
A-level History

7042/1B Spain in the Age of Discovery, 1469–1598
Report on the Examination

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General Comments

This was the first year of the new A level specification on Spain in the Age of Discovery 1469-1598. It was pleasing to note that there were many students who were well prepared and able to write with confidence and enthusiasm on this period they had been studying. The breadth nature of the component allowed students to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding within the assessment objectives in a positive and determined manner. Section A Question 01 addressing A03 was an exploration of the importance of American silver from the Indies for Spain. Many students offered extensive contextual own knowledge in support of their understanding and evaluation of the arguments presented within the three extracts. Many students could access a range of questions within Section B. There was a demonstrable spread across the three essay choices on social and economic change within Spain between the years 1469-1516, Charles I and the extent of stable and efficient royal government within the years 1517-1555 and the extent to which the religious policies of Philip II were “ill-judged and ineffective.

Most students revealed a good understanding of the demands of the questions selected and could deploy specific and precise knowledge in an analytical way to reach partially substantiated judgements to well substantiated judgements. Most demonstrated an ability to think across a broad period of history selecting relevant examples to support personal evaluation. There remained however, a number who sought to override the issues and concepts with content. This was particularly noted in 03. Whilst 04 was the least popular it was generally very well attempted by those who clearly understood the demands of the question, writing with clarity and perception on the nature of Philip II’s religious policy both domestically and internationally. The least successful in terms of student performance was 02 which by its nature constrained some students who were determined to write on the Crown’s relationship with the nobility or who had written extensively on the economy in Question 01 and had little developed understanding of the conceptual links across the two factors, creating an imbalance and paucity of relevant knowledge within their answers. Student knowledge of change and continuity the question addressed within A01, was subsequently disappointing. Those, who despite effective revision, still under-performed, may have failed to take on board some of the new A-level requirements.

Section A

Question 01

Students were required to evaluate three separate extracts in relation to an issue – the importance of American silver from the Indies to Spain. The students had to access the extent to which the interpretations were convincing by drawing on contextual knowledge to corroborate and challenge the arguments presented in the respective extracts from: Parry, Scammell and Dunn. They were not asked to compare the extracts, nor evaluate their respective provenance, tone or bias. Those that did so wasted valuable time for no reward, though they were not penalised for doing so. The answer did not require an introduction – nor an overall conclusion. However, some concluding judgement on each extract in relation to the question posed was helpful to meet the criteria for the highest marks.

The most obvious differentiator between student responses to this question lay in the ability to identify and address the overall argument raised by each extract. In some responses, there was a propensity to adopt a mechanistic line by line approach which failed to demonstrate an overall understanding, or kept the answer focused on the A03 demands of the question.

For the benefit of those preparing students for the future, it might be worth reiterating the importance of first considering the topic to be addressed - which follows the “in relation to...” in the question and then assimilating the whole extract before starting to write. Students should be reminded that the key argument of an extract does not necessarily appear in the first line.

On this year’s exam paper the overall argument put forward in extract A by Parry strongly suggested that the influx of American silver was “more imaginary than real” and that the impact on the economy “created more problems than it solved”. Extract B by Scammell argued that American silver was a great asset for Spain, providing an income that financed the creation of a vast Empire which in turn came to mean, “the empire meant wealth.” Extract C by Dunn created the argument that American silver was a universal panacea for the huge financial burden bequeathed to him by his father’s imperial policy, a legacy that American silver ultimately failed to resolve. Within the arguments clear links could be made to the international financial problems and the failure of a domestic Castilian economy, riven by social inflexibility and lack of inward investment exacerbated by regional inequalities and feudalism, which left it unable to respond positively to the challenges it faced.

Whilst many students understood the respective arguments and their validity when measured against a range of contextual factors few could make the necessary links. Too frequently students used the word “convincing either as a prefix or suffix with little evaluative appreciation, often claiming that historian A was wrong or they agreed with historian B without genuine analysis and evaluation of respective arguments and supporting contextual knowledge. Given the different interpretations with their very contradictory arguments, it was surprising how many students found all the extracts “convincing”. Whilst there needed to be a balanced evaluation, those who took the full interpretations of the extracts on board provided much more nuanced judgement, demonstrating understanding and cognizant reflection on the passages.

There were sub-arguments within each extract which the more able students discerned. However, it was not necessary to mechanistically comment on every statement often at great length and many that did, wrote copious, if descriptively, from their own knowledge, in some cases drawing on information better suited to Question 02. Effective discrimination and more judicious exercise of supporting own contextual knowledge was demanded. In this sense, some responses, lacked coherence and precision. Equally there appeared to be a paucity of detail relating to the relationship between finance and economic development, the scale of imported silver and the ability of the economy to process it effectively.

Some students, whilst often indiscriminating in their approach, nevertheless lacked precision. Others were careless in their reading of the extracts, failing to appreciate, particularly, the arguments by Dunn on the failure of Philip to manage imported wealth in respect to his growing foreign policy and subsequent wars.

Section B**Question 02**

The question addressed change and continuity and allowed students the opportunity to explore and reach judgements on the nature of changes both within the social structure of Castile and to a lesser extent Aragon and the nature of economic change and development during a period which was defined by extraordinary prime drivers to change within a framework of continuity. Whilst social structure remained fundamentally defined by traditional feudalism and the role of the nobility, this was not a political essay based on the relationship between the Crown and the ruling elites as many students were convinced it was, consequently, writing at great length describing that relationship almost to the exclusion of any other relevant social change/continuity. Equally many saw the importance of the Reconquest, the later Jewish expulsions and the subsequent Morisco expulsion in the early 1500's as social change but equally failed to link these events to the economic changes of the period, especially the Morisco expulsions which led to disastrous Castilian migration into Granada, devastating the agrarian economy. Whilst most debated the effects of Jewish expulsion, few sought to define it in terms of Castile and Aragon with little demonstrable understanding of post 1504. Whilst the discovery of the New World in 1492 was identified as a catalyst for fundamental change, its impact was not to be felt until the next reign. This was not fully appreciated by some students who sought to recycle the influx of New World wealth as defining both social and economic change between 1492-1516. Not the focus of the question.

Good answers demonstrated a clear knowledge and understanding of a balanced range of factors which could be interlinked between social and economic. Whilst there was no expectation of comprehensive or fully balanced responses, an assessment of the extent of social and economic change across an extended period from the mid-15th century, through the reigns of Ferdinand and Isabella, to the situation inherited by Charles I after 1516 was required to access the higher levels. Most students made the judgement that there was much more continuity than change within this period. Any argument was accepted so long as it was clearly supported and convincingly argued, avoiding long descriptions of the relationship between Crown and the nobility. The economic knowledge of many students, despite some being diverted into 01, remained weak.

Question 03

This question focused on the ability of Charles I to offer a more effective system of royal government whilst re-establishing stability after 1522. Students were expected to have presented a range of evidence and arguments assessing the extent of political stability and efficient government in Spain by 1529. The key words, "stable and efficient" relate to a single concept of effective government during the reign of Charles I. Students were rewarded either by bundling both terms together or by separating the strands, either approach was valid and rewarded appropriately.

Most students showed understanding and balance by acknowledging the period 1517-1522 as a period of political crisis, replaced between 1523-1527 by attempts to establish stable and efficient government. Early years reflect the unpopularity of Charles as a Habsburg inheriting Spain, by no means politically, socially and religiously peaceful and cohesive on his arrival in 1517. From 1522/3 after the revolts of the Germania and the Comuneros, inspired by the social and religious tensions Charles inherited, were suppressed, he embarked upon a period of reform of royal government, yet did this create a more stable and efficient style of royal government? Was the authority of Charles defined by autocratic power or effective government. Reforms included, strengthening of the existing conciliar system, redefining the established Cortes, relationship with the elites and

administration which was inherited by Charles. By 1529 Charles had made effective changes yet despite the stability of the state the government remained vulnerable, largely a consequence of economic and international constraints.

The more able students were defined by their ability to show skilful differentiation between “stable” and “efficient”. Offering a clear challenge to the premise by advocating the revolts were serious challenges to his royal authority, Charles was forced to make concessions to the elites and Imperial ambitions and consequent wars proved a burden on royal finances from which the reign never recovered. The judgements on the nature of the efficiency of the structure of government and its relationship with Charles as an absentee monarch after 1527 were discussed variously, the more able students were clear in their evaluation of the role of the Royal Secretaries, the new councils and the effectiveness of Charles’s succession of regents, especially Philip after 1543. Students needed to have a greater knowledge and understanding of Philip’s regency to deal effectively with this period when Charles was pre-occupied with imperial affairs.

Though well attempted by the majority, some students wrote at great length in a largely descriptive way of the events of 1517-1522 without clear links to the focus of the question or their relationship with the later changes. The relationship between Charles and the ruling elites similarly could have been more convincingly demonstrated. A small number of students were eloquent in their descriptions of the structure of Charles’s government and changes yet failed to evaluate more precisely on the focus of the question. Students who approached the question as intended, and balanced the ways in which stability and efficiency inter-reacted scored highly but to do this they needed to draw upon information and examples from across the whole period.

Question 04

Whilst attracting the smallest number of student responses, this question was well attempted. It polarised students, a small number of very weak offerings were nevertheless outweighed by a clear demonstrable majority of students, clearly well taught in this topic, placed as it is at the end of the specification. Detail had been learnt, and whilst there was an overload of knowledge it was very well directed and relevant, used to inform and support balanced approaches and secure individual judgements. An area of the specification which students cannot afford to neglect. Students were expected to be able to present a range of evidence and arguments to assess the religious policies of the Crown over the whole reign. The best answers provided breadth without the expectation of being wholly comprehensive. The key words, “ill-judged” and “ineffective” defined the focus of the question and the best answers addressed these, if not always in a completely balanced way. The best responses demonstrated through differentiated assessments change over time and/or aspects of religious policy that were successful. Equally, very able students demonstrated differentiation through policies that were ill-judged and consequently doomed to fail, or were ineffective because they were badly thought through, or constrained by external influences.

Most students demonstrated very good knowledge of both domestic and international religious policy. Internal policy was defined by Church reform, the role of the Jesuits, papal authority, the continuation of the Inquisition and the Morisco Revolt and the continuing rooting out of heresy, censorship, persecution and the eradication of effective Protestantism within Iberia. Internationally most students understood this was where ill-judged was essentially to be found, the Calvinist revolts in the Netherlands, France and the Wars of religion and the later war with Anglican England. Despite often lengthy descriptions of these politico-religious campaigns, understanding was ably demonstrated. There was a clear focus to the responses, where both aspects of the question were identified and evaluated, balanced responses, leading to effective evaluation and independent judgements.

Use of statistics

Statistics used in this report may be taken from incomplete processing data. However, this data still gives a true account on how students have performed for each question.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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