

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)

- 1 (a) Identify **one** way in which the Vikings were effective sailors. [1]

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

Question 1 (b)

- (b) Name **one** place raided by Vikings from 793. [1]

Most candidates identified accurately raided locations with some outside the stated time frame.

Question 1 (c)

- (c) Name **one** area settled by Vikings who crossed the Atlantic. [1]

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; 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 my 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 they 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 with this answer 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 gained 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 candidates were able to explain examples of raids on monasteries and other settlements including Lindisfarne, the Siege of Paris 865 and explain 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

Candidates should aim to write a response with an element of balance to it, although this doesn't mean they need the same amount of arguments on each side of their response, 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 with the single source question and were confident to give a range of contextual features. There were occasions when the length of context outweighed the actual focus on the evidence which is a balance that candidates must look to strike. The multiple source and interpretation question was answered most commonly by the description or explanation of each piece of evidence in turn. However, many candidates did not explain the utility of the source and rather focused on reliability which meant they did not access the higher marks. The terror essay question was answered really well by the majority of candidates who selected it for completion showing a range of factors to qualify their judgement. The second essay question was less popular and some candidates did not adequately refer to this in a balanced way demonstrating awareness of the benefactors of Nazi policy.

Question 6

- 6 What can Source A tell us about Hitler and the Nazi Party in January 1933? Use the source and your own knowledge to support your answer. [7]

Candidates did well to pick out many inferences from the source for example that Hitler was anti-Communist or that he wanted to make Germany strong and powerful again. Many candidates supported these inferences with a quote/quotes from the text which was excellent. Those who excelled at this question were able to explain the intended impact of this speech which was to persuade the people of Germany to vote for the Nazis in the March 5th election 1933 as they didn't have the majority vote. Candidates who explained this achieved Level 3 on this question. Candidates who didn't achieve as well on this question gave too much contextual knowledge which wasn't needed to score well on this particular question; this is a test of historical skill not historical knowledge. It is also worth noting that many candidates were giving contextual knowledge which was not only not applicable to the question but was also not applicable to the new SHP Germany specification, for example hyperinflation and the Treaty of Versailles. This is not needed and will not be tested due to it not being on the new specification. It did not reduce candidates' marks but did not enhance them either as many focused on evidence outside of the time period rather than focusing on the intended impact of the source.

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. Candidates should be encouraged to deal with the source in depth rather than deploying contextual knowledge which too often was irrelevant to the question. Candidates should aim to pick out the intended impact of the source and should also be making inferences rather than giving surface features. The best answers also had support from source A showing explicit use of the source in their response.

Question 7

- 7 How useful are Sources B and C and Interpretation D for a historian studying total war in Germany between 1943 and 1945? In your answer, refer to the two sources and the interpretation as well as your own knowledge. [15]

Candidates generally described B, C and D well however this description severely limited marks on this question as they should have been explaining B, C and D's utility. Many candidates achieved only 3 marks on this question as a result of not linking B, C and D to the question's focus which was 'Total War'. It was clear that some candidates didn't know the difference between Germany being at war and Total War. Candidates were often too focused on evaluating the provenance of B, C and D but often got dragged into explaining why they were unreliable and therefore not useful. This limited marks on this question as the focus of the question is utility - what a historian could learn from the sources.

Candidates who achieved well on this question were able to link B to Total War and either used the source's content to explain how enthusiastic the nation was towards Total War making it useful, or using contextual knowledge such as the war going badly following the invasion of Russia speeches such as these were needed to raise morale for Total War which was unpopular at times. Many candidates struggled with C as it was a British source; many described the image but didn't link this to Total War in their explanation of utility. Those who excelled tended to describe the destruction of cities such as Dresden and Berlin during Total War by using their contextual knowledge. Those who used the provenance of the source as content to explain its utility tended to explain that the British people must have been feeling guilty about the destruction caused by Total War therefore meaning the government needed to produce propaganda to alleviate this guilt and prove that destruction of cities was the only way to destroy the Nazis – hence the swastika in the image. Those who were able to discuss the utility of Interpretation D for studying Total War were often candidates who explained using the content that the Nazis needed to hide the reality of Total War as much as possible to win people over. Those who used context well linked the source to the extreme policies during Total War in the East such as the Holocaust, for example. Unfortunately many candidates tried to explain the Holocaust in reference to D but often veered away from the interpretation when they did this or they didn't explain how it was linked to Total War. Candidates who explained the intended impact of B, C and/or D in reference to the focus of the question achieved the highest marks for this question. Candidates who then made a judgement on utility of B, C and D overall were able to achieve full marks on this question – this did not have to be a comprehensive judgement.

The main problem with responses for this question came from candidates explaining why the sources were not useful or picking out irrelevant information from the provenance to discredit B, C and D for being unreliable which is not the focus of the question. There were very few candidates who explained their evidence of B, C and D in reference to Total War leading to many candidates achieving 3 marks.

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 Total War, if they are to achieve the highest marks.

Question 8

- 8* 'Terror was more important than propaganda in controlling people in Nazi Germany between 1933 and 1939.' How far do you agree with this view? [18]

This question tended to be the question most candidates opted for. Many of the candidates dealt with the topics in the question relatively well. However, there were some candidates who didn't support their arguments with specific contextual examples e.g. with methods for terror or propaganda. As this is a depth study candidates should ensure their arguments are supported with specific contextual knowledge.

Those candidates who dealt with terror well tended to explain the role of the SA, SS and Gestapo and how they helped with controlling people in Germany e.g. the Jewish community during Kristallnacht or the fear of the Gestapo for encouraging denunciations. Those candidates who explained how their evidence of terror helped to control people in Germany tended to achieve high marks on this question. However, there were many examples of lists of terror groups or description of terror which meant candidates couldn't access higher level marks as they had not linked their evidence back to the question.

Those candidates who dealt with propaganda well tended to explain examples such as films, posters and speeches in specific detail. Those candidates who explained how their evidence of propaganda helped to control people in Germany tended to achieve high marks on this question. However, there were many examples of lists of propaganda or description of propaganda methods which meant candidates couldn't access higher level marks as they had not linked their evidence back to the question. There were also responses which included other methods of control such as education but candidates didn't link this to propaganda through textbooks for example, and as a result of this they became separate factors to those in the question which meant they were not applicable.

Generally candidates did attempt a judgement for this question however it is worth noting many candidates didn't have sufficient evidence in the main body of their argument to qualify for judgement marks. Those who had produced a balanced argument with sufficient supporting evidence tended to do a good job on this conclusion – those that were the strongest tended to consider both sides or have a focus on long term/short term distinction between factors.

The candidates who struggled on this question were those who picked evidence outside of the time period, for most this consisted of explanation of the White Rose movement, the Holocaust and the execution of the Edelweiss Pirates in Cologne in 1944. Candidates need to read dates carefully to ensure all of their evidence is applicable.

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 in order to prove how their evidence explained whether terror or propaganda was the most significant for controlling the German public. 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* 'Nazi policies made the lives of German people worse between 1933 and 1939.' How far do you agree with this view? [18]

Generally this question was not answered well by candidates. Candidates who addressed why life got worse for the people of Germany tended to focus on minority groups such as the Jewish community giving examples such as the Nuremburg Laws and Kristallnacht as evidence in support. Those candidates who explained how their evidence proved life got worse for people in Germany tended to achieve high marks on this question. However there were candidates who simply described bad treatment rather than policies such as anti-Semitism or segregation, for example.

Candidates who dealt with the other side of the argument well tended to explain how many Aryans benefitted for example due to employment policies which saw many people back to work through schemes such as the autobahn which increased their quality of life, or women being awarded the motherhood cross. Those candidates who explained how their evidence proved life got better for people in Germany tended to achieve high marks on this question. However this side of the essay was generally dealt with less well by candidates and there were many candidates who simply described policies such as Strength Through Joy without explaining why they improved people's quality of life.

Generally candidate did attempt a judgement for this question however it is worth noting many candidates didn't have sufficient evidence in the main body of their argument to qualify for judgement marks. Those who had produced a balanced argument with sufficient supporting evidence tended to do a good job on this conclusion – those that were the strongest tended to consider both sides or have a focus on long term/short term distinction between factors.

The candidates who struggled on this question were those who picked evidence outside of the time period or country, for most this consisted of explanation of Holocaust for Jewish lives getting worse which is not applicable to the time period, or ghettos which were in occupied territory. Candidates need to ensure their evidence is applicable to all demands of the question. Some candidates also decided to use the two factors from Question 8 as a focus for Question 9 however generally this led to description as this question was best answered in terms of policies towards different groups of people.

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 in order to prove how their evidence explained whether the lives of the German people were made worse. Candidates should aim to have a sustained argument throughout their response; generally 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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