

The Crusades

In the Middle Ages, the Muslim world stretched from India to Spain, including Jerusalem and the Holy Land. For Jews, Christians and Muslims, Jerusalem was and still is a holy city. In fact for Medieval Christians it was the centre of their world spiritually and geographically according to their maps. For Christians, Jerusalem was the place where Jesus Christ died and was buried. The Church of the Holy Sepulchre stood at the site where Christians believed his tomb was found. Christian pilgrims had come to the city for centuries. To Muslims, Jerusalem is the third most holy city, as Prophet Muhammad ascended to heaven from there. Arab Muslims conquered the Holy Land in 638. The Dome of the Rock and the Al-Aqsa mosque are sites of pilgrimage for Muslims. The Church of the Holy Sepulchre had to be rebuilt after it was destroyed by the Caliph of Egypt, Al-Hakim, in 1009. Following this time, Christian pilgrims were free to visit the church. However, around 1077 Muslim Seljuk Turks took control of the Holy Land. In 1095, Pope Urban II promised the knights of Europe forgiveness of their sins if they went on a Crusade to win back Jerusalem for Christianity. Many responded by taking the cross and showed this act by cutting out red crosses before sewing them into their tunics.



Over the next three centuries there were many more Crusades. The Crusaders benefited from divisions between the Seljuk Turks and the Abbasid rulers of Baghdad to take control of parts of the Holy Land. In the long term the Crusaders failed to keep any of the territory they conquered. However, they benefited from profitable trade links with the Muslim world, and improved castle design. They also borrowed many ideas from the Muslims, such as:

- better castle design
- science
- medicine
- numbers that were easier to use than Roman numerals.

Writers in the 1800s portrayed the Crusades as great romantic adventures. In fact, the Crusaders were invading a foreign country, and many Crusaders committed what we would regard today as criminal atrocities.

Some historians would argue that whilst the primary motive may have been religious, many Crusaders got side-tracked by their greed and lust for power. This may explain why they took control of Edessa, which was not on the route to Jerusalem and did not contain any holy sites. The historian Giles Constable says each participant made his own crusade. Some reasons for going were:

- To obey the Pope's call to free the Holy city from the infidels and ensure access for pilgrims. St Bernaud of Clairvaux wrote in 1140, Of mighty soldier, oh man of war, you now have something to fight for. If you win it will be glorious. If you die fighting for Jerusalem, you will win a place in heaven.
- To be forgiven for past sins. The Pope offered forgiveness for anyone who took part. This was important for knights who had killed many people in battle.
- To see the world, have an adventure and prove their bravery.
- To get land overseas. This was tempting for a younger son who would not inherit his father's lands.
- Serfs, peasants who belonged to their lord, joined the Crusades because the Pope promised them their freedom if they went.
- To gain wealth.
- Kings encouraged troublesome knights to go on Crusade because it got them out of the country.

The origin of empire

An 'empire' is a group of countries ruled over by a single monarch or ruling power. An empire doesn't need an 'emperor'. The British Empire comprised of Britain, the 'mother country', and the colonies, countries ruled to some degree by and from Britain.

The British began to establish overseas colonies in the 16th century. By 1783, Britain had a large empire with colonies in America and the West Indies. This 'first British Empire' came to an end after the American Revolution.

However, in the 19th century, the British built a second worldwide empire, based on British sea-power, made up of India and huge conquests in Africa.

The first British Empire: 1497-1763

Sir Walter Raleigh

Between 1497 and 1763, English seamen discovered new lands, set up colonies and traded all over the world.

In 1497, only five years after Christopher Columbus sailed to the West Indies, the Italian explorer John Cabot, financed by English merchants, discovered new lands in Canada.

After 1612, the East India Company began to build up a small empire of trading posts in India.

The first successful English colonies in the West Indies were founded in the 1620s. The settlers set up sugar and tobacco plantations and used slave labour.

In 1664, the English took over the Dutch colony of New Netherland, which included the state of New Amsterdam. The English renamed this New York. The English also took over New Sweden (which is now called Delaware). Florida became a British colony in 1763.

Fighting the French and gaining control of India

In the 18th century, Britain fought a number of wars against France, taking over colonies established by the French:

in 1713, the British took over the French colony of Acadia (New France in northeastern North America)

victories by Robert Clive, including the Battle of Plassey in 1757, drove out the French and established British control in India during the Seven Years' War (1756-1763) the British won Canada from the French with a notable victory coming from General James Wolfe's capture of Quebec in 1759

The shape of the British Empire by 1783

By 1783, Britain had established an empire which comprised of: colonies in Canada, America and the West Indies including New Zealand after Captain James Cook claimed it for the British crown in 1769

trading posts in India
naval bases in the Mediterranean - Gibraltar and Minorca

But:

Britain's defeat in the American War of Independence meant the loss of the American colonies and the end of the 'first British Empire'.

1787	First shipment of transported prisoners to Australia.
1839	The Opium War forced China to allow British traders to sell the drug opium into China.
1857	There was a rebellion in India (the Indian Mutiny). The government took over rule of India from the East India Company.
1867	Canada was given 'dominion' (self-governing) status, followed by Australia and New Zealand in 1907.
1876	Queen Victoria was declared 'Empress of India'.
1881-1919	The 'Scramble for Africa' – Britain acquired colonies in Africa stretching from Cairo to Cape Town.
1899-1902	The Second Boer War – the British conquered South Africa.
1919	The Treaty of Versailles gave Germany's colonies as 'mandates' for Britain and France to administer.
1924	The British Empire Exhibition at Wembley Stadium. The Empire looked happy and strong.

Britain regarded itself as 'ruler of the waves'. The songs 'Rule Britannia' and 'Land of Hope and Glory' show this. Many British people at the time thought that they were doing the right thing by taking the British government and Christianity to the rest of the world, ending slavery and barbaric traditions and bringing 'civilisation' and an international 'Pax Britannica', or 'British peace'. The British generally felt that the way they lived their lives was the right way. They believed that colonising various countries was a means of helping others to become like Britain and therefore improve.

The Transatlantic slave trade

The slave trade began with Portuguese (and some Spanish) traders, taking mainly West African (but some Central African) slaves to the American colonies they had conquered in the 15th century. British sailors became involved in the trade in the 16th century and their involvement increased in the 18th century when the Treaty of Utrecht (1713) gave them the right to sell slaves in the Spanish Empire. The slave trade made a great deal of profit for those who sold and exchanged slaves. Therefore, they often ignored the fact it was inhuman and unfair. At least 12 million Africans were taken to the Americas as slaves between 1532 and 1832 and at least a third of them in British ships.

For the British slave traders it was a three-legged journey called the 'triangular trade':

West African slaves were exchanged for trade goods such as brandy and guns.

Slaves were then taken via the 'Middle Passage' across the Atlantic for sale in the West Indies and North America.

Finally, a cargo of rum and sugar taken from the colonies, was taken back to England to sell.

In the 16th and 17th centuries, Portuguese traders took slaves from Africa to work in the Portuguese colony of Brazil and the Spanish colonies of South America. As many as 350,000 Africans were taken in this way as slaves to the Americas.

In the 16th century, English pirates started selling slaves to the Spanish colonies. Sir John Hawkins was the first English sea-captain to do this, starting in 1562.

In 1625, the British captured Barbados in the West Indies and in 1655 they secured Jamaica. English slave traders started supplying African slaves to the English colonies.

In 1672, the Royal African Company was set up to trade African slaves to the sugar plantations of the West Indies.

In 1713, Spain gave British slave traders the contract, known as the Asiento, to trade 144,000 slaves a year to Spanish South America. This contract was part of the Treaty of Utrecht.

A British slave ship set off from Liverpool, Glasgow or Bristol, carrying trade goods and sailed to West Africa. Some slaves were captured directly by the British traders.

Most slave ships got their slaves from British 'factors', who lived full-time in Africa and bought slaves from local tribal chiefs. The chiefs would raid a rival village and sell their captured enemies as slaves.

The slaves were marched to the coast in chained lines, where they were held in prisons called 'factories'.

The slave ship then sailed across the Atlantic to the West Indies – this leg of the voyage was called the 'Middle Passage'.

In the West Indies the slaves were sold at an auction and then trained to obey, often using brutal methods.

Some ships, but not all, then loaded up with sugar and rum to sell in Britain, before making the voyage back home.



The slave trade was huge – British ships transported 2.6 million slaves. It has been estimated overall, about 12 million Africans were captured to be taken to the Americas as slaves.

At the end of the 18th century, public opinion began to turn against the slave trade and there was resistance to the slave trade:

Some African rulers refused to sell slaves to the traders. Occasionally villages attacked British slave ships and set the slaves free.

Sometimes slaves mutinied on board ships. The most famous case was the Amistad in 1839. There were many slave rebellions. The most famous slave leader was Toussaint l'Ouverture, who led a successful slave revolution in French Saint Domingue in 1791. In Jamaica, runaway slaves formed 'Maroon' communities that fought against the British soldiers.

In Britain, slaves like James Somerset (or Somersett), frequently ran away from their masters. When he was recaptured, he and his friends contested his case in the courts.

In 1787, the Committee for the Abolition of the Slave Trade was set up. William Wilberforce represented the committee in Parliament.

The role of William Wilberforce in the abolition of slavery

The campaigners boycotted sugar, wrote letters and presented petitions.

Thomas Clarkson went on a speaking tour, showing people chains and irons and a model of a slave ship.

British Africans such as Olaudah Equiano formed the 'Sons of Africa' and campaigned against the slave trade.

There is some evidence that the slave trade was becoming less profitable – the price of buying slaves in Africa was rising, reaching £25 in 1800, but the price for selling in the Americas had not risen as quickly and was only £35 in 1800.