RICHARD THE LIONHEARTED

A member of the Angevin, or Plantagenet, dynasty of kings, Richard the Lionhearted ruled as king of England from 1189 to 1199. An ambitious and brutal military leader, he was also known as Richard I, and in France as Richard Coeur de Lion.

An Unlikely King

Born in Oxford, England, on September 8, 1157, Richard was the third son of England's King Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine. As third born, he was not expected to succeed his father as king. His parents separated when he was just a boy, and Richard stayed under Eleanor's care in France. When his older brother Henry was named as his father's successor, Richard was given the duchy of Aquitaine in 1168, as well as the duchy of Poitiers in 1172. A well-educated young man, Richard was also noted early on for his military and political abilities, which he utilized well in protecting and controlling his territories.

In 1173, Richard joined with two of his brothers—Henry, heir to the English throne, and Geoffrey, duke of Brittany—in an ill-fated revolt against their father. They planned to overthrow him and immediately install the younger Henry as king. In response, Henry II launched two separate invasions of Aquitaine, but Richard held his ground and was the last of his brothers to acknowledge defeat. Finally, in 1174, Richard submitted to his father, humbly swearing a new vow of subservience to king's authority.

Following this defeat, Richard concentrated on suppressing a rebellion of nobles in Aquitaine, particularly in Gascony, where Richard's harsh reign prompted a major uprising in 1183. The rebels sought help from Richard's brothers, while his father sent troops to aid in his defense. The death of the younger Henry later that year ended the fighting, with Richard retaining control over his territories. Henry's passing also left in question who would succeed Henry II as king of England, but the death of Geoffrey in 1186 solidified Richard's position as the likely heir to the thrones of England, Normandy, and Anjou.

In 1188, King Henry II declared his plans to give the duchy of Aquitaine to his youngest son John (later King John of England). This so angered Richard that he negotiated an agreement with King Philip II Augustus of France by which Richard would concede both Anjou and Normandy to Philip in exchange for France's help in overthrowing Henry. The plan was successful, and King Henry was forced to name Richard as his heir just before dying in July 1189. Richard was crowned as duke of Normandy, count of Anjou, and king of England on September 3, 1189 in Westminster Abbey.

Third Crusade

Soon after becoming king, Richard joined the Third Crusade to reconquer Palestine and Jerusalem from Muslim leader Saladin and the Seljuk Turks. Richard concentrated on amassing troops and funding for the battle, raising taxes, emptying the treasury, and selling official government positions as well as lands and properties. In order to defend his territories against any French invasions during his absence, Richard persuaded Philip to enlist in the crusade as well. The last major monarch to join the Christian campaign was German king and Holy Roman emperor Frederick I Barbarossa, making the crusade the most ambitious European effort to retake the Christian holy lands. However, the alliance of the three kings soon broke down in disaster and disagreement. En route to the Middle East, Frederick drowned, and the German forces by and large quietly returned home.
Traveling by sea to Palestine, Richard, Philip, and their armies stopped briefly in Sicily in 1190, where they became involved in a dispute with the newly crowned King Tancred. Tancred had imprisoned Richard's sister Joan, the widow of Tancred's predecessor, King William II. Following a revolt in Messina, Richard and Phillip captured and looted that city and forced Tancred into a treaty. The agreement promised that Joan would be released and financially compensated in exchange for the recognition of Tancred as Sicily's rightful king. In addition, Richard was to name his nephew, Arthur of Brittany—Geoffrey's son—as his heir, which infuriated his younger brother John, who had hoped to become his older brother's successor as king.

The crusaders left Sicily in the spring of 1191, only to be stopped on the island of Cyprus because of bad weather. There, they captured the port city of Limassol, before waging war against the island's despotic leader and installing Richard as the new ruler of Cyprus. After looting the island and murdering those who resisted him, Richard staged his wedding to Princess Berengaria of Navarre in the city of Lemesos. Following the event, he departed once again for Palestine.

The crusaders finally arrived in Palestine in June 1191 and quickly captured the port city of Acre. When Richard and Philip's demands for a ransom went unmet, they massacred 3,000 of Acre's inhabitants. Richard then marched his armies south toward Jerusalem, battling Saladin's troops along the way. Meanwhile, Philip and the French crusaders deserted him; Philip formed an alliance with Richard's brother John in a plot to seize Richard's French territories and overthrow his rule in England. Richard remained in Palestine, fighting Saladin's men, but he was unable to capture Jerusalem. Finally, Richard negotiated a treaty by which the city would remain under Saladin's rule, but Christian pilgrims would be permitted to visit the city's important holy sites. The crusade thus ended with the establishment of a small Latin kingdom on the coast and Jerusalem remaining in the hands of the Muslim forces.

**Capture and Imprisonment**

In 1192, Richard commenced his journey home. He was captured, however, by King Leopold V of Austria, whom he had insulted while on crusade. Leopold imprisoned Richard in the castle at Durnstein. He was supposedly freed following the legendary discovery of his location by the troubadour Blondel de Nesle, only to be again taken prisoner by Holy Roman emperor Henry VI. Henry then ransomed his life to England for an enormous fortune as well as suzerainty of his kingdom. Richard finally reached England in 1194, suppressing a rebellion against him by his brother John, before traveling to France to fight Philip. Richard spent the next five years battling in defense of his French territories.

Richard died on April 6, 1199, from a wound he received during the minor battle of Chalus in France. He was interred alongside his parents at the Fontevrault Abbey in Anjou, France. His brother succeeded him as King John of England.

Richard's knightly manner, his military skills and courage, and his determination to fight for Christian control of Palestine made him a popular king during his reign, as well as a legendary warrior hero in the myths and tales since his death. In his dedication to war, however, he rarely devoted attention to administering England itself. During his 10 years of rule, he remained a mere six months in England proper, and he recklessly used the country's resources in his efforts to achieve his goals.

Katharine Haber

**Further Reading**

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Entry ID: 593517