The Setting of the Tournament in Chrétien de Troyes and its Historical Actuality*

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The way medieval tournaments became influenced by their literary counterparts has already been written lengthily about.[1] Since at least the first quarter of the thirteenth century the Arthurian world with its heroes, and their deeds, fortunes and misfortunes, started to be enacted in the gallant setting of the tournament and its pageantry. Far and wide, from Cyprus, where "the adventures of Brittany and of the Round Table were imitated"[2] to the spectacular festivities in the English court of Edward III, more than two centuries later, far from becoming tiresome, they kept on being a joyous entertainment particularly to the aristocracy. The early beginnings of the popularity of Lancelot, Gawain, Perceval and their peers are the work of Chrétien de Troyes, which was to be followed soon after by numerous others.

But in Chrétien's time there were already tournaments. From c.1160 to c.1190[3], when he would have written the five romances we know today, he was also witnessing the flourishing of a tournament circuit that was bringing the lords from the Anglo-French world together into a premier league of knightly teams. He happened to attend both the cultured courts of Flanders and Champagne, under the patronage of two of the most active tourneyers of the time;[4] and was therefore almost certainly acquainted with the greatest pastime of the nobility he was writing for. We will observe from the texts that Chrétien does make clear that to a great extent he had knowledge of the procedures a tournament would require in his days. There could be various reasons for organising one, and matters such as the time and the place, when

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[1] The most significant study still is Cline's "The Influence of Romances on Tournaments of the Middle Ages", pp. 204-11.
[2] Philip of Novara, *Mémoires*, C. Kohler (ed.), H. Champion: 1913, p. 7, cit. in Flori, *O Tempo dos Cavaleiros*, p. 54. (This translation from the Portuguese is mine.)
[3] Cf. *Arthurian Romances*, Carroll, C., and Kibler, W. (edd.), pp. 4-5.
[4] His direct support in Champagne came from Marie, wife to count Henry. See also Crouch, W., *William Marshal*, pp. 174-5, for fuller accounts on the role of Henry and Philip of Flanders as sponsors of the tournament.

and where to have it, are crucial for the understanding of the tournament in its historical background.

There has long been much debate as to whether medieval literary records are or are not of avail for tracing historical evidence, and if they can be equal testimonies of reality and of imagination. The period that concerns us is not rich in comprehensive accounts about tournaments, and so I will largely rely for my assessments on our other major source of information. It is a biography, the *Histoire de Guillaume le Maréschal*, completed between 1226 and 1231, which comprises his adventures in the lists,[5] and in the main reliable throughout;

> In one particular instance, the portrayal of tournaments, it has been pointed out by Larry Benson that the *Histoire*'s account of certain of them seems to have been inspired directly by the writings of Chrétien de Troyes, a half-century before.[6]

Benson was particularly referring to the "language, themes and conventions of romance tournaments"[7] sometimes used to enhance the figure of the Marshal. These situations are however identifiable, and for the majority the descriptions are characterised by their practicality and down-to-earth style.

Barber and Barker's impressive *Tournaments*, undisputedly the most valuable work on the subject, make restrained use of the romances as historical evidence, "in support of what we can show to have had some existence in reality"[8], and opt not to take into account possible clues and details found there. This approach takes the risk of deliberately discarding valuable information and is in my opinion somewhat over-sceptical. Flori, on the other hand, allows for caution with the treatment of literary sources:

[5] To Crouch, these would be from 1167 to 83 (*William Marshal*, *idem*). Benson gives a slightly different chronology: 1166 to 85 (in "The Tournament in the Romances of Chrétien de Troyes & L' Histoire de Guillaume Le Maréchal", p. 7).
[6] *William Marshal*, p. 6.
[7] "Chrétien & Guillaume le Maréchal", p. 20. See also pp. 21-3.
[8] *Tournaments*, p. 11.

> Les sources dites "historiques" décrivent peu et mal les tournois, en partie parce que leurs auteurs, généralement ecclésiastiques, les ont volontairement écartés. La littérature en revanche, et singulièrement les romans chevaleresques, nous en fournissent d'abondantes et minutieuses descriptions, témoignant par là même leur faveur auprès le public. (…) Les poètes ne dénaturaient guère la réalité des tournois de leur époque, tout en insistant bien entendu sur les exploits individuels dont le public était friand. Les sources littéraires, interroguées avec précaution, sont donc fiables en ce domaine.[9]

Indeed, as Flori sensibly points out, we can never be certain of the absolute veracity of historical accounts, such as the chronicle of the Marshal.

Benson also argues that "Chrétien's tournaments had been bloodless and decorous affairs" and that he "purified the tournament".[10] He is right in observing that the overall feeling conveyed by the descriptions might even be one of aseptic tidiness - but for the matter, we are dealing with a literary piece of evidence and should treat it accordingly. Thus, it is not from a *general* sense but from *exact* references that our conclusions should arise. One should not ignore that the treatment of violence in the romances is less concerned with portraying a gory scenery – although sometimes painstakingly it does – rather than with the reassurance of any character as *that* character, helping to shape its characteristics. As happens with all combats, "les tournois permettent aussi une valorisation chevaleresque des deux protagonists masculins".[11]

If a careful distinction can be made between narrative function and fact, literature, and Chrétien's literature, is therefore able to supply our subject with evidence that is scarcely - and more frequently, never – found in material of other nature. What evidence of the like exists in the romances, what its relation to already known reality is and how it can deepen our knowledge of that reality is the object of this study.

[9] *Chevaliers et chevalerie au Moyen Age*, p. 132.
[10] "Chrétien & Guillaume le Maréchal", pp. 24, 13.
[11] Lachet, C., "Les tournois dans le *Roman de Flamenca*", p. 69.

What is tornoiez*?*

In the whole of the five romances, there are only four tournaments. This may seem a little score, given the importance they already had where and at the time Chrétien wrote. This scarcity may perhaps be explained by the role they have within the development of each of the romances, which in fact is not fundamental to the story itself, but still serves as "un ressort décisif dans l'approfondissement du héros"[12], and so to the character rather than the narrative. Individual jousting arguably does better in making the protagonist stand out, demarcating him as the chivalrous hero. Lachet avows that the *jostes*, rather than the characteristic twelfth-century *mêlée*, would be more to the liking of the audiences,[13] to what should be added the fact that those audiences lived in a specific environment, the courts, and tournaments were a mark of its culture. The public was certainly familiar with their structure: on the whole, men – because they participated – and women – because they were having more and more influence - were undoubtedly quite fond of them. But, as we shall see, there are other aspects well worth considering, namely the reasons why these tournaments are held.

One might remark that more tournaments can in fact be found adding to the number I gave. Indeed, there are more descriptions of haslitudes, but they cannot be considered as tournaments. The words *tornoiz, tornoi, tornoiement*, are used to refer to the tournaments in, respectively, *Érec, Cligés* and *Lancelot*, and *Perceval*.[14] In *Cligés*, there are two other occasions when there are two groups of knights jousting: at the time Alexander and his companions fight the defenders of the castle besieged by Arthur and between Cligés and the household of the German emperor against the Duke of Saxony's party. In both events the encounters are referred to as not "to tourney", but to *behorder*, a definition known already in France, as it appears in Wace's translation of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain*, c. 1150. This is most significant, for the *béhourd* was, throughout the middle ages, a sort of lightweight version of the tournament proper,[15] and the two were not confused:

[12] Chênerie M. L., "'Ces Curieux Chevaliers Tournoyeurs': des Fabliaux aux Romans", p. 350.
[13] "Les tournois dans le Roman de Flamenca", p. 67.
[14] The following abbreviations will be used henceforth*: Erec - Erec et Enide; Histoire - L'Histoire de Guillaume le Maréchal; Lancelot - Le Chevalier de la Charrete; Perceval - Le Conte du Graal.*
[15] See, for example, *Tournaments*, p. 164.

Usually the knights – and perhaps more frequently the squires – fought clad only in hardened leather and even attired with just a "linen armour" (probably a quilted *gambeson*), as Mathew Paris later puts in his *Chronica Majora*[16]. He would be referring to this type of joust, as they are depicted in *Cligés*, where

> Cil del chastel par le gravier
> Furent venu esbanoier
> Seulemant les lances es poinz,
> Les escuz devant lor piz joinz
> Car plus d'armes n'i aporterent.
> A ces defors sanblant mostrerent
> Que gaires ne les redotoient
> Quant desarmé venu estoient.
>
> (1265-72)[17]

After which they do joust against the Greeks, recently knighted and in need of practise. This is what Alexander says, exhorting his companions:

> "Seignor, fet il, talaz m'est pris
> Que de l'escu et de la lance
> Aille a cez feire une acointance
> Qui devant moi *behorder* vienent.
> Bien voi que por mauvés me tienent
> Et po nos prisent, ce m'est vis,
> Quant *behorder* devant noz vis
> Sont ci venu tuit desarmé.
> De novel somes adobé,
> Ancor n'avomes fet estrainne
> A chevalier ne a quintainne.

[16] Cf. Barber, R., *The Knight and Chivalry*, p. 162.
[17] I have used as basis for all romances the new Daniel Poiron's edition of the Guiot manuscript (Paris, BN, fr. 794). Also, the English translation by Carroll and Kibler provides more accessible reading and has a good introduction. Occasionally I referred also to Foerster's edition of *Cligés*. Full references are to be found in the bibliography.

Trop avons noz lances premieres
Longuemant gardees antieres.
Nostre escu por coi furent fet?
Ancor ne sont troé ne fret.
C'est uns avoirs qui rien ne valt,
S'a estor nen et a assalt.
Passons le gué, ses assaillons."
(1288-305)

Along with renown, the objective is to practise skill at arms, what is done in a particular way concerning equipment, different from the one for tournament, which is to say at this period, the same as for war.[18]

Kibler's translation is then misleading when in the same romance he later gives "he strode defiantly from the court; but as he was leaving, his youthful impetuosity led him to challenge Cligés to a *tournament*."[19] What in fact appears in Foerster is

Quant il vit que tuit se teisoient
Et que par desdaing le feisoient,
De cort se part par desfiance.
Meis jovenetez et anfance
Li firent Cligés anhatir
De *behorder* au departir.
(2875-80; my emphasis here and above)

Immediately, so it seems, they mount their horses and proceed, along with other knights, to *behorder* (2881-2).[20] This is the only instance in the five romances where a "tournament" takes place immediately after the challenge is made. Thus, I will centre in those we can be certain to be *tornois*.

[18] For knightly equipment in general during the twelfth century, see Painter, S., *French Chivalry*, pp. 22-3, and especially Flori, *Chevaliers,*, pp. 100-6, and Barker, J., *The Tournament in England*, pp. 164-80.
[19] *Arthurian Romances*, p. 157.
[20] In Walter's edition these correspond to ll. 2857-62 and 2863-5, where the definition used is again "behorder".

The first – if we follow the conventionally established chronological order given to the romances, that is, *Erec, Cligés, Yvain, Lancelot, Perceval* – is on the occasion of Erec's marriage to Enide, marking the beginning of the second part of the romance, and taking 135 lines[21]; another at the time Cligés arrives in Britain in quest for glory, endeavouring to be knighted by king Arthur (435 lines); the next is when Lancelot, imprisoned by Méliant in one of his castles, pledges to return if granted leave to attend a tournament where Guenivere will be present (697 lines); finally, Gawain, on his way to respond to Guinganbresil's insult, gets involved - somewhat against his liking – in another (778 lines altogether: there are satellite episodes in between that do not concern this survey so much). There are no substantial descriptions of tournaments in *Le Chevalier au Lion.*

The call to arms

Why are these tournaments held? Chênerie would abridge by saying that "le tournoi y apparait comme un plaisir de classe"[22], and certainly it is, but along with other reasons. Further than a means to assure the prominence of the hero's knightly and chivalric attributes among his peers or before the eyes of his sweetheart, these can also indicate the contemporary and rather practical functions a tournament could have. Surely it is indispensable for Cligés, when he conquers the Saxons at the *béhourd*, that Fenice will think him the knight the most *bel, cortois* and *preu* (2966-8), and that all the knights at Cologne will make clear their admiration for such great glory and renown (*pris*) won in such a short time by a knight-to-be (2951-2). Chrétien´s tourneys offer more in addition, since military, political and social purposes underlie them.

The former was certainly the most common inspiration in the mid-twelfth century. Tournaments, with their *mêlées*, were privileged opportunities for commanders and their forces to exercise tactics and techniques in a warfare-like scenario, and as a

[21] The numbers given may be naturally discussible. I have tried to make the most accurate division, circumscribing the reference to each of the tournaments as a logical and readable self-contained episode.

result were sponsored by feudal lords, who participated with their entourages.[23] Upon his arrival at Wallingford with his men, and desirous to make himself known to Arthur and his knights, Cligés takes part in one of these. What is said is that

> Ses genz, cui il l'ot comandé,
> Que dit et reconté lor fu
> Que li baron le roi Artu
> Et li cors meismes le roi
> Avoient anpris un tornoi.
> (4572-6)

Within the narrative this event precedes Cligés' return to Constantinople where he will get into difficulties in order to stay with Fenice. It marks a diversion in the action, and the only reason for its existence is, again, confirming the merits of the hero to us and himself. We know only that this tourney is being held under Arthur and his barons, with no other pretext whatsoever. It may well be that it is being held for itself, that is, as an ordinary knightly exercise that could be set up out of sheer necessity or enjoyment. Their abundance in the *Histoire* makes that in high season tournaments were held every fortnight.

But this was on the Continent. Henry II was enforcing the ban of haslitudes in England, and that is the reason why his son and William the Marshal were roving around the Northwest of Europe apparently getting into every tournament they could find. William of Newburgh affirms that since Henry I it was – at least in theory – impossible to tourney in England. But even under his grandson's reign there might have been a few, as evidence indicates.[24] And according to Kibler

> Circumstantial evidence also strongly suggests that Chrétien spent some of his early career in England and may well have composed his first romance there. References to English cities and topography, especially

[22] "Curieux Chevaliers", p. 340.
[23] Good summaries of this can be found in *Chivalry*, p. 88 and *Chevaliers*, pp. 97-9.
[24] Cf. *Tournament in England*, pp. 7-10.

> in *Cligés* but indeed in all of his works, show that the Britain of King Arthur was the England of King Henry II Plantagenet.[25]

Could then Chrétien be aware of the existence of any tournaments in England at this period? It is very unlikely. *Cligés* dates from 1176 at the most, and to consider this possibility would mean that the author would have to have been in England prior to 1154, when Henry took the crown. Moreover, at the Court of Champagne he would know well about the tournament circuit, both in the Continent and in England: his lord was not only a habitué but also Henry the Young King's brother-in-law. The tournament at Oxford should then be considered unlikely to have happened during that period, although in its presentation it is in conformity with contemporary practice.

The tournament in *Perceval* is another affair. The elder daughter of the lord of Tintagel, Tiebaut, coveted by Méliant de Lis promises him that she will grant her love if he can perform great deeds of chivalry in her presence:

> "Ne puet ester an nule meniere,
> Dist la pucele, par ma foi,
> Jusque vos avroiz devant moi
> Tant d'armes fet et tant josté
> Que m'amor vos avra costé,
> Que les choses qu'an a an bades
> Ne sont si dolces ne si sades
> Come celes que l'an conpere.
> Prenez un tornoi a mon pere
> Se vos volez m'amor avoir"
>
> (4856-65)

And Méliant acts accordingly. *D'armes fet* is what, in 1227, Ulrich von Lichtenstein would do for the sake of his lady: while travelling from Italy to Bohemia he jousted with all willing to; "if the challenger was defeated, he was to bow to the four corners

[25] *Arthurian Romances*, p. 5.

of the earth in honour of Ulrich's lady."[26] This is an example of literary influences on History rather than otherwise, but even so it clarifies to what extent knightly exploits would be motivated by the conceptions of amorous vassalage.

And so Chrétien presents us with a challenger stricken by love. From what we know it is his longing for the damsel – or better put the promise of her receptiveness - that compels Méliant to take the initiative of a competition. Gawain hears this in reported speech from a squire, who offers his considerations upon the matter:

> "Si come cele devisa,
> Le tornoiement anpris a,
> Qu'Amors a si grant seignorie
> Sor cez qui sont as sa baillie
> Qu'il n'oseroient rien veher
> Qu'Amors lor volsist commander;
> Et mout feriez que neanz
> Se ne vos meteiez dedans,
> Qu'il en avroient grant mestier,
> Se vos lor voliiez aidier."
>
> (4869-78)

Seemingly Lady Love has such might that she can lead a knight (especially a fresher, as Méliant was knighted especially for the occasion) to seek personal glory in the vicinity of his beloved. And if, like Ulrich, you are an influential lord, the prospect can be quite promising. It happens that Tiebaut is Méliant's liegeman, and for that reason owes homage to him. Although the reason for the tournament is clear enough, there is more to say; lines 4875-8 prefigure the risk of a grim outcome, confirmed by the measures taken by the castellan:

> Mes Tiebauz n'a mie trové
> An son chastel consoil privé
> Qu'il torneast a son seignor,

[26] *Chivalry*, p. 92. He was later to embark on another journey, dressed as King Arthur.

Que il avoient grant peor
Que il les volsist toz destruire;
S'a bien fet murire et anduire
Del chastel totes les antrees.
Bien furent les portes fermees
De Pierre dure et de mortier,
Que il n'i ot autre portier,
Mesc'une petite posterne,
Don li huis n'estoit pas de verne,
Li orent lessié a murer.
(4891-904)

These measures are no less than a defensive strategy in the face of a direct attack or siege. They can either point towards a particularly brutal *mêlée*, in which the challengers would break into a castle and *toz destruire*, or imply the tournament as a substitute for real war. Therefore I wholly disagree with Benson, who oversimplifies stating "this is another very life-like tournament".[27]

We have no evidence for the first supposition, simply because, for what we know, fortifications would not be assaulted in a tournament, and furthermore because knights would be more interested in taking prisoners amongst noble fighters on the other side, while possible infantry would be engaged in defending the lords.[28] When Young Henry and William the Marshal are tourneying between Anet and Sorel, in 1176, they pursue Simon de Neauphle to find him in a street of the village of Anet. (Even then, and despite he was being guarded by three hundred men, "li Mar[es]chals ala prendre / Monseignor Symon par le frein".[29]) The *Histoire* does not refer to deliberate aggression of civil population, basically because there was no reason for it.

On the other hand, citizens of the quarrelling Italian cities of Piacenza and Cremona, while at Roncaglia, make use of the 1158 Imperial assembly there to engage in "combat, which they normally call a tournament", thus appeasing bloodier

[27] *Chrétien & Guillaume le Maréchal*, p. 13.
[28] An overall description of the twelfth century tournament can be found in *French Chivalry*, pp. 47-50.
[29] *Histoire*, ll. 2849-1.

enthusiasms.[30] This may support a different approach: Tiebaut reacts as if he would fear an invasion and is backed up by *la gent del chastel*, "Et li plusor grant joie avoient / Del tornoi qui remés estoit" (4920-1), but an experienced vavasour reassures him, saying

> Je lo et creant androit moi
> Que vos a ce tornoiement
> Ailliez trestot seuremant,
> Que vos avez bons chevaliers
> Et boens sergenz et bons archiers
> Qui lor chevax lor ocirront,
> Car ge sai bien que il vanront
> Tornoier devant ceste porte.
> (4938-45)

They are to use knights, men-at-arms and archers, the same military units accompanying Simon de Neauphle, but the archers at Tintagel are upon the walls and are to kill the challengers' horses, something which certainly would be frowned at by their most chivalrous adversaries down below.

> Et li tornoiemanz remaint,
> Mes chevaliers I ot pris maint
> Et maint cheval I ot ocis,
> S'an orent cil de la le pris,
> Et cil dehors i gaaignerant
> (5157-61)

Hence, I would say that this tournament, or the opposite team, is regarded by the defenders as an actual military threat, although in reality it was never meant to be. Méliant is defeated in an ordinary joust and his horse captured by Gawain (5513-20). The whole encounter apparently settles the score, for when "li tornoiemenz depart, /

[30] For a comparative analysis, see *Tournaments*, pp. 19-20.

Si s'antrant par mi la porte" (5584-5). Whether it can be regarded as a substitute for war cannot be clearly defined. Gawain leaves soon after the fray ends, and from that point we know nothing more of Tiebaut and his challenger.

Tournaments in Chrétien can have other connotations. Enide and Erec marry, and after three weeks one is organised.

> Par seignorie et par leesce
> Et por Erec plus enorer,
> Fist li rois Artus demorer
> Toz les barons une quinzainne.
> Quant vint a la tierce semainne,
> Tuit ansanble comunemant
> Anpristent un tornoiement.
> (2082-8)

The barons assembled in Arthur's Court for the occasion of the nuptials decide to hold a tournament soon after the banqueting and the feasts, characteristic of aristocratic life. They all are a natural extension of the celebrations. In 1184 Frederick I summons princes, dukes and knights to Mainz for a great feast, he himself taking part in a *gyrus* (a war game emphasising horsemanship).[31] Arthur does the same,

> Et par son reaume anvea
> Et rois et dus et contes querre,
> Ces qui de lui tenoient terre,
> Que nul si hardi n'i eust
> Qu'a la Pantecoste ne fust.
> (1888-92)

while it is interesting to observe that the German gathering also begins on Whitsunday. To Bumke "above all the tournament was associated with weddings", a

[31] *Courtly Culture: Literature and Society in the High Middle Ages*, p. 205.

practice first registered in the 1180s by Lambert of Ardres, on the occasion of the count Arnould l'Ainé's marriage to Gertrude of Flanders,[32] not that far from the time and place when and where Chrétien is writing.

Lancelot goes to a tournament of which the purpose is to find a number of husbands for the *dames* and *dameiseles* of the kingdom that are *desconseilliees* (5367-77). That is to be organised by women: the Lady of Noauz symbolically challenges the Lady of Pomelegoi, in what is an early demonstration of the theatrical aspects tournaments would later acquire, based on the issue of a fictitious challenge. In this instance we have a most courtly example of knights fighting exclusively – in theory – for the honour of the ladies they stand for. Although to my knowledge we have no contemporary record from which we can gather that tournaments could indeed sometimes be a joint feminine initiative, we may suggest that their importance to aristocratic marriage can be significant. Count Arnould manages to marry such a figure thanks to his chivalric deeds in tourney, which come to her brother's knowledge, the lord of Alostz, who eventually gives him her hand. "La prouesse, la vaillance guerrière, sont alors vertus éminentes qui méritent d'être honorées, admirées",[33] these being the qualities that must be displayed in the field, especially by knights-bachelor, younger brothers who do not have rights of inheritance and that are not willing to take vows, and who will ultimately find in the tournament promising financial opportunities, either by capturing knights and horses, or by capturing the attention of some well-off lady.[34] On the other hand, by and large it would be to the interest of marriageable noble women to find a proficient suitor with the attributes necessary to administer land and household. To Duby

> the strong wave of reaction against the trend toward female emancipation was not partly responsible for the reversal of attitude that was first observable among noble families in the last third of the twelfth

[32] *Tournaments*, p. 169.
[33] *Chevaliers*, pp. 141-2.
[34] For a sociological approach to the tournament in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries see Duby, *The Legend of Bouvines*, pp. 84-97.

> century: more young men were allowed to marry, perhaps because it seemed best to place one's daughters under the control of a husband.[35]

The ladies certainly become quite upset when the triumphant Lancelot rides away with all their hopes of marrying a capable lord:

> Et lor volontez est commune
> Si qu'avoir le voldroit chascune;
> Et l'une est de l'autre jalouse
> Si con s'ele fust ja s'espouse,
> Poe ce que si adroit le voient
> Qu'eles ne pansent ne ne croient
> Que nus d'armes, tant lor pleisoit,
> Poist ce feire qu'il feisoit.
> (6025-32)

In this fine example of social Darwinism by Chrétien, the ladies just will not accept less than the best, to the point that they pledge by Saint John they will remain single for the rest of the year!

It is at least remarkable that Chrétien can direct to women the initiative of a virile sport that is traditionally the attribute of men, but which nevertheless is starting to be permeated by courtly behaviour and ideals, the same we can detect in the *Histoire*, for instance when the Marshal at the tournament of Joigni sings for the ladies present, amongst whom is a countess. And it is at their request he does so: "Qui sera / Si corteis qu'il nos chantera?" (3475-6).

Time and place

The four tournaments in the romances share familiar characteristics as regards their organization.[36] The feudal magnates of, mainly, Northwest Europe who were also patrons of the tournament – Baldwin of Hainault, then after Philip

[35] *The Knight, the Lady and the Priest: The Making of Modern Marriage in Medieval France*, p. 216.
[36] Historical references pointed out in this section can largely be found in *Tournaments*, pp. 173-7. Others will be stated separately.

of Flanders or Henry of Champagne – actually took part in them besides caring for their organization. In fact, they were running the most popular and enjoyable sports circuit of the time. Also, while they visited the other's territorial domains, each was also keen on hosting such events back home, if they had the means to do so. Tournaments were prestigious affairs and unarguably functioned as a most fitting vehicle at their disposal for display of power.[37] Therefore they ought to make sure they welcomed the largest possible sum of participants.

Cligés arrives at Wallingford and hears the news of a tournament nearby. Chrétien explicitly tells us that, as the event was to be at least two weeks ahead, the young knight still had of plenty of time to make his preparations.

> Mes ainz porroit molt sejorner
> Cligés, por son cors atorner,
> Se rien li faut endemantiers,
> Car plus de quinze jors antiers
> Avoit jusqu'au tornoiemant.
> (4581-5)

During the interim his squires have the time to go to London and bring back to their lord "trois peires d'armes". Other knights naturally would use this period as best befitted them.

What is more, about the tourney Cligés is also told "Qui devoit durer quatre jorz" (4580)[38]. A concern with planning is noticeable, from both the organiser and the participant. The intent is even clearer in *Lancelot*:

> Sel feront savoir et crier
> Par totes les terres prochienes

[37] Cf. *William Marshal*, pp. 175-6.

[38] In fact, instead of the four days of Guiot, it should be noticed that Foerster for some reason has as equivalent the lines "Einsi est anpris li estorz / Qui devoi durer *quinze* jorz" (4593-5). This is unreasonable, an unparalleled length which cannot be found in any romances of the kind. (See also note 12 above.)

Et autresi par les loingtienes,
Et firent a molt lonc termine
Crier le jor de l'ahatine
Por ce que plus i eust genz.
(5384-9)

It is while imprisoned in a castle somewhere in the realm of Gorre that he learns "l'ore et le terme" (5443) of the competition at Noauz, for

La novele par tot ala
Et loing et pres, et ça et la;
S'est tant alee et estandue
Qu'el reaume fu espandue
Don nus retorner ne soloit;
(5425-9)

A parallel can be found in the *Histoire*, the author assuring us that a tournament at Eu, in Normandy, had been announced broadly and had an according attendance:

Ci aprés covient que ge die
Qu'il out a Eu, en Normendie,
Pris un riche tornoi[e]ment.
Ne fu pas fait si qu[e]iement
Que portez ne seit li esclandres
Par France, par Henau, par Flandres,
E par Borgoingne e par Peitou,
E par Toroigne e par Angou,
Par Normandie e par Brutaigne;
N'a nul haut home qui remaigne,
Ne bacheler, sel puet save[i]r,
Qui velt nul pris d'arme[s] aveir,
Qui ne seit a cele [a]sembl[é]e

A cels qui avei[e]nt enpris
Par armes a monter en pris.
(3181-96)

Sustainable as it is, the postulation that it is a structural need of the romance to, even briefly, retrieve Lancelot to Guenivere from his incarceration or to grant Cligés the means to fight incognito the knights of Arthur should not outshine other perceptions, linked to perhaps more prosaic aspects. The news of the tournament heralded far or waiting for it to begin in a fortnight are so much of a reality that they can develop to be the ground for fiction.

As for the rest, in *Perceval*, as we have seen before, Méliant's challenge is issued in advance, and in *Erec*, when Arthur's court at Cardigan decides to make arrangements for another, this tourney is to start only a week after (2086-8 / 2095-6).[39] No matter how uncomplicated tournaments of this period may seem to us, especially if compared to later spectacles, they still required an effective administration to make them and their patrons' investments worthwhile.

In respect of a preference for a specific time of the year, I do not think we can vouch for a "high-season" of Chrétien's Arthurian tournaments. In Northwest Europe, from what one can make out, for instance from the *Histoire*, that would be in late autumn,[40] even if we can find the Marshal in the lists "As oytaves de Pentecoste", and even during winter, some time after Christmas. As far as the romances are concerned, they appear whenever there is need for them. Singling out the one in *Erec*, which takes place "Un mois aprés la Pantecoste" (2098) – as we see, another popular period for tourneying, marking the end of Lent – the information is inconclusive as to the exact time of the year. Despite the fact that the text does not tell us if and what specific days of the week would witness these events, we can gather elements pointing – roughly, though – to a timetable of the day. Before, it should be noted that they can take more time than that.

[39] As might be expected, a variant would be the "tournament" at Cologne, apparently getting on immediately after the challenge (ll. 2860-3 in Walter and 2878-81 in Foerster).
[40] These are Crouch's calculations (in *William the Marshal*, p. 175. Compare this to *Tournaments*, pp. 173-6).

Chênerie's valuable table of tournaments in the Arthurian romances of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries[41] shows that they can range from one up to four days, two being the most common. In fact, the one in *Cligés* is the longest, followed by *Beaudous*, that lasts three. In our more concise *corpus* a couple of days normally suffice for the hero to make his prowess more than apparent. The knights, on two occasions and at the end of the encounter, agree to prolong the fighting onto the next day. In *Lancelot*, all try to decide whom to laureate, "Au departir i ot grant plet / De ces qui mialz l'avoient fet" (5717-8), concluding that no one had clearly distinguished himself or was worthy enough to spouse the ladies. Thus the decision is made to resume the competition later:

> Mes a totes et a toz sist
> Que l'andemain tuit revandront
> A l'ahatine, et si prandront
> Ces cui le jor seroit l'enors
> Les dameseiles a seignors;
> (5736-40)

Alongside, in *Perceval* it happens the same, perhaps because of another tie, the "et" in the third line most likely indicating consequence:

> S'an orent cil de la le pris,
> Et cil dehors i gaaignerant,
> Et au departir rafierent
> Que l'andemain rasanbleroient
> Et tote jor tornoieroient.
> (5160-4)

In *Erec* this following day is not an improvisation, as a winner is found straight off, but only to confirm his victory afterwards: "Si bien le fist Erec le jor / Que li miaudres

[41] *Le Chevalier Errant dans les Romans Arthuriens en Vers des XIIe et XIIIe Siècles*, p. 135.

fu de l'estor. / Mes mout le fist mialz l'andemain" (2213-5). So, there would not need to be any clearing up of the score.

Barker and Barber affirm that "tournaments usually began in the afternoon, largely because the process of arming the knights and organising them was a protracted one"[42], but in the latter part of the twelfth century these would not yet be such major impediments. Body armour was still largely confined to a mail hauberk, comparatively simpler and faster to don than later defensive equipment, and the same may well be true of the organisation, also much more practical at the time. When the Marshal hastens to a tournament between Saint-Brice and Bouere, three days after the one he was just coming from, he still arrives in time. "Que [il] est venuz a tot tens / La ou li chival[i]er s'armoient"[43], and manages to get himself in, recognised by two knights there. Goes without saying that he wins the tournament.

The four descriptions we have in Chrétien allow us, to establish a very plain daily schedule. The second day of the tournament in *Cligés* unequivocally begins in the morning - "L'andemain as armes revindrent / Tuit sanz semonse et sanz proiere." (4748-9) - and in *Lancelot* the same is apparent[44], while the Maiden with the Little Sleeves, after getting up "au matinet" (5475) to see Gawain before the tourney, finds him and his peers already stepping out from the church:

> Mes ele n'i va pas si main
> Que il ne fussent ja levé,
> Et furent au mostier alé
> Oir messe qu'an lor chanta,
> Et la dameseile tant a
> Chiés le vavasor demoré
> Qu'il orent longuement oré
> Et oi quanque oir durent.
>
> (*Perceval*, 5480-7)

[42] *Tournaments*, p. 176.
[43] *Histoire*, ll. 1410-2.
[44] "Et quant se vint a l'anjornee / Refu a la genz tote atornee" (5773-4): Kibler gives "When day broke, all the knights donned their armour once more and returned to the fighting." (*Arthurian Romances*, p. 278), while Daniel Poirion translates as "Mais le jour suivant tout le monde était prêt et l'on revint au tournoi" (p. 649).

Aprés ce ne tardierent mie
Li chevalier qu'il ne s'armassent.
(*Idem*, 5496-7)

Soon after the knights assemble and the spectators take their places, the tournament begins, to last "Tote jor jusqu'a l'anserir" (5162-4). Likewise, Lancelot has his rest when "li bas vespers les depart" (5716) and Érec is taken from his fun driving his foes back, "El chastel les remet batant. / Les vespres sonerent a tant." (2211-2). This could mean that the fighting would end not only because it was getting dark but also officially at the sounding of vespers. Nowhere are indications of any general interruption of the combats throughout the day; the descriptions of the fighting, sometimes at intervals with parallel situations, lead the different narratives.

All of this would happen after a suitable place had been chosen beforehand. "A feudal prince (…) would select as a site a pleasant meadow in his lands and then send heralds about the countryside to announce the affair",[45] as we have seen already. Painter's supposition that haslitudes of the time would require such a place is confirmed by both Chrétien and the *Histoire*. Here we find tournaments being fought in a designated area in between two towns or villages, such as between Gournai and Ressons or Sainte-Jaumes and Valennes, the same happening in the romances. So now we shall look at the site of the tournament as a competition ground, that is, the lists.

Cligés, as he arrives in Wallingford, soon is informed that "Es plains devers Osenefort, / Qui prés ert de Galinguefort, / Ensi ert anpris li estorz" (4577-79). Arthur had situated his military training in the most appropriate place, the plains just outside a town. Similarly, in *Erec*, the court and household depart from Caerleon to have their tournament "Desoz Tenebroc an la plaigne" (2097); and in which Gawain opposes Melis and Meliadoc, in the forefront of the two teams of Edinburgh and York. The fighting is also in a plain, but at a certain time

[45] *French Chivalry*, p. 47.

Girflez, li filz Do, et Yvains
Et Sagremors li Desreez
Ces de la ont tex conreez
Que tresqu'es portes les anbatent;
Asez an prenent et abatent.
Devant la porte del chastel
Ont recomancié le cenbel
Cil dedans contre cez defors.
(2190-7)

being evident that the lists are in the vicinity of the city walls. No mention is made of archers on the castle walls, as there are in *Perceval*, but it could be argued from these two last lines that there might have been a fight between those physically inside the castle and the outsiders. Most probably its meaning is simply to illustrate that the knights *dedanz* are the appointed defenders of Edinburgh against the Yorkists, *cez defors*, rather than implying a more complex struggle between the parties.

This is supported by what happens in *Lancelot*: the ladies simulate a symbolical challenge of one party to another, while two groups of knights support their "causes". Here is what Lancelot and the other knights do:

S'a tant erré qu'a Noauz vint.
De cele partie se tint
Et prist fors de la vile ostel.
(5515-7)

Chevaliers boens et esleuz
Ot molt el chastel amassez;
Mes plus en ot defors assez
(5522-4)

Bien cinc liues tot an viron
Se furent logié li baron

Es trez, es loges, et es tantes.

(5531-3)

Depending on which side they take, they lodge in or outside the town. They choose whether to hold the site as a sign of their lady's honour or to be *venants,*[46] just as Lancelot does.

> Les deux "côtés" n'impliquent aucune hostilité, c'est une simple repartition sportive en deux camps, rendue nécessaire par les joutes. Plus souvent, en tel cas, on oppose ceux de dedans (la ville) à ceux de dehors.[47]
>
> The fray is then again where there is the space for it, which would be the environs of the encampment:

Si sont plainnes les praeries
Et les arees et li sonbre,
Que l'an n'en puet esmer le nonbre
Des chevaliers, tant en i ot.

(5618-21)

An important element is introduced in *Lancelot* when mention is made of the stands from where the public, especially the queen and the ladies can enjoy the *mêlée*,

La ou li tornoiz devoit estre
Ot unes granz loges de fust,
Por ce que la reine i fust
Et les dames et les puceles:
Einz nus ne vit loges si beles,
Ne sil longues ne si bien faites.

(5590-5)

[46] The peculiarities of this designation are explained in *Tournaments*, p. 213.

There are no other contemporary sources to corroborate the existence of structures of this sort, in or near the tournament field, that were built especially for the event. I daresay it would be possible that they *did* exist only if they were to have a practical function. In the situation we have, they operate as a necessary substitute for pre-existent constructions used for the same effect – to provide watchers with a suitable position -, namely the walls of the castle.

Finally, in *Perceval* it has been made clear that the main setting is at the foot of Tiebaut's castle in Tintagel, "contre cez de horz" (4837), this time a more than satisfactory belvedere for the ladies there (5499-503). Although the circumstances show this is not the case of a siege, the description of the site itself has some resemblance to tournaments held during sieges, such as those during the "resistance" of Stephen of Blois, at Lincoln and Winchester in 1141. It might be even that Chrétien could be aware of their existence, or of others similar, to shape them here as an attractive literary motif.

This castle is naturally on a mount, a deduction that can be made when the ladies tell a squire that Gawain is "An ce pré qui est desoz nos" (5128), that is, in a lower position and having retreated from the lists proper because he was not taking part in the fighting. But the place where he is encamped has been deliberately enclosed by a palisade "S'antre an un pré desoz la tor, / Qui estoit clos de pex antor" (4915-6). Everything suggests that this is meant to set the knight apart from the fray and not to surround all the tournament site, which would be rather unpractical, particularly if we take into account that when Méliant charges he leaves his companions "Bien loing deus arpanz et demi" (5507). Even this distance should not perhaps be a fictional exaggeration: the Marshal goes to a tourney that is to take place "Entre Mestenon e Nogent", two towns that have eight kilometres setting them apart.[48] To encircle a tournament field, as small as it might be, is perceptibly at least idiosyncratic for this period. So, the area where Gawain has his tent pitched can only be a refuge prepared for the participants of the tourney to recover from the

[47] *Oeuvres Complètes*, p. 1290.
[48] Cf. *Histoire*, vol. III, note 3 to p. 45.

skirmishes, in what indeed are the "lists" of the time, an already established feature of tournament grounds.[49]

Conclusions

It is hardly surprising to gather a weight of information out of the various depictions of tourneys in the romances we have been looking at. The tournaments of the twelfth century, from merely being an end in themselves, as training and enjoyment, were already being used to mark exceptional occasions closely bound to social and political interests. They encompassed multiple purposes altogether, and were as valuable to the great magnates who organised them as to the landless knights seeking renown and fortune there. A feminine presence is even worthier to mention and, although it will only be consistently pointed out in historical accounts by the thirteenth century[50], the *History of the Kings of Britain* refers to such before:

> The knights planned a mock battle, and competed together on horseback, while their womenfolk watched from the city walls and aroused them to passionate excitement by their flirtatious behaviour.[51]

Indeed, more even than a probable sudden increase of their stamina, these knights would be witnessing a growing preponderance of the role of women in tournaments. At first they were barely spectators, whilst forecasting the importance they soon came to have in the whole affair, by all means not subsidiary of men's.

Chrétien's portrayal often mirrors the changing and complex society of the time, replicating situations that could - and did - happen in aristocratic life. Some of them could actually be the cause of tournaments, where others were dealt with by them. A liegelord would train his entourage by organising a tournament, would entertain his entourage by holding another and could even use the same entourage as a statement of his power if he challenged a fellow nobleman. On the other hand, sequential and spatial information have their importance in characterising the physical environment

[49] Cf. *Knight and Chivalry*, p. 163.
[50] *Tournaments*, p. 7.
[51] Quoted in *Chivalry*, p. 91.

of the tournament. Allusions to time are unfortunately more vague, and even though on the whole they do not add greatly to what we know from other sources, the indications on how the day of the tournament is arranged put forward a few answers. As to the place, we can discern from the writer's account that it is very much in conformity with contemporary accounts, sometimes allowing for further enquiry.

The scarcity of sources providing any glimpse into why and how these events were arranged is yet natural. Benson's assumption that this absence of references means that tournaments were unimportant, and "not worthy of historical record"[52] is groundless; to add to what I have been adjudging, it is just reasonable to think that no clerk would be delighted to describe in detail something that basically meant excommunication to those who participated in it.[53] Tournaments, to the Church, were a menace to social order, meaning killing and violence and, more important still, as deaths were not that many, a menace to the authority of the Church itself. I would add that when Chrétien was writing the tournament was already so well established and well defined as a cultural attribute appertaining to the aristocracy that it comes naturally in the romances as a means of identifying that social class – with its habits and interests – with what happens in the narrative. It seems logical that the response expressed by the courtiers of the time had much to do with the realism they could find in the fictional work of Chrétien: their world in Champagne and Flanders was too close to the great tourneys of the time for them to accept anything categorically implausible.

As we have seen, the descriptive value of the setting of the tournament as presented by Chrétien de Troyes is in a very considerable degree analogous to the value of other sources. Sometimes it is better even. If analysed and evaluated with care it can surely help to unveil some of what has remained so far as unsolvable conjecture.

[52] "Chrétien & Guillaume Le Maréchal", p. 3.
[53] This is also pointed out by Barber in *The Knight and Chivalry*, p. 162.