

3: Reading a Historical Map Sequence

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Overview and Purpose of the Lesson:

The purpose of this set of lessons is to help students get a clear picture of the locations and environments that helped shaped the story of Al-Andalus. Students first look at the vast territory spanned by the growing Islamic Empire and examine its environments to explain why Spain would have been considered such a rich prize. Spain’s unique geographic location is also studied to understand its role as independent Caliphate and transmitter of knowledge to Europe. Students then examine a time-series of maps illustrating the stages of Spain’s medieval history.

(**Note:** Although a lesson is described below, the maps provided on this website are intended to be a kit from which teachers can design their own lessons and presentations.)

Performance Objectives:

- Locate major political features of medieval Spain.
- Describe the stages of medieval Spain’s history.

Materials Needed:

- Map Sets: A large variety of possible maps and combinations of maps have been provided on the website www.islamicspain.tv. The intent is that teachers will select the sets of maps that best suit their students’ needs and teaching situation. For example, black and white maps can be used if a teacher decides to Xerox class sets. Color maps could be used to create transparencies or make PowerPoint presentations.
- Student Handout 3a: Reading a Historical Map Sequence

Time: 20 – 30 minutes

Procedure:

1. Distribute or display map sets for task 4 (Maps of medieval Spain www.islamicspain.tv)
2. The maps illustrate stages of medieval Spain’s complex history, and each question follows a brief description of what happened during that stage. This task can be completed stage by stage in conjunction with viewing the video or as a pre-viewing activity.
3. Extension: Combine this activity with the Timeline Activity (lesson set #3) and have students correlate the maps with the corresponding point on the timeline when the changes to the political landscape occurred (invasions, battles, conquests).

Possible Assessments:

- Include a map section on a unit assessment.
- Have students place untitled versions of the map sets in chronological order.
- Create matching questions using the timelines and the political maps.

Student Handout 3a: Reading a Historical Map Sequence

Use the set of Spain maps to answer these questions about the political story of Al-Andalus.

Al-Andalus reached its greatest height during the Cordoba-based Caliphate begun by Abd al-Rahman III. For most of the 900's, Al-Andalus was unified, independent, and able to hold its own against any would-be adversaries including the Christian kingdoms to the north. But a series of civil wars among Muslim factions beginning early in the 1000's eventually brought an end to the Caliphate. The result was the fragmentation of Al-Andalus into many "taifa" kingdoms. (Taifa is Arabic for "party" or "faction.") At first there were as many as 60 taifa kingdoms. But constant struggles among them for land, power, and prestige gradually reduced their number as the stronger absorbed the weaker.

1. Why would the division of Al-Andalus into taifa kingdoms be an advantage to the bordering Christian kingdoms?

Some taifa kingdoms fought against Christian kingdoms as well as against each other. Sometimes taifa kingdoms made alliances with their Christian neighbors in order to defend themselves against other taifas.

2. Which taifas shown on the map would most likely have both fought against and sometimes made alliances with Christian kingdoms? Explain your answer.

By the late 1000's the Muslim taifas were beginning to have trouble holding off the advances of Christian kings, especially Alfonso VI of Castile and Leon. In 1086 taifa leaders invited a North African Berber dynasty known as the Almoravids into Spain to help them defend against the Christians.

3. What major Muslim taifa city had already fallen to the Christians when the Almoravids were asked to come help defend Spain?

The Almoravids did help hold off the Christian armies. But the religiously conservative Almoravids were offended by the rich, tolerant, and diverse society they found in Spain. They soon conquered the taifas and took control of Muslim Spain for themselves. Around 1150, the Almoravids were succeeded by another even more puritanical Berber dynasty, the Almohads. Meanwhile, the Christian kingdoms continued to chip away at Muslim territory.

4. Which two major Muslim cities had fallen to the Christians by the time of Almohad rule in 1200?

The strict and puritanical Almohads were unpopular with much of the native Andalusian population, whatever their religion. Many fled Almohad rule into territory held by the Christians.

5. Which Christian cities would have been most attractive to refugees from Almohad rule? Explain your answer.

In 1212, the Almohads were soundly defeated by a combined Christian army at the Battle of Las Navas. The Almohads abandoned Spain and returned to North Africa. This left the much-weakened taifas on their own once more. Unable to effectively defend themselves, most of the remaining taifas were quickly overrun.

6. Which Muslim kingdom survived until 1492?