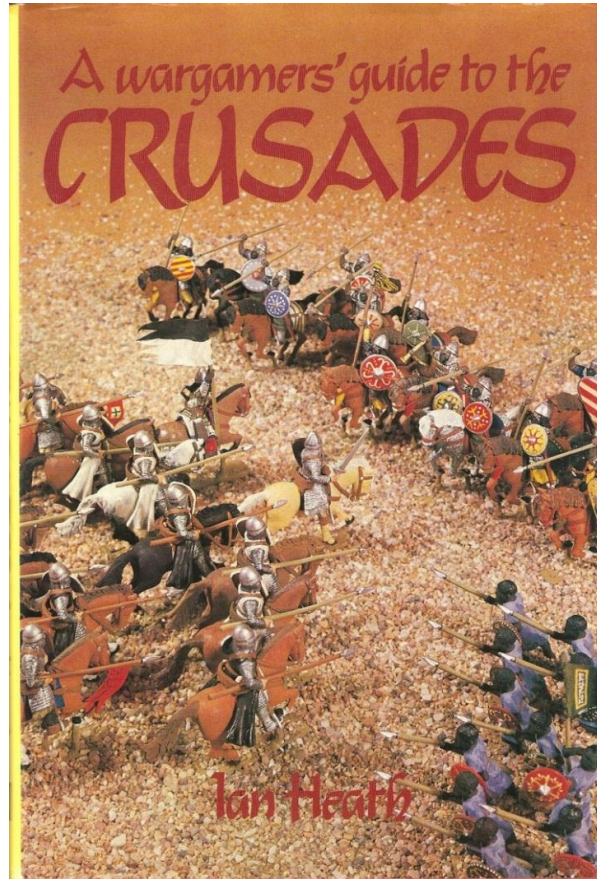


'A Wargamers' Guide to the Crusades'

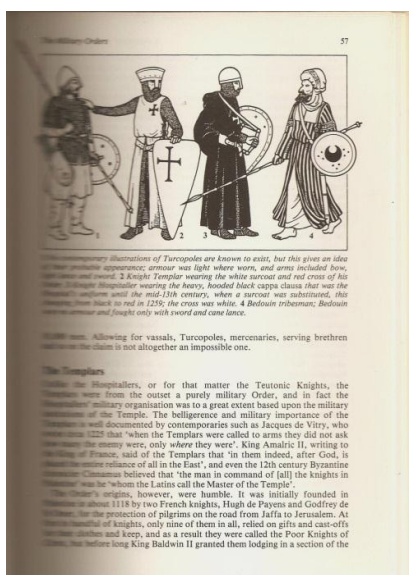
By Ian Heath

Review by Jonathan Aird

A Wargamers' Guide to the Crusades was a product of the hobby reaching a new level of maturity -- at the age of 28, the author, Ian Heath, had already notched up 17 years in the hobby, and had been weaned on the books of Donald Featherstone and benefitted from the founding of the Society of Ancients. He had already become a leading light of the Wargames Research Group with his contributions to their series of army organisation books that were to become the bible of the figure designers of the time (the dust jacket of this volume, for example, has painted test castings of the then about to be released Minifigs Crusades range). This maturity demonstrated itself in a more dedicated attitude to research that aimed to overturn the earlier approaches by the fathers of the hobby -- no longer would it be that a couple of history books, a cluster of historical novels and a few films could be deemed to represent "research." This new seriousness is reflected in every aspect of "A Wargamers' Guide to the Crusades."



The text is crisper and less chatty (although there are a few jokes). Indeed, the tone is closer to a serious academic work than what had been recognised up to this time as a wargaming book, and this is reflected in the number and quality of the maps and line drawings. There is no attempt to explain what wargaming is -- the reader knows, and if he doesn't then he should be reading an easier introductory book. This is not a book about wargaming. It is a book for the wargamer with a deep interest in the Crusades, and one who intends to raise a number of armies and play long campaigns with them. We have left the nursery behind, and we're ready for serious wargaming. Which is by no means meant as a criticism -- this volume was one of a number that PSL published at the time that reflected, if you will, the next stage of the hobby. In many cases, greater access amongst the authors to academic research led quite naturally to a desire to see this research reflected into their wargames, a deep and abiding interest in a narrow period of time allowed the wargamer the luxury of indulging in realistic political intrigue, to examine the effect of economic factors on their period and to realistically



assess the historical costs of raising and supporting an army of the day. Logistics became less abstract. In truth there was nothing really new about this -- it's just that the majority of the early writers on the hobby preferred the horse and musket period, and their in-depth research had been done there. The bulk of the book consists of detailed chapters covering the following self-explanatory topics -- an outline chronology; the nature of the land; raising, financing and organising the armies; the Military Orders; the Assassins; the Byzantine connection; supply & attrition; communications; strategy & tactics; the naval scene; siege warfare; A gazetteer of fortified sites; aspects of a crusade campaign for the wargamer. These all feature meticulous research (with the regular use of footnotes), and present cogent arguments for why things

were as they were. A good overview is given of wide topics and there really is everything the gamer could need -- pay rates, speed of travel, assessment of fighting ability and methods of fighting and so on. It is interesting to note from the extensive bibliography that a number of the titles used when writing this book have yet to be replaced in modern academic writing on the period -- so a lot of this research has not been disproven (with the caveat -- yet!). The last chapter on campaign aspects instructs the reader to go and buy or borrow a copy of Tony Bath's wargame campaigns book, and then provides additional specific information for use in a crusading campaign that is run along the lines described in that book. That advice is still good!

There are also two appendices, one covering the availability of figures -- the conversion of hordes of plastic figures is very much a thing of the past -- and this covers metal figures in 15mm and 25mm only. Many of these figures are still available although of course many more have appeared since. The second appendix provides a set of troop classifications in terms of the WRG Ancients Rules -- a rule set that the author early on describes as having "almost universal acceptance," a statement that held quite true until the 7th Edition started the revolution in approach that DBA, DBM and DBMM would bring to full fruition. The rule sets of more recent years -- Warhammer Ancients, Warmaster, Vis Bellica and many others -- have successfully destroyed this WRG hegemony, but it is interesting to reflect that for a while there was one wargaming period at least that had almost managed to find a single rule set that all could accept (if not love!).

This is in all a superb book -- authoritative and detailed, wonderfully illustrated with Ian Heath's line drawings of the troops of the time and providing everything the would-be gamer of the Crusades could desire in order to get started on the extremely interesting period. It's also a fascinating read for anyone with the slightest interest in medieval wargames, as much of the material on troops and organisation can be used for games set outside of the Holy Land. As such it is heartily recommended. It is currently out of print, but Amazon UK have

many second-hand copies starting from as low as £8 (~\$12), which really is a complete bargain.

Patrick Stevens Limited, 1980

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