

Was the Holy Land betrayed in 1291?

Article

Published Version

Barber, M. (2008) Was the Holy Land betrayed in 1291?
Reading Medieval Studies, XXXIV. pp. 35-52. ISSN 0950-3129
Available at <https://centaur.reading.ac.uk/84766/>

It is advisable to refer to the publisher's version if you intend to cite from the work. See [Guidance on citing](#).

Publisher: University of Reading

All outputs in CentAUR are protected by Intellectual Property Rights law, including copyright law. Copyright and IPR is retained by the creators or other copyright holders. Terms and conditions for use of this material are defined in the [End User Agreement](#).

www.reading.ac.uk/centaur

CentAUR

Central Archive at the University of Reading

Reading's research outputs online

Was the Holy Land Betrayed in 1291?

Malcolm Barber

University of Reading

'By their fruits we can know them', declared the French royal lawyer, William of Plaisians, 'since through their fault the Holy Land was said to have been lost and they are said often to have made secret pacts with the Sultan.'¹ William of Plaisians was one of Philip the Fair's chief ministers and a close confidant of the king. On 29 May, 1308, in a great speech delivered in a public consistory at Poitiers, he sought to bully an obdurate Clement V into reopening the proceedings against the Templars, suspended by the pope the previous February after initial confessions of apostasy made by the leaders had been withdrawn. The choice of quotation was highly appropriate because Plaisians knew that his listeners would understand that he was referring to the gospel of Matthew, chapter 7, which concludes the three chapters St Augustine had called the Sermon on the Mount. This seemed to fit the Templars very well, for Christ had warned the disciples to beware of false prophets, 'which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves' (verse 15). On the face of it the Templars were the faithful servants of Christ, yet in ceremonies cloaked in secrecy they were really idolaters and traitors. 'Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit' (verses 16-17). The answer was contained in verse 19: 'Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.' Surely the head of God's Church on earth could not continue to protect such an organisation. Indeed, John Burgunyó, the Aragonese ambassador at the papal court, reported to King James II that the oral delivery of the speech was even more direct and explicit. It was, said Plaisians, 'the general belief that the Holy Land was lost by their actions' and that in Spain they had actually gone over to the Saracens and joined in attacks upon the kingdom of Aragon. How this contrasted with the sacrifices of the royal house of France; both the present king's father and grandfather had died on crusade, as had so many barons

and others from France. 'The Church of God has been extended and put down roots and foundations in the blood of these and other kings.'²

William of Plaisians' audience had, of course, an obvious reference point in the loss of the city of Acre to the Mamluks in May, 1291, an event still a raw memory for many contemporaries, for its fall had been the catalyst for the complete collapse of what remained of the crusader states in Palestine and Syria. 'Know, fair lords', said an eyewitness, the chronicler known as the Templar of Tyre, 'that no one could adequately recount the tears and grief of that day. The pitiful sight of the little children, tumbled about and disembowelled as the horses trampled them ...! There is no man in the world who has so very hard a heart that he would not have wept to see the slaughter. And I am sure that all the Christian people who saw these things that day wept, because even some of the Saracens, as we learned afterwards, had pity on these victims and wept.'³

However, as the French government presented it, the worm of corruption within the Temple had burrowed much deeper. In the order for the arrest of September, 1307, the Templars were accused of holding secret reception ceremonies in which new entrants were obliged to deny Christ and spit on a crucifix and then, naked, were kissed by their receptors on the base of the spine, navel and mouth. Once accepted into the Order, they became part of a system in which compulsory sodomy and the worship of idols were central tenets.⁴ The loss of Acre was therefore the external manifestation of this internal decay, indeed, the culmination of a betrayal which had found its origins over a century before in the time of Saladin. When, during his second appearance before the papal commission in Paris on 28 November, 1309, the Grand Master, James of Molay, attempted a stuttering declaration of the Order's qualities, he was brusquely interrupted by William of Nogaret, the royal Keeper of the Seals, and Philip IV's chief minister. Nogaret claimed that 'in the chronicles of Saint-Denis it was written that in the time of Saladin, the Sultan of Babylon, the then Master of the Order of the Temple and other leading members of the Order had done homage to this Saladin, that the same Saladin, on hearing of the heavy defeat the Templars had just suffered, had publicly declared that the Templars had suffered the said defeat because they were labouring under the vice of sodomy and had violated their religion and their statutes'.⁵ Molay expressed his astonishment at this story – and, indeed, it

does not appear in any known version of the chronicles – but the contemporary collection known as *Les Grandes Chroniques de France*, which was similarly produced at the monastery of St Denis, does allege that the belt which all Templars wore was a symbol of their treason with the Muslims.⁶

If Plaisians was exaggerating when he portrayed the Catholic Church as nourished by the blood of French kings, it was nevertheless true that recent members of the Capetian family had sacrificed their lives in the conflict with Islam. Philip IV's grandfather, Louis IX, canonised in 1297, was the king's evident role model, and he had ended his days before Tunis in 1270 on his second attempt to come to grips with the infidel. Twenty years before, during St Louis' first crusade, the great expedition against Egypt, his younger brother, Robert of Artois, had been hacked to death in the narrow streets of the city of Mansourah. Yet, in the early fourteenth century, there was little to show for two centuries of suffering; the Holy Land was firmly in the hands of the Mamluks, while the main Christian possession in the eastern Mediterranean, the island of Cyprus, maintained only a shaky presence in a world the Christians had believed was their own heritage. Plaisians knew that past events had engendered resentments. The Mansourah debacle had clearly been caused by the recklessness of the count of Artois, yet it had been preceded by a shouting match in which the Templars had tried to prevent what they evidently saw as a suicidal assault.⁷ Although they were right, in some quarters this had hardly redounded to their credit, for it was said that the military orders had a vested interest in continuing the holy wars which legitimised their existence and therefore did not wish to see the Muslims decisively defeated.⁸ After 1291 western Christians needed a focus for their grief and disillusionment; Plaisians' rhetorical brutality and Nogaret's sly insinuations were calculated to depict the Order of the Temple as the canker within the body of Christendom itself.

These perceptions of the Temple have had a long life. It was firmly embedded in the popular imagination in Britain in the early nineteenth century, not the least through the immensely successful novels of Sir Walter Scott. In *Ivanhoe* (1819), the Templar, Sir Brian de Bois-Guilbert, a haughty villain whose contempt for the principles of the founders of the Order is unrestrained, stains the reputation of the Order irredeemably with his conduct; but the action takes place in England, far from the lands where contact could be made

with Islam. More pertinent is *The Talisman*, published six years later, in which Brother Amaury, the Grand Master, is at the centre of all the intrigues which undermined the armies of the Third Crusade and the efforts of the hero-king, Richard the Lion-Heart. In a scene based on Saladin's execution of Raynald of Châtillon, his chief enemy among the Christians, after his victory at Hattin in July, 1187, Saladin decapitates the Grand Master with a single blow. Alone among the Christian leaders, Brother Amaury is not allowed to accept the hospitality for which the sultan is famous. Saladin knew of the Master's numerous treacheries, while King Richard condemned him as a devil-worshipper and a necromancer, actions ultimately based on an obsessive desire to further the interests of the Order before all else. Not surprisingly, such a man did not balk at making secret pacts with the Muslims.

Scott dealt in the currency of fiction, but modern historians have found the idea of suspicious contacts with the Muslims no less attractive. In Britain, the most influential historian of the crusades in the second half of the twentieth century was Sir Steven Runciman, who died in 2001. Runciman's great three-volume history, which was published between 1951 and 1954, remains in print, and is still chosen by most readers who wish to follow a narrative history of the crusades in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, despite the half century of intensive research which has taken place since he wrote. He thought that, to a degree, the Templars had brought their misfortunes on themselves through the friendships they had made in the Muslim world and the financial dealings which this involved. These contacts had then led to an interest in Islamic religion and culture.⁹ Runciman appears to have transposed this view directly from E. J. Martin's *Trial of the Templars*, published in 1928. According to Martin, William of Beaujeu, the Master of the Temple who died at Acre in 1291, 'was accused of friendship with the Sultan, an accusation which persisted so strongly that it may have had some truth behind it'.¹⁰ More recently, the French biographer of Philip the Fair, Jean Favier, in a study published in 1978, was similarly convinced although, unlike Runciman, he was not even willing to credit the Templars with any intellectual curiosity, believing that they had been contaminated by a process he describes as 'osmosis'. They were, he felt, too ignorant to have imbibed Islamic culture in any other way.¹¹

The connections are therefore obvious. By 1291 the Templars had had a continuous history in Syria and Palestine stretching back to

1119. This meant frequent contact with the Muslims of the Middle East and by one means or another they had absorbed the religion and culture of Islam to such an extent that, as the order for the arrests alleges, they had 'forgotten their origins', and had thus fallen into the pit of apostasy.¹² The career of William of Beaujeu, the last Grand Master of the Order to govern from the Palestinian mainland, is therefore of key importance. If this view has any validity, it was during this man's mastership between 1273 and 1291 that 'the fruits', as Plaisians put it, came to maturity with the fall of Acre and the dramatic disappearance of the crusader states. But William of Beaujeu can hardly be described as one of Favier's ignorant Templars. He was a member of one of the leading noble houses in France, the fourth son of Guichard of Beaujeu, lord of Montpensier. His uncle, Humbert V of Beaujeu, was the first cousin of Louis VIII, King of France between 1223 and 1226 and the father of St Louis, and this explains why William refers to Charles of Anjou, King of Sicily and a younger brother of the saint, as his kinsman. Family members held important positions in the royal service: Humbert V, who died on crusade in Egypt in 1250, was a constable of France, a post later held by Humbert of Beaujeu-Montpensier, William's elder brother.¹³ William himself had wide experience in the Order of the Temple, having joined by 1253 at the latest.¹⁴ He was Preceptor of Tripoli in 1260, when he was captured by the Mongols, and later Preceptor of Sicily during the reign of Charles of Anjou. He was elected master in 1273, attended the great council of Lyon in 1274, which had been called primarily to discuss new crusading projects, and finally had left for the East in 1275, having gathered men, equipment and horses to reinforce the Templars in Palestine.¹⁵ At Lyon he had called for arms, provisions, troops and ships, for the Holy Land was lacking in all of them.¹⁶

When he arrived the Latin settlements were indeed in dire trouble. Harassed by Mongols and Mamluks alike they were quite unable to take any effective initiatives in the conflict with Islam. William of Beaujeu was in no position to adopt frontal tactics; instead he followed a cautious policy of non-provocation and negotiation. When James of Molay was drafted into the Templar frontline in the late 1270s, he recalled that he and other young knights, 'who want to see feats of arms', were critical of the master because he 'was submissive to the sultan and kept himself in his favour'. However, they soon realised that the master 'could not act otherwise because at that time their

Order possessed and held in its power and under its custody many cites and strongholds in the said sultan's territories'.¹⁷ References during the trial show that Beaujeu's relations with the Mamluks were known to the lower ranks of the Order even among those who had not served overseas. In May, 1311, in a deposition markedly hostile to the leadership, Hugh of Narsac, a serving brother who had been Preceptor of Les Épeaux in the diocese of Saintes, claimed that errors had been introduced into the Order a long time ago in the East, where Beaujeu and a Templar knight called Matthew le Sauvage had had frequent contacts with the sultan with whom they had 'a great friendship'. He must have learnt this from returning brothers. Peter of Noblat, another serving brother from the diocese of Limoges, who had been in the East for six years during Beaujeu's mastership, spoke of the master's 'great friendship with the sultan and the Saracens'. Like Molay, he understood that 'otherwise neither he nor the Order could have remained in Outremer at that time'.¹⁸

Respite was essential. In 1282 Beaujeu and the Sultan, Qalawun, signed a truce for ten years and ten months covering extensive tracts of territory. A key component was the port of Tortosa, held by the Templars, which would, said Ibn 'Abd az-Zahir, secretary and biographer of the sultans Baybars and Qalawun, 'enjoy security and tranquillity'; but at the same time no one from there could invade any of the sultan's lands nor pillage any of his ships which might be damaged or wrecked on that coast. 'In the territory of Tortosa mentioned in the treaty no fort or fortification is to be repaired, nor any reinforcement, entrenchment or the like built'.¹⁹ The Muslims would never accept a permanent peace and this was the best that could have been arranged in the circumstances.

Conciliation was underpinned by spying. The Templar of Tyre, who was not a member of the Order, but acted as the master's secretary and interpreter, describes how Beaujeu obtained advance information about the Mamluk military plans. 'There was a very old emir, one of the four who governed the *Paynimie*; he made my lord the master of the Temple aware of these developments. This emir was called the Emir *Silah*, and he was accustomed to notify the master of the Temple of matters of interest to Christendom, when the sultan wished to injure Christianity in any manner. This contact cost the master fine presents each year, which he sent to him.' Again, this was known within the Order, at least in general terms, for Hugh of Narsac said that William of Beaujeu had some

Saracens in his pay, which the master said was for their greater security, 'but others contradicted this'.²⁰ When the Sultan Qalawun began preparations for the assault on Acre, the emir, whose proper name was Badr al-Din Bektash al-Fakhri, sent a warning to Beaujeu. This emir was, said the Templar of Tyre, 'the friend of the master of the Temple'.²¹ Not all Templar masters had enjoyed the favours of such a contact, but none of them had acted without negotiators and interpreters. In 1167 a leading Templar, Geoffrey Fulcher, was a key figure in negotiations with Egypt during a period when Amalric, King of Jerusalem, looked to have some chance of taking over the country, for he accompanied Hugh of Ceasarea, the royal envoy, into the actual presence of the caliph in his palace in Cairo.²² Negotiation with Muslim powers was quite usual and the hierarchical statutes of the Templar Rule, which date from the 1160s at the latest, lay down that the master, the seneschal and the commanders of the Kingdom of Jerusalem, the City of Jerusalem and of Tripoli and Antioch, should all be supplied with Saracen scribes.²³

While William of Beaujeu's temporising policies may look to modern eyes to have the stamp of common sense, they bore little relation to the images of the heroes of the First Crusade, epitomised by Godfrey of Bouillon, the first ruler of Jerusalem, whose exploits had passed into legend even in the twelfth century, and whose story was the common property of western Christians. Moreover, Beaujeu's reputation was not helped by his perceived partisanship, for he supported Charles of Anjou's controversial claim to the throne of Jerusalem in opposition to King Hugh of Cyprus, and thus contributed to the development of faction at a time of acute external threat.²⁴ The Templar of Tyre himself, although a great admirer of Beaujeu, describes how warnings sent by the master, first to Tripoli in 1289 and again at Acre in 1291, were not believed because his motives were suspected.²⁵

When the assault finally began on 5 April, 1291, William of Beaujeu's politics were of little relevance, for it soon became a brutal and ultimately one-sided battle for survival. The Templars and Hospitallers were stationed on the walls of Montmusard, from where, on the night of 15 April, the Templars led a sortie against the troops from Hama. Initially successful, they were soon beaten off, falling back in confusion as they tripped over the tent ropes in the darkness.²⁶ The city held out for another month and then on 18 May the Mamluks broke into the Accursed Tower and street

fighting began. William of Beaujeu, unprepared and only lightly armed, rushed out to help, but it was his last act. Fatally wounded, he was carried to the Templar quarter on the northern side of the city, where he died that evening. He was about sixty years old. The Templars fought on but as the Mamluks made ever greater inroads into the city they were forced back into their own compound, already heaving with people. At this point Theobald Gaudin, the Templar Grand Commander, took ship to Sidon, taking some of the Templars with him, while Peter of Sevrey, the Marshal, attempted to resist the inevitable Mamluk onslaught. The last Templars in the city met their deaths when a tower, undermined by sappers, collapsed on top of them.²⁷

If the Templars had betrayed Acre, al-Ashraf showed no sign of recognising it, for the brothers were slaughtered along with all the others who failed to find a place on the few ships available. Peter of Sevrey was tricked into believing that al-Ashraf was willing to negotiate, only to be seized and beheaded. As for William of Beaujeu himself, the Templar of Tyre was not the only witness to his bravery during the last days. James of Plany, who testified during the Templars' trial in Cyprus in 1311, said that 'the master well could have escaped and fled if he had wished at the capture of the city of Acre, just as many other religious and secular knights fled, but he preferred to die for the Catholic faith and its defence, and he wanted to shed his blood for Christ against the enemies of the faith, just as Christ did for our redemption'.²⁸ William of Beaujeu lingered for a day, but captured Templars suffered the equivalent of a living death for many years. Matthew Zaccaria, a Genoese imprisoned with some Templars in Cairo, told the Cypriot tribunal in 1311 that those held with him resisted all inducements to apostasize, saying that 'they (would not) deny the Christian faith, but wanted to die in the good faith of Christ, and (live) all their days there in captivity ... rather than do anything against the health of their souls ...'²⁹

The loss of the remaining footholds on the Palestinian mainland created a crisis for both the major military orders, the Hospitallers as well as the Templars, and naturally they were subject to close scrutiny in the following years.³⁰ The military orders presented critics with a clear target. The Templars were particularly vulnerable, since their military role was at the core of their ideology, whereas the Hospitallers had been founded to take care of the sick and only took on military duties after the Templars had come into existence. Tax-

payers, both secular and clerical, inevitably wanted to know what had become of all the resources poured into the defence of the Holy Land in the decades before 1291. Even before the end, vociferous critics had been demanding that expenditure be curbed or that some result be achieved before the whole edifice came crashing down. One common solution was the union of the two great military orders, which, some argued, undermined the Christian cause through their rivalry, as well as duplicating their functions and thus costing more than they should.³¹ In 1307, in response to an order from Pope Clement V, both grand masters were required to set down their thoughts about such proposals. James of Molay was strongly opposed, pointing out the differences between them, but more importantly arguing that the idea of union had been considered a generation before at the council of Lyon in 1274, and had been rejected at that time. The only reason for its revival he contended, was that when the Holy Land was lost in 1291, 'the Romans and other nations were complaining loudly that effective help for the defence of that land had not been sent' and the reigning pope, Nicholas IV, had dragged up this old notion 'as some sort of excuse of his role, and to give the appearance that he wished to bring a solution to the business of the Holy Land'.³² As Molay saw it, the idea arose not from any genuine desire for reform, but from the politics of the Roman curia, where evasion of responsibility demanded the shifting of blame.

In fact, since his election as master in 1292 James of Molay had worked hard at organising resources for the war with Islam: young knights had been drafted to the frontline in Cyprus, ships hired, raids made against the Egyptian and Syrian coasts. Between 1293 and 1296 Molay went on an extended visit to Aragon, France, England and Italy, where he met the secular rulers who could be the greatest help in gathering forces and money for a new assault, as well as the pope, and held chapter-meetings with the Templar brothers in order to increase awareness of needs in the East. Between June and September, 1294, he concluded a major agreement with King James II of Aragon, in which the Order ceded its rights in Tortosa in Aragon to the crown in exchange for the castles of Ares, Cuevas and Peñíscola in northern Valencia.³³ It seems reasonable to conclude that this was part of a future strategic plan to open up a considerable hinterland for the port at Peñíscola through which supplies to Cyprus could be channelled. When, in 1303, the Order purchased the

castle of Culla for the very high price of 500,000 *solidi* it had extended this hinterland west as far as the border of Aragon.

Territories like this could help support initiatives in the East. Molay had, for example, been instrumental in establishing a force on the island of Ruad, just off the coast at Tortosa, which he apparently saw as a staging post for a more permanent presence on the mainland, as well as a meeting place with representatives of the Mongols with whom many Christians hoped to form an alliance. But Molay was well aware that such activity was no antidote to criticism. Indeed, the Ruad occupation did nothing to restore the Order's reputation, when in September, 1302, the island was overrun by the Mamluks, who killed or captured the entire garrison.³⁴ The master would not have been surprised that, at the same time as he was explaining to Clement V the futility of creating a combined Order, Peter Dubois, an opinionated Norman lawyer keen to gain a placement within the French administration, was complaining that the military orders had misused what he saw as their vast incomes, and that the only way to promote the cause of the Holy Land was to unite the orders and force those members living in Cyprus to subsist from local resources rather than drawing on their European networks. Dubois, who paints a vivid picture of idleness and incompetence, believed that once it was generally known how much income the orders had, the evidence of their betrayal of the Holy Land would be clear for all to see.³⁵

On the evening of 18 May, 1291, as William of Beaujeu lay dying in the Templar house at Acre, the senior Templars around him had only two options, either to take to the sea and abandon the city to its fate or to fight to the last against an implacable enemy. Whatever his previous relations with the Muslims, Beaujeu had known that the new Mamluk Sultan, al-Ashraf, was not interested in negotiation; the master's secretary himself translated and distributed the sultan's letter announcing his intentions.³⁶ Witnesses to Templar bravery in defending Acre do not therefore in themselves invalidate William of Plaisians' claim that the knights should be judged by the results of their actions, for he meant that the stain of corruption extended far beyond the events of 1291. The people, Plaisians said, had suspected the Temple of illicit activities for so long that nobody could remember a time to the contrary.³⁷

The Templar Rule in both the French and Catalan versions certainly acknowledges the possibility of apostasy. Rows among

Templars may not have been uncommon and threats, made 'in anger or wrath', to go over to the Saracens, were certainly made, although, as far as can be seen, not very often acted on. The Aragonese Templars who fled into Muslim territory in 1307 and 1308 did so in the exceptional circumstances of the impending trial; even then they may not have meant their exile to be permanent for it was a well-established practice in Iberia for secular nobles who had lost political favour to remove themselves from Christian territories until circumstances changed.³⁸ In the East, the Rule draws attention to specific examples intended to demonstrate how the Order's disciplinary system dealt with such cases. Thus, brother Esteven, who worked as a blacksmith in the castle of Safed, had intended to desert and had actually stayed one night in a house garrisoned by Saracens, but the next day had regretted his action and went back to the Order, was still sentenced to lose the habit for some unspecified period, only escaping expulsion because the *casal* concerned had been under the command of Christians.³⁹ More serious was the case of Roger the German, captured at the battle of La Forbie in 1244. At some point he was able to return to the Order, but he was expelled for swearing an oath to renounce Christianity, even though he pleaded that he had not understood what the Muslims had forced him to do. He was probably not believed, for they may have thought he owed his survival to some kind of promise of this nature.⁴⁰

If there was some ambiguity about the attitudes of these two men, in another two cases apostasy appears to have been the clear intention. In one incident, a mason-brother, called Jorge, fled from Acre with the intention of joining the Saracens, but he was pursued by other Templars sent by the master. They caught up with him and found that he had secular clothing under his habit. He was put in prison in the castle of Athlit, where he died.⁴¹ In the second case, at Athlit, 'there were brothers who practised wicked sin and caressed each other in their chambers at night; so those who knew of the deed and others who had suffered greatly by it, told this thing to the Master and to a group of worthy men of the house.' In Acre they were sentenced to be imprisoned in heavy irons, but one of them, called Brother Lucas, 'escaped by night and went over to the Saracens.'⁴²

Individual cases might be expected, but the surrender of a complete fortress involved a whole garrison. This was what happened at Baghras (Gaston) in the Amanus Mountains north of

Antioch in 1268. Antioch itself had been held by the Christians since 1098, when it had been captured by the armies of the First Crusade, but it had lasted only two days in the face of Mamluk forces, so it is understandable that the defenders of Baghras were apprehensive. The situation was exacerbated when, while the others were dining, one of the Templars, Gins of Belin (who perhaps came from the locality), handed over the keys to the Sultan, Baybars. After some discussion, Gueraut of Saucet, the Commander, and the other brothers, decided to retreat to another of the marcher fortresses, La Roche Guillaume, after destroying everything in the castle which could be of use to the enemy. Unknown to them the convent at Acre had come to the same conclusion and sent a messenger to inform the commander. Even so, afterwards there was a long debate in the Order about what action should be taken against the Baghras garrison, as to abandon a marcher fortress without permission was an offence punishable by expulsion.⁴³ In the end the brothers were given penance for failing to destroy all the goods in the castle before they left, which confirms the account of the Arab historian, Abu'l Fida, that they had fled in some haste, but the fact that expulsion was even considered despite the decision of the central convent and the stealing of the keys was meant to emphasise how seriously the Order regarded any action which could be interpreted as treacherous behaviour.

The Templars may have been sensitive on this issue since, a century before, William of Tyre, their most trenchant twelfth-century critic, alleged that a similar frontier fortress, which he described as 'an impregnable cave, lying beyond the Jordan on the borders of Arabia', had been surrendered by the Templars to Shirkuh, one of the lieutenants of Nur al-Din, the ruler of Damascus and the most formidable enemy of the Christians. King Amalric had heard of the attack on the castle, but was only able to reach the River Jordan with a relief force when he heard that the place had fallen to the enemy. The king, never patient with what he regarded as insubordination, evidently regarded this as treason and, despite the Templars' status as religious, had about twelve of them hanged.⁴⁴

Such examples, though, are quite isolated in the overall sweep of Templar history. Set against this are the massive losses sustained by the Order in battles to defend the Holy Land. Deaths in the defeats at the Springs of Cresson and at Hattin in Galilee in 1187 amounted to 290 knights, while the great disasters of the 1240s, the battle of La Forbie, near Gaza, in 1244, and the crushing of Louis

IX's advance guard at Mansourah in the Nile Delta in 1250, led to the slaughter of 547 knights. These are huge numbers, given that the Order is unlikely to have had more than 600 knights available at any one time in the crusader states and, even in crises such as these, some would still have been needed to garrison castles.⁴⁵ No figures are known for the sergeants who died alongside them, but they are unlikely to have been lower. In most circumstances the Templars adopted relatively cautious tactics, for their knights were a valuable resource not to be discarded lightly. Even so, Gerard of Ridefort, the Grand Master largely responsible for the Cresson defeat and, some believe, for the mistaken tactics which led to Hattin as well, was nevertheless remembered as one of the heroes of Templar history for his selflessness in refusing to abandon his colleagues in a battle outside Acre in October, 1189. According to an anonymous account known as the *Itinerarium*, probably written by an English crusader familiar with the Templars: 'The Lord had conferred such great glory on him, giving him the laurel wreath which he had earned in so many battles and making him a fellow of the college of martyrs.'⁴⁶

William of Plaisians had no evidence to show that the Templars had betrayed the Holy Land; the written version of his speech is couched in the language of lawyers, for the Holy Land 'was said to have been lost' and the secret pacts 'are said often to have been made'. Nor can William of Nogaret's story be verified. During Saladin's time, the Mesopotamian chronicler, Ibn al-Athir, describes the Templars and the Hospitallers as 'the fiercest fighters of all the Franks', whom Saladin had executed after the battle of Hattin because 'he wished to rid the Muslims of their wickedness.'⁴⁷ Baha ad-Din Ibn Shaddad, who was Saladin's *qadi* to the army from 1188 and was in a position to know if there had been any treasonable overtures from the Templars, mentions nothing. The master to whom Nogaret was referring can only have been Gerard of Ridefort, whose faults were evident to contemporaries. Arrogant, vengeful and impetuous he may have been, but his place in the pantheon of crusader martyrs was secure in the eyes of knights whose value system placed bravery and loyalty above all other qualities. Nor are the Muslim sources on the fall of Acre willing to ascribe any part of the Mamluk success to Christian betrayal, for both Qalawun and al-Ashraf are presented as determined to overcome this last major stronghold of the unbelievers who had invaded Islamic lands nearly two hundred years before. The slaughter of the inhabitants was seen

as justifiable revenge for the killing of Muslim captives outside Acre by Richard I when the city had been regained by the Christians in 1191, while the destruction of the city showed that the Mamluks had no intention of ever again allowing the Latins to regain a position on the mainland.⁴⁸

The French lawyers were trying to ride the currents of unpopularity which washed against those most closely connected to the defence of the holy places. Failure to stop the Mamluks was meant to demonstrate that the Templars were secretly undermining the faith at the very heart of the Christian world. Yet for so many brothers to die to cover up the real purposes of the Templars is to stretch credulity beyond even the melodramas of Sir Walter Scott. In the words of an anonymous tract, known as the *Lamentacio*, circulating in Paris in 1308 during the proceedings against the Templars: 'It seems absurd and is almost unbelievable, or rather impossible, that in an Order so spread across the whole world that the noble brothers, clerks and burgesses, who for the safety of their souls had given themselves in obedience to the glorious Virgin, wearing the cross in perpetuity on account of reverence to the Crucifixion and in memory of the Passion, should have been ensnared by such crimes.'⁴⁹

Notes

- 1 *Le Dossier de l'Affaire des Templiers*, ed. and trans. G. Lizerand, Paris, Société d'Édition "Les Belles Lettres", 1964 (Les Classiques de l'Histoire de France au Moyen Age), 2nd ed., pp. 122–3.
- 2 H. Finke, *Papsttum und Untergang des Templeordens*, Münster, Druck und Verlag der Aschendorffschen Buchhandlung, 1907, vol. 2, pp. 145–6, no. 88; *The Templars*, selected sources trans. and annotated by M. Barber and K. Bate, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2002, pp. 267–8, no. 72.
- 3 *Cronaca del Templare di Tiro (1243–1314): la caduta degli Stati Crociati nel racconto di un testimone oculare*, ed. and trans. L. Minervini, Naples, Liguori Editore, 2000, pp. 224–5, para. 270 (506); 'The Templar of Tyre'. Part III of the 'Deeds of the Cypriots', trans. P. Crawford, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2003 (Crusade Texts in Translation 6), para. 506, p. 116.
- 4 *Le Dossier*, pp. 18–21; Barber and Bate, no. 67, pp. 244–7.
- 5 *Le Dossier*, pp. 168–9; Barber and Bate, no. 74, pp. 294–5.
- 6 *Les Grandes Chroniques de France*, ed. J. Viard, Paris, Société de l'Histoire de France, 1934, vol. 8, pp. 274–6.

- 7 Jean de Joinville, *Histoire de Saint Louis*, ed. N. de Wailly, Paris, Le Clere, 1874, pp. 118–21; Matthew Paris, *Chronica Majora*, ed. H. R. Luard, London, Longman, 1884 (Rolls Series), vol. 5, p. 148.
- 8 See S. Menache, 'Rewriting the History of the Templars According to Matthew Paris', in *Cross Cultural Convergences in the Crusader Period. Essays presented to Aryeh Grabois on his Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. M. Goodich, S. Menache and S. Schein, New York, Lang, 1995, pp. 183–213. Matthew Paris's treatment of the Templars in this and other incidents reflects his inconsistent and episodic approach to chronicle writing. Menache argues that, although his work is of limited historical value, it is nevertheless a useful barometer of contemporary views on the military orders, which were themselves contradictory, oscillating between awe at their willingness to suffer martyrdom and anger at their alleged treachery.
- 9 S. Runciman, *History of the Crusades*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1954, vol. 3, pp. 435–6.
- 10 E. J. Martin, *The Trial of the Templars*, London, Allen and Unwin, 1928, p. 19.
- 11 J. Favier, *Philippe le Bel*, Paris, Fayard, 1978, pp. 444, 473.
- 12 *Le Dossier*, pp. 16–17.
- 13 See A. Demurger, *The Last Templar. The Tragedy of Jacques de Molay, Last Grand Master of the Temple*, trans. A. Nevill, London, Profile Books, 2004, pp. 37–8.
- 14 *Cartulaire de l'église collégiale Notre-Dame de Beaujeu*, ed. M. C. Guigue, Lyon, Trevois, 1864, p. 59.
- 15 *Cronaca del Templare di Tiro*, §§70 (306), pp. 84–5 and 147 (383), pp. 142–3; *Regesta Regni Hierorolymitani*, ed. R. Röhricht, Innsbruck, Wagner, 1893, no. 1378, p. 359.
- 16 *The Book of the Deeds of James I of Aragon. A Translation of the Medieval Catalan Llibre dels Fets*, trans. D. Smith and H. Buffery, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2003 (Crusade Texts in Translation 10), §§ 524, p. 359 and 532–4, pp. 363–4. There are many references in the Angevin registers to exports to the East through Apulian ports during Beaujeu's mastership.
- 17 *Le Dossier*, p. 168; Barber and Bate, no. 74, p. 295.
- 18 *Le Procès des Templiers*, ed. J. Michelet, Paris, Imprimerie Royale, 1851 (Collection des Documents Inédits sur l'Histoire de France), vol. 2, pp. 209, 215.
- 19 *Arab Historians of the Crusades*, selected and trans. F. Gabrieli, trans. E. J. Costello, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1969, pp. 323–31.

- 20 *Procès*, vol. 2, p. 209.
- 21 *Cronaca del Templare di Tiro*, §§ 238 (474), pp. 194–5 and 245 (481), pp. 202–3; ‘*Templar of Tyre*’, §§ 474, p. 99 and 481, p. 103. As the bearer of the sultan’s arms and controller of the arsenal as well as commander of part of the royal guard, al-Fakhri was well informed about military preparations, see D. Ayalon, ‘Studies on the Structure of the Mamluk Army – III’, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 16 (1954): 60.
- 22 Guillaume de Tyr, *Chronique*, ed. R.B.C. Huygens, Turnhout, Brepols, 1986 (Corpus Christianorum), 63A, 19.18, p. 887.
- 23 *La Règle du Temple*, ed. H. de Curzon, Paris, Société de l’Histoire de France, 1886, clauses 77, p. 75, 99, pp. 86–7, 110, p. 94, 120, p. 100, 125, p. 102.
- 24 See, for example, the events of 1278–9, *Cronaca di Templare di Tiro*, paras. 160–5 (396–401).
- 25 *Cronaca del Templare di Tiro*, paras. 238 (474), pp. 194–7, 249 (485), pp. 204–5.
- 26 *Cronaca del Templare di Tiro*, para. 255 (491), pp. 208–11.
- 27 *Cronaca del Templare di Tiro*, paras. 262 (498), pp. 216–19, 269–273 (505–9), pp. 224–7.
- 28 *The Trial of the Templars in Cyprus. A Complete English Edition*, ed. A. Gilmour-Bryson, Leiden, Brill, 1998, p. 59.
- 29 *Trial of the Templars in Cyprus*, p. 68.
- 30 See H. J. Nicholson, *Templars, Hospitallers and Teutonic Knights. Images of the Military Orders 1128–1291*, Leicester, Leicester University Press, 1993, pp. 125–8, on the wider reaction to the fall of Acre.
- 31 See A. J. Forey, ‘The Military Orders in the Crusading Proposals of the Late-Thirteenth and Early-Fourteenth Centuries’, *Traditio* 36 (1980): 317–45. Not all the authors were hostile to the Orders; some advocated union to enable the new Order to play a more central role in the reconquest of the Holy Land.
- 32 *Le Dossier*, pp. 2–15; Barber and Bate, no. 64, pp. 234–8.
- 33 See L. Garcia-Guijarro, ‘The Growth of the Order of the Temple in the Northern Area of the Kingdom of Valencia at the Close of the Thirteenth Century: A Puzzling Development?’ in *Knighthoods of Christ. Essays on the History of the Crusades and the Knights Templar presented to Malcolm Barber*, ed. N. Housley, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2007, pp. 165–81.
- 34 See Demurger, pp. 73–110.
- 35 Pierre Dubois, *De Recuperatione Terre Sancte*, ed. C. V. Langlois,

- Paris, Picard, 1891 (Collection de Textes pour servir à l'Étude et l'Enseignement de l'Histoire), pp. 13–15.
- 36 *Cronaca del Templare di Tiro*, para. 251 (487), pp. 206–7.
- 37 *Le Dossier*, pp. 120–1.
- 38 See, for example, S. Barton, 'Traitors to the Faith? Christian Mercenaries in al-Andalus and the Magreb, c.1100–1300', in *Medieval Spain: Culture, Conflict and Coexistence. Studies in Honour of Angus MacKay*, ed. R. Collins and A. Goodman, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2002, pp. 23–45.
- 39 *The Catalan Rule of the Templars*, ed. and trans. J. Upton-Ward, Woodbridge, The Boydell Press, 2003, clause 162, pp. 68–9.
- 40 *La Règle*, clause 569, pp. 296–7; *Catalan Rule*, clause 163, pp. 68–71. Sparing an enemy's life in return for conversion was a well-established practice on the frontiers of the crusader states, dating back to their foundation. In 1100 the Norman crusader, Tancred, recklessly sent six envoys to demand of Duqaq of Damascus that he surrender the city and convert to Christianity. All except one were decapitated, the sole exception having agreed to accept 'the Turkish religion', Albert of Aachen, *Historia Ierosolimitana*, ed. and trans. S. B. Edgington, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2007, 7.17, pp. 510–11.
- 41 *La Règle*, clause 603, p. 312.
- 42 *La Règle*, clause 573, pp. 297–8; *The Rule of the Templars. The French Text of the Rule of the Order of the Knights Templar*, trans. J. Upton-Ward, Woodbridge, The Boydell Press, 1992, p. 148.
- 43 *Catalan Rule*, clause 180, pp. 80–7. See J. Upton-Ward, 'The Surrender of Gaston and the Rule of the Templars', in *The Military Orders. Fighting for the Faith and Caring for the Sick*, ed. M. Barber, Aldershot, Variorum, 1994, pp. 179–88.
- 44 Guillaume de Tyr, 19.11, p. 879.
- 45 See M. Barber, *The New Knighthood. A History of the Order of the Temple*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 232.
- 46 *Das Itinerarium Peregrinorum. Eine zeitgenössische englische Chronik zum dritten Kreuzzug in ursprünglicher Gestalt*, ed. H. Mayer, Stuttgart, Anton Hiersemann, 1962, pp. 313–14; *Chronicle of the Third Crusade. A Translation of the Itinerarium Peregrinorum et Gesta Regis Ricardi*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 1997 (Crusade Texts in Translation 3), p. 79.
- 47 *The Chronicle of Ibn al-Athir for the Crusading Period*, trans. D. S. Richards, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2007 (Crusade Texts in Translation 15), Part 2, p. 324.
- 48 See D. P. Little, 'The Fall of 'Akka in 690/1291: The Muslim version', in *Studies in Islamic History and Civilization in Honour of Professor David Ayalon*, ed. M. Sharon, Leiden, Brill, 1986, pp. 159–81.

- 49 *Lamentacio quedam pro Templariis*, in C. R. Cheney, 'The Downfall of the Templars and a Letter in Their Defence', in *Medieval Miscellany Presented to Eugène Vinaver*, ed. F. Whitehead, A. H. Diverres and F. E. Sutcliffe, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1965, p. 75.