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Richard the Lionheart, Contested Queerness, and Crusading Memory

Hilary Rhodes, University of Denver, US, Hilary.Rhodes@du.edu

This article explores King Richard I of England (r. 1189–99) and the medieval and modern historiography on the subjects of 1) his contested sexuality and 2) his participation in the Third Crusade (1187–92). In addition to demonstrating that the evidence of his queerness is both considerable and unambiguous, the article investigates how Richard’s political and cultural legacy has been used and re-used, how his status as an English national hero has been increasingly called into question, and how modern anxieties about the medieval crusades have driven the need to reconfigure his historical memory. It also briefly touches upon questions of ‘religious’ versus ‘secular’ violence, transhistorical Christian-Muslim relations, and the problematic and enduring mythology of the crusades in modern and post-Brexit Britain, especially in regard to the epistemological legacy of the Western Christian world, its historical empire-building and other projects in which the crusades have played a major role, and the ongoing reckoning and reshaping of these ideas. Lastly, it proposes new concepts of premodern queer memory and the academic practice of queer history, and calls for the creation of an analytical space that assertively centres these complexities.



Introduction

King Richard I of England (r. 1189–99), better known as Richard the Lionheart, is a colourful and controversial figure. Famed and admired in his own time as a formidable warrior and for his participation in the Third Crusade (1187–92), his modern legacy is more complex. His immense popularity as a Victorian-era romantic hero led to the placement of his statue before the Houses of Parliament in 1860, and its damage but not destruction during the Blitz became a symbol of English national resilience in World War II (Parliament of the United Kingdom, 2009; see also Horswell, 2018). However, in the later twentieth century, as political and social unease with uncritically imperialist crusading memory began to grow, this image came in for increasing critique and revision (see Siberry, 2000; Knobler, 2006). Richard's apparent disinterest in England, likely inability to speak the English language, presumed religious zealotry, hot temper, and other personal flaws were given prominence in constructing a narrative of him as an undeserving and ungrateful ruler who never merited his lofty status in public mythology and who should, quite literally, be brought down from his pedestal (Markowski, 1997; Johnson, 2016).

This move to distance Britain's collective self-image from the crusades, and therefore the figure of Richard himself as most famously emblematic of them, is further complicated by Richard's allegedly unclear sexuality, wherein he is often 'rumoured' or 'suggested' to be queer, as if the evidence is much less conclusive or convincing than it actually is. Likewise, given recent political developments such as Brexit, which rely strongly on an imagined sense of 'British exceptionalism', one must wonder if this distancing has been undertaken in any meaningful way, or merely as a cosmetic attempt to modernise the names and set dressing without ever challenging the underlying assumptions. (Or indeed, simply to 'punish' Richard for not caring enough about England, which in this xenophobic framework is regarded as the centre of the world and the only nation that truly matters.)

While there are many ways to study Richard, this article focuses on two: that of his contested sexuality and of his complicated status as a crusading hero in the post-9/11 world. By showing how these facets of Richard's life interact and perform often-unacknowledged work in the relevant historiography, I challenge assumptions, reveal biases, and set parameters for future scholarship. The agenda is threefold. First, I establish that the evidence for Richard's fluid sexuality—or, as I henceforth call it, his queerness—is both clear and extensive, even with the usual caveats about premodern same-gender relations. Second, I explore how Richard's queerness has been uneasily received in modern historical and fictional narratives, with one main approach denying and explaining away all the evidence as scanty, mischaracterised, or misinterpreted

in order to rehabilitate him as a ‘good king’, and the other tying it deeply to him as a paramount flaw that is representative of many other failures. Lastly, I explore how this persistent obsession with Richard’s private character, well out of proportion to other important figures of the period, reflects our difficult contemporary relationship with the crusades and our still-limited acceptance of premodern queer history.

Queering Richard in Medieval Sources

We begin with the medieval texts that discuss Richard’s personal behaviour, including the chronicles of Roger of Howden (fl. 1169–1202), Benedict of Peterborough (fl. 1174–93), Adam of Eynsham (c. 1155–c. 1233) and the anonymous *Itinerarium Peregrinorum* or *Itinerarium Regis Ricardi* (c. 1220s). All of these sources are generally or overwhelmingly favourable to Richard, meaning that they are not unfriendly outside accounts or politically motivated slander from his rivals. None of them wished to openly ascribe sinful conduct to Richard, but they were nonetheless consistent, within acceptable limits, on the topic of his love for other men. The first instance, from Roger of Howden, came in the summer of 1187, during Richard’s wars with his father Henry II of England (r. 1154–89), and after he had formed a sudden attachment with the young Philip II of France (r. 1180–1223):

After peace was made, Richard, count of Poitou, remained with the king of France, against the will of his father [Henry II], and the king of France held him in such high esteem that every day they ate at the same table and from the same dish, and at night the bed did not separate them. On account of this vehement love [vehementem amorem] that seemed to have arisen between them, the king of England was greatly stupefied and wondered what it could mean, and taking precautions for the future, frequently sent messengers into France for the purpose of recalling his son Richard (Roger of Howden, 1853: 64; Roger of Howden, 1869: 318).

It has often (and correctly) been pointed out that sharing a bed had no specific sexual connotations in the medieval world, and that this alone did not indicate a romantic or physical relationship between Richard and Philip. However, this overlooks the particular and emphatic wording of ‘vehementem amorem’, which Henry Riley (very understatedly) translated in the nineteenth century as ‘strong attachment’ (Roger of Howden, 1853: 64). The Latin word ‘vehementier’ contained the implications of ‘a tendency or motion of the soul which was excessive or beyond bounds ... a perturbation or Stoic passion ... irrational and contrary to nature’ (Harris, 1783) and as Ann Trinidad points out in her analysis of this same passage, had specific connotations of sexual

excess or misbehaviour for medieval moralists (Trinidad, 1999: 190–95). Intense homosocial bonds between twelfth-century knights, both exalted for the supposed spiritual superiority of their love and regarded warily for their risk of turning sexual and thus sinful, were the subject of clerical and cultural debate (Kuefler, 2006; Karras, 2006), and this anxiety later increased in the fourteenth century, due to the excessive and potentially homoerotic reliance of several European kings on their male favourites (Zeikowitz, 2003; Bagerius and Ekholst, 2017). Roger of Howden's anecdote was repeated in Benedict of Peterborough's *Gesta Regis Henrici Secundi et Gesta Regis Ricardi Benedicti abbatis* (late twelfth century), which not only used 'vehementem' to describe this relationship [vehementem dilectionem], but added a sentence claiming that Philip loved Richard 'like his own soul' [et dilexit eum rex Franciae quasi animam suam], and noted, once more, that this seriously alarmed Richard's father Henry (Benedict of Peterborough, 1867: 7).

Thus, while bed-sharing alone is not proof of an intimate relationship, the broader context and Richard and Philip's subsequent obsessive, bitter, and personal rivalry, only ended by Richard's death in 1199, is surely worthy of more careful consideration (see also Kocher, 2008). My intent is not to claim beyond all doubt that the relationship was sexual, but to demonstrate that it was suggestively framed as such by chroniclers favourable to Richard and his family. This highlights the problematic modern demand for concrete 'proof' to establish any kind of premodern queer legitimacy—in this case, with the physical actions of sexed queer bodies, which creates an artificial standard that can never be satisfied and is never requested for heterosexuality. The medieval authors reporting on Richard and Philip's affair evidently had reason to believe that it was in fact sexual, but even if not, it is no less legitimate as an example of historical queer love. (For a discussion on the rhetorical 'silence' of sodomy, and how it was never directly highlighted or spoken about, see Scanlon, 1995.)

Roger of Howden next commented on Richard's penance in Messina, Sicily, in late 1190 or early 1191. Here he was more enigmatic, writing only that:

Richard, king of England, the Divine grace inspiring him thereto, being sensible of the filthiness of his life [foeditatis vitae suae] after due contrition of heart, having called together the archbishops and bishops who were with him at Messina ... fell naked at their feet, and did not hesitate to confess to God, in their presence, the filthiness of his life. For the thorns of lustfulness had departed from his head [vepres enim libidinum excesserant caput illius] and it was not the hand of man that rooted them out, but God, the Father of Mercies, who wisheth not for the death of a sinner, but rather that he may turn from his wickedness and live (Roger of Howden, 1853: 176).

Several factors make clear that this was a public atonement for queer sexual sins. First, Richard's clerical rebukes on two further occasions, in 1195 and 1198, were specifically for sexual misdeeds (as can also be understood from the reference to the 'thorns of lustfulness' here) and second, any act of repentance for extramarital sex with women, especially for a king, was simply unheard-of for any of Richard's peers or predecessors. The chroniclers, when they took notice at all, treated the subject very differently. In the *Gesta Regum Anglorum's* discussion of Richard's great-grandfather Henry I of England (r. 1100–35) and his nearly 20 illegitimate children, William of Malmesbury (c.1095–c. 1143) claimed:

All his life [Henry I] was completely free from fleshly lusts, indulging in the embraces of the female sex ... from love of begetting children and not to gratify his passions; for he thought it beneath his dignity to comply with extraneous gratification, unless the royal seed could fulfil its natural purpose; employing his bodily functions as their master, not obeying his lust as its slave (William of Malmesbury, 1998: 745).

In this passage, we see that medieval chroniclers could easily turn an eyebrow-raising number of illegitimate children into a kingly virtue. The *Gesta* also praised Henry I's 'hatred of indecency', explicitly in contrast to its condemnation of his brother William II of England's (r. 1087–1100) court and companions as:

spineless, unmanned, [and] reluctant to remain as Nature had intended they should be; they were a menace to the virtue of others and promiscuous with their own [Enerues, emolliti, quod nati fuerant inuiti manebant, expugnatores alienae pudicitiae, prodigi suae] ... as a wise man once said, the court of the king of England [William II] is not the abode of majesty but a brothel for perverts (William of Malmesbury, 1998: 560–61).

In other words, Henry I's vigorous career of extramarital heterosexual sex was no obstacle to his presentation as the righteous alternative to the effeminate (and queer-coded) degeneracy of William Rufus. It is also significantly unlikely that the chroniclers, with their admiration for Richard otherwise, would have made much of any female mistresses or other expected peccadilloes for a king, far less calling it the 'filthiness' of his life. Richard's father Henry II, a notorious womaniser, was recorded as undergoing a similar public penance only once, but not for sexual sin. On 12 July 1174, he was scourged at Canterbury for his supposed role in instigating the December 1170 murder of Thomas Becket, and coincidentally rewarded with the capture of William 'the Lion', king of Scots, on the same day (William of Newburgh, 1884). In his lengthy obituary of

the king, the chronicler William of Newburgh (1136–1198) made a passing reference to Henry's 'excessive manner of conjugality' [conjugalem modum excessit] but largely focused on his ultimately unhappy relationships with his wife, Eleanor of Aquitaine, and their sons. Despite still believing that Henry had made an insincere or incomplete repentance for Becket's murder, Newburgh enumerated many of his personal virtues and overall approved of his tenure as king. This brief, singular, and matter-of-fact mention of Henry's infidelities once more does not fit with the pattern of Richard being rebuked at length, in detail, and repeatedly for an action described specifically, in its next instance, as the sin of sodomy. Once more from Howden:

In the same year [1195], there came a hermit to king Richard, and preaching the words of eternal salvation to him, said: 'Be mindful of the destruction of Sodom and abstain from what is unlawful, for if thou dost not, a vengeance worthy of God shall overtake thee'. The king, however, intent upon the things of this world, and not those which are of God, was not able to withdraw his mind from what was unlawful ...

Hence it was, that on the Lord's day in Easter week, the Lord visited him with a rod of iron, not that he might bruise him, but that he might receive the scourging to his advantage. The Lord scourged him with a severe attack of illness, so that, calling before him religious men, he was not ashamed to confess the guiltiness of his life, and after receiving absolution, took back his wife, whom for a long time he had not known, and putting away all illicit intercourse, he remained constant to his wife, and they two became one flesh, and the Lord gave him health both of body and soul (Roger of Howden, 1853: 356–57).

As explicit as the English translation of this paragraph is, the Latin is, in my reading, even less ambiguous. The sin of Sodom [subversionis Sodoma] was becoming increasingly established as male homosexual intercourse; it had previously functioned as a catch-all for 'deviant' sexual behaviour, and the modern scholarship taking care to insist that it could also cover non-procreative sexual activity with women—i.e., oral or anal sex—rests on the deeply improbable assumption that chroniclers were stationed in the royal bedroom to report on which sex positions the king was using (see Boyd, 1994; Russell, 1998; Cottier, 2007; Olsen, 2011 for the evolution of 'sodomy' as a category of moral and/or sexual transgression). The twelfth-century semantic transformation of 'sodomy' to refer primarily to male homosexual intercourse is exemplified by the Parisian theologian Peter the Chanter (d. 1197) (Clarke, 2001; Chambers, 2013). In a chapter of his *Verbum Abbreviatum*, Peter railed against sodomy and 'hermaphroditism' (probably to be understood as gender non-conformity or transvestism), and ranked it as the only sin

comparable with murder (Peter the Chanter, 1855; Mills, 2015).¹ In his discussion, Peter quoted scripture (Romans 1:26–27) about men ‘leaving the natural use of the women [and] burning in their lusts for one another’,² and made clear that in his interpretation, the ‘fornication’ of Sodom and Gomorrah was of an explicitly homosexual nature: ‘males with males, women with women’.³ (See also Van der Lugt, 2010.)

Thus, while the emerging legal definition of sodomy did encompass women, for a man to commit the sin of Sodom was for him to engage in homosexual intercourse. This is echoed by Howden’s description of Richard ‘rejecting illicit intercourse’ [*abjecto concubitu illicito*], grammatically (and one feels, deliberately) gendered masculine in Latin, when it could just as easily have been formulated as the feminine ‘*abjecta concubita illicita*’. Additionally, when Richard accepted penance and took back his queen, Howden did not use the usual Latin word for wife, ‘*uxor*’, but instead phrased it as Richard accepting ‘his woman’ [*mulierem suam*], whom he had not known in a long time. While ‘*mulier*’ can also be used to translate ‘wife’, it is more often simply used for ‘woman’. Thus, the sense is that of Richard receiving back not just his wife, Berengaria of Navarre (c. 1165/70–1230), but women more generally, renouncing his illicit queer liaisons. It is also noteworthy that while we often know at least some names of royal mistresses, including several for Henry II, none are recorded for Richard, and the mother of his one illegitimate son, Philip of Cognac, is also unknown. This suggests a lack of any female lovers who remained prominent long enough to draw general attention. Likewise, any woman at the centre of a royal sex scandal would be named and shamed, and the blame deflected onto her rather than the king himself.

Even the 1195 rebuke, however, failed to permanently alter Richard’s habits. He was once more admonished in 1198 by two different churchmen, Fulk of Neuilly (d. 1201) and Hugh of Lincoln (c. 1135/40–1200), but his response was quite different. Unlike his politically motivated penance in 1191, and what seems to have been a moment of panic following his serious illness in 1195, Richard’s answers evoked a distinct defiance. When Fulk accused him of begetting three shameless daughters, Pride, Greed, and Lust, Richard shot back that he hoped the Templars would marry Pride, the Cistercians would marry Greed, and the Church would marry Lust (Roger of Howden, 1869: 76–77; Gerald of Cambrai, 1868: 44). When Hugh, bishop of Lincoln, travelled to

¹ ‘De tantum duobus ergo peccatis tanquam, maximus et paribus, homicidio scilicet et vitio sodomitico’. (Peter the Chanter, 1855: 333–335).

² ‘Item ad Romanos, cap. 1 ... Nam feminae eorum immutaverant naturalem usum, in eum usum, qui est contra naturam. Similiter et masculi, relicto naturali usu feminae, exarserunt in desideriiis suis, invicem masculi in masculos turpitudinem operantes, traditi in reprobum sensum, ut faciant ea quae non conveniunt’. (Peter the Chanter, 1855: 334).

³ ‘Sodoma, et Gomorra et finitimae civitatis, quia exfornicatae sunt, et abierunt post carnem alieram, masculi cum masculis ... mulieres cum mulieribus’ (Peter the Chanter, 1855: 335).

Richard's castle of Château-Gaillard in Normandy, where he met the king on 28 August 1198, he went to considerable lengths to obtain the kiss of peace first, before rebuking Richard on several issues including marital infidelity, which was apparently a matter of public rumour [iam publicus rumor est quia nec proprie coniugi maritalis thori fidem conseruas] (Adam of Eynsham, 1985: 105). Richard responded that 'his conscience was clear in almost everything except his hatred for his enemies', and 'listened attentively to [Hugh's] exhortations and counsels, denying in some cases that he was guilty, and imploring the assistance of his prayers in others' (Adam of Eynsham, 1985: 104–05). This incident is reported by Adam of Eynsham (d. c. 1233), who was Hugh's scribe and may have personally witnessed it. But unlike the other instances of Richard being accused of sexual misbehaviour, neither rebuke sparked a public penance or reconciliation with his wife Berengaria, from whom he was once more effectively separated.

Overall, we can conclude that Richard's own view on his preferences was complicated, that he recognised them as contrary to church teaching and was willing to forswear and apologise for them at moments of political or personal necessity, but nevertheless returned to them as a general rule. Even though all the above quotes come from sources favourable to the king, a claim sometimes used to invalidate Richard's queerness is that his French enemies supposedly never accused him of it. This is an utterly illogical standard for several reasons. First, it requires the burden of proof to be that of hostile hearsay explicitly written down and acknowledged as legitimate, and considering the existence of Richard's affair with Philip, would be a very double-edged sword for the French indeed. Second, sodomy was firmly established as the 'silent sin' [peccatum mutum], which was simply not directly acknowledged or mentioned; we have already considered the essential evasion of the chronicles. As Mark D. Jordan comments: 'Sexual vocabulary is particularly rich in metaphors, ironies, and allusions. This seems as true for medieval Latin as modern English. Both use dozens of ways to speak about sexual things without speaking of them, to point without describing, to suggest without disclosing' (Jordan, 1997: 7). Finally, it ignores the fact that one of Richard's enemies apparently *did* accuse him of it. During the Third Crusade, Hugh III, duke of Burgundy (r. 1162–1192), became commander of the French troops after Philip's departure, and repeatedly clashed with Richard in that capacity. After the crusading army advanced as close as four miles from Jerusalem, but was ultimately ordered to retreat in July 1192, diplomatic and military relations broke down altogether. The French camped separately from the English, and Hugh took out his animosity toward Richard in a more personal fashion. The *Itinerarium Peregrinorum* comments:

On top of all this, Henry [Hugh] duke of Burgundy, prompted by a spirit of worthless arrogance or perhaps led on by the most unbecoming malicious envy, composed the words of a song to be sung in public. Such shameful words should never have

been made public if its composers had retained any sense of propriety, for they were revealed not so much as men but men beyond raping women [non tantum viris, sed et viros ultra rapientibus mulieribus]. Those who applied their efforts to such shocking and silly activities certainly made themselves conspicuous and revealed the hidden intentions of their hearts ... This invidious composition was sung all through the army. [Richard] was extremely annoyed about it, and thought that he should punish them by paying them back in their own coin. So he also sang something about them, and it was little trouble to compose because there was plenty of material at hand (*Chronicle of the Third Crusade*, 1997: 346; Boswell, 1980: 231–32).

The author's shocked tone in reporting this story, the implication that Hugh's song was too shameful to even be hinted at, and the curious comment that the ones who sang it were men 'beyond even raping women' gives the distinct impression that this was a musical slander of Richard's sexual habits, especially considering his public penance in Messina prior to the crusade. It also fits the tradition wherein songs were used as a versatile and popular method of mass communication within crusading armies, praising their successes and lambasting their failures (Sweetenham, 2018; Barbieri, 2018). The *Itinerarium Peregrinorum* deflected the suggestion of sexual irregularity by the straightforward tactic of claiming that the French were engaging in it instead and hence by inference, homosexual sodomy was even worse than heterosexual rape. It also shows that Richard's own reaction was simply to sing a wittier and more scathing song about his accusers, which is entirely in character and matches with his defiant response to the 1198 rebukes (see also Lee, 2018).

Richard's Queerness in Modern Historiography

How, then, have these medieval sources been interpreted, revisited, and revised in modern historiography? It is my contention that the reassessment of Richard's legacy was tied to a growing modern unease over his crusade participation and the presentation of him as the archetypal, gentlemanly Victorian hero, such as in Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* (Sroka, 1979; Ragussis, 1993). Even a cursory reading of the primary sources reveals a much more complicated picture of Richard's actions and personality, and eighteenth-century Enlightenment intellectual figures were scathing in their assessment of the crusades, characterising them as motivated by 'imbecility and false zeal' (Diderot) 'the most signal and most durable monument of human folly that has yet appeared in any age or nation' (Hume) and sheer 'savage fanaticism' (Gibbon) (Tyerman, 1998: 112). After their romantic renaissance in the nineteenth century, as idealised versions were used to support European colonial and imperial projects, this derogatory view returned to prominence in the twentieth century. As the supposedly

modern and secular Western world privileged an idea of itself as superior to, or far removed from, the ‘inferior’ medieval cultures of religious violence, the crusades had to be condemned, not celebrated (Asad, 2007; Cavanaugh, 2009), and Richard, previously lauded as a glorious hero, had to be likewise deconstructed.

In James Brundage’s 1974 biography of Richard, he treated the king’s sexuality fairly but not necessarily positively, concluding that ‘Richard was by preference a homosexual ... the conclusion is, if anything, reinforced further by his known affection for his mother and his dislike of his father who rejected him’ (Brundage, 1974: 258). This claim, while it reflects the Freudian and oedipal views of homosexuality then fashionable in 1970s psychology, likewise does not result from a measured assessment of the actual evidence, and once more serves only to confirm the biases of the historian’s own cultural context. This view was also presented in the 1968 film *The Lion in Winter*, where Richard—played by a young Sir Anthony Hopkins—is portrayed as humourless, bloodthirsty, obsessed with war, and likewise rather too much so with his mother Eleanor (Katharine Hepburn). However, he is also entangled in a messy love-hate affair with Philip of France (Timothy Dalton), who describes it as beginning when he woke up after being knocked unconscious in a hunting accident and found Richard ‘touching me’. In this telling, Richard is suffering from disordered sexuality in every way: he has a possibly incestuous attachment to his mother and forces an initially non-consensual homosexual encounter onto a younger political rival. This is magnified in his unpleasant personality and determination to destroy his enemies at any cost. While *The Lion in Winter* is a dramatic fictional narrative and has no obligation to represent historical facts accurately or fully, it entirely removes the romantic and consensual context of Richard and Philip’s alleged affair. In this framework, even this could only happen because of a private sin and immoral individual choice made by Richard alone, and could never be truly desired or actively reciprocated (see also Palmer, 2009).

Lorraine K. Stock has analysed other fictional portrayals of Richard that likewise incorporate his unresolved sexuality. Famed twentieth-century filmmaker Cecil B. DeMille, in his 1935 epic *The Crusades*, created a paradigm in which Richard (Henry Wilcoxon), suspiciously prone to queer desires and behaviours in the first half of the film, moves to more socially acceptable heterosexual passions by the end. As Stock (2009a: 65) puts it, ‘The film’s transformative construction of a gay-to-straight Richard uncannily anticipates later historians’ vexed polarity about the king’s sexuality’. Yet even this transformation is far from categorical or complete. DeMille added an imaginary love triangle between Richard, Berengaria (Loretta Young), and Saladin (Ian Keith), suggesting that the powerful and chivalrous Muslim sultan represents a virile masculinity that Richard, despite his ultimate profession of love for Berengaria, can

never quite achieve, and the royal couple's marriage remains visually unconsummated and incomplete. (See also Stock, 2009b, for filmic depictions of Richard especially vis-à-vis Saladin and Robin Hood, and the queer/homoerotic undertones present in each of these dyads.) This uneasy, unsettled interplay between queerness, crusading, Christianity and Islam, orientalism, the Western gaze and its sexual exoticism of the 'other', in a narrative which seemingly emphasises default heteronormativity while never actually resolving or disavowing the queer subtext, is emblematic of many of the themes and debates under consideration here.

John Gillingham's work thus functions, to some degree, as a useful correction of this confusion. Gillingham's assessment of Richard considers both his flaws and strengths to paint a portrait of a king who, despite personal shortcomings, was a brilliant and dynamic ruler whose success, particularly in battle, proved impossible for his brother and successor John to replicate. However, Gillingham's rehabilitation of Richard deliberately strips away any suggestion of queerness. He summarily rejects any idea that the 1195 rebuke of Richard could refer to homosexuality, claiming that 'in the days when people read their Bible all the way through and when they appreciated the value of a good sermon, no one understood the hermit's words to mean that Richard was a homosexual' (Gillingham, 1994: 134; see also Gillingham, 1980, Gillingham, 1992, and Gillingham, 1999 for all the times he has felt it necessary to 'debunk' Richard's queerness). Aside from the fact that only a very few medieval people could read the entire Bible, we have seen that Peter the Chanter had already interpreted sodomy as exactly that: male homosexuality. Gillingham also dismisses Philip and Richard's relationship on the same grounds: 'To a modern reader the meaning of these words may seem blindingly obvious. But it is, in fact, an obvious mistake to assume that ritual gestures such as kisses or sleeping in the same bed retain a uniform meaning in all ages ... whoever Peter the Chanter may have had in mind, it is clear that the thirteenth century did not suffer from the illusion that Richard preferred monks' (Gillingham, 1994: 135–36).

Gillingham might view claims for Richard's queerness as 'suffer[ing] from illusion', but William Burgwinkle (2004) has criticised his conclusions at length. He argues that it is absurd to constantly dismiss, downplay, or ignore the substantial textual evidence or to simply view it as a generic tool of political slander, since it exists singularly around Richard and no other members of his family (and as noted, comes from otherwise friendly chronicles). Burgwinkle also identifies several more allusions, particularly in William of Newburgh and Richard of Devizes (fl. late twelfth century), about Richard's queer behaviour, and asks, 'Why, in sum, are we constantly reminded that to impose any notion of homosexuality on the Middle Ages is anachronistic, when our equally time-warped notions of heterosexuality are spread, thick and unilateral,

across centuries of critical commentary?’ (Burgwinkle, 2004: 74). He likewise notes that Richard—a talented and feared warrior and charismatic ‘man’s man’—cannot be reduced to a stereotypical feeble or ‘effeminate sodomite’, such as his great-granduncle William Rufus. Interpretations of Richard’s sexuality thus tend to affirm him entirely as one (heterosexual) or the other (homosexual), without any room for the negotiation or fluidity that often characterises sexual orientation and experience. As Burgwinkle (2004: 85) concludes: ‘Claiming Richard as a heterosexual is like claiming that there are no gays in the U.S. military because they do not “tell”’.

Of course, this narrative is then taken too far in the wrong direction. James Reston Jr.’s popular history *Warriors of God* (2007) congratulates itself for ‘dealing frankly’ with Richard’s homosexuality and goes so far as to claim that Richard’s marriage to Berengaria was a ‘sham’ and never consummated. (Stock also echoes this idea, but it is quite unlikely to be true, especially since we are explicitly informed, in Howden’s anecdote about the 1195 rebuke, that it *was* consummated.) Reston also participates in the same pointedly personal attacks on Richard that characterised treatments such as Michael Markowski (1997). While Gillingham tries to rehabilitate Richard by removing him from any lingering taint of queerness, Reston ties Richard to his ‘aberrant’ sexuality as closely as possible, in order to vindicate his overall criticism of the king. It goes without saying that both of these analytical approaches are structurally and systematically homophobic, and reflect the authors’ own private agendas and desired conclusions, rather than any solid historical or textual evidence. One treats Richard’s queerness as a disparaging and baseless ‘accusation’ that cannot be taken seriously for fear of once more besmirching his reputation, while for the other, it is the central synecdoche and ultimate proof of his unworthiness.

This highlights the modern discomfort with Richard’s crusading participation, and involves broader questions of ‘religious’ versus ‘secular’ violence, Christian-Muslim relations, critiques of the West’s Middle Eastern military interventions, and so on. It is easy to see the correlation between fear of the social-religious ‘other’ and fear of the sexual ‘other’, and the transitory, contradictory role that Richard, as a queer crusader and indeed the leader of the expedition, uneasily fulfilled (see also Biddick, 2007). As Burgwinkle (2004: 73) points out, ‘sodomy’ had indeed been used ‘simply as a marker of otherness and difference, and applied indiscriminately to the non-white, non-Christian, non-reproducing foreigner’ (see also Hutcheson, 2001; Hernández Peña, 2016). The term ‘Saracen’ likewise functioned without particular specificity in medieval narratives, referring to any number of enemies outside the Western Christian body politic, until it came to be restricted mostly, but still not exclusively, to Muslims. (See Murray and Roscoe, 1997; Tolan, 2002; Berco, 2007.)

Re-evaluating Richard's Queerness in Modern Context

Altogether, we are left with an interlinking set of conclusions about sexuality, memory, and how they should be understood in Richard's particular context. It seems indefensible, considering the evidence herein examined, to continue to claim that his sexual orientation or experience was one of modern heterosexuality or 'default straightness'. This aspect of his personality, along with his crusade participation, has uncomfortably reinforced the damaging stereotypes of 'sodomites and Saracens'—or the 'gays and Muslims'—who are still positioned as unwanted 'others' in modern Western right-wing political discourse. Richard's crusading memory was an uncomplicated virtue in the colonising and imperialising nineteenth century, but in the post-9/11 world, this has been carefully—and often disingenuously—distanced from the present (Rhodes, 2019).

This critical responsibility therefore extends to us, whether as members of the LGBTQ+ community, premodern historians, or both. While we may find some satisfaction in uncovering a queer ancestor of Richard's fame and stature, we must also seriously reckon with the long-lasting and deeply damaging racial, religious, national, ethnic, social, and cultural legacy of the crusades, in which Richard himself was an enthusiastic and uncritical participant. In short, while scholars have become much more comfortable with examining and affirming queerness and queer history, they have become much *less* comfortable with the epistemological legacy of the Western Christian world, its historical empire-building and institutional violence, and other projects and mindsets in which the crusades played a major role. On one hand, it is obviously desirable to see these harmful assumptions critically interrogated and deconstructed, and this represents part of an overall and much-needed movement in medieval studies to question its complicity in serving as a haven for white supremacists and white-supremacist models of historical thinking (Chan, 2017; Gabriele; 2019). However, even as the academy conducts this necessary self-reflection and liberalisation, it cannot simply change out one set of biases for another.

As the memory and imagery of the crusades have been increasingly repurposed to support far-right political and racial goals (Gabriele, 2017), we cannot detach or 'pinkwash' Richard from this context, and we cannot view him as a heroic gay or bisexual man admirably overcoming the blinkered prejudices of his time (and that of certain modern scholars). This represents a fairly new concern for premodern queer studies, as academics in this field are often so preoccupied with proving that their subjects were in fact definably queer that they spend less time constructing an analytical framework for how it should be received or interpreted. In Richard's case, his personal behaviour has been so deeply and disingenuously tied to his portrayal as either a good (heterosexual) or bad (homosexual) king that the need for nuanced interpretation is

even more acute. Stephen J. Spencer (2017) has examined how modern historians often also depict another frequently cited ‘flaw’ of Richard’s—his quick temper and alleged propensity to fits of spectacular rage—much more broadly and disparagingly than is actually supported by the sources.

In other words, in any attempt to create either an accurate picture of Richard’s character or our own understanding of it, we must consider the immense social, cultural, military, and political power that was available to him in his role as king, head of state, army commander, and Christian crusader, which he frequently and remorselessly deployed. As such, we cannot read his queerness as representative of personal oppression or positive morality. Instead, we must evaluate Richard in a way that does not treat his private life as either an obvious flaw or an obvious virtue, and move toward analytical frameworks that assertively centre these complexities, rather than black-and-white conservative or liberal perspectives. We must also reject the notion that medieval queer people were always oppressed or stringently excluded from their communities, or that any prejudice automatically outweighed all other social, cultural, or religious considerations. While Richard did have to undergo ritualised acts of penance, these always ended with reconciliation to the church and reaffirmation of his power, and did not represent any long-term or permanent isolation.

Likewise, we must consider whether the public mythology of modern Britain has in fact separated itself from the crusades in any meaningful way, especially during the post-Brexit pursuit of ‘making Britain great again’. A romanticised narrative of British supremacy and imperial nostalgia continues to centrally inform the policies and self-image of the modern nation-state (Cain and Hopkins, 2016; Sangera, 2023), and the legacy of crusading still figures prominently in expressions of English pride—particularly in the culture of the national football team, the Three Lions, itself a name with explicit medieval and crusading roots. English fans often dress as crusaders, enact ultra-macho and ultra-nationalist behaviour, and create explicit links between this social identity and homophobic, misogynist, xenophobic, and anti-Islamic organisations such as the English Defence League (Garland and Treadwell, 2010; Vincent et al., 2010; Doidge, 2012). When the modern memory of crusading exists primarily in such virulently anti-gay realms as football hooliganism and alt-right movements, it is easy to see how Richard can never occupy both spheres simultaneously, and how these political developments and cultural mindsets have forced ‘queer’ and ‘crusader’ into even more of a diametrically opposite and irreconcilable binary.

The notion of ‘memory’ must also be read in its most obvious sense: that of creating a space for premodern queer history, which is still sometimes met with resistance even from academic members of the LGBTQ+ community. In 2017, a professor of LGBTQ+

history at San Francisco State University claimed that ‘in the era before there was any notion of same-sex sexual identity, it does a disservice to the specificity of historical periods to project or impose current terms. On some level, many of us would argue that there were no gay people or lesbians before the terms existed’ (Armus, 2017). When this is the level of erasure propagated by academics within the community, to say nothing of hostile outsiders, the necessity for new paradigms and modes of thinking becomes urgent. As Richard’s example shows, even in historical periods where explicit evidence is scant or the textual sources are almost entirely polemical and clerical, there have always been notions, experiences, and contestations of same-sex desire (see also Bennett, 2000). To claim that queer people did not ‘exist’ prior to the invention of modern terminology is comparable to claiming that gravity did not exist until the seventeenth century, thanks to Isaac Newton.

Conclusion

The denial of a queer past is always coupled, implicitly or explicitly, with the denial of a queer present, and the right of queer people to claim their own origins before the gay rights movement of the 1960s. In short, the world expects LGBTQ+ people to be grateful that they are allowed to exist at all in a heteronormative culture that routinely oppresses, erases, and violates them, and the teaching of history is frequently distorted in the service of whatever collective memory needs to be evoked, accurately or otherwise. Given that the concept of sexual orientation is articulated as early as 370 BC in Plato’s *The Symposium*, it is well past time for a more expansive hermeneutic of queer history, especially as it comes under renewed attack from the American political right wing, their embrace of ‘Don’t Say Gay’ laws, and other revived institutional discrimination. The deliberate misremembering of the queer past is far from a merely academic problem, and holds direct and troubling relevance for how we conceptualise, respond to, and prepare for both the present and the future.

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