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Review of *Templars: The Knights Who Made Britain* by Steve Tibble

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analysis comes from English records, while (with some exceptions) German, French, Italian, Polish, and other European sources appear more often as supportive evidence; likewise, the sources he uses apparently incline to the latter end of the period. Nevertheless, this is a forceful work of scholarship and an important addition to the growing body of work on historic swords and sword-use.

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Steve Tibble, *Templars: The Knights Who Made Britain*. London: Yale University Press, 2023. xviii + 334 pp. 31 illustrations, 5 maps. ISBN: 978-0300264456 (hardback). Price £25.00.

Following on from his *Crusader Armies* in 2018 to *The Crusader Strategy* in 2020, Steve Tibble has turned his attention to the most famous Crusaders of all: the Knights Templar. *Templars* also takes Tibble outside of the Latin East as he focuses on the Templar's activities in both Britain and the Holy Land, creating a dual history of the order. In some ways the book succeeds at this goal, and it certainly brings Tibble's considerable expertise on the subject matter to bear, but in other places its overall structure and focus becomes jumbled and results in a book that does not entirely live up to its potential.

Tibble has made a considerable study of the Crusades and his breadth of knowledge of the subject matter is on display in *Templars*. Readers will find an abridged history of the Crusading movement, largely focusing on the period after the formation of the Templars in the early twelfth century and continuing through the loss of the last vestiges of the Latin East to the Mamluks, with an emphasis on matters with a strong Templar presence. In addition, the book includes a history of Britain at the same time, breaking up the Crusade narrative by describing what was happening back in Europe and the impact that this could have on efforts to sustain Crusading in the east. This structural choice is a helpful reminder that Crusades did not happen in a vacuum. The emphasis Tibble places on the diplomatic role that Templars often fulfilled in Europe and how that desire for European peace fit in with their overall mission of directing European violence towards enemies in the Holy Land is particularly noteworthy.

The book's strongest part is its final third, which covers the suppression of the Templars. This event has long been dominated by a focus on King Philip IV's raids on

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Templar houses and the burning of the grand master of the order at the stake. In contrast, *Templars* focuses on how the suppression took place in Britain and Ireland, where the persecution was altogether lacklustre and lethargic. A process marked more by dragging of feet and lack of enthusiasm, in marked contrast with the salacious events occurring in France. Tibble's account shows how spurious the accusations levelled against the Templars were, including a very thorough analysis of one popular accusation and how a simple mistranslation by interrogators working in Yorkshire exposes the sham. Tibble emphasises how few actual Templars were left in Britain in 1307, most having died during the disastrous final years of the Crusader States, and how many of those that were left were too old or too sick, or both, to fight.

Templars also includes a section on the medieval myths about the Templars and how stories of heresy and satanism reflected wider conceptions of medieval sin and deviancy. This helps to fit the crimes the Templars were charged with into a much wider context and shows that while what happened to them was something of an abnormality, the accusations were taken from a script. Perhaps most interesting in this section is the discussion of how the Templars were far from a secretive organisation and in fact often played a central role in their community – making the likelihood that they hid vile Satanic practices functionally impossible.

Templars is not a book without flaws, however, and what problems it has are largely derived from its scope and its structure. The book's subtitle, *The Knights Who Made Britain*, and the opening sections declare that this is to be a history of the Templar order within Britain. It does not quite live up to this promise. In practice, the definition of Britain is quite vague. Excluding the section on the suppression of the Templars, the focus is almost entirely upon the Templars in England. To some degree this is reflective of how the Templars were organised, with the master in England having oversight of Ireland, Scotland, and Wales as well. However, the narrative of the book also takes a strongly English view – with chapters divided by the reigns of English monarchs, not Templar masters. Given the focus on England and English politics, it is a little disappointing that the relationship between the Templars in England and those in other lands ruled by English monarchs, such as Normandy or Gascony, are not brought up at all. The emphasis on English politics sometimes overshadows the history of the Templars. The chapter on the reign of King John, for example, includes several pages on John's personal failings with little to no reference to the Templars.

In general, the choice to pursue a chronological structure makes some of *Templars* arguments harder to follow. For example, discussion of the Templars role in negotiating peace on behalf of the English kings are split into short sections across several chapters for each English king. A better picture of the Templars' role could be shone by a thematic grouping that links each of these sections into one single argument.

Overall, *Templars* is a book that is strongest in its opening and closing chapters with a slightly too nebulous and messy middle that could have benefited from a thematic rather than chronological structure and a more coherent conception of what exactly its scope is. Still, there is something on offer here and the section on the trial of the Templars and its aftermath is a fascinating read. *Templars* is not a book that everyone needs to read, but it will offer a different perspective to anyone already interested in the subject.

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John Sadler, *Crucible of Conflict: Three Centuries of Border War. Dunbeath: Whittles Publishing Ltd, 2023. xi + 227 pp. 7 maps, 25 photographs. ISBN 978-1849955423 (paperback). Price £18.99.*

The history of Anglo-Scottish conflict has been partly brought to the attention of the masses by Hollywood, in particular the stories of William Wallace in the largely historically inaccurate *Braveheart* (dir. by Mel Gibson, 1995) and Robert Bruce in Netflix's *Outlaw King* (dir. by David Mackenzie, 2018). This decade of battles from c. 1296-1307, however, is merely a small over-romanticised part of a longer, bloodier conflict spanning multiple centuries. John Sadler, in *Crucible of Conflict: Three Centuries of Border Warfare*, aims to explore this wider history – with a focus on the conflict that occurred in the areas surrounding the border of Scotland and England. Within this, Sadler argues that Walter Scott's version of border history is 'pure fiction'; and questions whether borderers are 'a harder, more contentious breed'. The blurb of *Crucible of Conflict* boldly claims that the book will offer: 'a full interrogation of primary and secondary sources' and 'an in-depth look at how this history has shaped and affected the [Scottish] independence debate'. Whether Sadler achieves these two aims will form the basis for this review, along with a more general view of its contents and tone.

Crucible of Conflict is a very readable account of Anglo-Scottish border warfare, aided by Sadler's vivid and evocative descriptions of battlefield encounters. Moreover, Sadler's personal connection to the area increases the appeal of his account in comparison to a generic historical re-telling. This personal aspect is prevalent in the