

## The Taking of Cyprus (1191)

*'Like a shower upon the grass did the arrows fall on those who fought'*

Roger of Howden on Richard's attack on Cyprus

Richard did not stay long in Messina after Berengaria's arrival. He left on 10 April, the same day that the man who he thought of as the Anti-Christ, Pope Clement III, died in Rome. He took with him not only a bride-to-be but a castle, for his prefab fortress Mategriffon was dismantled and put aboard ship, to be called into use again at some future time. Richard was said to be delighted with Berengaria; the chronicler William of Newburgh suggested this was a good thing for it would be a distraction for Richard against the evils of extra-marital fornication, another hint concerning Richard's energetic sexual exploits in the past.

But the Mediterranean weather was unreliable. The fleet had planned to put in at Crete as a staging-post on the way east. Crete, with Mount Ida dominating the view, was said by the sailors with the fleet to be halfway between Messina and Acre. Richard's flagship hoisted a lantern as a beacon for the other vessels, over 200 of them by now, to follow, 'as the mother hen leads her chicks to food'.<sup>1</sup> It was no easy task as the ships were of different construction and therefore journeyed at a varying pace. They were soon widely dispersed.

The ships were supposed to stay within a trumpet call of each other but the weather had other ideas. Ironically, it was on the holiest of days in the Christian calendar, Good Friday, that the

storm broke, on 12 April, just two days after leaving Messina. Soon the ships were being tossed around on the choppy surface of the waters with great rollers and violent waves creating panic.

The helmsmen gave up trying to steer as it was a useless task. Many men felt more seasick than terrified, so bad was the effect of the motion. Eventually the wind eased off but now the fleet was all over the place. Although most of the ships made it to Crete, twenty-five snekkars did not, much to the fury of Richard. Two were particularly important; one carried Richard's treasure and the other his wife-to-be and his sister Joanna, who were travelling separately from him; they had set out in advance in ships that were slower than his but stronger.

While Richard moved on to Rhodes, with the winds still gusting and the waves still high, other ships were despatched to look for those which were missing. It was a worrying time; many of what we now call the Greek islands were at the time bases for pirates. Richard did hear that Philip had arrived at the Siege of Acre but for ten days there was no news of the missing ships.<sup>2</sup>

On 1 May, Richard at last learned that the ship carrying Berengaria and Joanna, the *Buza di Luna*, had been found, anchored off Limassol in Cyprus. Two other ships had sunk nearby. Amongst those who had been lost was Richard's Vice-Chancellor, Roger Mauchat. Mauchat's body had been pulled from the sea with the royal seal still suspended around his neck.

The local Cypriots had pillaged the wrecks. This was not altogether surprising in those days; Richard had only recently cancelled his right to wrecks that were thrown up on the shores of his territories. Ironically, one of the recovered seal's uses in Sicily was when Mauchat witnessed a document that confirmed this action.<sup>3</sup> Now on Cyprus survivors had been taken prisoner, useful hostages and a further way of raising money; again, not unusual for the times. Others had been killed. The ruler of Cyprus, Isaac Comnenus, had invited Berengaria and Joanna to disembark but they had wisely resisted the bait; they would have made the most valuable hostages of all.

Isaac resorted to trickery to lure the women ashore, sending them gifts including presents of Cypriot wine, said to be the best in the world.<sup>4</sup> He was painted by some writers as the ultimate villain, 'the most wicked of all bad men. He surpassed Judas in faithlessness and Gamalon in treachery', which seems like something of an

exaggeration, however underhand his tactics were. Some chroniclers even said that he was in league with Saladin and the two had drunk each other's blood as a mark of their friendship.<sup>5</sup>

An intriguing prospect has been raised by some historians,<sup>6</sup> namely that Richard had always planned an attempt on Cyprus. Possibly Richard had already seen both the importance of Cyprus and its vulnerability to attack given the fact that the position of Isaac Comnenus was far from secure. It is an interesting speculation, even if an unproven one.

When he received news of Berengaria and Joanna's whereabouts, Richard moved into action, although he was now ill again. A fleet sailed across the Gulf of Antalya, considered to be particularly dangerous because of the strong currents there in a location where several different seas met. Before long they were off Cyprus.

Isaac was a usurper. He had taken advantage of the declining fortunes of the Byzantine Empire to seize Cyprus. He proved to be an unpopular ruler. On his arrival off Limassol on 6 May 1191, Richard predictably demanded that Isaac release his prisoners. The Cypriot king (Isaac called himself Emperor, but of exactly what was unclear) equally predictably showed that he had no intention of doing so. The matter would be decided by force.

According to the chroniclers, Isaac's reply to Richard's messengers was extremely discourteous. Those who knew Richard understood that this must lead to an aggressive response. The Cypriots had a military advantage as they held the shoreline. Amphibious operations are always a risk in any age and when Richard's ships hove into view the beachhead was strongly defended against them.

The assault would require the attackers to transfer to small rowing boats from their ships and make their way ashore in these. It was not an attractive proposition. Those in the boats would be exposed to missiles from the shore. The Cypriot forces had set up ramshackle barricades, behind which they prepared to drive Richard back into the sea. Richard ordered his archers to unleash their volleys and soon their arrows were streaking across the sky; 'like a shower upon the grass did the arrows fall on those who fought' Roger of Howden wrote.<sup>7</sup>

Richard had immense forces with him – one commentator has suggested that the fleet of 200 ships and more was probably carrying 17,000 men<sup>8</sup> – and although they were probably not all with Richard on Cyprus he certainly had a large force present to call upon. The eye-witness Ambroise put it very well: 'we had

the worse hand, for we were coming from the sea, in tiny little boats, exhausted by the storms, crippled by the waves, weighed down with our arms and all on foot. They were on their land. We, however, better understood the business of war'.<sup>9</sup> And so indeed it would prove.

Galley sent out to stop the crusader's boats were met by a hail of crossbow fire and were soon taken, with many of the men aboard jumping into the sea rather than be captured. As Richard's boats moved closer to shore, his men plunged into the waters, eager to close with the Cypriots. At their head was Richard, allegedly the first into the sea at the head of his army like a latter-day Alexander storming ashore on the beaches of ancient Troy. The position held by the Cypriots might in theory be strong but when they saw the cream of Richard's army heading for them they opted for flight rather than glory. They rushed panic-stricken back into the nearby town but in such a haphazard way that it was easy for Richard's men to follow them into it, particularly given the fact that it was unwallled.

Once inside, the crusaders started to help themselves to anything of value that they could find; particularly satisfying was the seizure of large stocks of corn, oil, wine and meat. Inevitably there was some confusion when Richard's men broke in, and it is probably a safe speculation that they were also distracted by the prospect of booty. In the chaos, Isaac Comnenus made good his escape on the back of a swift-footed steed called Fauvel.

Richard chased after him, demanding that he stop and give battle, again rather as Alexander the Great had done at the decisive Battle of Gaugamela when the Persian king, Darius, was fleeing from him nearly 2,500 years before. Both Richard and Alexander had been unsuccessful in their challenge and one modern historian suggests that Richard probably was not even heard in the din of battle and that this was nothing more than a piece of 'ritual sabre-rattling'.<sup>10</sup> Isaac was able to regroup with some of his men just a few miles away and prepared to confront Richard in battle once more.

In the meantime, Richard ordered his horses to be brought ashore. They were unsteady on their feet, having spent some time at sea; it would take a while for them to find their 'land legs'. They would not have long to recuperate as Richard planned to use them on the next day. Isaac's men slept in their hastily established camp in an olive grove that night, perhaps fearing the worst for the battle which was likely to come when the sun rose on the following morning.



In the event, they would not have to wait that long. Richard had now been joined by Berengaria and Joanna. He smelt the scent of fear amongst Isaac's men and was determined to take full advantage of it. That night, seemingly informed by spies of Isaac's whereabouts, he launched a surprise attack on his camp, which was completely unprepared to receive it. Richard and his men fell on the Cypriots 'like ravening wolves'.<sup>11</sup> It was a rout. Disoriented by the ferocity of the attack and the enveloping cloak of night, the Cypriot army fell apart.

Once more, the faithful Fauvel did his part, bearing Isaac away to safety. But the camp contained much of the king's treasure and with its loss to Richard a great deal of his remaining power went too. His gilded standard was captured, a great symbolic blow for him to compound the material losses he had suffered; Richard would later make a gift of it in honour of the Anglo-Saxon king and martyr, Saint Edmund.

More mundanely, Isaac's bed was taken along with cloths of silk and scarlet dye. A plentiful supply of food was seized too: oxen, cattle, pigs, goats, capons and cocks, fat mules bearing embroidered cloth, good doublets, elegant, beautiful clothes and good horses.<sup>12</sup> It was a hammer-blow to Isaac's cause and it was only a matter of days before many of the nobles of the island were deserting him and submitting themselves to Richard's mercy.

Many of those Cypriots with horses managed to escape to the mountains; the foot-soldiers in Isaac's army were either killed or captured and lines of the latter blocked the roads. Soon after, on 11 May, three ships hove into view. They came from Outremer and on board one of them was her disenfranchised king, Guy of Lusignan. He was accompanied by his elder brother Geoffrey, who Richard knew well from his days in Aquitaine.

Guy, captured at Hattin, had been released when his wife Sibylla handed over Ascalon in exchange for his freedom. On board with him were also some of the other leading men of Outremer, such as Raymond of Antioch, Bohemond of Tripoli and Humphrey of Toron. Richard was about to come face-to-face with the realities of the politics of the crusader kingdoms of the East. Having said that, he probably knew a great deal about them already. The arrival of an advance party of English crusaders in the region some time before, led by Archbishop Baldwin supported by Hubert Walter, would have given Richard plenty of opportunity to find out what was going on on the ground in advance of his arrival.

Guy's position was desperate. He had been taken prisoner by Saladin during the closing moments of the disaster at Hattin. Saladin had treated him well, as befitted a king. He had offered the devastated Guy a goblet of water cooled by snow from the mountains to refresh him against the heat of the mid-summer sun, a crucial gesture as the offering of hospitality to a captive was a sign that he was now under his captor's protection. This was a chivalric move, fully in line with Saladin's reputation for courtesy and honour.

It had contrasted rather markedly with some other actions of Saladin at the end of the battle. Among the many men captured was an arch-enemy of his named Reynald de Chatillon. Reynald was a violent adventurer who had committed many great crimes against Islam, including attacks on pilgrims on their way to Mecca. He had also allegedly outraged Saladin's sister when she had fallen into his hands, a stain on the Muslim leader's honour that could never be forgiven. When Reynald was captured, he was brought before Saladin and executed. It was said that Saladin himself had personally struck his head from his shoulders.

Guy was then taken off into captivity; his survival was not just a chivalrous act but also one of realpolitik. He was too valuable a bargaining chip to be removed from the scene. He was of great use to Saladin. In the aftermath of Hattin, much of Outremer fell to Saladin, most famously Jerusalem and the great seaport of Acre. Apart from Tripoli and Antioch in the north, every other place of note was lost to the crusaders, or the *Franj*, as the western settlers in the area were known.

Or, to be accurate, every other place but one; the port of Tyre. Saladin had been dilatory in laying siege to it, seen by many historians as a critical mistake on his part, for the delay was Tyre's salvation. Saladin had moved on Jerusalem, a crucial prize from a religious and political perspective, but its fate was already decided. It would fall, sooner or later, provided that Saladin could keep his army together. If Tyre had fallen, then every major port on the coast would be denied the crusaders, making any attempted landing by a fresh wave of crusader reinforcements extremely difficult. Jerusalem could be left to wither on the vine; cut off from supplies it must fall.

Jerusalem was, though, a huge symbolic prize. It was retaken by Saladin on the exact anniversary of the day on which Mohammed was said to have ascended into Heaven from the city. The timing was perfectly stage-managed and Saladin's place in history was assured by this one conquest alone. It also meant that his men



were inspired to stay by his side whereas a long, tedious and unglamorous Siege of Tyre could well have seen thousands drift away. Saladin had taken a calculated gamble by concentrating on Jerusalem but it did not work out as he had hoped.

Even as Tyre was contemplating surrender, a ship arrived. Aboard was an Italian adventurer who had made his name in Constantinople. This was Conrad, Marquis of Montferrat. The Montferrats had married into the highest levels of imperial Byzantine society but they had fallen on hard times recently. Conrad was fleeing a charge of murder. He was cynical, manipulative, devious and untrustworthy. He was also the saviour of Outremer.

Conrad had left pretty much everything behind in Constantinople and therefore had little else to lose. Sometimes desperation drives men on to extraordinary things and now was such a moment. Conrad breathed new life into the defence of Tyre through his determination and energy. Those who had before been without hope came to see Tyre as a rallying point and those who still had the stomach for a fight made their way there. It was a glimmer of hope that revived the dying body of Outremer.

Saladin was not without his critics, even amongst fellow Muslims. Ibn al-Athīr said of him that 'he never evinced real firmness in his actions. He would lay siege to a city, but if the defenders resisted for some time, he would give up and abandon the siege'.<sup>13</sup> He realised too late that Tyre needed to be taken but try as he might it was now determined to resist. Conrad's father, an old man by the name of William, was Saladin's prisoner, having been taken at Hattin. He was brought before the walls of Tyre. Saladin threatened to kill him unless Tyre was surrendered. Conrad – *al-Markish* as the Muslims called him – took up a crossbow and offered to shoot him himself. Saladin, his bluff called, desisted.

He had then tried another tack. Conrad did not seem the sort of man who would meekly put Guy of Lusignan back on the throne. He was intensely ambitious and probably saw himself as the next king of Outremer. So Guy was then released by Saladin in a move that he hoped would spread dissent and disunity amongst the *Franj*. It was a clever ploy but it did not work in the way intended for one very surprising reason. Guy, the loser of Hattin, was about to act completely out of character.

This eventual result was not at first obvious. On his release, Guy had made his way to Tyre to re-establish his leadership of the kingdom of Outremer. Conrad was having none of this; he had not

put in so much effort just to restore the throne of a discredited ruler. Guy was not allowed into Tyre and his hopes for a restoration were dashed. Guy it seemed had struck rock bottom.

Guy's reputation had suffered irreparable damage through the disastrous Hattin campaign, which had effectively destroyed Outremer. In modern times, some historians say that his incompetence has been over-emphasised and that he has unfairly been made a scapegoat for everything that went wrong in 1187. It is certainly true that other, far more experienced, men played their part too; Reynald de Chatillon and Gerard de Ridfort, Grand Master of the Templars, had both exerted pressure and their actions had also contributed to the catastrophic decision to march into Saladin's pre-arranged trap at Hattin.

That is true enough; but what is also true is that Guy was king and as such the ultimate decision lay with him. A stronger man, Richard for example, would have resisted the foolish advice offered and stayed put. Guy did not do so.

But having been rejected by the people he claimed to lead, Guy then did something extraordinarily decisive, even though at the time it seemed foolish. Acre was the crucial seaport that needed to be taken back from Saladin if there was to be any real hope of revival in Outremer and Guy had moved to lay siege to it after being turned away from Tyre. It seemed a pointless gesture as he was outnumbered and out-resourced.

Guy took up a strong position. He did not have enough men to break through the towering walls of Acre but he could not be driven off either. Soon, crusaders came to see Acre as the place where the fightback would begin. Conrad's efforts at Tyre had provided a powerful symbolic moment but they were essentially a defensive action. At Acre, Christendom was going onto the offensive.

And so a great siege had been established at Acre – in many ways one of the greatest set-piece sieges of the Middle Ages in terms of both its duration and its violence. It kept Guy tenaciously hanging on as a player in the politics of Outremer. Guy's position had been further weakened by the subsequent death of his wife Sibylla. This was a constitutional disaster for Guy as his claim to the throne came from the fact that he was her husband; he had no entitlement to be king in his own right. This complicated matters further.

Now he had come to Cyprus to seek Richard's help. There was good reason to think he could get it, for after all the Lusignans were vassals of the dukes of Aquitaine and could therefore hope

for a sympathetic ear, however rebellious they had been in the past. When he reached Cyprus, Richard greeted Guy with enthusiasm. He was happy to support Guy's claims to be reinstated; it would do him no harm to have someone who was nominally his vassal as the king of Jerusalem and there was even a distant family relationship between the two men. Richard made a generous gift of 2,000 marks and twenty expensive goblets, two of them of pure gold; much needed as Guy was now 'poor and destitute'.<sup>14</sup> But there were other matters to be attended to on Cyprus before Guy's cause could be more actively supported; the battle for the island was not yet over.

On 12 May 1191, a day which many who knew Richard must have doubted they would ever see at last arrived. On this day, the Feast of St Pancras, Richard was married to Berengaria, who was then about twenty-six years of age, in the Chapel of St George in Limassol by Nicholas, Richard's chaplain. Records have survived which tell us what he was wearing; a rose-coloured tunic made of samite, a rich silk fabric. He also wore a mantle (a cloak) threaded with gold crescents and silver suns. On his head was a bonnet decorated with gold beasts and birds, while he also wore buskins (boots) with gilded spurs.<sup>15</sup>

Roger of Howden, who described the king's coronation in copious detail, gives us the merest scraps of information about the wedding ceremony; and while telling us what the groom wore, not a mention is made of what the bride was dressed in. The whole event was in keeping with Richard's love of extravagance: records also show him buying several expensive (and striking) scarlet robes for the king.<sup>16</sup> Richard was clearly no hair-shirted pilgrim.

The chronicler Richard of Devizes noted that the bride was 'probably still a virgin';<sup>17</sup> possibly because this contrasted the pure Berengaria which the much dishonoured or abused (depending on the observer's point of view) Alice. This helped to justify Richard's abandonment of Alice. Berengaria was at once crowned queen of England by John, the bishop of Evreux. The prevarication was finally over. All this was in stark contrast to the way in which Alice had been dealt with during a largely humiliating three decades. Philip of France would not have been human if he had not noticed the difference in treatment. It can only have jaundiced him even more against Richard.

Richard went through the required formalities in honouring his bride. It may even be that he set up an Order in her honour; the

delightfully named Order of the Blue Thong.<sup>18</sup> But this was in many ways a formulaic response of a man and a king doing what was expected of him and no more. There would be few signs of real closeness, let alone intimacy, in their future married life.

Negotiations between the competing parties in Cyprus had in the meantime been ongoing, brokered by Garnier of Nablus, Master of the Hospitallers. Isaac Comnenus was now suing for peace. He offered the sum of 20,000 gold marks as compensation for his mistreatment of the shipwrecked crusaders. He undertook to provide troops for the crusade and indeed to take part in it personally. He would also swear homage to Richard as his liege lord and would hand over several of his castles as security.

This was exactly what Richard wanted and Isaac visited his camp to agree terms. But then for some unknown reason he had a change of heart and, whilst the camp was enjoying a siesta, he rode off; possibly the terms that he had been discussing with Richard had been so harsh that it drove him to take precipitate action. There was a brief skirmish when he left but he managed to make good his escape.

Richard of course was not likely to let this go and anyway probably preferred an unconditional surrender from Isaac; he might even have made it deliberately easy for Isaac to make his getaway. He led his men after him and caught Isaac holed up in a castle. One of Isaac's advisors plucked up the courage to suggest that the best thing he could do was surrender. Infuriated at this advice, Isaac struck him with a knife and cut his nose off. Not surprisingly, the mutilated adviser escaped from the castle as soon as he could and made his way to Richard, where he became his ally.

Richard's strategy for the taking of Cyprus involved splitting his army. One part was to be led by Guy of Lusignan; a good opportunity for the man whose family had been troublesome rebels in Aquitaine to prove his loyalty now. The second sailed around the island to attack from the other side. The fleet was led by Robert of Turnham. The two forces re-joined at Famagusta, where Richard had ordered that a close watch should be kept to prevent Isaac from escaping by sea.

While he was there, Richard was confronted with a delegation from Philip who was now at Acre. It was led by Dreux of Mello (later constable of France) and Philip, bishop of Beauvais, the latter a man that Richard would come to despise. Ambroise and the writer of the *Itinerarium* both suggested that they were far from



diplomatic in their language; their message was purely and simply to tell Richard to hurry up and make his way as quickly as he could to Acre. They went as far as to suggest that the king was a coward and should not be wasting time fighting other Christians when there were Muslim armies to take on. They got a suitably blunt reply from Richard 'O c e No' who was greatly angered at their tone and the nature of their mission.<sup>19</sup>

Richard then moved on Nicosia, the main town on Cyprus. An attempted ambush laid by Isaac with the support of 700 men achieved nothing. Although it was said that he fired two poisoned arrows at Richard, they failed to bring him down.<sup>20</sup> Richard attempted to charge Isaac but was unable to catch him. Isaac sped to safety again on the back of the fleet Fauvel. Nicosia, which had recently been sheltering Isaac, was taken and the men of the city were deprived of their distinguishing beards. This greatly offended the proud but impotent Isaac Comnenus, who mutilated some of his captives in response.

Richard stayed at Nicosia for a short while as he was still feeling unwell; mentions of such illnesses frequently appear in the accounts of the chroniclers and suggest that he was prone to bouts of poor health. Once Nicosia was taken the end was nigh as far as Isaac was concerned as his remaining support started to melt away. The great castles on the north of the island, like Buffavento, Kantara and the stunning St Hilarion ('Didemus'), held out, sentinels astride the entrance to the mountains, but these were only final places of refuge and not those from which a counter-attack could be launched.

Isaac's daughter, a young girl, was taken captive at Kyrenia when it fell; Guy of Lusignan oversaw the successful operation. She prostrated herself before Richard when taken before him and was well treated in return. Some suggested that Richard became inappropriately intimate with her. Later, she was sent to stay with Berengaria who may well have been expected to play a role in her education as this was the way in which young ladies of the aristocracy were taught in those days with formal learning often denied them.<sup>21</sup> Shortly afterwards, Buffavento was under siege. Isaac was soon blockaded at Kantara but the loss of his daughter broke his resistance.

Isaac was still understandably reluctant to surrender; as he told Richard through his envoys, he had no wish to be a captive in iron chains. Richard promised that he would not be so shamefully treated so Isaac duly gave himself up. Richard kept his word;

the chains that Isaac was led away in were made of silver. Some thought this a clever trick, not without its amusing side in a 'black humour' kind of way. But it is also evidence of a cruel streak.

Isaac was a man with many faults. He was a usurper and he was not much loved by his people who were quick to abandon him when the time came. The Byzantine chronicler Niketas Choniates was scathing of him as a man with a volcanic temper. Yet for all this there is no reason to doubt that he felt a genuine and deep affection for his one and only child. There were stories of a brief and tearful reunion between father and daughter but the reign of Isaac Comnenus was over. His moment in the sun had been short-lived. Born into the Byzantine royal family, though not close to the centre of power as he was a minor relative, he now faced an uncertain and, as it transpired, tortured future. Perhaps he pondered on the words of the biblical prophet Samuel as he was led away: 'how are the mighty fallen'.

The fight for Cyprus was over and all the important nobles on the island surrendered to Richard. Two of Richard's supporters, Richard of Canville and Robert of Turnham, were appointed to govern it on his behalf. Shortly afterwards the island was sold to the Knights Templar for 100,000 Saracen bezants, to be paid in instalments.<sup>22</sup> It was a crucially important strategic gain given its position just off the coast of Outremer. If the crusaders could attain supremacy at sea, then supplies and men could flow through the island and on to the crusading battlegrounds. It was in a prime position both to keep Outremer provisioned and for launching attacks on the coast of Muslim-held territory in the region. The Templars, guardians of the Christians in Outremer, should theoretically be reliable custodians of the new acquisition.

The terms of the final settlement were harsh for the people of Cyprus; empire-building and conquest back then being a question of exploitation as it always has been. A 50 per cent capital tax was levied on the Cypriots. There was even cultural humiliation to endure; Greeks were to shave off their beloved beards and be clean-shaven in the Western fashion. Some refused to submit and one prominent rebel, a relation of Isaac Comnenus, was captured and hanged by Robert of Turnham.

A huge amount of plunder was taken in the capture of the island. Ambroise said that when Richard examined what he had seized, 'he found that the towers were stocked with treasures and riches, with pots and pans of silver, great vats, cups and bowls of gold,



spurs, bridles and saddles, rich and precious stones, which were powerful against infirmity, cloths of scarlet and of silk (I have not seen any like them anywhere else I have been) and all other riches appropriate to the high and mighty; the king of England conquered all this in the service of God and to take His land'. These were of course hugely welcome; but so too were the substantial supplies of barley, wheat, sheep and cattle that could be brought from Cyprus to the crusading army in Outremer.<sup>23</sup>

The situation in Cyprus had presented Richard with a glorious opportunity that he had taken full advantage of. He had added a significant prize to his territories and boosted the prospects for Outremer too. But that was not all. He had had the chance to forge an alliance with a man who was his vassal back in Aquitaine in the shape of Guy of Lusignan. He would therefore already have a strong position when he arrived in Outremer, not just against Saladin but also against his longer-term rival, Philip of France. And he would be able to present the French king with a *fait accompli* on the marriage front too.

Philip of France soon after suggested to Richard that, as Cyprus was conquered whilst on crusade, the spoils taken should be divided equally between them. Richard responded that the deal made at the start of the crusade only applied to gains made in Outremer, though he had already surrendered some of the spoils he had taken at Messina which weakened his negotiating position. It is highly unlikely that Philip was satisfied with this answer though he was in no immediate position to do anything about it. He stored up the perceived duplicity of Richard as yet another on his rival's part. One day, he would take his vengeance on him; it was just a question of waiting for the right moment to do so.

The fall of Cyprus can only have raised Richard's prestige still further. It was an important achievement for both him and for the crusading movement. He had completely outmanoeuvred Isaac Comnenus in his blitzkrieg on the island. Richard's reputation as a warrior had risen again. But this was only the beginning. Not far away, across the short stretch of water that separated it from the mainland, was the vital port of Acre, under siege as it had been for several years. It was to this even more crucial prize that Richard turned his attention next. Three and a half years after impulsively taking the cross, Richard was at last about to arrive in the Holy Land.

## High-Water Mark: The Siege of Acre (1191)

*'The Christian glories in the death of the pagan, because Christ  
is glorified'*

St Bernard of Clairvaux

Acre: it was here on the Mediterranean coast of Outremer that Richard was to first taste crusader glory. The siege of the city and its consequences would shape his kingship, his life, his reputation. Here he would lay the foundations of his legend. Here events would be played out that would make the breakdown of relationships with Philip of France irreparable. Here an ill-timed moment of pique would lead to cataclysmic personal consequences when he fell out with Duke Leopold V of Austria. And here, in the aftermath of the capture of the city, would be played out the darkest and most controversial event of Richard's life which still resonates now, nine centuries on. After Acre, nothing would be the same again.

Richard already had experience of siege warfare, though nothing on the scale of what he was about to face. Philip had less experience to call on. Both men though were keen students of military strategy and in particular the renowned Roman writer on the subject of siegecraft ('poliorcetics' to give it its formal name), Vegetius.<sup>1</sup> The depth of their learning was about to be fully tested.

Richard set sail from Cyprus on 5 June 1191, accompanied by Guy of Lusignan and other new-found allies. Berengaria and Joanna sailed for Outremer too, though on different ships, which was a trifle odd as this was effectively a honeymoon period for the newly married couple.