

## DOCUMENTS

Interpreting Alternative Viewpoints  
in Primary Source Documents

# Islam's Impact

*Early Islamic armies gained a vast territory.  
What impact did they have on the ancient cultures  
they conquered?*



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## *Debating* the DOCUMENTS

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in Primary Source Documents

# Islam's Impact

The 2017 World History Course and Exam Description of the College Board Advanced Placement Program\* lists five themes that it urges teachers to use in organizing their teaching. Each World History *Debating the Documents* booklet focuses on one or two of these five themes.

### *The Five Themes*

- 1. Interaction between humans and the environment.** (demography and disease; migration; patterns of settlement; technology)
- 2. Development and interaction of cultures.** (religions; belief systems, philosophies, and ideologies; science and technology; the arts and architecture)
- 3. State-building, expansion, and conflict.** (political structures and forms of governance; empires; nations and nationalism; revolts and revolutions; regional, transregional, and global structures and organizations)
- 4. Creation, expansion, and interaction of economic systems.** (agricultural and pastoral production; trade and commerce; labor systems; industrialization; capitalism and socialism)
- 5. Development and transformation of social structures.** (gender roles and relations; family and kinship; racial and ethnic constructions; social and economic classes)

### *This Booklet's Main Theme:*

- 3** State-building, expansion, and conflict.

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# Teacher Introduction

## ★ *Using Primary Sources*

Primary sources are called “primary” because they are first-hand records of a past era or historical event. They are the raw materials, or the evidence, on which historians base their “secondary” accounts of the past.

A rapidly growing number of history teachers today are using primary sources. Why? Perhaps it's because primary sources give students a better sense of what history is and what historians do. Such sources also help students see the past from a variety of viewpoints. Moreover, primary sources make history vivid and bring it to life.

However, primary sources are not easy to use. They can be confusing. They can be biased. They rarely all agree. Primary sources must be interpreted and set in context. To do this, students need historical background knowledge. *Debating the Documents* helps students handle such challenges by giving them a useful framework for analyzing sources that conflict with one another.



*“Multiple,  
conflicting  
perspectives are  
among the truths  
of history.  
No single  
objective or  
universal account  
could ever put an  
end to this endless  
creative dialogue  
within and  
between the past  
and the present.”*

From the 2011 Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct of the Council of the American Historical Association.

## INTRODUCTION

### ★ *The Debating the Documents Series*

Each *Debating the Documents* booklet includes the same sequence of reproducible worksheets. If students use several booklets over time, they will get regular practice at interpreting and comparing conflicting sources. In this way, they can learn the skills and habits needed to get the most out of primary sources.

#### **Each *Debating the Documents* Booklet Includes**

- **Suggestions for the Student and an Introductory Essay.** The student gets instructions and a one-page essay providing background on the booklet's topic. A time line on the topic is also included.
- **Two Groups of Contrasting Primary Source Documents.** In most of the booklets, students get one pair of visual sources and one pair of written sources. In some cases, more than two are provided for each. Background is provided on each source. *Within each group, the sources clash in a very clear way.* (The sources are not always exact opposites, but they do always differ in some obvious way.)
- **Three Worksheets for Each Document Group.** Students use the first two worksheets to take notes on the sources. The third worksheet asks which source the student thinks would be most useful to a historian.
- **One DBQ.** On page 20, a document-based question (DBQ) asks students to write an effective essay using all of the booklet's primary sources.

### ★ *How to Use This Booklet*

#### **1. Have students read “Suggestions for the Student” and the Introductory Essay.**

Give them copies of pages 5–7. Ask them to read the instructions and then read the introductory essay on the topic. The time line gives them additional information on that topic. This reading could be done in class or as a homework assignment.

#### **2. Have students do the worksheets.**

Make copies of the worksheets and the pages with the sources. Ask students to study the background information on each source and the source itself. Then have them take notes on the sources using the worksheets. If students have access to a computer, have them review the primary sources digitally.

NOTE: If you are using these materials with an AP world history class, an honors class, or some other group of advanced and/or more knowledgeable students, you may want to make more written sources available to them on this topic. Do a basic Internet search for sources that provide additional perspectives and then add to the sources provided here.

### 3. “Debate the documents” as a class.

Have students use their worksheet notes to debate the primary source documents as a class. Urge students to follow these ground rules:

- Use your worksheets as a guide for the discussion or debate.
- Try to reach agreement about the main ideas and the significance of each primary source document.
- Look for points of agreement as well as disagreement between the primary sources.
- Listen closely to all points of view about each primary source.
- Focus on the usefulness of each source to the historian, not merely on whether you agree or disagree with that source’s point of view.

### 4. Have students do the final DBQ.

A DBQ is an essay question about a set of primary source documents. To answer the DBQ, students write essays using evidence from the sources and their own background knowledge of the historical era. (See the next page for a DBQ scoring guide to use in evaluating these essays.)

The DBQ assignment on page 20 includes guidelines for writing a DBQ essay. Here are some additional points to make with students about preparing to write this kind of essay.

#### **The DBQ for this Booklet (see page 20):**

Did Islam’s most lasting and important impacts come about through trade and peaceful interaction, or did they come mainly through war and conquest?

- Analyze the question carefully.
- Use your background knowledge to set sources in their historical context.
- Question and interpret sources actively. Do not accept them at face value.
- Use sources meaningfully to support your essay’s thesis.
- Pay attention to the overall organization of your essay.

## INTRODUCTION

### ★ *Complete DBQ Scoring Guide*

Use this guide in evaluating the DBQ for this booklet. Use this scoring guide with students who are already familiar with using primary sources and writing DBQ essays.

#### **Excellent Essay**

- Offers a clear answer or thesis explicitly addressing all aspects of the essay question.
- Does a careful job of interpreting many or most of the documents and relating them clearly to the thesis and the DBQ. Deals with conflicting documents effectively.
- Uses details and examples effectively to support the thesis and other main ideas. Explains the significance of those details and examples well.
- Uses background knowledge and the documents in a balanced way.
- Is well written; clear transitions make the essay easy to follow from point to point. Only a few minor writing errors or errors of fact.

#### **Good Essay**

- Offers a reasonable thesis addressing the essential points of the essay question.
- Adequately interprets at least some of the documents and relates them to the thesis and the DBQ.
- Usually relates details and examples meaningfully to the thesis or other main ideas.
- Includes some relevant background knowledge.
- May have some writing errors or errors of fact, as long as these do not invalidate the essay's overall argument or point of view.

#### **Fair Essay**

- Offers at least a partly developed thesis addressing the essay question.
- Adequately interprets at least a few of the documents.
- Relates only a few of the details and examples to the thesis or other main ideas.
- Includes some background knowledge.
- Has several writing errors or errors of fact that make it harder to understand the essay's overall argument or point of view.

#### **Poor Essay**

- Offers no clear thesis or answer addressing the DBQ.
- Uses few documents effectively other than referring to them in “laundry list” style, with no meaningful relationship to a thesis or any main point.
- Uses details and examples unrelated to the thesis or other main ideas. Does not explain the significance of these details and examples.
- Is not clearly written, with some major writing errors or errors of fact.

# Suggestions to the Student

## ★ *Using Primary Sources*

A primary source is any record of evidence from the past. Many things are primary sources: letters, diary entries, official documents, photos, cartoons, wills, maps, charts, etc. They are called “primary” because they are first-hand records of a past event or time period. This *Debating the Documents* lesson is based on two groups of primary source documents. Within each group, the sources conflict with one another. That is, they express different or even opposed points of view. You need to decide which source is more reliable, more useful, or more typical of the time period. This is what historians do all the time. Usually, you will be able to learn something about the past from each source, even when the sources clash with one another in dramatic ways.

## ★ *How to Use This Booklet*

### 1. **Read the one-page introductory essay.**

This gives you background information that will help you analyze the primary source documents and do the exercises for this *Debating the Documents* lesson. The time line gives you additional information you will find helpful.



### 2. **Study the primary source documents for this lesson.**

For this lesson, you get two groups of sources. The sources within each group conflict with one another. Some of these sources are visuals, others are written sources. With visual sources, pay attention not only to the image’s “content” (its subject matter) but also to its artistic style, shading, composition, camera angle, symbols, and other features that add to the image’s meaning. With written sources, notice the writing style, bias, even what the source leaves out or does not talk about. Think about each source’s author, that author’s reasons for writing, and the likely audience for the source. These considerations give you clues as to the source’s historical value.

### 3. **Use the worksheets to analyze each group of primary source documents.**

For each group of sources, you get three worksheets. Use the “Study the Document” worksheets to take notes on each source. Use the “Comparing the Documents” worksheet to decide which of the sources would be most useful to a historian.

### 4. **As a class, debate the documents.**

Use your worksheet notes to help you take part in this debate.

### 5. **Do the final DBQ.**

“DBQ” means “document-based question.” A DBQ is a question along with several primary source documents. To answer the DBQ, write an essay using evidence from the documents and your own background history knowledge.



## *Islam's Impact*

By the sixth century, a complex network of overland and ocean trade routes already linked the Byzantine and Persian empires with civilizations to the east and west. Merchant caravans passed through Arabia regularly. Tribal gods may have begun to seem less powerful and convincing to many Arabs as they learned of the monotheistic beliefs of Byzantine Christians, Zoroastrians from Persia, and Jews throughout the region.

Early in the seventh century CE, a new monotheistic religion, Islam, arose on the Arabian peninsula. Islam was founded by a man named Muhammad who lived from around 571 to 632 CE. According to traditional Muslim accounts, the angel Gabriel appeared to Muhammad in his fortieth year and told him to “recite,” or repeat, words that came directly from God. Gabriel’s revelations make up Islam’s holy book, the Qur’an. The Qur’an was revealed in Arabic. As Islam spread, Arabic language and culture would spread with it. The Qur’an refers often to the teachings of Jews and Christians. But it is meant to replace, not simply add to, both religions.

Unlike Moses or Jesus, however, Islam’s Prophet Muhammad was as much a political and military leader as a religious prophet. And under his leadership, the Arabs united and launched an age of imperial expansion second to none. The Arab armies were made up of nomadic warriors used to the desert. They fought effectively on camel and horseback, and their new faith helped motivate them. Armies alone, however, could not have won an empire for the Arabs. The Byzantine and Persian empires were weak after centuries of warfare with each other. And many heretical Christian sects were unhappy about mistreatment by their Byzantine rulers. For these and other reasons, the Arab conquerors were able to move swiftly to create one of the world’s greatest empires.

By the middle of the eighth century, they had united the lands of ancient Egypt and

Mesopotamia, along with large parts of the former Roman Empire. 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 Islamic civilization began to thrive. To understand Islam’s impact on these regions, you first have to understand Islam itself.

Any effort to do this must begin with the Qur’an. It is Islam’s holy book. The opening *sura*, or chapter, of the Qur’an sums up Islam’s central ideas: a belief in a single, all-powerful god who demands that we serve him by living a moral life; a humanity seeking the right way to live but in need of guidance to avoid sin and error; a time of judgment after death when God will show mercy to believers but anger to those who have failed to live good lives.

From Spain to the borders of India, the vast Islamic empire was ruled by leaders called caliphs. The political power of the caliphs faded after the ninth century, and military rulers came to control many smaller realms. Yet Islam and the Arabic language still united the entire region in belief, customs, and culture. The eighth to the thirteenth centuries saw a great flowering of learning and the arts in the Islamic world. Christian and Muslim scholars began translating Greek classics of philosophy and science. They also adopted numerals from India (known now as “arabic”) and further developed many techniques and devices they gained from others. Muslim, Jewish, and other merchants introduced many goods from the east to the Islamic world, such as silk, paper, cotton, or sugar. This openness to new ideas led to efforts to adapt Islam to the ideas of many other cultures.

As Islam spread, what sort of impact did it have on the various cultures that had already long existed on the lands it came to dominate? That is the question the sources for this lesson can help you discuss and begin to answer.

# Islam's Impact Time Line

610–632

In 610 CE, Muhammad begins to have visions in which the angel Gabriel instructs him in the Islamic faith, a strict form of monotheism. In 622, Muhammad and his followers flee the Arabian city of Mecca to Yathrib, later named Medina. This is the *Hijra*, and the Islamic calendar is dated from this year. Muhammad dies in 632. By then, he has conquered or persuaded most of Arabia to unit in a single Islamic community.

632–661

A series of Muhammad's companions lead the Islamic community as "caliphs" (successors or deputies to Muhammad). Arab armies conquer Egypt and parts of North Africa, as well as Syria, Palestine, and other parts of the Byzantine and Persian Empires. The Qur'an may have been written down for the first time in the 650s.

661–750

After a time of strife, the Islamic realm is reunited under the Umayyad Dynasty based in Damascus. Partisans of Muhammad's son-in-law Ali oppose the Umayyads and soon develop into the Shi'a sect. Arabic becomes the official language of the Islamic lands. The Islamic empire is extended to the Indus River to the east and Spain to the west. Small numbers of the conquered populations convert to Islam. "Peoples of the book" (Christians and Jews) are subjected to restrictions but allowed to practice their faiths.

750–1000

The Abbasid Dynasty takes over and establishes a new capital city, Baghdad. Religion and culture flourish. A center is established in Baghdad to translate ancient Greek texts into Arabic. "Hadith" (sayings of the Prophet) are collected, written down, and evaluated. A variety of forms of Islam develop—mystical Sufism, more rational philosophical writings, new groups of Shi'ites, etc. The Abbasid caliphs remain rulers of all Islam in name, but after about 900 CE, other Islamic rulers arise in certain regions, including Spain and Egypt.

1000–1258

Ibn Sina (Avicenna) writes on medicine, Aristotle and other philosophers, and much more. The Christian "Reconquista" begins to take back Muslim-held lands in Spain. In 1055, the Seljuk Turks take over Baghdad and defeat the Byzantines at the Battle of Manzikert in 1071. In 1099, Christian Crusaders conquer Jerusalem and establish several Crusader states. Ibn Rushd (Averroës), a philosopher in Cordoba, writes commentaries on Aristotle. In 1174, Saladin declares himself sultan of Egypt and Syria. He drives the Crusaders from Jerusalem in 1187. By his death in 1193, most Crusader states have been overthrown. In 1258, the Mongols sack Baghdad and kill the caliph. This ends the Abbasid caliphate.

1258–1453

The Mongol rulers soon convert to Islam, but Mongol rule still lasts only about a century. In the meantime, a weakened Byzantine Empire faces constant threats from Turkish warriors, especially the Ottomans who begin their rise to power in the late thirteenth century. In India, several Muslim dynasties known together as the Delhi Sultanate arise. Meanwhile, the Ottomans invade the Balkans and finally besiege and conquer Constantinople itself, putting an end to the Byzantine Empire.

## DOCUMENTS 1 &amp; 2

## Visual Primary Source Documents 1 &amp; 2

Document 1



The Granger Collection, New York

Document 2



The Granger Collection, New York

## Information on Documents 1 &amp; 2

**Document 1** is a thirteenth-century illustration of Spanish and Muslim traders at Acre. Acre is on the shores of what is now northern Israel. Arabs captured it in 638 CE. Five centuries later in 1104, Christian Crusaders seized it. Muslim forces took it back for good in 1291, basically ending the Crusades. Acre was also always a trading port where Muslim merchants exchanged goods with many others, including the Crusaders themselves. Merchants were central to Islamic culture from the start. Trade was a major way in which Islam's impact was felt.

**Document 2** is part of the *Catalan Atlas*, a 1375 map created by Abraham Cresques, a Catalanian Jew. It shows a famous African king named Mansa Musa on his throne holding a gold nugget. His realm, Mali, was famous for its gold. It rose to wealth as a crossroads in a trading network across the Sahara. Muslim merchants carried not only goods but ideas. Mansa Musa himself was a Muslim who made a famous pilgrimage to Mecca. Mansa Musa, the *Catalan Atlas* and the trade network all illustrate the interaction of cultures that the rise of Islam helped foster.