GRIEF AND MEMORY AFTER THE BATTLE OF AGINCOURT

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…For this damned war has caused us so much misery…¹
great grief there was throughout the kingdom of France especially at the king’s court for the loss at Agincourt.²

Who is the one who does not find sadness where it is common to everyone?³

Of the many general outcomes of military engagement during the Hundred Years War, emotional and psychological consequences remain generally unexplored. While this is partly a result of the paucity of source material dealing explicitly with the aftermath of military action and its sometimes intangible effects on civilian populations, it is also partly a result of the tendency of military historians to conceive of the effects of warfare in a conventionally socio-political sense. That is, consequences of war—especially on non-combatants—still tend to be measured in terms of economic loss, geographical displacement, the fracturing of social and political networks, agricultural and rural devastation, political change and so on.⁴ These are all important, indeed

fundamental, effects, of course, and all at least hint at the sometimes terrible experiences of those who were forced to deal with the loss and displacement suffered by many during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Yet questions remain to be asked about the way in which medieval people dealt with and responded to the violence of war and the trauma of loss. How did they articulate grief? What were the means by which war was remembered and the war dead commemorated during this period?

Much work has been completed on emotional and psychological consequences of modern warfare by historians of the Great War and the Second World War. Scholars such as Jay Winter, in his groundbreaking book, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, have taken a cultural historical approach to the aftermath of violent conflict. They have interrogated the ways in which societies have attempted to talk about the grief that accompanies war, the processes of mourning which articulate loss, and the construction of collective memories about war and death.\(^5\) It is clear from such studies that attitudes towards death and grief must be historically contextualized. For Winter, the reflections of Sigmund Freud on mourning and melancholia provided an early-twentieth century context in which to consider other cultural manifestations of loss and bereavement.\(^6\) In the medieval context, Frederick Paxton has shown that by the ninth century, outward or public responses to death (whether deaths as result of combat or otherwise) had become strongly Christian, highly politicized, and ritually delineated.\(^7\) The eagerness of Carolingian rulers to assert control and homogeneity over funerary and mortuary practices led, in Paxton’s words, to a “complex and coherent ritual process,” which eventually pervaded not just the Frankish church, but medieval western Europe in general.\(^8\) Such rituals were not just associated with the practical interment of a corpse, but were also concerned to provide a clear framework in which appropriate lamentation could take place and in which the dead could be adequately


\(^8\) Ibid., 209.