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Matthew Hefferan’s monograph, *The Household Knights of Edward III: Warfare, Politics and Kingship in Fourteenth-Century England*, navigates the tumultuous social and political world of English household knights during the reign of Edward III and the subsequent genesis of the Hundred Years’ War. Hefferan’s goal is simple: to delve deeper into the roles, duties, and rewards of household knights and provide a richer understanding of knighthood, medieval warfare, societal roles, and English politics under Edward III.

The work is composed of eight chapters broken into four parts and is accompanied by an extensive collection of source material, chronology, maps, a bibliography, and an index. Part 1, which includes chapter 1, “The Mechanics of Retaining,” and chapter 2, “Recruiting Household Knights,” looks to answer the questions, “how were household knights retained? And who was chosen to serve in such a capacity?” (p. 14). Relying heavily on the College of Arms manuscript and the British Library archives, Hefferan expertly highlights both a collective identity and individuality within this knightly class. For example, Edward III’s household knights wore slightly different uniforms, illustrating a common fraternity with each other as well as specialization among ranks. Hefferan then looks at knights who came and went, analyzing external factors and hypothesizing why these persons may have been dismissed. In this way, these factors almost always influenced the size, composition, and personnel that comprised a knightly household.

Part 2, which includes chapter 3, “Preparing for War,” chapter 4, “In the Field of Combat,” and chapter 5, “Diplomacy and Defensive Warfare,” explores how household knights were involved in raising, supplying, and financing royal armies. Here, Hefferan analyzes leadership and military structures to illustrate how these frameworks revolutionized late medieval military tactics in England. Because Edward III looked toward his household knights first, these knights were lucrative in raising wartime funds, especially after 1337. For example, during the 1340s, these funds often accounted for a fourth to half “of all men-at-arms serving in English royal armies” (p. 111). Part 2 also delves into the extent to which Edward III’s household knights were used for diplomacy and defensive warfare. Household knights were a critical component in politics and deeply participated in their roles, which often included “furthering the king’s (often lofty) foreign ambitions” (p. 145).

Part 3, which is this monograph’s strongest section, includes chapter 6, “At the Centre: National Politics and Central Government,” and chapter
7, “In the Localities.” Here, Hefferan delves into the dual nature expected of a household knight, noting that “their domestic and political service to the crown was as important as their military obligations” (p. 175). He then flushes out the roles of these knights, looking at how higher-ranking persons (e.g., Miles Stapleton and John Potenhal) often offered their services in national politics, while the lower-ranking knights (e.g., Gilbert Talbot, John Darcy, and William Montagu) had a more “domestic” role within the household. Hefferan also notes significant logistics and differences within these spheres and the large importance placed on court culture and political stability. Knights were not just knights; they were culturally affluent by nature and varied in experience, rank, and role.

Part 4, which includes the eighth and final chapter, “The Rewards of Service,” looks at the system of rewards and the issues surrounding the service of knighthood. Hefferan notes that the “household knights were specifically favoured as recipients of royal patronage” and argues that this environment was unique as “household knights were singled out for special reward under Edward III” (pp. 241-42). Loyalty and reward were expected for their service and this “reward relationship” influenced the fourteenth-century English political climate.

Hefferan concludes his work with three overarching themes. First, household knights in fourteenth-century England had a varied and “multifaceted nature of royal service” (p. 262). Second, household knights were largely viewed as Edward III’s “loyal servants,” and their personal bonds, experiences, and comradery contributed to a collective loyalty among each other and in their relationship with the king (p. 263). Finally, household knights were employed with “intelligence, moderation, and sophistication,” meaning that Edward III had a great deal of personal and political reliance on them as a collective group (p. 264).

The Household Knights of Edward III is a detailed work, allowing the reader to become entrenched in fourteenth-century English warfare, politics, and culture. Hefferan’s scope is significant; and the monograph is well organized and meticulous. The book, however, does display a number of awkward phrases and grammatical choices; and, in a similar manner, some chapters are not as strong as others (e.g., chapter 4). But these inconsistencies do not take away from the value of the monograph as a whole. The Household Knights of Edward III is an excellent source for those looking to enhance their knowledge of fourteenth-century knighthood and English politics at the genesis of the Hundred Years’ War.
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