

H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Michael Lower. *The Tunis Crusade of 1270: A Mediterranean History.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. 240 pp. \$81.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-874432-0.

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Published on H-War (September, 2019)

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Readers who pick up a copy of Michael Lower's excellent book *The Tunis Crusade of 1270: A Mediterranean History* looking for a history of the Tunis Crusade are going to get far more than they bargained for. It is immediately evident that Lower has a grander task in mind, namely, the furtherance of the notion of "Mediterranean studies," a field the author describes as preemptively gerrymandered out of existence by the classical fields of European and Near Eastern studies. For this task, the Tunis Crusade (once upon a time, the Eighth Crusade) is a perfect entree, for, as Lower demonstrates in exhilarating fashion, it is impossible to understand the event without a clear understanding of the political, social, economic, and religious forces at play on all three of the Mediterranean's coasts and beyond. Following the outstanding synthetic approaches to Crusade studies of scholars Peter Jackson (*The Mongols and the West, 1220-1410* [2005]) and *The Seventh Crusade, 1244-1254* [2007]), Carole Hillenbrand (*The Crusades: Islamic Perspectives* [1999]), and Paul Cobb (*The Race for Paradise: An Islamic History of the Crusades* [2014]), *The Tunis Crusade of 1270* is both a scholarly achievement and—perhaps rarer—an entertaining book.

Interestingly, the Tunis Crusade is scarcely mentioned until about halfway through the book. The first three chapters are devoted to four princes whose fates are intertwined: Louis IX of France; Baybars, the Mamluk sultan of Egypt; Charles of Anjou, King Louis's younger brother who ruled Sicily; and al-Mustansir, the emir of Ifriqiyya. Eschewing the two "traditional" interpretations of the Tunis Crusade—that it was a battle for religious purity spearheaded by Louis and Baybars and that it was a battle for economic dominance of the Mediter-

anean between Charles and al-Mustansir—Lower successfully not only integrates these interpretations but also delves into the individual psychology of these four influential men. This allows the reader a view of the period that covers a broad scope of territory and dives deeply into the psyches of its most important decision-makers. While it is impossible to know the mind of anyone, let alone historical figures long dead, Lower's interpretations of their actions is at least plausible, and usually convincing.

By the time he gets to the Tunis Crusade itself, the stage has been set, and the picture that emerges is of Louis's quest for religious penance, coopted by Charles for economic purposes, met by al-Mustansir for similar economic purposes, and ultimately won by Baybars, who used the Crusade to validate his suspicious rise to power. All of these elements are explained well, and the book's central question—why did a Crusade bound for the Holy Land divert to a peaceful North African port almost 1,500 miles to the West?—is found in the interplay of the answers. Lower also makes the point that Tunis itself, as a target of opportunity, was a particular draw: for Louis and Charles, it was "a place where Muslim souls could be won *and* Hafsids money could be had; where Latin Christian commercial interests *and* missionary initiatives could be advanced; and where methods of militant confrontation *and* conciliatory diplomacy could be tried. The key to understanding the Tunis Crusade, in other words, has been hiding in plain sight. It is Tunis itself, with its far-flung commercial engagements, ambiguous political status, and enduring centrality to Mediterranean networks of exchange" (p. 5).

One should approach with caution, however. The book covers, in under two hundred pages, a staggering amount of information, taking into account the internal politics of France, Sicily, Tunis, and the crusader states, with an eye elsewhere (most notably on the waves generated by the Mongol eruption in the East), and is therefore not suitable for the novice. Despite the author's game attempts to clarify and identify all the players, a fair amount of preexisting knowledge is presupposed for the reader. That hardly counts as criticism, though; one imagines that there are no shortage of text-

books or, heaven help us, Google searches to fill in the blanks. Besides, one of Lower's self-appointed tasks is to help establish Mediterranean studies as a useful academic discipline, and so this is most certainly not a book for the uninformed. The titular promise of a history of the Tunis Crusade is delivered; as a step in the direction of a Mediterranean history, incorporating the interactions of all its inhabitants regardless of the languages of their sources, Lower's *The Tunis Crusade of 1270* is a resounding success.

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Citation: Aaron Hagler. Review of Lower, Michael, *The Tunis Crusade of 1270: A Mediterranean History*. H-War, H-Net Reviews. September, 2019.

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