

*Le crépuscule de la chevalerie: Noblesse et guerre au siècle de la Renaissance.*

Nicolas Le Roux.

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As the author explains rather briefly in his introduction, *Le crépuscule de la chevalerie* aims to fill a gap in French historiography. The purpose of this book is to analyze and describe the military culture of the Renaissance, taking into account the personal experiences of soldiers in the campaigns around the Italian Wars. As this sort of analysis has been done before for other famed conflicts, the author continues, it is high time to undertake such analysis for some of the arguably bloodiest conflicts in French early modern history. The

title of the book refers to the pivotal point these Italian Wars constituted in the history of both knighthood as a distinct social class and certain elements of a chivalric lifestyle, from a changing appetite in literature to subsequent changes in tournament culture. The author does not identify a clear question, nor does he offer more explanation as to why his analysis should contribute to current scholarship.

*Le crépuscule de la chevalerie* is divided into seven parts, each consisting of two or three chapters. As the author asserts in true Braudelian fashion, these parts refer to different forms of temporality. The first three parts of his book cover the formation of ideological constructions, social norms, and the technique of warfare. The middle of the book, covering parts 4 to 6, represents a *courte durée*, the events surrounding the Italian Wars waged by Charles VIII, Louis XII, and mostly Francis I of France. Finally, part 7, “La gloire et la mythe,” refers to Braudel’s *longue durée*, in which he discusses the memory, or, rather, the legacy that famous Renaissance captains left behind. Exactly why the author chooses to incorporate these time frames as some sort of metastructure in his book is not clear, and this should certainly not be viewed as an attempt to incorporate theoretical discussions in *Le crépuscule*, as these are largely absent. Neither does this book contain a conclusion (there is only an epilogue discussing how the legacy of famous knights was recycled for various political reasons throughout these last centuries), in which the author might have explained what his analysis has contributed to current scholarship on this topic or on related topics.

The first three parts of *Le crépuscule* (“Noblesse et chevalerie,” “La société militaire,” and “L’épreuve du combat”) should be seen as a synthesis in which Le Roux brings together what has been published in France and its neighboring countries on the noble lifestyle and the importance of honor and warfare in noble society. These chapters are extremely well written, albeit rather superficial. In that sense, any specialist on the history of the nobility, court history, or military history could skip these chapters, as they offer nothing new. Its textbook-like quality (especially “Noblesse et chevalerie”) makes this an ideal read for students. Likewise, the final part of the book (“La gloire et la mythe”) is again quite well written, but unfortunately only skims the surface of important topics, like the funeral of the archetypical knight Bayard. Instead of an analysis, these chapters are mostly a description of events.

The most interesting read is offered by the middle three parts (“L’aventure italienne,” “Les années terribles,” and “L’honneur et la vie”), in which the author presents a very convincing and detailed account of the events surrounding the various Italian Wars, from the crusading dreams of Charles VIII to the imperial aspirations of Francis I. However, the author’s plan to offer an analysis of soldiers’ experiences is sometimes difficult to fathom. His many descriptions occasionally make it hard to extract more from a sequence of events than just an understanding of what occurred. In general, I can conclude that this is a well-written book, based on an up-to-date bibliography, that offers readers or researchers a point of departure for further study. Yet as a synthesis it does not contain enough new information or viewpoints to be of interest to specialists.

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