

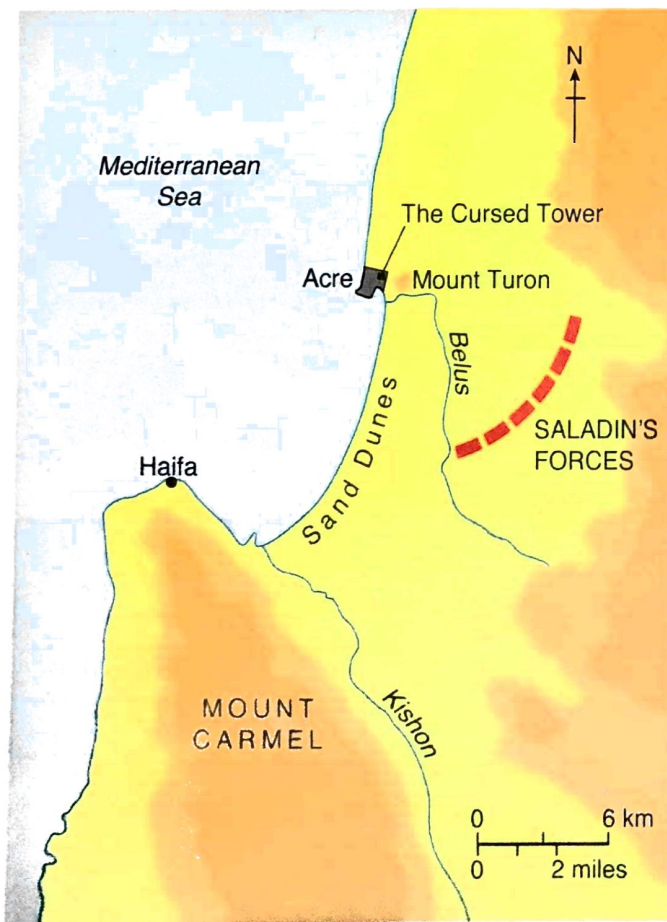
Victory at Acre, July 1191

Saladin's struggle

In the years following Saladin's great victories at Hattin and Jerusalem in 1187, his political and military strength began to decline. Divisions within the Muslim world resurfaced and Saladin struggled to take control of the remaining crusader strongholds. In the winter of 1187–88 Saladin attacked the crusader port of Tyre, but the town was successfully defended by Conrad of Montferrat, an Italian nobleman recently arrived in the Holy Land. Then, the following summer, Saladin released from prison Guy of Lusignan, King of Jerusalem. This was a costly decision. By August 1189, Guy gathered several thousand men and besieged Muslim-held Acre – one of the most important ports on the Mediterranean coast.

Guy positioned his troops on a low hill called Mount Toron, nearly a mile to the east of Acre. A swift attack from Saladin's more numerous troops could have finished the Franks, but he was too cautious and set up a holding position about six miles to the south-east of Acre. For the next year and a half, the Siege of Acre ground to a stalemate with the Franks camped in trenches between Saladin's army and the Muslim garrison inside Acre. The Christian forces were swelled by Conrad of Montferrat's men and then by the first waves of crusaders from Europe, but the Franks could not break the strong walls that surrounded Acre. The winters of 1189 and 1190 were particularly harsh, and both sides were weakened by disease and hunger. The city somehow managed to resist the Christian onslaught. However, by the summer of 1191, Sultan Saladin must have been dreading the arrival of the Kings of England and France.

▽ The Siege of Acre.



Crusader victory

On 8 June 1191, Richard I landed on the coast near Acre with great ceremony. He set up his camp to the north of the city, Philip having taken up a position to the east some five weeks earlier. Within days of Richard's arrival, both kings were struck down with a disease which the chroniclers called 'Arnaldia'. Richard's teeth and nails loosened, and his hair began to fall out. Despite his illness, the Lionheart opened negotiations with Saladin. The English King even sent envoys to Saladin's camp requesting ice and fruit. This willingness to use diplomacy as well as military strength would be a crucial aspect of Richard's strategy during the Third Crusade. Saladin, too, was willing to negotiate, but thought it improper for kings to meet before an agreement had been reached.

In the end, bitter warfare rather than diplomacy determined the fate of Acre. In late June and early July the siege reached a climax with a hard-fought struggle between the siege engines, catapults, **sappers** and scaling ladders

of the crusaders and the **Greek fire**, stone-throwing machines and counter-sappers of the Muslims. Philip's men directed their catapult on the Cursed Tower at Acre's north-eastern corner. Richard's troops constructed two well-designed catapults and bombarded the city with massive stones that they had brought from Messina. By 2 July, the incessant bombardment from the crusaders' siege machines began to pay off. The Cursed Tower was weakened and the wall next to it was beginning to crumble. The defenders of Acre knew that they were defeated. On 12 July 1191 they surrendered Acre in return for the lives of the Muslims in the city.

Dreadful decisions

As the defeated Muslims marched out of Acre, Richard's and Philip's banners were raised above the walls and towers of the devastated city. The two monarchs divided the property of Acre equally, but tension soon resurfaced because each king supported a different claimant to the throne of Jerusalem. Philip was allied to Conrad of Montferrat while Richard supported Guy of Lusignan. At the end of July it was agreed that Guy should hold the throne for his lifetime, but that on his death the crown should pass to his rival. By that time Philip had already made the decision to abandon the Third Crusade and return to France. Philip's continued ill health, his irritation at Richard's arrogance and the need to assert his rights over Flanders following the Count of Flanders' death at Acre, must all have influenced his decision. Before he left the Holy Land Philip swore that he would not attack Richard's territory in France. The English King did not trust Philip to keep his promise and the threat of Philip's interference in Angevin territory became an increasing distraction for the Lionheart during the remainder of the Third Crusade.

Of more immediate concern to Richard was Saladin's reluctance to honour the surrender terms following the fall of Acre. Saladin failed to hand over the True Cross that he had held since Hattin and he was in no hurry to release Frankish prisoners or to pay ransom money. The Lionheart knew that he could not afford a delay if the Third Crusade was to succeed. On 19 August Richard made the decision to kill all the Muslim prisoners taken at Acre, apart from the most important who could be ransomed. The next day Richard's men marched 2700 Muslim prisoners out of the city, bound in ropes. In an area of open ground beyond the crusaders' tents they set upon the Muslims with their swords and murdered them in cold blood. Richard's message to Saladin was clear: this was the ruthless brutality that he was prepared to bring to the Holy War.

▽ Richard the Lionheart watching the execution of Muslim prisoners at Acre. Detail from a French miniature, 1490.



Remember to add more notes to your timeline and key issues. Make sure you are clear about the nature of the rivalry between Richard and Philip and its impact on the Third Crusade.