



Causes and Consequences of the Crusades

The Crusades were a centuries-long struggle between Christian and Muslim kingdoms, as they struggled for control of the Holy Lands. Yet, these conflicts also brought new connection and ideas into the Mediterranean world.



<p>0:07</p> <p><i>Animation of a battle—soldiers both on foot and on horseback wage war, fighting with bows, arrows, and spears</i></p>	<p>The Crusades call to mind images of battles and bloodshed. And they should! It's estimated that nearly 2 million people died as medieval Christians tried and failed to take the so-called Holy Land from Muslim control.</p>
<p><i>An ornate, eight-pointed sun, a motif common in Islamic art</i></p>	<p>But the period between the 11th and 13th centuries wasn't all death and destruction. It was also a time of increased trade, connection, and exchange between the East and West.</p>
<p>0:36</p> <p><i>Animated map showing the divide between the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches as well as the boundaries of the Byzantine and Seljuk Empires, animation of Alexius I and Pope Urban II</i></p>	<p>It all started in 1095 with Christianity bitterly split between the Catholic church in the West and the Eastern Orthodox Church. In the East, the Byzantine Empire was fending off invasions by a powerful Muslim Force: The Seljuk Empire. The Byzantine emperor Alexius I wrote to Pope Urban II for help reasoning that Muslim control made it harder for all Christian pilgrims to travel safely to the Holy Land. "And if you help us", he offered, "maybe our churches could get back together."</p>
<p><i>Painting of Pope Urban II giving a sermon inside of a crowded church</i></p>	<p>It was an offer the Pope couldn't refuse. He gave a fiery sermon urging European Christians to take up arms and seize lands that had been conquered by Muslims. The Pope wanted to take the holy lands from Muslims, but he was also driven by another goal: To get Christian kingdoms to stop fighting each other!</p>
<p>01:18</p> <p><i>Animation of nobles and peasants going to answer Pope Urban II's call to defend the hold lands, map and paintings of the Crusades</i></p>	<p>European Christians answered the Pope's call in droves—nobles and peasants alike. The First Crusade conquered a large slice of the Levant, establishing the Kingdom of Jerusalem and several smaller states.</p> <p>For much of the next two centuries, Christian rulers led several more Crusades into the holy lands, fighting wars against different Muslim empires before being finally driven out in 1291. There are even some reports of a Children's Crusade, unsanctioned by the Pope and led by a 12-year-old boy, Stephen of Cloyes.</p>
<p>02:08</p> <p><i>Paintings of the Crusades</i></p>	<p>Some Crusades, like the first, were fairly successful. But most, like the Children's Crusade, were utter disasters. Yet, that doesn't mean the Crusades didn't achieve anything: They reshaped trade in the Mediterranean world.</p>
<p><i>Animation of a ship carrying spices, map of trade routes and port cities</i></p>	<p>Trade between Christians and Muslims wasn't new, but the Crusades revved up demand. Europeans returned from their travels with a taste for Eastern spices, fruits and textiles. Italian merchants capitalized on this opportunity by strengthening ties with Eastern traders, and opening new trade routes by sea.</p>
<p>02:44</p> <p><i>Photos of the Basilica of San Francesco, including the</i></p>	<p>By the 13th century, port cities like Venice and Genoa transformed into the wealthiest and most powerful states in Europe. At the same time, Eastern influences flowed into Western art and architecture. Take the Basilica of San Francesco, built in Italy in the</p>



<i>pointed arches and eight-pointed stars that echo Islamic architecture and textiles</i>	13th century. Its pointed arches echo Islamic architecture that Crusaders would have encountered in their travels. And its walls and mosaic floors are dappled with eight-pointed stars—a motif commonly found in Islamic textiles and tiles.
<i>Photo of a 13th century Syrian brass container</i>	This cultural exchange went both ways. Take this inlaid brass container made in 13th century Syria. It's engraved with both Christian and Muslim motifs reflecting a blend of Western and Eastern Styles.
03:39 <i>Animation of the mathematical, scientific, and astronomical advancements made by Muslim scholars</i>	The Crusades didn't just enable the flow of things, but also the exchange of ideas. The Islamic world was the center of learning and science in Afro-Eurasia. Muslim scholars were making incredible advances in mathematics, medicine, and astronomy—like Ibn al-Nafis a 13th century physician who first described the pulmonary circulation of blood. Or Hasan Ibn al-Haytham, whose insights on optics paved the way for the development of telescopes.
<i>Animation of the exchange of ideas and knowledge between Eastern and Western scholars, seal of the University of Naples</i>	Increased contact during the Crusades brought Eastern knowledge to the West. In Spain and Sicily, especially, massive translation efforts introduced Arabic numerals, algebra, and the concept of zero to Christian scholars. In fact, when the King of Sicily established the University of Naples in 1224, its library was filled with books by Muslim scholars.
04:33 <i>Statues of Ibn Rushd and Aristotle</i>	Meanwhile, Muslim scholars were building on classical Greek and Roman knowledge. Take the 12th century scholar Ibn Rushd, for example, who translated and critiqued the work of the Greek philosopher Aristotle.
<i>Painting of European scholars during the Renaissance</i>	Muslim scholars engaged with classical knowledge and merged it with their own, preserving ideas that later influenced the European Renaissance.
04:58 <i>Animation of soldiers battling during the Crusades and a merchant ship entering a port city; map of maritime trade routes going east from Europe to the Americas and south from Europe to Africa</i>	So, while the Crusades were deadly wars that ultimately weren't successful for European Christians, they did change Europe. They created the conditions that fostered the Renaissance bringing immense wealth to Italian merchants and increased access to Islamic scholars' scientific knowledge. And as the Ottoman Empire expanded and took control of major trade routes by land, Europeans began to seek other ways of getting to the East. These events paved the way for the Columbian Exchange, and eventually trade networks slicing across the globe shaping the World as we know it.



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