

“Li darriens tens et la fin de l’aage”. Old Age as perceived by a Crusader knight. Philip of Novara’s views on Age and Aging

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This article delves into the portrayal of old age in a renowned treatise on the stages of life, which exerted significant influence on subsequent European literary tradition. The treatise was authored by Philip of Novara in the early 1270s, and is widely recognized as a moralizing tract that reflects abstract views on old age, characteristic of the Middle Ages. However, upon closer examination, the work is revealed to be based substantially on empirical evidence, especially when compared with the author’s legal treatise and other writings. Being the work of a Crusader, the text bears the imprint of knightly mentality and reflects prevailing ideas about old age within this aristocratic society.

Recent research in age and aging has shown that the way late life is understood, experienced, and valued can vary significantly across cultures and societies. This research suggests that age is, to some extent, a socio-cultural construct (Classen 5–84; von Hülsen-Esch 7–20), shaping perceptions of different life stages. Further, cultures differ in their understanding about when specific life stages begin and end. Concepts of age in the medieval period differ considerably from contemporary perceptions of age (Gaffney 570-582). Hence, examining medieval understandings of age may contribute to a historical-cultural approach to aging research.

Traditionally, the primary sources for examining medieval representations of old age are moral and didactic literary works, particularly treatises on *aetates homini*. These texts, which deal with the ‘ages of man’ reflect highly abstract moral concepts of the stages of human life (Shahar; Sears). In my paper, I focus on the portrayal of old age in the treatise, “The Four Ages of Man” by Philip of Novara (*Les .IIII. tenz d’aage d’ome*). A discussion of medieval perceptions of old age would be incomplete without reference to this classical text. Written in the vernacular, this exceptional work had a significant influence on subsequent literary tradition. In the treatise, believed to have been written in the early 1270s, the aging author shares moral reflections on life and offers guidance to the young from the perspective of old age.¹

Although the treatise has been studied extensively—including a recent edition by the Italian medievalist Silvio Melani (*Les. IIII. tenz d’aage d’ome* 237-415) and a newly discovered fragment by Roberto Tagliani (“Un nuovo frammento” 39-77), —one aspect that has thus far received relatively little attention is that the treatise *Les .IIII. tenz d’aage d’ome* was written by a knight-crusader and reflects chivalric mentality.

Philip of Novara was a typical representative of the knightly class of the Eastern Mediterranean. These knights were distinguished by their use of French as a common language and their knowledge of courtly literature (Jacoby 158-186). Literature became a powerful formative element in shaping norms of social behavior and knightly ethos (Jacoby 617-646). The treatise, written in Old French, reflects conceptions of old age prevalent in aristocratic society. I will examine the author’s descriptions of older adults and attempt to reconstruct his understanding of aging.

FOUR STAGES OF LIFE

¹See selected studies of his life and writing: Kohler, “Philippe de Novare and *Les Quatre Ages de l’homme*.”; Bromiley, “Philippe de Novare Another Epic Historian”; Schulze-Busacker, “Philippe de Novare, “*Les Quatre Ages de l’homme*”; Loba, “La vie humaine au rythme des saisons et des mois — “*Les quatre âges de l’homme* de Philippe de Novare et les *Douze mois figurez*”; Samuelson and Singer, “Crossing Time with Philippe de Novare: Deconstructing the Life Cycle in the .iiij. tenz d’aage d’om”. See also the list published on the website *Archives de littérature du Moyen âge*: http://www.arlima.net/mp/philippe_de_novare.html. Accessed 12.05.2026.

Philip of Navara was probably born in the early 1200s in Lombardy and, by 1218, had travelled east by 1218, when he served as a page to the Cypriot baron Pierre Chape. He then entered the service of John of Ibelin, the ‘Old Lord’ of Beirut—a prominent legal scholar of the Latin East closely connected to the High Court of Jerusalem—and became a devoted supporter of the baronial Ibelin family. He likely owed his success to his skills as a professional pleader, whose role was to present the facts of a court case. It was during the Fifth Crusade that he met Ralph of Tiberias, a renowned crusader baron and expert in feudal law, from whom he acquired knowledge that he later incorporated in his legal treatise *Livre de forme de plait*.² This work, like others, was written in Old French.

In the introduction to his treatise, Philip of Novara explains that he conceived the idea of writing such a work when he was over 70 years old, which scholars situate in the early 1270s.³ Having passed through the stages of life—from childhood to old age—he decided to talk about the different ages of a person’s life,⁴ employing the analogy of the four seasons of the year. Using Pythagoras’ scheme, Philip of Novara divides life into four stages (childhood, youth, maturity, old age), which he then compares to the seasons (spring, summer, autumn, and winter). Each stage spans 20 years and is subdivided into two ten-year substages (5.1.-5.6).

The number four was considered ideal for various combinations: it aligns with the four seasons, the four humors (blood, phlegm, yellow bile, black bile), the four temperaments (sanguine, phlegmatic, choleric, melancholic), and the four elements (air, fire, earth, and water). In Christian symbolism, this pattern repeats in the four gospels, the four rivers of paradise, and numerous other

² In his treatise, he recounts how, at the request of his suzerain Pierre Chape, he served Ralf of Tiberias and had extensive interactions with him. Philip of Novara, *Livre de forme de plait*. Ed. Peter W. Edbury. Nicosia: Cyprus Research Centre, 2009, p. 122: “Messire Rau...me conteit moult de choze dou royaume de Jerusalem et des us et des assises, et disoit que je les retenisse...”

³ As Peter Edbury observes, “what we know of Philip’s career confirms his claim that he lived beyond the age of seventy. Assuming that, as a squire in 1218, he was in his late teens at the time, his birth can be dated to around 1200”; Edbury sets out the full argument in the introduction to his edition of Philip’s treatise. (Philip of Novara, *Livre de forme de plait*, pp. 15-16).

⁴ Filippo da Novara. *Les. IIII. tenz d’aage d’ome*. Testo, traduzione e note a cura di Silvio Melani. Padova: Università degli Studi di Padova, 2020 (hereafter cited as follows: *Les. IIII. tenz d’aage d’ome*). II: “et par soffrir et par server assez de bien eü, dont il devoit miex savoir ansaignier les autres.”

instances (Burrow 18; Paravicini Bagliani 7-19). Thus, rational connections were established between humans, nature, and Christian symbolism. Philip of Novara's adoption of the fourfold scheme of dividing life into stages allowed him to draw parallels between the course of life and the passage of a year. In addition to associating life stages to the four seasons, Philip attributed a virtue to each stage: childhood with *souffrance* (patience), youth with *service*, middle age with *valor*, and old age with *honor*. Clearly, the virtues *valor* and *honor* correlate to knightly values.⁵

On the one hand, Philip's depiction of old age is quite clichéd and reflects biblical stereotypes. According to him, old age spans from 60 to 80 years, with the decade from 70 to 80 considered the most difficult stage of life, especially as one approaches 80. Philip writes: "Whoever has passed this point had better pray for death and ask God for a good ending." He also states: "There is no need to ask an old man, 'are you suffering?' for the life of a good old man is travail and suffering."⁶ These references to the age-span of 70 and 80 years closely echo Psalm 90:10: "The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty; yet their span is but toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away."

Not only do stereotypes appear in Philip of Novara's moral tract, but a closer look at his legal treatise and the works of other Crusader jurists reveals that knights over 60 years old were relieved from military service and required to return their horse and sword to their lord.⁷

Furthermore, noblewomen in their sixties were also excused from the obligation of 'marriage service' imposed on the widows in the Crusader states.

⁵ *Les. III. tenz d'aage d'ome*. 4.4.1-2: «La vie dou bien viel n'est que travail et doulour, et por ce dit on que l'an ne doit mais demander au viel: 'Vous dolez ?' »»

⁶ *Ibid.* 4.4.1-2: «La vie dou bien viel n'est que travail et doulour, et por ce dit on que l'an ne doit mais demander au viel: 'Vous dolez ?' »»

⁷ John of Ibelin, *Le livre des Assises*. Ed. Peter W. Edbury. Leiden; Boston, 2003, p. 696. 5.1: " Il est assise et costume et husage que tous chevaliers, qui ont passé .XL. ans d'aage...est quite dou servise de son cors, et, il s'en veaut excuser par ce que il a passé aage, le seignor en avra le cheval et les armes en eschange de son cors... ". The editor argues that "XL" is a copyist's error for "LX." However it should be noted that this passage appears only in relatively late recensions. On the other hand, the age of 60 was apparently considered a significant milestone in the Crusader states. For instance, Philip's treatise indicates that the participation of individuals of such advanced age in judicial duels, such as the *bataille des champions*, was discouraged. See Philip of Novara, *Livre de forme de plait*: ch. 10 (p.44) ; ch. 12 (p.50) ; ch. 31 (p. 91).

In these societies, widowed noblewomen were obliged to remarry in order to fulfil the military service obligations attached to their fiefs. A lord could not compel any widow to remarry until a year and a day had elapsed since the death of her previous husband. After that period, he could summon her to remarry and was required to present three eligible men, from whom she could choose her future husband (Brundage 258-271). All these candidates were expected to be social equals of the woman and her late husband.⁸ That women were exempt from marriage obligations at the age of sixty signals the transition to older age for both men and women. This view, as reflected in the treatise, is consistent with historical practice.

‘A LA MORT NE FAUT NUS’

In his treatise, Philip of Novara discusses several subjects related to old age, with the main theme being mental and bodily decay. Old age is portrayed as a time of degradation, when a person's abilities begin to change: “consciousness, natural intelligence, and memory begin to weaken and diminish.”⁹ It is described as “the final age and the worst period of life” (*au darreen tens de son aage et ou poieur*), “the last age before the end of life” (*li darriens tens et la fins de l’aage*), and “a very dangerous and treacherous age” (*moult perilleuse chose et dangereuse*).¹⁰ Philip compares old age to winter: “Old age is worse than winter with all its frost.”¹¹ Older people are reminded “that they are on the brink of the grave and that no one can escape death.”¹² Death spares no one: *A la mort ne faut nus* (4.5.7, 5.22.6) — such a refrain recurs throughout the treatise.

Compared to other life stages, old age is often considered the worst. While childhood forms the foundation of life, and youth can be a dangerous period,

⁸ Philip of Novara, *Livre de forme de plait*... p. 161. ch.57: “Le seignor ne peut nule veve esforcier de mari prendre tant que .i. an et .i. jor soit passé après la mort de son mari qui fu. Après la peut semondre d'esposer mari, et il en deit offrir .iii. qu'ele preinge lequeil qu'ele vaudra. Et tous les .iii. doivent estre pareil a la feme et au mari qui mors est, car la feme est a chois de dire lequeil elle vaudra, et metre avant le parage de li ou de son mari qui fu...”

⁹ *Les .IIII. tenz d’aage d’ome*. 4.1.6: “Connoissance et soutilice naturel et memoire commence a faillir et a amenuiser.”

¹⁰ Ibid. 4.4.44 ; 4.1.1; 4.1.2

¹¹ Ibid. 2.37.6: “Car viellesce vaut pis que yver a toute sa froidure.”

¹² Ibid. 5.22.5-6: “Et touz jors doivent avoir en remembrance de savoir qu’il sont sus l’ourle d leur fosse et que nuns ne puet eschapper a la mort.”

the ages from 40 to 50 are considered the pinnacle, a time of balance when all human abilities reach their peak and individuals experience their prime,¹³ the perfect stage of life.¹⁴ Old age falls short in many respects when compared to the vitality of middle age.

The gradual decline over the full lifespan is depicted as an organic progression using the metaphor of the growth of a tree. Old age, compared to winter, is the period of decline of the human body and the degeneration of vegetation: a person's limbs bend and the head bows, like a tree that has lost its leaves and leans toward the earth. 'Car de terre sont, et en terre revendront,' concludes Philippe de Novare, reflecting on the death of men and the lethargy of nature.¹⁵

The second theme related to old age concerns appropriate behavior in advanced years. Drawing on examples from the Bible, Philip of Novara depicts a repulsive image of the old lecher. He cites a biblical passage (Ecclesiasticus 25:2) describing three types of sinners despised by the Lord: the lustful old man, the proud beggar, and the deceitful rich man. Philip also evokes the well-known figure of the *senex amans* (the old man in love), a character frequently encountered in ancient and medieval literature. According to him, older men should refrain from imitating the behavior of younger men, particularly in matters of sexuality, such as marrying a much younger woman. If the wife is young, an older husband is likely to be consumed by jealousy and fear that a younger man may lure her away. If he takes an old wife, then, as Philip remarks, "two rotting bodies in one bed are not very fitting."¹⁶ God hates an aged lecher, but an arrogant old man is no less repulsive. Even if he possesses great wealth, he remains physically and mentally weak. Consequently, it is advisable to strive for modesty and humility in all aspects of life. Philip of Novara's subsequent account of Lucifer's fall, attributed to pride, implies that the unattractiveness associated with old age may be a consequence of sinful behavior (4.4.17-20).

¹³ Ibid. 2.47.9: "li plus atemprez et li meillors de tous les .IIIIJ. tenz d'aage. "

¹⁴ Ibid. 4.4.45: "meillor estat de l'aage, ce est ou moien."

¹⁵ Ibid. 3.20.16-18 : "Et toz les jors doivent avoir en remembrance que en viellesce li cors acourbiront, et li chief ploieront et li mambre trambleront et engordiront et revenrons vers terre, car de terre sont, et en terre revendront."

¹⁶ Ibid. 4.4.5: "et se il le prant vielle, II. poretures en .I. lit ne sont mie afferables."

The third aspect of old age is its ambivalence. Although old age may be seen as unattractive, it can also contain “rewarding and valuable aspects” (*choses profitables et convenables*), such as the wisdom that comes with age (5.5.5). Older men act as advisors to the younger generation, particularly in matters of chivalry. They function as mentors, imparting valuable life experiences. Philip of Novara portrays the ideal relationship between older and younger men in this context. It is possible that he drew inspiration from his own life experiences, including his conversations with his older mentor, Ralph of Tiberias.

Philip of Novara illustrates how older people can prevent the young from poor decisions. He asserts that it is most beneficial for a young person to heed the advice of the older and middle-aged. A wise decision will be esteemed, and even if a mistake is made, it can be fully or partially justified.¹⁷ Through their experience and wisdom, older people can provide valuable counsel, which constitutes some of the most important guidance young people can receive.¹⁸

In medieval Christian and feudal ethics, counsel was a central concept, implying assistance, wisdom, and sound decision-making. It was viewed as a gift bestowed by the Holy Spirit, an essential prerequisite for any action, and a guarantee of success in all endeavors. It was widely believed that undertaking actions without first seeking counsel from older people would likely lead to failure, while independent decision-making was often regarded as a manifestation of arrogance or pride.

Today, old age is an important preoccupation, especially the fear of growing old without financial means. In the Middle Ages, society lacked collective provision for older people, and charity systems neither recognized them as a group in need nor provided them with relief. Philip of Novara depicts, with

¹⁷ Ibid. 2.30.1-4: “se il fait bien, qui que li ait loé, l'onor est soe; et se il faut et l'en seit que ce soit par conseil. Il en est escusez de tout ou de grignor partie...”

¹⁸ Ibid. 5.20.7: “Et se doivent traveiller de bien amplier lor jovent en valor et en vigor et en conquest et en euvre par le consoil des ainneis et des plus sages.”

contempt, an older man who, failing to plan for the future endures deprivation or premature death from illness.¹⁹

Philip himself is widely known to have encountered substantial financial difficulties throughout his life,²⁰ and he may be drawing on these experiences in this passage. To avoid similar troubles and achieve a more carefree old age, Philip recommends attending to one's well-being from youth onwards.

The author encourages young lords, knights, and other warriors to employ their strength in undertaking significant military exploits in pursuit of glory and reputation. Moreover, knights should serve not only for martial glory but also for personal gain. They must “conquer earthly goods and wealth” (*conquerre les biens temporex et les richesses*) in order to provide for their family, heirs, and those who serve them, and to secure a comfortable life in old age, living off accumulated wealth without becoming a burden on society (2.31.3-7)

To illustrate the concept of preparing for old age, Philip recounts another story about the ‘deserted island’ (*ile sauvage*) (3.4.1-24). The exemplum describes how, in a particular kingdom, a king was chosen annually and at the end of his reign, was banished to an uninhabited island. There, he would eventually die a shameful death due to a lack of resources. However, Philip of Novara relates the story of a wise ruler who prepared for the final stage of his life by sending his treasure to the island ahead of time. The author interprets this story in a purely spiritual sense: the king's reign symbolizes the earthly, mundane world, while the ‘deserted island’ represents the afterlife. A wise ruler accumulates his treasure through fasting, praying, and almsgiving (*jeûnes et en orisons et en aumosnes*) in preparation for attaining eternal life (3.4.15-17). Nevertheless, according to Philip, the attainment of this goal requires diligent and honest labor to acquire “[earthly] goods, inheritance, and wealth”, since their possession enables them

¹⁹ Les .IIII. tenz d'aage d'ome. 2.37.7-8 : “povres viax est haïz et mal serviz et blasmez et meprisiez de ce qu'il ne se porchaça en jovant, et plusor en ont esté mort de mesaise qui vesquissent plus, si ce ne fust.”

²⁰ His financial embarrassment did not end until Queen Alice of Cyprus paid all his debts and gave him a money-fief of 1000 Saracen bezants for convincing the High Court of Jerusalem to recognize her claim to be Queen in 1242.

to give generously to charity and perform deeds pleasing to God. This is equivalent to ‘sending one's treasure’ to the island” (*mander son tresor*).²¹

With the wealth you acquire, “you can lead an honorable life in this world and provide support not only for your family but also for those who serve you.”²² As Philip argues, all possessions (*touz les biens*), whether gained through fortune or battle, should be increased in middle age to prevent their loss and ensure that old age is neither shameful nor uncomfortable (3.5.12).

WHAT DOES ‘BONE FIN’ MEAN?

As we have seen, youth is regarded as the second stage of human life, and, according to the author, it should be dedicated to service, allowing knights to cultivate the skills, virtues, and resources necessary for later life. In Philip's framework, the notion of service appears as the central element of ethical life. He identifies three groups of individuals as playing a pivotal role in providing such service, encompassing all those capable of contributing to this system. One category comprises persons who are noble, courteous, and good-hearted; the second includes those who engage in a trade or profession; and the third encompasses the common people. Philip asserts that everyone in the world should engage in service: free individuals, especially knights, should serve willingly in exchange for reciprocal obligations; professionals, such as doctors and lawyers, should receive compensation for their work; and villeins are compelled to labor for their lord (5.13.1–16). Philip further extends the notion of service beyond human society, applying it to the divine hierarchy. In this framework, old age is seen as the culmination of a lifetime devoted to service, ultimately directed toward God, who stands at the apex of the entire hierarchy and is described as the “supreme lord of heaven and earth” (*li haus sires dou ciel et de la terre*).

²¹ Les .IIII. tenz d’aage d’ome. 3.5.6-7 : “Aprés ce, se doit on porveoir et traveillier et porchacier que l’an ait des biens temporés, heritages et richescs qui les puet avoir loiaument, car de ce puet on faire aumosnes et bienfaiz et mander son tresor si comme il est dit devant.”

²² Ibid. 3.5.8-9: “Et en puet on vivre a honor en cest siecle et norrir ses anfanz, et eriter et aidier, et bien faire a son lignage et a ces qui mestier en ont et a ses autres amis et serveors.”

Philip portrays the relationship between God and humans as analogous to the relationship between lords and vassals (5.11.4). Jesus redeemed humanity through his Crucifixion, showing the path to salvation; this act constitutes his invaluable service and gift to humankind. Humans are called to follow his example, willingly enduring suffering out of love for the Heavenly Lord, who sacrificed himself for the world. From Philip's perspective, those in positions of power, such as large landowners, ought to treat their subordinates with kindness and forgiveness, following Christ's model (5.7.4–6).

Meanwhile, those subject to lordly authority are expected to serve with loyalty and dedication.²³ Laymen (*gens du siècle*), primarily knights, must faithfully fulfill their duties and anticipate rewards (*les doivent servir loiaument, et attendre lor guerredon*), if not from their lord, then from God, who recognizes their devotion (5.11.1–4). Just as the soul is a priceless gift from God, comparable to a fief bestowed by the supreme sovereign, so too should humans entrust their souls to their Creator in expectation of eternal life.²⁴ For this reason, old age is a time for atonement and preparation for salvation. This, according to Philip of Novara, is his conception of old age.

Such reasoning is highly characteristic of crusading knightly ideology. The concept of vassal obligations to God closely correspond to Crusade ideology. In sermons, papal letters, and papal bulls, a recurring theme is that God has granted knights their soul and body as a fief. In return, these faithful vassals are bound to fight for the Lord and for the Holy Land, conceived as his inheritance.²⁵ Therefore, it is not surprising that Philip of Novara represents the

²³ Ibid. 5.7.10: "Et se li grant seignor terrien sueffrent les menors, bien doivent donc par raison li petit soffrir les granz et attendre lor menaie et lor merci."

²⁴ Ibid. 5.10.6-7: "Et por ce requiert il que l'an ne li face service que celui qui est por la gent meïsmes, a lor ames sauver et randre a lui, por vivre pardurablement après la mort dou cors."

²⁵ For instance, certain passages from a letter of Innocent III to King Philip II of France in 1199, in which he reminds him of his vassal obligations towards God, closely parallel Philip of Novara's text: "Surely, in the same way, would not Jesus Christ, King of kings and Lord of lords... who has bestowed upon you both body and soul, who has redeemed you with His precious blood, who has also granted you life ..., and has given you all the good things you possess, since you have nothing that you have not received from His gift... would He not condemn you if you were to neglect to come to His aid?" ("Nonne similiter Iesus Christus Rex regum et Dominus dominantium...qui et corpus et animam tibi contulit, qui te suo sanguine pretioso redemit,...qui et vivere tibi contulit..., et universa que habes bona donavit, cum nihil habeas quod de ipsius munere non acceperis...te damnaret, si...negligeres sub venire?"). Die Register Innocenz III. Bd. II, pp. 460-461.

‘bone fin’ (good end of life) of an elderly person in terms of lord-vassal relationships.

An example of a good knightly death is provided by Philip in his *Memoires*, where he recounts the death of Jean of Ibelin, the senior lord of Beirut, in 1236. According to Philip of Novara, Jean was well aware of the “great mercies and honors granted to him by Our Lord Jesus Christ” and prepared himself well for death. As a result of an accident (his horse fell beneath him), he drew up a will, made amends for misdeeds, and settled all his debts; all his vast movable and immovable property he “gave to God for the salvation of his soul,” while the fiefs he passed on to his sons, whom he enjoined to serve their eldest brother.²⁶

Metaphorically, the author likens the final phase of life to a journey to a new city or country. Like travelers, individuals nearing death must settle their debts before departing. This involves publicly proclaiming their impending departure with a loud announcement, similar to a lord calling upon their vassals for military service, and also summoning all those with whom they have unresolved issues.²⁷ The author even employs the corresponding phrase *crier le ban*, borrowed from feudal law, to underscore this point. The inevitable moment to repay one's dues and atone for sins will come for everyone. ‘A la mort ne faut nus’ (4. 5.7) — no one escapes death, and old people are likely to face it first.

In his reflections, Philip emphasizes that reaching old age signifies that God has granted a person sufficient time to settle spiritual accounts and atone for sins. He urges older people to confront their mortality, and meet the open grave with their face directed toward heaven and their backs turned to hell.

Philip invokes the themes of *memento mori* and *vanitas vanitatum*, encouraging older people to cultivate a certain contempt for the world in order to save their souls (4.3.1-14). He reminds them that life is a battle, and the longer one lives,

²⁶ “monseignor Johan d’Ybelin, le bon seignor de Baruth, quy bien reconoissoit les grans graces que Nostre Seignor ly avoit faites et les grans honors... il fist son testament... Ses torsfais amenda, de maintes choses fist amende que meinte gent ne tenissent pas a tort fais, ses detes paia, car il avoit au jour grant mueble et estable sans les fiés; et tout douna por Deu et por l’arme de luy, de sa main, a boune mémoire. Et plusors fiés douna il a ses enfans, et comanda que il fussent homes et tenssent de lor aihné frere” (Filippo da Novara, *Guerra di Federico II in Oriente (1223-1242)*, ed. Silvio Melani. Naples: Liguori, 1994, p. 210, ch. 116).

²⁷ Les .IIII. tenz d’aage d’ome. 4.5.1-5: “Chascun doit prandre garde a çax qui doit qui partent d’une vile ou d’un païs et vont en autre...et pour doute qu’il n’aient aucuine chose obliee, il font crier le ban que tuit cil a cui il doivent riens...si seront païé...”

the more one suffers at the hands of the human enemy, who relentlessly destroys all in its path.²⁸ Philip also suggests that older people should develop such contempt based on their extensive life knowledge. They have faced many anxieties, pains, and losses throughout earlier life and have witnessed the death of loved ones (4.3.14). These moralizing reflections are illustrated primarily through examples drawn from chivalric life. Philip of Novara considers it a loss when a knight either fails to receive proper reward or fails to give it to others.²⁹

An additional obligation of an older man is to be generous, insists the medieval writer: in order to save his soul, he must give to the poor and assist the needy. Yet Philip of Novara is concerned not only with Christian charity but with feudal generosity. According to Philip, those seeking to amend their lives must first distribute their property among those who have served them faithfully and grant them their due reward (*guerredon*), thereby preserving both their own honor and that of their dependents.³⁰

This is precisely how accumulated wealth should be disposed of. As Philip points out, wealth holds little value, since inherited property can often harm heirs, who may squander it. Young widows, for example, may pass their inheritance on to new husbands or lovers.³¹ However, if one uses wealth to reconcile with God and others—by repaying debts, settling accounts with those who have served them, and ultimately saving their soul—one can achieve *bone fin* (a “good end”) and return this gift bestowed by the Lord God. In this way a person attains the highest honor at the end of their life.³² As noted earlier, honor is associated with the final stage of life.

²⁸ Ibid. 4.3.14: “Cist siecles est une bataille, qui plus i vit, plus i travaille, et li Anemis met tout en taille”

²⁹ Ibid. 4.3.6-7: “et eü povre guerredon et mauveis d’aucun service que il a fait; 7 et bien puet estre qu’il a mal guerredoné çaus que l’an li a faiz.”

³⁰ Ibid. 4.4.39-41: “Et bien doit aucune partie dou sien doner por honor et por raison naturel aus siens et a çax qui l’ont servi, car jone ne viel ne doivent retenir autrui desserte, ainz doivent randre le guerredon a çaus qui les ont serviz, selonc le servise des serveors et selonc aus meïsmes, en tel meniere que lor honors i soit sauve.”

³¹ Ibid. 4.2.10: “Ainz porra avenir que des biens qui furent leur feront moult de mal et de pechié cels qui les averont. Et lor jones fames, se ils ont, les donront et departiront volantiers à lor jones mariz qu’eles pranderont.”

³² Ibid. 5.18.15: “Et nule greignor honor n’est que de venir a borne fin car c’est honor parfete. It is noteworthy that, at the end of his treatise, Philip reminisces about his lords — Ralph of Tiberias, John of Ibelin, and others — and notes that all of them have attained a ‘good end.’ Philip of Novara

Philip's essay is widely regarded as a moralizing treatise reflecting the abstract, moralistic views on old age typical of the Middle Ages. However, a closer examination reveals that it also incorporates considerable empirical evidence (concerning the age of exemption from military service and restrictions on participation in judicial duels, among other matters), particularly in comparison with his other works, such as his legal treatise.

Furthermore, there are points of intersection between moralistic literature and law. Philip's portrayals of old age offer insights into how the aristocratic class perceived and experienced the aging process. While his depictions are frequently imbued with rhetoric and clichés, he nevertheless succeeds in conveying a chivalric representation of old age and in articulating his own ideas about this stage of life. Therefore, his treatise demonstrates that, in medieval society, old age was not merely a moral category, as it is often portrayed in didactic literature, but also carried a significant social dimension.

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