

Medieval Sourcebook:

Itinerarium Peregrinorum et Gesta Regis Ricardi:

Muslim Hostages Slain at Acre, 1191

[Adapted from Brundage] *After the departure of Philip Augustus from the Holy Land, Richard took command of the remaining Crusaders there. The fulfillment of the truce conditions at Acre was the first consideration now and Richard pressed Saladin to deliver the prisoners whose release had been promised. The Muslim arrangements, however, proved too slow for the impatient English king.*

King Richard awaited the expiration of the time set by the agreement between him and the Turks, as mentioned earlier. Meanwhile, he had the siege machines and mangonels loaded into packs for transport. **Even after the period set by the Saracens for the return of the Holy Cross and the freeing of the hostages [on the conditions mentioned before] had ended, he waited three weeks beyond the time limit to see if Saladin would remain faithful to what had been done or if the treaty maker would further violate his agreement.** King Richard thought that since Saladin seemed to care nothing about it, perhaps God would so arrange things that something even better might come of it. Too, the Saracens might need a delay in order to fulfill their promise and to seek for **the Holy Cross**.

Frequently you could hear the Christians seeking for news of when the Holy Cross would come. God, however, did not wish it to be returned at that time for the liberation of those whose freedom had been promised for its return. Rather, he wished them to perish. One man said to another: "The Cross has come now!" Another man said to someone else: "It has been seen in the Saracen army." But all of them were mistaken.

Saladin had not arranged for the return of the Holy Cross. Instead, he neglected the hostages who were held as security for its return. He hoped, indeed, that by using the Holy Cross he could gain much greater concessions in negotiation. Saladin meanwhile was sending gifts and messengers to the King, gaining time by false and clever words. He fulfilled none of his promises, but by an increasing use of graceful and ambiguous words he attempted for a long time to keep the King from making up his mind....

Later, indeed, after the time limit had more than passed, King Richard determined that Saladin had hardened his heart and cared no longer about ransoming the hostages. He assembled a council of the greater men among the people and they decided that they would wait in vain no longer, but that they would behead the captives. They decided, however, to set apart some of the greater and more noble men on the chance that they might be ransomed or exchanged for some other Christian captives.

King Richard always hoped to overwhelm the Turks completely, to crush their impudent arrogance, to confound the Moslem law, and to vindicate Christianity.

On the Friday next after the feast of the Assumption of Blessed Mary, [August 16, the date when the decision to massacre the Muslims was made. It was done on August 20] he ordered that two

thousand seven hundred of the vanquished Turkish hostages be led out of the city and decapitated. Without delay his assistants rushed up and quickly carried out the order. They gave heartfelt thanks, since with the approval of divine grace, they were taking vengeance in kind for the death of the Christians whom these people had slaughtered with the missiles of their bows and ballistas.

Source:

Itinerarium Peregrinorum et Gesta Regis Ricardi, ed. William Stubbs, Rolls Series, (London: Longmans, 1864) IV, 2, 4 (pp. 240-41, 243), translated by James Brundage, *The Crusades: A Documentary History*, (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1962), 183-84
For this text see also *The Crusade of Richard the Lionhearted*, ed. and trans. John L. LaMonte, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941)

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