

Using Primary Sources in World History

- ❖ - Primary sources: original records created at the time under study
- ❖ - Secondary sources: later interpretations; tertiary sources: compiled summaries
- ❖ - Essential for research, learning, and historical thinking skills
- ❖ - Course builds core skills: sourcing, contextualization, corroboration
- ❖ - Supports students, teachers, researchers, and independent learners



What Counts as a Primary Source in World History

- **Written documents:** letters, diaries, official records, newspapers, speeches, manuscripts
- **Visual materials:** photographs, maps, artwork, political cartoons, film footage
- **Artifacts and objects:** tools, pottery, clothing, architecture, everyday items
- **Oral traditions and personal narratives:** interviews, folklore, memoirs, autobiographies
- **Born-digital records:** emails, websites, social media, digital datasets
- **Hybrid and edge cases:** translations, reproductions, later editions—context determines classification



Searching and Accessing Global Primary Sources

- Collections like World History Commons offer 1,700+ annotated sources
- History Genie provides AI transcription across 46 languages and scripts
- World Historical Gazetteer links 1.8M+ place records for spatial context
- Evaluate provenance, authority, and completeness of online collections
- Use bibliographic tools and metadata for rigorous citation practices



The Four-Move Critical Reading Framework



Sourcing

- Identify creator, date, location, and original purpose



Contextualization

- Place the source in its historical and cultural setting



Close Reading

- Examine language, tone, argument, and genre



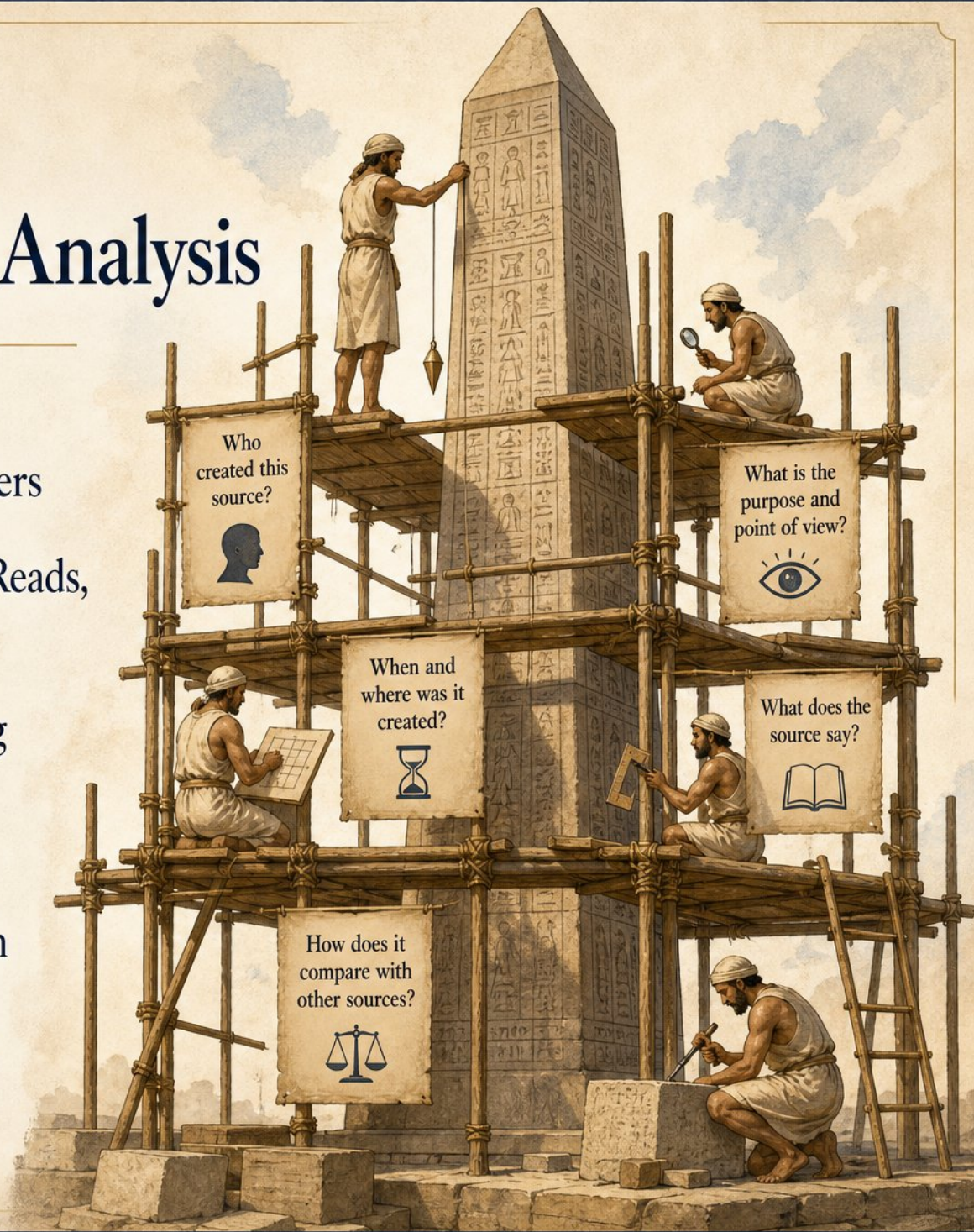
Corroboration

- Compare multiple sources to find patterns and contradictions



Teaching and Scaffolding Source Analysis

- ✦ Design scaffolded activities for elementary to undergraduate learners
- ✦ Apply frameworks: SCIM-C, Four Reads, and LOC analysis tool
- ✦ Facilitate discussions on conflicting sources and multiple perspectives
- ✦ Use rubrics to assess sourcing, contextualization, and corroboration
- ✦ Build inquiry skills through "junior detective" mystery investigations





Analyzing Visual and Material Sources



- Interpreting images, maps, and artwork as historical evidence
- Reading objects using material culture methods for world history
- Decoding symbolic and cultural meanings across regions
- Integrating visual, written, and oral sources for richer interpretations

Working with Oral Traditions, Interviews, and Personal Narratives

- **Strength:** captures voices absent from written archives
- **Limitation:** shaped by memory, performance, and transmission
- Myths and folklore reveal cultural values, not just events
- Memoirs and letters require analysis of bias and audience
- Assess reliability by comparing perspectives and context



Sources Across Borders: Translation and Multilingualism

- ★ Assess website authority and translation quality before using any translated source
- ★ Investigate what may be lost, altered, or domesticated in translation choices
- ★ Apply cross-cultural context without stereotyping or oversimplifying past actors
- ★ Use translated sources alongside original-language materials to identify nuances
- ★ Remember: translation is mediation—bridging past worlds and present readers



Digital Methods and Computational Approaches



- Text mining and distant reading across multilingual digital corpora



- Geospatial analysis and mapping with tools like the World Historical Gazetteer



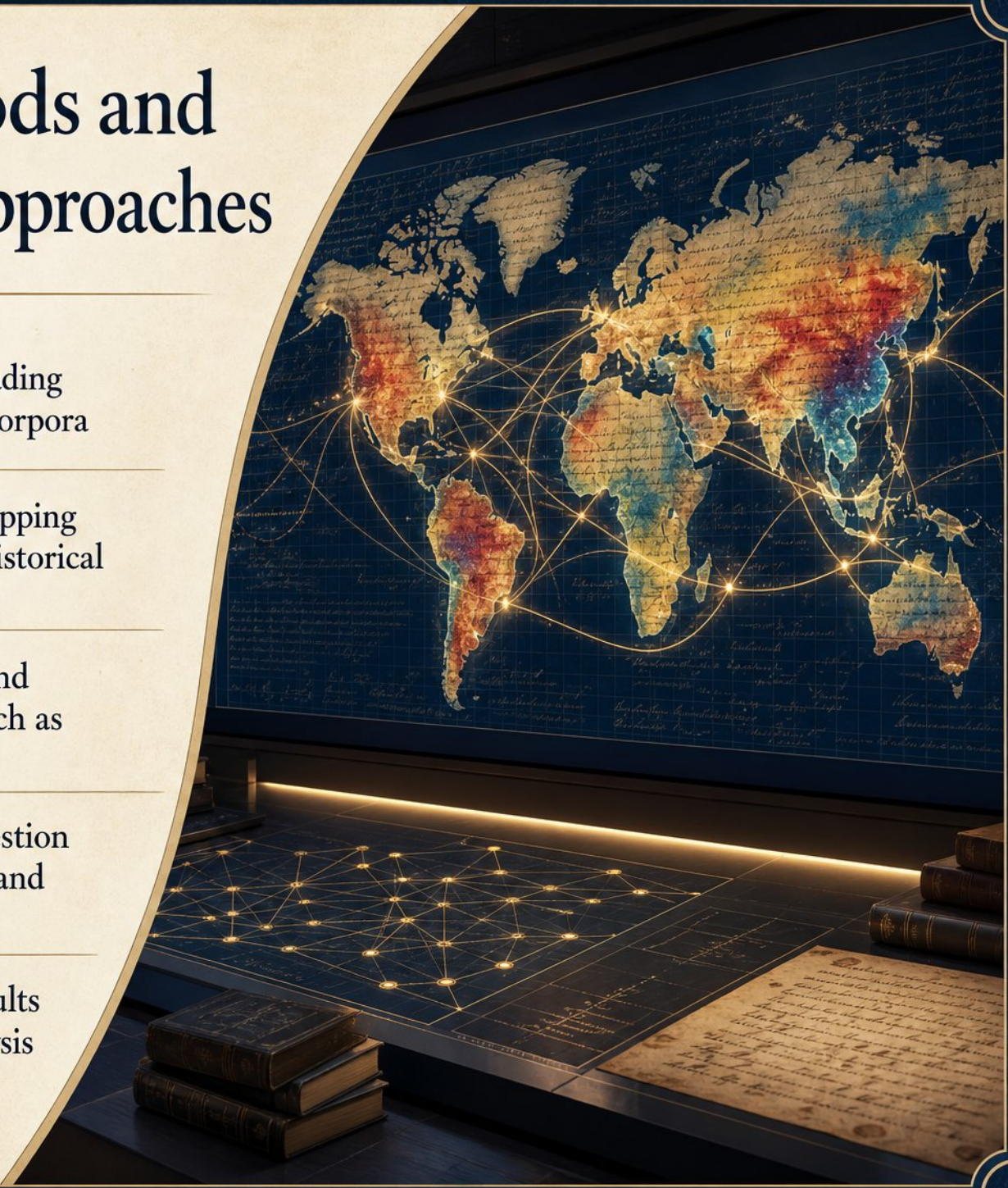
- AI-assisted transcription and annotation via platforms such as History Genie



- Critical digital literacy: question technological determinism and maintain interpretive rigor



- Integrate computational results with traditional source-analysis methods



Ethics, Silences, and Power in the Archive



Archives are shaped by power, colonialism, and what institutions choose to preserve



Read against the grain to recover marginalized and suppressed voices



Practice ethical care with sensitive, contested, or community-related sources



Apply Indigenous data sovereignty and community-based archival approaches



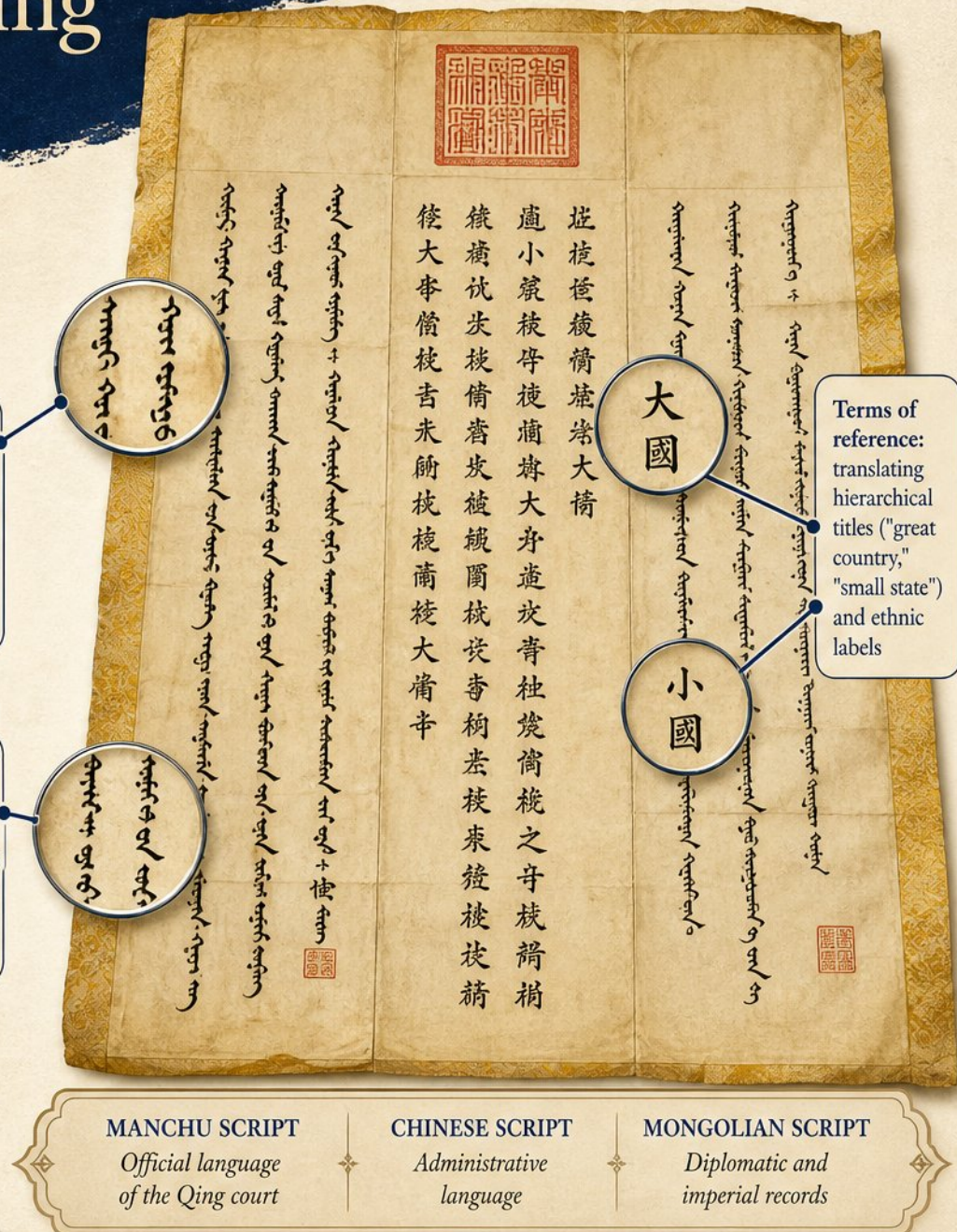
Case Study: Translating the Qing Empire

- **Calendar conversion:** aligning lunar and sexagenary dating with the Gregorian calendar
- **Linguistic hurdles:** deciphering phonetic Manchu transcriptions of regional Turkic words
- **Terms of reference:** translating hierarchical titles ("great country," "small state") and ethnic labels
- **Tongchi as mediators:** interpreters who bridged religion, culture, and language for Qing officials
- **Core lesson:** preserving original nuance while keeping sources intelligible for modern readers

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Case Study: Commodities, Trade, and Global Exchange



- Trace commodities through manuscripts, printed records, and visual sources
- Connect economic, social, and cultural dimensions of global trade
- Integrate shipping logs, advertisements, and material artifacts into narratives
- Design student research projects on consumption and cultural exchange



Designing Primary Source-Based Inquiries and Assessments

- Junior detective and mystery models build evidence-based inquiry skills
- Scaffold research: select, source, contextualize, and corroborate independently
- Assess with rubrics targeting sourcing, context, corroboration, and argument
- Address language barriers, incomplete evidence, and conflicting accounts directly

A SILK ROAD INCIDENT

*Three Accounts. Different Perspectives.
Which is closest to the truth?*

ACCOUNT ONE

The caravan was attacked at dawn near the rocky pass. Bandits from the west stole the bolts of silk and vanished.



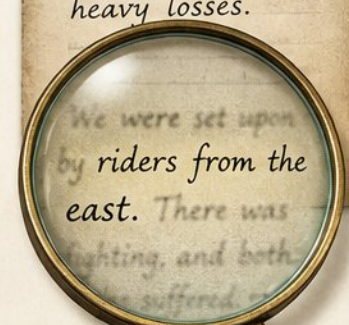
ACCOUNT TWO

No attack occurred. A sandstorm delayed us for two days. We lost goods to the wind and had to turn back.



ACCOUNT THREE

We were set upon by riders from the east. There was fighting, and both sides suffered heavy losses.



Fragmented Sources. Recovered Truths. Stronger Inquiries.



Building a Sustainable Practice with Primary Sources

- ✦ Curate a personal archive of trusted world history repositories
- ✦ Stay current with new digital tools and collections
- ✦ Practice curiosity, skepticism, empathy, and persistence
- ✦ Source analysis makes learners active history-makers



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