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**Formal Medieval Combat
and Performance**
The Woodville-Burgundy
Emprise of 1467

Mark Geldof

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REGINA, SK, Canada

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PREFACE

Steven Muhlberger's 2011 lecture at the International Congress of Medieval Studies, Kalamazoo, addressed the challenges period sources posed for the study of military biography. Some sources resisted analysis, but persistence and time often yielded results. Therefore, Muhlberger advised that "old sources deserve a new look every once and a while [...] once a century is about right."¹ This was said in reference to one of the more frustrating sources for the study of medieval combat, namely, the series of eye-witness accounts of the arranged combat between Anthony Woodville, Lord Scales, and Antoine de Bourgogne, commonly called The Bastard of Burgundy (the illegitimate son of Philip the Good).² The men fought each other over two summer days at Smithfield, London: the first day on horseback and the second day on foot.³ Sydney Anglo produced one of the few detailed studies of the episode and compared the two most detailed accounts but concluded that, for all their vivid language, neither

¹Steven Muhlberger, 'Chivalry and Military Biography in the Later Middle Ages: The Chronicle of the Good Duke Louis of Bourbon', *The Journal of Medieval Military History*, X (2012), p. 113, 115.

²In contrast to modern usage, the title of 'Bastard' here acknowledges the individual's noble blood, and there were several royal Bastards of Britany and Orléans. See a discussion of this usage in Helen Matthews, *The Legitimacy of Bastards: The Place of Illegitimate Children in Later Medieval England* (Pen and Sword, 2019).

³The family name is found spelled Wydville, Wideville, and Wodeville, among others, but is here given as 'Woodville' throughout.

seemed to agree in detail, and on some points they “flatly contradicted” each other.⁴ Anyone hoping to reconstruct a combat, blow-by-blow, would give up in frustration when confronted with these accounts. And this was certainly Muhlberger’s experience. However, his point was that there were plenty of things one could still learn from even contradictory sources. As our understanding of the broader social and political influences on late medieval chivalric culture has increased, so too has our capacity to find new meaning in old sources. As John Morrill explained, “[E]very historian believes but struggles to prove that knowledge of the past helps us to understand the present. It is so much easier to see how experience of the present helps us to understand the past.”⁵ Thus, the value of returning to old sources, once dismissed as fatally flawed.

The present collection of all contemporary and near-contemporary accounts of the Woodville-Burgundy emprise was assembled with this goal of asking new questions of old sources. None of these accounts are new to historians, but few of them are easily accessible and only even fewer are available in English translation. Nowhere have all (or even most) of the accounts appeared together in a way that would permit closer comparison. While it must be acknowledged that a more formal edition of the following accounts, with orthographic notation and, where possible, facing-page translations and transcriptions would be valuable, the scope of the present study is simply to provide readable modern editions of the accounts for reference and comparison. The introduction provides historical contexts for the concept of the *pas d’arms* and the emprise—late medieval forms of the arranged combats involving Europe’s martial elites. It also provides more specific contexts for the Woodville-Burgundy emprise and the social, political, and literary contexts in which the event took place. Many questions are posed of the sources, but not all of them can be answered here. Instead, this is an exercise in the collection and presentation of a body of historical material, as a tool for working on those questions and discovering new ones, that are still worth asking.

⁴ Muhlberger, “Chivalry and Military Biography,” p. 114. The study is S. Anglo, ‘Anglo-Burgundian Feats of Arms: Smithfield, June 1467’, *Guildhall Miscellany*, 2.1 (1965), pp. 271–83.

⁵ John Morrill, ‘Thinking About the New British History’, in *British Political Thought in History, Literature and Theory, 1500–1800*, ed. by David Armitage (CUP, 2006), p. 23.

Thanks are due to Dr. Muhlberger for encouraging this project; to my partner Zena Charowsky for her patience in sharing her space with it; and to Carly Silver and the staff at Palgrave Macmillan for guiding this project into print. I hope this gives students and scholars of this event a place to start more involved projects.

Regina, SK

Mark Geldof

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare that are relevant to the content of this manuscript.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mark Geldof completed a D.Phil. at Merton College Oxford, UK, in 2018. He studied the shifting meanings of violence among late medieval and early modern English social elites. In addition to his history training, he holds degrees in English Literature and Library Science. Published work includes the history of martial pedagogy, text-production, and the earliest English fight-texts. He has written about the role of the archaeology of physical trauma in studies of violence. He has also edit two books on the history of modern firearms for Safar Publishing, from Ukraine.