

Testing the reliability of sources - life in the monasteries

Historians use a variety of sources to build up a picture of the past. However we have to be careful that the sources are accurate and believable. Sources that can be believed are called **RELIABLE**. Your job is to work out how reliable the following sources are using the source report to help you.

Source A, from Geoffrey Chaucer's poem, 'The Canterbury Tales' written in the 1380s

A monk there was, one of the finest sort
Who rode the country: hunting was his sport
A manly man, fit to be an Abbot
He had many dainty horses in his stable.
The rule of good St Benedict
As old and strict he tended to ignore
Greyhounds he had, as swift as birds to run
Hunting a hare or riding at a fence
Was all his fun, no matter what the expense.

Source B, some of the rules of St Benedict

- **All monks should take turns to wait on each other so that no one is excused kitchen work**
- **Above all, care must be taken of the sick.**
- **Laziness is the enemy of the soul. Monks should be busy working or reading holy books**
- **A mattress, woollen blanket and pillow is enough for bedding.**

Source C from a book 'The Monastic order of England', written by Ailred of Rievaulx, a monk in 1135

We have little food, our clothes are rough, our drink is from the stream. Under our tired bodies is a hard mat; when we are fast asleep a bell is rung to wake us. There is no moment to be lazy or play. We have peace of mind and a marvellous freedom from the hurly burly of the world.



Source D - This is a picture of a monk who worked in the cellar of a monastery. It comes from an illustrated book made in the 13th century.

Source Report

What does the source tell us?

Chaucer's monk did not follow the rules of St Benedict

Written /drawn by

Geoffrey Chaucer

Date

1380s

List of reasons to doubt source

- 1 In poems or stories the writer sometimes exaggerates to tell a good story.
- 2 Chaucer may be biased (only showing one side of the story)

List of reasons to believe source

- 1 Other sources (D) show that some monks did not behave properly
- 2 Chaucer may have met monks like this

Do other sources support it?

Source B

Support? monks should not be lazy and he does a lot of hunting and riding

Oppose? "Monks should be busy working or reading holy books" and he is breaking the rules of St Benedict

Source C

Support?

Oppose?

Source D

Support?

Oppose?

How far is source A reliable for someone studying about monks in the middle ages? Use evidence from the sources to support your answer.

Use these sentence starters to help you with the question:

Source A is a poem by Geoffrey Chaucer in which he describes his monk in the following way ...

There are a number of reasons to doubt the reliability of source A, for example ...

However, there are also a number of reasons to believe the reliability of source A, for example ...

Examples from other sources that do not support source A include ...

Examples from other sources that do support source A include ...

Overall I feel that source A is ... because ...

How far is source A reliable for someone studying about monks in the middle ages? Use evidence from the sources to support your answer.

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