

social superiors. *Peasants Making History* is a complex and dense work that is made more accessible through the author's clear prose and organization. He never loses sight of his central claim, and he manages to tie each subtopic seamlessly into his thesis. The chapters are divided into clear sections, each with a helpful concluding segment. Chapters 2 and 3 examine peasants' relationships with land, from environmental, agricultural, legal, and social perspectives. Chapters 4 and 5 assess peasants' roles within both wider society and their individual family units. Chapters 6 and 7 provide a rich amount of detailed material on peasant agriculture and pastoralism. Chapters 8 and 9 explore peasants' relationships with towns and their participation in early industrial activities. Finally, chapter 10 uses the poem *Piers Plowman* as a lens through which to scrutinize peasant worldviews. This chapter, which focuses more directly on the peasant mindset than the others, is particularly intriguing against the backdrop of Dyer's other claims. The well-defined formatting of the chapters means that the work could be read as a whole or used as a reference source for more focused investigations. The monograph also provides abundant tables and figures, as well as a glossary of terms. *Peasants Making History* therefore gives the favorable impression that it was produced for a specialist audience but with general readers in mind.

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Agnès Sorel and the French Monarchy: History, Gallantry, and National Identity.
Tracy Adams.

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To comprehend Agnès Sorel's (ca. 1422–50) life and her presence in cultural memory requires exploring what she meant and means in fluid contexts. The changing projections, each casting distinct norms onto her legacy as mistress to French king Charles VII in the fifteenth century, form the backbone of Tracy Adams's *Agnès Sorel and the French Monarchy*. The study takes two approaches: first, reconstructing what we know about Agnès from the minimal allusions in contemporary sources, her relationship with the king, and position at court, and second, historicizing her communicative and cultural memory spanning different eras.

In her afterlife, Agnès's memory was mediated through her family and friends, cultivated shortly after death through the Melun Diptych, a painting of the Virgin commissioned by the king's secretary. Over the course of the sixteenth century, Agnès became a celebrity at court, and in the seventeenth century featured in discourses on gallantry. Agnès's soft involvement in politics is reflected in her good nature amidst self-serving schemers during the eighteenth century. In the nineteenth century, she subsequently takes on a role in the construction of national identity as a heroine of France. These fluctuating conceptions exemplify how "cultural memory casts the past in symbols that illuminate the present."

Tracy Adams specializes as a scholar of European court literature and the position of women, previously coauthoring *The Creation of the French Royal Mistress: From Agnès Sorel to Madame Du Barry*, among many other publications. The first chapters of *Agnès Sorel*, where she meticulously scrutinizes the primary sources, lead us on a fascinating exploration distinguishing between known facts about Agnès and assumptions present in historical writings. Agnès's engagement in court politics is undeniable, but Adams contends that specific details remain elusive. Nonetheless, Agnès garners more attention in the chronicles than do other contemporary women in comparable positions. The historical records highlight King Charles VII's affection for her: he maintained their relationship for several years, starting around 1444. The chronicles also underscore the material favors bestowed upon her. Agnès died in her mid-twenties as a result of an acute overdose of mercury, either deliberately administered to her or by suicide. Whether or not this was related to the dauphin's conflict with his father, at a time when the "greatest melancholy had entered the land," remains unresolved.

In the following chapters, Adams traces the changing evaluation of Agnès's role. Initially she is portrayed as a woman who led the king astray. Afterwards, Agnès's "known traits," rather than an accurate likeness, are depicted, showcasing the relationship between Agnès and the Virgin Mary. As the early sixteenth century unfolds, Agnès becomes a subject of cultural memory. In the subsequent narrative of national identity, Adams delves into the complexities of her portrayal as a royal mistress, a French tradition. The final chapter explores Agnès's connection to seventeenth-century gallantry and its relevance in contemporary contexts, such as the #MeToo movement and popular forensic anthropology.

Adams shows how Agnès was presented as the reliable advisor to the king over his official advisors. This raises intriguing questions about the relationship between power and affection in society that deserve further delving into. The solid analysis of sources, including the debunking of assumptions that Agnès was the first *maitresse-en-titre*, highlights the informal nature of power. However, the dynamics of changing norms and discourses in each period are touched upon fleetingly. How, for instance, do criticisms of duplicity at court in the sixteenth century evolve from earlier, well-documented attacks on flattery and insincerity? How did the memory of Agnès's position reflect but also feed into such evolving norms and discourses, eventually transforming into a narrative of national identity in the nineteenth century? And what is the connection with suggestions of an earlier discourse of national identity, which has long been a topic of discussion going back to Colette Beaune's *Naissance de la Nation France*? While the book covers extensive ground, it leaves the reader with lingering questions.

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