

[Price on Moffat, 'Medieval Arms and Armour: A Sourcebook'](#)

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Ralph Moffat. *Medieval Arms and Armour: A Sourcebook*. Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2022. 352 pp. \$90.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-78327-676-9.

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The field of study for medieval martial arms and armor has long been led by its doyen, Claude Blair, even after his passing in 2010. Blair's monumental 1958 work, *European Armour: circa 1066 to circa 1700*, augmented by a host of articles, formed the cornerstone for scholarship in the English language. Blair's courtly demeanor, careful scholarship, and knowledge both wide and deep ensured his influence to the extent that it continues to the present day. The present writer had the pleasure of meeting him at the Park Lane Arms Faire in the late 1980s where I witnessed firsthand each of the adjectival descriptors above, with an emphasis on *courtly*.

With Medieval Arms and Armour: A Sourcebook, Volume 1, the Fourteenth Century, Ralph Moffet has, I believe, taken up Blair's mantle and will henceforth lead new generations of scholars in the field. Far from slavishly following Blair (indeed he respectfully challenges some of Blair's judgments that have been highly influential), Moffet's *Sourcebook* instead attempts to establish a firm grounding for further scholarship, proposing standardized usage of terms and providing transcriptions and translations of 151 sample source documents, a veritable gold mine intended to drive a new wave of scholarship. His hope is boldly stated a number of times, including this instance: "It is very likely that sources yet to be brought to light will make much of which is unknown known. Well might we yet find baleen genulers, cuir bouilli mustilers, and detailed instructions for the manufacture of gaignepains" (p. 24).

Unusually, Moffet writes both for the very small pool of medieval military scholars as well as the much larger pool of passionate medieval enthusiasts, which he categorizes as "living history" (pp. xxvi-xxvii). Without question the larger number of his books will sell to this community, and by proposing shifts in language—such as "basinet" ("bass—in it," p. xxxiii) over "bascinet," "staples" over "vervelles," and "coat armour" over "surcoat," he hopes to inject historically based English usage over terms that have emerged from well-intended but confusing usage by museum curators, collectors, and early scholars. Indeed, this author intends with the revision of *Techniques of Medieval Armour Reproduction* (2000), to recast terms according to Moffet's usage.

The *Sourcebook* is divided broadly into three parts. Moffet's useful introduction clearly lays out both his method and the limitations of that method, which is to draw from a host of document types discussed below and to articulate his main purpose, establish terms, and demonstrate the value of surviving documents as a source for historians and reenactors. Moffet wisely tempers his work by cautioning about the translations, which, he notes "best allow the reader to engage with these primary sources I have presented the original text in as clear a form as possible.... Rearrangement of

syntax has also been considered necessary in some instances ... this allows for a smoother-flowing and more readable text" (p. 5). But "it is not necessary to be completely reliant upon my translation," as Moffet includes his original transcription. And he encourages readers so able to consult the originals and to even challenge his transcriptions where needed, as part of the next generation of scholarship he intends to lead.

The second part contains a chronological collection of source documents. Neatly analyzed in his "introduction of source types," this is in some ways a fine introduction to the potential and limitations of medieval sources commonly used in the study not only of arms and armor, but also of the fighting treatises and chivalric culture, such as tournaments and war. Following, he discusses physical sources, surviving arms and armor, and artwork such as brasses, stained glass, and illuminations. The documents themselves are a cornucopia, a bounty, from well-known ones like Boucicaut's exercise regimen to a myriad of obscure and fascinating ones, such as payment rolls for the armory at the Tower of London (151-166) or armor in the Register of the Bonis Brothers, merchants of Mountauban, in 1345 and 1348.

Document types include wills, inventories, household payments, acts of Parliament, muster rolls, royal decrees, legal complaints, inquisitions, official correspondence, mercantile correspondence (such as those preserved in the Datini Archives, which Iris Origo brought to light in 2002 with *The Merchant of Prato*), challenges to single combats, and judicial duels, alongside prose religious works, chronicler's accounts, biographies, travelers' accounts, and written challenges to combat for deeds or feats of arms. Omitted are the more problematic romance tales, which also sometimes provide usage and descriptions of arms and armor, such as the tale of Guy of Warwick.

These documents are, as Moffet notes, drawn from the footnotes of previous generations of scholar, establishing this work as standing on the literal shoulders of giants who went before, such as Sir Guy Laking, Sir James Mann, Charles Beard, Charles Ffoulkes, and a host of others. Moreover, as with the multiple generations of scholars upon whose work he stands, Moffet's recent scholarship has been scattered in a host of collections and journals, many of which will be relatively unknown to the larger market of living-history practitioners, so Moffet's own extensive footnotes are an additional gold mine of secondary writing that should be acquired and devoured by scholars and practitioners alike. As I often implore my own students, "read the notes!" Thou shalt be rewarded.

The value in these documents is not merely so that they can be mined by scholars and students of medieval arms and armor; their inclusion should point the way for future medieval scholars to where to look for still more documentary evidence. These sources and the many undiscovered ones like them should assume a much larger role in arms and armor scholarship.

The third part contains a nicely illustrated glossary of terms, which Moffet hopes will essentially replace or augment work such as the *Glossorium Armourium*, providing a common basis for future discussions among both scholars and living-history practitioners.

If there is a flaw in this work, it may be that the price of the work situates it outside the means for many in his target audience, living-history practitioners. As is usual with Boydell, one cannot complain about the high-quality print and editorial work that has polished this volume to a high gloss; thus the price point is indeed fair. But one may hope for a future paperback edition that will bring the

work more into the grasp of ever-scrambling practitioners, balancing life, family, and their medieval passions with the need to acquire an ever-expanding library, camp furnishings, clothing, shoes, and dress accessories—as well as the arms and armor itself.

Moffet's *Medieval Arms and Armour: A Sourcebook* is hopeful. It hopes to spark further scholarship, which this writer also hopes, and thinks likely. This generation of armor scholars, such as Nicholas Dupras, author of an influential PhD thesis, "Medieval Armourers and Their Workshops" (2012), now has a compass, carefully crafted by Moffet with plenty of leads for avenues for graduate and professional research. Indeed, Moffet's hopeful tone is even reflected in the title, "Volume 1, the Fourteenth Century," and readers may well be hopeful that Moffet is busy at work on the next volume(s) for the fifteenth century. A gauntlet has been thrown; let a new generation of scholarship begin—"laissez aller!" as medieval heralds sometimes cried to begin feats of arms.

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