

**History**  
**Prelims 2021**  
**Examiners' Report**

## PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION IN HISTORY 2021

### REPORT OF THE EXAMINERS

#### I: Statistical overview

Table 1: Performance of candidates by gender

Year	All HIST cand	No + % of Ds, all	No + % of Ps, all	F	No + % of Ds, F	No + % of Ps, F	M	No + % of Ds, M	No + % of Ps, M
2021	252	71 30.50%	181 71.82%	146	37 25.34%	109 74.65%	106	34 32.07%	72 67.92%
2019	227	64 28.20%	163 71.81%	109	18 16.52%	91 83.49%	119	46 47.46%	73 61.34%
2018	215	64 29.80%	151 70.23%	114	26 22.80%	87 76.32%	101	38 37.62%	63 62.37%
2017	219	74 33.80%	145 66.21%	118	28 23.78%	90 76.28%	101	46 45.50%	55 54.45%

Table 2: Number of candidates for each paper in 2021

Paper	Main School	Joint Schools	Total
BIP 1 (History of the British Isles - c.300-1100)	35	5	40
BIP 2 (History of the British Isles – 1000-1330)	53	4	57
BIP 3 (History of the British Isles - 1330-1550)	39	3	42
BIP 4 (History of the British Isles – 1500-1700)	43	10	53
BIP 5 (History of the British Isles V– 1688-1848)	40	10	50
BIP 6 (History of the British Isles – 1830-1951)	43	11	54
EWP 1: The Transformation of the Ancient World, 370-900	75	13	88

Paper	Main School	Joint Schools	Total
EWP 2: Medieval Christendom & its Neighbours, 1000-1300	61	14	75
EWP 3: Renaissance, Recovery & Reform, 1400-1650	67	33	100
EWP 4: Society, Nation & Empire, 1815-1914	50	20	70
OS 1 – Theories of the State (Aristotle, Hobbes, Rousseau, Marx)	24	28	52
OS 2 – The Age of Bede, c.660-c.740 <i>(No takers in 2020-21)</i>	-	-	-
OS 3 – Early Gothic France c.1100-c.1150	6	1	7
OS 4. The Mongols (new)	18	-	18
OS 5 – Conquest & Frontiers: England & the Celtic Peoples 1150-1220 <i>(No takers in 2020-21)</i>	-	-	-
OS 6 – English Chivalry & the French War c.1330-c.1400	4	1	5
OS 7 – Crime and Punishment in England c.1280-c.1450	4	-	4
OS 8 – Nature and Art in the Renaissance	10	5	15
OS 9– Witch-craft & Witch-hunting in early modern Europe	18	4	22
OS 10 – Making England Protestant 1558-1642 <i>(suspended in 2020-21)</i>	-	-	-
OS 11 – Conquest & Colonization: Spain & America in the 16 <sup>th</sup> Century	15	1	16
OS 12 – Revolution and Empire in France 1789-1815	16	4	20
OS 13 – Women, gender and the nation: Britain, 1789-1825	10	2	12
OS 14. The Romance of the People: The Folk Revival from 1760 to 1914	6	4	10
OS 15 – Haiti and Louisiana: The problem of Revolution in the Age of Slavery	38	6	44
OS 16 – Imperial Republic: The US and Global Imperialism, 1867-1914 (new)	13	-	13
OS 17. The New Women in Britain & Ireland, c.1880-1920	5	-	5
OS 18 - The Rise and Crises of European Socialisms: 1881-1921 (old and New regs)	11	4	15

Paper	Main School	Joint Schools	Total
OS 19. 1919: Remaking the World	13	2	15
OS 20 – Living with the Enemy: The Experience of the Second World War in Europe (new)	11	2	13
OS 21 – Viewing Communism: Cinema and Everyday Life in Eastern Europe, 1944-1989 (new)	10	1	11
OS 22 – Radicalism in Britain 1965-75	11	5	16
OS 23 – The World of Homer and Hesiod (AMH)	5	3	8
OS 24 – Augustan Rome (AMH)	5	3	8
OS [25] – Industrialization in Britain & France 1750-1870 (HECO only)	-	9	9
Approaches to History	136	43	179
Historiography: Tacitus to Weber	72	18	90
Herodotus	2	1	3
Einhard and Asser	5	-	5
Tocqueville	12	9	21
Meinecke and Kehr	2	4	6
Machiavelli	2	-	2
Vicens Vives	11	3	14
Trotsky (suspended in 2020-21)	-	-	-
Quantification	11	1	12

History of the British Isles (Sex/paper by paper)

Class	Nos (both sexes)	%	Men		Women		Women as % of total in each class
			Nos	%	Nos	%	
D	70	23.72	31	24.61	39	23.07	55.71
Pass	225	76.28	95	75.39	130	76.93	57.77
PPass							-
Fail							
Total	295	100	126	100	169	100	

European & World History (Sex/paper by paper)

Class	Nos (both sexes)	%	Men		Women		Women as % of total in each class
			Nos	%	Nos	%	
D	84	25.30	44	30.55	40	21.28	47.61
Pass	247	74.40	99	68.75	148	78.72	59.92
Ppass	1	0.30	1	0.70	-	-	
Fail				100			
Total	332	100	144		188	100	

Optional Subjects (Sex/paper by paper)

Class	Nos (both sexes)	%	Men		Women		Women as % of total in each class
			Nos	%	Nos	%	
D	94	27.82	46	31.73	48	24.88	51.06
Pass	244	72.18	99	68.27	145	75.12	59.42
Ppass						-	
Fail							
Total	338	100	145	100	193	100	

Approaches to History (Sex/paper by paper)

Class	Nos (both sexes)	%	Men		Women		Women as % of total in each class
			Nos	%	Nos	%	
D	57	31.84	32	42.10	25	24.28	43.85
Pass	122	68.16	44	57.90	78	75.72	63.93
Ppass							
Fail							
Total	179	100	76	100	103	100	

Historiography (Sex/paper by paper)

Class	Nos (both sexes)	%	Men		Women		Women as % of total in each class
			Nos	%	Nos	%	
D	15	16.67	7	17.08	8	16.33	53.33
Pass	75	83.33	34	82.92	41	83.67	54.66
Ppass							
Fail							
Total	90	100	41	100	49	100	

## II Marking & Classification

### A. General Comments on the Examination

252 candidates sat the examination (146 F, 106 M). 71 candidates (37 F, 34 M) achieved a Distinction. 181 candidates achieved a Pass (109 F, 72 M). Four candidates were awarded partial passes with papers to be sat or resat in September. The overall percentage of Distinctions and passes awarded was in line with previous years. Despite a very modest, though welcome, increase in both the number and percentage of female candidates achieving a Distinction, variations in outcome by gender persist.

The Chair and Secretary are particularly grateful to Isabelle Moriceau, Andrea Hopkins and the Undergraduate Faculty office for their administration of the examining and marking processes, which were transferred to new formats this year.

### Administration

Main school Prelims was overseen by a Chair and six members (this year's Chair, originally slated to preside over the exercise cancelled in 2020, agreed to return as an 'additional' member to mitigate the burdens associated with an increased cohort of candidates).

Taking the view that this year's results were not substantially out of line with those reached in previous examinations, the Board did not use its powers to scale upwards outcomes on individual papers or uplift the results of the year group as a whole.

This year's examination was the first to be conducted on-line. The use of Inspera occasioned fewer problems than some had anticipated. The chair acknowledges with gratitude the considerable effort made by tutors, students and assessors to familiarise themselves with the new software.

This year every answer in every paper submitted via Inspera generated a "similarity score" derived from the software programme Turnitin. In response to the central university, as well as to concerns expressed by tutors, the Board made use of this feature to identify and, where appropriate, penalise, instances of poor academic practice.

The Board agreed a tariff of possible penalties (annexed). The Chair (who alone had access to the Turnitin scores) reviewed results for all candidates in all six British papers, the four EWP papers, Approaches, and Historiography. (This process took four working days and was only possible because the marks meeting was set back by a week). Discounting inflated scores occasioned by, for example, repetition of the wording of the question, the Chair identified 70 cases of potential interest and reported 44 to a sub-group of the Board (noting the scores and briefly indicating the nature of the material identified in the similarity report). The sub-group in turn suggested actions to the full board. The full board considered 28 cases in greater depth, awarding 23 penalties, the most severe being a deduction of seven points. Deductions were applied to the raw mark of the script as a whole, even if the transgression concerned a single answer within the script. In only one case did the application of a penalty arrived at in this way result in a change to the candidate's classification. Regrettably penalties for poor academic practice were not reported in the transcripts received by students and seen by tutors.



## **Medical Certificates and Mitigating Circumstances**

This year the Board considered 50 medical certificates and MCEs. Following by now accustomed procedure, a sub-committee of the Board banded them and presented recommendations to the marks meeting. The Board waived penalties for late submission caused by technological issues associated with the new platform. It accepted submissions specifying other technological issues, though overall classification was not affected in any of the 13 submissions within these categories. In four cases the board classified on three rather four papers on the basis of evidence submitted. This year in particular the problem of calculating any impact on performance across all four papers, even in well-documented cases (a problem which bears even more heavily on Prelims than on FHS), was compounded by the interruptions caused by COVID. Thankfully in the overwhelming majority of cases the circumstances reported to the board did not adversely affect the outcome achieved.

### **B. Equality and Diversity Issues and Breakdown of the Results by Gender**

25.37% of female candidates achieved a Distinction, compared to 32.07% of male candidates. In raw percentage terms a “gap” of circa 7% represents something of a return to previous years (and is certainly an improvement on the outcome recorded in 2019). In 2017 and 2018, recent years in which women marginally outnumbered men in the cohort, female candidates performed slightly less well in percentage terms. The raw “gap” in those years, circa 12% and 15%, was greater. However, women greatly outnumbered men in this year’s cohort. That women within this year’s disproportionately female year group nearly achieved parity with current male classmates and matched the achievements of previous female cohorts is very modestly encouraging. Additionally, this year the glass of gendered disparity was “half full” in the British History papers, a subject of concerns raised in previous reports. Still, a problem persists and was this year particularly visible in respect of Approaches and EWH. Detailed discussion in relevant faculty committees should follow.

### III Comments on Papers: General

#### **BIP1- History of the British Isles, c. 300-1100**

Forty one candidates took this paper (thirty seven Hons, four J/S). Of these, 5 obtained a Distinction mark, twenty five who landed between 60 and 69, and eleven between 52 and 59. Put another way, no candidate came remotely close to failing this paper, the vast majority were able to answer the questions with genuine competence and a basic awareness of the complexity of some of the issues involved—but very few candidates truly excelled (only 2 marks of 75 or above).

Of the 20 questions set, 4 received the lion's share of attention: there were 15 answers on the end of Roman Britain, 15 on royal women, 24 on the vikings, and 10 on the Norman Conquest. No question had no takers, but no other question came close to double figures. There were disappointingly few takers for a question on the family; and, some enthusiasts aside, not many candidates willing or able to venture beyond England.

On the 'big' questions, the quality of the answers reflected the overall spread of the marks. On Roman Britain, royal women, and the vikings almost all of the candidates were able to explain key debated issues, with some able to take the discussion further with granular discussion of the primary evidence. Conversely, answers on the Norman Conquest were notably narrow in their scope, choosing to focus on the deeds of William I rather than the social dynamics of the Conquest.

Overall the conclusion one can draw is that students are well-prepared to sit this paper—but we should also consider the possibility that we are selling them short, not least in the exam room. This paper works in lectures and the tutorial because of the vistas it can open up across centuries and areas of the British Isles. Come the exam, however, a 'safety first' mentality appears to prevail, with its attendant tangible benefits and hidden costs. The redesign of this paper currently in progress cannot come too soon.

#### **BIP2 - History of the British Isles, 1000-1330**

This paper was offered by fifty nine candidates (including three for History & Politics and one for History & English). The difficulties under which candidates have been labouring throughout their time in Oxford – or rather, for much of the year, at the other end of an internet connection from Oxford – seemed to this examiner to have weakened performance since last he marked the paper (2018). There was more A-level-style deference to historians, and dutiful balancing of their views, and less confident analysis of evidence, than one might hope for. This is the sort of transition which is more easily effected in tutorials in person than on Teams. The answers often appeared disjointed, and failed to sustain an argument in response to the question. That is frequently the case, but it seemed much more so this year. There was more overlap in answers than normal. Sentences, sometimes whole paragraphs, were repeated, suggesting a good deal of cutting and pasting. Some candidates had clearly found Inspira deeply uncongenial. The examiner sympathized.

The most popular question allowed candidates to write either about Domesday Book or Magna Carta, so was in effect two different questions. Magna Carta (30 attempts) proved vastly more popular than Domesday Book (7). The number of candidates who began essays on Magna Carta with an account of King John signing it must have had Vivian Galbraith turning in his grave. The question was in effect about long term factors. Most candidates were determined to avoid this, and to focus on short term ones, most obviously that John was 'a bit of a shit' (Gillingham). This was because although they knew they must mention Holt, few appeared to have read him. There was very little evidence of knowledge of changes in legal procedure in the second half of the twelfth century, which Holt and others have shown to be so important to understanding Magna Carta (though one bold candidate began a sentence 'Milsom is wrong...', and was duly rewarded). There were very few references to the Unknown Charter, none to the Articles of the Barons. As for Domesday Book, currently being intensively studied in Oxford, there was little sign that most candidates had looked at a Domesday shire, or engaged with the products of that research, which have begun to appear in profusion.

The other question which attracted large numbers was on the differences between England in 1000 and 1100. It was answered primarily and often exclusively by reference to the second successful conquest of the eleventh century (32 attempts) – though one candidate memorably opined that Cnut had an ‘amiable style of personal politics.’ The impression was of regurgitated tutorial essays, or perhaps simply cut and pasted tutorial essays. The question on the weakness of royal power secured 17 answers, exclusively with respect to particular weak kings as distinct from royal power. Some simply wrote one paragraph on one weak king, and a second on another, and called it a day. Otherwise no question elicited more than 10 answers. Those on trade, on the use of written records by crown or church, and on any work of art failed to secure any takers. The final failure was particularly disappointing, in the light of a large body of very engaging scholarship, and the invitation to write about the political significance of any one work of the candidate’s choosing. It is customary to bewail the demise of economic history. That of art history is at least as distressing, and very recent. It has been lamented in other examination reports.

The question about gender and religious devotion elicited a number of very generalised observations about women – ‘the home was a deeply female space’ was asserted several times – but almost no knowledge of lay piety, monasticism, etc. Men were scarcely mentioned. The impression was that existing tutorial essays on women were being ineffectively repurposed, and little attempt made to address the question. There is a very considerable literature on female (as well as male) monasticism, and what made it distinctive.

On less mainstream subjects, whoever has been tutoring on the Jews deserves congratulation, because there were several decent answers to this question, and they did not all make the same points. Scotland has clearly benefited greatly from Alice Taylor’s fairly recent book, which has now percolated through to undergraduate consciousness. There was much talk of identity with respect to Wales and Ireland too, and sometimes England, but no-one attempted to define it.

The problems highlighted in this report seem almost entirely attributable to the effects of lockdown and the examination system adopted as a consequence. They are a very powerful argument for the restoration of traditional examinations. Let us hope that will indeed, as the Faculty has proposed, happen.

### **BIP3 - History of the British Isles, 1330-1550**

This paper was well done by students this year. All scripts were full of interesting observations, and candidates mostly seemed to have engaged with recent scholarship critically and reflectively. The evidence base used by students was wide-ranging, and this examiner particularly appreciated not having to read about the same examples over and over again – candidates drew on a range of material, read the primary sources closely and carefully, and demonstrated an impressive depth of insight. Overall, there were 13 first class marks out of 41 scripts. There were no marks below 60.

Pleasingly, there was not too much ‘bunching’ of responses around certain questions – although questions on the Lollards, epidemic disease, revolts, kingship, women, and the early Reformation were particularly popular. No candidates answered the questions on education, literature or art and architecture.

Methodologically, most of the essays were thoughtful. The best candidates thought about the ways in which responses were necessarily inflected by the kinds of surviving evidence, distinguishing carefully between what eg. chronicles, legislation, or manorial accounts might tell us. The best scripts also drew careful conceptual distinctions, eg. to achieve a more fine-grained analysis of social groups, to think about the relationship between persecution and self-identification of heretics etc.

The weakest scripts did not think sufficiently carefully about the terms of the question – particular words required careful consideration and definition (eg. ‘misogyny’, ‘mirrors for princes’). Some scripts resorted to weak assumptions, eg. about bastard feudalism, or misleading characterisations of Marxist approaches to revolts.

This examiner was most impressed by many candidates' ability to think from unusual and fresh angles about problems eg. the nature of town life, the role of women in revolts, the gendering of rulership.

#### **BIP 4 - History of the British Isles, 1500-1700**

Fifty four candidates sat History of the British Isles IV, 1500-1700. The standard was generally high: twelve candidates achieved marks ranging between 70-78, thirty six between 60-69, and six between 50-59. All topics on the paper were answered other than a question on ethnic identity and social tension: a new lecture in the Michaelmas Prelims circus should encourage students to engage with this subject. There was fairly even coverage of other topics, but the most popular themes were women and religion, the Henrician Reformation, popular religion, Tudor queenship, and the 'British context' and the causes of the civil wars.

The best answers were imaginative, conceptually sophisticated and knowledgeable about the historiography. A number of students who knew a good deal about their subject fell into the traditional trap of failing to engage with the question. Political and religious history was particularly well done: there were highly knowledgeable, broadly-conceived and analytical essays on the Break with Rome and relations between the three kingdoms in the 1640s, which did not revolve narrowly around the deficiencies or personalities of individual monarchs. The worst answers by far were on gender and Tudor queenship: there is an extensive scholarly literature on this subject, but students frequently exhibited no understanding of politics / conceptions of queenship at all, preferring to cite hoary clichés about a feisty proto-feminist Elizabeth, winning hearts and minds with her brilliant speeches. Weaker essays on women and gender also tended to rely on the candidate's assumptions about gender roles in the period rather than being engaged with any evidence or even frameworks from the historiography. Students vastly preferred to answer questions from an Anglo-centric perspective: although three answers did acknowledge that Wales was a part of the early modern British Isles, candidates were reluctant to answer specific questions on Ireland and Scotland, and perspectives from these realms were lacking in answers to broader questions about politics and religion in the later part of the period.

#### **BIP5 - History of the British Isles, 1688-1848**

50 candidates sat the paper, of whom 14 achieved a Distinction. A healthy percentage of scripts showed evidence of Distinction level work in a particular answer. The assessor awarded nine marks of 70 or above. Conversely, the Assessor awarded three marks of 60 or below. The perennial problem of "bunching" was not as pronounced as it sometimes has been. The Glorious Revolution aside, the paper offered a variety of questions in subject areas perceived by students to be "bankers." In the main candidates made intelligent choices, seeing for example a distinction between questions 13 and 17 and 6, or 5 and 10, and attempting to tailor answers accordingly. No question was unanswered, though q. 9 and 20 had but one taker. It remains the case that several candidates underperformed by focussing solely on one aspect of a question. For example, many candidates answered q. 15 on abolitionism with limited reference to 'widespread public support'. In response to q. 18, weaker answers discussed the rise of methodism with little attention to the weaknesses of the Church of England. In response to q. 17 some candidates discussed politeness, others discussed gender relations, but comparatively few placed the two factors in dialogue. Questions centrally concerned with abstractions, for example, "empire" (q.16), "loyalism" (q. 4), state "strength" (q. 2) and, to a lesser extent, "provincialism" (q. 13) also suffered from a lack of attention to definitions and meanings. In contrast, three questions (7 on the political consciousness of women, 17 on politeness and gender relations and 21 on John Robertson's view of the Enlightenment) attracted particularly sparky and sophisticated answers. The best scripts showed an uncommonly good command of relevant historiography or awareness of scholarly debate. A good year.

### **BIP6 - History of the British Isles, 1830-1951**

The History of British Isles VI paper was taken by fifty four candidates (forty three History and eleven from the Joint Schools). Of these, sixteen were awarded marks of 70 and above. Although previous examiners' reports did not discuss grades, this was roughly in line with the performance on other outline papers over the past few years.

Candidates approached a very broad range of questions. Only one – 8. How far was it possible for Britain to ignore events in continental Europe? – was ignored. Sport, culture, and protectionism were almost as unpopular, but inspired some good responses. The most popular themes were national identity (19 takers), poverty (20), and empire (23). It is encouraging to see just how wide-ranging the course has become, with substantial numbers of people also writing confidently on Conservatism, gender, and women's history. This is no longer a paper solely or even chiefly concerned with high politics – though some of the best answers did indeed focus on parliament and the constitution, not least by finding evidence of their importance for issues like gender and national identity.

While the stronger answers were able to show depth as well as breadth, weaker responses tended to be characterised by a narrowness of focus, a failure to provide substantial evidence to sustain their argument, and diffuse, inconclusive planning. Candidates should ensure that they spend sufficient time planning their essays and that each one directly addresses the question set.

Coming at the end of a long and dreary year of COVID, marking prelims could have proved a long and dreary process. It is enormously to the credit of this cohort of students that such was not my experience. There was much impressive work here, revealing real insight and a remarkable engagement with recent literature in the field. All candidates are to be commended for rising to this challenge so impressively. The best of this work, which ranged across the whole period while remaining precise and well-substantiated with detailed evidence, was really outstanding.

### **EWP 1: 370-900 (The Transformation of the Ancient World)**

Eighty eight candidates took this paper (seventy six HHons, twelve J/S). The range of marks was between 52 and 79: twenty three students obtained a Distinction mark, 51 marks between 60 and 69, and 14 marks between 50 and 59. Even if there were some weak scripts, no candidate came close to failing this paper; but, at the same time, we have seen few really excellent scripts (only 4 marks above 75). The average mark of J/S students (69.8) was significantly higher than that of HHons (65.0) – no J/S student had a mark lower than 63.

Of the 20 questions set, the most popular was by far 'To what extent were states in the post-Roman West based around ethnic identity?' (49 answers). The other very popular questions were on military leadership (34), the survival of the Christian Church after the fall of the Roman Empire (23), Muslim religious identity (22), nomadic/maritime raiders (18), and the study of manuscripts or buildings (18). Perhaps surprisingly, no one took the question 'What means did EITHER slaves OR peasants have to resist exploitation?'; there were also very few takers for questions on climate change, trade, family or emotions.

Many students attempted to illustrate their essays with non-Western examples, and the popularity of the question on Muslim identity is notable. But we were a bit disappointed by the quality of answers on questions related to identity. They were probably seen by the students as a safe choice: the answers were often vague on the evidence and, with few exceptions, did not set forth independent-minded arguments. If religious history was fairly popular (in addition to questions on the Church and the Muslim identity, 14 candidates compared male and female sanctity), social and economic history are clearly underrepresented; relatively few candidates also attempted essays on gender, family and emotions.

The quality of the essays was overall good: they were competent, demonstrated solid knowledge and the ability to analyse complex issues. But the spread of questions is narrow, and the perception of identity as a safe topic to answer may have held some candidates back from achieving their full potential.

## **EWP 2: 1000-1300 (Medieval Christendom and its Neighbours)**

There were seventy four candidates for this paper (sixty two main school and twelve joint school), of which fifteen produced distinction-level performances. Although the number of distinction-level performances across the whole paper was not as high as in some other papers this year, there was a great deal of mid- to high-2:1 level achievement (31 marks in the range 65-69, 19 in the range 60-64). There was relatively little very thin content, and only a handful of aggregate marks below 60% were given (9). The overall impression gained by the examiners was that of a demanding and ambitious paper to which a clear majority candidates of responded with energy and commitment. In the past three years the paper has evolved in a more explicitly 'world' direction, while continuing to accommodate students and tutors who wish to pursue a principally 'European' pathway. This dual approach has necessitated a broadening of the terms of the questions set so that the majority of them can be answerable in either European or world terms. It may be that students and tutors will need to continue to think carefully about how specific topics, historiographies and evidence bases can be productively studied in tutorials in the context of an examination that takes such a wide-ranging format. However, the evidence of this year's cohort (who were, we need to remember, studying the paper under the very difficult circumstances of the Hilary Term lockdown) suggests that most students are able to bring their specialist knowledge into productive and, at times, startlingly good conversation with the broad terms of the examination questions.

A pleasing aspect of this year's examination was the spread of questions answered. Most questions on the paper received at least one answer. Questions on gender, heresy, and the crusades were particularly popular. Those on imperial power, rulership, towns, papacy, feudal revolution, Seljuks/Mongols, and frontiers also attracted much interest. Questions on learning, art, education, law and written sources garnered fewer answers. Candidates used asterisked questions to reflect on World as well as European history. Thus, candidates were able to use the gender question to reflect on east and central Asian, Islamic, and Byzantine history as well as western European examples; the same was true for the questions on empire, towns and trade. Questions on gender, town and trade also allowed candidates room to reflect on evidence from the Jewish world.

Previous reports have raised the issue of the under-representation of the experience of medieval women in candidates' answers, so it is pleasing to report that women were much more fully present in this year's scripts, and not solely in the question on gender. That said, most candidates who tackled the gender question did so in principally binary male/female terms, and principally with an eye to female agency without allowing much space for more wide-ranging and plural readings. There was relatively little discussion of gender as a category of historical enquiry (which was perhaps strange given that some candidate must have done gender in Approaches) or of masculinity/ies. Examiners in the past have also drawn attention to over-essentialised readings of heresy, and the evidence from this year suggests that candidates are more aware of the significance of the historiographical debates of the past thirty years than was once the case; conversely, the few candidates who were unable to display knowledge of recent controversies in this field produced notably weaker answers. Some answers on towns, monasticism and mendicant orders referred to very long-standing historiographies without much evidence of reading published since the 1990s. There are many routes to success on this wide-ranging paper, and this year's examiners would not wish to be too prescriptive, particularly as the paper continues to evolve. However, candidates tended to do better if they sought to bring their own specialist knowledge into productive conversation with the precise terms of the question, and if they showed evidence of critical and constructive thinking about sources, and, where relevant, with modern scholarship. Candidates also did better if they could demonstrate that they had broadened what may have been the initial focus of their tutorial essay or if they had created connections between topics in the revision process. For instance, those who answered on crusading tended to score more highly if they included reflections which went beyond the First Crusade alone. As has always been the case for this paper, candidates who displayed convincing evidence of sustained direct engagement with primary sources almost invariably achieved good marks.

Examiners for this paper have for many years offered advice about adhering to the terms of questions, using sources, engaging with scholarship and showing range. As the paper evolves, however, it is important to stress to candidates that the examiners are not expecting the impossible. Candidates are not expected to include everything into their answers – indeed, to do so can lead to superficial responses. Instead, the skill in this paper is to bring specific knowledge to bear on broad questions. This means, for instance, that it was perfectly acceptable for candidates to use one empire to answer the question on imperial power (e.g. Germany, Song China, Byzantium or the Mongols); or one polity to discuss rulership or the respective merits of public ceremonial and financial resources (e.g. Capetian France, the Ayyubids, Norman Sicily, etc.). A comparative approach can be very effective, but is not essential. In either case, comparative or single-example-focused, the crucial skill to hone is the same: that of demonstrating explicitly how the evidence and experience about which the candidate has knowledge can be interpreted to answer the question set.

### **EWP3: 1400-1650 (Renaissance, Recovery and Reform)**

103 candidates took this paper. The most popular question was 1 (gender), which attracted answers from fifty candidates. Otherwise, the questions that received the most interest were 9 (humanism), 7 (voyages of discovery), 13 (Catholic Reformation), 11 (late medieval church), 12 (Protestantism), and 18 (revolts), each of which attracted more than 20 answers. Questions 2 (European economy), 5 (demographic change), 6 (printing), 8 (patronage), 14 (religious conformity), 15 (witchcraft) and 17 (nobility) each received at least 10 responses. Otherwise, every question was attempted with the following number in parentheses indicating the number of candidates who answered the topic: growth of the state (9), towns (8), political thought (7), science (5), status (3), and mercenaries (3). The best answers to question 1 on gender offered sophisticated, evidence-driven arguments that incorporated men alongside women in the discussion of gender norms. Despite the popularity of question 1 among candidates, however, it is striking that most candidates continue to stop short of incorporating gender into their answers to other questions on the paper. Similarly, there is a sense that religion has become siloed, with candidates only referring to Christianity or the Reformation when answering specific questions about those topics in Section C. Those candidates whose answers showed an awareness of the indivisibility of religion from other aspects of life in the early modern world achieved a more three-dimensional vision of the past, which resulted in higher marks. Limits on the performance of candidates were due mainly to their not having engaged closely with the precise terms of the question. The strongest answers to question 9, for example, recognized that the question's invitation to consider whether humanism was a 'progressive or a reactionary movement' required a specific reflection on what these terms meant in an early modern context. Too many responses to the question on the Catholic Reformation 'from above' invoked vague notions of 'elites' which had the result of generalizing across a very diverse group of historical actors (e.g., the Pope, bishops, parish priests, missionary orders, and many others). Without a clearer explanation of why these groups should be seen as a movement 'from above', arguments could not obtain a higher mark. Candidates should remember that the exercise of exams – especially with prelims – is to engage with the precise terms of the question; an arsenal of empirical information on its own, no matter how relevant, is a common route to a lower mark.

Otherwise, certain answers showed a limited range within individual topics. Many answers to question 7 on 'voyages of discovery' focused only on the New World without reflecting enough on how the European experience of travel in the New World compared to European encounters with older societies to the East such as India, China, and the Ottoman Empire. Too many answers to question 11 on the late medieval church used the question as an opportunity to parrot Reformation critiques of the late medieval church without thinking critically about the late medieval church on its own terms. Occasionally candidates tried to use material from outside the period, in the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries, and some combined very incongruous historical analyses without noticing the contradictions this produced in their arguments. Where candidates built their answers around

the analysis of a geographical range of case studies, they were most effective at constructing a persuasive argument.

The overall impression was of a very good range of topics tackled but the weaker candidates not really working out and addressing the specific point of the question, the usual prelims difficulty.

#### **EWP 4: (Society, Nation, and Empire 1815-1914)**

The overall performance on the paper was consistently competent, with students answering on a wide range of questions across economic, political, social and cultural history. Many showed a good awareness of how European history needs to be set in a broader context in order to understand complex processes such as industrialisation, which were a product of global networks and connections. Some really excelled and came up with very creative solutions. This year a total of 71 candidates sat this paper. The most popular question was no.12 on forms of religious revival, which was taken up by 33 candidates, followed by question no. 15 on European imperial expansion, which was done by 30 candidates. Other questions that proved popular related to the role of political boundaries in European industrialization (21 candidates), migration flows within and beyond Europe (19 candidates), the impact of radical politics on gender norms (16 candidates), and on the appeal of socialism to the working classes (15 candidates). Questions on nationalism and liberalism (13 candidates), peasant culture (12 candidates), 'bourgeois culture' (8 candidates), and revolutions (8 candidates) attracted some interest, while questions on architectural styles, romanticism, as well as Clark's sleepwalker thesis, were attempted by very few or no candidates. Overall, candidates performed well in addressing a challenging paper, one that didn't restrict them but offered them a chance to be creative and imaginative. The overall standard was well in line with that of previous years. While best candidates were capable to develop their answers in critical and sharp dialogue with important secondary works, there was, overall, a bit less of that skill on display than in previous years. Whether or not this was because of lockdown and its consequences for teaching and access to books is ultimately hard to tell. Even so, just a few years ago a first-class rate of approximately 26% (18 candidates accomplished a first) would have been deemed very commendable. Three candidates accomplished a 2.2, and the rest achieved a 2.1.

#### **Optional Subject 1: Theories of the State**

Fifty four candidates took this paper. The standard was high, with relatively few marks below 60, and the candidates answered a range of questions but primarily those focusing on a single author. Of the comparative questions, 11 (on how far the authors responded to contemporary problems) was the most popular. The best candidates showed genuine thought and engagement with the texts, answering the question directly while showing how their argument fitted into the wider theory of the author(s) as a whole. On the whole, candidates had grasped the fundamental principles of the authors on whom they wrote and made good reference to the text. Often they ranged beyond the set texts to consider other works by the authors, this could work well but sometimes took the candidates away from the set texts and often candidates' understanding of these additional texts (especially Rousseau's 2nd Discourse) was quite limited. Weaker answers were narrow or one-sided, or reproduced the text with a fairly descriptive commentary. Indeed, the open book format seems to have encouraged candidates to include lengthy quotations, from the texts or from the authors more generally, and these quotations did not always move the candidates' arguments forward. The best candidates quoted selectively and judiciously, however, analysing the text and drawing in the context where relevant. Finally, it should be noted that candidates paid remarkably little attention to questions of gender in their arguments or in their language. The terms 'men' and 'human beings' were used rather interchangeably (albeit with a marked preference for the former), despite the clear differences in the ways the set authors viewed gender and the roles of men and women in political life.



### **Optional Subject 16: Imperial Republic: The United States and global Imperialism, 1867-1914 (new)**

This paper was sat for the first time in 2021. Thirteen candidates took the paper, of which three were awarded distinctions. The assessor was impressed though that most scripts showed signs of distinction-level work on at least one answer, and perhaps the constraints of the exercise or difficulty pacing exams lead to weaker final answers. Candidates engaged well across the whole paper – just 4 of the 14 questions were not answered (3, 8, 9, and 13). Candidates tended toward cultural topics (Q14 was especially popular with 9 answers), which reflects the breadth of visual, literary, and popular printed sources on the course and the results were often impressive, especially in the discussion of how knowledge shaped power. Candidates were inventive and engaged well with both the questions and the set texts. The best answers drew lateral connections between texts across the paper and paid close attention to historical context and the nature of the evidence deployed. Answers were weakest when candidate's merely quoted set texts without engaging directly with the provenance of the source or contextualising the material (indeed there was little specificity about what was happening in given colonial territories). One common problem was the tendency to collapse all imperial activity into a rather bland "civilising mission" – much greater conceptual precision discussing imperial power would have lifted many answers from the pass to the distinction bracket. The weakest answers deployed pre-prepared material that did not engage the question directly – the online format unfortunately lent itself to this type of approach but it did not, and will not in future, produce analytically compelling intellectual results.

### **Optional Subject 20: Living with the Enemy: The experience of the Second World War in Europe (new)**

This course was taught and examined for the first time in Trinity 2021, in part as a response to the bulge in student numbers in the First Year. However, it also serves a larger purpose by providing first-year students with an opportunity to engage with the different dimensions of the European experience of the Second World War. The set texts cover a range of geographical and social perspectives, and have been chosen because of their subjective character. They are memoirs, dairies, contemporary journalism, and some observer reports. It was pleasing to see how readily the 13 students who took the course responded to the challenges of working with this unreliable evidence. In particular, candidates wrote well about the way in which different identities structured the documents, with the consequence that none could be treated as conveying a generally valid truth. All candidates wrote good solid answers, with prominent use of the set texts, and the range of marks awarded was predominantly strong. The experience of examining the course was a very positive one, and it feels like a good addition to our provision of Optional Subjects.

### **Optional Subject 21: Viewing Communism: Cinema and Everyday Life in Eastern Europe, 1944-1989 (new)**

The overall level of responses was disappointing for this first iteration of 'Viewing Communism'. Most candidates struggled to make balanced arguments that addressed competing viewpoints and avoided sweeping generalizations, often demonstrating a shaky grasp of historical context. Few candidates showed confidence in using films as historical evidence; many essays made reference to just a single film, some to no films at all. Quite a few essays fell significantly short of the expected word-count.

Some of this may have been a function of Covid. Students did not have access, for example, to all of the films during the first part of term, when most were away from Oxford libraries. Also, because of a Covid-related teaching buyout, the paper was taught by two (albeit extremely knowledgeable and enthusiastic) DPhils rather than the paper convenor.

But the paper may also be pitched too high for first-years. A revised reading list might go at a slower pace, for example, reducing the number of required films and thereby allowing more time for close analysis of the films in class. It would also devote more time to establishing the basic historical and

historiographical context (key dates and events; key interpretive paradigms/debates, especially the 'totalitarian' and 'revisionist' models).

Even without changes to the reading list, however, tutors can and should take time to address the mental baggage many students bring to the study of East European communism; the revisionist thrust of much recent historiography barely seems to have made a dent in many candidates' view of everyday life in Eastern Europe as uniformly grey and repressive. Finally, tutors should foreground approaches to using cinema as historical evidence, both by modelling this in class discussion and through feedback on students' work throughout the term.

## **Approaches to History**

This paper was taken by 179 candidates (136 main school and 43 joint schools), 57 (38%), of whom achieved distinctions. Previous examiners have noted that "at its best, Approaches invites candidates to adopt a more analytical and imaginative means of approaching the past." This year that invitation was, apparently, taken up disproportionately by men. Assessors found more Distinctions this year than in 2019 but, despite a substantial increase in the number of women sitting the paper, the percentage of women achieving a Distinction fell. This aspect of the paper will need to be discussed in relevant faculty committees and fora.

Answers in the Sociology section of this year's exam illustrated the difficulties many candidates seem to face with the paper as a whole. For example, candidates understood that a good answer to question 29 might involve a discussion of Marx or Weber, and wrote accordingly and ably, but few engaged with "social stratification" or risked an assessment of utility. The "secularization thesis" at the heart of q. 27 invited many porous discussions of "secularisation." In response to q. 21 candidates frequently wrote with engagement about "patriarchy" or "gender norms" or "continuity" but seldom within an explanatory framework. Judging from answers responding to "banker topics" it seems to be the case that many candidates are unwilling or unable to place ideas, concepts and evidence in a dialogue with question set. (Answers to q. 24 on race, class, gender and power relations provided a notable exception to this observation. Indeed, experienced Assessors noted an improvement in the quality of answers submitted to questions in Section E History and Gender. This surely in turn reflects the efforts of many college tutors involved in teaching the section as well as the interests of the student body). Many scripts contained at least one answer offering an imaginative and apposite range of examples. Within the Anthropology section, q. 4, on the use of history to create a shared sense of identity, attracted good writing of this kind. Within History and Art q. 12, when answered, was well answered; so too q. 18 in History and Economics and q. 9 within Archaeology and History. That students have favourite topics or themes within this paper is hardly surprising. The effect of their preferences and dislikes on final classification was probably amplified by remote learning and differential access to resources. The mood among this year's assessors was mainly upbeat. Few other universities attempt to teach and examine a paper of this kind to first year historians. While it is possible to detect in the scripts a safety-first approach to teaching and learning, and while the gender disparity visible in outcomes remains a matter of concern, the ambient level of attainment and ambition on display is impressive.

## **Historiography: Tacitus to Weber**

Seventy two students sat this paper, with answers ranging from the outstanding to the very weak. six candidates achieved marks over 70; fifty seven between 60-69; eight between 50-59; one between 40-49. Coverage of the authors was spread evenly, with questions about Machiavelli and Weber inviting the largest numbers of responses. The best answers were really excellent: students had engaged with the most important historiography on individual authors (Syme, Markus, Kempshall, Ghosh etc.) and also offered their own sophisticated reading of the set texts. There were stronger responses to questions on individual authors rather than to those which invited a

comparison between texts. Weak students failed to show knowledge of the set works and wrote very vaguely about them. Answers to Gibbon were universally badly done, nearly all students failing to recognise that one of the questions asked about the place of the city of Rome in the Decline and Fall rather than the Roman empire more broadly. Many candidates offered only the most generalised account of Macaulay's whiggism, and failed to account for its 'development'. While there were some excellent answers on Tacitus's use of annalistic structure, most responses to a general question on literary style were extremely poor, exhibiting no understanding of the subject at all.

Examiners:

Prof A. Gajda

Prof J-P. Ghobrial

Dr M. Jankowiak (Secretary)

Dr C. Leyser

Dr P.J Thompson (Chair)

Prof. W. Whyte

Prof O. Zimmer

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