

Richard the warrior:

- His early military experience

From a young age, Richard the Lionheart had been trained as a warrior. War was one of the functions of the nobility, especially in the second half of the 12th century when the culture of the nobility and the culture of the knights were gradually merging.

- “The Lionheart”

Richard experienced his first battles at the age of sixteen when he was Duke of Aquitaine. In 1173 he rebelled against his father, Henry II, at the side of his brother, Henry the Young King. Named as successor to Henry II, Henry the Young King had nevertheless not been given a fief. It seems that Eleanor had also plotted to set her sons against the king of England. The revolt failed, in spite of the support of numerous lords from Anjou, Poitiers and Aquitaine, as well as the King of France, Louis VII. The rebel armies were all repulsed by Henry II, in Normandy, in Aquitaine and even in Scotland; his victory was complete. Richard and his brothers were reconciled with their father and swore allegiance to him again.

The king therefore ordered his son Richard to pacify the rebel lords in Aquitaine. That is why Richard turned against the lords who were in revolt against his father, although they had supported Richard himself several months earlier. He led campaigns in the Toulouse region and in Gascony, but also in Angoumois and Limousin. The Viscount Adémar (or Aymar) of Limoges, who had been his ally against his father, Henry II, became after that an implacable enemy. He triumphed over the barons of Limousin and Angoumois at the Battle of St Maigrin in May 1175, the first battle in which he took part.

He next tried to pacify Limousin and Angoumois to consolidate his victory. The Viscount of Limoges and the Count of Angoulême, William Taillefer, were sent to England to ask for pardon from King Henry II at the end of the year 1176. Richard next went to Gascony and the Basque country where he subdued the robber lords who were ransoming pilgrims on their way to Santiago de Compostella. Imprudently, and perhaps calculatingly, he then let loose his mercenaries in Poitiers where they pillaged and murdered, treating Limousin in the same way. The enraged population was obliged to raise a “peace-keeping militia” who wiped out the mercenaries at the Battle of Malemort in April 1177.

It was during this period, after the capture of Agen and Castillon in 1175, that Richard showed his qualities as knight and leader in war, being given his nickname “Lionheart” as a mark of his courage but also of his ferocity and perhaps of his cruelty. He carved out for himself as much of a reputation for being a model knight, brave and modest, as for being brutal. This volatile aspect of his character also earned him the nickname “oc e no”, in Occitan meaning “yes and no”, given to him by the knight troubadour Bertran de Born.

- Family quarrels:

During the years that followed, Richard was involved in numerous feudal conflicts in his domain of Aquitaine. The barons of the duchy never stopped rebelling, particularly the counts of Angoulême and the viscounts of Limoges. Revolt rumbled on in Limousin and Richard, sometimes accompanied by his father, had to undertake several campaigns to pacify the region.

Henry the Young King finished by rebelling again against his father, encouraged by his brother Geoffrey. They managed to rally the rebel barons of Aquitaine and Poitou to their cause. They

ravaged Limousin, Perigord and Poitou, pillaging and committing numerous atrocities. Richard, with his father in support, led a campaign in Limousin and subdued the rebel vassals again. This was the moment when everything changed for Richard. His oldest brother, Henry the Young King, became ill and died prematurely in 1183. The war with his brothers came to an end and Richard the Lionheart found himself heir to the throne of England.

But his father, Henry II, was wary of Richard and tried to take Aquitaine from him in order to give it to his other son John who had not received any fiefdom. Enraged, Richard claimed his dead brother's inheritance and entered into a conflict with John, considering that he held Aquitaine from his mother and that therefore his father had no power over it. At this point, Richard recruited the mercenary leader Mercadier, who became one of his most loyal lieutenants. Richard was remarkable for his employment of so many mercenaries, a fact which was not without consequence for local populations, as his troops were violent and predatory. The Church had tried several times to limit the predations of these bands of mercenaries, and equally the use of the crossbow, a murderous weapon also favoured by Richard.

- The beginning of the struggle against the Capetians:

It was at this moment that the recently crowned King of France, Philip Augustus, involved himself in the quarrel within the Plantagenet family. He applied a divisive strategy, supporting one camp and then the other in order to weaken his dangerous rivals.

In this situation, Geoffrey began to lay claim to Anjou as well as Brittany, of which he was duke by marriage. Supported by Philip Augustus he took refuge at the French court. He joined himself in friendship to the French king but he died, trampled by horses during a tournament in 1186. Therefore, Philip Augustus began to attack Normandy and Berry. He took as his pretext the fact that Alice, his sister, should have married one of the sons of Henry II some time earlier. The King of England had let the matter drag on, all the while keeping her dowry. It seemed, in fact, that Henry II had made the young Alice his concubine. Only the prospect of his departure on Crusade, after the announcement of the taking of Jerusalem by the Muslims, brought peace between the two kings.

But the Crusade was slow to be organised, and new revolts took place in Aquitaine. Richard was obliged to go to re-establish order. On this occasion he entered into conflict with Raymond of Toulouse and he went to besiege his castles in Quercy. Philip Augustus, overlord of the Count of Toulouse, took the part of his vassal and the conflict between the Capetians and the Plantagenets threatened to begin again.

It was Richard who was to act as intermediary to guarantee the peace but Philip Augustus brought him over to his side by letting it slip that Henry II was not intending to let Richard succeed him, and they entered an alliance against the King of England. They led victorious campaigns in Normandy and Berry. The defeat of Henry II seemed unavoidable and he fled to his castle at Chinon, pursued by Richard and his knights. William the Marshal, a knight eternally loyal to the old king, enabled him to escape by killing Richard's horse. Several months later, Henry II died.

Richard the king:

So, on 3 September 1189, Richard the Lionheart ascended the throne of England. He was crowned in an impressive ceremony at Westminster. His coronation was marked by the religious fervour that was rife in Europe at this time and preparations for the departure on Crusade were increasing. Since his brothers were dead, with the exception of John, he inherited all his father's domains, that is, England, The Duchy of Normandy, the County of Anjou, The County of Poitiers and the Duchy of Aquitaine. Brittany, where the duke was Arthur, his nephew, son of Geoffrey, was also loyal to him. Thanks to the diplomacy of Eleanor of Aquitaine, the barons loyal to the dead king also rallied to

Richard, who thus saw that his power was virtually uncontested in all the Plantagenet domains except for Limousin and Angoumois.

His companions in arms:

- William the Marshal, the archetypal knight;

William was born in about 1145 in England. He was the son of John the Marshal and Sybil of Salisbury. His family came from a minor line of Anglo-Norman knights in the service of the kings of England. The nickname "Marshal" came from William's grandfather, Gilbert the Marshal, who received this hereditary title while serving at the court of Henry I, Beauclerc.

After his first exploits, he entered the service of Henry II of England. He showed such bravery and talent in military matters that the King charged him with the education and training of his oldest son, Henry the Young King. It is probable that he was also one of the masters-at-arms of Richard the Lionheart. William distinguished himself in numerous tournaments, which at the time took the form of small battles, to such a pitch that Henry II had tried to forbid them in his domains. Having insured for himself as good a reputation in France as in England, William the Marshal had become famous.

He remained in the service of Henry the Young King, son of Henry II, even when he rebelled against his father the king in 1174. The life of William the Marshal showed clearly the complexity of the feudal system at the time. William was in the service of Henry the Young King, but because of the mechanics of the vassal/overlord relationship he was also the vassal of Henry II. In this way, William was torn between his different allegiances. He chose the side of Henry the Young King but not without having asked for Henry II's permission to stand alongside his rebel son!

This unswerving loyalty on William's part was characteristic of his attitude. Seeking to prove his ability in tournament and war, loyal to his lord, but also modest and courteous, he was the very incarnation of the chivalric values which were gaining more and more currency in the second half of the 12th century.

In 1183, Henry the Young King died. William himself escorted his body on its return to Rouen. Following this, he left for the Holy Land. He returned to Europe in 1187, a little before the Battle of Hattin in 1188 which led to Jerusalem falling into the hands of the Muslims, which was the reason for the Third Crusade.

Impressed by the bravery and loyalty of William, Henry II engaged him in his service and gave him the fief of Cartmel in Lancashire in England. Despite coming from a minor family of knights, William thus gradually entered the aristocracy of landholding lords. However, he remained a "bachelor", an unmarried knight in the service of a lord, until he was in his forties.

During the internal disputes of the Plantagenets, William the Marshal was one of the last remaining loyal supporters of the old king, Henry II. Once Richard the Lionheart became King of England, in spite of the unswerving loyalty that William had shown for his father, he pardoned him. He gave him Isabelle de Clare, countess of Pembroke and Buckingham (known as "The Virgin of Striguil") as a wife. As a result of this marriage, William the Marshal, knight bachelor, became one of the most powerful barons in England: his wife brought him the county of Pembroke, half the county of Longville and almost a quarter of Ireland.

Subsequently, William served Richard the Lionheart, during his war against Philip Augustus, and then his brother John, after Richard's death. He himself died on 14 May 1219. On learning of his death, the King of France, Philip Augustus, honoured his memory by describing him as the "best knight in the world". He was the incarnation of the values of chivalry in a rapidly changing society

at the turning point between the 12th and 13th centuries.

- Mercadier:

Mercadier was a 12th century mercenary. We know little about his life, but he was one of the most loyal servants of Richard the Lionheart. Nothing is known of him before 1183, at which time he was reputed to be the leader of the Brabançons. The Brabançons were troops of mercenaries who sold their services throughout the kingdom of France. They had a sinister reputation, because once paid off by their employers they had the habit of living off the country, ravaging towns and villages, pillaging and committing atrocities. They were also called the “flayers” because of their appalling methods of extortion. “Brabançons” (people from Brabant) was a generic term for these mercenaries who, in fact, came from various places. In spite of their reputation, they were regularly employed by kings and great feudal lords.

Mercadier followed and supported Richard in all his campaigns. From 1190 to 1192 he accompanied him on crusade. After Richard was freed by the German emperor, Mercadier rejoined his army and fought in the conflict with the king of France. As recompense for his loyalty, Richard gave Mercadier the land left by Adhémar de Beynac, in Perigord, after he had died without heir. In February 1199, Richard the Lionheart again entrusted Mercadier with the job of pacifying Limousin. On Richard’s orders, Mercadier led his mercenaries to Châlus where he laid siege to the castle. The King rejoined him there and died after being hit by a crossbow bolt.

On the death of the King, Mercadier remained in the service of the new King of England, John Lackland, brother of Richard, and ravaged Aquitaine as well as the town of Angers. On the 10th April 1200, Easter Monday, he was assassinated at Bordeaux by a henchman of Brandin a rival mercenary captain also in John’s service. One of the bridges of Château Gaillard in Normandy carried his name, witness to the affection that Richard had for him.

- The flowering of chivalry:

The first battles in which Richard the Lionheart participated took place in a period when a particular kind of combatant was establishing himself: the knight. Emblematic of the Middle Ages, chivalry was also linked to this period in the same way as the castle and the troubadour. Pictured as a noble warrior, defending the widow and the orphan, the reality of the knight was, as always, more complex and more subtle. Richard the Lionheart, seen as and claiming to be a true “knight-king”, contributed a great deal to the spread of chivalric values.

- What was a 12th century knight?

The French word for knight, *chevalier*, is clearly based on the word for horse, *cheval*. A knight was, therefore, someone who fought on horseback and who was sufficiently rich to own one, or even several horses. (From *chevalier* come the English words cavalry and chivalry). It was in the 10th century that the Latin term “*miles*” - soldier (“*milites*” - soldiers) began to be used to mean only fighters on horseback and not ordinary soldiers. These new warriors were collectively known as *mesnies* or households, and consisted of the entourage of the feudal lords. It was in the 12th century that they became an institution in their own right, integrating with the nobility.

A knight was a heavily armed fighter on horseback. The fittings and armament of a knight were very costly. Only by belonging to a noble family or receiving the favours of a lord could they afford this equipment. Furthermore, the knights were the elite warriors, trained from youth to fight with

the sword, to ride a horse, to joust and to wear and move about in a heavy coat of mail.

A knight could have no other activities in the 12th century, other than war and training for war. On the other hand, some “peasant-knights” who otherwise worked on the land, existed during the early days of the knights. Not all knights in the 12th century were noble. Some were the servants of a lord or could be of very modest origins. At the end of the 12th century, knighthood was increasingly closed to non-nobles and many of these lesser knights had a lot of trouble in maintaining their status.

Young nobles destined to bear arms served a master, often a close family member, who taught them the arts of warfare. Learning also to recognise coats of arms, sometimes to read and write, the future knight was first a page, then a squire. If he was judged worthy, he was finally dubbed and became a knight in his own right. The dubbing ceremony was a ritual, a genuine rite of passage, during which the new knight was reminded of his duty. Knights were supposed to respect a set of moral principles, founded on defined values: honour, loyalty and the principles of Christianity. This moral side of chivalry, beginning in the 11th century, was largely a result of the influence of the Church, which tried to channel the violence of this new warrior aristocracy. A more profane culture, that of the troubadours, was an added influence and emphasised warlike exploits, pride and glory. A real culture of chivalry thus developed in the 12th century. It reached its peak with the tales of chivalry inspired by ancient Breton and Celtic legends and songs, which gradually evolved into the legend of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table.

After being made a knight, one’s fate depended enormously on social status and position in the family. Among the nobility, the oldest effectively ended up by inheriting the land and privileges of his father and became a feudal lord. The younger sons and the knights of lower birth could put themselves at the service of a lord, who sometimes eventually found them a small fief. Sometimes, the inheritance was divided among the heirs of a lord. In Limousin and other regions of Aquitaine the lordships were often not divided and the heirs could jointly inherit the same domain. Others became knights errant (wandering knights), taking their chances and travelling the roads, offering their services to those who needed them. They aroused a great deal of fascination and they were often imagined as paragons of chivalry. In reality, hunger and greed very often turned them into bands of robbers that the Church tried to bring under control, particularly by calling them to go on crusade.

The knight was, above all, a fighter. However, battles were not frequent in the Middle Ages, even if wars themselves were. In order to be able to exercise their “talents” and to train, the knights practised a variety of activities which were reserved for them. Hunting, for example, was a privilege of the aristocracy. In the Middle Ages it was a physical and dangerous activity. Effectively, one often hunted with the spear, killing the animal at close quarters.

Some special war games developed at the same time as chivalry: jousts and tournaments. Tournaments were simulations of battles where two camps confronted each other and tried to put their adversaries out of action. The object of the joust was training for the cavalry charge; in it two opposing knights, heavily armed, set off at a gallop and tried to unseat each other by striking their opponent’s shield with a lance.

As a general rule, the life of a knight consisted of duty and fighting. He owed his overlord help and attendance as well as advice, particularly in war. Knights were supposed to follow a very strict ethical code demanding humility and discipline. But the reality was different. Knights were, above all, aristocrats and warriors. Very often, greed, pride and personal ambition took precedence over the theoretical duties that chivalry involved. Nevertheless, it served to channel many of the impulses of the feudal warrior nobility which otherwise would have probably seriously destabilised medieval

society.

Richard and the Third Crusade

The Third Crusade was one of the major events of the life of Richard the Lionheart, and one of his most well known military exploits. It marked the beginning of his reign and made a lasting contribution, like his captivity that followed it, to forging the legend of Richard the Lionheart.

- A journey fraught with hazards:

Jerusalem, which had been in the hands of the crusaders for almost a century, had been re-taken in 1188 by the Muslims under Saladin, a powerful “prince” and military leader. The Third Crusade, whose goal was to re-take the Holy City, was therefore preached throughout Europe. The greatest monarchs of their time, Henry II, then Richard, Philip Augustus and Frederic Barbarossa, the German emperor, all swore to take up the cross.

Richard and Philip left together for the Holy Land from Vézelay on 4 July 1190. The two kings arrived at Messina in Sicily. A dispute broke out between Richard and the King of Sicily, Tancred of Lecce, who had usurped the throne and imprisoned Jeanne, Richard’s sister and widow of the previous king of Sicily. Following the acts of extortion perpetrated by the Crusader troops, the inhabitants of Messina rose up. Richard took advantage of this to take the town on 4th October 1190. This enabled him to impose a treaty on Tancred, which stipulated the liberation of Queen Jeanne. Richard and Philip recognised Tancred as King of Sicily on condition that he named Arthur, duke of Brittany and nephew of Richard, as his heir. As a result, tension mounted between Richard and the king of France. Philip Augustus left Sicily for the Holy land just before the arrival of Eleanor of Aquitaine who brought with her Berengaria of Navarre, promised in marriage to Richard. The friendship between the two kings was then definitively at an end because the engagement between Richard and a sister of Philip was now broken off.

The Crusader armies continued their slow journey. Philip Augustus led the advance when Richard was forced to stop on Rhodes in April 1191 in order to avoid a storm. In May, he set off again but another storm caused the wreck of several of his ships on the coast of Cyprus. There, Richard came into conflict with Isaac Doukas Comnène who was ruling the island after it had been freed from Byzantine control. Richard took over the island in May 1191. His marriage with Berengaria of Navarre took place at Limassol on 12 May 1191.

Richard’s conquest of Cyprus had several consequences for the Latin States of the East. The island was very useful for supplying the Christian kingdoms of the Holy land. It also served as a refuge for Christian barons when their possessions in the East were finally taken by the Muslims during the 13th century. But the presence of Cyprus had equally driven the Syrian Christian barons to lose interest in their possessions on the Continent and to take refuge on the island; this accelerated the disintegration of the last Latin States of the East.

These events had other more immediate consequences. Richard welcomed Guy de Lusignan, the former King of Jerusalem, who had fallen into disgrace and been rejected by the free barons of the Holy Land who preferred Conrad de Montferrat, the heroic defender of Tyre. When Philip gave his support to Conrad, Richard decided to support Guy, both because he was a lord from Aquitaine and to thank him for his help during the conquest of Cyprus. This matter further aggravated the dissent between the king of England and the king of France.

- The siege of Acre:

Richard set out again and rejoined Philip Augustus on the Lebanese coast at Acre, which was occupied by Muslim troops and under siege by the Christian barons led by Guy de Lusignan. The

siege had already lasted several months but the arrival of the Crusader army enabled the town to be taken. It was an extremely difficult siege. The weakened Crusaders were affected by numerous illnesses which frequently ravaged their armies, as a result of their cramped conditions and lack of hygiene. Sybille, wife of Guy de Lusignan, died during the siege, as did their daughter, along with numerous others, combatants and non-combatants alike. Richard and Philip were themselves affected by an unidentified illness which seriously weakened the French king. Furthermore, Saladin's army was besieging the Crusader army laying siege to Acre and continued to harass the Christian troops.

In spite of everything, Richard the Lionheart, Philip Augustus and numerous knights distinguished themselves in the assault. Despite the difficulties that they met and the efforts of Saladin to save the town, the Crusaders finally succeeded in taking it. On 12 July 1191 the banners of the Crusaders fluttered over the walls of the citadel. It was then that an event happened which was to have serious consequences. According to the chroniclers of the time, Leopold, duke of Austria, had his banner planted beside those of the two kings. Richard took umbrage and had the duke's banner thrown over the ramparts. Leopold was furious and returned to Austria. He continued to bear a grudge and was to capture the King of England on his return from the Crusade.

The dispute over the succession to the Kingdom of Jerusalem provoked discord in the Crusader army. The King of Jerusalem was officially Guy de Lusignan, successor to Baldwin IV "The Leper". But after the disaster of the Battle of Hattin which saw the crushing of the Christian forces of the East and the taking of Jerusalem by Saladin, the Syrian barons no longer wanted him. Having fallen into disgrace, he came with a handful of knights to lay siege to Acre. Guy next rejoined Richard in Cyprus. However, Philip Augustus had taken the side of Conrad of Montferrat, the saviour of Tyre and pretender to the throne of Jerusalem, supported by the Syrian barons. The two men were thus both able to lay a legitimate claim to inheriting the Kingdom of Jerusalem.

- Richard leads the Crusade alone:

The king of France fell ill during the siege of Acre and Richard took all the glory for himself. Furious, Philip decided to return to his own kingdom after the capture of the town, leaving only a small contingent under the command of the Duke of Burgundy. Thus Richard found himself alone at the head of the Crusade, He managed to restore among the quarrelsome knights some discipline, a virtue which the medieval armies of the time did not possess.

Before continuing on his way, Richard tarnished his reputation by ordering the massacre of the defenders of Acre because Saladin was delaying the payment of the ransom and, in particular, the return of the True Cross, a sacred Christian relic captured during the Battle of Hattin. This act broke off all diplomatic contact. It increased the Muslims' thirst for vengeance and they no longer showed any mercy towards their own prisoners.

Richard moved on to the offensive. He put into practice all his talents as strategist and fighter. He led the Crusader army southwards, accompanied by the military religious orders, the Hospitalers and what remained of the Templars, who had been decimated during the Battle of Hattin four years previously. The Crusaders moved along the coast. They were not encumbered by baggage and the fleet ensured their provisioning. In this way, the heavily protected knights of his army were able to resist harassment by Saladin's troops.

The Muslim troops were extremely mobile and knew the terrain better. On the other hand, they were much less heavily armed than the Crusaders who, for the most part, consisted of knights equipped with coats of mail, helmets and shields. However, Saladin's Turkish cavalry employed a tactic that completely surprised the first Crusaders. This consisted of harassing the Christian troops with arrow-fire then pretending to flee, aiming to draw them into a trap by encouraging them to follow.

In a compact mass, disciplined and well protected, the Crusaders suffered few losses and repulsed each attack without ever falling into the traps offered by the Muslim cavalry. The Christians were thus able to pass along the Palestinian coast and threaten the towns of Ascalon and Jaffa.

- The Battle of Arsuf:

For a while, Saladin refused a pitched battle. He knew that his army, although superior in numbers, could not resist the charge of the English and French knights. The bulk of the Muslim forces brought together by Saladin was composed of troops who were battle-hardened but lightly equipped. Fearing the power of the Christian knights and their devastating charges, he waited to be in a position of strength, encircling the Crusaders and driving them back to the sea, close to the little town of Arsuf, in order to move on to the attack. The battle took place on 7 September 1191. Saladin's Turkish cavalry made an attempt to disorganise the Crusaders in their normal way, firing at the column of knights and pretending to flee, hoping to be pursued in order to trap the unwary. But the ruse failed and Richard managed to maintain cohesion in his ranks. He ordered his army to hold its position.

Harassed by the Muslim archers and having suffered some significant losses without being able to reply, a small group of knights and Hospitalers left the column and charged in order to strike back. Richard was thus forced to order the charge too soon. The mass of Crusaders launched into a gallop and crashed into the enemy ranks. The shock of such a charge was terrifying. The Crusaders put to flight the first ranks of Saladin's army. After some fighting, Saladin's army fled in disarray and scattered. If Richard had been able to put his strategy into action and get round behind them, the Muslims would have been annihilated. Even here the king still managed to maintain discipline by preventing his knights from pursuing the fleeing Muslims. This would have separated the Crusader army, rendering it vulnerable to the counter-attack. The attack came but was broken on the Crusaders' solid ranks. After several hours' fighting, Richard was finally victorious.

- Negotiations and departure:

Even if it the victory at Arsuf was not total, it unsettled Saladin, who had been regarded as invincible until now. But for various reasons, Richard did not follow up his advantage. He could have marched on Jerusalem and taken it without effort because its defences had remained damaged since the last siege in 1188. But instead, he took the town of Jaffa and installed himself there. There began a period of negotiation. Peaceful exchanges even took place, notably between Richard the Lionheart and the brother of Saladin, Al-Adil. Tournaments were even being organised between the two camps.

But Richard then received bad news from Europe. In France, Philip Augustus had tried to lay his hands on his possessions, notably in Normandy. Worse, Prince John, his brother, had allied himself with the king of France and paid him homage. Richard was forced to re-open hostilities. On 24 May 1192 the Crusaders assembled at Ascalon and, still under Richard's command, marched on Jerusalem without taking it. It is probable that the King, worried about events in Europe, was progressively less interested in the Crusade and did not want to involve himself in a long-term campaign.

Two other attempts were made to re-take the Holy City. They were both abortive, one as a result of sporadic but violent fighting and the other because of the bad weather. Richard was forced to re-open negotiations. After his victorious exploits at Jaffa, where he raised the siege of the town on 1st August 1192 and repulsed a counter-attack by Saladin's troops being himself involved in the fighting, he forced the Sultan to negotiate. He arrived at an agreement in which he renounced his claim to Jerusalem but ensured the continued existence of the Latin States of the East, guaranteeing them the towns on the coast (including Antioch, Acre, Tyre, Ascalon and Jaffa). He also managed to obtain the free passage of Christian pilgrims to Jerusalem. The treaty was concluded on 2

September 1192 and Richard left the Holy Land on 9 October to return to the West.

-Saladin:

- His youth:

Saladin, which means “Righteousness of the Faith” was a Muslim political leader and military chief of Kurdish origin. He was known for having fought and driven back the “Franks”, that is to say the Christians of the Latin States of the East. A legendary figure of the medieval period in the East, it was he who managed to unify the different Muslim states which enabled him to re-capture the land conquered by the Christians of the West during the First Crusade. He was the principal adversary of Richard the Lionheart during the Third Crusade.

Saladin was born in Takrit, on the Tigris, into a Kurdish family that originated in Armenia. Shortly after his birth, his family went to the court of Zengi, “king” of Mosul and ruler of a kingdom comprising a large part of modern day Syria and the West Bank, including the towns of Aleppo, Damascus and Mosul. Zengi, followed by his son Nur-ad-Din, wanted to re-unite the different Muslim states and factions in order to confront the Crusaders. This was the objective that Saladin also pursued.

From the middle of the 12th century, the Franks of the Kingdom of Jerusalem increased their incursions into Egypt, which was at the time under the control of the Shiite caliphs of the Fatimid Dynasty. It was Saladin who was charged with intervening. He literally took control of Egypt, putting an end to the Fatimid Caliphate. He next made use of his position to overthrow Nur-ad-Din and his successors and found himself at the head of a vast collection of states and a considerable army. He had succeeded in bringing about what the Christians of the East dreaded: the unification of the Muslims.

- The leader of the Jihad:

He led his first expedition against the Kingdom of Jerusalem in 1177. But Baldwin IV “the Leper”, king of Jerusalem, showed himself to be a serious adversary and routed his army on 25 November 1177 at the Battle of Montgisard. Saladin took his revenge at the Battle of Marj Ayoun on 10 June 1179. The two kings, who had learned to respect one another, agreed a truce in 1180. Saladin led further campaigns against Tripoli, and agreed another truce with Count Raymond III.

But King Baldwin’s illness grew worse and left him weak. Thus he could not prevent the robber lord, Renaud de Châtillon, from attacking Muslim caravans, which provoked Saladin’s anger. Baldwin IV died on 16 March 1185; his nephew and successor, Baldwin V, died in 1186.

It was Guy de Lusignan who ascended the throne of Jerusalem. With Josselin III of Edessa, Renaud de Châtillon and Gerard de Ridefort, Grand Master of the Templars, he was one of the principal supporters of renewing hostilities with Saladin. It was Renaud de Châtillon who provoked the outbreak of renewed hostilities by attacking a caravan containing Saladin’s sister. Enraged, Saladin called for a jihad. Next, he marched on the Kingdom of Jerusalem. Guy de Lusignan also gathered his army and tried to drive him back. The Christian army, thirsty, exhausted and numerically inferior, was crushed at Hattin on 4 July 1187. The Hospitalers and the Templars were decimated, along with the Frankish knights of the East. Guy de Lusignan was captured. Renaud de Châtillon and Gerard de Ridefort were executed.

The road to Jerusalem was therefore open. Saladin began by taking the ports in order to cut off all possible retreat for the Christians. Only Tyre resisted, under the command of Conrad de Montferrat. At the high point of his reign, Saladin took Jerusalem on 20 September 1187. He spared the population and returned the places of worship to their respective religions: The Al-Aqsa Mosque to

the Muslims, the Wall to the Jews and the Holy Sepulchre to the Christians. This generosity contributed to the appearance of the legend of the “Muslim knight” attributed to Saladin by his Christian opponents. He died a little after the departure of Richard from the Holy Land.

- Richard and the King of France:

The end of Richard the Lionheart’s life was marked by incessant conflict with his great rival, the King of France, Philip Augustus, who, keen to bring the Plantagenets back into line, had tried to involve himself in the family disputes that had torn them apart before the death of Henry II. After the Crusade, the King of France did not hesitate further in making a direct attack upon Richard’s interests. The two monarchs thus engaged in a merciless conflict.

The captive:

On returning from the Crusade, having left his army to go home by sea, Richard decided to travel overland in the company of a small group of knights, because the coast of the South of France was held by his enemies, notably the Count of Toulouse. Therefore, he disembarked on the Adriatic coast and decided to continue by way of the Holy Roman Empire. The King of England was recognised and imprisoned in the autumn of 1192 by a lord, Leopold V of Babenberg, who was a vassal of the German emperor whom Richard had humiliated at Acre. He handed him over to the Emperor Henry VI, the successor of Frederick Barbarossa. He demanded a ransom of 150, 000 silver marks for his release, which was approximately two years’ revenue for the kingdom of England.

Richard’s conditions in captivity were not harsh. He was free to move around the castle where he was held and to enjoy the hospitality of his “hosts”. He even wrote a number of pieces in the courtly style during his captivity. On the other hand he was frustrated and anxious because the situation in his domains was alarming.

In England, it was Prince John who was acting as regent. The situation was delicate because during Richard’s absence the king of France had made some moves to take back the Plantagenet fiefs, particularly in Normandy, and John was far from having the same confidence as his brother. He even allied himself with Philip Augustus against Richard, and tried to convince the barons to abandon the homage that they owed to the King. John probably even tried to usurp the throne. In spite of these problems, Eleanor of Aquitaine, their mother, managed, with difficulty, to collect 100, 000 silver marks (the equivalent of 34 tonnes of silver) by taxing the Plantagenet lands, particularly England. Henry VI agreed to free Richard in exchange, in spite of the manoeuvring of Philip Augustus to prevent his release,

Finally, the ransom was paid; Richard the Lionheart was freed in February 1194 and returned to England with his mother. Richard was crowned again to secure his power over his vassals. He also pardoned his brother John, probably as a result of Eleanor’s influence. In May 1194 he crossed the Channel to land in Normandy, determined to take revenge on the king of France. He never returned to England, where he had spent at most six months of his reign. He engaged himself as soon as possible in the struggle against the king of France to protect his possessions on the Continent. War raged between the two monarchs, particularly in Normandy and Aquitaine.

The war against the Kingdom of France:

Richard the Lionheart assembled the feudal army of Normandy (the “host”), probably adding troops who had come from his other domains. He began by re-taking that part of the duchy that had fallen into the hands of the Capetians. He routed the army of Philip Augustus at Fréteval on 2 July 1194.

The king of France had to abandon the royal archives, which until then had accompanied him on his travels; Richard had them destroyed. He accepted the submission of his vassals by making them renew their homage.

This period was one of incessant fighting. Richard travelled the length and breadth of his domains in an effort to keep them together. He conducted numerous campaigns against the king of France and rebel vassals. He triumphed completely over Philip Augustus and ensured the security of the Plantagenet domains. As a result, in 1196, a peace treaty was signed with Philip Augustus. Even if Richard agreed to abandon several fortresses to the king of France, he recovered the bulk of his domains.

Furthermore, on 28 September 1197, Henry VI, the German emperor, died. Richard the Lionheart managed to get his nephew, Otto of Brunswick, elected in June 1198 in preference to Philip of Swabia. Otto ascended the throne of the Holy Roman Empire, which thus found itself an ally of the Plantagenets, having previously been their enemy. It was also during this period that Richard started to fortify Normandy with the aim of protecting it against the king of France, who had established himself not far away in Paris. He built a great fortress, Château-Gaillard, at the entry to Normandy, a stronghold built with all the latest defensive technology. It was a symbol of Richard the Lionheart's triumph, his own personal brainchild and the fruit of his military and political experience.

In spite of the treaty, the war between Richard and Philip Augustus began again in 1197. Richard led his army to Normandy and invaded the part of the Norman Vexin that had remained under the control of the king of France. He beat Philip Augustus again on the battlefield in September 1198 near Courcelles. The king of France barely escaped with his life; a hundred of his knights were killed or captured. Richard's campaigns took him also to his old domain of Aquitaine where he had to counter his rebel vassals. It was one of these campaigns that took him to Perigord and Limousin: During a truce with Philip Augustus, Richard left to quell yet another revolt by Aimar, Viscount of Limoges; while besieging the fortress of Châlus in Limousin, he died of a wound from a crossbow bolt, a weapon that he had been involved in introducing to the armies of the 12th century.

- Philip Augustus, an implacable enemy:

Philip was born on 25 August 1165 at Gonesse. He was the son of Louis VII, king of France, and of Adele of Champagne, Louis' third wife. His father's two preceding wives, one of whom was Eleanor of Aquitaine, had only given him daughters and it was feared that Louis VII would die without a male heir. That is why the birth of Philip was considered a miracle and why he was given the nickname "Dieudonné" (gift of God).

Like all the Capetian kings, Philip shared the throne during his father's lifetime. His father had him anointed king at Reims on 1 November 1179. On 18 September 1180, Louis VII died and his son remained alone as king at the age of fifteen, under the name Philip II. There were two important threats to his domain: the Counts of Flanders and Alsace in the north and the east and the feudal Plantagenet empire of Henry II which pressed upon his royal domain from the north and south. The possessions of the king of England included some fiefs of the Kingdom of France, over which Philip was determined to exercise his rights as overlord.

Louis VII had left his son a kingdom that was stable and prosperous but under threat. The authority of the kings of France in fact only extended over the royal territory corresponding to the Ile de France. Their vassals were troublesome and did not really recognise their authority. The young king managed to break the alliances of the Count of Flanders and to isolate him from his allies. These

manoeuvres ended with the treaty of Boves, which confirmed the King's possession of Vermandois, Artois and Amienois. This was a first victory for Philip, which enabled him to receive the submission of his vassals within the kingdom of France and which earned him the nickname "Augustus", which meant "to augment" (i.e. "increase") and made reference to the Roman emperors of antiquity ("Augusti").

Philip Augustus tried next to resolve the problem posed by the Plantagenet threat. He laid claim to Norman Vexin and tried to force Henry II to pay him homage for all the fiefs that he held in the kingdom of France. But the king of England refused. The fighting raged, particularly between 1186 and 1188. Faced with the strength of his enemy, the King of France tried to divide Henry's supporters by involving himself in the divisions within the Plantagenet family. He ended by pushing Henry II into his last retreat, at Chinon, where Henry died in 1189.

But Philip Augustus' tactics against the feudal Plantagenet empire came to nothing. His objective had been to shatter this empire by dividing it, but after the successive deaths of Henry the Young King, Geoffrey of Brittany and Henry II, Richard the Lionheart found himself alone at the head of his father's feudal empire. He kept it as united as before and, having been the ally of Philip Augustus against his father, he became Philip's main adversary.

The Crusade prevented the conflict from breaking out immediately. Philip left at Richard's side for the Third Crusade in 1190. But from the time of the Crusaders' stay at Messina in Sicily, the tensions between the two kings were rekindled and intensified.

The king of France arrived with his army at the siege of Acre in 1191. He managed to prevent the armies of Saladin from breaking the siege but failed to take the city. During the long months of the siege, Philip Augustus fell seriously ill and had to leave Richard to direct operations. The quarrel about the king of Jerusalem and his succession further poisoned their relationship. After the fall of the city, Philip decided to return to his kingdom.

Philip Augustus attacked the Plantagenet lands once again. The capture of Richard the Lionheart by Leopold of Austria was a godsend for the king of France. By his political, strategic and diplomatic finesse, Philip Augustus managed to keep his adversary at bay and to reattach the Norman Vexin to his territory. He also did everything to prevent the release of Richard, whose abilities and merits he well understood. As a result, the king of England developed a bitter hatred of his old ally.

On his release, his reply was immediate. War broke out between the two kings and fighting continued until 1199. Philip Augustus was forced to give back his conquests to Richard. A truce was finally signed in 1199. This allowed Richard to go to put down the revolt of the Lords of Angoumois and Limousin; he lost his life under the walls of Chalus during this campaign.

Philip Augustus was the main adversary of Richard the Lionheart, who managed all the same to hold him in check. Once Richard was dead, the king of France finally had his hands free to break the power of the Plantagenets on the Continent. He began by supporting Arthur of Brittany to succeed Richard, with the aim of destabilising John who had finally become king of England. But John lacked all the qualities that had brought about the success of his brother. After Richard's death, the French king retook, one by one, all the Plantagenet lands. He consolidated his success at the Battle of Bouvines in 1214, where he crushed the coalition armies of the Holy Roman Empire and King John. When he died in 1224, the kingdom of France had become one of the most powerful of Western Europe and the Plantagenets had lost most of their possessions on the Continent.

- War in the 12th century:

Richard the Lionheart was involved in numerous conflicts throughout his life. War at this time was very frequent and was waged according to customs and rules that were very different from those of more recent periods.

Who did the fighting?

In the 12th century, there was no professional or standing army. When a lord or king went to war, he summoned his vassals, who had the duty of answering his call. The men summoned in this way were called the “ban”. The lords came accompanied by their “households”, their entourage of knights. This collection of various bodies of troops was called the feudal host. The fighting men who composed it were knights, i.e., fighters on horseback, and troops of armed men of various origins - conscripted peasants, mercenaries, etc.

From the 12th century, other fighters were increasingly present on the battlefield: the sergeants at arms of the urban guards. When the towns freed themselves from the control of the feudal lords, they often received the right to maintain a militia designed to stand guard on their ramparts and defend them in case of siege. Thus, although war was normally the preferred activity of the nobility, numerous commoners (i.e., non-nobles) took part in the conflicts that brought bloodshed to the kingdom of France and Europe in general.

But in the 12th century, the fighter par excellence was the knight. The knight of the Middle Ages was an elite fighter, formidable, well equipped and well trained. The French knights in particular were known throughout Europe for their bravery.

Battle:

The classic pitched battle of our imagination was in fact very rare in the Middle Ages. It was an exceptional event, brought about by powerful lords or sovereigns; the Battle of Hastings in 1066 and the Battle of Bouvines in 1214 are examples. But in the 12th century, almost no battle as major had occurred, although numerous clashes had taken place. During these great set pieces, seen both as test and divine judgement, the two armies faced each other and were arranged in battle order.

The objective in the 12th century was to crush the enemy swiftly by a cavalry charge. There was not really any battle plan or coherent strategy. The “commanders”, i.e., the great lords, were in the thick of the fighting and led their men by example, including the king himself sometimes; this approach could be criticised on the grounds that they were not able to direct their army according to a predetermined strategy.

When at the right distance, the knights launched their horses into a gallop, their long lances wedged under their arms. The impact when they reached the enemy troops was extremely violent. Many troops fled and scattered after been subjected to such an assault. As the fighting continued, the knights found themselves in the *mêlée*. They abandoned their lances, which were often broken in the impact, and drew their swords. There, too, they had no set formations or predetermined tactics, just the knight fighting in a quest for personal fame and military glory. The concept of discipline, very important in the Roman legions of the Classical Period, was absent from the feudal wars of the Middle Ages.

Although very violent, these combats were, in fact, rarely deadly. The knights, well protected, were not trying to kill each other but to put each other out of action, in order to claim a ransom later. The ransom was a very important source of revenue in time of war for lords and knights.

But the majority of acts of war in the Middle Ages were skirmishes, raids, ambushes and, in particular, sieges. The aim was to weaken the enemy by pillaging and ravaging his land until he gave in. Armies on campaign went from stronghold to stronghold, devastating everything on their

way. When they came to a castle or the ramparts of a town they besieged it.

The assault only came when the attacker had comfortably superior numbers. It was a very costly operation in terms of men and resources. The fighters, including the knights on foot, mounted the assault of the walls with ladders and other siege towers. They had to make their way through a hail of arrows, crossbow bolts, stones, burning tar and all sorts of missiles.

Once they arrived at the top of the ramparts, they engaged in fierce hand-to-hand fighting until the defenders yielded or the attackers were repulsed. It was often necessary to make numerous assaults one after the other before being able to take the objective. Siege engines, such as trebuchets and other catapults, as well as mining could create a breach in the wall and thus make entering the fortress easier. But it was always a costly business which, if it went badly, could pose problems for an entire expedition.

Consequently, most armies contented themselves with making a blockade around the stronghold and waiting until its occupants ran out of supplies. Sieges, therefore, could last for months.

Weapons:

- Offensive weapons:

The principle weapon of the knight was the sword, which was also the symbol of his rank. The sword was a fearsome weapon. In the 12th century, it was a one-handed, wielded in conjunction with a shield. Contrary to popular belief, these swords were very light, weighing a little more than a kilogram on average. It was a weapon designed for cutting, not crushing. The sword became relatively inefficient against a well protected opponent.

This is the reason that, very early on, other weapons were developed, such as the mace, the one- or two-handed battle-axe and the flail, that strange weapon consisting of a metal ball attached to a handle by a chain. These weapons, blunt rather than sharp, were designed to perforate armour and were feared on the battlefield.

The cavalry lance was the knight's other principal weapon. Employed "at the level" (held horizontally), it could be devastating in the charge. It consisted of a long shaft of wood, up to four metres long, with a sharp iron tip. The knight wedged it under his arm, point towards the front, and launched his horse into a gallop. Reaching the enemy, he stood up in his stirrups and put all his weight behind the lance. The wooden shaft often broke at this point. In tournaments, the point was blunted to avoid serious injury to the opponent, but this did not prevent the death of numerous participants.

Foot soldiers fought most of the time with pole arms. In the 12th century, it was the spear that was still used most by foot soldiers. The other weapons of these fighters could be knives, daggers and other similar blades. The sword was less widespread but was also in use, although the quality of those used by common soldiers would have been poorer than those wielded by the nobility.

The principal projectile weapons were the bow and the crossbow. The bow, known in all periods, could, when used in great numbers, rain down so many arrows on the enemy as to make them retreat. The crossbow was even more fearsome. It fired bolts, small arrows specially invented for the crossbow, with incredible power, capable of piercing the strongest armour. It was so dangerous that the Church tried to forbid its use between Christians. On the other hand, it took a very long time to re-load. It was one of these weapons which struck Richard the Lionheart at Chalus in 1199 and put an end to his life.

- Defensive armament:

The knight in armour is an image that is automatically associated with the Middle Ages. However,

heavy armour of plate steel, evoking the Knights of the Round Table, did not appear until the 14th century, and was in use in the 15th and 16th centuries. During the preceding centuries, the strongest and most widespread protection for knights was the coat of mail. It consisted of a sort of garment made of thousands of steel rings of about 1cm in diameter, put together in such a way that each ring was joined to four others. It formed a supple protection, flexible and following the shape and movements of its wearer.

In the 12th century, it consisted of a long tunic reaching to the knees or lower, called a “hauberk”, and held in at the waist by a belt and shoulder strap. The large flaps of mail which thus fell below the waist were designed to protect the legs of the knight when he was in the saddle. This long tunic also had sleeves which came to the wrists or formed a sort of mail mitten designed to protect the wearer’s hands.

At neck level, a “camail”, a sort of hood of mail, and a “ventail” which hid part of the face, were added. Most of the time it was attached to the hauberk and the two elements formed one single piece. In combat, this hood was pulled over the head and served to support the helmet. Thus it protected the sides of the face and skull.

Many fighters did not have the means to pay for this kind of extremely costly protection. Therefore they resorted to forms of protection made of leather and material. Leather breastplates offered only nominal protection against sword cuts and the point of a lance. For this reason the leather was often reinforced by pieces of metal, such as nails or small plates or rings fixed directly on to the leather. This type of protection is called a “byrnie”. A gambeson, a sort of thick, padded tunic, was often the only protection for the foot soldiers.

Helmets in the 12th century were not yet the helms that enclosed the whole head. Most were helmets with a nose guard. They consisted of a metal skullcap, in shape conical, hemispherical, or in the Phrygian style, with a nasal protector in the form of a strip of metal of varying widths coming down over the nose in order to protect it. For the more wealthy knights, a new type of helmet had appeared, the helmet with a visor or face mask. It consisted of a skullcap to which was fixed a visor with holes to see and breathe through. These helmets were the forerunners of the great cylindrical helms of the 13th century.

Finally, a last essential form of protection: the shield. The 12th century was a period of transition and the shield was the descendant of those that are seen on the Bayeux Tapestry. It was large and almond-shaped, carried on the left and designed to protect its possessor from the shoulder to the knee; it was particularly useful on horseback where the legs on each side of the saddle were very vulnerable. The shield also took on an important role in this period because it became the ideal way of displaying its bearer’s coat of arms.

From the 11th century, the lords began to make use of heraldic symbols designed to represent their lineage and identity. The coat of arms, therefore, became the means of recognising a knight.

- Siege weapons:

The siege engines of the Middle Ages were the descendants of those used in Antiquity. It was a continual process of development, bringing about a parallel development in fortifications. This arms race ended with the invention of firearms, the perfection of which rendered useless fortifications and armour alike and opened the way to the modern army.

In the 12th century, the most common form of siege engine was the ballista. It was a kind of huge bow which fired either enormous arrows or streams of rocks with great force. However, the most formidable of these engines were the trebuchets that originated in the East. This weapon involved a system of counterweights which acted on an arm ending in a sort of enormous sling. A trebuchet

was capable of throwing a stone ball of more than 200kg a distance of 300 or even 400 metres.

The use of several of these engines could rain a mass of stone on to the besieged fortress and reduce it to a pile of rubble. However, these weapons were difficult and expensive to design, they had to be constructed on site and their accuracy left something to be desired. For that reason, they were never used against an army but always against a fixed defensive position.

During sieges, siege towers were also sometimes employed. These huge constructions in wood were mounted on wheels and dragged to the foot of the ramparts after being filled with men who could therefore reach the rampart relatively well protected from the numerous missiles which were thrown at them. Battering rams to break down the doors, trenches and mining, a technique aiming at digging a gallery under the foundations of a wall and causing its collapse, were also used during an assault.

War was the basis of the chivalric culture which became symbolic of the Middle Ages. Richard the Lionheart carved out a reputation as an outstanding fighter, an incarnation of the values of the warrior aristocracy of his time. It was largely his exploits as a warrior, true or not, that forged the legendary reputation that continues to this day.