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Thorstad, Audrey

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Seats of Power in Europe during the Hundred years War,

Anthony Emery

(Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2015).

Review by: Audrey M. Thorstad

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Seats of Power in Europe during the Hundred Years War. By Anthony Emery. Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2015. ISBN978-1-7857-0103-0. xi + 386 pp. £49.95.

Anthony Emery is well known for his vast repertoire of publications on the architectural history of elite residences across Europe having composed a three-volume history on the topic. *Greater Medieval Houses of England and Wales, 1300-1500* (CUP, 1996, 1999, 2006) presented an architectural survey of all known great houses throughout England. In his new monograph, Emery explores elite residences or "seats of power" during the turbulent times of the Hundred Years War across Europe.

Seats of Power in Europe during the Hundred Years War provides a chronological survey of elite residences built or renovated during the years 1330 and 1480 over a wide geographical area. The book begins with the Avignon Papacy and the papal palace, and its first renovation phase under John XXIV in 1320-22, and ends with fifteenth-century renovations and additions to Linlithgow Palace by several Scottish kings. In between, the volume covers well known residences such as Windsor Castle in England and the Louvre in France, as well as lesser known buildings such as Germolles Manor in Burgundy, which was gifted by Philip the Bold to his wife, Margaret, Countess of Flanders, in the late fourteenth century. In the first part of the book covers the period 1330-1400, with geographical areas comprehensively covering all of Europe except Italy. The second part is similarly thorough, though its focus is more on France and its associated duchies for the period 1380-1420. Lastly, the third section extends its chronological examination of France with the addition of Scotland and England to its geographical spread. Within each region and for each patron, Emery discusses the renovation work and architectural changes that took place, encompassing outward facades, interior decorations and chamber arrangements.

Emery takes a refreshing approach to buildings he has labelled as "seats of power" by broadening the focus from royal and noble residences, to include in his exploration the religious powerhouses of Europe, such as the Papal Palace at Avignon and Malbork Castle of the Teutonic Knights. Alongside the architectural descriptions and historical context are high-quality glossy photographs, plans, and manuscript images. These help the reader to visualise the descriptions and concepts discussed within the book, bringing life to the buildings. The clear chronological order of each section makes it ideal for anyone looking to trace the architectural history of a specific building, area, or patron through the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

The study of castles and elite architecture more generally is not a new topic of historical exploration, especially when considering such important structures such as Windsor Castle. The benefit of this study is its grand

geographical scope, which allows the reader to make international comparisons that would have previously required the study of several books to accomplish. It is through this comparative approach that Emery is able to demonstrate that the devastating war did not necessarily affect building work as much as previously thought. Financial restraints for the English and French crowns did stifle renovation programmes during the war, but as Emery argues, "ducal money could be spent on embellishing palaces and castles with a fantasy of decoration and ornamentation".[1] Indeed, throughout the book, Emery does not solely focus on the military function of the residences –though it does feature prominently– but other interior and residential functions are explored adding to the current historiographical trend of studying the symbolic and social functions of martial architecture. Although examining a wide range of buildings, the book does not make any concise statements about similarities of these structures across Europe because, as Emery concludes, "what is overriding in the many residences considered is how they differed in response to the needs of their owners".[2] This statement is reinforced repeatedly throughout the many chapters. Each case study demonstrates the individuality of the buildings examined with considerations such as finances, geography, fashion, and the needs of the patron all brought to the forefront. It is insightful to explore architecture alongside the socio-political context. At the same time, it is a pity that the references are not more thorough for readers to explore beyond the book's information.

A weakness that cannot be easily dismissed, even with the book's many strengths, is the lack of concise definitions for the terminologies used to describe the different residences, from castles to palaces, from strong houses to unprotected houses and fortified houses. What do these terms mean and how do they differ? Emery is not clear. Within the remit of castle studies, there is a tendency to be over pedantic; however, using so many different terms can confuse the reader and conflate the debate about the 'true' purpose of a certain type of architecture.

With that being said, this book is an excellent survey of architecture during the Hundred Years War. Architecturally engaged students or those seeking information on the progression of a specific building or region will find Emery's work extremely enlightening. The images, architectural

[1] Emery, 369.
[2] Emery, 373.

descriptions, and Emery's knowledge of great houses combine to make a fantastic volume on a subject that had not been explored in such a way before.

AUDREY M. THORSTAD
Bangor University