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### **The Rise of Latin Christian Naval Power in the Third Crusade**

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The international conflict in the late twelfth century known as the Third Crusade usually holds a somewhat inconclusive place in medieval history, at least when one looks only at the results on land. There, both sides could claim partial victory: the Muslims managed to retain some of the territory Saladin had taken in Syria and Palestine during the previous decade (including Jerusalem and Beirut) while the Latin Christians under King Richard's command won back the critical port city of Acre and an important strip of fortified coast in the area. One can argue pros and cons about which side emerged slightly better from the truce that ended the war. Yet, power on the seas emerged as an important factor in the struggle too, and in this frequently overlooked aspect of the conflict, power tilted significantly to the Latins.<sup>1</sup> This paper will examine how and why

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<sup>1</sup> Several important and well-researched secondary sources on the Third Crusade note the importance of naval support to the Latin crusading effort on land but seem to pay little attention to the significance of the Latin dominance on the sea by the end of the conflict. Volume II of Wolff and Hazard's *History of the Crusades* mention some of the naval engagements of the Third Crusade but nautical matters are absent from their conclusions, instead detailing what the results of the Third Crusade meant for the crusader kingdoms' terrain. Likewise, in *A History of the Crusades* Volume III, Runciman mentions naval

naval strength in the Mediterranean shifted during the end of the twelfth century and what the immediate and lasting effects of this shift were on the region.

To organize the many instances of ships and fleet references leading up to and continuing throughout the Third Crusade, five specific naval campaigns will serve as discussion points: Saladin's wave of expansion with fleet support (1187), the Muslim blockade/siege of Tyre (1187), the Christian blockade/siege of Acre (1189-1191), Richard's preparation and nautical procession across the Mediterranean (1190-1191), and Richard's advance after Acre with fleet support (1191-1192). Naval power started to shift towards the Latins with the Muslim disaster at Tyre and turned decisively to the Christians after the victory at Acre. All five of these actions, however, are important to understanding the regional naval situation as well as the larger crusade and its aftermath.

We will begin by studying the siege of Tyre, a medieval citadel perched on the Mediterranean coast. As one of the chronicles of the time describes the town:

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forces minimally and restricts his conclusions on the war to the lands that changed hands and the fact that Saladin's expansion had been checked. In *European Naval and Maritime History, 300 – 1500*, Lewis and Runyan note that the Latins have control of the Mediterranean for centuries until the Ottomans arise in force, but they do not tie the long Latin naval dominance to the outcome of the Third Crusade. Susan Rose concludes that the Muslims simply stopped viewing naval power as important after the Third Crusade (see my response to this theory later on p.21). John Gillingham's excellent work in *Richard I* certainly notes Richard's naval victories and aptitude without saying much about the larger maritime situation. None of these writers assign much weight to the new Latin naval dominance. Perhaps this is because the various Christian states eagerly fought with one another on the Mediterranean once the Muslims were removed. Nevertheless, the Third Crusade seems to mark a crucial point in the history of medieval naval development.

Tyre is sited in the heart of the sea, ringed with fortifications on all sides. The small part which is not closed off by the depths of the sea is fortified by multiple walls.<sup>2</sup>

Clearly, this was a substantial stronghold. If defended and supplied adequately, it could not be overcome unless land and sea forces acted in concert. Acre and many of the other Christian towns scattered along the Syrian/Palestinian coast at this time were of similar type. To meet the challenge of these fortresses, Saladin had built up a fleet in Egypt during the 1170s and 1180s to support his armies when the time came to attack.<sup>3</sup> That time arrived in 1187. As December wore on that year inside the beleaguered Christian stronghold, hopes were dimming. A Muslim army was besieging the town; a Muslim fleet blockaded the port. What galleys the Christians had were bottled up in the harbor just as the knights and fighting men of Tyre were caged behind the walls. Outside on land and sea waited a much larger force under the leadership of the seemingly invincible sultan, Saladin, who had successfully united the Muslim forces of the region.

During the six months prior to the siege of Tyre, Muslim forces had conquered much of the crusader states' territory following a decisive victory at the Battle of Hattin in July. There, Guy Lusignan, King of Jerusalem, had led his host of warriors to a crushing defeat at the hands of Saladin's army. Inland from the coast, the Christian army had marched through the oppressive summer heat to break a siege at a fortress called Tiberius. It turned out to be a disastrous move for them. Saladin's army surrounded the

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<sup>2</sup> *Itinerarium*, 40.

<sup>3</sup> Ehrenkreutz, 105.

already dehydrated Christian force in the desert and weakened it from a distance with arrows and smoke before closing in for the final assault.

After Saladin had neutralized the fighting strength of the Christians at Hattin and demoralized those not present at the battle, he and his followers proceeded steadily to capture territory from the Latins. The sultan's Egyptian fleet aided him in these efforts by providing supplies and support. Acre, known as the "Constantinople of Syria" due to its strength and strategic position,<sup>4</sup> fell to the sultan only a few days after Hattin on July 9, 1187. The taking of this important port by the Muslims allowed Saladin to reposition war galleys and other vessels at Acre instead of further away at the Egyptian ports. With a naval and supply base much closer to the action, Saladin could advance easily on other Christian towns and fortresses of Outremer (France's name for 'the land beyond the sea'). Beirut and Sidon fell soon after Acre. Next was Tibnin, where Saladin's Egyptian fleet helped again. As a Muslim chronicle reports: "Tibnin, a strong fortress, was besieged on Sunday 11 Jumada I (19 July). The sultan set up trebuchets and pressed hard with assaults and a blockade."<sup>5</sup> It did not hold out for long, and after Tibnin was taken, the chronicle says the invasion continued unabated throughout the region:

The [Muslim] troops dispersed throughout the coastal lands, taking forts, castles and fortified places. They took Nablus, Haifa, Caesarea, Saffuriya, and Nazareth.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ehrenkreutz, 110.

<sup>5</sup> *Baha al-Din*, 76.

<sup>6</sup> *Baha al-Din*, 76.

As Saladin overpowered more and more Christian citadels and towns with his army and fleet, one can see how people on both sides started to think of him as unstoppable.

Tyre almost surrendered to Saladin as well during the wave of Muslim conquests in the summer of 1187. Had not the experienced leader Conrad of Montferrat arrived there unlooked-for from Constantinople, it is very doubtful Tyre would have resisted long. Conrad, also known as ‘the Marquis’ by the crusaders, had apparently sailed down from the Byzantine capital to Acre one evening in mid July as part of a religious pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Some accounts say he may have had other motives to be absent from Constantinople for a while, but whatever reason brought him there, he quickly noticed that something was seriously amiss.<sup>7</sup> When a Muslim ship came alongside Conrad’s vessel, he wisely pretended his ship was a cargo vessel and that he, the ship’s master, was loyal to the sultan. Conrad’s promise to dock the next morning in Acre with his goods satisfied the Muslim captain who allowed him to proceed. Instead, as a contemporary chronicle reports, “That night, with a favourable wind, he [Conrad] slipped away to Tyre and took over its defense. His arrival was much to the advantage of the Christians who came later.”<sup>8</sup> The biggest advantage was that there was a port in the area for the Christian forces to come to at all.

Conrad’s adventure at Acre gives us several important details about the naval situation of the time. First, at least some of the Christian nobles and sea captains could obviously communicate easily and accurately enough with the Muslims as to not arouse

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<sup>7</sup> See David Boyle’s, *Troubadour’s Song* for a tale of how Conrad was on the run from a murder charge in Constantinople, 60.

<sup>8</sup> *Itinerarium*, 36.

suspicion.<sup>9</sup> Second, we notice that Conrad could think and act quickly under pressure, qualities necessary for a good military leader. Third, Acre is identified as an international trading center for Christian, Byzantine, and Muslim shipping. We also see that after Acre, Conrad thought immediately of Tyre as the next best port and stronghold in the region to try. Lastly, it gives us a feeling of the desperation at Tyre where the people quickly promoted a stranger (albeit one with battle experience) to lead the city.

Tyre's new defiance was not welcome news to Saladin. The chronicles tell us that "He hoped to claim Tyre with the same ease [as he had taken Beirut and Sidon] but he was shamefully repulsed and forced to retreat."<sup>10</sup> Leaving Tyre for later, Saladin continued on with other conquests such as Ascalon to the south. The sultan's hammer eventually fell on Jerusalem itself, the Holy City, which surrendered in October of 1187. News of this defeat was devastating to all of Christendom. Jerusalem was more than a city to the faithful of the time, and its value stretched far beyond any tactical significance (as it continues to do for many today). With the loss of the Holy City, Christians of the twelfth century started to wonder if God was angry with them, and many, according to a contemporary chronicle, began to view Saladin as the terrible "rod of His fury."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> There are also reported episodes where disguised Muslims run the Christian blockade at Acre, so we know the opposite was true as well. In Baha al-Din's chronicle describes Muslim ship captains conversing with Christian ship captains and Muslim crews shaving their beards and flying crosses on their ships to disguise themselves in successful blockade runs from Alexandria or Beirut into Acre during the Christian siege. *Baha al-Din*, 124.

<sup>10</sup> *Itinerarium*, 37.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 23.

Divine instrument or not, Saladin was a skilled tactician. From years of battling the Latin forces in the area, he knew the Christians would soon send more ships and more soldiers. Rather than rest on his laurels and wait, Baha al-Din's chronicle reports that he pushed on to take the remaining enemy stronghold on the coast before reinforcements could arrive:

When Jerusalem was firmly in the sultan's control, his heart was fixed on attacking Tyre. He understood that, if he delayed the task, it would perhaps grow more difficult. He called on the Egyptian fleet, which began to blockade from the sea, while the troops did so by land.<sup>12</sup>

Saladin set out for Tyre on November 13, 1187, and the siege from land and sea began in earnest on November 25<sup>th</sup>.

Earlier in November 1187, before the siege started and when it was still possible to send out ships before the winter storm season, a chronicle tells us the Christians sent word to Pope Urban III and the monarchs of France, England, Sicily and Germany by way of an august messenger to get their attention:

Archbishop of Tyre [Joscius] had embarked on a ship and carried the news of this great disaster to the whole of Christendom. So the wound of this small country brought pain to all lands. Rumours flew to the ears of princes and declared to all the faithful that the inheritance of Christ had been occupied by the Gentiles, stirring some to tears and inflaming others to revenge.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *Baha al-Din*, 78-9

<sup>13</sup> *Itinerarium*, 47.

Some accounts describe Josias' vessel as black with black sails to emphasize the dark news he carried.<sup>14</sup> Since ships traveling from one end of the Mediterranean to another generally stayed fairly close to the coast, Christian onlookers along the coast might well have witnessed the ship's passage from Outremer to Italy with growing dread.<sup>15</sup> Bad news from the area might well have spread ahead of Josias. A meeting between Pope Urban III and Tyre's Archbishop, however, would serve as the awful, formal confirmation of Jerusalem's fall and the beginning of Christendom's official response.

The Papacy sent out the call for a new crusade, and thousands answered. Several of the most powerful figures in Latin Christendom pledged to join the fight after hearing the news from Josias and/or other messengers. Richard, then the Count of Poitou, announced first that he would take the Cross and travel to the Holy Land to fight against the Muslims.<sup>16</sup> As the presumptive heir to England's throne, his act was significant. Phillip, the Capetian King of France, declared his support for a crusade shortly thereafter as did the Emperor of Germany, Frederick Barbarossa. Whether these leaders were genuinely moved by spiritual inspiration or by more worldly motivations to gain glory, prestige, wealth, influence or land, we will probably never know, but the sponsorship of these twelfth century luminaries made the Third Crusade possible. There was also a sort of electricity that ran through the Christian lands attracting knights, fighting men, sailors,

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<sup>14</sup> David Boyle, *The Troubadour's Song*, 59.

<sup>15</sup> Although one might commonsensically think medieval ships would avoid the coasts and associated dangers (e.g., shoals sandbars, rocks), apparently the dangers of the open sea (e.g., storms, getting lost, currents) were considered worse. See *The Age of the Galley* by Gardiner (ed.) for a discussion of the principal galley routes and evidence of medieval ships "hugging the coast," 211.

<sup>16</sup> *Itinerarium*, 47.



minor nobles and even commoners to take the Cross and follow their kings over land or sea to win back the Holy Land. As one of the chronicles of the time reports: “The enthusiasm for the new pilgrimage was such that already it was not a question of who had received the cross but who had not yet done so.”<sup>17</sup> True, those who joined the crusade would face great dangers, but one could argue there were hazards at home as well. In some cases, the incentives for going might outweigh those for staying, e.g., exemption from taxes such as the Saladin Tithe, church protection of lands (at least in theory), and, of course, remission of sins.<sup>18</sup> Still, the extraordinary level of enthusiasm and support for the new crusade seems to go beyond what these inducements might offer.

The forces of Latin Christendom were set in motion for a new armed pilgrimage, but there were many important questions regarding how best to direct the massive operation. The Emperor of Germany decided to march his army overland to Outremer whereas Richard and Phillip chose the maritime option. This split in the decision over conveyance is very illuminating for a naval understanding of the time. The two previous crusades had used land routes primarily if not completely. There was some naval support and transportation in these efforts (more in the Second Crusade than the First), but it was quite limited.<sup>19</sup> For both Richard and Phillip to use a fleet – or fleets since many left from different points at different times – to transport virtually all of their forces in the Third Crusade marks a new level of reliance on naval power. Procuring, outfitting, and

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<sup>17</sup> *Itinerarium*, 48.

<sup>18</sup> See Gillingman, *Richard I*, p 88-89 for a fuller description of the various benefits men derived from taking the Cross during the Third Crusade.

<sup>19</sup> D.D.R. Owen, Louis used a fleet to transport himself, Eleanor and some troops from the coast of Attalia (in Turkey) to Antioch on the journey to the Holy Land.

organizing such a large number of ships was by itself a major administrative feat. In reviewing the various chronicles and financial accountings, Beatrice Siedschlag argues quite convincingly that Richard's fleet included more than 100 ships when he set sail from Messina, and the total number of men involved was well over eleven thousand.<sup>20</sup>

Richard and his government were able to manage the massive operation, but the new king's efforts seem to have benefited from remarkable luck. It is difficult to be certain, but many factors could have worked in his favor. To start with, when the King of Sicily, William II, died in 1189, he bequeathed a large number of galleys with accompanying equipment and supplies to Richard's father, Henry II. <sup>21</sup> These ships, possibly as many as a hundred, would have then passed on through inheritance to Richard when Henry died, also in 1189. Since Richard was about to embark on a crusade via the sea, it was very fortunate. Perhaps a little too fortunate. It is at least possible that Henry and his son-in-law William had planned on making a large naval foray to the Eastern Mediterranean and that Richard became the instrument of this action.<sup>22</sup> Other naval help almost certainly came from the Italian city states, long known for their sea power. Richard may have simply bought the help of Genoese or the Pisans (or both). Perhaps

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<sup>20</sup> Siedschlag, 147.

<sup>21</sup> Wolff & Hazard, 40.

<sup>22</sup> Wolff & Hazard, 40, states that William II had approached the kings of England and France in 1187 regarding a joint crusader campaign against the Muslims using Sicilian bases and ships, but this author wonders if plans may have been discussed even earlier between Henry II and William II.

even more likely, Genoa or Pisa may have acted in concert with the crusade to protect their trading interests in the eastern Mediterranean.<sup>23</sup>

Another advantage Richard and the Latins had in moving a large force was an environmental one. It may seem basic, but the prevailing wind on the Mediterranean during the summer months came from the Northwest. This would tend to promote movement of sailing vessels from west to east.<sup>24</sup> During the colder months, prevailing wind direction was less important for ships since winter storms generally made sea travel unsafe. Some have even argued that in a period when ships relied on wind power, the Mediterranean wind currents and climate facilitated naval invasion from the north and west while blocking such invasion from the south and east.<sup>25</sup> This contention would seem to be overstating the natural factors, however, since trading vessels and warships had traveled in all directions throughout the Mediterranean for centuries. Overall, the sailing environment probably gave the Latin Christians only a slight positional or field advantage, but every one helped.

Whatever geographical advantages or outside factors may have worked in the Latins' favor, it took a considerable amount of time to prepare such large fleets and armies, not to mention arrange for political stability (such as there was) at home while the monarchs would be absent. Accordingly, Frederick Barbarossa did not leave with his army until the spring of 1189. Richard and Phillip departed with the bulk of their forces

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<sup>23</sup> Genoese and Pisans are mentioned as being involved in the Third Crusade at various points throughout the *Itinerarium*, e.g., 113, 172, 203.

<sup>24</sup> Rose, 562-3.

<sup>25</sup> Rose, 563.

even later, during the summer of 1190, almost three years after the fall of Jerusalem! As a chronicle tells us, only one monarch of Latin Christendom sent reinforcements relatively quickly to the region:

The distinguished King William of Sicily sent the first relief force to the land, two counts, 500 knights and fifty galleys. Who can doubt that this was a miracle? ... Margarit was in command of the royal fleet: a great man of action. Hastening ahead with his galleys, he boldly crushed pirates ... he had won through his many victories the title of 'king of the sea'. Some also called him 'Neptune'.<sup>26</sup>

This passage shows us that Sicily of all the Christian states at the time was able to mobilize a sizable force with the most speed, and not surprisingly, it was a naval one. (Again, it makes one wonder whether William II was already considering a naval expedition to the Eastern Mediterranean). In the late twelfth century, William's Sicilian navy was experienced and quite powerful. A fleet of William's ships had been waging a successful naval campaign against the Byzantines in 1187, but when the news of Jerusalem's fall reached Sicily, William arranged for a truce with Constantinople and recalled his ships along with their apparently very able commander, Margarit.<sup>27</sup> With winter setting in, however, even the Sicilians could not organize a formidable naval force and set out with it until the following spring. Grand though it may have been, the fleet did not arrive off the coast of Syria/Palestine until the summer of 1188, much too late for the immediate problems at Tyre.

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<sup>26</sup> *Itinerarium*, 43-44.

<sup>27</sup> Wolff and Hazard, 38.

So, we can understand the doubt and fear gripping the Christian inhabitants of Tyre on that December night in 1187 as well as the confidence of the Muslims surrounding it. This is now the sole crusader port town in the region except for Tripolis far to the north. Given the winter season, no war galleys or supply ships from Italy, France, England or Sicily are expected for months. Time and food are running out for Tyre. Both those inside and outside the walls know the end of the siege is at hand. Worse yet for the Christians, when Tyre falls, Outremer may fall with it since without a naval base for shelter, supplies and staging, the Latin forces will find it difficult if not impossible to counterattack effectively when reinforcements finally arrive.<sup>28</sup>

At this critical point, the Christians in Tyre under Conrad's command made a desperate move. "When dawn was breaking, they came out with a few small boats, and broke up the sea blockade in a naval battle."<sup>29</sup> Not only did they break the blockade, Christian war galleys then took the initiative. They sailed out of the harbor at Tyre where they had been essentially imprisoned for more than a month and pursued the Muslim ships that were in retreat north to the port of Beirut. The catastrophe was only half over for the Muslims at this point. When it appeared they could not outrun the Christian galleys, the crews of the retreating Muslim vessels abandoned ship and tried to swim to shore. This remarkable reversal appears to have been due partly to luck and partly to a lack of discipline. Although warned by the fleet commander, Faris al-Din Badran, to stay sharp and warned as well by the Admiral Abd al-Mushin to "be cautious and watchful in

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<sup>28</sup> Ehrenkreutz, 111.

<sup>29</sup> *Itinerarium*, 41.

order to give no opportunity to the enemy,"<sup>30</sup> the Muslim sailors, according to a Muslim chronicle, had let their guard down on the wrong night:

The crews disobeyed him and kept no watch at night. The infidels' fleet sailed from Tyre and took them by surprise, capturing their captains and five of their ships and killing a multitude of men in the Egyptian fleet.<sup>31</sup>

One notices how the Christian chronicle describes the raiding force as "a few small boats," while the Muslim chronicle calls it "the infidels' fleet," but this implicit discrepancy in the number and size of ships is not particularly surprising or meaningful given expected bias. Overall, the accounts from the opposing sides match up fairly well, which gives us some trust in the accuracy of the events that night.

Although "the sultan was extremely vexed"<sup>32</sup> by news of the naval defeat at Tyre, he was now forced to reassess the entire situation there, proving how even in this period battles at sea could determine the course of action on land. Instead of removing an important piece of Christian naval power as Saladin had hoped, Egyptian naval power had suffered a huge setback. Being surprised by the Christian raid was unsettling enough, but the subsequent retreat and abandonment of galleys by Muslim sailors was alarming. Such lack of resolve in his navy was an issue that Saladin had had to deal with before. During an unsuccessful land and sea attempt to take Beirut in 1182, an Egyptian

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<sup>30</sup> *Baha al-Din*, 79

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 79.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 79.

fleet had retreated from battle with a Christian fleet of more or less equal numbers.<sup>33</sup> Knowing from experience in Egypt during the previous decades that at least some naval power would be required to challenge the crusaders,<sup>34</sup> one concludes that Saladin would have done what he could to enlarge his navy and improve discipline among the sailors. The number of galleys certainly increased, but the actions at Tyre that December showed the sultan that despite his efforts, the Egyptian fleet still had some grave problems when it came to fighting spirit on the seas. Faced with this realization along with the intimidating effect the defeat had on his troops, Saladin followed his emirs' advice, raised the siege of Tyre on January 3, 1188 and withdrew his forces.<sup>35</sup>

It was the beginning of a shift in momentum.<sup>36</sup> Saladin never threatened Tyre again as far as is known. With the arrival of Margarit's battle-hardened Sicilian fleet in the summer of 1188, the town was safe. Moreover, Tyre became a central point for supplying crusader armies and ships in the region just as Saladin may well have feared. Throughout 1188, Margarit and his ships were able at least to annoy if not seriously endanger Saladin's army as the Muslims continued to march north. The sultan's Egyptian fleet on the other hand seems to have been left in disarray after the disaster at

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33 Ehrenkreutz, 109.

34 Ibid, 103.

35 Baha al-Din, 79.

36 Some of the secondary sources on the Third Crusade (e.g., Wolff & Hazard) and even some naval histories (e.g., Lewis and Runyan) ignore the Latin victory at Tyre. Others downplay it, e.g., in *Medieval Naval Warfare 1000 – 1500*, Rose says the defeat from Saladin's view was "only of minor importance." However, it seems evident from Saladin's efforts to take the city, that the Muslim commander thought Tyre's importance was more than minor.

Tyre for it remained out of action afterwards, at least temporarily.<sup>37</sup> The sultan managed to conquer some Syrian territory from the crusaders in 1188, e.g., Tortosa and Jabala, but the larger prizes, Antioch and Tripoli, were now beyond his reach thanks to the Sicilian fleet.<sup>38</sup> With Christian ships patrolling the coasts of Syria and Palestine largely unchallenged, the crusader armies on land had a protected flank to the West and were able to receive much-needed supplies and reinforcements more easily. In contrast to the summer of 1187 when Muslim fleets prowled the coastal seas and regularly blockaded ports, the Christians had made important progress. By 1189, Christian forces had started to translate this advantage into enough strength to go on the offensive, and the famous siege of Acre began.

The struggle over the port city of Acre in the Third Crusade is one of the grand epics of medieval history, but it holds fewer keys to understanding the larger naval balance than the story of Tyre. Still, a few elements of the legendary encounter are illuminating to consider for our purposes. The siege of Acre in naval terms is basically an account of continued arrivals (and some departures) of Christian ships with accompanying forces and the increasingly desperate, sometimes successful, attempts by Muslim ships to pierce the Christian blockade. It was a very long operation. The siege lasted almost two years, and during that time, the chronicles describe the ebb and flow on each side as specific reinforcements or supplies would arrive.

A few specific instances of naval activity may suffice to present at least a general idea of the shifting fortunes at Acre. Several Muslim vessels broke through the Christian

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<sup>37</sup> Ehrenkreutz, 111.

<sup>38</sup> Wolff and Hazard (eds.) *History of the Crusades, Vol II*, 38-39.



blockade in September 1190, and one can almost hear the delighted, thankful cries of the besieged Muslims in a description from a chronicle of the time:

Voices were raised high by both parties and prayers rent the veils,  
until eventually, with God's grace, the ships came safely into harbour,  
to be met as rains are met after drought by the population of Acre,  
who were reprovisioned by their cargoes. It was the night of  
nights.<sup>39</sup>

By this time, Saladin's Egyptian fleet was indeed active again, but it nevertheless had a limited role, mostly to run the blockade. Other attempts by Muslim ships to reach Acre were not so fortunate.<sup>40</sup> Sources occasionally mention bigger naval battles, the chief one probably occurring sometime in March of 1190 between a "Turkish" fleet and a Christian fleet sent down from Tyre (again showing Tyre's importance as a regional naval base). Conrad of Montferrat is mentioned as being in command for the Christians. Apparently, there were many vessels – perhaps 50 or more – involved on each side, and a huge battle raged on land at Acre simultaneously. "At sea the battle lasted all day. However, thanks to God our fleet had the victory."<sup>41</sup> In this case, "our fleet" refers to the Christian force. The land battle that day was more indecisive, but again, Latin naval forces prevailed. A second, more moderate sea battle at Acre in the summer of 1190 is recorded also with victory claimed by the Muslims.<sup>42</sup> Victory in this case was defined, however, by the

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<sup>39</sup> *Baha al-Din*, 127.

<sup>40</sup> *Baha al-Din*, 141: Three Muslim supply ships break up on the rocks while trying to gain entry.

<sup>41</sup> *Ambroise*, 80.

<sup>42</sup> *Baha al-Din*, 112.

Muslim ships sinking a few Christian galleys and fighting through to the besieged city, not by shattering the Christian blockade, which merely reformed and remained in effect after this episode.

Other reports of naval activity at Acre show the ever-increasing strength of the Christian forces there, even in the face of severe casualties such as those after the St.

James Day battle in July 1190:

After this pitiful slaughter our people's strength was much reduced.

Then fortune smiled on them more sweetly and Favonius [the west wind] began to blow, bringing vessels loaded with troops.<sup>43</sup>

Interestingly, there are several reports of Muslim reinforcements to the area, but these are almost entirely regarding army units moving into the area from the interior of the country.<sup>44</sup> Whereas, aside from the German army which showed up at Acre from the overland route in October of 1190, all the major Christian forces arrived by sea. This is why although exact numbers of galleys and other vessels are impossible to count with any real accuracy (for either side), most would agree that the Christians had a clear numerical advantage in ships as the crusade wore on, for the list of arrivals is long.

Henry, the Count of Champagne landed with a fleet and troops in late July 1190.

Baldwin, the Archbishop of Canterbury, along with many English crusaders arrived in September 1190. In the spring of 1191, King Phillip of France and Leopold, the Duke of Austria, arrived with their men.<sup>45</sup> One of the more poetic descriptions captures the

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<sup>43</sup> *Itinerarium*, 97.

<sup>44</sup> *Baha al-Din*, 144-6.

<sup>45</sup> See Chronology in *Estoire de la Guerre Sainte*, xii.

demoralizing effect of Christian naval power on the Muslims by noting, “the ships transformed the coast into a forest.”<sup>46</sup> The “forest” is one of ship masts covering the Mediterranean. By early June 1191, the most famous of the Christian leaders makes his long-awaited appearance:

You would have heard the trumpets trumpeting to welcome Richard the peerless. All the people together joyful at his arrival.<sup>47</sup>

There are no corresponding reports in the chronicles of trumpets for King Phillip when he arrived, but the rivalry between the kings would be deferred at least until Acre was taken on July 12, 1191.

King Richard’s drawn-out voyage to the Holy Land and especially his return journey and subsequent capture tend to invite myth and suggest comparisons to classical figures. Such hyperbole, however tempting, will not be entertained here, but on his long passage to Acre in 1190-1191, Richard did attain some significant and durable naval benefits. The first was in Sicily where Richard’s grand arrival at Messina is worth noting for the naval power he was able to muster:

Look! Far away they saw the sea covered with innumerable galleys, and from afar the sound of war-trumpets echoed in their ears ... As the fleet came nearer, they saw galleys rowing in good order, adorned and laden throughout with various sorts of weapons, with countless standards and pennants on tips of spearshafts fluttering in the air in

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<sup>46</sup> Ehrenkreutz, 112

<sup>47</sup> *Ambroise*, 65.

beautiful array. The prows of the galleys were each painted differently, with shields glittering in the sun hung on each bow.<sup>48</sup>

King Richard made use of some of these splendid forces to seize control of Messina after a falling out with Tancred of Lecce, the new king of Sicily who took over when William II died. The disagreement with Tancred arose over the matter of Richard's sister, Joanna, the wife of the late King William, and her dowry (presumably a large one). Eventually, Tancred gave in and worked out an understanding with Richard, one that involved releasing Joanna to Richard and transferring 40,000 ounces of gold to him.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, they forged an alliance, and Richard wound up spending the winter there.

Some would paint Richard as a reckless if chivalrous king, almost battle-crazed at times, constantly picking fights with those around him.<sup>50</sup> If so, his actions at Messina did not show instances of such behavior. At Sicily, Richard rescued his sister, obtained a large amount of probably much-needed funds for his troops, and enlisted a kingdom with (as we have already noted) significant naval power as an ally. True, his actions may have also upstaged and upset King Phillip of France, but that affiliation had been in jeopardy since Richard rejected Alice, Phillip's sister, as a bride in favor of Berengaria of Navarre.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> *Itinerarium*, 157.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, 168.

<sup>50</sup> See especially the views of Gibbon, Hume and Markowski noted in John Gillingham's first chapter "The Best of Kings, the Worst of Kings," in *Richard I*.

<sup>51</sup> Gillingham, *Richard Coeur de Lion*, 128-9.

When Richard departed from Sicily with his huge number of ships the following spring, the king would have to withstand the natural challenges of the sea as they sailed east. Storms, fog, currents, rocks and other dangers were all potential problems. With a massive fleet like Richard's, even ships getting separated from the main group could cause delays or worse. Richard showed he had valuable leadership qualities on sea as well as on land with a method for keeping the vast fleet together:

King Richard, whose heart was always quick to respond, did a worthy deed. He had the custom of having on his ship a great candle in a lantern lit at night. It threw a clear light and burned all through the night to show others the way. He had with him able seamen, worthy men, who knew their work well. All the other ships followed the king's flame, keeping it in near view, and if the fleet ever moved away he would willingly wait for them. In this way he led the proud fleet.<sup>52</sup>

Such an episode from the chronicle may seem minor, but it shows an attunement with the voyage and an example of personal interest that Richard took in the management and direction of his fleet (or at least that the men aboard believed so). This type of connection between the top leaders and the naval forces on the Muslim side seems absent. Perhaps a lack of direct concern (real or imagined) discouraged Muslim sailors to some degree or kept the best men among the Muslims from pursuing or continuing naval careers. If so, it may have contributed to the earlier noted lack of fighting spirit displayed on many Muslim vessels at key moments. In any case, Richard obviously valued his fleet and did what he could to safeguard it.

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<sup>52</sup> *Ambroise*, 48.

Storms at sea were beyond anyone's control, though, and a powerful one partially dispersed Richard's fleet in late April. Gathering it back together and making repairs took time. In early May of 1191, Richard and the main portion of the reconstituted fleet landed at Cyprus where a few storm-tossed ships from the fleet had arrived already (including the ship carrying Joanna and Berengaria). Cyprus at the time was under the unpopular rule of Isaac Comnenus, a Byzantine, who had seized power there five years earlier.<sup>53</sup> Evidently, Isaac had imprudently seized and jailed some of Richard's men from the separated ships that landed a few days before.<sup>54</sup> After failing to release the imprisoned men at Richard's request, one thing led to another beginning with Richard leading an amphibious assault from his galleys and ending with Isaac locked away in silver chains.<sup>55</sup> Thus, Richard was left in charge of the island, a valuable nautical asset that would have a positive effect on the Latin crusade effort at Acre.

Again, one could say Richard provoked or escalated the conflict, but it seems doubtful that the king proceeded recklessly. On the contrary, he conquered a rich, fertile island (whose inhabitants could be taxed) and secured more funds plus supplies for his forces without suffering many losses.<sup>56</sup> Perhaps more importantly, Cyprus held a strategic location in the eastern Mediterranean. It was close enough to Syria and

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<sup>53</sup> *Itinerarium*, 179: The chronicle also claims Isaac was in league with Saladin and a generally bad king.

<sup>54</sup> *Itinerarium*, 180.

<sup>55</sup> *Itinerarium*, 194: Isaac's shackles were specially made of silver after his agreement to surrender which stipulated Isaac though a prisoner would not be thrown into iron chains.

<sup>56</sup> Wolff and Hazard, 64: Sources report the people of Cyprus were taxed to the point of half what they owned.

Palestine to serve as an additional naval base for shelter, supplies, and troops in the crusade. Richard's seizure of the island enhanced the naval position of Latin forces in the area greatly, especially when one considers that Cyprus held out as a Christian outpost even more than a hundred years later when all the crusader lands in Outremer were swept away at the end of the thirteenth century.<sup>57</sup>

Richard's last major naval adventure before arriving at Acre was perhaps more instrumental to the city's eventual fall than any direct help he and his troops provided for the final month of assault on the city. Richard apparently received word while still on Cyprus that Acre might be soon captured. (Cyprus was so close to the Syrian coast, boats traveled back and forth from Acre easily.) The king had stayed a few extra weeks on the island engaged in among other things his marriage to Berengaria who had been traveling with the fleet since Sicily. Upon hearing this rumor from Acre though, he reportedly declared, "God forbid that Acre should be won in my absence," and made haste to gather a force of galleys to head for the battle.<sup>58</sup>

On the way, his fleet came across an usually large ship in the distance moving south towards Acre. Richard's ships approached it, and at first the big ship's captain reported it was in the service of the King of France. Unconvinced that this was the truth, perhaps by knowing that Phillip did not have and could not afford so great a vessel, Richard requested more information. This time, the ship reported it was Genoese and bound for Tyre. At that, the king ordered some of his ships to come alongside it. This

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<sup>57</sup> Near the conclusion of the Third Crusade, Richard bestows the Kingdom of Cyprus to the former King of Jerusalem, Guy Lusignan (who had no lands after the war) whose heirs ruled it after him, *Itinerarium*, 315.

<sup>58</sup> *Itinerarium*, 196.

action was met with a hail of crossbow bolts from the mammoth ship.<sup>59</sup> Chance had led one of Saladin's gambits for resupplying Acre directly into the path of Richard as Baha al-Din's chronicle reports:

On 16 Jumada (11 June) a large and imposing buss arrived from Beirut, loaded with siege engines, weapons, provisions and stout fighting men. The sultan had ordered it to be fitted out in Beirut and dispatched, and a great company of fighting men had been embarked to force an entry into Acre despite the enemy blockade. Its fighting complement was 650 men. The accursed king of England confronted the buss with a number of galleys.<sup>60</sup>

Some sources say the huge ship sank during the ensuing sea battle after the Muslims abandoned it while others report the Muslims scuttled it rather than let the ship be captured.<sup>61</sup> In any case, had the giant buss with so many men and supplies made it to Acre, the besieged could have held out much longer, perhaps indefinitely. Of course, the existing blockade at Acre might have stopped it even without Richard's galleys, but it was crucial for the Christians to prevent it from reaching its destination.<sup>62</sup> Upon hearing of the great cargo ship's failure, Saladin is reported in a chronicle to have said, "Now I have lost Acre."<sup>63</sup> He did a month later.

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<sup>59</sup> *Itinerarium*, 196-7.

<sup>60</sup> *Baha al-Din*, 151.

<sup>61</sup> *Baha al-Din*, 151-2, *Itinerarium*, 198-9.

<sup>62</sup> In *Medieval Naval Warfare 1000 – 1500*, Rose argues that the sinking of the great supply ship had little real strategic significance, but some of the chronicles of the time seem to suggest otherwise.

<sup>63</sup> *Itinerarium*, 199.



Saladin's naval strength all but ended with the capture of the many Muslim ships trapped at Acre when the city fell. The Muslims still fought fiercely on land, but the Christians now had total dominance on the seas. This advantage helped the crusaders immensely and heavily influenced policy for the rest of the war. When Richard set out from Acre with the army to advance south on Muslim territory, he stayed near the coast and the protection of naval support.<sup>64</sup> Also, as the crusaders conquered land or cities, e.g., Joppa, they could easily call for supplies via cargo vessels, and "the Turks were very much distressed because they could not prevent their sailing."<sup>65</sup> Ships similarly supplied Richard and the crusading armies at Ascalon.<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, if Saladin counterattacked crusader coastal territory, the Christian naval forces could move troops quickly in response. For example, when Muslim forces threatened Joppa in September of 1192, Richard arrived with galleys and stormed up the beach with men to relieve the town.<sup>67</sup> Finally, naval support or rather the lack of it convinced Richard not to press on and attempt to conquer Jerusalem.<sup>68</sup> Richard knew that it would be too easy for Saladin to cut the Christian supply lines and trap the Latin army inland just as Saladin's forces had

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<sup>64</sup> Jean Flori, 159 "ses troupes suivent un chemin proche de la mer, dont sa flotte (qui l'accompagne) a désormais la maîtrise. Il ne risque ainsi aucune attaque sur son flanc droit." The secondary sources (Runciman, Wolff & Hazard, Gillingham) all agree that Richard kept the army near the fleet-patrolled coast to protect his right flank.

<sup>65</sup> *Itinerarium*, 263

<sup>66</sup> *Itinerarium*, 286

<sup>67</sup> *Itinerarium*, 355

<sup>68</sup> Gillingham, Runciman, and Wolff & Hazard all note that one of the main reasons Richard chose not to attack Jerusalem was the difficulties his army faced in keeping supply lines to the sea open.

trapped King Guy's army at Hattin five years before. While discussing the issue on the road to Jerusalem, one of the chronicles reports Richard saying, "We are a long way from the coast."<sup>69</sup> Instead, Richard and several of the Hospitallers and Templars suggested an invasion of Egypt where naval power could again prove pivotal. The French and others, however, would not agree to any further military action except a march on Jerusalem. The failure to bring these factions together along with more urgent requests for Richard to return to England effectively ended the crusade, and peace negotiations produced a truce in October 1192.

The main legacy of the Third Crusade on the Latin side (besides added territory) was the acceptance of using sea power primarily for further military actions in the Levant. Indeed, it was not long before the Latins flexed their newfound naval muscles in the Mediterranean again, this time turning it on the Byzantines in what became the Fourth Crusade. Constantinople proved no match for the powerful Latin fleet. It was also no accident that the Fifth Crusade led by King Louis IX in the next century followed up on Richard's and the Templars' plan to attack Damietta in Egypt with a fleet rather than assault Jerusalem. Emperor Frederick II was able to leverage naval strength in the Sixth Crusade to achieve what even Richard could not: the surrender of Jerusalem (albeit by negotiation).<sup>70</sup> The Byzantines, once a considerable power on the seas, were already in retreat from the Sicilians by the Third Crusade and after the Fourth, they were a naval non-entity. Lastly, on the Muslim side, naval power fell into a long decline after the

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<sup>69</sup> *Itinerarium*, 335

<sup>70</sup> Lewis and Runyan, 56.

death of Saladin in 1193.<sup>71</sup> This serious lack of attention to marine affairs only facilitated

the aforementioned Latin ascent.<sup>72</sup> It would not be until the rise of Ottoman fleets in the latter half of the fifteenth century that Muslim sea power would return to challenge the Christian nations of Western Europe for supremacy on the Mediterranean.<sup>73</sup> The Third Crusade had set the nautical tone in the region for almost three hundred years.

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<sup>71</sup> Ehrenkreutz, 116.

<sup>72</sup> In her book *Medieval Naval Warfare*, 41-2, Susan Rose supposes that the Muslim rulers of Egypt simply saw little value in building or equipping warships from the thirteenth through the fifteenth centuries. She goes on to say this was an understandable response to a specific tactical situation and that one should not conclude from this anything approaching Latin naval supremacy at the time.

While Rose's scholarship on medieval naval history is informative, this author finds her deductions in the above matter questionable. First of all, Saladin, the brilliant military leader of the Muslims, obviously saw the value – indeed the necessity – of challenging the Christians on the seas in order to achieve a full victory in the region. Secondly, if the Egyptian Muslim leaders after Saladin decided to concede the Mediterranean to their Latin enemies because they could not counter them effectively in the naval arena, many might call that an indirect admission of Latin naval supremacy.

<sup>73</sup> Lewis and Runyan, 82. It was not until the decades following the capture of Constantinople (1453) that the Turks began to threaten Latin shipping throughout the Mediterranean.

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