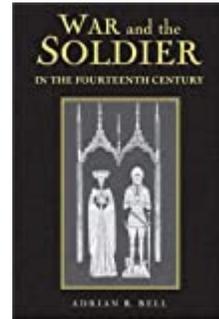
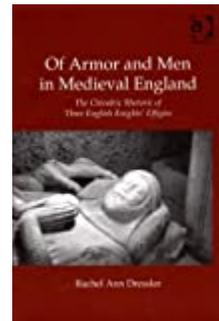




Adrian R. Bell. *War and the Soldier in the Fourteenth Century.* Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2004. xvi + 246 pp. \$90.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-84383-103-7.



Rachel Ann Dressler. *Of Armor and Men in Medieval England: The Chivalric Rhetoric of Three English Knights' Effigies.* Burlington: Ashgate, 2004. xii + 145 pp. \$94.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7546-3368-6.



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Diverse Views of the Medieval Warrior

Is there any medieval subject that has received more scholarly attention than the warrior? Yet the books keep rolling out—reflecting not only the centrality of fighting men to medieval life, but also to the vast amount of literary, archival, and artistic material that bears upon them. These two books exploit very different types of source material from the same country, England, and produce very different analyses of the fourteenth-century English warrior. Each study has its virtues; together they are a tribute to the current vitality of medieval scholarship on chivalry and military history.

The worst that can be said about Adrian Bell's *War and the Soldier in the Fourteenth Century* is that its title will strike many readers as deceptive advertizing. This is not a general study of fourteenth-century “soldiers” (itself a tricky term in this context), in England or elsewhere. I would not recommend this book to the amateur reader nor to undergraduate students. It is a specialist’s book suitable for research libraries, and in such institutions it will find an appreciative audience. A certain number of active researchers in English military and institutional history will find it necessary to have this rich

collection of data on their own shelves.

Bell's book is a study of the English campaigns led by Richard Fitzalan, earl of Arundel, in 1387 and 1388. Arundel was a key member of the clique known as "the Appellants," a pro-war group opposed to King Richard II and his unmilitary ways. During the years 1386-88, the Appellants dominated the political scene and were able to use the power of the royal government to destroy the king's closest friends and aggressively pursue war against France. These two campaigns were at the heart of the Appellant's policies, and when they failed to produce a decisive victory, the king was able to take control of the royal government without opposition and open serious peace negotiations with France.

Bell has two chief reasons for his focus on these two campaigns. First, they allow investigation of the evolution of military organization in the reign of Richard II. As Bell says, the second phase of the Hundred Years War (1369-99) has not received as much attention as the glory days of Edward III and his son Edward, Prince of Wales (the Black Prince). The Edwards won stunning, if evanescent, victories; the leaders who followed them had to deal with defeat and debt. Yet the later period was one of intense and well documented military activity, and provides plenty of raw material for detailed analysis. Second, the muster rolls of the Arundel campaigns, the chief sources used by Bell, are particularly useful for identifying individual warriors and placing them in the context of the "military community" of the time. Bell follows Andrew Ayton, the author of *Knights and Warhorses: Military Service and the English Aristocracy* (1994), in believing that "the men who actually fought in the war have been neglected" (p. 3). Bell's study of the personnel of these two closely related campaigns is meant to correct that perceived omission. By relating the detailed muster rolls with other accounts, issue rolls, letters of protection and attorney, and other material, Bell attempts to reconstruct and describe the "military community" as it existed in the 1380s.

Bell's book makes a couple of noteworthy contributions to scholarship of late medieval warfare. *War and the Soldier* shows how much detail can be wrung out of the archival material by diligent investigation aided by careful database design. As such it will serve to inspire further large projects of this sort. Further, he adds significantly to our knowledge of the length and continuity of military service, recruitment, and social and political connections of warriors—if we can take these two campaigns as typical for the late fourteenth century. Again,

further research will build upon Bell's work. In the meantime, Bell is not afraid to venture some conclusions. The campaigns of 1387 and 1388 took place in a tumultuous political atmosphere; they were separated by the brief civil war known as "Radcot Bridge" and the purge of the royal entourage that took place at the "Merciless Parliament." Yet despite this, there was a remarkable continuity of personnel between the two armies, and between these campaigns and later campaigns when the king was fully in control. Demonstrable political and personal connections with the royal party, argues Bell, did not deter men from serving an "Appellant" commander, nor did service under Arundel or connection with him have much affect on the later careers of such men after the royal restoration. Bell concludes that membership in the military community, a sense of professionalism, was a strong factor in motivating warriors at this time.

Where Bell's book is based on practical, business-like archival sources, driven by organizational imperatives, Rachel Dressler's *Of Armor and Men in Medieval England* traces the outlines of the medieval warrior as depicted in a symbolic corpus—specifically, the roughly two hundred military tomb effigies that survive in England from the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. Dressler argues that these monuments have been mostly studied by antiquarians, as reflecting distinctive and worthy English or regional religious and cultural traditions or for their value in shedding "light on our manners, habits, arts, national taste and style of Architecture," (p. 7, quoting Richard Gough's *Sepulchral Monuments in Great Britain*, 1786). This extensive collection of monuments has therefore lacked an up-to-date art-historical treatment that takes them seriously as artistic and social statements. It is this lack that Dressler sets out to repair, by looking in detail at the meaning, or rather multiple meanings the effigies had for those who commissioned them and those who viewed them.

There is much to like about this short book. Although the author focuses on three surviving effigies of mail-clad warriors created in the early fourteenth century, she systematically puts them in a multitude of larger contexts. Dressler has surveyed English and continental effigies, military, royal, ecclesiastical and civilian, and many of these are illustrated in the forty photographs the book includes. She likewise refers often and with authority to literary and artistic traditions relevant to issues of body, sexuality, rank, and salvation that a medieval tomb necessarily had to address. The reader is made aware how many different messages these expensive and prominently located monuments could convey.

Dressler ranges widely and interestingly over a great deal of material. I found some arguments more satisfying than others. Any historical source has its ambiguities. Parallels between artistic depictions which strike the modern eye, or which can be posited after diligent scholarly examination, may or may not have struck the medieval audience or audiences. There are times when I felt Dressler was perhaps a little more certain about this point or that than I could be. In one long section, however, I waited in vain for a little more clarity from Dressler. One of the most common stories about funeral effigies and later funeral brasses is that those warriors shown with crossed legs were crusaders. Were they? Dressler can hardly avoid discussing this question, and she writes about it at length. That discussion, however, struck me as largely beside the point. Dressler devotes nearly fifteen pages to the history and ideology of crusading and the involvement of English warriors, but most of it is of questionable relevance to the issue of crossed legs. The case she makes that crossed legs was a claim by or for the deceased that he was a *miles Christi* (soldier of Christ) is based purely on iconographic parallels; the

connection with actual crusading is neither established nor rejected. Far more interesting is the alternative argument that crossed legs were indicative of dynamism: the three effigies and many others show the knight frozen in motion, drawing or about to draw his sword: the crossed legs are part of a forceful uncoiling of a powerful, masculine, knightly body in action.

Dressler's book is successful in drawing attention to these fascinating effigies, and broadening the analytical framework in which they are seen. Even those already familiar with the existence of these monuments will look at them differently after reading it. The material and the analysis will attract a variety of readers. Both books are nicely produced and carefully edited, something that can hardly be taken for granted. The most striking thing about them is how the two works approach similar subjects—English warriors of the fourteenth century—with such different agendas and analytical skills. Their simultaneous appearance indicates that historical scholarship on medieval warriors is flourishing.

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