

Richard I of England

Richard I was born in England in 1157, the son of King Henry II of England and his queen, Eleanor of Aquitaine. Richard was Eleanor's favorite son and twice took part in rebellions against King Henry, with Eleanor's support. However, Henry forgave him, and Richard was crowned king after Henry's death. Because he had such a strong reputation for military planning and bravery in war, Richard was known to the English as "the Lionheart."

Richard was devoted to the Roman Catholic Church and to the knightly ideals of courage and honor in battle. After hearing about the Christian defeat to Salah al-Din at the Horns of Hattin, a site in Palestine, Richard taxed the people heavily to raise money for himself and his soldiers to fight the Third Crusade. At the time, the crusading spirit of defeating non-Christians had led to anti-Semitic laws and to killing Jews in England. Richard tried to protect the Jews in England so that their tax money could help pay his expenses. By organizing the best equipment, the largest ships, the greatest number of troops, and the most money, Richard became the leading fighter in the Third Crusade.

Despite Richard's organization, the Third Crusade was long and difficult. The European Crusaders needed to cope with an unfamiliar desert environment, disease, and fierce fighting by Muslims led by Salah al-Din. In 1191, forces led by Richard and King Phillip II of France succeeded in capturing the city of Acre. Acre was located on the Mediterranean coast north of Jerusalem in Palestine. However, when Richard felt that Salah al-Din failed to honor the terms of his surrender, he ordered the deaths of all 2,700 Muslims inside Acre's city walls.

By the time Richard and his soldiers finally reached Jerusalem, the men were exhausted and many had been badly hurt in battle. Realizing that he could not capture the city from the Muslims, Richard signed a treaty with Salah al-Din. The Christian Crusaders kept the coastal cities and the Muslims kept Jerusalem and some surrounding territory. They also guaranteed that Christian pilgrims could still visit the city. Richard headed back to England without ever seeing Jerusalem. During the journey home, he was captured and handed over to the Holy Roman emperor, Henry VI, who accused Richard of plotting against him. Eleanor worked hard to raise the enormous amount of money needed to pay for Richard's release, and the English people were forced to pay even more taxes. Richard finally returned to England in March 1194.

Prepare for the Talk-It-Out:

1. Make sure you know the following about your historical figure:
 - How was your historical figure involved in the Crusades?
 - What is most significant or memorable about your figure's participation in the Crusades?
 - What would you say was the "high point" of the Crusades for your figure? The "low point"?
2. Prepare a two- to three-sentence description of your historical figure based on your answers to the questions above. Then share your description with your fellow group members.

Salah al-Din

Salah al-Din was born in 1138 to a powerful Muslim family in Syria. When Salah al-Din was a young boy, he experienced the Christian attack on Damascus during the Second Crusade, and felt compelled to defend his homeland. Salah al-Din became a respected and successful soldier. At age 18, he was put in charge of the Muslim security forces in Damascus. He became the personal assistant to the powerful Muslim leader Nur al-Din, which helped him gain valuable experience in military and political organization and effective communication.

Salah al-Din's successful military career brought him more honors. In 1169, he was chosen as commander-in-chief of Nur al-Din's entire army. At this time, the many groups of Muslims fighting the Crusaders were not united. This contributed to the success of the Crusaders. Salah al-Din was a strong leader who won respect from many Muslims. As a result, he was able to create a powerful and unified Muslim army.

By 1174, Salah al-Din was the leader of both Syria and Egypt. Under his leadership, Muslim forces fought with and usually defeated the Crusaders. By 1187, Salah al-Din had captured most of the Kingdom of Jerusalem from the Crusaders. In July 1187, his forces defeated Crusader forces at the Horns of Hattin, a site in Palestine. Salah al-Din, who was known for sparing the lives of his enemies in battle, presided over an uncharacteristic massacre of the most experienced and feared Crusader groups: the Knights Templar and the Hospitallers.

In October 1187, Salah al-Din and the Muslim army reconquered Jerusalem. He was generous with the Christians and other inhabitants of Jerusalem who surrendered to his army. Although the Muslims now were in control of Jerusalem, they never succeeded in driving all the Crusaders from the Holy Land.

The Third Crusade was difficult for Salah al-Din and his army. After the Crusaders' victory under King Richard I at Acre in 1191, many Muslims were massacred. Salah al-Din's army began to lose some of its energy and spirit. When Salah al-Din realized he could not defeat the Christians in the Third Crusade, he signed a peace treaty with King Richard in September 1192. Under the agreement, the Crusaders remained in control of the cities on the Mediterranean coast and the Muslims remained in control of Jerusalem and surrounding lands. However, the Christians were still able to visit the holy sites in Jerusalem. It was largely due to Salah al-Din's leadership that the Crusaders failed to recapture Jerusalem during the Third Crusade, and that Richard returned to England. Salah al-Din remarked that he thought so highly of King Richard that if he himself had to lose Jerusalem, he would rather see it ruled by Richard than by anyone else.

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Eliezer ben Nathan

Eliezer (ell-ee-AY-zar) ben Nathan, a Jewish poet and writer, was born around 1090, several years before the beginning of the First Crusade. He studied with some of the most famous Jewish scholars of the Middle Ages. His poetry included special prayers for the Sabbath, poems for Jewish services, and poems that expressed his sadness over the many Jews killed in the First Crusade. His chronicle *The Persecutions of 1096* told about the violence that occurred against the European Jewish communities of Speyer, Worms, Mainz, and Cologne (all located in modern-day Germany). It is one of only three Jewish accounts of the First Crusade that have survived.

The Persecutions of 1096 was probably written many years after 1096, and Eliezer may have relied on other sources, as well as his own experience, in writing it. With passionate language, he describes how the European Crusaders stole from Jews, destroyed their homes, and killed those who refused to convert to Christianity. He writes that the Crusaders stole the Torah, stomped on it in the mud outside Jewish homes, tore up the scrolls, and made fun of the Torah itself.

One of the most shocking parts of Eliezer's account of the Crusades is his description of Jews who killed their families and themselves rather than be forced to convert to Christianity or be killed by the Christian Crusaders.

Although many of the Jews who did choose to convert to save their lives continued to secretly practice Judaism, Eliezer felt that the Jews who killed themselves displayed more dedication to God. He wrote of these dead: "The foe [enemy] hurled stones and arrows at them, but they did not scurry to flee."

Eliezer's description of the effect of the First Crusade on Jews is extremely emotional. He

wrote about his enormous feeling of sadness that God allowed so many Jews to be killed. Toward the Christian Crusaders he expresses great hate, describing them as over-proud enemies and oppressors, whose anger and violence caused great harm to Eliezer's people. It was difficult for Eliezer to understand why God could have allowed such an enormous tragedy to happen to the Jewish people.

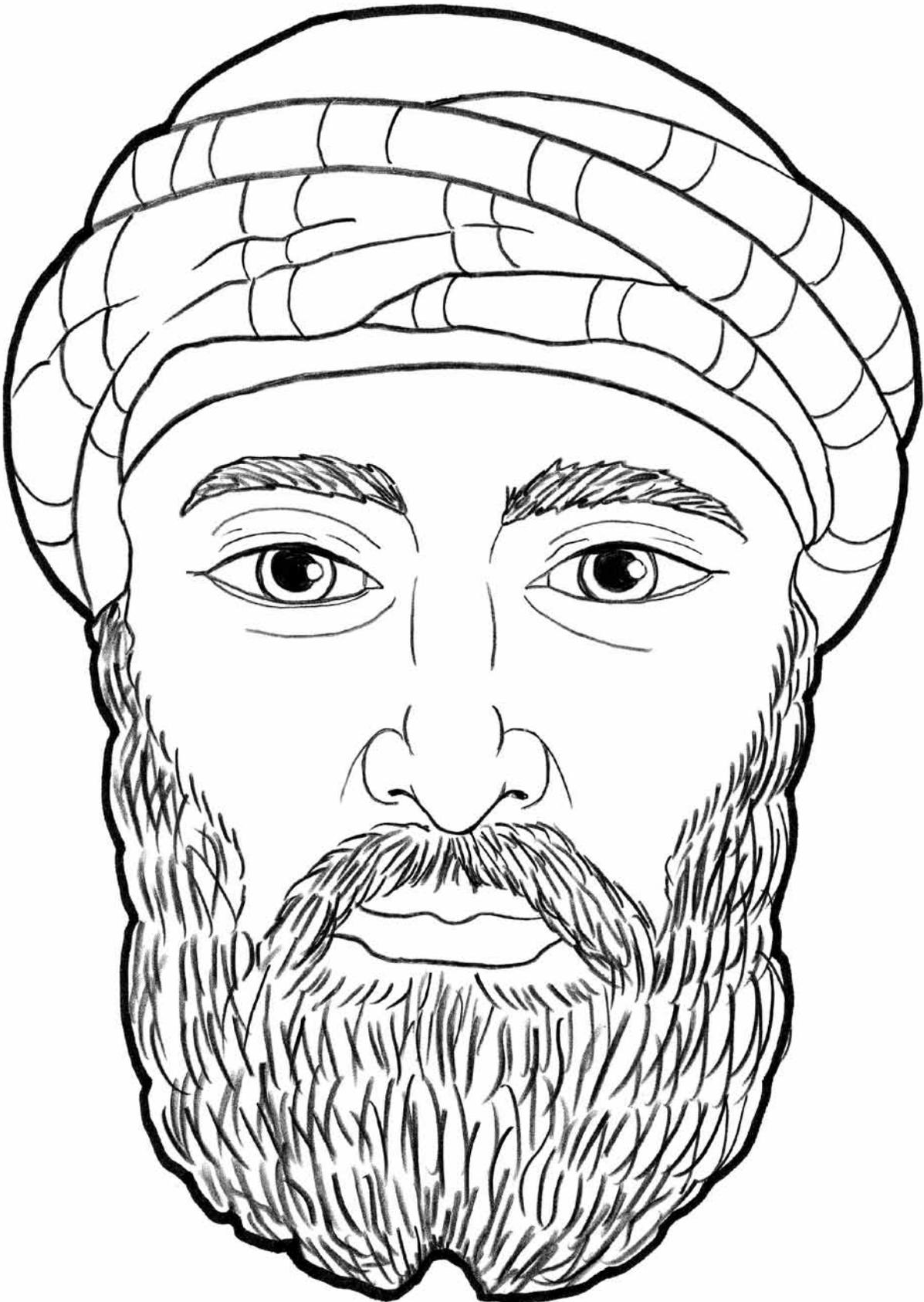
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