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Anne Curry. *Great Battles: Agincourt*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. ISBN: 978-0-19-968101-3. Hardback. Price £18.99.

This volume is among the first to be released in a series that seeks to examine the long historical shadows cast by important battles. The primary emphasis of this series, as explained by Hew Strachan in the Foreword, is therefore on legacy rather than tactics: on how and why these battles have been interpreted, reinterpreted, remembered and artistically represented over time, and with what consequences, including for current perceptions. For a medievalist, this is a most welcome publishing initiative, not least because it may help to release the battles of the Middle Ages from stifling constraints: from the commonplace perception that they were unimportant because they occurred rarely and had little lasting impact; and from a tired and often futile focus on tactics and weaponry, fuelled by uncritical cherry-picking of extracts from a selection of narrative sources. Given that Agincourt 'has a greater cultural legacy than any other medieval engagement' (p. 1), it is the natural choice for a path-finding study of this kind. Although the extraordinary richness and variety of pertinent source material, spanning six hundred years of Anglo-French history, make this a challenging commission, no one is better qualified than Anne Curry to take it on, and this stimulating and original book confirms her reputation as the doyenne of Agincourt studies. The required focus on how the battle has been interpreted, represented and remembered means that key issues are viewed repeatedly from shifting vantage points. How this can provide depth and texture to our understanding of the battle is nicely illustrated by the changing reactions to Henry V's decision to kill the French prisoners. While most contemporary reporters considered it an understandable response to the threat of renewed French attack, the episode has proved more troubling to modern sensitivities, being completely omitted by Lawrence Olivier (1944) and Kenneth Branagh (1989) when they adapted Shakespeare's *Henry V* for the big screen. While a book of this kind may not be an appropriate first port of call for someone seeking a straightforward narrative of the campaign and battle, old Agincourt hands will find what they 'know' about the battle subjected to critical scrutiny and perhaps exposed as myths that can be traced to unsubstantiated interpretation or pure invention. They will also experience a master-class in how a new kind of 'battle history' might be realised. It is, of course, no more a simple blueprint for future books than was John Keegan's *Face of Battle*. But like that sustained, imaginative exploration of the nature of the combatant's battlefield experience, Curry's book deserves to be influential as both critique of established preoccupations and exemplar of new approaches.

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The book is most obviously a model for those interested in understanding the long-term cultural impact of battles. That said, Agincourt is something of a special case, its legacy unlike any other in British history. When we trace the process whereby interpretation and perception of the battle evolved over the centuries, it is the overwhelming influence of Shakespeare's theatrical representation, 'an imagined Agincourt', that is immediately evident (Chapter 4). But while 'for many, the battle is Shakespeare's Agincourt rather than the Agincourt of 1415', what emerges as Curry unpacks and probes the Bard's influence is how far 'his' battle has been re-imagined and supplemented over the centuries: by the now largely forgotten Michael Drayton in the early seventeenth-century, for example, or film-makers in the twentieth. The absorption of Agincourt ideals and myths into the bloodstream of national consciousness, to be invoked with appropriate modifications when required, was a complex process conditioned by external influences (Chapter 5). Clearly, whether England (or Britain) was at war with – or allied to – France mattered a great deal, but myth-making was also shaped by socio-economic developments at home. The enhanced standing of the upper working classes during the mid-nineteenth century was accompanied by the championing of the yeoman archer 'as the true victor of Agincourt', a perception that the experience of Tommy Atkins in mass-participation wars could only amplify. The role of archery in the battle, entirely absent from Shakespeare's Henry V, inspired one of the most memorable sequences in Lawrence Olivier's 1944 film. Curry's book also highlights the methodological problems thrown up by broadly conceived surveys of cultural legacy. Casting the research net as widely as was required for Chapter 6 ('Traditions, myths and creations') is likely to yield an accumulation of ephemera, often culled from newspapers, that are difficult to organise effectively. Some categories of evidence demand more contextual background than is practicable if word limits are tight and pace of argument to be maintained. Where do the Agincourt pictures, including the series by William Kent, commissioned in 1729-31, fit into bigger story of British battle painting, for example?

Alongside its necessary engagement with the legacy of Agincourt, this book offers an object lesson in how the campaign and battle itself should be approached. Delivered with the concise assurance that comes with genuine expertise, Chapter 2 begins with organisational issues (recruitment, sinews of war) and a sketch of the campaign, and ends with an assessment of significance, concluding that Agincourt was 'a moral but not a strategic triumph'. At the heart of the chapter is a reconstruction of the battle that eschews the usual blow by blow narrative based predominantly on chronicle testimony in favour of what might be termed thematic characterisation, built on what we know, or can reasonably deduce, of the composition and capabilities of the armies and the decisions of their commanders, as conditioned by the environmental setting. And, as noted above, the issues are revisited, and understanding refined, as categories – and accumulating layers – of evidence are considered successively in later chapters.

Rather than simply deployed as *sources*, the narrative accounts are approached in Chapter 3 as *interpretations* of the battle, shaped by purpose, viewpoint and context, as well as by the information available to authors. Thus, the purpose of the *Gesta Henrici Quinti*, often considered reliable because written by an eyewitness, was 'to deploy the victory to enhance Henry's reputation and to encourage ecclesiastical support for his future ventures'. Reflecting on the likely influence of Vegetius's *De re militari* on narratives of Agincourt, Curry observes shrewdly that 'authors may have found it difficult to escape the battle topoi they knew from classical and biblical texts'. Sixteenth-century historians, such as Raphael Holinshed, whom Shakespeare read and digested, had access to only a selection of fifteenth-century narratives, which meant that some chroniclers – like Monstrelet, who was brought to an English audience by Edward Hall – were particularly influential in shaping perceptions of the battle. Today, historians with the whole corpus of Agincourt narratives at their disposal are well placed to find meaning and coherence amidst the apparent babel of inconsistencies and contradictions. Distinctive authorial agendas, the dissemination of ideas, shifting interpretations over time: these are among the issues that allow the study of battle narratives to contribute to the mainstream of intellectual and cultural history, as well to our understanding of the legacy of a particular event.

When we arrive at Curry's survey of modern historiography (Chapter 7), the focus shifts to different 'sources', including the battlefield, and to new approaches to understanding the battle. There are judicious assessments aplenty, not least of how battlefield conditions may have affected the dynamics of the engagement. Tim Sutherland's recently proposed relocation of the battle to a site to the west of the traditional field is given a fair hearing. But it is the triumph of the 'military administrative' records that emerges as the central theme of modern Agincourt historiography. The origins of this are to be traced to Robert Glover's 'Agincourt roll', a list of retinue leaders and men-at-arms compiled in the late sixteenth century from a now lost administrative record; but the process really began in the nineteenth with the pioneering work of Nicholas Harris Nicolas (1799-1848) and Joseph Hunter (1783-1861), and it has been brought to first-stage completion by Anne Curry's own work on the archival records for both armies. Thanks to her endeavours, about 8000 soldiers (perhaps two-thirds of the total), including 320 military contractors, can be named in the English army. This is particularly noteworthy: few English armies of the preceding hundred years are as fully documented. And yet it is Curry's carefully reasoned, revisionist argument that the French fielded no more than 12,000 combatants at Agincourt that has attracted attention, to the extent that it has become 'a major area of contention'. Such controversies need to be explained. (Sometimes, indeed, they raise a smile, as this reviewer found as he read Curry's skewering of the myth that Agincourt was essentially a Welsh victory.) But discussion of the potential that the military administrative records offer for illuminating both the battle itself and

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its legacy is surprisingly brief, presumably because, beyond establishing who fought with King Henry in 1415, comparatively little further work had been completed at the time of writing. Given that so much about the battle remains uncertain, it would perhaps have been helpful to examine how exploitation of the documentation that exists for the English army could open up new avenues of investigation. As has been demonstrated by Gary Baker in an article that examines the martial affinity of the duke of York, the highest-ranking English casualty at Agincourt (*Journal of Medieval History*, 2017), identification of the names on the muster rolls through nominal record linkage to other documents, both military records and those generated by domestic affairs, can be the starting point for prosopography and the analysis of social networks. Collective biographical study of the men in Henry's army, exploring depth of military experience and the nature of relationships within retinues, would cast light on military performance, but also provide hard data for an assessment of impact on domestic politics, family fortunes and collective memory. Understanding the men of Agincourt, what brought them to the battle and what happened to them afterwards, should surely be a key thread in the study of legacy.

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Randall Nicol, *Till the Trumpet Sounds Again: The Scots Guards 1914-19 in Their Own Words*. Helion: Solihull, 2016. Two Volumes. Notes, Bibliographies, Indexes, Photographs & Maps. pp. 1105. ISBN: 978-191-109-601 & 978-191-109-607-8. Hardback. Price £24.37 & £23.49.

What is the evidential value of personal testimony when writing military history? On my bookshelves in Aldershot, I still have the first two military history books I ever read: Sir John Keegan's *The Face of Battle*, and Martin Middlebrook's *The First Day on the Somme*. Keegan explicitly warns against over-reliance on the accounts of soldiers, whereas Middlebrook almost completely relies on his interviews with veterans for content. Both are seminal works of British military historiography, but almost three decades of military service has convinced me that the words of the average soldier cannot be accepted uncritically; Tommy Atkins cannot be trusted with the regimental silver, the RSM's daughter, or the history of war.

Keegan's argument focusses on an individual's need to preserve their reputation, producing a version of events which, whilst not wholly inaccurate, may paint the writer in a better light than either other combatants, or impartial observers, might recognise. 'Better' is, of course, a subjective assessment; one man may wish to portray himself as