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Susan Rose, *An English Town in France, 1347-1558*. Woodbridge and Rochester: The Boydell Press, 2008. x + 187 pp. Maps, figures, bibliography, and index. \$95.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-1-84383-401-4.

Review by Christian D. Liddy, Durham University, UK.

This book traces the history of the town of Calais in northern France from its capture in 1347 by the English king, Edward III, to its eventual return to the French crown in 1558. The study is divided into nine chapters, which are arranged chronologically and broadly thematically. Rose's book makes clear the three-fold importance of Calais to a succession of English kings. First and foremost, Calais was a staple town. From the early 1360s Calais became the site of the English wool staple, which meant that all wool leaving England for markets overseas could only be bought and sold in the town. Secondly, the merchants of the company of the Calais staple, which emerged as the organisation in control of the wool trade, became a major creditor to the English crown. Thirdly, the town served a military function in the Hundred Years War and was the location of a permanent garrison, whose strategic value lay in protecting Calais's position as a gateway for English forces to France and to the continent more generally.

The importance of Rose's monograph lies in the fact that it is the first book-length study of Calais in English. It should really be read alongside David Grummitt's recent account of the Calais garrison in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.^[1] Both books reflect, in their own way, the growing interest among historians of late medieval England in the function and significance of the more geographically peripheral possessions of the English crown. Rose seeks to demonstrate the economic vitality and continuing political, military, financial and diplomatic relevance of Calais to English interests. She takes aim at several distinguished English historians, as well as "French historians" (pp. 39, 49, 56), who have tended to see English possession of Calais as merely a tokenistic symbol of dynastic pretensions abroad. Rose works hard to show how various interest groups in England, from mercantile oligarchs to aristocratic factions, had a stake in the success of Calais. She shows how Calais played an important role in the English civil war of the fifteenth century (the Wars of the Roses), as a military base and centre of political conspiracy for disaffected nobles such as the earl of Warwick. In connecting Calais to the fortunes of the English crown and to various episodes in the high politics of late medieval England, Rose's book will be of greater value to historians of England than of France.

Rose's earlier work has been in naval history, and what is missing from the book is a real sense of Calais as a town. Her Calais comprises merchants and soldiers, a world which can be reconstructed from the voluminous English royal records which she exploits to good effect, but it was also a community of townspeople, craftsmen and traders. I would have liked to know more about the town itself, as opposed to the economic staple and military garrison stationed there. How did Calais society compare to the experience of living in English or French towns in this period? A map or plan of the medieval town would have been very useful.

Rose's book begins with a quotation from the fourteenth-century chronicler, Jean Froissart, who recounts the speech supposedly made by Edward III after his successful siege of Calais in 1347 (p.1). The king declared his wish that the French soldiers who had defended the town against his forces, as

well as ‘everyone else in the town, men, women and children’, should depart immediately. “I wish to repopulate Calais with pure-blooded English”, Froissart reports Edward III as saying. What exactly did the king mean? To what extent did he succeed? What was the composition of the urban community of Calais between 1347 and 1558? How far did ordinary townspeople identify themselves as English? These are perhaps slightly unfair questions about issues of urban, national and collective identity, which go beyond the remit of this book. However, Rose provides tantalising examples of the linguistic dexterity of some of the English inhabitants of Calais, who could write in French and Flemish, and about the kinds of cultural interactions between English townspeople and French residents expressed in love songs and love letters, which complicate the description of Calais as an “English town.”

NOTES

[1] David Grummitt, *The Calais Garrison: War and Military Service in England, 1436-1558* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2008).

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