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**British historiography on the Crusades and Military Orders:
from Barker and Smail to contemporary historians**

Editor's note: This paper was originally written for a conference at Teruel, Spain, in July 2001. Regrettably, the proceedings remain unpublished to date. Since 2001 the British historiography of the Crusades has continued to develop, so that in certain respects this is now an historical piece. Nonetheless, it provides a valuable summation of the state of research at the turn of the twentieth century.

Sir Ernest Barker (1874–1960) may not seem the most obvious person with whom to start this survey of British historiography on the Crusades and military orders. A distinguished scholar who was successively Principal of King's College London and then, from 1928, Professor of Political Science at Cambridge, his obituary in the supplement to *The Dictionary of National Biography* makes no reference to either his interest in, or his writings on, the Crusades.¹ Truth to tell, his publications on the subject were not extensive, but they do reveal an acute mind and wide reading. For example, Barker, in an encyclopaedia article written before the First World War, gave due credit to the writings of Reinhold Röhricht and Hans Prutz, thereby helping to make their insights known in the English-speaking world, and he realised, more fully than many of his generation, that speaking of the First, Second or Third Crusade and so on tends to obscure the truth that crusading was an almost continuous process.² Neither was he the only serious scholar of the early part of the twentieth century whose works still deserve to be remembered. I might mention W.B. Stevenson, the author of *The Crusaders in the East* (1907) and, along with C.L. Kingsford, of the

¹ *The Dictionary of National Biography, 1951–1960* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 62–4.

² Ernest Barker, *The Crusades* (London: Oxford University Press, 1923), p. 52, n. 2.

chapters on the Crusades in volume five of the *Cambridge Medieval History* (1926), or E.J. King, whose *Knights Hospitallers in the Holy Land* appeared in 1931.

Barker died in 1960. Among his innumerable interests and activities he found time to supervise the research of another Cambridge historian, R.C. Smail, whose PhD thesis entitled 'Military Methods employed by the Latin States in Syria, 1097–1192' was presented in 1947. Smail, who was always known by his schoolboy nickname of 'Otto' Smail, spent his career at Cambridge as a Fellow of Sidney Sussex. This was the same college at which in the seventeenth century Reverend Thomas Fuller, whose book, *The History of the Holy Warre* (1631) can be claimed as the first English-language history of the Crusades, had been a Fellow. In 1956 Smail published his *Crusading Warfare, 1097–1193*. Re-reading it today, it is easy to forget how innovative it was at that time. Previously the emphasis in the history of warfare had been on military architecture and the tactics of the battlefield. Smail turned attention to the composition of the armies, to the interdependence of mounted warriors and infantry, to raiding and other forms of military engagement, and to the role of castles as centres of authority as well as military strongholds. The book's influence on the history of medieval warfare, and not just on the history of the Crusades and the Latin East, is now widely acknowledged. At the time, however, not all the reviewers were favourably impressed. Giles Constable's review in *Speculum* was particularly strident, and, although some of his criticisms were undoubtedly justified, in retrospect he seems not to have given due credit to Smail's very considerable achievement.³

Looking back on the careers of Barker and Smail, it has to be said that whereas Smail will always be remembered primarily as a historian of the Crusades

³ *Speculum*, 32 (1957), pp. 866–71.

and the Latin East, Barker is a good example of someone for whom the history of the Crusades was only one of several interests. Smail's publications were, by today's standards, modest. Apart from *Crusading Warfare* there was a short book for a more popular audience, *The Crusaders in Syria and the Holy Land*, and a handful of articles. He set himself high standards, and, as his review of the first volume of the Wisconsin/Pennsylvania *History of the Crusades* made clear,⁴ he expected them of others. Smail strongly believed that the crusading movement warranted a pivotal place in any account of the central or later Middle Ages. Indeed, more than once he quoted with approval the words of Sir Maurice Powicke, another English historian who was not by any stretch of the imagination a specialist in the Crusades, to make this point:

It is not too much to say that the recovery of the Holy Land, whether as an ideal, a symbol, or an immediate duty, pervaded the minds of men in the thirteenth century. It was inseparable from the air they breathed. However indifferent or sceptical they might be, they could not escape its influence. 'If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget her cunning.' It was a constant preoccupation of the papal curia.⁵

It remains an important message, and it has to be said that in the past British historians of the Crusades have often had their work cut out convincing their colleagues who specialise in other fields of medieval history that the crusading movement cannot be ignored. Medieval historians in Britain are, on the whole, not as insular in their outlook as they once were, but even now the task of persuading them of the significance of crusading in the political life and social fabric of the time does sometimes seem an uphill struggle.

⁴ *English Historical Review*, 72 (1957), pp. 680–7 (where Smail also reviewed volumes two and three of Steven Runciman, *A History of the Crusades*).

⁵ F.M. Powicke, *The Thirteenth Century, 1216–1307* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2nd edn, 1962), p. 80, quoted by Smail in *The Crusaders in Syria and the Holy Land* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), p. 15 and in *English Historical Review*, 72 (1957), p. 680.

Smail's *Crusading Warfare* appeared just a few years after Sir Steven Runciman's celebrated trilogy. Even in Britain, Runciman had not had the field to himself. I might mention here three other remarkable scholars working around that time in Britain whose contributions to the field of crusading studies have had an abiding impact. One of these was Cedric Johns (1904–92), an archaeologist with the Palestine Department of Antiquities under the British Mandate, who is celebrated chiefly for his work at 'Atlit, and whose reports on the excavations there and some of his other publications have recently been rescued from obscurity by Denys Pringle.⁶ A second was Sir George Hill (1867–1948), a numismatist at the British Museum who ended his career there as director and principal librarian.⁷ His four-volume *History of Cyprus*, the product of his retirement, appeared between 1940 and 1952. It is said that his interest in the island was sparked by his work on the British Museum's collection of ancient Cypriot coins, but it is the volumes devoted to Frankish and Venetian rule in the Middle Ages that have better retained their value. Finally, T.S.R. Boase (1898–1974), Director of the Courtauld Institute (1937–47) and then President of Magdalen College Oxford (1947–68), was an art historian whose contribution to the artistic achievement in the Latin East ended with his chapters in the fourth volume of the Wisconsin *History of the Crusades*.

If Runciman's great achievement was to provide the English-speaking world with a narrative of the Crusades written in the grand manner, Smail produced what can fairly be said to be the first modern research monograph on the Crusades by a British scholar. We have, however, to wait until 1967 for what I would see as the next

⁶ Cedric N. Johns, *Pilgrim's Castle ('Atlit), David's Tower and Qal'at ar-Rabad ('Ajlun). Three Middle Eastern Castles from the time of the Crusades*, ed. Denys Pringle (Aldershot: Variorum CS, 1997).

⁷ *The Dictionary of National Biography, 1941–1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), pp. 391–2.

landmark in British scholarship: Jonathan Riley-Smith's *The Knights of St John in Jerusalem and Cyprus*. Thus was launched the career of the man who has become the dominant figure in British crusading studies in the past thirty years. The book was based on the author's Cambridge doctoral thesis, which had been prepared under Smail's supervision. Like *Crusading Warfare*, it demonstrated how much could be achieved by a careful and systematic study of the available printed sources – in this case the principal collection being the Hospitaller documents collected and edited at the end of the nineteenth century by J. Delaville Le Roulx. The story goes that when the young Riley-Smith started his research, none other than Sir Steven Runciman tried to warn him off the subject of the Hospitallers on the grounds that there was not enough to be said. How very wrong he proved to be! Riley-Smith has gone on from there to produce a series of books on the Latin East and on the ideology and experience of crusading.

But if Jonathan Riley-Smith's formidable reputation rests securely on his own wide-ranging publications, it is also true that he has had enormous success supervising postgraduates, a number of whom have come to him from outside Britain. It might be helpful here to 'see ourselves as other see us'. Let me quote some remarks made by the eminent American historian, Jim Brundage, in a contribution to an internet discussion:

Jonathan is an enthusiastic (I am even tempted to say charismatic) teacher, who, in his turn, has produced a great number of talented students, who are carrying on the tradition with considerable élan: I think, among others, of Peter Edbury, Norman Housley, Marcus Bull, Christoph Maier; and these are only a few out of a much longer and extremely impressive list.⁸

⁸ <http://www.ukans.edu/~medieval/melcher/19990201.med/msg00180.html> (accessed 2001, since deleted).

In fact, at the last count no less than five of Riley-Smith's pupils – Norman Housley, Marcus Bull, Jonathan Phillips, Tom Asbridge, and myself – hold tenured positions at British universities, while Nicholas Coureas has a permanent post at the Cyprus Research Centre in Nicosia, and Christoph Maier, a Swiss national, teaches at the university of Zurich. Others – I have in mind in particular Riley-Smith's British pupils, Christopher Marshall, Joyce McLellan, Elizabeth Siberry, and Steven Tibble – while not employed in higher education have nevertheless made worthwhile contributions to the subject of the Crusades. I am not going to attempt to describe the range of publications from what one outsider once referred to as the '*équipe* Riley-Smith', but most of the more significant books are listed in the bibliography at the end of this article.

As we come forward to the 1970s and 1980s we find a veritable explosion in the literature on the subject. Derek Lomax (who chose to write much of his best work in Spanish) and Alan Forey set new standards for research into the military orders in Spain. From the early 1960s onwards, Tony Luttrell has produced a prodigious number of articles on the Hospitallers in the fourteenth century, making extensive use of archival resources throughout Europe. Bernard Hamilton's work on the church history of the Latin East and the relations between the Latins and the various eastern confessions came to fruition in his 1980 study on the Latin Church in the East, while his pupils, John France and Malcolm Barber, have made names for themselves as the leading British exponents of military history at the time of the Crusades and of the Templars respectively. Eric Christiansen has written on Christian expansion on the northern frontiers of Europe, and Michael Burleigh produced what I believe to be the only full-length monograph by a British scholar on the Teutonic Knights.

From the mass of more recent work, I would single out three particular areas – the British Isles, the Muslim Near East, and the Latin States in the Levant – and mention just a few of the scholars who are contributing to these fields. Interest in the role of the British Isles in the crusading movement had been strangely muted until the appearance of major books by Simon Lloyd and Christopher Tyerman in quick succession in 1988. Similarly, British scholarly interest in the military orders in the British Isles has tended to languish, although I should draw attention to a series of articles by Helen Nicholson. Nicholson has also attempted to cross the divide that seems to exist throughout the English-speaking world between historians and specialists in medieval literature in attempting to see what light contemporary works of fiction shed on the perceptions of the military orders, while her recent books on the Templars and Hospitallers have established her reputation as a leading historian of the orders.⁹

Britain has produced a small but highly talented group of Arabists whose interests have included the Crusades: Peter Holt has focused on the Mamluk sultanate; Donald Richards has produced a new translation into English of Baha' al-Din Ibn Shaddad's biography of Saladin; Malcolm Lyons, in this instance working with a co-author, the late David Jackson, is best known for what has long been recognised as the best modern historical biography of Saladin; Robert Irwin and Peter Jackson (not to be confused with David Jackson) have between them published a number of invaluable essays on the Muslims and their Christian neighbours in the East; Carole Hillenbrand has come to prominence with a major study of Muslim views of the

⁹ For work explicitly on Wales and Scotland see Peter W. Edbury, 'Preaching the Crusade in Wales', in Hanna Vollrath and Alfred Haverkamp (eds), *England and Germany in the High Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 221–33; Ian Cowan, P.H.R. Mackay, and Alan Macquarrie (eds), *The Knights of St John of Jerusalem in Scotland* (Scottish History Society, 1983); Alan Macquarrie, *Scotland and the Crusades, 1095–1560* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1985).

crusading movement. There is no doubt that there is considerable potential for studying the Latin East using hitherto unpublished or untranslated Arabic materials. What is worrying is that, so far as I am aware, there are no up-and-coming younger scholars in Britain who can read Arabic and who have an interest in the Crusades or the Latin East. Nor for that matter has Britain produced anyone engaged in research into the Crusades who knows Armenian.

Turning now to the Latin East, I can only sketch a few themes. Michael Metcalf has greatly advanced our understanding of numismatics and monetary history. Denys Pringle has catalogued secular and ecclesiastical buildings in the Kingdom of Jerusalem and has set new and rigorous standards for archaeological investigation in what was once the Kingdom of Jerusalem. Historians writing on castles in the East include Hugh Kennedy, whose book is an excellent general survey, and, more recently, Kristian Molin. Peter Lock has investigated Frankish towers in Greece and written more generally on Latin Romania. Special reference should also be made to some of the scholars mentioned earlier – Bernard Hamilton on church history and more recently on King Baldwin IV of Jerusalem, Tom Asbridge on the principality of Antioch, Peter Jackson on the problems facing the Latin East in the mid thirteenth century, to name just three – and others such as Andrew Jotischky, who has written on hermits in the East, Alan Murray on the First Crusade (his demolition of the *Chronicle of Zimmern* as a source for that expedition is particularly brilliant) and the early years of the Frankish settlement, and Piers Mitchell on the evidence shed on life in the Latin East by human remains. Then there is the study by Antony Leopold on the Crusade proposals of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries published in 2000. The list could go on...

The study of the Crusades and the military orders has flourished in Britain during the past half century and continues to do so. Part of the reason for this is that Medieval History generally is in a very healthy state in Britain, and there have been a good number of scholars who, like Sir Ernest Barker in an earlier generation, would not think of themselves primarily as crusading historians but who nonetheless have made significant contributions. I am thinking of people of the calibre of, for example, David Abulafia, John Cowdrey, Ralph Davis, Gary Dickson, John Gillingham, Graham Loud, Colin Morris, and Sir Richard Southern. (Others are listed in the bibliography at the end of this article.) This should not come as a surprise. Historians of the medieval papacy, of medieval thought, of spirituality, of heresy and popular religion, not to mention the Byzantine world and Mediterranean trade, will sooner or later be forced to turn their attention to the crusading movement.

What is more, the teaching of the Crusades flourishes at British universities. We live, I regret to say, in an illiterate age. We are forced to teach medieval history to undergraduates through the medium of primary sources translated into English. But at least there are plenty of texts available relating to the Crusades, and the bibliography contains a list of the British contributions to this ever-growing corpus of material. These translations mean that aspects of the Crusades are seen as manageable topics for modules in our history degree schemes, and the number of undergraduate courses available undoubtedly stimulates interest and further research. But although a number of scholars have produced translations, the British have tended to fight shy of producing critical editions of major texts. There are a few – Rosalind Hill's *Gesta Francorum*, Ruth Morgan's *Continuation de Guillaume de Tyr*, Margaret Jubb's *Estoires d'Outremer* – but not very many. Susan Edgington's work on her edition of

Albert of Aachen's *Historia Iherosolimitana* is well advanced.¹⁰ Editing texts is, as I can testify from personal experience, hard work and, in Britain at least, seems to carry very little kudos.

The study of the Crusades, the military orders, and the Latin East is undoubtedly an international activity in which scholars from many countries cooperate. Increasingly the subject transcends national boundaries, with graduate students from outside Britain studying at British universities and leading scholars from other parts of the English-speaking world having their books published by British publishing houses.¹¹ I think it is true to say that British research on the Crusades is for the most part firmly rooted in the British empirical tradition of scholarship. It is difficult to detect much influence from Marxist, *Annaliste*, or postmodernist approaches to historical enquiry on the vast majority of the historians I have mentioned, and it is probably partly as a result of this that the subject within Britain has not been bedevilled by deep-rooted controversy. That is not to say that there have been no arguments. Christopher Tyerman, for example, has challenged the views of Riley-Smith and Housley as to whether contemporaries regarded crusades directed to other theatres of war in the same way as they regarded crusades to the Holy Land, and he has his own views on questions such as the development of the conceptualisation of crusading in the twelfth century.¹² This particular debate can, I think, be explained in terms of different readings of the texts or a reluctance to accept challenges to long-held assumptions rather than as the result of conflicting ideologies. The relative absence of academic controversy also means a relative absence of personal animosities – at least among professional historians – and that in turn has

¹⁰ It appeared in 2007 to universal acclaim.

¹¹ For example, the Australian John Pryor and the Canadian Michael Gervers.

¹² In particular, Christopher Tyerman, *The Invention of the Crusades* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998).

contributed in no small measure to the success of various conferences and collaborative ventures that have taken place in recent years. There can be no doubt that this is a state of affairs of which both Ernest Barker and Otto Smail would have approved.

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¹³ This list is not intended to be comprehensive, and I have deliberately omitted popularising works. Section D lists collections of essays edited by British scholars: by no means all the contributions to them are by Britons.

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