

8

‘*Martyrum collegio sociandus haberet*’: Depictions
of the Military Orders’ Martyrs in the Holy Land,
1187–1291

Helen J. Nicholson

The military religious orders were founded to fight on behalf of their fellow Christians, in defence of pilgrims and Christian territory. They fought alongside and supported the crusaders in the Holy Land. New members of these institutions took the three monastic vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, underlining that their work was a spiritual undertaking, despite the fact that they shed blood. In an era in which warriors who died fighting non-Christians were increasingly depicted as martyrs, it is not surprising that writers of the 1120s and 1130s associated the first knight-brothers with martyrdom. But as the Franks of the Holy Land met with division and defeat, how far did this imagery continue? Did outsiders continue to depict the brothers of the military orders in this way?

Christianity has had its martyrs since the beginning of the faith. Even after external persecution ceased, martyrs were held up as examples of steadfast faith to inspire believers.¹ Some warriors who died fighting non-Christians were regarded as martyrs, such as St Oswald of Northumberland (d. 642), but Colin Morris has argued that these were exceptions, and that although it was widely agreed that warriors who died fighting for Christ would receive a heavenly reward, it was not until the eleventh century that such were generally described as martyrs.² Scholars concur that it was only during the First Crusade that Western Christian society decided that death in battle for Christ was martyrdom.³ Clerical

¹ See, for example, William H.C. Frend, ‘Martyrdom in East and West: The Saga of St George of Nubatia and England’, in Diana Wood (ed.), *Martyrs and Martyrologies*, Studies in Church History, 30 (Oxford, 1993), pp. 47–56; Shmuel Shepkaru, ‘To Die for God: Martyrs’ Heaven in Hebrew and Latin Crusade Narratives’, *Speculum*, 77 (2002), pp. 311–41.

² Colin Morris, ‘Martyrs on the Field of Battle before and during the First Crusade’, in Diana Wood (ed.), *Martyrs and Martyrologies*, Studies in Church History, 30 (Oxford, 1993), pp. 93–104.

³ Morris, ‘Martyrs on the Field of Battle’; H.E.J. Cowdrey, ‘Martyrdom and the First Crusade’, in Peter W. Edbury (ed.), *Crusade and Settlement: Papers Read at the First Conference of the Society for the Study of the Crusades and the Latin East and presented to R.C. Smail* (Cardiff, 1985), pp. 46–56; Jean Flori, ‘Mort et martyre des guerriers vers 1100. L’exemple de la première croisade’, *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale, Xe-XIIIe siècles*,

writers depicted the First and Second Crusades as an opportunity for martyrdom.⁴ Martyrdom continued to be an issue in crusading as its history developed, but Caroline Smith has pointed out that there was a tension between the traditional view of martyrdom – voluntarily and passively offering up one's life – and those who died in a combat situation where the necessary passivity could be called into question.⁵

Some of those writing in support of the early Templars in the 1120s and 1130s claimed that not only were the warriors of these orders fighting for Christ (like the crusaders) but if they died in battle, they could expect a martyr's reward. The opening paragraphs of the Templars' primitive rule of 1129 suggest this:

Ante omnia autem, quicumque es, o Christi miles, tam sanctam conversationem eligens, te circa professionem tuam oportet puram adhibere diligentiam ac firmam perseverantiam, que a Deo tam digna, sancta et sublimis esse dignoscitur; ut, si pure et perseveranter observetur, inter militares qui pro Christo animas suas dederunt, sortem obtinere mereberis.

[Above all things, whosoever would be a knight of Christ, choosing such holy orders, you in your profession of faith must unite pure diligence and firm perseverance, which is so worthy and so holy, and is known to be so noble, that if it is preserved untainted for ever, you will deserve to keep company with the warriors who gave their souls for Jesus Christ.]⁶

Abbot Bernard of Clairvaux drew parallels between the Templars and martyrs in his letter *de laude novae militiae*, written to encourage the early Templars:

Securi igitur procedite milites, et intrepido animo inimicos crucis Christi propellite, certi quia neque mors, neque vita poterunt vos separare a caritate Dei, quæ est in Christo. Jesu, illud sane vobiscum in omni periculo replicantes: sive vivimus, sive morimur Domini sumus. Quam gloriosi revertuntur victores de prælio! Quam beati moriuntur martyres in prælio! Gaude fortis athleta, si vivis et vincis in Domino: sed magis exsulta et gloriare, si moreris et jungeris

34:134 (1991), pp. 121–39; William J. Purkis, *Crusading Spirituality in the Holy Land and Iberia, c.1097–c.1187* (Woodbridge, 2008), pp. 42–5.

⁴ Shepkaru, 'To Die for God', pp. 311–41: here 336–7; Purkis, *Crusading Spirituality*, p. 81.

⁵ Caroline Smith, 'Martyrdom and Crusading in the Thirteenth Century: Remembering the Dead of Louis IX's Crusades', *Al-Masaq: Islam and the Medieval Mediterranean*, 15 (2003), pp. 89–196, especially 189–90. See also Caroline Smith, *Crusading in the Age of Joinville* (Aldershot, 2006), pp. 98–103, 139–49, 194–5.

⁶ *Il Corpus normativo templare: Edizione dei testi romanzi con traduzione e commento in Italiano*, ed. Giovanni Amatuccio (Galatina, 2009), p. 404; see also *La Règle du Temple*, ed. Henri de Curzon (Paris, 1886), p. 12; Judith M. Upton-Ward (trans.), *The Rule of the Templars* (Woodbridge, 1991), paragraph 2: amended by the author.

Domino. Vita quidem fructuosa, et victoria gloriosa; sed utrique mors sacra jure præponitur. Nam si beati qui in Domino moriuntur; num multo magis qui pro Domino moriuntur?

[Therefore, knights, go forth confidently, and with a stalwart heart drive back the foes of the Christ's cross, certain that neither death nor life is able to separate you from the love of God which is in Jesus Christ, repeating in every danger: 'Whether we live or die, we are the Lord's'. How glorious they return as victors from battle! How blessed are those who die there as martyrs! Rejoice, strong athlete, if you live and conquer in the Lord; but exult and rejoice even more if you die and are united to the Lord. Life is certainly fruitful and victory glorious, but a holy death is rightfully more important than either. For if they are blessed who live in the Lord, how much more are they who die for the Lord?]⁷

Bernard went on to explain that the Templars were '*agnis mitiores, et leonibus ferociores*' [gentler than lambs, fiercer than lions], men of peace who, when at war, '*hostes velut oves reputant*' [regard their enemies as sheep], believing like the Maccabees that victory does not depend on numbers: '*quod et frequentissime experti sunt, ita ut plerumque quasi persecutus sit unus mille, et duo fugarint decem millia*' – so that often one may put a thousand and two put ten thousand to flight.⁸

The purpose of such documents was as much to educate and guide as to depict actuality. Abbot Bernard intended to give the Templars spiritual direction, to teach them how to imitate Christ and to die for their fellow Christians.⁹ In the same decade as these two documents were composed the pseudonymous Hugo Peccator wrote a sermon to the Templars '*pugnare et vincere et coronari in Christo Jhesu Domino nostro*' [to fight, conquer and be crowned in Christ Jesus our lord], telling the Templars that '*qui querit coronam non subterfugiat pugnam*' [anyone seeking a crown must not avoid fighting]. The context indicates that the crown of martyrdom is meant, the reward for dying for the Christian faith promised in Revelation 2:10.¹⁰ This suggests that the Templars were familiar with this concept.

⁷ 'Liber ad milites Templi de laude novae militiae', from *S. Bernardi opera*, vol. 3: *Tractatus et opuscula*, ed. Jean Leclercq and H. M. Rochais (Rome, 1963), pp. 205–39: here 214–15, translation adapted by the author from 'In praise of the New Knighthood', Conrad Greenia (trans.), in *The Works of Bernard of Clairvaux*, vol. 7: *Treatises III* (Kalamazoo, 1977), p. 130.

⁸ 'Liber ad milites Templi', Ch. 4, p. 221.

⁹ Jean Leclercq, 'Saint Bernard's Attitude Towards War', *Studies in Medieval Cistercian History*, 2 (1976), pp. 1–39, at 22–5; Malcolm Barber, *The New Knighthood: A History of the Order of the Temple* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 44–9; Purkis, *Crusading Spirituality*, pp. 101–11; Helen Nicholson, *A Brief History of the Knights Templar* (London, 2010), pp. 27–8.

¹⁰ Jean Leclercq, 'Un document sur les débuts des Templiers', *Revue de l'histoire ecclésiastique*, 52 (1957), pp. 86–9, at 88. For a summary of the debates over the authorship of this text see Luis García-Guijarro Ramos, 'Ecclesiastical Reform and the Origins of the

Much of the language these writers used was drawn from the Bible: the athlete (2 Timothy 2:5), one man defeating a thousand (Deuteronomy 32:30), the contrast of lion and lamb (Isaiah 11:6), and the concept that death for Christ was gain (Philippians 1:21). The early accounts of those who died as martyrs, witnessing to their Christian faith (the Hellenistic Greek word *μάρτυρ* means 'witness'), describe the martyrs as athletes,¹¹ rejoicing in their death,¹² *milites Christi* [soldiers of Christ]¹³ waging spiritual battles.¹⁴ These are the terms which contemporary commentators on the crusades used to describe crusading martyrs, and they are the terms we should expect to find in any description of martyrs from the military religious orders.

Recent years have seen increasing research into the military orders' spirituality.¹⁵ The military orders encouraged devotion to martyr-saints.¹⁶ David Woods has noted that that the Templars may have translated relics of the supposed early fourth-century military martyr St Varus from Jezreel in Palestine (Le Petit Génin, held by the Templars before 1187) to northern Italy, suggesting that they saw him as a possible role model for members of the order.¹⁷ Nicholas Morton has explored the parallels that contemporaries drew between the crusaders, the military religious orders and the Maccabees, holy warriors of the second century BC, of whom some had been martyred for their faith.¹⁸ But at present there is no direct evidence that the Templars or Hospitallers promoted any of their own members as

Military Orders: New Perspectives on Hugh of Payns' Letter', in Judith M. Upton-Ward (ed.), *The Military Orders*, vol. 4: *On Land and By Sea* (Aldershot, 2008), pp. 77–83.

¹¹ *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, ed. Herbert Musurillo (Oxford, 1972), pp. 26–7, 32–3 (Papyrus), 66–7, 72–3 (martyrs of Lyon), 164–5 (Pionius).

¹² *Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, pp. 26–7 (Carpus), 32–3 (Pamphilus), 72–3, 78–9 (martyrs of Lyon), 126–7 (Perpetua and Felicitas), 180–1 (Fructuosus), 204–5 (Marianus and James), 226–7 (Montanus and Lucius), 248–9 (Maximilian).

¹³ *Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, pp. 204–5, line 26 (Marianus and James).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 214–15, line 1 (Montanus and Lucius).

¹⁵ For example, Sebastián Salvado, 'Templar liturgy and Devotion in the Crown of Aragon', in Helen J. Nicholson (ed.), *On the Margins of Crusading: The Military Orders, the Papacy and the Christian World* (Farnham, 2011), pp. 31–43; Sebastián Ernesto Salvadó, 'The Liturgy of the Holy Sepulchre and the Templar Rite: Edition and Analysis of the Jerusalem Ordinal (Rome, Bib. Vat., Barb. Lat. 659), with a comparative study of the Acre Breviary (Paris, Bib. Nat., MS. Latin 10478)', PhD thesis, Stanford University, 2011; Jochen Schenk, 'Some Hagiographical Evidence for Templar Spirituality, Religious Life and Conduct', *Revue Mabillon*, 22 (2001), pp. 99–119.

¹⁶ Helen Nicholson, 'Saints venerated in the Military Orders', in Roman Czaja and Jürgen Sarnowsky (eds), *Selbstbild und Selbstverständnis der geistlichen Ritterorden*, *Ordines Militares Colloquia Torunensia Historica XIII* (Toruń, 2005), pp. 91–113.

¹⁷ David Woods, 'Varus of Egypt: A Fictitious Military Martyr', *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, 20 (1996), pp. 175–200: at 200.

¹⁸ Nicholas Morton, 'The Defence of the Holy Land and the memory of the Maccabees', *Journal of Medieval History*, 36 (3) (2010), pp. 275–93.

military martyrs.¹⁹ I have suggested elsewhere that this was because these orders preferred not to glorify individuals (to the potential detriment of discipline) but instead publicized the piety and devotion of all brothers equally.²⁰ However, their contemporaries did promote individual brothers as martyrs, as the examples which follow will demonstrate.

Before the Third Crusade: 1187–89

The first extensive descriptions of the members of the military religious orders as martyrs on the battlefield arose from Saladin's conquests of 1187–89. These conquests were reported in various letters to Western Europe, and subsequently written up by western commentators. As the military religious orders played a leading role in events, commentators highlighted their feats and deaths on the battlefield, starting with the battle at the spring of the Cresson on 1 May 1187 where the author of the *Itinerarium peregrinorum* recorded the death of one Templar, the knight Jacquelin de Maillé.

*Quidam Templarius, officio miles, natione Turonicus, nomine Jakelinus de Mailliaco, quadam virtutis præminetia in se omnium provocabat insultus; cæteris autem commilitonibus suis qui quingenti æstimabantur, vel captis, vel interfectis, belli totius impetum solus sustinuit, et pro lege Dei sui athleta gloriosus effulsit ... mori pro Christo non timuit, sed telis, lapidibus, lanceis, oppressus magis quam victus, vix tandem occumbens, ad cælos feliciter cum palma martyrii triumphator migravit. Mors quidem mitior, et ad sensum dolor non venerat, cum unius viri gladius tantam circumjacentis turbæ struxisset coronam. Dulce viro sic occumbere, ubi victor ipse in medio, et in circuitu impii, quos dextera victrice consumpist. Et quia in equo nitido et armis albicantibus tunc casu puginator incesserat, Gentiles qui Sanctum Georgium in hujusmodi habitu militare noverant, se militem nitentis armaturæ Christianorum propugnatores, interfecisse jactabant.*²¹

¹⁹ Helen Nicholson, *Templars, Hospitallers and Teutonic Knights: Images of the Military Orders, 1128–1291* (Leicester, 1993), pp. 118–20; Tom Licence, 'The Templars and the Hospitallers, Christ and the Saints', *Crusades*, 4 (2005), pp. 39–57, at 52–3; Schenk, 'Some Hagiographical Evidence', pp. 100, 102.

²⁰ Nicholson, *Templars, Hospitallers*, pp. 118–20.

²¹ *Itinerarium Peregrinorum et gesta Regis Ricardi, auctore, ut videtur, Ricardo, canonico Sanctae Trinitatis Londoniensis*, ed. William Stubbs, *Chronicles and Memorials of the Reign of Richard I*, RS 38 (2 vols, London, 1864), vol. 1, book 1, Ch. 2, pp. 7–8; *Das Itinerarium peregrinorum: eine zeitgenössische englische Chronik zum dritten Kreuzzug in ursprünglicher Gestalt*, ed. Hans Eberhard Mayer (Stuttgart, 1962), pp. 247–9; this and subsequent translations by Helen Nicholson.

[A certain Templar – a knight by profession, of Touraine by nation, Jacquelin de Maillé by name – brought all the enemy assault on himself through his outstanding courage. While the rest of his fellow knights (estimated to number 500) had either been captured or killed, he bore all the force of the battle alone and shone out as a glorious athlete for the law of his God ... he was not afraid to die for Christ. At long last, crushed rather than conquered by spears, stones and lances, he sank to the ground and joyfully passed to heaven with the martyr's palm, triumphant. It was indeed a gentle death with no place for sorrow, when one man's sword had constructed such a great crown for himself from the crowd laid all around him. Death is sweet when the victor lies encircled by the impious people he has slain with his victorious right hand. And because it so happened that the warrior had been riding a white horse and had white armour and weapons, the Gentiles, who knew that St George had this appearance in battle, boasted that they had killed the Knight of Shining Armour, the protector of the Christians.]

The imagery in this account is similar to that used by Abbot Bernard and Hugo Peccator. Jacquelin has not only won a crown but has forged it himself through his actions. He has won the martyr's palm, a reference to the vast throng in Revelation 7:9, robed in white and holding palms in their hands, who 'have passed through the great ordeal' and now 'stand before the throne of God and worship him night and day in his temple' (Revelation 10:14). Jacquelin is God's *athleta* or champion, his death is glorious and an occasion for joy rather than sorrow. Like Abbot Bernard's Templar who can overcome a thousand, Jacquelin fights overwhelming odds, and although he is killed he is not overcome.

Furthermore, Jacquelin is compared to St George, preeminent among military saints. Although St George himself did not die in battle but as a result of vicious tortures, he gained a military role in crusader legend. According to Iacopo da Varazze's *Legenda Aurea*, St George appeared at the siege of Jerusalem during the First Crusade, '*armis albus indutus et cruce rubea insignitus*' [bearing white arms and marked with a red cross]. The besiegers did not dare climb their own siege ladders, but George signalled to them to climb up after him and capture the city; and so the city was taken.²² Although the *Legenda Aurea* was written after the *Itinerarium peregrinorum*, a similar legend may have already been in circulation.

The battle of 1 May 1187 was also described in the *Libellus de expugnatione terrae sanctae*, but this time focusing on the Hospitallers more than the Templars. The master of the Temple (unnamed) is depicted urging his brothers to remember their fathers the Maccabees ('*memores estote patrum vestrorum Machabaeorum*') and that they were always victors because numbers and arms are less important than faith and observing God's mandates. The Templars respond that they are ready to die for Christ, as He redeemed them with His precious death. The master

²² Iacopo da Varazze, *Legenda Aurea*, ed. Giovanni Paolo Maggioni, vol. 1 (Florence, 1998), pp. 391–8, especially 398.

of the Hospital (also unnamed) tells his brothers that they are a chosen people, a holy people, and eternal because they will reign with the Eternal. He urges them to remember how Abraham routed the four kings with 300 men and the king of Salem offered him bread and wine (Genesis 14): likewise they will meet the king of Justice who offers them the bread of eternal satiety and the wine of perpetual redemption.²³

A desperate battle follows. At last the master of the Temple, seeing that there is no hope of survival, flees the field. The master of the Hospital remains:

*Vir pius et bone misericordie visceribus semper affluens, ne coronam praesentem perderet, nec aliquid de mercede aeternae retributionis minueret, instabat intrepidus; et quoniam perfecta caritas foris timorem mittit, athleta victoriosus millia populi se circumdantis non timuit, quia laboris sui remuneratorem mente et spiritu in caelo vidit. Perforatus igitur undique ictibus sagittarum acutissimis et proprio cruore perfusus, insuper data lancea per medium pectoris, martir et victor capitis abscissione Deum glorificavit. Proh dolor!*²⁴

[That pious man, who was always abounding with the bowels of good mercy, lest he lose the present crown nor lessen anything of the wages of eternal reward, persisted undaunted; and since perfect charity casts out fear, the victorious athlete did not fear the thousands of people surrounding him, for he saw in mind and spirit the remunerator of his labour in Heaven. Therefore, perforated on all sides with the most piercing arrow-blows, and covered in his own blood, besides a lance through the middle of his chest, the martyr and victor glorified God with his head being sliced off. Alas!]

The imagery is as in the *Itinerarium peregrinorum*: the master of the Hospital has won a crown, is a victorious athlete, has no fear even in the face of overwhelming odds, and he falls dead at last from his wounds, undefeated. He is specifically termed a martyr. However, unlike the *Itinerarium*, where there was no place for grief, the author goes on to bemoan the loss of this holy man who helped orphans, lodged the sick, gave alms and cared for the poor: ‘*quid facietis capite ablato?*’ – what will these people do now that they have lost their head? The show of grief reflects the pastoral role of the Hospital in caring for the physical needs of the poor and sick; in the same way the compilers of the acts of the early Christian martyrs pondered

²³ ‘De expugnatione terrae sanctae per Saladinum’, in *Radulphi de Coggeshall Chronicon Anglicanum*, ed. Joseph Stevenson, RS 66 (London, 1875), p. 212; ‘Anonymi Chronicon Terrae Sanctae sive Libellus de expugnatione’, in *Quellenbeiträge zur Geschichte der Kreuzzüge*, ed. Hans Prutz (Danzig, 1876), pp. 61–2

²⁴ ‘De expugnatione’, pp. 214–15; ‘Anonymi Chronicon’, p. 63.

the grief of Christians who were ‘*velut derelicti sine pastore fratres*’ [brothers abandoned, without their shepherd] when their leader had been martyred.²⁵

The *De expugnatione* next describes the deaths of Brother Jacquelin de Maillé, described as marshal of the Temple, and Brother Henry of the Hospital, ‘*miles et preliator fortissimus*’. They are called ‘*bellator*’ and ‘*gladiator*’, and compared to a lioness and a wild boar, whom their enemies did not dare approach. Instead, the enemy threw javelins, spears and arrows at these ‘*martyribus Christi*’ [martyrs of Christ]:

*at illi gaudenter susceperunt ictus, ut mererentur accipere coronam vitae. Bellatores igitur incliti et amici Dei pondere tanti laboris fatigati, atque multitudine armorum oppressi, martyrio Christum glorificantes, glorioso fine quieverunt.*²⁶

[And they joyfully received the blows, so that they might deserve to receive the crown of life. Therefore, the renowned warriors and friends of God, fatigued by the weight of such labour and weighed down by the multitude of weapons, glorifying Christ through martyrdom, in a glorious ending found rest.]

In short, the *De expugnatione* depicts the master of the Hospital, a Templar and a Hospitaller as martyrs, but gives particular emphasis to the master of the Hospital and his caring vocation as well as his military role.

The authorship of these two works is unclear. The content of the *Itinerarium peregrinorum* indicates that the author wrote before autumn 1192 and was probably English. As it does not include information which a Templar would have known and makes errors that a Templar would not have made, the *Itinerarium peregrinorum* cannot have been written by a Templar.²⁷ Nevertheless, its pro-Templar anecdotes may have been based on information supplied by the Templars. The *De expugnatione* may be a compilation of contemporary eyewitness and later material; it may have been written in the early thirteenth century by an Englishman or it may have been an *excitatio*, an account designed to encourage recruitment for the Third Crusade; but its authorship and compilation is currently under debate.²⁸ As Jacquelin de Maillé was not Templar marshal (two contemporary

²⁵ *Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, pp. 182–3, line 11 (Fructuosus).

²⁶ ‘De expugnatione’, pp. 215–16; ‘Anonymi Chronicon’, p. 64.

²⁷ This subject is too wide to be discussed within the confines of this paper. For detailed discussion of the authorship of this text see Hannes Möhring, ‘Eine Chronik aus der Zeit des dritten Kreuzzugs: das sogenannte Itinerarium Peregrinorum 1’, *Innsbrucker Historische Studien*, 5 (1982), pp. 149–67; *The Chronicle of the Third Crusade: The Itinerarium Peregrinorum and the Gesta Regis Ricardi*, trans. Helen J. Nicholson (Aldershot, 1997), pp. 7–9.

²⁸ Alan V. Murray, ‘Libellus de expugnatione Terrae Sanctae per Saladinum expeditione’, in Alan V. Murray (ed.), *The Crusades: An Encyclopedia* (4 vols, Santa Barbara, CA, 2006), vol. 3, p. 725; John H. Pryor, ‘Two excitations for the Third Crusade: the letters of brother Thiery of the Temple’, *Mediterranean Historical Review*, 25 (2010),

letters reveal that the marshal was Brother Robert de Frenellus, who also died on 1 May), it is likely that the present version of the *De expugnatione* was compiled some years after events.²⁹ Although neither work was written by a member of the military orders both may have been influenced by them.

The next event in the *Itinerarium peregrinorum* in which the military orders are described as martyrs occurred after the battle of Hattin, 4 July 1187, when Saladin ordered that all the Templar and Hospitaller captives be executed: although the *Itinerarium peregrinorum* mentions only the Templars.³⁰ The *Itinerarium* describes the actions of one Templar and a miracle which followed. No other work mentions this Templar except for the Latin continuation of William of Tyre's chronicle, whose author appears to have taken the account from the *Itinerarium peregrinorum*.³¹

*Inter hos Christi milites, Templarius quidem nomine Nicolaus, ita cæteris subeundæ mortis persuaserat amorem, quod aliis prævenire certantibus, ipse martyrii gloriam vix primus poterat obtinere, quod tamen summopere affectabat. Nec defuit miraculosa divinæ miserationis potentia; nam per tres noctes proximas cum sanctorum martyrum corpora adhuc insepulta jacerent, cælestis radius ignis desuper manifestus infulsit.*³²

[Among these knights of Christ a certain Templar named Nicholas had been so successful in persuading the rest to undergo death willingly that the others struggled to go in front of him and he only just succeeded in obtaining the glory of martyrdom first – which was an honour he very much strove for. Nor was the miraculous power of divine mercy missing. A ray of celestial light shone down clearly on the bodies of the holy martyrs during the three following nights, while they were still lying unburied.]

pp. 147–68; Malcolm Barber, *The Crusader States* (New Haven and London, 2012), p. 421 n. 31. John H. Pryor of the University of Sydney and his research team are producing a new edition of the *De expugnatione*; at the time of writing this has not yet been published.

²⁹ See Jochen Burgdorf, *The Central Convent of Hospitallers and Templars: History, Organisation and Personnel (1099/1120–1310)* (Leiden, 2008), pp. 576–7.

³⁰ In contrast to 'De expugnatione', p. 228; 'Anonymi Chronicon', p. 73.

³¹ *Die lateinische Fortsetzung Wilhelms von Tyrus*, ed. M. Salloch (Leipzig, 1934), p. 70. The later account of Constable Smpad of Cilician Armenia mentioned the miraculous light which followed the slaughter of the Templars: Sirarpie Der Nersessian, 'The Armenian Chronicle of the Constable Smpad or of the "Royal Historian"', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 13 (1959), pp. 143–68, at 152.

³² *Itinerarium Peregrinorum*, book 1, Ch. 5, pp. 16–17; *Das Itinerarium peregrinorum*, p. 260.

In this anecdote, the Templars went willingly to their deaths in the manner of the early Christian martyrs.³³ The bright light shining around them also had a long tradition in Christian martyrologies.³⁴

These defeats were also described by other contemporaries. A letter of Pope Urban III to the archbishop of Canterbury on 3 September 1187, based on information from Gerard de Ridefort, master of the Temple, after the battle of 1 May 1187, mentions the deaths of the master of the Hospital, Marshal Robert Frenellus of the Temple and Jacquelin de Maillé, but does not specifically refer to martyrdom.³⁵ A letter from the Genoese to Pope Urban III described the Templar Order at the battle of Hattin on 4 July 1187, '*sicut leo fortis in hostes concurrens*' [charging like a strong lion into the enemy], but did not mention the deeds of any individuals or call them martyrs.³⁶ Brother Terricus of the Temple wrote to the commanders and brothers of the order in the West soon after the defeats of 1 May and 4 July 1187, but he said nothing about the actions of individual Templars, only that 60 were killed on 1 May, and 230 executed after the defeat of 4 July, and that he himself escaped from the battlefield.³⁷

The occasion of the final depiction of military orders as martyrs during this period was the battle of 4 October 1189, at the siege of Acre. The knighthood of the Temple, '*quam nulla insignior ... cædi devota*' [none are more renowned ... devoted to slaughter], charged into the enemy, but as the other Christian troops did not follow them, they were surrounded and cut to pieces:

*Ibi Magister Militiæ Templi Gerardus de Bidefordia, cujus supra fecimus mentionem, cæsus occumbit. Felix cui Dominus tantam gloriam contulit ut lauream, quam tot bellis meruerat, martyrum collegio sociandus haberet.*³⁸

[There the master of the Temple, Gerard de Ridefort, whom we mentioned above, fell slain. Happy man! The Lord 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.]

³³ For example, *Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, pp. 12–13 (Polycarp), 130–1 (Perpetua and Felicitas), 162–3 (Pionius).

³⁴ For two late third- or early fourth-century examples: *Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, pp. xxxiv–v, 210–11 lines 17–18 (Passio of Saints Marianus and James), pp. 216–17, lines 8–10 (Passio of Montanus and Lucius).

³⁵ Girardus Cambrensis, 'De instructione principum', in *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera*, ed. James F. Dimock, J. S. Brewer and George F. Warner, RS 21 (8 vols, London, 1861–91), vol. 8, pp. 201–2.

³⁶ *Gesta Henrici Secundi: The Chronicle of the Reigns of Henry II and Richard I*, ed. William Stubbs, RS 49 (2 vols, London, 1867), vol. 2, p. 11.

³⁷ Roger of Howden, *Chronica*, ed. William Stubbs, RS 51 (4 vols, London, 1868–71), vol. 2, pp. 324–5.

³⁸ *Itinerarium*, book 1, Ch. 29, p. 70; *Das Itinerarium peregrinorum*, pp. 313–14.

Urged by his companions to flee, he refused to abandon them although he could have escaped had he wished. The author specifically described Gerard as a martyr; he is '*felix*' [fortunate, happy] and in losing his life in Christ's service he has won the laurel wreath of victory.

Other writers described this event. Ambroise's vernacular verse chronicle described Gerard as '*cil qui dist la bone parole / Que lui vint de la preuz eschole*' (he who spoke words of good, which he obtained from the School of courage: lines 3018–19), but does not specifically state that he was a martyr.³⁹ A contemporary Latin verse account of the 1189–91 siege of Acre by one Richard, canon of St Victor of Paris, does not use the term martyr to describe Gerard, although the references to '*constans mente, probus vita*' might imply it. However, it calls the Templars' losses at Hattin '*martirium*' [martyrdom], and the whole order is called '*sacer*', holy or sacred.

Hic prius occubuit dux Templi sive magister,
 Nominis interpres indiciumque sui;
 Ardea quippe gerens Gerardus erat, quia constans
 Mente, probus vita, Marte timendus erat,
 Vexillumque gerens cecidit marescalcus ab hoste:
 Hic signi tulimus dampna virique simul.
 Exclamare libet, dum tanti mencio casus
 Occurrit, lugens signa suumque ducem,
 Dum Templi sacrae legionis damna recordeo
 Et justis totiens fata sinistra viris,
 Erumpunt oculis lacrimae, quia saepe periculum
 Haec acies fuso sanguine sola tulit.
 Nempe satis loquitur urbs ipsa Tiberias hujus
 Martirium, damnum flebile, triste scelus,
 Sed nec Petulia cladem tacet ejus, ubi tot
 Effudit proceres barbara turba viros.
 Insuper extremum Tholomaidis arva cruorem
 Templi senserunt rore sacrata pio.
 Sed non pressuras oneris exponere possum,
 Quas totiens Templi tam sacer ordo tulit.⁴⁰

[Here earlier fell the leader or master of the Temple/ Whose name indicated his role:/ If 'Gerard' means 'gerens ardea', bearer of hardships, he certainly bore them: with constant/ Mind, virtuous life, he was feared in battle:/ Bearing the

³⁹ *The History of the Holy War: Ambroise's Estoire de la Guerre Sainte*, ed. Marianne Ailes and Malcolm Barber (2 vols, Woodbridge, 2003), vol. 1, p. 48.

⁴⁰ 'Versus ex libro magistri Ricardi canonici Sancti Victori Parisensis', in Hans Prutz (ed.), 'Ein zeitgenössisches Gedicht auf die Belagerung Acons', in *Forschungen zur Deutschen Geschichte*, 21 (1881), pp. 449–94: here 478–9, lines 767–86.

banner, the marshal fell from the battle;/ Here we suffered the loss of banner and man together/ It is permitted to cry out, when mention of such a great disaster/ Occurs, mourning the banners and their leader,/ While I record the losses of the holy legion of the Temple/ And so many misfortunes befalling upright men,/ The tears burst from my eyes; because often/ Their battle line bore alone danger and loss of blood./ Truly that city of Tiberias has enough to say of this/ Martyrdom, lamentable loss, sad crime/ But nor is Hattin silent about its slaughter, where/ The barbarous mob threw down so many illustrious men./ Moreover, the region of Acre experienced the most extreme slaughter,/ Consecrated with the Temple's pious blood./ But I cannot expound the substantial pressures/ Which the so-holy order of the Temple so often bore.]

Unlike the *Itinerarium* and Ambrose, Richard's account does not mention the Templars' tactical error in this battle.

To sum up: in response to Saladin's victories of 1187–89, individual writers described individual members of the military orders, particularly the order of the Temple, as martyrs. Obviously, as almost all the Christian warriors were killed, these martyrdom-accounts could not have been based on eyewitness observation. They are more likely to reflect attempts to rebuild morale after these defeats and to recruit secular warriors for the Third Crusade and new members for the Temple and the Hospital.

After the Third Crusade: The Thirteenth Century

Over the next few decades, not all commentators agreed that the brothers' martyrdom was a sufficient end in itself. In the early decades of the thirteenth century, Guiot de Provins, trouvère turned monk, admired the Templars' courage and the Hospitallers' good works, but considered that both orders had become so rich and powerful that they had lost sight of their original vocation. Hugh, lord of Berzé, wrote that the military orders gave up their bodies to martyrdom and protected the Holy Land, but their privileges enabled them to protect murderers and other criminals.⁴¹

Although the devastating defeat at the battle of La Forbie in 1244 was widely reported in the West it did not inspire any accounts of individual knight-brothers' prowess. The next major occasion for descriptions of individual deaths in battle against Muslims was the battle of Mansurah in 1250, during King Louis IX of France's first crusade. Even here, while Latin commentators agreed that the military

⁴¹ 'La Bible', in *Les œuvres de Guiot de Provins, poète lyrique et satirique*, ed. John Orf (Manchester, 1915), pp. 62–9, lines 1695–1926; *La 'Bible' au seigneur de Berzé*, ed. Félix Lecoy (Paris, 1938), pp. 34–5, lines 261–93.

orders had opposed the engagement,⁴² were not to blame for the defeat and had fought bravely, there were no descriptions of individual brothers dying as martyrs.⁴³ Although a letter from the Hospitallers to the West described all those involved as martyrs, it did not single out the military orders.⁴⁴ The term ‘martyr’ was reserved for the English nobleman William Longespee.⁴⁵

An Anglo-Norman poem, ‘La Chanson de bon William Longespee’, described William’s death at Mansurah.⁴⁶ The word ‘martyr’ is not used, but William and his fellow warriors were ‘bon’, ‘gentil’, ‘hardiz’, ‘pruz’: brave, noble, bold and doughty,⁴⁷ and William was compared to the Christian hero Roland.⁴⁸ The Templars played a significant role in the poem, fighting alongside William, but the Hospitallers – who also suffered heavy losses in this battle – were not mentioned. Two Templars were named: William, master of the Temple, and Frer Richard or Wymound of Ascalon, who had been with Earl Richard (of Cornwall) when he captured Ascalon.⁴⁹

In this account, the master of the Temple and William Longespee are first into the fray (line 111). When the master’s horse is killed, another Templar gives up his horse to him and is then killed by a Muslim. St Michael carries his soul to heaven: ‘*L’alme enport seint Michel en parays chauntant/ Ou serra en glorie od Jhesu toutpussant*’ (lines 178–9). In contrast, when the master receives a mortal wound he leaves the battlefield, is confessed, repents and receives communion, then dies and his soul departs to God: ‘*sa alme fu richement a Dieu presenté*’ (line 204). The rest all die on the battlefield: ‘*Jhesu les almes ad en parais*’ (Jesus has their souls in paradise: line 460). Only Alexander Giffard escapes to tell the tale, and Simon Lloyd suggested that the poem was composed partly to defend Alexander from a charge of deserting his fellow crusaders in battle.⁵⁰

When the Templars’ castle of Saphet surrendered to Baibars in 1266, the Templar garrison and two Franciscan friars who were in the castle were executed, despite an earlier guarantee of safe conduct. The Franciscan Fidenzio of Padua, vicar provincial of his order in the Holy Land, called them martyrs and recorded that a

⁴² Matthew Paris, *Chronica Majora*, ed. Henry R. Luard, RS 57 (7 vols, London, 1872–83), vol. 5, pp. 148–9, 150.

⁴³ Caroline Smith also notes that many contemporary writers referred to the martyrdom of the group, rather than describing individuals as martyrs: *Crusading in the Age of Joinville*, pp. 141–2.

⁴⁴ Matthew Paris, *Chronica Majora*, vol. 6, p. 195, line 4: *veri martires*.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 192: *praemia martirii in caelis adepturus*.

⁴⁶ ‘La Chanson de bon William Longespee’ in Simon Lloyd (ed.), ‘William Longespee II: The Making of an English Crusading Hero. Part II’, in *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, 36 (1992), pp. 79–125, at 110–21.

⁴⁷ ‘Bon William Longespee’, lines 14, 39, 69, 152, 431.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, line 217.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, lines 147, 223–6.

⁵⁰ Lloyd, ‘William Longespee II’, pp. 92–3, 98–9.

great light shone over their bodies at night.⁵¹ Fidenzio's description of these deaths was in the tradition of the early Christian martyrs: peaceful people slaughtered for their faith by the non-Christian enemy because they refused to give up their faith, not military men fighting to the death on the battlefield. Although he recorded that the garrison was Templar, Fidenzio referred to the victims throughout as *Cristiani* rather than *Templarii*: the important factor was their religion, not their order.

The loss of Acre, 1291

With the fall of Acre in 1291 to the Mamluk sultan of Egypt, Al-Ashraf Khalil, the military orders returned to the spotlight as active warriors. The most contemporary account of the disaster that survives is that composed by the Master of the Hospital, John de Villiers, on Cyprus just a few days later. The Master reported the deaths of Brother Matthew de Clermont, marshal of the Hospital, and of Master William de Beaujeu of the Temple, praising the courage and military skill of Brother Matthew and praying that God be merciful to him ('*il estoit nobles et preus et sages as armes. Diex li soit deboinaires!*'), but – like the reports immediately after the battles of 1187 – did not declare that any of those fallen were martyrs.⁵² In summer or autumn 1291 a writer in the city of Erfurt in Thuringia included an account of the loss of Acre in the *Liber cronicorum sive annalis Erfordensis*. The date of the piece can be fixed because the author states that Sidon and Castle Pilgrim were still in Christian hands: in fact Sidon fell to the sultan of Egypt on 14 July 1291 and Castle Pilgrim on 14 August.⁵³ This account describes how, after the city had fallen, a good 7000 people fled to the Templars' house, and held out there for another 12 days.

*Sed cum Templarii et alii qui illuc confugerant se viderent deficere in expensis nec sperarent humano subsidio liberari, oracionibus devotis et confessionibus premissis, de necessitate facientes virtutem, Iesu Christo suas animas committentes, in Sarracenos strennuissime irruerunt et multos valde ex adversariis prostraverunt. Sed tandem ipsi omnes a Sarracenis finaliter sunt occisi.*⁵⁴

[But when the Templars and the others who had fled there realised that they had no supplies and no hope of being supplied by human help, they made a virtue of necessity. With devoted prayer and after confession, committing their souls

⁵¹ Fidenzio of Padua, 'Liber recuperationis Terre Sanctae', in *Projets de Croisade (v. 1290- v. 1330)*, ed. Jacques Paviot (Paris, 2008), pp. 87–90.

⁵² *Cartulaire général de l'ordre des Hospitaliers de S. Jean de Jérusalem, 1100–1310*, ed. Joseph Delaville le Roulx (4 vols, Paris, 1894–1905), vol. 3, p. 593: no. 4157.

⁵³ Matthias Eifler, 'Liber cronicorum sive annalis Erfordensis', in Graeme Dunphy (ed.) *Encyclopedia of the Medieval Chronicle* (2 vols, Leiden, 2010), vol. 2, p. 1023.

⁵⁴ 'Cronica S. Petri Erfordensis Moderna', *MGH SS*, vol. 30, pp. 424–5.

to Jesus Christ, they rushed out most energetically on the Saracens and strongly threw down many of their adversaries. But at last they were all finally killed by the Saracens.]

Again, this does not describe any of the fallen as martyrs, but by indicating their piety implies that they might be.

Accounts written a few months after the loss of the city were more explicit. The anonymous *Excidium Aconis*, written soon after the fall of the city, had little good to say about the Christian defence, but praised Brother Matthew, marshal of the Hospital. The work depicts Brother Matthew leading the Christians out to fight, and encouraging the Christians who had been fleeing to join him so that almost all the Saracens fled him as the sheep flee the wolf (*'sicut oves lupum fugiebant'*)⁵⁵ – similar to Abbot Bernard's image of the Templars as lions pursuing sheep. Brother Matthew, *'arte mirabilis et agilitate virtuosa'* [with marvellous skill and agile valour] and the other Christians drove the Saracens back through the breach they had earlier made in the city wall.⁵⁶ The battle raged on, until at last the Christians made their last stand. Brother Matthew, seeing that all the Hospitaller knights were dead and the secular knights had fled, put spur to horse and charged ahead of the army. The enemy fled him like sheep flee the wolf but, at last, exhausted, he made a stand and was struck to the ground by the enemy's javelins: *'sicque fidelis pugnator miles Christi suam suo animam redditit Creatori'* [and thus the faithful warrior, knight of Christ, gave up his soul to the Creator].⁵⁷

Again there is the imagery of the sheep fleeing the wolf, and – as in previous accounts – we see the martyr surrounded by overwhelming numbers of the enemy, struck through by their weapons. Brother Matthew is not explicitly described as a martyr, but as the *'fidelis pugnator, miles Christi'*; he is comparable to St George, the *'fidelissimus miles Christi'*, in the *Legenda Aurea*.⁵⁸

Thadeus of Naples's account of the loss of Acre also praised Brother Matthew, writing of his *'probitate'* or *'prowess'*: *'nec ... a Christi martirum numero ... excludendus'* [nor should he be excluded from the number of Christ's martyrs]:

qui veluti victoriosus Christi miles et pugil fortissimus certamen fidei animo simul amplectens et corpora, hostibus hinc inde per civitatem occurrebat viribus et animo indefessus, tantamque ante felicitatis mortis sue cursum stragem fecit, effundendo sacrilegum sanguine impiorum, ut videretur potius celestis quam

⁵⁵ 'Excidium Aconis' (I) in *The Fall of Acre 1291: Excidii Aconis Gestorum Collectio; Magister Thadeus civis Neapolitanus Ystoria de desolatione et conculcatione civitatis Acconensis et tocus terre sancte*, ed. R.B.C. Huygens, with contributions by Alan Forey and David C. Nicolle (Turnhout, 2004), V lines 250–66, pp. 72–4: here 73, lines 275–6; for date see 9.

⁵⁶ 'Excidium Aconis', IX lines 561–5, p. 85.

⁵⁷ 'Excidium Aconis', XII lines 680–98, pp. 90–1: at lines 697–8.

⁵⁸ Iacobo da Varazze, *Legenda Aurea*, vol. 1, p. 396, line 111.

*carnalis milicie arma victricia secum ferre. Qui tandem undique suo conspersus et rutilans sanguine, vite huius detrimenta contempnens et mortis supplicia per magnanimitatis constanciam non exhorrens, temporalem clausit et transtulit in eterna lumina lucem et quasi violentus predo celorum regno vim intulit et intra eterna illius tabernacula per proprium sanguine immortaliter introiit et ad immortalis regis tribunal feliciter laureandus ascendit.*⁵⁹

[who like a victorious knight of Christ and very strong fighter embraced the battle at once with mind of faith and body, falling on the enemy hither and thither with strength and unwearied mind, and made such great slaughter before the course of his fortunate death, pouring out the sacrilegious blood of impious men, that it might seem rather that he bore with him victorious weapons that were heavenly rather than of physical knighthood. At last on all sides splattered and red with blood, despising the losses of this life and through the constancy of his great heart not dreading the pain of death, he ended this passing life and transferred into eternal bright light; and like a violent robber he inflicted violence on the kingdom of heaven and entered into its eternal tabernacle immortally through his own blood, and ascended, be-laurelled, felicitously to the tribunal of the immortal king.]

Another martyr was the master of the Temple, William de Beaujeu. He was ‘*strenuus Christi athleta*’ [active champion of Christ],⁶⁰ who, although fatally wounded:

*conversione mirabili dum vincitur devicta morte victor consurgens, sue grandis meruit fidei merito gloriosum triumphum, palmam martirii, in victorioso loco certaminis perhenniter obtinere.*⁶¹

[although he is conquered, through a marvellous turnaround death is conquered and he rises up as victor; by his great faith he deservedly merits to obtain eternally in the victorious place of battle a glorious triumph, the martyr’s palm.]

William was ‘*Christi militem*’ [Christ’s knight], through his death he obtained the ‘*victorie bravium*’ [the reward of victory], and his death was ‘*felix*’ [fortunate], another indication of martyrdom.⁶²

In contrast, Thadeus criticized the rest of the Templars for failing to follow their master’s example, and the Hospitallers for escaping. However, he praised the Teutonic brothers for fighting to the death, ‘*tanquam acrestes Christi pugiles in*

⁵⁹ ‘Magister Thadeus’, in *The Fall of Acre 1291*, ed. Huygens, p. 118, lines 479–495; Peter Damian-Grint, ‘Thadeus Neapolitanus’, in Dunphy (ed.), *Encyclopedia of the Medieval Chronicle*, vol. 2, pp. 1417–18.

⁶⁰ ‘Magister Thadeus’, pp. 114–15, at line 381.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 115, lines 399–402.

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 115–16, lines 406, 416, 419.

agonis laboris intrepidi persistentes' [like aggressive fighters for Christ, persisting intrepid in agonising labour], standing by their intention to die for Christ, and:

*sicut victores victoriae laurea laureati ad eterne refectionis gaudia, proprio candidati sanguine, assumpti ex presentis valle miserie ylariter conscenderunt.*⁶³

[as the victors, be-laurelled with the laurels of victory to the joy of eternal restoration, clothed in white with their own blood, taken up from the present valley of misery they merrily go up.]

In a spiritual trade-off, they exchange this mortal life for Heaven:

*fideles Christi milites mercati sunt in regno dei et feliciter acceperunt lucida refrigerii sedes, inconcusse quietis beatitudinem et eterni luminis inextinguibilem claritatem.*⁶⁴

[the faithful knights of Christ traded within the kingdom of God and felicitously accepted a shining abode of refreshment, the blessing of unshaken rest and the inextinguishable brightness of the eternal light!]

Clearly, in Thadeus' eyes, at least some of the brothers of the military religious orders could still fulfil the old ideals of martyrdom.

Conclusion

Focusing on Latin accounts written within a year or two of events, this survey has demonstrated that some contemporaries explicitly depicted some members of the military religious orders who died in encounters with the Muslims in the Holy Land as martyrs. As the Christian force in each of these encounters was effectively annihilated, leaving no immediate eyewitnesses, these descriptions must have been more or less fictional. None of these accounts were composed by the orders, and the reports which members of the orders wrote immediately after these battles did not claim that their dead brothers were martyrs. It is possible, however, that some information about these brothers' deaths originated with their orders.

It is tempting to suggest that the paucity of clerical descriptions of martyrdom between the Third Crusade and the final loss of Acre in 1291 was linked to theological anxiety regarding the appropriateness of labelling men who died in combat as martyrs. While groups could be so described, ecclesiastical authors were

⁶³ Ibid., pp. 119–21, lines 516, 533–36.

⁶⁴ 'Magister Thadeus', p. 120, lines 541–4.

wary of using the term for individuals.⁶⁵ Fidenzio of Padua was happy to use the term for the Templars who died at Saphet in 1266 as they had died voluntarily and passively, but not in battle. However, the fact that this term appeared again in 1291 suggests that another factor was also significant.

Each of these depictions of martyrdom was linked to a devastating Latin Christian defeat which threatened or effectively destroyed the Latin Christian presence in the Holy Land. In such circumstances, the authors may have intended such imagery to encourage recruitment to recover the Holy Land. Certainly, as contemporaries in 1291 expected the Templars and Hospitallers to lead re-conquest of the Holy Land,⁶⁶ images of the brothers' martyrdom could have helped to repair their reputation in the West preparatory to a new expedition. What is not clear, however, is how far these orders themselves promoted their own military martyrs: the current state of scholarship suggests that they did not.

⁶⁵ See Smith, *Crusading in the Age of Joinville*, p. 140.

⁶⁶ Alan Forey, 'The Military Orders in the Crusading Proposals of the Late-Thirteenth and Early-Fourteenth Centuries', *Traditio*, 36 (1980), pp. 317–45, reprinted in Alan Forey (ed), *Military Orders and Crusades* (Aldershot, 1994), article IX.