

j.f. verbruggen, *The Art of Warfare in Western Europe During the Middle Ages from the Eighth Century to 1340*. 2nd ed., revised and enlarged. Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 1997. Pp. x, 388. 6 leaves of plates. isbn: 0-85115-630. \$71.

In 1954, the eminent Belgian historian J.F. Verbruggen published *De Krijgskunst in West-Europa in de Middeleeuwen IX<sup>e</sup> tot begin XIV<sup>e</sup> eeuw*. This work was subsequently translated into English by Sumner Willard and Mrs. R.W. Southern, published in a somewhat abridged form twenty years ago by North Holland, and immediately recognized as the best survey of medieval warfare then available in English, although priced too high for much of its potential audience. Now we have what is described as a revised and enlarged edition, published in Britain as part of the series *Warfare in History* under the general editorship of Matthew Bennett. Actually, this edition appears to be the same translation of the original work, with the inclusion of footnotes and restoration of those sections omitted from the earlier English edition.

What made Verbruggen's work so important was his insistence that earlier military historians, including those best known to readers of English, had failed to give the narrative sources a sufficiently careful and critical reading. As a consequence, they tended to exaggerate the size of medieval armies and to treat medieval battles as disorganized brawls consisting mainly of individual combats and lacking any tactical coherence. Verbruggen's reading of the sources led him to conclude that military forces were much smaller than formerly claimed, that mounted warriors regularly fought in groups as small tactical units, and that commanders showed considerable tactical skill in the maneuvering and ordering of these units. In the decades since his book originally appeared, Verbruggen's arguments have generally prevailed, and his influence can be seen in many more recent works on medieval military history.

Aside from its important central thesis, the great strength of the book is Verbruggen's careful reconstruction of various famous battles, occupying large parts of the third and fourth chapters (on 'Footsoldiers' and 'General Tactics,' respectively). These chapters are preceded by a short but important one on 'Historiographical Problems' and a long one on 'The Knights.' Despite his attention to other kinds of fighting men, Verbruggen has limited his study to the centuries in which European warfare was dominated by heavy cavalry, and these knights necessarily dominate the entire work.

Geographical coverage of medieval warfare is very uneven. Most of the evidence is drawn from the Middle East during the century of the first three crusades or from campaigns fought in or near the Low Countries. Britain, France, Italy, Germany, and Slavic Europe are not neglected, but Spain and Scandinavia are virtually ignored, as is Byzantium except in connection with the crusades. Battles receive vastly more treatment than sieges despite the importance of the latter in medieval warfare. Castles are mentioned almost in passing and in connection with defensive warfare, with no attention to their role in an offensive strategy or in the evolution of military society. These aspects of uneven coverage are the most notable reminder that we are reading a forty year-old book. The editor deals with the problem of out-datedness by furnishing a full and up-to-date bibliography and supplying, in brackets, occasional addenda to footnotes, indicating when a more recent work has provided an important new perspective. Surprisingly, however, there are no maps, not even the very helpful battle plans that appeared in the previous English edition.

Verbruggen's topical arrangement, while effective in making his basic point, does not leave the reader with any consciousness of chronological development. We get little sense of the evolution of armor, weapons, fortifications, and tactics over a period of several centuries, or whether, and to what extent, medieval commanders learned from the successes and failures of their predecessors. Verbruggen's decision not to go beyond the early fourteenth century may have been wise, since it avoids some of the new problems (and solutions) that appear in the Hundred Years' War, the Hussite Wars, and Renaissance Italy, including the appearance of firearms. But students of these later conflicts will wish that he had gone further. His brilliant analyses of the battles of Arsuf, Bouvines, Worringen, etc., make one long for a similar analysis of Cocherel, Najera, Westrozebeke, Nicopolis, etc. One wonders how well those later commanders adapted tactics to technological change. To ask more of Verbruggen's classic work is not really fair, of course. It is enough to have it readily available in English.

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