

Reviews

Combrie, Laura. *Archery and Crossbow Guilds in Medieval Flanders 1300–1500*. Woodbridge, UK: The Boydell Press, 2016. Pp. 259 + 6 ill., 1 map. ISBN 978-1-78327-104-7 (hardcover) US\$99.

Archery competitions were a significant sporting event in western Europe in the later Middle Ages, from various bow and crossbow *Palii* in Italy to the carnival like shooting competitions in Germany and France. In the cities of medieval Flanders, archery and contests of skill held important political, military, social, and civil functions. In *Archery and Crossbow Guilds in Medieval Flanders*, Laura Crombie examines the archival records of Flemish Crossbow and Archery guilds. In so doing, she overturns many assumptions about the nature of these guilds and demonstrates that these were not simply shooting clubs, but important institutions in civic governance and identity.

The book is divided into six chapters, each focusing on an element of the activities of these guilds. The first chapter begins with the discussion of the origin of the guilds in the early fourteenth century, as well as discussing the relative size of the guilds. She then examines the martial aspects of the guild activities: guarding the walls, policing the streets, and serving with the armies of the duke of Flanders. Crombie then examines six case studies of the guilds' participation in war in France and the Low Countries.

In the second chapter, Crombie exposes the social status of these guilds by comparing the status of members of various martial fraternities. The archer came just after the orders of knighthood and ahead of all other martial fraternities. Members of the guild also had a much higher proportion of members who were part of a city's government. Naturally, this makes the reader curious about deeper social networks of the guilds as seen in, for example, Ronald F.R. Weissman's *Ritual Brotherhood in Renaissance Florence* (1982) about lay fraternities in Florence or Sandra Cavallo's *Artisans of the Body in Early Modern Italy* (2007) about surgeons in Turin. However, Crombie is clear about the fragmentary nature of the archival material and the inability to probe so deeply. In this chapter, Crombie also engages in a fascinating discussion on women in these guilds — they made up roughly 10% of the total membership.

The third chapter will likely be of most interest for readers of this journal. This chapter examines the social and devotional activities of the guilds. Crombie starts by documenting the drinking activities of these groups (records of wine are a significant element of Crombie's evidence), as well as the rituals of joining and departing (typically by death) the guilds. She also discusses mediation and dispute amongst the guild members. Crombie ends with a lengthy discussion of the guilds' spiritual activities. This includes the iconography of their patron saints, their devotions, and the chapels they built. In the case of Ghent, one crossbow guild also built and maintained a

hospital (120). Crombie concludes that lay confraternities, trade guilds, and martial guilds all shared similar goals, rituals, and likely origins.

The fourth chapter explores the relationship between the guilds and civic and princely government. The relationship with the civic government is not only based on defence and security, but also in contributing to civic honour. The behaviour of the individual members of the guilds reflected on the honour of both the guild and the city, and were closely monitored. This relationship was clearly of value to the city, which in return gave members of the guilds vast quantities of wine, money, and special rights. The relationship with the duke of Flanders was more subtle. The need for a ducal charter made the guilds beholden to the duke. But this control could work in both ways: normally, dukes that engaged with the various city guilds were generally more popular than those that did not. The guilds did contribute to the duke's military power. Crombie hints that in some cases the guilds may have participated in revolt against unpopular rulers.

The next chapter focuses more closely on the relationship between the guilds and civic honour, as Crombie examines the shooting contests that guilds held. Crombie begins by examining the extant invitations that discuss the honour of the members, guilds, and cities. She then moves to the discussion of the contests themselves, which could last several weeks; they included plays mounted by the guilds and the important "entrances" made by each guild into the city hosting the contest. These were theatrical parades involving hundreds of people and elaborate props and, in one case, possibly a live elephant (182). All of these were judged and had silver prizes awarded, typically in the form of tableware or drinking vessels. Cities would also heap cash rewards on the guilds that performed well at these shooting contests.

The final chapter examines how the guilds and the shooting competitions served as a link between cities and as a contributor to a civil society in Flanders. The competitions created local and regional networks as guilds from cities all over Flanders attended these events. Given the status of guild participants, discussions of economic and political cooperation naturally occurred. The guilds' economic prosperity and the political mediation significantly contributed to the civic society of medieval Flanders.

Crombie peers as deeply as she can into the fragmentary sources available. With the sources available to her, she is able to paint a fairly detailed picture of the way these guilds operated. However, the gaps between the fragments pique the curiosity and leave the reader wanting to know more about the social networks of the members of the guilds. *Archery and Crossbow Guilds* makes a fascinating contribution to the study of lay religious organization in late medieval Europe through the examination of these little known guilds.