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Clifford J. Rogers. *Soldiers' Lives through History: The Middle Ages.* Portsmouth: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2007. 336 pp. $65.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-313-33350-7.

Reviewed by Christopher A. Candy (Department of History, Texas Tech University)
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Medieval Soldiers' Lives

This book is part of a larger five-volume series printed by Greenwood Press and edited by Dennis Showalter. The stated aim of the series is to "address comprehensively the cutting-edge experiences of the Western soldier from his initial appearance … to his latest avatars" (p. xii). This work, the second entry in the series, achieves this aim in admirable fashion in trying to describe the lives of European "soldiers" during the period from 476 to 1453.

Clifford Rogers has already written and edited several well-received books on military history, particularly his *War Cruel and Sharp: English Strategy under Edward III, 1327-1360* (2000) and *The Military Revolution Debate: Readings on the Military Transformation of Early Modern Europe* (1995). *Soldiers' Lives* is a much broader work than his previous material, meant to provide a generalized picture of the experience of war from the individual's view and over the broad sweep of medieval Europe. As the author himself notes in his preface, to do so is practically impossible due to the wide differences in place and time. Rogers's approach is therefore to identify the attributes of medieval soldiering that cross these boundaries and are unique, both compared to the warfare of the Greeks and Romans that preceded it and to the world of gunpowder that would follow. Having set that challenge from the beginning, Rogers then proceeds to define carefully what is possible given the available evidence and material. Unsurprisingly, the majority of the material comes from western Europe after the eleventh century, though he has gone to great lengths to find material from outside this familiar ground where it exists. Rogers's introduction then continues this process of defining his subject by tackling the question of what a "soldier" is in the medieval context: an individual who soldiers as an activity among other activities, rather than fitting into the modern concept of a full-time, exclusive professional distinct from the civilians that surround him. Because the chapters are not organized chronologically, in the rest of the introduction Rogers then briefly describes the different time periods from the fall of Rome to the fall of Constantinople to frame his later thematic approach.

The first chapter places the medieval soldier into the context of the society from which he came. Rogers systematically defines what shaped the lives of "those who fight" before conflict ever occurred–the activities that gave them their skills, the roles they played as landowners and aristocrats, and the service they gave in garrisons and in the households of other rulers and lords. He then completes this picture by showing how participation in military activity was not limited to the aristocracy, but also encompassed the militia service of townsmen and peasants, the familiarity of churchmen with war, and even the regular participation (when necessary) of women in conflict. The convincing impression is of a society that was militarized at all levels and across the social spectrum.

Having defined the medieval soldier and his relationship to his society, Rogers then moves forward to address the soldier's experience during wartime. This is broken down into specific chapters, each one addressing a specific wartime experience–mustering, marching, siege, battle, raiding, and the aftermath of war. Though these categories are familiar ones from most histories of medieval warfare, Rogers again focuses on the experience of the soldier, not the society as a whole. As a result, certain topics are addressed briefly compared to their recent treatment by other authors, such as John France and Michael Prestwich. For example, logistics, a centerpiece in many recent works, is addressed only in piecemeal fashion.

The conclusion of *Soldiers' Lives* works to bring together each of the topics covered in the previous chapters by using the life of the fourteenth-century English knight, Sir Thomas Gray of Heton, to show how all of the

threads Rogers has explored previously intertwine in a single career. Drawing heavily upon Andy King's recent translation of the *Scalacronica,* Rogers lays out Gray's life in brief to provide concrete examples of how warriors of the time dealt with each of these issues.[1] Rogers concludes by reemphasizing the point that, due to the wide sweep of history, the impressions of the individual's role in warfare (as conveyed by such evidence as Gray's life) are far more useful and accurate than any numerical analysis could be.

Indeed, the most notable feature of this work is the extensive, voluminous presentation of evidence to buttress the impressions of the individual experience of the medieval soldier. Rogers goes to great lengths to bring in material outside of the familiar English and French sources, especially from eastern and southern Europe. Each chapter has extensive endnotes which contain information both on the primary sources for the material covered and on the academic debates regarding them. The capstone of this work is also the bibliography and its collection of suggestions for further reading. Broken down into both chronological and thematic sections, this resource provides a concise list of materials for any student of the military history of this time to peruse–and suggests a few to leave behind.

While Rogers addresses larger issues of armies or nations, they are not the focus of this work–a point that the author makes very clear in his preface. While most histories of this type use chronicles, archival materials, and governmental records to examine warfare from the viewpoint of societies, armies, or nations as a whole, Rogers uses the same materials to focus on the individual and his particular experience of conflict. In many ways, this is a social history of the experience of one part of medieval society–the soldier–rather than any sort of operational, procedural, or organizational military history. Within these limits, however, Rogers should be complimented for the depth and concision with which he has explored this subject. This book is an excellent complement to major general works on medieval military history, such as those by Philippe Contamine or Michael Prestwich, and should be a required addition to any collection of texts on medieval military history.

Note

[1]. Thomas Gray, *Scalacronica, 1272-1363*, ed. and trans. Andy King (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell Press, 2005).

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