

Mapping Gothic Occidentalism: Crusading Cartographies Between Nation and Empire

Wednesday, January 21, 2026

3-4:30 PM in HNMSS 2212

In this presentation, I offer a critical, philological account of crusading that traces the word through its conceptual developments in modern intellectual history. I begin by excavating the eighteenth-century popularization of the English word “crusade” as it achieved terminological standardization in works of vernacular lexicography. Works like Samuel Johnson’s Dictionary (1755) did not merely record the word; they authorized and stabilized it as the primary historical term, moving it from variable usage to fixed, canonical vocabulary of a national lexicon.

This lexical standardization enabled a new historical critique. Eighteenth-century philosophical historians from Voltaire and Hume to Robertson, Smith, Gibbon, and others demystified the sacred history that long enshrined holy wars of the Middle Ages. These thinkers employed ironic modes of narrative emplotment to measure the contemporary distance of Britain’s civilizational progress and rationalist secularism from its past of medievalism.

Furthermore, the crusades were memorialized within an inherently cartographic framework, as the geography of medieval holy wars was rigidly parsed through the lens of a global binary—opposing the Christian West to an Islamic-Byzantine East. I argue that the modern cartography delineated in eighteenth-century historiography of the crusades became naturalized as the spatial logic upon which the scholarly field of Orientalism achieved methodological and institutional systematization during the final decades of the eighteenth century. This talk draws from my current book project, tentatively titled *New Jerusalems, Modern Crusades: Holy Lands in the Imaginative Geography of Empire*.

Suleiman Hodali received his PhD in comparative literature from UCLA.

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Recent and forthcoming writings appear in such publications as *Studies in Romanticism*, *South Atlantic Quarterly*, *Political Concepts: A Critical Lexicon*, and *Ebb Magazine*.

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