

Agincourt: Battle of the Scarred King

Michael Livingston

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Agincourt is an innovative historical reinterpretation of the Battle of Agincourt.

In 1415, England and France endured an epic showdown in the midst of the Hundred Years' War. The battle reverberated through the centuries, helped by William Shakespeare's play about Henry V, the English king who led his army to victory. Indeed, Agincourt looms large in medieval military history as the battle that the winner won because he did everything right.

Through meticulous analysis and an interdisciplinary methodology that includes history, archaeology, topography, toponymy, and psychology, Michael Livingston's book debunks the myth of Henry V and the English longbow archers as the divinely ordained victors. What emerges instead is the story of a battle that happened only because the pursuing French army got close enough to fight the English, who were racing to reach Calais.

By moving the site of the battle further away from the castle of Agincourt, Livingston concludes that the English won because the French military leadership was in disarray due to an ongoing civil war caused by King Charles VI's mental illness. Further, he says, the English army was in better fighting form on that day; and heavy rains had turned the battlefield into mud.

Its prose engaging, *Agincourt* builds up to the battle through a historiographical discussion of previous research, as well as an extensive historical background of the Hundred Years' War and the trials and tribulations of an army on the march through enemy territory. Relaying the battle minute by minute, the book exposes the carnage and terror of war too—humanizing combatants, lords, and kings; bringing down to earth those who are elevated; and elevating those who are often overlooked.

Agincourt is an exciting retelling of the battle of Agincourt that brings forth new information about a topic believed to have been long since settled.

ERIKA HARLITZ KERN (September / October 2023)

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