Chivalry In The Gesta Regis Ricardi

The *Itinerarium Peregrinorum et Gesta Regis Ricardi* is a contemporary chronicle providing a comprehensive account of the Third Crusade, 1187-1192.[1] It includes the crusading exploits of Richard I , King of England, r.1189-1199,[2] with authorship often attributed to Richard de Templo, Canon of Holy Trinity Priory, London, c.1217-1222, who is believed to have travelled with Richard I as a crusader and may have been a chaplain to the Templars.[3] The Chronicle is written from a western Christian crusader viewpoint using eyewitness accounts[4] by the ecclesiastical elite in support of honourable and political duties for God and the English king.

The chronicle includes a description of the Siege and Capture of Acre, 1191, where crusaders took back the important walled city from the Muslim Sultan, Saladin. This passage gives clear and crucial historical details of events and key persons using descriptive imagery and symbolism. Chivalry and honour can be identified as key themes throughout the text. The Christianity of the author and westerners he writes about is also undeniable.

Richard I has long been cast as the embodiment of medieval chivalry. During his lifetime he became known as the Coeur de Lion (the Lionheart).[5] A legendary hero reputation has endured, with John Speed noting in the seventeenth century that he was 'this triumphal and bright shining star of chivalry'.[6] This reputation can be seen in the treatment of Richard and events chronicled in the *Gesta Regis Ricardi*. Throughout the account of the Siege of Acre, he is carefully portrayed as a much respected and valuable leader and knight. There is a sense of Richard being superior in strength and presence to the French king, Phillip II (whose name is not used by de Templo). Richard's

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[1] Internet Archive, *Chronicle Of The Third Crusade: A Translation Of The Itinerarium Peregrinorum et Gesta Regis Ricardi* (2022) https://archive.org/details/chronicleofthird0000rica [accessed 4th February 2025].

[2] Christopher Tyerman, *God's War A New History Of The Crusades*, first pub. 2006 by Allan Lane, (London: Penguin Books, 2007) p.993.

[3] Thomas Andrew Archer, *Dictionary Of National Biography, 1885-1900/Richard de Templo*, (2020) https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Dictionary_of_National_Biography,_1885-1900/Richard_de_Templo [accessed 15th February 2025].

[4] Helen J. Nicholson, *The Construction Of A Primary Source, The Creation Of The Itinerarium Peregrinorum I*, (2019) https://doi.org/10.4000/crm.17272 [accessed 8th February 2025].

[5] John Gillingham, *Richard I [called Richard Coeur de Lion, Richard the Lionheart]* (2004) https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/23498 [accessed 14th February 2025].

[6] ibid, [accessed 14th February 2025].

authority and presence appear more essential to campaign victory. His arrival and assistance was desperately required, but bias for the English monarch over others is implied.

The popular medieval chivalric epic *The Song of Roland* is utilised. A clever comparison for expressing the importance and honour of the crusaders and their actions which gives strength and justification to the crusading movement. It is not the English king that is likened to Roland, but the French lord Geoffrey of Lusigan, who is described as 'an exceptionally worthy knight'.[7] The writer states that Geoffrey was the first to be so deserving of praise since the 'famous knights Roland and Oliver'.[8] The descriptive and figurative language alludes to all crusaders being brave and honourable as in the legend. It is worth considering whether a sense of Charlemagne can also be extracted from this account. The French legend sees Roland serve under the great Charlemagne. At Acre, Geoffrey served under Phillip II, however, given Richard I's elevation by the writer, is there an intended parallel between Richard and Charlemagne in this passage?

The language used to describe the army under the French king is full of positive adjectives and descriptions which conjure up imagery of legendary knighthood, the very heart of chivalric identity. The armed men have 'shining coats of mail', 'glittering helmets', 'noble horses' and many 'select knights…[are] of great probity and daring'. Following this an unfavourable description of the Turks sees them in contrast as noisy, uncivilised barbarians beating drums and using smoke signals.

As well as Richard I, the *Gesta* primarily focuses on Phillip II, r.1179-1223,[9] and Frederick Barbarossa, Holy Roman Emperor, r.1152-1190.[10] In concentrating on these three important powerful figures a message of strength, vigour and prestige is eluded to, which fits perfectly with the ideal of chivalry. Gerald Harriss notes that 'leadership in war was the principal function of the nobility

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[7] Internet Medieval Sourcebooks, *Medieval Sourcebook, Itinerarium Peregrinorum et Gesta Regis Ricardi: The Siege And Capture Of Acre, 1191*, (1997) https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/1191acre.asp [accessed 10th February 2025].

[8] Ibid, [accessed 10th February 2025].

[9] Oxford Reference, *Philip II*, (2025) https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100322537 [accessed 16th February 2025].

[10] The British Museum, *Frederick I Barbarossa Holy Roman Emperor*, (n.d) https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/term/BIOG108183 [accessed 16th February 2025].

both as commanders and as exponents of the chivalric ethic'.[11] Monarchs would not have been members of military orders, but we can identify traits and values of the orders within this text, with chivalry being a key characteristic in the writing. If Richard de Templo was a Templar, this embedded theme within the text becomes even more understandable. We see chivalric sentiments merge with 'the Christian aspiration for eternal salvation',[12] which points to the writer's ecclesiastical and knightly positions, whilst highlighting classic crusader doctrine within an historical account.

The writer's treatment of chivalry also extends to their portrayal of the enemy. Although description of the Turks is clearly biased, with prejudice and racial slurs. Towards the end of the text during their surrender they are issued with some respect. We hear that the Turks 'probity was admirable', that they were 'vigorous in military enterprises' and 'distinguished in their magnificence'. They are admired by the Christians, but cannot be held to the same standard due to their corruption into idolatry by a 'superstitious cult'. We understand them to be a worthy honourable opponent, therefore increasing the importance of the chivalric acts carried out in God's name by the crusaders.

In conclusion this historical account can be seen to strongly utilise the contemporary ideal of chivalry to enforce support for the crusading movement and western leaders, whilst underlining their power and strength.

[11] Gerald Harriss, *Shaping The Nation, England 1360-1461*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) p. 125.
[12] Jean Richard, *The Crusades c. 1071-c.1291*, Originally pub. in French as *Historie des Croisades* by Librairie Artheme Fayad (1996), First pub. in English by Cambridge University Press (1999), Reprinted (2001) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) p.284.

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