

*Divided Rule: Sovereignty and Empire in French Tunisia, 1881-1938*. Mary Dewhurst Lewis. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2014. ISBN: 9780520279155

While the title of Lewis' *Divided Rule: Sovereignty and Empire in French Tunisia, 1881-1938* explicitly indicates the book's main timeline, she actually begins and ends with the 2011 revolution and ousting of president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. This frames her reflection within the long history of the issues of sovereignty, law, state power, the place of religion in the Tunisian state, and the nature of nationality: issues which continue to reverberate in Tunisia up to the present day. *Divided Rule* is a clear illustration of both the uniqueness of the Tunisian case in considering the workings of empire, and the persistence of certain questions throughout the protectorate's history and beyond.

Overall this book illustrates the inherent anxiety of colonial authority over the identity of its subjects, through a detailed study of the workings of the French protectorate in Tunisia. Lewis' argument is initially a little bogged down by the extensive introduction to the complexities of the political situation in late 19th-century North Africa, but by the middle of the book her main point has been driven home: French attempts to define the power of the bey, the Ottoman-appointed governor, ended up (unintentionally or not) creating the conditions for sole French sovereignty, while the subsequent French policies of divided rule themselves led to the coalescing of a unified national Tunisian identity. Richly interwoven with comparative details from the history of Algeria, Morocco, and Libya, this book is an illuminating study of this small but diverse nation, a reflective account of its place in the conflicts of European powers in the Mediterranean and North Africa, and a call to consider the co-dependence of international empires with the colonial territories they seek to claim.

The book is organized roughly chronologically, beginning with three chapters on the last decades of the 19th century, the fourth on the early 20th century, and the final chapter on the 1930s. In the introduction, Lewis explains that the aim of her book is to expand theories of colonial governance to consider the realities of how Tunisia was actually governed, and the intertwined relations between domestic and international conflict within the context of what she terms the zero-sum game of 'Age of Empire' power struggles. As she writes, "the case of Tunisia exemplifies [that] this game was played not only on a purely geopolitical level, with sparring over boundary lines on a map. It was also about human beings and the boundaries of their

allegiances” (15). The body of *Divided Rule* focuses on how the governance of the French protectorate was translated into the daily lives of Tunisia’s diverse inhabitants — Jews, Christians, and Muslims; Europeans and locals; holders of French citizenship and those aspiring to it.

Lewis begins by considering the relationship between France and other European powers, and their citizens, in Tunisia following the signing of the Bardo Treaty in 1881 which established the beginnings of the French protectorate in Tunisia. Lewis demonstrates that in the Tunisian context the invocation of extraterritorial rights could act both as a means to establish French sovereignty over the authority of the bey as well as an assertion of the ongoing validity of the bey’s treaties with foreign powers. She argues that French control of Tunisia meant proving themselves “masters not only over the bey’s subjects but also over the several thousand Europeans, particularly Italians and Maltese British subjects, who called Tunisia home” (28), a process which remained contentious even decades after the establishment of the French protectorate. This is the ‘divided rule’ of her title: the co-existence of multiple systems of governance, including the co-sovereignty of the French protectorate and the Ottoman bey, along with the extraterritorial rights of other European subjects.

This was particularly complex in the case of Tunisia’s Jewish community, which had extensive transnational ties, including access to French citizenship via a claim of Algerian origin. Attention given to Jewish history is appreciated in a work of this nature, and Lewis’ treatment of issues relating to the Jewish community is sensitive and well-done, showing how the fluid legal identities of Tunisian Jews initially presented one of the most pressing issues for colonial administration, and how the process of the formation of Tunisian nationality eventually coalesced around Muslim identity, pushing out the Jewish community out of public discussion (and contributing to their eventual abandonment of Tunisia). It is regrettable, therefore, that Lewis limits her discussion to a few instances; a more extensive discussion of the differing attitudes of Tunisian Jews vis-à-vis their relationship to France, European Jews, and the colonial administration (one thinks, for example, of the acrimonious disagreement between the Jewish communities of Tunis and Jerba regarding the merits of the French-Jewish educational organization, the Alliance Israélite Universelle) would have been illuminating.

Lewis’ most successful presentation is in Chapter 5, which deals with the controversy over the burial of ‘naturalized’ Tunisian Muslims in Muslim cemeteries in the 1930s. Lewis

shows how this question represented the perfect collaboration of political, national, and religious forces, leading to the emergence of Habib Bourguiba as a leader of the national debate over the meaning of Tunisian identity, who would eventually negotiate Tunisia's terms of independence from France. The period of the 1930s "shifted the question of sovereignty in Tunisia from France's interaction with other imperial powers to its relations with the people it claimed — however disingenuously — to protect" (164). The immensely successful campaign to link abstract questions of national identity to the concrete level of ritual practice is a perfect case for Lewis' focus on how the game of empire was played not only on a geopolitical level but with the lives and daily affairs of the region's inhabitants.

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