the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and provides a valuable supplement to Russell's book in that it examines chiefly how the formulations of theologians and canon and civil lawyers were interpreted in the courts. In addition, Professor Coopland's edition of *L'Arbre des Batailles* (1949) by Honoré Bouvet (formerly called Bonet) has made available the work of a fourteenth century canon lawyer whose treatise is widely accepted as being one of the best guides to the laws of war as they were practised in the fourteenth century. The significance of Bouvet's vernacular treatise can hardly be overestimated for it made available for the first time, in a language and in a form that interested laymen could understand, the teachings of theologians and lawyers on the nature and conduct of the just war. What is original about Bouvet's work is not his ideas—those he took from his source the Italian professor of canon and civil law John di Lignano—but his presentation of those ideas in a form which makes *L'Arbre des Batailles* the kind of handbook that a captain or commander might take with him on campaign.<sup>5</sup> Bouvet was followed by Christine de Pisan whose *Livre des Faits d'Armes et de Chevalerie* (1408) provided commanders with a compendium of current knowledge on the legal, tactical and

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<sup>5</sup>On the popularity of Bouvet's work and its use as a practical handbook for commanders see N. A. R. Wright's essay, 'Honoré Bouvet and the Laws of War' in *War, Literature and Politics in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. C. T. Allmand (Liverpool, 1976), pp.12-31.

organizational aspects of war.<sup>6</sup> Christine's source for the laws of war was Bouvet's treatise and for her account of the science of war she recounted advice given by some unnamed contemporary knights as well as drawing extensively on the *De Re Militari* of the fourth century Roman military theorist Vegetius whose work proved very popular in the later Middle Ages. Bouvet's treatise and Christine's, and many illuminating references in contemporary chronicles, provide reliable sources of contemporary attitudes to the conduct of war in the light of which we may judge the behaviour of Arthur and Chaucer's Knight.

Logically, any formulation of the laws governing the conduct of war, the *ius in bello*, must be preceded by a formulation of the *ius ad bellum*, the circumstances in which a ruler might justly make war. Therefore, before we consider whether the conduct of Arthur's wars and the Knight's activities as a crusader were just we must first consider the question of whether the Knight's crusades and Arthur's wars would have been considered just wars. Critics of *Morte Arthure* are divided on the question of whether all or only some of Arthur's wars are unjust. John Finlayson takes the more moderate view, arguing that the war against Lucius is a just war of defence and it is only when Arthur turns to war on the Duke of Lorraine and in Lombardy and Tuscany that he strays from the path of justice to make unjust wars of conquest. He notes that the campaign in Lorraine and Italy is an addition of the poet, not to be found in the chronicles, and argues that the poet consciously added episodes that depict Arthur engaging in unjust war. It is true that a war of conquest is one of the frequently cited categories of unjust war. However, it is by no means certain that the poet and his first audiences would have regarded Arthur's campaign in Lorraine and Italy as a war of conquest.

To resolve the issue we need to turn to the opening scene of the poem in which the Roman ambassador demands Britain's submission to Roman overlordship. In rejecting the ambassador's claim Arthur gives two reasons for going to war with Rome. The first is in defence of his kingdom and the upholding of its sovereignty in the face of an unjust aggressor (271-274), that is a just war of defence. The second is to pursue his own inherited claim to the throne of the Roman Empire (275-287). To make war for the recovery of things lost, whether material objects or rights, was acknowledged as a just cause for undertaking war. Thus Aquinas, echoing Augustine, declares: 'We usually describe a just war as one that avenges wrongs, that is, when a nation or state has to be punished either for refusing to make amends for outrages done by its subjects, or to restore what it has

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<sup>6</sup>*The Book of Fayttes of Armes and of Chyualrye: Translated and Printed by William Caxton from the French Original by Christine de Pisan*, ed. A. T. P. Byles (EETS, original series, clxxxix, 1937).

seized injuriously.’<sup>7</sup> Christine de Pisan went even further, arguing that a prince had not only the right but even the obligation to pursue his inherited rights by means of war:

to recouere his propre thynges loste / is not onely leefful to a prynce to  
moeue warre or to maintene it / but it is to hym pure dette to make it  
by oblygacion of tylte of seignourie & iuredicion.<sup>8</sup>

Likewise Edward III, in a manifesto published in England, Flanders, Aquitaine and France in 1340, argued that since France fell to him by divine disposition it was his duty to prosecute his claim, ‘lest we should seem to neglect our right and the gift of divine grace, or be unwilling to submit the direction of our will to the divine pleasure’.<sup>9</sup>

Arthur’s war against Rome falls into two distinct parts. The first culminates in his victory over Lucius at Sessoyne, which vindicates Britain’s claim to be independent of the overlordship of Rome. The second part is his campaign in Lorraine, Lombardy and Tuscany which ends at Viterbo when a cardinal comes as emissary from Rome to offer him the crown of the empire and to sue for a truce. Contrary to what Matthews and Finlayson have argued, the second campaign is no sudden decision on Arthur’s part, born of overweening ambition and lust for conquest consequent on his victory at Sessoyne. It has in fact been announced at the very beginning of the poem in Arthur’s formal reply to the Roman ambassador where he rejects the Roman claim to overlordship and states his own hereditary right to be Emperor of Rome. The message he sends back to Lucius includes a promise to make war in Lorraine, Lombardy and Tuscany and to besiege Rome itself (419-442). The provinces mentioned are all clearly depicted in the poem as parts of the Roman Empire to which Arthur lays claim, and his war against them is not an unjust war of aggression but a legitimate means of gaining recognition of his claim to be Emperor of Rome. Arthur’s just war ‘to recouere his propre thynges loste’ ends when the Romans bow to the inevitable and offer him the crown.

In respect of the justice of the crusades, such as those in which Chaucer’s Knight has taken part, Bouvet in *L’Arbre des Batailles* provides a useful summary of the position of contemporary theologians and canonists. He makes it clear that there was no doubt of the justice of a crusade to win back the Holy Land, for it

<sup>7</sup>*Summa Theologiae* IIa IIae 40, art.1, responsio, in *St. Thomas Aquinas: Summa Theologiae* (Blackfriars ed., London and New York, 1963-, 60 vols), xxxv.83.

<sup>8</sup>*Book of Fayttes of Armes*, p.12.

<sup>9</sup>Robert de Avesbury, *De Gestis Mirabilibus Regis Edwardi Tertii*, ed. E. M. Thompson (Rolls Series, 1889), p.309.

was the patrimony of Christ and therefore of his vicar on earth, the pope. Moreover, the pope could also sanction crusades against other lands governed by the Saracens where Christians were being oppressed or in lands considered to be part of Christendom. Although forced conversion was forbidden and the right of Saracens to jurisdiction in their own lands was recognised, these prescriptions left enough latitude to justify crusades such as those in Lithuania, Armenia and Granada in which the Knight has served.<sup>10</sup> Both the Knight and Arthur therefore engage in just wars, at least in so far as they fight in wars that have a just cause. However it was also recognised that a war must be fought justly, that is, those who engaged in a just war must acknowledge certain constraints on their behaviour towards their enemies. It is in this area that criticism of the Knight and of Arthur seems strongest. Terry Jones cites Runciman's account of the brutal massacre by the crusaders of the inhabitants of Alexandria:

They spared no one. The native Christians and the Jews suffered as much as the Moslems; and even the European merchants settled in the city saw their factories and storehouses ruthlessly looted .... Houses were entered, and householders who did not immediately hand over all their possessions were slaughtered with their families. Some five thousand prisoners, Christians and Jews as well as Moslems, were taken to be sold as slaves. A long line of horses, asses and camels carried the loot to the ships in the harbour and there having performed their task were killed. The whole city stank with the odour of human and animal corpses.<sup>11</sup>

In respect of *Morte Arthure* the case seems even stronger for whereas Chaucer simply mentions the Knight's presence at Alexandria the alliterative poet gives an unsparing account of the suffering and devastation caused by Arthur's army at the siege of Metz and in the *chevauchée* through Lombardy and Tuscany:

Into Tuskane he tourneȝ, when þus wele tymede,  
Takes townnes full tyte, with towrres full heghe;  
Walles he welte down, wondyd knyghteȝ,  
Towrres he turnes and turmentez þe pople,  
Wroghte wedewes full wlonke wrotherayle synges,  
Ofte wery and wepe and wryngen theire handis;  
And all he wastys with werre, thare he awaye rydez,  
Thaire welthes and theire wonnynges, wandrethe he wroghte.

(3150-3157)

<sup>10</sup>*The Tree of Battles of Honoré Bonet*, ed. G. W. Coopland (Liverpool, 1949), pp.126-8.

<sup>11</sup>S. Runciman, *A History of the Crusades* (Cambridge, 1951-4, 3 vols), iii.446.

Yet contemporary accounts of the laws governing the conduct of war hardly bear out these conclusions:

We might cite for example Bouvet's account of the behaviour required of soldiers towards their enemies:

... the opinions of our masters are to the effect that if in fact the king of England's subjects give him aid and contenance for the war against the king of France, the French can make war on the English people and take their possessions and lands and all that they can sieze, without being required in the sight of God to return them ... if on both sides war is decided upon and begun by the councils of the two kings, the soldiery may make war freely; and if sometimes the humble and innocent suffer harm and lose their goods it cannot be otherwise ...<sup>12</sup>

What making war 'freely' in the lands of one's enemies meant is made abundantly clear in many accounts in the chronicles; in, for example, the Lanercost chronicler's matter of fact account of the depredations of Edward III's army in Scotland:

he took part of the army and marched beyond the Scottish mountains, burning Aberdeen and other towns, taking spoil and destroying the crops which were nearly ripe for harvest, trampling them down with horses and troops ...<sup>13</sup>

It appears clearly too in the French chronicler Jean de Venette's account of the French attack on Winchelsea in 1359:

They hoped that those who had not been able, by reason of God's disfavor, or perchance of their own demerits, to defend themselves on their own ground from the enemy might with humility and diligence recover on foreign soil the fame and wealth lost at home and return with honour and renown by God's aid. They put to sea on the fourteenth day of March, crossed to England, and took the town of Winchelsea by force of arms. They sacked it and burned it, slew the inhabitants and after two days returned to their own land.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>*Tree of Battles*, pp.153-4.

<sup>13</sup>*Chronicon de Lanercost*, ed. J. Stevenson (Edinburgh, 1839), p.286. I have quoted from the translation of Sir H. Maxwell (Glasgow, 1913), p.298.

<sup>14</sup>*The Chronicle of Jean de Venette*, ed. and trans. J. Birdsall and R. A. Newhall (New York, 1953), p.97.

Not only was such brutality towards enemies considered legitimate in a just war, it might even, as the account of Jean de Venette suggests, appear admirable. Thus John Gower in his *Vox Clamantis* (c. 1378-81), urged the young king Richard II to model himself on his famous father, the Black Prince:

France felt the effects of him; and Spain in contemplating the powers with which he stoutly subjected her, was fearful of him. Throwing his foes into disorder, he hurled his troops into the midst of his enemies and broke up their course of march like a lion .... Just as the wild boar tears the swift hounds to pieces with its deadly jaws when it is driven from the woods by their clamorous barking, so did he crush the bolder enemies near him, whom he struck with the murderous jaws of his sword. He won all his fierce battles like a lion. He attacked strongholds annihilating the people. In order to seize booty, he boldly penetrated deep among his antagonists and the enemies' necks were subjugated by his hand.<sup>15</sup>

Similarly, Honoré Bouvet, reflecting upon the qualities required of a good king, argued that on occasion, ruthlessness was a desirable trait in a ruler. He summed up the qualities required of a warrior king as follows:

The king who wishes to be a good warrior,  
Let him be wise, proud and brave,  
And lord of his people,  
As the hawk of the quail.  
And let him be merciful  
And rigorous when need is.  
In great tasks let him be first  
If he would be fortunate in arms.<sup>16</sup>

Close in spirit to these views in Chandos Herald's admiring account of the depredations of Edward III's army during the Thiérache campaign:

But the English to disport themselves put everything to fire and flame.  
There they made many a widow lady and many a poor child orphan.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup>*The Complete Works of John Gower*, ed. G. C. Macauley (Oxford, 1899-1902, 4 vols), iv.257-8. I have quoted from the translation of E. W. Stockton, *The Major Latin Works of John Gower* (Seattle, 1962), p.242.

<sup>16</sup>*Tree of Battles*, p.212.

<sup>17</sup>*The Life of the Black Prince*, ed. and trans. M. K. Pope and E. C. Lodge (Oxford, 1910), p.137.



Since the context makes it clear that this behaviour is approved, even admired, there is a considerable reason to doubt the claims of those critics who argue that the poet's reference to Arthur making many widows is certain proof of the king's ruthlessness.

From this examination of contemporary evidence we may conclude that the devastation and suffering caused by Arthur's army, and that which Mr Jones claims was a feature of the campaigns in which the Knight took part, was both usual and legitimate according to the contemporary *ius in bello*. As C. T. Allmand has reminded us, fourteenth century warfare involved many people who did not actually take up arms.<sup>18</sup> Those who provided the food and transport and equipment for armies, and even those who contributed taxes to pay them, could be held to have given 'aid and countenance' to the war and were therefore legitimate objects of attack. Their homes, crops and livestock could be destroyed and their goods taken as booty. These were the tactics employed by 'official' armies, not only mercenaries as Mr Jones would claim. As H. J. Hewitt has observed,

... medieval war did not consist wholly or mainly in battles and sieges with the marches necessary to effect encounters. It consisted very largely in the exertion of pressure on the civil population and this pressure took the form of destruction, of working havoc. The ends sought in twentieth-century warfare by blockade and aerial bombardment had to be sought in the fourteenth century by operations on the ground. That in recent periods civilians suffered in mind, body and estate and were intended to suffer, is universally allowed. The circumstances of the fourteenth century, though not wholly parallel, are sufficiently similar to enable us to infer the purpose and the effect of the devastation carried out in that period.<sup>19</sup>

In countenancing attacks upon enemy civilians the fourteenth-century *ius in bello* recognised their contribution to the war effort and the military value of demoralizing a largely defenceless population.

Siege warfare, as Michael Walzer notes, is the oldest form of total war, directed as much against civilians as against soldiers:

When a city is encircled and deprived of food, it is not the expectation of the attackers that the garrison will hold out until individual soldiers ... drop dead in the streets. The death of the ordinary inhabitants of

<sup>18</sup>*Society at War* (Edinburgh, 1973), pp.131-2.

<sup>19</sup>H. J. Hewitt, *The Organization of War under Edward III* (Manchester, 1966), pp.111-12.

the city is expected to force the hand of the civilian or military leadership. The goal is surrender; the means is not the defeat of the enemy army, but the fearful spectacle of the civilian dead.<sup>20</sup>

The special severity of siege warfare was, as M. H. Keen has shown, recognised in the fourteenth century *ius in bello*.

In a city taken by storm almost any license was condoned by the law. Only churches and churchmen were technically secure, but even they were not often spared. Women could be raped, and men killed out of hand. All the goods of the inhabitants were regarded as forfeit. If lives were spared, it was only through the clemency of the victorious captain; and spoliation was systematic.<sup>21</sup>

The reasons for this severity were probably twofold. In the first place, as Keen notes, the art of defence was highly developed in the later Middle Ages and it took a great deal of time, equipment and expense to reduce the walls of a fortress. In those circumstances the extreme penalties of systematic spoliation and slaughter allowed by the law must have induced many a garrison commander not to resist to the last. Secondly, as Keen also points out, to refuse the summons of a prince who claimed a town as of right was an insult to his majesty and punishable as such. Those who resisted were guilty of contumacy and treason, and, if overwhelmed, their spoliation and destruction was a sentence of justice and not an act of war.

No legal authority of the fourteenth century or earlier refers to these special laws of siege warfare but they were applied in the courts and the chronicles provide many instances of them being put into effect.<sup>22</sup> Froissart's account of the taking of Limoges by the Black Prince in 1370 is only the best known example. A further interesting source of evidence is to be found in Christine de Pisan's *Livre des Faits d'Armes et de Chevalerie*. Here Christine is paraphrasing some advice which the Roman author Vegetius offers to the commanders of besieging armies which have succeeded in breaching the defences of a city. He warns them that this moment of triumph may also be the moment of greatest danger, for, as they pour through the narrow streets, the defenders, using windows and roofs as vantage points, have still the power to inflict great damage on them:

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<sup>20</sup>M. Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations* (New York, 1977), p.161.

<sup>21</sup>M. H. Keen, *The Laws of War in the Later Middle Ages* (London, 1965), pp.121-2.

<sup>22</sup>Keen cites Monstrelet on the spoliation of Chartres in 1431: 'Quand est de parler de ravissements, violacions et autres besognes extraordinaires, il en fut fait selon les coutumes de la guerre, comme en ville conquise' (*The Laws of War*, p.121).

Innumerabilibus declaratur exemplis, saepe caesos ad interneccionem hostes, qui pervaserant civitatem. Quod sine dubio evenit, si oppidani muros ac turres retinuerint vel altiora occupaverint loca. Tunc enim de fenestris ac tectis omnis aetas ac sexus irrumpentes obruit saxis aliisque generibus telorum.<sup>23</sup>

When Christine paraphrases this passage she gives it a quite different orientation:

we putte cas that they of the ost shulde haue doo so muche that they had wonne the walles / the towres & the yates of the cyte / shall they of withinne let hem self be slayne therfore as bestes / & by bussument & fere to be taken as men take the quayle vndre the sperhawke / Nay / but as valyaunt vasselles deffendyng alwayes to the dethe & hauynge styll a gode hope / they ought to mounte vp to the wyndowes of the houses & vpon þe thakkes / & with grete stones & tyles / sedyng water / hote asshis & quyk lyme / they shall kyll & slee theyre enemyes as thei go here & there by grete hepes for to spoylle the towne / & as they shall trowe to sette the houses on a fyre thenne shall they of the towne brayne hem with stones whiche they shall caste doune / and so dere they ought to selle theyre flesshe that hit be not for their enemyes avaylle<sup>24</sup>

Christine's exhortation, addressed not to the attackers (as in the original) but to the defenders, is offered in the full knowledge of the fate which by law befell those in a city taken by assault. Having nothing to look forward to but inevitable death and spoliation, they are urged to sell their lives dearly.

From the evidence reviewed here it is clear that the sacking of Alexandria and the slaughter of its inhabitants, terrible as it was, was in no way unusual. Nor have we any indication that its sufferings at the hands of the crusaders aroused the horror and condemnation of contemporaries as Mr Jones supposes. Indeed contemporary evidence suggests that the news of the city's fall gave fresh impetus to the call for a large-scale crusade. Petrarch thought the taking of Alexandria was 'a great and memorable feat and of immense value in widening the empire of our religion'. The pope was delighted and immediately tried to arrange reinforcements for Peter of Cyprus. King Charles of France promised an army and such notable knights as Bertrand du Guesclin, Constable of France, and Amadeus of Savoy took the Cross.<sup>25</sup> Although in the end these efforts came to

<sup>23</sup>*Epitoma Rei Militaris*, ed. C. Lang (Leipzig, 1885), p.146.

<sup>24</sup>*Book of Fayttes of Armes*, p.176.

<sup>25</sup>Runciman, *op.cit.*, iii.447.

nothing, there is every reason to believe that the taking of Alexandria was generally hailed with delight in Christendom.

It was not only the laws governing sieges that justified the sacking and pillaging of Alexandria but also the laws governing crusades. Medieval legal theory recognised three categories of just war, each with its own distinctive *ius in bello*. The first of these was feudal war or *guerre couverte*, a form of private war between feudal vassals which did not confer any legal right to take booty or to put men to ransom. The second was public war or *bellum hostile*, a war declared on the authority of a prince, in which it was legally permissible to ransom prisoners, to take booty and to waste the lands of the enemy. The Hundred Years' War was generally fought according to the conventions of the *bellum hostile*. The third category of just war was a crusade, often called a Roman war or *guerre mortelle*, that is a war to the death without the privilege of ransom.<sup>26</sup> That such distinctions were known to those who engaged in war is clear from many references in the chronicles. For example, Froissart records that at the battle of Montiel Du Guesclin ordered that no prisoners should be taken because of the many Jews and infidels in the army of Pedro the Cruel, and at Roosebeque the same order was given because the Flemings, as supporters of Pope Urban, were considered schismatics.<sup>27</sup> These distinctions help to explain the brutal massacre that followed the taking of Alexandria. They may also help to explain Chaucer's reference to the Knight's fifteen mortal battles:

At mortal batailles hadde he been fiftene,  
And foughten for oure feith at Tramysse  
In lystes thries, and ay slayn his foo. (I(A)61-63)<sup>28</sup>

Mr Jones claims that the intention of these lines is ironic and that the Knight is being condemned for unchivalrously killing his opponents. It seems more likely that Chaucer was emphasizing that the Knight had fought 'for oure feith' and that he had engaged in battles fought under the terms of the *guerre mortelle*, which was war to the death.

The case of Arthur's siege of Metz is more complex and requires a fuller understanding of the laws of siege warfare. As Keen has shown, a besieged city or fortress could fall to its attackers in one or two ways: either it could surrender or treaty on *appointment* or it could be taken by storm. The legal consequences in these two instances were very different. In the first case, the defenders could

<sup>26</sup>Keen, *op. cit.*, p.104.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid. p.105.

<sup>28</sup>*The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. F. N. Robinson (Boston, 1957), p.17.

make a treaty with the besiegers which guaranteed the lives and property of the citizens. In the second, as we have seen, the lives and property of the inhabitants were at the mercy of the besiegers. Furthermore, there is some evidence to show that there were recognised conventions governing the circumstances in which a besieged town or fortress could make such a treaty which was really a conditional surrender. There is, for example, a curious discussion in Bouvet's *L'Arbre des Batailles* on the legal conventions of siege warfare:

in my youth I heard the question discussed among knights who said that when one country is at war with another, and a truce is made for a time, this does not mean that a city or a walled town or a fortress open to capture by escalade cannot lawfully be captured.<sup>29</sup>

Bouvet professes not to remember the arguments put forward by the knights to justify this apparent breach in the conventions of a truce, but they are probably summed up in the phrase 'a city or a walled town or a fortress open to capture by escalade'. What is implied here is that no besieged city or fortress could enter into a truce or treaty to save itself from the consequences of a successful assault *after* its walls had been breached. In those circumstances the only options open to the defenders were to fight on to the last or to make an unconditional surrender, which in legal terms was the same thing as falling by assault. Thus, when the citizens of Calais tried to reopen negotiations for a conditional surrender with Edward III after King Philip's army had failed to relieve the town, Edward rejected their offer. Instead he forced them to the humiliating ritual whereby the garrison marched out bareheaded with naked swords in their hands, and the burgesses with halters about their necks. This was a sign that even though it had not been stormed Edward had taken the town by force of arms and that the lives and property of its citizens were at his mercy. Commines gives a similar account of the surrender of Liège to Charles the Rash which makes clear that in the case of an unconditional surrender the citizens might suffer the same fate as from a successful assault. A deputation of three hundred citizens went out to meet the duke,

clothed only in their shirts, with their legs and heads bare. They brought the duke the keys of the city and delivered themselves to him unreservedly to do with as he wished, only begging him not to burn or pillage it.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>*Tree of Battles*, p.189.

<sup>30</sup>*Philippe de Commines: Mémoires*, ed. J. Calmette and G. Durville (Paris, 1924-5, 3 vols), i.111. I have quoted from the translation by M. Jones (Harmondsworth, 1972), p.125.

These details are all highly relevant to the account of taking of Metz in *Morte Arthure*. According to the poet Metz falls by assault: 'Sothely the same day was with asawte wonnen' (3012). Yet the account of Arthur's entry into the city bears no relation to the many historical accounts of the entry of besieging armies into cities taken by assault. Instead of the systematic pillaging and destruction, exacted as punishment for contumacy, Arthur issues orders designed to protect the citizens:

In iche leueré on lowde the Kynge did crye,  
 Of payne of lyf and lym and lesyng of londes,  
 That no lele ligemane, that to hym lonngede,  
 Sulde lye be no ladysse, no be no lele maydysn,  
 Ne ne no burgesse wyffe, better ne werse,  
 Ne no biernez mysebide, that to þe burghe longede. (3078-3083)

Punishment is to fall only on the leaders of the community, the rebel duke and his closest associates:

The Duke to Douere es dyghte, and all his dere knyghtez,  
 To duelle in dawngere and dole þe dayes of hys lyue. (3066-3067)

Even this is, by the standards of the age, moderate punishment, for the penalty for treason was death.

It is instructive to compare these arrangements with Foissart's account of the punishment meted out to Limoges when it fell by assault to the Black Prince in 1370:

There were pitiful scenes. Men, women and children flung themselves on their knees before the Prince, crying: 'Have mercy on us, gentle sir'. But he was so inflamed with anger that he would not listen. Neither man nor woman was heeded, but all who could be found were put to the sword, including many who were in no way to blame. I do not understand how they could have failed to take pity on people who were too unimportant to have committed treason. Yet they paid for it, and paid more dearly than the leaders who had committed it.<sup>31</sup>

Despite Froissart's protest it is clear that the Black Prince was acting within his legal rights in punishing all the inhabitants of Limoges for contumacy. At Metz, Arthur goes beyond what prevailing legal conventions require of him and distinguishes between the guilty few and the innocent majority.

<sup>31</sup>*Oeuvres de Froissart*, ed. Kervyn de Lettenhove (Brussels, 1870-77, 30 vols), xvii.501-2. I have quoted from the translation by G. Brereton, *Froissart: Chronicles* (Harmondsworth, 1968), p.178.

Juliet Vale has suggested that the surrender of Metz is unconditional.<sup>32</sup> This would not conflict with the poet's statement that the city was taken by assault, for, as we have seen, these two terms were legally the same, implying that the conquered city was legally open to sacking and pillaging. In this case Arthur's magnanimous behaviour in protecting the lives of the citizens, and even foregoing the humiliating ritual signifying unconditional surrender, which Edward III demanded at Calais, would be remarkable enough. However, if we look closely at the details of the surrender of Metz, it appears that the poet, who had a wide knowledge of the laws of war, intended to represent Arthur's behaviour as a conqueror in an even more magnanimous light. We have already noted the existence of the legal convention whereby a besieged city or fortress was allowed to make terms for a conditional surrender which would save the lives and property of its inhabitants only while it was still defensible. Thus at Calais Edward III insisted on unconditional surrender because the army of Philip of France had been unable to raise the siege and the town had been so reduced by the protracted siege that the garrison was no longer able to offer any defence. From the account of the taking of Metz it appears that the town is in such imminent danger from Arthur's forces, for its citizens are already making efforts to escape with their portable property in anticipation of the customary pillaging and slaughter (3068-3071). The Countess of Crasyne asks Arthur for mercy, 'Or þe cete be sodaynly with assaute wonnen' (3053). What she is pleading for in fact is that Metz should be allowed a belated chance to negotiate a conditional surrender, even though the city is no longer defensible. Arthur responds immediately, ordering an end to the assault, promising the safety of the inhabitants and receiving the keys of the city in formal token of its surrender.

The significance of this will become clearer if we compare the surrender of Metz with the fall of Jerusalem as recounted in another alliterative poem, *The*

<sup>32</sup>'Law and diplomacy in the alliterative *Morte Arthure*', *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, xxiii (1979), 39. Juliet Vale has objected to the use of Bouvet's *L'Arbre Des Batailles* as a guide to the interpretation of *Morte Arthure* on the grounds that his treatise was not widely circulated until after the first third of the fifteenth century (p.36). However, this objection would be valid only if Bouvet were presenting original ideas. In fact his only innovation is in presenting well-established legal principles in the vernacular for readers who were neither lawyers nor academics. That the laws of war he describes were already well known is clear from many other contemporary sources. Among these may be mentioned the numerous contracts for military service which have survived and also the *Scalacronica* of Sir Thomas Gray (ed. J. Stevenson, Edinburgh, 1836). This chronicle, which Gray wrote while a prisoner in Edinburgh, is particularly valuable because the author was himself a knight whose military service was mostly performed on the Scottish borders.

*Siege of Jerusalem*, which tells of the taking of Jerusalem in 72 A.D. by the Roman army under Titus.<sup>33</sup> There the Jewish defenders refuse Titus's offer of a negotiated surrender until the city's defences have been breached. Only then do they offer the Roman commander the keys of the city and plead to be allowed to surrender on terms. Their situation is the same as that at Metz when the Countess of Crasyne pleads for a chance to negotiate terms while the city is in imminent danger of falling by assault. However, Titus refuses their pleas because, 'We han geten vs a gate / agen gour wille' (*Siege*, 1215). He reminds them that by law they are too late to negotiate a conditional surrender because the city's defences have already been breached. Consequently Jerusalem falls by force of arms and the Roman victory is the signal for the wholesale pillaging and slaughter legally permitted in a city taken by assault.

Titus sticks to the letter of the law: Arthur, in a comparable situation, readily forgoes his legal rights and offers Metz what is in fact a belated chance to surrender conditionally. Thus his entry into the city is marked, not by the orgy of killing and destruction that accompanied the taking of Limoges and Alexandria, but by orders to protect the citizens. Notable too is Arthur's concern to re-establish peace and good government in the land he has conquered (3090-3093).

Although the details are different the account of the taking of Como provided in *Morte Arthure* emphasizes the same themes. The city is taken by stratagem, a legitimate practice in a just war, and one that avoids the expenses of a long siege.<sup>34</sup> Florent and his men lie in ambush awaiting the opening of the city's gates in the early morning to allow the herdsmen to take their animals out to pasture. Their irruption into Como is sudden and violent:

Fowre stretis or þay stynte they stroyen fore euere (3127)

Nonetheless the violence is quickly over and, despite Matthew's view that the poet intended to condemn Arthur's knights, it appears likely that contemporary readers with experience of warfare would have approved of Florent's successful stratagem, not only because it avoided the expense of a long siege but also because it

<sup>33</sup>*The Siege of Jerusalem*, ed. E. Kolbing and M. Day (EETS, original series, clxxxviii, 1932).

<sup>34</sup>Bouvet gives what is, by the fourteenth century, a thoroughly traditional account of the legitimacy of stratagems in a just war. He cites the usual example of Joshua at the siege of Ai (*Joshua*, Ch.8). Deceptions which involve breaking an oath made with one's enemy are forbidden, 'For the laws say that once a pledge is given to one's enemy it must be kept.' However, provided that no oath-breaking is involved, deceptions used to gain tactical advantage over the enemy are permissible (*Tree of Battles*, pp.154-5). Many such stratagems, drawn from the *Stratagemata* of the Roman author Frontinus, are described in Christine de Pisan's *Fayttes of Armes*.



minimized the sufferings of defenders as well as attackers. As in the account of the siege of Metz, the author seems determined to portray Arthur as a king who is ruthless to his enemies only in so far as he has to be, and who desists from military action as soon as he has gained his objectives. He uses war as a means of gaining peace:

Now es the Conquerour in Combe and his courte holdes  
 Within þe kyde castell, with kynges enoyntede;  
 Reconsaillez the comouns þat to þe kyth lengez,  
 Comfourthes þe careful with kynghtly wordez;  
 Made a captayne kene a knyghte of hys awen,  
 Bot all þe contré and he full sone ware accordide. (3128-3133)

There is no question of taking military action against Milan, for the lord of that city bows to the inevitable and accepts Arthur as his sovereign (3134-3135).

To sum up, Arthur's behaviour at Metz and throughout his campaign in Lombardy and Tuscany, when compared with contemporary records of the laws and practice of war, does not substantiate the claims made by Matthews and others that the poet intended to portray him critically. On the contrary, it may be argued that the poet devised these additional scenes, in part at least, to show Arthur as an ideal king and conqueror. Few medieval commanders would have foregone their customary rights to plunder and destroy as Arthur did at Metz, and fewer still would have had the absolute control over their troops required to prevent the excesses that normally followed the taking of a city, for, as Keen has observed, such opportunities for profit were a major attraction of soldiering in the period. The attacks on Metz and Como, and the *chevauchée* in Lombardy and Tuscany, are violent and destructive, but, as we have seen, such ruthlessness towards enemies was considered legitimate in a just war and an admirable trait in a ruler. Furthermore, in every instance, the violence ceases as soon as Arthur has achieved his desired goal. The king exemplifies the teachings of the theologians from Augustine onwards, that war is justified by the desire to achieve peace and concord.<sup>35</sup> Thus, the poet stresses Arthur's eagerness to re-establish peace and

<sup>35</sup>Even those who wage a just war intend peace. They are not then hostile to peace, except that evil peace that our lord did not come to send on the earth. So Augustine again says, "We do not seek peace in order to wage war, but we go to war to gain peace. Therefore be peaceful even while you are at war, that you may overcome your enemy and bring him to the prosperity of peace". *St. Thomas Aquinas; Summa Theologiae*, IIa IIae 40, art. 1, responsio, ed. cit., xxxv.85. Bouvet paraphrases this argument: 'War by its very nature seeks nothing other than to set wrong right, and to turn dissention to peace, in accordance with Scripture' (*Tree of Battles*, p.125).

civil government in the wake of war. As he progresses through Europe he brings to those places he has conquered that peace and stability that characterize his rule in Britain (471-478).

At his moment of triumph, when his claim to the Roman empire is finally recognised, Arthur announces a new goal, a crusade to the Holy Land. His ultimate aspiration is that to which Chaucer's Knight has dedicated his life. It has often been assumed that fervour for the crusade declined in the course of the fourteenth century, but there is much evidence to suggest that the crusading ideal was still a potent force. Some of the most admired knights of the age went on crusade. Henry of Grosmont, famed for his piety as much as for his chivalric virtues, went on crusade with the Teutonic Knights.<sup>36</sup> Henry, earl of Derby, later Henry IV, campaigned in Prussia in 1390 and 1392 and made a reconnaissance trip to the Holy Land in 1393 in preparation for a new crusade expected to be jointly led by the kings of France and England. Among those who joined the new crusading Order of the Passion, founded by Philippe de Mézières to spearhead that projected crusade, were many members of the English nobility, including the dukes of Lancaster, Gloucester and York and the earls of Huntingdon, Rutland, Nottingham and Northumberland.<sup>37</sup> Chaucer's friends the Scrope family were notable for their crusading activities: Sir William Scrope of Masham was at Satalye, Sir Stephen Scrope at Alexandria and Sir Geoffrey Scrope was killed crusading in Lithuania.<sup>38</sup> All these are campaigns in which Chaucer's Knight took part.

This evidence suggests that to go on crusade still represented the highest aspirations of the knight in Chaucer's day. There is also evidence to suggest that it still represented the highest aspirations of a Christian prince. Froissart (here borrowing from the chronicle of Jean le Bel) records that on his deathbed Robert the Bruce made a solemn request of Lord James Douglas:

You know that I have had much to do and have suffered many troubles during the time I have lived, to support the rights of my crown: at the time I was most occupied, I made a vow, the nonaccomplishment of which gives me much uneasiness—I vowed, that, if I could finish my wars in such a manner, that I might have quiet to govern peaceably, I would go and make war against the enemies of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the adversaries of the Christian faith. To this point my heart has

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<sup>36</sup>J. Barnie, *War in Medieval Society* (London, 1974), pp.59-61.

<sup>37</sup>J. J. N. Palmer, *England, France and Christendom 1377-1399* (London, 1972), pp.189-90.

<sup>38</sup>Robinson, ed. cit., p.652.

always leaned; our Lord was not willing and gave me so much to do in my lifetime, and this last expedition has lasted so long, followed by this heavy sickness, that, since my body cannot accomplish what my heart wishes, I will send my heart instead of my body to fulfil my vow.<sup>39</sup>

The result of this appeal is well known. Douglas undertook to carry the Bruce's heart to the Holy Land. Instead he went to Spain to fight against the Moslems of Granada, carrying his king's heart with him into battle. He was killed in action, and his body, along with the heart of Robert the Bruce, was brought back for burial in Scotland. According to the author of the *Brut*, Henry V too, as he lay dying at the Château de Vincennes expressed the same unfulfilled desire to go on crusade to the Holy Land.

And when he saw he shold dye, he made his testament, and ordeyned many thinges nobley for his soul, And devoutly receyved al þe rightes of holy churche, in so fer-forth, þat when he was enoynted, he said þe service with þe preste; And at þe verse of þe psalme 'Miserere mei deus' þat was 'Benigne fac dunc in bona voluntate tua, Syon, ut edificantur muri Ierusalem', he bad tarie þer, and said þus: 'O good Lorde, þou knowest þat myne entent hath bene, & yet is, if I might lyve, to reedify þe walles of Ierusalem' & þen þe preest proceded forth, & made An end; & Anone aftyre, þis moste noble prince and victoriouse kyng, flour in his tym of Cristen chivalrie, whom al þe world dovypted, gaf his soul in-to þe handes of God, and died.<sup>40</sup>

These death-bed wishes have their counterparts in the frequent references to the need for a crusade in the correspondence between French and English kings throughout the period of the Hundred Years' War. In 1340 Edward III composed a letter for dissemination throughout France, justifying his claim to the French throne, which stresses the familiar theme that peace in Europe was an essential prerequisite for a crusade:

And we tell you again that our greatest desire is that God, working through us and the good people, should grant peace and love among Christians, and especially among you, so that a Christian army may go in haste to the Holy Land to deliver it from the hands of wicked men; this, with God's help we aspire to do.

<sup>39</sup>*Chroniques*, ed. cit., xvii.2-30. Cf. *Chronique de Jean le Bel*, ed. J. Viard and E. Déprez (Soc. de l'Histoire de France, 1904-5, 2 vols), i.83-5. See also Barbour's *Bruce*, ed. W. W. Skeat (Scottish Text Society, Edinburgh and London, 1894, 2 vols), ii.178.

<sup>40</sup>*The Brut*, ed. F. W. D. Brie (EETS, original series, cxxxi and cxxxvi, 1906-8), ii.493.

King Philip, in replying to this letter, accused Edward of preventing the projected crusade by fomenting war among Christians.<sup>41</sup> It would be unwise to dismiss either these claims or the words attributed to Robert the Bruce and Henry V on their death-beds as mere propaganda. They do at least show what kind of ideal kings felt they had to live up to.

There is considerable evidence to suggest that the calls for an end to the war in Europe in order to make possible a combined crusade to the Holy Land became more insistent in the last decades of the fourteenth century. J. J. N. Palmer has shown how important a part was played by plans for a joint crusade in the peace negotiations between France and England in the period 1377-99.<sup>42</sup> In England, John Gower in his *Vox Clamantis* (the first version of which was written about 1378) fulminated against churchmen who helped to stir up wars among Christians and neglected to encourage a crusade to the Holy Land.<sup>43</sup> His *In Praise of Peace*, addressed to the new king Henry IV in 1399, has sometimes been seen as a pacifist tract. However Gower is no pacifist for although in this work he speaks eloquently of the miseries of war and of the joys of peace he also specifically restates the right of a prince to make war in a just cause. *In Praise of Peace* should more properly be seen as an urgent plea to Henry to continue Richard II's policy of seeking an end to the war with France. For Gower, one of the most compelling reasons for concluding a peace with France is the urgent need for a crusade.

The worldes cause is waited overal,  
 Ther ben the werres redi to the fulle;  
 Bot Cristes oghne cause in special,  
 Ther ben the swerdes and the speres dulle;<sup>44</sup>

In France, Philippe de Mézières, formerly chancellor to the crusading King Peter of Cyprus and later tutor and counsellor to Charles VI of France, tirelessly preached the same text of peace in Europe and a joint crusade to the Holy Land. His aspirations were expressed not only in such treatises as the *Songe du Vieil Pelerin* and the *Epistre au Roi Richart*, addressed to Richard II in 1395, but also in his founding of the new international crusading Order of the Passion that was intended to spearhead the projected crusade.<sup>45</sup> This order, as we have seen, attracted some of the leading members of the nobility in England, including the king's uncles, as well as important French nobles. As well as a propagandist

<sup>41</sup>Allmand, *op. cit.*, pp.147-9.

<sup>42</sup>*Op. cit.* See especially Ch.5, 'Christendom and the Turk'.

<sup>43</sup>*Ed. cit.*, iii.124-5.

<sup>44</sup>*Ed. cit.*, iii.487.

<sup>45</sup>Palmer, *op. cit.*, pp.186-8.

Philippe was also a diplomat, and his role (and that of his disciple Robert the Hermit) in the peace negotiations with England underlines the significant part plans for a joint crusade played in efforts to end the war between France and England.

It is indeed tempting to suggest that it was in this period, when men's minds were preoccupied with the need for peace in Europe that would make possible a combined crusade against the Turks, that the poet of *Morte Arthure* created his unique vision of Arthur as ideal Christian warrior king and emperor. For a moment, before the Wheel of Fortune turns, Europe is united in peace and harmony under a strong and just emperor. Briefly, Arthur realises the ideal of a united Christendom able to embark upon that much desired crusade to win back the Holy Land for Christianity.

It was, of course, a vision that was strongly at variance with the political realities of late fourteenth century Europe. The war between England and France, which had come to involve almost every nation in Western Europe, continued without any apparent hope of a lasting peace being achieved. The hostilities between the two armed camps were intensified by the schism in the Church, for France recognised the pope in Avignon while England supported a rival pope in Rome. The Turks were making advances in the east while a divided and demoralized Christendom seemed powerless to oppose them. It does not seem unlikely that in such conditions the poet's vision of the great national hero Arthur as a Christian emperor uniting Christendom in peace and harmony would have appealed to English audiences of the last decades of the fourteenth century.

If Arthur can be said to embody the ideal of a Christian emperor for this period then Chaucer's Knight may be said to embody its ideal of knighthood. Mr Jones notes that none of the great English victories of the war with France, Crècy, Poitiers and Nájera, are listed in the account of the Knight's military career, and argues that an English audience would regard these as significant omissions that showed the Knight to be a freelance mercenary who preferred to serve abroad for profit rather than engage in wars in his country's defence. However, the last of these battles was fought in 1367, about twenty years before the General Prologue was written and in the intervening period English armies had been by no means as successful. Enthusiasm for the war was declining and there was a sense of war-weariness, even despair; peace seemed impossible to achieve. Those feelings were intensified, as we have seen, by the conviction that continued war and schism in Christian Europe were making it impossible to mount a new crusade. Very often it was the knights who fought in the war with France who were blamed for the failure to reach a peace settlement. In his *Epistre au Roi Richart* Philippe de Mézières characterized the knights of England and France as Scylla and

Charybdis, the twin hazards between which the kings of England and France must steer a perilous course for peace.<sup>46</sup> Gower accused the English knights of urging the continuance of the war with France in order to line their own pockets with profit from ransoms and booty, an accusation also echoed by Froissart.<sup>47</sup>

Viewed in the context of these contemporary opinions, the apparent poverty of the Knight and the fact that his military career had been spent overseas on crusade must surely have been intended as an idealized portrait. He cannot be accused of helping to prolong the conflict in Europe for his own profit, nor of preventing the crusade. If Chaucer did indeed intend an ironic commentary on contemporary chivalry, then surely it is to be found in the contrast between the idealized, ascetic, even anachronistic, portrait of the Knight and his real life contemporaries who were filling their coffers by fighting in Europe. That possibility is strengthened by the striking contrasts in the appearance and careers of the Knight and his son the Squire. Whereas the father is poorly dressed the son is lavishly equipped, and whereas the father has fought in crusades against the heathen his son has taken part in *chevauchées* in 'Flanders, in Artoys and Pycardie' (I(A)85-86) against his 'even Christian'. It is possible, as Robinson has suggested, that this is a reference to the so-called 'crusade' of Bishop Despencer of 1383, one of those many 'crusades' of the period of the schism where Christian fought against Christian which, as Mr Jones rightly remarks, were the scandal of the age.<sup>48</sup> The Squire's appearance and military exploits would appear to fit the description of those knights whom Gower, Philippe de Mézières and others believed were prolonging the war in Europe for their own financial benefit.

Some additional evidence of Chaucer's attitude to the war of England and France may be found in his choice of *The Tale of Melibeus* as his own contribution to the entertainment of the pilgrims on the road to Canterbury. Mr Jones argues that the tale is an anti-war tract and that, read alongside the account of the Knight, it is confirmation of Chaucer's pacifist views. However, *The Tale of Melibeus* is no pacifist document, any more than is Gower's *In Praise of Peace*. Both works recognise the prince's right to make war in a just cause, but they also stress the misery brought about by war and the need for patience and restraint. Neither author is a pacifist in the modern sense of the word. Both seem to be giving expression to the war-weariness and disquiet felt by men who could see no end to the conflict between England and France that had for so long turned much of

<sup>46</sup>Philippe de Mézière's *Epistre au Roi Richard*, ed. G. W. Coopland (Liverpool, 1975), pp.60-1.

<sup>47</sup>See Barnie, *op. cit.*, pp.125-6.

<sup>48</sup>Robinson, *ed. cit.*, p.653.

Christian Europe into two warring camps. At about the same time, Philippe de Mézières was counselling patience to Charles VI of France and urging him to be prepared to relinquish some of his rights in his dispute with the king of England in order to accomplish that peace that would make possible a joint crusade to the East.<sup>49</sup> In his *In Praise of Peace* Gower, like Philippe de Mézières, makes explicit the connection between the desire for a peace settlement between England and France and the need for a crusade. Is it not possible that Chaucer, characteristically always less willing than Gower to pronounce explicitly on political affairs, has in his portrait of the Knight as a crusader and in his choice of the *Tale of Melibeus* made an implicit statement of support for this programme?

Such an interpretation of the portrait of the Knight fits the historical evidence and also provides an answer to the question that clearly perplexes Mr Jones: how could Chaucer (whom we feel, no doubt quite rightly, to have been a humane and compassionate man) have admired a man who went to war for the sake of religion? The immediate answer is that, in the last decades of the fourteenth century, men of conscience could and did turn with fervour to the idea of a crusade as a war which would restore harmony and peace to a Christendom wracked with war and schism and unite it in a holy and just cause. The more general answer must be that we too readily assume that Chaucer and the unknown poet of *Morte Arthure* had the same preconceptions and the same ideals as late twentieth century liberal intellectuals. In our age the military hero has suffered an eclipse; neither can we espouse the ideal of a war to further the cause of religion. It was not so at the end of the fourteenth century. The Knight and Arthur are heroes created out of the needs and aspirations of their own age.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>*Le Songe du Vieil Pelerin*, ed. G. W. Coopland (Cambridge, 1969, 2 vols), i.24.

<sup>50</sup>This opinion is substantiated more fully in my forthcoming doctoral thesis, 'The Conduct of War as reflected in certain Middle English Romances with special reference to *The Alliterative Morte Arthure*' (The Queen's University of Belfast). I wish to thank my supervisor, Dr. A. J. Minnis, who made helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.