Preface

In the mid-2010s, the medieval Christian holy wars known as the crusades were widely appropriated and weaponised by different state actors and would-be state actors. Academics and journalists addressed this phenomenon and challenged the trend through scholarly articles and opinion pieces in the popular press, and in 2017–18, via campus symposia and international conferences.¹

In February 2018, Manchester Metropolitan University hosted the Northern Network for the Study of the Crusades (NNSC) second annual symposium on the theme of “The Modern Appropriation of the Crusades”.² It was clear that the appropriations of the crusades take on many forms and that the act of crusading has meant – and continues to mean many different things to different people. From amongst the many fine presentations at the symposium, four papers, each given by members of Manchester Metropolitan University’s War, Conflict and Society (WCS) research group, specifically addressed the weaponisation of the crusades by state actors in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This special issue brings together the work of the NNSC and the interests

¹ For example, “The Middle Ages, the Crusades, and the Alt Right: A Symposium for Scholars and Journalists”, George Washington University, October 2017. There were numerous panels held on the “Memory of the Crusades” and “Engaging the Crusades”, plus a roundtable discussion on “Teaching the Crusades in an Age of White Nationalism”, at the Leeds International Medieval Congress in July 2018. The first of the Engaging the Crusades volumes of brief articles was published in 2018; see Mike Horswell and Jonathan Phillips, Perceptions of the Crusades from the Nineteenth to the Twenty-First Century (Abingdon, 2018).

² The Northern Network for the Study of the Crusades would like to thank the following scholars for accepting invitations to present at the symposium: Graham Cross (Manchester Metropolitan University), Sam Edwards (Manchester Metropolitan University), Charlotte Gauthier (Royal Holloway, University of London), Fernando Gill Gonzalez (King’s College, University of London), Mona Hammad (Independent Researcher), Mike Horswell (Royal Holloway, University of London), Pedro Alexandre Guerreiro Martins (Universidade Nova de Lisboa), Hilary Rhodes (University of Leeds), Chloe Riggs (Royal Holloway, University of London), Elizabeth Siberry (Independent Researcher), Mercedes Penalba-Sotorrio (Manchester Metropolitan University) and Jason T. Roche (Manchester Metropolitan University).
of the wcs group, plus a reflective piece on how we might address and inform the appropriation of the crusades, to seek a better understanding of the processes of appropriation and weaponisation by state actors and would-be state actors in the modern era.3

3 The special issue’s guest editor was scheduled to present in the same session as John D. Cotts (Whitman College) at the Leeds International Medieval Congress in July 2018. The guest editor extends his thanks to Prof. Cotts for agreeing to share his thoughts here on addressing and informing the modern appropriation and weaponisation of the crusades.