



# The Troubadour's Song: The Capture and Ransom of Richard the Lionheart

*David Boyle*

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## **The Troubadour's Song: The Capture and Ransom of Richard the Lionheart** David Boyle

On his long journey home from the Third Crusade, Richard the Lionheart--one of history's most powerful and romantic figures--was ship-wrecked near Venice in the Adriatic Sea. Forced to make his way home by land through enemy countries, he traveled in disguise, but was eventually captured by Duke Leopold V of Austria, who in turn conveyed him to Henry VI, the Holy Roman Emperor. Henry demanded a majestic ransom, and Richard's mother, Eleanor of Aquitaine, raised the historic sum--one quarter of the entire wealth of England--and Richard was returned. But a peculiar legend followed him--that a troubadour named Blondel, a friend of Richard's, had journeyed across Europe singing a song he knew Richard would recognize in order to discover his secret place of imprisonment.

David Boyle recreates the drama of the Third Crusade and the dynamic power politics and personalities of the late 12th century in Europe, as well as the growing fascination with romance and chivalry embodied in the troubadour culture. An evocation of a pivotal era, *The Troubadour's Song* is narrative history at its finest.

## **The Troubadour's Song: The Capture and Ransom of Richard the Lionheart Details**

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## From Reader Review The Troubadour's Song: The Capture and Ransom of Richard the Lionheart for online ebook

### Pete daPixie says

I agree with Alson Weir's summing up 'this is a compelling and fascinating read, packed with brilliant detail and a haunting and provocative evocation of a turbulent age'. David Boyle's 2005 publication of 'Blondel's Song' is packed with late 12th century personalities and monumental events.

The Angevin struggle between Henry II and Philip of France is put on hold in 1190 when Richard the Lionheart and Philip embark on the third crusade. However the meat of this tale begins with Richard's return journey, so expertly described here. His epic traverse, in disguise, across the Austrian Alps ends with his capture at Vienna and imprisonment in Durstein Castle. It took a quarter of the wealth of England to secure his release.

However it's the legendary and almost fairy tale discovery of the king's whereabouts by the minstrel Blondel that Boyle provides as the missing link in this story. History and legend are never far away from each other here, with the Arthurian legends, the Holy Grail, the Templars, the Cathars and from Sherwood, the tales of Robin Hood and the Sheriff of Nottingham.

On Richard's return from Palestine, he was shipwrecked near what is now Dubrovnik. It is said that he endowed gold for the building of a cathedral there. At the height of World War One in 1916 the Serbian ambassador to Paris reminded his audience of Richard's munificence, claiming, "It is not Great Britain who will fail in keeping her promises. Great Britain has known us ever since Richard received our hospitality and built for us a most beautiful church on the spot where our ancestors had saved him from a shipwreck on his way back from the crusade".

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### Abrahamus says

This book caught my eye when it was first published, ten years ago now, but it's taken me that long to actually get hold of a copy and read it. (The primary impetus being that we homeschool our kids and were covering medieval history this past year.)

I found it to be a pretty good read, though not a great one. The parts I found the most interesting occupied the central portion, dealing directly with the Third Crusade, Richard's clandestine journey homeward, and his capture on the outskirts of Vienna (at that time just a miserable little village on the banks of the Danube – its subsequent rise to greatness due in no small part to the share of Richard's enormous ransom which would soon flow into and through it). The introductory chapters giving background on the Courts of Love and the Twelfth Century Renaissance, while important contextually, I found to be rather tedious. And I frankly take issue with many of the author's modernist (and post-modernist) sympathies, agendas, and interpretive spins on the events covered and their overarching significance.

The legend of Blondel itself and that troubadour's mythic role in locating Richard during his captivity (and thus confirming both the fact that he was still alive as well as his location – which has always struck me as being of little practical value, given all of Blondel's supposed efforts, and despite the story's romantic appeal), is actually assigned a rather minor, supporting role in this narrative, which makes the title perhaps a bit misleading. To summarize the author's assessment on this point: Blondel was almost certainly an actual person and an active troubadour of the time (some music attributed to him has actually survived), but his precise identity and connection with Richard is impossible to determine. The mythic accounts of his search for and discovery of Richard through song are probably just that – myths – but myths which, in pearl-like

fashion, gloriously conceal and embellish a more mundane (but tantalizingly undocumented) grain of truth at their center: the complex network of spying and espionage that was surely employed by the medieval courts.

There is one point that is still fairly obscure to me even after having read this detailed account, and given all the complicated points of intrigue and corruption which are enumerated: I understand the concept of ransom and the role it played in ancient and medieval warfare and politics. But given the particulars of this case (Richard was not taken in a battle between two warring nations but captured as a returning Crusader simply trying to return home) I still fail to see how those responsible for holding Richard hostage were able to carry out their brazen extortion scheme without serious censure by the church. Furthermore, it seems that Richard, his family (especially his powerful and remarkable mother, Eleanor of Aquitaine), and his advisors made but paltry attempts to press the claim in this direction and on these grounds, and instead apparently found it easier to simply acquiesce to the outrageous demands and to somehow raise the enormous sum of money required. (The details regarding the process of raising this money are also pretty interesting.)

The author even manages to touch (briefly) upon the origins of the Robin Hood myths, since they also arise from this same era.

Most interesting fact I learned from this reading: The strong east-flowing current through the Strait of Gibraltar and the limitations of sea-going vessels of the era (whether propelled by sail or by oar, apparently) meant that any ships sailing through the Strait from the Atlantic side (e.g. from England) were making a one-way trip. This explains one thing that has long puzzled me, namely, why Richard couldn't have just traveled home from the crusade entirely by sea, as he had done on the outward journey, and avoided altogether the dangerous trek overland through a continental Europe dominated by his political enemies.

Second most interesting fact I learned from this reading: for centuries the Royal Exchequer employed a system of wooden tally sticks to keep track of accounts. It is possible that even the ones pertaining to Richard's ransom payments were among those lying around in huge moldering piles in Westminster Palace by the early 19th century. At that time (1834), the decision was made that these quaint relics of the past had taken up valuable space in the palace for long enough, and it was the burning of them which accidentally ignited the conflagration which destroyed both Westminster Palace and the Houses of Parliament, thus making way for the grand neo-Gothic edifice which dominates that western bank of the Thames in London today.

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## **Sarah - All The Book Blog Names Are Taken says**

Love, love, love this one. No surprise though, in a text that details an important time in England's history involving Eleanor of Aquitaine and her favorite son, Richard I.

Boyle's writing style is easy to stick with for long stretches of reading and he is a great story-teller. While the premise at first seems to primarily be about the legend of Blondel and his role in Richard's rescue after the failed Crusade, it is actually all-encompassing of the age of chivalry and the troubadours. The stage is set first with an overview of the period itself, how Richard became who he was, in the climate he was raised in.

Boyle then moves on to the Crusade itself, but I personally appreciated fewer details of the battles and sieges than I've read in previous Richard texts. The focus for the majority is primarily then Richard's attempt to get home, his subsequent capture and trial, and finally his beloved mother doing everything she possibly can to secure his release from prison. (Side note: Eleanor, by wrath of God, Queen of England, Duchess of Normandy and Countess of Anjou, was pretty bad-ass. It's kinda why my daughter is named Eleanor.)

Boyle wraps up the story in the logical place, with the death of Richard and an epilogue of sorts revisiting the legend of Blondel. Additionally, the lyrics Richard wrote while imprisoned in the summer of 1193 are included.

Well done. Very well-done. Some unknowns here and there presented very confidently as fact, but nothing so outrageous that I did not enjoy the text. Highly recommended to all.

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### **secondwomn says**

this is really 3.5 stars. not about the ransom of king richard so much as about his era, his reign, his culture, and the consequences of his life. written in a charming and snarky style, with frequent interjections and tidbits of information about life in the 12th century. i'd likely have given this a straight up 4 stars, but i do think that the idea of the ransom of king richard and the blondel story are not very tightly woven into the entire work - it seems to get dropped for long stretches while boyle gets excited about something else. so minus half a star for lack of focus. still, a really nice history book in an approachable and readable style. this is not dry history.

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### **Kate says**

Oh man, you guys. *Oh man.*

I loved this book. It was great! Yes, Boyle is researching "Blondel," who has fallen into the cracks of history and emerged a myth.

But his critical eye is on King Richard all the time, reveling stuff that I had no idea about! We're talking about PIRATES! And the almost!bromance with Saladin was more intense than I had originally though! And so much more. You guys.

If you read one book about Richard the Lionheart, read this one. I learned so much. All of it was very readable, very compelling, and with Boyle only too happy to incorporate and explore the myths, it's very approachable.

LOVE LOVE LOVE THIS BOOK.

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### **Jock McClees says**

It has been a while since I read this book, but it was fascinating. I knew this time period only superficially and the book gave a lot of interesting insights. Also, some surprises. I never knew Richard couldn't speak English and that he only visited England a few times.

The book covers the politics and culture of the time and Richard's going to Jerusalem on one of the Crusades. Then Richard trying to get back knowing that the Holy Roman Emperor was out to get him. He shipwrecks, gets caught in Germany trying to get back home and then a ransom has to be raised. It was only a small part of the book, but I was fascinated that although the ransom almost bankrupted England, it caused changes in government that were positive and led to later growth. (Wish I could remember more details to relate about

that). There is so much more to the book. It was a great read. For a fun review, read Margaret Sanky's review.

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### **James (JD) Dittes says**

So much of this book is set in Germany, not in France or England. I felt that the idea of telling Richard's story through Blondel was really too contrived. I never could make the link. But overall, Boyle's sense of history carries the day: Abelard, Robin Hood, the Courts of Love, Saladin, they all get their fair shake. Richard's personality also comes shining through.

Don't read this for the troubadours or Blondel. Read it to immerse yourself in the highest point of the Middle Ages.

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### **Relstuart says**

How to start a letter like a boss: "Eleanor, by the wrath of God, Queen of England, Duchess of Normandy and Count of Anjou". This letter was written to the pope asking him to enforce his edict protecting returning crusaders from harassment after her son (Richard the Lionhearted) was imprisoned while returning from the crusades to England. (See page 194).

This books talks about the troubadour that allegedly helped find where King Richard the Lionhearted was hidden away in a castle after being captured returning from the crusades. The author acknowledges that this story was probably not true. It discusses the history of the Royal family, troubadours, the court of love and grace that affected Richard, and the crusades. A bit of discussion on how troubadours operated as public opinion makers with their creation and publication of songs, and possibly as spies. There is quite a bit of discussion about the ransom and politics over the arrest and ransom of Richard the Lionhearted.

A bit slow in the middle and feels like a history book most of the time rather than a re-telling of an exciting time in history. However, it filled in some of the gaps about Richard and his family that I had not read about since most of what I have read has focused more on the Crusader conflict rather than Richard. And it filled in the gaps about England raising the ransom and all the politics about that and getting it to the people with Richard in their power.

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### **Vera says**

Richard the Lionhearted was captured on his way home from the Crusades, and held for a ransom that nearly bankrupted his kingdom. This book was interesting, but unfortunately, the author had to do a lot of guessing to fill out the bare bones story of what we know from history. The idea that a troubadour actually found Richard in prison by singing a song which was answered by Richard doesn't make sense when we have the records of the ransom paid for him. The author proves this is a romantic story that probably didn't happen. The problem with writing about something like this from so long ago is that some evidence, like records are still around, but who knows what all has been destroyed in the last several hundred years.

## **Ben says**

I'm still reading this one. Yes, I'm just put-putting.

Anyway, Boyle does a good job of giving the reader a feeling of the world in which Richard grew up and setting up the scenario of a subject that has been overlooked by historians as a fairy-tale or legend. However, unlike the more well-known legends of King Arthur and Robin Hood, the story of Blondel and King Richard involves two individuals we can prove existed and centers around a kidnapping that did, in fact, take place.

I haven't gotten to his examination of the song and the rescue of Richard, but from what I've read so far, Boyle will do an expert job of clearing the truth from the fairy-tale, or at least give the reader the information they need to form their own opinion.

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## **Jane says**

I found this fascinating.....mostly! I have to admit to falling asleep several times while reading it and it has taken a long time to finish....but it is an amazing look at the life and times of Richard the Lionheart and the third crusade. Whilst not a novel at all, it explores the fables and myths that have grown up around the troubadore Blondel and his search for his beloved king. Lots of historical detail made palatable. Why couldn't they make history as interesting at school!!

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## **Jen says**

There's a lot of background here, which I actually appreciated. Ostensibly, this is a book discussing the legend that a troubadour named Blondel wandered around Europe singing underneath tower windows until he found the imprisoned Lionheart, who sang back to him. Actually, this is a pretty thorough look at who Richard was, what he was doing to be captured, why he was captured, where he was held, how he was released, who Blondel might or might not have been, and what happened to all the key players involved in ransoming the Hero of Christendom. It's very well written with a dry humor behind Boyle's observations; very accessible for historians and non-historians alike.

Also, he has fun footnotes that act more as parenthetical tangents. I always appreciate fun footnotes.

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## **Todd says**

I love reading about the Crusades, and The Troubadour's Song is a wonderful addition to the stories of the Crusaders. The book focuses on Richard the Lionheart's journey to the Holy Land, his arrest and imprisonment by political rivals, and the great lengths that his mother, Eleanor of Aquitaine, and England went to release him from imprisonment. Does a great job of immersing you in the the danger and adventure of the Middle Ages!

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## **Kara says**

David Boyle sets out to prove that the story of the minstrel Blondel finding King Richard by going from castle to castle and seeing if anyone recognized the song Richard wrote was not just a fairy tale by Sir Walter Scot, but an actual event, and he makes a good case for it.

The author isn't a professional historian, but he did his research, and it shows. He's a journalist, so he brings an up to the minute quality to the writing, even as he gives you the big picture on how each, no matter how tiny at the time, event is going to effect the main players down the road.

He states in the prologue that he was inspired to write the book when he spent a brief time in jail after being in the wrong place at the wrong time, and he learned what it meant to hear a familiar song sung by a friend.

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## **Margaret Sankey says**

So, you're coming home from the Third Crusade and get arrested by the Holy Roman Emperor and his flunky the Duke of Austria who don't like your brother in law, or the fact that you cut your losses and abandoned Jerusalem to Saladin, who was probably the smartest person to leave it with (and you threw the Austrian flag in a ditch because it was basically Leopold's old tunic stained bloody except the white part where his belt was and that was absolutely vile after two weeks in the desert) and meanwhile, their buddy Philip Augustus of France is plotting with your conniving brother John, who is doing his best to run the kingdom into the ground while your mother, who is NOT someone you want to cross, is beating money out of all those English peasants and double-crossing the Archbishop of Canterbury. And while you're locked up in an Alpine prison, your personal troubadour and decorative boy toy is roaming the hills singing "your song" in an attempt to establish your location so your Templar cronies can...well, they can't really DO anything, but it is a perfectly normal part of this story that a lovestruck poet would be singing blood and guts songs under castle windows. If you're Richard the Lion-Heart, this is pretty much the way life works

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