

*The*  
**HISTORIAN'S  
APPRENTICE**

# Christian-Muslim Encounters in the Middle Ages

**Sourcing**  
**Contextualizing**  
**Finding Bias**  
**Corroborating**  
**Interpreting**

*Students learn the historian's craft by  
analyzing primary and secondary sources*

**MindSparks**  
CHALLENGING STUDENTS TO THINK HISTORICALLY

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# Christian-Muslim Encounters in the Middle Ages

by Jonathan Burack

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Each unit in *The Historian's Apprentice* series deals with an important historical topic. It introduces students to a five-step set of practices designed to simulate the experience of a historian and make explicit all key phases of the historian's craft.

## ***The Historian's Apprentice: A Five-Step Process***

**1. Reflect on Your Prior Knowledge of the Topic.**

Students discuss what they already know and how their prior knowledge may shape or distort the way they view the topic.

**2. Apply Habits of Historical Thinking to the Topic.**

Students build background knowledge on the basis of five habits of thinking that historians use in constructing accounts of the past.

**3. Interpret the Relevant Primary Sources.**

Students apply a set of rules for interpreting sources and assessing their relevance and usefulness.

**4. Assess the Interpretations of Other Historians.**

Students learn to read secondary sources actively, with the goal of deciding among competing interpretations based on evidence in the sources.

**5. Interpret, Debate and Write About the Topic Yourself.**

Students apply what they have learned by constructing evidence-based interpretations of their own in a variety of ways.



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# Teacher Introduction

## ★ *Teaching the Historian’s Craft*

The goal of *The Historian’s Apprentice* units is to expose students in a manageable way to the complex processes by which historians practice their craft. By modeling what historians do, students will practice the full range of skills that make history the unique and uniquely valuable challenge that it is.

Modeling the historian’s craft is not the same as being a historian—something few students will become. Therefore, a scaffolding is provided here to help students master historical content in a way that will be manageable and useful to them.

Historical thinking is not a simple matter of reciting one fact after another, or even of mastering a single, authoritative account. It is disciplined by evidence, and it is a quest for truth; yet, historians usually try to

clarify complex realities and make tentative judgments, not to draw final conclusions. In doing so, they wrestle with imperfect sets of evidence (the primary sources), detect multiple meanings embedded in those sources, and take into account varying interpretations by other historians. They also recognize how wide a divide separates the present from earlier times. Hence, they work hard to avoid present-mindedness and to achieve empathy with people who were vastly different from us.

In their actual practice, historians are masters of the cautious, qualified conclusion. Yet they engage, use their imaginations, and debate with vigor. It is this spirit and these habits of craft that *The Historian’s Apprentice* seeks to instill in students.

## ★ *The Historian’s Apprentice: Five-Steps in Four Parts*

*The Historian’s Apprentice* is a five-step process. However, the materials presented here are organized into four parts. Part I deals with the first two of the five steps of the process. Each of the other three parts then deals with one step in the process. Here is a summary of the four parts into which the materials are organized:

**Teacher Introduction.** Includes suggested day-by-day sequences for using these materials, including options for using the PowerPoint presentations. One sequence is designed for younger students and supplies a page of vocabulary definitions.

**Part 1.** A student warm-up activity, an introductory essay, a handout detailing a set of habits of historical thinking, and two PowerPoint presentations (*Five Habits of Historical Thinking* and *Christian–Muslim Encounters in the Middle Ages*). Part 1 (including the PowerPoints) deals with *The Historian’s Apprentice* Steps 1 and 2.

**Part 2.** A checklist for analyzing primary sources, several primary sources, and worksheets for analyzing them. Part 2 deals with *The Historian’s Apprentice* Step 3.

**Part 3.** Two secondary source passages and two student activities analyzing those passages. Part 3 deals with *The Historian’s Apprentice* Step 4.

**Part 4.** Two optional follow-up activities enabling students to write about and/or debate their own interpretations of the topic. Part 4 deals with *The Historian’s Apprentice* Step 5.

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**INTRODUCTION** **Suggested Five-Day Sequence**

Below is one possible way to use this *Historian's Apprentice* unit. Tasks are listed day by day in a sequence taking five class periods, with some homework and some optional follow-up activities.

**PowerPoint Presentation: *Five Habits of Historical Thinking***. This presentation comes with each *Historian's Apprentice* unit. If you have used it before with other units, you need not do so again. If you decide to use it, incorporate it into the **Day 1** activities. In either case, give students the “Five Habits of Historical Thinking” handout for future reference. Those Five Habits are as follows:

- History Is Not the Past Itself
- The Detective Model: Problem, Evidence, Interpretation
- Time, Change, and Continuity
- Cause and Effect
- As They Saw It: Grasping Past Points of View

**Warm-Up Activity: Homework assignment:** Students do the “Warm-Up Activity.” This activity explores student memories and personal experiences shaping their understanding of the topic.

**Day 1:** Discuss the “Warm-Up Activity.” Then either have students read or review the “Five Habits of Historical Thinking” handout, or use the *Five Habits* PowerPoint presentation.

**Homework assignment:** Students read the background essay “Christians and Muslims in the Middle Ages.”

**Day 2:** Use the second PowerPoint presentation, *Christian–Muslim Encounters in the Middle Ages* to overview the topic for this lesson. The presentation applies the Five Habits of Historical Thinking to this topic. Do the two activities embedded in the presentation.

**Homework assignment:** Students read the “Interpreting Primary Sources Checklist.” The checklist teaches a systematic way to handle sources:

- Sourcing
- Contextualizing
- Interpreting meanings
- Point of view
- Corroborating sources

**Day 3:** In class, students study some of the ten primary source documents and complete “Source Analysis” worksheets on them. They use their notes to discuss these sources. (Worksheet questions are all based on the concepts on the “Interpreting Primary Sources Checklist.”)

**Day 4:** In class, students complete the remaining “Source Analysis” worksheets and use their notes to discuss these sources. Take some time to discuss briefly the two secondary source passages students will analyze next.

**Homework assignment:** Students read these two secondary source passages.

**Day 5:** In class, students do the two “Secondary Sources” activities and discuss them. These activities ask them to analyze the two secondary source passages using four criteria:

- Clear focus on a problem or question
- Position or point of view
- Use of evidence or sources
- Awareness of alternative explanations

**Follow-Up Activities** (optional, at teacher discretion):

Do as preferred: the DBQ Essay Assignment and/or the Structured Debate.

## ★ *Suggested Three-Day Sequence*

If you have less time to devote to this lesson, here is a suggested shorter sequence. The sequence does not include the PowerPoint presentation *Five Habits of Historical Thinking*. This presentation is included with each *Historian's Apprentice* unit. If you have never used it with your class, you may want to do so before following this three-day sequence.

The three-day sequence leaves out a few activities from the five-day sequence. It also suggests that you use only six key primary sources. Yet it still walks students through the steps in the *Historian's Apprentice* approach: Clarifying background knowledge, analyzing primary sources, comparing secondary sources, and debating or writing about the topic.

**Warm-Up Activity. Homework assignment:** Ask students to read or review the “Five Habits of Historical Thinking” handout and read the background essay “Christians and Muslims in the Middle Ages.”

**Day 1:** Use the PowerPoint presentation *Christian–Muslim Encounters in the Middle Ages*. It overviews the topic for this lesson by applying the Five Habits of Historical Thinking to it. Do the two activities embedded in the presentation.

**Homework assignment:** Students read or review the “Interpreting Primary Sources Checklist.” The checklist teaches a systematic way to handle sources.

**Day 2:** In class, students study some of the ten primary source documents and complete “Source Analysis” worksheets on them. They use their notes to discuss these sources. We suggest using Documents 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, and 10.

You may wish to make your own choices of primary sources. Use your judgment in deciding how many of them your students can effectively analyze in a single class period.

**Homework assignment:** Students read the two secondary source passages.

**Day 3:** In class, students do the two “Secondary Sources” activities and discuss them. These activities ask them to analyze the two secondary source passages using four criteria.

**Follow-Up Activities** (optional, at teacher discretion):

Do as preferred: the DBQ Essay Assignment and/or the Structured Debate.

## ★ *Suggestions for Use with Younger Students*

For younger students, parts of this lesson may prove challenging. If you feel your students need a somewhat more manageable path through the material, see the suggested sequence below.

If you want to use the *Five Habits of Historical Thinking* PowerPoint presentation, this sequence takes four class periods. If you do not use this PowerPoint, you can combine **Day 1** and **Day 2** and keep the sequence to just three days. We suggest using six primary sources only. The ones listed for **Day 3** are less demanding in terms of vocabulary and conceptual complexity. For **Day 4**, we provide some simpler DBQs for the follow-up activities.

**Vocabulary:** A list of vocabulary terms in the sources and the introductory essay is provided on page 7 of this booklet. You may wish to hand this sheet out as a reading reference, you could make flashcards out of some of the terms, or you might ask each of several small groups to use the vocabulary sheet to explain terms in one source to the rest of the class.

### SUGGESTED FOUR-DAY SEQUENCE

**Warm-Up Activity. Homework assignment:** Students do the “Warm-Up Activity.” This activity explores student memories and personal experiences shaping their understanding of the topic.

**Day 1:** Discuss the “Warm-Up Activity.” Show the *Five Habits of Historical Thinking* PowerPoint presentation (unless you have used it before and/or you do not think it is needed now). If you do not use this PowerPoint presentation, give students the “Five Habits of Historical Thinking” handout and discuss it with them.

**Homework assignment:** Ask students to read the background essay “Christians and Muslims in the Middle Ages.”

**Day 2:** Use the PowerPoint presentation *Christian–Muslim Encounters in the Middle Ages*. This introduces the topic for the lesson by applying the Five Habits of Historical Thinking to it. Do the two activities embedded in the presentation.

**Homework assignment:** Students read or review the “Interpreting Primary Sources Checklist.” The checklist teaches a systematic way to handle sources.

**Day 3:** Discuss the “Interpreting Primary Sources Checklist” and talk through one primary source document in order to illustrate the meaning of the concepts on the checklist. Then have students complete “Source Analysis” worksheets after studying primary source documents 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, and 9.

**Homework assignment:** Students read the two secondary source passages.

**Day 4:** Students do only “Secondary Sources: Activity 2” and discuss it. This activity asks them to choose from among the sources the two that best back up each secondary source passage.

**Follow-Up Activities** (optional, at teacher discretion):

Do as preferred: the DBQ Essay Assignment and/or the Structured Debate.

Here are some alternate DBQs tailored to the six primary sources recommended here:

**Using the documents for this lesson, explain why you think conflict was so common between Christian and Muslim societies in the Mediterranean region from 700 to 1300 CE.**

**In what ways were ideas about faith and reason similar in Muslim and Christian European societies in the 12th and 13th centuries? In what ways, if any, were they different?**

## Vocabulary: The Introductory Essay

- **barbarian:** In this case, a term often used for the Germanic tribes that invaded the Roman Empire
- **Crusades:** The series of military expeditions by Christians in the Middle Ages to recover the Holy Land in the eastern Mediterranean from Muslim rule.
- **heritage:** Customs and achievements handed down from one generation to the next as part of a group's identity
- **monotheistic:** Describes the belief that there is only one god
- **philosophy:** Rational, systematic inquiry into the most basic and general questions of life (e.g., the nature of values, knowledge, and reality itself); the existence and nature of god is also investigated, but on the basis of reason rather than personal revelation
- **Reconquista:** The term used by later Spaniards to describe the effort of several northern Christian kingdoms to retake southern Spain from Muslim rule between the 13th and 15th centuries

## Vocabulary: The Primary Sources

- **blasphemies:** Irreverent speech or acts in violation of religious laws or beliefs
- **cognizance:** Awareness or understanding
- **discernment:** Clear or sharp judgment or insight
- **discrepancies:** Differences or inconsistencies
- **Franks:** The Germanic peoples of northern France and the area around the Rhine in the early Middle Ages; medieval Muslims often used this term to refer to all Western European Christians
- **indissoluble:** Describes things that cannot be dissolved or separated
- **Mahomet:** An outdated term used by medieval European authors for Muhammad, Islam's prophet
- **metaphysical:** Having to do with the fundamental nature of the world (e.g., being, time, causality, etc.)
- **perspicacity:** Keen understanding or insight
- **Saracens:** An ancient Greek designation for nomadic tribes in and around Syria, used often in medieval European literature for all Arabs or Muslims
- **voracity:** A strong appetite or eagerness to consume or obtain something

## Vocabulary: The Secondary Sources

- **autonomous:** Independent
- **corpus:** In this case, the body of works by an author
- **cosmology:** A theory about the origins and basic structure of the universe
- **elusive:** Hard to express or understand; evasive
- **institutionalize:** To organize and make regular a feature or practice within a society or legal system
- **integral:** Essential
- **transmuted:** Changed or transformed

## Part 1: Christian–Muslim Encounters —Providing the Context

**Note to the teacher:** The next pages provide materials meant to help students better understand and evaluate this topic. The materials also seek to teach students the Five Habits of Historical Thinking.

This section includes the following:

- **PowerPoint presentation: *The Five Habits of Historical Thinking***  
This presentation illustrates five habits of thought or modes of analysis that guide historians as they construct their secondary accounts of a topic. These five habits are not about skills used in analyzing primary sources (those are dealt with more explicitly in another handout in the next section). The Five Habits are meant to help students see history as a way of thinking, not as the memorizing of disparate facts and predigested conclusions. The PowerPoint uses several historical episodes as examples to illustrate the Five Habits. In two places, it pauses to ask students to do a simple activity applying one of the habits to some of their own life experiences.  
  
If you have used this PowerPoint with other *Historian’s Apprentice* units, you may not need to use it again here.
- **Handout: “The Five Habits of Historical Thinking”**  
This handout supplements the PowerPoint presentation. It is meant as a reference for students to use as needed. If you have used other *Historian’s Apprentice* units, your students may only need to review this handout quickly.
- **Warm-Up Activity**  
A simple exercise designed to help you see what students know about the topic, what confuses them, or what ideas they may have absorbed about it from popular culture, friends and family, etc. The goal is to alert them to their need to gain a clearer idea of the past and be critical of what they think they already know.
- **Introductory essay: “Christians and Muslims in the Middle Ages”**  
The essay provides enough basic background information on the topic to enable students to assess primary sources and conflicting secondary source interpretations. At the end of the essay, students get some points to keep in mind about the nature of the sources they will examine and the conflicting secondary source interpretations they will debate.
- **PowerPoint presentation: *Christian–Muslim Encounters in the Middle Ages***  
This PowerPoint presentation reviews the topic for the lesson and shows how the Five Habits of Historical Thinking can be applied to a clearer understanding of it. At two points, the presentation calls for a pause and students are prompted to discuss some aspects of their prior knowledge of the topic. Our proposed sequences suggest using this PowerPoint presentation after assigning the introductory essay, but you may prefer to reverse this order.

# Warm-Up Activity

## *What Do You Know About Islam and Europe?*

This lesson deals with interactions between Christian and Muslim societies in the Mediterranean region from 700–1300 CE. Whenever you start to learn something about a time in history, it helps to think first of what you already know about it, or think you know. You probably have impressions. Or you may have read or heard things about it already. Some of what you know may be accurate. You need to be ready to alter your fixed ideas about this time as you learn more about it. This is what any historian would do. To do this, study this illustration and take a few notes in response to the questions below it.



This photo shows the inside of a Roman Catholic cathedral in Cordoba, in Spain. It was first built as a Visigothic Christian church, but was turned into a mosque starting in 784. What do you know about Spain in the eighth century and later, that explains why this change occurred?

Spain was a key location for both conflict and the cooperation and sharing that have marked relations between Christian European and Muslim societies. Following such contacts, European states began to dominate the globe, and together with the United States have come to be called “the West.” What do you think is meant by the phrase “the West”? Why do you think the phrase “Muslim societies” is often used to talk about certain Middle Eastern, African, and Asian countries?

What do you know about both cooperation and conflict between Christian and Muslim states in Spain and elsewhere during the years 700–1300? Which do you think was more present, conflict or cooperation? Why?

## *Christians and Muslims in the Middle Ages*

By the end of the sixth century, the western half of the Roman Empire had collapsed; the eastern half remained intact. In both halves, Christianity was establishing itself as the dominant religion. In the new Germanic kingdoms in western Europe, the Church did what it could to preserve the Classical heritage of ancient Greek and Roman learning. Much more of that heritage was preserved in the Eastern Roman Empire, which we have come to call the Byzantine Empire.

Another force confining the main Christian societies to the Byzantine Empire and western Europe arose far to the south and east in Arabia. From there, a wave of conquering Muslim armies in the seventh and eighth centuries helped spread a new religion, Islam, throughout southern and eastern portions of the old Roman Empire.

As the Muslim armies advanced, the Arabic language and culture as well as Islam would spread with them. A large portion of the area conquered by these armies was inhabited by Christians and Jews. By the middle of the eighth century, Islam had united the lands of ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, along with large parts of the former Roman Empire, including Syria, Palestine, stretches of northern Africa, and Spain. Persia was taken over completely and the Byzantine Empire drastically reduced in size. From Spain to the borders of India, a vast region was united, and a new Muslim civilization began to thrive.

The spread of Muslim societies limited contact between Christian Europe and Christian communities in those Muslim lands. Muslim raids continued even after 732 CE, when Muslims made their farthest thrust into Europe at the Battle of Tours and Poitiers. Europeans later came to view that battle as a key turning point, though it may well have been only a minor clash among many between Muslims and Christians in and around the Mediterranean. Meanwhile, Byzantium held off Muslim forces for centuries and gave Europeans protection against pressures from the east.

By the late tenth century, the Muslim desire for conquest had eased considerably. Yet now, a

recovering Europe began to fight back. In Spain, the “Reconquista,” as Europeans called it, would ultimately restore to Christian control portions of Spain taken over by Muslims in the eighth century. In 1072, Sicily was recovered by Normans led by Roger I. A few years later, the first of several Crusades conquered parts of the Holy Land in the eastern Mediterranean, including the city of Jerusalem. The Europeans held the lands they reconquered in Spain, Sicily, and other parts of Europe, but they could not hold the lands seized in the Crusades. Salah ad-Din (known in the West as “Saladin”), the Kurdish Sultan of Egypt and Syria, led Muslims against the Crusaders and took back Palestine and Jerusalem for Islam after the Battle of Hattin in 1187.

As this all makes clear, conflict and mutual hostility was a key part of the story of the Christian West and the Muslim lands. This conflict didn’t end with the Crusades. Periods of warfare and bitter confrontation would mark the centuries since then, right up to the present era.

However, hostility is not the whole story by any means. Even as warfare and raiding continued, a far more creative economic, cultural, and intellectual interaction also occurred, especially from the eighth to the 13th centuries, when a great flowering of learning and the arts took place in Muslim societies. Christian and Muslim scholars translated Greek classics of philosophy and science. They also adopted numerals from India (known now as “Arabic”), added to the knowledge they absorbed, and further developed many techniques and devices gained from others. Merchants introduced many goods from the east to the Muslim societies, such as silk, paper, cotton, and sugar. This openness to new ideas led to efforts to adapt Muslim culture to the ideas of many other cultures.

In knowledge and culture, the Muslim societies preserved much of the scientific and philosophical learning of the ancient Greeks—Ptolemy on astronomy, Euclid on geometry, Galen on medicine, and above all, Aristotle on logic, physics, philosophy, and more. Muslim thinkers added their own commentaries on this learning and made many

advances of their own. Muslim medical knowledge and astronomy, India's mathematics, and China's technology all far surpassed Europe's.

By the 11th century, however, Europeans were regaining an interest in learning and their own Classical Greek heritage. Soon, they were eager to absorb as much of it as they could find.

Europe was then still a land of peasants, simple villages, few books, and ignorant princes often at war with one another. Yet within a few centuries, Europe's science and technology, philosophy, and art would be second to none. How did this happen? Many factors played a role: One of the most important was Europe's growing ability to borrow from more advanced cultures, Muslim ones in particular. Between 1000 and 1300 CE, as Europeans began to trade more with Muslims, they learned about and began to adopt new techniques having to do with

ships, maps, navigation, guns and gunpowder, and much more. They also soon realized how much of the ancient Greek and Roman learning Muslims had preserved. Just as Muslim scholars had learned to borrow and absorb this learning, so Europeans now began borrowing it all back again. In this, as in their monotheistic religions, Europeans and Muslims actually had much in common.

After the 13th century, Europe seemed to move ahead in knowledge and power. In the 14th century, Islam would receive a new boost of strength from the Turks and their Ottoman Empire. Yet it would never regain the lead in science and technology it had once enjoyed over the Europeans. Why this was so remains a topic of great debate among historians. So also does the question of why a dramatic pattern of both bitter conflict and creative cooperation has remained so strong throughout the history of these two large groups of societies.

## Points to Keep in Mind

### Historians' Questions

Historians passionately debate many aspects of the long history of relations between Muslim and European Christian civilization. Many historians seek to understand the commonalities and distinctions between the two. Both are rooted in a shared monotheistic faith tradition, but Muslims and Christians in those centuries typically saw each other as unbelievers and spiritual rivals. Ideally, historians seek to describe and explain developments between historical actors, rather than assigning blame or credit, or making value judgements. Good historians enable readers to draw their own conclusions about historical developments.

In the area of cultural sharing and cooperation, some feel a strong need to correct past European assumptions that by themselves they invented all the things that helped them become the dominant force in the world after about 1500. Others say that absorbing and creatively adapting cultural achievements is itself an accomplishment, one Muslim civilization should be praised for in its early centuries, and one Europeans should be praised for in the later centuries covered by this unit of study.

### The Primary Source Evidence

For this lesson, you will study ten primary source documents spanning 700 to 1300. Some of them deal with the military encounters between Muslims and European Christians. Other sources will help you to see the differing perspectives of Muslims and European Christians regarding faith and reason. Still others deal with the sharing of culture between Muslim and European scholars and others in the latter half of this period. They should give you a better sense of what key ideas and ways of thinking were at the heart of this dynamic and creative interaction.

### Secondary Source Interpretations

After studying and discussing the primary sources, you will read two short passages by two different historians. The historians who wrote these passages differ somewhat in their views about the role of cooperation and conflict in the history of Muslim relations with the Christian West from 700 to 1300 CE. You will use your own background knowledge and your ideas about the primary sources as you think about and answer some questions about the views of these two historians.

## Five Habits of Historical Thinking

History is not just a chronicle of one fact after another. It is a meaningful story, or an account of what happened and why. It is written to address questions or problems historians pose. This checklist describes key habits of thinking that historians adopt as they interpret primary sources and create their own accounts of the past.

### *History Is Not the Past Itself*

When we learn history, we learn a story about the past, not the past itself. No matter how certain an account of the past seems, it is only one account, not the entire story. The “entire story” is gone; that is, the past itself no longer exists. Only some records of events remain, and they are never complete. Therefore it is important to see all judgments and conclusions about the past as tentative or uncertain. Avoid looking for hard-and-fast “lessons” from the past. The value of history is in a way the opposite of such a search for quick answers; that is, its value is in teaching us to live with uncertainty and see even our present as complex, unfinished, open-ended.

### *The Detective Model: Problem, Evidence, Interpretation*

Historians can’t observe the past directly. They must use evidence, just as a detective tries to reconstruct a crime based on clues left behind. In the historian’s case, primary sources are the evidence—letters, official documents, maps, photos, newspaper articles, artifacts, and all other traces from past times. Like a detective, a historian defines a very specific problem to solve, one for which evidence does exist. Asking clear, meaningful questions is a key to writing good history. Evidence is always incomplete. It’s not always easy to separate fact from opinion in it, or tell what is important from what is not. Historians try to do this, but they must stay cautious about their conclusions and open to other interpretations of the same evidence.

### *Time, Change, and Continuity*

History is about the flow of events over time, yet is not just one fact after another. It seeks to understand this flow of events as a pattern. In that pattern, some things change while others hold steady over time. You need to see history as a dynamic interplay of both change and continuity together. Only by doing this can you see how the past has evolved into the present—and why the present carries with it many traces of or links to the past.

### *Cause and Effect*

Along with seeing patterns of change and continuity over time, historians seek to explain that change. In doing this, they know that no single factor causes change. Many factors interact. Unique, remarkable, and creative individual actions and plans are one factor, but individual plans have unintended outcomes, and these shape events in unexpected ways. Moreover, individuals do not always act rationally or with full knowledge of what they are doing. Finally, geography, technology, economics, cultural traditions, and ideas all affect what groups and individuals do.

### *As They Saw It: Grasping Past Points of View*

Above all, thinking like a historian means trying hard to see how people in the past thought and felt. This is not easy. As one historian put it, the past is “another country,” in which people felt and thought differently, often very differently, from the way we do now. Avoiding “present-mindedness” is therefore a key task for historians. Also, since the past includes various groups in conflict, historians must learn to empathize with many diverse cultures and subgroups to see how they differ and what they share in common.

## Part 2: Analyzing the Primary Sources

**Note to the teacher:** The next pages provide the primary sources for this lesson. We suggest you give these to students after they read the background essay, after they review the “Five Habits of Historical Thinking” handout, and after they watch and discuss the PowerPoint presentation for the lesson.

This section includes the following:

- **Handout: “Interpreting Primary Sources Checklist”**

Give copies of this handout to students and ask them to refer to it when analyzing any primary source..

- **Ten Primary Source Documents**

The Documents are as follows:

- Document 1A & 1B. Photos of a Qur’an class and a Bible class
- Document 2. Edward Gibbon’s account of the Battle of Tours and Poitiers
- Document 3. Arab account of the Battle of Tours and Poitiers
- Document 4. Sa’id al-Andalusi’s description of Europeans in 1068
- Document 5. Raymond d’Aguiliers on the fall of Jerusalem
- Document 6. Saladin on encouraging Christian merchants to trade
- Document 7. Ibn Rushd on faith and reason
- Document 8. Peter Abelard on questioning conflicting authorities
- Document 9. Adelard of Bath on the rationality of the natural universe
- Document 10. Al-Ghazali on philosophers being unreliable

- **Ten “Source Analysis” Worksheets for Analyzing the Primary Sources**

Each worksheet asks student to take notes on one source. The prompts along the side match the five categories in the “Interpreting Primary Sources Checklist.” Not every category is used in each worksheet, only those that seem most relevant to a full analysis of that source.

You may want students to analyze all of the sources. However, if time does not allow this, use those that seem most useful for your own instructional purposes.

Students can use the notes on the “Source Analysis” worksheets in discussions, as a help in analyzing the two secondary sources in the next part of this lesson, and in follow-up debates, DBQs, and other activities.

## Interpreting Primary Sources Checklist

Primary sources are the evidence historians use to reach conclusions and write their accounts of the past. Sources rarely have one obvious, easily grasped meaning. To interpret them fully, historians use several strategies. This checklist describes some of the most important of those strategies. Read the checklist through and use it to guide you whenever you need to analyze and interpret a primary source.

### *Sourcing*

Think about a primary source's author or creator, how and why the primary source document was created, and where it appeared. Also think about the audience it was intended for and what its purpose was. You may not always find much information about these things, but whatever you can learn will help you better understand the source. In particular, it may suggest the source's point of view or bias, since the author's background and intended audience often shape his or her ideas and way of expressing them.

### *Contextualizing*

"Context" refers to the time and place of which the primary source is a part. In history, facts do not exist separately from one another. They get their meaning from the way they fit into a broader pattern. The more you know about that broader pattern, or context, the more you will be able to understand about the source and its significance.

### *Interpreting Meanings*

It is rare for a source's full meaning to be completely obvious. You must read a written source closely, paying attention to its language and tone, as well as to what it implies or merely hints at. With a visual source, all kinds of meaning may be suggested by the way it is designed, by such things as shading, camera angle, use of emotional symbols or scenes, etc. The more you pay attention to all the details, the more you can learn from a source.

### *Point of View*

Every source is written or created by someone with a purpose, an intended audience, and a point of view or bias. Even a dry table of numbers was created for some reason, to stress some things and not others, to make a point of some sort. At times, you can tell a point of view simply by sourcing the document. Knowing an author was a Democrat or a Republican, for example, will alert you to a likely point of view. In the end, however, only a close reading of the text will make you aware of point of view. Keep in mind, even a heavily biased source can still give you useful evidence of what some people in a past time thought. But you need to take the bias into account in judging how reliable the source's own claims really are.

### *Corroborating Sources*

No one source tells the whole story. Moreover, no one source is completely reliable. To make reasonable judgments about an event in the past, you must compare sources to find points of agreement and disagreement. Even when there are big differences, both sources may be useful. However, the differences will also tell you something, and they may be important in helping you understand each source.

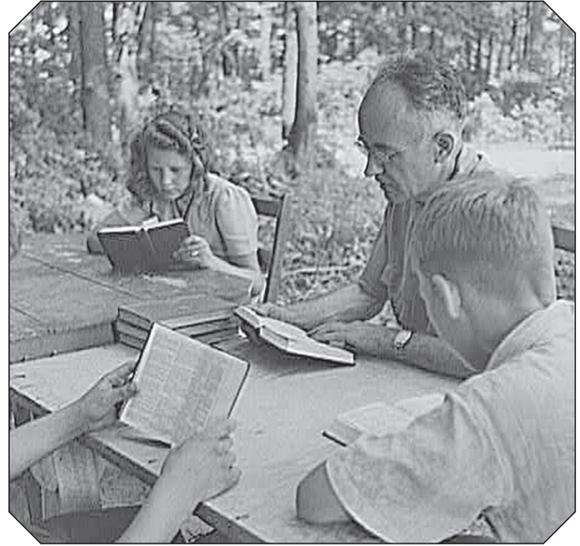
## The Primary Sources for the Lesson

### Documents 1A & 1B

**Information on the source:** 1A is a photo of an Arabic school in Egypt with students learning the Qur'an. 1B is a 1943 photo showing children attending daily Bible class at a camp in Maryland.



1A



1B

### Document 2

**Information on the source:** This is part of an account of the Battle of Tours and Poitiers, where Charles Martel led the Franks (the Germanic people then ruling northern France) to defeat a Muslim force and halt its northward progress in 732 CE. The account is in Edward Gibbon's famous book *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. While this is not a primary source for the Middle Ages, it is a primary source for a general attitude that evolved in Western societies over time about Christian-Muslim interactions.

*A victorious line of march had been prolonged above a thousand miles from the Rock of Gibraltar to the banks of the Loire; the repetition of an equal space would have carried the Saracens to the confines of Poland and the Highlands of Scotland; the Rhine is not more impassable than the Nile or the Euphrates, and the Arabian fleet might have sailed without a naval combat into the mouth of Thames. Perhaps the interpretation of the Koran would now be taught in the schools of Oxford, and her pulpits might demonstrate . . . the sanctity and truth of the Revelation of Mahomet.*

### Document 3

**Information on the source:** This is a small part of a ninth-century Arabic account of Muslim conquests in North Africa and Spain. The passage refers to the same Battle of Tours and Poitiers as Gibbon describes in Primary Source Document 2. This account is by Ibn 'Abd al-Hakam, in *Futuh misr wa-akhbaruha*, ed. C.C. Torrey (New Haven, 1922), pp. 216–217. The account is as quoted in *The Muslim Discovery of Europe*, by Bernard Lewis (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001) p. 19.

*'Ubayda [the governor of North Africa] had given authority over Spain to 'Abd al-Rahman ibn 'Abdallah al-'Akki. 'Abd al-Rahman was a worthy man who made expeditions against the Franks. They are the remotest of the enemies of Spain. He gained much booty and overcame them . . . Then he went on another excursion and he and all his companions suffered martyrdom for Islam. His death . . . took place in the year 115 [733–34 CE].*

## Document 4

**Information on the source:** In 1068 CE, Sa'id al-Andalusi, a judge in Toledo (then a Muslim city) in Spain, wrote an account of various nations around the world. He praises certain qualities in many of them, including the Christians of the Byzantine Empire. He then discusses two groups he sees as primitive barbarians, a northern white group and a southern black group. This passage describes the northern group—that is, a part of the European population. This passage is from Sema'an Salem and Alok Kumar, tr., *Science in the Medieval World: "Book of the Categories of Nations"* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991), p. 7.

*The rest of this [group], which showed no interest in science, resembles animals more than human beings. Those among them who live in the extreme North, between the last of the seven regions and the end of the populated world to the north, suffered from being too far from the sun, their air is cold and their skies are cloudy. As a result, their temperament is cool and their behavior is rude. Consequently, their bodies become enormous, their color turned white, and their hair drooped down. They have lost keenness of understanding and sharpness of perception. They were overcome by ignorance and laziness, and infested by fatigue and stupidity.*

## Document 5

**Information on the source:** Raymond d'Aguliers was a chaplain who went with the Southern French army of the First Crusade, in which Europeans captured Jerusalem in 1099 CE. This part of his account is from August C. Krey, *The First Crusade: The Accounts of Eyewitnesses and Participants* (Princeton: 1921), pp. 257–62.

*Strange to relate, however, at this very time when the city was practically captured by the Franks, the Saracens were still fighting on the other side, where the Count was attacking the wall as though the city should never be captured. But now that our men had possession of the walls and towers, wonderful sights were to be seen. Some of our men (and this was more merciful) cut off the heads of their enemies; others shot them with arrows, so that they fell from the towers; others tortured them longer by casting them into the flames. Piles of heads, hands, and feet were to be seen in the streets of the city. It was necessary to pick one's way over the bodies of men and horses. But these were small matters compared to what happened at the Temple of Solomon, a place where religious services are ordinarily chanted. What happened there? If I tell the truth, it will exceed your powers of belief. So let it suffice to say this much, at least, that in the Temple and porch of Solomon, men rode in blood up to their knees and bridle reins. Indeed, it was a just and splendid judgment of God that this place should be filled with the blood of the unbelievers, since it had suffered so long from their blasphemies. The city was filled with corpses and blood. Some of the enemy took refuge in the Tower of David, and, petitioning Count Raymond for protection, surrendered the Tower into his hands.*

## Document 6

**Information on the source:** Salah ad-Din Yusuf ibn Ayyub, known in the West as Saladin, reconquered lands from the Crusaders. In this letter in 1174 to the caliph in Baghdad, he explains why he was encouraging Christian merchants to trade, on his terms, in the lands he had recently taken back from them. As reproduced in Bernard Lewis, *The Muslim Discovery of Europe* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001), p. 26.

*. . . the Venetians, the Pisans, and the Genoese all used to come, sometimes as raiders, the voracity of whose harm could not be contained and the fire of whose evil could not be quenched, sometimes as travelers, sometimes trying to prevail over Islam, with goods they bring, and our fearsome decrees could not cope with them...and now there is not one of them but brings to our lands his weapons of war and battle and bestows upon us the choicest of what he makes and inherits.*

## Document 7

**Information on the source:** Ibn Rushd (1126–1198), known in Europe as Averroës, was a Muslim scholar and judge who mastered several areas of knowledge, including logic, medicine, and astronomy. He became known in Europe as the greatest Arab commentator on Aristotle. Here he discusses the central question for both Muslim and Christian scholars of this era—the question of whether faith and reason can always work in harmony. From Ibn Rushd, *On the Harmony of Religions and Philosophy*, trans. Mohammed Jamil-al-Rahman (Baroda: A. G. Widgey, 1921), pp. 14.

*“We maintain that the business of philosophy is nothing other than to look into creation and to ponder over it in order to be guided to the Creator—in other words, to look into the meaning of existence. For the knowledge of creation leads to the cognizance of the Creator, through the knowledge of the created. The more perfect becomes the knowledge of creation, the more perfect becomes the knowledge of the Creator. The Law encourages and exhorts us to observe creation. Thus, it is clear that this is to be taken either as a religious injunction or as something approved by the Law. But the Law urges us to observe creation by means of reason and demands the knowledge thereof through reason. This is evident from different verses of the Quran. For example, the Quran says: “Wherefore take example from them, you who have eyes” [Quran 49.2]. That is a clear indication of the necessity of*

*using the reasoning faculty, or rather both reason and religion, in the interpretation of things. Again it says: “Or do they not contemplate the kingdom of heaven and earth and the things which God has created” [Quran 7.184]. This is in plain exhortation to encourage the use of observation of creation. And remember that one whom God especially distinguishes in this respect, Abraham, the prophet. For He says: “And this did we show unto Abraham: the kingdom of heaven and earth” [Quran 6.75]. Further, He says: “Do they not consider the camels, how they are created; and the heaven, how it is raised” [Quran 88.17]. Or, still again: “And (who) meditate on the creation of heaven and earth, saying, O Lord you have not created this in vain” [Quran 3.176]. There are many other verses on this subject: too numerous to be enumerated.”*

## Document 8

### Information on the source:

Peter Abelard (1079–1142) was a French theologian and philosopher. He developed his ideas before most of the ancient Greek works were translated from Arabic into Latin, though he was aware of Arab learning. In this passage from the prologue to his *Sic et Non*, he discusses the relationship of reason and faith in ways similar to but not exactly the same as those of Ibn Rushd. This passage is based on a translation by Anderz Piltz and is reproduced in Edward Grant, *God and Reason in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 60–61.

*I present here a collection of the Holy Fathers in the order in which I have remembered them. The discrepancies which these texts seem to contain raise certain questions which should present a challenge to my young readers to summon up all their zeal to establish the truth and in doing so to gain increased perspicacity. For the prime source of wisdom has been defined as continuous and penetrating enquiry. The most brilliant of all philosophers, Aristotle, encouraged his students to undertake this task with every ounce of their curiosity. . . . By raising questions we begin to enquire, and by enquiring we arrive at the truth, and, as the Truth has in fact said: “Seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.” He demonstrated this to us by His own moral example when He was found at the age of twelve “sitting in the midst of the doctors both hearing them and asking them questions.” He who was the Light itself, the full and perfect wisdom of God, desired by his questioning to give his disciples an example before He became a model for teachers in his preaching. When, therefore, I adduce passages from the scriptures it should spur and incite my readers to enquire into the truth and the greater the authority of these passages, the more earnest this enquiry should be.*

## Document 9

**Information on the source:** Adelard of Bath (1080–1142) learned Arabic and translated scientific works from Arabic to Latin during his many travels. It is not clear how much of this Islamic learning influenced his own thinking, but in these two passages from his *Natural Questions* he deals with the key problem that Ibn Rushd also faced, the relationship of faith and reason. From Chapter 4 and Chapter 6 of Adelard's *Natural Questions*, as translated by Richard Dales in Dales, ed., *The Scientific Achievement of the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1973). This particular passage is quoted in *God and Reason in the Middle Ages*, by Edward Grant (Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 71–72.

*I take nothing away from God, for whatever exists is from Him and because of Him. But the natural order does not exist confusedly and without rational arrangement, and human reason should be listened to concerning these things it treats of. But when it completely fails, then the matter should be referred to God.*

*I will cut short this discussion of the fact that in my judgment authority should be avoided [in deciding what is true]. But I do assert this, that first we ought to seek the reason for anything, and then if we find an authority it may be added. Authority alone cannot make a philosopher believe anything, nor should it be adduced for this purpose.*

## Document 10

### Information on the source:

Al-Ghazali (1058–1111) was a Muslim theologian and scholar who criticized too widespread a reliance on Greek philosophy, and on Aristotle in particular. These two passages are from his book, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, translated into English by Sabih Ahmad Kamali (Lahore, Pakistan, 1963). In passage A (taken from the preface), al-Ghazali explains why philosophy is not totally reliable in the way mathematical knowledge is. In passage B (p. 185), he denies that God is bound by the ordinary laws of cause and effect that philosophers like Aristotle say govern the universe. Some see al-Ghazali's views as undercutting a rational or scientific approach to knowledge. Others see them as in fact offering a skeptical approach that is itself a part of the scientific spirit.

### A

*We . . . let it be known that there is neither firm foundation nor perfection in the doctrine they [philosophers] hold; that they judge in terms of supposition and surmise, without verification or certainty; that they use the appearance of their mathematical sciences as evidential proof for the truth of their metaphysical sciences, using [this] as a gradual enticement for the weak in mind. Had their metaphysical sciences been as perfect in demonstration, free from conjecture, as their mathematical, they would not have disagreed among themselves regarding [the former], just as they have not disagreed in their mathematical sciences.*

\*\*\*\*\*

### B

*Take for instance any two things, such as the quenching of thirst and drinking; satisfaction of hunger and eating; burning and contact with fire; light and the rise of the Sun; death and the severance of the head from the trunk; healing and the use of medicine; the loosening of the bowels and the use of a purgative, or any other set of events observed to be connected together in Medicine, Astronomy, or Arts, or Crafts. They are connected as a result of the Decree of God (holy be His name), which preceded their existence, If one follows the other, it is because He has created in that fashion, not because the connection in itself is necessary and indissoluble. He has the power to create the satisfaction of hunger without eating, or death without the severance of the head, or even survival of life when the head has been cut off, or any other thing from among the connected things (independently of what is supposed to be its cause).*

## Source Analysis: Primary Source Documents 1A & 1B

A photo of Egyptian schoolchildren studying the Qur'an, and a photo showing American children attending Bible class

### Interpreting meanings

These photos capture an essential feature of both Islam and Christianity. Both religions value texts, especially sacred writings seen as revelation from God. What are the sacred writings of each religion?

### Contextualizing

Islam and Christianity are monotheistic religions, emphasizing the oneness of God. This is a central teaching also found in the older monotheistic tradition known as Judaism. In what other ways do Islam and Christianity have similar teachings or features?

Could the qualities the two faiths share have contributed both to the readiness to cooperate at times, and also to tension and mutual hostility at other times? Defend your answer using evidence from other examples from history or from your own personal experience.

## Source Analysis: Primary Source Document 2

Edward Gibbon's account of the Battle of Tours and Poitiers

### Contextualizing

The Battle of Tours and Poitiers took place in what is now central France. Given what you know about the decline of the Roman Empire, why might it have been possible for Muslims to venture north of Spain? Why might the appearance of such a force there in 732 CE have alarmed Christian inhabitants in the region?

### Interpreting meanings

In this passage, Gibbon refers to the battle as taking place “a thousand miles from the Rock of Gibraltar.” Why do you think he used that spot as the point from which to measure the distance to the battle? What overall point is he trying to make about this battle by referring to this distance and the other geographical facts he mentions?

Gibbon wrote his description of this battle in the late 1700s, in his famous history of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire. Despite the distance in time, the battle seemed enormously important to him. Why do you think that a European historian living a thousand years later would write about this battle in such a dramatic way?

## Source Analysis: Primary Source Document 3

An Arab account of the Battle of Tours and Poitiers

### Contextualizing

Based on what you know about the expansion of Muslim rule in the seventh and eighth centuries following the rise of Islam, explain why the author of this passage describes the Franks as “the remotest of the enemies of Spain.”

### Interpreting meanings

What else in al-Hakam’s account here suggests how unimportant the Battle of Tours and Poitiers may have seemed to the Muslims at the time?

Why does the text begin its discussion with Ubayda, and what does this suggest about the significance and location of the battle in relation to the capital of the empire?

### Point of view

Compare al-Hakam’s account to Gibbon’s. What conclusions might later readers of these accounts draw from them?

## Source Analysis: Primary Source Document 4

Sa'id al-Andalusi's description of Europeans in 1068

### Contextualizing

From what you know of economic and cultural conditions in western Europe in these centuries, explain why a Muslim writer might have viewed Europeans as this writer did.

Given how the author characterizes certain Europeans, what can you infer about his view of Muslims at the time?

### Interpreting meanings

Sa'id al-Andalusi appears to have had a theory of the causes of differences in human societies based on environmental factors. How does he apply this theory to the northernmost Europeans he discusses in this passage?

### Point of view

Was Sa'id al-Andalusi's view of Europeans reasonable for him to hold, or was it a sign of bias and prejudice against an alien people he did not like? Explain your answer.

## Source Analysis: Primary Source Document 5

Raymond d'Aguiliers describes the fall of Jerusalem during the First Crusade

### Contextualizing

What changes in Europe in the 11th century made it easier for Europeans to undertake a series of crusades against Muslims in lands far from Europe?

From what you know about warfare in these centuries, do you think this siege was unusual or typical in how bloody and indiscriminate the slaughter was?

### Point of view

How accurate do you think this description is of the siege and fall of Jerusalem in 1099? From his tone and the phrases he uses, do you think Raymond d'Aguiliers might be exaggerating the amount of slaughter and bloodshed? If so, why might he have wanted to exaggerate it?

Some might say d'Aguiliers's views about Muslims and Islam were as distorted as those of Sa'id al-Andalusi (Primary Source Document 4) were about some northern Europeans, but in a different way. Do you agree or disagree? Why?

## Source Analysis: Primary Source Document 6

Saladin explains why he was encouraging Christian merchants to trade with Muslims

### Contextualizing

This is a letter from Saladin to the caliph in Baghdad. Explain who Saladin was and why he might have wanted to explain himself to the caliph.

In speaking of European merchants, why would Saladin mention Venetians, Pisans, and Genoese in particular?

### Interpreting meanings

In what ways does Saladin suggest Europeans are weak? In what ways does he recognize their strengths?

## Source Analysis: Primary Source Document 7

Ibn Rushd on whether faith and reason can always be reconciled

### Contextualizing

Ibn Rushd, known in the West as “Averroës,” was also known there as “The Commentator.” The nickname referred to his commentaries on the works of Aristotle. What do you know about Aristotle? Why do you think Aristotle came to be seen by Muslim scholars and those in the West as a great authority on nature and on scientific subjects?

### Interpreting meanings

Ibn Rushd is determined in this passage to make clear that philosophy’s search for knowledge of the creation is not just for knowledge of the creation alone. What did he mean by “creation,” and what is the ultimate purpose in seeking knowledge about it?

In this passage, Ibn Rushd quotes various verses from the Qur’an. Why do you think he felt such a strong need to cite these passages?

## Source Analysis: Primary Source Document 8

Peter Abelard on the need for questioning conflicting authorities

### Contextualizing

Abelard was a pioneer of what is known as medieval “scholasticism” in Europe. What do you know about scholasticism?

### Interpreting meanings

Scholasticism has been defined as a learning method that emphasizes “dialectical reasoning to resolve contradictions.” Explain what you think this means and how Abelard’s statement here illustrates the scholastic method.

Like Ibn Rushd, Abelard here seeks to combine the idea of using reason to reach truth while also obeying the “authority” of the sacred texts. What parts of this passage best show this?

Do you think Ibn Rushd would entirely agree with what Abelard says about pitting one authority against another in order to force students to ask their own questions? Explain your answer.

## Source Analysis: Primary Source Document 9

Adelard of Bath on the rationality of the natural universe

### Interpreting meanings

Notice the way Adelard of Bath states that he takes “nothing away from God,” but that the “natural order does not exist confusedly and without rational arrangement.” Why do you think he expresses it this way? Why might some see him as taking something away from God?

### Corroborating sources

Does Adelard of Bath go further than Ibn Rushd in questioning “authority” as evidence for philosophical inquiry? Why or why not?

Adelard of Bath discussed the role of traditional authority in the discipline of philosophy, while Peter Abelard’s *Sic et Non* was a sort of workbook for students of theology. How might the differences between these two disciplines account for disagreement as to the role of “authority” as evidence?

## Source Analysis: Primary Source Document 10

Al-Ghazali, claiming philosophers are unreliable in understanding God's power

### Interpreting meanings

Al-Ghazali here makes a clear distinction between philosophers on the one hand, and religious authorities on the other. How is this suggested by his language in passage A?

What point is he making about the philosophers by comparing mathematical knowledge to their “metaphysical” knowledge?

In passage B, al-Ghazali is making a point about laws of cause-and-effect in nature. In your own words, what is his point?

### Point of view

Some have seen in al-Ghazali's views a perspective critical of the use of reason, an attitude that would not encourage the further development of scientific understanding. Others see a healthy skepticism about metaphysical speculation that goes beyond evidence; such skepticism, they say, may in fact help foster a scientific spirit of inquiry. With which view do you agree more? Why?

## Part 3: Analyzing the Secondary Sources

**Note to the teacher:** This next section includes passages from two secondary source accounts dealing with Christian–Muslim encounters in the medieval era, along with two activities on these sources. We suggest you first discuss the brief comment “Analyzing Secondary Sources” just above the first of the two secondary sources. Discuss the four criteria the first activity asks students to use in analyzing each secondary source. These criteria focus students on the nature of historical accounts as 1) problem-centered, 2) based on evidence, 3) influenced by point of view and not purely neutral, and 4) tentative or aware of alternative explanations.

Specifically, this section includes the following:

- **Two secondary source passages**

Give copies of these passages to students to read, either in class or as homework. The two passages are from *The House of Wisdom: How the Arabs Transformed Western Civilization*, by Jonathan Lyons (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2009), p. 4, and from *The Rise of Early Modern Science: Islam, China, and the West*, by Toby E. Huff (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 189.

- **Two student activities**

Activity 1

Students analyze the two passages, taking notes on the following questions:

- How clearly does the account focus on a problem or question?
- Does it reveal a position or express a point of view?
- How well does it base its case on primary source evidence?
- How aware is it of alternative explanations or points of view?

Activity 2

In pairs, students select two of the primary sources for the lesson that best support each author’s claims in the secondary source passages. Students discuss their choices with the class.

## The Secondary Sources for the Lesson

### Analyzing Secondary Sources

Historians write secondary source accounts of the past after studying primary source documents like the ones you have studied on Muslim–Christian interaction between 700 and 1300. However, they normally select documents from among a great many others, and they stress some aspects of the story but not others. In doing this, historians are guided by the questions they ask about the topic. Their selection of sources and their focus are also influenced by their own aims, bias, or point of view. No account of the past is perfectly neutral. In reading a secondary source, you should pay attention to what it includes, what it leaves out, what conclusions it reaches, and how aware it is of alternative interpretations.

\* \* \* \*

### Secondary Source 1

**Information on the source:** The passage in the box below is an excerpt from *The House of Wisdom: How the Arabs Transformed Western Civilization*, by Jonathan Lyons (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2009), p. 4.

The arrival of Arab science and philosophy, the legacy of the pioneering Adelard and of those who hurried to follow his example, transmuted the backward West into a scientific and technological superpower. Like the elusive ‘elixir’ — from the alchemists’ *al-iksir* — for changing base metal into gold, Arab science altered medieval Christendom beyond recognition. For the first time in centuries, Europe’s eyes opened to the world around it. This encounter with Arab science even restored the art of telling time, lost to the western Christians of the

early Middle Ages. Without accurate control over clock and calendar, the rational organization of society was unthinkable. And so was the development of science, technology, and industry, as well as the liberation of man from the thrall of nature. Arab science and philosophy helped rescue the Christian world from ignorance and made possible the very idea of the West.

Yet how many among us today stop to acknowledge our enormous debt to the Arabs, let alone endeavor to repay it?

## The Secondary Sources for the Lesson

### Secondary Source 2

**Information on the source:** The passage in the box below is an excerpt from *The Rise of Early Modern Science: Islam, China, and the West*, by Toby E. Huff (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 189.

The European Medievals, fully cognizant of their intentions, created legally autonomous, self-governing institutions of higher learning, and then they imported into them a methodologically powerful and . . . rich cosmology which directly challenged and contradicted many aspects of the traditional Christian worldview. Instead of holding these “foreign sciences” at arms length (as the Middle Easterners did), they made them an integral part of the official and public discourse of higher learning. By importing, indeed ingesting, the corpus of the “new Aristotle” and its methods of argumentation and inquiry, the intellectual elite of medieval

Europe established an impersonal intellectual agenda whose ultimate purpose was to describe and explain the world in its entirety in terms of causal processes and mechanisms . . . By incorporating the natural books of Aristotle in the curriculum of the medieval universities, a disinterested agenda of naturalistic inquiry had been institutionalized. It was institutionalized as a curriculum, a course of study, and it was this curriculum that remained in place for the next four hundred years in the European universities. It thereby laid the foundation for the breakthrough to modern science.

## The Secondary Sources: Activity 1

In this exercise, you read two short passages from much longer secondary sources dealing with Christian–Muslim interaction between 700 and 1300. For each secondary source, take notes on the following four questions (you may want to underline phrases or sentences in the passages that you think back up your notes):

1. How clearly does this account focus on a problem or question. What do you think that problem or question is? Sum it up in your own words here.

*The House of Wisdom*, Lyons

*The Rise of Early Modern Science*, Huff

2. Does the secondary source take a position or express a point of view about Christian–Muslim encounters between 700 and 1300? If so, briefly state that point of view or quote an example of it.

*The House of Wisdom*, Lyons

*The Rise of Early Modern Science*, Huff

3. How well does the secondary source seem to base its case on primary source evidence? Take notes about any specific examples, if you can identify them.

*The House of Wisdom*, Lyons

*The Rise of Early Modern Science*, Huff

4. Does the secondary source seem aware of alternative explanations or points of view about this topic? Underline points in the passage where you see this.

*The House of Wisdom*, Lyons

*The Rise of Early Modern Science*, Huff

**In pairs, discuss your notes for this activity.**



## Part 4: Follow-Up Options

**Note to the teacher:** At this point, students have completed the key tasks of *The Historian's Apprentice* program. They have examined their own prior understandings and acquired background knowledge on the topic. They have analyzed and debated a set of primary sources. They have considered secondary source accounts of the topic. This section includes two suggested follow-up activities. Neither of these is a required part of the lesson. They do not have to be undertaken right away. However, we do strongly recommend that you find some way to do what these options provide for. They give students a way to write or debate in order to express their ideas and arrive at their own interpretations of the topic.

Two suggested follow-up activities are included here:

- **Document-Based Questions**

Four document-based questions are provided. Choose one and follow the guidelines provided for writing a typical DBQ essay.

- **A Structured Debate**

The aim of this debate format is not so much to teach students to win a debate, but to learn to listen and learn, as well as speak up and defend a position. A more interactive and more civil debating process is the goal.

## Document-Based Questions

Document-Based Questions (DBQs) are essay questions you must answer by using your own background knowledge and a set of primary sources on that topic. Below are four DBQs on Muslim–Christian encounters in the medieval era. Use the sources for this lesson and everything you have learned from it to write a short essay answer to one of these questions.

### Suggested DBQs

**Using the documents for this lesson, describe the mutual misunderstandings that seem to have fueled hostility between the West and Islam from 700 to 1300 CE.**

**“The arrival of Arab science and philosophy...transmuted the backward West into a scientific and technological superpower.” Assess the validity of this statement (that is, explain why you do or do not agree with it).**

**“Europeans often claim ancient Greek learning to be an integral part of their culture and institutions. But Muslim societies can make that same claim about themselves in an equally valid way.” Assess the validity of this statement (that is, explain why you do or do not agree with it).**

**Islam and Christianity share some of the same scriptural heritage, and both are similar monotheistic religions. How has this influenced the ways they have interacted, conflicted, and cooperated?**

### Suggested Guidelines for Writing a DBQ Essay

- **Planning and thinking through the essay**

Consider the question carefully. Think about how to answer it so as to address each part of it. Do not ignore any detail in the question. Pay attention to the question’s form (cause-and-effect, compare-and-contrast, assess the validity, etc.). This form will often give you clues as to how best to organize each part of your essay.

- **Thesis statement and introductory paragraph**

The thesis statement is a clear statement of what you hope to prove in your essay. It must address *all* parts of the DBQ, it must make a claim you can back up with the sources, and it should be specific enough to help you organize the rest of your essay.

- **Using evidence effectively**

Use the notes on your “Source Analysis” activity sheets to organize your thoughts about these primary sources. In citing a source, use it to support key points or illustrate major themes. Do not simply list a source in order to get it into the essay somehow. If any sources do *not* support your thesis, you should still try to use them. Your essay may be more convincing if you qualify your thesis so as to account for these other sources.

- **Linking ideas explicitly**

After your introduction, your internal paragraphs should make your argument in a logical or clear way. Each paragraph should be built around one key supporting idea and details that back up that idea. Use transition phrase such as “before,” “next,” “then,” or “on the one hand . . . , but on the other hand” to help readers follow the thread of your argument.

- **Wrapping it up**

Don’t add new details about sources in your final paragraph. State a conclusion that refers back to your thesis statement by showing how the evidence has backed it up. If possible, look for nice turns of phrase to end on a dramatic note.

## A Structured Debate

**Small-group activity:** Using a version of the Structured Academic Controversy model, debate alternate interpretations of this lesson's topic. The goal of this method is not so much to win a debate as to learn to collaborate in clarifying your interpretations to one another. In doing this, your goal should be to see that it is possibly for reasonable people to hold differing views, even when finding the "one right answer" is not possible.

Use all their notes from previous activities in this lesson. Here are the rules for this debate.

1. Organize a team of four or six students. Choose a debate topic based on the lesson *Christian–Muslim Encounters in the Middle Ages*.

(You may wish to use one of the DBQs suggested for the "Document-Based Questions" activity for this lesson. Or you may want to define the debate topic in a different way.)

2. Split your team into two subgroups. Each subgroup should study the materials for this lesson and rehearse its case. One subgroup then present its case to the other. That other subgroup must repeat the case back to the first subgroup's satisfaction.
3. Then the two subgroups switch roles and repeat step 2.
4. Your team either reaches a consensus which it explains to the entire class, or it explains where the key differences between the subgroups lie.

## Answers to “Source Analysis” Activities

### Source Analysis: Document 1

*Interpreting meanings:* Qur’an for Islam; Old and New Testaments for Christianity

*Contextualizing:* Answers to both of these questions will probably vary and should be discussed. It is possible that important theological differences between the two faiths led believers to overlook their common monotheism and make exclusive claims about the truth.

### Source Analysis: Document 2

*Contextualizing:* Unified by Islam, Arab armies created a new Muslim empire extending across all of northern Africa and into Spain within a century, by the time of the battle. The decline of the Roman Empire made it possible for Muslim armies to enter areas with little defense against new conquerors.

*Interpreting meanings:* Gibbon is dramatizing the reach of Arab armies and the ease, as he sees it, with which they might have conquered all of Europe.

Perhaps because European confrontations with Muslim societies were still taking place, yet Muslim conquest never reached as far into western Europe, etc.; perhaps because Europe’s economic and military success prompted historians and thinkers to discuss world events in terms of European culture’s superiority

### Source Analysis: Document 3

*Contextualizing:* The Muslim empire’s center of power was in Syria and Iraq and it reached as far east from there as it did west to Spain.

*Interpreting meanings:* That he speaks of it only as “another excursion” or of the aims of these attacks simply as “booty,” etc.

Answers will vary and may depend on which side’s point of view is being considered.

*Point of view:* Differences due to seeing it from a Muslim or a European Christian viewpoint; also differences in time of writing, etc.

### Source Analysis: Document 4

*Contextualizing:* Europe was still very rural and had for a long time been at a much lower technical and scientific level than the Muslim world.

He may have thought that Muslim culture was superior to other cultures, and that it benefited from the exchange of goods and ideas by being geographically central, unlike the far-off lands of northern Europe.

*Interpreting meanings:* He seems to think the reduced sunlight and colder climate affects their character in several ways.

*Point of view:* Answers will vary but should deal with the colorful language Sa’id al-Andalusi uses.

### Source Analysis: Document 5

*Contextualizing:* Growing wealth from trade, increasing population, more unified feudal states, etc.

Sieges of this sort were common on all sides, but as to how ferocious this was compared to others, this depends partly on which accounts can be trusted most.

*Point of view:* Answers may vary, but d’Aguiliers does seem to want to exaggerate the slaughter, of which he might be proud given his view of Muslims as evil.

Answers to this will vary and should be discussed.

**Source Analysis: Document 6**

*Contextualizing:* Saladin was ruler of Egypt, but the caliph was technically the leader of all Muslims living in various lands.

Venice, Pisa, and Genoa were trading city-states growing in wealth and power in the Mediterranean.

*Interpreting meanings:* He feels they are weak in that he can control them, but he acknowledges both their ferocity and the high quality of their goods, including their weapons.

**Source Analysis: Document 7**

*Contextualizing:* Answers will vary. Aristotle's works cover almost all aspects of the natural world as it was then known, and offered what seemed a coherent approach to reasoned understanding of the world.

*Interpreting meanings:* By "creation," Ibn Rushd means the entire natural order created by God. Knowing it is above all a way to know God better.

He quotes from the Qur'an to establish that his views are consistent with accepted religious teachings. This may show he is anxious to make sure no one accuses him of putting reason ahead of religion.

**Source Analysis: Document 8**

*Contextualizing:* Answers should be along the lines of the definition provided in the next question.

*Interpreting meanings:* Seeking to use reason to reconcile "discrepancies," or disagreements, in various views of a topic; Abelard explains this especially in the first two sentences of this passage.

The parts of the passage that describe Christ as someone ready to listen to questions suggests Abelard's effort to prove that his method also fits with revealed religion.

Answers here will vary and should be discussed. The answer is not clear.

**Source Analysis: Document 9**

*Interpreting meanings:* Perhaps some might think he is limiting God's power by requiring his creations to be lawful and reasonable.

*Corroborating sources:* Answers to both of these questions will vary and should be discussed. Some students may see Adelard going further with his statement that "authority alone" can't make a philosopher believe something.

**Source Analysis: Document 10**

*Interpreting meanings:* He clearly marks off a "we" and a "they" in distancing himself from the philosophers.

He sees mathematical knowledge as certain but dismisses claims that "metaphysical," or philosophical, knowledge has this certainty.

Answers will vary, but al-Ghazali is insisting that God could ignore cause-and-effect laws if he wished to, since he must be seen as able to do anything.

*Point of view:* Answers will vary. Al-Ghazali seems to insist that an all-powerful God cannot be limited by the kind of natural order he creates; however, al-Ghazali also criticizes philosophical speculation that goes beyond what evidence and real knowledge would accept.

## Evaluating Secondary Sources: Activity 1

**These are not definitive answers to the questions. They are suggested points to look for in student responses.**

1. How clearly does this account focus on a problem or question. What do you think that problem or question is? Sum it up in your own words here?

*Lyons* in *The House of Wisdom* focuses on one single question—the question of how much the West owes to Muslim civilization for the learning and technology that enabled European states to shift from an agrarian society in the Middle Ages to a more wealthy, industrial, and innovative position on the world stage.

*Huff* in *The Rise of Early Modern Science* seeks to understand what Europeans did with the rich intellectual legacy they absorbed from Muslim civilization in the 12th and 13th centuries. His focus is not so much on the fact that Europe imported Arab science and Arabic translations of ancient Greek and Indian works on nature, mathematics, medicine, and philosophy. He is interested more in what the Europeans did with that knowledge and how they organized themselves to make use of it.

2. Does the secondary source take a position or express a point of view about the interactions of Muslims and Europeans, 700–1300? If so, briefly state that point of view or quote an example of it.

*Lyons* praises Arabic science and philosophy and basically gives it most or all of the credit for bringing the medieval West out of its backwardness—or as he puts it, Arab learning helped “rescue the Christian world from ignorance and made possible the very idea of the West.”

*Huff* acknowledges elsewhere in his book the enormous debt the West owed Muslim civilization for the ancient learning that Arabs preserved and to which they added a great deal. Above all, the Arabic translations of Aristotle were introduced in Western Europe in the 12th and 13th centuries and became the basis for its systems of higher education. However, Huff’s main claim is that the West’s institutional settings—independent universities—enabled it to go further with Aristotle and other forms of science than had other civilizations and in the end launch the scientific revolution of the modern era.

3. How well does the secondary source seem to base its case on primary source evidence? Take notes about any specific examples, if you can identify them.

Neither Lyons nor Huff make any specific reference to primary sources in these brief passages.

4. Does the secondary source seem aware of alternative explanations or points of view about this topic? Underline points in the passage where you see this.

Neither Lyons nor Huff make specific references to alternative explanations, though Lyons takes to task people he clearly feels are unaware of what the West owes Muslim civilization and who must have other theories about the West’s development.

