

Richard The Lionheart's Crusade To The Holy Land

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Historical Criticism and the Cost of Richard's Crusade

Historians have always criticized Richard the Lionheart's crusade to the holy land between 1190 and 1192. They claim that the mission was bedevilled by many factors. First, it required huge financial investment, which made the king resort to devious practices to offset the cost, such as extorting his subjects and selling off public offices. Besides, Richard spent a considerable amount of time outside the kingdom during the crusade period, thus giving latitude to the King of France, who was his brother, to plot against him. This was quite detrimental not only to the kingdom of England but also to the entire Plantagenet territories. Further, there was a lot of conflict and rivalry over the strategy that would enhance the success of the crusade. This led to great tensions and hostility between him and the Philip of France and the Duke of Austria. Therefore, the Third Crusade greatly drained Richard's subjects regarding resources and was responsible for his long absence from the kingdom.

Worse still, Richard was not able to achieve the purpose of the crusade: recapturing Jerusalem and restoring the Holy City under the control of Christians. There is also adequate evidence indicating that the crusading army came a few miles from Jerusalem twice but retreated in all these instances, painting Richard's strategy and reputation in a bad light. Literally, it appears as if he sacrificed the security and wealth of England for nothing. However, despite the critical criticisms levelled against King Richard, it is essential to reassess his accomplishments in the Holy Land: Philip of France and the Duke of Austria. There is no doubt that Richard's conquest of Cyprus turned the island into a breadbasket, a recruiting base, and a staging area for the other states for more than a century. It should also be noted that the Latin Kingdom of Cyprus offered protection for more than 300 years to the shipping lanes for Europeans en route to Egypt, Near East and Constantinople. Therefore, this confirms the significant role Cyprus played in the progress and prosperity of Italy and an indirect role in enhancing the growth of philosophy, art, science, and technology during the Renaissance period.

However, the conquest of the Kingdom of Cyprus did mark the end of Richard's accomplishments in the East. He also re-captured the Acre from the Saracens. This had always been a critical port city as it acted as the commercial heart of the European presence in the Holy Land and remained a principal gateway that linked Europe to Jerusalem. Besides re-capturing the Acre, Richard was also able to re-establish Christian control across the coastlines between Jaffa and Antioch. Despite the fact that the territory was reduced to nearly a quarter of what the Latin Christians had before they lost it in the Battle of Hattin, the conquest was significant to England and entire Europe. It reignited the pilgrimage

traffic and facilitated trade, the development of naval capacity, and the exchange of ideas, which was quite critical to the intellectual growth and economic prosperity of the Western economies.

England, Crusading Tradition, and Military Mobilization

During the Third Crusade, England did not have any significant history of organizing crusade movements as compared to the Germans and French, who had provided the bulk of foot soldiers, knights, and intellectual and spiritual heft during the two previous Crusades. The kingdom had been characterized by numerous civil infighting and political strife, mostly involving succession issues, which just ended when Richard ascended to the throne, thus giving England an opportunity to join hands with other Christian kingdoms to attempt to secure the Holy Land.

Therefore, considering the instability that had characterized the kingdom of England, it is quite to stress the accomplishments of Richard the Lionheart. Despite the economic devastations experienced in England and failure to finally capture the kingdom of Jerusalem, Richard used wooden ships that relied on oars and sails to transport nearly ten thousand men across a vast distance. After that, he was in charge of a multinational force that comprised his diverse subjects, Germans, Scandinavians, French and natives within the kingdoms where the crusade was being undertaken. Using his intellectual skills and experience, Richard was able to organize efficient and complex military operations with adequate logistical support to sustain his forces through hostile terrains, thus enabling him to defeat the legendary Saladin in all instances of their confrontation.

It is thus apparent that Richard earned his legendary fame through his personal lifelessness and bravery throughout the confrontations in the Holy Land. (Gillingham, 1999) David Miller attests to this while analyzing the military capabilities of Richard *Richard the Lionheart: The Mighty Crusader*. In the analysis, Miller states that Richard was able to set himself apart from most of his contemporaries through his careful planning, rational strategic thinking, and exceptional logistical organization. For instance, Miller narrates that Richard of England could never expose his troops to be encircled by the enemy or allow them to march and camp without water, as it happened at the Battle of Hattin under the leadership of Guy de Lusignan. Through strategic and careful planning and organization, Richard always ensured that his forces had adequate supplies that would always keep them in good shape while in the field, and he also had the ability to integrate cavalry and infantry to utilize their advantages. Moreover, Richard led by example. Throughout the conquests, Richard not only fought in the forefront, but he also carried out menial activities such as putting up walls in the company of his lowest soldiers. This is the epitome of leadership by example.

Royal Display, Reputation, and the Arrival at Messina

Richard made a grand public display once he first reached Messina. History records that the pageantry of Richard's arrival in Messina produced the desired result among his opponents: Muslims. According to Baha ad-Din, a Muslim historian, the appearance of Richard of England made a grand impression that instilled Muslims with great fear. It was a sharp contrast with the earlier conquests undertaken by Philip of France. The chronicler writes that Philip's entry into Messina sharply contrasted with Richard's. For instance, he only had one ship, and he secretly took himself into the castle harbour within the city as if he was avoiding the human gaze. In fact, the people who were waiting for his arrival on the shore jeered him on account of his timid appearance. Therefore, much as the people felt that King Philip had let them down, the grand production that surrounded the arrival of Richard did not disappoint. The crowd gathered at the shore of Messina to witness the arrival. Richard could see numerous galleys covering the sea. They could also hear the sounds of war trumpets from afar. Moreover, in an elegant dress, Richard willingly stood on his vessel's prow for everyone to see him. This was a grand display of power that made commoners acclaim their desire for Richard to become ruler over kingdoms of the earth.

Besides, Richard started to command the army when he was only 16 and was able to use his skills and ability as the commander to quell political strife and rebellions in France. These are indications of the great crusader, Richard the Lionheart. When Philip of France fell ill, Richard sieged Acre and took for himself all the glory. This made Philip furious, and thus decided to return to France after the town had been captured. He only left a small contingent to be commanded by the Duke of Burgundy, an act that led Richard alone with the mandate of controlling and directing the crusade. However, being an impeccable crusader, Richard managed to restore discipline among quarrelsome knights. During these periods, such a virtue could not be imaginable among armies.

However, history records that Richard tarnished his reputation before continuing by ordering his troops to massacre the defenders of Acre due to Saladin's delay to pay the agreed ransom and also failing to return the True Cross, which Christians considered a sacred relic. The action stirred anger and thirst among Muslims, driving them to revenge. On realizing this, Richard, being an incredible strategist and a fighter, moved on the offensive by employing his skills and talents. He moved southwards with his Crusader armies in the company of Hospitalers, Templars, and military and religious orders. They drove along the coast without any baggage since their fleet on the coastline supplied food, equipment, and other requirements. This enabled his army to resist Saladin's army.

Equipment, Strategy, and Combat Against Saladin

Although Saladin's troops had knowledge of geography and were quite mobile, Richard's Crusaders had superior equipment at their disposal. For instance, they had helmets, coats of mail and shields.

However, the Turkish cavalry devised a master strategy that made the Crusaders suffer a few losses. The approach comprised of using arrow fire to harass Christian troops and then pretending to give in by fleeing so that they could follow them and fall into their trap. After a few casualties, the Crusaders were able to repulse any attack without further falling into other traps set by the Muslim troops. As a result, the Crusaders managed to pass through the Palestinian coast safely, even issuing a significant threat to Jaffa and Ascalon.

However, it is also critical to recognize Richard's ineptitude. He failed in his mission. He achieved a task which was not his plan. Richard reestablished and allowed the Latin Christians to hold out for a century in the Holy Land. He failed to execute the mission of taking back Jerusalem. Although he defeated Saladin nearly in all their confrontations, he never could hold his army together, as did the Saracen's king. Moreover, Richard had an oversized personality, which separated him from his German and French allies. He also showed a lack of foresight by leaving England in a toxic situation, thus necessitating his return. Therefore, although he never lost a single battle in the Holy Land, Richard only had the option of making peace, which became quite distasteful, making him refuse to append his seal to it. (Tyerman, 2006)

Further, the reign of Richard meant constant war with the people of France. It wounded the people of England with exorbitant taxes and a sharp increase in brigandry. He freed many prisoners and recruited them into his crusade entourage. Most of these people became outlaws when they returned to England. His reign also meant a series of civil wars. Issues even turned worse when Richard let himself be caught while on their return journey from the crusade. He could only blame himself for this misery. He was captured by the Duke of Austria (Leopold), who was a fellow crusader. He failed to mend fences and recognize him as his equal earlier, which led to the fallout. This is in contrast with the ideals of a great crusader who should be able to win the support and trust of allies. In this instance, his selfishness and self-centeredness, as well as greed, show how he falls into the trap that he has already set.

Richard's Leadership and the Contested Legacy of the Third Crusade

This blame notwithstanding, Richard was still a great crusader – at least according to some historians. His nobles held him in great light. The nobles considered themselves to have been born and raised to go to war and win battles. Therefore, they derived much value from a king who was a competent warrior. Their ideal definition of a king was one who would protect their holdings by leading them to victory. This is what Richard knew best, having won a battle at the age of sixteen. In fact, he earned the name Lionheart from his youthful exploits, way before he even became king of England. Richard managed to keep his vassal in line when he ascended to the throne and was able to protect his jurisdiction from the French Emperor. The crusades he commandeered chronicle victory one after the other.

Therefore, considering Richard a failure because he did not retake Jerusalem relies on one's opinion on the primary aim of the conquest. Richard is always able to defeat Saladin in every confrontation, Which means that there is no way he will lose the battle. However, he made the decision not to capture Jerusalem in two accounts from his advisory council, which was comprised of elected representatives from across all contingents under the command of Richard. In all these accounts, the decision to back down was informed by a careful assessment of the possibility of holding Jerusalem once it was conquered. The council considered the long distance of Jerusalem from the sea, which would cut it off a constant supply of reinforcements and resources at any given moment. Therefore, Richard persuaded his followers to abandon the mission, citing that the victory would be costly and short-lived because the Saracens would besiege the city once again after his crusaders had gone home. This is a fact that was recognized by Saladin, as was Richard. Therefore, Richard used his diplomatic skills to secure for Christian pilgrims unmolested, free access to the Holy City even after his departure.

Furthermore, even though he failed to capture Jerusalem, he led Christians to win other strong victories. For instance, Richard captured the cities of Jaffa and Acre. He halted Saladin on all fronts, which is proof that he was a capable commander and an incredible crusader. His capable leadership, coupled with military prowess and favourable rapport with his troops, all point to Richard's great success as a crusader.

References

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