



ST. MARY THE VIRGIN

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Sovereign Military Order of the Temple of Jerusalem

# The Eighth Crusade

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## INTRODUCTION



## Eighth Crusade

The **Eighth Crusade** is sometimes counted as the Seventh, if the Fifth and Sixth Crusades of Frederick II are counted as a single crusade. The Ninth Crusade is sometimes also counted as part of the Eighth. The Eighth Crusade of 1270 was, like the Seventh Crusade (1248-1254), led by the French king Louis IX (r. 1226-1270). As previously, the idea was to attack and defeat the Muslims first in Egypt and then either reconquer or negotiate control of key Christian sites in the Levant, including Jerusalem. Tunis was decided upon as the first target, from where the Crusaders could then attack Egypt.

Despite the failure of the Seventh Crusade, which ended in the capture of King Louis by the Mamluks, the King did not lose interest in crusading. He continued to send financial aid and military support to the settlements in Outremer from 1254 to 1266. While the "crusade" of the King's brother Charles of Anjou against the Hohenstaufen Kingdom of Sicily occupied Papal attention for some years, the advance of Baibars in Syria during the early 1260s became increasingly alarming to Christendom. The War of Saint Sabas between Genoa and Venice had drawn in the Crusader States and depleted their resources and manpower. The exhausted settlements were systematically overrun by the methodical campaigns of Baibars. By 1265, he had raided Galilee and destroyed the cathedral of Nazareth, captured Caesarea and Arsuf and temporarily took Haifa. In late 1266, Louis informed Pope Clement IV that he intended to go on crusade again.



## Louis IX

(April 25, 1214 – August 25, 1270), commonly known as **Saint Louis**, is the only King of France to be canonized in the Catholic Church. Louis was crowned in Reims at the age of 12, following the death of his father Louis VIII; his mother, Blanche of Castile, ruled the kingdom as regent until he reached maturity. As an adult, Louis IX faced recurring conflicts with some of the most-powerful nobles, such as Hugh X of Lusignan and Peter of Dreux. Simultaneously, Henry III of England tried to restore his continental possessions, but was utterly defeated at the battle of Taillebourg. His reign saw the annexation of several provinces, notably parts of Aquitaine, Maine and Provence. Louis IX was a reformer and developed French royal justice, in which the king was the supreme judge to whom anyone could appeal to seek the amendment of a judgment. He banned trials by ordeal, tried to prevent the private wars that were plaguing the country, and introduced the presumption of innocence in criminal procedure. To enforce the application of this new legal system, Louis IX created provosts and bailiffs.

# Historical Context

Louis had led the Seventh Crusade, which had met with disaster at the battle of Mansourah in April 1250. He had even been captured but later released after payment of a ransom and the concession of Damietta on the Nile River. Louis had then stayed in the Levant for four years when he refortified such key Latin strongholds as Acre. 16 years later, the French king once more turned his attention to the Middle East.

Louis had been sending funds annually to the Latin states in the Levant in the intervening years since his previous crusade, but the rest of Europe was preoccupied with affairs elsewhere. In England, a civil war raged (1258-1265), and the Popes were in constant battle with the Holy Roman Empire over control of Sicily and parts of Italy. It seemed that nobody cared much for the fate of Holy Sites in the Middle East.

In the Middle East, meanwhile, the situation for the Christian cities looked bleak. The Mongol Empire, seemingly intent on total conquest everywhere, was moving closer and closer to the Mediterranean coast. In 1258 Baghdad, the seat of the Abbasid Caliphate, was captured, followed by Ayyubid-controlled Aleppo in January 1260 and Damascus in March of the same year. It looked very much like the Crusader states might be next in line when the Mongols made raids on Ascalon, Jerusalem, and northern Egypt. When a Mongol garrison was established at Gaza, an attack on Sidon quickly followed in August 1260. Without outside help, Bohemund VI of Antioch-Tripoli was obliged to accept subservience to the Mongols and permit a permanent garrison to be established at Antioch.

The Muslims, in contrast, staged a fight back against the Mongol invaders when the Egyptian-based Mamluks, led by the gifted general Baibars, won the battle of Ain Jalut on September 3, 1260. Baibars then murdered the Mamluk sultan Qurtuz and took the position for himself, reigning until 1277. The Mamluks continued their expansion over the following years, fighting the Mongols back to the Euphrates River. The Christian cities suffered too, with Baibars capturing Caesarea and Arsuf, even, too, the Knights Hospitaller castle of Krak des Chevaliers. Antioch would be captured in 1268. The Muslim sect the Assassins were also targeted and their castles in Syria captured during the 1260s. Baibars was now master of the Levant and declared himself God's instrument and the protector of Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem.

**BAIBARS** was the fourth sultan of Egypt in the Mamluk Bahri dynasty.

In the complex regional politics of shifting alliances, the Christians of Antioch had actually joined forces with the Mongols to take Aleppo. In contrast, the Christians of Acre decided to remain neutral and side with neither the Muslim nor the Mongols. Whatever the macro-politics, the wider geographical reality by the mid-1260s was that the Latin East was on the very verge of obliteration. It was into this complicated political, and to a much lesser extent religious, soup that Louis IX and the Eighth Crusaders were about to blindly leap into.



## Mamluks

meaning "property", is an Arabic designation for slaves. The term is most commonly used to refer to non-Muslim slave soldiers and Muslim rulers of slave origin. These were mostly enslaved Turkic peoples, Egyptian Copts, Circassians, Abkhazians, and Georgians. Over time, Mamluks became a powerful military knightly caste in various societies that were controlled by Muslim rulers. Particularly in Egypt, but also in the Levant, Mesopotamia, and India, Mamluks held political and military power. In some cases, they attained the rank of sultan, while in others they held regional power as emirs or beys. Most notably, Mamluk factions seized the sultanate centered on Egypt and Syria, and controlled it as the Mamluk Sultanate (1250–1517). While Mamluks were purchased as property, their status was above ordinary slaves, who were not allowed to carry weapons or perform certain tasks. In places such as Egypt, from the Ayyubid dynasty to the time of Muhammad Ali of Egypt, Mamluks were considered to be "true lords" and "true warriors", with social status above the general population in Egypt and the Levant. In a sense they were like enslaved mercenaries.

# The Campaign

Louis formally took the cross on March 24, 1267 at an assembly of his nobles. A second ceremony took place on June 5, 1267 before a papal legate in Notre-Dame de Paris. Louis's son-in-law, King Theobald II of Navarre, who had also taken the cross, was also present. The French king had the backing of Pope Clement IV (r. 1265-1268) and a general call was made for nobles and knights in Europe to once again come to the aid of Christians in the Middle East. As in previous campaigns, preachers toured with the Crusade message, finances were accumulated by any means the state could think of, and ships were hired from Marseille and Genoa. As before, Crusaders came from other countries such as England, Spain, Frisia, and the Low Countries, but it was, once more, an expedition dominated by the French. The nobility included Alphonse of Poitiers (Louis' brother), future King Edward I of England (r. 1272-1307), King James I of Aragon (r. 1213-1276) and Charles of Anjou, king of Sicily (r. 1266-1285 and also Louis's brother). An army was gathered of between 10,000 and 15,000 men, similar in size to that of Louis' previous crusade.

Pope Clement ceded a tenth of the church's income in Navarre to King Theobald for the financing the crusade. The prior of Roncesvalles and the dean of Tudela were to oversee the collection of the tenth. The preaching of the crusade in Navarre was primarily undertaken by the Franciscans and Dominicans of Pamplona.

## Tunis

The idea that in order to defeat the Muslims and retrieve control of the Holy Land it was best to attack from Africa prevailed, although the first target was not Damietta in Egypt, as in the last Crusade, but Tunis, much further west on the North African coast. The Crusaders needed a mustering point after the various fleets had sailed across the Mediterranean, and the Emir of Tunis, al-Mustansir, was an ally of James I of Aragon. If the region could be controlled, it would provide a solid base from which to attack the Nile in 1271.

The plan is attributed to the King's brother Charles of Anjou, whose newly-conquered Kingdom of Sicily would benefit from a renewal of its traditional influence on Tunis. However, the details of Charles' preparations suggest that he was not initially aware of the change of plans, which originated at the French court. Louis may have thought that Tunis was an important base of supplies for Egypt; Geoffrey of Beaulieu stated that the King thought that the Khalif of Tunis, Muhammad I al-Mustansir, might be persuaded to convert to Christianity, if given military support.

The army of the Eighth Crusade set off for the Middle East in groups. An Aragonese contingent under James I of Aragon sailed from Barcelona in September 1269, but was caught in a storm and badly damaged; most of the survivors returned home, while one squadron under the King's natural sons Pedro Fernández and Fernán Sánchez reached Acre. Too weak to engage Baibars, they soon returned to Aragon as well. Charles of Anjou set off in July 1270 while Edward I sailed in August 1270.



A large and well-organized fleet under Louis IX sailed from Aigues-Mortes about a month late, on July 1, 1270. The following day a second fleet under the King of Navarre sailed from Marseille. The two fleets joined up at Cagliari on the southern coast of Sardinia. They landed on the Tunisian coast on July 18 without facing much resistance. The Crusaders built a camp near a fort built over Carthage and awaited the arrival of the Sicilian contingent under Charles of Anjou.

As was typical in medieval warfare, the two great enemies were lack of provisions and disease amongst such a high concentration of humans in the height of summer; the Crusader camp was hit by both, and especially problematic was the lack of clean water. Disease and illness struck indiscriminately so that Louis' son John Tristan died on August 3, 1270, and the French king himself, just like on his first crusade, had a serious bout of dysentery. After a month of torment, Louis IX died, in penitence, on a bed of ashes on 25 August. His brother Charles arrived just after his death. Legend tells (but not his confessor, who was with him when he died) that the king's last words were 'Jerusalem! Jerusalem!'

Charles of Anjou took command of the Crusade after Louis' death. Because of further diseases the siege of Tunis was abandoned on October 30, by an agreement with the Emir of Tunis to hand over Christian prisoners, guarantee freedom of worship in the city and donate a golden handshake of 210,000 gold ounces.

Prince Edward of England arrived with an English fleet the day before the Crusaders left Tunis. The English returned to Sicily with the rest of the Crusaders in

November; the combined fleet was badly damaged in a violent storm off Trapani losing most of the ships and 1,000 men. Only Edward wished to continue on to the Holy Land, everyone else abandoned the Crusade. At the end of April 1271, the English continued to Acre to carry on the Ninth Crusade.



Figure 1 Death of King Louis IX

# Aftermath

Despite the failure, the Papacy did not abandon the idea of crusading. Edward I and his small force of 1,000 men, supplemented by a handful of French knights, arrived at Acre in September 1271. They could do little to stop Baibars' expansionist plans, but Edward did gain the benefit of being lauded by poets and songwriters for his efforts as the only European monarch to make it to the Holy Land from the Eighth Crusaders. Louis IX was made a saint in 1297 for his services to the cross. In the Levant, in 1291 with the fall of Acre, the Latin East, established during the First Crusade (1095-1102 CE), effectively came to an end.