
Archaeology and Architecture of the Military Orders: New Studies arose from the fifth Military Orders Conference at Cardiff in 2009, specifically from the range of papers presented on both the archaeology and architecture of the various Orders, and it was felt by the editors that these would benefit from a more focussed volume. The result is a handy book, simply and clearly laid out, with a good range of illustrations. The text itself is clear and the figures given enough space, although the restriction to black and white images does, in a few cases, make the images less easy to interpret. That being said this may be more to do with image selection than with the quality of the images themselves.

The volume itself aimed to provide the varied contributors the opportunity to delve into greater depth in this growing field of Military Orders study, but strove to allow equal space to the three main Orders, the Knights Templar, the Knights Hospitalier, and the Teutonic Knights, as well as highlight the sheer geographical spread of the work being carried out. In this they are almost too successful, with several large areas of Europe unrepresented in the text, especially the British Isles, Iberia, and much of Germany. However, also included were some often neglected areas, such as Scandinavia and the Aegean, specifically in this case the Dodecanese. The volume also aimed to highlight the range of approaches that could be taken when examining this material, from the use of historical documents to archaeological excavation, the application of geographical landscape studies, or an in-depth architectural examination. The introduction by Anthony Luttrell serves to highlight the unifying themes of the volume seen within the varied papers, namely the use of excavation to improve or critique what has commonly been assumed about the varying military orders, or to showcase specific source material that may help the interpretation of archaeological remains. He also voices a common critique of archaeology from a historian’s perspective;

Martin Huggon m.huggon@sheffield.ac.uk University of Sheffield

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The final paper in the section on Hospitallers is by Benjamin Michaudel who discusses the fall and subsequent reuse of the Hospitaller and Templar castles by the Mamluks. In particular he examines Krak des Chevaliers and Marget, and points out that the assumed ‘scorched earth’ policy of the Mamluks was actually more nuanced, and each site was assessed for its continued potential. Michaudel also highlights the improvements made by the Mamluks, particularly in turning Krak des Chevaliers and Marget into more palatial sites. It is also highlighted that the Mamluks, rather than borrowing military architecture advances from the Military Orders, benefited from the improvements brought in by the Ayyubids in the first half of the 13th century, bringing into question the long term influence of the architecture of the Military Orders. Whilst an engaging and pertinent paper, especially in serving to re-evaluate the impact of the Military Orders, this paper is hindered by translation issues, often making sentences stilted or confused. Also, although the pictures used are good quality and useful, occasional plans may have helped as well.

The second part of the volume deals with the Templar Order, with papers by Nadia Bagnarini, Damien Carraz, and Mathias Piana. Unfortunately Bagnarini’s paper on the Templars in the Viterbo region, which made use of documentary sources on architecture, surviving buildings, and available cabrei from later periods, as well as some choice photographs, is in Italian and has no English summary, limiting its wider impact and potential integration with wider synthesis (also particularly unfortunate that the author of this particular review cannot read Italian).

Carraz discusses the current state of research on Hospitaller and Templar sites in Southern France, in what serves as an important but restricted discussion on elements that need further work in the archaeology of the Military Orders more widely. The paper discusses not just architecture, but also funerary archaeology, and raises the important question of how much traditional monasticism influenced the Military Orders, particularly in reference to architecture. There is a comparison of the urban and rural sites that is
often missing from other discussions, and also highlights the likely influences of secular elite architectural influence on the Military Orders. Although some more figures may have been useful, the plans chosen helped provide context to the argument when discussing specific sites and their development.

The final paper of this part is by Piana who provides a re-examination of the Templar citadel at Tortosa. His work utilises documentary records and a new architectural survey to rephrase and categorise the fortifications of the castrum of Tortosa, and highlights the effort taken to create a strong defensive position on the Syrian coast that equally served as an important administrative centre. The paper is well supported with illustrations and photographs of the site, with the analysis working its way around the site before discussing first the implications to chronology of the site and then the significance of these findings to the study of castles in the region. The paper is an articulate examination of the architecture that supports the view that Tortosa represented a new approach to castle fortification.

The last part of the volume focusses on the Teutonic Order, with papers by Adrian Boas, Giulia Rossi Vairo, and Tomasz Torbus. Boas’ paper provides an introduction to new work being carried out at Montfort Castle, the purpose-built site that served as the home of the Order in the Holy Land. This work aimed to develop on the earlier excavations and surveys carried out on the site, with new excavations focussing on the area of the Great Hall, which appeared to have suffered the least amount of disturbance from earlier work. This work has led to a rephasing of the Great Hall, as well as highlighting the changes in use the central residence block underwent during its life. Boas also reports on the evidence for damages caused during the siege of June 1271. The paper is supported with some excellent site photography but may have been aided by a plan of the site and the excavations. However, this detracts little from a well written contribution that exposes the potential for the re-exCAVATION of these major sites.

The penultimate paper of the volume was Giulia Rossi Vairo’s examination of the architecture of the Teutonic Order in Italy. This paper provides a wide-ranging and accessible examination of the Orders architecture, mostly commanderies, that leads to a discussion on some of the social implications of their buildings, providing more comment on the wider community than is often found in such examinations. Again the use of photographs of the sites was appreciated and clear, but the lack of any plans is felt during some of the descriptions of sites. However, overall the argument was clearly articulated and provided a useful synthesis of the material.

The last paper of the volume was Tomasz Torbus’ examination of the architecture of Teutonic castles in Prussia. This paper provided a broad summary of architectural traditions found in the region, as well as highlighting some key sites. The paper was comprehensive and well-written, and supported with a wide-range of both photographs and site plans, aiding in the underlying discussion on architectural traditions. This paper provides a valuable source in English for the material and the region, as well as illustrating the varied work being carried out that often fails to reach an English-speaking audience.

Overall, this volume on the archaeology and architecture of the Military Orders is an enjoyable read and provides a number of broad and narrow examples of the work being carried out currently in this subject. The vast majority of the papers are well-written and understandable, providing new information to a wider audience and highlighting the strands that both tied the Orders together, but also the range of scholars from different countries and academic backgrounds that are attempting to understand the material they left behind. Other than the few papers that would have benefited from help with translation and some editorial faults, the main issues with the volume is the use of images by many of the contributors. The lack of any figures at all for some papers in a volume such as this seems strange, and for others useful site plans are often missing that would have helped orientate around the sites under discussion. That being said some had a wide array of figures that were used well throughout the paper, such as those
of Torbus and Heslop, and whilst the image issue detracts from the whole it does not stop this volume being incredibly useful and informative. Just as an indication of the subject, it is promising to see such a range of regions under study as well as the variety of approaches. Now all that is needed is more of these studies and the ongoing integration of this material into wider work on the Military Orders and the Crusades.

Martin Huggon-University of Sheffield