

**RIDING THE HORSE, WRITING THE CULTURAL MYTH:**

**THE EUROPEAN KNIGHT AND THE AMERICAN COWBOY AS EQUESTRIAN HEROES**

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I

Any comparative study of cultures will prove that virtually every culture has created its own hero according to its historico-cultural needs, characters, and potentials. In Mexico that hero is called “vaquero;” in Columbia and Venezuela, “illenora;” in Argentina, “gaucha;” in Japan and China, “samurai,” and “karate man” respectively; in Ottoman empire, “akıncı.” Similarly, both the European knight and the American cowboy had an important role in the emergence and development of their national heritage. There are many similarities and historical ties between the two in that they are idealized representatives of the cultures in which they emerged, and that they are equestrian.

The popular images of the American cowboy and the European knight have been much misrepresented and distorted to fit the illusions of fiction. The medieval Latin word for “knight,” *miles*, does not help us sort out definitions much further. Originally signifying “soldier,” in the eleventh century *miles* became associated with notions of horsemanship and nobility in mysterious and complicated ways (Chickering and Seiler 3). The word eventually became interchangeable with Latin *caballarius*, its romance cognates, all of which etymologically refer to the idea of horsemanship. Mono-dimensional definition of the European knight, too, has so much been repeated and popularized that the sole perception of him today is the general conclusion that tends to determine him as the paragon of gentility, as was pictured in the Tudor age, when imitating the adventures of the knights of King Arthur was deemed very important by knights.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, portrayal of the European knight as a gentle courtier Elizabethan period supplemented the false consciousness of this figure.<sup>2</sup>

The popular image of the knights is well-known. Literature and cinema have presented charming scenes of those mounted warriors either as the defenders of their country and religion or as the romantic lovers of young ladies who devoted their lives to winning their favors (Barber 4). Likewise, the image of the American cowboy is a cluster of eulogies. He often appears as a powerful character created by dime novels and, particularly, by Hollywood cinema. Although the cowboy is actually nothing but a cowhand, who participated in long trails across America, and who was later sublimated by numerous writers and film directors to a national hero. He has been taken out of his historical context and been fit into the framework of frontierism. The resulting stereotype was a misfit that lived on the fringes of civilized society permanently in contact with the wild nature, representing the American “cult of masculinity” (Hine 151).

On the other hand, the American cowboy is seen as a brand new concept that emanates from Anglo-American culture, and thought of as independent of other preceding heritages on the American continent. The cowboy is romanticized, fictionalized and made the possession of Anglo-Americans by constant cinematic attempts of Hollywood. In such efforts the cowboy is depicted as the repository of virile virtues and the indigenous people as ferocious and savage adversaries. As appears in The Cowboy Encyclopedia, The Covered Wagon (1923), The Iron Horse (1924), In Old Arizona (1929), The Virginian (1929), The Big Trail (1930), The Westerner; and especially director John Ford’s Stagecoach (1939), The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance (1962), The Searchers (1956) and his cavalry trilogy Fort Apache (1948), She Wore a Yellow Ribbon (1949) and Rio Grande (1950) amplified the tones of western supremacy over uncivilized barbarians. Demonization and vilification of the “other,” who was invariably personified by Indians, and sometimes by blacks, prevailed throughout such films.

The American Cowboy stood for rugged individualism; he was also presented as the embodiment of right that inevitably triumphed over wrong. Cowboy heroes like Tom Mix, Fred Thomson, Randolph Scott, Tom Tyler, Audie Murphey, Hoot Gibson, Wild Bill Eliot, Allan Lane, Buck Jones, John Wayne, Gene Autry, Roy Rogers, Gary Cooper and many others were enthusiastically acclaimed by American audience (Slatta 128-133).

Moreover, the cowboy as a frontiersman, hence a unilateral character, is presented as the first man to step the depths of the inland. He encounters many difficulties, which he is entirely alone to bear. Since laws, as a feature of settled life, lack, he creates his own stock of rules and regulations, almost always settling the disputes with his revolver. Enemies defeated and civilization secured, he rides his only friend, a horse that carries almost human qualities and has a perfect emotional bond with him, to a distant horizon where the sun goes down. During all these flowing pictures we never see him doing his real duty, ranching a herd of cattle.

In a similar vein, in the minds of many, the knight resonates with his grace in striving for virtue, excellence or a distant ideal, and his perseverance of seeking to overcome the vanities of the body and soul. The historical image of the knight portrayed him as a contractor: a protector of a Lord, as the defender of the weak and the seeker of virtue, sometimes as a blend of warrior and pilgrim heading to Jerusalem or as a romantic hero apt to do anything that takes to be worthy of his fair lady. A deeper insight about a “mounted-warrior,” a “knight,” “knighthood” and “chivalry,” would, however, yield a different portrait of the knight. Then, it is necessary to delve into their historical origins and the motives behind his emergence. The general imaginary perception of the knight is actually open to vast criticism. As Chikering and Seiler put it, the historical “illusion of a world ruled by chivalry had little to do with reality,” though it gradually gave it “the lie and force” to take “refuge in the domains of literature and conversation; and chivalry came to serve as a cloak for the whole of violence and self-interest in that age of passionate extremism” (52). What follows is the origins of “knighthood” and the cultural and political context that gave birth to it, and then a discussion of the history of the equestrian hero along with the significance of the horse as his companion and how the image of the American hero fits into history.

## II

Essentially, as Barber notes, the “knight” is a mounted warrior who enjoys a specific social status and a distinct ethos, “which eventually blossoms into the wider culture of chivalry” (Reign of Chivalry 4). However, historically, and naturally, it would be unthinkable to assume knighthood as a full-fledged institution at its very outset. He had “barbarian” roots and his emergence falls between the collapse of the Roman Empire and the accession of Charlemagne, namely during the centuries of turbulence and lack of central authority.<sup>3</sup> In the absence of an effective central authority, feudalism emerged as a decentralized system that gave rise to local powers assuming to perform its functions. After the fall of the “Great Rome,” European leaders aimed to defend their own territories by forming armies that predominantly consisted of infantry. In the period of the rise of Frankish power, the nature of warfare was disorganized, spasmodic and often between the nomadic marauders as aggressors and poorly organized native populations defending their homes. The defenders were local levies that did not have horses of their own since they were hardly away from their homes, therefore did not need them. Obviously, they could not have afforded one either.<sup>4</sup>

It is not until the advent of the Huns “who were so inseparable from their horses that a Roman writer called them shaggy centaurs” that the new style of cavalry warfare found favor in the eastern empire (Barber 4). In Europe, they were also called the “Horsemen of the Apocalypse.”<sup>5</sup> The Huns were far more superior to the Westerners in terms of their military capabilities. They had fast and rapid horses on which they “practically lived, even eating on and negotiating treaties on horseback.”<sup>6</sup> The Huns, who came to Europe from Central Asia in the fourth century, introduced Europe two very essential equestrian innovations that made cavalry possible and that changed forever the nature of mounted warfare; saddle and stirrup.<sup>7</sup> It should be noted that even until then, mounted warriors were very scarce in the west and, if any, they were of Germanic tribes. Franks and Anglo-Saxons remained skilled only in infantry tactics as late as the eleventh century. It was only after the combat, in which Frankish infantry was at last able to stop the Arab expansion at Poitiers in 732, that the West started to adopt the horsemanship and cavalry tactics of their Arab adversaries (Barber 5).

The earliest word that signifies a knight is *miles*. The word is Latin and it is a simple name for a professional soldier. Through certain social and military developments in the eleventh and twelfth centuries the usage of the word would undergo changes in meaning and emphasis. In the first place, we find the meaning of the word *miles* is narrowed down to point specifically to a mounted warrior. The extension of the use of the word as a title would cause the two groups, the lesser knighthood (often named as vassi or vassal) and the greater nobility (the overlords of vassals) intermingle in terms of social cohesion; though not economically. Thus, the Latin word *miles* for knighthood was starting to acquire more clearly honorific association ascending in the social scale and approaching a *petite noblesse* in some areas by 1100 (Keen 27-28).

The major driving force behind knighthood’s emergence as a distinct social stratum is “the mutual need of one and other”; landlords holding gross territories and mounted warriors to protect and take care of them (Keen 29). Here, the word feudalism appears before us as the key concept and needs explanation to clarify knighthood in its social, historical and political context. The circumstances in which feudalism first emerged in Europe overlaps with the collapse of the Roman Empire in the West, mostly “because almost none of its subjects cared enough for it to make any great effort to defend it” (Coulborn 20). Rulers of Germanic origin, who survived as the Emperors after the fall of the Great Rome, were not hostile to Roman heritage and they did their

best to maintain some of its political institutions, though they were not entirely successful in their attempts (Mc Kitterick 14). Nevertheless, As H. G. Atkins states, they were able to assume the real power for the central government (56). Among Germanic rulers, Charlemagne was able to unite a large portion of Western Europe under a new Empire: an achievement that inspired Westerners for over a thousand years (Prestage 81).

Relying also on the moral support of the Church with clever policies and on the military force of his own people, the Franks, Charlemagne held his Empire together. However, the structure had always been a shaky one. The population was composed of Latin and Germanic people who had no cultural and political union, though they interacted for economical reasons. Their interests tended to be local. The forces of localism were far stronger than that of unity. Local government fell in the hands of counts that held wealth and high position. Despite the fact that these counts acquired their authority right from the king, they were not always fully loyal or obedient to him. In return, ironically, they were not always able to establish their domination over the great landowners of their districts. Charlemagne tried to strengthen the doubtful loyalty of his subjects by making great men his vassals, but this measure proved temporary. Because the relation between the magnates and their retainers was far closer and more intimate than the relation between Charlemagne and the magnates, for the retainers lived with their magnates where as the magnates rarely visited the imperial court. As an outcome of this situation the magnates had great power in their own provinces and they were subject only to the intermittent intervention of the king. Still, however, these great men held political power by delegation from the king and not in their own rights. The last straw for the formation of feudalism proper, without a king who has the ultimate and overall control, was the death of Charlemagne. Fifty years following the death of Charlemagne witnessed the quarrels of his less capable heirs. In the absence of a central authority the magnates profited from the quarrels to claim their independence; they began to declare their lands private possessions to be inherited by their sons (Riche 36-39).

In the meantime, the population of the Empire was constantly under the threat of invaders from all sides such as Saracens, Magyars, Slavs and Danes. The central government was helpless for it could not situate regular troops quickly everywhere on the vast territory of the Empire. It could seldom assemble and move an army on time that was capable of stopping the fast-moving raiders. Taken into account that "Carolingian armies were primarily mounted infantry" and very slow in counter-acting, defense had to be localized (Barber, *Reign of Chivalry* 9). The responsibility of fighting the invaders fell on the part of feudal local lords. His proto-knights and his castle provided a certain amount of security for the subjects of the Empire and also of his lands.

By the 1000 A.D. feudalism had achieved its purpose. The Saracens had been driven beyond the Pyrenees; the Slavs had been forced back to the Oder; the Magyars had been expelled from Germany and Italy; Danes, too, had been compelled to cease their attacks and had become Christians. With the defeat of the pressure of the invaders and thus a relative relief, lords who surfaced this turbulent period well established themselves and claimed their own sovereignty. The most sensible effect of this kind of constitution, which was also a great change in the political structure of Europe, was the erection of numerous petty tyrannies. In such a chaotic and spasmodic condition the sentiments are produced correspondingly. Loyalty to the group, sacrifice for it, hatred and contempt for outsiders, brotherhood within, and warlikeness without all grow together and are the common products that mark the general characteristic of the feudal era (Riche 239-246). Constant feuds between neighboring fiefs to secure themselves and attempts to absorb one and other intensified warfare. In his Letters on Chivalry and Romance Richard Hurd sketches these rivalries between the landlords:

Hence, their mutual aims and interests often interfering, the feudal state was, in a good degree, a state of war: the feudal chiefs were in frequent enmity with each other: the several combination of feudal tenants were so many separate armies under their head or chief: and their castles were so many fortresses, as well as palaces of these puny princes (8).

Interestingly enough, knighthood and chivalry have long been polished by constant literary narrations especially of Tudor and Victorian periods and elevated to take a radiant stance that in the minds of many now chivalry is associated with certain values (like loyalty, courage, nobility) that inspire many people. Even today, in England for instance, persons who afford great contributions to his/her country are dubbed, though they have nothing to do with any martial accomplishments. It has been entirely abstracted and has fallen into a make-believe situation. During all these charades going on, ritualization of this 'ethical institution' gains all the more importance with masqueraded dubbing processions. Its touch of reality and of its origins have long been erased from the minds and became what the great historian Huizinga calls "play-element of culture" (qtd. in Vale 10). Such cultures find relief in verbosity and bombastic abstractions. The meaning underlying all these attempts is clear; sophistication of a pseudo-culture and to provide it with a base that has its roots in the history. In such an attempt the word "history" must be carefully treated and origins be diligently delved into. In such cultures, historical figures and events are duplicated, and actuality is blurred and obscured via literary attempts that employ excessive magnificence; not to mention that origins are attributed to the culture in question without

specific reference to the real fountain. Chivalry, in our specific case, presents us a huge disparity between the realities and the artificial revivals that are the direct outcome of literary endeavors.

European knighthood relies largely upon adoptions from Turks and Saracens in terms of horsemanship and gears of cavalry. The Westerners learned from their enemies a great deal of things when they encountered them. Military and tactical inventions were inevitably adopted in order to cope with the insuperable force and skills of their enemies. Not out of admiration, but it was a dire necessity that urged the panicking Europeans to defend themselves for the collapse of the Roman Empire in the fifth century, caused by the military supremacy and cavalry genius of Turks, left Europe without a defensive fortification. Note that Franks, credited to have masterminded knighthood and chivalry, by that time, knew nothing concerning either proper cavalry or its military application and merits. Franks, as all historians agree, had almost no cavalry and if any, they were not used as a military means (Oman 9). As late as the sixth and seventh century, again, we see that the Franks and Saxons could not utilize the horse (Oman 16). It is only from the ninth century onwards that the Franks began to abandon their tradition of waging battles on foot, and to initiate cavalry operations (Oman 19).

Likewise, it was not in the Roman world that knighthood had its origins. Some historians asserted this thesis solely out of their veneration for the Roman Empire. On the contrary, Roman legions had fought on foot and the men who had enough power or wealth to acquire a horse would not purchase one for defense because he had no need for immediate protection, and little contact with, or respect for, the realities of military life. Military service was seen only as a burden fit only for hired menials. In case of necessity horsemen were hired from other tribes (Barber 3-4). Such horsemen were not unusual among the Germanic tribes, but rarely caused any great reverses of fortune. They were little esteemed as a body of cavalry since they were mounted bareback, with a loose cloth as saddle and a very primitive bit, and lacking stirrups, their light javelins were difficult to use accurately. Deprived of proper equipment of horsemanship they were too easily unseated to make a really effective charge. In the seventh century A.D. we may mention the Lombards who used horses in battle. These people swept into Eastern Europe and then into Italy where they founded the Kingdom of Lombardy. Notably both of the last two tribes mentioned belong to northeastern Europe and had been under the constant exposition of the influence of Turkish cavalry (Barber, *The Knight and Chivalry* 4-5). It is not until the advent of Hunnish Turks, that cavalry in Eastern Europe underwent a remarkable change. They brought with themselves a new style of cavalry warfare that found extensive favor in Eastern Europe. According to Barber, "many accounts of chivalry begin with the hordes of barbarians such as the Huns, who swept across the frontiers of the Roman Empire and who seemed so inseparable from their horses that one classical writer called them "shaggy centaurs" (9).

Here, one thing must be admitted; the first introduction of horse to Europe, the integral element of knighthood, was via the invasion of Kurgan Turks; "mounted warriors ranging out from a homeland north of Black Sea beginning in about 4000 B.C."<sup>8</sup> (Raulwing 72). It should be noted that Europeans of Iron Age had bred horses of Celtic descent, which were also adopted by Greeks, but these horses were extremely small and "some the size of an ass with a withers height of below one meter" and of course rendered useless in cavalry.<sup>9</sup> Assertions made to trace down the root of the horses suitable for cavalry in Celtic origins, namely in the West, do not reflect the reality. "We must therefore," says Bökönyi, refute the romantic supposition that the Celts were the best horse breeders of their epoch and their horses were of superior quality. Just the opposite, Celtic horses were very small; remains of several individuals with a withers below 1 m have been found in Celtic sites" (qtd. in Mason 169).

By 700 BC, Greeks, who used Celtic horses, were to replace this breed by large importations of Eastern horses. Later reinforcements of the spread of horse throughout the Eastern Continent were to be made by constant invasions of Turks; among which is the famous advent of Huns that caused the collapse of the Roman Empire. The Huns were a new race of horsemen formidable by their numbers and their rapidity of movement. They caused a shock wave in Europe with their constant rain of arrows that they would pour on their enemies without allowing them too close (Oman 10). The elegant proportions and stamina of the new bloodstock they were mounted on far surpassed that of any Western ones. Moreover, according to Vegetius Renatus, "For purposes of war the Huns' horses are by far the most suitable, on account of their endurance, working capacity and the resistance to cold and hunger."<sup>10</sup>

Towards the end of the Migration Period begins the conscious horse-breeding in Europe and the first large and heavy 'cold-blooded' Western horses began to appear. However, it seems that the Westerners knew very little about breeding and training horses. The horses they bred for heavy armored knights, who had considerable weight, were thick legged and since their hooves were weak they required shoeing which the eastern horses did not. In contrast, Hunnish cavalry and their pure breeds were exceptional and unmatched. It was for their incredible proficiency in cavalry that even Roman Empire had once called for their assistance in the Battle of Daras, a turning point in the history of the Empire, waged against the Persians. The result was absolute victory on the Roman side: "It is noteworthy that the day was mainly won by the charge of the Hunnish light cavalry" (Oman I: 29).

By the time of alien invasions, horses were scarce and rarely accessible in Europe. During the Merovingian age, for example, “cow was worth only one, and a horse six solidi”; a sum that was absolutely crushing for the free man (59). There had always been an economic barrier to join the ranks of horsemanship in the Frankish world. It should be noted that “The crucial point is that the cost of equipping a horseman with armour, weapons and steed was substantial. Even in the ninth century a horse cost six times as much as a cow and armour possibly as much again: these were luxury items needed” (Church and Harvey 4).

Although Frankish counts and dukes had horses with their immediate retinues, “when pressed or surrounded they would still dismount and fight on foot like their ancestors” (Oman I: 57). The Franks had no concept of fighting on horse and of utilizing it as a platform to wage a combat. When they reached the battlefield, “The Franks leaped off their horses, as is their custom, intending to fight as foot-soldiers” (Thuroczy 57). A. Goodman’s account concerning horsemanship, too, parallels with Thuroczy. Along with Franks, he also adds the English men-at-arms in the list of foot soldiers and says that they used horses simply “to carry them to the scene of the engagement . . . therefore they will ride any sort of horse, even pack horses” (qtd. in Ayton 27). Neither in the Carolingian Age did Franks know anything about cavalry and its tactics. As conveyed in The Song of Roland, the perpetuated archetype of knighthood, “The men of the north remained as motionless as a wall, and frozen together like a block of ice, they put the Arabs to the sword” (qtd. in The Knight and Chivalry 5).

It is obvious here that the body of the Frankish army is depicted as dependant entirely on infantry whereas the Arabs were mounted warriors who had expertise in cavalry tactics. Unlike Muslims, Franks were a nation of foot soldiers armed only with spear, sword and axe. It seems that they “borrowed nothing from their Roman predecessors” even in terms of infantry (Oman I: 53). Fighting in one solid mass, without breaking rank or attempting to maneuver, the day was won by the purely defensive tactic of the very simple and primitive infantry square. They were wont to advance in a deep column or wedge and so terrified by the Muslim cavalry that they “could move neither to front nor flank, for fear of breaking their array and letting the horsemen into the gaps, hence they stood helpless, exposed to a shower of missiles to which they could make no reply” (Oman 36-37).

At Poitiers, Charles the Great was only able to oppose and repulse the advent of the Arabs. Neither was he able to inflict a full destruction on his enemy nor it was an absolute victory that decimated the Arabs. F. Cardini points to this everlasting misunderstanding; the encounter was not even a proper battle, as French epics excessively praise, it was only a “minor skirmish” (qtd. in Azzaroli 41). And in this skirmish Charles could not even dare to chase his enemies:

But there was no pursuit, for Charles had determined not to allow his men to stir a step from the line to chase the broken foe. Probably he was right, for an undisciplined army can not advance against without danger, and the Arabs, even when repulsed, were too agile and brave to be allowed the chance of penetrating into the mass (Oman I:58).

Nevertheless, Franks were at last able to stop the Arabs at Poitiers in 732 and in the years proceeding they would adopt a great deal of things from their Arab adversaries. It is of great significance that shortly after Poitiers “the Franks began to raise large numbers of cavalry” and certain laws concerning the recruitment and equipment of them were enacted (Edge and Paddock 9).

In Muslim Spain, however, cavalry had a far more distinct course since the social structure served as a fertile ground for horsemanship. Barber portrays the turn that the concept took in Muslim Spain comparing it with feudal Europe:

Because horses were relatively cheaper and easier to obtain in Spain, the sharp financial distinction between the mounted warrior and the foot soldier did not apply, and we find a class of ‘peasant warriors’, farmers with relatively small holdings who were nonetheless equipped for military service (Church and Harvey 5).

In Castile, for example, “anyone could own horse and armour”, and all those who could afford to purchase one comfortably did so (The Knight and Chivalry 61). There was no mystique to the profession of arms, and it was seen in an entirely practical light. Outside the royal circle were small landowners who were not necessarily vassals but fought on horseback. Thanks to the Muslim rulers of Spain, the country did not suffer from feudalism and its inequality of holding property. Besides, by means of the conquest of the Iberian Peninsula, by the Muslim commander Tariq Bin Ziyad, innumerable Arab steeds, which were brought from Arabian Peninsula over North Africa, penetrated the land. This new breed was soon to be carried to the north and changed the entire nature of the equine world of Europe. As Matthew Bennet says: “... we know that these horses

were imported into north-eastern Europe from Spain and further east from at least the time of crusades” (Church and Harvey 26).

Having large lung capacity, incredible endurance and swiftness, Arabian horses were instrumental in extending the Saracens’ dominion. This athletic breed was marked by a distinctive profile: large, lustrous, wide-set eyes on a broad forehead; small curved ears; and large, efficient nostrils. Scientific tests have shown that Arabians surpass any other breeds by virtue of their efficient heart, superior blood composition and endurance oriented muscle fiber, and have long been acknowledged by equine experts to be the most suitable animals for endurance riding. Other breeds that excelled in endurance surely have Arabian blood in their veins.

It is possible, furthermore, to trace back the origin of Arab horses to Central Asia, the center of horse breeding of the ancient world. The pure breed of Turkish Akhal-Teke horses is acknowledged to be the beginning of the horse breeding of the ancient world. It is with the advent of Islam to the north that Arab conquerors got access to abundant herds of these marvelous animals. That Arabia is very rich in horses is a “general but erroneous opinion” (qtd. in Forbis and Serif 177). Moreover, the Arabs

started breeding horses rather late and in Mahomet’s time they still had a very small number of them. The Arab of course belongs to the oriental, hot-blooded group, but its real father is not Arabia but Turkistan, and the race was bred and fixed in its present characters in Egypt, by people who had come from Central Asia. The Turkish origin of this breed is also attested by its name: the Arabic word to designate any horse in general is "faras" or "husan" but a horse of noble blood is called, with a Turkish word, “atik” (Azzaroli 180).

The great heat of climate in the Arabian Peninsula is reckoned unfavorable to the breeding of horses. The peninsula, where water is only to be had from wells, is not an ideal district where the original stock could be stemmed from. The main problem is in maintaining the fitness of horses; ill-fed horses soon lose their breath and stamina. Those Arab horses that did exist were limited only to the extent of fertile pastures. Tribes who were rich in such horses were those who dwell in the comparatively fertile plains of Mesopotamia, on the banks of the river Euphrates. Horses in this district could feed for several of the spring months upon the green grass and herbs produced by the rains in the valleys and fertile grounds, and such food seems absolutely necessary for promoting the full growth and vigor of the horse. Horses, therefore, became scarce in proportion as they proceeded towards the south. Foreseeing their advantages of them to expand the domain of their new religion, Muslims adopted Turkish Akhal-Teke horses, the ancestors of the Arabian steeds:

At the time that a new religion--Islam--began to spread in the Arab countries was the beginning of Arabian horse breeding. Before this, the horse was a very rare animal in Arabia; the main animals used in warfare were camels. The influence of Akhal-Teke horses on Arab horse breeding came from the fact that the Arabs got many of their horses from their enemies; a lot of these horses were Akhal-Tekes that were then used as breeding stock by the Arabs, and from which the Arabs developed a strong cavalry.”<sup>11</sup>

Promoted also by the Prophet of Islam in his various hadiths, the keeping, breeding and training of horses became almost a religious duty. Cavalry, thus, enjoyed great deal of reverence among Muslims. Meticulous and diligent efforts of horse breeding to increase the number of the body of cavalry soon resulted in abundance of these horses to which Europeans got access via Andalusian Spain. Where as the horse was a “valuable capital resource” in Europe and accordingly, the acquisition of it, to a high degree, was through lordly grant or feudal inheritance; the Arabian became so common and abundant in Muslim Spain that it did not require a fortune to get access to them (qtd. in Ridyard 18). As a result, Barber claims, the mounted warrior was a common place and never set apart by a particular mystique from the rest of the society but remained a military figure within society with a specific function. His Frankish counterpart, on the contrary, was so scarce and thus a peculiar character on horse that this hardly attainable status had always been embellished and decorated with uppermost attachments (Church and Harvey 5-6). However, the horse of the European knight always remained very humble and inadequate compared to the Arabian steeds:

Europe had developed horses through the Dark Ages to carry a knight and his armour. Their lighter horses were from the pony breeds. They had nothing to compare with the small, fast horses upon which the invaders

were mounted. An interest in these 'Eastern' horses grew, along with fantastical stories of prowess, speed, endurance, and even jumping ability. To own such a horse would not only allow for the improvement of local stock, but would endow the fortunate man with incredible prestige. Such a horse in the stable would rival the value of the artwork on the wall. Europeans of means, primarily of Royalty, went to great lengths to acquire these fabled horses.<sup>12</sup>

These new steeds found extensive favor among Europeans for their trainability, intelligence (which was celebrated by thousands of anecdotes), gentle disposition, stamina and their ability to bond with humans. It was for this reason that Robert of Bellême, one among many, for example, is known to have bought horses in Spain to improve his stock since Spain was recognized as a premier country for the production of horses (Prestwich 31).

The adoptions were not limited to only horses. Horse alone was not enough to provide cavalry's superiority in mobility and striking power. Had it not been for the vast technical developments undertaken by Turks and Arabs, the efficiency of the use of horse would not have been increased. Among these inventions, stirrup was the most important. In its simple form, it was a flat-based loop or ring hung from either side of a horse's saddle to support the rider's foot in mounting and riding. It gave the mounted warrior a far greater stability in the saddle and an altogether improved control of his horse. Without the stirrups the back of the horse could have never been utilized as a fighting platform; they made it easier for the rider to stay mounted securely on the horse and to blow and receive strikes without losing balance. Some historians asserted that the stirrups had taken their root in China. However, being a settled race, the pressure of the necessity of such an invention was not dire enough for the Chinese to go for such technical developments. Chinese had by no means subscribed to the use of them on a grand scale; "the fashion was by no means universal in China", let alone Europe (Barber, *The Knight* 5). Neither could we say that the origin of this technical development should be sought in the Roman Empire; "the Greeks and Romans never used the stirrup" (Edge and Miles 37). The stirrups were unknown to Europe until the contact with the west established by Turks; Avars to be more precise:

In the west the stirrup was also imported by the nomads of central Asia but the date of its arrival is somewhat controversial ... the stirrup was also imported into central Europe by the Avars, and in fact the oldest specimens come from their tombs. These Avars were ethnically related to the Huns and established a powerful kingdom; they were made of iron and betrayed a metallurgical skill far superior to that of the Western world, where the technique of iron casting was still unknown ... the Avars imported directly from Asia their tradition of metallurgy and their stirrups when they came to settle in Europe in 568 ... all authors seem to agree on one point: that the stirrup was imported from central Asia (Azzaroli 159).

The standard for stirrups was set by Central Asiatic Turks. Being the first race to domesticate the horse, Turks had far more past with it than any other race in the history. During the constant wars with the Chinese, they enhanced their cavalry skills and invented much equipment in due course. This was exigent and vital for them in order to protect their dominion. Additionally, drastic climatic changes, afterwards, in Central Asia brought about long expeditions on horseback from the steppes, where life was embittered by aridity, to more habitable places. The inevitable migration necessitated mobility. Mobility augmented the efficient use of the horse. Furthermore, conflicts in encounters with alien races resulted in excelling in cavalry skills and tactics that would later inspire their adversaries. Transmission of these inventions would not come to a halt only by horse and stirrup.

As for the sword of the European knight, it was basically designed and used for hacking, much as though they were axes with three-foot blades. It was of a simple style without sophistication and was badly balanced; extending straight without any curves. By 1050, the sword grew definitely longer in size and acquired a rounded point instead of a sharp one, "so that it was wholly a cutting weapon" incapable of thrusts (Oman I: 129). Muslims used, on the other hand, two types of swords with curved blades. One style had the sharp edge outside the curve, for slashing, while the other had its cutting edge on the inside of the curve to drag the blade along the opponent's body while riding by, making a long, deep 'draw cut'. Both styles had sharp points for thrusting from horse back. When the European straight blade was driven into an enemy, the opposing actions of the falling body and the moving horse would tend to wrench the sword from the rider's hand. The sword of the Muslim rider, however, did not suffer from such undesirable results. The curved blade of the Muslim sword would tend to free itself by arcing out of the body as the riding moved on. Soon, the European knight would

learn from Muslims the most efficient architecture of sword and “the curve would become the identifying feature of cavalry saber” (Robinson 46).

Being the first people to invent the ballistics, Turkish impact also on the change of the nature of other arms is undisputable. By this new race, the European knight was to learn a very effective and lethal arm that he had never been accustomed to: “The influence of the Huns on the Roman army was very marked: profiting by their example, the Roman trooper added the bow to his equipment” (Oman I: 21)

The bows and arrows should also feature in this discussion since this was the most effective and significant weapon that decided the doom of westerners in many of their wars waged against Turks and Saracens. The fact that we have no archeological discovery yet has done in Europe for bows as late as eleventh century means that Europeans drew little example from their Roman ancestors, thus, this new and effective weapon had not been used on a large scale in Europe. The crusades, too, brought knowledge of these bows and the methods of their construction to most of Europe. Persistence of close contacts and wars with the Turks and Saracens made it inevitable for the Westerners to change their war habits. And by the end of the next century certain areas of southern Europe had become famous for the manufacture of composite bows, which then moved up to the north: “The earliest recorded crossbow maker in England seems to have been one ‘Peter the Saracen’, who was working for King John in 1205; the name is perhaps a further indication of where these bows originally stemmed from” (Edge and Paddock 36).

The bow-staves were shorter than the height of a man, giving perhaps an estimated effective killing range of about 100 yards (90m). There are sometimes references to specific arrow-proof mails, indicating that arrows could not penetrate such armor; on the other hand, the mere fact that it was necessary to emphasize this distinction implies that mail was indeed frequently pierced and left the knight without a protection that he so much counted on: “Modern writers estimate the arrow’s penetrating power as equal to that of a rifle bullet” (The Knight 233).

It was the crossbow that was predominantly used in twelfth century Europe. Especially common infantry who threatened the effectiveness of knights on the battleground favored the weapon. Despite its incredible merits, the European knights were essentially conservative in their attitudes to this new mode of warfare. For one thing, it was never considered by the aristocrats as a noble weapon to be used by a knight, for another, it required a perfectly trained horse intelligent enough to be guided only by the legs since the knight would inevitably unhold its strings while taking shots with arrows on a full gallop. This skill he could never achieve and as a result the “sword and lance remained the primary weapons” that the knight was occupied with (Edge and Paddock 46). In their heavy metallic armors the knights were soon exhausted by heat and exertion, and a considerable portion of the army was outnumbered well before the actual battle was fought. Learning deadly lessons in the Holy Land and acquainting with the Byzantine tactics, which were developed through constant battles and skirmishes with Turks, crusaders had to go for a different military understanding that forced the “kings of Europe and the crusaders of Outremer to supplement their forces with light cavalry or *turcoples*” (52). Nevertheless, never faced by the lightly equipped horse archers in Europe, the knight remained indifferent to the potency of this fatal weapon and stuck to his traditional weapons of sword and lance in his homeland.<sup>13</sup>

#### IV

As the circumstances required, European proto-knights fought against the Magyars, Muslims and Vikings who had invaded Europe. There was no thought of offering Christians reassuring or peaceful images, for life was still too violent and dangerous in Europe, and churches were literally devastated by these invasions. During the eleventh century the invasions had ceased but there was a bitter and violent internecine feudal warfare. Knights were once utilized as a protection mechanism against the invaders but now they were no longer defendants of the Church and Christendom in the absence of an external foe (Erdman 95-96).

During a battle, when the poor were caught between the armies of warring knights, they could barricade themselves into the church and find safety there. She was protecting them from the harassment and vulgarity of the knights who had no concern for their welfare. Thus, as the knight often “indulged in localized violence against the peasantry of an opponent” the poor common people looked to the Church for help and guidance, not to the lords and their knights (Strickland 339). Serving as the only shelter to save one’s own life, it did not take long for the Church to gain the favor and support of the mass poor populace of Europe. Yet, this did not change the fact that the Church herself was subject to the damages caused by the greedy and warlike knights for bishops themselves were usually “important landholders; many monasteries rich” (Wakefield 65). It was inevitable that the landed holdings of ecclesiastical foundations should suffer loss during hostilities. Such damage might involve land, crops and livestock. The riches of the churches were a standing temptation that the European Knight could not resist in times of unrest. Indeed, the habitual and ubiquitous looting of churches themselves forms of one of the most striking features of knighthood and medieval warfare and directly challenges any

assumptions that the Christian element in knighthood and chivalry acted as an effective restraint on the conduct of the Warriors:

Notwithstanding their frequent use as banks, the material wealth possessed by many churches, with their plate, crucifixes and reliquaries adorned with precious metals and gems, made them extremely vulnerable to despoliation in an age when booty was seen by knights and common soldiers alike as a necessary supplement to wages. In time of war, moreover, churches might become crowded with the goods of the local population seeking protection for themselves and their chattels (Strickland 78)

Therefore, warfare within or without meant utter misery for the peasant and churches. After the invasions ceased and there were no more legitimate external enemies, the system of defense that had been long been nourished and evolved collapsed and turned in upon itself. Knights and barons started to fight each other. The country was devastated and property and crops vandalized. To counteract this Church initiated a peace movement that was called the Peace of God. This began in the south of France at the end of the tenth century. Crowds of priests, knights and poor people gathered in huge councils and proclaimed a peace that they called the Truce of God. During this Truce all the knights were forbidden to fight for a definite period and a group of knights volunteered to police this new rule. War and violence were depicted as unchristian and the common people felt that their hatred of the violent knights was justified. The cruelties of the knights were rehabilitated, though to a very limited extent, by spiritual instructions claiming that to fight other Christians was deeply sinful. The Church achieved relative peace and order that could not be enforced by royal authorities. Here, the Church hierarchy for the first time appears to have taken a real and important initiative towards the regulation and limitation of martial activity, and in doing so, to have gone over the head of formally constituted secular authority to deal directly itself with the knighthood. Popes had always been anxious to keep control of knights. Although she was against war officially the Church was still anxious to harness this useful aggression and make it instrumental in her terrestrial policies (Strickland 34-35).

Yet, the messages of the Church involved an obvious inconsistency. Christianity has always been against the violence and in the Peace of God ecclesiastical members had been encouraging the people to see the war as unchristian and to hate the knights. How could the Church now bless these new wars of aggression, which were to be fought on crusadal expeditions, as indeed she did? For many years the popes had been preaching a double message. Unlike the former tendency of the Church that maintained peace and condemned violence of any kind, some of the reformers had wisely felt that to antagonize the knights was foolish. It did not matter for the Church if the Crusades were going to be undertaken with excessive violence. After all, they were sanctioned and spurred by many stories in Old Testament. However, for a knight going on a crusade things were much more complicated (*The First Crusaders* 42). Not having a fixed and stable definition to the problem of violence, the knights were perplexed by this obscurity and many of them felt uneasy about their careers.

Nevertheless, the Church's growing material wealth and ambition to involve in secular affairs helped to assist this change of attitude, though her attitude was still guarded: it encouraged knighthood in order to control and tame the warrior instinct only for the benefit of her. When Urban II preached the Crusade his words addressed specifically to "knights and other ranks who would be militarily useful" and excluded the poor (*Illustrated History* 34)<sup>14</sup>. Urban II's words indicated a "positive" transformation of a knightly way of life as well as revealing the true nature of former knighthood: "Let those who have been robbers now be soldiers of Christ ... let those who have been hirelings for few pieces of silver now attain an eternal reward" (qtd. in Keen 48).

He knew perfectly well that the knights' ever-existing crudity and brutality could not simply be stopped by preaching peace. The very nature of knighthood always opposed religious docility and demanded a pretext to shed blood and acquire material wealth. Urban II was perfectly aware of it and found a radical solution to this deeply rooted problem by inventing a 'just pretext' for them while, on the other hand, still pointing to their "moral deficiencies and sins as well as their neglect of duty in defending Christianity" (Maier 116):

Christian warriors, who continually and vainly seek pretexts for war, rejoice, for you have today found a true pretext, you, who have so often

been the terror of your fellow men, go and fight against the barbarians, go and fight for the deliverance of the holy places. You, who sell for vile pay the strength of your arms to the fury others, armed with the sword of the Machabees, go and merit an eternal reward ... this now is the time to prove that you are animated by true courage, the time to expiate the violence committed in the bosom of peace, type many victories purchased at the expense of justice and humanity. If you must have blood, bathe in the blood of the infidels. I speak to you with harshness because my ministry obliges me to do so. Soldiers of Hell, become soldiers of the living God (qtd. in Payne 34-35).

Here, referring to the background and pillars of knighthood, we are informed by Urban II what knighthood really meant to the medieval mind; a blasphemous institution. Moreover, never attempting to a spiritual rehabilitate this institution and without the slightest intention to install peace in them, he encouraged and reinforced bloodshed, though this time sanctified by the Church in the name of God. If the fighting and robbery could not be stopped, at least “knightly aggression could perhaps be canalized to be of service to the church” (Billings 19). That concept had been one expression of the genius of Urban II. It is of great importance, I believe, to note Urban II’s special emphasis on ever-lasting robberies. With the protection of the material wealth of the Church in mind, it seems that he makes an effort to dodge the looting and plundering of the knights by granting them an eternal life, an attractive compensation. It is evident that the Church ventured the canalization of martial energy away from her riches, as well as from the peasantry’s, into a real war that was to be fought thousands of miles away from home. This meant the relief and security of the Church’s properties that she accumulated for centuries:

By this time, of course, the Church of Rome had become wealthy and powerful in its own right, gathering revenue from property and estates throughout Europe; it was therefore its interest to harness the ideals of the warrior code for its own defense... The Church figured high in the list of priorities for knightly behavior (Edge and Paddock 40).

Reinforcing the role of the knight as a soldier of Christ, the Church would not only get rid of being the constant target of the knights’ attacks but also expand its sphere of political influence and acquire tangible wealth in distant lands. When Urban II preached the first Crusade at the Council of Clermont in November 1095 the sole reason of such an expedition was not by any means a sudden call based upon an emotional sympathy for the Christian fellows who have suffered in Asia Minor and the Holy Land. He was asserting the Pope’s leadership in the West and was attempting to dominate the quarreling princes of Europe by declaring a Holy War in the East. He was trying to give direction to a divided Europe at a time when the quarrels of lords were becoming dangerous to the papacy. He had political considerations and hoped to establish the principle that the Church was the supreme arbiter over earthly kingdoms with the power to authorize wars and prevent wars, as it did in France through the Truce of God. However, there had to be such an enemy upon whom the knights could project all their inherent hatred and violence (Payne, *The Crusades* 32). Urban II was not late at all to create a scapegoat, the Turks:

Distressing news has come to us... that the people of the Persian kingdom, an accursed race, a race utterly alienated from God, a generation that set not their heart aright and whose spirit was not steadfast with God, has invaded Christian lands and devastated them with sword, pillage and fire. Some of these Christians have been made captive and taken to Persia, and some have been tortured to death ... Oh, most valiant knights, descendants of unconquerable ancestors, remember the courage of your forefathers and do not dishonor them (qtd. in Payne 34).

Contrary to what Urban II preached Christians had never been subject to such atrocities as he claimed. Christians in the Holy Land were permitted to practice their religion, and “there was no barrier to pilgrims visiting the Holy Places” (Robinson 10). The provocative speech that Urban II made was strongly biased and meant to wake the hatred of people against Turks and Muslims. As Urban II rose to address the crowd he employed all of the propaganda techniques the job required. He inspired hatred for Islam by allegations of horrible physical atrocities worked upon helpless Christians, which had nothing to do with the reality (Payne,

The Crusades 33-34). The devastations, which were reported to be carried out by Turks, existed nowhere but in the Westerners' imagination:

“To believe that a war of extermination was a war of love involved a huge suppression and it would seem that this led to the neurotic projection those Christian anxieties on to the Crusaders' victims. In the Christian imagination both 'the Jew' and 'the Muslim' were monstrously violent and bloodthirsty. Surely this must reflect a deep worry about Christian violence? As they groped for a new understanding of who they were and what they stood for, Christians in Europe got used to seeing Jews and Muslims as symbols of all they were *not*. The fantasies they created bore no relation to the objective reality but were unhealthy creations expressive of a flaw in Western integrity. At each stage of Europe's development, Europeans redefined the image of the Jew and Muslims to make them both the complete opposite and the distorted mirror image of the Western self” (Armstrong 342).

Such sharp statements, however, were deemed necessary because with such religious tolerance on the part of the Muslim rulers of Jerusalem, and with access to the Holy Places for Christian pilgrims, it was going to take some skillful effort on the part of the papacy to stir up the knights and the nobility of Europe to the point that they would leave their homes to risk their lives in a foreign land. Urban II's astonishing success lay in that he held out the ultimate reward, an eternity in Paradise, by declaring that all who died in this Holy Crusade would receive instant absolution and total remission of sins. Calculating the possible shortcomings of such a spiritual reward and to reinforce his message with additional ones he also held out the promise of land, catering to the frustrations of the non-inheriting younger sons of the nobility and knights (Mayer 39):

Wrest that land from the wicked race, and subject it to yourselves. That land which the scripture says “floweth with milk and honey” (qtd. in Robinson 10).

In the crusading context, then, military undertakings came to be just that the knights served as the strong right arm of the militant Church. The Crusade offered a means by which secular knighthood could be drawn into a specifically Christian context. The prospects of the Crusade were impossible to be underscored neither by the loose-canon knights nor even by the well-off lords of Europe. The crusade became a chivalrous adventure, in which killing in the name of God and the quest for earthly renown and reward became interlaced. The simultaneous pursuit of both secular and religious goals was at the heart of chivalry, inclination being predominantly on the former (The Knight 258).

The mindset of the Crusader knight surfaced too early, even before the Muslim territory was reached. The motive behind the crusade was to help the fellow Christians who were under the so-called persecutions of Muslims. The very preaches of Urban II had stated this situation in very clear terms. The stunning fact, indeed, was that the first to meet religious violence of the Crusader knights were, contrary to beliefs of many, not Muslims but the very people of Europe and Jews *en route*, and the Greek Christians who demanded support from them. One thing we know for certain about the content of Peter the Hermit's crusadal preaches is that it was strongly biased against Jews and was “anti-Semitic and inspired a series of Pogroms in France” (Armstrong 51).

The Crusadal plan that was designed to “divert the energies expended by Christians in killing other Christians”, too, got out of hand from the very outset (Payne 33). History reports, for example, that when Peter the Hermit's knights, who set off from Amiens of Kingdom of France, reached the frontiers of Hungary they started a riot which turned into a pitched battle during which many 'fellow' Christians were killed:

This was the first big battle waged by the Crusaders. Ironically it was fought between Christians. About four thousand Hungarians were killed, and the chroniclers claimed that the Crusaders lost only a hundred men (41).

It seems that Peter the Hermit lost his control and authority over the Crusader knights and peasantry to a considerable extent; his orders were rarely obeyed. When the people of Belgrade saw the army coming, they fled to the mountains. Feeling the city was abandoned to them, the knights, along with the poor pilgrims, set fire to it. Then they set off for Nish reaching it after a seven-day march through the forests. Upon their arrival at Nish on 3 July 1096, the Crusaders had already fallen hungry and exhausted. The local inhabitants not only allowed the

Crusaders to acquire the supplies that they need, but many of them gave alms to the poorer pilgrims. As they were leaving the town some German knights who had quarreled with a townsman on the previous night wantonly set fire to a group of mills by the river. Hearing of the skirmish between the Crusaders and the townsmen, another company of Crusaders “thereupon turned and assailed the fortifications of the town” (Runciman 1: 126). Repulsed by the inhabitants, some of the men insisted on renewing the attack. Nicetas, the chief commander, committed the fatal mistake of letting his men loose who were completely routed and scattered; many of them were slain and many other were captured. This time the defeat fell on the Crusaders side.

Some of the stragglers, however, achieved to join the main body of the Crusaders of Peter the Hermit who headed towards Sofia. They reached Sofia on 12 July where they met the envoys and the escort from Constantinople with orders to keep them fully supplied. Thenceforward, their journey passed smoothly. The local population treated them friendly; at Philippopolis, the Greeks were so much affected by the stories of their suffering that they freely gave them their money, horses and mules. It was even decided that the expedition, which was now tainted with bloodshed, should be forgiven for its crimes. Ironically, the victims of the traumatic character of the crusaders were the Greeks themselves. When the crusaders arrived at Constantinople, Alexius “certainly did not trust the Crusaders” (Armstrong 102). Greeks were horrified by the Franks. They found the massive crusading armies encamped in the suburbs threatening and could only see these Westerners as ignorant barbarians. The anxieties proved true. The European knights, who took up the Cross for the very reason of freeing the fellow Christians and to help them, now realized that there was no restraint for them to sack Constantinople (Runciman I: 127)

The worst of all took place at the crusade that was preached by Innocent III. Casting aside all sense of restraint the knights combed the city for everything they could find, be it treasure, trinket or money. Constantinople was an opportunity for easy plunder that could never come again. As a factual matter, there was pillage and booty of Constantinople the like of which had never been obtained in any city since the world began. The discovery of the wine cellars and the orgies of drunkenness removed all restraint; and men who during the last year had been subject to the agonies of thirst, now became completely out of control. That there was some slaughter, number of which amounts to 2000, was certain. It was easy plunder in which the ‘soldiers of Christ’ were above all interested, “for whatever might have been their original motives in taking the ‘Cross’, they were venal self-seekers” (Godfrey 127). The houses were systematically ransacked, especially the mansions of the nobility, many of whom fled the city. Individual citizens were searched, or tortured to make them say where their money and valuable were hidden. The sheer callousness of the sack by these men impelled Nicetas to write that “even the Saracens had behaved better when they took Jerusalem in 1187. The Muslims had at least respected the sanctity of the church of the Holy Sepulcher” (qtd. in Godfrey 127).

Some of the finest and easily the most accessible of the city’s treasures were those in the churches, and far from being respected and protected by the ‘Knights of Christ’ they were the objects of their most odious greed:

The oath taken on the sacred relics before the assault –that churches should not be robbed- was totally ignored. It took hours to ransack the great church of the Holy Apostles, burial-place of Constantine and many emperors. The imperial tombs, it is fair to say, had already been tampered with by Alexius III in his search for valuables, but they were now desecrated and completely denuded of the precious stones and other ornaments with which the emperors had been buried. The body of Justinian, discovered undecayed, was stripped of its funeral jewelery; sacrilege could hardly go further. In the entire history of either barbarian or civilized countries it would perhaps be hard to find a more deliberately calculated piece of rapacity than the pillage of the imperial tombs. The soldiers descended on church after church .... The monasteries were ransacked, and the monks and nuns subjected to every indignity (Godfrey 128).

Looting and plundering was a deep-rooted habit of knighthood. Theft and ransacking that once used to occur at churches in the Frankish Kingdom now took place in the churches of Constantinople. Holiness meant very little for the European knight. Not much was changed in the crude and greedy character of the knight even though he was designed to serve Christ and his holy churches. The Crusader knight, who was expected by the church to function as the military extension of her and to help fellow Christians, resulted in total failure. Neither had he any respect for anything sacred nor did he support his brothers in Constantinople; he had his own agenda of accumulating his material wealth and quenching his blood-thirst as he always had done at home.

We must also mention the chivalrous virtue of protecting ladies, so much a eulogized aspect of knighthood. Chastity of the Christian knight, which the church always emphasized, was, too, long forgotten. Rape became commonplace:

But they were subject to intolerable harassment, and this was so especially of the women ... Men died trying to protect the persons of their wives; nuns were raped, even in their own convents; girls were dragged away to become the enforced mistress of soldiers who had for long lived almost exclusively in male company. The best that the women could do was to keep out of sight, or to make themselves as ugly and shabby as possible (Godfrey 132).

Indulging themselves in every possible earthly desire, the 'knights of Christ' ended the crusadal season, which was preached by Innocent III in 1204, without a single blow having been struck against an armed Muslim. Holy crusaders did nothing but to add pain to the grief of their Greek brothers and to bring them destruction. The religious feelings that were aroused in the knight by the Church, made almost no contribution to civilize him and to restraint and tame his ever-existing brutality and crudity. Quite the opposite; the riches and beauties of Constantinople and the East led him astray more than the churches at their homeland did. We may rightly say, then, the crusade of the European knight "was not a chivalric exercise in the way that later generations would have understood it" (Smith, *Illustrated History* 22). Neither was he, as Hearnshaw states, able to fulfill the ideals imposed on him by the Church:

There was, in truth, no Golden Age of Chivalry; no period when the lofty ideals which the Church sought to impose on knights were actually realized by the generality of the chivalric order. There was always a great gulf fixed between the standard of the hero of the Cross whose life was dedicated to conflict, and the horrid actuality of profane, cruel, selfish, and sensual men (Prestage 20).

## V

Chivalry came to Latin America in 1492. With the discovery of the New World by Christopher Columbus in 1492 the institution of knighthood carried over to the American Continent. In this respect, both the European knight and the American cowboy utilized the equestrian equipment adopted from the Arabs of Andalusia. Both of them depend on the same ancestry. The American cowboy was nothing but an extension of the European knight, his counterpart in the American Continent brought over by the Spanish conquistadores. Anglo-American cowboy could have never come into existence if the Spanish heritage had remained inaccessible.

Apparently, it was impossible for the early settlers of Latin America to break up entirely with the European value system and to come up with a totally different one. Having assimilated the Moorish culture that dwelled on the Iberian Peninsula from 711 to 1492, and also contributed to it in return, Spaniards carried out the task of the transmission of many European and Muslim habits to the New World. By "New World" we refer to the southern regions of North America colonized by the Spaniards and Portuguese, for Anglo-Americans of North America appear on the scene far too late in terms of horsemanship and its codes. Readers would be surprised to learn that "in both the literal and the metaphorical sense the romances of chivalry were an important part of the baggage of the *conquistadores*;" which means that the enthusiasm for chivalric ethics was too transported to the new found land along with other items (Anglo 253). Indeed, this type of literature (chivalric romances) had long remained an important part of Spanish culture. Taking into account that in the first half of the sixteenth century new romances of chivalry were published "at an average rate of almost one a year" while the total number of the editions of such romances amounted to over 150, we will have a clearer understanding to what extent these romances were popular in Spain. (Thomas 147). Peter Burke draws us the picture:

Research on the history of the reading based on the study of the library inventories confirms the impression of widespread enthusiasm for these books on the part of sixteenth century Spaniards, merchants as well as nobles (Anglo 254-255).

Given this continuing interest in Spain, the themes of romances of chivalry would inevitably have its repercussions in Latin America. Spanish “romance” and music in Latin America “were coloured by Arab exoticism” and were accompanied by an Arab musical instrument and they were so influential that they

were in almost every essential the lineal descendants of the troubadours who performed at the court of Eleanor of Aquitaine, in the middle of the twelfth century; and their song was the Creole counterpart of the early Spanish *romances*, those Iberian *chanson de geste*, in which countless medieval bards sang of the fabulous exploits of Hispanic knights to the accompaniment of the *lira mendicoram-romances*, the first of which must have come to America with the *conquistadores*, for Bernal Diaz wrote that one of Cortez’ soldiers, named Ortiz, was a *tocador de bihuela* (a guitarlike instrument of Moorish design) and taught dancing. The Jews, upon their expulsion from Spain, carried *romance* with them to the entire Spanish-speaking world, to North Africa, Latin America, and the Philippines (Tinker 82-83).

Riding style of Moors, too, was among the list of habits that was carried over to the Americas. Slatta points out that stirrups were adopted by the Spanish from the Moors. Later, Anglo-Americans adopted them from the Spanish conquistadors, but what is striking is that the custom of using short-stirrups that was very much favored by the “charros” was not totally abandoned by them. The style was used especially by Moorish light cavalry at various battles whereas the heavily armored European knight used the long stirrup since it took too much effort for him to fight by rising on the horse. As representatives of noble horsemanship and as the extensions of Spanish cavalry in the New World, it is interesting to see the adherence of “charros” to the old Moorish customs. Though the length of these Moorish stirrups was increased by vaqueros; charros -- the landed elite, receivers of royal grant of Indian labor and perpetuators the upper-class equestrian heritage of the Spanish gentlemen rider or “caballero” -- did not give up the military style as they did not personally engage in cattle-ranching:

The charro retained *jinetea*, a short-stirrup riding style earlier adopted by Spanish riders from the Moors. The style evolved as a military tactic. By riding with short stirrups, cavalymen could stand high above an enemy and slash downward with a sword or lance. Charros favored this style over the long-stirrup *la brida*, used by heavily armored medieval knights (Cowboys and Frontiers 77).

However, the practice of the chivalric ethos, as it was understood in Europe, remained limited only to the noble Spanish landlords in Latin America. Tinker sets the difference between these two styles of horsemanship in America:

Some of the *Conquistadores*, and the favored friends of the Spanish kings, were given huge grants of land upon which they built magnificent haciendas and lived a feudal life surrounded by their mounted retainers. The *hacendados* were known as *charros*,<sup>15</sup> a word that has the general meaning of cavalier or gentleman-rider, while the hired hands were called vaqueros, the equivalent of the North American cowboy (73).

Later, as the vaquero’s principal occupation was simply herding cattle, the Spanish conception of horsemanship ceased to connote nobility as chivalry once did in Europe; though this is not to say that literary attempts to elevate vaquero to make him refer to a set of values did not exist. The new horseman who took the name “vaquero” came to be adopted and called as “cowboy” by Anglo-Americans; and it was under the name “cowboy” that horsemanship across the Atlantic came to point to a set of traits and values. This was largely due to the fact that the vaquero was common place in Latin America and southern parts of North-America and, thus, his mythologizing was not as easy as cowboy for his historical character was portrayed in unambiguous terms and his definition was not enough obscure to lead to a creation of an entirely distinct personality that would challenge its historical reality. The harsh realities of life encountered in the new continent, the landscape, the dire need for man-power to tend numerous cattle resulted in alteration of the image and definition of the new horseman, vaquero. The result was a “mounted herdsman,” a mere instrument to carry out the menial work which Spanish nobles despised and avoided. Regardless of the degree of the expansion of the chivalric values performed by the Spanish nobles in America, today, it is not them but the vaqueros who come to mind

when early horsemanship in America is considered. According to Slatta, it is the vaquero to whom the cowboy is indebted all the equestrian habits and equipment that survived with him through time (Encyclopedia 180).

To understand the cowboy, then, we should recapitulate the history of vaquero; his function and what he stood for. Following this account, we will question the historical credibility of the image of cowboy and the set of values he now came to represent. Ironically, the cattleman rather than the cowboy was the central character on the ranching frontier. Without him there would have been no cowboys, and he set the bounds within which they lived. Today, cowboy's fame grows even greater as his environmental surroundings recede into history. Especially, novelists, dramatists, film directors and other practitioners of the arts have generally relegated the rancher to a shadowy background role for the main hero of their imaginative creations, the American cowboy.

In Cowboys of the Americas, Slatta argues that the cowboy trade goes back almost five hundred years. His history begins with Christopher Columbus who first introduced cattle and horse on his second voyage in 1494. He brought "twenty-four stallions, ten mares, and an unknown number of cattle on the island of Hispaniola" (9). The introduction of cattle to the mainland, however, was provided by Gregorio de Villalobos who carried "seven hardy Spanish Andalusian calves, six heifers and young bull" (Hassrick 113). As Hassrick notes, the cattle that was to give birth to the big ranching industry and, thus, to the cowboy of the Americas was of Andalusian stock: The cows that were to form the basis of the entire cowboy culture several generations later were the descendants of these offshoots and strays of the Andalusian cattle which the Spanish introduced to the New World (117).

Ranching started to be operated in North America in Mexico during the sixteenth century, when Spanish settlers brought the first domesticated horses and cattle to North America. Back home, Spanish had kept their cattle penned up in pastures. However, in the wide-open spaces of the New World, the cattle were allowed to wander freely, finding their own grass and water. The animals flourished. Soon, huge Spanish ranches were scattered across northern Mexico. As the years passed and the Spanish control of Mexico spread northward so did the cattle. Since the cattle roamed far and wide, the ranchers needed skilled horsemen to tend their herds. Despising the menial work of looking after cattle the Spanish nobility, Slatta explains, utilized Indians to fulfill this task:

The medieval Spanish Catholic culture carried a stigma against manual labor. White elites in the New World avoided manual labor, thus much work was left entirely to mestizos, blacks, and Indians (Cowboys and Frontiers 32).

The Spanish began to train "the local Indians to ride horses and handle cattle on the open range" and "these barefoot Indian cow herders were called *vaqueros*," after the Spanish word "vaca" for cow (Freedman 10). However, as Slatta explains, since the Spanish set very strict rules concerning horse trade they often gave horses to "Christianized Indians;" at stock ranches near the Rio Grande, for example, the Spanish trained Christianized "Native-American captives as stable hands" (Encyclopedia 199). The location of the cooperation of the Spanish missionary and explorers to find Indian cowhands was not limited only to Rio Grande:

The Jesuits and explorers, in their search for souls and gold, spread the descendants of these animals until wild cattle and feral horses teemed on the great prairies north of the Rio Grande and competed with the buffalo for existence. In what is now Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, and California, intrepid Spanish pioneers established missions and great haciendas, and trained Indians and mestizos to be good *vaqueros* (Tinker 99).

In the process of conversion, however, Indians were subjected to the cruel indifference and intolerance of the missionaries. Acceptance or refusal of Christianity often marked the thin line between survival and death. Some Indians who accepted the new religion often did so in order to survive Christian atrocities that were commonplace: "To those Indians who proved recalcitrant, the Spanish went to the extremes of cutting off their hands and feet to convince them of Christianity's omnipotence (Hassrick 38).<sup>16</sup>

Even though an Indian became a ranch hand after his conversion to Christianity, racial discriminations and prejudice were often the factors that determined their status. Many of them being the "sons of Spanish nobility," the missionary activities of the priests helped tame the Indian populace to utilize them for their menial works under religious guise and encouraged the expansion of Spanish inland movement; and, in the due course, the converted Indians were constantly regarded as "neophytes—a religious euphemism meaning trained slaves" (Forbis 53).

As Slatta records in Cowboys and Frontiers, things were not always as easy as the Spanish planned. There were also Indians who could not be converted and made work for the Spanish as cattle herders. The quick

spread of horses westward resulted in Indians' acquisition of them. Many of them strayed from the Spanish settlements. These horses came into the hands of Indians in increasing numbers. The expansion of the mining frontier, too, pushed horses and mules northward during the latter half of the sixteenth century. By the 1590s Indians as far as El Paso, Texas, prized Spanish horses enough to steal them.

During the seventeenth century, many Apaches and Navajos became highly skilled equestrian raiders, attacking Spanish ranches and larger settlements (Slatta 43). The Navajo kept strings of horses and regarded them as a measure of wealth and status. The Cheyenne were using horses by 1760. A decade later horses had become common among tribes north and east of the Missouri River. In later years the Cheyenne would acquire horses by capturing them from their enemies. They became famous as mounted hunters and warriors, joining the Kiowa, Apache and Comanche in an alliance against encroaching whites in 1840 (45-46). Horse also allowed them to follow the migratory buffalo and other big game for their sustenance.

The Indians could no longer cultivate their lands for the livestock introduced by the Spanish trampled their crops. They either damaged or ate them and as a result the Indians abandoned their crops and supported themselves with the spoils of buffalo hunt. The horse replaced both the canoe and dog as their primary transport. Wealth and honor came to be measured by the number and health of one's horses. Boys began tending family herds at the age of ten and could break horses in their early teens. Horse became an essential and valued element of Indian life. It is striking that the Indians integrated with horse in an astonishingly short time and proved insuperable horsemen. The horse marked the greatest single social and military transformation of the Indian character. Those who adopted the horse proved most resistant to conquest and conversion (Slatta 47). In their fight for freedom no other horsemen, be it Anglos or Spanish, could keep up with the Indian cavalry and their high equestrian skills. Neither were their horses better bred or trained than the Indian horses, as Worcester writes:

Army officers considered Plains warriors on their best war ponies the finest light cavalry in the world. If a cavalry unit couldn't overtake a band of Plains Indians in two hours, further pursuit was useless, for the Indian ponies could keep going for ninety miles (4).

In terms of both ranching and horsemanship, most Anglo cowboys looked upon Indians, as people of the wild nature, to survive and adapt to the land. Plains Indian skills have originally laid the groundwork for an understanding by early white pioneers on how to survive the harshness of the Great Plains. When Indians came to be employed by the Anglos, their status still suffered discriminations. Since it was a society of white Anglo-Saxon domination, Indians were not generally promoted to foremen and rarely did a trail boss or rancher despite the fact that, as General Brisbin once pointed out, "Indian herders were the best in the world" (Savage 94). In Cowboys of the Americas, Richard Slatta draws attention to the racial prejudice of Anglo-Americans, which had resulting effects on payments as well; ranchers usually paid Anglo ranch hands "ten dollars a month more than they paid vaqueros regardless of skills" (76).

The racial spectrum of cattle herders included also blacks. Most of the blacks had been slaves on Texas ranges, where they had been taught the skills of roping and riding. According to Forbis, "about one cowboy in six or seven was Mexican; a similar proportion was black" (18). It is possible to see black vaqueros during the early days of Anglo-American ranching (the 1830s and 1840s) on the South Texas coast. Slatta, too, reports that blacks "comprised about one-seventh of the total cowboy population" (Cowboys of the Americas 168). They were employed by the Anglos for the long trails north from Texas between 1866 and 1895. They, too, faced social discriminations and referred to by such names as "Nigger John." They frequently occupied the low-status job of horse wrangler; and, like Indians, seldom became foremen.

The portrait of the racial diversity of the early vaqueros reveals the fact that it was predominantly the Indians, and then Blacks and mestizos, who were the real cowboys. Unlike the popularized conception of today's cinematic cowboy it was these peoples who ran the cattle industry starting from the Spanish conquest of America until its demise in Anglo-American hands. In The Cowboy Encyclopedia, Slatta concludes that

In reality, many cowboys were nonwhite, especially on the southern ranges. Hispanic, black, and Native American cowboys worked the range in Texas, Oklahoma, and the southwestern borderlands (253).

## VI

The Anglo-Saxon tread in the scene of cattle industry is far later than the Spanish. The Anglo cowmen came to Texas in the 1820s as members of the Austin Colony, founded by S. F. Austin; they found that ranching had already been established by vaqueros. The Anglo-American cowboy came to his own in Texas during 1865 and 1880<sup>17</sup>. Even the word "ranching" was foreign to their language: it came from the word "ranch," which in

turn was derived from the Spanish word “rancho,” meaning farm or land, particularly one devoted to the breeding and raising of livestock.<sup>18</sup> David Dary writes that ranching, as it was then practiced on the haciendas of south and southwest Texas, across the Rio de Grande to the south, and far to the west in California, “was not part of the culture from which these predominantly American colonists came” (69). In the States, moreover, cattle raising was carried out along farming and not on a large scale. Ironically, the Anglo-cowboy often performed his work on foot. Furthermore, Dary adds that “only in the South was stock normally herded on horseback. In the North, men and boys herded cattle on foot” (Dary 69).

The Anglos had simply to take over the Spanish system that they found ready at their disposal. Not having a method of their own to establish a ranch, they often went into dangers in their encounters with buffalos and desperately needed vaqueros’ assistance:

One can imagine a new colonist seeing his first bunch of wild cattle on the edge of a thicket. Advancing toward them on foot, perhaps believing them to be docile like many cattle back in the States, he is suddenly surprised by the appearance of a wild bull, pawing the earth and tossing his head in anger at the man’s appearance. In a flash the bull charges. The colonist turns and runs to safety as the wild-eyed bull gives chase. The colonist learned quickly that wild Spanish cattle were dangerous and should be approached only on horseback. Even then wild cattle often charged man and horse. For that reason many newcomers to Texas let Mexicans and Indians capture and tame these sharp-horned beasts (Dary 72).

The portrait of the first cowboy chased by the Spanish Longhorn is a comic one and directly falls in opposition to the charismatic character that is always credited to conquer the Wild West. Nevertheless, it was a real life situation and the real Anglo-cowboy was not at all interested in being the embodiment of certain values.

Thus, one of the important points of divergence between cowboy life in North and South America is the time span involved. Wild-cattle hunting and open-range ranching was already well established in much of Latin America by the mid-sixteenth century.<sup>19</sup> Gauchos, illaneros, and vaqueros rode the range for two or three centuries before the appearance of Anglo cowboys in the American West. Frobis points out that the American cowboy, on the other hand, enjoyed a brief heyday that “lasted a bare generation;” from the end of the Civil War until the mid-1880s (17).

In this short period, the American cowboy relied entirely on this vaquero culture, that dates back to the Iberian Peninsula and further back to Moorish origin, for his very existence for he had no idea about the techniques and equipment necessary for managing numerous cattle they found on their arrival in Texas:

The North-American cowboy owed everything to Spain, not only the tools and techniques of his trade, but the very economic necessity that brought him into being: for it was she who sent the first horses and cattle to North America...The North Americans established ranches of their own and stocked them from the great unbranded herds. They needed cowboys to take care of them, but the young men from the Atlantic coast knew nothing of how to manage huge numbers of wild, fierce longhorns, roaming an unfenced continent. They had to learn how to ride herd from the Mexican *vaquero*, how to break a bronco, and to use riatas and branding irons. They adopted his entire equipment—the ring-bit, that was copied by the Spaniards from the Moors and is still in use in parts of the Southwest, and the stock saddle, which is merely a slightly modified form of the *Conquistadores*’, with a horn added for roping (Tinker 99-100).

It is impossible to think of cowboy’s existence without any reference to horse and cattle. The very name “cowboy” signifies where the term stems from and what his main function is. Cowboy as a loner who rides to sunset is an irrelevant character as far as history is concerned. Freedman points out this very basic fact refuting the so-called image that is destined to conquer new frontiers:

The American cowboy was fast becoming a legend. People saw him as a romantic figure, a colorful folk hero on horseback. He was admired for his independent spirit and his free-roaming way of life... The cowboy was in the saddle to herd cows, not to win the West (85).

The process of elevating the cowboy to an esteemed position was deemed possible only through disinformation, and not misinformation, produced by the dime novels and Hollywood's B westerns. If deprived of these two media, it would never have been possible for the cowboy character to emerge as a referential point for Americans to identify themselves with. The main point is that this so-called core-self is hollow in that it is all made-up and has nothing of its own; neither the horse, without which he would not be able to survive the harshness of the Great American Desert and to "win" new frontiers, nor the necessary equipment to handle this animal of crucial importance that marked many decisive turning points in the history of civilizations.<sup>20</sup>

At this critical point, we feel obliged to make clear the importance of the horse for long distances could not be eaten up without him; this is especially true of the vast New Found land. Even if, for a moment, we situate the myth of "frontier cowboy" in the place of the Spanish Conquistadors, inland explorations could not be implemented without these animals. James Serven, stating first that "His domestic ancestors carried the Conquistadors through the unexplored territory," pictures how essential these animals were for inland explorations:

The Age of exploration might better have been called the Age of the Spanish Horse, for without this particular type of horse, the New World would have been almost impenetrable (qtd. in Lawrence 137).

It is necessary, Tinker stresses, to recall that these horses were descendants of "Arab ancestors brought over by the *Conquistadores*" (74). Indeed, it was these horses that the American westward expansive experience, that of overcoming all types of hardships and obstacles; the harsh and unpredictable Great Plains climate, fierce Indians, vast distances, and awesome alien creatures of the wild, became a possibility. In the process of penetrating this realm, nature and wilderness was conquered by the very imposition of these horses: "Cowboys preferred them to the larger horses imported from the East" (Freedman 30). In this respect, these Arab horses in particular, whose pedigree could be traced back to Turkish Akhal-Tekes of Central Asia, are the archetypal symbol of man's conquering force:

Beginning just after the Civil War, it ended sometime in the 1890's; but in those few years those bowlegged centaurs, those restless horizon-hunters, rode into the West on their Spanish ponies, tamed a country the size of an empire, and made possible its settlement and unbelievable development (Tinker 109).

On the other hand, if we adhere to the realities of history and point out that cowboy was nothing but a cowhand, then, still he must entirely rely upon the existence of these horses. Both cases entail the dire necessity of owning a horse. As Adams rightly observes, if a man "didn't have a hoss he couldn't be a cowboy" (3). The irony with the second assertion is that majority of cowboys who worked in the ranches, long trails or round-ups were not, as discussed earlier, of Anglo-Saxon origin; and even if they indeed were, the horses they rode mostly belonged to ranch owners, not to them:

Every cowboy owned his saddle, but he did not always own a horse. Horses were furnished by the ranch or trail outfit he was working for...As long as a cowboy stayed with an outfit, the string of horses assigned to him were his, as surely as if he did own them. If a boss wanted a man to quit, he would take the cowboy's favorite horse away from him (Freedman 29-30).

The adoption of the Arab horses brought about the adoption of horse equipment, too. Most of these equipments were of Turkish origin transported to the Iberian Peninsula by Moors; and across the Atlantic to the New World by the Spanish Conquistadors. The Arab horses on which the Spanish Conquistadors were mounted were favored by the Anglos to the ones which were brought to the colonies from the East. In the process of adoption, Anglo cowboy simply took over the vaquero way of horsemanship abandoning their old customs:

They learned to rope cattle and horses with rawhide riatas, to catch and break mustangs, and to ride with a big horned saddle. No longer did they use long whips and herd dogs to work cattle. A century and a half later, Texas cowboys still use the equipment and practices borrowed from the vaqueros. Over the years they have made some improvements, but the riding gear serves the same basic purposes (Worcester 5).

Vaquero equipment was vastly imitated. The Western saddle, as it evolved on the plains, was a direct descendant of the 16th century Spanish war saddle on which the Spanish conquistadors rode into Mexico. This war saddle "itself descended from one devised by the Moors a few hundred years earlier..." (Forbis 105). Worcester, too, acknowledges that "The vaquero's horned saddle evolved gradually from Moorish and Spanish war saddles into one suitable for use in handling cattle on the open range" and that "The catch rope and saddle horn were among the vaquero's greatest contributions to later cowboys" (Worcester 6). Due to the changes in the function of saddles caused by the environmental differences encountered on the pampas, some regional alterations of them would take place. The vaqueros of the Rio de la Plata "copied their leather and wool, layer-cake saddle from the 'a la brida' of Spain, while the Mexican adopted the wooden tree of the *Conquistadores*, to which he added a large horn as a snubbing post for his riata." Despite these slight changes in saddle "They used the same spurs and ring-bit of Arab origin" (Tinker 77). Moorish stirrups were also among this set of adoptions. Slatta calls attention to the fact that "The Moors brought stirrups to Europe in about eighth century, when they conquered the Iberian Peninsula" (Encyclopedia 343). He also emphasizes in *Cowboys of the Americas* that the use of short stirrups remained unchanged among the "charros" but their length was increased by vaqueros for stirrups used in ranching had to be long for ergonomically purposes unlike those which were used in battles. The vaquero passed all these methods and equipment to the American cowboy, "who in return carried them north to the Canadian ranges" (73). During these vast adoptions and imitations, cowboy language was inevitably affected. Cowboy terminology, as Worcester illustrates, got heavily peppered by Spanish terms that were slightly altered to fit the English spelling and pronunciation:

Anglos and their slave cowboys became adept in roping both cattle and horses. They borrowed not only the techniques and horsemanship of the Tejanos but also their terminology. Cowpens became corrals; vaquero was transformed into buckaroo; and ropes became lassos or lariats. Chaps, broncos, mustangs, sombreros and hackamores were also terms made over or adopted from Spanish words (9).

## VII

By the 1890s, the open range roundup and the long trail drive had passed into history, and cowboy's way of life had changed forever. Homesteaders had been settling down all over the West. To protect their fields and keep their livestock from straying, they began to use the newly invented barbed wire, which made it possible for the first time to fence off large areas cheaply and easily. Soon, cattle ranchers were also putting up barbed-wire fences. Long strands of barbed wire stretched across the western plains, and wherever the new fences appeared, they marked the end of the open range. Meanwhile, a network of railroad tracks was spreading throughout the West (Slatta, Encyclopedia 85). By the early 1890s, railroads reached all the way to central Texas, making long trail-drives unnecessary. The last was driven north to Kansas in 1896. Roundups, which once had ranged over hundreds of square miles, now were conducted within barbed-wire enclosures. Men on horseback still drove herds of cattle, but only from their fenced pastures to railroad loading pens a few miles away. Cowboys began to spend much of their time fixing fences, repairing windmills, and mowing hay. The golden age of the cowboy in the American West was gone as the twentieth century dawned.

Yet a cowboy culture was still looming larger in the minds of Americans. While this culture still permeates the American society, it is not the culture of the real nineteenth-century cowboy. Rather it is a fabrication of imagination, and it is rooted in the writings of many writers. These writers produced romantic and adventurous stories about the West to capitalize on the public's curiosity about the frontier. The popularity of these fictional tales became so great that more and more of them were written to satisfy the public's craving.

The 1890s was the era that codified the "frontier thesis" of American history, which would also directly contribute to the definition of the cowboy image, which argued that Americans had evolved a unique and superior civilization due to the impact of the frontier experience. According to historian Frederick Jackson Turner, the existence of a rugged frontier and 400 years of Americans being in contact with it had created a new breed of person, of whom the frontier cowboy would be the embodiment, and new type of culture.<sup>21</sup> The ancestry of most Americans came from the Old World where, Turner suggested, individual strength had become suppressed beneath the dictates and priorities of a complex culture and an overbearing society. Nonetheless, Turner continued, the challenge of a raw frontier helped such civilized weaknesses and shortcomings to regain a degree of self-reliance and personal strength. The frontier, Turner continued, had closed about 1890 and although occasional parts of wilderness survived, they are surrounded by civilization and will sooner or later be annexed by it. Nevertheless, Turner asserted, the heritage of the frontier experience would continue to impact American culture and society for many years to come since it has given rise to a strong and virile personality type and created a national character which led to greatness. The frontier thesis was quickly embraced by the

American elite. For many years, Americans had been made to feel like second-class intellectuals by Europeans who suggested that American achievements were but second-hand reflections of more sophisticated European prototypes. In contrast, Turner's frontier thesis would reverse the situation by asserting that on the wild frontier Americans had sharpened their skills to an edge far better than that of their European counterparts and in the process they created a sense of distinctiveness all their own:

Closely related to the prevailing view that Americans possessed a positive and productive uniqueness is the fact that American intellectuals and the social elite were actively fighting for parity with their European cousins. Chauvinistic Europeans often dismissed American civilization as a weak reflection of the cultural traditions of Europe and Americans as cultural and intellectual second-class citizens. In this environment, "Americans" sought a means of asserting their equality or superiority (Walle 92).

Just after the twentieth century began, Owen Wister, who had been to the West, added to what was becoming the myth of the cowboy with his novel The Virginian. However, there were no cattle in the story, and the life of the cowboy was portrayed with enormous deviation from his historical context. As J. Frank Dobie aptly pointed out, Wister's Virginian was a "cowboy without cows," a "hero [who] does not smell of cows" (124). The novel firmly established the gunfight between the hero and the villain as a western theme. During the book's fifty years, it sold more than 1,600,000 copies, not counting foreign translations and reprints. Social elites, who were looking for a means of portraying American civilization on a par with older European cultures, quickly embraced the book since it was in accordance with Turner's frontier thesis:

Owen Wister's cowboy hero, via his social Darwinist portrayal of the frontier thesis, provided the American elite with the intellectual justification its members needed to portray themselves as superior to their rivals from the Old World (Walle 189).

In the early years of the twentieth century, Zane Grey (1872-1939), the most famous and best-seller dime novelist also turned to writing about the west and cowboys, and added fuel to the sparkling mythical cowboy culture. He proved a successful popular writer. His main focus was cowboy's rugged individualism and the way that the "Great American Desert" help men build a unique character in their encounter with wilderness; he covered these themes in his Desert Gold, The Call of the Canyon and Riders of the Purple Sage. He also valued horses and made them the central character in his novels, such as Last of the Plainsmen and Wildfire. In his Knights of the Range and The Trail Driver, alluding to the chivalric virtues of the European knight he imbued his characters with loyalty and moderation (Slatta, Encyclopedia 166). Well aware of the public's expectations, he formulized the dimensions of the cowboy that sharpened the edges of the character and made him the embodiment of certain values:

Zane Grey understood how to market fiction to mainstream people who believed the spirit of the frontier gave Americans and American society an inherent superiority. Grey routinized the basic plotline which had been crystallized by Owen Wister's fictional embracing of Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis, and he transformed it into a formula which he replicated time and time again. The cowboy story has often been depicted as a completely predictable genre which features a virile and moralistic hero who confronts a society. Grey standardized and codified what emerged as the classic formula of the cowboy story (Walle 113).

He emphasized the wild beauty of open spaces and rugged individualism. He wrote about the cowboy in the way that non-westerners wanted him to, developing a western mythology that helped turn that area into the most romanticized area of the United States. The West, to Grey, was more an idea than a geographical region. In fact, the West did not offer the charm with which Grey endowed it, but that was not a great problem. After all, the most important thing was that in Americans' thought the West had all these qualities and this thirst should be quenched. Writer Burton Rascoe sums up the reason of the great attraction that Zane Grey had:

Grey brought about the vicarious wish-fulfillment of millions of sedentary workers in the office warrens of cities and industrial towns—of imprisoned men to whom a new Zane Grey novel was a splendid escape into a wild, free dreamland of limitless horizons, where the problems of

life are reduced to the simple elements and where justice triumphs over evil, the wages of courage and uprightness are true love and genuine happiness, and where men breath in freedom (qtd. in Rainey 39).

It was Grey who made “western” a generic term, and whose success prompted many other writers to follow in his footsteps. Much of his work has been used as the story line for movies, sometimes with astronomical profits. Between 1956 and 1961, many of his books were shot for television by “Zane Grey Western Theatre” (Slatta, Encyclopedia 166-167).

Another form of entertainment was adding to the misconceptions: the Wild West show. William F. “Buffalo Bill” Cody performed shows on the road in 1883. Cody, already a hero of dime novels, included in his repertoire demonstrations of shooting, bronco-busting, roping and riding wild steers, horse races and numerous other acts supposedly depicting life in the Wild West. The Wild West shows of Buffalo Bill toured not only the West but many eastern cities and even foreign countries adding to the myth of the cowboy:

It is a historical fact that before Buffalo Bill the American cowboy was far from being considered a hero. It was largely due to the influence of the Wild West that he was given that status (Lawrence 46).

Later, rodeo replaced the Wild West show as the largest form of live western entertainment. Today’s bull riding originated as solely as rodeo entertainment. And the professional rodeo entertainer was only an entertainer and nothing more. Nevertheless, the cowboy’s effort to overbear and tame the bull still signifies another form of conquering the West. In this respect, the Wild West is credited with being the first large-scale event to dramatize the American West and to transform the entire region into a place of romance and glamour.

Film industry, too, reinforced the myth of the cowboy no less effective than any other art forms. Cripple Creek Barrom was produced in 1898. Then came The Great Train Robbery in 1903. The film was to stand as a prototype for all the westerns to follow. It was produced something like a modern documentary in order to make the audiences of these early western feel that they were witnessing “not merely casual entertainment but, rather, a serious and dignified visual discussion of an era which had already passed into the nations heritage” (Everson and Fenin 27). The movies that followed perpetuated, perfected, and extended the cowboy myth to such a degree that the average person could not easily distinguish reality from myth when thinking about the cowboy. The scripts of writers such as Zane Grey, Louis L’Amour, Luke Short, Peter Field, Peter Kyne, and Jackson Gregory turned the whole business of cowboy myth into almost a reality which people were so keen to embrace. Sensationalized, glorified, romanticized, distorted, and imaginative depiction of the American cowboy gave body and form to him that ultimately ascended him to the heights of a legend: “No class of men were ever so unfaithfully represented and in consequence so misunderstood and unfairly judged by people generally, as the old-time cowboy has been (Adams 2).

However, the cowboy captured the imagination of many Americans. Having rejected the European bounds, they had to establish a self of their own. The cowboy stepped in the right time to cater to this need. He served as a role model for many Americans to identify themselves with. It also created a referential point for Americans to keep them intact at difficult times. In this regard, B westerns played an immensely important role in terms of shaping and moulding the “self” of American people:

The popularity of the “B” western was an extension of the cowboy myth in American life. Historian Carl Becker noted that Americans are prone to cling to what he called “useful myths.” The western film hero received an adoration and continuing loyalty of amazing proportions. Villains were hissed with equal fervor. Westerns moved audiences emotionally as no other type of film. The emotional conditioning provided by these films, and the durability of that conditioning should never be underestimated by historians of American life. Some historians have dismissed the “B” western as simply a novelty or tasteless fad with no real substance or significance. However, it is entirely possible that in the midst of the confusion and uncertainty created by the Depression and World War II audiences sustained many of their “faiths” by identifying with such admirable and powerful symbols of straight-forward righteousness as seen in the “B” westerns (qtd. in Rainey 6).

Buck Rainey holds that in almost all the B westerns, the cowboy always exists in binary opposition to the villain. He stands for the “good” while the Indians and Mexicans represent the “bad.” Racial superiority of

white Anglo-American is reinforced throughout B westerns. The inferiority complex against Hispanic Mexicans, to whom the white cowboys owe everything, was settled by degrading them. And Indians, who had always been under Anglo-American persecution, came to be the stock of everything bad and violent. It was only through demeaning them that the Anglo-cowboy was able to elevate himself. In the process, they often had to be invariably eradicated. The racial bias was so deeply engraved in the Anglo-American mind that in at least 90 percent of B westerns portrayed Indians and Mexicans as subhuman or inferior creatures. From the very outset of American cinema industry Indians were stereotyped as “dumb, painted, animalistic savages and Mexicans as dirty, treacherous, knife-wielding misfits.” Since both Indians and Mexicans were indispensable killing either did not matter at all. In this stereotypical portrayal, Indians and Mexicans stood for all negative characteristics, such as savagery, corruption, immorality and wickedness, whereas “the pure Anglo hero functioned as a preserver of civilization.” All in all, as Rainey concludes, the treatment was unrealistic, unfair, misleading, and downright degrading (11).

In reality, as Slatta quotes from a magazine called *Las Vegas Optic* (New Mexico, 28 June 1881), there was not a wilder or more lawless men in any country that pretends to civilized than the gangs of semi-nomads that live in some of our frontier States and Territories and are referred to in our dispatches as “the cowboys.” Many of them have emigrated from our States in order to escape the penalty of their crimes, and it is extremely doubtful whether there is one in their number who is not guilty of penitentiary offense, while most of them merit the gallows. They are supposed to be herdsmen employed to watch vast herds of cattle, but they might more properly be known under any name that means desperate criminal. They roam about in sparsely settled villages with revolvers, pistols and knives in their belts, attacking every peaceable citizen met with (Encyclopedia 86).

The American Cowboy is no paragon of virtue. He is a made-up image created by romantics and popularizers through literature and cinema. The cowboy of the American West was portrayed in many novels and films as courageous and daring figure living out his life on the fringes of wilderness and civilization. However, as Slatta writes, he was no more than a “poorly paid laborer engaged in difficult, dirty, often monotonous work” (Encyclopedia 85). Whatever his efforts and merits for ranch owners may be, he was ultimately no more precious than the cattle he tended because ranch hands could be obtained anywhere at any time for only a few dollars (Savage 7).

Whatever the historical records might be, the American cowboy is popularly accepted by Americans as a symbol and myth. He represents ultimate heroism in fiction and film. His image stands for rugged individualism and it is firmly fixed in the popular mind. As Savage asserts, this is, to a considerable extent, because “the sophisticated methodologies that historians are wont to apply to the examination of other historical problems have not been applied to the study of the cowboy, for several reasons” (*The Cowboy Hero* 4). Much of what emerges as cowboy scholarship is itself imagerial. Thus, when dealing with the American Cowboy, it should be estimated that it is an image that is dealt with at the very bottom.

All the foregoing discussion shows that the horse helped create cultures and equestrian heroes. In this sense they function to transmit not only cultural patterns, but also shape their heroes. There are strong indications that most of them are totally adopted from the Arabs encountered in Poitiers and from Turks, who came to Europe from the heart of Asia. Among them, horse is an integral part of knighthood for it is the horse that fundamentally changed the nature of battles in European history. Remarkably, the oldest known breed of riding horse, the Arabian evolved from the ancient deserts of Middle Asia (Azzaroli 180). The passage of Arab horses to Europeans is via the conquest of the Iberia Peninsula by a Muslim commander, Tariq Bin Ziyad. The importance of these horses rest in their speed, swiftness, incredible stamina and endurance with their large lung capacity and their unequalled ability to bond with humans; to understand and give response to the orders of the rider in battles, and therefore are predominantly preferred by knights ever since. Although Europeans had bred horses through the Dark Ages, their pony breeds were no match for the small, fast horses that the Muslims owned.<sup>22</sup>

In addition to the material components of cavalry and their origins, to fully understand knighthood, we must, as is stated above, look at the phases it evolved into. The knight is essentially a product of the militarization of society. He is always marked with the advent of feudalism, a form of society distinguished by the decentralization of authority, which gave birth to a certain tie of personal dependence between man and man called vassalage.<sup>23</sup> By the physical domination of the rural populace, it became inevitable for the landlords to turn themselves into a military aristocracy in order to survive since wars were commonplace in feudal Europe. This required arms, retinue and agents of various kinds. Those who provided them came increasingly to be called knights. Thus, at the very outset, the knight was a warrior who served a lord by fighting for him. The interdependence between the lord and the knight emphasizes the concept of service, which is central to

knighthood (Painter 2). The European knight is always pictured as a wandering man of free spirit. However, it is interesting to note that “only a handful of men in medieval Christendom would have regarded themselves as truly free; even the king of England owed feudal service to the king of France” (Church 23)

According to F. J. C. Hearnshaw, knighthood began as a stranger to the world of courtesy; masculine and aggressive, that missed the distinctive touch of chivalry and its central figure, the heroine. It was the courtly elements that helped most the transformation of the rude warrior into an idealistic figure. Had the knight kept belonging only to a military context, be it either for secular or religious reasons, this civilizing process would not have happened. The contribution of the royal or princely courts, the meeting-places of knight and cleric, was immense. With the defeat of the invaders, such as Magyars, Slavs and Saracens, and the dawn of the stress of the pressure of it in the Continent, the knight, no longer so frequently abroad, was thrown more into the company of his wife, his family and courts. In Southern French courts did feminine graces start to bloom under the patronage of princes and barons that also paved the way for music, poetry, handicraft, painting and sculpture to flourish and to form a brand new civilization. The priests who captured the knighthood were now replaced by the troubadours who captured it for romance and service of a lady. With the appearance of romances, the lady became the main inspiration behind the knightly deeds. However, considering the feudal and Christian attitudes against woman, it is rather surprising that this new cult could stem and find favor in Europe. Because, feudalism defined woman as a serf and a chattel, and it was a deadly enemy of romance. It was the world of epics; of bloodshed and swords, which had no room for reverence for women (Prestage 15-18).

Without any doubt, the emergence of both the European knight and the American Cowboy could ultimately be traced back to Turks; especially to the Huns who introduced horsemanship and bow to Europe. Permanent existence of certain Turkish tribes in Eastern Europe (such as Avars, Magyars and Pechenegs, all of which are different branches of Asiatic Turks) introduced and consolidated this entirely new fashion to Europe. The introduction and proper use of saddles, stirrups, bits; techniques of horse-breeding caused a radical change in the history of European civilization. Most important of all, modeling Turkish horsemen, Europeans got access to the knowledge of riding a horse and waging battles on horseback, which would change drastically the nature of warfare. Europeans started to recruit their armies predominantly of cavalry. We have no earlier records that indicate an existence of an army of another nation or tribe that is entirely based on cavalry. The horse in its odyssey from Central Asia to North America, thus, prove to be a transmitter of values and culture, changing on its way the course of history.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.burbage-jun.leics.sch.uk/tudors/kings/h8\\_jousting.htm](http://www.burbage-jun.leics.sch.uk/tudors/kings/h8_jousting.htm)

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.burbage-jun.leics.sch.uk/tudors/kings/elizabeth\\_courtiers.htm](http://www.burbage-jun.leics.sch.uk/tudors/kings/elizabeth_courtiers.htm)

<sup>3</sup> [http://members.tripod.com/~aaron\\_neilson/birth.html](http://members.tripod.com/~aaron_neilson/birth.html)

<sup>4</sup> <http://historymedren.about.com/library/weekly/aa031398.htm>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.fernweb.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/mf/huns.htm>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/society/A0824551.html>

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.ucalgary.ca/applied\\_history/tutor/oldwrld/armies/huns.html](http://www.ucalgary.ca/applied_history/tutor/oldwrld/armies/huns.html)

<sup>8</sup> Archeological evidences indicate that horse was first domesticated by Turks and used by them for riding, the traction of light vehicles and sometimes for food. See also page 96 of the same book for Uzbek (Central Asiatic Turks) Petroglyphs showing horses and chariots, which date from the second or third millennium B.C.

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.turanianhorse.org/origin.html>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.turanianhorse.org/origin.html>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.turanianhorse.org/yesterday.html>

<sup>12</sup> [www.arabianhorseamerica.com/history/beduin.asp](http://www.arabianhorseamerica.com/history/beduin.asp)

<sup>13</sup> For similar reasons the knight was not interested in learning the skills of firearms like gunpowder and artillery in 1400s. Blinded by pursuit of prowess and honor, crude and vulgar display of power at hot contacts in wars, which lacks any tactical intelligence, it seems, draws the character of the knight, which caused its downfall.

<sup>14</sup> By the rapid spread of the impact of the Council of Clermont through the West, things got out of hand and Urban II lost control in the matter of personnel. Note that it is Peter the Hermit who led the bands of poor to the Holy Land, which resulted in total destruction upon their arrival in Anatolia.

<sup>15</sup> The word “charro” came from Salamanca, Spain, where it was used to denote those who lived in the surrounding countryside.

<sup>16</sup> See also Stannard, David E. *American Holocaust*. New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992. pp 57-146 for an elaborate treatment of the Spanish enslavement and systematic genocide of the Indians

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.unm.edu/~gabbriel/chap5.html>

<sup>18</sup> 11 Apr 2003 <http://www.unm.edu/~gabbriel/chap9.html>

<sup>19</sup> 11 Apr 2003 <http://www.unm.edu/~gabbriel/chap5.html>

<sup>20</sup> 11 Apr 2003 <http://www.unm.edu/~gabbriel/chap2.html>

<sup>21</sup> <http://history.sandiego.edu/gen/text/civ/turner.html>

<sup>22</sup> 09 Apr 2003 [www.arabianhorseamerica.com/history/beduin.asp](http://www.arabianhorseamerica.com/history/beduin.asp)

<sup>23</sup> 11 Aug 2001 <http://historymedren.about.com/library/weekly/aa031398.htm>