

Conversion and St Louis's Last Crusade

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Arguments as to why St Louis diverted his 1270 crusade to Tunis from Jerusalem have been raging ever since the expedition returned to France. Although historians have recently agreed that the diversion was the decision of Louis himself, this consensus has not led to exploration of his reasons for crusading to a north African port city. This essay argues that the diversion to Tunis is best understood in terms of Louis's ideas about conversion in general and his policy towards the Jews of his land in particular. The close parallels between Louis's Jewish policy and the Tunisian strategy suggest that these conversion policies led Louis to Tunis.

On 25 March 1267, at the abbey of St Denis, Louis IX of France took the cross for the second time. His concern for the Latin settlements in the Holy Land had not waned since his disastrous first crusade some twenty years earlier. That expedition had not only resulted in the capture of the king and his army in the Nile Delta, but had also, by precipitating the collapse of the Ayyubid dynasty of Cairo, the successors of Saladin, had the unintended effect of bringing to power one of the most formidable opponents the crusader states would ever face, the Mameluks. Under their sultan Baybars they set out to eliminate the crusader states and by 1265 they appeared well on the way to achieving their goal.¹ It is strange, though, given the danger facing the crusader states and Louis's concern for their welfare, that when the crusade finally departed Aigues-Mortes in July 1270, it set its course for Tunis, a north African port city just across the Straits of Messina from Sicily. Though geography alone would suggest that Tunis posed little threat to the Latin settlements in the Holy Land, Louis and his men besieged the city through the height of an African summer. Disease eventually set in, taking the lives of many crusaders and, on 25 August, the

I would like to thank David Abulafia, Lianna Farber and Jonathan Riley-Smith for their valuable comments on earlier versions of this essay. I would also like to thank the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies in Toronto for a travel grant that facilitated research in their library on this project.

¹ Peter M. Holt, *The age of the crusades: the near east from the eleventh century to 1517*, London 1986, 82, 94.

life of the king himself. That very same day, as some chroniclers tell it, Louis's younger brother Charles of Anjou arrived from Sicily, where he had recently come to power.² Familiar with Tunis and its emir, al-Mustansir, he quickly negotiated a truce on terms favourable to himself.³ In this way he brought to an end the last crusade of his elder brother, a future saint and the last European monarch to lead a crusade in defence of crusader Syria.

Although for some time after Louis's death Charles was held responsible for the disastrous decision to crusade to Tunis, since the end of the nineteenth century historians have done much work to show that Charles did not plan the diversion and that Louis was therefore responsible for it. The question why Louis might have wanted to crusade to Tunis, however, has received less attention. In this paper I argue that Louis's choice of Tunis as crusade target is best understood in the context of his efforts to promote conversion to Christianity. I maintain that there was little for him to gain militarily or strategically from attacking the city and that the desire to convert the emir and people of Tunis, traditionally regarded by historians as quixotic, was in fact consistent with other missionising activities he supported and in which he participated. In particular, the strategy for converting the Tunisian populace, outlined by the king's confessor Geoffrey of Beaulieu, shows close parallels with the one Louis adopted towards the Jewish communities of France in the year before he departed on his last crusade.

In the immediate aftermath of the expedition, some found it difficult to hold the pious king responsible for the descent on Tunis. Rumours began to spread among returning crusaders that Charles of Anjou was actually to blame.⁴ He alone appeared to have benefited from the crusade and he seemed to have motives for directing it against Tunis. When the Hohenstaufen had ruled Sicily al-Mustansir had paid them an annual tribute; but after Charles defeated them and seized power there al-Mustansir withheld the payments.⁵ It was also said that the emir had harboured some of

² Geoffrey of Beaulieu, *Vita Ludovici noni*, in *Recueil des historiens des Gaules et de la France* (hereinafter cited as *RHGF*), ed. Martin Bouquet and others, Paris 1738–1904, xx. 24; Primat, *Chronique de Primat*, traduite par Jean du Vignay, *RHGF* xxiii. 57; William of Nangis, *Gesta sanctae memoriae Ludovici regis Franciae*, *RHGF* xx. 446.

³ Sylvestre de Sacy, 'Mémoire sur le traité fait entre le roi de Tunis et Philippe-le-Hardi', en 1270, pour l'évacuation du territoire de Tunis par l'armée des croisés', *Histoire et mémoires de l'Institut royal de France, Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres* ix (1831), 448–77.

⁴ Primat, and following him William of Nangis, report that 'the vulgar common people blamed Charles of Anjou [for the truce]; they said that ... he had arranged the truce ... in order to return the tribute, which for some years before had not been paid': Primat, *Chronique de Primat*, 80; William of Nangis, *Gesta Ludovici*, 478.

⁵ Frederick II negotiated a generous tribute from Tunis in 1231: Robert S. Lopez, 'Back to gold', *Economic History Review* ix (1956–7), 227. The Norman rulers of Sicily had also received tribute from Tunis: David Abulafia, 'The Norman kingdom of Africa and the Norman expeditions to Majorca and the Muslim Mediterranean', in *Anglo-Norman studies*, VII: *Proceedings of the Battle conference*, 1984, Woodbridge 1985, 35, 44.

the remnants of the defeated Hohenstaufen forces. What was more, Charles was known to have peaceful relations with Sultan Baybars of Egypt, a potential target of the crusade.⁶ By diverting the expedition to Tunis Charles could have restored the tribute payments, driven the Hohenstaufen exiles from their Tunisian sanctuary and spared his Egyptian ally an invasion. Arguments along these lines found a receptive audience among Charles's political rivals, especially Sicilians disenchanted with his rule. The Sicilian Saba Malaspina, for example, explained how 'wishing to go to that country and desirous of driving by the force of others the serpent from his cave [al-Mustansir], Charles had acted adroitly to lead such an important army against Tunis'.⁷ Saba's accusation has formed the basis of many subsequent discussions of the Tunis expedition.

This was especially so in the nineteenth century, when historians from the emerging national schools of historical writing took up the question of Louis's last crusade and found themselves as convinced as Saba had been that Charles had been guilty of diverting it to Tunis.⁸ French historians blamed Charles for leading his saintly brother to death in Africa. German historians, disturbed by his execution of the young Hohenstaufen prince Conradin in 1268, were also inclined to suspect the worst of Charles, as were Sicilian patriots like Michele Amari, who criticised what he saw as Charles's oppressive rule over the island and celebrated the revolt of the Vespers. By the end of the century the idea that Charles had diverted the Tunis crusade had become something of a historical commonplace. As such it made an irresistible target for revision and in 1896 Richard Sternfeld took up the task with a will. Making fresh use of the registers of Charles's correspondence, Sternfeld sought to demonstrate that Charles could not have been

⁶ Baybars and Charles of Anjou frequently exchanged ambassadors. See, for example, *I registri della cancelleria angioina ricostruiti da Ricardo Filangieri con la collaborazione degli archivisti napoletani*, ed. Ricardo Filangieri and others, Naples 1950–, ii, no. 247. Renato Lèfevre (*La crociata di Tunisi del 1270 nei documenti del distrutto archivio angioino di Napoli*, Rome 1977) collected and summarised in Italian documents pertaining to the Tunis crusade. Documents which do not appear in the *Registri* will be cited from Lèfevre.

⁷ Saba Malaspina, *Sallae, sive rerum sicularum, liber VI ab anno Christi MCCL usque ad annum MCCLXXVI*, in *Rerum italicarum scriptores*, ed. Lodovico Antonio Muratori, Milan 1723–51, viii, 860.

⁸ Henri Wallon, *Saint Louis et son temps*, Paris 1876, ii, 435–6; Karl Hampe, *Geschichte Konradins von Hohenstaufen*, Leipzig 1940, 305, 311, 312, a reissue of the original text (Innsbruck 1894) with an afterword by Hellmut Kämpf; Michele Amari, *La guerra del Vespro Siciliano*, n.p. 1947, 41, originally published as *Un periodo delle istorie siciliane del secolo XIII*, Palermo 1842. On Charles's reputation in nineteenth-century historiography see David Abulafia, 'Charles of Anjou reassessed', *Journal of Medieval History* xxvi (2000), 93–114; Jean Dunbabin, *Charles of Anjou: power, kingship, and state-making in thirteenth-century Europe*, London 1998, 70; and Jean Longnon, 'Les Vues de Charles d'Anjou pour la deuxième croisade de Saint-Louis: Tunis ou Constantinople?', in *Septième Centenaire de la mort de Saint-Louis: actes des colloques de Royaumont et de Paris*, Paris 1976, 185.

responsible for the diversion because he only learned of it after the attack on Tunis was underway. Sternfeld also argued that Charles lacked the motives for attacking Tunis traditionally ascribed to him. He insisted that Charles's relations with Tunis were peaceful, that Charles's primary goal in the period immediately prior to the crusade was the establishment of Angevin hegemony in the east, and that Louis's crusade represented an unwelcome distraction from that goal.⁹

Though subject to a thoughtful critique by Henri-Francois Delaborde, Sternfeld's conclusions have held the field ever since.¹⁰ In recent years Jean Longnon, Michel Mollat, Jean Richard and Jacques Le Goff have, in their own studies of the crusade, echoed Sternfeld's argument that Charles was not responsible for the diversion.¹¹ Having eliminated Charles as a candidate, these historians have been led to the unavoidable conclusion that the king of France himself must have directed the crusade to Tunis. This recognition of Louis's role in the affair ought to have brought his motives for crusading to Tunis under renewed scrutiny. Surprisingly, it has not.

What discussion there has been of Louis's motives has focused mainly on what Longnon self-consciously labelled the 'mystical explanation' for the Tunis diversion.¹² This is the argument presented by the king's Dominican confessor, Geoffrey of Beaulieu, that Louis, *en route* to aiding the Holy Land, first led his crusade to Tunis in order to bring about the conversion of al-Mustansir and those of his people who wished to join him in becoming Christian.¹³ Taken on its own, what Geoffrey proposes is scarcely credible. In 1253 al-Mustansir had taken the title of caliph. From caliph to Christian is a stretch – could Louis actually have believed that al-Mustansir would make it? Those who hold Louis responsible for the Tunis crusade have tended to accept this 'mystical explanation' for his actions as the only plausible one, however implausible it might seem. Rather than testing it they have instead moved on quickly to the task of situating the Tunis expedition in the history of the crusades. For Mollat, the expedition, with its ostensible aim of conversion, marked the emergence of a new European approach to the infidel that was a harbinger of Christian humanism. For Richard, too, the expedition represented a break from the past. For him it was the first of a new type of crusade, the 'general passage', which involved major western leaders,

⁹ Richard Sternfeld, *Ludwigs des Heiligen Kreuzzug nach Tunis 1270 und die Politik Karls I. von Sizilien*, Berlin 1896, 313–14.

¹⁰ Henri-Francois Delaborde, review of Sternfeld, *Kreuzzug nach Tunis*, in *Revue de l'Orient Latin* iv (1896), 423–8.

¹¹ Longnon, 'Les Vues de Charles d'Anjou'; Michel Mollat, 'Le "Passage" de Saint Louis à Tunis: sa place dans l'histoire des croisades', *Revue d'histoire économique et sociale* 1 (1972), 289–303; Jean Richard, *Saint Louis, roi de France féodale, soutien de la Terre Sainte*, Paris 1983, 549–74; Jacques Le Goff, *Saint Louis*, Paris 1996, 291.

¹² Longnon, 'Les Vues de Charles d'Anjou', 195.

¹³ Geoffrey of Beaulieu, *Vita Ludovici*, 22.

Europe-wide financing and diplomatic engagement with Mongol and Byzantine princes, all with the goal of reconquering the Holy Land. For Benjamin Z. Kedar, by contrast, the Tunis crusade did not mark a new Christian approach to the Muslim world. He finds analogues for the expedition in the earlier history of the crusades and declares the ideas embodied in it 'somewhat pedestrian'.¹⁴

A more thorough analysis of Louis's decision to crusade to Tunis is needed, however, before we can determine the Tunis crusade's place in the history of the crusades, or even if the history of the crusades is the context in which the Tunis crusade can best be understood. The place to begin this analysis is in Tunis itself: what did the city offer to the king that other potential targets for the expedition did not?

The choice of Tunis needs to be considered in light of Louis's original purpose when he took the cross in 1267, which was to aid the Holy Land. The idea that a crusade against Tunis could aid the crusader states of Syria was not inherently implausible. By the latter half of the thirteenth century the notion that help could be brought to the Holy Land without actually campaigning there was uncontroversial. Louis himself had aimed his first crusade at Egypt because the Ayyubid sultanate based there controlled Syria. Attacking Tunis might appear to offer a less direct reward, especially since Baybars of Egypt, not al-Mustansir of Tunis, controlled Syria in the late 1260s. But the link between the ultimate objectives of crusades and their immediate targets was growing weaker during the thirteenth century, thanks in part to a steady stream of papal rhetoric that invoked aid to the Holy Land as a justification for launching expeditions against regions as remote from the crusader states as the Italian peninsula and the Baltic. Louis himself had been listening to arguments along these lines for some thirty-five years by the time he set his course for Tunis.¹⁵

It has also been said in defence of Louis's plan that north Africa may not have been its final goal.¹⁶ He may have envisaged the descent upon Tunis as only the first stage of the expedition, although what he planned for the second stage is far from clear. The naval contracts Louis signed with Genoa through 1268 and 1269 suggest only that he wanted to keep his options as open as possible. They make allowance for the possibility that the army might stop in one place, winter there, and then move on to a second stage of

¹⁴ Mollat, 'Le "Passage" de Saint Louis', 303; Jean Richard, 'La Croisade de 1270, premier "Passage général"?', in *Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres, comptes-rendus des séances de l'année 1989*, Paris 1989, 523, 510; Benjamin Z. Kedar, *Crusade and mission: European approaches toward the Muslims*, Princeton 1984, 168.

¹⁵ In the 1230s, for example, Pope Gregory IX attempted to convince Louis that the Holy Land could best be served by an expedition in aid of the Latin empire of Constantinople: *Les Registres de Grégoire IX: recueil des bulles de ce pape publiées ou analysées d'après les manuscrits originaux du Vatican*, ed. Lucien Auvray, Paris 1896–1955, nos 2873–8.

¹⁶ Richard, *Saint Louis*, 562; Mollat, 'Le "Passage" de Saint Louis', 291–2.

the campaign.¹⁷ Geoffrey of Beaulieu also describes Louis's plan in terms of a two-part strategy, with the army making a stop at Tunis *en route* to Syria or Egypt.¹⁸ A number of chroniclers, drawing upon a now lost common source, also speak of the conquest of Tunis as the first, and thus by implication not the last, objective of the crusade.¹⁹ The landing before Tunis may have been the first part of a larger plan to defend the crusader states, a possibility that the king's death and the subsequent return of most of the crusaders to France has obscured.

Even as a prelude to a campaign in Syria or Egypt, however, a landing before Tunis was of little benefit to the Latin settlements in the Holy Land. The city did not pose a threat to their security. Due to its position astride the Straits of Messina, Tunis played an important role in medieval Mediterranean trade. A commercial interest dominated the foreign policy of the Hafsid dynasty to which al-Mustansir belonged, which ensured that relations with Christian states were largely peaceful.²⁰ Al-Mustansir signed trade treaties with commercial powers great (Pisa, Genoa, Venice) and small (Norway).²¹ He was a subtle diplomat who kept on peaceful terms with such archrivals as Genoa and Venice and Aragon and Sicily.²² When a conflict did arise, he seems to have been willing to pay his way out of it rather than risk

¹⁷ For the naval contracts see Augustin Jal, 'Pacta navorum', in *Documents historiques inédits*, ed. Jacques-Joseph Champollion-Figeac, Paris 1841, i; Luigi Tommaso Belgrano, *Documenti inediti riguardanti le due crociate di San Ludovico IX, re di Francia*, Genoa 1858; Sternfeld, *Kreuzzug nach Tunis*, 363–8; Mollat, 'Le "Passage" de Saint Louis', 293; and Richard, *Saint Louis*, 562.

¹⁸ Geoffrey of Beaulieu, *Vita Ludovici*, 22.

¹⁹ For these texts which, besides the continuation of Gerard of Frachet, include the continuation of Otto of Freising, the anonymous *Gesta Ludovici* and the chronicle of Bernard Gui see Sternfeld, *Kreuzzug nach Tunis*, 378.

²⁰ Robert Brunschvig, *La Berbérie orientale sous les Hafsides, des origines à la fin du XVe siècle*, Paris 1940–7, i, 42–52; Charles-Emmanuel Dufourcq, *L'Espagne catalane et le Maghrib au XIIe et XIVe siècles de la bataille de Las Navas de Tolosa (1212) à l'avènement du sultan mérinide Abou-l-Hasan (1331)*, Paris 1966, 110–31; Harry W. Hazard, 'Moslem north Africa, 1049–1394', in Kenneth M. Setton (ed.), *A history of the crusades*, Madison 1969–89, iii, 471–3; Charles-Emmanuel Dufourcq, 'Commerce du Maghreb médiéval avec l'Europe chrétienne et marine musulmane: données connues et problèmes en suspens', *Centre d'études et de recherches économiques et sociales, Tunis, cahier série histoire* i (1979), 161–91, repr. in Charles-Emmanuel Dufourcq, *L'Ibérie chrétienne et le Maghreb XIIIe-XVe siècles*, London 1990; Olivia Remie Constable, *Trade and traders in Muslim Spain: the commercial realignment of the Iberian peninsula, 900–1500*, Cambridge 1994, 5, 34–5, 241–2; Michael Brett, 'The Maghrib', in David Abulafia (ed.), *The new Cambridge medieval history*, Cambridge 1995–, v, 632.

²¹ Louis de Mas Latrie, *Traité de paix et de commerce concernant les relations des chrétiens avec les Arabes de l'Afrique septentrionale au moyen âge*, Paris 1866. For Genoa see pp. 118–21, 122–5; for Venice see pp. 189–202, 203–6; for Pisa see pp. 43–7.

²² The Angevin–Aragonese rivalry over Tunis is discussed in Dufourcq, *L'Espagne catalane*, 110; David Abulafia, 'Catalan merchants and the western Mediterranean, 1236–1300: studies in the notarial acts of Barcelona and Sicily', *Viator* xvi (1985), 215–18, repr. in his *Italy, Sicily, and the Mediterranean, 1100–1400*, London 1987; Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *Before Columbus: exploration and colonisation from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic, 1229–1492*, London 1987, 133–5;

the disruption in trade that a lengthy war might entail. This was certainly the case with the Tunis expedition, which al-Mustansir brought to an end by negotiating a truce that called for the payment of an indemnity to the crusade leaders and an annual tribute to Charles.²³ The crusaders went home, and Tunis and Sicily went on to enjoy peaceful relations and economic exchange.

Tunis's wide network of trading partners and amicable relations with European states ensured a substantial Christian presence in the city. The traders of each Christian community occupied their own compound – the funduk.²⁴ Within its walls they had considerable rights of self-government along with freedom to practise their religion in chapels staffed by Christian clergy. A more unconventional Christian presence in Tunis was a militia of European knights, mainly Catalan in origin.²⁵ The militia played an important role in defending the city from the crusade of 1270, when its numbers were strengthened by the recruiting efforts of the dean of the cathedral of Valencia, who paid the wages of twelve knights to join the militia and defeat the crusade of the future saint-king.²⁶ Another and perhaps still

and David Abulafia, *A Mediterranean emporium: the Catalan kingdom of Majorca*, Cambridge 1994, 120, 141–2.

²³ For Charles's gains from the truce see *Registri*, vi, no. 151. Negotiations over the tribute payment had been ongoing since 1269. In May of that year, the Angevin curia sent a certain William of Farumville on an embassy to Tunis: *Registri*, ii, no. 247. On 18 August, Charles ordered his functionaries in Sicily to receive Tunisian envoys honourably: *Registri*, ii, no. 692. On 22 April 1270 the Dominican Brother Berenguer travelled to Tunis on Charles's behalf: *Registri*, v, no. 190. As Charles's fellow crusaders were well aware, the potential renewal of the tribute payments gave Charles an interest in preventing the crusader army from destroying Tunis. Peter of Condé, a clerk of the king of France who accompanied him on the crusade, reported that 'the king of Sicily had asked our barons at the beginning of the war, that they should not threaten the king of Tunis until they had received his [Charles's] message. I believe this was because there were discussions about peace between [al-Mustansir] and [Charles], and about the tribute that should be collected again from the king of Tunis': *Epistola Petri de Condeto, ad Matthaeum Abbatem*, in *Spicilegium: sive, collectio veterum aliquot scriptorum qui in Galliae bibliothecis delituerant* ... , ed. Luc d'Achéry, Paris 1723, iii. 667–8.

²⁴ On Tunisian funduks see A. B. Hibbert, 'Catalan consulates in the thirteenth century', *Cambridge Historical Journal* ix (1949), 352–8; Charles-Emmanuel Dufourcq, 'Les Consulats catalans de Tunis et de Bougie au temps de Jacques le Conquérant', *Anuario de estudios medievales* iii (1966), 469–79, repr. in Dufourcq, *L'Ibérie chrétienne*; and Fernández-Armesto, *Before Columbus*, 109–110. For the funduk as a Mediterranean institution see Olivia Remie Constable, 'Funduq, Fondaco, and Khān in the wake of Christian commerce and crusade', in Angeliki E. Laiou and Roy Parviz Mottahedeh (eds), *The crusades from the perspective of Byzantium and the Muslim world*, Washington, DC 2001.

²⁵ Andres Giménez Soler, 'Caballeros españoles en Africa y africanos en España', *Revue hispanique* xiii (1905), 299–372; xvi (1907), 56–69; J. F. P. Hopkins, *Medieval Muslim government in Barbary until the sixth century of the Hijra*, London 1958, 75–7; Dufourcq, *L'Espagne catalane*, 101, 103, 440–4; Robert I. Burns, 'Renegades, adventurers, and sharp businessmen: the thirteenth-century Spaniard in the cause of Islam', *Catholic Historical Review* lviii (1972), 341–66.

²⁶ Dufourcq, *L'Espagne catalane*, 113, 121.

more unusual Christian institution in Tunis was a language school operated by Dominicans for the training of missionaries. Its role in the Tunis crusade was rather different from that played by the militia.

With his emphasis on trade and commerce, his Christian militia and his toleration of a school for Christian missionaries, al-Mustansir does not fit the profile of an ardent holy warrior. Even had he the will to be one, moreover, geography limited his ability to strike at the Holy Land. At the most he posed a secondary threat to the crusader states there, a fact which even apologists for the Tunis expedition acknowledged. A number of chroniclers, drawing upon a common source, accuse al-Mustansir of providing aid to Baybars and impeding transportation to and from the Holy Land.²⁷ Geoffrey of Beaulieu also portrays Tunis as a source of military assistance to Baybars, 'in the form of horses, arms, and warriors, to the distress and great harm of the Holy Land'.²⁸ These sources charge al-Mustansir not with threatening the Holy Land directly, but rather with assisting its attackers and hindering its defenders.

It is hard to imagine how it could have been otherwise, given the great distance separating Tunis from both the crusader states and Mameluk Egypt. This distance also made Tunis an inconvenient 'first-stop' on the way to either destination. Geoffrey of Beaulieu maintained to the contrary that an attack on Tunis would be advantageous to the crusade. Tunis, he argued, was wealthy because it had not (to his knowledge in any event) been conquered since ancient times. Yet he also believed that it was now easy to conquer – a somewhat paradoxical but highly attractive combination to the would-be invader. If the emir and his people refused to convert to Christianity, the crusaders would sack their city. The treasure thus gained, in Geoffrey's estimation, 'would have contributed very effectively' to the restoration of the Holy Land.²⁹ This may or may not have been so; the failure of the expedition either to sack Tunis or to campaign elsewhere makes it impossible to say. It is possible, though, to conceive of more efficient means of raising funds for a crusade, as well as more convenient stopover points *en route* to Syria or Egypt. Louis's efforts to raise funds for the Tunis crusade had, it is true, encountered some clerical and popular resistance, but there is no indication of a financial shortfall. The crusade had been three years in the planning, and although hard numbers are difficult to come by, it is usually estimated to have been roughly the same size as Louis's first crusade.³⁰ Crusaders were always short of money, to be sure. But there were safer and more convenient places than Tunis to break up a journey from southern France to Syria or Egypt. There was Cyprus, where Louis had wintered before invading Egypt in 1249. And there was Sicily,

²⁷ Sternfeld, *Kreuzzug nach Tunis*, 378.

²⁸ Geoffrey of Beaulieu, *Vita Ludovici*, 22.

²⁹ Ibid. ³⁰ Richard, *Saint Louis*, 550; Mollat, 'Le "Passage" de Saint Louis', 294.

which was now under his brother's control. An entry in the Angevin registers, in fact, indicates that Louis had initially selected Syracuse as the mustering point for his second crusade.³¹ There was little to be gained strategically, militarily or financially from setting these options aside in favour of Tunis.

One possible explanation for why Louis might have done so is that Tunis appeared a more attractive target to him than it does to us. A number of modern historians have argued as much, claiming that Louis and his fellow crusaders grossly underestimated the distance between Tunis and Egypt. According to Le Goff, Mollat and Sternfeld, the crusaders believed Egypt to be just a four-day journey by horse from Tunis.³² Under this misapprehension the two-stage plan for the expedition would appear more viable: a quick strike against Tunis followed by a rapid descent upon Egypt. None the less, there are reasons to doubt that Louis believed Tunis to be closer to Egypt than it actually is. I have found no contemporary source that makes this claim. Le Goff and Mollat cite Sternfeld as their reference, and Sternfeld cites no reference at all. In the absence of evidence, one must ask whether the crusaders could have made such a geographical error. Louis and his counsellors, it is true, were not well informed about the Mediterranean world. Louis's reign marked only the first stages of the establishment of a Capetian presence on the Mediterranean. The king had the port of Aigues-Mortes built to provide a base for his first crusade. For his second crusade he appointed a Frenchman as admiral of the fleet.³³ But the king still purchased his ships from the maritime powers of northern Italy and relied on their sailors to sail them. For the Tunis expedition Louis used Genoese ships and crews.³⁴ It is hard to believe that Genoese mariners did not know where Tunis was in rough relation to Egypt. Genoa had commercial and diplomatic relations with Tunis; its merchants had a long history of plying the routes between Genoa, Tunis and Alexandria.³⁵ Nor should the ignorance of Louis and his advisors be overstated. On his first crusade Louis had sailed from Aigues-Mortes to Cyprus, from Cyprus to Damietta, from Damietta to

³¹ Lefevre, *La crociata*, no. 27.

³² Le Goff, *Saint Louis*, 459, 546; Mollat, 'Le "Passage" de Saint Louis', 291–2; Sternfeld, *Kreuzzug nach Tunis*, 228. ³³ This was Florent of Varennes: Richard, *Saint Louis*, 546.

³⁴ Primat, *Chronique de Primat*, 41–2; William of Nangis, *Gesta Ludovici*, 444.

³⁵ For Genoese treaties with Tunis see Mas Latrie, *Traité de paix*, 118–21, 122–5. For a statistical overview of Genoese trade with Alexandria and Tunis in the thirteenth century see Steven Epstein, *Genoa and the Genoese, 958–1528*, Chapel Hill 1996, 141–3. For Genoese shipping to Tunis see Eugene H. Byrne, *Genoese shipping in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries*, Cambridge, MA 1930, 47–9. For Genoese diplomatic contact with north Africa see Georges Jehel, 'Expéditions navales ou croisade? L'activité militaro-diplomatique de Gênes dans l'occident méditerranéen (xe–xive siècles)', in Michel Balard and Alain Ducellier (eds), *Coloniser au moyen âge*, Paris 1995, 231–2.

Acre, and from Acre to Hyères. His brother was just across the Straits from Tunis. Envoys from al-Mustansir would visit Louis in Paris on several occasions. In the absence of evidence to the contrary there are no grounds to suppose that Louis and his sailors misjudged the distance between Egypt and Tunis.

What Tunis offered that other targets did not was the possibility that its ruler would convert to Christianity. This, of course, was the suggestion of Geoffrey of Beaulieu. In many ways Geoffrey is an attractive source.³⁶ For twenty years the king's confessor and valued counsellor, he was with Louis in Egypt and later administered the last rites to him on his deathbed in the camp before Tunis. Geoffrey survived the crusade and subsequently accepted a commission from Pope Gregory X to write an account of Louis's life and deeds for the king's canonisation procedure. He completed his *Vita Ludovici* some time before his death in 1274. His closeness to the king and his first-hand experience of the crusade and the events preceding it thus make him an important witness to Louis's aims. His discussion of the king's reasons for crusading to Tunis is both the earliest and fullest that exists. It soon acquired authoritative status: the monk-historians of St Denis incorporated it verbatim into *Les Grandes Chroniques de France*, the quasi-official history of the French monarchy.³⁷

Nevertheless there are also reasons to treat Geoffrey's explanation with caution. His stated aim in writing his life of the king was to convince the pope that Louis deserved sainthood. He was also candid, in other parts of his account, about his lack of interest in warfare. He says that he will leave it to others who know better of such matters to write about them.³⁸ This boredom with military affairs could have led him to discount any strategic considerations Louis might have had. What is more, Geoffrey's account is an after-the-fact justification of Louis's decision to go to Tunis directly addressed to critics of that decision. 'We believe,' he explained, 'that it would be expedient to assign the reasons that the lord king gave at the time concerning this, on account of the murmurs of the multitude, who would

³⁶ *RHGF*, p. xxviii; Natalis de Wailly, 'Examen critique de la vie de Saint Louis par Geoffroy de Beaulieu', *Mémoires de l'Académie royale des inscriptions et belles lettres* xv (1845), 403–36; Auguste Molinier, *Les Sources de l'histoire de France: des origines aux guerres d'Italie (1494)*, Paris 1901–6, iii, 116; Thomas Kaeppli, *Scriptores ordinis praedicatorum mediæ ævi*, Rome 1970–93, ii, 15; Le Goff, *Saint Louis*, 333–5.

³⁷ *Les Grandes Chroniques de France*, ed. Jules Viard, Paris 1920–32, x, 171–3. The account of the Tunis crusade in the *Chroniques* is taken from William of Nangis's *Gesta Ludovici*, which in turn is taken from Geoffrey's *Vita Ludovici* and the chronicle attributed to Primat. For the relations among these texts see *Grandes Chroniques*, p. iv; Gabrielle M. Spiegel, *The chronicle tradition of Saint-Denis: a survey*, Brookline, MA 1978, 98–102; Bernard Guenée, 'Les Grandes Chroniques de France: le roman aux roys (1274–1518)', in Pierre Nora (ed.), *Les Lieux de mémoire*, Paris 1986–92, ii, 196; and Le Goff, *Saint Louis*, 358.

³⁸ Geoffrey of Beaulieu, *Vita Ludovici*, 22.

have preferred it if he had gone to the succour of the Holy Land by the most direct route.³⁹ Geoffrey thus set his analysis of the king's motives in an explicitly polemical context.

Geoffrey's status as a witness, therefore, does not in itself provide a basis for either accepting or rejecting his ascription of a missionary aim to the Tunis crusade. Instead, in order to evaluate his account we must compare the motives Geoffrey claims for Louis in this instance to what is known of the king's conversion policies over the course of his reign.

One does not have to look far for a link between the Tunis crusade and Louis's previous missionising efforts. Geoffrey of Beaulieu places the king's decision to crusade to Tunis in the context of the baptismal ceremony of a prominent member of the Jewish community of northern France, which took place at St Denis in October 1269. Acting as sponsor to the convert, Louis invited two onlookers to participate in the ceremony:

In the same year, when the pious king had to cross the sea for the last time, the king of Tunis had sent to him solemn ambassadors, and on the feast of St Denis, the king had baptised a certain famous Jew ... As the king raised him from the sacred font, he wished that the ambassadors might take part in the baptismal ceremony. After they were brought over, the king said with great emotion, 'Say on my part to your lord the king, that I so strongly desire the health of his soul, that I would wish to be a captive of the Saracens for all the days of my life, I would wish never to see the light of the sun again, so long as your king and his people from their true hearts became Christians.'⁴⁰

Louis's zeal for conversion comes through strongly in this episode, which was not an isolated one. During his first crusade he sponsored missionary initiatives to the Mongols. While encamped on Cyprus in 1248 he heard rumours that the Mongol khan Güyük had converted to Christianity. The king sent three Dominicans, Andrew of Longjumeau, his brother William (or perhaps Guy) and John of Carcassonne, on a mission to discover whether these reports had any foundation. With the brothers went cups and liturgies to celebrate mass for the Mongol prince, along with a miniature chapel. Güyük was dead by the time they reached his court, and the regent Oghul Qaimish returned to the traditional Mongol policy of demanding submission from foreign rulers.⁴¹ This setback did not dissuade the king from encouraging further missionary initiatives in the Mongol territories. In 1253

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ On Louis's Mongol mission see Amand Rastoul, 'Andrew de Longjumeau', in *Dictionnaire d'histoire et de géographie ecclésiastique*, Paris 1912–, 1677–8; Jean Richard, 'La Politique orientale de Saint Louis: la croisade de 1248', *Septième centenaire de la mort de Saint Louis*, 201–2; *The mission of Friar William of Rubruck*, trans. Peter Jackson, introduction, notes and appendices by Peter Jackson with David O. Morgan, London 1990, 33–9; and Paul Pelliot, *Les Mongols et la papauté*, Paris 1923, iii. 160–214.

the Dominican missionary William of Rubruck set out into central Asia armed with a letter of introduction from the king.⁴²

Benjamin Kedar has shown that Muslims also received attention from Louis during his first crusade.⁴³ Geoffrey of Beaulieu claimed that ‘many Saracens came to him in order to accept Christianity’ and that some of these converts were brought back to France. In the royal accounts of 1256, pensions for six *baptisati* (baptised ones) are recorded. The chronicler William of St Palthus numbered the Muslims who converted during the crusade at forty, while a chronicle attributed to Primat, a monk of St Denis, counted more than 500. Matthew Paris told of a purported interview between the sultan of Egypt and Louis, in which the king nearly converted his Muslim rival. The king’s image among contemporaries as a missionary, if not the actual success of his efforts, shines through these episodes.

Just as he was devoted to missionising while on crusade, so too Louis was committed to proselytising at home. Here his targets were the Jewish communities of France. To the lords who allowed them to settle in their lands, Jewish communities were usually regarded primarily as financial assets, a source of tax revenue and credit. While Louis, like other lords, exploited the Jews financially, his policy towards them, as William Chester Jordan has shown, was driven by missionary aims to an extent untrue of any contemporary.⁴⁴

His approach to converting Jews was two-pronged, creating incentives for Jews to convert while punishing them if they did not. He encouraged conversions by personally sponsoring the baptisms of converts. Those who went through with the ceremony received life pensions from the crown. The children were recorded as *Ludovici baptisati* and the adults as *Ludovici conversi* (Louis’s converts). The children, furthermore, received housing until they reached adulthood. Although the precise number of Jews who took up this option is not known, a royal ordinance regulating the administration of justice to the converts and the accounts from some of the housing for children suggest that these efforts had some success.⁴⁵

At the same time, Louis made life increasingly difficult for those who did not convert by attacking Jewish ideas and occupations. He supported the efforts of the converted Jew Nicholas Donin to suppress the Talmud, convening a tribunal in 1240 that, after an investigation into the work’s alleged anti-Christian teachings, ordered it to be forbidden to Jews and

⁴² *The mission of Friar William*, 39–47.

⁴³ Kedar, *Crusade and mission*, 161–5.

⁴⁴ William Chester Jordan, *The French monarchy and the Jews: from Philip Augustus to the last Capetians*, Philadelphia 1989, 200.

⁴⁵ Le Goff, *Saint Louis*, 808–9; Gerard Nahon, ‘Les Ordonnances de Saint Louis sur les juifs’, *Les Nouveaux Cahiers* vi (1970), 23.

burned.⁴⁶ By that time a royal campaign against the important Jewish occupation of moneylending was already in full swing. Royal ordinances limited the capacity of Jews to lend at interest and a series of assessments on the profits of moneylending, known as the *captio* (taking), made it an increasingly unviable occupation for Jews to enter. The *captio* placed Louis in the potential position of benefiting from activities he was ostensibly trying to stop.⁴⁷

The king, though, worried about the morality of profiting from the *captio*, money that was, after all, gained from a sinful practice. In 1237 Louis expressed his concerns to Pope Gregory IX, who gathered that:

Since you have received no small sum of money from the Jews of your kingdom and from their Christian debtors ... and since this money acquired by the Jews bears the stigma of usury, you desire to give satisfaction for the said money lest the sin of it be imputed to you and you be punished for it.⁴⁸

Gregory IX devised a way of relieving Louis from the potential sin of using this money. The pope suggested that Louis donate it in support of a crusade to the Latin empire of Constantinople.⁴⁹ The arrangement assuaged the king's conscience, relieved him of his responsibility to search for Christian debtors and allowed the pope to put the proceeds of the royal campaign against usury towards a cause he favoured. This solution was so satisfactory to Louis that he channelled the funds gathered from further assessments towards his own crusading ventures in 1248 and again in 1270.⁵⁰ That Louis gained financially from these exactions is clear; but it would be wrong to see the motives behind his anti-usury policy as exclusively financial. In 1253–4, in the wake of his failed Egyptian campaign, Louis expelled all usurious Jews from France, showing an apparent willingness to spurn the profits to be made from Jewish moneylending.⁵¹

In 1269 this approach of combining positive and negative incentives for conversion intensified. On 18 June of that year the king issued an ordinance on the advice of the Dominican Paul Christian requiring Jews to wear a

⁴⁶ Isidore Loeb, 'La Controverse de 1240 sur le Talmud', *Revue des études juives* i (1880), 247–61; ii (1881), 248–70; iii (1881), 39–57; Hyam Maccoby, *Judaism on trial: Jewish-Christian disputations in the Middle Ages*, East Brunswick, NJ 1982, 19–38; Robert Chazan, *Daggers of faith: thirteenth-century Christian missionizing and Jewish response*, Berkeley 1989, 31–3; Jeremy Cohen, *Living letters of the law: ideas of the Jew in medieval Christianity*, Berkeley 1999, 317–25.

⁴⁷ Louis's policy on Jewish moneylending has been subjected to widely varying interpretations. See, for example, Nahon, 'Les Ordonnances de Saint Louis', 18–35; Robert Chazan, *Medieval Jewry in northern France: a political and social history*, Baltimore 1973, 103–47; and Jordan, *The French monarchy and the Jews*, 129–46. The broad aim of the policy to limit the capacity of Jews to charge usury is clear enough.

⁴⁸ *The apostolic see and the Jews*, ed. Shlomo Simonsohn, Toronto 1988–91, i, no. 157.

⁴⁹ Ibid. ⁵⁰ Nahon, 'Les Ordonnances de Saint Louis', 19.

⁵¹ Jordan, *French monarchy and the Jews*, 148.

badge in order to distinguish them from Christians.⁵² Paul Christian was a converted Jew who had played a leading role in the Barcelona Disputation of 1263.⁵³ He was not the first to propose that Jews should distinguish themselves by the character of their dress from Christians. The Fourth Lateran Council had enacted legislation along these lines in 1215.⁵⁴ Few secular princes besides Louis showed an interest in enforcing this measure.

On the same day Louis issued a separate ordinance to royal officials, which instructed them to compel Jews to attend Paul Christian's sermons, respond to his questions and surrender their books to him:

Since our beloved brother in Christ, Paul Christian of the Order of Preaching Brethren, the bearer of the present letter, wishes and intends, for the glory of the divine name, to preach to the Jews the word of light, in order, we understand, to evangelise for the exaltation of the Christian faith, we order you to force those Jews residing in your jurisdiction to present themselves to hear from him and without objection the word of the Lord and to present their books as the aforesaid brother shall require. You shall compel the Jews to respond fully, without calumny or subterfuge, on those matters which relate to their law, concerning which the aforesaid brother might interrogate them, whether in sermons in their synagogues or elsewhere.⁵⁵

In Paris, according to a contemporary Latin chronicle, Louis compelled Jews to listen to Paul's sermons in the Dominican chapter house and in the royal court itself:

In the same year [1269] ... a certain friar of the Dominican Order ... who had been a Jew and was a learned cleric in Mosaic law and in our law, came and publicly preached to the Jews in the royal court in Paris and in the court of the Dominicans. They came there at the order of the king, and he showed them that their law was null and invalid, that for a long time they had not observed it, and that they have deviated daily from all its articles.⁵⁶

These preaching sessions sometimes provided an occasion for Paul to engage in full-blown religious disputations. According to the recently rediscovered Hebrew text that recounts these debates, a leading savant from Rouen was

⁵² *Ordonnances des roys de France de la troisième race*, ed. Eusèbe-J. de Laurière and others, Paris 1723–1849, i. 294.

⁵³ Chazan, *Daggers of faith*, 70–2.

⁵⁴ *Decrees of the ecumenical councils*, ed. Norman P. Tanner, Washington, DC 1990, 266.

⁵⁵ The most recent edition of this mandate is in Joseph Shatzmiller, *La Deuxième Controverse de Paris*, Paris–Louvain 1994, appendix 1, p. 35. I follow here the translation in Robert Chazan, *Church, State and Jew in the Middle Ages*, New York 1980, 261–2.

⁵⁶ Léopold Delisle, 'Notes sur quelques mss. du Musée britannique', *Mémoires de la Société de l'histoire de Paris* iv (1877), 189. I follow here the translation in Chazan, *Church, State and Jew*, 262.

often made to represent the Jewish side.⁵⁷ The Jews of Paris, 'men, women, and children', were compelled by royal order to attend the meetings, which took place at either the royal court or one of the mendicant chapter houses.⁵⁸ Paul seems to have continued preaching and debating against Jews in Paris through the early 1270s.⁵⁹

Falling short of forced conversion, the strategy of Paul and Louis was one that sought to place potential converts in environments that made conversion more likely. This approach mirrors very closely that which Geoffrey of Beaulieu says the king took towards converting the emir of Tunis. The purpose of arriving before Tunis, according to Geoffrey, was not to attack the emir. Instead, Geoffrey explains:

The most Catholic king desired with the greatest devotion that the Christian faith, which in the time of Saint Augustine and other orthodox doctors had flourished in Africa, and most of all at Carthage, might flourish again and be extended in our time to the honour and glory of Jesus Christ. He thought, therefore, that if a large and renowned army suddenly placed itself before Tunis, the king of Tunis could scarcely have such a reasonable occasion to be baptised, because, by this means, he could avoid death at the hands of his men, keep possession of his kingdom, and others who wished could become Christian with him. Furthermore, [Louis] was given to understand, that if the aforesaid king utterly did not wish to become Christian, the city of Tunis could be taken quite easily, and by consequence, the whole country.⁶⁰

As Geoffrey presents it, Louis believed that the emir was on the verge of conversion and wanted to give him the security he needed to accept Christianity voluntarily. The plan mirrors the one put into effect in 1269 against French Jews in creating a coercive environment to encourage conversion without compelling it at the point of the sword. Both approaches place their objects in positions where they themselves will be free to convert, holding fast to the idea that conversion must be voluntary while pushing hard at the outer limit of what 'voluntary' might mean.

A second parallel between the two strategies is apparent in the consequences that would follow if the hoped-for conversion did not take place. According to Geoffrey, if al-Mustansir did not convert his city would be conquered. Furthermore, Geoffrey asserts:

That city was full of money and gold and infinite riches, as was possible with a city that had never been conquered. Thereupon, it was hoped that if, God willing, the said city were captured by the Christian army, that the treasures found there would contribute very effectively to the conquest and the restoration of the Holy Land.⁶¹

⁵⁷ The text is published along with a French translation in Shatzmiller, *La Deuxième Controverse de Paris*, 43–76.

⁵⁸ Ibid. 62.

⁵⁹ For Paul's activity in Paris see *ibid.* 15–22, and Cohen, *Living letters of the law*, 334–42.

⁶⁰ Geoffrey of Beaulieu, *Vita Ludovici*, 22.

⁶¹ Ibid.

The plan, in other words, was to use Muslim riches to finance the conquest and restoration of the Holy Land, just as Louis had already used the money of usurious and unconverted Jews for this same purpose. The Tunis strategy thus placed Louis in the admirable position of gaining (money for the Holy Land) even if he lost (the potential convert). What Geoffrey describes here is the king exporting his domestic Jewish policy to the Muslim world beyond the royal domains.

The question remains why Louis would believe that the emir of Tunis was ready to convert, since the plan hinged upon his willingness to do so. Geoffrey of Beaulieu maintained that 'trustworthy sources' told the king that the emir wished to convert to Christianity.⁶² Some historians have proposed that these 'trustworthy sources' were Tunisian envoys.⁶³ By the time Louis took the cross in 1267 he had already received embassies from al-Mustansir on several occasions. Tunisian envoys were present in October 1269 at the baptismal ceremony during which, according to Geoffrey, Louis originally announced his desire to see the emir converted. These envoys had arrived in Paris via Charles of Anjou's court, where they had been negotiating over the lapsed tribute payments. It has been suggested that al-Mustansir was seeking Louis's intervention in his negotiations with Charles.⁶⁴ Letting it be known that he was eager to accept Christianity would have been a good way of winning Louis's sympathy. But against this theory stands the only positive evidence there is about the purpose of the envoys' visits, which comes from Ibn Khaldun, the great north African historian. He writes that the envoys were in Paris negotiating a dispute over the debts of a Tunisian merchant and government minister who died under scandalous circumstances while still owing money to a number of French merchants.⁶⁵

If the case that the envoys were the 'trustworthy sources' is not strong, a better, although still circumstantial, case can be made that these sources were in fact Dominicans active in and knowledgeable about Tunis. Dominicans were deeply involved with missionising in Tunis, enjoyed close relations with Louis and were convinced that the emir was ready to convert.

Tunis was an important centre of missionary activity for the Dominicans in the thirteenth century. By the early 1240s they had established a language school there and in 1250 eight Dominican brothers arrived to reinforce its numbers.⁶⁶ Those involved with the school included several luminaries of the

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Delaborde, review of Sternfeld, *Kreuzzug nach Tunis*, 426.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibn Khaldun, *Histoire des Berbères et des dynasties musulmanes de l'Afrique septentrionale*, trans. William MacGuckin de Slane, new edition published under the direction of Paul Casanova, Paris 1925–34, ii, 359–62.

⁶⁶ *Scriptores ordinis praedicatorum*, ed. Jacques Quétif and Jacques Echard, Paris 1719–21, ii, 396. For the Dominican language school in Tunis see André Berthier, 'Les Écoles de langues orientales fondées au XIII^e siècle par les dominicains en Espagne et en Afrique', *Revue Africaine* lxxiii (1932), 89–103; José M. Coll, 'Escuelas de lenguas orientales en los siglos XIII–XIV', *Analecta sacra tarraconensia* xvii (1944), 115–38; and Robert I. Burns, 'Christian-Muslim

order: Raymond of Peñafort, Francis Cendra, Andrew of Longjumeau and Raymond Marti. Louis had close contacts with these men. Raymond of Peñafort, the great canonist, was the leading figure in the Dominican missionary programme and the driving force behind the founding of the Tunis language school.⁶⁷ Until 1240 he had been master-general of the Dominican order, of which Louis was one of the great patrons.⁶⁸ Francis Cendra visited Louis in 1262 and updated the king on events in Tunis. In return for this favour the king sent a single thorn from the 'crown of thorns', one of his prize relics, to Francis and his convent in Barcelona.⁶⁹

Andrew of Longjumeau had enjoyed a close working relationship with Louis since 1238, when the friar travelled to Constantinople and then Venice to collect the 'crown of thorns' on the king's behalf.⁷⁰ Andrew also represented the king on the royal mission to the Mongol khan Güyük in 1249. After returning from central Asia Andrew joined the Dominican community in Tunis where he made the acquaintance of al-Mustansir. Geoffrey of Beaulieu portrays the king on his deathbed as calling for 'a certain brother of the Preaching Order, who had gone there another time, and was known to the king of Tunis'.⁷¹ The *Grandes Chroniques de France* identify this brother as Andrew of Longjumeau.⁷² According to these sources Louis was aware of Andrew's tenure at the language school in Tunis and his contact with al-Mustansir.

Another Dominican missionary in close contact with Louis was Raymond Marti. Raymond was perhaps the most famous product of the language school in Tunis, which he first joined in 1250. In 1262 he returned to his native Spain and began teaching at the *Studium Hebraicum* of Barcelona, where he was appointed to the chair of Hebrew in 1281. It was there that he and a team of scholars produced the *Pugio fidei* (Dagger of faith), which provided the Dominican missionary effort against European Jewry with its theoretical underpinnings. Despite his increasing occupation with Jewish missionising, he did not abandon the Muslim mission. In 1268 he

confrontation in the west: the thirteenth-century dream of conversion', *American Historical Review* lxxvi (1971), 1386–434, repr. with modifications in his *Muslims, Christians, and Jews in the crusader kingdom of Valencia: societies in symbiosis*, Cambridge 1984. I follow Burns's dating for the foundation of the school.

⁶⁷ Chazan, *Daggers of faith*, 29–30.

⁶⁸ Lester K. Little, 'Saint Louis' involvement with the friars', *Church History* xxxiii (1964), 134.

⁶⁹ Daniel Antonin Mortier, *Histoire des maîtres généraux de l'Ordre des Frères Prêcheurs*, Paris 1902–20, i. 526.

⁷⁰ Étienne Delaruelle, 'L'Idée de croisade chez saint Louis', *Bulletin de littérature ecclésiastique* lxi (1960), 256, speculates that 'a better knowledge of this personage would without doubt make it possible to resolve the difficult problem of the choice of Tunis as the goal of the Eighth Crusade'. Pelliott also supposed that Andrew was responsible for inspiring the king to crusade to Tunis: *Les Mongols et la papauté*, iii. 221.

⁷¹ Geoffrey of Beaulieu, *Vita Ludovici*, 23.

⁷² *Grandes Chroniques de France*, x. 281.

returned to Tunis, but departed soon afterwards, travelling to Paris to meet Louis in October 1269. Raymond was thus in Paris when the king, on the basis of reports from 'trustworthy sources', told the Tunisian envoys that he had reason to believe that their ruler would soon convert to Christianity.⁷³

It is perhaps not surprising that Dominicans deeply involved in missionising in Tunis should have been close to the king. What is surprising is that they could reach the unlikely conclusion that Tunis was a hotbed of conversion activity and that the emir himself was on the verge of converting to Christianity. That they did reach such a conclusion, however, seems certain. In a letter written to an unnamed master-general of the order, perhaps Humbert of Romans (1254–63) if Robert I. Burns's composition date of 1256–8 is correct, Raymond of Peñafort listed 'the fruit which is born through the ministry of the brothers in Africa and Spain'. His list included 'the Saracens, among whom the powerful, and even Miramolinim himself, the king of Tunis, who bears such grace and favour of God towards them [the brothers]'. 'And furthermore', Raymond continued, 'it seems appropriate to remark that at the moment the door appears open, as if for an inestimable harvest.'⁷⁴ This is the most explicit statement of the Dominican vision of Tunis as a city ready to convert to Christianity, but others, too, were struck by what they perceived as the success of the missionary efforts there. Humbert of Romans proclaimed that north Africa was one of the most vibrant regions of missionary activity in his encyclical of 1256.⁷⁵ Pope Alexander IV congratulated Raymond of Peñafort on the order's work in north Africa while ordering more brothers to be sent there.⁷⁶

Robert Burns has described this optimistic assessment of the city's readiness to convert as an example of the 'thirteenth-century dream of conversion', to which prominent Dominicans and their supporters fell prey.⁷⁷ However misguided this Dominican dream may have been, Louis's enthusiasm for missionising and previous close collaborations with Dominicans made him as likely as anyone to take it seriously. Louis had been promoting missionary initiatives, and relying upon Dominicans to carry them out, long before he heard about the possible intentions of the emir of

⁷³ André Berthier, 'Un Maître orientaliste du XIII^e siècle: Raymond Martin OP', *Archivium Fratrum Praedicatorum* vi (1936), 267–8; Jeremy Cohen, 'The Christian adversary of Solomon Ibn Adret', *Jewish Quarterly Review* lxxi (1980), 51–2; Eusebi Colomer, 'La controversia Islamo-Judeo-Cristiana en la obra apologética de Ramon Martí', in Horacio Santiago-Otero (ed), *Diálogo filosófico-religioso entre Cristianismo, Judaísmo e Islamismo durante la edad media en la Península Ibérica*, Brepols 1994, 228–42.

⁷⁴ Coll, 'Escuelas de lenguas orientales', appendix 2 at p. 138. He dates the letter to 1246. Burns, 'The thirteenth-century dream of conversion', 85, dates it to 1256–8.

⁷⁵ Benedictus Maria Reichert, *Litterae encyclicae magistrorum generalium*, in *Monumenta ordinum fratrum praedicatorum historica*, Rome 1896–, v. 40.

⁷⁶ Coll, 'Escuelas de lenguas orientales', appendix 1 at pp. 136–8.

⁷⁷ Burns, 'The thirteenth-century dream of conversion'.

Tunis. In the year before he set sail for Tunis he was working with them more closely than ever, as his collaboration with Paul Christian on a programme of forced attendance at sermons, book seizures and badges for the Jews of the realm clearly shows. These initiatives should not be seen as separate from contemporary interest in promoting Muslim conversions. Louis and the Dominicans with whom he worked sought out potential converts among both Jews and Muslims. Raymond of Peñafort and Raymond Marti pursued conversions among the Muslim and Jewish communities of the Iberian peninsula and north Africa. Paul Christian, a specialist in the Jewish mission, had worked not only with Louis in France but also with Raymond of Peñafort in the Crown of Aragon.⁷⁸ The connections between Louis and this circle of Dominican missionaries within which the 'dream' that al-Mustansir would convert had its origins were very close indeed. In fact, the emir himself seems to have recognised this when, upon the arrival of the crusade before Tunis, he had the Dominicans and other religious arrested, threatening the crusaders with their deaths if hostilities did not cease.⁷⁹ That he rounded up the Dominicans, not the merchants, indicates that al-Mustansir may have recognised a causal connection between Dominican activity in his capital and the arrival of a French crusading army before his gates.

Whatever the source of the information that the emir was willing to become Christian, a story in the chronicle attributed to Primat suggests that Louis and other crusaders believed him to be so disposed. According to this story, three Hafsid men-at-arms approached the count of Eu and the lord of Acre while they were keeping watch one day. The soldiers asked to be made Christians, kissing the hands of the crusaders in a sign of good faith. The count of Eu led them back to camp, and after placing them under guard, returned to his post. There he found a hundred more enemy soldiers, all requesting baptism; while these men occupied the crusaders, their companions sprang an ambush, which succeeded in routing the camp guard. Returning to camp, the count accused the three men-at-arms of treachery. As they began to defend themselves with tears and excuses, the count softened and agreed, with the king's permission, to release them if they promised to return with 2,000 men for the crusaders. The men-at-arms made their escape but never kept their word. Since this was an embarrassing episode better perhaps forgotten, there is little reason for it to have been fabricated. The ruse preyed upon the crusaders' expectation that the Muslims were on the verge of conversion.⁸⁰

In the end, not only did the emir fail to convert but Louis failed to sack the city. In looking at this expedition historians have tried to understand it in light of the history of the crusades, seeing it either as an imitation of previous

⁷⁸ Colomer, 'La controversia Islamo-Judeo-Cristiana', 237.

⁷⁹ William of Nangis, *Gesta Ludovici*, 478.

⁸⁰ Primat, *Chronique de Primat*, 48–9; William of Nangis, *Gesta Ludovici*, 452–4.

practices or as marking the beginning of a new era, the first step towards the development of a new eastern strategy or a new Christian humanism. Setting the Tunis expedition in the context of Louis's career rather than in the context of crusading, however, increases our understanding of the expedition in two important ways. First, it shows that the conversion motive is not an aberration to be shrugged off but instead is consistent with his missionary ventures and cooperation with prominent Dominican missionaries. It also makes clear that the expedition is best understood in terms of Louis's ideas about conversion in general and his policy towards the Jews of his own land in particular. The close parallels between his Jewish policy and the Tunisian strategy outlined by Geoffrey of Beaulieu suggest the conclusion that it was these conversion policies, rather than past crusading developments or future strategic or humanistic ideas that Louis brought to Tunis on his last crusade.

Setting the crusade in the context of Louis's career can also provide insight into the place of crusading in his reign. William Chester Jordan and Jean Richard have seen crusading as the dominant concern of Louis's rule, the engine that drove most of his policy inside and outside the kingdom of France.⁸¹ Jacques Le Goff, contesting this conclusion, has downplayed the centrality of crusading, arguing instead that Louis's goal was to be an ideal Christian king.⁸² The Tunis crusade shows us what particular forms this goal, shared after all by most medieval kings, seems to have taken for Louis. Rather than drawing clear distinctions between policies and aims inside his kingdom and those outside of it, Louis seems to have taken the imperative of Christianisation everywhere as a crucial component of the ideal. We see this in his push to maintain and expand Christian lands in his first crusade. We see it in his attempt to establish concord among Christians on scales large, as in his intervention in disputes between Henry III and the barons of England, and small, as in his attempts to outlaw judicial combat. We see it too in his attempts to make France more Christian. These included efforts both to make Christians more properly Christian, such as his regulations against swearing, and to compel non-Christians either to convert or to leave his lands. They included too his programme to Christianise his own government through *enquêteurs* whom he sent throughout the kingdom to hear complaints about and reform his own officials.

In this larger context of Christianisation we can see that Louis's Tunis crusade neither drove nor was driven by policies within his kingdom. Instead, both the crusade and his internal policies can be understood as elements of his larger aims. As he trusted the mendicants at home, so too he trusted them abroad. As he sought to Christianise the Jews at home, so too he sought to

⁸¹ William Chester Jordan, *Louis IX and the challenge of the crusade*, Princeton 1979, pp. xii–xiii; Richard, *Saint Louis*, 157–8.

⁸² Le Goff, *Saint Louis*, 181.

Christianise the emir, and through him the population, in Tunis. As he was content to use money seized from Jews he could not convert to help fund crusades, so too he would have used riches from Tunis to help the Holy Land. The puzzle of why the king whose actions were driven by his concern for the Holy Land would seemingly turn away from it on his last crusade only remains a puzzle if we see crusading to aid the Holy Land as Louis's exclusive concern. While crusading was, as Jordan and Richard have clearly demonstrated, a crucial force behind Louis's policies, it seems not to have been the only force. The study of the Tunis crusade highlights the ways in which it seems not to have been crusading *per se*, but the aim of Christianisation, that dominated his reign. In this sense the Tunis diversion was no diversion at all.