Primary Source FAQs

WHAT ARE PRIMARY SOURCES?
Primary sources are original documents or objects created during the time period and situation under investigation.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF A PRIMARY SOURCE?
It provides a researcher with confirmation that the event, invention, government decision, etc., probably existed within a specific time frame. It also offers insight into reactions, perceptions, motivation, etc., of people who experienced the event or historical moment under study.

WHAT TYPES OF PRIMARY SOURCES ARE THERE?
Primary historical sources span a vast amount of material types and are highly diversified in character. They can include some of the following:

- **written sources** such as: Books, newspapers articles, letters, diaries entries, public records, census data, eye witness accounts, government documents, personal or institutional papers, manuscripts, and laws
- **visual sources** such as: sculpture, portraits, maps, coins, historical paintings, engravings, architecture, relics, and artifacts.

HOW DOES A PRIMARY SOURCE SUPPORT MY HISTORICAL EVIDENCE?
Below are some specific examples that coincide with some of your assignment questions. Notice how a painting, an architectural masterpiece, or a map created during the Islamic Golden Age helps confirm the actual existence of Muslim invention, exploration, sculpture, etc. during their “Golden Age.”

A twelfth century painting of a musician playing an alud, (a five string instrument forerunner to the guitar) is evidence of the invention of Arabic musicians during that time period.
A sixteenth century manuscript depicting the town plan of Diyabakir in southeast Turkey is primary source evidence of Muslim urban planning.

An illustration of a wudhu (washing machine) from a twelfth century manuscript in Arabic is primary source evidence of the washing machine being an Arab invention.

A thirteenth century manuscript depicting a trebuchet flinging missiles in a book titled The Book of Horsemanship and Other Ingenious War Devices by Syrian scholar Hasan al-Rammah in 1270 is primary source evidence of advanced Arab prowess with military weapons and tactics.

A current picture of the Dome of the Rock or the mosque of Suleyman the Magnificent is primary source evidence that the Muslims were able to construct beautiful, architecturally sophisticated public buildings.

A fifteenth century map attributed to Turkish Admiral Piri Reis shows primary source evidence that the Arabs were exploring and possibly trading with people on the island of Cyprus.