

History Level 8

Chapter 6 — Skills: asking, sequencing and using sources

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Asking and refining historical questions

Section 6A · Strand: Historical Concepts and Skills · Sub-strand: Historical questions **Owens:** VC2HH8S01 **Draws on:** .E01, .E02, .E03 (partial, §2A), .E04 (partial, §2A), .E05, .E06

Content description — VC2HH8S01 (Historical Concepts and Skills, Historical questions).

- .E01 questions for sources from oral tradition.
 - .E02 a key question that may have no definitive answer.
 - .E03 questions built on the seven historical concepts (partial, §2A: one of the two example questions attached to this code is First Nations content, excluded per the front-of-book note; the concept-based questioning is kept and taught here).
 - .E04 a key question with subsidiary questions (partial, §2A: one of the two example questions attached to this code is First Nations content, excluded per the front-of-book note; the Roman-empire example question and the subsidiary questions are kept and taught here).
 - .E05 questions about significance.
 - .E06 reviewing questions when the evidence surprises.
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Teaching sequence

1. Words to define before we start

Subject terms, defined before use.

- Inquiry** — the process of finding things out by asking questions, gathering evidence and weighing it. A historical inquiry is an investigation into some part of the past.
- Historical question** — a question about the past that can be worked on with evidence. Not every question is a historical one: “What shall I have for lunch?” is not; “What did Roman gladiators eat before a show?” is.
- Key question** — the one big question that drives an investigation. Everything else in the inquiry is built to help answer it.
- Subsidiary question** — a smaller question that supports the key question (the word *subsidiary* means “giving help to the main thing”). Historians never answer a key question in one jump; they climb to it through subsidiary questions.
- Evidence** — what survives from the past that can be used to answer questions: objects, buildings, bones, writing, coins, images. Evidence never speaks for itself — it answers only the questions someone asks of it.
- Theory** — in this section, a theory is a historian’s best explanation built from the evidence — not a wild guess. Two theories can fit the same evidence in different ways, which is why historians ask “What theories have been developed?”
- Oral tradition** — knowledge, stories, songs and family lines kept in memory and passed from one generation to the next by word of mouth, not by writing. Many societies kept their histories orally for centuries before any of it was written down.
- The seven historical concepts** — *cause* (what made something happen), *consequence* (what happened because of it), *continuity* (what stayed the same), *change* (what became different), *perspectives* (the different points of view people held at the time), *interpretations* (the readings historians make afterwards), and *significance* (how much something mattered: how many people it touched, how much it changed their lives, and for how long). These are the lenses through which historians look at the past — and the strongest question stems this section gives you.

2. What makes a question historical? .E02

Historians ask questions the way builders use scaffolding: the questions hold up everything that follows. A strong historical question passes four tests.

1. **It is about the past.** A question about next week is a plan, not history.
2. **It can be worked on with evidence.** If nothing survives that could help answer it, the question cannot be investigated — only guessed at.
3. **It is open.** A question that one word can answer (“yes”, “no”, “Rome”) stops an inquiry before it starts. Open questions begin with *how*, *why*, *in what ways* or *to what extent*.
4. **It is focused.** “What happened in the past?” is too big to answer. “How did the Black Death change work in European villages between 1347 and 1360?” names a place, a people and a time.

Figure 1 puts weak and strong questions side by side.

Weak questions made strong		
Four tests for a historical question: about the past - can be worked on with evidence - open - focused.		
Weak question	Why it fails	Strong rewrite
"Was Rome a big city?"	Fails test 3 - open. One word can answer it.	"How big was Rome compared with other cities of its time?"
"Why do people fight wars?"	Fails test 4 - focused. No place, no time: too big.	"What caused the wars between Rome and Carthage?"
"Is climate change a problem for Australia today?"	Fails test 1 - about the past. It asks about the present.	"How did changing climate affect the Angkor empire's water system?"
"What did Julius Caesar dream about as a boy?"	Fails test 2 - evidence. Nothing survives to answer it.	"What do Caesar's own writings show about how he wanted to be seen?"
A question that fails a test is not a bad idea - it is a first draft. The tests tell you which part to fix.		

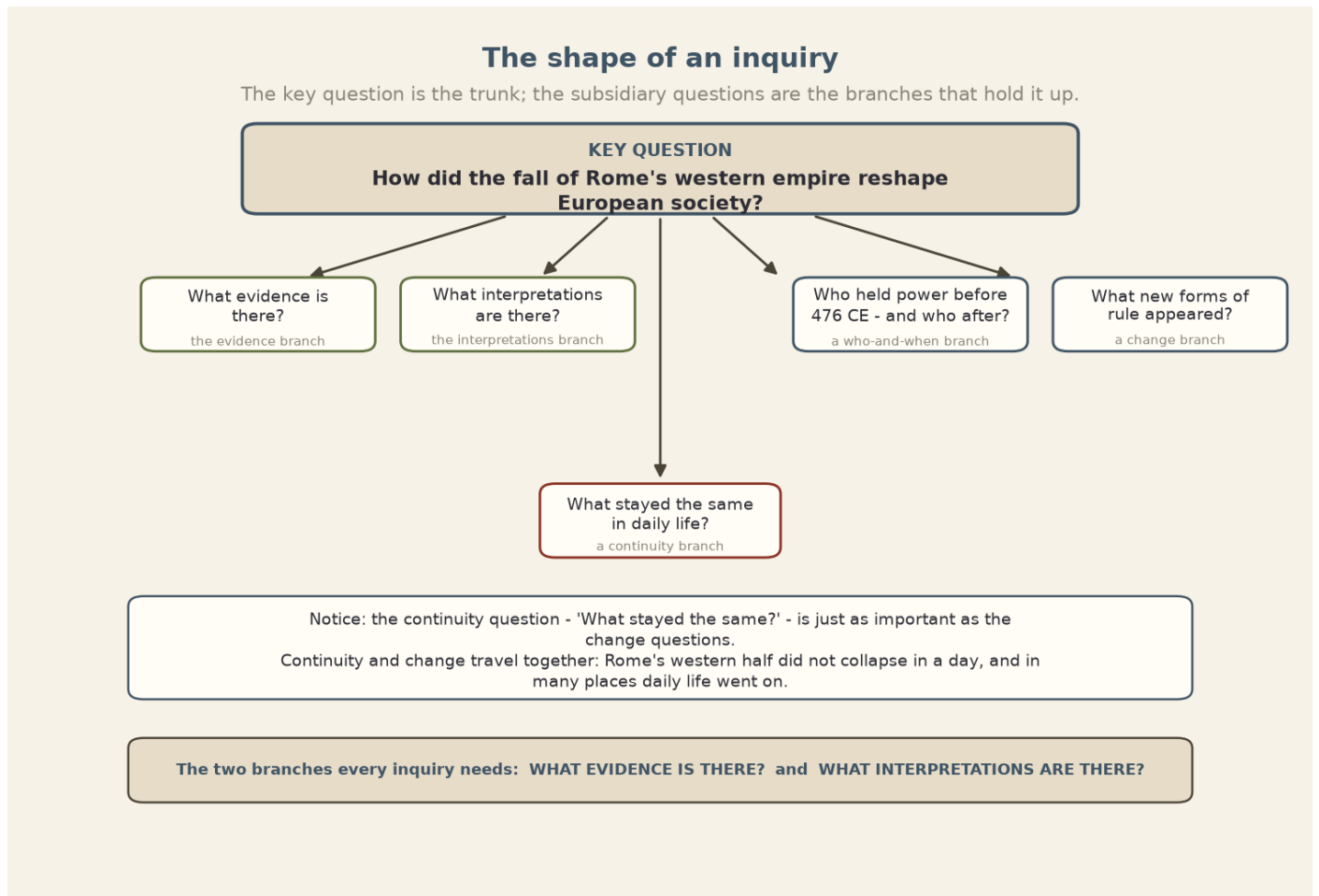
Table of four weak historical questions beside stronger rewrites of each: a yes-no question, a question too big, a question about the present, and a question no evidence could answer, each paired with an improved version and the test it now passes

Figure 1. Weak questions made strong: the four tests applied.

3. Key questions and subsidiary questions .E02 .E04

An investigation is shaped like a tree. The **key question** is the trunk; the **subsidiary questions** are the branches that hold it up. Two of the most useful branches are always the same: “**What evidence is there?**” and “**What interpretations are there?**” (or, while theories are being built, “**What theories have been developed?**”). The first turns the inquiry towards sources; the second turns it towards what historians have made of those sources.

Here is the shape applied to one of this book's biggest questions — this example question for .E04.



A question tree: the key question 'How did the fall of Rome's western empire reshape European society?' at the top, with five subsidiary question branches beneath it, among them 'What evidence is there?', 'What interpretations are there?', 'Who held power before 476 CE and who held it after?', 'What stayed the same in daily life?' and 'What new forms of rule appeared?'

Figure 2. One key question, five branches: the shape of an inquiry.

Notice two things. The key question uses a concept — *change* — and it names a time and a place, so it can be worked on. And the branch "What stayed the same?" is just as important as the branches about change: *continuity* and *change* travel together. Rome's western half did not collapse in a day; in many places daily life went on much as before, under new rulers.

4. A key question with no single final answer: the pyramids at Giza .E02

.E02 asks you to understand that some key questions **may not have a definitive answer**. The classic case is one of the oldest wonders of the world: *how did the Egyptians build the pyramids at Giza?* The Great Pyramid was raised about 4,500 years ago as the tomb of the pharaoh Khufu, from some two million stone blocks, each weighing as much as a large car. No Egyptian account of the building method survives. So historians and archaeologists work from evidence and build theories — and the theories still disagree.

A key question with no single final answer

'How did the Egyptians build the pyramids at Giza?' - built from the evidence, and still debated.

KEY QUESTION: How did the Egyptians build the pyramids at Giza?

WHAT SURVIVES (evidence)

The pyramids themselves

About two million stone blocks, raised about 4,500 years ago as the tomb of the pharaoh Khufu.

Quarries, tools, sledges and ropes

The stone was cut close by and dragged on wooden sledges.

The Diary of Merer

Papyrus logbooks found in 2013 at Wadi al-Jarf - the oldest papyrus writing known. Kept by an inspector, Merer, whose crews moved boatloads of limestone from Tura to Giza under Khufu.

The workers' village

Bakeries, heaps of animal bones, and graves showing the builders were fed, cared for and buried with respect.

WHAT HISTORIANS SUGGEST (theories)

One long straight ramp

Raised higher as the pyramid grew, with stone dragged up it.

A ramp winding around the outside

Spiralling up the pyramid's faces as it rose.

A ramp built inside the pyramid

A passage within the stonework, suggested in 2007.

What none of them has

A full fit with all the evidence - and no Egyptian account of the method survives.

No definitive answer yet - and that is normal in history. The question stays open, the evidence is reweighed, and each new find (like Merer's diary) moves the debate a step.

Two-column case study of the question 'How did the Egyptians build the pyramids at Giza?': the left column lists the surviving evidence — the pyramids themselves, the quarries and tools, the Diary of Merer papyri found in 2013, and the workers' village with its bakeries and graves; the right column lists three developed theories — one long straight ramp, a ramp winding around the outside, and a ramp built inside the pyramid — with a note that no single answer has been proven

Figure 3. Evidence and theories for the Giza question — no definitive answer yet.

The **Diary of Merer** is the prize piece of evidence. In 2013 a French-led team found papyrus logbooks in a cave harbour at Wadi al-Jarf on the Red Sea coast. They are the oldest papyrus writing yet found, and they were kept by an inspector named Merer, whose crews moved boatloads of fine white limestone from the quarries at Tura down the Nile to the pyramid site at Giza, in the reign of Khufu himself. The diary does not say *how* the pyramid rose — but it proves how the stone travelled, and who was moving it.

The workers' village found beside the pyramids adds more: bakeries, heaps of animal bones and graves showing the builders were fed, cared for and buried with respect. That evidence has forced a change in the old story that gangs of slaves built the pyramids — a story first told by the Greek writer Herodotus about 2,400 years ago.

Sources: the Great Pyramid's date and scale: [wikipedia.org](https://www.wikipedia.org), 'Great Pyramid of Giza'; the Diary of Merer, found 2013 at Wadi al-Jarf: [wikipedia.org](https://www.wikipedia.org), 'Diary of Merer'; the workers' village and its finds: [wikipedia.org](https://www.wikipedia.org), 'Giza pyramid complex'; the ramp theories: [wikipedia.org](https://www.wikipedia.org), 'Egyptian pyramid construction techniques'; all accessed 25 August 2026.

5. Concept questions: seven lenses on any topic .E03

.E03 asks you to develop questions **using the historical concepts**: cause, consequence, continuity and change, perspectives, interpretations and significance. Each concept is a lens; point it at any topic in this book and a different question appears. The same topic — say, the Black Death — yields seven different investigations.

Seven lenses, seven questions

Each historical concept is a question stem. Point it at any topic and a new investigation appears.

Concept	Question stem	Worked example
Cause	What caused ... ?	What caused the western Roman empire to weaken in the 400s CE?
Consequence	What were the consequences of ... ?	What did the Black Death change for workers in Europe?
Continuity	What stayed the same when ... ?	What stayed the same in daily life after Rome's western half ended?
Change	How did ... change ... ?	How did the organisation of European society change after 476 CE?
Perspectives	How did ... see ..., compared with ... ?	How did conquered peoples see Roman rule, compared with the rulers in Rome?
Interpretations	Why do historians disagree about ... ?	Why do historians disagree about how the western empire ended?
Significance	How were people affected by ..., and for how long?	How did the Black Death change community life?

One topic, seven investigations - and the concepts come in pairs: cause with consequence, continuity beside change, perspectives feeding interpretations.

Table of the seven historical concepts with a question stem and a worked example for each: cause — 'What caused...?' — 'What caused the western Roman empire to weaken in the 400s CE?'; consequence — 'What were the consequences of...?' — 'What did the Black Death change for workers in Europe?'; continuity — 'What stayed the same when...?' — 'What stayed the same in daily life after Rome's western half ended?'; change — 'How did... change...?' — 'How did the organisation of European society change after 476 CE?'; perspectives — 'How did ... see ... compared with ...?' — 'How did conquered peoples see Roman rule, compared with the rulers in Rome?'; interpretations — 'Why do historians disagree about...?' — 'Why do historians disagree about how the western empire ended?'; significance — 'How were people affected by ..., and for how long?' — 'How did the Black Death change community life?'

Figure 4. Seven lenses, seven questions: concept stems with worked examples.

Two cautions. First, the concepts often come in pairs: causes arrive with consequences, continuity sits beside change, and perspectives feed into interpretations. A strong key question often carries two of them. Second, a concept question still has to pass the four tests from part 2 — *Why did everything happen?* uses a concept but is far too big.

6. Questioning sources from oral tradition . E01

Some of the past's most treasured sources were never written down by the people who made them. They lived in memory — spoken, sung, repeated — and were written down later, sometimes centuries later. Such sources are said to be **based on oral tradition**. They are precious: for whole societies they are the main surviving voice. They are also hard to use: memory changes in the telling, and the person who finally wrote the words down stood between the account and you.

Here are the questions to ask of any source based on oral tradition.

Questioning sources from oral tradition

Six questions to ask of any source kept in memory before it was written down.

THE SIX QUESTIONS

1. How old is the oldest form of this account?	2. Who kept it and repeated it - and for whom?
3. What could change in the telling?	4. What might stay accurate?
5. What can be checked against objects and places?	6. Whose voices are missing?

TRIED ON HOMER AND TROY

The source Homer's <i>Iliad</i> : a poem about a great war at Troy, shaped in the 700s BCE out of a much older tradition of sung poetry, and fixed in writing only later.	What the questioning found From 1871, diggers opened the mound at Hisarlik and found not one city but many, layer upon layer. One layer - Troy VIIa - shows fire and violence around 1180 BCE: a candidate for the city in the poem.
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The poem is not proof that the war happened as sung.

But the questions turn it from a beautiful story into evidence that can be worked on: which parts can be checked, against what, and whose telling was written down.

*A card of six questions for evaluating sources based on oral tradition — how old is the oldest form of this account, who kept and repeated it, what could change in the telling, what might stay accurate, what can be checked against objects and places, and whose voices are missing — with a worked strip beneath using Homer's *Iliad* and the buried city layers at Troy*

Figure 5. Six questions for sources from oral tradition, tried on Homer and Troy.

Try them on the most famous case in this book's chapters. The Greek poet **Homer** gave the world the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, poems about a great war at Troy and a long voyage home. They were shaped in the 700s BCE out of a much older tradition of sung poetry, and only later fixed in writing. For over 2,000 years readers argued about whether Troy was a real place. Then, from 1871, diggers led by Heinrich Schliemann opened the mound called Hisarlik, in modern Turkey, and found not one city but many — layer upon layer of settlements, one built on the bones of the last. One of those layers, which scholars call Troy VIIa, shows signs of fire and violence from around 1180 BCE: a candidate for the city in the poem. The poem is not proof that the war happened as sung — but the questions above turn it from a beautiful story into evidence that can be worked on.

Sources: Homer's date and the oral tradition behind the poems: [wikipedia.org](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homer), 'Homer'; the mound at Hisarlik, Schliemann's digs from 1871 and the city layers including Troy VIIa: [wikipedia.org](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Troy), 'Troy'; both accessed 25 August 2026.

7. Questions about significance .E05

Some questions ask *what happened*. Significance questions ask **how much it mattered**. .E05 gives two models, both about the Black Death, the plague that swept through Europe from 1347: "*How did the Black Death change community life?*" and "*How long did the plague last?*" The second is a sharper question than it looks. The first great wave ran from 1347 to 1351 and killed a vast share of Europe's people — estimates often fall between a third and a half — but the plague did not leave: it returned in fresh waves for centuries, with one of the last great outbreaks hitting Marseille in 1720. Answering "how long" changes the answer to "how much it mattered".

Significance questions

'How much did it matter?' - four stems, tried on the Black Death.

THE FOUR STEMS	TRIED ON THE BLACK DEATH
How many people were affected?	A vast share of Europe's people died in the first wave - estimates often fall between a third and a half.
How deep did the change go in daily life?	Villages lost workers; old ways of holding land and paying for work broke down.
How long did the effects last?	The first wave ran 1347-1351, but the plague returned in fresh waves for centuries - one of the last great outbreaks hit Marseille in 1720.
Are the effects still visible today?	Its effects are still studied in graves, records and the laws it forced, such as rules about wages.

Significance is a judgement - and it looks different from a village, a town or a monastery.

Answering 'how long did the effects last?' changes the answer to 'how much did it matter?'.

A set of significance question stems applied to the Black Death: how many people were affected; how deep did the change go in daily life; how long did the effects last, from the first wave of 1347 to 1351 to the plague's returns for centuries after; and are the effects still visible today — with a note that significance is a judgement that looks different from a village, a town or a monastery

Figure 6. Significance stems, tried on the Black Death.

Significance questions borrow their strength from 7C's criteria — people touched, depth of change, length of effects, visibility today — but they do their own work here: they turn a topic into a weighing exercise before you start collecting evidence.

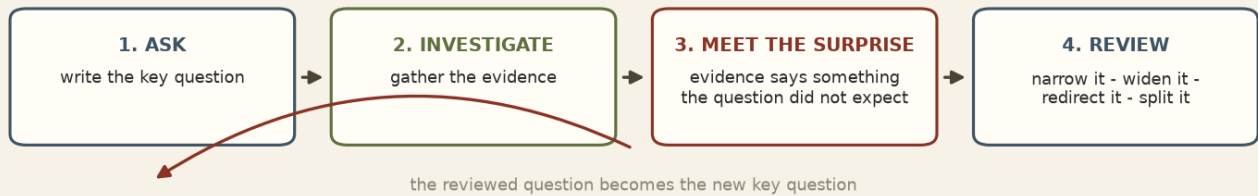
Sources: the Black Death's arrival in Europe in 1347, the death toll estimates and later outbreaks including Marseille in 1720: [wikipedia.org](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Death), 'Black Death'; accessed 25 August 2026.

8. When the evidence surprises you: reviewing questions .E06

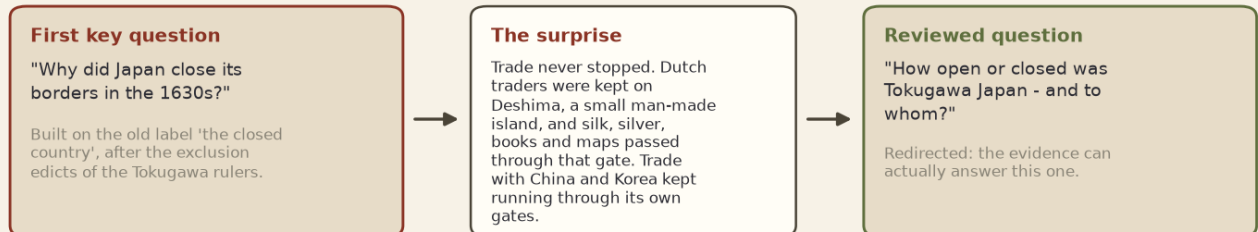
A good historian does not fall in love with a question. An investigation often turns up evidence that the question did not expect — and then the question, not the evidence, has to move. Reviewing a question usually means one of four moves: **narrow it** (too big), **widen it** (the evidence points beyond the question), **redirect it** (the evidence says the question points the wrong way), or **split it** (one question is really two).

When the evidence surprises you: the review cycle

A question is a plan about what the evidence should show. When the evidence shows something else, the plan changes.



WORKED CASE: TOKUGAWA JAPAN



Why the reviewed question is stronger

The first question assumes one closure and asks for a reason. The reviewed question asks for degrees and directions of contact - which records of ships, goods and rules can actually answer. It also opens the inquiry to perspectives: the gates looked different to a Dutch trader, a Chinese merchant and a Japanese official.

A four-step review cycle — ask, investigate, meet the surprise, review — with a worked case: the old key question ‘Why did Japan close its borders in the 1630s?’, the surprising evidence that trade never stopped but ran through controlled gates such as the island of Deshima, and the reviewed question ‘How open or closed was Tokugawa Japan, and to whom?’

Figure 7. The review cycle: when the evidence surprises, the question moves.

Here is the cycle on a real case, built around this example question: “How did world events reshape the organisation of Japanese society?” Japan in the 1600s looks at first like a society that answered outside events by shutting the door. From the 1630s the Tokugawa rulers issued a series of edicts expelling most European traders and missionaries, banning Japanese people from sailing abroad, and limiting outside contact to a few controlled gates. The classic name for this policy is “the closed country”. So the obvious key question looks like: *why did Japan close its borders?*

Then the evidence surprises. Trade never stopped. Dutch traders were kept on Deshima, a small man-made island in a Japanese harbour, and through that one gate flowed silk, silver, books, maps and knowledge of the outside world. Trade with China and Korea kept running through its own gates. The society was not shut; it was *sorted* — contact was controlled, ranked and taxed, not ended. So the question is reviewed and redirected: not “why did Japan close?”, but “**how open or closed was Tokugawa Japan — and to whom?**” That is a better question, because the evidence can actually answer it. Modern historians of Japan have pushed exactly this re-reading of the “closed country” label.

Sources: the exclusion edicts of the 1630s, the controlled gates of trade and the debate over the “closed country” label: wikipedia.org, ‘Sakoku’; Deshima and the Dutch trade there: wikipedia.org, ‘Dejima’; both accessed 25 August 2026.

9. From questions to a plan: informing the investigation .E02 .E04

The CD says questions must *inform* investigations — not sit on the page. The last move is to turn a question tree into a working plan. Figure 8 is a planning sheet filled in for one question from part 7’s Black Death work, so you can see every part carrying weight.

Questions turned into a plan

A filled-in investigation sheet. Read it bottom-up and the whole of Chapters 6 and 7 is visible in it.

KEY QUESTION (uses the concept: change) How did the Black Death change life in European villages?	drives the whole inquiry
SUBSIDIARY QUESTIONS (the branches) - What was village life like before 1347? - Who died, and who survived? - What changed in work, wages and the holding of land? - What stayed the same?	each says what to look for next
SOURCES TO LOOK FOR Records kept by the Church and by landowners: deaths, rents, wages. Accounts written at the time: chronicles, diaries and letters. The ground itself: graves and skeletons, read by science.	features and value: 6C / 6D
WHOSE VOICES ARE HARD TO HEAR? Ordinary villagers - and women most of all - left few records. Plan now for reading their lives from other people's sources.	perspectives: 6E
WHAT WOULD COUNT AS A GOOD ANSWER? Claims backed by named evidence - and the gaps named honestly, not hidden. (There will be gaps: that is the medieval past.)	the argued answer: 7D
Questions are the first rung of the ladder. Everything later in Chapters 6 and 7 stands on the questions asked here - the plan is the inquiry.	

A filled-in investigation planning sheet: key question 'How did the Black Death change life in European villages?'; subsidiary questions on village life before 1347, who died and who survived, what changed in work and wages after, and what stayed the same; the kinds of sources to look for — church and land records, writers' accounts, graves and skeletons; and a final row stating what would count as a good answer

Figure 8. Questions turned into a plan: a worked investigation sheet.

Read the plan bottom-up and you can see the whole chapter coming: the sources row belongs to 6C and 6D (features, value), the perspectives row belongs to 6E, and the final row — “what would count as a good answer” — belongs to 7D. Questions are the first rung of that ladder. Everything later in Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 stands on them.

Worked examples

Worked example 1 — scaffolded: making weak questions strong

Take each weak question below. Say which of the four tests from part 2 it fails, then improve it.

Working	Comment
(a) “Did the Black Death kill people?” → fails test 3: it is a yes-no question; one word ends the inquiry.	Improve: “How did the Black Death kill, and how did towns try to protect themselves?” Now it needs evidence and has no one-word answer.
(b) “Why did empires fall?” → fails test 4: no place, no time — far too big.	Improve: “What caused the fall of Rome’s western empire in the 400s CE?” The concept <i>cause</i> is kept, but the question now names its ground.
(c) “What will historians discover next about Pompeii?” → fails test 1: it is about the future, not the past — and test 2: no evidence exists yet to work on.	Improve: “What have recent digs at Pompeii changed about our understanding of the eruption?” Now it points at real, checkable finds.

∴ a question that fails a test is not a bad idea — it is a first draft. The tests tell you which part to fix.

Worked example 2 — scaffolded: building a question tree

Build a question tree for this topic: **the Mongol expansion** (Chapter 5’s default topic). Write one key question using a concept, then four subsidiary questions — including the two standard branches.

Working	Comment
Key question: “What were the consequences of the Mongol expansion for the peoples of China?”	Uses the concept <i>consequence</i> ; names a people and a place; open and focused.
Branch 1: “What evidence is there — records, objects, sites?”	The standard evidence branch.
Branch 2: “What interpretations are there — and why do they disagree?”	The standard interpretations branch; death-toll claims are one live disagreement (see 5E).
Branch 3: “What changed in how China was ruled under Mongol power?”	A change question aimed at government.
Branch 4: “What stayed the same in daily life for Chinese farmers?”	The continuity branch — always worth asking.

∴ a tree like this is a plan you can actually investigate: each branch says what to look for next.

Practice tasks

Scaffolded

Q1. Use Figure 1. For each weak question, name the test it fails and write a stronger version of your own: (a) “Was Rome a big city?”; (b) “Why do people fight wars?”; (c) “Is climate change a problem for Australia today?”; (d) “What did Julius Caesar dream about as a boy?”

Q2. Use Figure 2. (a) Which question is the key question, and which concept does it use? (b) Copy two of the subsidiary questions that ask about evidence and interpretations. (c) Add one more subsidiary question of your own to the tree.

Q3. Use Figure 3. (a) Sort these into *evidence* or *theory*: the Diary of Merer; the idea of a ramp winding around the outside; the workers’ village bakeries; the idea of a ramp built inside the pyramid. (b) In one sentence, say why the key question has no definitive answer yet.

Q4. Use Figure 4. Match each question to its concept lens: (a) “How did the plague reach Europe in 1347?”; (b) “What interpretations do historians give of the fall of the western empire?”; (c) “How much did the Black Death change village life?”; (d) “How did a Roman governor see his province, compared with the people who lived there?”

Q5. Use Figure 5. Choose three of the six oral-tradition questions and explain, for each one, why it matters when you use Homer’s *Iliad* as evidence about the Trojan War.

Q6. Use Figure 6. (a) Copy the four significance stems. (b) Answer each one in one sentence for the Black Death, using part 7.

Un scaffolded

Q7. Choose one topic from Chapters 1–5 of this book (for example: the building of the Colosseum, the Mongol expansion, the Black Death, or the pyramids at Giza). Write a question tree: one key question using a concept, and four subsidiary questions — including “What evidence is there?” and “What interpretations are there?” For each question, add one sentence saying what kind of source could help answer it.

Q8. A student investigating medieval Europe writes these questions: “What happened in Europe?” / “Was the Black Death bad?” / “Why is the medieval period interesting?” Identify what is wrong with each question using the four tests, then rewrite all three as one focused key question and two subsidiary questions that could drive the same investigation.

Q9. Explain the review cycle from part 8 in your own words. Then use the Japan case to show each step: the first key question, the evidence that surprised, and the reviewed question. Say why the reviewed question is stronger than the first one.

Q10. Section 3G told how the date of Vesuvius’s eruption moved from 24 August to late October 79 CE when fresh evidence was found in 2018. Imagine an investigator who began with the key question “What happened in Pompeii on 24 August 79 CE?” Explain why that question would have to be reviewed, which of the four review moves (narrow, widen, redirect, split) you would use, and write the reviewed question.

Source-based inquiry task

Q11. (.E01) Read the adapted source and answer the parts below.

“Tell me, Muse, of the man of many ways, who was driven far journeys, after he had plundered Troy’s sacred heights. ... Tell the story, goddess — daughter of Zeus — beginning where you will, and make it known to us all.” — Homer, *Odyssey*, Book 1, opening lines (adapted translation); shaped in the 700s BCE from a long tradition of sung poetry, and fixed in writing later

- (a) Pick out two details in these lines that show this poem was made to be spoken and sung aloud, not written at a desk.
 - (b) Write two of your own questions for evaluating this source as a product of oral tradition, using Figure 5’s card.
 - (c) The poem tells of a war at Troy. What kinds of evidence could check whether there really was such a war — and what did the digs at Hisarlik actually find?
 - (d) The *Odyssey* was composed about 2,700 years ago, about events it places hundreds of years earlier than that. Is the poem a primary source for the war it describes, or is it something else? Give one reason for your answer. (A *primary source* is one made at (or very near) the time being studied; a *secondary source* is one made later, using earlier evidence.)
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Answers

Q1. (a) Fails test 3 — one word can answer it; stronger: “How big was Rome compared with other cities of its time?” (b) Fails test 4 — no place or time, far too big; stronger: “What caused the wars between Rome and Carthage?” (c) Fails test 1 — it is about the present, not the past; stronger: “How did changing climate affect the Angkor empire’s water system?” (d) Fails test 2 — no surviving evidence could answer it; stronger: “What do Caesar’s own writings show about how he wanted to be seen?”

Q2. (a) Key question: “How did the fall of Rome’s western empire reshape European society?”; it uses the concept *change*. (b) “What evidence is there?” and “What interpretations are there?” (c) Sample: “Which new kingdoms took over Roman lands?”

Q3. (a) Evidence: the Diary of Merer; the workers’ village bakeries. Theory: the ramp winding around the outside; the ramp built inside the pyramid. (b) No Egyptian account of the building method survives, and no theory yet fits all the evidence, so the question stays open.

Q4. (a) cause; (b) interpretations; (c) significance (depth of change) — also accepts consequence with a reason; (d) perspectives.

Q5. Sample: “Who kept and repeated it?” matters because the *Iliad* lived in memory for generations, and singers could add, drop and reshape lines. “What could change in the telling?” matters because names, numbers and speeches are the parts most likely to grow or slip. “What can be checked against objects and places?” matters because sites like Hisarlik let diggers test whether the poem’s city matches any real layer of ruins.

Q6. (a) The four stems: how many people were affected? / how deep did the change go? / how long did the effects last? / are the effects still visible? (b) Sample: a third to a half of Europe’s people died in the first wave; villages lost workers and old ways of holding land broke down; the plague returned in waves for centuries, into the 1720s; its effects are still studied today in graves, records and the laws it forced, such as rules about wages.

Q7–Q10 — see the model responses below.

Q11. (a) The poet speaks to a goddess as if she were in the room (“Tell me, Muse”), and asks her to “make it known” — marks of a performance before listeners, not a private page. (b) Sample: “What might change when a poem kept in memory is at last written down?” and “Whose telling of the story was written down, and whose was lost?” (c) Layers of ruins at the site, signs of fire and violence, weapons and graves from the right centuries; at Hisarlik diggers found many city layers, one above another, and one of them — Troy VIIa — shows destruction around 1180 BCE, a candidate for the city in the poem. (d) It is not a primary source for the war: it was shaped centuries after the events it describes, from memory and tradition. It *is* a primary source for the beliefs and values of the Greeks who sang and kept it — one source can stand in different positions for different questions.

Model responses

Q7. Sample tree, on the Mongol expansion. Key question: “What were the consequences of the Mongol expansion for the peoples of China?” This uses the concept *consequence*, names a people and a place, and is open. Branch 1: “What evidence is there?” — Chinese records kept under Mongol rule, Mongol-era coins, and accounts written by people who visited, such as the record of Marco Polo’s years in China. Branch 2: “What interpretations are there?” — historians disagree sharply over the Mongols’ effects, including death-toll claims, so comparing two historians’ readings is real work (section 5E owns that debate). Branch 3: “What changed in government?” — records of how Kublai Khan’s Yuan dynasty organised tax, law and office-holding. Branch 4: “What stayed the same in daily life for farmers?” — local records, tools and farming remains. Each branch names a kind of source, which is what makes the tree a plan and not just a list of questions.

Q8. “What happened in Europe?” fails test 4 — a whole continent and all of time is far too big; no investigation can hold it. “Was the Black Death bad?” fails test 3 — “bad” invites a one-word yes, and “bad” is not something a historian can measure; the question needs to name *what* it is asking about. “Why is the medieval period interesting?” fails test 2 — “interesting” is a feeling in the present, not something evidence from the past can answer; it is a question about the reader, not about history. Rewritten: key question — “How did the Black Death change the lives of workers in Europe between 1347 and 1360?” Subsidiary questions — “What evidence is there for how many people died and

where?” and “What changed in wages and in the rules about work after the plague?” All three now pass the four tests: past, evidence-open, open and focused.

Q9. The review cycle says: ask, investigate, meet the surprise, review. A question is a plan about what the evidence *should* show; when the evidence shows something else, the plan changes. In the Japan case, the first key question was “Why did Japan close its borders in the 1630s?” — built on the old label “the closed country”. The surprising evidence was that outside contact never stopped: Dutch trade was kept running through the man-made island of Deshima, and trade with China and Korea went on through its own gates. So the question was redirected to “How open or closed was Tokugawa Japan — and to whom?” The reviewed question is stronger because it matches the evidence: instead of assuming one closure and asking for a reason, it asks for degrees and directions of contact, which records of ships, goods and rules can actually answer. It also opens the investigation to perspectives — the gates looked different to a Dutch trader, a Chinese merchant and a Japanese official.

Q10. The investigator’s question builds the old date into itself: “What happened in Pompeii on 24 August 79 CE?” When the 2018 charcoal date-note showed the town was still alive on 17 October, and the 2022 study settled on 24–25 October for the eruption, that question points at the wrong day — so it must be reviewed. The right move is *redirect*: the question is not too big or too small, it is aimed at a date the evidence no longer supports. Reviewed: “What happened in Pompeii in the last weeks before the eruption, and how do we now know when it came?” This version is stronger than the original because it does not trust one ancient witness — Pliny’s letters — on its own; it invites both the old evidence and the new, and it asks how the answer was reached, which keeps the inquiry honest when the next piece of evidence turns up.

Q11 (extended model). The *Odyssey*’s opening lines carry the marks of a sung performance: the poet speaks to a Muse as if she stood beside him, and he asks her to “make it known” — the poem presents itself as something heard, not read. That matters because the poem was shaped in the 700s BCE out of a tradition of sung poetry far older than itself, and was fixed in writing later. As a source from oral tradition it must be questioned with Figure 5’s card: what could change in the telling (speeches, numbers, the glory of heroes), what might stay accurate (place names, the layout of real coasts, old objects described in old words), and whose version survived when the poem was at last written down. On the war itself, the honest position is mixed. The poem is not a primary source for a war around 1200 BCE — it was composed centuries later, and it mixes the work of gods into human fighting. But the digs at Hisarlik showed that Troy was a real place with many layers of settlement, and one layer — Troy VIIa — shows fire and destruction around 1180 BCE, which keeps the poem’s war inside the range of real history without proving it line by line. The skill is not choosing “true” or “made up”: it is asking which parts of a source can be checked, against what, and holding the rest as what it is — the memory of a society, kept in song.

Timelines that explain: sequencing events, people and ideas

Curriculum focus — teacher block

Owning content description — VC2HH8S02 (Historical Concepts and Skills, Chronology).

Elaboration linkage (D7 — linkage only, not a teaching order; ids verbatim from the VCAA export):

- .E01 (partial, §2A) defining the dating toolkit's terms — this section teaches the nine kept terms (Pleistocene, Holocene, BC, AD, BCE, CE, BP, pre-history, history). The two terms 'Deep Time' and 'Everywhen' are dropped per §2A (their only referent is a First Nations framing of the deep past; CONTENT_POLICY Rule 1). They are not named to students here.
- .E02 explaining why timelines and narratives have gaps — Part 4, with the Greek Dark Ages as the worked case and Livy's own warning about Rome's lost early records (cross-reference to 3B).
- .E03 sequencing primary sources to explain continuities or changes — the primary-source close study: four dated Roman coins (c. 137 BCE, early 44 BCE,
 - c. 29–27 BCE, AD 69–79) sequenced to explain the change from Republic to one-man rule, plus the four-move sequencing model.
- .E04 dating when ancient societies began, ended and overlapped — Part 3, the coexistence chart of eight societies (all dates flagged approximate).
- .E05 scaled timelines showing continuity and change — Part 2, the worked method and the scale-honesty warning; practised in Q3, Q8 and ER1.

Achievement standard coverage: this section serves the standard's sentence on putting events, ideas and developments in time order to explain patterns of continuity, change, cause and consequence, and feeds the standard's wider goal of recognising and explaining such patterns in the societies students have studied. The .E01 vocabulary is the book's dating convention standard: every other section dates by BCE/CE, and 4B's sources block already points to this section for the convention.

First Nations disposition (§2A): partial — VC2HH8S02 .E01 drops the two terms 'Deep Time' and 'Everywhen'; the remaining nine terms are taught in full. No other elaboration of VC2HH8S02 is affected. The front-of-book note (CONTENT_POLICY Rule 1 wording) explains the book-wide exclusion; this section does not name the two dropped terms to students.

Cross-references: 1A (deep-time scales beyond this section's toolkit), 1B (the farming and first-writing dates used in examples), 1D (the 600–1750 timeline; scale practice), 3B (Livy's lost early records — gap case), 3F (the Republic-to-Empire story the coin case re-sequences from sources), 4B (476 and 800 used in examples), 6A (historical questions), 6C/6D (source features and evidence value — the next step after sequencing), 7A (rate and extent of change — applied here, owned there), 7B (triggers vs long causes), 7C/7D (significance criteria and formats for ER1). No section assumes a specific Level 7 sequence (D1); the step up from VC2HH6S02 (sequence to *describe*) is recorded in TOC §4 — sequencing now *explains*.

Key subject terms defined at first use (D2 exemption 2): chronology, sequence, timeline, scale, era, epoch, dating, approximate (c. / circa), coexist, gap, periodisation, primary source, secondary source (the last two re-established in one sentence; owned by 6C). Contested-term handling per CONTESTED_TERMS.md: the BCE/CE vs BC/AD naming choice gets a Rule 1 definitional box with both sides steelmanned (Rule 5) and tested symmetrically (Rule 4); "pre-history / history" is flagged as a frame-dependent split (it sorts the past by what survives, not by what mattered); "periodisation" is presented as historians' labels that are argued about (476 vs Pirenne vs Brown, each steelmanned); marking is on the quality of reasoning, not the conclusion reached (Rule 5, stated in the answer guide).

Teaching sequence (for the teacher). 1. What you will learn — frame the CD: ordering is what makes explaining possible; the year's vocabulary for time. 2. Part 1 — the dating toolkit, .E01 kept terms (Figures 6b_dating_terms.png, 6b_numberline.png, 6b_epochs.png). 3. Part 2 — scaled timelines, .E05: the five-step method and the scale-honesty warning (Figure 6b_scaled_timeline.png). 4. Part 3 — coexisting societies, .E04: begin/end dates and overlap (Figure 6b_coexist.png). 5. Part 4 — gaps, .E02: five causes, the Greek Dark Ages case (Figure 6b_gaps.png). 6. Primary-source close study — four Roman coins, .E03 (Figures 6b_coin_sequence.png, 6b_sequence_model.png). 7. From sequence to explanation — cause and

consequence language; “first” does not mean “caused” (Figure 6b_cause_chain.png). 8. Secondary-source interpretation — periodisation debate: when did the ancient world end? (Figure 6b_periodisation.png). 9. Practice tasks Q1–Q6 (with help), Q7–Q10 (alone), extended response ER1.

Common misconceptions to address: that a timeline is a list (the CD’s verb is *explain* — order serves explanation); that BCE/CE is a different count from BC/AD (same count, different labels — no date ever moves); that there is a year zero (there is not; 1 BCE is followed by AD 1); that BP counts from today (it is fixed at 1950); that ancient societies took turns like a queue (they coexisted and touched); that a gap means nothing happened (gaps are about what survives, not about what occurred); that “first” means “caused” (sequence is needed for cause, but is never enough by itself); that period edges like 476 are facts of nature (they are historians’ labels, and historians argue about them).

What you will learn in this section

History does not happen in one place at a time. While one city is burning, another is being built, and a third has never heard of either. To make sense of any of it, historians put things in order — and then use that order to explain.

Chronology is the study of time order. To **sequence** means to put events, people, ideas and developments in the order they happened. A **timeline** is a drawing that shows that order along a line.

But ordering is not the finish line. The content description for this section ends with two big jobs:

- to **explain continuity and change** — what stayed the same and what became different, and at what speed;
- to **explain causes and consequences** — what made things happen, and what those things led to in turn.

You can only do those jobs once you know the order. A cause has to come before its consequence. A change has to be dated before you can ask how fast it was. So this section gives you the tools of time: the words we date with, the way we draw time at a scale, the fact that ancient societies lived side by side, the reasons timelines have holes — and a worked example of putting primary sources in order to build an explanation.

Some words we will use, defined as we meet them:

- **era** — a long stretch of time given a name (the Roman era, the era of empires).
- **epoch** — a named slice of geological time; geologists divide the last few million years into epochs, and you will meet two of them here.
- **dating** (as a verb) — working out when something happened or was made.
- **approximate** — close to the right answer but not exact. Dates marked **c.** (short for *circa*, a Latin word meaning “about”) are approximate.
- **coexist** — to exist at the same time as something else.
- **gap** — a stretch of a timeline or story where evidence is missing.
- **periodisation** — the labels historians give to stretches of time (“ancient”, “medieval”). The labels are tools, and historians argue about them.
- **scale** — the fixed link between a distance on a drawing and an amount of time (1 cm = 500 years).

We will also keep using words from other sections: **primary source** (made at the time by someone there or close to it), **secondary source** (made later by someone studying the time), **continuity**, **change**, **cause**, **consequence** and **evidence**.

Key ideas

Part 1: The dating toolkit — the words historians count with

Every date in this book uses a small toolkit of nine words. Learn them as pairs:

The dating toolkit: nine terms

Term	What it means	Notes
BC	"Before Christ" - counts backwards from AD 1	the older label for years before AD 1
AD	"Anno Domini", Latin "in the year of our Lord" - counts forward from AD 1	worked out in 525 CE by Dionysius Exiguus
BCE	"Before Common Era" - same numbering as BC	this book's label; no date moves
CE	"Common Era" - same numbering as AD	this book's label; no date moves
BP	"Before Present" - counts back from the fixed anchor year 1950 CE	used with carbon dating; 11,700 BP is about 9750 BCE
pre-history	the time before writing existed	the far longer part of the human story
history	the time since writing began, from about 3300 BCE	everything in the other chapters of this book
Pleistocene	the epoch from about 2.58 million to about 11,700 years ago	the ice ages; early humans spread across the world
Holocene	the epoch from about 11,700 years ago to now	farming, villages, cities, writing - our own epoch

Remember: there is no year zero - 1 BCE is followed straight by AD 1.

Dates marked c. (circa, "about") are approximate.

A table of the nine dating terms used in this book - BC, AD, BCE, CE, BP, pre-history, history, Pleistocene and Holocene - each row giving what the term means and where it is used.

Figure 1 — the dating toolkit. The calendar pairs (BC/AD, BCE/CE) use the same numbering; only the labels differ.

Where BC and AD came from. The system counts years from the year Jesus of Nazareth was believed to have been born. It was worked out in **525 CE** by **Dionysius Exiguus**, a monk in Rome who was calculating the date of Easter, and it was spread by the English monk **Bede** in the early 700s. *AD* stands for *Anno Domini*, Latin for "in the year of our Lord"; *BC* means "before Christ". One twist: Dionysius's own anchor was off. King Herod, who features in the birth stories, died in **4 BCE** — so most scholars place the birth a few years before AD 1 began. Even the fixed point of our calendar has a history.

There is no year zero. The numbers run ..., 3 BCE, 2 BCE, 1 BCE, **then** AD 1, AD 2, AD 3, ... The year before AD 1 is 1 BCE. That one rule is behind most date-arithmetic mistakes, so watch it in Q2.

Contested labels — BCE/CE vs BC/AD. The two systems use the *same count*; only the labels differ. The Victorian Curriculum uses BCE/CE, and so does this book. The strongest case **for BCE/CE**: in a world of many faiths and none, "Common Era" labels do not name one religion, so they are the labels most museums, universities and scholars now share. The strongest case **for BC/AD**: honesty about origin — the count itself was made by Christians and is centred on a Christian event, and critics point out that "common" can sound as if everyone agreed, when they have not: the Jewish calendar counts 2026 CE as about the year 5786, and the Islamic calendar as about 1447–48. Neither choice moves any date by a single year: 44 BCE is 44 BCE either way. The argument is about labels, not about time — but labels matter, because they say whose story the calendar is told around.

BP — Before Present. Dates in **BP** count backwards from a fixed "present": **1950 CE**. The system grew out of **carbon dating** — a way of finding the age of once-living things by measuring how much of a certain kind of carbon

is left in them, since that carbon fades away at a known rate after death. **Willard Libby** and his team published the first dates from this method in the late 1940s (Libby received the Nobel Prize in Chemistry for the work in 1960). Scientists fixed 1950 as the anchor year because it sits just before nuclear weapons testing changed the mix of carbon in the air. Worked example: the Holocene epoch began about **11,700 BP** — that is, 11,700 years before 1950, which lands at about **9750 BCE**.

Pre-history and history. In this toolkit, **history** means the time since writing existed; **pre-history** is the far longer time before it. The split sits at about **3300 BCE**, when the first writing appears, in Sumer (southern Mesopotamia) and in Egypt. Handle the split with care: it is really a statement about *what survives*, not about what mattered. Peoples with no writing had full lives, beliefs and changes — we meet them through objects and through the words of neighbours, and neighbour's words are not always kind or fair.

The two epochs. Geologists divide the last millions of years into named slices:

- **Pleistocene** — from about **2.58 million years ago to about 11,700 years ago**: the age of the ice ages, when early humans spread across the world (1A).
- **Holocene** — the last **about 11,700 years**, our own epoch: warmer climate, farming, villages, cities, writing and everything in every other chapter of this book.

Counting across the calendar

The same numbering works for BC/BCE and AD/CE - the only trap is the join.



Worked sum 1 - how many years did Caesar's Rome last from his murder to Augustus's death?

$44 + 14 = 58$... but there is no year zero, so take away one year:

$44 + 14 - 1 = 57$ years

Worked sum 2 - change a BP date into a BCE date

BP counts back from the anchor year 1950 CE. The Holocene began about 11,700 BP.

$11,700 - 1,950 = 9,750$

So about 11,700 BP is about 9750 BCE (rounded; BP dates are always approximate).

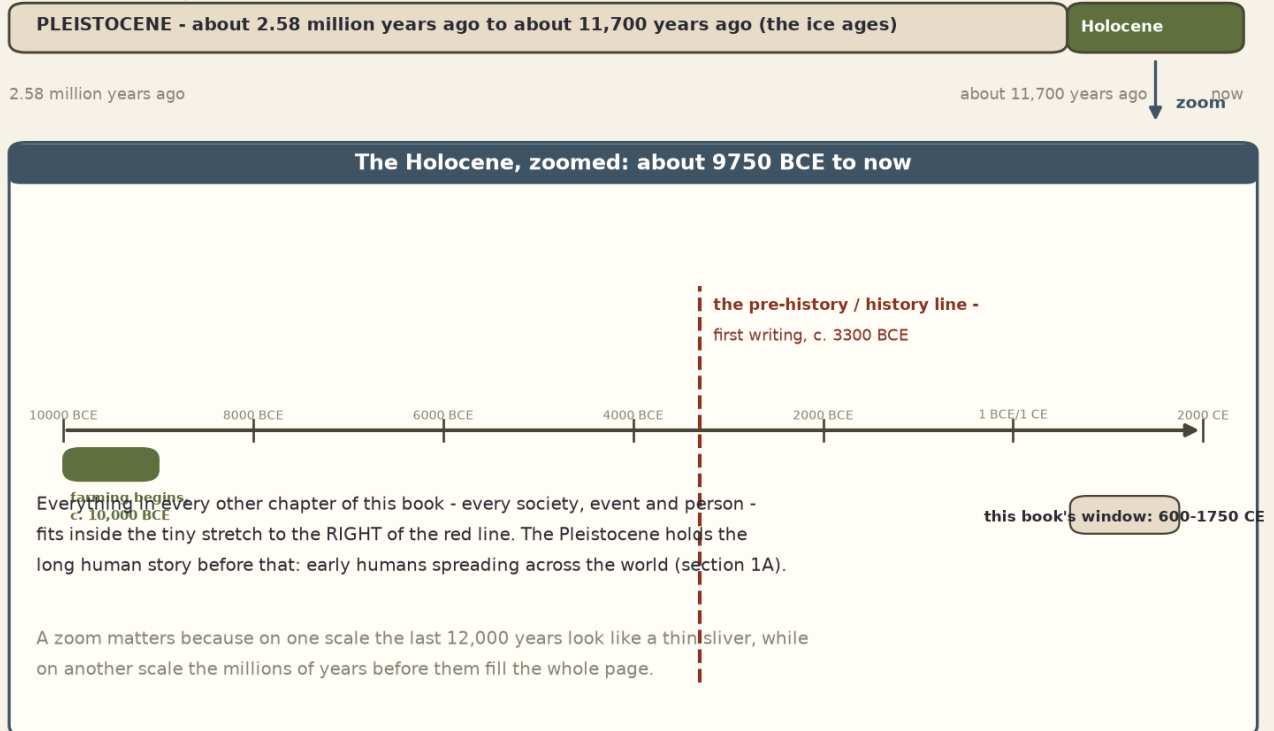
A number line from 500 BCE to 500 CE with no year zero, then two worked date problems: the 57 years between 44 BCE and AD 14, and the conversion of 11,700 BP to about 9750 BCE.

Figure 2 — the calendar number line and two worked sums. Counting across the join costs students one year if they forget there is no year zero.

Two epochs, and why we zoom

The whole of written history sits inside the last sliver of the last epoch.

The last 2.6 million years (schematic - the Holocene is too thin to draw to scale):



A two-panel figure: a long bar showing the Pleistocene epoch from about 2.58 million years ago to about 11,700 years ago, then a zoomed panel of the tiny Holocene epoch showing where farming, first writing (the pre-history-history line at about 3300 BCE) and the book's 600-1750 CE window sit inside it.

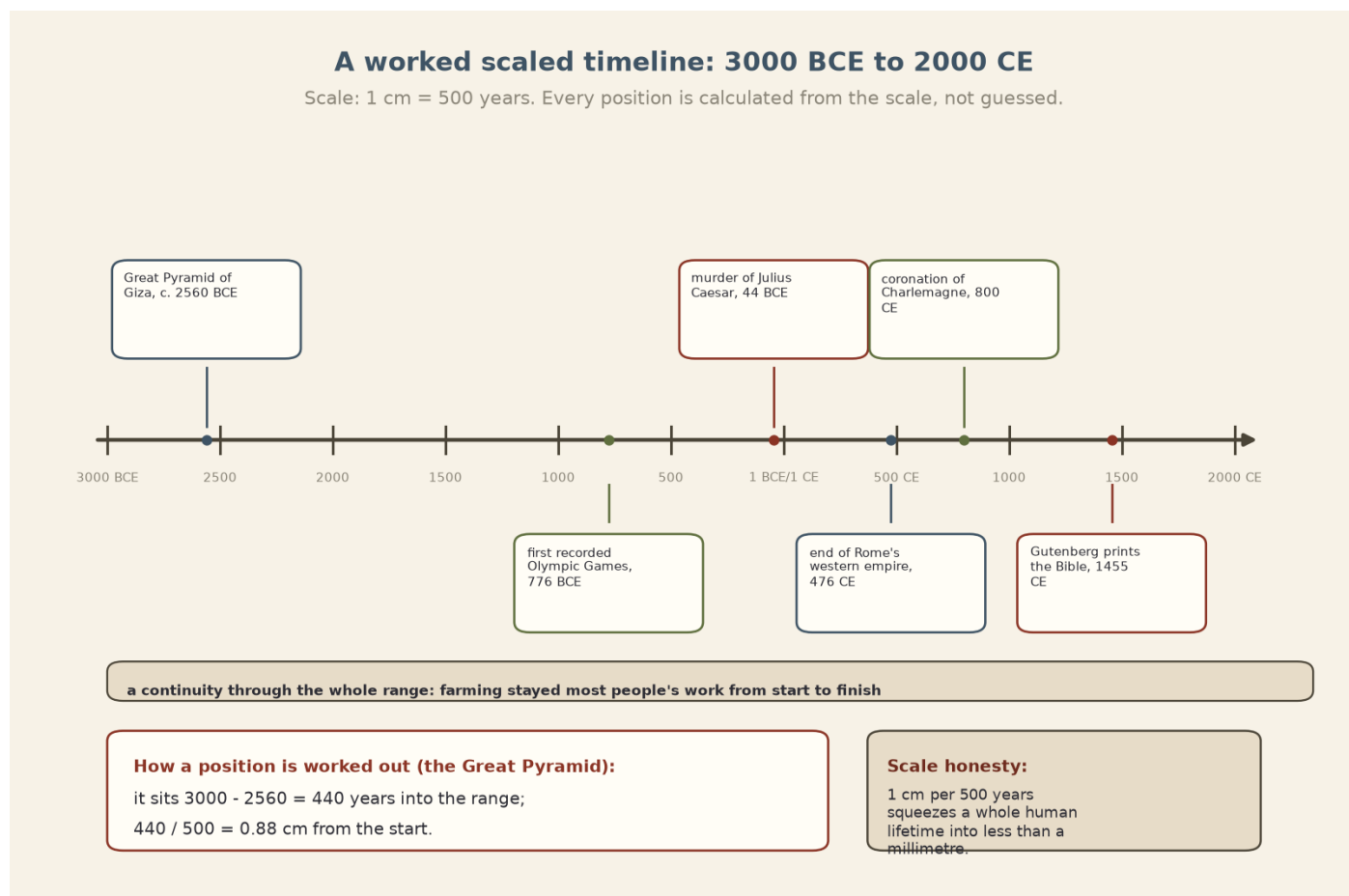
Figure 3 — the two epochs, and why we need a zoom. The whole of written history is a sliver of the Holocene, and the Holocene is a sliver of the two epochs.

Part 2: Scaled timelines — showing time honestly

A **scaled timeline** does not just put events in order; it makes the *gaps between them* true. Five steps:

1. **Choose the range** — the first and last dates you need.
2. **Choose a scale** you can fit on the page — for example, 1 cm = 500 years.
3. **Mark the axis** at even steps of that size.
4. **Place each event** by working out its position (do the arithmetic; do not guess).
5. **Label events**, and add bands or threads for things that continue through the period (a timeline shows change and continuity at once).

Figure 4 is a worked example covering the whole range of this book and beyond: **3000 BCE to 2000 CE** at **1 cm = 500 years**.



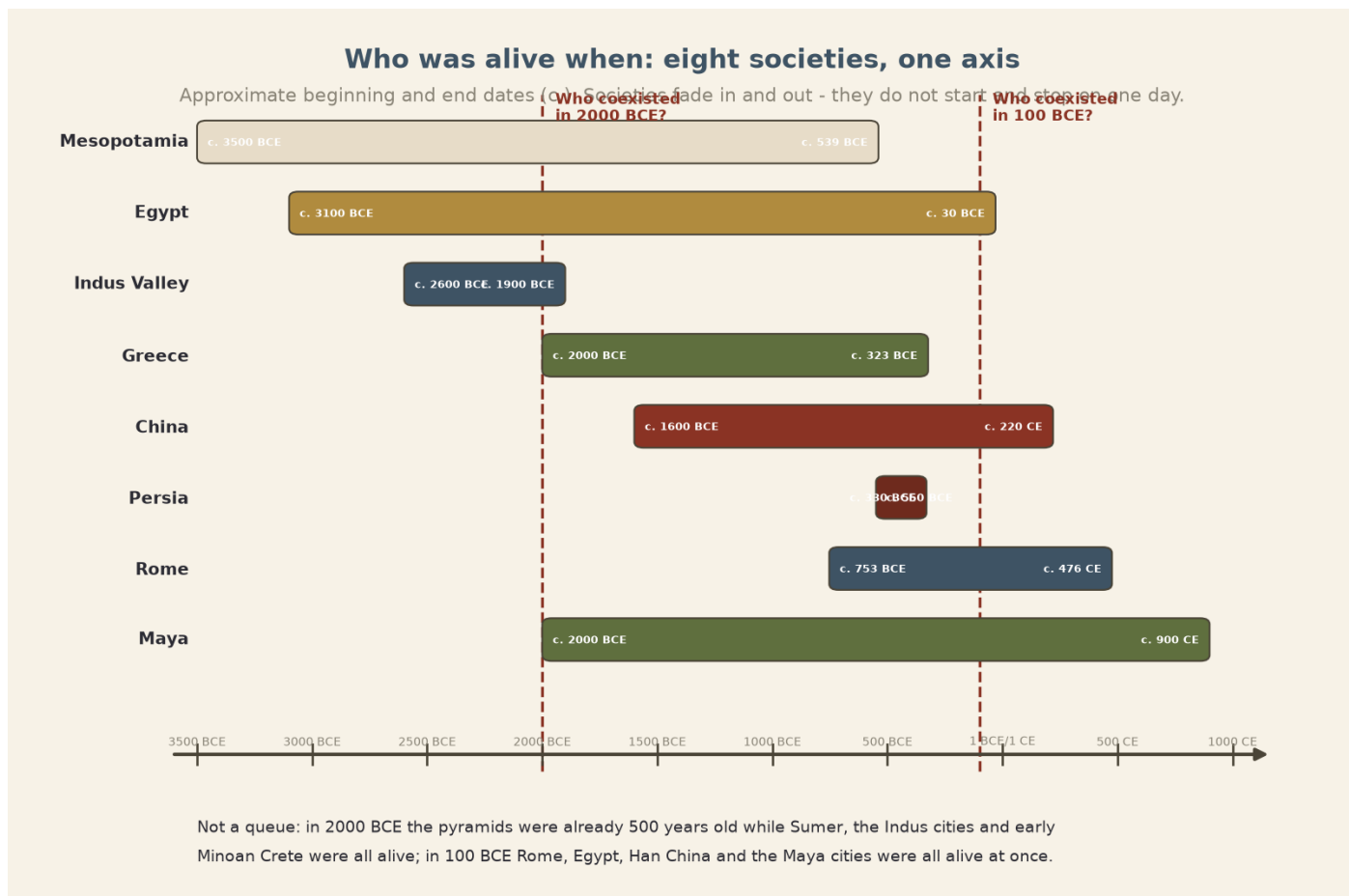
A worked scaled timeline from 3000 BCE to 2000 CE drawn at 1 cm per 500 years, with six placed events - the Great Pyramid, the first Olympic Games, the murder of Julius Caesar, the end of Rome's western empire, the coronation of Charlemagne and the Gutenberg Bible - and the arithmetic for one placement shown.

Figure 4 — a worked scaled timeline. Every position is calculated from the scale, not guessed.

Two warnings about scale. First, scale can lie: stretch a short period across a long axis and small gaps look huge; squeeze a long period into a corner and centuries look like minutes. A good historian says what their scale hides. Second, one scale rarely fits everything: the timeline in 1A had to use zoom panels, because the last 16,000 years would be invisible on the scale of the last 4 million. When you make your own (Q3, Q8, ER1), say out loud what your chosen scale shows well — and what it squashes.

Part 3: Side by side — societies that coexisted

The ancient world was **not a queue**. Egypt did not finish and hand history to Greece; Rome did not wait for China. At almost every moment in this book, several societies were alive at once — trading with each other, copying each other, fighting each other, or simply living far apart. Figure 5 gives approximate beginning and end dates for eight societies you will meet in this book.



A chart of eight ancient and pre-modern societies as horizontal bars on one time axis from 3500 BCE to 1000 CE - Mesopotamia, Egypt, Indus Valley, Greece, China, Persia, Rome and the Maya - with two dashed lines asking which societies coexisted in 2000 BCE and in 100 BCE.

Figure 5 — who was alive when. All dates are approximate (c.); societies fade in and out rather than starting and stopping on a single day.

Read the overlaps, not just the bars:

- In **2000 BCE**, the pyramids were already 500 years old, while Sumer's city-states, the Indus Valley cities and early Minoan communities on Crete were all alive at the same time.
- In **100 BCE**, Rome, Egypt, Han-dynasty China and the Maya cities were all alive at once. Rome and Han China never met in battle, yet their goods travelled the Silk Road routes described in 1D.
- Egypt's story ends **inside** Rome's story: Rome took over Egypt in **30 BCE**, after the deaths of Marcus Antonius and Queen Cleopatra VII.

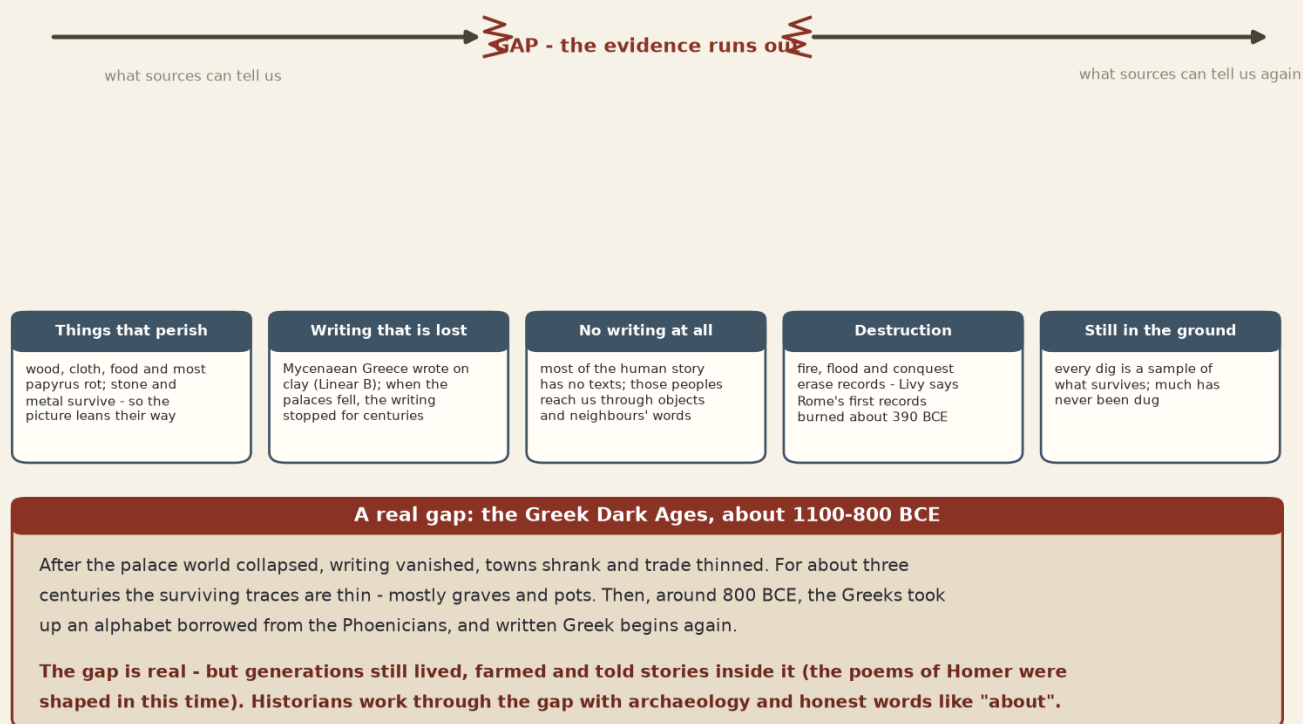
Notice also how the dates were found. For literate societies we have king lists, records and dated objects; for others we lean on archaeology and methods like carbon dating (Part 1). That is why every bar carries a c. — and why the next part matters.

Part 4: Why timelines have gaps

A **gap** is a stretch of a timeline or story where the evidence runs out. Gaps are not mistakes to hide; they are part of the evidence itself. Five common causes:

Why timelines have gaps

A gap is a fact about what survives, not proof that nothing happened.



A timeline with a torn, empty middle section, with five labelled causes of gaps around it - things that perish, writing that is lost, societies that left no writing, destruction by fire or conquest, and evidence still in the ground - and a case panel on the Greek Dark Ages.

Figure 6 — where holes come from. The case panel shows a real gap: Greece's Dark Ages.

1. **Things that perish.** Wood, cloth, food, skin and most papyrus rot. Stone, gold and fired clay survive — so our picture is pulled toward the things that do not decay.
2. **Writing that is lost.** The Mycenaean Greeks of about 1600–1100 BCE wrote on clay tablets in a script we call Linear B. When their palaces fell, the writing stopped; Greece used no writing for centuries afterwards.
3. **Societies that left no writing.** Most of the human story has no texts at all (Part 1). Those peoples reach us through objects — and through what others wrote about them, which must be read with care.
4. **Destruction.** Fire, flood and conquest erase records. In 3B, Livy himself warns that Rome's first records burned when Gauls sacked the city (about 390 BCE).
5. **Evidence still in the ground.** Every excavation is a sample of what survives, and much has never been dug.

The worked case: the Greek Dark Ages (about 1100–800 BCE). After the palace world collapsed, writing vanished, towns shrank and trade thinned. For about three centuries the surviving traces are thin — mostly graves and pots. Then, around 800 BCE, the Greeks took up an alphabet borrowed from the Phoenicians, and written Greek begins again. The gap is real. But a gap is a fact about *survival*, not about people: generations lived, farmed, told stories and raised children inside those three centuries. Historians just have to work harder to hear them — with archaeology, with later memories (the poems of Homer were shaped in this time), and with honest labels like “about” and “perhaps”.

Primary source close study: sequencing four Roman coins

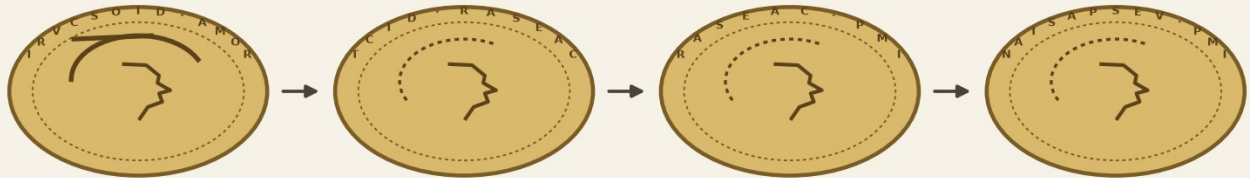
Coins are near-perfect sources for sequencing: they were made by states, they carry names and pictures, they are dated, and thousands survive. Here are four Roman coins. Your job is to put them in order — and then use the order to explain a change.

Sequencing four Roman coins

Put the sources in order, then use the order to explain a change. Sketches are simplified from British Museum coins.

THE CHANGE the sequence shows: the state's money moves from shared symbols to one ruler's face.

THE CONTINUITY underneath: the same silver denarius, the same Latin lettering, money controlled by the same state.



Coin 1	Coin 2	Coin 3	Coin 4
Republic denarius, about 137 BCE Head of Roma on the front; the twin horsemen on the back. No living face - a state with no single ruler.	denarius of Julius Caesar, early 44 BCE The first Roman coin with the portrait of a living Roman. Caesar was murdered months later.	denarius of Augustus, about 29-27 BCE Struck after the civil wars. One man is master of the Roman world, yet the coin keeps the old Republic's habits.	denarius of Vespasian, AD 69-79 A century on, the emperor's face on silver is simply how Rome works.

Order first, explain second: the coins only tell this story because they are put in date order.

Four Roman coins drawn in a row in date order with captions - a Republic denarius of about 137 BCE with the head of Roma and the twin horsemen, a denarius of Julius Caesar of early 44 BCE with his portrait, a denarius of Augustus of about 29-27 BCE, and a denarius of Vespasian of AD 69-79 - with a change note above (from state symbols to one ruler's face) and a continuity note below (same silver, same Latin, same state control).

Figure 7 — four primary sources. British Museum holdings; drawings are my own, simplified from the real coins.

- **Coin 1 — a denarius of the Republic, about 137 BCE.** Silver money of the Roman Republic (the first denarius was struck about 211 BCE). The front shows the helmeted head of Roma, the city's symbol; the back shows the Dioscuri, the twin horsemen who guarded the city. No living person's face appears: this is a state with no single ruler.
- **Coin 2 — a denarius of Julius Caesar, early 44 BCE.** The first Roman coin to carry the portrait of a living Roman. Caesar's own face and name appear while he is still alive. Months later he was murdered in the senate.
- **Coin 3 — a denarius of Augustus, about 29–27 BCE.** Struck after the civil wars ended. The man born Octavian now appears as *Imperator Caesar*, sole master of the Roman world — yet the coin keeps the old Republic's names and habits.
- **Coin 4 — a denarius of Vespasian, AD 69–79.** A century on, the emperor's face on silver is simply how Rome works. Vespasian came to power after another year of civil war and made the portrait-on-coin habit unremarkable.

The method, in four moves.

Model text: the four moves of sequencing primary sources

Use these moves on any set of sources in this book.

1

Date each source.

Coin 2 names Julius Caesar, who was murdered in March 44 BCE - so it must have been struck before that date.

2

Put the sources in order.

About 137 BCE, then early 44 BCE, then about 29-27 BCE, then AD 69-79.

3

Test the dates.

Coins carry official names and titles that can be checked against written records; a c. marks the honest margin of doubt.

4

Explain: continuity and change, cause and consequence.

The metal moved from shared symbols to one man's face - because the Republic fell and one ruler took power (3F). The same silver and Latin carried on underneath.

Move 4 is where the content description lives: ordering is only worth doing because the order lets you explain what changed, what continued - and what might have caused what.

A colour-coded model of the four moves for sequencing primary sources - date each source, order them, test the dates, then explain continuity and change and possible causes - with one worked sentence per move using the Roman coins.

Figure 8 — model text: the four moves of sequencing. Use these moves on any set of sources in this book.

Notice that move 4 is where the content description lives. Ordering the coins is only worth doing because the order lets us say: **the state's money changed from showing shared symbols to showing one man's face, and that change followed the fall of the Republic and the rise of one-man rule** (3F tells the story from the writers' side; here the metal itself tells it).

From sequence to explanation: causes and consequences

Order is the frame; explanation is the building. Once sources are in order, you can trace **cause** backwards and **consequence** forwards:

From sequence to explanation: the coin case as a chain

Each arrow carries a cause-consequence link word. Order is the frame; explanation is the building.



What the chain lets us say:

Because Caesar was murdered and the civil wars followed, one man ended up in charge - and the coins, struck by the state, show that change within a generation. Consequence at one step becomes cause at the next.

Warning: FIRST does not mean BECAUSE

School exams come before the summer holidays every year - but the exams do not cause the holidays. Sequence is needed for cause: a cause must come before its consequence. But order alone never proves a link. You need evidence of the link - here, the coins show the change, and the Roman historians tell us the politics behind it.

A cause-and-consequence chain built from the coin case: the murder of Caesar in 44 BCE, the civil wars, Octavian's victory at Actium in 31 BCE, the settlement of 27 BCE that left one man in charge behind Republic names, and emperors on coins as the normal way by AD 69-79 - with link words at every step and a warning that first does not mean caused.

Figure 9 — from sequence to explanation. Each arrow carries a cause-consequence link word; the warning box is the point of the figure.

Two rules for cause language:

- **Use link words on purpose:** *because, led to, as a result, so that, this meant that*. If you cannot put a link word between two events, you may only have a list, not an explanation.
- **“First, then” is not “because”.** School exams come every year before the summer holidays, but the exams do not cause the holidays. Sequence is *needed* for cause — a cause must come before its consequence — but order alone never proves a link. You need evidence of the link: here, the coins show the change, and writers such as the Roman historians tell us the politics behind it.

Secondary source interpretation: when did the ancient world end?

Periodisation is the habit of cutting time into named stretches — “ancient”, “medieval”, “early modern”. These labels are historians’ tools, not facts of nature, and historians argue about where the cuts go. Here is one famous argument, with three real positions, each given in its strongest form:

When did the ancient world end? Three historians' answers

Periodisation - cutting time into named stretches - is historians' work, and historians argue about it.

View A	View B	View C
The traditional reading: a clean break at 476 CE THE CLAIM In 476 the Germanic commander Odoacer deposed Romulus Augustulus, the last western emperor. No new western emperor replaced him. ITS STRONGEST EVIDENCE the end of western imperial rule is a dated, checkable political fact; western sources of the time treat it as an ending WHAT IT DOWNPLAYS the eastern Roman empire kept going for another thousand years; trade, farming and daily life did not stop in a single year	Henri Pirenne (1937): the real break came in the 600s-700s THE CLAIM Mediterranean trade kept the old Roman world joined after 476; the conquests of the 600s split the sea in two, and power moved north to the Franks - Pirenne's famous line is that without this shift there would have been no Charlemagne. ITS STRONGEST EVIDENCE follows the evidence of trade and goods, which shows the Mediterranean world working as one system long after 476 WHAT IT DOWNPLAYS the real political collapse of western provinces in the 400s - kings, armies and tax systems did change then	Peter Brown (1971): a long transformation, c. 250-800 CE THE CLAIM No single year works. Instead Brown named the stretch late antiquity: slow religious, legal and cultural change, as Christianity spread and new kingdoms grew out of the Roman world. ITS STRONGEST EVIDENCE fits the slow evidence of belief, law and culture better than any single date WHAT IT DOWNPLAYS real collapse in some regions - towns shrank, trade thinned and writing grew scarce, which 'transformation' can soften
All three read real evidence; they weigh different parts of it - political events, trade, or slow cultural change. Which view do you judge best supported? You are marked on the weighing, not the label you choose.		

Three labelled panels comparing historians' views of when the ancient world ended - the traditional 476 CE break, Pirenne's 600s break, and Peter Brown's long transformation called late antiquity - each panel giving the claim, its strongest evidence and what it downplays, ending with the question of which is best supported.

Figure 10 — three historians' answers to one question. This is the same skill 6F will take further: interpretations differ because historians give different weight to the same evidence.

All three historians read real evidence; they simply weigh different parts of it — political events, trade, or slow cultural change. When you answer Q9, you are marked on how well you weigh, not on which label you choose.

Practice tasks (with help)

Q1. Using Figure 1, match each term to its meaning: (a) counting years from a fixed anchor year, 1950 CE; (b) the time before writing existed; (c) the epoch we live in now; (d) "in the year of our Lord"; (e) the ice-age epoch; (f) "Common Era".

Q2. Figure 2, three parts. (a) How many years passed between the murder of Julius Caesar in 44 BCE and the death of Augustus in AD 14? Show your working. (b) Convert 5,000 BP into an approximate BCE date (anchor: 1950). (c) Why is there no year zero?

Q3. Draw your own scaled timeline of the range **3000 BCE to 2000 CE** on grid paper at 1 cm = 500 years, using the five steps from Part 2. Place these four events, showing your arithmetic for each: the Great Pyramid of Giza (c. 2560 BCE); the first recorded Olympic Games (776 BCE); the coronation of Charlemagne (800 CE); the fall of Rome's western empire (476 CE). Under your line, draw one band for a continuity of your choice that runs through the whole range.

Q4. Figure 5, three parts. (a) Name three societies that coexisted in 2000 BCE. (b) Name two societies that coexisted in 100 BCE but not in 2000 BCE. (c) Which bar covers the longest time, roughly, and about how long is it?

Q5. Match each situation to its cause of a gap, using Figure 6: (a) a wooden temple has rotted away, leaving only stone footings; (b) a palace archive burned when invaders took the city; (c) a farming people left tools and graves but no words; (d) a script stopped being used after the palaces fell; (e) a whole city quarter has never been dug.

Q6. Figure 7, two parts. (a) Put the four coins in date order. (b) State one **continuity** and one **change** across the whole sequence.

Tasks to try on your own

Q7. “BCE/CE is a better choice for a shared world.” Give the strongest case **for** the claim and the strongest case **against** it (the contested-term box in Part 1 arms both sides). Finish with your own reasoned judgement. You are marked on the reasoning, not on which label you prefer.

Q8. Build a scaled timeline for the whole of this book’s period: **10,000 BCE to 1750 CE**. Choose a scale that fits a page, place five events from any sections of this book (label each with its section), and mark one period where at least two societies from Figure 5 coexisted. Then write two sentences: what does your scale show well, and what does it squash?

Q9. Claim: “*Ancient societies took turns — one ended before the next began.*” Using Figure 5, argue **against** this claim with at least two real overlap examples. Then give the other side its best case: one reason a student might believe the queue idea (think about how timelines are usually drawn). Finish with one sentence on what coexistence lets historians study that a queue would hide (trade? copying? comparison?).

Q10. Choose one cause of gaps from Figure 6 and one real example from this book (the Greek Dark Ages, Livy’s burned records, the perishable bias of Part 4). Explain in one paragraph how historians can still work despite that gap — name at least one kind of evidence they would use instead.

Extended response (chapter task — the full criteria live in 7C and 7D)

ER1. Choose one society from Chapters 1–5 of this book. Build for it: (a) a scaled timeline with its approximate beginning and end dates and five dated events, using the five-step method of Part 2; (b) two other societies from Figure 5 that coexisted with it, with the overlap stated in years; (c) one gap in its story and the most likely cause of that gap. Then write a short commentary that sequences four primary sources of your choice from this book to explain one significant **change** or one significant **continuity** in your society’s story, using the four moves of Figure 8 and cause-consequence link words throughout. Apply the significance criteria from 7C to justify why your five events deserve their places, and present your answer in a format from 7D. Address the strongest counter-case to your choice of change or continuity (something that continued while your change happened, or changed while your continuity held).

Answer guide (for the teacher)

Q1. (a) BP; (b) pre-history; (c) Holocene; (d) AD; (e) Pleistocene; (f) CE.

Q2. (a) $44 + 14 - 1 = 57$ years (no year zero). (b) $5,000 - 1,950 = 3,050$, so about 3050 BCE. (c) The BC/AD system was built before Europe used the number zero; the count runs 1 BCE, then AD 1.

Q3. Positions at 1 cm = 500 years from 3000 BCE: Great Pyramid $(3000 - 2560) \div 500 = 0.88$ cm; Olympic Games $(3000 - 776) \div 500 = 4.45$ cm; 476 CE $(3000 + 476) \div 500 = 6.95$ cm; Charlemagne $(3000 + 800) \div 500 = 7.6$ cm. Accept correctly worked positions and any defensible continuity band (e.g. farming as most people’s work; written records after c. 3300 BCE).

Q4. (a) Any three of: Egypt, Mesopotamia, the Indus Valley cities, early Greece (Minoan Crete); early Maya villages also acceptable if flagged as approximate. (b) China and Rome (or Rome and Egypt, Persia and China). (c) Egypt, about 3,070 years (c. 3100 BCE to 30 BCE); accept Mesopotamia at about 2,960 years given the approximate dates, marked on the reasoning.

Q5. (a) things that perish; (b) destruction; (c) societies that left no writing; (d) writing that is lost; (e) evidence still in the ground.

Q6. (a) Republic denarius (c. 137 BCE) → Caesar (early 44 BCE) → Augustus (c. 29–27 BCE) → Vespasian (AD 69–79). (b) Continuity: silver denarius, Latin lettering, state-controlled money, portrait-and-symbol layout. Change: from shared state symbols with no living face to the portrait of one ruler as the normal design.

Q7. Mark on: the for-case (labels that name no one faith; the working choice of most museums and scholars; same count, so nothing is lost) and the against-case (the count's origin is still Christian-centred; "common" overstates agreement while the Jewish and Islamic calendars run their own counts). A full-mark judgement says what the choice is really about — whose story the calendar names — not just a preference. Different judgements with sound reasoning meet the standard (CONTESTED_TERMS.md Rule 5).

Q8. Mark on: a consistent chosen scale with arithmetic shown; five real, dated events from the book; one correct coexistence mark (e.g. Rome and Han China, or Egypt and Persia's empire where the bars genuinely overlap); and two honest sentences about what the scale squashes (expected: the whole of pre-history before the book's range, or the deep contrast between 10,000 years of slow change and the busy last centuries).

Q9. Mark on: two real overlaps from Figure 5 with dates (e.g. Egypt, Mesopotamia and the Indus Valley all alive in 2000 BCE; Rome, Egypt, Han China and the Maya all alive in 100 BCE); a genuine steelman of the queue idea (single-line timelines like Figure 4 show one thread at a time, and school stories often follow one society at a time); and a final sentence reaching contact, copying or comparison (trade routes, shared ideas, or judging one society against another).

Q10. Mark on: a correctly matched cause and real example, and a paragraph that names at least one working substitute (archaeology — pots, graves, seeds, building footings; later writings that remember the gap period, like Homer's poems for Dark Age Greece; scientific methods like radiocarbon dating). The point is that a gap is a problem of survival, not proof that nothing happened.

ER1. Mark on: a correct scaled timeline with arithmetic shown and approximate begin/end dates; two coexistence overlaps stated in years; a gap matched to a likely cause; four sequenced primary sources with the four moves of Figure 8 visible; cause and consequence link words in the commentary; 7C criteria applied to event choice; the counter-case given real strength before it is answered. The verdict or chosen society is not marked; the reasoning chain is.

Sources used in this section

Every source examined or quoted here is a real, citable artifact (D4). Verified 25 August 2026.

- **Denarius of the Roman Republic, c. 137 BCE** (head of Roma; Dioscuri reverse; RRC 234/1, M. H. Crawford, *Roman Republican Coinage*, Cambridge University Press, 1974). British Museum, London.
- **Denarius of C. Julius Caesar, early 44 BCE** — first coin to carry the portrait of a living Roman (RRC 480). British Museum, London.
- **Denarius of Augustus, c. 29–27 BCE**, struck after the battle of Actium (RIC I², Augustus). British Museum, London.
- **Denarius of Vespasian, AD 69–79** (RIC II, Vespasian). British Museum, London. All coin drawings in Figure 6b_coin_sequence.png are my own simplified sketches of these types, not reproductions of any publication's plates.
- **Dionysius Exiguus**, Easter tables computed at Rome 525 CE (the AD system's origin); **Bede**, *De temporum ratione* (725) and *Historia ecclesiastica* (731), which spread BC/AD usage. Herod the Great's death dated to 4 BCE in modern scholarship.
- **J. R. Arnold and W. F. Libby**, "Age Determinations by Radiocarbon Content", *Science* 110 (1949), pp. 678–680 — first published radiocarbon dates; W. F. Libby, Nobel Prize in Chemistry 1960 for the method.
- **Pleistocene–Holocene boundary** — Global Boundary Stratotype Section and Point ratified by the International Union of Geological Sciences (2008): about 11,700 years before 2000 CE.
- **First writing** — Sumer (southern Mesopotamia) and Egypt, c. 3300–3100 BCE; early cuneiform tablets of Uruk in the British Museum's collection.

- **Greek Dark Ages** — Linear B tablets from Mycenaean palaces (British Museum; deciphered 1952 by Michael Ventris and John Chadwick); adoption of the Phoenician alphabet by the Greeks, c. 800 BCE.
- **Livy**, *Ab Urbe Condita*, preface to Book 6 — the warning that Rome’s early records perished in the Gallic sack (cross-reference to section 3B).
- **Silk Road contacts between Rome and Han China** — as taught in section 1D.
- **Rome’s takeover of Egypt, 30 BCE** — after the deaths of Marcus Antonius and Cleopatra VII.
- **Henri Pirenne**, *Mohammed and Charlemagne* (published in French 1937, after his death) — the “break in the 600s” reading, summarised in my own words.
- **Peter Brown**, *The World of Late Antiquity* (Thames and Hudson, 1971) — the long-transformation reading, summarised in my own words.
- Victorian Curriculum 2.0 History, Levels 7–8, VC2HH8S02 and elaborations .E01–.E05, per the VCAA export retrieved 2026-07-29 and re-read 2026-08-21 (build TOC §1).
- All dates follow the BCE/CE convention taught in this section. No First Nations content appears in this section; the §2A disposition of .E01 (two terms dropped, nine kept) is recorded in the teacher block above.

Section 6B · VC2HH8S02 · Draws on VC2HH8S02.E01 (partial, §2A), VC2HH8S02.E02, VC2HH8S02.E03, VC2HH8S02.E04, VC2HH8S02.E05

Reading historical sources: features, content, context

Curriculum focus — teacher block

Owning content description — VC2HH8S03 (Historical Concepts and Skills, Using historical sources).

Elaboration linkage (D7 — linkage only, not a teaching order; ids verbatim from the VCAA export, final ids over substantive elaborations; all six active, no §2A exclusions):

- .E01 working with a wide range of sources — Part 2’s four source families.
- .E02 working with a wide range of interpretations — Part 2’s five kinds.
- .E03 selecting and recording information; telling primary from secondary — Part 3. The two definitions are given in the student text at first use.
- .E04 the challenges of translating across cultures — Part 4. Carries the official “Asia and Australia’s Engagement with Asia” cross-curriculum tag — official tag name kept; no change required (no First Nations referent in the text). The section is taught end-to-end on Ashoka’s edicts: the code’s named case, and the richest match for the CD’s features/content/context + translation demands.
- .E05 evaluating methods used on the ancient past — Part 5.
- .E06 cross-sectional drawings of excavation layers — Part 6.

Achievement standard coverage: this section owns the standard’s sentence on explaining primary and secondary sources in terms of their features, content and context, and contributes the habit of applying historical questions to sources — carried forward in 6D, which owns value and accuracy of evidence.

First Nations disposition (§2A): none — the CD and all six of its elaborations carry no First Nations content. Nothing in this section is excluded.

Division of labour with 1C (VC2HH8K03) and with 6D (VC2HH8S04). 1C introduces stratigraphy and DNA testing on the Knowledge side (methods and heritage). Here those methods are taught on the Skills side of this CD — as ways of fixing a source’s *context* (date, place, who), *evaluated* for what they can and cannot show (E05) — and the E06 cross-sectional drawing task is owned here. 6C re-establishes each method in one or two sentences and cross-refers to 1C; it does not assume 1C’s tasks. Value-of-evidence judgements (accuracy, usefulness, fact vs opinion) are owned by 6D and are not taught here — 6C stops at explaining what a source is, what it says and what surrounded it.

Cross-references: 1C (stratigraphy, DNA testing of mummies), 3F (the Res Gestae close study already applies these three questions), 4B (Einhard’s Life of Charlemagne), 5C (Marco Polo-era travel writing), 6A (historical questions), 6B (BCE/CE conventions), 6D (value of sources — next step), 6E (perspectives from sources), 6F (interpretations and debates). No section assumes a specific Level 7 sequence (D1).

Key subject terms defined at first use (D2 exemption 2): source, feature, content, context, primary source, secondary source (the last two defined at first use in Part 3), artefact, oral tradition, written source, visual source, inscription, script, edict, epic, translation, interpretation, stratigraphy, DNA, destruction layer. Contested-term handling per CONTESTED_TERMS.md: “primary source”/“secondary source” are treated as stipulated terms (Rule 1b) — definitions fixed by this book at first use, with the genuine boundary cases surfaced rather than hidden; the historians’ disagreement over Ashoka’s motives is steelmanned on both sides (Rule 5) and tested symmetrically (Rule 4); marking is on quality of reasoning, not conclusion reached (Rule 5, stated in the answer guide).

Teaching sequence (for the teacher). 1. The three questions — features, content, context — worked on one object, the Athenian owl coin (Key ideas Part 1; Figure 6c_three_lenses.png). 2. The broad range of sources and of interpretations (Part 2; Figure 6c_source_families.png) — E01 and E02. 3. Primary vs secondary using the book’s stipulated definitions; the boundary cases; selecting and recording information (Part 3; Figures 6c_primary_secondary.png, 6c_recording_frame.png) — E03. 4. Translation and intercultural understanding: the Edicts of Ashoka, the Vedas, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata (Part 4; Figure 6c_translation_gaps.png) — E04. 5. Methods that fix context — stratigraphy and DNA, evaluated (Part 5; Figure 6c_methods_eval.png) — E05; joins 1C. 6. The cross-sectional drawing and the destruction-layer inference, worked against Troy (Part 6; Figures 6c_cross_section.png, 6c_troy_layers.png) — E06. 7. Primary-source close study: the Edicts of Ashoka, with Major Rock Edict I in the author’s own plain-English

rendering (Figures 6c_ashoka_card.png, 6c_ashoka_extract.png). 8. Secondary-source interpretation: the two strongest readings of Ashoka's dhamma — the changed-king reading and Romila Thapar's shared-code reading (Figure 6c_two_views.png). 9. Scaffolded practice Q1–Q6, unscaffolded Q7–Q10; Q10 is the evidence-based extended response, with the worked model in Figure 6c_model_explanation.png.

Common misconceptions to address: that “primary” means trustworthy and “secondary” means weak (a primary source can be one-sided, and a careful secondary source can keep voices no primary source preserves — students meet this again with Suetonius in 3F); that anything old is automatically primary (a late copy of a lost older text, or a story first written down long after it was told, sits on the boundary and must be argued); that a translation is the same thing as the original (every translation carries choices, and some words have no clean carry-over — dhamma is the worked case); that stratigraphy gives calendar dates (it gives order — which layers are older and younger — not years); that one source alone can settle a question (features, content and context claims are checked against other evidence — that is 6D's work).

What you will learn in this section

Everything this book has said about Rome, medieval Europe, the Mongol world, or the ancient societies of India, China, Egypt and Greece comes from **sources** — things people made, wrote, said or built that have survived into our time. Historians do not simply read a source and believe it. First they explain three things about it: its **features**, its **content** and its **context**. That is the skill of this section, and you will use it in every section after this one.

It starts with a mystery. In the early 1800s, stones all over India carried writing in a script nobody alive could read. In 1837 a young scholar named **James Prinsep** worked out how to read that script, called **Brahmi**. The stones he read were signed by a king who called himself “Beloved of the Gods, King Piyadasi” — and they had a great deal to say. By the end of this section you will know who that king was, what his stones say, and how to explain sources like them in terms of their features, content and context.

Some words we will use, defined as we meet them:

- **source** — anything from the past that historians can use as evidence: a letter, a speech, a story, a picture, a tool, a building, a bone, a coin.
- **feature** — what a source is as a physical thing: what it is made of, what form it takes, its size, its condition, where it is now.
- **content** — what a source says, shows or contains.
- **context** — the situation in which a source was made and used: when, where, by whom, for whom, and what was going on around it.
- **primary source** — a source **made at the time of the events, people or places it deals with**.
- **secondary source** — a source made later that represents a later interpretation.
- **artefact** — an object made or shaped by human hands, such as a weapon, a tool or a pot.
- **oral tradition** — knowledge passed on by voice from person to person and generation to generation, including stories.
- **inscription** — words cut into a hard surface such as stone or metal.
- **script** — a system of written signs: the shapes a language is written in.
- **edict** — an official order or statement made by a ruler and put in public.
- **epic** — a long poem that tells a story of heroes, gods and great events.
- **translation** — a version of a text turned into another language. Every translation is made by a person who has to choose between meanings, so a translation is never exactly the same thing as the original.
- **stratigraphy** — reading the layers of soil at a site to work out which finds are older and which are younger. You met this in section 1C.
- **DNA** — the chemical code inside every living thing. It can survive in old bones and teeth and can be read in labs today. You met this in section 1C.

A note about “primary” and “secondary”. These are not words with one meaning everyone agrees on forever. Their meanings are **fixed by stipulation** — the definitions above are the ones this book uses. There are real sources that sit

on the boundary between the two, and historians argue about them. That arguing is part of the skill, and you will do some of it yourself.

Key ideas

Part 1: Three questions to ask of any source

To **explain** a source is to answer three questions:

1. **Features** — **what is it?** The facts you could list without understanding a word of it: what it is made of, its form, its size, its condition, where it was found, where it is now.
2. **Content** — **what does it say, show or contain?** The message, the picture, the story, the use. For a written source: what does it claim? For an object: what was it for, and what pictures or marks does it carry?
3. **Context** — **what surrounded it?** When and where it was made, by whom and for whom, and what was happening in that society at the time. Context is what stops us reading the past with modern eyes.

Here are the three questions run over one object — a silver coin made in Athens more than 2,400 years ago:

- **Features.** A small silver coin, about the size of a thumbnail and about 17 grams in weight, struck (pressed between shaped metal dies) in Athens from about 450 BCE. On one side it shows the head of the goddess **Athena** wearing a helmet; on the other side an owl, a small olive branch and three Greek letters. It survives today in large numbers in museums such as the British Museum in London.
- **Content.** The pictures are the city's own symbols: Athena was Athens's patron goddess, and the owl was her bird. The three letters are short for "of the Athenians" — the coin announces who made it. An olive branch recalls the olive tree that, in Athenian story, Athena gave the city.
- **Context.** Athens in the fifth century BCE was a rich trading city whose silver came from mines at Laurion. The coins paid sailors, traders and soldiers across the Mediterranean — which is why so many survive far from Greece. The owl coin tells us about Athens at the very time Athens was at its height.

Each question guards against a different mistake. Listing the **features** stops you guessing about what a source is. Explaining the **content** stops you assuming you know what it means before you have read it. Working out the **context** stops you taking it out of its own time and place.

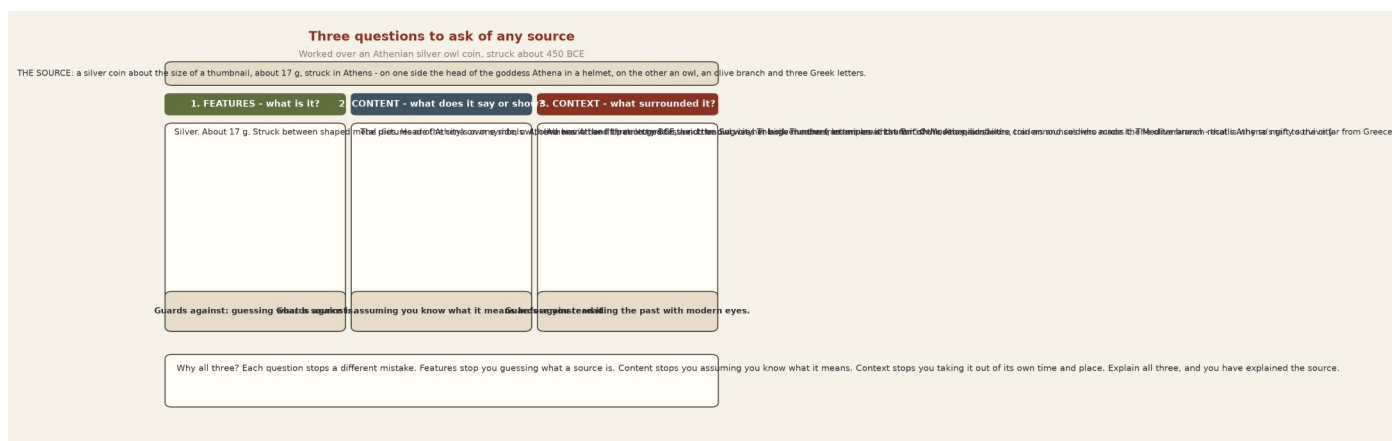


Diagram of the three questions historians ask of any source — features, content, context — each one worked over an ancient Athenian silver owl coin, with the mistake each question guards against

Part 2: The families of sources

Historians work with a broad range of sources. This book sorts them into four families, and each family shows up across the chapters of this book:

- **Written materials** — letters, speeches, laws, records. Examples you have met or will meet: the letters of **Pliny the Younger** describing the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 CE; the **Res Gestae**, the emperor Augustus's own record of his deeds (3F); the law code of **Ur-Nammu**, cut in Sumerian on clay more than 4,000 years ago (1B).

- **Oral tradition, including stories** — knowledge passed by voice. The poems of **Homer** about the Trojan War were sung from memory for generations before they were written down in Greek around the eighth century BCE. The **Vedas** of ancient India were passed on by voice with extraordinary care long before they were written. The **Secret History of the Mongols**, the oldest account written from the Mongols’ own side, gathered up older spoken tales.
- **Visual sources** — artworks: paintings, carvings, mosaics, decorated buildings. The wall paintings in the caves of **Lascaux** in France were made about 17,000 years ago. **Trajan’s Column** in Rome, finished in 113 CE, wraps a carved story of the emperor Trajan’s wars around a stone pillar.
- **Artefacts** — weapons, tools and buildings. The **Colosseum** in Rome, finished in 80 CE, is an artefact the size of a stadium. So are a soldier’s sword, a baker’s oven, a child’s toy. Archaeologists also recover smaller finds that were never “made” at all — bones, seeds, charcoal from old fires — which count as archaeological sources.

Then there is a second broad range: the **interpretations** — accounts of the past made after the fact. This book names five: **textbooks** (like this book), **documentaries**, **films**, **fiction** and **the writings of historians**. An interpretation is not the past itself; it is someone’s version of the past, built from sources. That means interpretations are sources too — they have features, content and context of their own: who made them, when, for whom, and which sources they used. When you watch a film set in ancient Rome, you are meeting the film-maker’s Rome, and the three questions still apply.

The families of sources — and the interpretations built from them		
Family	What it includes	Real examples from the chapters of this book
Written materials	Letters, speeches, laws, records	Pliny the Younger’s letter on the eruption of Vesuvius (79 CE) - the Res Gestae, Augustus’s own record (31) - the law code of Un-Nammu on clay, over 4,000 years old (18)
Oral tradition, including stories	Knowledge passed by voice, person to person, generation to generation	Homer’s poems of the Trojan War; sung from memory before being written down around the eighth century BCE - the Vedas of India, passed by voice with great care - the Secret History of the Mongols, gathering older spoken tales
Visual sources	Artworks: paintings, carvings, mosaics, decorated buildings	The cave paintings of Lascaux in France, about 17,000 years old - Trajan’s Column in Rome (113 CE), a carved story of war around a stone pillar
Artefacts	Weapons, tools and buildings - plus small finds such as bones, seeds and charcoal	The Colosseum in Rome (finished 80 CE), an artefact the size of a stadium - a soldier’s sword, a baker’s oven, a child’s toy
And the second broad range: INTERPRETATIONS — accounts of the past made after the fact		
Textbooks (like this book)	The writings of historians	Documentaries
		Films
		Fiction

An interpretation is not the past itself - it is someone’s version of the past, built from sources. So it has features, content and context of its own: who made it, when, for whom, and which sources they used.

Table of the four families of sources — written materials, oral tradition, visual sources and artefacts — with real examples from the chapters of this book, and a strip of the five kinds of interpretation: textbooks, historians’ writings, documentaries, films and fiction

Part 3: Primary and secondary — and recording what you find

With the families in view, historians make one big sorting decision. The two definitions to use:

- A **primary source** is one **made at the time of the events, people or places it deals with**.
- A **secondary source** is one made later that represents a later interpretation.

The test to run: *was this made at the time of the thing it tells us about, by someone who was there or close to it?* If yes — primary. If it was made later, by someone working from other sources — secondary.

The test sounds simple, but real sources sit on the boundary, and the honest move is to say so and argue your sorting:

- Pliny the Younger’s letter about Vesuvius was written about 25 years after the eruption — but by a man who watched it happen. Most historians still call it a primary source: it is an eyewitness account. The time gap still matters, and it should be noted.
- The **Bayeux Tapestry** — a long strip of embroidered cloth showing the Norman conquest of England in 1066 — was made within decades of the event, probably in the 1070s, probably by stitchers close to the winners. Near the boundary: made after the event, but by people near it.
- **Einhard’s Life of Charlemagne** was written after the emperor’s death in 814 — so it is secondary — but Einhard had lived at Charlemagne’s court, so his book keeps details no earlier written source has.

- The **Secret History of the Mongols** was put into writing within decades of Genghis Khan's death in 1227, from older spoken tales — primary in part, later gathering in part.
- A modern film about gladiators is plainly a later interpretation: secondary.

Selecting and recording. Explaining sources is also a working habit: you select the sources that matter to your question, and you record what they show before you start arguing. Use a frame like the one below, one row per source. Writing the columns forces you to separate what the source *is* from what it *says* from what *surrounded* it — which is the whole skill of this section.

A recording frame for sources

One row per source. Copy it, and fill a row for each source your question needs.

Source	Features (what it is)	Content (what it says / shows)	Context (what surrounded it)	What it shows for my question
Athenian owl coin,	struck about 450 BCE	between Athens and Persia	showing Athena and Nike	wealth used for trade, ships and pay
		Your source:		

Write each column honestly: what you can SEE, what it SAYS, what SURROUNDED it - then what it shows for your question. Do not let the columns blur into each other.

A four-column recording frame — features, content, context, what it shows for my question — completed as a model for the Athenian owl coin

Primary or secondary? The test, and the cases that test it

The definitions this book uses (covering elaboration E03)

PRIMARY SOURCE	SECONDARY SOURCE
A source made at the time of the events, people or places it deals with.	A source made later that represents a later interpretation.

THE TEST: Was it made at the time of the thing it tells us about, by someone who was there or close to it? **Yes = primary. Made later from other sources = secondary.**

Pliny the Younger's letter about Vesuvius	Written about 25 years after the eruption - but by a man who watched it happen. Most historians keep it primary: an eyewitness account. Note the time gap when you use it.
The Bayeux Tapestry (the Norman conquest of 1066)	Made within decades of the event, probably in the 1070s, probably by stitchers close to the winners. After the event - but near it. A boundary case.
Einhard's Life of Charlemagne	Written after the emperor's death in 814 - secondary. But Einhard lived at the court, so the book keeps first-hand details no earlier written source has.
The Secret History of the Mongols	Put into writing within decades of Genghis Khan's death (1227), from older spoken tales. Primary in part, later gathering in part.
A modern film about gladiators	Made now, from other sources, with a story to tell. Plainly a later interpretation: secondary.

When a case sits on the boundary, say so - and argue your sorting. The arguing is part of the skill.

Sorting guide for primary and secondary sources: the two definitions, the test question to run, and five boundary cases from this book with the case for each side

Part 4: When sources come from far away — translation and intercultural understanding

Many of the world's great sources were not made in English, or in our time. They come from societies with other languages, other scripts and other ways of seeing the world. That creates real problems for anyone interrogating them — problems of **translation** and of **intercultural understanding** (understanding across cultures).

Problem 1 — the script. The writing may be in a script nobody uses any more. The Edicts of Ashoka were cut mostly in Brahmi, the script James Prinsep worked out how to read in 1837. Until someone cracks the script, the source is silent.

Problem 2 — words that do not carry over. Some words in old languages have no clean match in English. The Edicts of Ashoka keep using the word **dhamma** (in Sanskrit, **dharma**). Translators have turned it into “duty”, “right conduct”, “law”, “morality” and “the teaching of the Buddha” — and each choice shows the reader a slightly different king. The epics of India, the **Ramayana** and the **Mahabharata**, are full of the same word. Choosing how to move such a word across is a judgement, not a lookup.

Problem 3 — what the maker took for granted. A source assumes its first audience shares its world: its gods, its ranks, its duties, its jokes. The **Vedas** — the oldest sacred texts of Hinduism, whose oldest verses were composed in Sanskrit around 1500 to 1000 BCE and passed on by voice for centuries before being written down — name gods, rites and duties their first hearers knew by heart. A modern reader has to learn that world before the words land.

Problem 4 — who carries the message across. Translation was work people did at the time, too. Ashoka ruled an empire of many languages, and his own officials translated his edicts: a copy of his teaching found at **Kandahar** in modern Afghanistan, discovered in 1958, carries it in Greek and Aramaic. Every translator stands between you and the maker, and each one makes choices.

What can you do about all this? Historians use the same habits you can use:

- compare more than one translation of the same text and watch where they differ;
- learn what the key words meant to the people of the time, not just what they mean now;
- ask what the source takes for granted — what did the maker assume everyone knew?
- say plainly when a meaning is uncertain, instead of making it sound certain.

When sources come from far away: four challenges, four habits

The challenge	A real case	The habit historians use in reply
1. The script nobody uses any more	The Edicts of Ashoka were cut mostly in Brahmi, a script nobody could read by the early 300s. It is 800 years, please, work it out, how to feed it - and the stones began to speak.	
2. Words that do not carry over	Ashoka's edicts keep using the word dhamma (in Sanskrit, dharma). The edicts use it to name the teaching of the Buddha - and each choice shows a different king. The epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, are full of the same word.	
3. What the maker took for granted	The Vedas - the oldest sacred texts of Hinduism, whose oldest verses were composed around 1500 to 1000 BCE and passed on by voice for centuries before being written down - name gods, rites and duties their first hearers knew by heart.	
4. Who carries the message across	Ashoka ruled an empire of many languages. His own officials translated his edicts: a copy of his teaching found at Kandahar in modern Afghanistan, discovered in 1958, carries it in Greek and Aramaic.	

A translation is made by a person who has to choose between meanings. It is never exactly the same thing as the original - so read it with care.

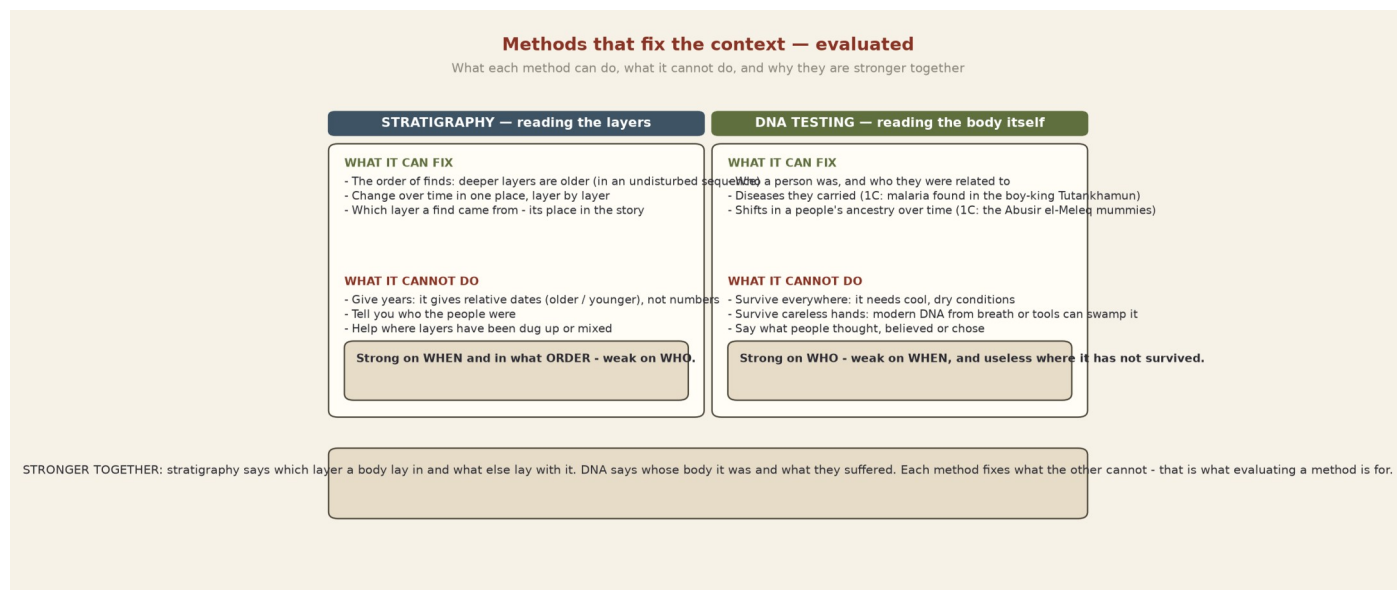
Table of the four challenges in translation and intercultural understanding — the script, words that do not carry over, what the maker took for granted, and who carries the message across — each with a real case from the Edicts of Ashoka, the Vedas, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, and the habit historians use in reply

Part 5: Methods that fix the context — and their limits

A source's **context** needs dates, places and people — and for the ancient past, documents often cannot supply them. That is where investigative methods come in. You met two of them in section 1C; here you evaluate them — weigh what each can and cannot do — because choosing the right method is part of explaining a source's context.

- **Stratigraphy** reads the layers of soil at a site. People build on top of what came before, so a dig site grows upward layer by layer: in an undisturbed sequence, deeper layers are older than layers above them. Stratigraphy gives **relative** dates — it says which finds are older and younger than others, in what order — and it shows change over time in one place. It does not give years on its own.
- **DNA testing** reads the chemical code in old bones, teeth and soft tissue. It can identify individuals, work out who was related to whom, and find the diseases a person carried — as the studies of Egyptian mummies in 1C showed (the boy-king Tutankhamun carried malaria; the ancestry of Egypt's people shifted across 1,300 years). DNA needs cool, dry conditions to survive, and modern DNA from hands or breath can swamp it, so samples are taken with great care.

Evaluated side by side: stratigraphy is strong on *when and in what order*, weak on *who*; DNA is strong on *who*, weak on *when* and useless where it has not survived. Used together they fix a context neither could fix alone: stratigraphy says which layer a body lay in, and DNA says whose body it was and what they suffered.



Evaluation table of the two methods — stratigraphy and DNA testing — with what each one can fix about a source's context, what it cannot do, and the mummy studies from section 1C as the worked DNA example

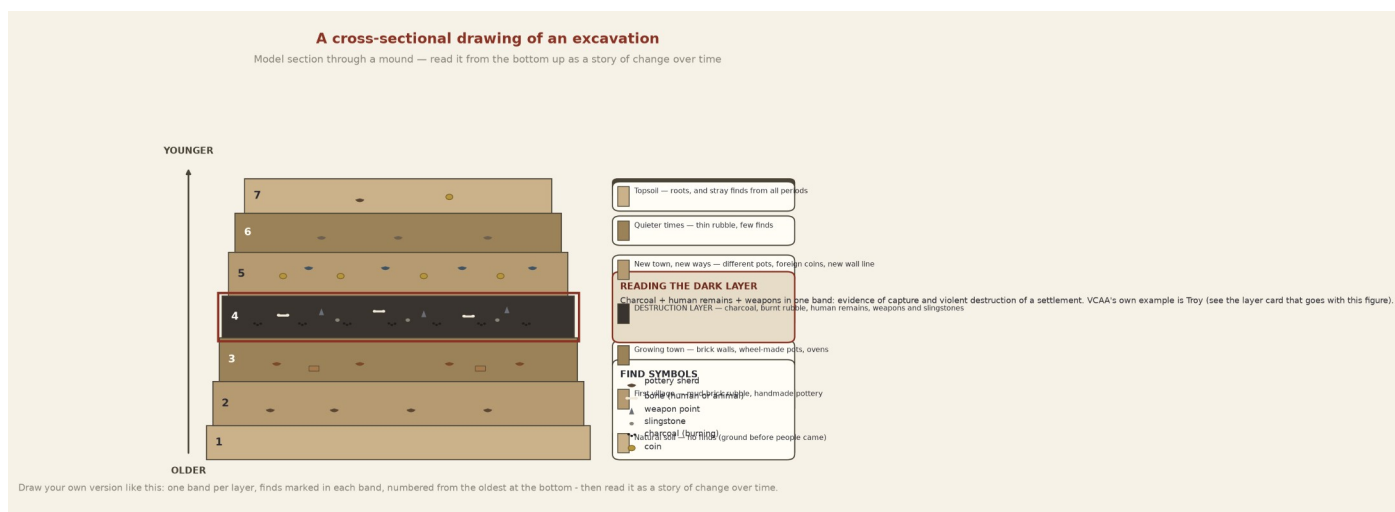
Part 6: Drawing change over time — the cross-sectional drawing

One of the best ways to show what stratigraphy reveals is to **create a cross-sectional drawing**: a picture of the side of a dig, showing each layer of soil and the evidence sitting in it, like a slice through a cake.

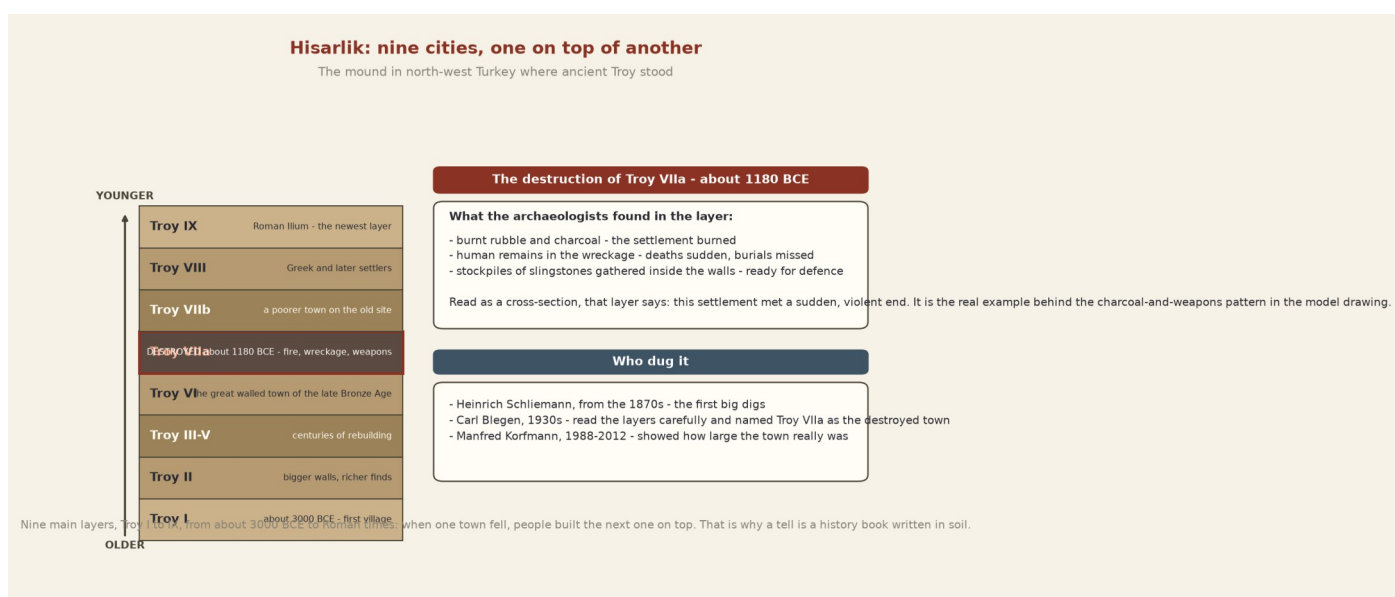
To make one: draw the side of the excavation as a stack of bands; label each band with its soil type; mark the finds in each band (pottery, bones, charcoal, walls, coins); number the bands from the oldest at the bottom to the youngest at the top; then read your drawing as a story of change over time.

One pattern historians watch for is a **destruction layer**: a band of charcoal and burnt rubble containing human remains and weapons. A layer like that can point to an ancient settlement being captured and destroyed — the worked example here is **Troy**.

The real site of Troy is the mound of **Hisarlik** in north-west Turkey. Since the 1870s — starting with Heinrich Schliemann, and later Carl Blegen (1930s) and Manfred Korfmann (1988–2012) — archaeologists have dug through it and found not one city but nine main layers of city, one on top of another, from about 3000 BCE up to Roman times. The layer called **Troy VIIa** ended in destruction around 1180 BCE. The diggers found burnt rubble, human remains in the wreckage, and stockpiles of slingstones gathered ready for defence. Read as a cross-section, that layer says: this settlement met a sudden, violent end.



Model cross-sectional drawing of an archaeological excavation, a slice through a mound showing seven layers from topsoil down to natural soil, with the finds marked in each layer and one charcoal-rich destruction layer holding human remains and weapons highlighted



Layer card for the mound of Hisarlik, the site of ancient Troy: nine main settlement layers from about 3000 BCE to Roman times, and the evidence in the Troy VIIa layer that points to capture and destruction around 1180 BCE

Primary source close study: the Edicts of Ashoka

The king who called himself “Beloved of the Gods, King Piyadasi” was **Ashoka** (the curriculum writes his name **Asoka**), emperor of the **Maurya** dynasty, whose empire covered most of the Indian subcontinent. He ruled from about 268 to 232 BCE. Early in his reign he conquered the region of **Kalinga**, on India’s east coast — a war so bloody that, by his own later account, 100,000 people were killed, 150,000 carried off, and many times that number died. After that war Ashoka turned towards the teaching of the Buddha, and he began to rule by a code he called **dhamma**.

More than thirty of his inscriptions survive, carved into rock faces and onto tall stone pillars across his empire. Most are written in Prakrit — the everyday languages of his people — in the Brahmi script, and were meant to be read aloud to crowds, since few people could read. They are among the richest primary sources the ancient world has left us.

Source card: the Edicts of Ashoka

The set of sources this section keeps coming back to

EDICTS OF ASHOKA - a king's words cut in stone

What they are	More than thirty short texts (edicts = official orders or statements) carved onto rock faces and stone pillars.
Who made them	Ashoka, emperor of the Maurya empire in India. The edicts sign themselves "Beloved of the Gods, King Piyadasi".
When	Ashoka's reign, about 268-232 BCE. Most were cut in the later part of it.
Script and languages	Mostly the Brahmi script and Prakrit languages of India; in the north-west some use Kharoshthi; one copy from Kandahar is in Greek and Aramaic.
Where they were placed	Beside roads, near borders, at places where people gathered - to be seen, and read aloud to crowds.
What they say	The king's code of dhamma: care for living things, respect for elders and teachers, restraint, fair and kind treatment of people of all beliefs.
Why they matter	They are the king's own voice from his own time - a PRIMARY source. The stones still stand today, across India and nearby lands.

THE NAMING CLUE: for centuries the stones said only "Piyadasi". In 1915 a small edict was found at Maski that joined the king's name Ashoka to that title - and fixed once and for all who was speaking.

Source card for the Edicts of Ashoka: what they are, who made them, when, in what script and languages, where they stood, how they were used, and where they can be studied today

Here is the opening edict of the main set, **Major Rock Edict I**, in a plain-English rendering made for this section from the standard scholarly edition. It is a rule about killing — and it starts in the king's own kitchen:

"No living being is to be killed here, or offered as a sacrifice. Formerly, in the kitchen of Beloved of the Gods King Piyadasi, many living beings were killed every day to make meat dishes. But now, at the time of this writing, only three are killed: two peacocks and one deer — and even the deer not every time. And in future, not even these three will be killed."

— Major Rock Edict I of Ashoka, about 257 BCE, rendered into plain English by the author for this section from the standard edition (E. Hultzsch, *Inscriptions of Asoka*, 1925)

Run the three questions over it:

- **Features.** Words cut into living rock, at eye level, in Brahmi script and Prakrit language. The same edict was cut at several sites — one surviving copy stands at Kalsi in northern India — placed beside roads and near borders, where people moved. Note a context clue inside the features: the edicts sign with the title "Piyadasi", not the name Ashoka. It was a small edict found at **Maski** in 1915 that first joined the king's own name to that title.
- **Content.** A king ordering that fewer living things be killed — starting with his own table, and ending with zero. The tone is personal: "at the time of this writing" — the king reporting his own progress. The message is dhamma in action: care for living beings, put in public where everyone could hear it.
- **Context.** Carved after the Kalinga war, when Ashoka had turned towards the Buddha's teaching and was ruling the largest empire India had yet seen — an empire of many languages, many faiths and many peoples. The edicts were his way of speaking to all of them at once.

The translation problem lives inside this one source. The king's whole programme hangs on the word **dhamma** — and, as Part 4 showed, translators still disagree about what to call it in English.

Reading a source: Major Rock Edict I
The king's first great order, in plain English

THE EXTRACT

"Here in the capital the king has had this order made. Before this, in the king's kitchen, many living creatures were killed every day for food. Now only three living creatures are killed; two peacocks and one deer - and the deer not always. From now on even these three will not be killed."

— Major Rock Edict I, in the author's own plain-English words from Hultzsch, *Inscriptions of Ashoka* (1925)

WHAT A READER OF GC NOTICES

WHO IS SPEAKING?	WHAT IS HE DOING?	THE HINGE WORD
The king signs with his titles only ("Beloved of the Gods") to protect the king's identity as the ruler of the world.	The king is giving orders to his subjects to stop killing living creatures.	The word <i>dhamma</i> is the hinge of the whole translation problem.

Notice what the extract does NOT say: nothing about war, taxes or how ordinary people lived. Content is what a source contains - its silences are part of the story too.

The text of Major Rock Edict I in a plain-English rendering, with notes on the king's title, what the edict orders, what it leaves out, and why the word dhamma is the hinge of the whole translation problem

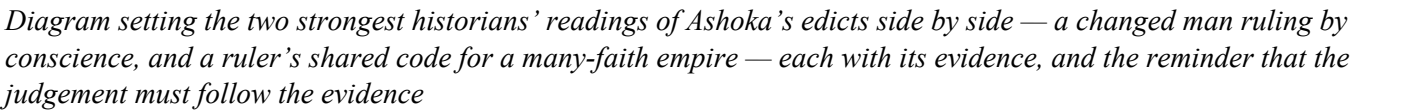
Secondary source interpretation: what do historians make of the edicts?

The edicts are primary sources — Ashoka's own words, from his own time. But what do they *show* about him? Here we meet **interpretations**: later accounts built from the sources. The writings of historians are interpretations, and historians do not all agree. Two readings of Ashoka's dhamma have stood for decades, and each deserves its strongest form before you judge.

View 1 — a changed man. The edicts mean what they say. In Major Rock Edict XIII, Ashoka sets out the cost of the Kalinga war — the dead, the taken, the grief — and says he feels sorrow and regret. The edicts keep speaking in his own voice ("at the time of this writing"), and the first rules fall on his own kitchen before anyone else's. On this reading, the stones record a real turning: a conqueror who saw what conquest costs and tried, for the rest of his reign, to rule by conscience. The *Mahavamsa*, the great chronicle of the island of Lanka (south of India), written in the Pali language around the fifth century CE — about seven hundred years after Ashoka's death — tells the same shape of story: a king turned to the Buddha's teaching who sent teachers out across Asia, including to Lanka itself.

View 2 — a ruler's plan for a hard job. The historian **Romila Thapar**, in her book *Asoka and the Decline of the Mauryas* (1961), argued that Ashoka's dhamma was broader than any one religion: a shared code of respect, self-control and care for living beings that Brahmins, Jains and Buddhists alike could accept. Think of the job: one king, one road system, one set of stone messages, ruling an empire of many faiths and many tongues. On this reading, the edicts are a ruler's public message, placed with care where people moved, designed to hold a diverse empire together.

Neither view is silly, and both use the same stones. The split is about what best explains them — inner change, or public policy — and a good case can be made for some of both. Your task as a historian is not to guess which answer the teacher wants. It is to weigh the evidence for each reading and say what you judge, and why. Different students, reasoning well from the same sources, may land in different places — that is expected, and it is the reasoning that is marked.



Q1. Sort these eight real sources into the four families from Part 2 — written materials, oral tradition, visual sources, artefacts: (a) the letter of Pliny the Younger describing the eruption of Vesuvius; (b) the poems of Homer, sung from memory before they were written down; (c) Trajan's Column, with its carved spiral of scenes from Trajan's wars; (d) a Roman sword recovered from a fort; (e) the Colosseum in Rome; (f) the verses of the Vedas, passed from voice to voice for centuries; (g) a mosaic floor from a Roman villa; (h) charred wheat seeds recovered from a dig. Two of these can be argued into more than one family. Name them and say why.

Q2. For each source below, say whether it is primary or secondary by the definitions in Part 3, and give your reason in one sentence: (a) the *Res Gestae*, the emperor Augustus's own record of his deeds (3F); (b) Suetonius's *Life of Augustus*, written about 107 years after Augustus died (3F); (c) Pliny the Younger's letter about Vesuvius, written about 25 years after the eruption; (d) Einhard's *Life of Charlemagne*, written after Charlemagne's death in 814 by a man of his court; (e) a modern film set in Pompeii; (f) this book. For (c) and (d), say why the sorting can be argued.

Q3. Copy the recording frame from Figure 6c_recording_frame.png. Complete it for ONE source you have met in another part of this book (for example the Res Gestae in 3F, the law code of Ur-Nammu in 1B, or Einhard's *Life of Charlemagne* in 4B). Fill in at least two features, the content, the context, and one question the source could help answer.

Q4. The word **dhmma** in Ashoka’s edicts has no clean English match. A translator must choose. For each of these three choices — “duty”, “right conduct”, “the teaching of the Buddha” — write one thing the choice helps the reader see and one thing it might hide. Then say which you would use, and why.

Q5. Match each question to the method best suited to it — stratigraphy or DNA testing — and give one reason. Then give one limit of each method. (a) Were the two people buried in this cemetery related? (b) Is the pottery layer above or below the burnt layer? (c) Did this person carry malaria? (d) Did this town change hands and links over many centuries? (Think carefully: one method points one way here, another method points another; you may use both.)

Q6. Look at Figure 6c_cross_section.png. (a) List three pieces of evidence found in the destruction layer. (b) What does that layer suggest happened to the settlement? Use the word *capture* or *destruction* and point to the evidence that supports it. (c) Which numbered layer is the oldest? How do you know? (d) Give one piece of evidence from a higher layer that the rebuilt town had links with far places.

Tasks to try on your own

Q7. Write a full explanation of the Athenian owl coin (Part 1 and Figure 6c_three_lenses.png) in terms of its features, content and context, in one paragraph of 5–7 sentences. End with one sentence saying what the coin can show about Athens, and one thing it cannot show on its own.

Q8. Choose ONE of the three: the Vedas, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata. Explain TWO challenges of translation or intercultural understanding a historian meets when using it, and for each challenge give one habit historians use in reply (Part 4). Use specifics: name the language, the key word or the scene of passing-on that makes the challenge real.

Q9. “Stratigraphy and DNA testing together tell us more about the past than either method alone.” Do you agree? Give reasons and use evidence: one example from Part 5 of this section and one from the mummy studies in section 1C. Write two paragraphs — one for each side of the claim as you test it, then your judgement. You are marked on the reasoning, not on which side you land on.

Q10. Chapter 6 extended response. Choose ONE source from Figure 6c_source_families.png that is not the Ashoka edict. Write an evidence-based explanation in three parts: (1) explain its features, content and context — one short paragraph each; (2) answer the question: *what does this source show about the people who made it?* (3) name one limit of the source, and one method or other source you would use to check what it shows. Figure 6c_model_explanation.png works one good shape of this task over Pliny the Younger’s Vesuvius letter. Your answer may take a different shape; it is the reasoning and the use of evidence that are marked.

Model: an explanation of a source's features, content and context

Now the three questions are asked, and the answers are given, one for each row.

FEATURES	CONTENT	CONTEXT	WHAT IT SHOWS	LIMIT	CHECK
	The source is a letter written in Latin by Pliny the Younger to the historian Tacitus, and it is one of the Letters Pliny published. It was written about twenty-five years after the eruption it describes, in 79 CE.				
	Pliny tells what he saw: the great cloud rising "in the shape of an umbrella pine", ash falling like snow, the sea pushed back from the shore, people fleeing in panic. He also tells of his uncle, Pliny the Elder, sailing towards the danger and never returning.				
	Roman Italy, 79 CE: the volcano Vesuvius buried the towns of Pompeii and Herculaneum. Pliny was seventeen, staying at Misenum across the bay. Tacitus asked him for the story so he could use it in his histories.				
	It shows how the eruption looked and felt to someone who was there, and it is our only full written account from a witness.				
	It is one man's memory, set down decades later, and it covers only what he saw from across the bay - not what happened inside Pompeii itself.				
	Check it against the ground: the layers of ash and pumice at Pompeii, and the shapes the bodies left in it, match the story of a sudden, deadly fall of volcanic material.				

Every sentence in this model does one job: features, content, context, meaning, limit, check. Your turn - now do the Edicts of Ashoka the same way (Q10).

Model explanation for the extended response: Pliny the Younger’s letter about Vesuvius explained in terms of features, content and context, written out in full, colour-coded by the three questions, with the limit and the checking step, as one good shape for Task Q10

Answer guide (for the teacher)

Q1. (a) written; (b) oral tradition; (c) visual (also arguable as artefact — it is a built object; accept argued moves); (d) artefact; (e) artefact (a building — the family list in Part 2 puts buildings under artefacts); (f) oral tradition; (g) visual and artefact — the two to argue; a mosaic is an artwork and a made object; (h) archaeological find (small find; not a made object — accept students who sort it as artefact-like with a reason, reward the student who notes it was never “made”). Mark the argument, not the box.

Q2. (a) primary — Augustus’s own words from his own time; (b) secondary — written about 107 years later by someone who was not there; (c) primary — an eyewitness account, though written about 25 years after the event, and the gap should be noted when it is used; (d) secondary by the definition — written after the death — but by a man who lived at the court, so it keeps first-hand details; (e) secondary — a later interpretation; (f) secondary — a textbook is a later interpretation built from sources. For (c) and (d) accept any sorting that runs the definition and argues the boundary honestly.

Q3. Accept any real source from the book with: two features (material, form, size, condition, location), content (what it says/shows), context (when, where, by whom, for whom) and one question it could answer. Res Gestae example: bronze and stone, public, first century CE; the deeds Augustus chose to record; Rome at the start of one-man rule; “How did Augustus want to be remembered?”

Q4. Mark the trade-offs, not the choice. Sample: “duty” — shows the social, binding side of dhamma, but can sound like forced rules and hides the care side; “right conduct” — shows the ethical reach, but is vague and hides the religious roots; “the teaching of the Buddha” — shows Ashoka’s own faith, but narrows a word he used to speak to all his peoples, Buddhist and not. Any choice defended with both a gain and a loss meets the standard.

Q5. (a) DNA — reads family links from the bodies themselves; (b) stratigraphy — layer order is exactly what it gives; (c) DNA — disease markers survive in tissue, as with the malaria found in Tutankhamun (1C); (d) both argued well — stratigraphy shows the order of layers and shifts in styles of goods; DNA shows shifts in ancestry over time, as in the Abusir el-Meleq mummy study (1C). Limits: stratigraphy gives relative order, not years, and disturbed layers mislead; DNA survives only in favourable (cool, dry) conditions, risks contamination, and says nothing about bodies that do not survive.

Q6. (a) charcoal, human remains, weapons (and burnt rubble); any three. (b) Capture and violent destruction: burning (charcoal), deaths (remains in the wreckage), and defence (weapons gathered) in one layer, with the life above it broken off. (c) Layer 1, the natural soil at the bottom — in an undisturbed sequence the deepest layer is the oldest. (d) Accept any named item from a higher layer that came from elsewhere, e.g. coins of a foreign style or pottery in a style from far away (per the figure).

Q7. Mark on: two features (silver, about 17 g, struck, Athena head/owl and letters), content (city’s symbols; “of the Athenians”; Athena’s olive), context (fifth-century BCE Athens, Laurion silver, trade and pay across the Mediterranean). Can show: Athens’s wealth, symbols and reach. Cannot show on its own: e.g. what ordinary non-trading people thought, or the dates of events — it needs other evidence.

Q8. Mark on: two genuine challenges tied to the chosen text, and one matching habit per challenge. Sample (Mahabharata): the word dharma runs through it and has no single English match (compare translations; learn the word’s period meaning); it assumes its hearers know the world of duty, gods and kings (learn the world before judging it); it grew across centuries, so “when was it made?” is itself a question (ask what the source takes for granted; check the scholarly view of its growth).

Q9. Mark on both sides being tested before the judgement (CONTESTED_TERMS.md Rule 4). For: layers order finds that DNA then identifies (stratigraphy: order and change over time; DNA: who, family, disease — the mummy studies of 1C). Against/limits: DNA fails where conditions destroy it; stratigraphy alone can still order and date finds by style; methods are only “together” where bodies survive. Any judgement reasoned from these moves is full marks.

Q10. Mark on: three parts present and distinct (features/content/context paragraphs; the “what does it show about its makers” answer; one named limit plus one named check). Every claim should sit on something in the section or the figure. The model shows one acceptable shape; different sources and different shapes are equally acceptable if reasoned and evidenced.

Sources used in this section

Every source examined or quoted here is a real, citable artifact (D4). Verified 25 August 2026.

- **The Edicts of Ashoka (Asoka)** — more than thirty inscriptions of the Maurya emperor Ashoka (reigned about 268–232 BCE), carved on rock faces and stone pillars across the Indian subcontinent; most in Prakrit languages in the Brahmi script, with versions in Kharoshthi in the north-west and in Greek and Aramaic at Kandahar. Major Rock Edict I quoted above in my own plain-English rendering from the standard edition: E. Hultzsch, *Inscriptions of Asoka*, Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum vol. 1 (Calcutta, 1925). Subject of Figures 6c_ashoka_card.png and 6c_ashoka_extract.png.
- **Major Rock Edict XIII** — Ashoka’s account of the Kalinga conquest and his remorse: 150,000 carried away, 100,000 slain, many times that number dead (Hultzsch 1925). Summarised in the secondary-source close study.

- **The Maski edict** — small rock edict found at Maski, Karnataka, in 1915; the first inscription to join the name Ashoka to the title Devanampiya Piyadasi (“Beloved of the Gods, He Who Looks Kindly”). Cited in the primary-source close study.
- **The Kandahar bilingual inscription** — Greek and Aramaic version of Ashoka’s teaching, found at Kandahar, Afghanistan, in 1958. Cited in Part 4 as proof that Ashoka’s own officials translated the edicts in his lifetime.
- **Romila Thapar, *Aśoka and the Decline of the Mauryas*** (Oxford, 1961; later revised editions) — the historian’s reading summarised as View 2 in the secondary-source close study. Described in the author’s own words.
- **The Mahavamsa (“Great Chronicle”)** — Pali chronicle of Sri Lanka, composed around the fifth century CE, traditionally linked to the monk Mahanama; carries the story of Ashoka’s turn to the Buddha’s teaching and the mission to Sri Lanka. Cited in the secondary-source close study as a later interpretation with its own date.
- **The Vedas** — oldest sacred texts of Hinduism, composed in Sanskrit; the oldest verses (Rigveda) composed around 1500–1000 BCE and passed orally before being written down. Described in the author’s own words in Part 4.
- **The Ramayana and the Mahabharata** — Sanskrit epics, grown across many centuries (the Mahabharata reaching roughly its present form between about 400 BCE and 400 CE). Described in the author’s own words; their translation challenges (dharma) are the E04 worked case alongside the edicts.
- **Silver owl tetradrachm of Athens** — head of Athena / owl, olive branch and the letters ΑΘΕ; struck from about 450 BCE on silver from the Laurion mines; examples in the British Museum, London. Worked example of Part 1 and subject of Figures 6c_three_lenses.png and 6c_recording_frame.png.
- **Pliny the Younger, Letters 6.16** — eyewitness account of the eruption of Vesuvius (79 CE) written to the historian Tacitus about 25 years later. Boundary case in Part 3 and subject of Figure 6c_model_explanation.png.
- **The Bayeux Tapestry** — embroidered cloth about 70 m long showing the Norman conquest of 1066; made probably in the 1070s, probably in England. Boundary case in Part 3.
- **Einhard, *Life of Charlemagne*** — written after Charlemagne’s death in 814 by a courtier who knew him. Boundary case in Part 3.
- **The Secret History of the Mongols** — earliest surviving account from the Mongols’ own side, put into writing within decades of Genghis Khan’s death in 1227 from older spoken tales. Cited in Parts 2 and 3.
- **Troy / Hisarlik** — mound site in north-west Turkey; nine main settlement layers (Troy I–IX) from about 3000 BCE to Roman times; excavated from the 1870s (Heinrich Schliemann), by Carl Blegen in the 1930s, and by Manfred Korfmann 1988–2012. Troy VIIa destroyed around 1180 BCE with burnt rubble, human remains in the wreckage and stockpiles of slingstones. Subject of Figures 6c_cross_section.png (model drawing, original, not to any one site’s scale) and 6c_troy_layers.png.
- **James Prinsep** — worked out how to read the Brahmi script in 1837, opening the Ashoka inscriptions to modern readers. Cited in the opening and Part 4.
- All dates follow the BCE/CE conventions taught in section 6B. No First Nations content appears in this section (none exists in this CD or its elaborations).

Judging a source's value as evidence

Curriculum focus — teacher block

Owning content description — VC2HH8S04 (Historical Concepts and Skills, Using historical sources).

Elaboration linkage (ids verbatim from the VCAA export; all six active — no §2A exclusions touch this CD):

- .E01 (limited evidence → insights into power structures): served in Key ideas Part 5 (Vindolanda tablet and Epictetus) and task Q10.
- .E02 (the forms of evidence — what each is good for): served in Key ideas Part 4 and task Q5.
- .E03 (fact vs opinion — the gladiator pair): served in Key ideas Part 2, tasks Q1 and Q4.
- .E04 (evidence in a source that backs an interpretation; causes and significance): served in the Pliny close study and task Q9.
- .E05 (sources and criteria in judging significance): served in Key ideas Part 6 and task Q9; full criteria work is owned by 7C and applied here, not re-taught.
- .E06 (the four validity questions): the spine of the section — Key ideas Part 3, both close studies, tasks Q3, Q7, Q8.

Achievement standard coverage: this section serves the standard's sentence on interpreting information from sources and checking how accurate and valuable it is as evidence, and supplies the source-testing engine the standard's interpretation and contested-history sentences rest on. Significance criteria are applied from 7C (VC2HH8S09); source features (primary/secondary, content and context) are re-anchored from 6C (VC2HH8S03), not re-taught.

First Nations disposition (§2A): none — the CD and all six elaborations carry no First Nations content, and this section contains none. Rule 1 of the content policy is honoured by exclusion here, not by adaptation.

Cross-references: 6C (features of sources — primary/secondary, content and context, re-anchored in one sentence), 6E and 6F (perspectives and interpretations built on tested sources), 3G (interpretations of Rome rest on this section's testing), 4E and 5E (this section is the evidence engine under their source work — 5E's death-toll claims pair with Part 3 and Q7), 7C (significance criteria, applied in Part 6), 7D (evidenced interpretations). No section assumes a specific Level 7 sequence (D1).

Key subject terms defined at first use (D2 exemption 2): source, evidence, value (of a source), fact, opinion, interpretation, reliable, criteria, significance. Contested-term handling per `CONTESTED_TERMS.md`: “fact”, “opinion” and “value” are defined operationally at first use (a fact is a claim a test can settle; an opinion is a judgement; value is usefulness for a named question); both sides of the Vesuvius date debate are steelmanned (Rule 5) and tested symmetrically (Rule 4); marking is on quality of reasoning, not conclusion reached (stated in the answer guide).

Teaching sequence (for the teacher). 1. Frame the CD: value is not in the source alone — it is between the source and the question (What you will learn; Part 1; Figure 6d_value_questions.png). 2. Fact vs opinion with the gladiator pair (Part 2; Figure 6d_fact_opinion.png). 3. The four questions as a loop (Part 3; Figure 6d_validity_questions.png). 4. Forms of evidence — what each is good for, where each falls short (Part 4; Figure 6d_evidence_forms.png). 5. Little evidence, big insight — limited evidence and power structures (Part 5; Figure 6d_vindolanda_card.png). 6. Significance with sources and criteria, applied from 7C (Part 6; Figure 6d_significance.png). 7. Primary source close study: Pliny's letter, four questions worked (Figure 6d_pliny_worked.png). 8. Secondary-source close study: the date debate, steelmanned both sides (Figure 6d_date_debate.png). 9. Scaffolded practice Q1–Q6, unscaffolded Q7–Q10. Q8 is this chapter's evidence-based extended response; the model paragraph and its sentence-jobs live in Figure 6d_model_response.png.

Common misconceptions to address: that a source is either “good” or “bad” in general (value is question-by-question); that opinion means useless (opinions are evidence of beliefs and values); that a fact-claim being false makes it not a fact-claim (it is the kind of claim a test can settle); that one source can prove a big claim alone (question 4 is never finished); that later secondary sources are automatically worthless (the date debate shows later work testing earlier work); that significance is a feeling (it is judged with criteria, from 7C).

What you will learn in this section

A historian cannot visit the past. Everything we know about the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 CE, or about life on Rome's northern frontier, comes to us in **sources** — things left behind: letters, tablets, walls, bodies, layers of rock. In this section you will learn to ask how much **value** a source has — that is, how useful it is as **evidence** for a particular question — and to test that value with four questions you can use on any source in every section of this book.

Some words we will use, defined as we meet them:

- **source** — anything left from the past that we can learn from.
- **evidence** — information from a source that we actually use to answer a question.
- **value** (of a source) — how useful the source is as evidence *for a named question*. A source is never just “good” or “bad” — its value depends on what you ask of it.
- **fact** — a claim that can be tested against evidence. A fact-claim can turn out to be false; it is still the *kind* of claim a test can settle.
- **opinion** — a judgement. It depends on standards inside the person making it, not on a test. Opinions still matter to historians — as evidence of what people believed and valued.
- **interpretation** — the account a historian builds from the evidence.
- **reliable** — able to be trusted on the matter you are asking about, for reasons you can name.
- **criteria** — the standards you use when you judge something, such as its **significance** (the size and lasting reach of the difference it made).

We will also keep using words you have met in other sections: **primary source** (made at the time, by someone there or close to it), **secondary source** (made later by someone who was not there — re-anchored from 6C), **cause**, **consequence**, **continuity**, **change** and **perspective**.

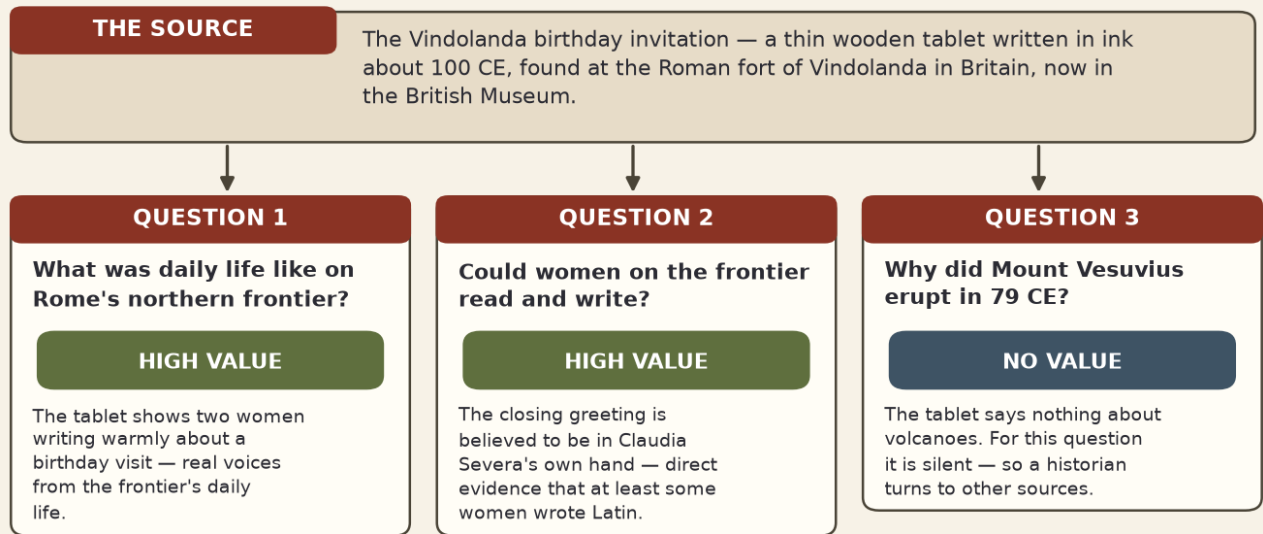
Key ideas

Part 1: Value depends on the question

The same source can be priceless for one question and useless for another. The Vindolanda birthday invitation — a thin wooden tablet written in ink about 100 CE, found at a Roman fort in northern Britain — tells us warmly and directly about daily life on the frontier, and about women writing Latin. Ask it why Vesuvius erupted, and it says nothing at all. Value is not in the source alone; it is between the source and the question.

One source, three questions

A source's value is not in the source alone — it is between the source and the question you ask of it



Same source — very different value. The question decides what a source can do.

Value is judged question by question: what can this source help you answer, and where does it fall silent?

Original figure for this book — History 8, Section 6D

One source card at the top with arrows down to three question panels: two panels marked **HIGH VALUE** for questions about frontier life and women's writing, and one panel marked **NO VALUE** for a question about the volcano, showing that the same source has different value for different questions.

This matters because evidence has three main uses in this book: explaining **significance**, explaining **continuity and change**, and explaining **causes and consequences**. One source rarely serves all three:

Use of evidence	The question it serves
Significance	How big and how lasting was the difference?
Continuity and change	What stayed the same, and what changed, over time?
Causes and consequences	What made it happen, and what followed?

Before you lean on a source, name the question you are using it for. Its value is your answer.

Part 2: Fact and opinion

The difference is easiest to see in a pair: 'Some gladiators wore helmets' is a fact; 'All gladiators were brave' is an opinion. The first is testable — bronze helmets survive from Pompeii, and pictures of gladiators show them. The second is a judgement: 'brave' is a value word no find can measure, and 'all' makes a claim about every fighter who ever lived.

Fact or opinion? A sorting exercise about gladiators

A fact is a claim we can test against the evidence. An opinion is a judgement — it depends on standards inside a person, not on a test.

Statement	Sort	Why?
'Some gladiators wore helmets.'	FACT	Testable: bronze helmets survive from Pompeii, and pictures of gladiators show them. The evidence can settle it.
'All gladiators were brave.'	OPINION	'Brave' is a value word — no find can measure bravery — and 'all' makes a claim about every fighter. It is a judgement.
'Bronze gladiator helmets were found at Pompeii.'	FACT	A claim about finds that were made. We can check the museum record.
'The games were the best part of Roman life.'	OPINION	'Best' is a judgement word. Other Romans would have named other things — and their answers could not be settled by evidence alone.
'Gladiators fought in amphitheatres.'	FACT	Testable: amphitheatres still stand, and records of fights survive.
'It was wrong to send men to fight for the crowd's fun.'	OPINION	A moral judgement. History can show what happened and what people at the time thought about it — the judgement itself is yours to argue.

Two reminders: a fact-claim can still be FALSE — it is the kind of claim a test can settle. And opinions matter to historians too: they are evidence of what people believed and valued.

Original figure for this book — History 8, Section 6D

A six-row sorting table about gladiators. Each row shows a statement, its sort as FACT or OPINION, and the reason: testable claims about helmets, finds and amphitheatres sort as facts; judgements using words like brave, best and wrong sort as opinions.

Three flags that you are reading an opinion:

1. **Value words** — brave, best, worst, cruel, great. They report a standard inside a person.
2. **All / every / never / always** — claims about every case can rarely be tested case by case, and usually carry a judgement inside.
3. **Should and ought** — they point at how the world ought to be, and no source can settle that.

Two reminders. A fact-claim can be *false* — “the eruption killed everyone in Pompeii in one hour” is the kind of claim the layers of rock and the finds can test, and they weigh against it. False does not mean “not a fact-claim”; it means the test went the other way. And opinions are not rubbish: a Roman writing that the games were the best part of city life is precious evidence of what Romans valued. Historians collect judgements too — they just file them as judgements, not as facts.

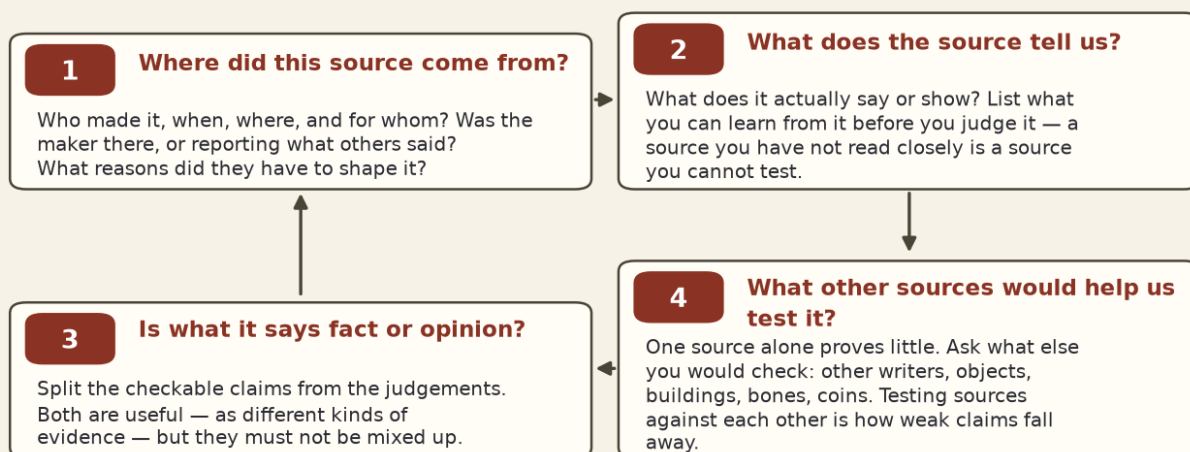
Part 3: Four questions for testing a source

Historians test a source by asking four questions of it. They work on any source in this book:

1. 'Where did this source come from?'
2. 'What does the source tell us?'
3. 'Is what it says fact or opinion?'
4. 'What other sources would help us test it?'

Four questions for testing a source

Ask these of any source before you lean your argument on it — in any order, and more than once



Question 4 hands you new sources — and each one starts the loop again at question 1.

The testing never really ends: every new source joins the conversation, and old answers can change.

WHY 'WHERE DID THIS SOURCE COME FROM?' COMES FIRST

Knowing who made a source, and why, tells you what kinds of mistakes or shaping to look for — and what the source was never meant to show.

Original figure for this book — History 8, Section 6D

Four numbered boxes joined by arrows in a loop: where did this source come from, what does the source tell us, is what it says fact or opinion, and what other sources would help us test it. A strip below explains why the first question comes first.

Question 1 comes first because knowing who made a source, when, where and for whom tells you what kinds of shaping to look for — and what the source was never meant to show. A letter from a nephew about his uncle carries a nephew's love whether or not the nephew means it to. Question 2 slows you down: list what the source says or shows *before* you judge it. Question 3 is Part 2's sorting work. Question 4 is the engine of the whole section: one source alone proves little, and every new source you check starts the loop again at question 1.

Part 4: Different forms of evidence

Sources come in different forms, and each form is good at different questions. Writing keeps names, dates and reasons — but only where people wrote, and usually from the few who could. Material remains — buildings, tools, coins, food, casts of bodies — show daily life no one wrote down, and a loaf of bread is hard to argue with; but objects cannot speak, and we must work out what they mean. Pictures show how people saw their world — made for a purpose, to please an owner or honour a god. And spoken words rarely survive at all: most people in the ancient world never wrote, and their voices were never caught.

Forms of evidence — what each is good at, where each falls short

Examples drawn from the towns buried by Vesuvius in 79 CE, studied elsewhere in this book

Form	Examples at the Vesuvius towns	What it is good for	Where it falls short
Written records	Pliny's letter; graffiti scratched on walls; notices painted beside doors	Names, dates, events, and reasons — and with graffiti, the voices of ordinary people	Only exist where people wrote; usually carry the view of the few who could write
Material remains	Buildings, streets, tools, coins, food — and plaster casts of bodies	Daily life that no one wrote down; hard to 'lie' about a loaf of bread or a wall	Objects cannot speak — we must work out what they mean, and some questions no object can answer
Pictures and art	Wall paintings and mosaics in houses and public buildings	How people saw their world, their gods and themselves	Made for a purpose — to please an owner, honour a god or show off wealth
Oral accounts	None survive — spoken words die unless someone writes them down	(Where they do survive, they keep memories no text kept)	The great silence of the ancient record: most people never wrote, and their words were never caught

Different questions need different forms. A question about what people ate goes to material remains; a question about what they believed may go to pictures; a question about an event may need writing and rock layers together.

Original figure for this book — History 8, Section 6D

A four-row table of forms of evidence — written records, material remains, pictures and art, oral accounts — with examples from the towns buried by Vesuvius, what each form is good for, and where each falls short.

Different questions need different forms. A question about food goes to material remains; a question about what people believed may go to pictures; a question about an event may need writing and rock layers together. When your question 4 asks what other sources are needed, it is often asking for a *different form* of evidence.

Part 5: Little evidence, big insight

Some groups in the past left little evidence of their own — because they were not allowed to write, or could not, or because nobody kept what they made. There is an important point here about any society we study: even limited evidence can tell us a great deal about who held power in that society — who had standing, who could write, whose voice was kept and whose was lost.

Source card: a birthday invitation from Rome's northern frontier

Vindolanda tablet 291 — thin wood, ink, about 100 CE

THE SOURCE AT A GLANCE

What is it?

A wooden writing tablet — a birthday invitation.

Who wrote it?

Claudia Severa, writing to her friend Sulpicia Lepidina, wife of the fort's commander. Most of the text is in a scribe's hand; the closing greeting is believed to be Claudia's own.

Where?

Vindolanda, a Roman fort in northern Britain.

When?

About 100 CE.

Where is it now?

The British Museum, London.

Why it matters

One of the earliest surviving examples of Latin written by a woman — and rare proof of women's voices on a military frontier.

The invitation (rendered into English by the author of this section from the Latin):

Claudia Severa to her Lepidina, greetings.

On 11 September, sister, for the day of my birthday, I give you a warm invitation to make sure you come to us, to make the day more enjoyable for me by your arrival.

Give my greetings to your Cerialis. My Aelius and my little son send theirs.

I shall expect you, sister. Farewell, sister, dearest to my soul, as I am to yours.

The closing lines — believed to be written by Claudia Severa's own hand.

LITTLE EVIDENCE, BIG INSIGHT: one tablet cannot speak for every woman on the frontier — but it proves that women were there, writing, and it shows who had the standing to write. The power structure of the frontier is visible in a single invitation.

Ask yourself: whose voices are missing from this fort's record? Soldiers' families? Servants? Enslaved people? What sources could ever recover them?

Original figure for this book — History 8, Section 6D

A source card for Vindolanda tablet 291 — what it is, who wrote it, where, when, where it is now, why it matters — beside a rendering of the birthday invitation in English, with a box marking the closing lines as believed to be in Claudia Severa's own hand.

One tablet cannot speak for every woman on the frontier. But it proves that women were there, writing, and it shows who had the standing to write: the wife of one commander, inviting the wife of another. The power structure of the frontier is visible in a single invitation.

The same is true of the enslaved. Epictetus, born about 50 CE, was enslaved in Rome under Epaphroditus, a freedman of the emperor Nero. He studied philosophy, was freed, and was later banished from Rome by the emperor Domitian, about 93 CE. We know his thinking at all only because a student of his, Arrian, wrote down his lectures about 108 CE. One of the few enslaved people whose voice survives, survives *through someone else's writing*. That fact is itself evidence: it shows who the ancient record was built by, and for. When you ask question 4 — what other sources would help us test it? — ask also whose voices no source kept, and what that silence tells you about power.

Part 6: Significance with sources and criteria

To judge the **significance** of an event — the size and lasting reach of the difference it made — you need criteria (7C owns the full criteria work; here we use it). And every criterion is only as good as the sources behind it. “How many people felt it?” needs sources that count or show people. “What did it lead to?” needs sources that trace what followed. Significance is not a feeling; it is a judgement built from sources, criterion by criterion.

Judging significance with sources and criteria

Worked example: how significant was the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 CE? (Full criteria work belongs to Section 7C — this is the source-linked version.)

Criterion	What the sources show	Judgement
How many people felt it?	Whole towns — Pompeii, Herculaneum and others — were buried; thousands died or lost everything. Pliny's letter describes crowds fleeing along the shore.	Very many — a whole region, not one street.
How long did it last?	The eruption itself lasted days — but the towns stayed hidden for about 1,700 years, and the hill of Vesuvius stands there still.	The event was short; its marks on the land remain.
What did it lead to?	The buried towns were never rebuilt as they were. Yet the same ash that killed them preserved them — making the sites the richest evidence of Roman daily life anywhere.	A disaster that became, by accident, a gift to later history.
What do the sources show — and whose voices do they carry?	Pliny's letter (one Roman official's family); the towns, casts and objects (everyone, including those who never wrote). Written voices are few; material voices are many.	Strong source base — but the loudest voice is one man's.

Value for the CD's three uses: the sources let us explain the CAUSE (the volcano, read from its deposits) and the CONSEQUENCES (death, burial, preservation); show CONTINUITY AND CHANGE in one frozen moment; and judge SIGNIFICANCE with criteria — not with a feeling.

Original figure for this book — History 8, Section 6D

A worked table judging the significance of the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 CE: criteria such as how many people felt it, how long it lasted and what it led to, set against what the sources show, with a judgement for each.

Notice the division of labour: the sources supply the *evidence* (towns buried, thousands dead, layers of volcanic rock, a letter from a witness); the criteria supply the *questions*; and the judgement is what you build by putting them together. If the sources behind a criterion are thin, say so — that honesty is part of the skill.

Primary source close study: Pliny's letter from the eruption

The source at a glance. A letter from **Pliny the Younger**, a Roman official and writer, to the historian **Tacitus**, who had asked for an account of the eruption. Pliny was about 17 in 79 CE and watched from Misenum, across the bay from Vesuvius; his account of his uncle's death comes from the men who were with him. The letter was written about 25 years after the eruption and published in Book 6 of his *Letters*. It survives in copies made centuries later — no copy made in Roman times survives.

Extract, in my own words from the Latin (the wording here is the author's rendering, not a published translation):

You could hear the shrieks of women, the wailing of infants, and the shouting of men; some were calling for help, others cried; some believed there were no gods left, and that the last and endless night had come.

The extract mixes the two kinds of claim you sorted in Part 2. "You could hear the shrieks of women" is a fact-claim — the kind of detail survivors confirm or challenge. "The last and endless night had come" reports what people *believed* in the moment — an opinion in the source, and as such it is gold: evidence of fear, not of night.

The four questions, worked: Pliny's letter on the eruption

Pliny the Younger, Letters 6.16, to the historian Tacitus — written about 25 years after the eruption of 79 CE

Question	The answer for this source
1. Where did this source come from?	A letter from Pliny the Younger, a Roman official and writer, to the historian Tacitus, who asked for an account of the eruption. Pliny was about 17 when Vesuvius erupted; he watched from across the bay, and his account of his uncle's death comes from the men who were with him. The letter was written about 25 years later, when it was published in Book 6 of his Letters.
2. What does the source tell us?	The sequence of the eruption as seen from Misenum: the great cloud, falling ash and pumice, earthquakes, the sea pushed back from the shore, and crowds fleeing to the beach. It also tells of his uncle's rescue voyage and death.
3. Is what it says fact or opinion?	Mixed. The observations — the cloud, the ash, the fleeing crowds — are fact-claims we can test against the buried towns and the layers of volcanic rock. Pliny's praise of his uncle's courage is a judgement: loving evidence, but evidence of a nephew's pride.
4. What other sources would help us test it?	The buried towns themselves — Pompeii and Herculaneum — with their buildings, bodies and layers of volcanic rock; other ancient writers who record the eruption; and today, the work of geologists reading the volcano's deposits. Where they agree with Pliny, his account stands firmer; where they differ, we look closer.

Notice the shape of the test: questions 1 and 3 find reasons to read with care; questions 2 and 4 find reasons to trust. A good source usually gives you both.

Original figure for this book — History 8, Section 6D

A four-row table working the four testing questions on Pliny's letter: where did this source come from, what does the source tell us, is what it says fact or opinion, and what other sources would help us test it — the buried towns, other ancient writers, geologists' reading of the rock.

For question 4, the letter is tested against the buried towns themselves — Pompeii and Herculaneum — with their buildings, bodies and layers of volcanic rock; against other ancient writers who record the eruption; and against modern geology's reading of the volcano's deposits. Where they agree with Pliny, his account stands firmer; where they differ, we look closer. That testing is what turns a good letter into strong evidence.

Secondary source close study: when did Vesuvius erupt?

You have just used Pliny's letter as a star witness. Now the awkward part: for centuries the letter's late-August date was *the* date. Then finds and studies pulled the other way — autumn fruit such as pomegranates among the remains; warm clothing on victims; jars sealed full of new wine, the harvest already in; and in 2018, a note written in charcoal found in a house at Pompeii naming 17 October, in a house still being repaired — a note easy to wipe away, so probably fresh when the ash fell. A 2022 study placed the eruption between 24 October and 1 November; other scholars hold to late August. The debate is **not settled** — and that is the point. Watch both sides do the same honest work: weighing sources, naming what is missing, waiting for the next find.

Two readings of the evidence: when did Vesuvius erupt?

Each side is set out as strongly as its own supporters would put it — then the same questions are asked of both

THE LONG-HELD VIEW: LATE AUGUST

Pliny's letter gives a date in late August, and most surviving copies of the letter agree with it. For centuries this has been the accepted date, and the letter is the only account written by someone who saw the eruption.

Its supporters add:

- the charcoal note might have been written days or weeks before the eruption — charcoal writing can survive indoors;
- a date held for centuries should not move for one new find alone; strong grounds are needed, and they ask for more.

THE GROWING VIEW: LATE OCTOBER

In 2018, excavators in a house at Pompeii found a note written in charcoal naming 17 October. Charcoal is easy to wipe away, so the note was probably fresh when the ash fell — the town was alive in mid-October.

Its supporters add:

- fruits of autumn, such as pomegranates, were found among the remains, and victims wore warm clothing;
- large jars were sealed full of new wine — the grape harvest was already in;
- some copies of Pliny's letter give an autumn date, and no copy made in Roman times survives to check them by.

WHERE THE DEBATE STANDS: NOT SETTLED — AND THAT IS THE POINT

A 2022 study placed the eruption between 24 October and 1 November; other scholars still hold to late August. Both sides are doing the same honest work: weighing sources, naming what is missing, and waiting for the next find.

Original figure for this book — History 8, Section 6D

Two panels setting out both sides of the date debate at their strongest. The long-held view: Pliny's letter gives a late-August date and is the only eyewitness account. The growing view: the 2018 charcoal note naming 17 October, autumn fruit, warm clothing and sealed wine jars. A strip below states that the debate is not settled.

Ask the four questions of *both* sides, symmetrically. Where did each side's evidence come from — an eyewitness letter copied centuries later, or a fresh charcoal note and things found in the ground? What does each side tell us? Fact or opinion? And what other sources would help us test it — more dated writing from the towns, more finds with seasons in them? This is question 4 doing its real work on a live debate. It is also a warning about copies: no copy of Pliny's letter made in Roman times survives, and later copies give different dates — so even “what the letter says” has to be checked.

The evidence engine under the rest of this book

Everything in this section is used again and again. **3G** tests interpretations of Rome with these questions. **4E** and **5E** run their sources through the same loop — including 5E's big death-toll claims for the Mongol conquests (one million at Nishapur, sixty million across China). Ask of them: where did the number come from? What does the source actually tell us — a count, or a story meant to horrify? Fact or opinion? What other sources would help us test it? A number that fails question 4 is not evidence of a death toll; it may still be evidence of what later writers wanted readers to feel. **7C** and **7D** then build significance and interpretations on sources you have already tested here.

Practice tasks (with help)

Q1. Sort these three statements as fact-claims or opinions, and give the flag or test for each: (a) ‘Gladiator helmets were found at Pompeii.’ (b) ‘The games were the best part of Roman life.’ (c) ‘Some gladiators wore helmets.’

Q2. The Vindolanda tablet is HIGH VALUE for the question ‘Could women on the frontier read and write?’ Name the single detail that gives it that value, and explain why the same tablet is NO VALUE for the question ‘Why did Vesuvius erupt in 79 CE?’

Q3. Work question 1 ('Where did this source come from?') on Pliny's letter. Your answer must name: who wrote it, to whom, how old the writer was in 79 CE, how long after the eruption it was written, and how the writer knows about his uncle's death.

Q4. Look at the extract from Pliny's letter. Pick out one fact-claim and one opinion in the source, and say what each is evidence *for*.

Q5. Match each question to the form of evidence most likely to help, and say why: (a) 'What did people in Pompeii eat?' (b) 'What did the people of Pompeii believe about the gods?' (c) 'In what month did the eruption happen?'

Q6. A single line of graffiti scratched on a Pompeii wall says 'The man I love is brave.' Is this line a fact, an opinion, or does it contain both? What is it evidence for — and what can it never tell us?

Tasks to try on your own

Q7. Apply all four testing questions to the Vindolanda birthday invitation. For question 4, name at least two other sources that could support or challenge what the tablet shows about life on the frontier.

Q8. *Extended response — this chapter's evidence-based task.* 'Pliny's letter is our best source for the eruption of Vesuvius — but its value is not the same for every question.' How far do you agree? Use the four questions, and refer to at least two other sources that could support or challenge the letter. (The model paragraph and its sentence-jobs are in the figure below — study it after you have written your own.)

The Q8 model paragraph, taken apart

Every sentence has a job. Use these moves in your own extended response.

MODEL RESPONSE (Q8)

Pliny's letter is valuable evidence for the eruption of Vesuvius, but its value is not the same for every question. For the sequence of the eruption — the cloud, the falling ash, the crowds on the shore — it is strong: Pliny watched these things himself, and the buried towns and their layers of volcanic rock agree with him. For his uncle's death the value is weaker, because Pliny was not there and wrote from what survivors told him, about 25 years later. The letter also mixes fact with a nephew's pride, so his praise of his uncle's courage tells us about the family's view of itself as much as about the event. Checked against the towns themselves and other ancient writers, the letter stands as one strong witness among several — most valuable where it can be tested, and read with care where it cannot.

POSITION

State your judgement of the source's value — and that value depends on the question.

EVIDENCE FOR STRENGTH

Name what the source does well, and what other evidence agrees with it.

LIMIT, HONESTLY

Name where the source is weak: distance in time, second-hand parts, purpose.

FACT AND OPINION

Show you can split checkable claims from judgements — and say what each kind shows.

CHECK AGAINST OTHERS

Show the testing: which other sources were used to support or challenge it.

FINAL JUDGEMENT

End with a balanced verdict — the source's value, question by question.

Original figure for this book — History 8, Section 6D

The model paragraph for Q8 on the left, and on the right the six sentence-jobs it uses: position; evidence for strength; limit, honestly; fact and opinion; check against others; final judgement.

Q9. Judge the significance of the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 CE using two criteria of your choice. For each criterion, name the source or sources you used, and say where the evidence behind it is strong or thin.

Q10. Enslaved people in Roman Italy left almost no writing of their own. Using Epictetus and one other example from this section, explain how limited evidence can still tell us a great deal about who held power in that society.

Answer guide (for the teacher)

Q1. (a) fact-claim — testable against the museum record of finds; (b) opinion — ‘best’ is a value word; (c) fact-claim — testable against surviving helmets and pictures. Remind students that (a) and (c) could turn out false and would still be fact-claims.

Q2. The closing greeting is believed to be in Claudia Severa’s own hand — direct evidence of a woman writing Latin. For the volcano question the tablet is silent: value is question-by-question, and silence for one question does not make a source worthless for others.

Q3. Pliny the Younger, a Roman official and writer; to the historian Tacitus; about 17 in 79 CE; written about 25 years later (published in Book 6); his uncle’s death he knows from the men who were with him — so part of the letter is second-hand, and the letter’s love for the uncle is a shaping force to keep in view.

Q4. Fact-claim: the shrieks, wailing and shouting — testable kind of detail, evidence for panic and crowding. Opinion in the source: ‘there were no gods left’ / ‘the last and endless night’ — evidence of fear and belief, not of night or of the gods. Accept any clean split with the *evidence-for* point made.

Q5. (a) material remains — food, seeds, bones; (b) pictures and art — wall paintings of the gods show belief; (c) writing and material remains together — dated writing (the charcoal note, sealed wine jars, autumn fruit) against the layers of rock. Accept reasoned matches; the *why* carries the mark.

Q6. Contains both: ‘the man I love’ reports a fact-claim (a person, a feeling that can be checked against other traces) wrapped around an opinion (‘brave’ — a value word). It is evidence for ordinary people’s feelings and for literacy of a kind; it can never tell us whether the man was brave, nor what most people thought.

Q7. Look for: question 1 — Claudia Severa, wife connected to the fort’s command, about 100 CE, a private letter not meant for us; question 2 — a birthday invitation, warmth between two women, family names; question 3 — the claims in it are mostly the kind a find can test (a birthday, a visit), the warmth is judgement and feeling; question 4 — other tablets from the fort, writing tablets and stylus finds, gravestones naming women. Mark on the loop being used, not on the list matching this one.

Q8. Mark on quality of reasoning, not conclusion reached. The model (figure) shows the shape: a position that value depends on the question; evidence for strength (eyewitness of the sequence; the buried towns and rock layers agreeing); limits named honestly (25 years later; second-hand for the uncle’s death; a nephew’s pride); fact and opinion split; checking against other sources (towns, other ancient writers, geology); a final judgement, question by question. A response that reaches an opposite overall verdict with the same discipline is a full-marks response.

Q9. Accept any two criteria applied honestly, e.g. ‘how many people felt it’ (sources: the buried towns, Pliny’s crowds — strong) and ‘what did it lead to’ (sources: the preserved towns as evidence of daily life — strong for preservation, thin for the lives of survivors, who left few records). The point is naming the source behind each criterion and saying where it is strong or thin.

Q10. Look for the power-structure insight: Epictetus survives only through Arrian’s writing — the enslaved speak mostly through their owners’ records; the Vindolanda tablet shows standing to write tracked with rank and family. Strong answers add the question of whose voices no source kept, and treat the silence itself as evidence of power.

Sources used in this section

Verified 25 August 2026.

1. Victorian Curriculum 2.0, History, Levels 7–8: content description VC2HH8S04 and elaborations E01–E06, as in the VCAA export held by this project.
2. Pliny the Younger, *Letters* 6.16, Latin text from the public textual corpus; the English wording in the close study is the author’s own rendering from the Latin, written for this section and marked as such. Facts of

Pliny's age, position at Misenum and the letter's dating (about 25 years after the eruption; Book 6 published about 107 CE) checked against the letter's own statements and the corpus apparatus.

3. Vindolanda tablet 291 (Tab. Vindol. II 291), British Museum, London: object record and published transcription; the closing greeting's attribution to Claudia Severa's own hand is the published record's 'believed', and is hedged the same way here.
4. Arrian, *Discourses of Epictetus*, public textual corpus; the life facts (enslaved under Epaphroditus, freedman of Nero; freed; banished by Domitian about 93 CE; lectures written down about 108 CE) as given in the corpus and its ancient introduction.
5. Archaeological Park of Pompeii, 2018 charcoal date-note found in a house under repair at Pompeii; the autumn-fruit, warm-clothing and sealed-jar findings, and the 2022 dating study, as reported in the park's announcements and scholarly reporting of the debate. The state of the debate ('not settled') is stated as at the verification date.
6. The gladiator fact/opinion pair is this book's own example (it teaches the fact/opinion split named by .E03); the supporting facts (bronze helmets from Pompeii, standing amphitheatres) are standard finds recorded in museum collections.

Perspectives, beliefs and values: reading people from sources

Owning content description — VC2HH8S05 (Historical Concepts and Skills, Using historical sources).

Elaboration linkage (D7 — linkage only, not a teaching order; ids verbatim from the VCAA export; E01 excluded entire under §2A, the remaining five active):

- .E02 (reading a perspective out of a source — the Confucius saying): the section’s anchor source; the code’s own named case. Carries the official “Asia and Australia’s Engagement with Asia” cross-curriculum tag — official tag name kept, no change required (no First Nations referent).
- .E03 (limited evidence → insights into power structures).
- .E04 (the values and attitudes a source reveals, cross-checked against other sources).
- .E05 (perspective and the whole society’s values and attitudes; why historians differ).
- .E06 (differing perspectives in sources; the less-audible voices).

Excluded (do NOT teach): .E01 — what Country and Place mean to First Nations Peoples — §2A exclusion, entire. It is not in the student text and is not claimed as coverage.

Achievement standard coverage: this section owns the standard’s sentence on using primary and secondary sources to work out the perspectives of people and groups, and to understand what the individuals and societies studied believed, valued and felt.

First Nations disposition (§2A): E01 is the only First Nations item under this CD and is excluded entire; the CD and the five active elaborations carry no other First Nations content. Nothing else in this section is excluded.

Division of labour. 6C owns features, content and context of sources (and the primary/secondary distinction); 6D owns value and accuracy of evidence, fact vs opinion and the validity questions; 6F owns how and why interpretations and debates differ. This section uses 6C’s three questions as a starting habit and hands value-judgements to 6D. Where 6E and 6F both touch “why historians disagree”, 6E keeps it tied to reading a perspective from a source, and 6F takes the broader interpretations-and-debates treatment (museum displays, films, games). No section assumes a specific Level 7 sequence (D1).

Cross-references: 6C (features/content/context; boundary primary/secondary cases), 6D (value and accuracy of evidence), 6F (interpretations and debates), 3B (Rome’s groups and their perspectives), 5C (rulers and ruled under the Mongols), 4C (power and authority).

Key subject terms defined at first use (D2 exemption 2): perspective, belief, value, attitude (each given an operational definition — VCAA does not define them, so Rule 1 of `CONTESTED_TERMS.md` applies), source, primary source, secondary source, context, perspective lens, less audible, saying, underling, dynastic, imperial, court, court scholar, regent, admonition.

Contested-term handling per `CONTESTED_TERMS.md`. The four idea-words (perspective, belief, value, attitude) are defined before use and the student is told this is the sense this section uses (Rule 1). The Confucius saying is a genuinely contested source: its two key words are translated differently by different scholars, and what it shows about the society that kept it is read two ways. Both readings are put in their strongest form before the student judges (Rule 5), the competing reading is tested as carefully as the favoured one (Rule 4), and marking is on the quality of reasoning, not the conclusion reached.

Teaching sequence (for the teacher). 1. The four idea-words — perspective, belief, value, attitude — defined and anchored to one case (Key ideas Part 1; Figure 6e_four_words.png). 2. The perspective lens — the questions to run over any source to read a perspective (Part 2; Figure 6e_perspective_lens.png). 3. Whose voices survive — the “less audible” groups, and why limited evidence still reveals power structures (Part 3; Figure 6e_audible_voices.png) — E03, E06. 4. Primary-source close study: the Confucius saying from the *Analects*, with the Chinese text, a plain-English rendering and the two contested words (Figures 6e_confucius_card.png, 6e_saying.png) — E02. 5. A less-audible voice that answers back: Ban Zhao and her *Admonitions for Women* (Part 4; Figure 6e_banzhao_card.png) — E03, E06. 6. Secondary-source interpretation: the two strongest readings of the saying, steelmanned (Figure 6e_two_views.png) — E04, E05. 7. Why historians read the same source differently — access, personal views, and the time the historian was working (Part 5; Figure

6e_why_differ.png) — E05. 8. Scaffolded practice Q1–Q6; unscaffolded Q7–Q10, with Q10 the evidence-based extended response and its worked model in Figure 6e_model_explanation.png.

Common misconceptions to address: that the people who made the sources speak for everyone in their society (the loudest surviving voice is usually a ruler, official or learned man); that a source that is “about” a group gives that group’s own perspective (a saying *about* women is not the same thing as a voice *from* women); that one saying can stand for a whole society across centuries; that a limited or faint source is useless (limited evidence still reveals power structures — the E03 point); and that historians disagree because one must be wrong (differences often trace to what sources a historian could reach, the views they brought, and the time they were working in).

What you will learn in this section

Every source that survives from the past was made by someone. That someone had a place in their world — rich or poor, ruler or ruled, man or woman, free or enslaved — and that place shaped what they saw, what they thought mattered, and what they thought was normal. When historians read a source, they are not only asking *what happened*. They are also asking *who is talking, and what do they believe, value and feel* about the people around them.

That is the skill of this section. You will learn to read a source for the **perspectives** of the people and groups behind it — their **beliefs, values** and **attitudes** — and you will do it for people whose own voices are hard to hear: women, servants, workers and conquered peoples, who appear in the records mostly through the eyes of others.

The main case is one short, famous saying from ancient China, by the teacher we call **Confucius**. It is a saying *about* women and servants. It was written down and kept by men. By the end of the section you will be able to say what it reveals about the society that kept it — and what it cannot tell you on its own. Then you will meet a remarkable woman who answers it back.

These words do not have one fixed meaning that everyone agrees on, so this section tells you the sense it uses for each. Other writers use them in close but slightly different ways:

- **perspective** — the view of the world a person or group has, shaped by who they are, where they stand in their society, and what they have lived through. A ruler and a ruled person looking at the same event see it from different perspectives.
- **belief** — something a person or group holds to be true about the world: about the gods, about how things work, about what people are like.
- **value** — what a person or society thinks is important, good and worth aiming for: for example respect, learning, obedience or family.
- **attitude** — the settled way a person or group feels and acts towards someone or something: towards women, towards servants, towards strangers.

Three more words you already know from section 6C, used again here:

- **source** — anything from the past historians can use as evidence: a text, an object, a building, a picture.
 - **primary source** — a source **made at the time of the events, people or places it deals with**.
 - **secondary source** — a source made later that represents a later interpretation.
-

Key ideas

Part 1: Four idea-words

This section is built around four idea-words: **perspective, belief, value, attitude**. They are close cousins, so it helps to keep them apart. The table below gives the working meaning this section uses for each, a question to ask, and a tiny example from the Confucius case you will meet in a moment.

Four idea-words: what they mean in this section

VCAA does not fix one meaning for these words. These are the working senses used here.

The word	What it means here	A question to ask	From the Confucius case
perspective	The view of the world a person or group has, shaped by who they are, where they stand in their society, and what they have lived through.	Where does this person stand — and how does that change what they see?	A learned teacher who moved among rulers looks at women and servants from above.
belief	Something a person or group holds to be true about the world — about the gods, about how things work, about what people are like.	What do they treat as true?	That some people are born above others, and some below.
value	What a person or society thinks is important, good and worth aiming for: respect, learning, obedience, family.	What do they think matters most?	Order, rank, and knowing your place.
attitude	The settled way a person or group feels and acts towards someone or something: towards women, towards servants, towards strangers.	How do they feel about this person or group?	Wary and impatient towards servants — hard to handle either way.
How they join up: beliefs feed values, values show up as attitudes — and together they shape the perspective inside a source.			

Table of the four idea-words — perspective, belief, value and attitude — with the working meaning this section uses for each, a question to ask of a source, and an example from the Confucius saying

These four words often travel together. A society's **beliefs** (what it holds true) feed its **values** (what it thinks matters), and its values show up as **attitudes** (how it feels and acts towards different people). All of these together shape the **perspective** that ends up inside a source. Reading them out of a source is the work of this section.

Part 2: The perspective lens

To read a perspective out of a source, run the same set of questions over it every time. Think of them as a lens you hold up to the source:

1. **Who made it?** A person, a group, an official, a ruler? Man or woman? Rich or poor?
2. **Where did they stand in their society?** High or low, free or unfree, near power or far from it.
3. **Who was it made for, and why?** To instruct, to praise, to command, to record, to sell.
4. **What do they take for granted?** What do they treat as normal and obvious, without arguing for it? This is often where values hide.

5. **Who do they praise, and who do they blame?**

6. **Whose voice is missing?** Who is talked *about* but never speaks for themselves?

Question 6 is one of the most important in history. The people who made most surviving sources were a small slice of their society. Everyone else — most women, most workers, most conquered peoples — shows up mainly through the maker's eyes.

The perspective lens

Hold these six questions up to any source and its perspective comes into view.

1 Who made it?

A person, a group, an official, a ruler? Man or woman? Rich or poor?

2 Where did they stand in their society?

High or low, free or unfree, near power or far from it.

3 Who was it made for, and why?

To instruct, to praise, to command, to record, to sell.

4 What do they take for granted?

What they treat as normal and obvious, without arguing for it. This is often where values hide.

5 Who do they praise, and who do they blame?

Praise and blame point straight at what the maker values.

6 Whose voice is missing?

Who is talked about but never speaks for themselves?

Why question 6 matters most:

The people who made most surviving sources were a small slice of their society — usually rulers, officials and learned men. Everyone else shows up mainly through the maker's eyes, talked about but rarely heard.

A perspective lens: six questions to run over any source — who made it, where they stood, who it was made for, what they took for granted, who they praise or blame, and whose voice is missing

Part 3: Whose voices survive?

Imagine the people of an ancient society lined up by how loudly their own words reach us today. It is not the most important people we hear most from. It is the people who could write, or who had the power to get their words written down and copied.

Rulers, officials, generals and learned men sit near the top: they made the laws, the histories, the monuments and the great texts, and they had scribes to copy them. They are **audible**. Far below them sit most women, servants, farm workers, slaves and conquered peoples. They rarely wrote, and almost nothing of theirs was copied and kept. Their own voices are **less audible** — sometimes almost silent.

Here is the key idea of this section: **even when the evidence for a group is limited, it can still tell us a great deal about who held power in that society** — its power structures: who was above whom, who could command whom, and who got to decide. A single saying about servants tells us servants existed, that they were set below their masters, and that their masters found them hard to control. That is a real insight into power, drawn from one short line.

The less-audible groups for this section are **women, servants, workers and conquered peoples**. The main saying is *about* two of them — women and servants. Keep this warning in your mind as you read it: a source *about* a group is not the same thing as a voice *from* that group. Later in the section you will meet a source that changes that — a woman who wrote back.

Whose voices survive?

The people of an ancient society, lined up by how loudly their own words reach us.

How loudly
their own
words reach us

loud

nearly
silent

AUDIBLE

Rulers, officials, generals and learned men

They made the laws, the histories, the monuments and the great texts — and had scribes to copy their words and keep them.

QUIETER

Traders, craftspeople, minor scribes

Some traces remain — mostly inside records kept by the people above them.

LESS AUDIBLE

Most women, servants, farm workers, slaves, and conquered peoples

They rarely wrote, and almost nothing of theirs was copied and kept. They appear mostly through the eyes of others — talked about, but rarely heard.

Limited evidence is not useless

Even a faint trace can tell us a great deal about who held power in that society:

- who was above whom,
- who could command whom,
- who got to decide.

One short saying about servants tells us servants existed, sat below their masters, and were hard to control. That is a real insight into power — from one line.

A source ABOUT a group is not the same as a voice FROM that group.

A scale of whose voices survive, from the most audible — rulers, officials, generals and learned men — down to the less audible — most women, servants, workers and conquered peoples — with the point that even limited evidence reveals power structures

Primary source close study: a saying of Confucius

The maker. Confucius (in Chinese, **Kong Qiu** or **Kongzi**) was a teacher, thinker and adviser who lived in China from about 551 to 479 BCE, during a time of small rival states and frequent war. He taught that society would be peaceful if people knew their place, respected those above them, cared for those below them, and followed old customs and rituals. His students wrote down his sayings after his death.

The source. Those sayings were gathered into a book called the *Analects*. It is not one person's writing but a collection, put together and edited by followers over a couple of centuries, reaching much its present form by the early **Han dynasty** (the Han ruled China from 202 BCE). Because the words come *from* Confucius but were written down *after* him by his students, the *Analects* sits on the boundary between primary and secondary (you met boundary cases like this in 6C). It is the closest we can get to Confucius's own teaching.

The saying. In Book 17 of the *Analects* there is a short saying that historians still argue about today. Its first line, in this book's plain-English rendering:

“Women and servants are the most difficult people to deal with.”

Here is the saying as it stands in the Chinese text, with a plain-English rendering made for this section from the standard scholarly editions (James Legge's and others). Notice it has two halves — and the second half matters:

“Women and servants are the most difficult people to deal with. If you are too familiar with them, they become insolent; if you keep them at a distance, they become resentful.”

— Confucius, *Analects* Book 17, saying 25 (about 5th century BCE), recorded by his students and kept in the *Analects*; rendered into plain English by the author for this section.

Source card: the Analects of Confucius

A collection of sayings and deeds of Kong Qiu (Kongzi), whom we call Confucius.

THE SOURCE

What it is:

The Analects (Lunyu) - sayings and deeds of Confucius, a Chinese teacher, thinker and adviser (about 551-479 BCE).

Who made it:

His students, after his death. Followers kept adding and editing it for a couple of centuries.

When:

Confucius taught in the 500s-400s BCE, a time of rival states and frequent war. The book reached much its present form by the early Han dynasty (the Han ruled from 202 BCE).

Kind of source:

The words come FROM Confucius but were written down AFTER him by followers - a boundary case between primary and secondary.

The famous saying:

Book 17, saying 25: 'Women and servants are the most difficult people to deal with...'

Language:

Classical Chinese - the written language of educated Chinese men at the time.

USE IT WITH CARE

Strengths

- The closest we can get to Confucius's own teaching.

- Kept and copied for over two thousand years - it shows what later ages valued enough to preserve.

Limits

- Written down by followers after his death, then edited for centuries.

- A handful of learned men's words. No voice of any woman or servant appears in it.

- The famous saying's two key words are contested - translators read them differently.

How to use it:

Strong evidence for the perspectives and values of the men who made and kept it - not, on its own, the voice of a whole society.

Source card for the Analects of Confucius: what it is, who made it, when, what kind of source it is, and the strengths and limits to use it with

The saying of Confucius - Analects, Book 17, saying 25

About 5th century BCE, recorded by his students. The text below is the classical Chinese.

子曰：「唯女子與小人爲難養也！
近之則不孫，遠之則怨。」

Classical Chinese - the written language of educated men of the time

A plain-English rendering (made by the author from the standard scholarly editions):

"Women and servants are the most difficult people to deal with.

If you are too familiar with them, they become insolent;

if you keep them at a distance, they become resentful."

The two contested words

女子

the word for women

Some translators read it as 'women'; others as 'girls' or 'young women'. Each choice paints a different picture of who the saying is about.

小人

the second key word

Rendered here as 'servants'; also translated as 'underlings' or 'petty people'. The word rendered 'deal with' can also mean to keep, support or look after.

Why it matters:

Because the key words can be read more than one way, what the saying seems to say about the society that kept it changes with the translation. The book renders its first line as: 'Women and servants are the most difficult people to deal with.'

The Confucius saying as it stands in the Chinese text, with this book's plain-English rendering and the two contested words set out — the word for women, and the second key word rendered here as 'servants' — which translators read differently

Run the perspective lens over it.

- **Who made it?** A learned man, a teacher and adviser — a man near the top of his society, though not a ruler.
- **Where did he stand?** Above women, above servants, above most workers. He moved among rulers and officials.
- **What does he take for granted?** That women and servants are there to be "dealt with" — managed, kept in their place. He does not argue that they *should* be below him. He simply assumes it. That assumption is where a value is hiding.
- **Who does he praise or blame?** He does not praise women or servants here. He complains about them, as a manager complains about difficult staff.
- **Whose voice is missing?** The women and the servants. The saying is *about* them. Not one of them speaks.

What does it reveal about the **society that produced it**? At minimum, it shows a society in which a learned man could assume that women and servants sat below him, and in which that assumption was worth writing down and copying for over two thousand years. That is evidence of the **values** (order, rank, knowing your place), the **beliefs** (that some people are born above others) and the **attitudes** (impatience, wariness) of that society — or at least of the men whose words were kept.

The two contested words. Two words in the Chinese are not settled. The first is the word for women; some translators read it as "women", some as "girls" or "young women". The second is often translated "underlings" or "servants", but it can also mean "small" or "petty" people. The word rendered "deal with" can also mean to keep, support or look after. Because the words can be read more than one way, what the saying seems to say about the society changes with the translation. Hold that thought — it returns when we ask why historians disagree.

Part 4: A less-audible voice answers back — Ban Zhao

The saying you just read is *about* women, written down by men. For over two thousand years that was most of what survived. But sometimes a less-audible voice breaks through. In China, one of the clearest belongs to a woman named **Ban Zhao**.

Who she was. Ban Zhao (about 45 to about 117 CE) lived during the Han dynasty, around six hundred years after Confucius. She was one of the most learned people of her age. When her brother, the historian **Ban Gu**, died before finishing the great history of the Han — the *Book of Han* — the emperor ordered Ban Zhao to complete it. She did. She also worked in the imperial library, taught the empress, and later advised the **regent** empress who ruled on behalf of a young emperor. A regent is a person who rules in place of a ruler who is too young or unable to rule.

Her book. Late in life Ban Zhao wrote a short book of advice for women, the *Admonitions for Women* (an admonition is a piece of advice or warning). It has seven chapters with names like *Humility*, *Husband and Wife*, and *Devotion*. It is one of the first surviving works written by a Chinese woman — a real voice from a group the Confucius saying only talks about.

What it says. Its first chapter, *Humility*, opens with a picture from older custom: when a baby girl was born, she was laid **under the bed** and given a **spindle** to play with, to teach her, Ban Zhao writes, to be “lowly and weak” and to expect a life of work. She tells girls to be humble, to work hard, to put others before themselves, and to respect and obey their husbands.

Read it with the lens. Here is where it gets interesting. Ban Zhao’s book seems to agree with the values of the Confucius saying: women should be lowly, humble and obedient. So is it just the same perspective, repeated by a woman? Or is it something more complicated?

Think hard before you answer. Ban Zhao was the opposite of lowly: she finished one of China’s great histories, taught the empress and advised the ruler of the empire. A woman with that much learning and authority wrote a book telling girls to be lowly and weak. That tension is not a mistake to smooth over. It is the kind of thing historians argue about, and it is exactly what makes her such a rich source. Her book reveals the values of her society — but her very life shows those values never told the whole truth about what women could be.

Source card: Ban Zhao and her Admonitions for Women

A less-audible voice that answers back - a woman who wrote about women.

WHO SHE WAS

Ban Zhao:

About 45 to about 117 CE, Han-dynasty China - around six hundred years after Confucius.

Standing:

One of the most learned people of her age: a court scholar.

The great history:

Her brother Ban Gu died before finishing the Book of Han, the great history of the dynasty. The emperor ordered Ban Zhao to complete it. She did.

At court:

She worked in the imperial library, taught the empress, and later advised the regent empress - the woman who ruled in place of a young emperor.

HER BOOK: ADMONITIONS FOR WOMEN

Written late in life: a short book of advice and warning for women. Seven chapters:

Humility - Husband and Wife - Respect and Caution - Womanly Qualifications - Whole-hearted Devotion - Implicit Obedience - Harmony Between Younger In-laws.

Chapter 1, Humility:

By old custom, when a baby girl was born she was laid UNDER THE BED and given a SPINDLE to play with - to teach her, Ban Zhao writes, to be 'lowly and weak' and to expect a life of work.

Girls were told to be humble, to work hard, to put others before themselves, and to respect and obey their husbands.

One of the first surviving works written by a Chinese woman - a real voice from a talked-about group.

Read it with the lens:

Her book repeats the values of the Confucius saying - women lowly, humble, obedient. But her own life is the opposite of lowly. That tension is not a mistake to smooth over; it is what makes her such a rich source.

Source card for Ban Zhao and her Admonitions for Women: who she was, what she achieved, what her book says in its first chapter on Humility, and why her voice matters as a less-audible voice answering back

Secondary source interpretation: what do historians make of the saying?

The Confucius saying is a primary source — very old words from the past. But what do those words *show* about the society that kept them? Here we meet **interpretations**: later readings built from the sources. Historians and translators do not all agree, and two strong readings have stood for a long time. Each deserves its strongest form before you judge.

What does the saying show? Two strong readings

Both use the same saying. Each is set out in its strongest form before you judge.

VIEW 1 - It tells us what the society really thought

- The saying was kept, copied and respected for more than two thousand years. Readers across many ages recognised it as true of their world.
- Other early Chinese texts, and much later ones like Ban Zhao's *Admonitions for Women*, repeat the same pattern: women and servants set below men, told to obey and serve.
- Even Ban Zhao, a woman of great learning, tells girls they are born to be lowly and humble.
- When sources separated by centuries keep agreeing, that looks like the values and attitudes of society as a whole - not one man's private opinions.
- Short as it is, the saying opens a window onto a real pattern of power.

VIEW 2 - It cannot stand for a whole society

- Confucius was one teacher speaking to particular students at a particular moment. His words were written down by followers and edited for centuries before reaching their present form.
- The key words are unsettled: 'women' or 'girls' or 'young women'? 'Servants' or 'petty people'? Legge chose 'girls and servants'; others choose 'women'. Each choice shows a different picture.
- Ban Zhao's own life - finishing a great history, advising an empress - shows women were not simply silenced or powerless.
- The saying gives us one perspective. Many more sources are needed before it can stand for a whole society across two thousand years.

Your job: weigh the evidence for each view, then say what you judge and why.

Both views are sensible, and students who reason well from the same sources may land in different places. That is expected. It is the quality of the reasoning - not the conclusion reached - that is marked.

The two strongest readings of the Confucius saying set side by side — one reading it as direct evidence of the values of the society that kept it, the other warning that one contested saying cannot stand for a whole society — each with its evidence, and the reminder that the judgement must follow the evidence

View 1 — the saying tells us what the society really thought. This reading takes the saying as direct evidence of the values and attitudes of its society. It points out that the saying was kept, copied and respected for more than two thousand years, which suggests readers across many ages recognised it as true of their world. Other early Chinese texts, and much later ones like Ban Zhao's *Admonitions for Women*, repeat the same pattern: women and servants are set below men and told to obey and serve. Even Ban Zhao, a woman of great learning, tells girls they are born to be lowly and humble. When sources separated by centuries keep agreeing, this reading says, we have good reason to think these were not just one man's private opinions but the values and attitudes of society as a whole. The saying is short, but it opens a window onto a real pattern of power.

View 2 — one contested saying cannot stand for a whole society. This reading warns against turning one line into a picture of an entire civilisation. It points out that Confucius was one teacher speaking to particular students at a particular moment, and that his words were written down by followers and edited for centuries before reaching their present form. The key words themselves are unsettled: translators disagree over whether the first word means "women", "girls" or "young women", and whether the second means "servants" or "petty people". James Legge, a nineteenth-century translator, chose words like "girls and servants"; others choose "women". Each choice shows a different picture. And Ban Zhao's own life — a woman who finished a great history and advised an empress — shows that women were not simply silenced or powerless. On this reading, the saying gives us one perspective, and we need many more sources before we claim it stands for a whole society across two thousand years.

Your job is not to guess which view the teacher wants. Both views are sensible, and both use the same saying. The split is about how far one contested source can be pushed. Weigh the evidence for each, then say what you judge and why. Students who reason well from the same sources may land in different places — that is expected, and it is the reasoning that is marked.

Part 5: Why historians read the same source differently

The two views above disagree about the same saying. That is normal in history, and it is not because one side is being careless. Historians usually differ for one of three reasons. You can see each one at work in this section:

- **Access to source material.** What a historian can read shapes what they can say. Confucius's own students heard him in person. Editors a few centuries later worked from copies of copies. When older copies of ancient Chinese texts have been found, they have sometimes changed what scholars could read — and so changed their readings. Different access, different interpretation.
- **Personal views.** Historians and translators bring their own beliefs and values to the work. Legge, who translated the *Analects* in the 1800s, made choices about women and servants from inside his own time and training. A translator working today, interested in women's history, reads the same words with different questions. The words have not changed; the reader has.
- **The time the historian was working.** Every age asks new questions of the past. For most of history almost no one looked for women's voices in old Chinese texts, so Ban Zhao stayed in the background. Modern historians, keen to find less-audible voices, have brought her forward. The source was always there; the time it was asked the right question is what changed.

When you meet two historians who disagree, do not ask “which one is lying?” Ask instead: *what could each of them reach, what did each of them believe, and when were each of them working?* Those three questions usually explain the gap.

Why historians read the same source differently

It is not because one side is careless. Three reasons - each at work in this section.

Access to source material

1 Different access, different interpretation.

What a historian can read shapes what they can say. Confucius's own students heard him in person. Editors a few centuries later worked from copies of copies. When older copies of ancient Chinese texts have been found, they have sometimes changed what scholars could read - and so changed their readings.

Personal views

2 The words have not changed; the reader has.

Historians and translators bring their own beliefs and values to the work. Legge, who translated the *Analects* in the 1800s, made his choice of words for women and servants from inside his own time and training. A translator today, interested in women's history, reads the same words with different questions.

The time the historian was working

3 The question changed; the source did not.

Every age asks new questions of the past. For most of history almost no one looked for women's voices in old Chinese texts, so Ban Zhao stayed in the background. Modern historians, keen to find less-audible voices, have brought her forward.

When two historians disagree, ask: what could they reach? what did they believe? when were they working?

Those three questions usually explain the gap.

The three reasons historians read the same source differently — access to the source material, personal views, and the time the historian was working — each shown with its example from this section

Practice tasks (with help)

Q1. Copy the four idea-words from Figure 6e_four_words.png. For each word — perspective, belief, value, attitude — write the working meaning this section uses, in your own words.

Q2. Look at Figure 6e_audible_voices.png. (a) Name TWO groups whose own voices are “less audible” in surviving sources. (b) Give ONE reason their voices are hard to hear. (c) Part 3 says limited evidence for a group can still be useful. What does it say limited evidence can reveal?

Q3. Run the perspective lens from Figure 6e_perspective_lens.png over the Confucius saying. Answer these two questions in one or two sentences each: (a) Who made the saying, and where did they stand in their society? (b) Whose voice is missing from it?

Q4. The saying assumes something without arguing for it. Write down ONE thing the maker takes for granted about women or servants. Then say what **value** or **belief** that assumption reveals.

Q5. Match each reason historians disagree to its example from Part 5. Write the letter. Reasons: (i) access to source material; (ii) personal views; (iii) the time the historian was working. Examples: (a) Modern historians, keen to find women’s voices, have brought Ban Zhao forward. (b) Legge translated the saying from inside his own nineteenth-century training. (c) Editors long after Confucius worked from copies of copies, while his students heard him in person.

Q6. Ban Zhao finished the *Book of Han*, taught the empress and advised the ruler of the empire — yet her book tells girls to be “lowly and weak”. In two or three sentences, explain why that is interesting to a historian rather than a mistake.

Tasks to try on your own

Q7. Write one paragraph (5–7 sentences) explaining what the Confucius saying reveals about the **values and attitudes** of society as a whole — the society that kept it. Use at least TWO of the four idea-words (perspective, belief, value, attitude) and point to the exact words in the saying that support you. End with one thing the saying cannot tell you on its own.

Q8. Choose ONE less-audible group from this section: women, servants, workers or conquered peoples. Explain how the limited evidence for that group can still reveal the **power structures** of the society. Use at least ONE specific source from this section as your evidence, and name what it shows about who was above whom.

Q9. Here is a claim: “*The Confucius saying proves that the whole of ancient Chinese society looked down on women.*” Test this claim on both sides. Write ONE paragraph giving the strongest evidence FOR it, and ONE paragraph giving the strongest evidence AGAINST it (use the translation disagreement and Ban Zhao). Then write your own judgement, with your reason. You are marked on the reasoning, not on which side you land on.

Q10. Chapter skills extended response. Choose ONE source from this section — the Confucius saying, or Ban Zhao's *Admonitions for Women*. Write an evidence-based explanation in three parts: (1) Identify the **perspective** in the source — who made it, and where they stood in their society. (2) Explain at least TWO **beliefs, values or attitudes** the source reveals, quoting or pointing to the exact words that show them. (3) Name ONE limit of the source, and one other source or kind of evidence you would use to check or complete the picture. Figure 6e_model_explanation.png works one good shape of this task over the Confucius saying. Your answer may take a different shape; it is the reasoning and the use of evidence that are marked.

Model explanation - one good shape for Task Q10

Over the Confucius saying, colour-coded by the moves it makes. Your answer may take a different shape.

1 PERSPECTIVE

The saying comes from the Analects, set down by the students of Confucius - a learned man who stood near the top of his society, above women and servants, moving among rulers and officials. That standing shapes everything it says.

2 VALUE

It shows that order and rank were valued. The speaker does not argue that women and servants should sit below him; he simply assumes they are there to be 'handled' and kept in their place. The assumption is where the value hides.

3 BELIEF

Behind the value sits a belief: that some people are born above others, and some below - and that those below need managing.

4 ATTITUDE

His attitude towards them is wary and impatient. Keep them close and they grow 'insolent'; keep them distant and they grow 'resentful'. Either way, they are 'the most difficult people to deal with'.

5 EVIDENCE

Every claim above points at exact words in the source: 'most difficult people to deal with', 'insolent', 'resentful'. That is what makes it an explanation, not an opinion.

6 LIMIT + CHECK

But this is one man's saying, in contested words, kept by men. On its own it cannot speak for a whole society. So I would check it against other sources - such as Ban Zhao's *Admonitions for Women*, where a woman's own voice both echoes the values and unsettles them.

The four idea-words, tied to exact words in the source, plus a named limit and a named check.

Model explanation for the extended response: the perspective, beliefs, values and attitudes revealed by the Confucius saying written out in full, colour-coded by the four idea-words, with the limit and the checking step, as one good shape for Task Q10

Answer guide (for the teacher)

Q1. Mark on the student's own words capturing each sense: perspective = a view of the world shaped by who you are and where you stand; belief = what is held to be true; value = what is thought important or good; attitude = the settled way of feeling/acting towards someone or something. Accept close paraphrase.

Q2. (a) Any two of: women, servants, workers, conquered peoples. (b) They rarely wrote, and little of theirs was copied and kept; they appear mostly through others' eyes. (c) The power structures of that society — who was above whom, who commanded whom, who decided.

Q3. (a) A learned man, teacher/adviser (Confucius), near the top of his society, above women and servants, moving among rulers and officials. (b) The women and the servants — the saying is about them, but they do not speak. Accept answers that note most women and servants' own voices are absent.

Q4. Accept any genuine taken-for-granted, e.g.: that women/servants exist to be “dealt with”/managed/kept in their place; that they are naturally below the speaker. The matching value/belief should follow, e.g.: value = order, rank, knowing your place; belief = some people are naturally above others. Mark the link between the assumption and the value/ belief, not the specific choice.

Q5. (a) = (iii) the time the historian was working; (b) = (ii) personal views; (c) = (i) access to source material.

Q6. Mark on the student noticing the tension rather than smoothing it: Ban Zhao’s own life (learning, authority, finishing a great history, advising an empress) contradicts the lowliness she tells girls to accept. Accept answers that say this shows the society’s stated values never matched the whole truth about what women could be, or that her book is a rich source precisely because of the gap. This is the E03/E06 point.

Q7. Mark on: uses two or more idea-words correctly; points to exact words in the saying (e.g. “most difficult people to deal with”, “insolent”, “resentful”); states a value/belief/attitude (order, rank, wariness towards women/servants); ends with a genuine limit (e.g. it is one man’s saying, contested words, no women’s voice, cannot stand for the whole society).

Q8. Mark on: a named group; a named source (Confucius saying or Ban Zhao); a clear statement of what it shows about power (who was above whom, who commanded whom). Example for women: the saying sets women below men to be “dealt with”, and Ban Zhao tells girls to be lowly and obedient — both show men above women; but Ban Zhao’s own life shows the structure had gaps. Accept reasoned alternatives, including workers/servants or conquered peoples if tied to a source in the section.

Q9. Mark on both sides being tested before the judgement (CONTESTED_TERMS.md Rule 4). FOR: the saying was kept and copied for over two thousand years; other sources across centuries (including Ban Zhao) repeat women as lowly/obedient. AGAINST: the key words are contested (women/girls; servants/petty people), so what it says is unsettled; it is one teacher’s words, written down and edited by followers long after; Ban Zhao’s life shows women were not simply powerless or silent. Any judgement reasoned from these moves is full marks.

Q10. Mark on: three parts present and distinct (perspective identified with who/where; two or more beliefs/values/attitudes tied to exact words; one named limit plus one named check). Every claim should sit on something in the section or the figure. The model shows one acceptable shape; a choice of Ban Zhao and a different shape are equally acceptable if reasoned and evidenced.

Sources used in this section

Every source examined or quoted here is a real, citable artifact (D4). Verified 25 August 2026.

- **Confucius (Kong Qiu / Kongzi)** — Chinese teacher and thinker, about 551–479 BCE, of the state of Lu, Spring and Autumn period. His sayings were recorded by students after his death. Described in the author’s own words in the primary-source close study.
- **The *Analects* (Lunyu)** — collection of Confucius’s sayings and deeds, put together and edited by followers over a couple of centuries, reaching much its present form by the early Han dynasty (the Han ruled from 202 BCE). Book 17, saying 25 is the centrepiece. Presented in the author’s own plain-English rendering from the standard scholarly editions, foremost James Legge, *The Chinese Classics, Volume I: Confucian Analects* (1861; revised 1893). Subject of Figures 6e_confucius_card.png and 6e_saying.png.
- **The Confucius saying (Analects 17.25)** — Chinese text (verified against the Chinese Text Project) and plain-English rendering. This book renders the first line as “Women and servants are the most difficult people to deal with”. The two contested words (the word for women read variously as women/girls/young women; the word rendered underlings/servants/petty people) are flagged in the section. Subject of Figure 6e_saying.png.
- **James Legge** — nineteenth-century translator whose rendering of the *Analects* (1861, revised 1893) is a standard scholarly edition; his choice of words for the contested saying is cited in Part 5 and View 2 as an example of a translator’s personal views and time shaping a reading. Described in the author’s own words.
- **Ban Zhao** — Han-dynasty historian and court scholar, about 45 to about 117 CE (dates vary by source). Completed the *Book of Han* after the death of her brother Ban Gu, worked in the imperial library, taught the empress, and advised the regent empress (Empress Dowager Deng). Cited as the section’s less-audible voice. Biographical details verified against encyclopaedia entries (retrieved 2026-08-25).

- **The Admonitions for Women (Nüjie)** — short conduct book by Ban Zhao, seven chapters (*Humility, Husband and Wife, Respect and Caution, Womanly Qualifications, Whole-hearted Devotion, Implicit Obedience, Harmony Between Younger In-laws*), composed late in her life. The opening image of Chapter 1 (*Humility*) — a newborn girl laid under the bed and given a spindle to teach her “lowliness and weakness” — is rendered into plain English by the author for this section from the standard scholarly translation (Nancy Lee Swann, *Pan Chao: Foremost Woman Scholar of China*, 1932). Subject of Figure 6e_banzhao_card.png.
- **The Book of Han** — dynastic history of the Han, begun by Ban Biao and Ban Gu and completed with Ban Zhao’s contribution after Ban Gu’s death. Cited in the Ban Zhao close study.
- All dates follow the BCE/CE conventions taught in section 6B. No First Nations content appears in this section (E01, the only First Nations item under this CD, is excluded under §2A and is not taught).

Why historians disagree: interpretations and debates

Curriculum focus — teacher block

Owning content description — VC2HH8S06 (Historical Concepts and Skills, Using historical sources).

Elaboration linkage (D7 — linkage only, not a teaching order; ids verbatim from the VCAA export, final ids over substantive elaborations):

- .E02 (different interpretations of one event, and what causes the difference): taught on the Renaissance-and-women case — the classic story of the Renaissance set against Joan Kelly’s 1977 question “Did women have a Renaissance?”, the difference accounted for by the question asked. The code’s other named case (the influence of scientific ideas) is carried as the short second worked case (Copernicus and Galileo).
- .E03 (exploring a debate over an event — the pyramids and Angkor are the code’s named cases). Carries the official “Asia and Australia’s Engagement with Asia” cross-curriculum tag — official tag name kept, no change required. The Angkor decline debate is taught in full as the section’s multi-position case (conquest; water-network failure; deliberate relocation; religious change), steelmanned per `CONTESTED_TERMS.md` Rule 5. The pyramid-building case is taught alongside it as the new-evidence case (Herodotus to the Merer diary, 2013).
- .E04 (a range of interpretations used to explain a society’s achievements): taught default: Renaissance Italy, on a real range of named historians (Burckhardt 1860, Burke 1987, Kelly 1977). The Ottoman Empire is the code’s named alternative and is scaffolded in Q4 with real anchors (Suleiman I’s law-giving, the Suleymaniye mosque of the architect Sinan finished 1557, and the letters of the Habsburg ambassador Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq, 1550s).
- .E05 (weighing an event’s consequences, positive and negative, through a selection of interpretations): the Indigenous peoples of the Americas named in this subject matter are in scope under TOC D3 — they are the Indigenous peoples of the Americas, not Australian First Nations content. Taught on a selection of three real interpretations: Bartolomé de las Casas (1552), the Black Legend debate that grew out of his book, and Matthew Restall’s myth-testing (2003). Difficult histories (mass death from disease, forced labour, the destruction of temples) are stated plainly and age-appropriately, without graphic detail, per `CONTENT_POLICY`.
- .E06 (media as interpretation: exhibitions, films, documentaries, games): taught on a five-question analysis frame: worked on the film *Gladiator* (2000) and on the British Museum’s display of the Rosetta Stone (with the return request from Egypt); Assassin’s Creed *Origins* and its Discovery Tour mode (2017/2018) is the student task case (Q7).

Excluded (§2A): .E01 — weighing pre-history against Deep Time as ways of framing the unwritten past — excluded from `Draws` on entire; its only referent is the Deep Time framing, a First Nations framing of the deep past. It is recorded here, reported `ACCEPTED` by coverage audits, and never silently dropped.

Achievement standard coverage: this section owns the standard’s sentence on recognising the contested nature of early and pre-modern histories, and on using that recognition to identify and analyse differing interpretations and debates. It is the skill engine under the interpretations-and-debates content sections: 3G (VC2HH8K18), 4E (VC2HH8K23) and 5E (VC2HH8K28).

First Nations disposition (§2A): one elaboration excluded entire — VC2HH8S06 .E01, as above. No other First Nations content exists in this CD or its remaining elaborations. The conquest-of-the-Americas content of .E05 concerns the Indigenous peoples of the Americas and is in scope per TOC D3.

Division of labour. 6F teaches the *skill*: what an interpretation is, how and why interpretations differ, and how to analyse a debate and a media interpretation. The knowledge sections own their own interpretation content: 1A opens with the human-origins debate, 3G owns interpretations of how significant an ancient society was, 4E owns medieval interpretations (the Arthur and Pope Joan myths, the Black Death debates) and 5E owns the Mongol death-toll debate. 6F does not retell their cases in detail; it cross-refers to them as places where this section’s method applies. 6D owns fact/opinion and source validity; 6E owns perspectives from sources — 6F builds on both (perspectives shape interpretations; validity questions test them) and does not re-teach either. 7D later owns the student’s own constructed interpretations.

Cross-references: 1A (the human-origins debate as an interpretations case), 1C (methods and heritage), 3G (legacies), 4E (medieval interpretations), 5B (Angkor’s water management as a taught cause case for the default Mongol chapter’s alternative topic), 5E (Mongol death-toll debate), 6A (questions), 6B (BCE/CE conventions), 6C (features, content and context of sources), 6D (value of sources), 6E (perspectives from sources), 7C (significance criteria), 7D (constructing interpretations). No section assumes a specific Level 7 sequence (D1).

Key subject terms defined at first use (D2 exemption 2): interpretation, historical debate, account, assumption, myth (defined in the sense this section uses it), exhibition, documentary, ally, epidemic, reservoir, canal, papyrus, dome, mosque; evidence and perspective re-established in one sentence each (owned by 6D and 6E). Contested-term handling per `CONTESTED_TERMS.md`: *interpretation* and *historical debate* get the Rule 1 formula at first use (the curriculum uses both without defining either; this section states the working sense and every question is answerable on that sense alone). *Positive and negative consequences* are handled as frame-dependent (Rule 1b) — the frame is *for whom?* — rather than measurable. Every debate in the section is steelmanned on all sides (Rule 5) and the same tests are applied to positions a student may favour (Rule 4); marking is on quality of reasoning, not conclusion reached (Rule 5 — stated in the answer guide and in Q9).

Teaching sequence (for the teacher). 1. One past, many accounts — what interpretations and debates are; the working definitions; the five reasons interpretations differ (Key ideas Part 1; Figure `6f_five_reasons.png`). 2. The two-step skill of E02: identify, then account for the difference. Worked case: the classic Renaissance story vs Joan Kelly’s question; short second case: scientific ideas (Key ideas Part 2; Figure `6f_two_renaissance_readings.png`). 3. Exploring a debate (E03): what ended Angkor — four steelmanned positions; then the pyramid-building case as new evidence changing the story (Key ideas Part 3; Figures `6f_angkor_debate.png`, `6f_pyramid_story.png`). 4. Using a range of interpretations (E04): the achievements of Renaissance Italy through Burckhardt, Burke and Kelly; the Ottoman alternative scaffolded in Q4 (Key ideas Part 4; Figure `6f_renaissance_range.png`). 5. Positive and negative consequences (E05): the Spanish conquest of the Americas through three interpretations; the “for whom?” frame (Key ideas Part 5; Figure `6f_conquest_scales.png`). 6. Primary-source close study: Las Casas’s *Short Account* of 1552 — features, content, context, purpose and reliability (Figures `6f_las_card.png`, `6f_las_extract.png`). 7. Interpretations beyond the book (E06): the five-question frame; the film *Gladiator* worked; the British Museum’s Rosetta Stone display (Figure `6f_media_kinds.png`, Figure `6f_gladiator_analysis.png`). 8. Scaffolded practice Q1–Q6; unscaffolded Q7–Q10; Q10 is the evidence-based extended response for this section, with the worked model in Figure `6f_model_response.png`.

Common misconceptions to address: that “the past” and “history” are the same thing (the past is fixed; every account of it is built, and built accounts can be compared and tested); that if historians disagree, nobody can know anything (a debate with rules and evidence is how knowledge gets stronger, not weaker); that all interpretations are equally good or equally bad (interpretations answer to evidence; some are better supported than others, and that can be shown); that a film or game about the past is either “true” or “false” (it is an interpretation: it has makers, a purpose, sources it used and choices it made, and all of those can be analysed); that “positive and negative consequences” are properties of the event itself (they are always consequences *for someone* — the frame must be stated); that new evidence simply “adds to” a story (it can overturn a story that everyone had accepted — the Merer diary is the worked case).

What you will learn in this section

In 2013, a team digging in the sand at Wadi al-Jarf, on the Red Sea coast of Egypt, found the oldest papyrus in the world. It was the work diary of a man named Merer. About 4,500 years ago, Merer ran a boat crew that carried stone down the Nile for the Great Pyramid. Because of one find, the things historians can say about how the most famous building on Earth was built have changed.

That is the heartbeat of this section. The past does not change, but what we say about it does. People who study the past do not all agree — about how the pyramids were built, about why the great city of Angkor emptied, about what the Spanish conquest of the Americas meant, about whether a film can teach you history. These disagreements have a name: they are **historical debates**. And they do not mean that “anything goes”. There are rules for thinking about them, and this section teaches you those rules.

By the end you will be able to:

- say what a historical interpretation is, and how it differs from the past itself;
- identify different interpretations of one event or development, and explain what makes them differ;
- explore a debate in which careful people reach different views, and set out each side at its strongest;
- use a range of interpretations to explain the achievements of a society;
- use interpretations to identify an event's positive and negative consequences — *for whom*;
- analyse a museum exhibition, a film, a documentary or a video game as an interpretation.

Some words we will use, defined as we meet them:

- **interpretation** — an account of the past made after the event, built from sources and shaped by the choices of the person who made it. A textbook, a historian's book, a museum display, a film about the past — each one is an interpretation.
- **historical debate** — a lasting disagreement between people who study the past about the best way to explain the same evidence.
- **account** — a telling of events: what someone says happened, and how.
- **assumption** — something a person takes to be true without checking it.
- **evidence** — re-established in one line: the information from sources that an argument stands on. Section 6D owns the full skill of judging it.
- **perspective** — re-established in one line: the view of the world a person or group has from where they stand. Section 6E owns the full skill of reading it. Here you will see how perspectives shape interpretations.
- **exhibition** — a display of objects set out to tell a story, usually in a museum.
- **documentary** — a film or programme that sets out to show real events and real people, not made-up ones.

One honest note before we start. The Victorian Curriculum uses the words *interpretation* and *debate* but does not define them. In this section, *interpretation* is used in the sense given above — an account of the past built from sources — and *debate* as a lasting, reasoned disagreement about how best to explain evidence. Other senses of these words exist and are not interchangeable with these ones. Every question in this section can be answered on these working definitions alone.

Key ideas

Part 1: One past, many accounts

There is a difference between two things that are easy to mix up:

- **The past** — everything that actually happened. It is fixed. It cannot be changed, and we cannot go back to it.
- **Accounts of the past** — what people say about it, built from the sources that survive.

An interpretation is an account of the past. Nobody writes a book or makes a film from the past itself — they work from sources: letters, objects, bones, buildings, stories. And building an account means making choices: which sources to use, which question to ask, what to put in and what to leave out. Two careful people can make different choices and end up with different accounts — both built from real evidence. That is why interpretations differ, and that is what makes debates possible.

Five reasons explain most of the differences you will ever meet:

1. **New evidence turns up.** The Merer diary, found in 2013, changed what can be said about building the pyramids. A source nobody had before can support a view nobody could hold before.
2. **Different questions are asked.** The past has no signposts. What you find depends on what you look for. Ask “what did kings do?” and you get one account; ask “what did women's lives change by?” and you get another — from the very same period.
3. **Different sources are chosen.** One writer builds on written records, another on bones and pots. The sources you start from steer the account you end with.

4. **The maker's time and values.** An account written in 1860 carries the assumptions of 1860. Older histories of the Mongol world, for instance, told a story of destruction almost alone; later historians went back to Mongol-era sources and built a story in which trade routes and moved ideas matter just as much (you can test both readings in section 5E). The evidence had not changed. The readers had.
5. **Purpose and audience differ.** A film is made to grip an audience in a dark room; a textbook is made to teach; a museum display is made for people walking past a case. Each purpose shapes what gets said and how.

None of these reasons is a scandal. They are the working conditions of history. What they mean is that when you meet an account of the past, you should always ask: *who made this, when, for whom — and which of the five reasons sits behind its choices?*

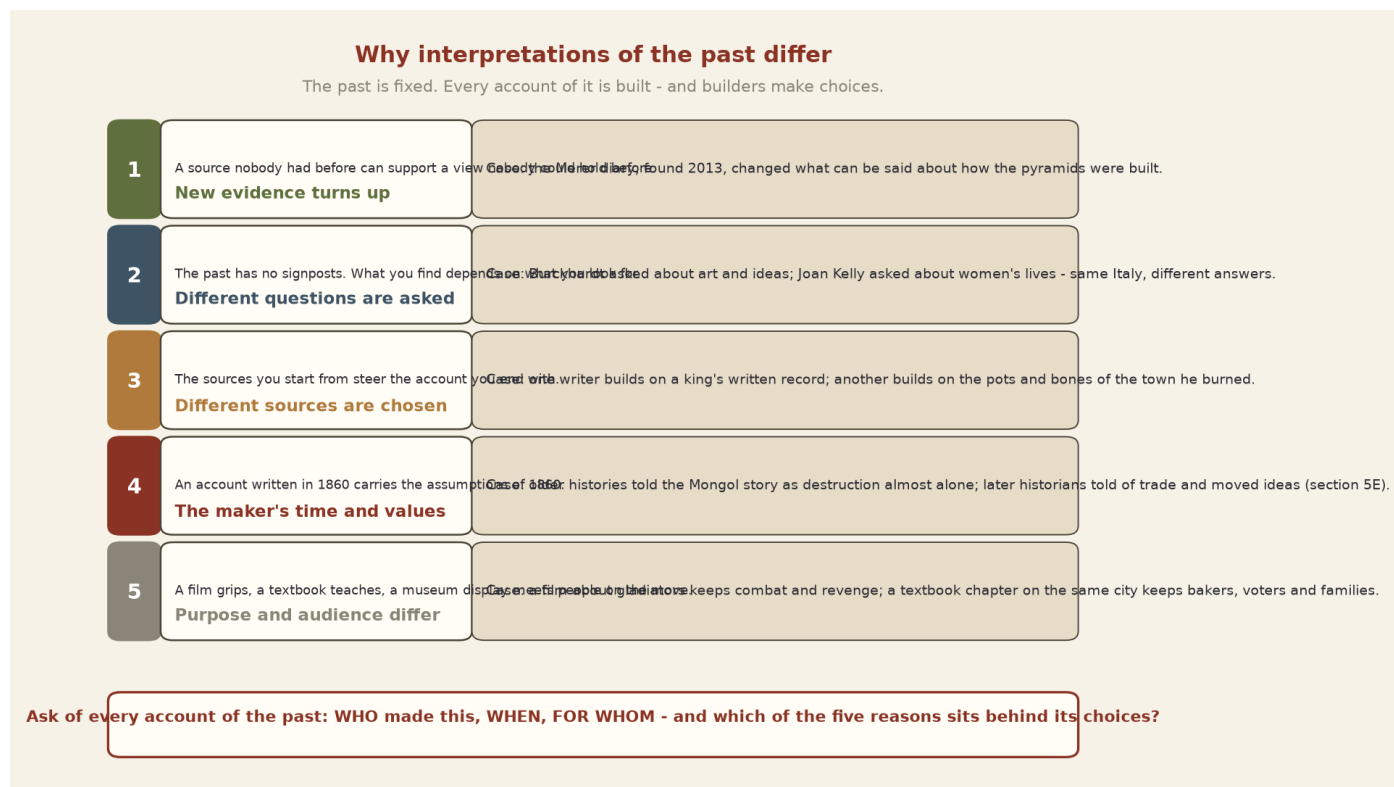


Diagram of the five reasons historical interpretations differ — new evidence, different questions, different sources, the maker's time and values, and purpose and audience — each paired with a real case from this book

Part 2: Identify the interpretations — then account for the difference

This section's two-step skill: first **identify** the different interpretations of one event or development, then **account for** the differences — say what caused them. Here is the move, worked on a famous case about the status of women.

The case: did women have a Renaissance?

The classic story of the Renaissance, set out by the historian Jacob Burckhardt in 1860, goes like this. In the city-states of Italy, from about 1350 to 1550, Europe turned a corner: new art, new learning, a new confidence in what one person could think and do. On this account, the Renaissance was the birthplace of the modern individual.

In 1977 the historian Joan Kelly asked a different question: *did women have a Renaissance at all?* She looked at the same period and tracked what happened to women's property, their role in public life and the rules that fenced them into the household. Her answer: for women, the Renaissance was no leap forward — in some ways their position grew weaker than it had been in the Middle Ages. The new learning praised women's education, but the power and property of public life stayed in men's hands.

Step one — identify. Burckhardt's interpretation: the Renaissance was a great leap forward in human freedom and individuality. Kelly's interpretation: that leap was not shared; for women the period brought limits, not new ground.

Step two — account for the difference. Which of the five reasons from Part 1 explains it? Chiefly reason 2: **different questions asked**. Burckhardt asked what was new in art and ideas; Kelly asked what changed for women. The period

did not change. The question did — and the question decided what each historian could see. Reason 4 is at work as well: Burckhardt wrote in 1860, Kelly in 1977, and a century of change in how societies think about women’s roles shaped which question got asked at all.

A second, smaller case, on the code’s other named example — the influence of scientific ideas. For a long time, accounts of the period put the art first: domes, paintings, sculpture. Then later writers gave full weight to what changed when Nicolaus Copernicus set the Earth moving around the Sun in 1543, and when Galileo Galilei turned a telescope on the sky in 1609 and saw mountains on the Moon. Their accounts describe a period in which a new habit — testing ideas against what you can see — mattered as much as any painting. Same period; different account; the difference is reason 3, different sources chosen for attention, and reason 2 again, a different question: not “what did artists make?” but “what changed in how people tested ideas?”

Two readings of the same 200 years

The Renaissance in Italy, about 1350-1550 - one past, two accounts

THE CLASSIC STORY	A NEW QUESTION
Jacob Burckhardt, 1860 In the cities of Italy, Europe turned a corner: new art, new learning, a ~~Kelly could have written her paper, she could have painted it, and the rules that fenced them into the household.~~ On this account, the Renaissance was the birthplace of the modern individual ~~in the sense of greater power~~ forward - in some ways their position grew weaker than in the Middle Ages. "What was new in art and ideas?" THE QUESTION ASKED:	Joan Kelly, 1977 ~~Kelly could have written her paper, she could have painted it, and the rules that fenced them into the household.~~ ~~in the sense of greater power~~ "Did women have a Renaissance at all?" THE QUESTION ASKED:

ACCOUNTING FOR THE DIFFERENCE

Reason 2 - different questions asked. The period did not change; the question did. Behind it, Reason 4: Burckhardt wrote in 1860, Kelly in 1977, and a century of change shaped which question got asked at all.

Two interpretations of the Renaissance set side by side — Burckhardt’s classic story of a great leap forward and Joan Kelly’s finding that women’s position did not rise with it — with the question asked named under each and the reason for the difference given

Part 3: Exploring a debate — what ended Angkor?

Some debates have two sides. The best ones have more. The decline of Angkor is one of the best, and it is the code’s own named case.

The background. Between about 800 and 1400 CE, the Khmer empire ruled much of mainland South-East Asia from the region of Angkor, in what is now Cambodia. Angkor was not one palace but a huge spread of temples, reservoirs, canals and streets — at its height one of the largest cities in the world before the machine age. Its greatest building, the temple of Angkor Wat, was raised under King Suryavarman II in the early 1100s. In 1296 the Chinese writer Zhou Daguan lived at Angkor for about a year and left a description of a busy, rich, working city. Yet by the 1400s the great city had mostly emptied, and the court had moved south. How did that happen? Historians still argue about it. Four positions hold the field, and each one stands on real evidence. Each deserves its strongest form before you judge.

Position A — conquest. In 1431, armies of the neighbouring kingdom of Ayutthaya took Angkor after a siege, and the court left. This is the oldest telling: it runs through the royal chronicles written down in later centuries. Its evidence is the record of the attack and the fact that the centre of power did move. Its limit: a city the size of Angkor does not live or die by one battle, and the chronicles were set down long after the event.

Position B — the water failed. Angkor ran on water: a vast network of reservoirs and canals fed its rice fields. Studies of old sediments in the region, and mapping of the network itself by the research team known as the Greater Angkor Project, point to a run of hard droughts in the 1300s and 1400s, broken by huge monsoon rains that damaged the canals. On this reading, the city’s engine broke. Its evidence is in the ground and the mud, not in any book. Its limit: climate stress alone does not say why the court chose to go south and not stay and repair.

Position C — a deliberate move south. Trade was shifting to the great river routes, and a court on the Mekong could tax it and work it. On this reading, leaving Angkor was not a collapse but a choice — moving the capital to where the wealth now was. Its evidence: the new centres did grow in the south, and Angkor was never fully deserted — the temple stayed in use. Its limit: it says why people chose to move, but not why staying became so hard.

Position D — a change of faith. From about the 1200s, the Khmer world turned more and more to Theravada Buddhism, which put less weight on the god-kings who had raised the great temples. Some historians argue that when the idea of the god-king lost its grip, the will to command vast workforces for royal temples went with it. Its evidence is in the temples themselves and in what was no longer built. Its limit: ideas rarely empty a city on their own.

Notice what makes this a genuine debate: four careful positions, four different kinds of evidence — chronicles, soil and water, trade patterns, religious change — and none of them simply wrong. Your job with a debate like this is not to pick a winner on instinct. It is to set out each position at its strongest, name its evidence, name its limit, and then say what combination of them you find most convincing — and what evidence would change your mind.

The smaller case: how were the pyramids built? The same skill in miniature. The Greek writer Herodotus visited Egypt around 450 BCE — more than 2,000 years after the Great Pyramid went up — and wrote that the stones were lifted by machines, in stories told to him by guides. For centuries his account stood almost alone. Later writers argued for long ramps. Then, in 2013, the team of Pierre Tallet digging at Wadi al-Jarf found papyri from the reign of King Khufu himself: the logbook of an official named Merer, whose boat crew carried limestone from the quarries of Tura to the pyramid works, season by season. The old question has not been “solved” in one line — but one new source has moved the whole debate onto firmer ground, because it comes from the very time of the building. New evidence is reason 1 from Part 1, and it is the strongest reason of all: when a source turns up that nobody had before, the account has to move.

What ended Angkor? A debate with four sides

The Khmer empire's great city, at its height about 1000-1300 CE - by the 1400s mostly emptied (each side stands on real evidence)

A - CONQUEST

In 1431 armies of the neighbouring kingdom of Ayutthaya took Angkor after a long and chaotic battle.

Evidence: the royal chronicles; the record of the attack; the centre of power did move south.

Limit: chronicles were set down long after; one battle does not end a city.

B - THE WATER FAILED

Angkor and the vast network of reservoirs and canals. Hard droughts in the 1300s-1400s, broken by huge rains, damaged the system (Greater Angkor Project; studies of old sediments).

Evidence: in the ground and the mud, not in any book.

Limit: climate stress alone does not say why the court went south.

C - A DELIBERATE MOVE SOUTH

Trade was shifting to the great river routes; a court on the Mekong could tax it and work it.

Evidence: new centres grew in the south; Angkor was never fully deserted - the temple stayed in use.

Limit: says why people chose to move, not why staying became so hard.

D - A CHANGE OF FAITH

From about the 1200s the Khmer world turned more to Theravada Buddhism, which put less weight on the god-kings who raised the great temples.

Evidence: in the temples themselves, and in what was no longer built.

Limit: ideas rarely empty a city on their own.

FOUR POSITIONS, FOUR KINDS OF EVIDENCE - NONE SIMPLY WRONG

The job: set out each side at its strongest, name its evidence and its limit, then say which combination you find most convincing - and what evidence would change your mind.

Four positions on the decline of Angkor set out side by side — conquest in 1431, failure of the water network, a deliberate move south to the trade rivers, and a change of faith — each with its evidence and its limit



The changing story of how the Great Pyramid was built, set out as three moments — the account of Herodotus written more than two thousand years after the building, the ramp arguments of later writers, and the logbook of Merer found in 2013 from the reign of Khufu himself — with the reason for each change named

Part 4: Using a range of interpretations — the achievements of Renaissance Italy

One interpretation shows you one face of the past. To explain something as big as a society's achievements, you need a **range** of interpretations — and a method for using it:

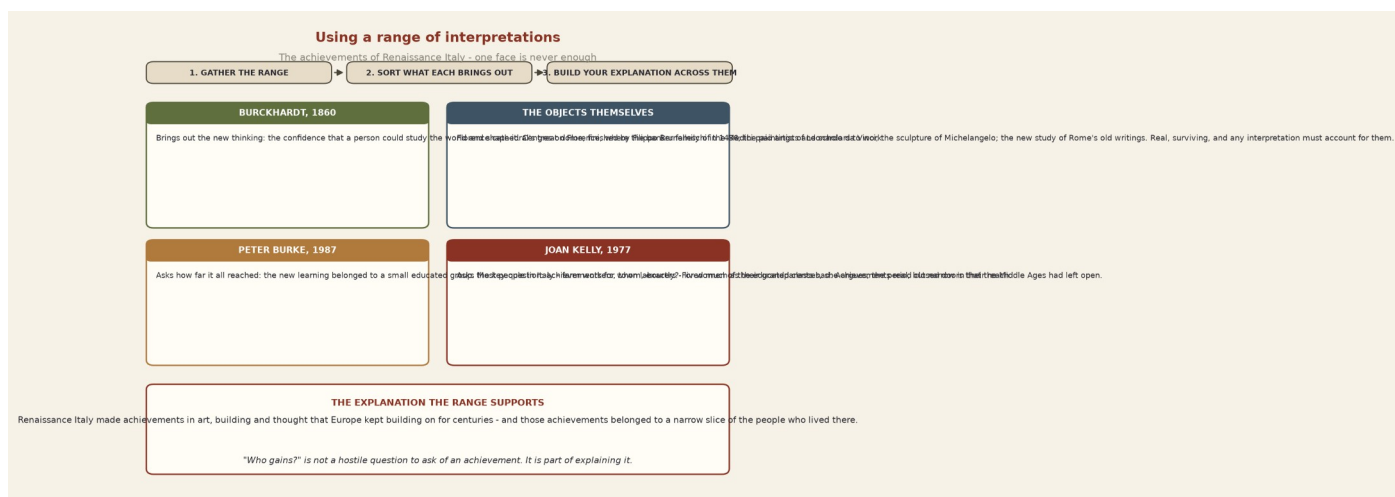
1. **Gather the range.** At least two or three accounts of the same matter, by different makers.
2. **Sort what each one brings out.** What does each interpretation put in the light? What does each push into the shade?
3. **Build your explanation across them.** Hold the range together and say what the achievements were — and for whom they were achievements.

Worked on the code's named case — the achievements of Renaissance Italy:

- **Burckhardt (1860)** brings out the new thinking: the confidence that a person could study the world and shape it. The achievements on his reading are ideas as much as objects — and they centre on the city of Florence, where the banker family of the Medici paid artists and scholars to work.
- **The objects themselves.** Florence cathedral's great dome, finished by the engineer Filippo Brunelleschi in 1436 without the wooden frame builders of his day believed necessary; the paintings of Leonardo da Vinci; the sculpture of Michelangelo; the new study of Rome's old writings. Any interpretation of the Renaissance has to account for these, and they are real: they still stand and can still be seen.
- **Peter Burke (1987)** asks how far it all reached. His book *The Italian Renaissance: Culture and Society in Italy* insists that the new learning belonged to a small educated group: most people in Italy — farm workers, town labourers — lived much as their grandparents had. On his reading the achievements are real but narrow in their reach.
- **Joan Kelly (1977)**, whom you met in Part 2, asks the key question: achievements for whom, exactly? For women of the educated classes, she argues, the period closed doors that the Middle Ages had left open.

Used together, the range supports an explanation with real teeth: Renaissance Italy made achievements in art, building and thought that Europe kept building on for centuries — and those achievements belonged to a narrow slice of the people who lived there. “Who gains?” is not a hostile question to ask of an achievement. It is part of explaining it.

The same method works on the code's other named case, the Ottoman Empire — and Q4 asks you to start it. Under Sultan Suleiman I (ruled 1520–1566), Ottoman writers called their ruler “Kanuni”, the lawgiver, and pointed to his law code, his armies on three continents, and the great Suleymaniye mosque his chief architect Sinan finished in Istanbul in 1557. The Habsburg ambassador Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq lived in the Ottoman lands in the 1550s and wrote letters home admiring Ottoman order and discipline — while still calling the empire the enemy his own side feared. Two makers, two purposes, one empire: sort what each brings out, and build your explanation across them.



A range of interpretations of the Renaissance used together — Burckhardt on new thinking, the surviving works themselves, Burke on how narrow their reach was, and Kelly on who was shut out — with the explanation the range supports set out underneath

Part 5: Positive and negative consequences — the Spanish conquest of the Americas

Here is the frame that matters: **“positive” and “negative” are not properties of an event. They are always consequences for someone.** State the frame — for whom? — and then judge. That is the whole of the skill in one line.

The event. In 1492 Spanish ships reached the Americas. In 1519–1521 the Spanish commander Hernán Cortés, fighting with Indigenous allies who had their own reasons to oppose Mexica rule — above all the people of Tlaxcala — took Tenochtitlan, the great island capital of the Mexica (Aztec) empire. In 1532–1533 Francisco Pizarro seized the Inca ruler Atahualpa and then the Inca heartlands in South America. Spain built an empire on both continents.

The consequences, in the plain form. Disease came with the conquest, and ahead of it. Smallpox and other sicknesses to which the peoples of the Americas had little defence spread from group to group. Historians still argue about the size of the loss — some estimates say that within a century of 1492 as many as nine in ten of the Americas’ people had died, most of it from disease — but all agree that the loss was vast. Forced labour was imposed on surviving communities in mines and on the land. Temples were pulled down and churches raised on their stones. And alongside all of this: Indigenous peoples survived, kept languages, stories and skills, and shaped the new societies around them; new crops — the potato, maize — crossed the oceans and changed the food of the whole world; new mixed cultures and faiths grew. Every one of these lines is a consequence. None of them is the whole story.

Three interpretations of it.

- **Bartolomé de las Casas, 1552.** A Spanish friar who had lived in the Americas for decades. His short, fierce book *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies* set out the cruelty done to Indigenous peoples and was written to make the Spanish crown act. It did: his writing fed the New Laws of 1542, which moved to limit the forced labour of Indigenous peoples. He was an insider, with a purpose, writing to persuade.
- **The Black Legend.** After Las Casas, writers in Spain’s rival countries — England, France, the Netherlands — took his account and stretched it into a story in which Spain was cruel above all others, and its rivals’ own empires looked clean by contrast. Historians call that story the Black Legend, and they argue about it to this day: how much of it rests on real cruelty, and how much on the needs of Spain’s enemies.
- **Matthew Restall, 2003.** In *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest* the historian Matthew Restall takes aim at the stories people tell about the conquest itself. The conquest was not won by a handful of brave Spanish men, he argues: it was won by armies in which Indigenous allies made up most of the fighters. It was not over in a season: it took generations. And it was not the end of Indigenous history — it was a disaster that Indigenous peoples survived and shaped. His interpretation changes who the story is about.

Now run the frame. Negative consequences *for whom?* For the Mexica and Inca peoples above all: death on a vast scale, forced labour, the pulling down of temples. Positive consequences *for whom?* For the Spanish crown: wealth and empire; for the world’s farmers eventually: new crops. And note the trap the frame protects you from: a consequence that is positive for one group can be built on a catastrophe for another. Silver that made Spain rich came

from American mines worked by forced Indigenous labour. A good answer says both things at once — and says *for whom* each time.

The Spanish conquest of the Americas: three readings

Cortes takes Tenochtitlan 1521; Pizarro seizes the Inca heartlands 1532-33 - then the arguing begins

LAS CASAS, 1552	THE BLACK LEGEND	RESTALL, 2003
A Spanish friar who lived in the Americas for decades or centuries. Witnesses Spanish violence (the conquistadors) and defends the Indians (the natives). Purpose: make the crown act. Effect: fed the New Laws of the Indies. <i>An insider with a purpose, writing to persuade.</i>	Other Spaniards, historians and artists. Witnesses the Spanish violence (the conquistadors) and defends the Indians (the natives). Purpose: make the crown act. Effect: fed the New Laws of the Indies. <i>An interpretation built for other people's quarrels.</i>	Other Spaniards, historians and artists. Witnesses the Spanish violence (the conquistadors) and defends the Indians (the natives). Purpose: make the crown act. Effect: fed the New Laws of the Indies. <i>Changes who the story is about.</i>

THE FRAME: CONSEQUENCES ARE ALWAYS CONSEQUENCES FOR SOMEONE

Negative - for whom? For the Mexica and Inca peoples above all: death on a vast scale from disease, forced labour in mines and on the land, temples pulled down.

Positive - for whom? For the Spanish crown: wealth and empire. For the world's farmers eventually: new crops - the potato, maize - crossing the oceans.

The trap the frame prevents: a consequence that is positive for one group can be built on a catastrophe for another. Spanish silver came from American mines worked by forced Indigenous labour. Say both things - and say for whom.

Three interpretations of the Spanish conquest of the Americas — Las Casas's protest of 1552, the Black Legend that grew out of it, and Restall's myth-testing of 2003 — with the positive and negative consequences each reading puts in the light, and the frame for whom each consequence held

Primary source close study: Las Casas speaks, 1552

The interpretations of Part 5 rest on sources. The oldest of them is itself a primary source — written in the time of the events, by a man who was there. Run the questions of section 6C over it.

Source card: A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies

A protest in print - the oldest interpretation in this section is itself a primary source

BARTOLOME DE LAS CASAS - a Spanish friar who changed sides	
What it is	A short printed book, small enough to travel - made on a printing press, in Spanish.
Who wrote it	Bartolome de las Casas. He came to the Spanish Americas in 1502 and lived there for most of his long life - first living as one of the conquerors, then as a priest and friar.
When and where	Printed in Seville in 1552.
Who it was for	The highest reader Las Casas could reach: the future king of Spain.
What it says	Indigenous peoples are being destroyed for gold; the prince must hear of it and command such great evils to stop. The writer says he saw it with his own eyes, over forty years.
What it did	His writing fed the New Laws of 1542, which moved to limit the forced labour of Indigenous peoples.
Why it matters	An eyewitness account from inside the empire, written to change what the empire was doing. Also the seed of a debate - the Black Legend - that still runs today.

INSIDER - EYEWITNESS - WITH A PURPOSE. All three at once: that is what makes this source powerful, and that is what you must hold against it.

Source card for Bartolomé de las Casas's A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies (1552): who wrote it, what it is, when and where it was made, who it was written for, and what its writer wanted it to do

Bartolomé de las Casas came to the Spanish Americas in 1502 and lived there for most of his long life — first as a colonist, then as a priest and friar. Over decades he watched what conquest did to Indigenous communities, and he changed sides. In 1552 he printed a short book in Seville, in Spanish, aimed at the highest reader he could reach: the future king of Spain. Its title in English is *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*.

The opening of the book, in a plain-English rendering made for this section from the 1552 text:

“The reason the Indians have been destroyed is this: the Christians have pursued them with no other end in view than to get gold and to swell themselves with riches in a very short time... The author of this account has seen these things with his own eyes over forty years, and he writes so that the Prince may know of them and command that such great evils stop.”

— Bartolomé de las Casas, *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*, 1552, opening lines, rendered into plain English by the author of this section from the 1552 text (standard English translation: Nigel Griffin, Penguin, 1992)

- **Features.** A printed book — made on a printing press, in Spanish, small enough to travel. Printed books could now reach many readers in months instead of years: the press was changing what a protest could do (you met the spread of printing as a development in section 4E’s world).
- **Content.** A claim: that Indigenous peoples are being destroyed for gold; an appeal: that the prince should step in; and a warrant — the writer says he saw it, for forty years.
- **Context.** Written inside the empire it criticises, by an insider, in a moment when Spanish priests and lawyers were already arguing about how the conquest should be carried. Las Casas wrote to win that argument.

Now the 6D questions — the worth of it as evidence. Two honest readings sit side by side, and the skill is holding both. *For*: he was there, for decades; he names places and people; his account moved the crown to act in the New Laws of 1542. *Against*: he wrote to persuade the most powerful reader in his world; every choice he made serves that purpose; his numbers have been argued over ever since. The right verdict is not “true” or “false”. It is this: a source of the first importance, written by an eyewitness with a purpose — to be checked, as all sources are, against other evidence: other writers, the laws that followed, and the bones and towns that archaeology keeps.

Reading the opening of the Short Account

Plain-English rendering made for this section from the 1552 text (standard English translation: Nigel Griffin, Penguin, 1992)

"The reason the Indians have been destroyed is this: the Christians have pursued them with no other end in view than to get gold and to swell themselves with riches in a very short time..."

"The author of this account has seen these things with his own eyes over forty years, and he writes so that the Prince may know of them and command that such great evils stop."

- Bartolome de las Casas, Seville, 1552

WHAT IT CLAIMS
Indigenous peoples are being destroyed - and the crown is to act on it.

WHAT IT ASKS FOR
The prince to command such great evils to stop.

WHAT BACKS IT
Forty years of eyewitness claim: "I saw it with my own eyes."

THE WORTH OF IT - BOTH SIDES HELD AT ONCE

FOR IT
He was there, for decades; he names places and people; his account moved the crown to act in the New Laws of 1542.

CHECK IT
He wrote to persuade the most powerful reader in his world; every choice serves that purpose; his numbers have been argued over ever since.

The right verdict is not "true" or "false": a source of the first importance, written by an eyewitness with a purpose - to be checked, as all sources are, against other evidence.

The opening of Las Casas’s Short Account in plain English, with notes on what the extract claims, what it asks for, the purpose behind its choices, and the two-sided verdict on its worth as evidence

Interpretations beyond the book: exhibitions, films, documentaries, games

Every interpretation so far has been a book or a written account. But you meet interpretations of the past every week, in forms that do not look like history at all: museum exhibitions, films, documentaries, video games. They are interpretations too. Each one is built from sources, by makers, at a time, for a purpose — which means the five reasons from Part 1 apply to all of them, and you can analyse any of them with one frame.

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The five-question frame.

1. **Who made this, and when?** A person, a company, a museum — at a date.
2. **For whom, and for what purpose?** To teach, to sell tickets, to grip an audience, to sell a game?
3. **Which sources and evidence did the makers use?** What did they read, visit, hire experts for?
4. **What did they choose to put in — and what did they leave out?** Every interpretation is a set of choices.
5. **What does it get right, and where does it move away from the evidence?** Both halves of this question matter. An account can be wrong in places and still worth analysing.

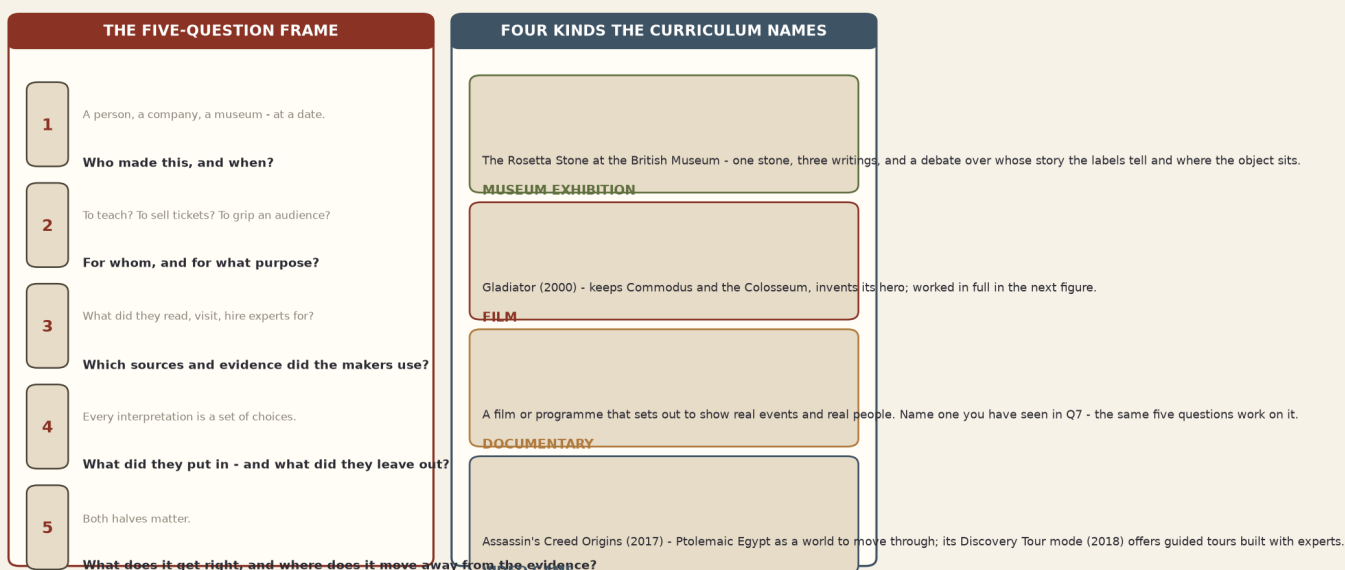
Worked case — the film *Gladiator* (2000). Directed by Ridley Scott, made by the studio DreamWorks, released in 2000, made to grip a paying audience.

- **Real:** the emperor Marcus Aurelius, his son Commodus, and Commodus's habit of fighting in the arena as a gladiator; the Colosseum itself.
- **Changed:** in the film Commodus murders his father. In fact Marcus Aurelius died of illness in 180 CE. The film moves and invents events to build a plot.
- **Made up:** the hero Maximus is not a historical person. The film's ending — a return of the Roman Republic — never happened; the empire ran on for centuries after Commodus.
- **Left out:** almost everything of daily Roman life you met in Chapters 3 and 4 — the baker, the voter, the enslaved worker, the mother. The film keeps what serves its story: power, combat, revenge.
- **Verdict, using the frame:** as evidence for what Rome was, *Gladiator* fails most of the five questions — and that is not a surprise, because its purpose was never to teach. But as an interpretation of what *our* time finds gripping about Rome — strong men, cruel emperors, the crowd in the arena — it says a great deal. Analysing an interpretation does not mean rejecting it. It means knowing what it is.

Worked case — a museum display: the Rosetta Stone at the British Museum. One stone, three writings: a decree of 196 BCE cut in three scripts — the picture writing of hieroglyphs, the everyday writing of Egypt at the time, and Greek. Found in 1799, in the British Museum in London since 1802, it gave scholars the key to reading hieroglyphs in the 1820s. Stand in front of the case and you are meeting an interpretation: the choice of what to put in the light (the cracking of hieroglyphs, a triumph of scholarship), what the labels say and do not say, and where the object sits at all. Egypt has asked for the stone's return, a request the archaeologist Zahi Hawass has pressed for years, arguing that a thing so central to Egypt's past belongs in Egypt. The British Museum holds it, pointing to the care and the public access it gives in London. Where an object lives, and whose story the labels tell, are choices — and choices are what interpretations are made of. You met the heritage side of this debate in section 1C; here you are reading the display itself as an interpretation.

Interpretations beyond the book

Exhibitions, films, documentaries and games are built from sources, by makers, at a time, for a purpose - so you can analyse them



The five-question frame for analysing any media interpretation — who made it and when, for whom and for what purpose, which sources were used, what was put in and left out, what it gets right and where it moves from the evidence — set beside the four kinds of interpretation this section names: museum exhibitions, films, documentaries and video games, each with a real case

The five questions on one film: Gladiator (2000)

Directed by Ridley Scott, made by DreamWorks - an interpretation you can take apart

1. Who made it, and when?	Director Ridley Scott and the studio DreamWorks; released in 2000.
2. For whom, and for what purpose?	paying audience in a dark room. Entertainment first: to grip, not to teach.
3. Which real things did it use?	The emperor Marcus Aurelius; his son Commodus, who really did fight in the arena as a gladiator; the Colosseum itself.
4. What did it change, make up, or change difficult?	Marcus Aurelius died of illness in 180 CE - the film has him murdered. Made up: the hero Maximus; the return of the Republic at the end never happened. Left out: almost all daily Roman life - the baker, the voter, the enslaved worker, the mother.
5. What does it get right, and where does it move away from the evidence?	emperor who fought as a gladiator. Away from the evidence: the plot - the murder of Marcus Aurelius, the hero, the ending.

THE VERDICT THE FRAME SUPPORTS

As evidence for what Rome was, Gladiator fails most of the five questions - and its purpose was never to teach. But as an interpretation of what OUR time finds gripping about Rome - strong men, cruel emperors, the crowd in the arena - it says a great deal. Analysing an interpretation does not mean rejecting it. It means knowing what it is.

The five-question frame applied to the film Gladiator (2000): what the film keeps from the real past, what it changes, what it invents, what it leaves out, and the verdict the frame supports about its worth as an interpretation

Practice tasks (with help)

Q1. Match each case below to the reason from Part 1 that best explains the difference — (a) new evidence turns up, (b) different questions are asked, (c) different sources are chosen, (d) the maker's time and values, (e) purpose and audience differ. Give one reason for each match. (i) Older histories told the Mongol story as destruction alone; later historians built on Mongol-era sources and told of trade and moved ideas (5E). (ii) A film about gladiators shows combat and revenge; a textbook chapter on the same city shows bakers, voters and families. (iii) In 2013 a dig in Egypt found a logbook from the time of the pyramid builders, and the story of how the stones moved had to change. (iv) Two historians write about the same 200 years of Italy; one asks about art, one asks about women's lives, and they end with different accounts. (v) One account of a battle is built from a king's own record of his victories; another is built from the pots and bones of the town he burned.

Q2. Read Part 2 again. In your own words: (a) Identify Burckhardt's interpretation of the Renaissance in one sentence. (b) Identify Kelly's interpretation in one sentence. (c) Account for the difference between them. Name the reason or reasons from Part 1 and say how each one applies.

Q3. The Angkor debate (Part 3) has four positions: conquest, water failure, a deliberate move south, and a change of faith. (a) Copy the table from Figure 6f_angkor_debate.png and, for each position, fill in one piece of evidence in your own words. (b) One position rests on chronicles written long after the event, and one rests on studies of mud and canals. Which is which — and what is one limit of each kind of evidence? (c) Which two positions fit together most easily, so that both could be true at once? Say why.

Q4. The Ottoman alternative (Part 4). Under Sultan Suleiman I, Ottoman writers called their ruler “Kanuni”, the lawgiver, and pointed to his law code and to the great Suleymaniye mosque his architect Sinan finished in Istanbul in 1557. The ambassador Busbecq, writing home in the 1550s from the rival Habsburg side, admired Ottoman discipline while calling the empire the enemy. (a) Sort these two accounts: what does each bring out about Ottoman achievements, and what does each push into the shade? (b) Which of the five reasons from Part 1 best explains the difference between an Ottoman court writer and a Habsburg ambassador? Give a reason. (c) Write three sentences explaining one significant Ottoman achievement of Suleiman’s reign, using both accounts.

Q5. Look at the Las Casas close study and Figure 6f_las_extract.png. (a) Give two features of the *Short Account* as a source. (b) What was Las Casas’s purpose, and who was his audience? How does knowing both change the way you read his numbers? (c) Give one reason to trust his account and one reason to check it against other evidence.

Q6. The film *Gladiator* (2000) keeps Marcus Aurelius, Commodus and the Colosseum; it changes the way Marcus Aurelius died; it invents the hero Maximus; it leaves out daily Roman life. Using the five-question frame from the last part of this section, answer: (a) Who made the film, when, and for what purpose? (b) What did the makers choose to put in, and what did they leave out? Why does that choice fit the film’s purpose? (c) A student says: “The film is wrong about a lot, so it is worth nothing.” Answer the student in two or three sentences, using the frame.

Tasks to try on your own

Q7. Analyse one media interpretation of the past using the full five-question frame. Choose ONE: the video game *Assassin’s Creed Origins* (2017) and its Discovery Tour mode — a combat-free set of guided tours of Ptolemaic Egypt, made with experts — or a museum exhibition or documentary you have actually visited or seen (name it). Write one paragraph on each of the five questions. End with a verdict in two sentences: what your chosen interpretation gets right, where it moves away from the evidence, and whether its purpose makes that fair.

Q8. Choose ONE debate from another part of this book: the debates over the Black Death in 4E, the death-toll claims in 5E, or the debate over how early humans spread across the world in 1A. Set out two positions from that debate, each at its strongest, with the evidence each one stands on. Then account for the difference between the two positions using the five reasons of Part 1 — name the reason or reasons that apply, and say how. You are marked on how well you set out both sides, not on which side you prefer.

Q9. “All interpretations of the past are equally good, because nobody was there.” Do you agree? Test the claim on both sides before you reach your judgement. For the claim: give the strongest reason anyone could give for it. Against the claim: use two cases from this section — one in which evidence separated a stronger interpretation from a weaker one, and one in which a debate has real rules for judging between positions. Then give your own judgement in two or three sentences. You are marked on the reasoning, not on the side you land on.

Q10. Extended response for this section, drawing together the skills of Chapter 6. Choose ONE debate or set of interpretations from this section that is not Angkor: how the pyramids were built; the Renaissance and women; the achievements of Renaissance Italy or of the Ottoman Empire; what followed the Spanish conquest of the Americas; or a film, exhibition, documentary or game as an interpretation. Write an evidence-based analysis in three parts: (1) Set out two or more interpretations of your chosen question — one paragraph each, each position at its strongest, with the evidence it stands on. (2) Account for the differences: name the reason or reasons from Part 1 that explain them, and say how each applies. (3) Give your judgement in one paragraph: which interpretation you find best supported by the evidence, what its limits still are, and what new evidence could change your mind. Figure 6f_model_response.png works one good shape of this task over the Angkor debate. Your answer may take a different shape; it is the reasoning and the use of evidence that are marked, not the side you land on.

One good shape for Task Q10

An extended response on the Angkor debate - your answer may take a different shape; reasoning and evidence are what count

PART 1 - SET OUT THE POSITIONS	
Conquest:	in 1431 Ayutthaya took Angkor after a siege, and the court left - per the royal chronicles.
Water failure:	droughts broken by huge rains damaged the reservoir-and-canal network that fed the rice fields - per studies of sediments and the mapped network.
Move south:	the court chose the river trade routes; new centres grew, and the temple stayed in use.
Change of faith:	Theravada Buddhism put less weight on the god-kings who raised the great temples.

PART 2 - ACCOUNT FOR THE DIFFERENCES	
Different sources:	chronicles vs sediments vs the record of trade vs the temples themselves.
Different questions:	what happened to the court? what happened to the water? what did people choose? what did people believe?
The makers' time:	older readings leaned on chronicles; modern tools - mapping, sediment studies - made new positions possible.

PART 3 - JUDGEMENT	
Most convincing:	a combination - climate stress made staying hard, trade made moving attractive (positions B and C together).
Limits of my own view:	written record survives of the court's reasons; the chronicles are late.
What would change my mind:	undisputed record from the fall itself, or new sediment studies showing the network broke after, not before, the move.

Marked on the reasoning and the use of evidence - not on the side you land on. Positions at their strongest, reasons named and applied, a judgement with its limits and the evidence that could change it.

Model extended response on the Angkor debate: the four positions set out at their strongest with their evidence, the reasons for the differences named, and a judgement with its limits and the evidence that could change it — one good shape for Task Q10

Answer guide (for the teacher)

Mark on quality of reasoning, not conclusion reached (CONTESTED_TERMS.md Rule 5). Where a task asks the student to test both sides, award the reasoning steps: terms used correctly, positions set out fairly, evidence named, limits acknowledged (Rule 4 — symmetry). Two students reaching opposite conclusions can both receive full marks.

Q1. (i) d — the maker's time and values (later historians brought different questions and different assumptions to Mongol-era sources; accept b with a good reason); (ii) e — purpose and audience (film to grip; textbook to teach); (iii) a — new evidence turns up (the Merer diary, 2013); (iv) b — different questions are asked; (v) c — different sources are chosen (a royal record vs material finds). Award the reason, not the letter: a match argued honestly from a different reason is worth full marks.

Q2. (a) Burckhardt: the Renaissance was a great leap forward — the birth of modern, free, individual thinking, centred on Italy's cities. (b) Kelly: for women the period was no leap forward; their position in property and public life did not rise and in some ways fell. (c) The difference is chiefly reason 2 (different questions asked — “what was new in art and ideas?” vs “what changed for women?”), with reason 4 behind it (1860 and 1977 made different questions thinkable). Accept any answer that names a reason from Part 1 and applies it to the case, not just labels it.

Q3. (a) Conquest: the record of Ayutthaya's attack of 1431 and the court's move; water failure: droughts and damaging rains read from sediments, plus damage to the canal network; move south: growth of new centres on the river trade routes, Angkor never fully deserted; change of faith: the spread of Theravada Buddhism and the decline of

god-king building. (b) Chronicles are the conquest position's evidence — limit: written long after the event, and royal chronicles serve royal stories; mud and canal studies support water failure — limit: they show climate stress but do not by themselves explain choices people made. (c) Any pairing argued honestly: most commonly B + C (climate stress made staying hard; trade made moving attractive) or A + B. Mark the fit, not the pair.

Q4. (a) The Ottoman court writer brings out law, building and rightful rule, and pushes the costs of empire into the shade; Busbecq brings out order and discipline (he cannot deny what he saw) but frames it all inside a story of enmity, and says little of law or art for their own sake. (b) Reasons 4 and 5: each maker's time, side and values differ, and the purposes differ — one writes to praise a ruler, the other to warn a rival court. (c) Award any achievement of Suleiman's reign (the law code, the mosque and its architect Sinan, the empire's reach) that uses both accounts — e.g. both sides attest Ottoman strength, and even an enemy ambassador's letters confirm it.

Q5. (a) Any two from: printed book; in Spanish; small and able to travel; printed in Seville in 1552; aimed at the future king. (b) Purpose: to make the crown stop the destruction of Indigenous peoples; audience: the highest levels of the Spanish court. Knowing both means reading the numbers as part of a case for action, not as a neutral count. (c) Trust: decades of eyewitness presence, named places, real effect (New Laws of 1542). Check: a purpose to persuade, and numbers argued over ever since — check against other writers, the laws, and archaeology. Mark the two-sided verdict, not one-sided praise or dismissal.

Q6. (a) Directed by Ridley Scott; studio DreamWorks; released 2000; purpose: to grip a paying audience — entertainment first. (b) In: power, combat, revenge, strong characters — what serves a plot. Out: daily life, work, ordinary families — what would slow a plot. The choice fits the purpose: an audience pays for a story, not a survey. (c) Award an answer that separates worth-as-evidence from worth-as-interpretation: the film is weak evidence for Rome as it was, but it is still an interpretation worth analysing — it shows what our own time finds gripping about Rome; and its purposes explain its choices. Pure dismissal (“worth nothing”) without the frame loses the mark.

Q7. Mark on: all five questions answered for the one chosen interpretation; a named interpretation; specifics (makers, dates, purpose, sources used, choices); a two-sided verdict. For *Assassin's Creed Origins*: Ubisoft, 2017, set in Ptolemaic Egypt (Cleopatra VII's reign); the Discovery Tour (2018) is a combat-free mode of guided tours built with experts — evidence of sources and expert advice; choices include keeping famous people and places (Alexandria, the pyramids) and compressing or inventing what suits a game; verdict should note the difference between the game mode and the tour mode. Accept any real exhibition or documentary the student names and analyses honestly.

Q8. Mark on: two positions set out fairly, each at its strongest with its evidence (Rule 5); the difference accounted for with named reasons from Part 1, applied, not just labelled. Sample (4E Black Death): plague vs older “something else” readings — difference is reasons 1 and 3 (new scientific evidence; different sources weighed). Sample (5E): the Mongol death-toll claims — reasons 2 and 4 (different questions, different times and values). Sample (1A): Out-of-Africa vs multiregional — reasons 1 and 3.

Q9. Mark both sides being tested before the judgement (Rule 4). For: nobody was there; sources survive by luck; every account is made by someone with a time and a purpose — so no account has a view from nowhere. Against: interpretations answer to evidence, and evidence separates them — the Merer diary gave the pyramid story something to stand on that Herodotus's hearsay never had; the Angkor debate has rules (chronicles vs sediments vs the record of trade), and some positions fit the evidence better than others; a view that flatly contradicts the evidence (e.g. “the pyramids are older than any human society”) is not equally good. Any judgement reasoned from these moves is full marks — agreement, disagreement, or a framed middle (“equally free to exist, not equally supported”).

Q10. Mark on: three parts present and distinct; positions set out at their strongest with evidence (Rule 5); differences accounted for with named and applied reasons; a judgement that names limits and says what evidence could change it. The model (Figure 6f_model_response.png) shows one acceptable shape over Angkor; different choices and different shapes are equally acceptable if reasoned and evidenced.

Sources used in this section

Every source, person, site and interpretation examined here is real, named and citable (D4). Verified 25 August 2026.

- **The Merer diary (Wadi al-Jarf papyri)** — papyrus logbook of an official named Merer, recording boat transport of limestone from Tura to the works of King Khufu's Great Pyramid; found in 2013 at Wadi al-Jarf

on Egypt's Red Sea coast by the team of Pierre Tallet; the oldest surviving papyrus. Opening case and Part 3 pyramid case.

- **Herodotus, *Histories*, Book 2** — Greek writer, visited Egypt around 450 BCE; his account of the Great Pyramid's building (machines, vast workforces) was written more than 2,000 years after the event, from stories told to him. Part 3.
- **Zhou Daguan, *The Customs of Cambodia*** — account of the Chinese envoy's stay at Angkor in 1296–1297 CE; a description of the city in its working life. Part 3. Zhou Daguan's writings are a referent of .E03 (TOC D4).
- **Angkor and the Greater Angkor Project** — Khmer empire capital region in modern Cambodia; Angkor Wat built under Suryavarman II in the early twelfth century; the Greater Angkor Project (a long research programme run with the APSARA authority and led from the University of Sydney, including Roland Fletcher and Christophe Pottier, with Damian Evans's aerial mapping) documented the city's vast water network; studies of sediments in the region (work by Dan Penny and colleagues) point to droughts broken by damaging rains in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries; the 1431 taking of Angkor by Ayutthaya is the conquest position's anchor. Part 3 and Figure 6f_angkor_debate.png. Position D is stated as an attribution to some historians, as the standard scholarly framing is.
- **Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (1860)** — the classic reading of the Renaissance as the birth of the modern individual. Parts 2 and 4. Described in the author's own words.
- **Joan Kelly, "Did Women Have a Renaissance?" (*Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 1977)** — the argument that women's position did not rise with the Renaissance and in some ways fell. Parts 2, 4. Described in the author's own words.
- **Peter Burke, *The Italian Renaissance: Culture and Society in Italy* (1987)** — the social reading that limits the Renaissance's reach to a small educated group. Part 4. Described in the author's own words.
- **Florence cathedral dome** — designed and built by Filippo Brunelleschi, finished 1436, raised without the centring (wooden support frame) builders of the day believed necessary. Part 4.
- **Suleiman I ("Kanuni", the lawgiver; ruled 1520–1566) and the Suleymaniye mosque** — Ottoman sultan's law code; mosque in Istanbul by the chief architect Sinan, finished 1557. Part 4 and Q4.
- **Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq, *Turkish Letters* (published 1589)** — letters of the Habsburg ambassador to the Ottoman court in the 1550s, admiring Ottoman discipline while writing as its rival. Part 4 and Q4. Described in the author's own words.
- **The Spanish conquest of the Americas** — Columbus's landfall 1492; Cortés's campaign 1519–1521 with Indigenous allies above all Tlaxcala; the taking of Tenochtitlan (1521); Pizarro's seizure of the Inca ruler Atahualpa at Cajamarca (1532) and the taking of the Inca heartlands (1533); smallpox and other diseases spreading ahead of and with conquest; demographic collapse estimates stated as argued among historians. Part 5. Handled age-appropriately: the scale of death and forced labour is stated plainly, without graphic detail, per CONTENT_POLICY; the Indigenous peoples of the Americas are in scope under TOC D3 (not Australian First Nations content).
- **Bartolomé de las Casas, *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies* (1552)** — printed Seville, 1552, in Spanish; written for the future king of Spain; fed the New Laws of 1542 limiting forced Indigenous labour. Opening extract above is the author's own plain-English rendering from the 1552 text (standard English translation: Nigel Griffin, Penguin, 1992). Subject of Figures 6f_las_card.png and 6f_las_extract.png.
- **The Black Legend** — the name historians give to the anti-Spanish reading that grew out of Las Casas's account in rival countries' hands; debated among historians to this day. Part 5. Named as the standard scholarly term; described in the author's own words.
- **Matthew Restall, *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest* (Oxford, 2003)** — the myth-testing reading: conquest by armies that were mostly Indigenous allies; a long, not short, process; Indigenous survival and agency. Part 5. Described in the author's own words.
- ***Gladiator* (2000)** — film directed by Ridley Scott, DreamWorks; fictional hero Maximus; Commodus (ruled 180–192 CE) did fight in the arena; Marcus Aurelius died of illness in 180 CE, not murdered; the Republic was not restored. Worked case of the media-interpretation part and Figure 6f_gladiator_analysis.png.

- **The Rosetta Stone** — granodiorite stone cut in 196 BCE with a decree in three scripts (hieroglyphs, the everyday script of the time, and Greek); found 1799; in the British Museum since 1802; the key to the reading of hieroglyphs in the 1820s; return requested by Egypt, a request pressed by the Egyptologist Zahi Hawass. Media-interpretation worked case; joins the heritage line of section 1C and the repatriation-debate companion of section 2E (TOC §2A). The word “repatriation” is not used in the student text (above the vocabulary ceiling); the case is taught as “the request for the stone’s return”.
- ***Assassin’s Creed Origins* (2017) and its Discovery Tour (2018)** — video game by Ubisoft set in Ptolemaic Egypt (the reign of Cleopatra VII); the Discovery Tour is a combat-free mode of guided tours built with experts. Q7 task case.
- **Nicolaus Copernicus, *On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres* (1543) and Galileo Galilei’s telescope observations (1609–1610)** — the scientific-ideas case of E02. Part 2.
- All dates follow the BCE/CE conventions taught in section 6B. One elaboration of this CD is excluded under §2A (VC2HH8S06.E01, the Deep Time framing); no other First Nations content appears in this section.