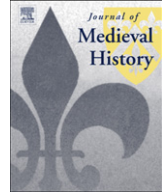




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Edward I's armies

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A B S T R A C T

This article reassesses some of the evidence for Edward I's armies, and suggests that the extent to which these armies anticipated the organisation and tactics used in the Hundred Years War should not be exaggerated. Cavalry numbers are hard to calculate, but historians may have underestimated the quantity of support staff. While horses were imported at the time of the Welsh wars, there is little evidence for this in Edward's later years. Infantry forces were large and well organised in theory, but desertion was a major problem. Commanders, especially castle constables, had considerable experience. For some, pay and rewards were inadequate. Engineers were highly skilled, with notable achievements in castle warfare and bridge building. The crown's chief concern in providing supplies was to ensure that there was sufficient for the royal household and for castle garrisons. Battles were few, and evidence for innovative tactics is thin. Bannockburn provided a test for the type of army developed under Edward I, a test which was failed. After 1314 new solutions were needed.

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An English army at the start of the fourteenth century appeared formidable. A poet described the host as it advanced in 1300 in the long warm days of summer, filling the hills and valleys with men, horses and wagons. The cavalry were mounted on splendid war horses. Highly coloured banners and bright caparisons gave a magnificent impression. The huge supply train carried provisions, tents and pavilions. For the historian, such an army is well documented. Pay rolls, records of feudal service, horse valuation lists, and victualling accounts provide an exceptional degree of detail.¹ On the other hand,

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¹The *Siege of Carlaverock*, ed. N.H. Nicolas (London, 1828), 2–5; P.M. Barnes, *List of documents relating to the household and wardrobe, John to Edward I* (Public Record Office Handbooks, 7, London, 1964) still provides the best guide to material held by the National Archives at Kew [hereafter TNA]. Material is also held in London by the British Library [hereafter BL], notably three important wardrobe books, BL, Add. MSS 7965, 7966a and 8835.

chronicle evidence for Edward I's wars is thin as compared to the Hundred Years War. There was no Froissart to provide anecdotal detail, nor was there a biographer of any of Edward's captains who might compare even with the Chandos Herald's life of the Black Prince, much less with the anonymous author of Boucicaut's *Livre des fais*, or Cabaret d'Orville's account of the duke of Bourbon's career. There is no way to know whether any of Edward's men shared the priggish Boucicaut's habit of watering his wine, or his dislike of good cooking, though this seems unlikely.²

Edward had no comprehensive programme to transform English armies. He could have obtained ideas about military matters from Vegetius' late classical manual, but although he was given a translation of it by his queen, Eleanor, when on crusade, there is no indication that he made practical use of it.³ Eleanor was half-brother of Alfonso X of Castile, whose great legal work, the *Siete partidas*, contained much of interest on military matters. It dealt, for example, with the way in which generals should be chosen, how armies should be organised on the march, and what formations might be adopted when arraying infantry troops for battle.⁴ There is no evidence to show that Eleanor knew of her half-brother's *Siete partidas*, much less that it had any influence on her husband. No parallel to the *Siete partidas* was produced by, or on behalf of, Edward I, whose legislation did not touch upon military matters.⁵ There is no indication that Edward took an interest in theoretical ideas about warfare. His approach was pragmatic; letters he wrote to the exchequer in 1301 show his concern with lack of money and supplies, and with troop desertions, but suggest no strategic ideas beyond a belief that if he could cross the Firth of Forth, he could deal with his Scottish enemies.⁶

Cavalry

Although there is an astonishing quantity of surviving accounts and records for Edward I's armies, some questions still present problems. It is not possible to do more than estimate cavalry numbers. Pay rolls show how many knights and men-at-arms were in receipt of royal wages, but many of the cavalry were not paid by the crown. For the Falkirk expedition of 1298, there is a heraldic roll listing 115 earls and bannerets present. Of these, only 48 appear on the lists of horses valued by the crown; this was done so that paid troops could be compensated if their animal was killed. The implication is that about 40 per cent of the cavalry were paid. In all, these lists contain some 1,360 names. This suggests a total force of at least some 3,260 cavalry. A similar calculation can be done for the Caerlaverock campaign of 1300, for the poem written by a herald to glorify an inglorious campaign listed the bannerets present, while the wardrobe account book and a horse list detail those in royal pay. Only 23 of the 87 bannerets were paid. Extrapolating from the horse list, which contains about 550 names, a total of some 2,080 is indicated.⁷ However, the accounts show that the total number of paid cavalry was greater than the horse list suggests, amounting to about 800 at its peak, and on this basis there could have been approaching 3,000 mounted men in the Caerlaverock army. If the horse lists for the Falkirk army similarly did not include all those in pay, the cavalry might have numbered about 4,000 in 1298. Such estimates need qualifying; for example, they assume that the proportion of bannerets to knights, squires and sergeants was the same in the army as a whole as it was for the paid troops, which was not necessarily the case. The Falkirk

² Chandos Herald, *La Vie du Prince Noir*, ed. D.B. Tyson (Tübingen, 1975); Jehan Cabaret d'Orville, *La Chronique du bon duc Loys de Bourbon*, ed. A.-M. Chazaud (Paris, 1876); Jean le Maingre dit Boucicaut, *Le Livre des fais du bon Messire Jehan le Maingre, dit Boucicaut, maréchal de France et gouverneur de Jennes*, ed. D. Lalande (Geneva, 1985).

³ M.C. Prestwich, *Edward I* (London, 1988), 123.

⁴ Relevant extracts from *Las siete partidas* are conveniently available at <<http://www.deremilitari.org/resources/sources/sietepartidas.htm>>, accessed 20 March 2011; *Las siete partidas*, trans. S. Parsons Scott, ed. R.I. Burns, 5 vols (Philadelphia, c. 2001), vol. 2.

⁵ The Statute of Winchester of 1285 set out the military equipment men were expected to possess, but this was in the context of the maintenance of law and order, not warfare.

⁶ *Calendar of documents relating to Scotland*, ed. J. Bain, G.G. Simpson and J.D. Galbraith, 5 vols (Edinburgh, 1881–7, 1986) [hereafter CDS], vol. 5, nos. 260, 262, 263.

⁷ M.C. Prestwich, *War, politics and finance under Edward I* (London, 1972), 69–70. H. Gough, *Scotland in 1298* (Paisley, 1888), 161–237; TNA E 101/8/23. An interesting entry in the 1298 roll shows that Piers Gaveston had an expensive horse, valued at 40 marks, which died on the campaign. The most valuable horses were those owned by Eustace Hatch, and Adam Welles, both set at 100 marks. Remarkably, John Walwayn, possible author of the *Vita Edward i secundi*, succeeded in having two horses valued.

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