Knights and Knighthood: Perception and Social Change in the Late Twelfth-Century Angevin Empire

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A common modern perception of the medieval knight is a mounted warrior in full plate armor, ruthlessly striking down enemies on the battlefield. Being a warrior was the essence of being a knight, and this perception generally applies to knights over the centuries; however, the concept of both knights and knighthood changed through the centuries of the Middle Ages. Some of the most significant changes to the concept of knighthood occurred in the late twelfth century, influenced in part by literature, a sense of noble superiority, and tournaments, and altered the perception of knights and knighthood permanently. This paper addresses the general question of what is was like to be a knight in the late twelfth-century Angevin Empire by examining the knights’ place in the social hierarchy, the significance of dubbing ceremonies and rituals, the purposes of the tournament, and how all of this was changing in the late twelfth century Angevin Empire.