

CHAPTER
14

Section 1

PRIMARY SOURCE *Massacre at Acre*
by Behâ-ed-Din

During the Third Crusade, Muslim leader Saladin squared off against the English king Richard the Lion-Hearted. The Crusaders led by Richard mounted a two-year siege of the city of Acre in what is now Israel. About 100,000 died. In 1191, during peace negotiations, Crusaders took the city and killed 3,000 Muslim prisoners. As you read, think about how Muslims viewed King Richard and the Crusaders.

These negotiations continued till our men had procured the money and the number of prisoners that they were to deliver to the Christians at the end of the first period in accordance with the treaty. The first instalment was to consist of the Holy Cross, 100,000 dinars [unit of money] and 1,600 prisoners. Trustworthy men sent by the Christians to conduct the examination found it all complete saving only the prisoners who had been demanded by name, all of whom had not yet been gathered together. And thus the negotiations continued to drag on till the end of the first term. On this day, the 18th of Rajab [11 August], the enemy sent demanding what was due.

The Sultan replied as follows: "Choose one of two things. Either send us back our comrades and receive the payment fixed for this term, in which case we will give hostages to ensure the full execution of all that is left. Or accept what we are going to send you today, and in your turn give us hostages to keep until those of our comrades whom you hold prisoners are restored." To this the envoys made answer: "Not so. Send us what is due for this term and in return we will give our solemn oath that your people shall be restored you."

This proposition the Sultan rejected, knowing full well that . . . he would have no security against treachery on the part of the enemy, and this would be a great disaster to Islam.

Then the King of England, seeing all the delays interposed by the Sultan to the execution of the treaty, acted perfidiously as regards his Mussulman [Muslim] prisoners. On their yielding the town of Acre he had engaged to grant them life. . . . Now the King broke his promises to them. . . .

In the afternoon of Tuesday, 27 Rajab [20 August], about four o'clock, he came out on horse-

back with all the Christian army . . . and advanced to the pits at the foot of the hill of Al 'Ayâdiyyeh. . . . The Christians, on reaching the middle of the plain . . . ordered all the Mussulman prisoners, whose martyrdom God had decreed for this day, to be brought before him. They numbered more than three thousand and were all bound with ropes. The Christians then flung themselves upon them all at once and massacred them with sword and lance in cold blood. . . . The Mussulmans, seeing what was being done to the prisoners, rushed against the Christians and in the combat, which lasted till nightfall, several were slain and wounded on either side. On the morrow morning our people gathered at the spot and found the Mussulmans stretched out upon the ground as martyrs for the faith. They even recognized some of the dead, and the sight was a great affliction to them.

The motives of this massacre are differently told; according to some, the captives were slain by way of reprisal for the death of those Christians whom the Mussulmans had slain. Others again say that the King of England, on deciding to attempt the conquest of Ascalon, thought it unwise to leave so many prisoners in the town after his departure. God alone knows what the real reason was.

from T.A. Archer, sel. and arranger, *The Crusade of Richard I, 1189-92*. Reprinted in John Carey, ed., *Eyewitness to History* (New York: Avon, 1987), 35-37.

Activity Option

Recognizing Point of View Write an editorial about the massacre at Acre from the point of view of a supporter of Saladin or a supporter of King Richard. Then share your editorial by reading it aloud to the class.