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*The Tunis Crusade of 1270: A Mediterranean History*, by Michael Lower (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2018; pp. xx + 216. £60.00).

The crusade of King Louis IX of France to Tunis in 1270 raises many questions that might equally be asked of the invasion of Iraq in 2003. When already committed to a great ideological war with a determined enemy on one established front, why attack a second target that is geographically distant from and only superficially linked with the first? When both fronts unsurprisingly collapse, how much blame ought to be apportioned to this decision? How tinged by material greed was this ostensibly idealistic diversion? Were the supposed leaders actually in control of affairs, or were they being manipulated by unscrupulous figures over their shoulders?

The answers to the contemporary iterations of these questions are perhaps not as contentious as they were fifteen years ago, but the Tunis crusade still divides historians or simply leaves them scratching their heads. While most studies of crusader motivations have moved on from the simplistic divide between material and spiritual, the 1270 expedition continues to invite such interpretations, helmed as it was by the saintly Louis and his calculating younger brother, King Charles I of Sicily. Michael Lower has done an excellent job of slicing through this established dichotomy of religious zeal *versus* filthy lucre to reveal a much more complex and intriguing picture which places the Tunis adventure not on the periphery of Christian attempts to control the Holy Land but at the centre of a much wider drama, encompassing not only the Mediterranean but the entire medieval known world.

One of the chief assets at his disposal in this assessment is his ability—still regrettably rare among historians of the crusades—to engage directly with Arabic sources. As a result, he is able to transcend the picture of a conflict pulled in two directions by Louis and Charles and replace it with one of permutating relationships between the brothers and the two chief relevant Muslim rulers, Sultan Rukn al-Din Baybars al-Bunduqari of Mamluk Egypt and Syria and Abu ‘Abd-Allah Muhammad al-Mustansir, emir and self-proclaimed caliph of Hafsids Ifriqiya.

This quadripolar approach allows Lower to bring to life a central Mediterranean marked by cross-cultural and cross-confessional commerce and co-operation as much as by conflict. Louis and Baybars both led regimes built upon a commitment to holy war centred on the Palestinian littoral, but Charles and al-Mustansir saw the Sicily–Tunis economic axis as essential to the flourishing of each of their principalities. Nevertheless, these pairings were not parallel. Al-Mustansir sought to improve his position by backing Hohenstaufen exiles from Sicily while negotiating with Charles over grain duties. For his part, Charles, as pretender (briefly) to the kingdom of Jerusalem, was personally invested in the preservation of the Levantine principalities threatened by Baybars and simultaneously courted the economic benefits of Alexandrine markets. Baybars and al-Mustansir were the briefest and most reluctant of allies in 1270, given their mutually exclusive pretensions to authority in the Islamic world. Most importantly, Louis

the crusader cannot be divorced from Louis the missionary. One does not need to give as much credence as Lower allows to the speculation that al-Mustansir's envoys advertised the Hafsid emir's openness to baptism in order to recognise the importance that a potential conversion played in the Louis' decision to go to Tunis. The French king's initiative in the diversion, as Lower points out, makes perfect sense in light of actual expressions of interest—whether real or feigned—in Catholic Christianity made in the same period by the Mongols and Byzantines.

Lower skilfully weaves a lively narrative through this swirl of competing and coinciding interests, recasting familiar events at each stage in the context of the interplay between the principal actors. His treatment of Baybars and al-Mustansir as active shapers of the destiny of the crusade, rather than as peripheral figures reacting to events, is a result of his introduction of Arabic sources to the central account. Of course, many of the explanations for the crusade provided by these Islamic historians are wildly inaccurate, as Lower shows in his crowning chapter, sensibly titled 'Why Tunis?'. These Arabic speculations, however, like the better-informed European sources, illustrate the concerns preoccupying the central Mediterranean, which Lower brings together in a convincing synthesis. Money and missionary fervour naturally take centre stage, but as complementary rather than countervailing interests that unite Louis and Charles. Tunis is a long walk from Cairo, much more Jerusalem, a fact recognised by the crusaders, despite uncredited historiographical claims to the contrary. Nevertheless, control of the central Mediterranean straits made sense as a strategic objective prior to renewed military, economic, or diplomatic attempts to wrest control of the Holy Land from the Mamluks. Domination of Hafsid Tunis—a goal won in principle by Charles despite the overall failure of the crusade—would contribute to stability in Sicily, the conquest of which by the Angevins had always been justified in terms of the island's value as a staging point for further crusades. Such grand expeditions would never in fact materialise, but that does not mean that contemporaries equated Louis' death at Carthage with the demise of the crusading movement as a whole. While many crusaders felt betrayed by Charles' exploitation of the withdrawal from Tunis, the restoration of cross-confessional intercourse in the Mediterranean, and the final loss of the kingdom of Jerusalem to the Mamluks in 1291, Lower demonstrates that the crusade of 1270 had from the beginning been built on a multiplicity of aims, all of which were rational and some of which were even achieved.

Seven hundred and fifty years from now, one hopes historians will be able to reach similarly nuanced conclusions about the motivations behind—and accomplishments of—the puzzling grand strategic decisions of our own time.

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