



In August 1096, something new happened: armed groups of Christians set off from Western Europe with the aim of ‘liberating’ Jerusalem from Muslim rule. The Christian capture of Jerusalem in 1099 marked the end of the First Crusade, the establishment of the Crusader States, the beginning of nearly two hundred years of Christian occupation of the Holy Land. Over the following centuries, the idea of crusading and the existence of the crusader states would change the political landscape of both Europe, the Levant, and North Africa. Kings, emperors, and popes struggled to work out what crusading meant for their own authority; new religious orders were founded to support the crusading enterprise; and undertaking a crusade became an increasingly important part of noble identity. Nor was crusading limited to the Holy Land, as military actions were launched in Iberia, Egypt, and the Baltic States. Crusading could even be turned against one’s fellow Christians, as they were in the Fourth Crusade and the Albigensian Crusade.

The Crusades remain a contentious topic to this day, and this module invites students to engage with the complexity of the phenomenon of crusading. How can we judge the motivations of crusaders? Given the huge personal and financial costs of crusading, why were so many so keen to make the journey? Should we see the establishment of the Crusader States as forerunners of later European colonialism? Does the term ‘crusade’ have any meaningful coherence at all?

This module will engage with crusading in broad terms, considering not just the military aspects of crusading, but the wider social and political landscape. This will include examining the political and economic problems of the Crusader States; the nature of interactions and accommodations between the different religious groups in the Holy Land; and the role of women in the enterprise of crusading. We will think about both the literary and the material evidence for crusading, and students will be encouraged to draw upon both Christian and Islamic accounts, including William of Tyre’s chronicle, Ibn Shaddād’s *History of Saladin*, and Geoffrey of Villehardouin’s account of the conquest of Constantinople.