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Gervase Phillips. *The Anglo-Scots Wars, 1513-1550: A Military History.* Woodbridge, Suffolk and Rochester, N.Y.: Boydell Press, 1999. 291 pp. $75.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-85115-746-7.

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Early Modern Wars of Futility

In an era when labored innovation and obscure language are marketed as brilliance among historians, it is refreshing to find an author who in the first line announces bravely that his book is "without apology a work of military history" and adds that "its focus is on the tactical and operational study of the conflicts between England and Scotland." Lest anyone should doubt his intentions Phillips adds that his book is "a chronicle of one damn battle after another" (p. 3). The book begins with a critical introduction to early modern European warfare, a survey of the rival English and Scottish armies, and then offers a meticulous study of the military conflict between the two British nations ending with the collapse of English efforts to dominate Scotland in 1550.

Sixteenth-century historiography has been beset by a surfeit of revolutions: G. R. Elton's revolution in government, an educational revolution, a variety of social and economic revolutions, a historical revolution. After critical scrutiny most of these have collapsed like a house of cards. Phillips' objective is to demolish the military revolution conceived by Michael Roberts and Geoffrey Parker. To challenge notions of early modern innovation he invokes medieval military achievements and questions the importance of gunpowder weapons. For example, he contends that "all early modern firearms were limited in their battlefield potential by the inherent ballistic qualities of smoothbore weapons fired by a matchlock system, making them slow firing, inaccurate, and most effective only at short range" (p. 15). While Phillips' recognizes many changes in military tactics and technology, he argues that they were not the product of a military revolution and that old practices coexisted with the new.

A comparative study of English and Scottish armies follows the critique of the early modern military revolution. Phillips believes that it is a mistake the overemphasize the isolation of English and Scottish military institutions from continental developments. The British kingdoms learned of European practices through the mercenaries and auxiliaries who crossed the Channel and North Sea in both directions. During the fifteenth century British and continental armies developed along similar lines resulting in a synthesis of military practices. The notion that English and Scottish armies were infe-

rior to their European counterparts is also challenged. For example, the author argues that "accusations of Scotland's military backwardness ignore sound evidence for Scottish competence in the use of the pike. From early in the sixteenth century French officers had been present in Scotland training their soldiers" (p. 65). As early as 1455 the Scots had an incredible bombard known as Mons Meg that was "capable of hurling a stone shot of over five hundred pounds weight for two miles" (p. 66). Both countries provided more skilful military surgeons by mid-century, but medical care for the ordinary soldier remained extremely rudimentary.

James IV began over a half century of conflict when he invaded England in 1496 and 1497. Henry VII was disinclined to pursue war in the North, but his heir, Henry VIII, shared with James IV a desire to enhance his international status through warfare. Phillips offers a detailed account of the fighting leading to the battle of Flodden in 1513. He shows that while Scotland suffered a significant defeat, Flodden did not leave "the Scottish Borderers prostrate before the victorious English" (p. 135). For the next three decades the two countries fought along their respective Borders. Great attention is given to the Scottish campaigns of Edward Seymour, Earl of Hertford and Duke of Somerset, who is portrayed as "England's foremost soldier" (p. 158). His disciplined attacks in 1544 and 1545 were brutally effective and alienated many members of the pro-English faction in Scotland. The campaigns therefore were politically counter-productive. In a similar vein Phillips praises Seymour's efforts in 1547 to create an English Pale in Scotland but again finds only failure and futility. His arguments for Seymour's military genius fail to convince; however, his harsh assessment of the overall futility of the Scottish campaigns is irrefutable. As for the Scots, the great sacrifice of lives and property preserved their independence.

The author boasts of his old-fashioned approach of describing one battle after another, but he actually offers more than he promises as the book provides a valuable social and political context as well as an excellent introduction to recent work on military history. He has the annoying habit of making a bold assertion and then backing away from an exposed position with a significant qualification. Despite his fearless attack on the concept of an early modern military revolution, it is doubtful whether its proponents will retreat promptly from the field of battle in disarray. While Phillips exaggerates the military talents of Somerset, few will quarrel with the conclusion that the Anglo-Scottish wars "simply fostered further conflict, neither achieving decisive results nor allowing for the possibility of a constructive peace" (259-60).

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