English Writings on Chivalry and Warfare during the Hundred Years War

Craig Taylor

In 1415, Thomas Hoccleve called upon the Lollard rebel, Sir John Oldcastle, to abandon heresy and to confine himself to reading suitable for a ‘manly knyght’:

Clymbe no more in holy writ so hie!
Rede the storie of Lancelot de lake,
Or Vegece of the aart of Chiualrie,
The seege of Troie or Thebes

Alongside the Old Testament stories of famous warriors like Joshua and Judas Maccabeus, these chivalric tales were to provide Oldcastle with the appropriate models for knightly behaviour that would, in turn, restore him to the path of heterodoxy. Viewed from an English perspective, this choice of stories is far from surprising, given the popularity in late medieval England of romances and narratives recounting the tales of Greeks, Trojans and the court of King Arthur. Yet, it is extremely unlikely that in 1415, a French writer would have regarded these books as the quintessential guides to chivalry and warfare. This

---

1 I am grateful to Christopher Allmand, Carolyn Collette, Peter Coss, Ralph Hanna, Nick Havely, Mark Ormrod, Catherine Nall, Derek Pearsall and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne for their advice and guidance while writing this chapter.


must raise important questions about writing and reading on these themes in England during the course of the Hundred Years War (1337–1453).

Hoccleve addressed Oldcastle on the eve of Henry V’s great expedition to Harfleur, the revival of a conflict with the Valois monarchy that had dominated the martial and chivalric identity of generations of Englishmen. Such a moment might have inspired thoughts of recent military successes under Edward III and his son Edward of Woodstock, later known as the Black Prince. Writers in other genres, most notably Thomas Walsingham, were driven by the revival of the war to remember the great continental adventures that had foreshadowed Henry V’s revival of the claim to the duchy of Normandy. That Hoccleve ignored the claims of recent English heroes must be explained as much as anything by his anxiety over engaging with recent history in light of the Lancastrian usurpation. But it is also important to note that there were few obvious chivalric narratives of the Anglo-French wars that he could have recommended to Oldcastle. The most famous chivalric chronicle of the first half of the Hundred Years War was that of Jean Froissart, whose work had a modest impact on the English after his death – not least in terms of inspiring subsequent writers. The only comparable works written in England during the course of the Hundred Years War were the biography of Edward of Woodstock by the anonymous Chandos Herald, like Froissart from Hainault, and the Scalachronica of Sir Thomas Gray, a universal history that culminated with a record of deeds of arms on both the Scottish borders and campaigns in France during the reign of King Edward III. The paucity of English chivalric chronicles of the wars contrasts strongly with France, where a series of important narratives was written not just by Froissart, but also by Jean le Bel, Enguerrand de Monstrelet, Gilles le Bouvier, Guillaume Gruel, Jean Cabaret d’Orville and Perceval de Cagny, not to mention the chivalric biographers of figures like Bertrand du Guesclin, Jean IV duke of


Brittany, Jean le Maingre dit Boucicaut and Jacques de Lalaing. The contrast between the traditions in the two countries led the historian Denys Hay to comment that ‘chivalrous history is found flourishing across the Channel; in England it is not found at all’. In short, tales of the recent wars in France were far less popular in fifteenth-century England than the chivalric narratives of the Greeks, Trojans and knights of the Round Table, as well as other heroes of chivalric romances such as Roland or Guy of Warwick.

Hoccleve’s reading list also raises important questions about the popularity of different genres of chivalric writing and their role in the education of the knight. These chivalric romances and narratives offered suitable instruction for Oldcastle because of the guidance that they provided regarding chivalric virtues, conduct and exemplary feats of arms. In the prologue to the Troy Book, completed in 1420, John Lydgate cited Henry V’s belief that the story served as a reminder of the ancient worthiness of ‘verray knyghthood’ and ‘the prowesse of olde chivalrie’. That is not to say, of course, that such tales provided simple and uniform interpretations of chivalry. Whether their authors intended it or not, these texts could not help but raise fundamental questions about the culture of chivalry, such as the tensions between the ideal of the manly warrior and the potentially weak and even effeminate courtier; between warfare, cultures of violence and the peace that they supposedly aspired to create; and between the legitimacy of the claims of the aristocracy to social dominance based upon superior virtue and behaviour, and the reality of a society in which such power was based upon inheritance and wealth. Moreover, while such works provided important advice on chivalric conduct and ethics, they were far from practical guides to the ‘science’ of warfare or chivalry. Thus, to complement the romances and narratives, Hoccleve recommended just one treatise as a source of concrete advice for the ‘manly knyght’, that is to say the Epitoma rei militaris, written by a Roman official named Flavius Vegetius Renatus.

8 Denys Hay, ‘History and Historians in France and England During the Fifteenth Century’, Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research 35 (1962), 116. Also see Richard Firth Green, Poets and Princepleasers: Literature and the English Court in the Late Middle Ages (Toronto, 1980), p. 8: ‘Unlike France and Burgundy, England seems to have had no established tradition of historical narrative writing for a court audience by men thoroughly conversant with the conventions of aristocratic society’.

9 See note 3 above. It is important to emphasise the value of such models for kingship, too: Maurice H. Keen, ‘Chivalry and English Kingship in the Later Middle Ages’, War, Government and Aristocracy in the British Isles, c. 1150–1500. Essays in Honour of Michael Prestwich, ed. Chris Given-Wilson, Ann Kettle and Len Scales (Woodbridge, 2008), pp. 250–66.


11 For important discussions of these issues, see for example, Lee Patterson, ‘The Knight’s Tale and the Crisis of Chivalric Identity’, Chaucer and the Subject of History (London, 1991), pp. 165–230 and Richard W. Kaeuper, Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe (Oxford, 1999), as well as my forthcoming monograph, Chivalry and Martial Culture in France During the Hundred Years War.

12 Christopher T. Allmand, ‘The De re militari of Vegetius in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance’,
The choice of Vegetius seems entirely appropriate given that this treatise was the most famous military manual of the Middle Ages, circulating in many languages including the original Latin, French, Anglo-Norman and Middle English, not to mention abridgements in works like Giles of Rome’s *De regimine principum*. Yet the success of Vegetius’ work in late medieval England masks the fact that there was no native tradition of writing on the science of warfare and chivalry that could have replaced this thousand-year-old treatise which, according to most modern military historians, could offer little practical advice for the commanders of the Hundred Years War. Just as there was no significant tradition of chivalric chronicles of the Hundred Years War in England, there was also almost no native English tradition of practical, didactic writings on the themes of warfare and chivalry. In 1327, shortly before the start of the Hundred Years War, Walter de Milemete had composed a Mirror for Princes entitled *De nobilitatibus, sapientiis et prudentiis regum*, offering brief advice on the raising of armies and the conduct of war, drawn from the *Epitoma rei militaris*. Henry of Grosmont, duke of Lancaster, and Sir John Clanvowe were the authors of the *Livre de seyntz medicines* and *The Two Ways*, two works that were occasionally couched in the language of warfare and chivalry but were ultimately far more concerned with personal piety than the practicalities of the life of the knight.

There were certainly very technical and specific manuals on heraldry and tournaments, such as the brief treatise on the office of Constable of England, Charles F. Briggs, *Giles of Rome’s ‘De Regimine Principum’: Reading and Writing Politics at Court and University*, c. 1275–c. 1525 (Cambridge, 1999).


The Ordenaunce and Fourme of Fightyng within Listes, written by Thomas of Woodstock, duke of Gloucester, and the heraldic Tractatus de armis supposedly composed by John de Bado Aureo. Traditional moral exhortations to knights were commonplace, particularly in the context of general writings on the abuses of the ages in which all estates were called upon to fulfil their true function within society; the most famous examples include sermons such as those of Bishop Thomas Brinton, and also John Gower’s Vox clamantis, completed at the time of the Peasants’ Revolt in 1381. Moreover poets like Laurence Minot and John Lydgate had occasionally joined in the mud-slinging against the French, particularly over the legal issues surrounding the war, but there was no English tradition of writing treatises on the legal debates of the war, as was to emerge in France in the fifteenth century. So it was only in the middle of the fifteenth century, as the Hundred Years War limped towards a bitter conclusion, that a body of didactic writings on the themes of warfare and chivalry emerged in England. For example, Nicholas Upton completed his De studio militari, written for Humphrey duke of Gloucester, in 1447, and shortly afterwards, William Worcester drafted his Boke of Noblesse, which was later given to King Edward IV in 1475. Even then, the lion’s share of such works were either imported copies or translations of prominent French treatises written by individuals like Christine de Pizan and Alain Chartier before the end of the Hundred Years War.


Indeed, while there was no native English tradition of manuals and treatises on warfare and chivalry written during the course of the Hundred Years War, the opposite was true for France. Vegetable’s great work certainly remained prominent in the libraries of French princes and noblemen, but it was joined by a vast body of new treatises, mostly written in vernacular prose by both intellectuals and experienced warriors, and all very much rooted in the contemporary wars and culture of chivalry. The first original French chivalric treatise of the Hundred Years War was composed by Geoffroi de Charny in verse and prose around 1350, almost certainly as a manual for the members of the Company of the Star founded by King Jean II in January 1352. Charny’s chivalric treatise was principally moral and exhortatory rather than practical, and as such belongs to a wider tradition that includes Ramón Llull’s Livre del Orde de Cavalleria, translated into French in the fourteenth century, as well as other treatises including the anonymous Ordene de chevalerie, the Epistre Othea by Christine de Pizan, the Chemin de vaillance by Jean de Courcy, Alain Chartier’s Breviaire des nobles, and three works now believed to have been written by Hugues de Lannoy, the Enseignement de vraie noblesse, the Enseignements paternels and L’instruction d’un jeune prince. But French writers during the course of the war also produced much more practical works. In 1335, Jean de Vignay translated into French a brief treatise on the art of war written by Theodore Palaeologus, marquis of Montferrat and second son of the emperor of Constantinople; this work, the Enseignements, was dedicated to King Philip VI as a guide for his planned crusade. The reign of King Charles V saw the composition of translations and original works exploring practical aspects


of chivalry and warfare, including John of Salisbury’s *Policraticus*, translated into French in 1372 by Denis Foulechat, and the *Somnium viridarii*, written by Evrart de Trémaugon in 1376 and translated into French two years later as *Le songe du vergier* by Jean Le Fèvre, abbot of Saint-Vaast and chancellor of Anjou.26 Thereafter, French writers offered increasingly practical advice on military strategy, leadership, discipline and conduct. In *Le songe du vieil pèlerin*, completed in 1389, Philippe de Mézières counselled the young Charles VI and his brother Louis d’Orléans to read Vegetius, but also provided the ‘xv reigles de la discipline de chevalerie’, as well as a further five key pieces of advice for the war with the English, and thirty more points regarding crusading.27 This practical approach was also echoed in Mézières’ pamphlets for the order of the Chevalerie de la Passion de Jhesu Christ, that offered spiritual meditations on the necessity of crusade alongside detailed advice on the organisation, logistics and rules of the order.28 The culmination of Philippe’s advice was the *Epistre lamentable*, addressed to Philip the Bold, duke of Burgundy, in 1397, in response to disastrous failures of the Nicopolis Crusade the previous year.29 The Provençal Prior, Honorat Bovet, wrote the *Arbre de batailles* between 1386 and 1389 for Charles VI, a wide-ranging discussion of the laws of warfare based upon the *Tractatus de bello, de represaliis et de duello*, written by Giovanni da Legnano in 1360.30 Bovet also wrote another important treatises, *L’apparicion Maistre Jehan de Meun*, completed in 1398, which included a lengthy discussion of the failures of contemporary French knighthood, copies of which were given to Duke Louis d’Orléans, his wife Valentine, Jean de Montaigu and Philip the Good, duke of Burgundy.31 At around the same time, Christine de Pizan began to explore the


nature of chivalry and warfare in a series of treatises addressed principally to the Dauphin. She moved on from the moral and allegorical discussions of virtues in her earlier *Epistre Othea*, in the subsequent *Le livre des fais et bonnes meurs du sage roy Charles V*, *Le livre du corps de policie*, *Le livre des fais d’armes et de chevalerie* and *Le livre de la paix.*32 Around 1419, the pamphlet *Débats et appointements* combined a highly practical set of suggestions for military reform, almost certainly written by a soldier, with an extremely partial account of the legal debates over the French royal succession, perhaps by a different author.33 Towards the end of the Hundred Years War, the Provençal squire, Antoine de La Sale, wrote two important pedagogical treatises for the sons of René d’Anjou and Louis de Luxembourg, *La salade* and *La sale*, before undertaking his more famous didactic romance, *Le petit Jean de Saintré*.34 In short, the Hundred Years War was a time of tremendous intellectual debate about warfare and chivalry in France, offering practical advice in the vernacular to kings, princes and aristocrats.35

The obvious temptation is to assume that these treatises were equally well known in England. After all, the English market for chivalric romances and narratives was dominated by French imports, and Hoccleve almost certainly imagined that Oldcastle would be reading all of the works that he had recommended in French.36 Yet there is remarkably little evidence to suggest that the new French treatises on chivalry and warfare did circulate across the Channel before the end of the Hundred Years War. In 1445, John Talbot presented the new queen of England, Margaret of Anjou, with the volume now known as the Shrewsbury book, a remarkable and unique manuscript that contained copies of chivalric romances and narratives, alongside the French translation of Giles of Rome’s *De regimine principum*, Honorat Bovet’s *Arbre des batailles* and

35 These writings were supplemented by treatises on the legal debates of the Hundred Years War, largely unmatched in England during this period, as well as manuals on tournaments, heraldry and hunting. Taylor, ‘War, Propaganda and Diplomacy’, pp. 70–91 and Contamine, ‘Les traités de guerre, de chase, de blason et de chevalerie’, pp. 359–64.
Christine de Pizan’s *Le livre des fais d’armes et de chevalerie*. This manuscript, almost certainly prepared in Rouen, marked the start of a rapid influx of French treatises on warfare and chivalry that circulated widely in the ensuing decades, until the efforts of both William Caxton and Gilbert Hay ensured their lasting fame in the British Isles. But the overwhelming evidence for English interest in the French treatises after 1445 does not prove that such works were circulating in England during the previous century. The anonymous fourteenth-century French translation of Ramón Llull’s *Libre de l’orde de cavalleria*, translated and published by William Caxton in 1484, survives in just two English manuscripts that predate the end of the Hundred Years War. There is no sign that any of Geoffroi de Charny’s writings were known in England during the late Middle Ages. Honorat Bovet may have met a number of leading English noblemen in Paris in April 1392, but of nearly ninety surviving manuscripts of his *Arbre des batailles*, just one appears to have circulated in England before John Talbot gave the Shrewsbury book to Margaret of Anjou in 1445. Philippe de Mézières enjoyed extensive contacts in England, including, indirectly, both Geoffrey Chaucer and John Clanvowe, and some of his works were certainly known there: Richard II was the recipient of Mézières’ *Epistre d’un vieil solitaire des Celestins de Paris*, calling for an Anglo-French crusade, and his half-brother John Holland, earl of Huntingdon, owned a manuscript of *La sustance de la chevalerie de la Passion*, the third draft of Mézières’ proposals for a new order that would

---


38 Oxford, St Johns College MS 102, a late fourteenth-century compilation which also includes the *Secretum secretorum* and Renaut de Louens’ *Livre de Mellibee et Prudence*, alongside other texts, and London, BL MS Additional 22768, a fifteenth-century manuscript that also contains Honorat Bovet’s *L’arbre des batailles*. There are at least fourteen surviving manuscripts of the French translation of Llull’s treatise.

39 There are six surviving medieval manuscripts of the complete corpus of works by Charny: *Librairie des ducs de Bourgogne. II, Textes didactiques*, pp. 187–8 and 233–7. Interestingly, Paris, BnF MS nouv. acq. fr. 25447 contains an error-ridden copy of the *Livre Charny*, that may have been prepared by an Englishman with little knowledge of French; the same work was mentioned in the 1534 inventory of the books of Thomas Benolt, king of arms Clarenceux: Anthony Richard Wagner, *Heralds and Heraldry in the Middle Ages* (London, 1956), p. 154.

40 BL MS Additional 22768 and BL MS Royal 15 E.VI (the Shrewsbury Book). Bovet’s principal source, Legnano’s *Tractatus de bello*, may have been better known in England: Chaucer mentions Legnano alongside Petrarch in the prologue to *The Clerk’s Tale*, the *Tractatus* was the principal source for Nicholas Upton’s *De studio militari*, and a copy of the original Latin text survives in a commonplace book, Dublin, Trinity College MS 516, dating from the 1460s or 1470s, that belonged to John Benet, vicar of Harlington in Bedfordshire: Gerald L. Harriss and M. A. Harriss, eds, *John Benet’s Chronicle for the Years 1400–1462* (Camden Miscellany, 4th series 24, London, 1972), pp. 153–4.
lead a crusade to recover the Holy Land, written between 1389 and 1394. Yet there is no evidence that Mézières’ two most substantial didactic works, *Le songe du vieil pèlerin* and the *Epistre lamentable* circulated in England. Humphrey duke of Gloucester owned Charles V’s illuminated copy of *Le songe du vergier*; his brother, Bedford, had an autograph compilation of works by Christine de Pizan that was prepared for Queen Isabeau of Bavaria, which included the *Epistre Othea* (1399–1400), one of her most popular treatises that survives in nearly fifty copies, and was subsequently translated into English by Stephen Scrope in around 1440. But beyond the *Epistre Othea*, Christine de Pizan’s didactic treatises on chivalry and warfare made little impact, at least until Talbot included *Le livre des fais d’armes et de chevalerie* in his Shrewsbury book. The writings of other French writers produced closer to the recovery of Normandy, such as the works of Jean Juvénal des Ursins and Antoine de La Sale, were unknown in England at that time.

It is certainly true that the lack of formal inventories of English royal or aristocratic book collections must make it extremely difficult to assess with any confidence the circulation of French treatises in England during the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The scale of loss and disappearance of manuscripts since the Middle Ages is amply demonstrated by the fact that barely a hundred volumes have survived from the 843 books that the duke of


42 *Le songe du vieil pèlerin* survives in seven manuscripts and, though Annetta Ilieva (‘Reassessing the Crusade of Nikopolis (1396): a View from Within’, *Al-Masaq: Islam and the Medieval Mediterranean* 10 (1998), 14) suggests that there are four surviving manuscripts of the *Epistre lamentable*, the editors have cited just one.

43 There are over thirty surviving manuscripts of *Le songe du vergier*, including Gloucester’s manuscript, BL MS Royal 19 C.VI, and seven more that contain extracts used by English diplomats and heralds: *Songe du vergier*, pp. xix–xlii.


45 Of the twenty-one surviving manuscripts of *Le livre des fais d’armes et de chevalerie*, just one comes from England before 1445, BL MS Harley 4605; this copy was completed in London on 15 May 1434.

46 Jean de Montreuil’s contributions to the legal debates of the war were better known: Jean de Montreuil, *Opera*, ed. Nicole Grévy-Pons, Ezio Ormato and Gilbert Ouy, 4 vols (Turin and Paris, 1963–86), pp. 5–49, especially pp. 44–6, and Taylor, ‘War, Propaganda and Diplomacy’.

47 Green, *Poets and Princepleasers*, pp. 4–8 and 91–100.
Bedford took from the French royal library at the Louvre in late June 1425. Nevertheless, plenty of evidence does remain for the circulation of other French treatises in England during the course of the Hundred Years War, including mirrors for princes, romances and devotional works. Intellectual and didactic treatises by authors ancient and modern, ranging from Boethius and Augustine to Vincent de Beauvais, Giles of Rome and Évrart de Trémaugon, were readily available to English princes and noblemen in both French and English. Chaucer famously translated both Boethius’ *De consolatione philosophiae* and the *Livre de Mellibee et Prudence* by Renaut de Louens, perhaps inspiring an increased interest in the writing of didactic works of advice and counsel. In the fifteenth century, Thomas Hoccleve presented the *Regement of Princes* to the future Henry V, a mirror for princes drawing upon Giles of Rome’s *De regimine principum*, the *Secretum secretorum* and Jacques de Cessoles’ *Le livre du jeu d’échecs*. Henry’s brother, Gloucester, not only commissioned John Lydgate’s English translation of Laurent de Premierfait’s *Des cas des nobles hommes et femmes* and an anonymous English translation of Palladius’ *De re rustica*, but also owned an extensive library of works in both Latin and French. Therefore the lack of evidence for ownership of recent French treatises on warfare and chivalry, apart from some of the more traditional, moralistic chivalric treatises like Pizan’s *Epistre Othea*, does suggest that England remained relatively unaffected by recent French writings on the science of warfare and chivalry, at least until the end of the Hundred Years War.

The principal explanation for mounting French interest in the science of war and chivalry must be the simple fact that armed conflict was significantly more relevant there during the course of the Hundred Years War. Warfare was endemic in France, not just because of English invasions but also because

---


50 Green, *Poets and Princepleasers*, p. 166.


of the brutal civil conflicts in Flanders, Brittany, Normandy, Picardy and Aquitaine. Like contemporary Italy or Iberia, the French countryside was persistently ravaged by marauding soldiers, including not only English troops, but also underpaid and poorly disciplined soldiers in service to the crown or in mercenary companies – the écorcheurs and routiers. At the same time, French armies endured a succession of demoralising military defeats, both at home and on foreign battlefields such as Alexandria, Najéra and Nicopolis. It was only natural that these pressures would inspire leading French intellectuals and military leaders to engage in a wide-ranging debate about warfare and chivalry.

Some writers, like Le Bel, Froissart and Monstrelet, continued to champion the traditional chivalric ideals of prowess, courage and honour. The royal notary and secretary, Jean de Montreuil, was even more chauvinistic, calling upon the ‘chevalerie’ of France to take heart from ‘la prouesse et vaillance de vos bons predecesseurs’, citing past victories from the days of Clovis, Charles Martel and Charlemagne, as well as an extensive list of ‘journeez et rencontres’ that the French had recently won against the English. But other writers, less directly implicated in the Valois cause, gave voice to the terrible shock of the devastating defeats and the impact of warfare and cultures of violence upon civilians. François de Monte-Belluna expressed deep outrage at the failure of the French aristocracy on the battlefield of Poitiers in 1356, while a Carmelite friar, perhaps Jean de Venette, developed upon this criticism of a decadent and weak French aristocracy by highlighting their failure to protect the people not just from the English but also from the marauding soldiers, robbers and thieves who preyed upon defenceless travellers and peasants. At the start of the fifteenth century, the Chancellor of the University of Paris, Jean Gerson, lamented the problems plaguing France and offered ideas for reform based upon education and enhanced royal control over the army. At the same time, Christine de Pizan addressed letters to both Queen Isabeau of Bavaria and Jean duke of Berry, calling upon them to bring an end to the civil war between the Armagnacs and Burgundians that threatened the ‘ruynes de citez, destruccions

53 Alexandre Tuetey, Les écorcheurs sous Charles VII. Episodes de l’histoire militaire de la France au XVe siècle d’après des documents inédits, 2 vols (Montbéliard, 1874); Nicholas Wright, Knights and Peasants: The Hundred Years War in the French Countryside (Woodbridge, 1998); Kenneth Fowler, Medieval Mercenaries, I: The Great Companies (Oxford, 2000).

54 Montreuil, Opera, II, pp. 91 and 110–21, and see notes 6 and 46 above.


56 These ideas were explored in a number of sermons, most famously Vivat rex, delivered on 7 November 1405. Jean Gerson, Oeuvres complètes, ed. P. Glorieux, 10 vols (Paris and Tournai, 1960–73), vii, ii. 1137–85, and also see Veniat pax in ibid., pp. 1100–37.
The royal notary and secretary, Alain Chartier, gave dramatic voice to the victims of war, most notably in his *Le livre des quatre dames* (1416), in which four women lamented their suffering after the battle of Agincourt. In 1439, Jean Juvénal des Ursins addressed his treatise *Loquar in tribulacione* to King Charles VII, pleading on behalf of the French people, especially those of his diocese of Beauvais, who had suffered so terribly at the hands of both English and French soldiers.

But the public debate in France went far beyond such polarised reactions to the culture of violence. The repeated success of English armies on the battlefield against numerically superior French forces, combined with the extraordinary threat to public disorder represented by both unemployed *routiers* and the underpaid troops in the royal army, inevitably demanded a fundamental re-examination not just of questions of strategy and tactics, but also of military discipline and the regulation of the army itself. Throughout the Hundred Years War, the French crown issued reform ordinances that slowly increased royal control over the armed forces, particularly following the formation of *compagnies d'ordonnance* under Charles VII in 1445, creating a standing army that, for a short time at least, re-established France as one of the foremost military powers in Western Europe. These radical changes went hand-in-hand with an extensive public debate over warfare and chivalry, voiced in assemblies such as the Estates General that met in the aftermath of the defeat at Crécy in 1347, but also public documents like the demands of the Cabochiens issued in Paris on 27 April 1413, and other treatises and pamphlets by some of the leading intellectuals and soldiers in France.

The most common aim for both the politically active and the writers was the reform of the warrior classes, based upon principles of military discipline and

---


61 Allmand suggests that the lack of institutional mechanisms for dialogue between the king and his subjects in France necessitated ‘works of commentary, protest or advice … to take the place of verbal discussions at an institutional level’: Allmand, ‘Some Writers and the Theme of War’, pp. 177–8.
unity under the leadership and unambiguous authority of the Valois monarchy. Some writers, including Bouvet and Pizan, debated the legal limits on warfare, both with regards to the justification for armed conflict (ius ad bellum), and to the rules controlling the conduct of war (ius in bello). More commonly, the ancient Romans were invoked as the perfect model and justification for increased discipline and training. Such notions were far from new, having been advocated, for example, by John of Salisbury in his famous Policraticus, translated into French in 1372 by Denis Foulechat, but also in contemporary Italy where similar threats to public order, particularly because of the condottieri, inspired a comparable debate led by scholars like Giovanni da Legnano, Leonardo Bruni and Niccolò Machiavelli. Writing in 1361 to Pierre Bersuire, Prior of Saint-Eloi and the French translator of Titus Livy, Petrarch had argued that French success in the wars with the English could only be built upon the inculcation of Roman virtues, including military ones. It is not surprising, then, that when Jean Gerson recommended a list of twenty-two books for the Dauphin, he included not only Vegetius and Giles of Rome’s De regimine principum, but also Valerius Maximus, Titus Livy, Suetonius and Frontinus. Such classical works were the foundation for the reforms advocated by Gerson, Christine de Pizan, Antoine de La Sale and their peers, applying and adapting the lessons and values of the Romans to the specific circumstances affecting France.

That both French writers and noblemen were receptive to such a wide-ranging debate about chivalry and warfare must also be seen as a consequence of the wider commitment to intellectual culture and didactic writing in France during the late Middle Ages. French scholars had long claimed that they were the heirs to the intellectual culture and learning of ancient Greece and Rome, the beneficiaries of a translatio studii. Around 1176, for example, Chrétiens de Troyes had famously claimed in the prologue to Cligès, that Greece’s fame for ‘chevalerie’

62 Blanchard and Mühlethaler, Écriture et pouvoir à l’aube des temps modernes, pp. 85–127.
had passed to Rome while the light of learning that had marked its pre-
eminence in 'science' had come to France. Such lofty claims were increas-
ingly given substance thanks to the patronage of Capetian and Valois kings, as well as leading princes of the blood like the dukes of Orléans, Burgundy and Berry. They were all strong supporters of intellectual culture, driven by varying levels of curiosity but also a sharp awareness of the symbolic value of cultivating an image of wisdom and openness to the counsel offered by intellectuals and their writings. King Charles V took such image building to new levels, amassing a collection of around 1,200 manuscripts, a library unequalled in Europe by any secular rulers except perhaps the Visconti in Pavia. He surrounded himself with authors of original works but also translators of the greatest works of scholarship by individuals ranging from Aristotle, Valerius Maximus and St Augustine to John of Salisbury, Bartholomaeus Anglicus and Petrarch. This great intellectual enterprise was marked more by a focus upon vernacular translation and composition, rather than an effort to reclaim the language, style and rhetoric of ancient Latin or Greek. Indeed, it was driven by an extremely utilitarian approach to learning, a desire to draw freely upon any and all wisdom that might be of practical benefit in the face of contemporary needs. In 1367, Petrarch had brilliantly defeated his French adversary in a debate over the papacy’s return from Avignon to Rome, causing Charles V to comment that such a rhetorician was worth an army. The king therefore strongly encouraged


70 In 1361, Petrarch had attended the French court as the ambassador of Galeazzo Visconti, sent to congratulate John II on his release from English captivity; the dauphin Charles heard his
two related think-tanks, that is to say the College of Navarre of which Nicole Oresme, translator of Aristotle, had been Grand Maître, and the royal chancery, whose notaries and secretaries provided the Valois monarchy with a consistent supply of scholars throughout the fifteenth century. As another graduate of the College of Navarre, Jean Gerson, declared in 1389, France finally enjoyed the calibre of writers capable of praising those brave warriors who, alongside its wise men, had contributed to its glory.

The situation in France contrasted strongly with that of England, which largely experienced warfare from a distance, even if the fear of raids and invasion was never completely banished. Warfare certainly remained a constant element in aristocratic identity, but campaigns and battles generally took place overseas, and a sustained period of superiority for English strategy and tactics meant that there were very few major defeats or setbacks to diagnose. The principal burdens of warfare were indirect, particularly in terms of the immense financial and logistical burdens placed upon state and society. As a result, intellectual debate in England tended to focus upon the justification for the wars overseas, the costs that such a conflict imposed upon society, and the conduct of its soldiers.


73 ‘Gallia, que viris semper et strenuis bello et omni sapientia eruditis illustrata est, gravium et eloquencium hystoricorum atque poetarum magnam hactenus passa est inopiam’, as cited in Gilbert Ouy, ‘Le brouillon inachevé d’un traité de Gerson contre Jean de Monzon’, *Romania* 83 (1962), 472.


SOLDIERS, NOBLES AND GENTLEMEN

English chivalric literature certainly debated difficult questions about the treatment of civilians and the brutality of war, and the same issues were raised in contemporary chronicles, sermons and other genres. Yet these debates fell far short of the practical responses offered by both French and Italian didactic treatises that directly explored the legal authorities, particularly civil and canon law, that were relevant to these questions. When debating the horrors of war, English writers rarely grounded their discussions in either the realities of the contemporary war or the legal debates of the just war tradition, in the manner of Giovanni da Legnano, Honoré Bouvet and Christine de Pizan. For example, Chaucer’s *Tale of Melibee* was ambiguous and disconnected from contemporary contexts, in part because it belonged to a very different tradition as a reworking of Renaut de Louens’ translation of Albertanus of Brescia’s thirteenth-century *Liber consolationis et consilii*. Even Henry V’s and the duke of Bedford’s increasing concern with military discipline did not inspire any practical English writing on the laws of war and *ius in bello* until these issues were taken up by Nicholas Upton and William Worcester at the very end of the occupation of Normandy.

Similarly, the chivalric narratives of the tragic downfalls of the Greeks, Trojans and the knights of the Round Table that Thomas Hoccleve recommended to Oldcastle, could certainly be read as commentaries on contemporary chivalry and warfare, serving either as inspiration for, or as warnings against an aggressive foreign policy. Yet for all the emphasis placed in these narratives upon leaders listening carefully to wise and scholarly counsel and wisdom, English chivalric literature gives little sense of what such advice might amount to in practical terms, especially for military commanders. For such matters, English kings and

---

77 Lollard denunciations of warfare made it more difficult to discuss just war theory in the fifteenth century. See, for example, the texts cited in Christopher T. Allmand, ed., *Society at War. The Experience of England and France During the Hundred Years War* (revised edn, Woodbridge, 1998), pp. 20–1 and 38–9.
n noblemen could only turn to Vegetius and the summaries in works like the De regimine principum of Giles of Rome.

Of course, it is far from clear that English kings and commanders needed to turn to such books for advice on warfare after such a long period of sustained military success. Contemporary writers certainly tried to claim that Vegetius had played an important part in this turn of events. For example, John Lydgate reported in the prologue to the Troy Book that as a youth, the future king Henry V had trained and exercised his body in the manner that Vegetius had taught. Hoccleve claimed in his Regement of Princes that Prince Henry had already read the three main sources of his book of advice, that is to say the Secretum secretorum, Jacques de Cessoles’ Le livre du jeu d’échecs and Giles of Rome’s De regimine principum. The anonymous author of the Gesta Henrici Quinti reported that Henry V drew military advice from Giles of Rome during the siege of Harfleur, and during a disputation in Oxford in 1420, the king was lauded for having waged war in France according to the advice given in Giles’ De regimine principum. The problem is that such testimony may amount to little more than an attempt to construct an image of a counselled and wise king, in order to persuade future lay audiences of the utility of these texts and the intellectuals who interpreted them. It seems most likely that the majority of English kings and noblemen were interested in didactic works, ‘not because they specially desired to have instruction in the business of government from clerks, nor because they would appreciate being told things they did not wish to hear, but because it was important that they should represent themselves as receptive to sage counsel.’ Hoccleve later declared in his Dialogue with a Friend that he had decided not to prepare an English translation of Vegetius’ Epitoma rei militaris for Humphrey duke of Gloucester because the duke already knew so much about warfare that it would be unnecessary.

81 Lydgate, Troy Book: Selections, p. 29, lines 86–9.
83 Gesta Henrici Quinti, p. 42 and also see pp. 28 and 40.
84 Oxford, Magdalen College MS 38, fol. 17v, quoted in Briggs, Giles of Rome’s ‘De Regimine Principum’, p. 64n.
85 Henry V had certainly been the subject of such efforts, as the preacher of an Epiphany sermon in 1414 entitled ‘Natus est rex’ encouraged him to attend to the ‘many soltell questions and conclusions in mater of were and armes’ in Vegetius and Gylus, De Regimine, parte ultima’: Woodburn O. Ross, ed., Middle English Sermons Edited from British Museum MS Royal 18 B xiii (EETS Original Series 209, London, 1940), pp. xxxvi–xxxviii and 223, cited in Briggs, Giles of Rome’s ‘De Regimine Principum’, p. 64.
87 Gloucester owned Vegetius in the original Latin and the French translation by Jean de Vignay: Alfonso Sammut, Unfredo duca de Gloucester e gli umanisti italiani (Padua, 1980), pp. 80, 95 and 100–1, and Cambridge, University Library MS Ec.2.17. Hoccleve also sidestepped the opportunity to write a chivalric biography of Gloucester, arguing that he had insufficient talent, and instead offered a narrative of virtuous women based upon the Gesta Romanorum.
no need of such advice, it is hard to imagine that it would have been more useful for Henry V.\textsuperscript{88} Certainly no contemporary attempted to link the military successes of Edward III or the Black Prince to their reading of Vegetius or any précis offered by other writers like Walter de Milemete or Giles of Rome.

Indeed, it is hard to find compelling evidence that either intellectuals or books played an important role in the development of the science of warfare earlier in the Middle Ages.\textsuperscript{89} At the end of the thirteenth century, Ramón Llull had called for the establishment of schools to teach the ethics and science of chivalry to young knights, but as Geoffroi de Charnay later attested, these matters were normally learned through practical experience, apprenticeship and conversation with experts.\textsuperscript{90} But training and advice in military matters would more likely have come from qualified and experienced veterans rather than ancient military manuals. Vegetius himself tried to justify the value of his \textit{Epitoma rei militaris} by arguing that it preserved the experience of past experts like Cato, Cornelius Celsus, Frontinus, Paternus, Augustus, Trajan and Hadrian for future generations.\textsuperscript{91} In practice, its continued success may have owed more to its reputation and its emphasis on personal discipline, than the military advice offered therein by Vegetius, which amounted to little more than common sense, or was simply irrelevant for medieval warfare.\textsuperscript{92}

Yet in late medieval France the \textit{Epitoma rei militaris} was not treated as a permanent, unchanging model of military wisdom, but rather the starting point for an on-going debate about warfare and chivalry. Enguerrand de Monstrelet

\begin{thebibliography}{99}

\bibitem{lgu} It is important to note that the first English translation of Vegetius was undertaken 'at the ordenaunce & biddynge of the worthi & worschipful lord sire Thomas of Berkeley', rather than the Lancastrian court. See note 13 above, and also Ralph Hanna III, 'Sir Thomas Berkeley and His Patronage', \textit{Speculum} 64 (1989), 878–916.
\bibitem{lus} Serge Lusignan, \textit{Parler vulgairement: les intellectuels et la langue française aux XIIIe et XIVe siècles} (Montreal, 1987), pp. 89–90: 'La philosophie médiéval s’est néanmoins toujours avérée incapable d’articuler un quelconque discours qui corresponde aux pratiques contemporaines réelles de ces arts … Le savoir médiéval est théorique et textuel par essence et son épistémologie n’accorde aucun intérêt aux enseignements de la pratique, … peut-être même en est-on incapable.' Also see Joël Blanchard, 'Ecrire la guerre au XVe siècle', \textit{Le Moyen Français} 24–5 (1990), pp. 7–8.
\bibitem{lul} Ramón Llull, \textit{Livre de l'ordre de chevalerie}, p. 257 (II, c.14) and Geoffroi de Charny, \textit{The Book of Chivalry}, pp. 92 and 100–6.
\bibitem{vgt} Vegetius, \textit{Epitoma rei militaris}, book I, chapter 8.
\bibitem{orm} Orme, \textit{From Childhood to Chivalry}, pp. 182–91; Stephen Morillo, \textit{Warfare Under the Anglo-Norman Kings}, 1066–1135 (Woodbridge, 1994), p. 118n; Michael Prestwich, \textit{Armies and Warfare in the Middle Ages: The English Experience} (New Haven, CT, 1996), pp. 186–7. In a rather odd debate, key medieval military historians have recently adopted the terminology 'Vegetian' to describe a strategy of battle avoidance, whilst all agreeing that there is no direct evidence that such a strategy was directly influenced by Vegetius' \textit{Epitoma rei militaris}; see the discussion in the \textit{Journal of Medieval Military History} 1 (2002). Also, see the wider perspective offered by Sidney Anglo, 'Vegetius' \textit{De re militari. Triumph of Mediocrity}', \textit{Antiquaries Journal} 82 (2002), 247–67.
\end{thebibliography}
began the second volume of his chronicle by citing the skill in arms and training of the Romans that had enabled them to achieve imperial control over the greater part of the world, as discussed by Vegetius in his book on ‘la vaillance et prudence de chevalerie’, but went on to assert the value of modern additions to the books of ‘sciences composés par les saiges anciens’ by ‘clercs sages et éloquens, philosophes et poëtes’, arguing that men of noble courage engaged in warfare should learn from these texts, and ensure that they fight bravely for the common good in the pursuit of great reputation.\textsuperscript{93} Giles of Rome had added a chapter on siege engines to the material that he drew from Vegetius, though the French translators of his \textit{De regimine principum} subsequently ignored that addition.\textsuperscript{94} Other French writers, including most notably Christine de Pizan, were equally willing to adapt and extend the text rather than offer slavish reproductions of the original. Philippe de Mézières, an experienced military commander, recommended Vegetius, Titus Livy and Valerius Maximus as the foundational works that had served the ‘vaillant[e] immuable chevalerie de Romme, qui tout le monde avoit conques a l’espee’. But he also offered wide-ranging, practical advice on chivalry, warfare and crusading.\textsuperscript{95} This practical approach was also echoed in Mézières’ pamphlets for the order of the Chevalerie de la Passion de Jésus Christ, that offered spiritual meditations on the necessity of crusade but also extremely detailed discussions of the organisation, logistics and rules of the order.\textsuperscript{96} That French writers were so keen to marry classical wisdom with contemporary experience and ideas was inevitable, given the depth of the crisis that affected France during the course of the Hundred Years War. In the process, they presented themselves as commentators on more than the moral framework of chivalry, justifying the role of texts alongside practical experience in the teaching of the laws and science of warfare, that is to say ‘l’art de chevalerie’.\textsuperscript{97} It is not surprising, therefore, that a man whose entire life was bound up in warfare like Guichard Dauphin, lord of Jaligny and master of the crossbowmen of France, would own the \textit{Enseignemens} of Theodore Palaeologus, Honorat Bovet’s \textit{Arbre des batailles}, Geoffroi de Charny’s \textit{Demandes pour la joute, les tournois et la guerre}, books on tournaments and armorial bearings as well as copies of Titus Livy and the lives of Alexander and Caesar.\textsuperscript{98} The demand in France not only for translations of Vegetius, but also a wider corpus of didactic treatises on ‘l’art de chevalerie’, is an indication of the fundamental reorientation of military and chivalric culture under the Valois monarchy, driven both by the intellectual milieu and the extraordinary challenges that France faced. The

\textsuperscript{95} See note 27 above.
\textsuperscript{96} See note 28 above.
military classes proved themselves open to significant reforms and also new forms of advice, part of the gradual development of a ‘caste consciousness distinguishing between military professionals and civilians’.  

In England, it was only towards the very end of the Hundred Years War, in the face of military defeat and increasing English domestic dislocation from the war effort, that veterans like Sir John Talbot, Humphrey duke of Gloucester, William de La Pole duke of Suffolk, Richard duke of York and Sir John Fastolf played a central role in importing key French treatises and also commissioning both English translations and completely new works on warfare and chivalry. Superficially, the timing of this, and perhaps also the limited role played by the English crown as opposed to such old soldiers, would suggest that these writings amounted to a literature of defeat, an attempt to diagnose and explain the downturn in English fortunes since the death of King Henry V.  

French cultures of chivalry were being reshaped and developed in original ways, responding not only to military crisis, but also to wider changes in reading and book-ownership, as well as fundamental social renegotiations and redefinitions within aristocratic, gentry and urban contexts. Yet ultimately, one cannot help but agree with Jean de Clermont’s declaration, during an argument with Sir John Chandos over heraldic devices on the eve of the battle of Poitiers, that the English ‘ne sept aviser riens de nouvel; mès quanqu’il voient, leur est biel’.

---


100 Allmand, ‘Some Writers and the Theme of War in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries’, pp. 177–8, and also see Catherine R. Nall, ‘Perceptions of Financial Mismanagement and the English Reaction to Defeat in the Hundred Years War’, *The Fifteenth Century VII, Conflicts, Consequences and the Crown in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. Linda Clark (Woodbridge, 2007), pp. 119–35. For Yorkist book ownership, see Anne F. Sutton and Livia Visser-Fuchs, ‘“Chevalerie … in som partie is worthi forto be comendid and in some part to ben amendid”: Chivalry and the Yorkist Kings’, *St George’s Chapel, Windsor, in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. Colin Richmond and Eileen Scarff (Windsor, 2001), pp. 107–33.

101 Nall, ‘The Production and Reception of Military Texts in the Aftermath of the Hundred Years War’.

102 Froissart, *Chroniques*, V, pp. 418–19: ‘They can never think of anything new themselves, but when they see something good, they just take it.’
This must raise important questions about writing and reading on these themes in England during the course of the Hundred Years War (1337–1453). Hoccleve addressed Oldcastle on the eve of Henry V’s great expedition to Harfleur, the revival of a conflict with the Valois monarchy that had dominated the martial and chivalric identity of generations of Englishmen. Such a moment might have inspired thoughts of recent military successes under Edward III and his son Edward of Woodstock, later known as the Black Prince. The most famous chivalric chronicle of the first half of the Hundred Years War was that of Jean Froissart, whose work had a modest impact on the English after his death not least in terms of inspiring subsequent writers. Click here to read this article from Academia.edu. But during the Middle Ages, the code was established for much grittier reasons. At a time of routine military violence with massive civilian casualties, chivalry was an effort to set ground rules for knightly behavior. The world chivalry itself comes from the Medieval Latin caballarius, meaning horseman. In the middle of the 11th century, the knight was not a particularly honorable figure. “He’s a hired thug,” says Jennifer Goodman Wollock, a professor of medieval studies at Texas A&M University who has written two books about chivalry. That style of warfare was still endemic during the Hundred Years’ War of the 14th and 15th centuries, when England and France fought each other, laying waste to the countryside. “In a way it’s like mafia tactics: ‘You think the king of France can protect you?”