Before opening this collection of 11 articles originally published elsewhere, attentive readers may have noticed the absence of a categorisation usually employed in studies on the Eastern Mediterranean between the 11th century and the 14th century. Its dominance, the author argues, may have only served to obscure many aspects of the societies which existed and interacted in this particular geographical space and during this particular time period. Defining a question for these complex phenomena in the time period indicated above, before even asking the question, involves assuming that the relevance of one framework is far weightier than that of the others.

It is this hidden assumption of such a categorisation that the author tries to bring out, while also pointing out its effect on researchers’ choice of approach, by not including it in the title of this Variorum reprint. ‘The Crusades’ is an overarching theme that has been commonly used to provide a basis for exploring the region in these centuries, but in this instance a different set of categorisations has been chosen.

What is the implication of using such a different set? While ‘crusaders’ are defined via their religious motivation for travelling to the East, ‘travellers’, ‘merchants’, and ‘settlers’ are more relevant categories in a wider discussion of the interactions between Westerners and the inhabitants of the East. Although each category may imply a certain length of visit, each is also marked by their distinct but sometimes overlapping social, economic, or cultural roles. This is the framework of three overlapping categories of East-West
interaction within which the author addresses various issues in the region.

This observation, or rather criticism, by Rodulfus Glaber may prove pertinent to revealing the underlying motivation for those participating in the pilgrimage to the Holy Land: ‘vanity which inspires so many to undertake the journey simply to gain prestige of having been to Jerusalem’ (quoted by the author in I, 276). The 11th-century chronicler may be preoccupied with worry over such indulgence in the 10th and the 11th century, but such worry does point out other motivations, apart from religious piety, that could explain such movements of large number of people. In ‘Bishop Gunther of Bamberg, Byzantium and Christian pilgrimage to the Holy Land in the eleventh century’, while touching on such criticism, the author also justifies studying the Western and Byzantine pilgrims to the Holy Land in the 11th century as a single group by pointing out the paucity of Byzantine evidence as well as the feasibility of applying the observations based on the Western sources to the Byzantine pilgrims. The author may not find unequivocal evidence for the Byzantine pilgrims (I, 267-9), but his use of Western sources to reconstruct the security conditions faced by the Byzantine pilgrims proves convincing, in so far as such conditions were not contingent on the geographical origins of the pilgrims. The limit of this approach, the author concludes, comes when the overland pilgrimage routes proved to be too insecure and the Western pilgrims turned to maritime transportation. Since there has not been much Byzantine evidence on pilgrimage, the author acknowledges the implicit assumptions of his approach: the Byzantine pilgrims took similar overland routes. He cautions against readily extending such implications into later 11th century because of the unknown relevance of maritime transportation to the Byzantine pilgrims as opposed to the Western ones. In short, the author places the German expedition of 1064–5, which included the bishop Gunther of Bamberg, against the background of important political events: the destruction of the Church of Holy Sepulchre in 1009, its restoration sponsored by Constantine IX Monomachus (1042–55), and the Western conquest of Jerusalem in 1099.

Although the author could not be sure about the relevance of maritime transportation to the Byzantine pilgrims in the 11th century, he addresses the issues of ownership of ships, their functions, and the development of the Hospitallers’ fleet, as revealed by the documents from Marseilles in the 13th century. In ‘Hospitaller ships and transportation across the Mediterranean’, he notes an intense relationship between the Commune of Marseilles and the commercial operations of the Hospitallers’ fleet. The point of fierce contention was the validity of the rights and exemptions obtained by the Hospitallers before the seigniorial rights of the viscounts were sold to the Commune. Judging from their extensive rights and exemptions (III, 59-60), the Hospitallers enjoyed a clear competitive advantage over the citizens of the Commune in long-haul cargo as well as tourist transportation, though the friction between the Order and the Commune eventually led to the restriction of these rights (III, 65-6) in 1234. Through this series of legal and business disputes, the author concludes that the Order had never had a fleet of such a number sufficient and capable of handling the volume of the maritime transportation (III, 71-2). Instead, it took advantage of private ships while also chartering vessels, purchasing vessels, or commissioning their construction.

The case of Gunther of Bamberg touches on the safety of local conditions along the routes to the Holy Land while the Hospitallers’ ships and their operation strategies illuminate the transportation conditions across the Mediterranean. As for the travellers themselves, Benjamin of Tudela and Marino Sanudo Torsello are two contrasting examples of the intentions of travellers’ writings.

While proposing strategies of economic warfare on Mamluk Egypt to Pope John XXII in 1321, Marino Sanudo Torsello observed the power of market forces: ‘for just as water will naturally flow into valleys, so goods will be transferred to the places were [sic] they are most required’ (quoted by the author in XI, 188). This rationale for economic warfare may be compelling, but the author is not at all confident that the evidence shows it was actually implemented. The author argues that in ‘Marino Sanudo Torsello on trade routes, commodities, and taxation’ gathering such information from other merchants may provide a clearer picture, when it is not clear whether Sanudo was engaged in trade activities in the East (XI, 187).

In contrast, Benjamin of Tudela wrote about his travels for an entirely different audience, the Jewish community in Spain (II, 143). In ‘Benjamin of Tudela and his “book of travels”’, the author not only notes the inclusion of local Jewish leadership by Benjamin in his descriptions of cities he visited in the 12th
century, but also points out examples of later editing and addition (II, 138-9). As for his identity, the author only offers some speculations based on the inclusion of a curious incident in Constantinople (II, 159). His motive for travel was equally puzzling, and Jacoby can only discount various possibilities based on his observations on the text (II, 161-4). Despite the problem of a lack of critical edition and the difficulties around dating and motive, the Book of Travels remains a vital source of information because Benjamin of Tudela and the local Jewish leaders shared Hebrew as a common language. This clearly gave him an advantage in dealing with such leaders, over contemporary Christian and Muslim travellers (II, 150-1).

Relying on unpublished Venetian archival material, ‘The demographic evolution of Euboea under Latin rule, 1205–1470’ looks at the demographic development in Euboea through the perspective of the Venetians. Its size and proximity to continental Greece made Euboea part of the regional political and economic development in the Aegean. Even within the island, there is an uneven level of data regarding the urban and rural settlements as well as its ethnic, religious and cultural compositions (IX, 132). Even though Venice only possessed an urban quarter in Negropont until 1340s, Venice had nevertheless exerted influence over the political development of the whole island (IX, 133). Latin conquest in 1205 deprived the local archontes of political power, the author argues, based on his study of the traces of rural estates possibly owned by such local leaders (IX, 135). In contrast to the archontes, local agrarian economic activities seem undisturbed by the new rulers (IX, 137). Although the larger part of the article discusses demographic development in Negropont rather than Euboea because of the limit of literary sources, it nevertheless provides a well-positioned snapshot of the larger trend on the island.

Discussion on the demographic development in Euboea is further aided by looking into the neighbouring Duchy of Athens. In ‘L’état catalan en Grèce: société et institutions politiques’, the author not only addresses the political development in the wider region, notably its relations with the Crown of Aragon, but also the development of the local governing institutions. Factors that induced demographic movement to Euboea are mentioned (X, 79, 86), but are embedded in a larger discussion challenging the prevailing view about “Catalan domination of Athens”. Far from being static (X, 80), the author argues the Duchy of Athens under the Catalan Company developed its political institutions based on the mechanisms set up during the previous Frankish period. This mercenary group, consisting not solely of the Catalans, found a polity with a large sedentary population and redefined the polity by recognising the authority of King of Sicily in 1312 (X, 81). Territories conquered before this recognition remained communal property while those after, under Alfonso Fadrique acting as regent of the Duchy, became the domain of the Crown of Aragon. This distinction is further illustrated by an example of two people refusing to cede ducal property in Neopatria while indenturing to Alfonso Fadrique (X, 88-9). Its members, concentrated in the urban areas because of security concerns, wedged themselves into a society of Frankish feudal system through marrying the widows of the defeated Frankish barons or inviting local barons to join the leadership (X, 83). The vertical chain of command was supported by the horizontal layer of urban governing institutions (X, 90-1), incorporating local Greek officials working in the previous Frankish administration (X, 89). Although the governing institutions are only attested in 1375 on its procedure, the author believes that such institutions were in place after the conquest of the Company (X, 92).

On the issue of settlers, another complicated issue is the Venetian settlers in Constantinople before and after the Fourth Crusade. The author examines Venetian merchants and settlers in a drastically changed political environment in three articles. In ‘The economy of Latin Constantinople, 1204–1261’, the author argues against the longstanding view of a Latin Constantinople in perpetual economic decline from its foundation, thinking this sweeping generalisation obscures some continuities in the city’s economic developments. For sure, the exodus of the Byzantine imperial household and members of nobility negatively affected the market for luxury goods in the city. The economic contraction was further exacerbated by the loss of revenue from the provinces (VII, 195-6). But the Black Sea trade volume conducted through Venetian vessels, the author argues, is a misleading indicator of the economy of Latin Constantinople if the separate regional trade networks, the Black Sea and the Mediterranean, were simply maintained, but not integrated (VII, 201-2). Not only there was a continuation of local participation in economic activities in the city (VII, 197), but also Constantinople remained a region trade centre where different shipping and trade networks
interacted and where the Venetians interacted with merchants from the Black Sea (VII, 201).

While it may be certain that the Venetian quarters became the centre of economic activity after 1204 (VII, 196–7), what it looked like is less clear. In ‘Houses and urban layout in the Venetian quarter of Constantinople: twelfth and thirteenth centuries’, the author challenges the notion that only Venetians lived in the Venetian quarters (VI, 281). He also proposes that timber may have been a common building material, basing this on several contractual documents. One stipulated that the leaseholders could build or add new buildings for renting or selling, but had to return all the buildings along with land upon expiration. If the leaseholders wanted to make a profit from the land, timber was a building material that could be used for swift construction. It was also easy to remove if the leaseholders wanted to recover their investment in building materials (VI, 276–8).

He also notes that different building materials might be employed in case of expanding into quarters formerly held by other merchant communities (VI, 279). Finally, the author addresses the important but often neglected issue of the Venetian administration in Constantinople after 1204 in ‘The Venetian government and administration in Latin Constantinople, 1204-1261: a state within a state’. The author argues that the establishment of a Venetian administration was compelled by the practical demands of administering the affairs in the enlarged Venetian quarter (VIII, 20-1). He also notes that only the very first podestà was elected by the local Venetian community and attested as being in such a capacity in 1205 (VIII, 24). But the newly elected podestà was still subject to the authority of the Doge in Venice (VIII, 25).

Building on top of the list of Venetian podestàs in Constantinople published by Robert L. Wolff in 1953, the author updates the list with four additional podestàs as well as dating more precisely their terms of office (VIII, 64-79). By outlining their careers before and after serving as podestà in Constantinople, the author provides a picture about the source of such Venetian representatives and their connections with the trade networks in the region.

Another pair of articles that provide some insight into the relations between the settlers and the local residents focuses on Acre during the Crusader period. ‘New Venetian evidence on crusader Acre’ deals with the confused understanding of the War of Saint Sabas in the 13th century. Instead of portraying the conflict as one of many Veneto-Genoese wars, the author looks into the origins of the locality (IV, 246) and its patron, Sava, the youngest son of the Serbian ruler Stephen Nemanja. Its strategic location may explain why the Venetians were willing to pay extremely large sums of money to buy a damaged property, even after the Genoese were ousted from the city (IV, 248). Other merchants, active before the fall of Acre to the Muslims (in the case of Pietro Vassano, IV, 248-51) or fleeing Constantinople in 1261 (IV, 251-2), could be viewed as examples of Acre serving as one of the destinations favoured by travelling merchants. In contrast, ‘Society, culture and the arts in crusader Acre’ addresses the thorny issues of ‘the Crusader art’. The author argues that emphasis on a definite ethnic-cultural label for artefacts obscures the mobility of artisans producing products catering to their customers’ taste (V, 110) as well as the varied levels of purchasing power of the vast majority of consumers (V, 117). The link of Byzantine pilgrimage, Byzantine patronage, St. Sava, Mount Athos, Nicaea, and Serbia with the local Orthodox Christian communities has also hitherto not attracted much attention (V, 106), and it may yet provide a multifaceted perspective on the larger discussion of the ‘Crusader art’.

Apart from the hegemony of the Crusader concept as a framework of reference for research, the author also makes clear that emphasis on the Mediterranean trade and shipping has caused the neglect of the intra-regional trade and cultural connections among various urban centres in the Eastern Mediterranean (V, 104).

Viewed individually, the articles provide new perspectives on sources that have previously been engaged with in the context of ‘the Crusades’ by other scholars. Taken together, as in this book, they provide a layered understanding that proves the worth and value of this reprint. The book is also a sequel to his previous one, Latins, Greeks and Muslims: Encounters in the Eastern Mediterranean, 10th-15th Centuries. The dominance of concepts such as ‘the Crusades’ in formulating questions is something the author seeks to highlight and he points out that taking other perspectives on these large societal, cultural, and economic questions would be beneficial. Putting together previously published articles and providing a suitable title
for the resulting Variorum reprint may have been a colossal task for both the publisher and the author. Far from being simply an aggregation, this book also comes with an ‘Addenda and corrigenda’, ‘Index of names’, and ‘Index of subjects’, making it useful for general readers wanting a quick look at some topics as well as interested researchers looking for detailed and updated bibliographical information.

To conclude, the author’s layered categorisations explore Westerners’ interactions with the local social, cultural, economic, and political environment(s). Such a framework helps to open up room for more nuanced understandings of the Eastern Mediterranean between the 11th century and the 14th century. His acknowledgement of the Eurocentric perspective inherent in the past research may not help his readers overcome the evidentiary disadvantages, but it alerts them that what is found in the evidence, be it in notarial deeds, chronicles, or travels, is only part of the story. This realisation may not help his readers to know the whole picture, but may deter them from making sweeping conclusions.

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