

Pierre Monnet (dir./Hg.), en collaboration avec/in Zusammenarbeit mit Rolf Große, Martin Kintzinger, Claudia Zey, Bouvines 1214–2014. Histoire et mémoire d'une bataille/Eine Schlacht zwischen Geschichte und Erinnerung. Approches et comparaisons franco-allemandes/Deutsch-französische Ansätze und Vergleiche, Bochum (Verlag Dr. Dieter Winkler) 2016, 170 p., ISBN 978-3-89911-253-5, EUR 29,75.

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In a year of many anniversaries – the death of Charlemagne 814, Council of Constance 1414, Congress of Vienna 1814, the outbreak of World War 1914 – it was appropriate to remember Bouvines 1214 for, as Pierre Monnet and Claudia Zey note in their Introduction (p. 9–15), it marked an important event in Franco-German relations with which all these events are in one way or another bound up. These two authors attach much importance to Georges Duby and his study of the battle, making it clear that the book is not about a single event, but concerned to contextualize and set it in the *longue durée*, hence the timespan of the title.

Indeed the reader who wishes to know about the battle itself needs to go elsewhere, perhaps to J. F. Verbruggen's 1954 account translated as »The Art of Warfare in Western Europe during the Middle Ages«¹. Only one of the essays, Dominique Barthélemy's »Sergents et communes à la bataille de Bouvines« (p. 29–52) really touches upon the battle. Barthélemy's is essentially a study of the sources, suggesting that they tend to exalt the role of the aristocrats while playing down that of commoners. It is likely that this was made easier by the form in which the encounter took place, which, as I have argued elsewhere, took the form of a purely cavalry battle to the south of the Lille-Tournai road and a mixed and highly confused but heavily infantry encounter to the north. However, as Barthélemy says, there is more on »sergeants« than is often the case in our sources. This may be because in earlier times the term *militēs* (plural) could usually be translated as »cavalry«. However by about 1200 it was clearly a title of social distinction claimed by major and minor aristocrats, hence the need to differentiate the cavalry and the inevitable difficulties of the term »sergeants«. But this is a fine essay and the suggestion that Renaud de Danmartin's disciplined troops were not mercenaries but the levy of Brabant is an interesting one.

Xavier Hélary (p. 19–28) also mentions episodes of the battle in »Ceux qui n'auraient pas dû y être: quelques combattants de la bataille de Bouvines« (p. 29–54) and argues that Guillaume le Breton portrays the conflict as primarily one in which evil vassals are corrected by their true master, the king

¹ Jan Frans Verbruggen, *The Art of Warfare in Western Europe during the Middle Ages. From the Eighth Century to 1340*, transl. by Sumner Willard and R. W. Southern, Woodbridge, Suffolk, Rochester, NY 1997 (*Warfare in History*), p. 29–52.

of France. Élisabeth Lalou in »1213–1314: le moment capétien« (p. 57–68) argues that factors other than the battle contributed to the rise of the Capetians, while Thomas Foerster in a very interesting »Bouvines 1214: Ein Konflikt zweier europäischer Netzwerke« (p. 69–90) points out that the relationships and alliances which underlay the battle were of long standing, and that, therefore the conflict was not of a moment but deep seated in the logic of European relationships. These two essays establish a context, but the next pair look to the significance of the event. Hermann Kamp »Politik statt Triumph? Zum Umgang Philipp Augustus' mit dem Sieg von Bouvines« (p. 93–116) argues that Philip Augustus used his victory to dominate the barons and to assert his power in Flanders, while maintaining the *status quo* with King John. Malte Prietzel »Bouvines und die Kriegspropaganda im 12. und 13. Jahrhundert« (p. 117–132) suggests that Guillaume le Breton was as important in shaping the triumph for posterity as anything else.

Overall these essays contribute little to our knowledge of the battle, though much to its context and the way it was received. This is a very well produced volume, and the idea of *résumés* in both languages after each paper is an excellent one. But the problem with the volume is not the contributions, but the founding conception. It seems odd, to say the least, to leave out King John who was the driving force of the coalition. The consequences of Philip's victory were at least as great for England as for France and Germany. Moreover, British popular historiography is even more sadly in need of correction. The English like to think of Magna Carta as somehow springing from the essence of the English experience and prefer to forget that it was in part the result of a battle in a place they have never heard of. In his Introduction Monnet does recognize John's role and Foerster more than touches upon it. But that is not much. Of course the conference which gave birth to this volume was under the auspices of two Franco-German Institutions, but this omission surely flies in the face of reality. Even odder is the absence of any direct treatment of the battle itself. In this book the battle is simply an event, the bloody business of which is best forgotten. Armies were the instruments of politics, yet here the *longue durée* so prevails that the squalid business of cutting throats on a muddy field can be conveniently glossed over. We might note that there has been little commemoration of Bouvines.

This book refers to an American conference, but there is also »Bouvines 1214–2014. Un lieu de mémoire«² and to this can be added my »The Battle of Bouvines 27 July 1214«. For such an important event this is a poor total, but in a newly minted Europe Waterloo and 1914 perhaps imposed a sufficient embarrassment.

² [Philippe Marchand, Françoise Verrier \(dir.\), Bouvines 1214–2014. Un lieu de mémoire. Actes des deux journées tenues à Lille, Genech et Bouvines les 17 et 18 mai 2014, Lille 2014, p. 251-272.](#)