



A-level
History

7042/2A

Report on the Examination

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General

The vast majority of students sitting this examination were well prepared and examiners were pleased to see that they had revised thoroughly and could deploy a good range of relevant material about the topics on the paper. Time was well managed, with very few students not attempting to answer all of the questions required by the rubric. Some students decided to start with the essays before attempting the compulsory source question. This approach is perfectly acceptable, students just need to remember to label their answers clearly and it is very helpful for the examiner if they can leave sufficient space between their answers for comments to be added. A minority had poor written communication skills, including grammar and legibility, which does make assessing extended answers more difficult, as does extensive use of asterisks and not crossing out rough working and essay plans. A number of students had clearly engaged with wider academic reading on the topics, which was sometimes well used in their answers, though historians should not be used in lieu of factual historical information, and the use of historiography is not required for even the highest marks, it is the student's own analysis and evaluation which is being tested and rewarded.

Question 01

With this question, students were required to evaluate the value of three separate sources in relation to an issue – the reign of King John. They were not asked to compare the given sources and those who did wasted valuable time, although they were not penalised for so doing. The answer did not require an introduction or an overall conclusion, but some concluding judgement on each source in relation to the question posed was helpful to meet the criteria for the highest marks.

Source A posed some problems for students when it came to the discussion of provenance. The author here was an unknown Flemish chronicler and those who scored highly tended to discuss the issue of his anonymity or the fact that he would not have been present in England to witness some of the events that he describes. Quite a number of students seemed confused about where Flanders is geographically and thus offered some not very convincing comments on how a Flemish chronicler would be biased in favour of the French. The content of the source was generally well understood, and students were able to deploy lots of relevant examples to support the view of John as a 'nasty' character. Strictly speaking, this question was about the 'reign of King John' and so discussion of his behaviour in England, with regards to his English barons, was what examiners were expecting. Many students discussed events from John's rule in his French territories (such as the Lusignan Affair or the murder of Arthur) and was credited as general evidence of John's poor behaviour. However, it is worthwhile emphasising to students that the Angevins were only kings in England and that their rule was not the same across their territorial holdings.

Source B offered students lots of opportunities, which they took, to use their knowledge of John's quarrel with the Papacy and his treatment of the English Church in their answers. Some of the knowledge deployed here was very good indeed, with students recognising that John's relationship with the Church did improve after 1213. Some students became a bit muddled as to exactly who was writing to whom and there was a tendency to assume that this letter was designed to be read aloud. This is an assertion that students made and was rather unconvincing. If a letter is described as an 'open letter' then this would be a fair conclusion to draw, but otherwise letters are probably intended to be more personal. Some students became distracted by the reference to Thomas Becket's death and spent time discussing this- when all comments needed to relate obviously and directly to the specific issue in the question- ie John.

Source C seemed to confuse some students who placed it after the agreement of Magna Carta and thus spent much time discussing events from the French invasion and the Civil War. However, those who could recognise that this chronicle pre-dated the Magna Carta agreement tended to be able to assess the source effectively. There were some very impressive answers where students showed that they had researched key Angevin chroniclers like Wendover and this really helped them to develop their analysis in a very convincing way. However, those who knew nothing from their own knowledge about Wendover were still able to make very sensible comments about how, for example, as a monk, he would probably not be very positive about John due to his treatment of monks during the Interdict.

The best answers offered a nuanced evaluation of both provenance and content of the sources, using them holistically as a pair, rather than dealing with them entirely separately. Formulaic, rote-learned approaches were much less effective. A significant number of students were able to identify features about provenance (eg that Source C was written by a monk) but then were not able to evaluate this beyond a simple comment that ‘he was there at the time and so this source is accurate.’ This approach often leads to much speculation around provenance which is not then borne out by the content of the source. Simply identifying provenance and making vague assertions about tone does not garner many marks. An example of an approach which would score highly would be a student who considered that Source C suggests that John is deceitful, and that William Marshal was lied to by him and manipulated. To an extent this is quite valuable as own knowledge tells us that John did, indeed, go back on his promises that he made to the barons. However, a strong answer would also be able to bring provenance to bear here: Wendover wrote his chronicle with full hindsight and knowledge of what did happen and thus this could reduce the value of the source as perhaps John did not intend to be deceitful in May 1215- Wendover’s opinion has been influenced by later events, such as John’s position at the time of his death and Marshal’s own regency of England.

It was disappointing to see a persistent minority making very few references to ‘value’ at all and conflating this with validity, utility, reliability and accuracy, which are not the same thing. It is vital that regular links to the wording of the specific question are made. It is also worth encouraging students to consider that Component 1 extract skills (‘how convincing’) and Component 2 source skills (‘how valuable’) are not the same and the terminology is not interchangeable.

Question 02

This was a popular choice of essay question, and students chose to approach it in a number of ways, all of which were valid. Some students focused on the ways in which Henry relied upon the Church versus ways in which the Church hindered his attempts to assert royal authority. Others wrote a section considering the role of the Church and then compared this with other methods used by Henry to establish his position in England, such as his destruction of adulterine castles and his judicial reforms. The best answers showed conceptual awareness of the role of the English Church in England in the 12th century: for example, by students showing that judicial and financial reforms would have been impossible for Henry to implement without the help of educated clerics such as Bishop Nigel of Ely. Discussion of Becket and the fact that he became a problem for Henry after 1162 was, of course, relevant, but examiners were pleased to see that very few students just lapsed into a generic, pre-prepared Becket essay.

Question 03

This was the least popular choice of essay question, but was generally answered well by those students who chose it. The vast majority of answers saw the students considering how Henry re-established his position in England (eg via the Assize of Northampton, the Assize of Arms, the Assize of Woodstock) fairly successfully and comparing this with his more limited successes on the continent, in particular with regard to his sons and the French king. Students could just discuss England, but often this approach lacked the depth and balance required for the higher marks.

Question 04

This essay was very popular, with 85% of students choosing to answer it. There were some very impressive answers where students showed excellent knowledge of the preparations that Richard made for England, with students often concluding that, despite his absentee kingship, he did not neglect England. Some students limited their marks by only considering the period 1191-93. Others became confused about the various justiciars, sometimes assuming that Walter of Coutances and Hubert Walter were the same person. Equally, some showed a lack of understanding of the role of justiciars entirely, not realising that England had an administrative system prior to Richard's reign whereby the justiciar undertook much of the day-to-day administration of the country. There was some discussion of Richard's commitment to crusading or France through material such as the sheer cost of Chateau Gaillard or the fact that Richard chose to take the cross even before Henry's death (ie when his own succession was not assured). However, some students did then lapse into describing events of the Third Crusade or the various stages of the war with Philip, forgetting the need for regular analytical links back to the question.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.