

*Les mots de la guerre dans l'Europe de la Renaissance.* Marie Madeleine Fontaine and Jean-Louis Fournel, eds.

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*Les mots de la guerre*, edited by Marie Madeleine Fontaine and Jean-Louis Fournel (who also figure among the contributors), is a fine collection of studies that explore selected aspects of an often abstruse and vexing field—military lexicography, terminology, and

the language of war in general. The nine main contributions are supplemented by ancillary material contained in a five-part appendix. Four of these parts supply mainly short word-lists and thus blend over organically into the main index of technical terms that follows the appendix. A contribution to the EUROLAB project *De Lingua et Linguis* headed by Elsa Kammerer and Jan-Dirk Müller, which focuses on the dynamics of Renaissance Europe's vernacular languages, the volume is unquestionably aimed at seasoned specialists. The student, the general reader, and the amateur military historian will find the collection a handy source of answers to various thorny terminological questions, but at a cost in time and effort. This is not a quick-reference work.

The critical approaches framed by Fontaine and Fournel in their introduction (included in both a French and an English version) have become acutely relevant over the last two decades. The main reason is the exponentially expanding and now generally cost-free online access to a plethora of older works on all aspects of military history, as well as to relevant manuscripts, incunabula (even were it for no other reason than depictions of urban fortifications as part of woodcut townscapes), postincunables, and subsequent sixteenth-century technical treatises. In an era of omnipresent visual communication, such material is routinely mined for casual illustrations, or supplies templates for new derivative visualizations. Availability, however, does not guarantee ready intelligibility or adequate comprehension and interpretation. Linguistic and conceptual keys to the material are for the most part indispensable, even for experts in premodern military history.

As Fontaine and Fournel hint gently and gracefully in the introduction, lexicographers and the compilers of eighteenth- through twentieth-century comprehensive dictionaries of military and technical terms have not always served historians well. The filiation of words typically proposed in dictionary definitions rarely if ever captures adequately the finer and vitally important aspects of the transmission of practical hands-on knowledge and of the attendant multidirectional dissemination, adoption, adaptation, and further idiosyncratic modification of new or evolving technical terms. Perhaps the most important notion that the Fontaine and Fournel collection projects is the necessity to abandon simple binary and unidirectional models in our study of the circulation of late medieval and Renaissance military terms and concepts, and to nuance contextually all mechanisms of plain borrowing.

Interstitial, noncodified, rapidly evolving sets and subsets of practical and adaptive military language forged in the innumerable pragmatic melting pots of plurilingual mercenary units, battlefields, and fortification building sites intersected on multiple levels with the channels of elite adoption or imposition of new terminologies, as well as with channels of erudite, scholarly, literary, and usually belated codification, explication, and recirculation of expressions. Top-down diffusion was involved (refracted through the milieu of courts and upper echelons of the machinery of state, as documented for instance by Pieter Martens for the Habsburg Low Countries) in tandem with bottom-up processes (projected and codified through the milieu of captains and *condottieri*, as exemplified in Fontaine's case study of Pietro del Monte's *Exercitiorum Collectanea*). The task of mapping out

the networks and the apparent sudden spurts of terminological change, particularly in the 1490s and the 1530–1550s, is in many senses only beginning.

Finally, the Fontaine and Fournel collection reinforces the idea that the editions of Latin military authors, the *veteres scriptores de re militari*—from Vegetius to Frontinus, pseudo-Modestus, or Claudius Aelianus—that proliferated from 1487 onward may have reflected both humanist erudition and a somewhat frantic and inchoate effort to tame and Latinize the burgeoning terminological thicket by refitting it into a better and now more systematically comprehended classical framework. That framework had suddenly become more widely accessible than ever before—just like, in our own case, all the older works of military history and sixteenth-century treatises are now available on Archive.org, Google Books, and numerous library sites. Easy and comparatively low-cost availability fed and forced efforts to explore and comprehend, to correlate terminologies, to reconcile and detect differences, to justify and to explain both the new and the old. Such processes were reflected in the phrasing and word choice through which the new military language(s) *stricto sensu* reverberated in the more general language of war, that of record-keeping, diplomacy, political theory, literature, and history—ultimately, as the collection stresses, in Machiavelli, Guicciardini, Erasmus, Rabelais, Clément Marot, and innumerable others.

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