

The Hundred Years' War is a topic much investigated in mediaeval studies in France and beyond. From recent decades alone, one could mention works by Favier,¹ Contamine,² Minois³ and the more broadly-conceived synthesis by Valerie Toureille focused on social history.⁴ Furthermore, I am disregarding English historiography here for obvious reasons, where the war is also a major topic.⁵ The common denominator for all these studies is a focus on political and war history, or finding links between the conflict and transformations in contemporaneous society.

Boris Bove's slender synthesis escapes this concept. Bove has undoubtedly made good use of his previous extensive monograph⁶ and built on his research focus on the nature of the late mediaeval French monarchy as determined by F. Autrand, C. Beaune and B. Schnerb.⁷ He has divided his study into six chapters, in which he progressively investigates the general nature of the crisis and causes of war, its influence on changes in the tax system in France, public opinion and methods of public communication, the response of elites and their internal conflicts, and finally the characteristics of post-war France and societies in the mid-15th century and also how the events of the previous century marked and changed this.

This would all be nothing new. But what makes Bove's approach an original one is his methodological concept of the Hundred Years' War. For him, this is above all a historiographic construct and not the course of historical events or a social phenomenon. Bove goes even further and handles it as a kind of catalyst of societal processes. He does not explain its occurrence merely as the consequence of previous political and power struggles between France and England, although he does not deny that these did happen. What he considers much more important, however, is a crisis in the mediaeval state, transforming the vassal system into a serfdom principle. Even this would not be a new idea, with Pocquet du Haut-Jussé having come up with a similar idea a number of decades ago.⁸ Haut-Jussé, however, linked it to the formation of the

1 J. FAVIER, *La Guerre de Cent Ans*, Paris 1980.

2 P. CONTAMINE, *La guerre de Cent ans*, "Que sais-je? histoire-géographie", No. 1309, 2010, 9^e éd. (1^{re} éd. 1968); P. CONTAMINE, *La vie quotidienne pendant la guerre de cent ans. France et Angleterre (XIV^e siècle)*, Paris 1976; P. CONTAMINE et al. (éd.), *Guerre et société en France, en Angleterre et en Bourgogne, XIV^e et XV^e siècle*. Lille 1991.

3 G. MINOIS, *La Guerre de Cent Ans*, Paris, coll. in: *Tempus*, No. 319, 2016 (1^{re} éd. 2008).

4 V. TOUREILLE, *Guerre et société, 1270-1480*, Cleff concours. Histoire médiévale. Neuilly, coll 2013.

5 Most recently one should note at least two monographs: G. CORRIGAN, *A Great and Glorious Adventure: A Military History of the Hundred Years War*, 2014; and D. GREEN, *The Hundred Years War: A People's History*, New Haven and London: Yale 2014.

6 B. BOVE, *Le temps de la guerre de Cent ans: 1328-1453*, coll. Histoire de France, Paris coll, 2009.

7 F. AUTRAND, *Charles V: le Sage*, Paris, 1994; F. AUTRAND, *Charles VI: la folie du roi*, Paris, 1986; C. BEAUNE, *Jeanne d'Arc*, Paris, 2004; B. SCHNERB, *L'état bourguignon: 1363-1477*, Paris 1999.

8 B.-A. POCQUET DU HAUT-JUSSE, *Une idée politique de Louis XI: la sujétion eclipse la vassalite*, in: *Revue historique*, 226, 1961, pp. 383-398.



early absolutist features of Louis XI's reign, while Bove sees it as a factor transforming the island monarchy and the high Capetian kingdom into a monarchy of sovereign princes who are able to absorb the relicts of previous vassalages only at the cost of a fundamental and open conflict: from this perspective, Louis IX's Treaty of Paris signed with England's Henry III is transformed from a document of peace to a *casus belli* for the future. War itself here, however, does not merely comprise the course of battles, diplomatic negotiations and periods of truce and peace. In a sensitive manner, Bove perceives the strengths and weaknesses of both warring armies in terms of their equipment and tactics, but he subjects his interpretation of the battlefield situation to finding social and administrative causes and contexts on both sides of the English Channel. And finally, he views war operations in particular from the perspective of their conceivable impacts on both monarchies. Thus, the Hundred Years' War changes from a mediaeval battle of knights into a modern and complex conflict, and not just a military one. While this may arouse some doubts, it is worth examining this contention further.

Even more interesting are the passages portraying the war as a catalyst for the transformation of the mediaeval state. It is here that Bove is the most convincing, and he produces truly original and fascinating arguments. First of all, he looks at tax reform. On the one hand, the conflict and its permanent costs forced the king to find regular sources of income, abandoning the principle of the monarch "living from his own sources", no longer dependent on taxes collected by the aristocracy. Thus the idea of regular taxation was born, further boosting the modernising features of the monarchy, shifting it away from mediaeval rule towards the early modern state, but arousing reaction from the noble elites, who soon recognised that this trend threatened their position, and attempted to find alternative ways to take control. Here, Bove further refines the long-running discourse within French historiography and on state bureaucratisation at the end of the Middle Ages which I have already mentioned, adding fiscal background and the motivation of privileged groups' positions to it. The question here remains of whether the capture of the king really did have the influence on the implementation of permanent tax that the author believes: the ransom for Louis IX did not result in such an effect, and an explanation of this fact would be worth further consideration.

Another major topic is the course of public opinion. Here too, the author was able to make use of the results of ongoing research, focused, however, mainly on techniques and strategies.⁹ Bove moves this forward through his thoughts on the formation of a "civil society" of the un-privileged, which alongside the elites represents another limiting factor in the king's actions. He also moves it forward by pointing out that this was an impetus to create a rule of law, if one that aligned with the period.

⁹ E.g. N. GRÉVY-PONS, *Propagande et sentiment national pendant le règne de Charles VI: L'exemple de Jean de Montreuil*, *Francia* 8 (1980), pp. 27–145; N. GRÉVY-PONS, *La propagande de guerre française avant l'apparition de Jeanne d'Arc*, *Journal des Savants*, No 2, 1982, pp. 191–214; S. FARGETTE, *Rumeurs, propagande et opinion publique au temps de la guerre civile (1407–1420)*, in: *Moyen Age*113, 2007, pp. 309–334; M. DEPRETER, *Moult cruaultéz et inhumanité y furent faictes. Stratégie, justice et propagande de guerre sous Charles de Bourgogne (1465–1477)*, in: *Moyen Age*121 (2015), pp. 41–69

While the king remained ruler “by the grace of God”, he did have to find new strategies for communicating with the public, and for the author this is another major feature of France’s late mediaeval transformation.

Within this chosen discourse, he then looks at and interprets political events in the country in the second half of the Hundred Years’ War: Charles V’s successes, the twists and turns during the rule of his mentally ill son and the resulting war of the princes, and at the end of his study he presents Charles VII’s regime as a victory for reforms and the beginnings of France’s political and national consolidation.

Bove’s work, benefiting from the traditional historical craft, might seem too conservative in its methodological concept to some critics. One can certainly wonder whether everything the author analyses really had to take place with the iron logic he has laid out. Sometimes one cannot ignore the suspicion that Bove has succumbed to an *ex eventu* perspective: there is a question, for example, of whether the Capetian revival would have achieved such success if Charles the Bold had not met an essentially accidental death in Nancy. But similarly, the question arises of whether a perspective constructed in this way remains within the historian’s vision. On the other hand, the work is an excellent example of absolute mastery of a topic in a small space, and the rehabilitation of intelligently executed event historiography. The essay form, which appears to be gaining ground in contemporary historiography,¹⁰ makes Bove’s work comprehensible and appealing to the general public.

Václav Drška

¹⁰ For a similar methodological concept and form of processing of another topic, see S. PATZOLD, *Wie regierte Karl der Große?*, Köln, 2020.