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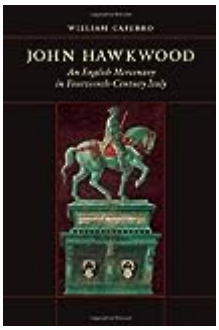

William Caferro. *John Hawkwood, An English Mercenary in Fourteenth-Century Italy.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006. xxi + 459 pp. $35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8018-8323-1.

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A View from across the Pond

In the 1960s Carl Bridenbaugh wrote a history of the origins of the American people entitled *Vexed and Troubled Englishmen* (1968). Should an Englishman be vexed that an American has written the definitive biography, in any language, of the outstanding English captain, Sir John Hawkwood (c. 1320-1394)? Not at all. This book will undoubtedly replace Sir John Temple-Leader's *Sir John Hawkwood (L'Acuto): Story of a Condottiere* (1889) which remained the essential biography for over one hundred years. It is far more convincing than Frances Stonor Saunders' *Hawkwood, Diabolical Englishman* (2004).

Hawkwood was a professional soldier who served his apprenticeship in France, but became "grand-master of war" in Italy, fighting in virtually every part of that peninsula and eventually becoming commander in chief in Florence. Italy was then very different from England. Far richer, she was hopelessly divided politically. The consequence today is that it takes a long time to write a reliable book about Hawkwood, because the administrative sources are in Florence and Milan, Siena, Lucca and Pisa, Perugia, Bologna and the Vatican, to name only the main cities Sir John had dealings with.

William Caferro is a careful student and has spent sixteen years in producing this book. It was worth it. Despite his modesty, we learn many things we never knew before. We now know that Hawkwood had several illegitimate children (so much for an earlier view that not a trace of "blame" attached to his private life), that he was not captured at Perugia in the late 1360s, that he found his last resting place in Florence and was not reburied in Essex and that Donnina, his Visconti wife, did not return to England after his death. (Just as well, for she would have been a fish out of water.) What of the interpretations? Caferro explains most things extremely well–what happened at Asti in 1371, how St. Catherine of Siena's famous letter of 1374 came to be written, how Uccello came to paint Sir John's portrait for the Duomo in the 1430s. The explanation of Hawkwood's complex relations with his principal employers is excellent, as is the account of how he came to acquire his extensive portfolio of estates in Italy and in England. In the process, Prof. Caferro deconstructs many myths. His reconstruction of Hawkwood's most famous battle at Castagnaro in 1387

and of the invasion of Lombardy in 1390 is magisterial.

There are some points of criticism. The illustrations are not exactly exciting, and the caption to the two coats of arms on page 40 gets them the wrong way round. Some of the ways in which Caferro refers to such matters as place names read unidiomatically in an English context. It would not be normal to refer to the River Thames as "Thames River" or to the County of Essex as "Essex County." Those of us who still use the word at all spell "feoffee" with a double "f." Referring to the Leadenhall as a "retail space" (p. 27) reads oddly; and in England one would not call Sir Robert Knollys "Robin" (p. 455), (at least, not unless one had been introduced!). English archers would not have been paid in *denari* (p. 39), but in pennies. Essex has no "rolling hills" (p. 31): it is flat. The Sienese Maremma is a marsh and has no "passes" (p. 289), unlike the Apennine Mountains. Henry IV was in no sense of the word ever "the English dauphin" (p. 333). Lastly, I doubt Prof. Caferro has ever visited Montecchio Vesponi, Hawkwood's home in Tuscany during the last ten years of his life.

I wonder if Prof. Caferro, though steeped in Hawkwood's life, is as well versed in English history. Richard II would not have "sought a marriage alliance" in 1377 (p. 197), since he was eleven years old at the time; his uncles would have done so. Reference is made to "the English army" (p. 267) after the Battle of Poitiers (1356). It was an English army, but it was also a Gascon army; and the words "Gascony" and "Aquitaine," which explain so much about English motives for their Great War, are absent from the index. The explanation of the Peasants' Revolt in 1381 is brief and unconvincing, considering all the ink spilt over it by English historians, as for that matter is the account of the revolt of the Ciompi in Florence, in the late 1370s.

Nor am I sure Prof. Caferro understands heraldry. His explanation of the symbols on Hawkwood's tomb in Essex merely repeats what was said by Richard Gough in *The Memoirs of Sir John Hawkwood* (1776), which explains them in terms of hunting. There are only two entries in his index for "chivalry"; and it may be significant that his very title omits the word "Sir" from its subject's name.

As to the law, Prof. Caferro–like many before him–remarks on the absence of an English will, when it is clear to me that Hawkwood never needed one. When death approached, he had already acquired lands in England, which had been conveyed to reliable trustees (or "feoffees," in the jargon). All he needed to do was to tell those men what to do when he died; and, in the indenture of 1393 which Caferro and Stonor Saunders both cite, he did just that. He had no need to make a will to dispose of his English properties, and (unlike his father Gilbert, whose will Caferro also reproduces) he had no personal property in England (meaning cash, furniture, clothing and so on). He was in Italy in 1393, and he died there the following year.

Prof. Caferro is an economic historian and I hesitate to cross swords with him about economics; but I do wonder about his assessment of how much money Hawkwood made. We are given a table of earnings, and comparisons are made with individuals like the humanist Coluccio Salutati, and even with the budgets of Italian city-states. Given the nature of the evidence which has survived, however, we can only know the gross, and not the net, figures. We cannot know how much it cost Hawkwood to keep his brigade in being; and the subcontracts he must have entered into (by the hundred) have not survived. But Hawkwood was nothing if not a contractor–that is what the word *condottiere* means–and above all he was a subcontractor. He had heavy expenses of his own. One cannot draw conclusions simply by looking at what he charged others for his services.

I do not think Prof. Caferro likes Hawkwood very much. Indeed he is a hard man to like; but we must judge him by the standards of his day. Caferro describes Hawkwood's conduct during the War of Eight Saints in the 1370s as "self-serving" (p. 178). Mercenary by trade, mercenary by nature–or so we are led to believe. Well, yes and no. Sir John was undoubtedly interested in making money; but so was everyone else, notably Iris Origo's eponymous (and roughly contemporary) Merchant of Prato, who began his ledgers "In the Name of God and Profit." So are most people I meet today.

It would be wrong to make too much of these detailed criticisms, however. This is a first-class biography and Prof. Caferro provides a thoroughly good read. His conclusions about Hawkwood are likely to stand the test of time.

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