



## Teaching the Middle East: A Resource for High School Educators

### Rulership and Justice, Islamic Period

John Woods, Professor of Iranian and Central Asian History, and of Near Eastern Languages & Civilizations

#### Lesson Plan 1:

#### The Book of Golden Meadows: Evaluating The Early Caliphs

**General Description of Lesson Plan:** Students will read a tenth century history of early caliphs and evaluate their rule based on al-Mawardi's lists of qualifications and duties for a caliph (from Framing the Issues #3).

**Created By:** Laura Wangerin, Latin School of Chicago, Chicago, IL

**Subject Area(s):** History, Social Studies, Political Science

**For Grade Level(s):** 9-12

**Time Needed:** Two 45-60 minute classes and one night's homework, or two night's homework and one class.

#### Outcomes/Objectives:

Students will read and analyze primary source material. Students will develop analytical skills applying a rubric for rulership to descriptions of rulers. Students will evaluate their assessments based on their conceptions of good rulership and write a short essay using evidence from the reading to support their assertions.

**Materials: Medieval Sourcebook: Abul Hasan Ali Al-Masu'di (Masoudi) (ca. 895?-957 CE) The Book of Golden Meadows, c. 940 CE**

See: <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/masoudi.html> - [The Caliphate of Al Mansur, The Builder of Baghdad](#)

Reading Primary Sources (see below)

Framing the Issues #3 from Module

#### Suggested Procedure(s):

##### Part I – Homework or In-Class

Distribute copies of "The Book of Golden Meadows" and Reading Primary Sources to students. Divide students into four teams and assign each team one of the four main sections of the reading: Al-Mansur, Al-Mahdi, Haroun al-Rashid, or Al-Mamoun. Have the students

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individually read their sections of the text either as homework or in class. Using Reading Primary Sources, they should be able to describe the text at the first level of understanding (1. Read for the literal meaning of the text. What is going on? Who are the characters or people involved, and what is the situation or conflict? What is the author describing?).

### Part II - In-Class

Working now in small groups, and using al-Mawardi's lists of qualifications and duties for a caliph from Framing the Issues #3:

1. Have students evaluate the leadership style of the caliph they read about. Have students list next to each duty or qualification how that caliph fulfills it – what in the text supports that.
2. Have the team decide whether or not al-Mawardi would feel their ruler was a good leader or not, and justify their answer.
3. Using Reading Primary Sources, answer the questions for the second and third levels of understanding a text (2. Examine the larger meaning of the text. What is the author trying to communicate to his audience? What is his approach? Why do you think he chose this way of getting his point across? 3. Dig for the historical significance of the text. What can we tell about the cultural milieu that produced this work? About the attitudes and biases of the person who wrote it?).

### Part III Homework

Essay – 4 paragraphs (introduction with thesis statement + 3 body paragraphs)

Paragraph 1 - Write an evaluation of the caliph you read about, using the data you collected as a group in II.2, above, citing the evidence for your assessment.

Paragraph 2 - Evaluate that caliph based on your own ideas of good leadership. Did this caliph have qualities that aren't on al-Mawardi's list that might make him a good ruler in your eyes? Or were there examples of poor leadership or choices that might cause him to be judged not a good ruler, despite fulfilling most of al-Mawardi's requirements? Give evidence to support your answer.

Paragraph 3 – How useful is this as a historical document? What can we tell about al-Mawardi or his concerns and biases (from II.3 above) based on what you read?

**Evaluation/Assessment Strategies:** Teacher should walk among the groups eavesdropping on the conversations and helping to guide them if they get off track or get stuck. This should allow a good indication if there are students who are exceptionally engaged and keeping the project on task or if there are those who are not contributing to their group or are getting it off topic.

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Essays should be evaluated using standards of good argumentative writing: a clearly stated thesis statement, evidence used to support the thesis, organization, transitions, grammar, spelling, etc.

### Use these guiding questions to spur discussion in your classroom:

1. What can we tell about the values of a historic society by examining different kinds of sources? What do these sources on rulers and leadership reveal in particular?
2. What makes a good ruler? When examining al-Mawardi's and al-Masu'di's descriptions of rulership, what commonalities and differences emerge with regard to their ideas of the qualities of a good ruler? How do their ideas of good leadership compare with what might be required of a ruler today?
3. What are the different purposes of different kinds of written sources? How does understanding the bias and intended audience add to or detract from its usefulness as historical evidence?

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### Reading Primary Sources

By Laura Wangerin

While some of the sources that you will look at in your class may seem intimidating, there is nothing here that you are not capable of reading and understanding on several levels. Think of the first time you read Shakespeare - the language probably seemed awkward and you may not have understood all of the words, but once you got into it, it started to make sense. Some of it is even funny. You will find the same thing with these texts.

The easiest way to approach these texts is to analyze them on three different levels.

1. Read for the literal meaning of the text. What is going on? Who are the characters or people involved, and what is the situation or conflict? What is the author describing?
2. Examine the larger meaning of the text. What is the author trying to communicate to his audience? What is his approach? Why do you think he chose this way of getting his point across?
3. Dig for the historical significance of the text. What can we tell about the cultural milieu that produced this work? About the attitudes and biases of the person who wrote it? Are there any details that give us insight into particular aspects of that society - values, activities, personal lives, relationships, even things like types of clothing and what they ate?

Once you can answer these types of questions regarding the text, you are ready to critically analyze its usefulness as a historical document. What are the benefits of using the text you are reading as a historical document? What are the drawbacks? Do the plusses outweigh the minuses? What other types of documents or sources might be helpful in comparison with the text you are examining to help determine its validity?

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### Evaluation Rubric:

### Research Report: The Book of Golden Meadows: Evaluating the Early Caliphs

Teacher Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_

CATEGORY	4	3	2	1
<b>Group Work Contributions</b>	Routinely provides useful ideas when participating in the group. A definite leader who contributes a lot of effort.	Usually provides useful ideas when participating in the group. A strong group member who tries hard!	Sometimes provides useful ideas when participating in the group. A satisfactory group member who does what is required.	Rarely provides useful ideas when participating in the group. May refuse to participate or gets group off track with side conversations or other topics.
<b>Organization and Writing</b>	Information is very organized with a clearly stated thesis, well-constructed paragraphs and subheadings. Excellent mechanics (spelling, grammar, etc.)	Information is organized with a clearly stated thesis and well-constructed paragraphs. Very good mechanics.	Information is organized, but thesis is not clear and paragraphs are not well-constructed. Mechanics are adequate.	The information appears to be disorganized. No thesis. Poor mechanics.
<b>Quality of Information</b>	Information clearly relates to the main topic. It includes several supporting details and/or examples from the reading.	Information clearly relates to the main topic. It provides 1-2 supporting details and/or examples from the reading.	Information clearly relates to the main topic. No details and/or examples are given.	Information has little or nothing to do with the main topic.
<b>Paragraph Construction</b>	All paragraphs include introductory sentence with transition, explanations or details, and concluding sentence.	Most paragraphs include introductory sentence with transition, explanations or details, and concluding sentence.	Paragraphs included related information but were typically not constructed well.	Paragraphing structure was not clear and sentences were not typically related within the paragraphs.