OF KNYGHTHODE AND BATAILE

Edited by Trevor Russell Smith and Michael Livingston

Of Knyghthode and Bataile

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Trevor Russell Smith and Michael Livingston

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Introduction

Of Knyghthode and Bataile is an unexpectedly fascinating work.[1] At one level, many scholars have no doubt dismissed it as a point of trivia: it is the second surviving English rendition of one of the most popular military treatises ever written. Yet in truth it is much more than that. "One of the most brilliant military poems of the fifteenth century," as Catherine Nall has regarded it, *Of Knyghthode and Bataile* well deserves to be counted among "the most elaborate, creative, and rich texts produced during the Wars of the Roses."[2]

This poem, as Nall indicates, stands at the crossroads of history. Behind and beyond its status as a translation — more accurately, a paraphrase — of Vegetius's famed work alternatively titled *De re militari* or *Epitoma rei militaris*, it engages with the contemporary realities of the nascent Wars of the Roses, the evolving status of chivalry at the end of the Middle Ages, and the shifting face of war as technological changes brought gunpowder to conflicts on the land and great ships into conflict upon the sea. The poet's world, in so many senses, was fragmenting, and he saw in the historical Vegetius a means to achieve present unity and healing: a properly trained fighting force would enforce the legitimate authority of the king, and a stabilized throne would bring peace for a shared society.

First Years of the Wars of the Roses

In its most literal sense, the Wars of the Roses began on May 22, 1455, when longstanding political rivalries among noble factions, combined with the mental instability of Henry VI, led Richard, duke of York, to meet the king in arms at the town of St. Albans. What would come to be called the First Battle of St. Albans had an impact far beyond its relatively small scale: Lancastrian leaders, including the duke of Somerset, the earl of Northumberland, and Lord Clifford were killed in the Yorkist victory, and the king was abandoned into his enemies' hands. The duke of York made no immediate play for the throne — whether due to respect for regnal authority or an awareness of the limitations in his position — but in retrospect the die of war had been cast. The Wars of the Roses, which would last until the 1487 death of the duke's son, King Richard III at Bosworth Field, had begun.

In the early years, attempts at keeping the peace were made, most notably during the elaborate ceremonies of the Loveday of 1458. On March 25 of that year, Henry VI — at the time in complete control of his faculties — orchestrated a public display of peace and unity, walking with his Yorkist foes from Westminster Abbey to St. Paul's Cathedral in London, surrounded by pomp, pageantry, and armed retinues. His queen, the influential Margaret of Anjou who fought bitterly for her husband's Lancastrian cause, followed the king, walking hand-in-hand with the duke of York. Payments and promises were made.

[1] The previous edition of the poem (see below), and thus the driver of critical conversations about it, entitled the work *Knyghthode and Bataile*, but both the text itself and its earliest surviving witness are consistent in naming it *Of Knyghthode and Bataile* — a nod, no doubt, to its Latin roots.

[2] Nall, *Reading and War*, pp. 114, 138.

Within months, however, hostilities were once more rising. The Yorkist Richard Neville, the earl of Warwick whom history would come to call "the Kingmaker," had held the captaincy of the garrison at Calais for several years. Calais, a massive port on the shores of France, was not just a rich nexus of trade between the English, the French, and the Low Countries, but also an important foothold in the larger geopolitical struggles between the kingdoms of France and England. To be captain of Calais was an important and enriching post. Beginning in May 1458, Warwick directed ships from Calais to plunder a number of Castilian and Hanseatic merchant ships, causing a diplomatic row. Called by Henry VI to answer charges on the matter, Warwick declined.

Influential members of the king's retinue, led by Margaret of Anjou, assumed the worst of Warwick's actions. The court retreated to Coventry, deep in the queen's home turf, and a council was called for June 24, 1459. Fearing that attendance would mean arrest, the duke of York, the earl of Salisbury, and the earl of Warwick refused the summons. Branded as rebels, the three men set out to bring their scattered forces together under the banner of York at Ludlow. On October 12 the rebels were making lines near a bridge beside the small town of Ludford in Shropshire, when the royal banner appeared on the horizon. The rebel army quaked at the prospect of fighting the king himself, and the Yorkist leaders knew they were undone. With hardly a shot fired, the Battle of Ludford Bridge was over before it began. York himself fled to Ireland, where he still had support. Salisbury and Warwick fled to Wales and then to Calais, only just beating the arrival of the duke of Somerset, whom the king had ordered to replace the rebellious earl as captain of Calais.

From November 20 to December 20, the Parliament — later termed the Parliament of Devils — met in Coventry. The Yorkist rebels were declared guilty of high treason, and bills of attainder were passed against them. Their lands were seized. Henry VI and the Lancastrians began to wrest back control of the country, all the while keeping a watchful eye across the English Channel to where Warwick adeptly held off Somerset's attempt to take back Calais and entrenched his power.

Date and Authorship

The following spring, a parson exiled from Calais in the political struggle approached Lord Beaumont with the gift of a poem about the making of war that he wished to give to the king. As Nall has noted, this was in keeping with the times: "reading, writing and the prosecution of warfare went hand in hand in the fifteenth century."[3] In any case, the parson's poem was read, found worthy, and the presentation was made when Henry VI returned to London on March 1, 1460. The poem was *Of Knyghthode and Bataile*, and the parson seems likely to have been a churchman named Robert Parker.

This identification of the date and authorship of *Of Knyghthode and Bataile* stands both with and against prior scholarship. The poem's first and only edition was executed for the Early English Texts Society in 1935 by Roman Dyboski and Zygfryd Marjan Arend, based on the three manuscripts then known: Cambridge, Pembroke College, MS 243; London, British Library, MS Cotton Titus A.xxiii; and Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 45. A fourth manuscript has recently been discovered in London, College of Arms, MS R.25.[4] In their edition, Dyboski and Arend are led by the poem's opening stanza — which declares its occasion to be a festive entrance by the king into London on the kalends of March (lines 1–8) — to suggest that the poem ought to be associated with the Loveday of 1458. This event was indeed celebratory, but Dyboski and Arend are forced into substantial difficulty trying to turn March 25 (the date of the

[3] Nall, *Reading and War*, p. 10.

[4] Davies and Edwards, "New Manuscript of *Knyghthode and Bataile*."

Loveday) into March 1 (the poem's kalends of March).[5] Even more problematic, the poem makes reference to events beyond the Loveday. Lines 985–1026 unmistakably refer to the Battle of Ludford Bridge on October 12, 1459 and its immediate aftermath: Warwick's subsequent retreat to Calais on November 2, 1459 (lines 987–88), and the Coventry Parliament from November 20 to December 20, 1459 (line 995). This Parliament's bills of attainder against the Yorkists also lies behind other statements on the part of the poet, including his direct reference to the king's enemies as "a legioun attaynte" (line 2017).

In short, the poem must surely have been composed *after* the end of 1459. As for a date *before which* it must have been written, the partisan poet would no doubt have crowed about the great Lancastrian victory at the Battle of Wakefield on December 30, 1460 if he had known of it. Narrowing the range still further, it would be difficult for the poet to present the poem through the intermediary of Lord Beaumont after the Battle of Northampton, on July 10, 1460, in which Beaumont died. A presentation date of March 1 not only falls perfectly within these terminal dates but also fits the approximate occasion of King Henry VI's return to London from Coventry. And, as Daniel Wakelin has observed in likewise arguing for a 1460 dating, "the scanty records of Saturday, 1 March 1460 do not attest a full entry pageant in London, but they do reveal martial display surrounding the king" that could inspire the vision described by the poem.[6]

Regarding the parson in question, Dyboski and Arend conclude that "the material at our command proves insufficient for identifying the person of the author."[7] Other scholars have not been so reserved. Earlier, in 1913, Henry Noble MacCracken made the suggestion that the poet ought to be identified with Robert Parker, whom he regarded as the author of another anonymous work, *On Husbondrie*, likewise a verse adaptation of a late-antique Latin treatise.[8] Parker's career, MacCracken observed, had much to recommend it as would seem fitting for the author of *Knyghthode and Bataile*. The Patent Rolls note that a Robert Parker, chaplain, succeeded a clerk of the king's closet to an appointment as parson of Stanford Rivers on February 25, 1439; it is presumably this same Robert Parker, now declared the king's own clerk, who was later named parson of the Church of St. Nicholas in Calais on August 16, 1450.[9] Robert Parker also appears on March 2, 1460 — the day after what we can now identify as the presentation date of the poem[10] — in a military-related commission from the king:

> Commission to John Judde, esquire, master of the king's ordinance, Henry Nevill, Alexander Norton, Robert Parker, John Carpenter and Dederic Tyle [*rectius* Pyle], to take carpenters called 'whelers' and 'cartwryghtz' and other carpenters, stonemasons, smiths, plumbers, artificers and workmen for the works of the king's ordnance, and bombards, cannons, 'culvryns,' 'serpentyns,' crossbows, bows, arrows, 'saltpetre,' powder for cannons, lead, iron and all other stuff for the said ordnance, and carriage therefor and horses called 'hakeneys.'[11]

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5 Ed. Dyboski and Arend, *Knyghthode and Bataile*, pp. xvi–xvii.

6 Wakelin, "Occasion, Author, and Readers," p. 263. For an alternate reading of the poem's depiction of the entry, which focuses less on its historical reality and more on its literary effects, see Scase, "Writing and the 'Poetics of Spectacle'," pp. 181–82.

7 Ed. Dyboski and Arend, *Knyghthode and Bataile*, p. xxiv.

8 MacCracken, "Vegetius in English," pp. 398–400.

9 *Calendar of Patent Rolls* 3.242, 5.334.

10 MacCracken, as Dyboski and Arend would later do, connects the poem with the Loveday of 1358 ("Vegetius in English," p. 394).

11 *Calendar of Patent Rolls* 6.605.

Despite the suggestive possibilities of this passage, to which we will return, MacCracken's identification of Robert Parker as the author of *Knyghthode and Bataile* was rejected in 2004 by Wakelin, who put forward John Neele instead.

Wakelin begins his objection to Robert Parker by first observing several flaws in identifying shared authorship between *On Husbondrie* and *Of Knyghthode and Bataile*.[12] These points are rightly made, though they say nothing of Robert Parker's hand in any case, just that the author of one might not be the author of the other. And, as it happens, the case for Parker's presumed authorship of either text lies most strongly with *Of Knyghthode and Bataile*, not *On Husbondrie*. Wakelin next wonders whether Beaumont's involvement in the presentation of the poem might indicate that the poet has a place in the court of Margaret of Anjou, for whom Beaumont served as her "grandest household servant," though this train of speculation does not go far.[13] Returning to Parker's candidacy, Wakelin states that "it is unclear how long Parker remained at St Nicholas's, Calais: other priests were appointed to the chantry of Holy Cross in that church throughout the 1450s." In addition, he dismisses the possibility that the parson Robert Parker is the same Robert Parker commissioned by the king to deal with armaments in 1460: "another unspecified Parker was employed as armourer to Henry VI in 1455, who is surely *that* Parker."[14]

Wakelin is quite right that there was a Parker who served as king's armorer at this time, but that man is not actually "unspecified" in the records. His name was Thomas, and he was given a grant for life "of all the workshops . . . of the armoury within the Tower of London" on May 6, 1450; he also later served as a counsel to a trial by battle on May 11, 1453.[15] It is a difficult proposition to accept that the keeper of the king's accounts was on multiple instances confused by Robert and Thomas Parker in the absence of any evidence.

In place of Robert Parker, Wakelin suggests John Neele, who, "because of his Lancastrian affiliations and because of his learning," was appointed rector of St. Mary's in Calais in January 1458.[16] To the latter point, Neele's education cannot serve as much argument for or against his authorship without a direct connection between his schooling and the text in question or, at the very least, evidence that Parker's education would have prevented him from composing it, none of which is evident. To the former point, Neele holds no more Lancastrian affiliations than Parker: Neele was indeed the receiver of several grants from the king in 1460; but so, it seems, was Parker, who had previously served as a clerk of the king. It is true that in May and June 1460 this same Neele apparently "received a benefice on Guernsey and a command to set in order castles there and in Jersey" — evidence that Wakelin posits as a reward for composing *Of Knyghthode and Bataile*.[17] Yet, as we have already seen, Parker appears to have a military command of his own, a commission to oversee the manufacture of weapons of war for Henry VI on March 2, 1460, just *one day* after the supposed presentation of this poem about war to the king.

Wakelin's last piece of evidence in favor of Neele is that his later career matches the poem's later history: Neele continued to be held in favor by the crown after Edward IV seized it, just as later Yorkist manuscripts preserved *Of Knyghthode and Bataile* by stripping or altering its specifically Lancastrian segments as they copied it.[18] This logic seems to suggest authorial oversight of those alterations, though the manuscripts

[12] Wakelin, "Occasion, Author, and Readers," p. 261.

[13] Wakelin, "Occasion, Author, and Readers," pp. 263–64.

[14] Wakelin, "Occasion, Author, and Readers," p. 264.

[15] *Calendar of Patent Rolls* 5.314; Ed. Nicolas, *Proceedings and Ordinances*, 6.129–30.

[16] Wakelin, "Occasion, Author, and Readers," p. 265.

[17] Wakelin, "Occasion, Author, and Readers," p. 265.

[18] Wakelin, "Occasion, Author, and Readers," p. 266. On these alterations, see pp. 11–14, below.

provide no internal evidence that this is so. And, once more, we can say much the same about the career of Parker, who was parson of St. Gregory by St. Paul's during the reign of Edward IV.[19] Wakelin suggests that this cannot be the same Robert Parker because this would give him an over-long career. Yet we can be sure that at least one well-connected churchman named Robert Parker had an overlapping career across this entire period: a clerk named Robert Parker, son of John Parker, is mentioned in a deed of January 17, 1434, and a chaplain named Robert Parker, son of John Parker, is recorded on December 1, 1487.[20] We cannot be certain that this is the same Robert Parker as the chaplain in Calais and the man commissioned by the king, but, likewise, it should not be casually dismissed. Lastly, it is worth noting, too, that the poet's devotion to Calais comes across as long-held, with deep enmity for the Yorkists who, in the text, now hold it. Parker was assigned to a Calais post in 1450; shortly afterward, the duke of Somerset — one of the Lancastrian leaders who was killed in the First Battle of St. Albans — became captain of Calais. In the political struggle of the next decade, Parker would have seen the captaincy come into the hands of the duke of York himself in 1454, and then the Yorkist earl of Warwick in 1456. Neele, who was appointed to his Calais post in 1458, would have known Calais only as a Yorkist stronghold, while Parker would have personally witnessed, as *Of Knyghthode and Bataile* relates, its fall from the Lancastrians.

Beyond the poet's self-identification with Calais, *Of Knyghthode and Bataile* gives further reason to connect poem and place. In several key sequences, the poet "shows great familiarity with and takes a wild sort of delight in stormy aspects of the sea," as Dyboski and Arend observe, suggesting that "he must many a time have observed them from his town of Calais."[21] The poet's imaginative explication of a naval battle in the latter parts of the poem — a sequence that spurred MacCracken to comment "Here is someone, in that barren age, who knows what he is about"[22] — likewise seems to point to a life lived in close proximity to the sea. Unfortunately, not enough is known about our possible authors to utilize this awareness to help us identify more positively the poet at work.

On balance, the identification of the author cannot be made with complete certainty, but there is little to Neele's claim that Parker cannot match or better.[23] One must admit that it is a highly remarkable coincidence that Robert Parker was close to the king, was a parson of Calais prior to its Yorkist takeover, and was named to an appropriate commission within a day of his formal presentation of the poem. It is also noteworthy to observe that in that commission Parker and his fellows were specifically tasked with ordinance including bombards, cannons, culverins, and serpentines. These relatively new-for-the-time artillery pieces make appearances in two memorable sequences in *Of Knyghthode and Bataile*:

Al this aray, and bumbardys thei cary, — *bombards*
And gunne and serpentyn that wil not vary, — *[a] gun and serpentine*

[19] The National Archives, SC 1/46/265.

[20] Wiltshire and Swindon Archives, 212B/4796; Devon Record Office, 3248A–0/11/117. If these are the same Robert Parker who served the king in Calais and London, then the first record seems to preclude the possibility that Thomas Parker in the king's armory was Robert Parker's immediate relation: it lists Robert's brother as John Parker, son of John Parker.

[21] Ed. Dyboski and Arend, *Knyghthode and Bataile*, p. xxxvi.

[22] MacCracken, "Vegetius in English," p. 395.

[23] That is, unless line 2982 could definitively be traced to John's name, on which see pp. 16–18, below.

Fouler, covey, crappaude, and colveryne[24]
And other soortis moo then VIII or IX^ne^.

. . . .

The canonys, the bumbard, and the gunne,	*cannons; bombard; gun*
Thei bloweth out the voys and stonys grete,	*sound and large stones*
Thorgh maste and side and other be thei runne.	*mast; hull*
In goth the serpentyne aftir his mete.	*serpentine; target*
The colveryne is besy forto gete	*coulovrine*
An hole into the top. And the crappaude	*top [of the ship]; crapaudeau*
Wil in. The fouler eek wil have his laude.	*veuglaire also; praise*

(lines 1849–52, 2854–60)

Indeed, these citations, and the royal commission that came the day after its presentation, are some of the earliest citations of several of these gunpowder weapons in English.

So what was the text that Robert Parker — or John Neele, or perhaps someone else entirely — handed over to King Henry VI?

Vegetius

Sometime in the late fourth century or early fifth century, a Christian writer named Publius Flavius Vegetius Renatus — commonly and hereafter called Vegetius — wrote a treatise on how to reform the declining Roman army into the more potent force that it had been in earlier days.[25] Scholars continue to debate the degree to which his work, *De re militari* [*Of Military Matters*], accurately reflects the Roman military experience in either his own or an earlier time, especially considering its heavy dependence on earlier literature, yet what is beyond dispute is the enormity of its influence in later centuries.[26] Vegetius's book is the most influential military treatise across the entirety of the Middle Ages: it was copied and recopied throughout the period and survives in nearly two-hundred manuscripts in its original Latin version alone.[27]

Through translation and paraphrase, Vegetius found additional life in the vulgar languages of Europe, passing through the hands of writers as well known as Jean de Meun, Christine de Pizan, and Niccolò Machiavelli.[28] The first translation into English was a 1408 prose translation, apparently by John Walton. Among its eleven surviving manuscripts is an ornate copy made for King Richard III.[29]

The second Vegetius in English is the work here edited, in which our parson from Calais was determined to adapt this important text into Middle English poetry for King Henry VI. For its early date and historical context alone, it is noteworthy. As Julia Boffey writes: "whatever its origins, the rendering into English of a treatise about 'euery feat of werre' by a one-time inhabitant of a town whose role throughout

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24 *Veuglaire, covey, crapaudeau, and culverin*

25 On the dating of Vegetius, see Goffart, "Date and Purpose" and Charles, *Vegetius in Context*.

26 Sherwood, "Studies in Medieval Uses," pp. 39–45.

27 So well-known was Vegetius, in fact, that the author's name became a short-hand reference to military writings whether of his hand or not, akin to calling a generic tissue a "Kleenex," due to the ubiquity of the brand name. Thus when Gower references "the clerk Vegecius" as his source for the tale of Ylia (*Confessio Amantis*, ed. Peck, 5.885), he could be referring to a number of related texts.

28 Allmand, *The "De Re Militari" of Vegetius*, pp. 156–59, 121–27, 139–47.

29 London, British Library, Royal MS 18.A.xii.

the fifteenth century was crucial in hostilities relating to trade and to both domestic and foreign politics is not without its significance."[30]

Despite containing many words and turns of phrase that bear French influence, *Of Knyghthode and Bataile* appears to be adapted from a particular family of the Latin Vegetius.[31] A thorough comparison of its peculiarities with the Middle English prose translation (1408), the Anglo-Norman translation (1271–72), the French translations by Jean de Meun (1284), Jean Priorat (1284–90), and Jean de Vignay (ca. 1315–20), as well as two anonymous French translations (ca. 1280 and 1380) reveals no intermediary source between the Latin Vegetius and our Middle English poem.[32] It is, of course, possible that the source is another French version that has yet to be identified, though Wakelin has observed a close affinity between the writer's composition and its Latin source: "this poem conjures the tone of Latin by using a tortuous grammar, with ablative absolutes and gerundives, and a sesquipedalian phraseology. The vocabulary is even more Latin than the Latin is, with some long words used in English when no like words occur in the original."[33] In sum, our poet freely adapts his source material, sometimes going through it at great speed and with little elaboration. When his source discusses material that surely appeared irrelevant to fifteenth-century practice, such as camels, elephants, and scythed chariots (Veg. 3.23–24), he simply skips over it.[34] In several instances he adds details here and there, or adds entirely new material. Only a few sections receive a great deal of attention and elaboration, most notably Vegetius's treatment of ships and naval warfare (lines 2609–2972), which Dyboski and Arend, rather colorfully, chalk up to the poet having been "a trueborn Englishman."[35]

One of the more important questions to ask about a manual for chivalry and war is how it might have affected the conduct of war. It has been argued by Bernard S. Bachrach, among others, that Vegetius had a practical influence throughout the Middle Ages because narratives describe military leaders following the precepts of his manual.[36] To demonstrate this, he considers only writers who appear to be unaware of Vegetius and narrate war without any rhetorical embellishment, then shows that their descriptions of warfare, strategy, and tactics clearly follow the precepts of Roman manuals. Bachrach claims that military leaders, in line with manuals, attacked only if battle was inevitable, harassed superior forces rather than

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30 Boffey, "Books and Readers in Calais," p. 70.

31 Reeve, however, facing the nightmare of comparing the freely adapted verse of the text, only went so far in comparing it to Latin Vegetius manuscripts and "ran out of patience" ("Transmission of Vegetius's *Epitoma Rei Militaris*," p. 343).

32 In their edition, Dyboski and Arend only really compared the poem to the Latin Vegetius and Jean de Meun's translation. On the content of these translations see Allmand, *The "De Re Militari" of Vegetius*, pp. 185–87, 152–68 (see also Ed. Galderisi, *Translations médiévales*, 2.256–60). The editions here consulted are: Ed. Lester, *Earliest English Translation*; Ed. Carley, "The Anglo-Norman Vegetius"; Jean de Meun, *Li abregemenz noble honme Vegesce Flave René*, ed. Löfstedt; Jean Priorat, *Li Abrejance de l'Ordre de Chevalerie*, ed. Robert; Jean de Vignay, *Li livres Flave Végèce de la chose de chevalerie*, ed. Löfstedt; *Le livre de l'art de chevalerie et la doctrine de l'enseignement des gens d'armes et à pié et à cheval* (unedited: Sankt-Peterburg, Rossiyskaya natsional'naya biblioteka, MS Fr.f.v.IX 1, fols. 1r–58v; and also in Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, MS Blankenburg 111, fols. 1r–47r); Ed. Leena Löfstedt et al., *Le livre de l'art de chevalerie de Vegesce*.

33 Wakelin, *Humanism, Reading, and English Literature*, p. 83.

34 Interestingly, the Middle English prose translation, ostensibly more pragmatic than *Of Knyghthode and Bataile*, does not omit but expands on these sections (Ed. Lester, *Earliest English Translation*, pp. 151–54).

35 Ed. Dyboski and Arend, *Knyghthode and Bataile*, p. xxxvi.

36 Bachrach, "Practical Use of Vegetius' *De re militari*."

confront them directly, used surprise, held reserves, positioned their forces so that the enemy faced the sun, held fortifications along lines of supply and communication, used fortifications to deter invasion, and took good care of their horses. Although scholars have identified some "pocket-sized" manuscripts of Vegetius that might be carried on campaign, it is clear that these are merely smaller copies of the text that were meant for use in libraries and not in the field.[37] Until the mid-fourteenth century Vegetius's manual was almost exclusively owned by monks and other religious figures. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the text became more popular with secular owners, especially French military leaders, in a period that witnessed the production of many of the vernacular translations.[38] However, it remains uncertain whether military leaders actually read or used these books at all. The nobility collected large libraries that included such manuals, but in many cases they appear to have used their books only to demonstrate their own military prudence and patronage of mankind's collected wisdom.[39]

It is tempting to imagine military leaders in the Middle Ages making practical use of military manuals. It would allow the often fragmentary, contradictory, and confusing representations of war to be filtered out by comparison. Manuals would answer many of the fundamental questions that recorded sources overlook and reveal how medieval military men approached the problems of war, and so help us to arrive at a clearer understanding of the period. It is evident, however, that those who described war in their narratives did not transparently represent leaders fighting according to Vegetius, but themselves often turned to Vegetius so that they could better write accounts of war. As John Keegan succinctly notes,

> Battles are extremely confusing; and confronted with the need to make sense of something he does not understand, even the cleverest, indeed pre-eminently the cleverest man, realizing his need for a language and metaphor he does not possess, will turn to look at what someone else has already made of a similar set of events as a guide for his own pen.[40]

Since these Roman texts were viewed as authorities, medieval writers employ them to appear well read, lend authority to their writings, and make the military leaders they describe look all the better.[41] However, writers rarely demonstrate their reading of these texts through direct quotation or cited paraphrase, but instead use them in a broader sense to understand warfare. Correlation between Roman precepts and medieval descriptions of war proves only that medieval writers, not military leaders, had read and accepted such ideas. Indeed, chroniclers portray Henry VI as reading Vegetius so that he could appear to be a wise and thoughtful military leader.[42] These manuals offer little in the way of detailed or specialized advice that might be applicable on the medieval battlefield, but rather only "common sense."[43] In the end, even if the text

[37] For a discussion of these claims, see T. Smith, "National Identity," pp. 29–30.

[38] On the ownership of Vegetius manuscripts, see Allmand, *The "De Re Militari" of Vegetius*, pp. 63–80; and Nall, *Reading and War*, pp. 14–36.

[39] Allmand notes that about a third of the Latin manuscripts appear unread, and Taylor notes that Charles V owned at least ten French Vegetius manuscripts (Allmand, *The "De Re Militari" of Vegetius*, p. 13; C. Taylor, *Chivalry and the Ideals of Knighthood*, p. 272).

[40] Keegan, *Face of Battle*, p. 62.

[41] Abels and Morillo, "A Lying Legacy?" p. 11.

[42] Wakelin, *Humanism, Reading, and English Literature*, p. 81.

[43] See Anglo, "Triumph of Mediocrity."

was not used in a literal sense by English military leaders, it still found importance amongst readers in the period, many of whom were clearly military men, if at least as a codification of the ideals they already held.

But what of our Middle English version of Vegetius? There is more at work in *Of Knyghthode and Bataile* than a simple Middle English translation of Vegetius. The parson's 3,028-line poem was, as the broad political context discussed already implies, deeply connected with its time. As Christopher Allmand observes, the poet's goal seems hardly focused on the accuracy of his translation at all; instead, "his method was more to emphasise certain themes running through Vegetius's work which might be used to build the foundations of a message, social and political as much as military, which would turn his version of *De re militari* into a committed text bearing upon contemporary problems in English society."[44] In this sense, Wakelin writes, though it is "a brilliant verse translation," it should be judged more precisely in terms of a paraphrase: the poet "intersperses Vegetius' dry technical advice with bombastic eulogies of political obedience, and paraphrases much military instruction into mischievous allegories of the possible fate of the king's enemies, the supporters of the Duke of York."[45]

In other areas the text reveals much about the time of transition in which it was composed. In several instances the writer discusses newer technology, most notably gunpowder weapons (such as at lines 1850–51: "gunne and serpentyn that wil not vary, / Fouler, covey, crappaude, and colveryne"), which were used in Europe by 1327 and were becoming more and more important by the mid-fifteenth century.[46] These instances help to illustrate the great variety in gunpowder weapons at this important stage in their development. The poet adds these and other details to bring his text's presentation of warfare up to date to ensure that its readers found it valuable and relevant, rather than just a series of antiquary details.[47]

On the other hand, throughout the text the poet is fairly imprecise with his handling of many of Vegetius's Latin terms.[48] Most notable of these is *miles*, which in classical Latin meant a professional soldier. The word was notoriously slippery throughout the later Middle Ages and, although commonly translated today as "knight," it might refer to a man's military function, equipment, training, experience, or high social status in contrast to other men.[49] Our writer variously translates the word as "chivaler," "knyght," and "werreour," and it is not at all clear what sort of the above-mentioned meanings he might have been aiming for in any given situation, let alone as a whole. Is the poet trying to suggest that knights were meant to be mounted by employing the French term "chivaler," with its equine connotations, or that other combatants were not necessarily of the knightly class by using "werreour"? Indeed, the Latin term *bellator* (meaning "warrior" or "fighter") is variously translated as "chivaler," "bellatour," and "werreour," with no suggestion that these were distinct from "werreour" as translated from *miles*. The difficulty in terminology is clearly expressed in the following passage (lines 1209–15):

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44 Allmand, "English Translations," p. 4.

45 Wakelin, "Occasion, Author, and Readers," p. 260.

46 See Rogers, "Gunpowder Artillery in Europe."

47 Allmand, "Fifteenth-Century English Versions," p. 43. Other medieval writers who made use of Vegetius, such as Giles of Rome, felt it necessary to update their texts as well, on which see Contamine, "Les Traités de Guerre," pp. 354–55.

48 For tables comparing use of vocabulary in different translations, see Allmand, *The "De Re Militari" of Vegetius*, pp. 350–53; Ed. Dyboski and Arend, *Knyghthode and Bataile*, pp. lviii–lxxiii. See also Allmand's discussion in "Fifteenth-Century English Versions," pp. 35–38.

49 See, for example, Prestwich, *Armies and Warfare in the Middle Ages*, pp. 12–18.

The chivaler, be he legionary, — *knight, whether he [is a] legionnaire*
As seide it is beforn, on hors or foote,
Or aydaunt, that is auxiliary,
On hors or foot — if that thei talk or mote — *discuss*
Of werre, and reyse roore, up by the roote — *war, and raise riot*
Hit shal be pulde with myghti exercise — *pulled*
Of werreourys, governed in this wise.

Here we see a "chivaler," which may or may not also be a "legionary," either on horseback or on foot, in opposition to an "aydaunt" (auxiliary), either on horseback or on foot, and then "werreourys," seemingly employed in a more general sense for all combatants. In most cases it is not clear whether he employs different translations to signify different types of men, or merely to fit the meter or rhyme. Allmand succinctly notes that "There appears to have been little attempt at consistency here. Was there ever intended to be such? Are we too 'modern' in expecting it? Probably so."[50]

In other cases, the direct senses of the Latin words are more clearly translated for their inherent functions. The Latin *pedites* (meaning those on foot) is translated straightforwardly as "footmen" or "men on foote." *Equites* (meaning those on horseback) is translated as "hors" (similar to the Napoleonic "horse" for cavalry), "horsemen," and "ryderys." These two ideas, in their varied translations, were often set in direct contrast with each other, and so shows that the poet viewed them as words meant to convey modes of fighting, rather than anything related to quality or equipment.[51] But such cases of clear meaning in the poem are rare when it comes to combatants.

The often fluid understanding of these terms for military men further reflects the ever changing makeup of armies in this period, when the use of the heavily armored combatant, often of the knightly class, had diminishing importance in the face of increasing reliance on missile weapons (gunpowder or otherwise). Through the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the proportion of men-at-arms to archers steadily declined in English forces.[52] Men-at-arms were generally from landed families, but were not necessarily of the knightly class. Indeed, fewer and fewer knights opted to fulfill their service when called. The poet, unlike his source, focuses on the importance of noble birth (for example at lines 271–77), although he does not use "knyght" to consistently signal higher social status. This reflects the late-medieval debates on whether nobility, and thus meritorious status, was gained from birth or earned through conduct.[53] Archers were generally from the lower stratas of society, although they were on occasion members of gentry families, despite the poem's suggestion that they were drawn from the same pool of men as knights (lines 432–34).[54] Armies also included more specialists, especially to man gunpowder weapons, which saw increasing use throughout the fifteenth century.

The poem's attention to other areas reveals much else about the poet's concerns. The focus on discipline, logistics, and the importance of paying one's military men (such as at lines 278–80, 397–99, 483, 603–06, and 796–98), is part of a larger dialogue in English writings in this period after the Hundred Years

[50] Allmand, "Fifteenth-Century English Versions," p. 37.

[51] See lines 552, 601–02, 644, 654, 656–58, 717–18, 730–32, 748–49, 1367–68, 1398–99, 1558, 1578, 1599–1600, 1760, 1839, 1902–03, 1956, 1958, 2077–78, 2082, 2087, and 2203–04.

[52] Bell et al., *Soldier in Later Medieval England*, pp. 59–72, 260–74.

[53] Vale, *War and Chivalry*, pp. 14–32.

[54] Baker, "Socio-Economic Origins of English Archers."

War (1337–1453) that attempts to understand why the English were defeated.[55] This focus might have been influenced by the poet's experiences in Calais, where the members of the garrison were particularly fickle when it came to their pay. Other details on kingship and leadership found throughout suggest an anxiety over the instability that England was suffering.[56] The omission of some details, notably all mention of retreat, along with a considerable shift in tone and style, with battles "written in high imaginative excitement," all reveal a far more "chivalrous" interpretation of war.[57] Although the French versions of Vegetius typically include the word "chivalry" in the title and their discussions, they rarely discuss the ideals of knighthood and knights, and instead mostly present sober translations.

Manuscript History and Provenance

Of Knyghthode and Bataile is indexed as item 3185 in ed. Boffey and Edwards, *New Index of Middle English Verse*, and it survives in four known copies:

- MS: Cambridge, Pembroke College, MS 243, fols. 1r–55v. [Base-text for this edition.]
- A: Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 45 (Part 2), fols. 1r–7v, 18r–23v, 41r–43v, 46r–53v.
- C: London, British Library, MS Cotton Titus A.xxiii, fols. 2r–53v.
- R: London, College of Arms, MS R.25, fols. 24r–62v.[58] [This text not in NIMEV.]

The text is transmitted fairly accurately in MS, A, and C, although there are some changes in A and C, and many more in R. None of the four copies appear to have been originally bound with any other material, although A and R have since been rebound with other texts.[59]

MS is an octavo volume with vellum pages of 241 x 166 mm, with the writing occupying 164 x 95 mm of space, that has post-medieval binding. It is written in Secretary with some Anglicana forms in a hand of the third quarter of the fifteenth century. The first letters of some words, especially at line beginnings, are rubricated, and certain other words are written entirely in red ink. The first letter of each of the proems and the books are many lines in height and heavily decorated, typically with red and blue ink. The volume is probably not an autograph copy, although it is the earliest of the four texts, as it includes praise of Henry VI on several occasions and does not have the many changes found in the later manuscripts. In its early years it may have been owned by the family of William and Ralph Hastings.[60] Its text is described in greater detail below.

C, written in a hand contemporary to that of MS, was first owned by one Edward Hatcliff, whose name is inscribed on fols. 56v and 57r.[61] It must have been written after July 10, 1460, when John Beaumont was

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[55] See Nall, "Perceptions of Financial Mismanagement" and *Reading and War*, pp. 48–74.

[56] Allmand, "English Translations," pp. 4–5.

[57] Ed. Dyboski and Arend, *Knyghthode and Bataile*, p. xxxii. See also Whetham, *Just Wars and Moral Victories*, pp. 159–60.

[58] R includes an unfoliated leaf after fol. 38.

[59] For codicological descriptions of MS, A, and C, see Nall, "Production and Reception of Military Texts," pp. 285–87, and for R, see Davies and Edwards, "New Manuscript of *Knyghthode and Bataile*." Dyboski and Arend largely skip over the manuscripts themselves, and even go so far as to print out the published catalogue entries for MS, A, and C instead of reassessing them anew (*Knyghthode and Bataile*, pp. xi–xiv).

[60] Nall, *Reading and War*, p. 34.

[61] On the identity of Hatcliff, see Boffey, "Books and Readers in Calais," p. 69n12.