HISTORICAL DOCUMENTS
(1000–1500 CE)
FEATURED IN

Teaching World History Thematically

Essential Questions and Document-Based Lessons to Connect Past and Present

Rosalie Metro
**Event:** Battle of Hastings, 1066

**Document:** Bayeux Tapestry, 11th century, female needleworkers

**Detail of the Bayeux Tapestry**

**Event:** Angkor Wat built, 12th century

**Documents:**

**Angkor Wat Temple**

![Angkor Wat Temple](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Angkor_Wat.jpg)


**Bas Relief of Suryavarman II, unknown artisan, 12th century**

![Bas Relief of Suryavarman II](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Suryavarman_II_Angkor_Wat_0869.jpg)

**Event:** Second Crusade, 1147–1149

**Document:** Letter on the Second Crusade, Bernard de Clairvaux, 1147

To the Lords and very dear Fathers, the Archbishops and Bishops, with the whole clergy and the faithful people of Eastern France and Bavaria: Bernard, called Abbot of Clairvaux, desires that they may abound in the spirit of strength.

I write to you with respect to a matter which concerns the service of Christ, in whom is our salvation. [. . .]

Behold, brethren, now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation. The earth also is moved and has trembled, because the God of heaven has begun to destroy the land which is his: his, I say, in which the word of the Father was taught, and where he dwelt for more than thirty years, a man among men; his, for he enlightened it with miracles, he consecrated it with his own blood; in it appeared the first fruits of his resurrection. And now, for our sins, the enemies of Cross have raised blaspheming heads, ravaging with the edge of the sword the land of promise. For they are almost on the point, if there be not One to withstand them, of bursting into the very city of the living God, of the holy places of the spotless Lamb with purple blood. Alas! they rage against the very shrine of the Christian faith with blasphemous mouths, and would enter and trample down the very couch on which, for us, our Life lay down to sleep in death.

What are you going to do then, O brave men? What are you doing, O servants of the Cross? Will you give what is holy to the dogs, and cast your pearls before swine? How many sinners there, confessing their sins with tears, have obtained pardon, after the defilement of the heathen had been purged by the swords of your fathers! [. . .]

Since, therefore, your land is fruitful in brave men, and is known to be full of robust youth, since your praise is in the whole world, and the fame of your valor has filled the entire earth, gird up your loins manfully, and take up arms in zeal for the Christian name. Let not your former warlike skill cease, but only that spirit of hatred in which you are accustomed to strike down and kill one another and in turn be overcome yourselves. [. . .]

But now, O brave knight, now, O warlike hero, here is a battle you may fight without danger, where it is glory to conquer and gain to die. If you are a prudent merchant, if you are a desirer of this world, behold I show you some great bargains; see that you lose them not. Take the sign of the cross and you shall gain pardon for every sin that you confess with a contrite heart.

**Event:** Ibn Rushd produces commentaries on Aristotle and Plato, 1169–1195

**Document:** Commentary on Plato’s Republic, Ibn Rushd, 1169–1195

It is fit for investigation whether there exist among women natures resembling the natures of each and every class of citizens—and in particular the guardians—or whether women’s natures are distinguished from men’s natures. If the former is the case, then as regards the activities of the city, women would have the very same standing as men in those classes, so that there would be among them warriors, philosophers, rulers, and the rest. But if this is not the case, then women are only fit in the city for activities that men in general are unfit for, as you were to say upbringing, procreation, and the like.

And we say that women, in so far as they are of one kind with men, necessarily share in the end of man. [. . .] We see women sharing arts with men except that they are weaker at it, although most of the women in [some] art may be more diligent than the men, as in the art of weaving, sewing, or other such arts. As for their sharing in the art of war and the rest, why this is made clear from the inhabitants of deserts and the “City of Women.” Similarly, too, since some women are formed with eminence and a praiseworthy disposition, it is not impossible that there be philosophers and rulers among them. [. . .]

The competence of women is unknown, however, in these cities since they are only taken in them for procreation and hence are placed at the service of their husband and confined to procreation, upbringing, and suckling. This nullifies their [other] activities. Since women in these cities are not prepared with respect to any of the human virtues, they frequently resemble plants in these cities. Their being a burden upon the men in these cities is one of the causes of the poverty of these cities. This is because they are to be found there in double the number of men, while not understanding through [their] upbringing any of the necessary actions except for the few actions—like the art of spinning and weaving—that they undertake mostly at a time when they have need of them to make up for their lack of spending [power]. This is all self-evident. This being so—and it is clear from the case of the females that they are to share with the males in war and the rest—it is fitting that, in choosing them, we seek for those very natures that we sought for in men and that they should be trained in the same way through music and gymnastic.

**Event:** Umayyad Caliphate, 661–750

**Document:** The Book of the Maghrib, Ibn Said, 13th c., Andalus

It was not until the arrival of the [Umayyad Caliphate] in Andalus that the fabric of Islam may be said to have rested on a solid foundation. When [Muawiyah I] had conquered the country, when every rebel had submitted to him, when all his opponents had sworn allegiance to him, and his authority had been universally acknowledged, then his importance increased, his ambition spread wider, and both he and his successors displayed the greatest magnificence in their court, and about their persons and retinue, as likewise in the number of officers and great functionaries of the state. . . . It is generally known that the strength and solidity of their empire consisted principally in the policy pursued by these princes, the magnificence and splendor with which they surrounded their court, the reverential awe with which they inspired their subjects, the inexorable rigor with which they chastised every aggression on their rights, the impartiality of their judgments, their anxious solicitude in the observance of the civil law, their regard and attention to the learned, whose opinions they respected and followed, calling them to their sittings and admitting them to their councils, and many other brilliant qualities; . . . for instance, that whenever a judge summoned the [Caliph], his son, or any of his most beloved favorites, to appear in his presence as a witness in a judicial case, whoever was the individual summoned would attend in person—if the [Caliph], out of respect for the law—and if a subject, for fear of incurring his master’s displeasure.

But when this salutary awe and impartial justice had vanished, the decay of their empire began, and it was followed by a complete ruin. . . . This continued until the disastrous times of the civil war, when the surviving members of the royal family hated each other, and when those who had neither the nobility nor the qualities required to honor the [Caliphate] pretended to it and wished for it; when the governors of provinces and the generals of armies declared themselves independent and rose everywhere in their governments . . .

As long as the dynasty of [Umayyad] occupied the throne of [Cordoba], the successors of [Muawiyah I] contrived to inspire their subjects with love of their persons, mixed with reverential awe; this they accomplished by surrounding their courts with splendor, by displaying the greatest magnificence whenever they appeared in public . . . : they continued thus until the times of the civil war, when, having lost the affections of the people, their subjects began to look with an evil eye at their prodigal expense, and the extravagant pomp with which they surrounded their persons. . . . These princes showed also great ostentation . . . ; for instance, whenever a [poet] wanted to extemporize some verses in praise of his sovereign, or any subject wished to address him on particular business, the poet or the petitioner was introduced to the presence of the [Caliph], who sat behind a curtain and spoke without showing himself, the . . . curtain drawer standing all the time by his side to communicate to the party the words or intentions of the [Caliph].


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**Event:** Chingghis Khan proclaims the Mongol Empire, 1206

**Document:** The Mongol Mission, Giovanni di Pian del Carpini, 1247

These men, that is to say the Tartars, are more obedient to their masters than any other men in the world, be they religious or seculars; they show great respect to them nor do they lie lightly to them. They rarely or never contend with each other in word, and in action never. Fights, brawls, wounding, murder are never met with among them. Nor are robbers and thieves who steal on a large scale found there; consequently their dwellings and the carts in which they keep their valuables are not secured by bolts and bars. If any animals are lost, whoever comes across them either leaves them alone or takes them to men appointed for this purpose; the owners of the animals apply for them to these men and they get them back without any difficulty. They show considerable respect to each other and are very friendly together, and they willingly share their food with each other, although there is little enough of it. [. . .] No one scorns another but helps him and promotes his good as far as circumstances permit.

Now that the good characteristics of the Tartars have been described, it is time for something to be said about their bad. They are most arrogant to other people and look down on all, indeed they consider them as naught, be they of high rank or low born.

For at the Emperor’s court we saw Jerozlaus, a man of noble birth, a mighty duke of Russia, also the son of the King and Queen of Georgia, and many important sultans; the chief also of the Solangi received no fitting honor from them, but the Tartars who were assigned to them, however base-born they were, went ahead of them and always had the first and highest place; indeed they were often obliged to sit behind their backs. [. . .]

They have neither bread nor herbs nor vegetables nor anything else, nothing but meat, of which, however, they eat so little that other people would scarcely be able to exist on it. They make their hands very dirty with the grease of meat, but when they eat they wipe them on their leggings or the grass or some such thing. It is the custom for the more respectable among them to have small bits of cloth with which they wipe their hands when they eat meat. One of them cuts the morsels and another takes them on the point of a knife and offers them to each, to some more, to some less, according to whether they wish to show them greater or les honor. [. . .] In winter, moreover, unless they are wealthy, they do not have mare’s milk.

**Event:** Mali Empire, c. 1230–1670

**Document:** Travels in Africa and Asia, Ibn Battuta, 1354

When I decided to make the journey to [Mali], which is reached in twenty-four days from Iwalatan if the traveler pushes on rapidly, I hired a guide from the Massufa—for there is no necessity to travel in a company on account of the safety of that road—and set out with three of my companions.

On the way there are many trees [baobabs], and these trees are of great age and girth; a whole caravan may shelter in the shade of one of them. There are trees which have neither branches nor leaves, yet the shade cast by their trunks is sufficient to shelter a man. Some of these trees are rotted in the interior and the rain-water collects in them, so that they serve as wells and the people drink of the water inside them. In others there are bees and honey, which is collected by the people. [. . .]

A traveler in this country carries no provisions, whether plain food or seasonings, and neither gold nor silver. He takes nothing but pieces of salt and glass ornaments, which the people call beads, and some aromatic goods. When he comes to a village the womenfolk of the blacks bring out millet, milk, chickens, pulped lotus fruit, rice, “funi” (a grain resembling mustard seed, from which “kuskusu” [couscous] and gruel are made), and pounded haricot beans. The traveler buys what of these he wants [. . .].

Thus I reached the city of Malli, the capital of the king of the blacks. I stopped at the cemetery and went to the quarter occupied by the whites, where I asked for Muhammad ibn al-Faqih. I found that he had hired a house for me and went there. His son-in-law brought me candles and food, and next day Ibn al-Faqih himself came to visit me, with other prominent residents. I met the qadi of Malli, ‘Abd ar-Rahman, who came to see me; he is a negro, a pilgrim, and a man of fine character. I met also the interpreter Dugha, who is one of the principal men among the blacks. All these persons sent me hospitality-gifts of food and treated me with the utmost generosity—may God reward them for their kindnesses! [. . .]

The negroes possess some admirable qualities. They are seldom unjust, and have a greater abhorrence of injustice than any other people. Their sultan shows no mercy to anyone who is guilty of the least act of it. There is complete security in their country. Neither traveler nor inhabitant in it has anything to fear from robbers or men of violence. They do not confiscate the property of any white man who dies in their country, even if it be uncounted wealth. On the contrary, they give it into the charge of some trustworthy person among the whites, until the rightful heir takes possession of it. They are careful to observe the hours of prayer, and assiduous in attending them in congregations, and in bringing up their children to them.