



Faculty Review of OER eTextbook

Reviewed Work:

[Internet Medieval Sourcebook: Primary Sources on Medieval Europe](#)

Textbook Author: Paul Halsall, Sources Editor

License: Copyright 1996

Course Number: CHIS 1113

Faculty Reviewer:

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Faculty Review:

Comprehensiveness

The primary sources included on this site are designed for western civilization courses, particularly those focused on the period from roughly 200 CE to 1600 CE (“Medieval”). These sources would **have to be** used as supplements to other primary sources that covered readings from sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, and the Americas. It is easily searchable and the categories are broken down so that students can explore certain themes based on their interests. Within medieval Western Europe, the source provides a very adequate sampling of primary texts from varied dimensions of life, including political, legal, economic, religious, and military. The texts are sourced from quality translations, and while they do not provide original languages, they do often direct students to where they could find published original languages for each source. It should be noted that this site provides strictly primary sources, so that it falls on the instructor to properly contextualize the materials either by using a secondary text or through lectures (ideally both). That said, the site does include a strong section entitled “Studying History” in which several sources explain the significance of using primary texts to study history and how a student should read such texts.

Content Accuracy

Because the site often directs users to hundreds of other sites, which then offer link to additional sites, it would be impossible to monitor for accuracy each link provided on this site. It is entirely incumbent upon the professor to assign specific links and works on the Fordham site, and to ensure that each is accurate. That said, I explored all of the links extensively and while some information was simplistic nothing I happened upon was incorrect. The managers of the site at Fordham do a good job of ensuring that their links are active and refer to quality materials that are accurate.

Relevance/Longevity

The site was initiated in 1996, and updated in 2006. Fordham continues to maintain the site. All links directly on this site marked [at this site] work. Because it is such a massive, comprehensive set of sources, link rot is quite possible, but no files on the Fordham site itself were obsolete in my viewing.

Clarity

This category is a bit irrelevant for primary sources, but I can say that the editors of the site have gone to great lengths to provide a few sentences introducing each source, letting the student know the significance of the author and the date of writing. The primary sources from this period are notoriously complex, written in a style that is no longer common, but the managers of the site have mostly selected lucid translations.

Consistency

The sources are remarkably consistent. In terms of religious life, Judaism, Islam, and Byzantine Christianity are represented. There could be more material on heresy. In terms of geographies and polities, more material on Eastern Europe would be helpful, but its absence really does not detract from the quality of sources assembled here. Additional document from female queens would be helpful, as so many are available in translation now. The Crusades dominate the coverage of military history.

Modularity

The content is very nicely divided into smaller reading sections. Sometimes there are so many sections, with so many links, often by the same authors, in tiny font, that it can become a bit dizzying to navigate each source. It would be very easy for the instructor to pull certain important links onto a class page so that the student did not have to select from the cacophony of sources. This excessive number of links only refers to major issues, such as the Crusades or Thomas Aquinas.

Organization Structure Flow

The organization might be a bit confusing for students. In addition to the Medieval Sourcebook, there are also links to full text sources, saints' lives, and legal texts. It is confusing that these select sources are separate from the other source categories. Additionally, it is not clear that students would know where to find certain texts, such as a letter from St. Dominic in the section on "The Medieval Church," which is further embedded in a section on "The Mendicant Orders." Again, because the organization is geared toward someone with a firm grasp of the chronological history of the period, it would be incumbent upon the instructor to select the most appropriate sources from this site, rather than to simply let students use it or explore it without guidance.

Interface

There do not appear to be any interface issues. The only graphics included on the site are maps, which are scanned. Some are so detailed that a student could not possibly be expected to use it. I would not recommend using the maps on this site.

Grammatical Errors

The manager/editors of the site include no grammatical errors in their brief introductory comments on each primary source.

Cultural Relevance

Again, because these are primary sources the cultural relevance must be contextualized. Certainly there are crusade texts and texts from the medieval Catholic Church that make claims that many would find offensive today. But these are historical sources and it is the job of the instructor to explain to students why people believed the things they did in the past about others races and religions. In terms of medieval Europe, it is inclusive of the religious diversity that existed in the Mediterranean at the time. It is certainly deeply lacking in coverage of voices from people of color, even during the medieval period. In part, this lack of coverage is a result of the western European focus of the site itself. For a world Civilization course, the sources provided here absolutely must be supplemented by those representing voices from Africa, Asia, and the Americas.

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