

GCSE (9–1)

Examiners' report

HISTORY B (SCHOOLS HISTORY PROJECT)

J411

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Introduction

Our examiners' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates. The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

Where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report. A full copy of the question paper can be downloaded from OCR.

Section A overview

The majority of candidates did well to respond to the initial, short questions and showed good knowledge of Viking features and geography. There was clear evidence that many candidates had been well prepared for the question relating to Bluetooth's reign and the theme of Christianity was the most common contextual example with some candidates explaining connectivity well. The summary question attracted many descriptions which had a focus on raids rather than settlement which meant that candidates did not progress through all levels of the mark scheme. The essay question regarding the Volga Vikings was slightly more popular than the alternative although both attracted some good contextual examples related to the question stem.

Question 1(a,b,c)

1 (a) Identify one way in which the Vikings were effective sailors.	[1]
(b) Name one place raided by Vikings from 793.	[1]
(c) Name one area settled by Vikings who crossed the Atlantic.	[1]

1(a) The majority of candidates answered this question with a solid historical example.

1(b) Most candidates identified accurately raided locations with some outside the stated time frame

1(c) Most candidates identified Greenland and some others misread this and did not focus on the Atlantic.

Question 2

2 Write a clear and organised summary that analyses Viking settlement in the British Isles after 865. Support your summary with examples. [9]

Candidates who answered this question effectively focused on the experience of settlement hinged on overwintering, aspects of Danelaw and the idea of assimilation. Candidates who approached this question from the perspective of violence and raids were often not able to convert this experience to the development of settlement. What was striking was that candidates chose from such a wide variety of historical knowledge to explain including law, customs, religion, trade, dress and appearance. This is to the credit of centres as this made for a diverse range of responses and a nuanced understanding of settlement.

The key concept in this question is the notion of change and continuity. Many candidates did well to explain the changes made to society by using Danelaw as an example. However some candidates found it difficult to separate this question from earlier violent raids and a popular misconception involved giving examples which occurred before 865. The teaching point here is to ensure that candidates have a good grasp of timelines so they can use relevant knowledge for each question.

The biggest problem with responses to this question was that some candidates were tempted to treat this exercise as a list which meant that they missed valuable opportunities to develop a conceptual understanding of settlement which is vital to progression through the mark scheme. The best answers focused on showing how Viking assimilation could be explained through cultural adjustments, overwintering, marrying and altering legislation over time. Many candidates explained how Jorvik was a good example of settlement but some did not sufficiently analyse the importance of this settlement of its nature.

Advice for Question 2

Advice for this question is to acknowledge the experience of successful candidates who tended to reach Level 3 when, commonly, three solid pieces of supporting evidence were used in their summary which showed a concrete understanding of the stem of the question. The contextual knowledge shown for this question in general was really positive and many candidates have obviously been prepared well for this exam, it was particularly pleasing to see some candidates make a distinction or describe an evolution between raids and settlement although some candidates found this confusing. Therefore, it would be a good teaching point to teach candidates the difference between the two and how the experience of the Vikings changed over time.

Question 3

3 What was the impact of Harald Bluetooth's reign upon Denmark? Explain your answer. [10]

Candidates answered this question well and many were able to give a second order concept substantiated with contextual knowledge from Bluetooth's reign. The majority of successful candidates deployed the conversion to Christianity as an effective example.

Candidates answered this question well and were able to use their explanatory skills effectively. There were a range of creditable examples of contextual knowledge that were assessed including the conversion to Christianity; shipbuilding and preparing the way for invasions by his son Sweyn Forkbeard; power as sole king, defence against outside pressures from other peoples e.g. Germans and Norwegians and evidence from forts at Trelleborg. However, as mentioned in the previous section, the most positive responses came from candidates who really explained the impact of Bluetooth's religious conversion as well as his commitment to connectivity across Europe. There were some fabulous examples of this explained and candidates needed to give multiple examples of impact to move to the top of the mark band.

The evidence that was most likely to show an understanding of the second order concept of consequence was the Christianisation of the Vikings and their future expansion. Some candidates explored the idea of expediency in the conversion to Christianity, as there were probably increasing numbers of Christians in Denmark anyway, and it helped secured the southern border against Otto.

The biggest problem that candidates faced was to misconstrue the importance of the anachronistic 'Bluetooth logo' from mobile phones. This may have been misunderstood by less able candidates who literally believed that Bluetooth's efforts in improving connectivity were due to technological advancements. There is a cautionary note to be sounded here to really check what candidates understand following any well-meaning stimulus related to this logo.

Advice for Question 3

The key advice to candidates, for this question is to ensure that they are fully explaining their evidence in reference to the question. This question does not require a list of evidence; it requires candidates to select the most applicable evidence and to explain this fully in reference to the question. The identified knowledge was an excellent feature of the exam this year and advice to centres is to take more time to consolidate how each action led to impact, as well as teaching the idea of anachronism and longer term impact if using the mobile phone symbol as part of the syllabus.

Question 4*

4* 'The success of the Volga Vikings was entirely due to their strengths as traders.' How far do you agree with this statement? Give reasons for your answer. [18]

Candidates gave a range of examples pertaining to strengths, for example the quality of their crafts and items traded from the homelands such as furs, honey, iron, leather, wool and slaves. They also carried effective weighing scales with them and were instrumental in the development of a 'bullion economy', and traded with both the Byzantine and Arab world. The experience of assessing candidate understanding of these strengths was that the most commonly well understood was the idea of specific items for trade such as furs, iron and slaves. Few candidates were able to give multiple examples of strengths outside of this one.

The best candidates were able to balance this success with grounds for disagreeing including sailing prowess, initial purpose of 'raiding' to the east, the warrior reputation, the Varangian guard and relying on plunder as a method of raising money. There was a significant contrast between candidates who answered this in more general terms relating to violence and those who gave specific examples of ways in which aggression was made manifest by the Vikings. The advice to centres is to check that candidates can qualify their judgements of Volga violence with more than one example which can bolster their explanations. What was most common was that candidates understood the Vikings were actually violent but did not support this with more than one piece of specific evidence.

The most common problem was that candidates occasionally missed reference to the Volga Vikings entirely and focused on other time periods and geographical areas; these generic answers missed the question and could not move beyond a general mark for description and in some cases received no marks due to generalisation.

Advice for Question 4

Candidates should aim to write a response with an element of balance to it. This doesn't mean they need the same amount of arguments on each side of their response but the other side of the argument should be considered, even if it is rejected. Candidates who performed well consistently linked their evidence back to the question. Candidates should aim to have a sustained argument throughout their response; generally speaking candidates who achieved full marks had a consistent argument throughout their essay so that their judgement was clear even before a conclusion had been written.

Question 5*

5* 'In the period c.750 to c.990 Vikings in Britain and France were aggressive raiders and nothing more.' How far do you agree with this view? Give reasons for your answer. [18]

Candidates gave a range of examples pertaining to aggression and there were some really good answers to this question which showed that centres had prepared candidates well. Good responses were able to explain examples of raids on monasteries and other settlements including Lindisfarne, the Siege of Paris 865 and the concept of plunder and slaving. There were very few candidates who were able to explain the societal and cultural pressures which explain raiding which may be a feature for future curriculum development in some centres as this would build a more complex understanding.

The best candidates were able to balance raiding with other features of the Viking nature. This included the spread of Christianity and lack of political cohesiveness in places like England. Adoption of societal elements in the countries they invaded e.g. evidence from Jorvik pointing to buildings being of Anglo-Saxon style and also Cnut recognising Anglo-Saxon law and customs. It is really important to state that there did not need to be a list of factors here but the most effective candidates were able to give a really measured view of the Vikings based on these examples and there were some really good justifications given at the end of the answer which, for some candidates, offered a sense of the multifaceted nature of Viking civilisation.

Advice for Question 5

Advice to centres is that candidates should aim to write a response with an element of balance to it. This doesn't mean they need the same amount of arguments on each side of their response but the other side of the argument should be considered, even if it is rejected. Candidates who performed well consistently linked their evidence back to the question. Candidates should aim to have a sustained argument throughout their response; generally speaking candidates who achieved full marks had a consistent argument throughout their essay so that their judgement was clear even before a conclusion had been written.

Section B overview

Candidates did well to explain the inference of the first historical source and many focused on the idea of brutality and impact with some success. The second evidence based question attracted a wide range of responses which varied in term of quality. The least successful answers reiterated the content of each piece of evidence and in particular, they did not offer insight or inference into the interpretation beyond a description. The better responses explained the value of each piece of evidence in turn and came to a cumulative or comparative judgement. The majority of candidates opted for the essay question rooted in the development of Spanish imperial pursuits and religious influence. These responses were good and many reflected the different drivers in Spain's ambitions in the West. On the other hand, many candidates who did the second essay question found it difficult to give meaningful examples of impact and often gave a description of events which did not graduate to explanation.

Question 6

6 What can Source A tell us about the extent and nature of Moctezuma's Aztec empire? Use the source and your own knowledge to support your answer. [7]

Candidates were able to access good marks for this question by using direct inference and contextual knowledge. This question was answered well when candidates linked key verbiage from the source with inferences of Moctezuma's empire and most commonly the brutal nature of this reign. The majority of candidates did really well to tie their evidence to the idea of extent and nature of empire and the more common of these themes to develop was the idea of the brutal nature of the empire.

Very few candidates were able to assert the critical provenance of this source to contextualise it as part of a wider rationale for Spanish colonial ambitions and the process of creating a historical narrative founded on the brutality of the conquered Aztecs.

Advice for Question 6

Candidates should not stray too much from the source which they have been given. That is the focal point of the question and therefore candidates are encouraged to use this and explain it in reference to the question showing their understanding of the source in hand.

Question 7

7 How useful are Sources B and C and Interpretation D for a historian studying the nature of Spanish rule in Mexico? In your answer, refer to the two sources and the interpretation as well as your own knowledge. [15]

Candidates who answered this effectively were able to explain how useful each source was for an historian. A limited number of candidates were able to access the highest marks for identifying the purpose and intended audience for each source. Interpretation D attracted a range of stock evaluation and was the least well used piece of historical evidence. In contrast, many candidates used Source B and C well and some candidates were able to draw a correlation between them in showing the developing nature of Spanish rule.

Advice for Question 7

Candidates should aim to explain all three of the interpretations/sources. They should aim to use quotes from these to support their points as this will ensure they remain focused on them throughout their response rather than veering towards contextual knowledge only. Candidates should be encouraged to deal with each of B, C and D separately as there is no requirement for candidates to compare and contrast the interpretations/sources. Candidates should explain inferences or the intended impact of the three interpretations/sources in reference to the topic in the question – in this instance Spanish rule, if they are to achieve the highest marks.

Question 8*

8* 'The most important reason for the Spanish expansion into the Caribbean and central America was the desire to spread the Christian faith.' How far do you agree with this view? [18]

Candidates who answered this question effectively did so by qualifying the nature of religious importance to the Spanish. Some candidates balanced this with concepts or imperialism and international rivalry. There were some really good responses written that centred on the Spanish ambitions overseas and in this region and theatre of the world to balance against a purely religious argument. Some candidates attempted to articulate the connection of both agendas to a varying extent.

Advice for Question 8

Candidates should aim to write a response with an element of balance to it. This doesn't mean they need the same amount of arguments on each side of their response but the other side of the argument should be considered, even if it is rejected. Candidates who performed well consistently linked their evidence back to the question. Candidates should aim to have a sustained argument throughout their response; generally speaking candidates who achieved full marks had a consistent argument throughout their essay so that their judgement was clear even before a conclusion had been written.

Question 9*

9* 'The massacre of Aztec nobles in May 1520 was a disaster for the Spanish.' How far do you agree with this view? [18]

A limited number of candidates answered this question and it was not answered well by many of those who selected it. Candidates were able to show balance by explaining the positive and negative effects of this event but often struggled to qualify the effects of the event rather than giving a narrative of what happened. These candidates did not access higher marks due to the descriptive nature of responses.

Advice for Question 9

Candidates should aim to write a response with an element of balance to it. This doesn't mean they need the same amount of arguments on each side of their response but the other side of the argument should be considered, even if it is rejected. Candidates who performed well consistently linked their evidence back to the question. Candidates should aim to have a sustained argument throughout their response; generally speaking candidates who achieved full marks had a consistent argument throughout their essay so that their judgement was clear even before a conclusion had been written.

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