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He Was The Best of Kings; He Was the Worst of Kings: A Critique of the Literary Presentation of Richard I

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Abstract

In order to achieve a more holistic understanding of Mediterranean History during the Third Crusade, a critical analysis of Richard I is necessary. This paper questions how accurately Richard I was portrayed in literary sources during the Third Crusade and attempts to construct as complete an image of the various motivations that led to differing depictions of Richard I as possible through a critical analysis of literary sources. Focusing on how his actions during the Third Crusade were interpreted, this paper will show the various, often opposing, sentiments held by both Western and Muslim authors on Richard I. Once a comprehensive presentation of the literary representations of Richard I has been established, this paper will question motives behind authors' characterizations of King Richard in order to create a greater understanding of the politics and cultural biases that were driving forces behind the actions of the Third Crusade and modern interpretation.

Keywords

Richard I, Crusade, Saladin

Disciplines

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Comments

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He Was the Best of Kings; He Was the Worst of Kings

A Critique of the Literary Presentation of Richard I

Estelle Reed

History 427

I affirm that I have upheld the highest principles of honesty and integrity in my academic work and have not witnessed a violation of the Honor Code.

In order to achieve a more holistic understanding of Mediterranean History during the Third Crusade, a critical analysis of Richard I is necessary. This paper questions how accurately Richard I was portrayed in literary sources during the Third Crusade and attempts to construct as complete an image of the various motivations that led to differing depictions of Richard I as possible through a critical analysis of literary sources. Focusing on how his actions during the Third Crusade were interpreted, this paper will show the various, often opposing, sentiments held by both Western and Muslim authors on Richard I. Once a comprehensive presentation of the literary representations of Richard I has been established, this paper will question motives behind authors' characterizations of King Richard in order to create a greater understanding of the politics and cultural biases that were driving forces behind the actions of the Third Crusade and modern interpretation.

No other figure from the crusading era has quite earned the same prestige and fame in modern imagination as that of King Richard I. Of all the individuals who participated in the Crusades, he alone has been the one that has been remembered throughout the centuries, and “has enjoyed posthumous fame as no other English King has achieved.”¹ His image as a “good Christian King” has become so ubiquitous within the modern medieval narrative that it is this interpretation of King Richard I that has been depicted within children’s literary and television programs such as the story of Robin Hood, thereby ensuring his legacy.² James Reston Jr. very succinctly captures the hold Richard I, as a heroic figure, has had on the modern imagination when he states, “he [Richard] is one of the most romantic figures in all of English History. In lore that has been embellished over the centuries and read to schoolboys at bedtime, Richard has become the very epitome of chivalry, the knight fighting bravely for his kingdom, his church, and his lady with ax, shield, and horse.”³ A hero to many within his own time for his actions in the Crusade, it was not until “the odyssey of his return journey that the legend of Richard the Lionheart was born. He was the new Odysseus, only his sirens and lotus-eaters and one-eyed monsters would take the

¹ James A. Brundage, *Richard Lion Heart* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1974), 261.

² A.S. Ambrisco, “Cannibalism and Cultural Encounters in Richard Coeur de Lion,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 29, no. 3 (1999): 511.

³ James Reston, Jr., *Warriors of God: Richard the Lionheart and Saladin in the Third Crusade* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), xv.

form of revenge-seeking dukes, pining minstrels, a traitorous brother, silly squires, and simpering maidens.”⁴ The accuracy of the depiction of Richard I held in modern imagination compared to how Richard I was described within his own time is suspect. Like Odysseus of classical myth, the image of Richard I within the literary sources is a construct of the author’s imagination. Therefore, it is impossible to ascertain a true understanding of the type of person Richard I was within his own time.

During his lifetime, Richard I was both loved and loathed in equal measure. The fame and infamy that Richard I achieved was “thanks to his crusade [and as a result], Richard moved on a world stage where all who supported him could admire his brilliant generalship, his personal prowess and courage; where all who loathed him could see his arrogance and his ruthlessness.”⁵ He was the most polarizing individual of his age in regards to the way he was depicted and as a result of the definitive perspectives of Richard I, the truth regarding his character will forever be clouded by the biases of those who wrote about him. Without a personal narrative from Richard I regarding his own actions during the Third Crusade, the ways in which his character have been posthumously constructed are a direct result of the conflicting depictions of him. Richard I, as a result of his participation in the Third Crusade, rose to such prominence as a public figure that he became involved in “a violent propaganda war” between various political and national factions.⁶ The politics that surrounded King Richard I, contributed greatly to the way he was represented by different authors and as a result, conflicting depictions of Richard I are found within literary sources from that time.

⁴ Ibid, 302-303.

⁵ John Gillingham, *Richard I* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 3.

⁶ Ibid, 6.

Although the Crusades were ostensibly a conflict between two opposing sides, Christian versus Muslim, there were three main depictions of Richard that offer different presentations of his personage. The fact that two of those depictions originated from Western Europe is vital to note when studying this dichotomy in the presentations of Richard I, because it suggests that Western Europe was not as unified in ideology and politics as was believed or promoted. Christian depictions of Christendom during the Crusades “seldom acknowledged its own internal differences, promulgating instead a transnational, trans-temporal myth of essential unity and sameness” throughout Western Europe, in order to appear to their enemy as a united front.⁷ Although the internal differences were never explicitly stated within the historical narratives, the divisions within Western Europe during the Crusades can be observed through the ways in which Richard I was depicted. Richard’s supporters depicted him as the ideal crusader, someone who should be emulated, while his enemies condemned him as a villain. The different ways in which various factions described Richard I allow for insights into the political and national motivations that were the driving forces behind the Crusades as well as hints at tensions that arose between different factions during the Third Crusade. Although these two perspectives of Richard I were not the sole depictions of this famous individual, they have become the two that are most focused on in modern scholarship and account for the clear division within the modern assessment of him.⁸ To the detriment of current understanding regarding the character of Richard I, modern scholarship seems to have generally ignored the Arab perspective on Richard I. Far removed from the politics of the European powers during the Crusades, it is believed by the few scholars who reference Muslims sources, that the Muslims offer the most neutral depiction of Richard’s

⁷Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, “On Saracen Enjoyment: Some Fantasies of Race in Late Medieval France and England,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31, no. 1 (2001): 115.

⁸ Brundage, *Richard Lion Heart*, 262.

character.⁹ Unlike some of the Western sources, Arab literature on Richard I depicted him as both a capable leader and enemy.¹⁰ However, Arab authors also portrayed him to be very cunning, crafty, and sneaky, which likely lead to the belief that the Muslim depiction of Richard I was the most neutral and detached, since equal weight is given to both Richard's virtues and shortcomings.¹¹ Much like the Western European images of Richard I, the Arab depiction of Richard I is much more complex than is discernable at first glance. In studying the historical literature written in a time period very different from the present, the literary conventions that were standard during the age and society in which the work was written must be addressed and understood. Medieval literature was not written for a modern audience. It was written for an audience in the era that it was written who would therefore understand the subtle peculiarities of the text. In analyzing the different ways in which his image was presented and manipulated to further political and ideological causes is essential because it is the image of Richard I, not the man himself, that has transcended centuries and remained a part of medieval lore and that is a distinction that must be made.

Richard the Saint?

The positive characterization of Richard I within the modern era speaks volumes of the persuasiveness of the argument that Richard I was the ideal crusader because that sentiment is still held to this day. Contemporaries of Richard I would often position their "hero, Richard, among a catalogue of real and fictional warriors from various historical periods, including Achilles, Alexander, Charlemagne, Roland, Arthur, and Gawain...rather than solely English

⁹ Gillingham, *Richard I*, 15.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 19.

monarchs or crusading figures,” thus propelling him to heroic, almost mythical, status.¹² The positive ways in which Richard I was depicted were so exalting that the Richard that emerged from their interpretations was “the most exuberant character wholly detached from reality,” and as a result, he almost seemed to be more than just mortal.¹³ This is a marker that identifies the literary genre of hagiography. Hagiography, as modern scholars define it, is used “to designate both a body of literature (writings about saints) and the study of those sources. The corpus of hagiography has been defined either by function (promoting saints’ cults), or by its content (saints).”¹⁴ Although Richard I was not explicitly deified as a Christian saint, writings about his deeds in the Holy Land were filled “with religious character and aim at edification,” two important tenants for hagiographic literature.¹⁵ The literary narrative of Richard I was perhaps made even more hagiographic due to the fact that Pope Gregory VIII promoted this religiously charged image.

The supporters of Richard I, including Pope Gregory VIII, evidently viewed him as almost greater than human, which they promoted in the various ways Richard I was utilized as a tool for propaganda. When studying interpretation of Richard I as the ideal crusader, the motivations behind Pope Gregory VIII’s call for the Crusade must also be studied because it was

¹² Lee Marion, *Narrating the Crusades: Loss and Recovery in Medieval and Early Modern English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 33.

¹³ Père Hippolyte Delehaye, S.J., *The Legends of the Saints: An Introduction to Hagiography*, trans. V.M. Crawford (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1961; Internet Medieval Sourcebook, 2000), 2. <https://legacy.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/delehaye-legends.asp>

¹⁴ Anna Taylor, “Hagiography and Early Medieval History,” *Religion Compass* 7, no. 1 (2013), 2. The matter of whether or not the ways in which Richard I were positively described can be called hagiography and are subject to how individuals during his own time understood the term hagiography. This article notes that during the Medieval era, there was no real distinction between hagiographic and the historical genres (3). As a result of this illumination, Taylor suggests that one “must ask whether historical fact could be subordinated to spiritual truth.” (8) If this is the case, then it does not matter that Richard I is technically not a religious saint.

¹⁵ Delehaye, S.J., *The Legends of the Saints*, 2.

within this context that Richard's positive image was being used as a propaganda tool to promote the Third Crusade:¹⁶

Gregory clearly considers the Muslims to be pagans, not Christian heretics, as other Christian versions of Islam professed, since he believed that Muslims did not share the same God as the Jews and Christians. His critique of the Muslim enemy proceeds from a religious view of the crusade, but Gregory does not attack Islam in any detail—indicating that his primary concern is with the injury to and obligations of Christianity.¹⁷

Pope Gregory VIII's call for the Third Crusade stemmed from a sense of Christian duty and obligation of promoting good Christian values and it was well known that the "Crusades would not have been possible without the active participation of the Curia."¹⁸ By diverging from the papacy's established Islamophobic narrative that focused solely on the portrayal of Muslims as "Christian heretics," Pope Gregory VIII had to find new a way to legitimize his desire for a Crusade. By creating a propagandized image of the ideal crusader; that of Richard I fighting to reclaim Jerusalem, Pope Gregory VIII was able to justify his call for the Third Crusade.

The Third Crusade, like any Crusade, was a cause entrenched in religious duty and the ways in which Pope Gregory VIII described the actions of the Muslims and the behavior of the Christian soldiers in Jerusalem only made it more so: "For from the magnitude of the dangers and their barbarous ferocity thirsting for the blood of Christians, and adding all their power in this cause to profane the holy and erase the name of God from that land."¹⁹ Pope Gregory VIII attributed Muslim victories over Christian forces preceding his call for a crusade to be the direct result of the bad behavior of Christian forces in the Holy Land, and phrased the situation in such

¹⁶ Gillingham, *Richard I*, 6.

¹⁷ Jessalynn Bird, Edward Peters, and James M. Powell, eds., *Crusade and Christendom: Annotated Documents in Translation from Innocent III to the Fall of Acre, 1187-1291* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 4.

¹⁸ D.A. Trotter, *Medieval French Literature and the Crusades (1100-1300)* (Genève: Librairie Droz S.A., 1988), 89. The "Curia", of course is referring to the papacy.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 6.

a way that was guaranteed to anger any devout Christian.²⁰ Correspondence between Pope Gregory VIII and the front lines of the campaign in the Holy Land further confirmed his fears that the Christians soldiers had spiritually lost their way, and once details regarding the extent to which this issue had affected crusaders reached the papacy, the attention that was focused on Richard I as the ideal Christian crusader only grew. Of the situation with the army in the Holy Land it was recounted:

The army is given over to shameful activity. It is with sorrow and sighs that I tell you that it indulges in idleness and vice rather than in virtue. The Lord is not in this camp: there is none that doeth good. The princes envy one another and jockey for position. The lesser men are in want and find no support. In the camp there is no chastity, sobriety, faith, love or charity, and, as God as my witness, I should not have believed it had I not seen it.²¹

It was in response to reports like this that Pope Gregory VIII and the Church further turned Richard I into a mythic figure. In supporting the portrayal of Richard I as the ideal for Christian crusader generosity and courage in battle, Pope Gregory VIII turned Richard into a pious religious character and roll model for the crusaders to emulate and rally behind.²² The mythology that surrounded Richard I's journey to the Holy Land was also imbued with religious character. In some Christian literary works about Richard I and the Crusade, Richard and his army became "signed with the cross. Richard undertakes an invented personal pilgrimage to the Holy Land in preparation for launching his campaign...most importantly, the campaign of Richard is explicitly intended to recover the lost kingdom of Jerusalem in the Holy Land and to 'wreke" [avenge] Jesus."²³ It is important to note that the cross, worn by crusaders and notably with which Richard I was signed, was a Christian literary symbol "enshrined in the vocabulary and propaganda of the

²⁰ Ibid, 5-6.

²¹ Peter W. Edbury, trans., *The Conquest of Jerusalem and the Third Crusade: Sources in Translation* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 1998), 171.

²² Brundage, *Richard Lion Heart*, 243.

²³ Marion, *Narrating the Crusades*, 37.

crusade movement,” further denoting that his image was propagandized.²⁴ By becoming someone worthy of emulation, Richard I served to educate crusaders on proper Christian crusader behavior.²⁵ The ways in which supporters described Richard I mirrored the literary genre of hagiography. The pitfalls that come with using hagiography as a literary genre with regards to Richard I were that it produced a very one-sided depiction. Richard I was just a man, and therefore subject to human frailty, but the hagiographic writing portrayed him solely as a saint-like being without fault. When analyzing hagiographic writings, this weakness in the presentation must be understood. To Pope Gregory VIII and other Western European leaders that promoted the image of Richard I as the ideal Christian crusader, it did not matter if Richard was actually as virtuous as they made him out to be, since as long as he was seen as virtuous, he aided their cause. For this reason the political and religious motivations behind the depictions of Richard I are important to study and note, because the way he was described was completely biased and was therefore not a honest presentation of Richard’s character.

Two of the most well regarded documents that depicted Richard I in a positive light, “the *Estoire de la guerre sainte* of Ambroise and the *Itinerarium peregrinorum et gesta regis Ricardi* provide the most complete and circumstantial narratives” on Richard I’s Crusade from a primary source context.²⁶ Though the shortcomings of these works are evident, “the chronicle accounts of the Third Crusade...show remarkable awareness of the challenges facing the crusade leaders and provide insight into their negotiations...While both sources clearly favor Richard I, they are

²⁴ Trotter, *Medieval French Literature of the Crusades (1100-1300)*, 77.

²⁵ Delehaye, *The Legends of the Saints*, 2.

²⁶ Ambroise, *The Crusade of Richard Lion-Heart*, trans. Merton Jerome Hubert and John L. La Monte (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941), 3.

generally well regarded for their historical value.”²⁷ The two literary works, although attributed to two different authors, are connected in the ways in which the narratives present information and each seem to provide insights that the other lacks. Though there are significant differences between Ambroise’s work and the *Itinerarium*, the similarities they share make the connection between the two unmistakable.²⁸ When studying the works in tandem, two aspects are made increasingly clear: “first, the poem of Ambroise cannot be a translation from the *Itinerarium*; second, the *Itinerarium* cannot be a translation from Ambroise. Yet the two books are obviously and undeniably related in some fashion.”²⁹ In order to achieve as holistic an understanding of the ways in which Richard I was praised in literary works as possible, an analysis of both is necessary because each stands as an example of how works sharing a common original source can still have differences that are important to note. The pedestal upon which both works placed Richard I has been made remarkably clear when both sources are studied together. The degree to which the authors praised Richard I makes the accolades they lavished upon his image seem suspicious and far too good to be accurate.

Though evidently not the best source in understanding the entirety of the Third Crusade, the *Estoire de la guerre sainte* provides a rare first person account of Richard’s Crusade, the actions he undertook during the Third Crusade, and has become modern scholarship’s best source for this.³⁰ Ambroise, the author attributed to the work, given his position as a crusader in the Third Crusade, described Richard Lion-Heart in a very positive manner while downplaying the actions of other significant political figures of the Third Crusade, especially figures who were

²⁷ Marion, *Narrating the Crusades*, 27.

²⁸ Ambroise, *The Crusade of Richard Lion Heart*, 18. It was likely that both Ambroise’s work and the *Itinerarium* shared a source in common, though that source seems to be lost to history.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 10.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 22.

Richard's political enemies.³¹ Ambroise's narrative of Richard I's Crusade was filled with clear biases that color the narrative and depict Richard I in a solely a positive manner while vilified anyone who was in conflict with Richard I. Though incredibly biased, *Estoire de la guerre sainte* has been significant in the study of this time period and Richard's role in the Crusade because it was one of the few and finest first person narratives of Richard's Crusade that survived through the centuries that provided an insight into what can has been agreed upon by modern scholarship as the mind of the average crusader.³² Within his work, Ambroise perfectly expressed the general attitudes that a crusader is believed to have felt towards any non-Christian they interacted with during the Crusade. He referred to all Saracens as " 'pagan cattle,' and he reveled, almost sadistically, in descriptions of their slaughter and discomfiture."³³ Due to the fact that his feelings toward Arabs mirrored those that are generally accepted by modern scholarship as being held by crusading knights, his positive feelings toward Richard as "the noble king, Coeur de Lion,"³⁴ have also been accepted as standard for crusaders who followed Richard on his Crusade and supported the English King. However, the legitimacy of Ambroise's perspectives and whether they can be used as representative for the entire crusader perspective has been subject to much debate. Ambroise was evidently educated to some degree, given that he was literate, but outside of being a participant in Richard's Crusade, Ambroise's identity and his motivations for writing the *Estoire* were unknown. As a result of Ambroise being a part of Richard's Crusade, Richard was most likely Ambroise's lord to some degree. Due to the feudal relationship that most likely characterized the connection of Ambroise to Richard I, Ambroise could probably only depict Richard in a positive manner. If this is accepted as truth, then either Ambroise's true

³¹ Ibid, 24.

³² Ibid, 27.

³³ Ibid, 24-25.

³⁴ Ibid, 115. This quote can be found on line 2,309.

feelings of Richard I were suppressed in the work, or Ambroise really believed Richard to be the heroic knight described in the poem. Another aspect of Ambroise's work that raises questions was his depictions of battle scenes. Ambroise himself did not fight in battle, but he wrote about the battles with the air of authority that can only be derived from a first person narrative, and praised Richard for his bravery in battle.³⁵ This is problematic since Ambroise must have worked from other crusader accounts to construct the battle scenes. The motivations and reasons for first person narratives such as the *Estoire de la guerre sainte*, which depicted Richard I positively, must be questioned in order to fully understand the depiction of him within the text.

The *Itinerarium peregrinorum et gesta regis Ricardi*, another positive literary account about Richard I was written in a style that has been perceived as being even more avowedly partisan of him than Ambroise's *Estoire de la guerre sainte* since it does not utilize poetic formation.³⁶ Of Richard I, the *Itinerarium* states:

He far excelled others both in his good character and in physical strength. He was memorable for his military power; his magnificent deeds overshadowed all others, no matter how glorious. He would have been thought really fortunate—speaking in human terms—if he had not had rivals who were jealous of his glorious deeds. The sole reason for their hatred was his greatness; because you will never torture the envious more than by serving virtue³⁷

The author of this work evidently promoted the propagandized image of Richard as entirely virtuous. Although authorship of the work was not attributed to anyone when it was written, modern scholars believe the author to have been Richard de Templo, the prior of the Augustinian

³⁵ Ibid, 20.

³⁶ A potential reason for why the praises in the *Itinerarium* seem much more powerful than those in the *Estoire* could be the result of the different literary presentation. The *Estoire* was obviously a poem and was written to be performed, while the *Itinerarium* was written to read.

³⁷ Helen J. Nicholson trans., *Chronicle of the Third Crusade: A Translation of the Itinerarium Peregrinorum et Gesta Regis Ricardi* (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 1997), 146.

priory of Holy Trinity in London from 1222 to roughly 1250.³⁸ Considering Pope Gregory VIII's support for Richard I and Richard de Templo's position as a religious leader, this suggestion of authorship is a logical assumption since de Templo's opinions on Richard I would have echoed those of the papacy and he would be invested in promoting proper Christian duty in the Crusade. Even though it has been considered one of the better primary sources for the Third Crusade, given that is incredibly detailed, the *Itinerarium* is controversial due to the fact that the date of the work is heavily debated and because there has not been a complete translation of the work since 1848, and the scholarship used in that translation is now completely outdated.³⁹ The controversies that surround this work should not be ignored when utilizing this source as a work praising Richard I. The questions that surround the date of this work are evidence that Richard "became a genuine folk-hero whose exploits were further dramatized and elaborated by numerous legends which, if they sometimes obscure the historical realities, nevertheless testify to his popularity."⁴⁰ Folk-heroes, were not entirely historical individuals. The legends that surround them and the deeds that are attributed to them are often embellished in order to further promote their greatness. Richard I's image was not exempt from this literary technique, especially in the *Itinerarium*. During an era when the lower classes of society were not invested in politics or matters of state, by including such high praises of Richard I from lower class individuals, the author of the *Itinerarium* was clearly trying to promote Richard's standing to the general readership which would include literate individuals of all societal levels. The *Itinerarium* recorded that "the common folk talked among themselves about his great magnificence, which left them stunned: 'this man is certainly worthy of authority! He deserves to be set over peoples

³⁸ Ibid, 7.

³⁹ Ibid, vii.

⁴⁰ Brundage, *Richard Lion Heart*, 261.

and kingdoms. We had heard of this great reputation, but reality that we see is far greater.’’⁴¹

The universal extolment of Richard I in *Itinerarium peregrinorum et gesta regis Ricardi*, was so one sided that it almost appeared to be sarcastic, but this portrayal highlighted the extent to which Richard I’s image was utilized in order to promote a greater agenda. Both Ambroise’s *Estoire de la guerre sainte* and the *Itinerarium peregrinorum et gesta regis Ricardi* presented the opinion held by many Western European Christians that Richard I was a man to be revered. However, this interpretation of his character was not the sole Western European position regarding Richard I.

Richard the Sinner?

Although Richard I was a Western European political figure whose image was utilized by many to promote Christian ideals within the Third Crusade, his image was also used by his opponents, especially King Phillip II of France, to further their own political ambitions. The insight that King Phillip II’s hatred of Richard I provided into Western European political relations during the Third Crusade was vitally important as it affected Richard I’s success in the Holy Land. Although “one of the most romantic figures in all of English History,” Richard I was not born in England.⁴² Richard was not English by modern definition of nationality; he was in fact a “French duke with French cultural and political affiliations.”⁴³ Richard I, upon his ascension to the English throne following his father’s death, owned more land than King Phillip II, although he occupied a lower rank within transnational Medieval European politics. This injustice from the French perspective only served to further fuel the French King’s jealousy of

⁴¹ Nicholson, *The Itinerarium*, 157.

⁴² Reston, *Warriors of God*, xv.

⁴³ Ambrisco, “Cannibalism and Cultural Encounters in Richard Coeur de Lion,” 499.

the new English monarch.⁴⁴ Phillip arrived in the Holy Land before Richard I did and was slowly making a name for himself as a competent crusader. However, “along with Richard’s dashing presence came his larger army, his more powerful fleet, his greater treasury, and his superior reputation as a warrior. He overshadowed Phillip entirely, and Phillip resented it.”⁴⁵ One suggestion regarding the reasoning behind Phillip’s hatred for Richard was that when Richard was given the English throne he broke off his engagement to Phillip’s sister, thus insulting the honor of the French royal family and causing Phillip to seek revenge.⁴⁶ Another suggestion, although it has been impossible to verify its validity, was that at one time Richard and Phillip were lovers, but had had a falling out and that resulted in Phillip’s hatred for Richard.⁴⁷ Both suggestions, being that they are completely enveloped in drama, only serve to highlight how the stories of Richard I and his actions seem more the stuff of legend than fact.

Regardless of the reasoning behind his decisions, Phillip slandered Richard from every angle: “that from the moment Phillip had arrived in Judea, Richard had tried to betray him to Saladin; that as soon as Richard gained access to Tyre, he murdered Conrad of Montferrat; that he had poisoned the Duke of Burgundy; and that he had sent Oriental assassins to slit the throats

⁴⁴ Amin Maalouf, *The Crusades through Arab Eyes* (New York: Schocken Books, 1989), 208.

⁴⁵ Reston, *Warriors of God*, 107-108.

⁴⁶ Gillingham, *Richard I*, 5. One reason that has been suggested for why Richard I chose to break off his engagement to the French Princess was that his father King Henry had had his way with her and Richard just could not go through with the marriage as a result. Whether this is true or not, it provides a different interpretation to the situation that almost serves to justify Richard’s decision. In addition, if this were the reason for why Richard ended his engagement, I doubt King Phillip would have been notified of that situation and so regardless of the circumstances behind Richard I’s decision, from King Phillip’s perspective it was an affront to French honor.

⁴⁷ Reston, *Warriors of God*, 61. This suggestion is impossible to corroborate in the primary sources I had access to, but I include it in my narrative regarding Phillip and Richard because it was referenced several times in this work and I think that leaving it out of the narrative would not be fair. However, I am not going to develop that string of the narrative further because of a lack of primary source documentation on it.

of various sitting monarchs of Europe who had opposed him.”⁴⁸ By accusing him of a myriad of horrendous acts, Phillip began a violent propaganda campaign against Richard’s name and honor and created a negative parallel of the pious crusading king that Richard I was being touted as. Phillip and his “black propaganda factory,” spread vicious rumors throughout the whole of Christendom that “Richard had bribed Saracen murderers -Assassins -to kill Phillip’s ally, Conrad of Montferrat, the lord of Tyre,” which led to several attempted assassinations of Richard and has often been cited as one of the reasons for his leaving the Crusade.⁴⁹ Phillip’s hatred of Richard and his negative opinion of him was made even more evident through a letter exchanged between Emperor Henry IV and King Phillip II celebrating Richard’s capture at the hands of their allies shortly after he left the Holy Land to return to England. The letter, which stated “that Richard, the ‘enemy of [Henry’s] empire’ and the ‘disturber of [Phillip’s] kingdom,’ was captured because of his ‘treason, treachery, and mischief...in the Holy Land,” and that the news will surely bring Phillip ‘great happiness, ’” was distributed and widely circulated when news of Richard’s kidnapping reached the whole of Europe.⁵⁰ From primary sources such as this, the affects of the propaganda are understood to have been so tangible that they irrevocably affected the crusades by forcing Richard, the most famous participant to leave and resulted in his capture. Even though Phillip II was not Richard’s only enemy that advocated against him, he was the most vocal. The motivations that drove Phillip’s feelings toward Richard I were both political

⁴⁸ Ibid, 303-304.

⁴⁹ Gillingham, *Richard I*, 5. The main reason often cited for his leaving the Crusade was that the illnesses Richard caught became too severe for him to continue and required him to return home to seek treatment. Of course, King Phillip would never have publicized Richard’s illness in the off chance it would garner sympathy for his enemy.

⁵⁰ Marion, *Narrating the Crusades*, 52. Emperor Henry IV was the son of Frederick Barbarossa, a German King and one of the leaders of the Crusade, who unfortunately drowned during it.

and personal and they defer so greatly from the more generally held European narrative of Richard I that they show the complex nature behind the driving motivations of the Third Crusade.

In addition to Phillip's propaganda machine that spread rumors throughout Europe, written works also served to cloud the presentation of Richard I as a pious Christian crusader. One work in particular that has survived the centuries was *Richard Cœur de Lion*. *Richard Cœur de Lion* was a complicated document with an equally complicated history that has sustained much scholarly debate regarding "its confusing representations of a hybrid otherworldly/human Richard, as the narrative takes liberties with what we know of the historical King Richard, making him, in this scenario, the progeny of an otherworldly (or possibly Oriental) mother and a human father."⁵¹ A complicated text that was comprised of two versions, *Richard Cœur de Lion* blended historical fact with evident fiction in order to vilify Richard's character.⁵² The two-version layout of the work has been studied in depth and adds to the confusing nature of the work because from those two versions, A and B, modern scholarship has seven existing manuscripts and "no manuscript seems to be the source for any other, but the relationships of the manuscripts indicate two groupings which represent two main versions of the *Richard* story."⁵³ Those two main versions however feed off each other, with version A beginning its narrative where version B ends, clearly working as an expansion on version B and is possibly the original version.⁵⁴ The questions that arise as a result of the layout of *Richard Cœur de Lion* serve as one way in which to question the validity of the writing. Another aspect of *Richard Cœur de Lion* that must be addressed in order to be able to see the motivations behind writing the work was the possibility it

⁵¹ Sonja Mayrhofer, " 'What, is Sarezyns flesch thus good': Cannibalism and the humors in Richard Coer de Lyon," *EHumanista* (September 2013): 76.

⁵² John Finlayson, "Richard Coer de Lyon: Romance, History or Something in Between?." *Studies in Philology* 87, no.2 (Spring 1990): 176.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 159-160.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 160.

was written as an anti-national sentiment. “Anti-national” in this usage of the term uses “the Greek prefix “anti” not solely to mean “opposed to” medieval nationalism, but also in its secondary sense, meaning “equal to” or “instead of,” as a way of tracing a history of alternative political forms that runs alongside (and occasionally intersects with) the history of nationalism and the state,” showing how layered and multifaceted different depictions of Richard I were.⁵⁵ That this work could not only show France’s issues with Richard I but also England’s frustrations with their monarch and an internal English feeling that Richard had abandoned them, only served to provide further proof that Christian Europe was in no way a united front during the Crusades.⁵⁶

Richard I was often depicted as a cruel and decidedly un-Christian individual within the text. In order to legitimize this view of Richard I within the narrative, the authors of the work used a historical event to lend credence to their more fantastical assertions regarding Richard’s actions in Holy Land. It was a confirmed historical fact that Richard decided to behead 2,700 Saracen prisoners instead of following the established rules of war and waiting for Saladin to ransom them.⁵⁷ This act, understandably, shocked both Muslims and Christians and was quietly albeit noticeably glossed over by Richard’s supporters. Richard’s enemies however latched onto the barbaric image of Richard this event inspired and took it one step further by declaring him to be a cannibal. *Richard Cœur de Lion* accused Richard I of committing cannibalism and in the crusading era, like the modern one, “‘eating people is wrong.’ Western culture has always treated the eating of human flesh as taboo. Reluctant or not, cannibals evoke fear, loathing,” which was

⁵⁵ Marion, *Narrating the Crusades*, 21.

⁵⁶ John Gillingham, “The Unromantic Death of Richard I,” *Speculum: A Journal of Medieval Studies* 54, no.1 (January 1979): 19.

⁵⁷ Marion, *Narrating the Crusades*, 60.

exactly how Phillip and Richard's enemies wanted Richard to be viewed.⁵⁸ Richard was accused of committing cannibalism, not once, but on two occasions.

The first occasion was described as unintended cannibalism, though that does not serve to justify his supposed actions. The tale began with Richard outside the walls of Acre, sick and dying from a mysterious and untreatable disease. His doctors did not know how to cure him and the only food he craved was pork. With no pork in the vicinity, a knight in the king's service cooked him the flesh of a Saracen prisoner, telling him it was pork. Richard ate the human flesh and he instantly was cured of the disease.⁵⁹ Although the human flesh was consumed unintentionally, it was still a sacrilegious act in the eyes of the Church and Christian community. The authors of *Richard Cœur de Lion* were not content with the extent that just consuming human flesh vilified Richard I, for he was also described as being "pleased at his unintentional cannibalism. In fact, Richard [then] seized upon cannibalism as a cure not only for his private ailment, but also for the collective ailment of his forces. With his men already suffering from famine, Richard declared that the Christians would not die of hunger because they can always eat the bodies of the fallen Saracens."⁶⁰ The authors of this work were not solely demonizing Richard's character. Through the act of his consumption of Muslim flesh, the authors of this work were giving Richard Muslim attributes, since earlier in the Crusades, the Saracen were also accused of cannibalism as a way to vilify them.⁶¹ In doing so, the authors further distanced his image from that of a pious Christian and capitalized on the distrust Richard's relatively friendly

⁵⁸ Nicola McDonald, "Eating People and the alimentary logic of Richard Coeur de Lion," in *Pulp Fictions of Medieval England: Essays in Popular Romance*, ed. Nicola McDonald (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2004), 124.

⁵⁹ Ambrisco, "Cannibalism and Cultural Encounters in Richard Coeur de Lion," 502.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 503.

⁶¹ Mayrhofer, " 'What, is Sarezyns flesch thus good,'" 90.

relations with leading Muslim figures had created between himself and other crusaders, adding another level to negative depiction of Richard.⁶² During the era of the Crusades, equating a Christian man to a Saracen was not a complement by any means. Within literary works of the crusading age, Saracen presence functioned as “both a call to arms and an uncomplicated antithesis to Christian identity. When a medieval text declared that in the Holy Land Saracens circumcised Christian boys and ‘spill the blood of circumcision rights into the baptismal fonts and compel them to urinate over them,’ it was clear that these demonized others performed their blasphemous acts to mobilize the text’s auditors against them.”⁶³ The authors of *Richard Cœur de Lion* evidently thought that the degree to which this singular instance of cannibalism tarnished Richard I’s image was not enough, because within the text, the authors did more than just claim he was a Saracen cannibal.

Not only was Richard called a cannibal; he was also depicted as a cruel villain. The second occasion in which Richard committed cannibalism only further constructed the image of Richard as cruel, demonic, barbaric, and Saracen-like. The second cannibalistic narrative involved Richard inviting Saracen officials to a banquet. When the guests arrived for dinner, the table in front of them was bare. Richard remedied this by having the heads of Saracen prisoners placed upon the table for consumption.⁶⁴ In providing this narrative anecdote, the authors of *Richard Cœur de Lion* attacked Richard’s personage twofold. By the very act of dining with Saracen officials, Richard was acknowledging them as his equals to some degree, because no one of lesser status would have been invited by such a public figure to share a meal. This trope played on the very strong anti-Muslim sentiment held by crusader and Christian layman alike,

⁶² Gillingham, *Richard I*, 23.

⁶³ Cohen, “On Saracen Enjoyment,” 114.

⁶⁴ Ambrisco, “Cannibalism and Cultural Encounters in Richard Coeur de Lion,” 503.

and his associating with Muslims would not have been easy to digest. In addition to this, “it [was] the Saracen emissaries who captured [the reader’s] empathy during this feast, because they grieved for the loss of their kinsmen (“þe teres ran out off here eyen” in l. 3466) and feared for their own lives (“To be slayn fful sore þey dredde” in l. 3469), not Richard I who was the clear villain in the scene.”⁶⁵ This role reversal where Richard I, a Christian crusader, was the villain, not the Saracen enemy, once again served to show just how intent Richard’s enemies were on crucifying his name and image.

In giving Richard I Saracen attributes and making him the villain, the authors of *Richard Cœur de Lion* were not only using this literary device in order to “mobilize the text’s auditors against” him, they transformed their writings into heresiography.⁶⁶ Just as the literary genre of hagiography was used by Richard’s supports to deify him, his enemies used heresiography to demonize him. Heresiography, as a literary genre, was used in order to highlight “ideas of heresy within each religion [that were] closely related to ideas of their religiously different neighbors, rivals, subjects, or rulers.”⁶⁷ Although notions of heresy were often confined within the context of one religion, Christianity grew to connect heresy with Islam, claiming “the real spiritual damage inflicted by Islam rendered it an ‘error of errors.’”⁶⁸ This was a powerful way in which Christendom grew to understand Muslims to be their enemy. The era in which the Crusades occurred was one that was permeated by religious thought and the idea of Muslims as the enemy,

⁶⁵ Mayrhofer, “‘What, is Sarezyns flesch thus good,’” 89-90.

⁶⁶ Cohen, “On Saracen Enjoyment,” 114.

⁶⁷ Christine Caldwell Ames, *Medieval Heresies* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Medieval Textbooks, 2015), 2. Unfortunately, I was unable to find many sources on medieval heresiography in its European usage. Many sources on medieval heresiography focus on the ways in which the Islamic world practiced this literary genre, rather than the Christian world. It is because of this that this section on heresiography might be lacking in conviction.

⁶⁸ Ames, *Medieval Heresies*, 152.

exemplified through the general crusader treatment of Muslims.⁶⁹ Therefore, by propagating the image of Richard I as un-Christian and decidedly Saracen, the authors of *Richard* branded him a heretic through the use of heresiography. In studying the ways in which *Richard Cœur de Lion* attempted to demonize Richard I, the limits of using heresiography to negatively depict Richard I are obvious.

Richard Cœur de Lion was “clearly dominated by a literary fictive impulse.”⁷⁰ *Richard Cœur de Lion*’s “fictive impulse” was exhibited within the first few lines of its narrative, when Richard I’s birth was recounted as being from a “demon mother who will not take mass or communion and eventually flies away.”⁷¹ Given that Richard I was the son of a King and ascended to the throne, his birth would have been highly documented and not once was it attributed to demonic forces. In addition to that, the tale of being born to a demon was first attributed to Richard’s great grandfather and was not accepted in that time nor was it original.⁷² This literary theme of Richard I’s demonism was one that wove its way through the narrative of *Richard* and continued to be so fantastical that it cannot be taken as historic fact. So great and unequalled was Richard I’s reputation “among the princes of Christendom,” that any who sought to make a lasting critique of him had to resort to constructing fabulous and fantastical tales, which only served to further point out the weaknesses in their arguments.⁷³ Just as there were limits to the effectiveness in the hagiographic writing of Richard I, there were evident limits to the heresiographic writing as well which must be taken into account.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 141.

⁷⁰ Finlayson, *Richard Coeur de Lyon: Romance, History or Something in Between?*, 176.

⁷¹ Ibid, 160.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Brundage, *Richard Lion Heart*, 143.

Richard the “Something-in-between”?

As a result of being so polarizing in nature, none of the European depictions can be taken as an accurate depiction of the man who was Richard I. This is because the groups who promoted these depictions could not have cared less about presenting a truthful depiction of Richard I’s character. This important distinction must be understood when studying the various literary interpretations of Richard I because the intended use was solely propagandist in nature. The stances of both Richard’s supporters and his enemies were entrenched in political motivations that were easy to discern from a Western cultivated mindset that must be taken into account when drawn upon. The ways in which Europeans twisted and manipulated Richard’s image and the reasons behind this were evident in the ways in which he was described and the actions of the factions which propagandized Richard during the Crusade. The Western depictions of Richard I were not the only ones being produced during this Crusade, however, because Richard I fought against and interacted with the Arab armies as well. Being that the motivations and politics that drove the Arab depictions of Richard I were entrenched in very non-Western ideologies, to Western scholars, those driving forces were very difficult to discern but just as present in their narratives as was in the Western sources. Just as there are limitations to understanding the general Western depictions of Richard I, there are limitations that must be stated in regards to the ways in which the Arabic sources generally depicted crusaders.

The majority of Medieval Arabic sources on the Crusades “remain only in manuscript form,” and are therefore not widely circulated or available to all scholars.⁷⁴ The lack of circulation of Medieval Arab manuscripts is not the only limitation scholars are faced with when

⁷⁴ Carole Hillenbrand, *The Crusades: Islamic Perspectives* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2010), 10.

attempting to study Crusade Arab literature. There are some works that have been translated into English and other languages; however, “those who write about the Crusades and who do not read Arabic (which is the vast majority of scholars) depend for their knowledge of the Muslim sources on translations which cover the field in a patchy and unsatisfactory way. Many important works remain inaccessible to them. Their image of the Muslim perspective is therefore incomplete and is skewed by the availability of those sources which have been translated.”⁷⁵ Similarly, Arab literary conventions were in no way identical to Christian European ones. For instance, although an Arab account may be titled as an autobiography, it was not one in the sense that a Western audience would recognize:

It would, however, be dangerously misleading to take the evidence of his book at face value. It is by no means an autobiography in the Western sense; nor is it always an account of authentic episodes...it belongs to a genre of Arabic literature termed *adab* which aimed to please, divert, and titillate its readers as well as instruct them. Such works of literature are not bound by conventions to tell the truth, but sought to rather narrate a good story.⁷⁶

Any Western scholar attempting to analyze Arab texts must interpret them with great care and should never try to rationalize or understand the texts from a Western, non-Arab mindset if the goal is to try to construct as truthful an interpretation as possible. Often “over-exploited...rather too simplistically, by scholars,” Arab sources on the Crusades are a vital part of the narrative that has often been left out from the Western reconstructions of the Crusades.⁷⁷ Although the limitations that surround any analysis of Eastern sources from the mindset of any Western historian are numerous, the ways in which the Arab depictions of Richard I differ from Western European depictions are important to understand.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 260.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 262.

There is merit in studying Arab sources in conjunction with European sources on the topic of Richard I, for although texts might not be truthful regarding the crusaders, they were written to be enjoyed by a Muslim audience and do pick up on what has, in modern scholarship, been agreed to have been the general Muslim attitudes regarding the crusaders during that time. Although entrenched in their own political schema, the Arab depictions of Richard I were not clouded or influenced by the political agendas that swayed the European narrative. Of Arab chroniclers of the Crusades it has been said:

Faithful characterization is one of the great merits of Muslim historians and is practiced (with other motives) in the brief but illuminating sketches of enemy leaders: Baldwin II's shrewdness, Richard Coeur de Lion's prowess in war, the indomitable energy of Conrad of Montferrat, Frederick II's diplomacy and skeptical irony; were all noted and independently confirmed by Muslim historians.⁷⁸

As a result of being "the most detached judges of his character and abilities," the Muslim writers, are believed to have been "indifferent to the internal Christian struggle" that surrounded the image of Richard I, and have been viewed as the most neutral sources for material regarding his persona.⁷⁹ This long held assertion is incorrect for it does not take into account Arab motivations for writing about Richard I. Just as Western powers had strong political motivations influencing how he was depicted, Arab sources did as well. It would therefore be the height of hubris to not take the Arab motivations and literary constructions into account when attempting to construct as well-rounded an understanding of the image of Richard I presented in the literary sources. It served the Arab propagandistic purposes to describe Richard I as favorably as possible because they were struggling to defeat him and his army. In describing Richard I as a formidable opponent they were justifying their struggle to defeat the crusading forces.

⁷⁸ Francesco Gabrieli ed., *Arab Histories of the Crusades* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969) xix.

⁷⁹ Gillingham, *Richard I*, 15.

Though it should be noted that the text can never be fully divorced from the motivations that led to its being written, the Muslim accounts of Richard I were ostensibly the most neutral when looked at without studying Muslim motivations behind the ways in which they wrote their sources, because they presented both Richard's positive and negative attributes.⁸⁰ However, no written work has been written without the influence of the society in which the author originated. It cannot be said of Muslims that “ ‘for two centuries the Muslims of the Middle East were in intimate if hostile contact with groups of Franks established among them—yet at no time do they seem to have developed the least interest in them.’”⁸¹ From the chronicles of Ibn Jubayr, it was widely known that this was not the case. Of the notion of negative interactions between Muslims and Christians, Ibn Jubayr stated that “the fires of discord burn between the two parties, Muslim and Christian, two armies of them may meet and dispose themselves in battle array, and yet Muslim and Christian travelers will come and go between them without interference.”⁸² The effects of the Crusades were felt throughout the Holy Land, and the assertion that the Muslim did not have any interest in these invaders was very incorrect. Although the crusaders were perceived as “an alien and infidel presence in the Muslim World,” the peculiarities of crusader culture and the attitudes held by the Crusaders were of great interest to Muslim writers.⁸³

Within the Muslim sources, Richard I was rarely mentioned at length. Although this may seem inconsequential, the glossing over of his deeds in the Muslim narrative has been argued as

⁸⁰ This is most likely the reasoning behind why Muslim sources are believed to be so objective.

⁸¹ Hillenbrand, *The Crusades: Islamic Perspectives*, 257.

⁸² Ibn Jubayr, *The Travels of Ibn Jubayr: A Medieval Spanish Muslim visits Makkah, Madinah, Egypt, cities of the Middle East and Sicily*, trans. Roland Broadhurst (New Delhi: Goodword Books, 2008), 300. Although this in itself could be a literary convention, it is more likely than not that there was some positive interactions between Arabs and crusaders, especially since Richard is believed to have had relatively friendly relations with Arab leaders.

⁸³ *Ibid*, 260.

showing an object neutrality in their depiction of him since he only appeared several times in the Muslim narratives on the Third Crusade. In regards to Arab literary topoi of the time, Richard's mysterious absence and the short and succinct descriptions of him within the narrative could possibly be the marker of Arab neutrality and truthful characterization on this matter. It has been widely agreed upon that within Arab literary conventions, an atomic unit of a description or story should be understood to be more credible than a long narrative with embellished details because the author tends to add details to legitimize the story.⁸⁴ In contrast to the ways in which Richard I was described within the literary narratives, "the Muslim sources expand much energy in presenting Saladin as a model Muslim, the champion of the faith."⁸⁵ Could the lack of focus on Richard I be attributed to his being Saladin's literary foil? It was a well established fact that Muslim "perception that the Franks had not only invaded but-far worse-polluted Islamic territory was pervasive."⁸⁶ The exemption of Richard I from a majority of the Arab narrative of the Third Crusade could be a literary manifestation of this wide held belief, or it is possible that the ways in which Richard I were described in the literary sources depicted a different non-Western literary topoi that Western scholarship has yet to fully understand.

While Richard I was praised by Muslim authors as " 'the man of his age as regards courage, shrewdness, endurance and forbearance and because of him the Muslims were sorely tested by unprecedented disaster, " and spoken of as " 'possess[ing] judgment, experience, audacity, and astuteness. His arrival aroused apprehension and fears in the hearts of Muslims,'" he was also criticized.⁸⁷ Richard I was also described as "the prototype of the belligerent and flighty knight whose noble ideals did little to conceal his baffling brutality and complete lack of

⁸⁴ Karim Samji, Lecture given in History 427 at Gettysburg College, November 5, 2015.

⁸⁵ Hillenbrand, *The Crusades: Islamic Perspectives*, 180.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 293.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 336.

scruples.”⁸⁸ Although Richard I was described within Arab literature relatively favorably, as “a redoubtable opponent and a worthy foe for the likes of Saladin,” readers of such praise must be wary of Arab literary conventions that may obscure how a Western reader understands the Arab literary narrative.⁸⁹ Within Medieval Arab literary conventions, it would be considered blasphemous for an Arab to only praise a non-Arab.⁹⁰ For that reason, following most praises of non-Arabs within the literary sources were very harsh criticisms. As a result of the necessary inclusion of those criticisms, Western readers especially, may not be able to discern what were the honest feelings of the author regarding the subject and what were the literary conventions of the culture. This could be one of the reasons why the Arab perspective of crusaders has not been fully understood and has been often misinterpreted within Western scholarship.

Although this peculiarity of Arab writing from the time of the Crusades is very important to note throughout all texts, from the very first encounter, Muslim sources described “the coming of the Crusades [with] outrage and horror, at least among those who experienced first hand the massacres and depredations perpetuated by the invaders, or who lived close enough to feel the repercussions of their presence.”⁹¹ In Muslim writings, the crusaders were seen as “boorish, ill-bred and lacking in proper pride towards their womenfolk.”⁹² They were characterized as “hav[ing] none of the human virtues except courage,”⁹³ and as “possess[ing] nothing in the way

⁸⁸ Amin, *The Crusades through Arab Eyes*, 209.

⁸⁹ Hillenbrand, *The Crusades: Islamic Perspectives*, 336. The claim that Richard I was described with relative favor stems from the comparison of how Richard was described within the Arab sources to the ways in which other crusaders were described within the Arab sources. The Arab authors were far kinder to Richard than they were to others.

⁹⁰ Karim Samji, Lecture given in History 427 at Gettysburg College, November 5, 2015.

⁹¹ Hillenbrand, *The Crusades: Islamic Perspectives*, 257.

⁹² *Ibid*, 279.

⁹³ Usama Ibn Munqidh, *The Book of Contemplation Islam and the Crusades*, trans. Paul M. Cobb (London, England: Penguin Books, 2008), 76.

of regard for honor or propriety.”⁹⁴ Were these negative depictions of the crusaders aspects of Arab literary conventions or were they examples of true opinions on the crusaders? It is possible that they were both. Due to the complexity in understanding how the Arab sources described non-Arabs, modern scholarship often takes the opinions of the Arab sources at face value. As a result of this paradigm, it is believed that the Muslim sources provide what was most likely the clearest depiction of the true King Richard I in any literary source when studied objectively. For regardless of how kindly Arab sources depicted Richard I, he would always have been of crusader ilk and the ways in which he was described cannot be analyzed outside of the context of how all other crusaders were described. Although Richard was praised, he was a crusader and there is no evidence to support the notion that the characteristics applied to all crusaders were not also applied to him. By that distinction, the Muslim sources provided the most well rounded depiction of Richard I’s image, at least when looked at by individual who was raised within the Western mindset. However, when the Arab sources are studied in conjunction with the known Muslim motivations and Arab literary conventions that were imbued in the writing, this depiction of Richard I is not necessarily neutral, it is something in between.

The Legacy of Richard I

The polarizing nature of the image of Richard I has been one that has transcended centuries. As a result of the Third Crusade, Richard I became almost larger than life, and to some, he represented what the ideal crusader should be like. Therefore the different ways in which different people described him allow for insights into the complex political structures and relationships that characterized the Crusades. The modern understanding of Richard I is as

⁹⁴ Ibid, 148.

uneven and varying as the contemporary understanding of King Richard was in his own time.⁹⁵ Similarly to how Richard I was depicted in his own time, modern historians and scholars ostensibly have fallen into the two camps, exemplified by the two Western European crusader depictions of Richard I and seem to ignore the which the Arab sources presented Richard I. This neglect of fully understanding Arab sources from Western historians, as Carole Hillenbrand suggests, might be the consequence of not understanding Arabic or Arab literary conventions. As a result, those scholars have to rely solely on translations on Arab narratives, which are not as numerous as the crusader narratives not are they as readily available, if they decide to consult them at all.⁹⁶ In addition to this insight, Hillenbrand also suggests that Western historians fall prey to the assumption that the only interaction between Muslims and Crusaders was hostile in nature.⁹⁷ This generalized assumption could be used as grounds for the reasoning behind the general exclusion of Muslim sources from modern historical narratives and allows for an balanced understanding of Richard I to prevail because it is known from primary sources that Richard I “had friendly relations” with Muslin leaders.⁹⁸ By excluding the Muslim narrative of the Crusades, or not understanding the full extent of contact between the two powers during the Crusades, half of a very complicated historical narrative is missing. Regardless of the reasoning behind it, in general, Western historians often do not use the Arab sources when attempting to reconstruct the Crusades. They rely almost explicitly on crusader and European narrative and when Arab sources are consulted, it is an unbalanced ratio.

Although based mainly upon European descriptions of Richard I, the ways in which modern historians present him highlight just how persuasive and long lasting the propagandized

⁹⁵ Brundage, *Richard Lion Heart*, 262.

⁹⁶ Hillenbrand, *The Crusades: Islamic Perspectives*, 10.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 257.

⁹⁸ Gillingham, *Richard I*, 23.

images of Richard I have been. All good modern scholarship must draw from primary source documents in order to achieve a level of legitimacy that is necessary for historians. However, the sources most often cited: the *Estoire de la guerre sainte*, the *Itinerarium peregrinorum et gesta regis Ricardi*, and *Richard Cœur de Lion* did not depict the real Richard I, they depicted the various propagandized versions of his persona. Modern scholarship, in regards to the view of Richard I, seems to follow the school of thought which believes that “it is not only impossible, but even mistaken, to attempt to distinguish too rigorously between history and literature: the two are closely related. Often overlapping, frequently mutually influential.”⁹⁹ Therefore modern scholarship has trouble discerning fiction from fact, the true Richard I from the dramatized. There is merit to understanding and appreciating the ways in which literature and fiction have been allowed to seep into the historical narrative. However, without addressing the impact fictionalize literature has had on the evolution of modern understanding of the era and the individuals in the era, modern scholarship is unable to provide a complete and equal comprehension of the time period.

The ways in which modern scholarship depict Richard I, as either a sinner or a saint, exclude Richard I as a human being from their narrative. Human beings are allowed to make mistakes and are understood to possess both positive and negative qualities, but Richard I is not granted the ability to do so based off the ways in which modern scholarship have adopted medieval European literary tropes. It is important to see the connections in the ways that Richard I has continually been depicted throughout history because they highlight the necessity in understanding a separation from man and propagandized image, which has been confused for so long. When discussing Richard I as a man and not the ways in which his image has been

⁹⁹ Trotter, *Medieval French Literature and the Crusades (1100-1300)*, 27.

distorted and manipulated by his contemporaries, he should be described with similar presentation of positive and negative characteristics as were provided in the Muslim sources, which described him as: “a brave soldier, but an irresponsible ruler who lacked sound political judgment,” but this is rarely if ever, the case.¹⁰⁰ Though to some, Richard I still remains a folk-hero of sorts, the embodiment of “chivalry, the knight fighting bravely for his kingdom, his church, and his lady with ax, shield and horse,” that image is not held by all.¹⁰¹ Modern historical opinions have judged Richard I much more harshly.¹⁰² John Gillingham, in his book, *Richard I* expertly lists the negative opinions of Richard I held by well-known historians:

For Hume, Richard was 'so much guided by passion and so little by policy', 'negligent', 'undesigning, impolitic, violent'. 'No man, even in that romantic age, carried personal courage and intrepidity to a greater height', hence his subjects 'had reason to apprehend, from the continuance of his reign a perpetual scene of blood and violence'. For Gibbon, 'if heroism be confined to brutal and ferocious valour, Richard will stand high among the heroes of the age'...A recent study has concluded that 'as a crusade leader, Richard was a dismal failure', that 'he was no hero, but a man who merely wanted to fight hand-to-hand forever'.¹⁰³

These beliefs held by modern scholars do not present a holistic depiction of Richard I. They are interpreting the widely circulated image of the public figure within the confines of their own time. The ways in which military men and leaders have to act has undergone so much change through the millennia, that as a result it becomes difficult to understand the actions of historical persons. When “judged by the standards of his own times and own class of knightly rulers and warriors, Richard was indeed a fine monarch and a very great man, for he exemplified virtues which they most admired and for them his vices and failings lay in areas of minor importance,” however the standards that were upheld within his own time are not identical to the ones upheld

¹⁰⁰ Gillingham, “The Unromantic Death of Richard I,” 19.

¹⁰¹ Reston Jr., *Warriors of God*, xv.

¹⁰² Gillingham, *Richard I*, 1.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, 2-3.

today.¹⁰⁴ Given the differences between the time in which Richard I lived and the modern era, his actions cannot be divorced from the historical context in which they lay.

The modern understanding of Richard I is at best inaccurate. Due to a lack of a personal narrative from Richard, others have written the narrative of who he was and what he believed and stood for. Whether it was the result of primary source documents or even secondary source documents, the Richard I presented was not and cannot be a true image of the man who once lived. The two opposing images of Richard I presented in modern scholarship and primary source documents are just that, images. They do not embody the complexity that was Richard I, the man. Rather they offer a very one dimensional depiction of a man who's character has been at the center of heated debate for centuries. They gloss over certain aspects of Richard I's character, while focusing on others that further the goals of the authors and their causes. The reason "his magnificent deeds overshadowed all others, no matter how glorious," was because they were used as a propaganda tool in order to promote the Third Crusade.¹⁰⁵ Had Pope Gregory VIII or any of the authors who wrote during the Third Crusade, chosen a different leader to praise, Richard I would likely only be as well known as any other Third Crusade leader. The image of Richard I that has captured the modern imagination is the result of blind luck rather than Richard I actually being so outstanding as a leader and a crusader, since many of the heroic attributes credited to him could have very easily been attributed to any other crusading leader. In the same respect, Richard I was not born of the devil.¹⁰⁶ Nor is there any archaeological or equally credible evidence to verify and support the idea that he was a cannibal or tried to force feed the severed heads of prisoners to Saracen leaders. Similarly, there is no conclusive evidence

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 13.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Finlayson, "Richard Coer de Lyon: Romance, History or Something in Between?,"160.

that states that Richard was guilty of Conrad of Montferrat's murder. These were all literary tropes that embodied Medieval heresiography and negative propaganda, just as the ways in which he was praised and quasi-deified were tropes that embodied Medieval hagiography and positive propaganda.

These depictions of Richard I stem from the image of him as a villain or a saint, not from his true self. Aside from his massacre of Saracen prisoners, much of what Richard I did while on the Crusade appears to have been justifiable within its historical context. From various primary source documents, both Arab and European, his actions regarding the massacre were universally panned and therefore his action in this specific instance could be regarded as historical fact, not constructed fiction. Although not as clear as the western motivations behind the different presentations of Richard, the Arab texts were also fraught with motivations and bias that color the narrative. When attempting to study a historical subject, it is imperative to understand that every writer has biases that color the way their narrative takes shape, and those biases must be made clear and fully understood because they can help provide insights into the work itself. Since both the historical and modern scholars disagree on the character of Richard I, a critical analysis of literary sources, both primary and secondary, is necessary. Such an analysis shows the discrepancies in modern depictions of Richard I because they do not treat the primary sources as propaganda, as they were intended. This is the underlying problem of all works on Richard I: that Richard I has been a victim of history. The true characteristics that he embodied will forever be lost because of the ways in which his image was used as propaganda and the ways in which historians have allowed that image to become synonymous with Richard I, the person. King Richard I was neither the worst king, nor was he the best king, but simply a man at the mercy of historical interpretation.

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