

Primary and Secondary Sources Activity

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Islam and the Arab Empire

The Battle of Tours

Background

For a number of years before the Battle of Tours, Muslim forces had conducted raids into Frankish territories without making permanent conquests. According to early Christian chronicles, the conflict began when Abd ar-Rahman al-Ghafiqi—the governor of Cordoba—defeated a Muslim rebel who had solicited the support of Duke Eudes of Aquitaine. Abd ar-Rahman pursued the duke and defeated his forces near the Garonne River. He then plundered Bordeaux, burned the church at Poitiers, and was on his way to Tours when he encountered Frankish forces led by Charles Martel, who ruled northern Gaul. (*Martel* was a nickname given to Charles that means “the hammer.”) According to brief, unclear accounts of the battle, the Franks killed Abd ar-Rahman in an initial skirmish. The remainder of his forces retreated to their tents. The Franks waited until the next morning to renew the attack, only to discover that the Muslims had fled. Historians believe that after this battle, Arab leaders decided they had neither the manpower nor the will to continue attempts to conquer Europe, choosing instead to concentrate on solidifying other parts of their empire.

Directions: The first selection provides a European account of the battle, taken from the Christian Chronicle of 754. The second selection is from the earliest Arabic account of the battle, probably written in the mid-800s. The painting depicts the confrontation at Tours. Read the selections and study the painting. Then answer the questions.

Then Abd ar-Rahman, seeing the land filled with the multitude of his army, cut through the rocky mountains of the Basques so that, crossing the plains, he might invade the land of the Franks. He struck so far into Frankish territory that he joined battle with Eudes on the other sides of the rivers Garonne and Dordogne. God only knows the number of those who died or fled, Eudes himself slipping away in flight. While Abd ar-Rahman was pursuing Eudes, he decided to despoil Tours by destroying its palaces and burning its churches. There he confronted the consul of Austrasia by the name of Charles, a man who, having proved himself to be a warrior from his youth and an expert in things military, having been summoned by Eudes. After each side had tormented the other with raids for almost seven days, they finally prepared their battle lines and fought fiercely. The northern peoples remained as immobile as a wall, holding together like a glacier in the cold regions. In the blink of an eye, they annihilated the Arabs with the sword.

—from the Chronicle of 754, as quoted in *Conquerors and Chroniclers of Early Medieval Spain*

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Ubayda [had] appointed 'Abd ar-Rahman 'Abd al-Akki as governor of al-Andalus [the Arabic name for Spain and Portugal]. 'Abd ar-Rahman was a virtuous man, and hence he undertook a military expedition to 'Ifranja. They [the Franks] are the most distant enemy of [the Muslims of] al-Andalus. 'Abd ar-Rahman took a great deal of booty and he gained a victory over them. He obtained much gem-encrusted gold, covered with pearls, rubies, chrysolite, and he commanded that it be broken up. He sent out one-fifth of it [to 'Ubayda] and divided [the rest] among the Muslims who were with him. When news of this reached 'Ubayda, he was greatly angered. He sent a message to 'Abd ar-Rahman, demanding that he arrange to come to him. 'Abd ar-Rahman then sent a message to 'Ubayda, saying that "until the sky and Earth are joined, the Merciful One would make the devout ones among them go out [to do battle with the infidels]." Then he led another military expedition against the Franks. He and all of his companions were martyred. His death, Yahya tells us, occurred in the year 115 A.H.

—Ibn 'Abd al-Hakam, from *Futuh Misr*, 871

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Caption: Charles Martel defeating Abd ar-Rahman at Tours, France, 732. Manuscript illumination from *Grandes Chroniques de France*, 15th century.

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The logo for 'networks' features the word 'networks' in a bold, lowercase sans-serif font. To the right of the text is a stylized graphic of a spider web or a network of lines radiating from a central point.

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1. **Comparing and Contrasting** How do the two accounts of the battle agree? How do they differ from historical information?

2. **Drawing Conclusions** Why did the European chronicler describe the outcome of the battle the way he did? Why did the Arab chronicler claim that all the Muslim forces were martyred?

3. **Interpreting Significance** Explain the significance of the outcome of the battle from a European perspective and from an Arab perspective.

4. **Analyzing Visuals** In the painting, what details help you identify the Frankish forces and the Muslim forces? What point of view does the painting express?
