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Book Review

Daniel Rosko.

A person's perception of King Henry V (1387-1422 CE) can vary greatly, based upon his or her regional origins. The English hail Henry V as a hero, and revere him as one of the great monarchs of England. The French, on the other hand, view Henry V as an invader who led a ferocious army that committed unspeakable acts against the people of France. In his book, *The Warrior King and the Invasion of France*, author Desmond Seward detailed how the House of Lancaster usurped the crown of England and described the second Lancaster king, Henry V, as a brilliant and successful military leader. Henry V believed that God supported his cause and that he, Henry, earned the right to rule Normandy through his military victories. Seward also highlighted the dual nature of this deeply religious king, who brought senseless slaughter to French soldiers as well as innocent French citizens during his campaigns and subsequent occupation of France.

Seward used sources that offer accurate, contemporary insight into Henry V, including eyewitness accounts and documents from people who lived during Henry V's lifetime, reign, and his creation of the Anglo-Franco dual monarchy. He used primary sources from the accounts of people such as Bishop Thomas Basin, Jean de Montreuil, Georges Chastellain, Adam of Usk, and Robert Blondel. These sources give great insight into Henry V as a soldier and leader, both from the period when he, as a young English prince, fought against the Welsh, and later, when as king of England, he campaigned against the French in Normandy. The authors of the sources mentioned above either were either confidants to the king, or had witnessed the destruction caused by Henry V and the English army. Along with his contemporary sources, the author also used a blend of secondary sources. These sources illustrate the biases between the British view of Henry V and the French view of the warrior king, and include resources from English historians such as E.F. Jacob and K. B. McFarlane. Though the secondary sources seem to emphasize the

British perspective a bit more, Seward's historical sources used to explain the different stages of Henry V's life are, for the most part, reliable and accurate.

One of the book's great strengths is how the author used historical sources to emphasize his key points. For example, one of the author's major points described how Henry V's family came to the crown as, "Gaunt had commissioned a forged chronicle containing a fable which purported to establish his son's right to the throne." (p. 8). Gaunt—John of Gaunt, the Duke of Lancaster—was the father of Henry IV and grandfather of Henry V. Gaunt used the aforementioned chronicle to prove the legitimacy of the Lancaster claim to the throne of England, yet, if the validity of the chronicle is in question, so then is the Lancaster claim to the throne. The use of sources such as this helped strengthen the author's message to the reader. Material from Robert Blondel provided another example. When talking about Henry V's treatment of the French, Blondel stated, "There are those who have been killed by the sword, those who have fled the soil of their fathers, those who have despaired and died, ground down by the sheer weight of tyranny." (p.162). Henry V tried to portray himself as the rightful ruler of Normandy, which is in fact a false presumption, especially if a person were to rely solely on English contemporary sources. Throughout the book, the author chronologically provided accounts that emphasize how Henry V and the English army subjected the French populous to execution, unjust punishment, and forcible removal from their homes.

Historians, including Gerald Harriss and Christopher Allmand, have written countless books about Henry V, including portrayals of his life, his reign as king of England, his creation of a dual monarchy between England and France, and his military campaigns into Normandy. Desmond's book provided a detailed, chronological description of how the House of Lancaster usurped the crown of England, and put Henry V on track to become king of England, and mass an army to attack the French. Along with his focus on Henry V, the author detailed many of the king's inner circle, who were the only people that the king could trust. For a person that may not be of English heritage or may not have a strong understanding of this period of history, this book is definitely worth reading. It seems astonishing that a king who was so deeply spiritual, would not just allow, but sanction the execution of innocent men, women, and children. The reviewer recommends that others read this book because the author, Desmond Seward, removed much of the romanticism that surrounds Henry V to this day; romanticism that is due in part to perceptions created by William Shakespeare's play, *Henry V*. The author addresses a general bias of English historians who have tried to minimize the cruelty of what happened to the

French during the invasion. For a person who may know little to nothing about English history, French history, or medieval warfare, this is a very good book to read. Even for a reader looking for a different perspective on King Henry V, this book would be a great choice, especially due to the sources of information that the author used in researching this book. For someone who may know a great deal about the English invasion of Normandy, this book may completely change the reader's perspective of Henry V, the House of Lancaster, and the English invasion of France.