

History Prelims 2010

Examiners' Report

**PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION IN HISTORY 2010
REPORT OF THE EXAMINERS**

I: Statistical overview

Table 1: Performance of candidates

Year	A	B	C	A1	B1	C1	A2	B2	C2
2010	236	47 <i>19.9%</i>	189 <i>80.1%</i>	106	17 <i>16.0%</i>	89 <i>84.0%</i>	130	30 <i>23.1%</i>	100 <i>76.9%</i>
2009	237	51 <i>21.5%</i>	186 <i>78.5%</i>	109	20 <i>18.3%</i>	89 <i>81.7%</i>	128	31 <i>24.2%</i>	97 <i>75.8%</i>
2008	228	54 <i>23.7%</i>	174 <i>76.3%</i>	99	14 <i>14.1%</i>	85 <i>85.9%</i>	129	40 <i>31.0%</i>	89 <i>69.0%</i>
2007	238	58 <i>24.4%</i>	180 <i>75.6%</i>	113	19 <i>16.8%</i>	94 <i>83.2%</i>	125	39 <i>31.2%</i>	86 <i>68.8%</i>

Columns

A: number of all candidates

A1: number of female candidates

A2: number of male candidates

B: number of distinctions

B1: number of women achieving distinctions, with the second figure in italic providing the percentage of distinctions among the female cohort

B2: number of distinctions and percentages (similarly constructed) for male candidates

C: number of passes

C1: number of women passing, with the second figure in italic providing the percentage of passes among the female cohort

C2: number of passes and percentages (similarly constructed) for male candidates

Table 2: Number of candidates for each paper in 2010

Paper	Main School	Joint Schools	Total
History of the British Isles I - c.300-1087	35	1	36
History of the British Isles II – 1042-1330	58	1	59
History of the British Isles III - 1330-1550	30	4	34
History of the British Isles IV – 1500-1700	42	10	52
History of the British Isles V – 1685-1830	31	10	41
History of the British Isles VI – 1815-1924	24	5	29
History of the British Isles VII – since 1900	16	3	19
General History I – 370-900	71	10	81
General History II – 1000-1300	52	11	63
General History III – 1400-1650	55	16	71
General History IV – 1815-1914	58	17	75
OS 1 – Theories of the State	45	45	90
OS 2 – The Age of Bede	3	1	4
OS 3 – Early Gothic France	6	-	6
OS 4 – England and the Celtic Peoples	1	-	1
OS 5 – English Chivalry and the French War	4	1	5
OS 6 – Nature and Art in the Renaissance	11	1	12
OS 7 – Witch-craft and Witch-hunting	24	2	26
OS 8 – Nobility and Gentry in England	5	1	6
OS 9 – Conquest and Colonization	30	6	36
OS 10 – Revolution and Empire in France	34	5	39
OS 11 – Women, gender and nation	7	1	8
OS 12. The Romance of the People: The Folk Revival from 1760 to 1914	15	-	15
OS 13 – The American Empire: 1823-1904	25	4	29
OS 14 - The Rise and Crises of European Socialisms: 1881-1921	10	-	10
OS 15 – Theories of War and Peace in Europe	5	5	10
OS 16 – Working-Class Life and Industrial Work	4	-	4
OS 17 – The World of Homer and Hesiod (AMH)	4	1	5
OS 18 – Augustan Rome (AMH)	3	6	9
OS [19] – Industrialization in Britain & France 1750-1870	-	11	11
Approaches to History	109	33	142
Historiography: Tacitus to Weber	75	14	89
Herodotus	-	-	-
Einhard and Asser	2	-	2
Tocqueville	32	4	36
Meinecke and Kehr	4	3	7
Machiavelli	1	-	1

Paper	Main School	Joint Schools	Total
Trotsky	2	-	2
Quantification	11	3	14

History of the British Isles (Sex/paper by paper)

Class	Nos (both sexes)	%	Men		Women		Women as % of total in each class
			Nos	%	Nos	%	
D	45	16.67	27	17.77	18	15.25	40.0
Pass	225	83.33	125	82.23	100	84.75	44.44
Fail	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	270	100	152	100	118	100	-

General History (Sex/paper by paper)

Class	Nos (both sexes)	%	Men		Women		Women as % of total in each class
			Nos	%	Nos	%	
D	62	21.37	36	22.36	26	20.16	41.94
Pass	228	78.63	125	77.64	103	79.84	45.18
Fail	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	290	100	161	100	129	100	-

Optional Subjects (Sex/paper by paper) OS 17/18/19 not included in stats

Class	Nos (both sexes)	%	Men		Women		Women as % of total in each class
			Nos	%	Nos	%	
D	73	24.26	44	25.28	29	22.84	39.72
Pass	228	75.74	130	74.72	98	77.16	42.98
Fail	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	301	100	174	100	127	100	-

Approaches to History (Sex/paper by paper)

Class	Nos (both sexes)	%	Men		Women		Women as % of total in each class
			Nos	%	Nos	%	
D	26	18.30	17	22.07	9	13.85	34.62
Pass	116	81.70	60	77.93	56	86.15	48.27
Fail	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	142	100	77	100	65	100	-

Quantification (Sex/paper by paper)

Class	Nos (both sexes)	%	Men		Women		Women as % of total in each class
			Nos	%	Nos	%	
D	2	14.28	1	12.50	1	16.67	50.0
Pass	12	85.72	7	87.50	5	83.33	41.66
Fail	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	14	100	8	100	6	100	-

Historiography (Sex/paper by paper)

Class	Nos (both sexes)	%	Men		Women		Women as % of total in each class
			Nos	%	Nos	%	
D	15	16.86	12	19.36	3	11.11	20.0
Pass	74	83.14	50	80.64	24	88.89	32.43
Fail	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	89	100	62	100	27	100	-

II: Administration

The tasks of the Chair, Secretary and Examiners this year were made immeasurably easier by the efforts of the Faculty Office. We received outstanding support from Faculty Office staff. [REDACTED] all did a sterling job of ensuring that everything went well, despite sickness in the office and knock-on problems caused by the delay in issuing FHS results the previous week. We are immensely grateful to them all. [REDACTED] in particular was a tower of strength, conveying material between the Faculty Office and the Examination Schools, although the geographical separation between the administrative part of this process and the Board's meetings in the Exam Schools did seem to place an unacceptable burden on Faculty Office staff.

Again, as last year, the conduct of examinations in the Schools was the remit of the Schools staff and invigilators. We encountered no serious problems with this arrangement. As far as their presence in the Examination Schools is concerned, the duty of Examiners is now confined to appearances at the beginning of sessions and at the 'laying-out of scripts' in the Schools after the first round of marking has been done.

The examiners expressed concern about two issues: first, the very tight timetabling of Examiners' meetings now verges on the unsustainable, in the light of the high proportion of rereads undertaken in accordance with the new procedures (see IV); second, while we naturally support the Proctors' desire to allot extra time to candidates with disabilities, it was noticeable that on occasion candidates were able to use the extra time allowed and/or permission to type their papers to write significantly more than those who completed the examinations in the statutory three hours by hand. We are pleased to note that this issue is now being addressed at University level.

III: Examiners and Assessors

Once again this year, the Board consisted of eight examiners: six in the early modern and modern periods, two for the medieval papers. The burden on the latter was substantial given the large number of candidates taking Medieval British and/or General papers, and the implementation of the new procedures meant that the two Medievalists had to do a disproportionate number of rereads. There may be a case for increasing the number of Medievalists on future Boards. General History I, History of the British Isles V and Historiography were all marked by assessors in the first instance; otherwise the outline papers and Approaches were covered by the Board. All eight examiners discharged their marking duties and attended the marks meetings. A total of 17 assessors acted. Without them, the Optional Subjects and Historiography papers could simply not be examined, and the Chair and examiners are very grateful indeed to them all for their excellent work.

Marking allocations were made according to various criteria, including other examining commitments (FHS, theses etc) as well as the information provided on the Faculty Office's Examining Burdens Spreadsheet, meticulously minded and updated by Faculty Office staff. Each examiner (including the Chair and Secretary) marked an average of about 110 scripts with an additional 15-20 rereadings of selected scripts each during the adjudication and classification process.

IV: Marking and classification

The results of the examination, in terms of percentages of candidates ranked within each category, were broadly similar to those seen last year: 19.9% of candidates in the Main School achieved Distinctions (21.5% in 2009); Passes accounted for 80.1% of the School (78.5% in 2009).

New moderating procedures adopted by the Examinations Sub-committee were implemented for the first time this year. These involved the Chair and Secretary meeting for two days before the full Board meetings to single out runs of scripts where a marker's average mark, or distribution of marks, deviated significantly from the Faculty's norms for Prelims. Individual scripts that were significantly out of line with a candidate's average mark were also identified, as (in accordance with existing procedures) were borderline marks, marks over 75 and under 50, and cases where a candidate had had more than one script marked by the same marker. This meant that the Main Board and Joint Schools Boards began their deliberations with a long list of scripts for re-reading.

As a result 94 candidates had 116 scripts re-read. 45 marks were confirmed; 71 marks were changed of which 40 went up and 31 went down; 4 women and 7 men were raised from Pass to Distinction by re-reads; 1 woman and 2 men were demoted from Distinction to Pass by re-reads. All in all therefore, about 40% of candidates had at least one script remarked, with examiners remarking down as well as up to ensure greater accuracy in the examining process. Some refinements are being proposed by the Board, in a separate submission to the Examinations Sub-Committee. Following a review of the medical evidence, 2 candidates were given a Pass instead of Fail at scrutiny, on the basis of an average of those papers they were able to sit.

The following aspects of this year's results might be noted:

1. The last three years have seen a decline in the number of Distinctions awarded in the Main School, from 24.4% in 2007 to 19.9% this year.
2. The percentage of women gaining Distinctions fell from 18.3% in 2009 to 16% in 2010, although it remains above the 2008 figure of 14.1%. The percentage of male candidates achieving Distinctions also fell, though less dramatically, from 24.2% in 2009 to 23% in 2010. Even so, the difference between the proportion of male and female candidates achieving distinctions remained much less marked than in 2008.
3. This year's experience suggested to the examiners that the conventions and guidelines recently introduced might benefit from some refinement, although in general they have rendered the moderating process more thorough.

V: Comments on papers

General Observations

In general, the Examiners remarked upon the relatively high standard of scripts, the overwhelming majority of which obtained 2:1 marks and higher. This was particularly pleasing for the challenging outline papers, which require students to move well beyond the confines of A level in terms of breadth as well as depth. Previous Boards have commented that many candidates do not score consistently across all four papers, and the new moderating procedures enabled us to test those marks that were deemed out-of-line. In almost all cases, these marks were found to be justified. Some papers, such as Theories of the State, were found to generate a very

high standard of script; others, like Tocqueville, had a considerably longer tail of disappointing answers. Notwithstanding some outstanding answers, the Medieval outline papers in particular were felt to be rather patchy, perhaps reflecting the fact that Medieval history is so little studied at GCSE and A level. More generally, the Examiners were a little troubled by the lack of consistency in setting conventions across supposedly similar papers: the division of GHIII into subsections was broadly welcomed, but some queried the fact that GHIV has more questions than the other General History papers; likewise the Trotsky Russian Text paper did not appear to focus as squarely on the set text as the other Foreign Text papers.

History of the British Isles I: c. 300-1087

36 candidates (1 joint-school, 35 main school) sat this paper; 6 were awarded marks over 70 and 1 a mark below 50; of the rest 19 obtained marks between 60 and 69 and 10 marks between 50 and 59. All but two of the questions were attempted (no one wrote on aristocratic land holding or Anglo-Welsh relations); most popular was the question on the conversion (21 takers) which attracted some energetic and argumentative answers, and that on Offa (18); persistence of Roman culture (8), the *adventus Saxonum* (11) and mechanisms for legitimising royal power (14) were also popular, the last being approached from an interesting range of angles. Apart from the answers on Offa – which were all fairly similar – most candidates did not generally produce pre-prepared answers but showed clear evidence of thinking out an argument during the examination. Those who obtained marks below 60 were those who found that task more difficult and struggled to tailor material they knew and understood to the precise requirements of the questions.

All of the scripts, even the weakest, showed a genuine interest in and frequently substantial enthusiasm for this period. Most candidates were able to use primary sources to excellent effect to illustrate their answers; many had learnt quotations as well as precise references to book and chapter numbers of Bede's *History*. (Such citations proved less than compelling when used to support an argument that Bede took a particularly negative view of King Offa.) The best candidates could show an informed understanding of the problems presented by the nature of the evidence for this period, an ability to deploy a range of types of evidence beyond the narrative sources including law-codes, coins, place-names, Old English poetry and archaeological evidence, as well as an awareness of debates in the recent historiography.

As in 2009, a small number of candidates stood out as markedly less well-informed, less able to use primary sources and dependent on a narrow and outdated bibliography. This caused them the most substantial problems in supporting an argument that made Offa the first king of the 'English' from Stenton's interpretation of the reign (first published in 1918) without showing any awareness of how the historiography of the Mercian supremacy has changed in the last thirty years.

History of the British Isles II: 1042-1330

58 main school candidates and one joint-school candidate took this paper. 10 obtained marks over 70; 35 marks between 60 and 69, and 13 marks between 50 and 59; no one obtained a mark below 50.

Of the 20 questions set, 5 attracted the majority of the takers and large numbers of candidates chose to answer the same 3 questions. 29 candidates answered question 1, about Norman legitimisation of the Conquest; 24 attempted to explain the causes and consequences of civil political discord; 23 wrote on whether or not the Church was subject to secular control; and 20 on the Norman empire. No other question attracted answers in double figures; 3 questions were not attempted at all (common law, popular religion, and vernacular literature) and only one candidate wrote on each of the questions on Scottish kings, the expulsion of the Jews, and on the increased use of written records.

For the examiner, this bunching of answers made for a rather predictable set of scripts. Candidates had the same limited range of evidence at their disposal and often constructed their answers in the same fashion. As the marks reveal, most were perfectly competent, able to deploy well-understood material to construct reasoned arguments but few showed much enthusiasm in so doing. The scripts awarded marks over 70 stood out for their independence of thought and for an ability either to use primary sources imaginatively, or to engage with historiographical debate. The overwhelming focus on the political questions meant that few candidates showed any knowledge of, or indeed interest in, the society or culture of Britain in the high middle ages; understanding of religion was generally weak (the question on secular control of the Church produced some poor answers from candidates who read this exclusively in terms of royal-papal relations as witnessed through kings' relations with their archbishops of Canterbury). On the other hand, most candidates could talk about high politics across the whole period; only a few candidates showed knowledge of only one century.

Manifestly there was nothing 'wrong' with these scripts but they did stand out very sharply from the BH I scripts as generally rather lack-lustre and distinctly unenthusiastic. Tutors are clearly succeeding in energising students taking the Anglo-Saxon paper with genuine interest in the early middle ages; the approach to BH II feels, from the evidence produced by these candidates, rather more mechanical, driven more by the instrumental need to fulfil a period requirement than a positive choice in favour of the Norman and Angevin realms.

History of the British Isles III: 1330-1550

Thirty-four candidates (30 main school, 4 joint schools) sat the paper this year. There were some very good scripts in which candidates thought about the question set, in the terms chosen by the examiner, and there were some poor re-hashes of tutorial essays, or lecture notes put into continuous prose, so the standard of answer was variable. This is a difficult paper, and while future candidates would do well to read more widely than they have for tutorials and to focus on the precise question before them, lecturers and tutors could also discuss in more depth some of the conceptual

issues in the history of this period. Candidates had particular trouble with ‘models’ of kingship, with the idea of a ‘political nation’, with ‘lordship’, with the phrase ‘dependent on’ (as opposed to ‘caused by’), and with the notion of gender being something that applies not just to women.

No candidate attempted any question on Scotland, Ireland or Wales; likewise nothing on patronage of religious institutions or the ‘decline’ of community. The lack of anything directly on non-English regions (though Owain Glyn Dwr did make welcome, unbidden, appearances elsewhere) is disappointing in a ‘History of the British Isles’ paper. Any candidate making comparisons across more than one region or polity ensures that he or she enters the mark scheme at a higher level than one whose examples all come from Westminster and the home counties.

Revolts were popular with candidates (27 answers), as were Lollards (15 answers), kings (9 answers), France (9 answers), regime change (9 answers), structures of government (9 answers), gender (5 answers), religious reform (5 answers). The political nation, lordship, personal impact on government, Marxism, literature, towns, and the visual, all received 4 or fewer answers, though there were some outstandingly original and interesting essays amongst these, for which candidates should be congratulated.

History of the British Isles IV: 1500-1700

Fifty-two candidates took this paper, including nine from History and Politics and one from History and English. The general impression was similar to last year’s. On the whole the paper was well done, with no shortage of Distinction level scripts and only a few really weak performances. Candidates displayed a good range and depth of knowledge, derived from lectures as well as their own reading. They usually eschewed party lines (if any now exist) or historiographical set pieces and instead tackled the questions head on, coming up with an impressively wide range of arguments and interpretations. Only occasionally did candidates resort to pre-packaged tutorial essays, though a number were inclined to change the question on ‘allegiance’ into one on ‘causes’ of the civil wars. As usual, good knowledge of Ireland was evident in a fair proportion of scripts, while this year Scotland and Wales also made a reasonable showing. Predictably, candidates generally had a better understanding of central politics than of the local government activities or of such topics as social structure. Perhaps candidates need more direct help in these areas; they are not easy matters to grasp, but they are important. In any event, all the questions were attempted, though there were only three answers on print culture; two each on foreign policy, Whig support, government in the 1690s, and the use of the arts to ‘sell the monarchy’; and one on London. Whereas last year there was a good number of essays (some very lively) on the dictum that England was ‘a paradise for women’, this year’s question on misogyny was answered by only four candidates. Most of the remaining questions attracted between five and ten candidates, while there were three clear favourites. Q. 12 on Mary and Elizabeth (eighteen candidates) stimulated a number of well-informed and well-crafted comparisons. Many of the twenty-one answers to Q. 11 were likewise successful; with varying degrees of emphasis, candidates took the opportunity to link changes in leadership to the shifting nature and incidence of popular disturbances. The twenty-eight answers to question 8

on religious change were patchier. Many candidates sensibly made a distinction between 'beliefs' and 'practices', but were often unsure where to go next. It was disconcerting to discover that hardly anyone knew about ecclesiastical visitations or the English church courts, let alone kirk sessions.

History of the British Isles V: 1685-1830

Forty-one candidates sat this paper, ten of them from the joint-schools. Although only six candidates averaged marks of 70 and over, a further five recorded a distinction mark on at least one essay, and only three students scored below 60. The overall level of performance was thus very satisfactory, and it was clear that the vast majority of students have engaged very profitably with the secondary literature of the field. A further sign of encouragement was the wide spectrum of questions attempted, with only two questions failing to elicit a response (Q. 12 on population debates, and Q. 17 on challenges to the Church of England). Political topics continue to be very popular, most notably the Glorious Revolution (Q. 1), the impact of the French Revolution (Q. 3), and the imperial priorities of foreign policy (Q. 7). However, social and cultural topics also attracted many good answers, especially regarding gender attitudes (Q. 15), the Enlightenment (Q. 18), and the urban renaissance (Q. 10). These topics sparked the most critical engagement with recent historiographical debates, and the stronger candidates used the secondary literature to define core terms, and to encompass developments across the period. These stronger scripts were also marked by their readiness to engage with Scottish and Irish perspectives, and, where appropriate, to take their surveys into the early nineteenth century. Weaker candidates struggled to achieve such productive frameworks for discussion, and were also noticeably reticent in providing effective illustrations of their ideas. Candidates should have the confidence to define their terms of engagement from the outset, and must ensure clarity and precision of analysis if they are to sustain their arguments. Such ambition and discipline will ensure that they achieve their potential on a paper which has clearly stimulated their interest across a broad array of topics.

History of the British Isles VI: 1815-1924

29 Candidates (24 main school, 5 joint schools) sat the paper this year, and attempted a fairly wide range of questions. The question on Victorian Culture (Q. 13) was not attempted by any of the candidates and questions on the British economy and the rise of the Labour party only attracted one and two responses respectively. The most popular questions were those on Conservative success, Imperial policy, piety and public worship, and parliamentary reform, with the first of these garnering eleven responses. The quality of the essays these questions produced was varied, however. Many of the essays on Conservatism concentrated on the role of Disraeli to the exclusion of other issues, and several of the candidates writing about parliamentary reform were very narrow in their interpretation of 'popular politics'. Generally, serious engagement with relevant and recent historiographical debates was lacking. The question on piety and public worship produced some quite strong answers which grappled with the difficulties of measuring piety and demonstrated the candidates' awareness of the ways in which the contemporary debate has influenced historians; very few considered the relationship between gender and religion, which seems a

significant omission given the thrust of the recent historiography, and some were pretty hazy about differences between denominations. The best essays on the women's movement included some analytically sophisticated and nuanced work which demonstrated an awareness of the complexity of interactions between legislative change and cultural assumptions, the worst re-hashed essays on 'the position of women' without attempting to define what a women's movement might have consisted of. Essays on national/imperial identity and the principles guiding foreign and imperial policy suffered from candidates paying insufficient attention to the precise wording and implications of the questions and churning out re-purposed essays on the motives for imperial expansion, though a few of the Q. 11 answers did grapple intelligently with recent debates about imperial culture or the lack of it. The strongest candidates attempted a range of political, social and cultural questions, demonstrating their awareness of the intersection of high and popular politics and different social and cultural pressures, rather than confining themselves to either high political analyses or attempting only broad general surveys of social and cultural questions.

History of the British Isles VII: since 1900

Nineteen candidates (three of them joint schools) attempted this paper. The standard of answers was highly competent, but there were only two really first-class scripts. The most popular questions were on feminism (8 takers) and Empire/decolonisation (6 takers.) Four questions received no takers – on affluence, the break-up of Britain, political extremism, economic decline, and British insularity. The questions on decades of 'crisis' (Q. 4) and on family life (Q. 18) had just one taker each, and only two students answered on Irish nationalism, and on democratised culture. The reluctance of candidates to answer on Ireland, Wales or Scotland bears out the 2009 examiners' criticism that this paper is still treated by most students as an *English* rather than *British* history paper. Some candidates were obviously frustrated that there was not a question on youth culture, and tried to shoehorn it into Q. 8, on permissiveness. Nobody spotted that Q. 13, on the social consequences of affluence, might have been a better place to discuss youth culture.

The general standard of knowledge was good, and most essays were well expressed. However, there was a tendency to reheat tutorial essays for some questions. In answering Q. 11, on multiculturalism, many candidates trotted out stock essays on immigration, which did not say anything about multiculturalism. Likewise, Q. 5, which asked how the aims and priorities of feminists changed, was often answered in terms of the divisions within inter-war feminism, with little sense of change over time. Surprisingly, almost no students ventured beyond the 1950s to discuss second-wave feminism. In general, the Board's advice for students of this paper in future years is to be more adventurous in their choices of question, and to pay closer attention to the exact wording of questions.

General History I: The Transformation of the Ancient World, 370-900

There were 81 candidates in total taking GH I; 71 were in the History main school and 10 Joint Schools. Of these 81, 18 were awarded marks over 70 by the first marker (15 in the Main School, 5 women, 10 men); 48 received marks between 60 and 69; and 5

obtained marks between 50 and 59. Put another way, no candidate came remotely close to failing this paper, the vast majority were able to answer the questions with genuine competence and a basic awareness of the complexity of some of the issues involved, but very few candidates truly excelled (only 3 of the 18 marks above 70 were above 75).

Of the 20 questions set, 5 received the lion's share of attention: there were over 40 answers each on ethnicity in the post-Roman West, and (hearteningly) on Islam; over 20 answers each on Vikings, the Church and the Fall of Rome, and the rise of the Carolingians. Only one other question—to do with rulership—reached double figures (12). Six questions on religion and culture received a total of 23 answers between them; three on social/economic history received a total of 14 answers. There were 5 answers on ninth-century Byzantium, and 5 on material culture. Two questions received no answers: one on the slave trade, and (disappointingly), the question on gender.

On the 'big' questions, the quality of the answers reflected the overall spread of the marks. On ethnicity, in particular, almost all of the candidates were able to explain some of the debated issues around the construction of identity, but very few of them were able to take the analysis any further. Answers on Islam were livelier, with a greater diversity of well-expressed opinion, as was also in the case of answers on the Carolingians. Some of the very best answers were offered in response to the 'minority' questions, and to the more difficult of these, such as the comparative question on cities in 370 and 900. In the final version of the question paper, this was in fact the only question to encourage broad comparative thinking.

Overall the conclusion one can draw is that students are well-prepared to sit this paper—but we should also consider the possibility that we selling them short, not least in the exam room. GH I works in the lecture room and the tutorial because of the vistas it can open up across centuries and continents. Come the exam, however, a 'safety first' mentality appears to prevail, with its attendant tangible benefits and hidden costs. If the function of the Preliminary Examination is to establish a threshold of competence, then all is well. But if the function of the first year and its exam is to render vivid to students the difference between school and university, and to open up for them dramatically new horizons of intellectual possibility, then, on the evidence of this paper at least, we are failing them.

General History II: Medieval Christendom and its Neighbours 1000-1300.

Sixty-three candidates (of whom 11 were in the joint schools) sat this paper, and the overall standard was high. Fifteen candidates achieved a distinction, while only twelve received a mark below 60% (and of these most showed the potential for higher marks in the future). Many candidates, not only those achieving the highest marks, were able to make the required broad comparisons between several different regions over long periods of time, and many were also able to use knowledge of primary sources to support detailed case studies within those broad comparisons. At the weaker end there were still too many candidates who did not appreciate the need to deal with the whole of Europe (and beyond) and with the whole period, or who just didn't have the knowledge to do so. Making sure all candidates understand that this paper is not a history of Capetian France is something that tutors could usefully do.

Every question was attempted by at least one candidate, though there was a very uneven split between politics and religion (very popular), and culture, society and economy (not very popular). Questions on love/friendship/sexuality, the pan-European economy, lords and peasants, and banking and money only received one answer each. Questions on social elites, women, the rhetoric of war and religion, law, and architecture each received fewer than five answers. Questions on romance and chivalric literature, the popularity of Christianity, coercion and persuasion, and ethnic identity received between five and nine answers. The question on papal government received fourteen answers. Questions on ideals of monarchical power and crusading each received fifteen answers. That on religious orders, seventeen answers. That on growth and centralization of government, twenty answers. That on Christian co-existence with other religions, twenty-three answers. The most popular question was heresy, with forty-five answers.

Many candidates attempting the political questions were well-armed with case studies of Capetian France, Salian and Staufien Germany, Byzantium, and Sicily, but it was notable that non-royal polities barely featured at all, which is odd for a period in which so much of the exercise of power was non-royal. There was also little or nothing on northern and eastern Europe. This may be something that tutors and lecturers would wish to address. Where candidates were able to rethink their material and provide a direct answer to the question, they did very well, but where they regurgitated a tutorial essay on, for example, the inexorable rise of the French monarchy (surely tutors are not waving this sort of thing through?), they did less well. There is a danger that writing about politics produces for-and-against 'balance sheets' instead of thoughtful essays. Future candidates might like to think about broadening their knowledge base beyond the obvious examples, and applying some critical thought to the basic categories like power, the state, politics, lordship, elites.

Those candidates answering questions on religion also frequently had a good range of case studies upon which they could draw. The question on religious co-existence produced some particularly good answers that touched on the Mongols, Sicily, the crusades, Iberia, Mediterranean trade and so on. That on religious orders was largely well-answered, but highlighted the need for students to provide themselves with knowledge about a wider range of examples. The question on heresy caused some to get tangled in knots in dealing with the concept of religious debate, and there were some lamentable mis-remembered re-hashed lecture notes, but again, many candidates were able to answer with imagination and thought. Particular praise must be given to those who attempted less canonical topics, displaying knowledge about medieval culture, society and economy that can only have come from a sustained and personal engagement with the secondary literature; praise is also due to those who applied critical thought to the definitions and concepts that shape the literature, and to those who made sensible use of theoretical reading.

General History III: Renaissance, Recovery and Reform, 1400-1650

71 students took the paper, including 16 from the Joint Schools. 10 students secured marks in the Distinction band; of the remainder, all but 7 secured marks in the 60s. All questions attracted some answers; the most popular questions were those on social policies, art, Catholicism, and rebellions, while Universities, the 'Scientific Revolution' and religious radicals elicited least interest.

Weaker answers failed to engage with the terms of the questions set, offering (for example) generalized overviews of women's history in Q. 3 with no reference to the concept of gender as required by the question. Others restricted themselves – sometimes explicitly – to a limited subset of the necessary material: several candidates who answered Q. 10 on art focused only on the High Renaissance in Italy, for instance, while few who answered Q. 5 on social policy discussed developments both before 1500 and after 1550. In some cases, essays were marked down for errors, inconsistencies, or conceptual limitations. But a pleasing number of answers were impressively well-informed, illustrating their arguments with material from the full chronological and geographical range of the paper, and alert to the main historiographical debates in the recent literature. The best were well structured, analytical, and elegantly written. Generally, in fact, this was a good set of scripts, suggesting that the current structure of the paper continues to introduce students effectively to the early-modern world.

General History IV: Society, Nation, and Empire 1815-1914

75 candidates (17 of them joint schools) sat the paper this year, and attempted a wide range of questions. Only two attracted no takers (Q. 14 on religious minorities and Q. 24 on public architecture), with Q. 8 on bureaucracies, Q. 19 on colonized peoples, Q. 20 on evolutionary ideas and Q. 23 on modernism only attracting a couple of takers each. Conversely, Q. 5 on the bases of aristocratic power, Q. 9 on revolutions, Q. 13 on liberals, Q. 15 on women and Q. 18 on empire all attracted at least 15 takers. Q. 10 on secularisation proved to be by far the most popular question on the paper, and it was therefore regrettable that so many candidates appeared to equate 'religion' with Christianity and, in many cases, with Catholicism: a more sophisticated awareness of the different issues affecting different faith groups in this period would be welcome. In general, the standard was quite high given the challenging nature of this paper. Only the best candidates, however, gave real thought to issues of change over time and national/ regional specificities, or considered how problematic any Europe wide generalizations might be. The best essays did take these issues into account, and made good use of the opportunity to reflect comparatively. More generally, the appeal of Q. 18 on Empire suggested a broad awareness of international as well as European developments. Some candidates also incorporated the experiences of the United States, Japan and India into their answers to the less explicitly extra-European questions, although this posed particular problems of interpretation and argument.

Optional Subject 1: Theories of State

The 90 candidates this year were exactly split between the main school and the joint schools (the overwhelming majority of the latter History and Politics candidates.) Overall, we were impressed by the quality of the papers in Theories of State this year. Certain questions were perhaps over-answered and in standard ways (this was true, for example, of the importance of the middle classes in Aristotle), but on the whole we were pleased by candidates' willingness to do comparative questions and to branch out into less well-explored areas, such as gender. There were perhaps too many dismissive and simplistic analyses of Marx. Virtually all the candidates engaged with key concepts, and had read the texts with care and enthusiasm. Those who had done substantial extra reading generally did better, as secondary texts in political

thought tended to enrich their understanding; but there also some who presented their own original readings who earned distinctions. Those who did less well did not deploy specific arguments or quotations. Because they stayed at an unhelpful level of generality, they were marked down.

Optional Subject 10: Revolution and Empire in France, 1789-1815

This remains a very popular Optional Subject, with 38 takers in total. As ever, there were some very good papers but the overwhelming majority were solid rather than stellar. In general, there is a sense that this optional subject does not encourage candidates to think across the whole period or to situate the questions on individual topics within a broader historiography. Only one candidate answered any of the three questions that addressed the period as a whole (Qs. 12, 13 and 14), with Qs. 13 and 14 attracting no takers. More generally, questions that gestured towards the historiography were often disappointingly answered: most who answered Q. 3 did not understand what was meant by the 'men of 1789'; answers on the 'popular movement' were surprisingly ignorant of the contentious historiographical debate around this phenomenon; and questions that provided an opportunity to consider the social v. political v. cultural interpretations of the French Revolution (or at least mention them in passing) usually failed to elicit replies that did so. As in previous years, Burke, Sieyes and the Napoleonic texts were relatively well used; the Lucas compilation rather less so – although answers that did make use of these documents were usually the better for it.

Optional Subject 12: The Romance of the People: The Folk Revival from 1760 to 1914

There were fifteen takers for this paper, a pleasingly substantial figure for a new course. Of the fifteen students, four obtained distinction marks, and four others were hovering close by, an impressive performance but this is indicative of a strongly engaged set of students. There were no marks below 60. The paper was chronologically and geographically wide-ranging, taking students to relatively unknown historical locations such as Finland and Norway, as well as introducing them to unfamiliar historical sources such as fairy tales, classical music, and film. None of this seems to have unnerved or confused them, and students made excellent use of the primary sources. The Grimms in particular received detailed attention, but some students used the musical sources to very interesting effect. The overall performance suggests that students can be stimulated by cultural historical topics.

Answers did congregate around a handful of questions (Qs. 2, 3, 5 and 11), and some questions were not attempted (Qs. 4, 9, 12, 13, 14). This is disappointing but not surprising: because this was a new paper, there was a strong level of coordination between the tutors teaching it, with the result that some topics that form part of the curriculum were not attempted in tutorial essays. It is also noticeable that students chose questions that directly referred to those set texts which had been the centre of class discussion, and were less willing to tackle the more thematic questions.

Optional Subject 14: The Rise and Crises of European Socialisms: 1881-1921

The paper aims to engage students with a fairly wide range of texts, so as to involve them at some level with the 'intellectual life' of socialism and its opponents in late nineteenth / early twentieth-century Europe. There is considerable attention given to social history and comparative analysis, both international and transnational. Broadly speaking, the paper seeks to understand the rise of socialism not as an automatic consequence of proletarianisation – though this is a conditioning factor to be explored – but rather as a consequence of the failure of liberalism to thoroughly subordinate the executive state to civil society. There developed, therefore, a new mode of radicalism that attempted to speak for the urban classes most excluded and feared by official political society.

In this first year, eleven students elected to take this paper, and 10 sat the exam. Four candidates achieved a mark of distinction, and the rest were in the 60s. All fourteen questions on the paper were attempted, with a focus on Q. 6, "The Jew has been impregnated by his religion with a sense of social righteousness." [BEER]. How adequately does this explain the prominence of Jewish people in the socialist movement?; Q. 7 'Did the existence of militarism and imperialism strengthen or weaken socialism?'; and Q. 14 'Why did the Vienna International fail to carve out a viable space between Communism and Social Democracy?'

Candidates were encouraged to maximise use of set texts, and were duly rewarded for doing so. The best candidates made full use of the set texts, showed knowledge of the entire period and wrote with a certain passion (not bias) and engagement. Weaker answers were perhaps a little glib, and sometimes unduly dismissive of some of the set texts. It is important that candidates across the three answers show awareness of the evolution of socialism in the period, from 'orthodoxy' through revisionism to bolshevism; that they note well heterodox socialisms, notably anarchism and revolutionary syndicalism; that they pay attention to socialist debates over how power might be seized from recalcitrant elites; that they are aware of debates on militarism and imperialism; and that they discuss socialism in relation to non-class identities, such as gender, religion, race or nation. While the set texts were very well used as a rule, more use should be made of events and incidents from the politics of the period to illustrate the context of socialist debates. For example, the 1905 revolution in Russia highlighted problems of reform and insurrection. Similarly, candidates should show awareness of the historiography of industrialisation, class identity formation and national contexts. This last was probably the biggest weakness.

Overall, candidates performed creditably and evinced enthusiasm for the topic. It was a successful first year.

Approaches to History

142 candidates sat this paper, answering a wide range of questions. The Sections on Anthropology and History, Art and History and Gender and History received the most attention. Only one question (Q. 10) was not attempted by any of the candidates, and only very few candidates attempted Qs. 6, 9, 12, 13, 14, 17, 19 or 26. The most popular questions were Q. 15 on the value of visual evidence to the historian, and Q.

21 on the ways religious systems have affected women. However, many of the responses these two questions elicited were narrow and superficial. Frequently, answers to Qu. 15 on visual evidence simply catalogued different kinds of visual evidence, without really considering their relative usefulness, or the kinds of question different kinds of visual source might help to answer. With very few exceptions, candidates who chose to write on the relationship between women and religious systems used 'religious systems' as synonymous with 'Christianity'; very few considered whether what they were describing might be specific to Christianity, or to a particular branch of Christianity in a particular period and place; answers which attempted to consider other religious systems were few and far between. The most successful essays in answer to both these and other questions, were those which attended to the specific characteristics of the historical examples they used to construct their arguments, and considered how the Approach under discussion might add to, or shape understanding of the past. The weaker essays tended to summarize the methodology or theoretical principles of the Approach they were considering, without applying them to historical questions or examples, and suggested that candidates had not thought much about how adopting a particular Approach might influence their own understanding of different periods and places.

Historiography: Tacitus to Weber

There were 75 candidates for the paper in the main school, and 14 in the joint schools, of whom 4 were with Ancient History, 1 with Economics, and 9 with Politics. Whilst a satisfying number gained first class marks in the paper, far too many gained marks under 60. This is a paper in which strong candidates tend to do very well, and in which weaker ones are somewhat exposed; the majority perform adequately to rather well. Historiography is a properly demanding paper, in which undergraduates are encouraged to think for themselves, and to use classic texts as the instruments through which to consider a multiplicity of the many issues raised by the serious study of History. The best candidates seized the opportunity, and wrote with conviction and often with elegance and accuracy of expression; clearly defined argument is to be greatly recommended in approaching this paper, as there is absolutely no room in it for waffle, or, indeed, for any lack of conceptual clarity whatsoever. Exposition is not enough; analysis is paramount. All too many candidates attempted to call up the ghosts of tutorial essays rather than engaging with the actual questions that confronted them; to change the metaphor, there was a tendency to present tepid oven-ready meals, which, as is usually the case, were totally lacking in intellectual nutrition, and which all too frequently lacked the vital, and sometimes even the necessary, ingredients. There was a notable bunching of questions, and a regularity of approach that could become, on occasion, depressing for the examiner. The best candidates read the texts both in context and as instances of historical reflection, marrying this approach in suitably considered and frequently illuminating answers. As ever, candidates should be encouraged to answer the questions asked, rather than the ones they wanted to be there.

Quantification in History

Fourteen students sat the paper for Quantification in History. The paper was divided into two sections as customary: Part One involving the application of statistics in calculation and comparison, and Part Two the interpretation of statistical materials. In both parts five questions were offered of which the students had to choose two each, means four in total. The most popular questions were on regression analysis, box-plot analysis, and the Chi-Square measure of bivariate association. However, overall the students answered each of the different questions on aspects such as the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, partial correlation or the independent samples t-test for two means. This indicates the wide comprehension that the students compiled. Correspondingly, in most cases the students demonstrated a very good knowledge in applying the various areas of statistical analysis and interpretation. Examination scripts were clearly presented with a sophisticated depiction of the results. Only a few transcription mistakes occurred, but those students who slipped up commented the resulting erroneous results in a high scholarly manner. In general, also the level of historical interpretation was – with a few exceptions on one particular question – very good. Thus, overall, all students performed well; various did so at a very high standard, and some even with distinction, although it clearly was a challenging examination.

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