Military Matters , & “Final Analysis” (Crusades)

See:

J France, *Victory in the East: a Military History of the First Crusade*, 1994

Dan Jones, *The Templars*, 2017, and *Crusaders*, 2019.

M Keen (Ed), *Medieval Warfare*, 1999, Part One – chapter on “The Crusades”

J Keegan, *A History of Warfare,* 1993, Chapter 4 – “Iron”

HE Mayer, *The Crusades*, 1965/ 2nd ed 1986

Helen Nicholson, *The Knights Templar*, 2001; *The Knights Hospitaller*, 2001; *Medieval Warfare*, 2003

D Nicolle, *Teutonic Knight 1190-1561*, 2007

P Reid, *Medieval Warfare*, 2007 - general

J Riley-Smith, *The Knights of St John*, 1967

Dominic Selwood, *Knights of the Cloister,* 1999

Desmond Seward, *The Monks of War*, 1972

R C Smail, *Crusading Warfare*, 1956

Crusader Armies: essentially followed the pattern of many Medieval European armies – based on the feudal levies of kings and lords, supplemented by “professionals” (mercenaries, & specialists such as archers, engineers &“artisans”) who were paid or otherwise suitably rewarded.

Typically, a king or great lord (“magnate”) would summon his “banners” to provide military service when required. Each “banneret” (a lesser lord, or a knight of sufficient status to have his own square banner, rather than the pennant of a mere knight, and thus entitled to lead a company of knights & men-at-arms) who held land from his “liege” (and was, therefore, bound to give military service, if needed) would present himself and his “array” (knights, squires, men-at-arms, foot soldiers) to fight for his lord, & ultimately, king.

For example, Alain Rouge/ “Rufus” (“The Red”) held Richmond Castle & the North of England for William I (“The Conqueror”) during the late C11th – he was a “magnate”. Over 200 knights held manorial estates across the North in Alain’s service: he was their “liege lord”. Each knight had at least one “squire” (a knight in training) serving him, and a few (the wealthier) also employed their own professional “men-at-arms” who trained/ supervised the knight’s common foot soldiers. Most knights could probably muster 6-10 foot soldiers -typically free peasants from their “manors”, whom they often armed at their own expense. If required, therefore, a great lord such as Alain Rouge could probably muster 1,500-2,000 men, of whom roughly 10% were fully armoured knights (plus squires & “men-at-arms”, typically serving as lighter cavalry), and a reasonably well trained & equipped body of foot soldiers - spearmen, archers etc.

Such “feudal arrays” were commonplace thro’out Medieval Western Europe. In England and Scotland especially (& probably elsewhere) these could be supplemented by “general arrays” (French: “arreare-ban”) of all able bodied men in given areas (typically counties), who served as best they could in supporting roles.

By the C14th, in England, this system was very highly developed (Peter Reid, 2007). It seems likely that similar approaches pertained in many areas of Medieval Europe, and were operating in prototypical forms by the Crusading Era of C12th-13th (M Keen, 1999).

The logistical demands & expense of mustering an army cannot be overstated. Each knight needed at least 3 horses, whilst squires & mounted men-at-arms needed 2. Horses had to be fed & cared for; weaponry & armour produced/ maintained, & soldiers fed. Consequently, just like in modern armies, there was a considerable logistical “train” of horses, mules, carts, baggage handlers, carters, grooms/ostlers, smiths/ farriers, carpenters, armourers, fletchers (arrow makers), plus numerous other “support service” providers of various kinds.

A fully armoured & armed knight, plus horses, cost – in real terms – about the same as a modern armoured vehicle: a war horse cost the equivalent of at least £50,000. Saddles & other essentials (eg stirrups, reins), armour and weaponry were all extremely expensive. Knights of the Crusading Era wore chain mail (plate armour was a much later development) and, typically, rounded “conical”, nasal guard, helmets. Later, some (esp members of the Military Orders, & lords/ kings) started to use “enclosed” ‘pot’ or ‘bucket’ helmets - flat topped steel cylinders with vision slits, or open faced “basinets”, some with basic visors. Weaponry consisted of battle lances (iron tipped, shorter, more rigid than jousting lances), “kite” shaped shields, highly tempered battle swords, & maces. All of this required a lot of specialist manufacturing, and was very pricey. Knights met such expenses from the revenues of their estates (“manors”).

Generally, freemen were expected to arm and equip themselves in readiness to serve when required. Archers were often “self-employed”, meeting their own expenses. The long bow had been used widely in the British Isles since Neolithic times: the ability to make and use such weapons was a source of great pride to certain sub-groups of freemen, in particular. Professional “men-at-arms” were self-financing, arming and equipping themselves, but some were in the paid service of a knight or lord.

Although Medieval armies were raised within the organising framework of feudal obligation (generally a commitment to serve for about 40 days p.a.), they were, in many ways, aggregations of various “private” agents and groups; in some respects more akin to modern militias & “private military contractors” than to state run armies.

In Medieval England, “Shire Reeves” (Sheriffs) were usually responsible for much of the necessary organisation & coordination, whilst officials called “purveyors” sought out and “acquired” the necessary resources and personnel. Common soldiers foraged for food, but there were also “fixers” called “harbingers” who scouted out the land ahead of an army’s line of march, identifying and taking control of suitable camp sites & billeting locations, water & food sources etc. This was hugely disruptive of the social and economic base.

Medieval warfare was very “seasonal”. It was hard to move much in winter, not least because of poor roads. Failure to attend to agricultural and related matters in home areas (sowing & harvesting crops, animal husbandry etc) would soon cause food shortages, even famine.

(NB John of Salisbury, a noted C12th scholar/ adviser to Papacy, & Bishop of Chartres, wrote extensively about the logistical problems facing Crusader armies.)

Kings & Great Lords typically supplemented their feudal forces with paid professionals: men who had specialist skills (eg siege-craft), or who were full-time soldiers for hire (“sell swords”; “free lances”) – mercenaries. This trend accelerated during the Crusades, esp those led by Kings, who were already becoming used to accommodating the growing demands of what later became known as “bastard feudalism” - payments by those owing feudal service in lieu of personal military service. In the Crusader States, the Kingdom of Jerusalem, in particular, but also the Military Orders, hired thousands of mercenaries locally – eg notably in 1187 in the period before the Battle of Hattin. Most of these were recruited from local Christian communities, esp Syrians. The Templar forces included more “turcopoles” (Syrian light cavalry) than Knights and mounted men-at-arms, and the Order had a senior officer (“Turcopolier”) responsible for recruiting & organising such groups. The Kingdom of Jerusalem hired huge numbers of infantry, incl archers/ crossbowmen.

The rates of pay for the “professionals” equated broadly, in real terms, to that of modern professional soldiers, with archers, men-at-arms, and specialists receiving at least twice the rate of common soldiers- about 1d/ day, ie in the “modern equivalence zone” of £20-30,000 p.a.. Knights probably got equivalent to £40,000+; “bannerets” about the same as a modern Lt Col/ Colonel (approx. £60-80,000), whilst those who led divisions or wings of the army received broadly equivalent sums to modern Brigadiers & Major Generals – ie £100,000+ p.a.

Regular payment was not, of course, guaranteed, and for the non-professional majority would, in any case, only be made once any feudal obligations had been met. The Crusades, however, provided ample opportunities for “wealth acquisition”. Generally, it was accepted that pillage and looting were legitimate means of “payment in kind”, esp for common soldiers and ordinary knights. Those of rank (knights upward) adhered to a widely accepted honour code, of which hostage taking and ransom demands were an integral part. If knights were captured by their peers, it was incumbent on their captors to treat them with the respect and dignity due to fellow knights, but it was perfectly normal to demand ransom payments of the captives’ kin or lords for their release.

Military training & culture

Most knights had trained regularly from boyhood, and “squired” for a knight from adolescence. They were versed in the “arts of war”, having been taught from an early age not only the “knightly code”, but also how to care for “their” knight (“my lord”), to hunt (small & large game), to groom and care for horses, maintain weapons & armour, and to use them properly.

Most were not particularly literate, but many probably knew enough to sign their names (and possibly “decode” basic account ledgers, patents & deeds), and all were certainly versed in their feudal duties. They understood battle tactics and other military matters, but most importantly, they knew how to command and how to obey. Most W European knights of the C11th-14th spoke French (or a dialect of it), reinforcing the sense of common membership of a supranational “brotherhood”.

Thousands of hours of stave fighting, wrestling, “sword play”, riding instruction, battle drills, & hunting (good training for war) resulted in extremely high levels of physical fitness, fast reflexes and well developed “muscle memory”. Due to a high protein diet, most knights were physically bigger than commoners, and their resilience and endurance were of a high order, analogous to elite athletes. Squiring taught them self-discipline, efficient time management, how to cope with sleep deprivation, and the critical importance of careful observation and attention to detail, without which horses might fall sick or equipment fail.

Military skills & tactics were honed in tournaments: individual contests (1:1) in the “lists” were valued for the chance to build personal reputations and win prizes – by the C12th tournaments were massively popular in W Europe. More militarily significant, however, were the “melees” where groups of knights, squires, & men-at-arms fought skirmishes over open ground – proper “war games”, often lethal to the participants, but a good “learning laboratory”.

Later Medieval/ Early Renaissance(C13th – 16th) knights were more refined: literacy, legal & administrative skills, “courtly arts” and “chivalry” were given as much emphasis as military training.

The knights of the Crusading Era were, however, primarily fighting men. They certainly adhered to a “code of conduct”, and some were highly religious, but essentially they were ruthless killers. They fought for their lords as part of an international “brotherhood” of knighthood which meant that most probably had more affinity for one another, irrespective of “nationality”, than for the “lower orders” in general.

Most Crusader knights, irrespective of any “oaths” (largely propaganda for the cult of “chivalry” developing during the Middle Ages; a cultural construct & by-product of “The Crusades” – see J Keegan, 1993, pp 294-5, p/back ed., & Terry Jones – TV series on The Crusades), probably had little regard for those of lower social status than themselves. This may have contributed to their proclivity for violence against civilians, esp those of cultural “other” groups - Jews, Muslims. Many Crusader knights seem to have been self-aggrandising, arrogant, and violent men who served themselves in the service of “the cause”. More than a few, judged in our terms, were probably psychopathic – eg Reynald of Chatillon, Godfrey of Bouillon, Tancred (of Edessa).

Military professionals (mercenaries) tended to come either from the upper echelons of the free peasantry or the artisan classes, although a few were lordless knights (“bannerless men”, or “free lances” – the origin of the term “freelancer”), or knights and squires who’d “gone rogue”. They equipped and armed themselves (to a higher standard than common foot soldiers), and were usually highly skilled at whatever military arts they practised. Most had learned their business “the hard way”, so those who were no good tended not to survive for long.

Most were foot soldiers who “sold their swords” to the highest bidder. Generally, these men had served as peasant foot soldiers, and having proved themselves, “gone solo” either because they enjoyed fighting and were good at it, or because it provided a chance for self-enrichment; probably a bit of both. Some were criminal outcasts.

The most successful might acquire sufficient wealth to “upgrade” to mounted status, and offer their services as light cavalry specialising in reconnaissance, skirmishing & raiding, and irregular warfare. Generally they rode rugged small horses (eg “Norman cobs”; “garrons”): agile, sturdy beasts, bred for endurance, & *much* cheaper than the larger war horses (“destriers”) of knights. Except when skirmishing or raiding, they did not fight on horseback: their mounts were a means of transport – they fought on foot, but “mounted-up” to evade trouble or manoeuvre around the battlespace. [NB This type became very familiar in later Medieval/ Early Modern Europe, and had various names – eg “muntators”, “hobelars”. The C16/17th “dragoons”, and Anglo-Scottish border “reivers”, were evolutions of the type.]

The best of these might eventually find positions as “serjeants” (mounted “men-at-arms”) in the service of a lord. This was a big step-up socially, and altho’ rare, it was not unknown for mounted men-at-arms who gave good service to be knighted, thus acquiring the status (and relative wealth) of a member of the elite.

Crusader forces (esp the Military Orders) employed large numbers of locally recruited mercenary light cavalry – “turcopoles”. Generally, these were hired from Syrian & other local Christian communities, but many may, in fact, have been Muslim: Arabs who feared the Turks, or members of Muslim sub-groups deemed “apostates” by Sunni Muslims.

Technical specialists (eg siege engineers, miners et al) were generally members of the artisan classes, who’d served long apprenticeships under the auspices of “guilds” (secretive associations of artisans – eg mid C13th Paris alone had over 100 guilds) to learn their crafts – mason/ builder, carpenter/ joiner, metalworker/ smith, or whatever. Competence in the essentials earned the apprentice his laurels (“baccalaureate), and he’d then proceed to “mastery of his art”. [NB Medieval universities were essentially guilds of scholars: such “graduations” are the source of modern academic degree titles. “Doctors” were simply scholars in the “higher fields” of learning (Canon & Civil Law, Medicine, Theology) only available to “Masters of Arts”.] Those who developed skills & reputations in fields of obvious military use could command fees in the service of lords and kings. They were analogous to modern specialists (eg “Cyber warfare”) hired today by government agencies and militaries.

Common foot soldiers were usually free peasants obliged to serve as their “lord” (typically the knight who held their home “manor”) required, who only received payment (maybe half a penny a day) if and when any feudal obligation was exceeded. In Medieval England, legally, such men were expected to arm & equip themselves. In reality, it was common for knights to arm them – it reflected well on a knight, and from a practical point of view, guaranteed that a credible force was available, which was useful, on an everyday basis, for local law enforcement and protecting the manor. In the Kingdom of Jerusalem there were few European style feudal estates (those of rank tended to hold “money fiefs”), and consequently it was the norm to hire common foot soldiers from local populations, esp Syrian and other Christian communities.

Most had basic “light armour” [plain metal “conical” or “bowl” type helmets, padded jackets, often reinforced with strips of hard boiled leather or mail, & surprisingly effective wooden, animal hide covered, metal embossed, “kite” shaped or oval shields], and were armed with spears/ pikes, basic swords or other assorted “close combat” weapons – eg hatchets, daggers, maces. Some were pretty well trained, esp if their lord employed a professional to organise them; others less so. All, however, were extremely strong and tough because of a life of hard physical labour, and they were more than capable of fending for themselves under the roughest of conditions.

Archers were often something of a law unto themselves. Some were free peasant levies – like common foot soldiers, but others formed “companies” under leaders of their own choice. Bowmen were extremely skilled (well -trained long-bowmen could unleash as many as 12 shots/ minute, creating en masse a “cloud” of arrows out to a range of 300 yards) , and were highly valued by military commanders; reflected in their higher pay. Usually very disciplined, archers provided lethal volley fire support - a great “force multiplier” in both offensive and defensive fighting. [In English, the classic command sequence for archer volley fire was “Nock – Draw – Loose.”]

Crusader armies did not have huge numbers of archers (nothing close to the very large contingents in English armies of the C14th), but their value (esp for countering Seljuk mounted archers) meant that the size of archer contingents increased throughout the Crusading Era. Crossbowmen (vulnerable on open battlefields) were also increasingly valued, esp for sieges and defending castles, where the greater accuracy of their fire was very useful. By the late C12th/ early C13th most archers were locally recruited in Outremer. They were not generally long-bowmen: most used either shorter “Frankish” style bows, or locally crafted composite models.

When an army’s different elements coalesced, a certain amount of collective training was usually undertaken. The “chain of command” had to be clarified and agreed, and words of command/ signals, and basic battle procedures assimilated by all. Ideally, some manoeuvres would be practised collectively, and if nothing else, time in encampment and on the march enabled all to become familiar with each other, and hopefully form mutual bonds.

It is notable that Crusader armies deprived of such familiarisation training (eg the French & German forces of the 2nd Crusade) often ran into military problems later, not least in “command, control & communication”. The 1st Crusade, altho’ ultimately successful, experienced initial difficulties because of its very diverse elements (and large range of languages spoken), and only really became a relatively coherent military force later in the campaign, by which time the less highly motivated elements had been eliminated.

Richard I’s English army of the 3rd Crusade, and that of Louis IX of France, 7th Crusade, 1248-54, were probably the most “professional” Crusader force fielded, and, generally, the armies of the German Emperors were well organised, equipped and trained. Throughout the Crusading Era, however, it was common for the cohesion of forces to be weakened by the prickly or slippery personalities and rivalries of leaders (eg Leopold of Austria, 3rd Crusade; Count d’Artois, 7th Crusade), and it often took men of titanic ego and singularity of purpose (eg Adhemar & Bohemond, 1st Crusade; Richard I, 3rd Crusade; Lord Edward, future K Ed I of England, 9th Crusade, 1271-2) to hold things together.

“Tafurs”

Crusader armies (esp the First Crusade) often contained non-feudal/ unpaid militias of poor townsmen & peasants, whose training and equipment were rudimentary. The First Crusade attracted many of this type – ignorant fanatics, or just “desperate men” looking for personal gain. Many were deluded religious zealots who’d been “fired-up” by preachers such as Peter the Hermit & Walter the Penniless. The more able bodied who survived the disaster of the so-called “People’s Crusade” formed loosely organised “companies” of light infantry (unarmoured, carrying basic rectangular or rounded wooden or wickerwork shields, & armed with short spears/ pikes, hatchets, knives, clubs) who were known as “tafurs”.

The exact origin of the term “tafur” is uncertain & contested. It may have been a reference to the light wooden shields (“talevas” or “talevarts”) which many used, or it may have derived from the name of a long forgotten knight or mercenary who’d first rallied & led them. Possibly it was a Flemish or N French dialect word, a Medieval slang term.

Such groups were a mixed blessing: hard to control - brutal ruffians who were probably some of the worst perpetrators of atrocities against civilian populations, such as the massacres of Jews in the Rhineland; slaughters of civilians@ Antioch & Jerusalem, 1st Crusade. They often got very drunk; rumours of cannibalism abounded (altho’ this was probably Muslim propaganda – there’s ltd credible evidence to substantiate it), and even leading Crusaders generally avoided their encampments, except when heavily escorted by their own soldiers. On the other hand, the fearsome reputation of “tafurs” was itself a powerful psychological weapon, and such groups had their uses as “expendable” light infantry in sieges & skirmishing operations. When organised by professionals, “tafurs” could be effective.

As J France has observed, ‘Tafurs’ (on the 1st Crusade) were ‘…a hard core of poor men organised under their own leaders…These desperados seem to have been predominantly Northern French and Fleming…and to have represented a quasi-autonomous force within the army.’ (J France,1994, pp 286-7)

From the Third Crusade onwards, “tafur” bands were less common because leaders of these expeditions tended to “professionalise” their forces. Nevertheless, the type was still found among mercenary forces, and the term seems to have become a generic descriptor of any group of “irregular” light infantry, incl those recruited locally in the Crusader States, even though such forces were usually paid.

The Miltary Orders – “Monks of War”

At the other end of the spectrum (socially, militarily, ethically) from “tafurs” were the Military Orders, who became the most important fighting forces available to the Latin Kingdoms, and the Crusaders. As both Fulcher of Chartres (*The Chronicle of Fulcher of Chartres*, circa 1120) and Al-Sulami (*Book of Holy War,*1105) point out, the Crusader States were weak & vulnerable (open borders, weak supply lines, lack of sufficient military personnel), and consequently the Military Orders assumed an importance to “Outremer” out of all proportion to their founders’ probable original intentions. (see D Jones, 2017; H Nicholson, 2001; J Riley-Smith, 1967; D Seaward, 1972; D Selwood, 1999.)

The original Military Order was The Knights of the Hospital of St John of Jerusalem (“The Hospitallers”)

* Founded 1099 after the First Crusade by Gerard Thom to help & protect Christian pilgrims visiting Jerusalem.
* Orig a “medical”/ pastoral order, they rapidly evolved their protective role to become primarily a force of military “brothers” who lived under monastic rules (vows of “Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience”).
* Broadly followed the Rule of the Benedictine Order (aka “The Black Monks”) – hence their black cloaks.
* A Papal Bull of 1113 approved the Order, and in 1130 Pope Innocent awarded them their own coat of arms – a silver cross on red.
* Wore black or red mantles (cloaks) adorned by white crosses.
* Very highly trained and disciplined. Austere lifestyle demanding total commitment as both knight & monk – eg “Rule” required mass at least thrice daily, plus regular prayer.
* “Brothers” were either ‘military’, ‘medical’ or ‘pastoral’.
* “Professed Knights” of the Order were in “Holy Orders” (ie priests), although these were the minority.
* Most were “Externs” – ie knights who were not ordained, but who lived celibate lives under monkish rules.
* Nickname – “The Religion”, which speaks volumes about how seriously they took their vows.
* At their height, the Hospitallers probably mustered about 2,000 knights and light cavalry - a formidable striking force.
* The most “cosmopolitan” of the Orders – members came from all parts of Christendom & Outremer.
* Because they built & garrisoned so many castles in the Latin Kingdoms (eg “Crac Des Chevaliers”, aka “Krak d’Ospital”, which guarded the Eastern Frontier of the County of Tripoli), they also had many thousands more members who were not “brothers” per se, but still members of the Order – “men-at-arms”, builders/ masons, armourers, smiths, carpenters, stewards etc.
* Many infantry & light cavalry mercenaries were recruited locally from indigenous Christian, and possibly even some Muslim, communities.
* When Acre finally fell (1291), and the Latin Kingdoms collapsed totally, the Hospitallers decamped to Cyprus…
* Ruled Rhodes, 1309-1522, and then Malta, 1530-1801.
* The Order still exists in various forms today – eg St John’s Ambulance, and as the “Sovereign Military Order” of “The Knights of St John of Malta” (Prof Riley-Smith was a member).

The Poor Knights of Christ and the Temple of Solomon (“The Templars”)

* The most famous, and certainly the most mythologised, of the Military Orders.
* Founded 1118 by Hugh de Payens to defend the pilgrim routes to Jerusalem. (see William of Tyre, *Historia*, 1184)
* Order confirmed by Papal Bull, 1139. Essentially the Templars were armed Cistercians.
* Headquarters on Temple Mount, Jerusalem – hence the name.
* Also called “The Order of Christ” or “The Order of Solomon’s Temple”.
* White mantle with a red cross. Black & White “piebald” battle flag.
* Similar in many ways to Hospitallers, but probably more pragmatic.
* Membership predominantly French, altho’ there were many from the British Isles (esp England, where they estab’d a v strong presence) & other parts of Europe, notably Iberia.
* Templars often interacted closely with Muslims, not least because their location on Temple Mount meant they controlled access to key Muslim holy sites.
* Like Hospitallers, Templars were “monks of war” who lived under strict religious rules – eg orig “Rule” (Cistercian) required mass 7 times daily! For practical reasons, most got by on 3.
* They were generally respectful towards Muslims. (see Usama bin Munqidh, *Book of Contemplation*, written in 1180s – recollections of visiting/ praying in Aqsa Mosque, Jerusalem, 1140s, under protection of Templar friends.)
* Templar knights always wore their white mantles, but they and other members of the Order also often adopted local customs (eg dress, food, styles of prayer), which may have contributed to their eventual downfall – “irregular” practices.
* They were not the fanatics of popular imagination – an image perpetuated by the likes of Walter Scott. Certainly they were sternly dedicated Christian warriors who would yield to no-one, but they were not mindless zealots.
* It is worth noting that some Templars seem to have had an affinity for certain Muslim groups, notably the so-called “Assassin” sect/ order…
* Indeed, some historians (mainly C18th/ 19th “Orientalists” – eg Joseph von Hammer, Jose Antonio Conde) noted that the Christian Military Orders were quite similar to Muslim “orders”(“ribat” – associations of medical/ pastoral & military “guardians”), even suggesting that they may, in part, have originally been modelled on them, altho’ most modern Crusade specialists refute this.
* The Order had 3 ranks: Knights, ‘Serjeants’ (who wore brown or black, & fought as light cavalry, but who were also the Order’s stewards, smiths, builders, armourers, accountants, archivists, medics etc), and Priests.
* At height of their power, the Templars probably had about 20,000 members (spread thro’out Christendom/ Outremer) – 2,000 knights, plus many others of non- knightly status.
* Numerous “Turcopoles” (Syrian light cavalry) served with the Order, whose “Turcopolier” was a senior Serjeant responsible for recruiting & organising such mercenaries.
* Like the Hospitallers, Templars also hired large numbers of infantry locally, esp archers/ crossbowmen.
* The Templars had very diverse activities, and truly international “reach”, eventually holding lands and castles all over Christendom.
* They were very involved in finance, banking, “real estate”, and politics, which was probably the main reason for their downfall: 1307, King Philip IV of France suppressed & destroyed them - they were simply too powerful, wealthy and influential for his liking, and he was (purely incidentally, of course!) in debt to Templar bankers.
* At the time of their downfall, it has been estimated that as much as 10% of the entire Southern French population was directly beholden to The Templars – tenants of their estates, financial or political dependants etc (Dominic Selwood, 1999).
* The last “Grand Master”, Jacques de Molay, was tortured to death on the orders of the French king.
* The Templars were charged with many “crimes” & sins, incl heresy, idolatry, & other “irregular practices”, and “depravity” (ie sodomy) – their badge of 2 men sharing a horse (signifying, in fact, poverty) was adduced as “evidence” of institutionalised homosexuality.
* Order disbanded by Pope Clement V, 1312.
* Inevitably perhaps, the destruction of The Templars, and the lurid allegations surrounding it, has given rise to many conspiracy theories about the Order, incl the belief that it continues to exist in secret, highly influential, forms in the World today - all, of course, utter dreck (Dan Jones, 2017).

The Hospitallers & Templars were hugely important military assets of the Kingdom of Jerusalem/ Crusader States. They could muster large, highly disciplined, “professional” fighting forces which were totally committed and very militarily capable: eg The Templars saved Louis VII’s French Army @ Mt Cadmus,1147, 2nd Crusade, & played a decisive part in the victory against Saladin @ Mont Gisard, Nov 1177. After Hattin, 1187, Saladin butchered Hospitaller & Templar prisoners precisely because he understood their military & symbolic importance to the Franks. Templars & Hospitallers formed the vanguard & rearguard for Richard I’s strategically vital advance on Jaffa, Aug-Sept 1191, 3rd Crusade, & played a key role in the brutal Battle of Arsuf, 7th Sept 1191. They figured in large numbers in pretty well all the later Crusades, often forming the backbone of Crusader armies.

They built, maintained, and garrisoned strategically important fortresses throughout the Holy Land, and were intimately involved in the politics of Outremer (see William of Tyre, *Historia,* 1184 – notably his unease re infl of The Templars in the Kingdom of Jerusalem). Their Masters were immensely powerful and influential men. Both Orders evolved into wealthy international organisations with extensive land, wealth, & power and influence throughout Christendom. Particularly true of the Templars, whose power in France became too much for King Philip IV (Dan Jones, 2017; Dominic Selwood, 1999).

There were other Crusading Military Orders, formed in emulation of the Templars & Hospitallers.

The Teutonic Order (“The Order of the Knights of The Hospital of St Mary of the Teutons in Jerusalem”) was founded 1190-1 during the siege of Acre, 3rd Crusade:

* 1st Master – Heinrich Walpot von Bassenheim.
* German: originated in the Holy Land, where they maintained/ garrisoned a number of key castles in N Palestine/ protecting Acre (eg Montfort, Rahel, Judin, Castellum Regis) & fought for the Crusader States.
* “Teuton” = simply Latin for “German”.
* Called themselves “The German Order”; others called them “The Order” or “St Mary’s Order”.
* Later, after fall of Montfort (their HQ) to the Mamluk rulers of Egypt & Syria, 1271, they moved N into Cilician Armenia where they held 2 strategically vital castles (Amoudain & Haruniye) in an informal alliance with the Christian rulers of Armenia.
* White mantle/ black cross, incl the so-called “Cross Pattee” later adopted by the Prussian/ German states, and still used as the symbol and tactical recognition flash of the modern German armed forces.
* Religious “Rule” similar to/ derived from Hospitallers, & to lesser extent Templars.
* Eventually (1244) their own distinct German Rule for The Order of Teutonic Knights was given Papal recognition.
* After Crusades in M East, the Teutonics became very involved in “crusades” V pagans in Prussia & the Baltic region (from 1225 onwards…)
* 1291 – HQ moved to Venice, but since 1250s The Order had become increasingly Baltic/ Prussian orientated: founded Konigsberg, 1254…from 1309 HQ was Marienburg, Prussia.
* Basically, they led the German colonisation of the hitherto Slavic region of “Prussia” (completed 1283), a process which involved more than a little of what today would be called “ethnic cleansing”, genocide even.
* Later went on to campaign thro’out Baltic region, esp in Lithuania.
* The Order still exists today as a private charitable foundation.

The Orders of Santiago, Calatrava, & Alcantara were Spanish/ Portuguese orders (largely “offshoots” of the Spanish Templars) who operated exclusively in Iberia V “Moors” during the Christian “Reconquista” of Spain/ Portugal, which contd until end of C15th.

In the opinion of some military historians (eg John Keegan, *A History of warfare,* 1993), these Military Orders were the direct ancestors of ‘…the regimented armies that arose in Europe in the C16th.’(p 295, paperback ed). Keegan continues ‘…the Teutonic Knights…founded a military regime from whose secularised estates [in Prussia] Frederick the Great, 500 years later, recruited the nucleus of his officer corps.’ (pp 295-6) In Keegan’s view: ‘These knightly orders…soon became both a mainstay of the Crusading effort as well as powers in their own right, great builders of castles in Palestine & Syria and recruiters and fund raisers for the Crusading effort in Europe.’(p 295) The Military Orders could, however, be an irritant to some because they sometimes ‘…pursued their own policies indifferent to the interests of the state…’ (HE Mayer, *The Crusades*, 2nd ed 1986, p 228 of paperback ed, 1988).

Other Crusader forces included the naval forces of the Venetians and Genoese – logistically and strategically invaluable, albeit at great expense. During the 4th Crusade, the Venetians supplied specialist amphibious infantry - “Fanta da Mar” (ancestors of the highly regarded “Lagunari” & “San Marco Marines” of the modern Italian military: highly rated by German generals who had them under their command in WW2), who led the successful assaults on Zara (Nov 1202) & Constantinople (July 1203).

Italian shipwrights, carpenters, riggers et al often provided a cadre of skilled men whose expertise was readily transferable to siege warfare – eg Genoese outside Jerusalem, Summer 1098, 1st Crusade. Earlier (1097-8) the Genoese Fleet had reinforced the First Crusade, landing fresh troops and supplies outside Antioch. Genoese crossbowmen (altho’ costly to hire) proved very useful, esp in siege warfare or when defending fixed positions, but their slow rate of fire/ complex reloading procedures made them vulnerable in more open warfare.

English naval forces were also often very effective. The only relative success of the 2nd Crusade was the English naval campaign of seaborne raids and assaults against the Moors in Iberia, capturing Lisbon, 1147.

The Genoese & Venetians used oar powered galleys, but also deployed substantial numbers of cargo carrying sailing ships, which often gave the Crusaders significant “strategic reach”. Italian and English naval forces sometimes helped Crusaders to conduct sustainable amphibious operations, which the galley dependent Muslim naval forces found harder to do – eg Saladin’s failed attempt, using the Egyptian Navy, to seize Beirut from the sea, Summer 1182; contrasting with Richard I’s very successful surprise amphibious assault on Jaffa, Summer 1192.

NB At the start of the 3rd Crusade, Richard I used his navy to transport his army directly to the Holy Land, and it also enabled him to seize Cyprus. Later, during the advance on Jaffa, Richard’s navy, advancing off-shore in parallel with the land forces, gave invaluable logistical support.

Byzantine forces were of variable quality: the best were very good, notably the fearsome “cataphracts”. These heavy cavalry shock troops (and their horses!) wore metal “fish scale” armour & fully enclosed helmets, and were armed with battle lances, Roman style long cavalry swords (“spatha”), and sometimes lead weighted throwing darts. The key mission of cataphracts was to drive a wedge into enemy battle lines, causing maximum damage and disruption, and “opening up” defensive formations for lighter follow-on forces to exploit.

Imperial heavy infantry (essentially an evolution from Roman legionaries) were also excellent troops – well armed, disciplined professionals. Such forces were, however, part of the Imperial Guard (“Tagmata”) – unavailable to the Crusaders. The Byzantines also had levies of less reliable troops recruited from Imperial “Themes”, and they hired many mercenaries, mainly from the Balkans (esp Slavs) and NW Europe (“Varangians”). More than a few Byzantines served as mercenaries (”renegade Greeks”) in both Crusader and Muslim armies.

The Byzantines tended not to get directly involved in Crusader warfare, not least because of mutual mistrust: “Franks” were regarded as barbarians who were a real threat to the Empire. The Byzantine Army of the Comnenan dynasty was very professional, and particularly adept at military engineering, and sometimes gave invaluable “technical” support and military advice to the First Crusade. Generally, however, the Emperors were too nervous about their own security to commit their forces to fighting alongside the “Franks”, and it should not be forgotten that, more often than not, Imperial and Crusader interests were distinctly unaligned.

Muslim Forces

“Saracens” (*possibly* a corruption of the Arabic “sarkan” – one who journeys to fight, or “sarikin” – marauder) was a slightly derogatory term used by Westerners to describe Muslim (esp Seljuk Turkish) warriors. In fact, most Crusaders developed huge respect for their opponents, and often referred to the Turks, in particular, as “knights”.

Muslim forces were very diverse – elements were similar, in many ways, to their Crusader opponents, but others such as “Mamluks” (or “Ghilman”) were different, not least because they were slave soldiers. Contrary to popular belief, many “Muslim” forces were not “Ghazhi” (Warriors of God), and as in Crusader armies, more than a few mercenaries were employed, incl quite a lot of non-Muslims – eg “renegade Greeks” probably instructed Muslim forces in siege warfare. Some Balkan (Albanians, Greeks, Slavs) & Circassian people took paid service (usually in specialist roles – scouts, slingers, skirmishers etc) in Muslim armies – most nominally became “Muslim”, but in reality not many questions were asked as long as they made a quick “declaration”, parroting Arabic words they probably did not understand.

The Egyptian Fatimids “recruited” many troops from N Africa: most were slaves (”mamluks”) but others were paid professionals. Included in these forces were N African cavalry - particularly Arab & Berber horsemen. The elite of the Fatimid Army (until disbanded by Saladin, 1169) was the Sudanese Infantry Corps, which was, when well led, a formidable force of ferocious “professionals” – slave soldiers, but well cared for. The Ayyubid elite infantry (Mamluks, of course) with whom Saladin replaced the Sudanese (and later, the Mamluk Sultanate troops) took over their barracks in the Citadel of Cairo, where they lived fairly self-regulated lives as an elite warrior caste enjoying far more comfort and privilege than most of the ordinary Muslim population.

The Egyptian navy was quite powerful. Mainly consisting of galleys propelled by slave oarsmen, it was useful for coastal operations, but had more limited utility in transporting forces over open sea, and was vulnerable in rough weather – the big limitation of any galley based naval force. The Egyptian navy had “marines”, who were adept at coastal raids and ship to ship fighting, but when compared to the naval forces of both N Europeans and Italians, generally, Muslim naval forces lacked “blue water” capability and “strategic reach”.

Most Syrian cities had their own defensive militias. These were of variable quality, and whilst useful for “local defence”, were of ltd use outside their home areas. Syrian nobles had their own levies of troops (cavalry, infantry, archers) bound to them in personal allegiance; not unlike the feudal arrays of Europe, but like all Muslim powers of the time, they also deployed large numbers of slave soldiers – “Mamluks”.

The Seljuk Turks were a “warrior race” – tough, resourceful, and almost invariably exceptionally aggressive and brave. They were formidable enemies, but also “men of honour”, which explains why most Crusaders regarded them as fellow “knights”. The Seljuks were very adaptive & pragmatic (eg their “high culture” was essentially Persian), which was why many “Turkish” forces contained numerous troops of Kurdish and Persian ethnicity, some attaining the very highest ranks – indeed, Saladin’s Kurdish dynasty (Ayyubids) ended up running the show. The Seljuk Turks of “The Sultanate of Rum” bore the brunt of fighting the earlier Crusades, but by the C13th the Seljuks had been supplanted by other Turkish clans, the Kurdish Ayyubids, and eventually the Mamluk Sultanate (1250-1577).

Like their Western opponents, the Muslim elite rationalised their war fighting in religious terms, but the suspicion lingers that many (probably most) were, in reality, equally motivated by more personal & secular “drivers” – glory/ reputation, the thrill of combat, acquisition of status & wealth etc. Most of these men were born and raised to fight, and knew little else – just like European knights. Indeed, there is evidence that some Muslim warriors developed a jousting/ tournament culture very similar to that of Medieval European knights (J Keegan, *A History of Warfare*, 1993, chap 4, “Iron”, p 294 paperback ed).

Turkish “Beys” (Provincial Governors) were expected to raise troops from the territories which they controlled, and did so in similar ways to European feudal lords, with similarly variable results. The “hard core” of Muslim infantry, and some cavalry, were, however, “Mamluks” – slave soldiers. Ethnically diverse (most were of Circassian, Georgian, Coptic, Slavic & Turkic ancestry), many were born into military service, and knew nothing else. They were not bound in chains/ coerced (“enslaved” in our sense), but were a warrior elite, a “caste” of, literally, “born soldiers”; disciplined and well trained, and usually ably led. They were also “well looked after”, not least because their masters had a vested interest in them reproducing themselves.

The Seljuks fought as cavalry. They did use sword and lance, but essentially they were mounted archers, equipped with very powerful and compact composite bows with which they were expert. Firing rapidly, and often remarkably accurately, at the gallop, they were a potent manoeuvre missile force.

Generally, the equipment and weaponry of Muslim forces were similar to that of their opponents: chain mail or laminated metal strip armour, rounded “conical” metal helmets – often with nasal or other facial guards, and frequently spiked & adorned with plumes or combined with turbans. Shields were typically round and metal embossed, but smaller than European types because speed was favoured over heavy protection. Swords were usually of the curved “scimitar” style, lighter than European battle swords.

It was not unknown, however, for some Muslim cavalry (notably Mamluks) to wear metal breastplates and throat “gorgets” (and even “cataphract style” ‘fish scale’ armour) and to carry heavier straighter swords (“Mamluk swords”) plus much bigger, oval, or even rhomboid, shields. It is believed that the European “basinet” helmet (appearing in C13th) may have been copied from Muslim helmets developed to improve the head protection of their cavalry.

Battle lances were pretty well identical to Western models. The composite bows of Seljuk cavalry (& Muslim archers generally) were extremely powerful, albeit over a shorter range than Western bows, and when used by experts, lethal.

Tactics

The horses of Muslim cavalry, bred from Arabian & N African types, were typically smaller and faster than European warhorses. Broadly, Muslim military culture (deriving especially from their Arab & Turkish nomadic heritage in the open spaces of Arabia & Central Asian steppes) favoured open manoeuvre fighting, and quite careful deployment of different combat arms (cavalry, infantry, skirmishers, foot archers)as appropriate to the terrain/tactical situation. In contrast, Westerners tended to favour always seeking decisive “shock action”. The military culture of European knights placed a premium on the ability to both withstand and inflict cataclysmic shock in battle, whilst foot soldiers engaged in supporting, “mopping-up” and consolidation operations, & escorting and garrisoning duties. Some of this changed in the light of experience gained by both sides during the Crusading Era. (see M Keen, 1999, Part One; John Keegan, 1993, Ch 4; RC Smail, 1956, passim)

The massed cavalry charge of armoured knights & mounted men-at-arms was the most devastating tactic of Crusader armies – this “mailed fist” (RC Smail, 1956) could shock, demoralise, and destroy the generally more lightly equipped Muslim forces – eg at Antioch & Dorylaeum, 1st Crusade; Ascalon, 1099; Mont Gisard, 1177. That stated, opportunities to apply it were relatively rare because Muslim forces (esp the Turkish cavalry) tended to stand-off and manoeuvre out of harm’s way, whilst inflicting damage with lethal archery. The other drawback of the “mailed fist” was its tendency to be a “use once” tactic – it was hard to regroup and “go again” in the event of a failed initial attack.

Muslim cavalry, esp mounted archers, favoured a “hit and run” or “swarming” attack, only closing for combat if and when the enemy was sufficiently weakened to render it vulnerable – usually by getting between its cavalry and the infantry and supply train to attack exposed flanks. Seljuk mounted archers regularly wore down lumbering Crusader forces (eg the First Crusade’s advance thro’ Anatolia), breaking off before the Westerners could “fix and kill” them with their heavier cavalry, but then wheeling round to repeat their attacks at different points.

Generally, Muslim forces were more adept at using cavalry & infantry in coordinated or task specific action, giving them particular advantage in broken or “close” country. This happened at Mt Cadmus & Dorylaeum (2nd Crusade) where the Turks used the mountainous & broken terrain to conceal parties of foot archers & light infantry who constantly ambushed and harassed the Crusaders, whilst also launching continual light cavalry raids (“hit and run”) against their vulnerable flanks and supply train. The 2nd Crusade also suffered badly in its “fight through” the belt of walled orchards surrounding Damascus because the Crusaders lacked sufficient experienced infantry for this sort of “labour intensive” close combat slog. Saladin’s great victory at the Horns of Hattin, 1187, was the result of clever “asymmetric”, attritional, tactics, followed by a “heavy strike” only when the exhausted and denuded “Franks” were corralled into a restricted area and surrounded.

The Crusaders did, however, learn, and by the 3rd Crusade were placing far greater emphasis on infantry protection of vulnerable flanks (eg Richard I’s coastal advance on Jaffa was heavily screened on the landward side by infantry, light cavalry skirmishers, and large numbers of archers to keep Seljuk mounted archers at bay), and only using the “mailed fist” when appropriate and to their advantage. At Arsuf (7th Sept 1191) Richard’s force punched its way through a much larger Muslim army because in such a brutal head-on “encounter battle” the lighter Muslim cavalry was unable to withstand direct “shock” action.

Military historians continue to debate such matters, and not all agree that Muslim forces were generally better than Westerners at achieving “tactical separation” opening up enemy forces to flank attacks. Generally, however, it was the case that when Muslim forces achieved victories against the “Franks” in open battle (eg Ramla, 1102; Marj’Ayyun, 1179; Cresson & Hattin, 1187) it was because they managed to separate the Crusader forces, isolating cavalry from infantry, thus exposing vulnerable flanks.

Such tactical imperatives, and the need to garrison castles, patrol frontiers, and engage in smaller scale raids and skirmishing operations (often in remote, “broken” country), meant that the Crusader States & armies, and particularly the Military Orders, eventually developed and retained larger numbers of infantry and lighter cavalry forces than fully armoured knights. By the C13th most of these personnel were recruited locally in Outremer.

Similarly, some Muslim forces started to “upscale” elements of their cavalry (heavier armour, helmets & shields, swords, lances etc) in an attempt to meet the “Franks” on more equal terms in “shock action”, which probably explains the development of jousting tournaments among some of the Muslim elite during the C13th. There were, however, limits to the extent of such evolutions – the Crusader States were always short of personnel, whilst for Muslim leaders, large bodies of heavy cavalry were expensive to maintain, and, in any case, heavy cavalry warfare simply was not part of their military tradition.

Keegan sums it up:

‘What underlay the Crusaders’ failure…was…a structural defect in their method of warmaking: dependence on the armoured charge…against an enemy whose main intention was not to stand and receive it…On the Crusades, the western warrior met an opponent whose tradition was quite other, and who saw no dishonour in fighting at a distance and manoeuvring to avoid the critical blow. Over time the Crusaders adapted to the unfamiliar…by enlisting increasing numbers of local infantrymen and by choosing where possible, in accordance with local practice, to fight in locales where their flanks were protected by obstacles; meanwhile the Muslims moved closer to western practice also…’ (p 294).

Such was very evident in siege warfare. Arab & Turkish warriors were not initially very adept at this, but they learned quickly – probably from “renegade Greek” Byzantine engineers.

Zengi’s capture of Edessa (Christmas, 1144) shocked the Crusader States & Christendom because the Turks used sophisticated siege warfare techniques to breach its defences. The siege methods and technologies of both sides were pretty well identical, and each side experienced, at various times, the problems inherent in this type of warfare.

The harsh military reality was that, generally, even relatively lightly garrisoned castles or other fortresses conferred substantial tactical advantages on the defenders, esp if they had secure water supplies, and adequate food stocks and weapons. This is why castles were such effective defensive structures. Well sited castles not only dominated the surrounding terrain and strategically important points (eg river crossings, access routes etc), but also imposed huge delays on invaders, who would be foolish to leave garrisoned fortresses in their rears as they advanced into hostile territory.

Siege warfare was, however, usually as testing for the besiegers as the besieged, often more so. Sieges made big demands on armies: large numbers of troops were required properly to invest a fortress or walled city, and besiegers were always vulnerable to attack from relieving forces sent to help the besieged – eg this was the big threat to the 1st Crusade as it besieged Antioch, Oct 1097-July 1098, which only eventually fell when Bohemond bribed a tower commander to betray the defenders. In fact, as often as not, sieges succeeded because of such treachery within the besieged garrison.

Godfrey of Bouillon’s brilliant and ruthless leadership at the successful siege of Jerusalem (1st Crusade), where he stormed the city walls (14th-15th July 1099), demonstrated how important careful intelligence gathering, deception, and daring strikes at identified points of weakness could be in siege warfare, not to mention a measure of good luck! (True in all warfare, of course, but especially in sieges!)

Besieging armies had to build elaborate trenches and other defensive positions, and the construction of “siege engines” (mobile towers, missile projectors, battering rams etc ) was complex, expensive and time consuming. Besiegers were always vulnerable to counter-attack by well led & motivated defenders “sallying forth” from the besieged fortress – as happened so devastatingly to Kerbogha’s force at Antioch, June 1098.

There was also the danger that besieging armies might find themselves under “counter-siege” by a relieving force – as happened to Guy of Lusignan’s force outside Acre, 3rd Crusade, 1189-91: he was “sandwiched” between Acre’s walls & Saladin’s army - until reinforced by Conrad of Monferrat, & then the English & French armies of Richard I & Philip II (Summer 1191), which by July were able to breach Acre’s walls and force the defenders to yield. This was, however, a brutal and costly process which weakened the Crusaders.

Sieges were nightmarishly complex affairs which “ate manpower”, and often failed because besieging forces ran out of food & supplies or were stricken by disease. Frequently, the onset of winter would compel a besieging force to withdraw.

Mining operations to undermine towers and walls were technically demanding and very risky – as often as not, they failed. Actually storming a fortress or city was usually horribly costly to attackers, even if they ultimately prevailed, because defenders on high walls, and in towers & citadels, had the tactical advantages of height and protection. This partly explains why successful assaults were often followed by “sacking” (mass murder, rape, pillage etc) – the “reward” for the common soldiery who’d have suffered most, and also a paroxysm of rage/ vengeance against those deemed to have caused their suffering – eg capture of Antioch, June 1098, and of Jerusalem, July 1099, First Crusade; Zengi’s capture of Edessa, 1144.

The Second Crusade’s misguided siege of Damascus (Summer 1148) failed because it was ineptly directed, could not maintain adequate water & food supplies, and lacked sufficient forces (esp infantry) to do the job properly. The Muslim defenders, although relatively weak, were very ably led (Unur) and highly motivated. The Syrians were able, therefore, to “tough it out” behind the defensive belt of orchards (which the Crusaders had to fight thro’ at great cost), and the (relatively weak) walls of the city itself, until the imminent arrival of Nur ad-Din’s relief force became too threatening for Conrad & Louis, who were left with no option but to withdraw or risk being crushed against Damascus’ walls.

In the lead up to the Third Crusade, Baldwin III of Jerusalem captured the strategically important port of Ascalon, 1153, but only after a long and expensive 8 month siege. Saladin’s takeover of Syria from his Muslim rivals (Autumn/ Winter 1174) came about thro’ a clever combination of diplomacy, intimidation, and bribery rather than an assault on Damascus, which would have been militarily costly and politically suicidal. In short, capturing walled cities like Acre, Damascus & Jerusalem by siege & direct assault was always a very “tall order”, which sensible military commanders avoided if they possibly could.

In the Summer of 1179 Saladin destroyed a Crusader castle under construction at Jacob’s Ford on the River Jordan because he could not allow the “Franks” to establish control over such an important crossing point from Muslim Syria into Palestine. His subsequent attempt to besiege Kerak in Transjordan (Nov 1183) failed, however, in the face of solid resistance by the defenders and his own logistical difficulties, made more tricky by winter conditions. The castle was simply too strong, and any attempt to storm it would probably have been catastrophic for his forces.

In the lead up to Hattin (1187), Saladin besieged Tiberias, but was finding it hard to breach its Citadel. Only the stupidity of King Guy (erstwhile ‘of Lusignan’) in “taking Saladin’s bait” and leading the forces of Jerusalem from the safety of Saffuriya to relieve Tiberias gave Saladin his chance, resulting in the stunning Muslim victory at the Horns of Hattin, leaving Jerusalem leaderless and defenceless. The City yielded to Saladin’s offer of “honourable quarter” (29th Sept 1187) in order to spare the population the almost inevitable slaughter which would have followed a storming of its walls.

The Third Crusade became stalemated because by the time it reached within striking distance of Jerusalem it lacked the personnel and resources to have a realistic chance of sustaining a successful siege of the city. Despite Richard’s other notable successes (Acre, Arsuf, & Jaffa), he simply did not have the military strength, nor time, to do such a big job.

The shenanigans of the Fourth Crusade do not need further elucidation her, other than to observe that the Croatian port of Zara was taken by seaborne assault (1202) which caught the Hungarians with “their pants down” – Zara was weakly defended, & the inhabitants did not appreciate the threat from fellow Christians until it was too late. Constantinople fell to the Crusaders (July 1203) largely because of inept leadership and a failure of will. Had the Byzantines been better organised, and more determined to resist, they could have died of old age defending their walls against what was a relatively understrength Crusader force.

Final Analysis

Arguably, Keegan’s analysis of the reasons for the Crusades’ failure is too narrowly focused on tactics. Ultimately, the Crusades and the Crusader States failed for strategic and cultural rather than tactical reasons. 5 more major Crusades followed after the debacle of the Fourth Crusade. Altho’ some achieved limited results in the short-term, nothing short of massive and sustained support from Europe, including migration and settlement on a large scale (ie full-on colonisation), could have saved the lands of “Outremer” from growing Muslim political, economic and military power.

The fundamental weaknesses of the Crusader States (porous/ hard to defend frontiers, weak lines of supply, & under-population) elucidated by Al-Sulami & Fulcher of Chartres in the early C12th never changed, and major military interventions from Europe were only short-term, and were always hard to sustain. Muslim powers, however, could draw on the considerably greater resources and populations of their adjacent bases in Egypt and Syria, and as their political unity increased (esp under the Mamluk Sultans from the 1250s onwards) they were able to bring increasing pressure to bear, often on more than one front.

NB The same strategic difficulties threaten the modern State of Israel (& its “Occupied Territories”), which broadly matches the geographical “footprint” of the Crusader “Kingdom of Jerusalem”. Israel survives partly because of the disunity of its potential enemies, but mainly because it has…

1. strong political and economic support from the USA.
2. largely succeeded (by a combination of military victories and diplomacy) in neutralising the threats from Egypt & Jordan.
3. created de facto “buffer zones” on its borders, which are themselves very tightly controlled and well defended.
4. sustained and grown its population, and developed a very strong agricultural, economic & technological base.
5. become a “war state” (a militarised population forming very powerful defence forces, plus excellent intelligence capabilities) with its own sophisticated “military-industrial complex” enabling it to arm itself and earn a lot of foreign currency.
6. a credible nuclear deterrent!

Obviously, little of this pertained for the Crusader States of the C13th. As HE Mayer notes (see *The Crusades*, 2nd ed 1986/ 1988 paperback, chap 11) the Crusader States never really recovered from ‘…the catastrophe of 1187…’ and existed thereafter in a ‘…permanent state of weakness…’(p 228). Earlier inflows of permanent settlers from Europe diminished steadily, and the nature of Crusading expeditions themselves changed: these “seasonal crusaders” provided military services for limited periods (p 228), but the mass movement “commotio” so typical of the C12th Crusades (caused by Christendom’s alarm at major events in the Holy Land – eg fall of Edessa-> 2nd Crusade; Horns of Hattin/ fall of Jerus-> 3rd Crusade) were replaced by more measured “passagia”, which often had more to do with commercial interests, or to simply making “the journey” of pilgrimage to the Holy Land, than to fighting “the infidel”. This was a particularly notable feature of the biannual “passagia” of the Italian merchant ship convoys which handily combined mercantile and religious interests.

It seems that decreasing numbers of European knights and lords were willing to commit to crusading for longer than feudal obligations demanded, and in any case many of Europe’s “leading players” had other concerns or better opportunities elsewhere: eg in S Italy/ Sicily, “Romania”, S France (eg The Albigensian Crusade, 1209-29), and increasingly (from 1220s onwards), the Baltic lands.

Concurrently, C13th Europeans (esp Churchmen) were developing a far better understanding of Islam (eg 1143 Peter the Venerable, Abbot of Cluny, commissioned the English scholar Robert of Ketton to translate The Qu’ran into Latin), and there was a growing awareness that Muslims were far from idol worshipping “infidels” or “heathen”, but in fact were ardent monotheists who prayed to the same one God as Christians, and revered Mary, Jesus, and the Old Testament Prophets. This changing perspective was very evident in C13th literature – eg the German poet Wolfram von Essenbach (*Willehalm*, c. 1220) presented Muslims as noble and honourable adversaries who, like Christians, were men created by God.

Increasingly, Church leaders stressed “missionary” work (far more readily controlled & managed by Rome), or “crusading” against pagans & “heretics” closer to home, rather than war against “the heathen” in the Holy Land. The Ayyubids controlling Jerusalem at the end of the C12th were broadly tolerant of Christians, and were no obvious threat to Christendom. This changed, of course, with the rise of the Mamluk Sultanate during the 1250s, but by this time it was evident that a far greater threat to all was arising from the Mongols from further East (1220s…) – as acknowledged by Roger Bacon, *Opus Maius* (c. 1266).

Although C13th Christian knights undoubtedly still regarded Muslims as “the enemy”, the growth of “courtly culture”, and the increasingly more educated and sophisticated nature of “knighthood”, meant that attitudes and approaches were changing, and political pragmatism and diplomacy became as important as war fighting:

‘…either there would have to be a tremendous increase in the military commitment…or, instead, an unarmed crusade might be tried – an illusion to which only the children of 1212 yielded. One thing…was absolutely clear: “conversion or destruction”, the choice offered by Bernard of Clairvaux when writing about the “crusade” against the Wends, was no longer a choice which made any sense in the East.’ (HE Mayer, p 230)

An immense campaign of preaching and fundraising (1213 onwards -Popes Innocent III & Honorius III) generated The Fifth Crusade (1217-21): a series of “old style” expeditions culminating in a campaign in Egypt, 1219. Strategically, this made sense – Egypt was a key source of Muslim military power in the Middle East. Despite the resources poured into it, the ldrshp of Fred II & Hermann von Salza, Master of the Teutonic Order, and Hungarian participation, it foundered at Damietta, & was defeated by the Egyptians, 1221.

The Sixth Crusade (1227-29) was in many ways a continuum of the Fifth, altho’ focused directly on Jerusalem this time. Significantly, it ended in Frederick II, ‘a man ahead of his time’, doing what would ‘…have been unthinkable in the twelfth century…’ (Mayer, p 231) by bringing a crusade to a “successful” end via diplomatic rather than military means. Frederick actually got back Christian control of Jerusalem by cutting a deal with local rulers, allowing Muslims control of their holy sites. It was, however, only a short-term, time limited, deal of 15 years. When Muslim control of Jerusalem was reasserted in 1244, it continued unabated until the collapse of Turkish (Ottoman) power in the Middle East, 1917.

Subsequent Crusades kept coming up against hard strategic realities: the virtual impossibility of sustaining major military operations in challenging environments (long distances/ logistical problems; personnel shortages; defensible “interior lines” of communication for the Muslims; hot, arid environment, ltd water & food supplies etc) where they were bound to meet more numerous & better supplied foes who could play for time on “home turf”. Such was very evident with the Seventh Crusade (1248-54)\* of Louis IX of France. Despite its “professionalism” (v well financed/ carefully planned/ committed ldrshp & military competence) it failed in Egypt in the face of disease and the larger, well organised, Muslim forces it faced.

(\*Local interest: Sir William Longespee (c.1212-1250), son of Ella of Salisbury, 2nd Earl of Salisbury, died at the Battle of Mansurah, Egypt, Feb 1250. He commanded the English contingent of the 7th Crusade, and was generally regarded as “a great & chivalrous knight”. He was KIA leading a substantial force (incl 280 Templars) in an ill-judged assault which saw the Crusaders lured into a trap. Some regarded him as a martyr killed by the military incompetence of the Count d’Artois, who’d ordered the attack. Certainly, the Sultan of Egypt held William of Salisbury in the highest regard, ensuring his burial with honour at the Church of St Cross, Acre.

Other Salisbury “Crusading connections” are: John of Salisbury, Bishop of Chartres, C12th scholar, who wrote about Crusading matters, notably logistics. Bishop Hubert Walter was one of Richard I’s negotiators with Saladin, 3rd Crusade. There is today a small area in Salisbury called “The Crusades” - Bishopdown, SP1 3PG.)

The later 1250s saw the Mamluk Sultanate’s rise to power in Egypt, ousting the Ayyubids. The Mamluk Bahri dynasty built a “war state” so powerful that it crushed the Mongol threat in Sept 1260 (Battle of Ain Jalut) - Baibars was a general. Sultan Qutuz was subsequently assassinated, & Baibars emerged as the new Sultan, took control of Syria, and turned the new Mamluk Sultanate into a military superpower. Baibars’ Mamluk Army not only saw off the Mongol Horde (eg Battle of Elbistan, 1277, crushed Mongols in the Sultanate of Rum: Baibars died shortly after this – possibly poisoned?), but also systematically took and destroyed Crusader fortresses throughout Outremer. That the Mamluks were able to do this was testimony to 2 facts:

1. The power/ resources and sophistication of the Mamluk Army, esp in siege warfare.
2. The terminal weakness of the Crusader States, which lacked the resources and personnel to offer sustained resistance.

In 1268 Baibars took one day to capture the Crusader bastion at Antioch. “Terms” for the city’s population were agreed: Baibars promised humane treatment and safe passage if they yielded without a fight, but then slaughtered or enslaved all of them (at least 14,000 died, & 100,000 were enslaved) – one of the biggest atrocities of the whole Crusading Era.

Louis IX’s Eighth Crusade (1268-70) was a forlorn response to this, but Louis died of plague in Tunis (1270), and his demoralised army turned for home.

In April 1271 the hitherto impregnable Hospitaller bastion of “Crac Des Chevaliers” yielded to Baibars’ besieging army. The Mamluks were simply too powerful, and the defenders lacked the personnel to maintain the garrison in the face of overwhelming force. The Grand Master of the Hospitallers instructed them to surrender. This was a real turning point, signalling that the end really was nigh for the Crusader States, which were now little more than a few coastal strips of territory centred on Acre.

Lord Edward, son of King Henry III of England, [the future King Edward I of England, aka “Longshanks” - future “Hammer of the Scots” and conqueror of Wales, where he built all the castles!], was a formidable warrior who led the Ninth Crusade (1271-2); an expedition to shore up Acre. In the short term he succeeded, negotiating a ten year truce with the Mamluks, who were wary and respectful of his highly capable and aggressive leadership, which might have made an attempt on Acre a tad risky. In 1272, however, Henry III of England died, and Edward went home to inherit the Crown.

Once this truce expired, the Mamluks renewed their advance, systematically eliminating all remaining Crusader settlements. In the absence of any reinforcement from Europe, the Crusaders simply no longer had the means to resist the onslaught. Tripoli fell in 1289, and in 1291 Acre was captured and destroyed. Survivors, incl the Military Orders, went wherever they could – the Era of the Crusades in the Middle East was over.

Postscript

“Crusading” continued elsewhere, mainly against the Papacy’s “enemies” in Europe, and against the Moors in Iberia: this “Reconquista” lasted until the final Muslim bastion, Granada, fell to the forces of “Their Most Christian Majesties” Ferdinand II of Aragon & Isabella I of Castile in 1492.

The “Reconquista” was as much to do with asserting “Spanish” identity and self-government as fighting “Holy War”, or asserting Papal power. Yes, of course, Catholicism was central to an emerging “Spanish” identity (religious conformity was ruthlessly enforced – The Inquisition etc), but so too were “Castilian” government centrism, and (particularly ironically) what was to become Spain’s “Moorish heritage” in culture, learning, & architecture. The Christian rulers of “Spain” wanted unification of Iberia, under a unified Catholic Crown. Religious and political conformity were one and the same: Moors, Jews, and Protestant and other Christian “heretics” were simply obstacles in the way of this Spanish hegemony, to be ruthlessly extirpated.

The actual political and military process of driving the Moors from Iberia was fundamental to shaping a distinctly “Spanish” self-perception. This was subsequently very evident in the language, “style” and mind-sets of the “Conquistadors” in America; Phillip II & his C16th “Crusades” against Protestant “heretics” (directed from his monastic palace/centre of government, the “Escorial”), and in General Francisco Franco’s Fascist regime in the C20th with its ultra-nationalism, centralising and militaristic government power, & extreme social conservatism. Catholicism was central to all of this, but so too was a very distinct and powerful “Spanishness” - very much a direct long-term product of the Reconquista.

Often also overlooked is Pope Innocent III’s “crusade” against the “Cathars” of Languedoc, S France, whose ‘capital’ was Albi – hence the “Albigensian Crusade”, 1209-29. The Cathars were a pacifistic Christian sect whose “Gnostic dualism” was deemed an appalling heresy by the Church because it offered a radically different interpretation of Christian meaning from that advanced by Rome. At least 200,000 Cathars were slaughtered, altho’ some French historians now believe the figure to be nearer the million mark.

The Templars, who were very powerful in Languedoc (aka “The Knights of Languedoc”), have long been associated with the Cathars, which may have been another “black mark” against them, contributing to their subsequent downfall. Some of the conspiratorially minded believers in continuing “Templar networks” in the World today think that the Templars became custodians of “Cathar Secrets” about the “true origins” of Christianity – the “real” reason behind their suppression, 1307-12. *Da Vinci Code* territory!

The Crusades in the Baltic lands, first in Prussia, and then on into Lithuania, involved what amounted to one of the earliest documented examples of “ethnic cleansing” (genocide even) in European history. There is no doubt that Hitler and the National Socialist movement in C20th Germany regarded this as a template for their “lebensraum” programme of eastward expansion, conquest and colonisation of Slavic lands. Nazi propaganda was explicit in portraying Hitler as a Teutonic Knight leading a German “crusade” against not only Jews and Communists, but also the “untermenschen” (the Slavic, or ‘slave’, populations) in Poland, Ukraine, Russia. Hitler was typically blunt about this in *Mein Kampf*, asserting that it was the “historic destiny” of the “Herrenvolk” (the German/ “Aryan” “master race”) to take control of, dominate, & colonise, Eastern Europe as new territory of the “Third Reich”.

It seems probable that the whole “Crusading” movement, certainly in the longer term, actually killed substantially more Europeans, pagan and Christian, than Muslims. Not only that, but the later rise of Ottoman Turkish power in the Middle East was a real threat to Early Modern Europe. In 1529 the Ottoman Army was finally driven back from the gates of Vienna, which signalled the end to the Ottoman Empire’s northward expansion. Nevertheless, areas of Southern Europe remained under direct threat, and when the Catholic Don Juan of Austria achieved a decisive naval victory over the Turks at Lepanto, 1571, even Protestant England cheered. As late as the 1680s Ottoman Sultans were still sending armies northwards, although without much success. The last was driven back from Vienna, 1683. By this time, most of Protestant Europe, and esp England, was sneering at the very idea of “crusading” as yet another example of “Papist superstition”.

Today, views on The Crusades to the Holy Land vary considerably, to say the least. The Medieval Crusades are, however…

‘…one of history’s richest dramas. Historians have argued for years…and continue to do so, but few would challenge the assertion that it represents one of the most colourful pageants of the Medieval World. For the student of human nature, there is everything that could be wished for and more: gallantry and cowardice; brutality and honour; wisdom and foolishness; greed and self-sacrifice. And, above all else, contradiction.’ – WB Bartlett, *God Wills It!*, 1999, p xi.

(CRH, 2019)