

Ralph Moffat, Medieval Arms and Armour. A Sourcebook. Vol. 1: The Fourteenth Century, Woodbridge (The Boydell Press) 2022, 298 p., 52 fig., ISBN 978-1-78327-676-9, GBP 60,00.

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The study of material culture has played an increasingly important role in historical inquiry over the past forty years, and now is an essential element in social, economic, and military history. Over this same period, the study of arms and armor has become increasingly sophisticated, with numerous detailed studies of their artistic qualities, examinations of the craftsmanship involved in their production, including detailed metallurgical studies, and ever more refined treatments of the evolution of both armor and weapon types over time. The more we learn about the production and use of armor and arms, in military as well as social settings, the greater our understanding of the societies that produced this equipment has become. The present volume, by Ralph Moffat, curator of European arms and armor at Glasgow Museum, adds to this growing body of scholarship with a study that focuses largely on arms and armor produced and used during the 14th century in Britain and France with some attention as well to the Low Countries, Italy and Central Europe.

The volume is organized as a sourcebook, the intention of which is to provide a substantial body of representative images and documents to facilitate further detailed studies by specialists. An additional intended audience consists of interested amateurs, who are seeking an entrée into a highly specialized subfield that draws upon an enormous range of disciplines. In by far the longest section of the volume Moffat provides 151 individual documents that treat arms and armor in a variety of contexts. These documents are published in both the original language, as transcribed by Moffat from unpublished manuscripts, and in English translations. Given that these are all 14th-century texts, it is not surprising that the majority were written in the various vernaculars of the places where they were produced, although a substantial minority were written in Latin. The translations of these texts are uniformly good, and provide an accurate understanding of the original document that adheres faithfully to its meaning. In some instances, Moffat did alter the syntax of lengthier sentences in his translations to make them more comprehensible to an Anglophone audience. In the view of this reviewer Moffat was correct to do so. The texts reproduced here come from a wide range of genres including wills, inventories, both governmental and private, acts of parliament and muster rolls, royal ordinances, legal texts, letters of various types including governmental and mercantile correspondence, narrative works, and manuals of advice.



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This lengthy list of texts is complemented by 52 exceptionally well executed images of arms and armor. These images depict equipment largely from the same regions as the documentary sources, with some additional coverage of Central Europe. As was also true of the documents, the images come from a wide range of sources. These include works of art, tomb sculptures in both stone and brass, as well as paintings. There are also a number of images of extant weapons and armors. The images are presented coterminously with an alphabetical list and corresponding definition for the various types of arms and armor that appear in the 151 documents. Helpfully, Moffat provides a key with this list of definitions so that the reader can identify the document(s) in which a particular term appears.

These two sections of the volume are, in themselves, valuable contributions to the field and will be of considerable use to both scholars and students. Moffat, however, provides additional introductory material that further enhances the usefulness of the book. This apparatus includes an extensive discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the various written and material sources available to the student of arms and armor, as well as the wide range of information that these numerous sources provide. The volume is further equipped with extensive notes, a bibliography, and a useful index.

In sum, Moffat has made an important contribution to the scholarly study of arms and armor, which provides a model for further publications that expand the overall base of information available for future detailed studies. One might point here to Moffat's selection of a set of payments made in 1312 for the construction of a battery of five springalds at the Tower of London, and envision a future volume that includes transcriptions of the hundreds of similar documents from the reign of Edward II (1307–1327), stored in the National Archives at Kew. Such a collection would provide a comprehensive record of the construction of artillery during this two-decade period. In a similar vein, the inventory of the arms held in 1302 by Connétable Raoul de Nesle, which included no fewer than 58 crossbows of various types, might inspire a broad-based publication of documents that listed the arsenals maintained by royal officials during the reign of King Philip IV (1285–1314) and thus illuminate an important aspect of contemporary French military organization.



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