

H 161: The Crusades

This course will introduce students to the series of religiously motivated European invasions of the Middle East that began at the end of the eleventh century and that led to the creation of Latin Christian principalities in Palestine. Though the crusading movement came to embroil much of Europe itself, the course will focus strictly on the military expeditions to what the Crusaders called the Holy Land, and the history of the Crusader states up to the point of their destruction at the end of the thirteenth century.

The course will be guided by the following questions: how did medieval Christianity justify wars of aggression against foreign peoples and religions? What motivated western Europeans to leave their homes and march into a hostile environment, where they often faced impoverishment if not death and where maintaining a Christian presence was a constant struggle? How did they manage to erect stable political entities in alien territory that lasted as long as they did, and how did they have to adapt their own culture to do so? Finally, how did the native peoples of the regions the Crusaders invaded and conquered – Muslim but also Christian and Jewish – perceive the Crusaders? How did the Crusaders' presence affect life in a region whose populations had their own ancient histories and patterns of life?