



Dan Spencer. *Royal and Urban Gunpowder Weapons in Late Medieval England.* Rochester: Boydell Press, 2020. 306 pp. \$99.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-78327-457-4.

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Dan Spencer's *Royal and Urban Gunpowder Weapons in Late Medieval England* surveys the ordnance of the English crown and towns from Richard II to Henry VII, with some attention paid to the earlier history of firearms in England. For anyone interested in the history of artillery, of the Hundred Years War and the Wars of the Roses, or in the administrative history of England in these years, this is a valuable, specialized work.

Spencer relies heavily on the administrative and fiscal records of the royal administration, the Pale of Calais, and of a few significant towns, especially Southampton where the records are particularly rich. The strength of the book is its solid grounding in records and data, though this limits its structure and scope. The work is divided into sections on guns owned by the Crown in England and the Pale of Calais, town guns, and a concluding analytical section. The material presents several avenues for further research, such as the changing nature of the English arsenal, why certain cities were better armed than their peers, the social standing and evolution of the roles of gunners, and the fragility of the weapons themselves. The chapters on Calais and Southampton, where surviving records permit more analysis, are especially good. While logical, the arrangement of the book makes it difficult to follow some developments through time, especially the changing status

and roles of gunners, and also the evolving preferences for different types of artillery.

The final chapters do tie things together but require more context to understand some of the changes. More context regarding foreign firearms and personnel would have helped. While grounding the discussion in what came before, the book lacks information on the transition to sixteenth-century guns and practice. Even a discussion of the second half of Henry VII's reign would have been helpful. So too might information about the metallurgical industries in England. Spencer notes the change in the proportions of cast bronze to wrought-iron guns over the course of the years 1375 to 1483, when the percentage of bronze weapons went from roughly 75 percent to less than 10 percent at Calais. He suggests this may have been a matter of the availability of artisans who could make each type of weapon and of the ease with which damaged cannon could be repaired. Bronze artillery had to be melted and recast. Wrought iron was easier to repair. There was an increase in bronze weapons again under Henry VII, reflecting changes also seen on the continent.

More attention to the causes of damage on campaign would be desirable, though their absence is likely due to the sources. Whether these were transport accidents, lack of care (which Spencer does imply in his analysis), or damage

when being fired, is uncertain. Equally unclear is what "damaged" meant. Some of the king's ships were issued only damaged guns. With as many as a third of guns damaged or "wasted" in some inventories, it would be useful to know how this compared to continental experiences.

The material on gunners is especially rich for Calais and Southampton. The changing roles of gunners is apparently reflected in their declining rate of pay at Calais. There were far more guns than gunners, and it is clear that gunners were originally artificers, inspectors, and even military engineers, as well as gunners in a modern sense. At Southampton, the town gunner seems to have made, repaired, and stored guns in his own house. From the cloth provided for his livery, he clearly ranked below sergeants, so something of his social status may be surmised.

For all that the book lacks in context, it is a solid piece of scholarship that meets the goals set

out by the author. Dan Spencer provides an overview of English firearms in a neglected period. There were clearly great changes afoot in both types and quantities of ordnance, and hence in their use. These included the adoption of new types, such as serpentines, from France and Burgundy, changes in materials, and the multiplication of the numbers of guns on ships in the 1480s. The latter was largely due to the invention of the "miche," or gun swivel, that made smaller guns on ships much more efficient and useful.

The book is a solid foundation for more work in this field. This is a critical period in the history of artillery about which much less is known than for the centuries that followed. Both for its own sake and to facilitate a better understanding of the transition to more modern types in the time of the Tudors, this is an important, if specialist, work.

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