
AS-LEVEL HISTORY

Component 7041/1B
Report on the Examination

Specification 7041
June 2016

Version: 1.0

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Component 7041/1B

Spain in the Age of Discovery, 1469–1598

Component 1B: The establishment of a ‘New Monarchy’, 1469–1556

General Comments

Medieval Spain has not previously been examined at AS yet there was an obvious correlation with centres which had previously embraced HIS3C and the depth and quality of the majority of responses seen reflected this. The vast majority of students were able to demonstrate what they knew, understood and could do in engaging fully with the demands of the question paper. Most wrote with knowledge and confidence, articulate and thoughtful answers which demonstrated the work of centres and the students’ willingness and enthusiasm to engaged in the subject and the inherent issues. There were some students whose ineffective time management defined their overall performance, running out of time or hastily truncating higher level opportunities in weak evaluations and conclusions. Many wrote extended responses with the additional time given yet a few wrote to excess with narrative responses, lacking definition or the requisite interpretive skills to take fuller advantage of the higher levels in Question 01.

Overall students coped well with the new format of the examination which demanded comparison between extracts, an understanding of historical context and interpretations. The new format helped to differentiate between students who were more confident than others in the reading of the extracts placing the weaker students in the lower levels. Many may well need to move away from simplistic references to “omission” as an effective comparison and interpretive tool, similarly many wrote extensively showcasing their own knowledge whilst not fully developing the interpretation of the extracts in order to articulate the convincing views expressed. The essays were focused and balanced, the most successful demonstrating clear supported and sustained judgements linking effectively to the question.

Section A

Question 01

It was clear that the vast majority of students were able to consider the two extracts by Hunt and Kamen in turn, making some effective comparative comment in their responses and developing this further in their conclusions displaying a demonstrable understanding of the respective interpretations in the two extracts and showing an understanding of their respective historical content within a secure and supported context. Knowledge of the crucial years of Charles’ reign was extensive reflecting the confidence of the vast majority of the students: There however remained a small minority of students whose responses remained largely content driven, lacking a fuller understanding of “the more convincing view” and quite reliant on “omission” as a determining factor in interpretation.

Examiners were looking for three key elements in student answers:

i) An understanding of the interpretations in the two extracts

The best students successfully identified the overall interpretation of each extract and explained it using effective and relevant own knowledge. They were equally able to acknowledge other views and arguments to evaluate, demonstrating high-level skills of reading with understanding. Whilst there was some evidence of a more mechanistic approach with the potential to offer a less effective interpretation. The complexity of the interpretation of comparative views was not appreciated by weaker students who usually addressed only one or two statements in each extract, relying on the sin of omission: 'Extract A is less convincing because it does not mention'.

(ii) An understanding of the historical context

The more confident students offered a cogent argument by both supporting the argument and challenging it. Charles I provided both a wealth and depth of own knowledge from well prepared students able to manipulate it in response to the skills required and the demands of the question. Precision was clearly demonstrated by the majority of students here in order to provide balanced and detailed argument within a clearly defined historical context. Weaker students characteristically demonstrated little precision or wider understanding of the need to offer a convincing interpretive and balanced approach. The majority understood the direction of the question to define the nature and success of Charles' royal authority in Spain in the 1520s.

(iii) Comparison between the two extracts

This had the potential to be problematic for weaker students whose approach to comparison extended to assertive phrases and reliance upon the content of the extract with little supporting contextual own knowledge. The most able were capable of recognising the need to judge the interpretations themselves drawing on effective and relevant analysis to provide a meaningful and substantiated judgement – many arguing that Kamen's view was the more convincing because of his critical approach, challenging assumptions about the degree of royal authority and underlining the continuity of the rule of the Catholic kings.

Section B

Question 02

The focus of the question was the impact of the religious policies of Ferdinand and Isabella for Spain. The argument that they had 'harmful consequences' required consideration leading to effective and supported evaluation. The vast majority of students were able to show demonstrable knowledge and understanding of the nature of the religious policies of Ferdinand and Isabella noting the four key elements: The Reconquest, the respective expulsions of the Jews and latterly Moors, the role of the Inquisition and the reforms of Cisneros in strengthening the independence of a Spanish Catholic Church under greater royal authority. This was acknowledged and students were awarded appropriately. The 'harmful consequences' was an effective discriminator which allowed students to explore a wide range of factors and reach supported and sustained judgments within a clear balanced structure. Those achieving the higher levels demonstrated the ability to analyse and evaluate key features such as: The economic and social impact of the expulsions, especially in Granada after 1499, the rise of the power and influence of the Inquisition, a hard line

approach to Moors in Granada and Castile led to considerable social tensions and after 1500 violent revolts. The respective attitudes of the pious Isabella and the pragmatic Ferdinand led to conflicting approaches to the treatment of Moors and Jews and especially Mudejars in Aragon. Ferdinand would allow the return of Jews especially as Conversos.

Yet equally most were able to a greater or lesser extent offer a challenge to the view by citing evidence against 'harmful consequences': The Reconquest did officially end convivencia and establish Catholic orthodoxy throughout Spain from 1492 creating a 'unity of purpose'. The Catholic Church would play a leading role in the creation of the Spanish American empire. Whilst Isabella was a driving force for reform. Cisneros sought greater religious education, reform of the clergy and religious houses whilst promoting greater independence of an emerging Spanish Catholic Church under increasing royal authority from the authority of Rome.

The vast majority of the students were able to reach considered conclusions as to the impact of Ferdinand and Isabella's religious policies, not only religious but economic and social and a large proportion were equally able to demonstrate the significance of the death of Isabella in 1504 and consideration of later developments up to 1516. There remained a small minority who sought essentially narrative responses with little developed understanding of 'harmful consequences' or who relied on largely unsupported and assertive conclusions. This remained a very accessible and popular question. The vast majority of responses used chronology and detail to sustain convincing arguments leading to equally convincing judgements.

Question 03

The focus of the question was the consequences of Spanish rule in the Americas between the arrival of Cortes in Mexico in 1519 and the end of the reign of Charles I in 1556. Not as popular as Question 02 nevertheless was well attempted by the majority of students who were able to respond largely successfully to the demands of the question arguing the premise that Spain gained little from its American empire. The more sophisticated responses demonstrated clear and detailed knowledge tempered with contextual and in the case of the highest level responses, conceptual understanding, clearly making links across a range of relevant factors revealing understanding of breadth and change over time. The better responses acknowledged what Spain gained, or not, from the American empire, was it well governed or not and did the wealth benefit Spain or ultimately prove a costly burden. Many students approached the morality of the Spanish exploitation of the Americas and the treatment of and impact upon the indigenous populations, this was acknowledged and rewarded appropriately within AO1.

The vast majority made reference to: the slow and cumbersome administration, based ineffectually in Seville with little regard for the interests of the colonists. Much of the vast wealth was lost to the financing of Charles' imperial wars, leading only to underinvestment in the internal economy, inflation and royal debt. The exploitation led to uncontrolled exploitation by ruthless conquistadores and demographic disaster which fuelled further economic decline. The vast majority of students were able to effectively demonstrate relevant counter arguments, making links to causation, consequence, change, difference and significance. Most recognised that the wealth was unrivalled making Spain the wealthiest Christian state in Europe and the pre-eminent military power. The administration became the bed rock of strengthening royal authority and the Crown's monopoly. The wealth sustained Charles' role as king of Spain and as Holy Roman Emperor. The flow of silver became a reliable and predictable source of wealth. The Crown's authority was secure after 1535 in Mexico and by 1551 in Peru. Good answers were able to demonstrate effective balanced and well supported responses leading to informed and well-articulated judgements at level 4 and above, Weaker responses offered little accurate and precise supporting detail with analysis

confined to largely unsubstantiated assertion. The focus of the question was an effective discriminator in defining weak, average and very good responses.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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