

The Medieval Tournament as Spectacle. Tourneys, Jousts and Pas d'Armes, 1100-1600

Edited by Alan Murray and Karen Watts. Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2020. Pb. edition, 2023.
xiii+249 pp. £26.99.

The first volume of the Royal Armouries Research Series, this is a volume at once handsome and scholarly. Aside from an introduction and a select bibliography, both by Alan Murray, Senior Lecturer in Medieval Studies at the University of Leicester, this volume contains ten detailed chapters that throw light on different aspects of the symbolic and practical significance of the key performative episodes in Christian warrior showmanship. Among the chapters of particular novelty is Iason-Eleftherios Tzouriadis's study of foot combat as tournament event. He points out that, although such combat became an often popular event in tournaments, with notable monarchs participating, nevertheless the research on the subject is limited. He suggests that this is due to a fixation on jousting that is unmerited. As with Natalie Anderson's piece on the tournament, the court of Maximilian I emerges as of particular significance. He was a ruler particularly committed to the performative character of power.

In part, the theme of the volume could be taken further if the Crusades are considered. There is also room for discussing cross-cultural comparisons, particularly with the Eastern Roman Emperors and, beyond that, with Islamic rulership, notably the development of Ottoman performative violence, from Mehmed II onwards. Indeed, it is as an encouragement to such thought that the volume offers much. Contributors, such as Marina Viallon on the tournament saddle and Ralph Moffat on jousting armour bring together utilitarian, ideological and cultural elements, helping to show that the themes of sport and theatre outlined by Catherine Blunk and honour advanced by James Titterton can all be shown to resonate widely.

This is an impressive volume. The editors, notably Murray, are to be congratulated for achieving what is so rare, a specialist collection that really does range widely.

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