

CHAPTER I
THE HISTORIANS OF CRUSADING
WARFARE

I. SCOPE OF THE SUBJECT

THE military achievements of the Crusaders during the twelfth century form a complete chapter in the history of medieval warfare. Its beginning is the foundation of the Latin states in Syria as a result of the First Crusade; its middle is the story of their expansion and then of their defence against Muslim states based on Aleppo, Damascus, and Egypt; the end lies in the events of the Third Crusade, when the joint strength of the Latin kingdom and the reinforcements from western Europe could recover only a few of the towns and territories lost to Saladin in 1187 and 1188. Throughout the period there is reasonable though not complete continuity both in the succession of military events and in the recording of them by contemporaries who travelled or made their home in Latin Syria, and who were sometimes eyewitnesses of the events they described. Generally speaking, the wars were fought around one main issue: the existence of the Latin states. They took place in one theatre: the lands which lie between the eastern end of the Mediterranean and the Syrian desert. Throughout the period the opposing armies preserved the same essential characteristics in organization, arms, and tactics, and these elements of unity and continuity appear to make possible a single and connected exposition of this warfare by the military historian.

The story of military events in Latin Syria has indeed been told in every detailed history of the Crusades, but analysis has not kept pace with narration. The significance of those events has not been drawn out, and they have been little related to other aspects of medieval history; yet there are two fields of study which demand such relation, and the first is the history of the crusaders' states themselves. Beneath the story of the often-told narrative lies the fact that the Syrian Franks of the twelfth century used

Cambridge University Press

0521458382 - Crusading Warfare, 1097-1193 - Second Edition

R. C. Smail

Excerpt

[More information](#)

warfare as an instrument to establish and to maintain themselves in the Levant. War was a part, and an essential part, of the whole life of Latin Syria. The means of waging war available to the Franks and the uses to which they put them were interconnected with considerations of policy and with legal and economic relationships within a feudalized society. The study of warfare and that of political and social organization illuminate and complete each other.¹ This task has scarcely been attempted in respect of the Latin East. Professor Lot has recently emphasized the interrelation between the military and other aspects of history,² but his demonstration of it in that section of his work dealing with the Crusades and the Latin East is disappointing. He is content merely to recount the succession of military, against a background of political, events; the result is indistinguishable from the general histories of Bréhier and Grousset.³ Historians of institutions have gone deeper and have examined the structure of the military forces organized by the kings of Jerusalem,⁴ but no special study has been made of military methods. It is the purpose of the present work to discuss these methods as part of, and in relation to, the general history of Latin Syria.

There is a second field of which crusading warfare forms an essential part. Latin Syria was created by conquest and settlement, and each process was dominated by knights from western Europe. Their campaigns in the east were part of the whole military experience of Western feudal society, and all historians of the art of war in the Middle Ages have laid them under contribution. A survey of this literature is a convenient and logical starting-point for this present study, and will serve to clarify the viewpoint from which it is written.

¹ The point has not so far impressed itself on historians of the Crusades. It is significant that in two recent surveys of crusading historiography, in which many aspects of the subject are considered and suitable topics for future research indicated, no mention is made of the Syrian Franks as soldiers. See T. S. R. Boase, 'Recent Developments in Crusading Historiography' in *History*, n.s. XXI (1937), p. 110; J. L. La Monte, 'Some Problems in Crusading Historiography' in *Speculum*, xv (1940), p. 57.

² F. Lot, *L'Art militaire et les armées au moyen âge*, I, p. 17.

³ Lot, I, pp. 124-30, 137-53. See review in *EHR*, LXIV, pp. 92-5.

⁴ G. Dodu, *Histoire des institutions monarchiques dans le royaume latin de Jérusalem (1099-1291)*, pp. 173-234; F. Chalandon, *Histoire de la Première Croisade*, pp. 315-29; J. L. La Monte, *Feudal Monarchy in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem, 1100 to 1291*, pp. 138-65.

Cambridge University Press

0521458382 - Crusading Warfare, 1097-1193 - Second Edition

R. C. Smail

Excerpt

[More information](#)

THE HISTORIANS OF CRUSADING WARFARE 3

II. MILITARY HISTORIES OF THE CRUSADES

The difficulties of writing the history of medieval warfare have been remarked by acknowledged authorities on the subject. The wars of classical antiquity can be subdivided into certain great themes, such as the age-long struggle between Greek and Persian, or that between the armies of the Roman Empire and the peoples beyond her borders. Similarly in modern times conflicts between the nation-states form separate chapters in the whole history of warfare. Compared with this the medieval historian is at a disadvantage.¹ Between the sixth and sixteenth centuries many peoples appeared on the European scene. The history of the period was dominated neither by a great empire nor by a small number of solidly founded states. During most of the period the authority of state government, and the efficiency of political institutions were alike limited. Rulers were often unable to control their great subjects, and as a result much medieval warfare was semi-private and on a small scale. There were no standing professional armies moulded by a system and tradition of drill and discipline, so that such armed forces as there were had too little training or power of controlled manœuvre to put into practice any but the simplest tactical plans. Furthermore, campaigns and battles were not usually recorded, as in the ancient world, by writers with experience or an intelligent interest in war; nor, with few exceptions, has the age left anything comparable to the official records of military operations and administration of modern times. As a result of these conditions, reconstruction of the subject is difficult and so is its subdivision;² and although there are histories of outstanding excellence of single episodes of medieval warfare,³ the most authoritative works in this field are still general surveys of western European military history which cover the whole or some considerable part of the Middle Ages. It is as part of such surveys that the military history of the Latin states has hitherto been considered.

One of the earliest examples of such a treatment of the subject was provided by Max Jähns.⁴ That part of his work which deals

¹ W. Erben, *Kriegsgeschichte des Mittelalters*, Beiheft 16 der *Historischen Zeitschrift*, p. 1. ² Delbrück, III, p. 277.

³ Pre-eminent among them, J. E. Morris, *The Welsh Wars of Edward I.*

⁴ M. Jähns, *Handbuch einer Geschichte des Kriegswesens von der Urzeit bis zur Renaissance.*

Cambridge University Press

0521458382 - Crusading Warfare, 1097-1193 - Second Edition

R. C. Smail

Excerpt

[More information](#)

with the Middle Ages shows that, for his method as well as for much of his matter, he owes much to an earlier and altogether slighter study by Martin Baltzer.¹ This scholar was interested primarily in the organization of military forces and the methods of warfare employed in Germany between the ninth century and the end of the twelfth. His work is essentially a collection of the most important references to these matters contained in the contemporary sources of German history, and as such it is still valuable.² In the subdivisions of his work he considers, besides tactical methods, such subjects as the strength of military forces, the provisioning of men and horses, their weapons and armour, the ordering of camps and the baggage train. Jähns exceeds him not only in the types of evidence which he uses,³ but in the number of military activities he considers, and in the geographical area of which he takes account. Thus Jähns gathers his material from the history of peoples other than the German, and among these he includes the Franks of Latin Syria.

In accordance with Baltzer's methods, Jähns's work is subdivided into sections, each of which deals with some aspect of medieval military activity, and to each of which the history of various European peoples contributes its quota of evidence. The *Handbuch* therefore contains scattered references to the Latin states, and three short surveys of some particular aspects of their warfare.⁴ But there is no chapter or section devoted to the military history of Latin Syria as a whole.

The decade following the publication of the *Handbuch* saw the appearance of other works on medieval military history by scholars whose methods were very different from those of Baltzer and Jähns. General Köhler, whose principal work appeared between 1886 and 1890,⁵ was a retired regular officer who had seen forty years' service in the Prussian artillery. He attempted to bring to the study of medieval military history the methods by which the

¹ M. Baltzer, *Zur Geschichte des deutschen Kriegswesens in der Zeit von den letzten Karolingern bis auf Kaiser Friedrich II.*

² See the use made of Baltzer's work by E. v. Frauenholz, *Das Heerwesen der germanischen Frühzeit, des Frankenreiches und des ritterlichen Zeitalters.*

³ Jähns makes considerable use of archaeological and pictorial evidence, as well as of the illustrations in the works of Viollet-le-Duc.

⁴ E.g. Jähns, *Handbuch*, pp. 586-9, 630-2, 682-4.

⁵ G. Köhler, *Die Entwicklung des Kriegswesens und der Kriegführung in der Ritterzeit von Mitte des 11 Jahrhunderts bis zu den Hussitenkriegen.*

Cambridge University Press

0521458382 - Crusading Warfare, 1097-1193 - Second Edition

R. C. Smail

Excerpt

[More information](#)

THE HISTORIANS OF CRUSADING WARFARE 5

staffs of modern national armies use historical examples to assist in the formulation of principles of warfare: thorough and detailed examination of selected actions and campaigns, followed by generalization from the results of such research. Köhler's first two volumes were devoted to the first part of this process. In them he carefully reconstructed a number of battles, campaigns, and sieges drawn from every century from the eleventh to the fifteenth. He selected those of which he considered the records to be sufficiently complete to make research profitable.¹ His third volume contains the consequent generalizations on many aspects of medieval warfare: the classes of soldiers; machines, weapons, and armour; the use of these men and materials in sieges and combats; the strategy behind these events and the leadership by which it was directed.

Köhler's method is beyond reproach so long as the contemporary sources are correctly evaluated, and this condition becomes of prime importance when use is made of medieval narrative histories. The trustworthiness of the available text; the relationship in time and space of the narrator to the events which he describes; his knowledge and experience of warfare; the extent to which he regards the description of military events as an opportunity for displaying his literary powers and his knowledge of classical models, are all factors which should be considered in determining the importance to be attached to any particular source, as is obvious.² Köhler was severely attacked in reviews of his work for his uncritical use of the texts, and though he defended himself with energy and a bitter resentment against his opponents, they had exposed his most considerable weakness.³

¹ Köhler, I, Vorbemerkungen, pp. iii-iv.

² The matter is well discussed by Erben in *Kriegesgeschichte*, pp. 31-41.

³ The breadth of his theme and the great volume of material which he handled led Köhler to make many inconsistent and self-contradictory statements. Many of his errors are mercilessly exposed in Delbrück, III, pp. 321-8 and 677-82.

Köhler's defence and counter-attack against Winkelmann, Ficker, Baltzer, and other critics appear in the prefaces to the various volumes of his *Kriegswesen*. His opponents allowed that he spoke with authority as a soldier, but that he lacked the necessary training as a historian. No verdict could have offended Köhler more deeply, and his infuriated protests have the intensity of a *cri de cœur*. See *Kriegswesen*, I, Vorb. p. xxx: 'Ich bin weit entfernt von dem Standpunkte Fickers, der einem preussischen General die Fähigkeit abspricht, sich die Regeln der historischen Methode anzueignen, etc.' For just reviews

The same criticism could not be brought against Otto Heermann, who in 1888 published the result of what is still the best piece of research ever made into the military history of the Crusades and the Latin states.¹ This work appeared after the publication of Köhler's first two volumes, but before that of his third, in the foreword of which he hails Heermann as a disciple of his method.² But there was an important difference, more apparent to the general's critics than to himself: a prominent feature of Heermann's work was his critical assessment of the available sources. As the title implies, Heermann's work covered only a limited aspect of military history. He was concerned only with the disposition and handling of forces on the battlefield. Using the sources with outstanding skill, Heermann reconstructed most of the important battles fought during the First Crusade, as well as of those in which the armies of the Latin states were engaged, down to Baldwin II's attack on Damascus in 1126. After his presentation of these engagements he provided in the last section of his essay a summary of general conclusions based on the earlier part of his work.

The subsequent publication of Köhler's third volume appears to show that he paid his supposed disciple the compliment of imitation. Elsewhere in his work Köhler had used events from crusading history to illustrate many of the subjects he was considering, but there had been no consecutive study of the military history of Latin Syria. The detailed study of medieval battles and campaigns contained in his first two volumes include none from the warfare of the Crusaders, because too many important factors concerning them, and in particular the ground on which they were fought, remained unknown. Köhler considered, however, that the facts which were available illustrated certain aspects of medieval tactics, and in that part of his work on 'die höhere Taktik' he included a section entitled 'Die Taktik der abend-

of Köhler's work see Baltzer in *Historische Zeitschrift*, Neue Folge, Band 21 (1887), pp. 458–62 and Band 24 (1888), pp. 296–9.

¹ O. Heermann, *Die Gefechtsführung abendländischer Heere im Orient in der Epoche des ersten Kreuzzugs*.

² Köhler, III, pt. 2, Vorb. p. iii. But elsewhere, *ibid.* III, pt. 3, Vorrede, p. v, Köhler criticizes Heermann in his usual 'grobem Ton' for presuming to generalize on medieval military history after the study of so short an episode.

Cambridge University Press

0521458382 - Crusading Warfare, 1097-1193 - Second Edition

R. C. Smail

Excerpt

[More information](#)

THE HISTORIANS OF CRUSADING WARFARE 7

ländischen Heere im Orient während der Kreuzzüge'.¹ Its likeness to Heerman's work is not limited to the title. Heermann gave an account of seventeen battles fought by the Crusaders; he began with Dorylaeum (1097) and ended with Marjes Suffar (1126); to these accounts he added a summary of his conclusions. In the first part of his survey Köhler studied thirteen battles, all of which had been described by Heermann, and after his account of Marjes Suffar Köhler inserted a similar summary. He completed this section of his work by accounts of battles fought in Syria later in the century.

The year 1886 had seen the publication of an important work on medieval warfare by Henri Delpech.² As his title implies, Delpech was not primarily interested in Latin Syria. He considered that military tactics in thirteenth-century Europe were exemplified on the battlefields of Muret and Bouvines, and his first volume contains a detailed reconstruction of these two engagements. He then turned to inquire into the development of the tactics employed by the combatants. Among their principal sources he placed the writings of Vegetius and the practice of the crusaders in Syria during the twelfth century. This led him to study their warfare.

His consequent researches were not entirely objective. In his view the tactics employed at Muret and Bouvines had included a mobility in manœuvre by the mounted troops, a skill and precision in the movements of the foot-soldiers and, above all, combined action by these two arms; and in searching through histories of the Crusades, and especially that of William of Tyre, he was looking for these innovations. Thus it will be noted that he limited his outlook by the objects which he set himself, and that, like Heermann and Köhler, he was interested primarily in tactical questions. He was moreover always prone to read too much into the text of the medieval authorities on whom he relied, and on innumerable points of detail he has been corrected by German scholars. Indeed so many of his generalizations on crusading warfare are plainly absurd that much of his work might almost be disregarded. But despite this, and despite an excellent and damaging review of his work by Molinier,³ the work of Delpech is still

¹ III, pt. 3, pp. 136-249. ² H. Delpech, *La Tactique au XIII^{ème} siècle*.

³ *Revue historique*, xxxvi (1888), 185-95.

Cambridge University Press
 0521458382 - Crusading Warfare, 1097-1193 - Second Edition
 R. C. Smail
 Excerpt
[More information](#)

used and quoted as an authority. Views on medieval warfare expressed in a modern American history of the subject are taken almost bodily from Delpech,¹ and this is true of the remarks with which Professor Baldwin introduces his admirable study of the battle of Hattin.²

The next account of warfare in Latin Syria was given by Professor Sir Charles Oman.³ In the revised edition of his work Book v is entitled 'The Crusades'. Oman has two short chapters devoted respectively to the march across Asia Minor of the different crusading expeditions, and another on the strategical problems and military geography of twelfth-century Syria; but the longest section of his fifth book is a study of the tactics employed by the Franks. His method is that of Köhler and Heermann: reconstruction of battles, followed by generalizations. In particular he analyses the causes of victory and defeat of the Frankish armies on the battlefield.

Oman wrote for the general reader, and the text is not overburdened with scholarly apparatus. As a result his work has been regarded with suspicion by many critics, and his undoubted carelessness on points of detail⁴ only strengthens the opinion of those who regard him as 'a learned amateur'. Nevertheless, besides being the most accessible and acceptable to the general reader, Professor Oman's work remains the best single history of the subject. His conclusions on matters of crusading strategy and tactics are, as far as they go, firmly based on the evidence at present available. They are presented clearly and convincingly and establish important points which have escaped the notice of more obviously painstaking historians.⁵

Contemporary with Oman's work was the masterpiece of one of the greatest of all military historians, Hans Delbrück.⁶ As the

¹ Spaulding, Nickerson, and Wright, *Warfare*, pp. 323-9.

² M. W. Baldwin, *Raymond III of Tripolis and the Fall of Jerusalem*, pp. 97-8.

³ C. W. C. Oman, *A History of the Art of War in the Middle Ages*.

⁴ For example, the chapter heading in *Art of War*, I, p. 320, announces an intention to discuss the battle of Harenc. There is in fact no mention of this battle in the chapter which follows. See also J. E. Morris in *EHR*, XIV, 134 and T. F. Tout in *EHR*, XL, 114.

⁵ Below, p. 85, n. 2.

⁶ H. Delbrück, *Geschichte der Kriegskunst im Rahmen der politischen Geschichte*.

Cambridge University Press

0521458382 - Crusading Warfare, 1097-1193 - Second Edition

R. C. Smail

Excerpt

[More information](#)

THE HISTORIANS OF CRUSADING WARFARE 9

title implies his history is not a technical treatise on military methods, but a study of military history as a part of general history. The relation of warfare to other human activities is all too seldom attempted by historians, and certainly Delbrück's work stands alone both in scope and excellence.¹ It is therefore the more disappointing that he does not consider the warfare of the Latin states as part of their general history. Such a treatment of the subject by a scholar of Delbrück's learning and insight would have been a notable addition to crusading historiography. He himself draws attention to the opportunity, but at once rejects it for a number of reasons which appear to him to be decisive.² The whole series of crusading expeditions took place over a period of 175 years, which is too long for a unified exposition. They were, he thought, so deeply influenced by the mystical aims of the pilgrims that it is not possible to consider them rationally as military campaigns. Furthermore, the few colonists who settled in Latin Syria maintained themselves only with great difficulty, and that the states established by them survived as long as they did was principally due to successive waves of assistance in the form of new crusading expeditions and the formation of the military orders of knighthood. For these reasons Delbrück included in his work only a short 'allgemeine Ansicht der Kreuzzüge' in which little more is discussed than the numerical strength of the crusading armies and the foundation of the Templars.

In his survey of the feudal military class in the central period of the Middle Ages, however, Delbrück quotes from and includes observations on the history of that part of it which settled in Syria. In a penetrating discussion of the emergence of the social caste of the knighthood during the eleventh and early twelfth centuries, and of the military methods and characteristics of the fighting men of the period, he gives his views on many aspects of crusading warfare:³ on the co-operation between individual

¹ B. H. Sumner, *War and History*, p. 18.

² For the remainder of the paragraph, see Delbrück, III, pp. 230-5.

³ Historians seeking Delbrück's views on crusading warfare do not always pay sufficient attention to his chapters entitled 'Das Rittertum als Stand', and 'Das Rittertum militärisch', *Kriegskunst*, III, pp. 239-328; e.g. L. J. Paetow's *Guide to the Study of Medieval History*, 1931 ed., p. 236, gives a reference only to *Kriegskunst*, III, pp. 226-31. M. W. Baldwin in his *Raymond*

Cambridge University Press

0521458382 - Crusading Warfare, 1097-1193 - Second Edition

R. C. Smail

Excerpt

[More information](#)

knights and foot-soldiers, on mutual support between formed bodies of the same; on the use of mounted archery in the Latin forces; on the tactical effects of a lack of horses; on the organization of marching columns.¹ The longest single section of his work devoted to the Crusades is contained in the last chapter of his consideration of 'das hohe Mittelalter'. This chapter is a series of notes, each of which is on a battle fought in the twelfth or thirteenth century. The notes are not intended as full accounts of battles; they contain only such details and observations as were considered necessary by the author either to support the views he expressed in the foregoing chapters, or to remove misunderstandings or false conclusions concerning them. In the course of the pages he mentions seventeen battles fought by the Franks in Syria, and includes as well criticisms of Heermann's terminology, together with some observations on the role of foot-soldiers during the Crusades.²

The most recent contribution to the subject has been made by Professor Lot. Besides attempting to relate the warfare of the crusaders to their general history he concentrates on two further main points—the results of earlier researches, and the numerical strength of crusaders' armies. Because the declared purpose of his book is to provide French-speaking students, for the first time, with a general survey of medieval warfare in their own language, he summarizes for them the main conclusions of older books; of those on crusading history he chooses the works of Delpesch and Heermann to which reference has already been made. He also devotes much space to the important topic of the numbers of those who went on crusade or who fought in the Christian armies in Syria. His account of warfare in the Latin East is thus made up of certain limited topics selected from the whole range of the subject.

The basic method adopted by most of the historians whose work has been so far considered is research into contemporary accounts of a number of battles fought in Latin Syria. This leads to reconstructions of these battles, which are used as a basis for

III of Tripolis, p. 151, n. 6 refers only to Delbrück's single sentence on Hattin in the unrevised edition of *Kriegskunst*, III, p. 421.

¹ Delbrück, III, pp. 283, 289-90, 305, 317, 417, 430.

² *Ibid.* pp. 420-30.