

David Potter. *Henry VIII and Francis I: The Final Conflict, 1540–1547*. History of Warfare 66. Leiden: Brill, 2011. xxix + 562 pp. \$243. ISBN: 978–90–04–20431–7.

The great rivalry between those two exemplary Renaissance princes, Henry VIII of England and Francis I of France, has long been the focus of scholarly attention. It is fair to say, though, that recently emphasis has been focused on the first half of their respective reigns: Francis's adventures in Italy, from the great

victory at Marignano in 1515 to the ignominy of defeat and capture at Pavia ten years later, and Henry's stuttering attempts to cut a figure on the European stage, from the costly but largely ineffectual invasion of France in 1513 to the spectacular Field of the Cloth of Gold in 1520. The recent historiography of the second halves of their reigns, however, have concentrated less on warfare and the dynamics of princely competition and focused instead on religious change and domestic politics.

David Potter's magisterial study of the Anglo-French conflict during the 1540s addresses this balance and restores warfare and international diplomacy to center stage in addressing fundamental questions concerning the motivations, ambitions, and capabilities of Renaissance princes and the kingdoms they ruled. Potter stresses how the war between Henry and Francis that raged from 1542 until 1547 was part of a much larger arena of competition which encompassed the ongoing struggle between the houses of Habsburg and Valois and the ancient conflict between England and Scotland. It took place against the backdrop of religious and social turmoil, endemic illness and social unrest, as well as innovations in the techniques and scale of warfare, all of which pushed the resources of both kingdoms to their very limits. When peace was finally proclaimed (a peace which proved to be short-lived) in June 1546 contemporaries considered Henry to have had the slight advantage. The English may have captured and held Boulogne and secured their command of Calais, but both princes had virtually bankrupted their treasuries in waging war on a scale not seen since the late fourteenth century.

This book chronicles the preparations, both military and diplomatic, and the conduct of the war in meticulous detail over more than 500 pages. It tells the story more from the English side than from the French; although this is partly due to the imbalances in archival survival, it also reflects the fact that the author has dealt with many of the issues from the French perspective elsewhere. The range of sources deployed is deeply impressive: no fewer than nine separate archives in the United Kingdom, eight in France, three in Italy, two in Germany, and one each in Belgium and Austria have been visited during the course of the research. The range of printed material is equally impressive; it is fair to say that scholarship of this depth and breadth is rarely seen in print nowadays. The publishers, Brill, are to be congratulated in supporting such a project and producing a handsome volume. The careful scholarship is evident in the fifteen appendices, detailing troop numbers, expenditure, and the very careful planning and preparation that enabled the princely ambitions of Henry and Francis to be played out. The scale of the war is evident and in making this abundantly clear Potter makes an important point about the priorities of Renaissance princes. As a declaration of expenses made for the English exchequer in 1550 (appendix 8) makes clear, the cost of the war was astronomical: £1.3 million alone on the French wars, excluding the Calais garrison, between 1542 and 1550 and a total military expenditure under Henry VIII in excess of £2.1 million. French military expenditure was of an even greater magnitude. The conflict was, however, in the final analysis not one of competing states or nations but one driven by the individual rivalry and competition between two great princes.

It was a conflict “which was to shape the histories of both countries for years to come” (481).

This book therefore is of great service to students of Anglo-French relations and conflict, but it is also vital reading to all those seeking to understand the dynamic forces that shaped European states during the sixteenth century. While national historians have stressed the role of religion, social provision, and local, domestic politics in shaping the early modern state, David Potter has reminded us that the king’s wars, and the demands of taxation, men, and equipment had the potential to affect ordinary people and mobilize the resources of the state to even greater degree.

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