

Topic Page: [Crusades](#)

Definition: **crusade 1** from *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate(R) Dictionary*

(ca. 1708) **1 cap** : any of the military expeditions undertaken by Christian powers in the 11th, 12th, and 13th centuries to win the Holy Land from the Muslims **2** : a remedial enterprise undertaken with zeal and enthusiasm



Summary Article: **Crusades**

From *Encyclopedia of Global Studies*

Image from: [The Crusades - 1096-1291 in Concise Atlas of World History. Andromeda](#)

The Crusades constituted a global event for their times and provided a term that continues to be applied to strident, zealous effort. The Crusades were a set of religiously motivated military campaigns that occurred primarily from the 11th to the 13th centuries and that had the principal goal of recovering the Holy Land from non-Christians, especially the Muslims. The Crusades, with all their ideological, economic, and social characterizations, exerted formative influence

on European history and on the relationship between East and West, between Islam and Christendom, having a lasting effect until the present day. In modern times, the term *crusade* has been revived for use both as a call for a concerted effort toward a particular goal (e.g., Campus Crusade for Christ) and as a metaphor for efforts and ambitions that try to establish the supremacy of one's own worldview.

The historic Crusades are of interest for scholars and students of global studies in many respects. For one, the Crusades represent an impressive example of the use of a special kind of rhetoric for legitimating and enforcing particular claims, which may shed light on the rhetoric employed in many of today's global initiatives. In addition, the period saw not only intense conflict and tension, especially between the Islamic and Christian faiths and cultures, but also the reopening of exchange between East and West and the expansion of commerce and geographic exploration.

Historical Overview and Context

The initial spark and public appeal for the Crusades was given by Pope Urban II at the Church Council of Clermont in 1095, mobilizing the faithful to liberate Jerusalem and the Holy Land more broadly. The situation in medieval Europe at the time was ripe for such an initiative. Among other factors, historians note the presence of armed warriors as a result of the Christianization of the Vikings and Slavs and the breakdown of the Carolingian Empire at the end of the 9th century. Given the relative stability of borders at the time, these warriors turned their energies to terrorizing each other and the local populations. In addition, although Western Christians had been making pilgrimages to Jerusalem, in particular the Holy Sepulchre, for centuries, the Muslim rulers of the time made it increasingly difficult for pilgrims. To complete the picture, although the Byzantine Christians and Roman Catholics continued to be at odds, the Byzantine emperor Alexios I called on the Catholic pope to send mercenaries to help defend the remains of the Byzantine Empire from a new wave of attacks from the (Muslim) Seljuk Turks.

Thus, the Crusades were conceived of and instigated as liberation movements and an expression of the Christian faith, along with (re)installation of its power; in the Christian rhetoric, participation was promoted as a (penitential) pilgrimage. The first crusaders set off from France and Italy in 1096, arrived

at Jerusalem in 1099, conquered the city, massacred the majority of the inhabitants, and subsequently established four crusader states. The retaking of Edessa, one of the four crusader states, by Muslims in 1144 led to a call for the Second Crusade, which began in 1147. From here, historians debate the number of subsequent Crusades, ranging from a total of seven to nine, with several other military campaigns with religious goals taking place in between. Traditionally, the fall of Acre in 1291 marks the end of the Crusades, but some historians extend them to 1798, when Napoleon expelled the Knights Hospitaller from Malta.

Aftermath and Legacy

Whether the Crusades were the most important events of the Middle Ages, as some historians would contend, there is no dispute that they contributed greatly to changes in Europe and indeed the world. Although the Crusades did not succeed in winning back the Holy Land, they did strengthen pontifical authority and fostered a view of Christendom as a united entity. In addition, papal intervention had the effect of channeling the violent energies of warring knights toward a common enemy and succeeded in reducing war within Europe.

The Crusades also had a positive impact on economies and trade, particularly in western Europe. The massive preparations for foreign war stimulated production. Trade in new types of goods opened up, especially once the Crusader states in the East were established.

Many historians also point to the impact of the Crusades on culture. Crusaders coming from the farthest reaches of Europe came into contact with new cultures and brought back with them novel ideas. These cultural transfers are manifested in western Europe through literature, for example Dante's *Commedia*, art, and architecture, such as the crusader castles. Some even attribute the origins of geographic explorations such as those of Marco Polo to the crusaders returning to Europe with knowledge of Asia.

Modern Views

In modern usage, a crusade refers to an effort or a campaign with a specific goal. In its positive connotation, crusades are launched against diseases or poverty. But today, crusades have also been linked to expansionary and colonizing activities, among them the Second Gulf War or the World Trade Organization's initiatives.

Furthermore, the Crusades won renewed interest following the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the United States. Many of the commonly held beliefs about the causes and impacts of the Crusades were revisited, especially in light of Osama bin Laden's purported criticism of the U.S. "War on Terror" as a new crusade. Clearly, the Crusades have had and will continue to have an influence on East-West and Muslim-Christian relations.

See also:

Christianity-Related Movements, Conquests, Diasporas, Empires, Global Religions, Beliefs, and Ideologies, Islam, Islam-Related Movements, Religious Politics, September 11, 2001 (9/11), Vatican, War

Further Readings

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