

**History**  
**Prelims 2024**  
**Examiners' Report**  
**DRAFT 7 rev**

## PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION IN HISTORY 2024

### REPORT OF THE EXAMINERS

#### I: Statistical Overview

##### Commentary on Statistical Overview, and Other General Matters

This report is meant to deal only with the Main School, there being separate reports for each of the Joint Schools. But as explained below, statistics for individual categories of paper include figures for Joint Schools.

This year the downward post-pandemic trend of Distinctions continued: they now stand at 27%. Some of the reasons why this has happened emerge from reading reports on individual papers below.

Over the four-year period covered by Table I below, the first thing to note is the rapid fall in the number of Main School candidates since 2021. Though not a matter of much relevance to the conduct of this Examination, it should be of deep concern to all of us.

The number of male and female Distinctions in 2024 **as a proportion of the total number of candidates of each gender**, recorded in Table 1, is showing very considerable fluctuations over these years, with women doing markedly better than men in 2023, and men markedly better than women in 2022. In 2024, 24% of women were awarded Distinctions, and 31% of men.

It must be borne in mind that Table 2 below, dealing with particular papers and categories of paper, deals only with Prelims 2024. It also includes **both** History **and** Joint Schools, whereas Table 1 is restricted to the Main School. In order to get a longer perspective on individual papers or categories of paper, one needs to consult Table 3 below. Like Table 1, but unlike Table 2, it does not include Joint Schools. For more detail, the Prelims reports for all these years would have to be consulted.

The percentage of female candidates in each mark band in Table 2 dealing with individual categories of paper – to repeat, this includes Joint Schools as well as the Main School – represents **women as a proportion of that mark band**. Even in the case of the mark band of 70 and above, therefore, it is recording something quite different from the **proportions of Distinctions within each gender recorded in Table 1**. Fully to assess the significance of these Table 2 figures, it would be necessary to work out the proportion of male and female candidates in the totals for the Main School and Joint Schools. This has not been done.

In most categories of paper and individual papers, women secure something over 50% of the 70+ marks. However, there are two dramatic divergences from this norm.

One is in EW papers, in which women did markedly worse than in any other category of paper (39.5% of Distinction marks). In the most obviously comparable category, HBI outlines, women achieved 52.5% of marks of 70 or above. Given previous years, when EW was generally and roughly in line with other outlines papers, it is difficult not to infer that this discrepancy reflects the fact that this year this category of paper alone was typed for

the first time. No-one had anticipated that a shift to typed examination might disadvantage female candidates. Yet that appears to be the case. The only other paper in which women make up less than 50% of the total number of Distinction marks is Approaches.

The second, equally dramatic, divergence is a strikingly good performance by women in Historiography (63.63% of Distinction marks); but in this instance fewer scripts were involved, so the divergence might be judged to be of less statistical significance.

The shift to compulsory typing of EW papers was the most important innovation this year. The Directors of Undergraduate Studies conducted a survey of undergraduate opinion on the subject in the immediate aftermath of the examination. There were only 106 responses, a response rate of just under 38%: candidates perhaps had other priorities as they emerged from the Exam Schools after their final paper. Among respondents, opinion was sharply and almost equally divided: 47% were opposed to continuing the experiment, 53% in favour. The views of those who marked the scripts appear to some extent in the detailed reports below. The Board also discussed the matter at length.

Obviously, it was much easier to read typed scripts, but they tended to be substantially longer than handwritten ones. The scope to write more was often not in the candidates' interests, because ignorance and/or misunderstanding became plainer. Several members of the Board commented on candidates' determination to keep writing, even when what they were writing was of no relevance to the question, as well as being often ungrammatical and unsyntactical. This sort of problem was much more apparent than when slightly veiled by difficult handwriting. It raised an interesting problem for markers: to what extent should they make allowance for nonsense or irrelevance being more obvious in typescript, rather than penalising it as they would do if it were forced on their attention in a handwritten script?

In practical terms, there were stories of computers shutting down, of the wrong questions being put to candidates, and so on. But these depended primarily on reports from invigilators, and it was unclear how comprehensive and thorough these were. 12% of those who responded to the DUSs' survey said they had experienced difficulties of many different kinds. There were many complaints from candidates about the level of noise created by the simultaneous pounding of hundreds of keyboards. All these matters will need to be taken into account, as well as the apparent disadvantage to female candidates, before a decision is made about continuing or perhaps extending the practice of typed examinations.

Table 1: Distinctions and Passes by gender, 2021-2024

Year	All HIST candd	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
2024	204	55 27%	149 73%	117	28 24%	89 76.1%	87	27 31%	60 69%
2023	216	74 34.3%	142 incl 4 LVs 65.7%	129	48 37.2%	81 (inc 2 LV) 62.8%	87	26 29.9%	61 (inc 2 LV) 70.1%
2022	228	70 30.7%	158 69.3%	114	23 20.2%	91 79.8%	114	47 41.2%	67 58.8%
2021	252	71 30.5%	181 71.82%	146	37 25.34%	109 74.65%	106	34 32.07%	72 67.92%

Table 2: Number of candidates for each paper in 2024

Paper	Main School	Joint Schools	Total
BIP 1 (History of the British Isles - c.300-1100)	32	7	39
BIP 2 (History of the British Isles – 1000-1330)	37	1	38
BIP 3 (History of the British Isles - 1330-1550)	19	1	20
BIP 4 (History of the British Isles – 1500-1700)	49	11	60
BIP 5 (History of the British Isles V– 1688-1848)	35	10	45
BIP 6 (History of the British Isles – 1830-1951)	32	15	47
EWP 1: The Transformation of the Ancient World, 370-900	51	17	68
EWP 2: Communities, Connections and Confrontations, 1000-1300	63	9	72
EWP 3: Renaissance, Recovery & Reform, 1400-1650	47	22	69

Paper	Main School	Joint Schools	Total
EWP 4: Society, Nation & Empire, 1815-1914	45	25	70
OS 1 – Theories of the State (Aristotle, Hobbes, Rousseau, Marx)	22	23	45
OS 2 – Alfred and the Vikings	1	3	4
OS 3 – Early Gothic France c.1100-c.1150	3	1	4
OS 4. The Mongols	16	8	24
OS 6 – Crime and Punishment in England c.1280-c.1450	5	-	5
OS 7 – Nature and Art in the Renaissance	4	2	6
OS 8– Witch-craft & Witch-hunting in early modern Europe	18	5	23
OS 9 – Making England Protestant 1558-1642	3	1	4
OS 10 – Conquest & Colonization: Spain & America in the 16 <sup>th</sup> Century	21	3	24
OS 13 – Brigands in a Landscape: Banditry, Rural Crime & Rebellion in the Mediterranean & Black Sea regions c.1750-1950 (new)	8	2	10
OS 14 – When Neighbours Became Strangers: Violence, Community & Identity in Late Ottoman Syria, c.1840-1900 (new)	9	4	13
OS 15 – Haiti and Louisiana: The problem of Revolution in the Age of Slavery	23	-	23
OS 16 – Imperial Republic: The US and Global Imperialism, 1867-1914	7	4	11
OS 17- The New Women in Britain & Ireland, c.1880-1920	9	3	12
OS 18 - The Rise and Crises of European Socialisms: 1881-1921	9	3	12
OS 19. 1919: Remaking the World	14	3	17
OS 20 – Living with the Enemy: The Experience of the Second World War in Europe	11	2	13
OS 21 - Global USSR: Empires, Borders and Identities	12	1	13
OS 22 – Viewing Communism: Cinema and Everyday Life in Eastern Europe, 1944-89	5	1	6
OS 23 – The World of Homer and Hesiod (AMH)	-	1	1

Paper	Main School	Joint Schools	Total
OS 24 – Augustan Rome	4	2	6
OS [25] – Industrialization in Britain & France 1750-1870 (HECO only)	1	8	9
Approaches to History	125	45	170
Historiography: Tacitus to Weber	55	26	81
Herodotus	1	-	1
Sallust	-	1	1
Einhard and Asser	4	2	6
Tocqueville	8	3	11
Meinecke and Kehr	4	1	5
Machiavelli (no takers in 2023-24)	n\a	n\a	n\a
Vicens Vives	3	1	4
Trotsky	-	2	2
Quantification	5	-	5

History of the British Isles (Sex/paper by paper) Main School only

Class	Nos (both sexes)	%	Men		Women		Women as % of total in each class
			Nos	%	Nos	%	
70+	40	19.6	19	21.8	21	17.9	52.5
60-69	137	67.2	62	71.3	75	64.1	54.7
<60	27	7.62	6	6.9	21	17.9	77.8
Total	204	100	104	100	117	100	-

\*Some candidates have their marks disregarded

European & World History (Sex/paper by paper) Main School only

Class	Nos (both sexes)	%	Men		Women		Women as % of total in each class
			Nos	%	Nos	%	
70+	43	21.1	26	30	17	14.5	39.5
60-69	147	72.1	59	67.8	85	75.2	57.8
<60	16	7.8	2	2.3	14	12	87.5
Total	204	100	87	100	117	100	-

\*Some candidates have their marks disregarded

Optional Subjects (Sex/paper by paper) Main School Only

Class	Nos (both sexes)	%	Men		Women		Women as % of total in each class
			Nos	%	Nos	%	
70+	55	27	27	31	28	23.9	51
60-69	139	68.1	54	62.1	85	75.2	61.2
<60	10	4.61	6	6.9	4	3.4	40
Total	204	100	87	100	117	100	-

Paper IV (Sex/paper by paper) Main School only

Class	Nos (both sexes)	%	Men		Women		Women as % of total in each class
			Nos	%	Nos	%	
70+	43	21.1	19	21.8	24	20.5	55.8
60-69	138	67.6	61	70.1	77	65.8	55.8
<60	23	11.3	7	4.34	16	13.7	69.6
Total	204	100	87	100	117	100	-

\*Some candidates have their marks disregarded



Approaches to History (Sex/paper by paper) all candidates

Class	Nos (both sexes)	%	Men		Women		Women as % of total in each class
			Nos	%	Nos	%	
70+	47	27.64	25	36.23	22	21.79	46.80
60-69	111	65.30	41	59.43	70	69.30	63.06
<60	12	7.06	3	4.34	9	8.91	75.0
Total	170	100	69	100	101	100	-

\*Some candidates have their marks disregarded

Historiography (Sex/paper by paper) all candidates

Class	Nos (both sexes)	%	Men		Women		Women as % of total in each class
			Nos	%	Nos	%	
70+	11	13.75	4	9.10	7	19.44	63.63
60-69	57	71.25	34	77.27	23	63.89	40.35
<60	12	15.0	6	13.63	6	16.67	50.0
Total	80	100	44	100	36	100	-

**GENDER STATS BY PAPER Prelims  
2024**

87M 117F

Main School Only

Paper	F Avrg	M Avrg	DIFF	F High	M High	F Low	M Low	F 70 +	M 70 +	F < 60	M < 60
ALL	65.3	66.3	1					10 (8.8)	11 (12.6)	6 (5.1)	1 (1.2)
BH	64.5	65.7	1.2	29	21	42	31	21 (18.4)	19 (21.8)	21 (18)	6 (6.9)
EWH	64.9	67.2	2.3	42	34	33	16	17 (14)	26 (30)	15 (12.8)	2 (2.3)
OS	66.4	66.5	0.1	40	26	22	22	28 (24.6)	27 (31)	4 (3.4)	6 (6.9)
IV	65	65.7	0.7	31	18	36	28	24 (21.1)	19 (21.8)	16 (13.7)	7 (8.1)

**Distinctions**

Women 28 24.6%

Men 27 31.0%

**GENDER STATS BY PAPER Prelims  
2023**

87M 129F

Main School Only

Paper	F Avrg	M Avrg	DIFF	F High	M High	F Low	M Low	F 70 +	M 70 +	F < 60	M < 60
ALL	65.6	66	0.4								
BH	65.5	66	0.5	34	20	33	22	30 (23.3)	17 (19.5)	12 (9.3)	4 (4.6)
EWH	65.9	65.9	0	34	26	27	24	32 (24.8)	23 (26.4)	14 (10.9)	7 (8.1)
OS	66.1	66.5	0.4	34	28	27	18	37 (28.7)	24 (27.6)	11 (8.5)	4 (4.6)
IV	64.8	65.6	0.8	27	13	41	23	30 (23.3)	17 (19.5)	19 (14.7)	5 (5.8)

**Distinctions**

Women 48 37.2%

Men 26 29.9%

**GENDER STATS BY PAPER Prelims 2022**

114M 114F

Main School Only

Paper	F Avrg	M Avrg	DIFF	F High	M High	F Low	M Low	F 70 +	M 70 +	F < 60
ALL	65.09	66.66	1.57					7 (6.3)	17 (14.9)	6 (5.4)
BH	65.33	67	1.67	33	28	27	24	21 (18.8)	35 (30.7)	8 (7.1)
EWH	64.2	65.6	1.4	19	14	44	33	14 (12.5)	29 (25.4)	16 (14.3)
OS	66.1	67.06	0.96	44	40	14	29	28 (25)	37 (32.5)	8 (7.1)
IV	64.68	66.7	2.02	25	31	32	27	21 (18.8)	37 (32.5)	14 (12.5)

**Distinctions**

Women 23 20.54%

Men 47 41.23%

**GENDER STATS BY PAPER Prelims  
2021**

108M 150F

Main School Only

Paper	F Avrg	M Avrg	DIFF	F High	M High	F Low	M Low	F 70 +	M 70 +	F < 60	M < 60
<b>ALL</b>	65.56	66.23	0.67					11 (7.3)	17 (15.7)	5 (3.3)	3 (2.8)
<b>BH</b>	64.91	65.36	0.45	44	19	54	48	33 (22)	21 (19.4)	19 (12.7)	10 (9.3)
<b>EWH</b>	65.59	66.57	0.98	42	32	39	26	31 (20.7)	32 (29.6)	19 (12.7)	8 (7.4)
<b>OS</b>	66.07	66.5	0.43	43	34	35	19	34 (22.7)	35 (32.4)	10 (6.7)	7 (6.5)
<b>IV</b>	65.63	66.44	0.81	46	34	41	31	31 (20.7)	34 (31.5)	10 (6.7)	12 (11.1)

**Distinctions**

**Women** 37 24.7%

**Men** 34 31.5%

## **II Marking & Classification**

### **A. General Comments on the Examination**

#### **Administration**

48 scripts were re-read for a variety of reasons. In every case, the new mark was substituted for the original one.

#### **Medical Certificates and Mitigating Circumstances**

17 MCEs were submitted by candidates for the Main School, 13 of them female and 4 male. These were considered by a small subcommittee, which attempted to classify them in terms of the prescribed grading system. The Board was presented with these classifications, which it accepted. In one case it was necessary to have a further discussion when an affected candidate was close to a borderline.

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

See above, Commentary on Statistical Overview, and Other General Matters

### III Comments on Papers: General

#### **BIP 1- History of the British Isles, c. 300-1100**

39 students took History of the British Isles, Paper 1, for Prelims this year: four History and English, three History and Politics and the rest all Main School History. There were eight first class marks, 17 marks between 65 and 69, 9 marks between 60 and 64 and five marks in the 50s. That 20% of candidates secured first class marks and some 65% got marks in the 65+ range (on a paper taught in the first term) testifies to the way the period, and the way it is taught, are successfully engaging students and getting them to rise to the challenge of studying and writing about history at a serious level.

As in the previous year the most popular question was Q.1 on the end of Roman Britain which attracted over 20 answers. This was closely followed by Q.3 on the conversion and then by Q.7 on the Picts and Q.17 on paying off or resisting the Vikings; Q.11 and Q.9 also attracted a good number of answers but these spread out over the choice of alternative sources that candidates were invited to consider. The only questions that were not attempted were Q.9 (Why were so many English sees located in the sticks?) and Q.20 ('Pot-bellied equanimity' (Thomas Carlyle). Is this characterisation of the late Anglo-Saxon nobility a plausible one?). In both cases it is possible that candidates did not understand them or worried that they might not have done so correctly. The absence of any explicit questions on women, queens, or gender was surprising but a number of candidates used their material on these topics to open up other questions in thoughtful and effective ways. Scotland, Ireland and Wales all attracted attention; in contrast to last year's report which highlighted the short shrift given to Wales, at least three candidates tackled the specific question on Welsh identity (in one case producing an answer of outstanding quality) and several thought about Wales in terms of Q.8 on the East-West divide in Britain. In contrast there was little or no evidence of engagement with landscape studies, the economy, or more generally the world beyond that of the elite; Q.2 on peasant freedom attracted a couple of answers but without displaying any discernible knowledge of evidence on the peasantry.

As always, points can be made about what distinguished the best, the middling and the weakest scripts. To take the most popular questions ("Why was there so little continuity between Roman and post-Roman Britain?" and "Why was the conversion of the English accomplished so rapidly?") most candidates knew quite a lot of relevant information but the majority were happy to be led by the questions into accepting that there was very little continuity or that the conversion was rapid (even when the evidence they cited pointed in the opposite direction) without even pausing to consider whether the "so little" and "so rapidly" might have been intentionally provocative; it would have been an interesting experiment to see whether the same candidates would have happily done about-turns if the questions had asked why there was so much continuity or why the conversion was so gradual. In a similar vein many candidates did not pause to consider how much hinged on the meaning of "Roman" and "conversion" and simply treated these as uncontentious terms. In contrast first class and high 2.1 answers used the detailed evidence to unpack or contest the terms of the questions, not as a mere semantic exercise, but rather as stepping stones on the way to mapping out their own carefully grounded arguments as to what was actually going on; in doing so the best answers also demonstrated a serious engagement with recent archaeology and/or a careful and perceptive reading of primary sources. At the

other end of the spectrum the weakest scripts failed to think about the meaning of questions and compounded this by failing to engage with relevant supporting evidence in any meaningful way. For example, several candidates tackled the question on coins without showing any knowledge of actual coins beyond (in each case) a single reference to King Offa and Queen Cynethryth adding their names to coins. Answers that simply rely on assertion and generalities are at best only going to secure 2.2 marks.

## **BIP 2 - History of the British Isles, 1000-1330**

This paper was sat by 37 candidates, three of whom achieved distinction marks, and one of whom failed at the first attempt.

As these marks suggest, the general quality was a little disappointing. That cannot be attributed to the range of questions: unusually, every one was attempted, the most popular being Jews (18 answers) and Domesday Book (also 18), followed by one on either women or peasants (14 – in a sign of the times, only two tried peasants). Despite a lecture specifically devoted to liturgy, and a sitting duck of a question on it, there was no evidence that any candidate understood what liturgy was.

Several of the questions, including the popular one on Domesday, required knowledge of a document or documents. The documents in question were predictable – Magna Carta, the Treaty of Winchester/Westminster of November/December 1153, etc, with another question inviting candidates to assess the significance of one of a long list of categories of source. If one is going to answer a question of this sort, it is a good idea to know something about the document or category in question. Too many candidates palpably did not. A glance at Domesday Book would establish that it does not comprise ‘a comprehensive list of exactly what each baron owed the king in tax’. The question on Magna Carta solicited comment on Stubbs’s apophthegm about it representing an ‘act of corporate life that had reached full consciousness’. Several of those who attempted this question interpreted Stubbs’s words as referring to (as one put it) ‘the increased development of a private sector of capital’. This suggested a failure to engage with any of the literature on the subject, most particularly J.C. Holt’s work. There were eight attempts at the question on the invention of common law, but few displayed familiarity with the procedural innovations generally deemed to constitute that law. One candidate, who intriguingly if implausibly credited its invention to Edward the Confessor, then lost the examiner’s sympathy by suggesting that Edward had created a ‘new administrative position’ known as the ‘Confessoris’ to draft the requisite writs. The examiner was also baffled by the suggestion made by a candidate in answer to two different questions that Henry I had issued a coin which depicted Edward the Confessor trampling on Harold II.

Jews continue to be a very popular, though the suggestion that the greatest concentration of Jews in the thirteenth century was in ‘North London’ suggested that the candidate was not thinking about the middle ages. The technical aspects of this difficult subject continued to elude many, though had been impressively mastered by a few. Essays on Scotland and Wales appeared confident, but there was no sign that, on the former subject, anyone had read Alice Taylor’s very important, recent book, though one question was designed to encourage reflection upon it. The obsession with identity which emerged about a decade

ago still dominates. Without any investigation, it is assumed to have a unique explanatory force. There was too much evidence of reliance solely on lectures: hides had been heard as 'hinds', burhs as 'burges', shipsokes as 'Ship soaks', the Mabinogion as 'Abynogion'.

The way to do well in this paper is to read more historians than most candidates appear to be reading, to do so much more attentively, and to read and think about the large amounts of source material readily available in translation. Do not attempt just to summarise the views of historians, especially if you have not read them.

All these comments are unfair on those who did well, some very well. But an examination report is not meant to pat them on the back, but to help others perform better.

This is not an easy paper, but the quality, intensity, and scope of the historical literature means it can be an exceptionally rewarding one. It is possible to read in translation most of the evidence on which historians have reached their views, and therefore to contest them with some assurance.

### **BIP 3 - History of the British Isles, 1330-1550**

Twenty candidates sat this exam, of whom 7 received marks of 68 or higher, and none received a mark below 60. The standard of the answers was on the whole very good, with candidates showing a good range of knowledge across political, social, religious and economic topics. Candidates could at times have engaged more vigorously with the terms of the question: where they asked how coherent, or convincing, or fundamental, a phenomenon was, there could have been more depth to the analysis. Some questions could have been answered with more direct reference to the historical debate, as for example the question about whether the impact of the Black Death has been overstated. Just occasionally there were indications of an out-dated historiography, or a lack of sensitivity to cultural difference, as when pre-Reformation religious was described as 'superstitious'. Some essays showed a tendency to include the names of historians, for example saying 'as A has argued' or 'as B has suggested', but without analysing the work in question. Candidates should only refer to the work of historians when they are sure that they are doing so accurately, and when they have something constructive to say about their views. Case studies cited as examples should be properly contextualised, and the most successful essays were those which managed to achieve the right balance between arguing a case and supporting that case with detailed evidence.

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

The standard of scripts this year was very good, and the range of subjects discussed was very encouraging. It was splendid to see a genuinely British dimension to many of the answers, with Scottish and Irish experiences in particular being explored in detail; there is still room for more consideration of Welsh history. The Welsh dimension to the witchcraft question, for example, was one area which could have been stronger, although on the whole answers on witchcraft were very well done. The essays about poverty tended to concentrate on official policy when they could have done more to consider unofficial responses, and a similar consideration of how government policy might have intersected with popular priorities and responses could have been extended to other topics too.

Answers to the question about Protestant identity could have had a broader scope; many took Lutheranism or Calvinism as the touchstone of 'pure' Protestantism without thinking about the possibility of multiple Protestant identities, and several answers weighed up the role of government versus that of Protestant reformers without considering other possibilities such as popular conversion. Revisionist views of Mary I were often overlooked; her 'cruelty' made an appearance, her marriage to Philip II was widely viewed as a mistake, and her unpopularity was taken as read by several answers, reflecting an out-dated historiography. Constitutionalism appeared several times in answers on the seventeenth-century in an unexamined form, when some critical thinking was needed. Candidates should remember that what they were taught at A level may well be inaccurate, or at least fail to do justice to the complexities of historical debate.

Candidates should remember to contextualise the examples that they cite; there is still a tendency to say things like 'as happened to Jane Doe in 1613', when a more detailed account of identity, place and circumstances would be helpful. Essays on gender should consider the experiences of men as well as women, especially given the rich secondary literature on masculinity, and candidates might want to avoid giving the impression that the experience of all men, or all women, was essentially the same, paying greater attention to differences of status, age, wealth, occupation, and location, among other considerations. There is little to no value in the arbitrary citing of any historian, for example saying 'as X has argued' or 'as Y has shown'. The work of a particular historian is best brought into an essay only if the candidate proposes to analyse the arguments that that historian has put forward. There are too many random references to named historians, and the situation is not improved when the names cited are inaccurately represented, or occasionally misspelled – Goodman for Goodare, for example, or Underwood for Underdown. Names are often brought in and applied to areas of history which are manifestly not what they work on, with historians of the Reformation being cited in essays on social policy, or prominent historians of the seventeenth century being invoked for essays on the sixteenth. Candidates should only cite the work of historians when they are confident that they are doing so correctly, and have something interesting to say about their views.

Despite some of these issues, candidates are to be congratulated on their performance this year. 60 undergraduates took this exam, of which 17 achieved a mark of 70 or above, and 11 achieved marks between 67 and 69. Only 4 candidates received marks below 60.

### **BIP 5 - History of the British Isles, 1688-1848**

There were 44 candidates who sat this paper this year. All but one of the questions were attempted, the exception being q. 16 on Evangelical revival. Nevertheless, several questions proved most popular by some margin. They were, in order of popularity, q.15 on women (19 answers); q. 1 on the revolution settlement and its consequences (15); q. 20 on the distinctiveness of the English Enlightenment (13); q.5 on the character of popular politics and q.9 the benefits of the Union of 1707 (both 10); and q. 6 on whether preoccupation with empire led to a lack of serious engagement in European affairs (10). Perhaps more surprisingly only two candidates chose to tackle q. 17 on cultural patronage, while the question on the 'poor' (q. 11) only attracted three answers. The best answers demonstrated breath of coverage, plenty of detailed evidence, some historiographical awareness, as well as good control over the arguments. Weaker answers failed to find much analytical focus or depth, tended to assert things rather than developing their arguments systematically and with



Careful attention to evidence, and tended to answer questions without a full appreciation of the period as a whole (where this was called for). One possible reason for the lack of much analytical depth was apparent ignorance of or proper attention to relevant historiographical debate. For example, no one who answered q. 19 on the pursuit of luxury challenged the notion that social emulation necessarily provides the main key to changing patterns and habits of consumption. Even cursory reading of Weatherill and Berg – standard texts on this topic – would have indicated the limits of the usefulness of emulation as a driver of change in this context. Or answers to q. 13 on the industrial revolution would have been considerably strengthened had they shown some knowledge of key debates about how to conceptualise and assess the extent of economic growth and change in this period. Better grasp of relevant historiography might have enabled more candidates better to identify key issues raised by questions, or to find more productive frameworks within which to develop their answers. The best answers to q. 5 on popular politics were able, for example, to move beyond a simple binary between conservative and radical in exploring their character, and to see that they resist such a simplistic typology. The weaker answers tended to get drawn into a largely unproductive exercise in trying to assess which were the more prevalent, radical or conservative popular politics. Candidates seemed to be in general more comfortable writing about the eighteenth century than the early nineteenth, even where the questions might have seemed to demand close attention to the post-1800 world, such as q.5 on popular politics or q. 12 on the working class. There were efforts to range across the British Isles, although this was not a paper which made this very easy given the wording of several of the questions. Only one candidate answered the specifically Irish question, q. 10, although there were more takers for q. 9 on the consequences of the Anglo-Scottish Union. Most of the candidates who answered q.1 on the Revolution Settlement read this as meaning the English Revolution Settlement.

### **BIP 6 - History of the British Isles, 1830-1951**

49 candidates entered this exam, and there was one withdrawal, for a total of 48 scripts. 32 candidates belonged to the History Main School, while 16 to HENG, HPOL, and HML. The median mark achieved this year was 66 – slightly below the previous year's median of 68. The mean mark was also 66. Eight candidates achieved an overall mark of 70 or above; there were no overall marks below 60.

There were 20 questions to choose from. Almost all questions were attempted, barring questions 6 (on Irish Home Rule) and 14 (on Britain's relationship with the European continent). As in past years, a question on the economy (q. 2) was largely untouched; more surprisingly, questions on marginalised groups (q. 13), war (q. 16), and education (q. 18) also saw few takers. By far the single most popular question, with a total of 28 responses, was question 7 (on women and class). However, questions 1, 8 and 17, which tackled different aspects of the British Empire (unity, religion, and popular knowledge, respectively), collectively elicited 36 responses, marking this out as the most popular overall topic. Including several questions on this theme usefully stretched candidates and produced a greater variety of answers overall.

Overall, this was a strong set of scripts, with all candidates demonstrating some distinctiveness in their answers. The most successful candidates engaged clearly with the questions in front of them and produced analytically driven answers supported by precise evidence. They demonstrated their awareness of relevant historiography or debates in at

least one of their answers and considered alternative interpretations. Some weaker answers appeared to answer a slightly different question than the one asked – e.g., responses to question 4 almost entirely focused on attitudes towards poverty rather than conditions – and some produced an overly strident answer without considering counterarguments. Almost all candidates tended to overlook the importance of change over time, while some focused on narrow parts of the period without explaining why. Some candidates narrowed their answers in other respects, too; this often made it impossible for them to engage fully with the implications of the question - e.g. those responses to question 7 that focused on only one class of women. Candidates should be reminded that the chief challenge of any Outline papers is the ability to marry breadth with depth.

## **EUROPEAN AND WORLD HISTORY PAPERS**

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

62 candidates sat this paper. The highest grade was 76, the lowest grade was 59. Of the candidates, 16 were 1sts; 43 2:1; and 3 2:2. The average grade was 67, as it was in the previous year. The first and second markers were largely in agreement across the cohort, with no major reconciliations. This is a very successful batch of marks, even with the three borderline grades at 59. Although in such a large group this is not unexpected, it would be helpful to see if there are any similarities in the failures of these essays, and if so to consider more focus on topics during the paper. Otherwise, a successful batch of grades.

### **EWP 2: 1000-1300 (Communities, Connections and Confrontations)**

69 candidates sat the paper, obtaining 56 passes (mostly of upper-second quality) and 13 distinctions; there were no fails, and only one third-class mark. As these data suggest, the overall level of performance was pretty good, with candidates mostly writing informed, relevant and orderly answers to the questions. Typing seemed to pose no problems to the vast majority of candidates, and it certainly rendered the scripts a great deal more readable. Although the question paper tended to favour medieval Europe, many candidates showed a good grasp of the Mongols and the Seljuk Turks, though few answered on the Song, perhaps because they did not know about the dynasty's trade policies. There was some impressive engagement with sophisticated literatures on gender, heresy, space and frontiers. The questions on heresy, the papacy and the crusades were the most popular, and relatively few candidates answered on the image of Constantinople, the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem, monasteries, cathedral schools, mendicants, poverty and the infirm and saints. Candidates could have thought more carefully about why questions were being asked – for instance, the question about 'the key features of a crusade' was quite often answered without any reference to the very prominent debates over definition; several of the answers on heresy made no reference to the work of Moore or Pegg, which was surprising. It isn't obligatory to comment on the historiography, but awareness of the debates and approaches of historians will often help students to sharpen their arguments and focus their answers.

### **EWP 3: 1400-1650 (Renaissance, Recovery and Reform)**

Sixty-nine candidates took the paper this year (47 for Main School, 4 for AMH, 5 for HML, 9 for HECO, and for 4 HPOL). The general quality was fairly good, but there was a relatively low number of 1s and a surprising number of 2.ii.s. The spread of final marks was as follows:

70-74: 11  
65-69: 37  
60-64: 11  
55-59: 9  
50-54: 0  
<50: 1

Two main issues seem to emerge from a general consideration of the exam scripts. On the one hand, only a very few questions attracted most of answers. While this may depend on the unexpected phrasing of one or another question, overall, it points to a possible problem of narrow historical knowledge by many candidates. On the other hand, answers to the most popular questions were also those which tended to be more repetitive in their structure, argument, and cited scholarship. This may raise the issue of an excessive dependence on pre-digested information gathered from lectures as opposed to independent study. Answers to q. 4 about religious constraints on women and q. 13 about the Council of Trent, which were the most attempted for Section A (Society and economy) and Section C (Religion), with thirty-one and twenty-six answers, respectively, are two cases in point. More generally, it is worth reflecting upon the extremely limited number of answers that major topics such as economy (q. 1, zero attempts), rural life (q. 2: two attempts), poor relief (q. 5: one attempt), medieval church (q. 11: three attempts), witchcraft (q. 15: one attempt), power (q. 16: two attempts), sovereignty (q. 18: one attempt), and republicanism (q. 19: one attempt) received. If this trend continues in the following years, tutors may want to address the issue by reconsidering the list of lectures that are offered for this paper or the way in which its various sections and the faculty bibliography are organised. This year candidates' choice demonstrated a marked decline of interest in socio-economic topics (but q. 3 about early modern cities still had fourteen answers) and a clear attraction to very specific elements of political history, the most answered question for Section D (Politics) being q. 20 about rebellions, with thirty-two attempts (the most answered question in absolute), followed at a great distance by q. 17 on authority, with five attempts. There was slightly more balance among the choices made for Section B (Culture), with q. 10 about the impact of America that received twenty answers, followed by q. 8 about print with fifteen answers, q. 6 about the Renaissance with nine answers, q. 7 about art with seven answers, q. 9 about science with six answers, and Section C with the sixteen answers given to q. 16 about the Protestant Reformation plus the eleven answers to q. 17 about religious tolerance that substantially equalled the number of the answers to q. 13 about the Council of Trent. Finally, there seems to be an interesting correspondence between the larger variety of questions chosen for a particular section and the latter's greater appeal to students: Section B and Section C had fifty-seven answers each, Section A had forty-eight answers, and Section D had forty-two answers.

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

70 candidates entered this exam, and there was one withdrawal, for a total of 69 scripts. 44 candidates belonged to the History Main School, while 25 were joint school candidates. The median mark achieved this year was 67, which was considerably above last year's median of 64. The mean mark was also 67. 18 candidates – roughly a quarter of all candidates – achieved an overall mark of 70 or above. With one exception, the remaining candidates all achieved a passing mark.

There were 20 questions to choose from. All questions were attempted by at least one candidate. The most popular were questions 1 (industrialisation), 18 (resistance to imperial expansion), 2 (urbanisation), 14 (secularisation), and 8 (economic distress and revolution). The least popular were questions 10 (emancipation), 3 (conservatism), and 20 (outbreak of WWI). Some of the questions that allowed for a further degree of selection produced a good mix of answers – question 1 elicited a range of answers on regional and global connections individually and together, and question 12 saw different combinations of identities considered. Others were less well explored – question 2, on urbanisation, was answered overwhelmingly with reference to migration; a few imaginative answers tackled urbanisation and communities; no candidate considered urbanisation and family life. Of the nine responses to question 16, eight focused on antisemitism, and only one focused on racial sciences. Answers to question 19 (on the environment) were largely focused on the effects of industrialisation, though two ambitious candidates attempted to discuss industrialisation and colonialism in conjunction. Given environmental history was new to EWP4 this year, the question was designed to enable candidates to apply knowledge developed partly through more standard topics; it seems likely that as teaching on this topic expands, candidates will produce a richer array of answers.

The overall quality of these scripts was undoubtedly high. There were relatively few cases of candidates not answering the specific questions asked of them and, on the whole, candidates demonstrated an impressive level of engagement with the themes of this paper. The best answers were analytically sophisticated and supported by precise references to a range of case studies and relevant scholarship. Generally, those who chose to focus on a small number of territories were hampered in their ability to fully engage with the inherently comparative nature of EWP4 questions. However, this was not universally the case – some answers that focused on only two or three case studies demonstrated impressive depth and sophistication. By far the most common element missing from all answers was contextualisation in, and engagement with, historical debate – candidates should be reminded that this is a part of the assessment criteria. Another common pitfall was candidates pointing to differences between countries and regions but not attempting to account for those differences. Few candidates contextualised European developments in a more global context, and women were rarely mentioned unless the question explicitly demanded it.

A note on typed scripts: It is difficult not to attribute the high overall median and mean marks this year, at least partly, to the introduction of typed exams. All scripts were naturally legible, but the answers were generally clearly organised and well-written, too. Some candidates were likely able to write much longer answers than they would have been able to otherwise, and on the whole, this was probably a benefit to them. That said, it is also clear that a few answers were rather too long and unwieldy. Candidates should be reminded that they are being assessed on their ability to craft a well-supported argument, which requires a degree of prioritisation of both points and evidence.

## OPTIONAL SUBJECTS

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

Forty-three candidates sat Theories of the State in 2024. The overall quality of scripts was encouraging, with seven candidates receiving marks of 70 or above, and thirty-two candidates obtaining marks of between 60 and 70. There were four scripts with marks in the 50s. It was pleasing to see that almost all questions on the paper received responses. The most popular question was question three, on Hobbes's account of the relationship between fear and liberty, which received twenty-four responses, followed by question five, on Rousseau's account of the general will, and question two, on Aristotle's understanding of human flourishing. The questions greeted with the greatest reticence were question ten, on the authors' views of gender relations, and question one, on Aristotle's concerns about political strife: these drew out four and three responses respectively. Question four, on Hobbes's view of toleration, was the only question on the paper to elicit no essays.

Historians' advice to beware secular preconceptions in approaching the history of political thought appears to have left this year's cohort unmoved.

The best answers on Aristotle engaged with his theory of active virtue, rationality, and eudaimonia, and could connect his ideas to the constitutional framework of the Politics. The stronger answers were able to relate the text to its hinterland in Aristotle's relationship to Plato and in the Nicomachean Ethics, although remarkably few candidates drew in the historical dynamics of ancient Greek politics. The stronger answers on Rousseau were also able to analyse fundamental concepts such as the General Will, amour de soi, and amour propre in a precise way; but there was often a limited awareness of the relationship between the Social Contract and Emile, or between the text and Rousseau's Genevan background. The figure of the lawgiver in Rousseau tended not to be well understood. The popular question on Hobbes drew out a goodly number of excellent responses, which engaged well with the notion of covenant and sovereignty, if less so with Hobbes's idea of the artificiality of the state. The specifics of Hobbes's political and religious background tended to pass into hazy generalities, however; and it was disappointing that no candidates appeared to have had the curiosity to venture into the second half of Leviathan. Answers on Marx were at their best where the candidates understood dialectical materialism, and looked for connections between the different set texts. There was strikingly little reflection, though, on the development of Marx's ideas over time.

Considering this year's scripts as a whole, the best candidates had evidently read and thought about the texts for themselves, adapting the rewards of forensic reading flexibly to the requirements of the questions. Weaker answers tended to misunderstand the texts; rely upon schematic or derivative generalisations; or make present-minded moral judgements about the past instead of engaging in the more complex and unsettling exercise of historical analysis. Candidates in the future can perform at their best by thinking carefully not just about the arguments which the authors make, but about why they made them, in a way that relates the texts to their intellectual, religious, and political contexts.

### **Optional Subject 2: Alfred and the Vikings**

Numbers were low this year, with only four candidates sitting the paper. The spread of marks was very similar to previous years: no candidate got under 65 and one achieved a

distinction. There was quite a lot of bunching in answers, with question 7 (on the existence of the Great Heathen Army) receiving three and questions 8 (on how Alfred won support), 10 (on Aethelflaed) and 14 (on Alfredian texts inventing the English) all receiving two answers each. The best answers both had plenty of detail and gave evidence of a thoughtful and independent response to the issues underlying the question. The weakest answers forgot to give adequate reference to the prescribed authorities as demanded by the rubric. There was an awful lot of competence on display with good knowledge of the material, but candidates should on occasion be wary of competence crowding out excellence (e.g. too much sign-posting of an argument just becomes time-wasting repetition). It would be nice to see more consideration of the sources as sources in context; candidates were generally strong on sources' agendas (unsurprisingly considering how much of the paper focuses on this) but sometimes could have been better about issues like audience and transmission.

### **Optional Subject 3: Early Gothic France**

Fewer than five candidates

### **Optional Subject 4: The Mongols**

Twenty-four students (including seven from Joint Schools) took the paper. Achievement was once again high, with 17 candidates gaining 2.i marks and 7 awarded Firsts. All the students had clearly engaged closely with the set texts and grasped the core issues at stake; differences in achievement opened up in the nuance with which the perspective of the set texts was handled (for example, consideration of cultural frameworks and issues of genre), and how effectively terms and the implications of concepts were probed. For example, answers to the most popular question on the Mongol approach to religion (q. 6, 14 takers), all successfully identified the Mongols' openness to drawing on different religious practices, often then exploring either conversion to Islam over time or the limits to Mongol toleration. The strongest answers also problematised the concepts of religion and conversion, using the secondary literature to explore what these might have meant to the Mongols. The next most popular questions were question 4 on whether authors from the Latin West always found the Mongols incomprehensible (10 takers, who put in much good work on a wide range of set texts) and question 10 on the success of Mongol wives and regents (9 takers, with the best answers making use of effective comparisons and digging into the factors shaping the status and potential for success and failure of different wives). Answers on the Secret History of the Mongols and the norms of steppe society (8 takers) were without exception very good: candidates demonstrated particularly thoughtful engagement with this demanding text and its themes. Question 7 on trade and merchants (7 takers), and question 3 on the rise of the empire and climate (6 takers) were also popular. The remaining questions attracted 1-3 takers each (1 taker each for q. 2, 5, 9, 2 takers for q. 8, 12 and 3 takers for 11, 13 and 14). All questions on the exam paper were therefore attempted; it was good to see candidates following their interests and tackling the questions on topics such as travel, change and Mongol rule, making creative use of the set texts and additional sources in the process. The most common problems drawing down marks were failure to link material clearly into the argument and not centring the argument on the exact question set. In a legacy of A-level, some essays – including some first-class essays - seemed determined to force all their material into three paragraphs, leading to very long thematic paragraphs containing multiple, tenuously linked elements. A more flexible template, thinking in terms

of sections that can be subdivided into paragraphs at need, would do better justice to candidates' material and help unfold their arguments precisely.

### **Optional Subject 5: Crime and Punishment in England**

Five candidates took the paper this year, all from the main school. Two achieved first class marks, the other three received marks in the sixties. A good range of questions were addressed: on ideas of legal consciousness, gender and sexuality, the role of communities, victims' subjectivities, and imaginative literature. There was a clustering of answers around heresy and the spectacle of punishment.

The answers were all of good quality, and the candidates have all thought carefully and sensitively about the implications of the material: overall, there was a good understanding of legal mechanisms, and a sensitive approach to the human experiences and subjectivities which lie at the heart of our studies. Those that stood out not only had a clear argument, but a depth of analysis of the primary material which was impressive. The weaker answers often also had a clear argument, but failed to achieve the same level of precise analysis of the sources. The best answers were also able to bring together different kinds of sources – chronicles, literary texts, legal sources and so on – and to incorporate a methodological sense of the different kinds of things those sources can tell us. The best answers also revealed an understanding of how different kinds of legal records were produced. Weaker answers often relied on too much generalisation, and tended to focus on just one or two examples to extrapolate broad arguments which were far less substantiated.

### **Optional Subject 6: Nature and Art in the Renaissance**

Six students sat this paper, receiving a range of marks between 72 and 62 and three narrow distinctions. The questions attempted were someone bunched, with six of fourteen questions not attempted by anyone. The questions attempted tracked lecture and tutorial topics more closely than set texts; yet the most popular question (answered by five of six students) involved the comparison of two set texts (Vasari and Stradanus), and the amount of knowledge displayed on the former was the most impressive aspect of this set of scripts: here, outside reading was put to excellent use. The preference for questions on collecting and alchemy, noted last year, remained evident. The best answers deployed the distinctions central to the paper with skill and nuance, illustrating the deep logic underlying the questions with an impressive range of examples drawn from the prescribed sources as well as other materials. The weakest answers were distracted by tendentious assumptions buried in the secondary literature from engaging closely with the issues central to the paper. The conceptual framework underlying this paper is being sharpened year-on-year. Students are advised to attend very carefully to this framework and to use it to organise their reading, thinking, discussion, and writing in preparing for next year's Prelims paper.

### **Optional Subject 7: Witch-craft and Witch-hunting in Early Modern Europe**

Twenty-three candidates sat the paper. Overall, 4 distinctions were awarded. There was one mark below 60, and the rest of the marks ranged across the 60s. Candidates tackled all but one question - Q.11 (geography and climate). The most popular question was Q.12

(sceptics), followed by Q.13 (trial records), Q.4 (demonologists) and, jointly, Q.3 (the devil's interaction with men and women) and Q.5 (visual images).

Candidates are encouraged to engage closely and consistently with the question, challenge its presumptions, and think about terms used. Candidates are also urged to tackle questions on less standard topics, where greater creativity in response can be displayed. Stronger work delineated a clear and well-structured argument from the outset. Such scripts went beyond the prescribed sources and engaged fruitfully with the historiographical literature, as well as considering issues such as audience and the reception of texts and images. These responses were alert to the importance of regional contexts and chronological change, especially when analysing individual authors and thought carefully about the types of source material, and differences as well as relationships between them, such as trial records and pamphlet literature. When answering questions relating to gender, candidates should remember to discuss men as well as women.

### **Optional Subject 8: Making England Protestant, 1558-1642**

Four candidates took the paper this year. There was one Distinction (70) and three Pass grades (all between 65 and 61). As this suggests, the general standard on display was more competent than excellent. Although a small group, half of the questions on the paper attracted takers, with q. 7 (on the royal supremacy) receiving answers from all the candidates. The best answers displayed a pleasing engagement with the set texts, and a real effort to construct clear arguments on the basis of thoughtful interaction with the precise terms of the questions as set. Less effective answers tended to be descriptive rather than consistently analytical, with the weakest making only fleeting use of the set texts.

### **Optional Subject 9: Conquest and Colonization: Spain and America in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century**

Twenty-four candidates took the paper this year (all for Main School, apart from two for Ancient and Modern History and one for History and Modern Languages). The overall quality was good, although most scripts were of average quality and slightly repetitive in their structure and content, which points to a possible issue in terms of independent thinking and creative engagement with the paper. The spread of final marks was as follows:

75-79: 1

70-74: 3

65-69: 17

60-64: 2

55-59: 0

50-54: 1

There seems to be a growing divide between a group of students who engage with more recent scholarship, discuss a range of set texts in detail, and tend to get higher marks and another group who stick to more traditional historiography and either do not refer to set texts or almost exclusively refer to conventional Spanish sources. Answers to questions that asked for some consideration of indigenous records or perspectives (48.5%) had an average mark of 68, whereas those exclusively focusing on Spanish elements (51.5%) had an average mark of 66. Additionally, candidates answering questions about indigenous records or perspectives dealt with a range of topics, among which the most popular were the issues



posed by using indigenous records (q. 1), which received fifteen answers, and the comparison of Inca and Aztec empires (q. 2), which was answered by ten candidates. Five students attempted the question on the place given to indigenous conflicts in Spanish chronicles (q. 4), while the question on Betanzos's account of Cajamarca (q. 6) received four answers and the question on the role of caciques/kurakas (q. 9) only one. Candidates more attracted by questions only concentrating on Spanish materials and perceptions limited their choices to four questions, namely, about the debate over indigenous people (q. 13) with sixteen answers; about missionary strategies (q. 10) with fourteen answers; about the mental world of conquistadors (q. 3) with five answers; and about Landa's account (q. 7) with only two answers. No candidates tried the questions about Malintzin/Doña Marina (q. 5), the evolution of the encomienda system (q. 8), silver mining (q. 12), and the reality of Spanish colonialism in rural areas (q. 14). Overall, a concerning lack of knowledge about, or interest in, the socio-economic part of the paper can be noticed. Tutors may want to try to remedy to this issue, while at the same time encouraging their students to integrate more systematically both Spanish and indigenous elements and perspectives when preparing for the exam.

### **Optional Subject 10: Brigands in a Landscape: Banditry, Rural Crime & Rebellion in the Mediterranean & Black Sea regions c.1750-1950 (new)**

This was the first year that this OS has run: the initial cohort was made up of 10 students. In the end two students received distinction marks, two marks in the upper 2.ii range, while the rest were mostly in the lower 2.i bracket. The average mark was 64.4. All but three questions (2, 9 and 14) were attempted at least once, and in general one did not see the grouping that usually accompanies OS papers. The most frequently attempted questions were those directed towards pastoralism, the social bandit concept and urban popular culture (1, 3, 7), but no question was overwhelmingly popular.

This first batch of scripts perhaps reveals some teething problems in the design of the course. All students showed at least reasonable familiarity with the prescribed texts, and some made very good use of them (and some were finding their own sources too!). However, not all students had thought sufficiently about the nature of those sources – how, when and where they were created, by whom and crucially for whom. Indeed, there was a tendency to use them all as if they were relevant to all questions: but Planché's melodrama 'The Bandit' is a very different type of document to memoirs written by bandits or hostages, and so can only really speak to different types of questions.

Most students had got some kind of handle on Hobsbawm's concept of 'social banditry' (slippery even in the original). However other concepts deriving from the social sciences, and in particularly historical anthropology, such as 'amoral familism', 'world of limited good', 'honour and shame cultures', 'violent peasant entrepreneurs', were less aired, and there was a noticeable unwillingness to actually name theorists and historians, even when citing their studies. For next year, it would perhaps be useful to reshape the reading lists, so that the historiographical debates and issues are more clearly signposted from the beginning of the course, or even in the preliminary reading. Ideally students would learn that they are engaging in an ongoing debate, in which they can both use and critique scholars' works, rather than trying to synthesise a response that treats all their various readings equally flatly.

**Optional Subject 11: When Neighbours Became Strangers: Violence, Community and Identity in Late Ottoman Syria, c. 1840-1900** (*new*)

This is the first time this paper has been examined. 13 students sat this paper and the results were generally very good: the majority of responses fell in the mid-60s. Students who excelled in the paper produced excellent scripts with a few outstanding responses awarded marks in the low 70s. All but two of the questions (Q3 and Q13) were attempted by at least one student. The most popular questions were Q8 (on Muslims and dhimmis in Ottoman Syria) and Q10 (on identity formation among Syrian migrants to the United States), which attracted nine and six responses respectively. Otherwise, the responses were fairly evenly distributed across the rest of the questions: Q4, Q6, and Q9 all received 4 responses, and Q11, Q12, and Q14 received a few responses each. Generally, the responses showed students had command of the main set texts, with frequent reference to the writings of Mishaqa, al-Hasibi, and al-Bustani. There were fewer attempts to engage with the sources by Arbeely or the Barakats. What set the strongest answers apart was an attention to specific, illustrative passages in the texts as well as an ability to situate the text deeply within the relevant contexts (Syrian, but also America and global). The very best answers made insightful reflections on audience, modes of publication, language differences, and the relationship between the writing of the source and the passage of time since 1860. Where students engaged in a close study of a particular source, they tended to write very insightful answers, for example on Q9 about the idea of ‘the homeland’ in al-Bustani’s writings. Weaker answers tended only to refer to the set texts in a general way, without using them as evidence for a larger argument that answered the question. Overall, candidates demonstrated a good understanding of sectarianism, intercommunal relations, and the variety of approaches to the events of 1860. Some candidates ranged widely in the use of set texts – for example, by drawing in texts from different weeks to answer a given question – they managed to construct distinctive, engaging, and very impressive responses that were awarded outstanding marks in the mid-70s. Conversely, the weakest responses were those that failed to substantiate their claims with reference to any set texts and/or lacked command of the details.

**Optional Subject 12: Haiti and Louisiana: The Problem of Revolution in an Age of Slavery**

31 candidates sat this paper, achieving a median mark of 68, a significant rise over the previous year’s 65. This reflects a generally strong cohort, but masks some consistent flaws. Almost all questions on the paper were attempted, though answers tended to cluster around just four of the set questions. This suggested candidates were perhaps relying too much on ‘question-spotting’ in their revision. Although answers were generally strong, with 7 candidates achieving marks of 70 or above, most of these higher marks were only 70, reflecting work with significant weaknesses, even if they also had marked strengths. Many scripts had one stronger and two weaker essays, which again suggested problems with revision. In most cases, candidates made very little reference (and in most cases no reference) to any secondary literature, in spite of the emphasis on recent and classic literature in the various reading lists produced for this paper. Detailed, as opposed to superficial, knowledge of set texts was demonstrated most convincingly only a small number of candidates. Scripts were free of catastrophic errors. No student was awarded a

mark under 60 this year -- though some scripts did give the assessor pause. Candidates in future years might wish to focus on definite engagement with both primary and secondary material, rather than relying on more general allusions to scholarly debates. However, it is clear that the general themes of this paper continue to excite students, and the general strength of the answers reflects this.

### **Optional Subject 13: Imperial Republic: The United States and Global Imperialism, 1867-1914**

12 candidates took the paper. They generally answered a broad sweep of questions with a bias towards cultural topics such as gender, race and consumption. A few questions were avoided entirely, such as those on Protestantism and imperial power and – unfortunately – the resistance of colonial subjects. As a group, the answers were strong with candidates making clear arguments backed up by primary sources from the reading list. The very best responses made more nuanced and precise claims, accounting for change over time, or the difference between public presentation and political realities. The weakest responses shoehorned in unnecessary historiographical debates, or made arguments which were vague and undefined. Critical evaluation of historical works – rather than their mere reproduction – might have been better incorporated into a number of responses. More specifically, the questions on race and gender were weaker on the anti-imperialist side. On the race question, students also tended to conflate Anglo-Saxonism with racial exclusion and American exceptionalism, instead of unpacking how these elements could exist in tension with one another, and exploring other forms of racial hierarchy. The evaluation of distinctions between formal and informal empire might have been foregrounded in the question on financial and business elites. Overall, however, the collection of scripts was impressive, particularly as candidates displayed a detailed knowledge of the bibliography and the ability to imaginatively deploy primary sources in support of their own arguments.

### **Optional Subject 14: The New Woman in Britain and Ireland, c. 1880-1920**

Twelve students took this paper in 2024, of which three were joint schools. Three candidates were awarded Distinctions, while the rest achieved marks of 65 and above. This represents an improvement on last year's results, though the range of questions answered this year was narrower than in 2023. Questions on marriage, sex, and women's suffrage were the most popular, though a number of students also wrote on separate spheres and religious ideology. Four questions were not attempted. Two of these were on explicitly political themes, one was on Empire and another was about class. This did not necessarily reflect a lack of interest in or understanding of these themes and many of them were addressed in other essays. The best answers on women's suffrage, for example, displayed a good grasp of the legislative and party political background of the campaign, as well as its place within Victorian and Edwardian politics more broadly. Empire and class featured in a number of answers too, reflecting student interest in both these themes over the term. I was pleased to note how well a number of candidates integrated Heavenly Twins into their answers, but I also noticed that a number of candidates cited novels and plays as though they were set texts, rather than acknowledging the secondary materials which featured them. Future students should be mindful of the difference and should be prepared to discuss the set texts in detail and with precision. The best answers drew from a range of set

texts, often linking them in interesting ways. They also reflected an awareness of the different ways in which particular texts could be read. Weaker answers, on the other hand, tended to discuss the texts in very general terms, often not taking into account how opinions, laws and politics changed over the period.

### **Optional Subject 15: The Rise and Crises of European Socialisms, 1883-1921**

12 students sat the paper, having attended six tutorials and having available 6 lectures. 3 students received marks of 70 and above. The median mark was 66.5, compared to 68 in 2023. There were no second or third-class marks, and no instances of short-weight. Popular questions included those on women's rights and the impact of the revolutionary crisis at the end of the second world war. Most questions attracted at least one answer. The question asking candidates to comparatively evaluate different categories of set text source material was not popular. It is a difficult topic, but one worth considering and weaving into answers in general. Overall, answers showed good knowledge and genuine intellectual engagement, though perhaps a reticence in really developing original responses.

### **Optional Subject 16: 1919: Remaking the World**

There were 17 candidates for 1919: Remaking the World this year. Performance was reasonably satisfactory on the whole. Four achieved a mark in the 70s, and the lowest was 57. It is disappointing that relatively few candidates attained a mark in the high 60s, with quite a number clustering around the low 60s. Common weaknesses were poor organisation of ideas, a lack of focus and lack of clarity and cogency in the argument. Students generally have good levels of knowledge, but need to employ it better and make more explicit use of the prescribed texts. Better answers showed good range, more incisive thinking (e.g. differentiating between regions/cases) and grappled with the terms of the question. Two questions were unanswered – on the working class and the idea of peace – while questions on mandates, national interest vs international solidarity, the PAC, and international arbitration vs disarmament were very popular. Students need to be careful when choosing questions to ensure they can show breadth of knowledge as some combinations make it more likely for material to be recycled.

### **Optional Subject 17: Living with the Enemy: The Experience of the Second World War in Europe**

This remains a successful and strongly-demanded element of the undergraduate Prelims course. The marks awarded ranged from 58 to 73, with five of the 13 candidates achieving marks of 70 or above. That reflected the pleasing willingness of the stronger scripts to engage with the challenges that these predominantly autobiographical and fictional primary texts present as historical sources. The most frequently answered question was by some distance that on women's experience – which was answered by 10 of the candidates. But there was a good range of essays in response to most of the other questions. Only the questions on political attitudes and on aerial bombing failed to attract any answers. As in previous years, it is noticeable that candidates are drawn towards questions which focus on issues of personal identity – gender, Jewish experience, and the experience of battle – and generally avoid questions on the wider social impact of the war. This reflects the set texts,

but also the evolution of the historiography on the subject. The challenge will be to ensure that the source materials evolve in order to engage with themes such as racial identities, sexuality, and masculinity that are coming to the fore in current historical writing.

### **Optional Subject 18: Global USSR: Empires, Borders and Identities**

Thirteen candidates attempted the examination for the 'Global USSR' option in Trinity Term 2024. The marks varied from 56% to 73%. Both the mean and the median marks were 67%. The candidates attempted all questions except 8 and 10 (see the full list of questions below). In contrast to last year, many candidates tackled the questions which invited them to reflect on broad methodological and conceptual questions arising out of the paper (12-14). These issues were discussed more extensively and more explicitly in classes and tutorials this year. The issues pertaining to questions 8 and 10 were tackled in the essential readings, but more time will be devoted to unpacking them in future class discussion. Questions 1 and 13 proved most popular – they were each attempted by six candidates. Questions 9 and 11 were each attempted by five candidates. This is an encouraging trend as it suggests that candidates were prepared to tackle issues spanning the entire paper. Question 13 produced some outstanding answers, pushing candidates to reflect explicitly on key methodological questions. Questions 4 and 5 were each attempted by one candidate. These topics will be explored in more depth in future iterations of the paper. The key strength of many answers was the candidates' engagement with the global scope of the paper, evidence of meticulous research about the origins and context in which key primary sources were produced, and/or critical analysis of key methodological trends in the study of Soviet and Cold War history. Multiple candidates based their analysis on the non-European parts of the USSR and examined Soviet relations with countries of the Global South. For example, question 11 yielded some very strong and diverse answers. All answers engaged with the set primary texts. The 56% paper was characterised by some errors of fact and interpretation. Candidates with marks in the lower 60s did not introduce the sources with sufficient care. At the upper end of the marking scale, candidates brought diverse primary sources in dialogue with each other and situated their arguments in a broader historiographical context. Some outstanding answers showed evidence of independent research beyond the required reading list. I was particularly impressed with the candidates' ability to engage with social and cultural histories of the global Cold War and to move beyond state-centric narratives of Soviet history.

### **Optional Subject 19: Viewing Communism: Cinema and Everyday Life in Eastern Europe, 1944-89**

This year's results were divided between three marks over 70 (71, 72, 72), two marks in the sixties (64, 66), and one very low mark (45).

The three scripts in the seventies were balanced, thoughtful, and nuanced. These essays generally established clear frameworks and criteria for answering the questions effectively and produced a good range of evidence, drawn from films, written set texts, and secondary readings. These scripts showed awareness of how historians have attempted to complicate Cold War stereotypes and open up new ways of thinking about everyday life in the Communist world. They also grappled at least in a basic way with meta-analytical questions

about the specificities of film as a historic source and deployed analytical tools and vocabulary specific to the interpretation of moving images.

The two scripts with marks in the sixties were uneven: respectively, they demonstrated either a strong discussion of the films themselves while engaging more weakly with historical contexts and debates, or vice-versa. Strong passages were accompanied by an occasional tendency toward over-simplification and generalization or weakness in argumentation and analysis.

The very concerning mark in the 40s went to a script that demonstrated little to no knowledge of the historical context, questions, and debates covered in the class and relied on the very clichés and generalizations the historiography had consistently addressed; it also showed very limited knowledge of the set-texts themselves, re-using some of the same examples across multiple essays. Generally the script demonstrated a lack of engagement with the course material and lack of preparation.

### **Optional Subject: Industrialization in Britain and France, 1750-1870**

Nine students sat the exam, eight of them from the History & Economics joint school and one from the main school. The distribution of marks was as follows:

60-64 2

65-69 4

70-74 3

The essays with the highest scores stood out for their clear arguments and explanations, occasionally for their originality. They also had good coverage of the relevant issues, good historical examples to illustrate their points, and references to specific authors and sources, but what put them above the others was their clarity.

Of fourteen questions on the exam, ten were attempted by one or more candidates. Eight of nine candidates answered the question about the causes of high productivity in British answer, a topic that was discussed extensively in both lectures and tutorials. Scores on this question were fairly tightly clustered and rather high on average. Five candidates answered the question about differing fertility trends in Britain and France a topic hardly touched on in lecture, about which some students wrote tutorial essays. Here there was a wider range of scores. No other question was chosen by more than three students.

The questions not attempted by any candidate were those about the political revolutions of 1688 and 1789, the 'industrious revolution', market size, and inequality.

## **PAPER IV**

### **Approaches to History**

This paper was offered by 170 candidates (F 101, M 69), 115 of whom were sitting for the Main School. 27.64% of all candidates received Distinction level marks, which almost exactly replicates the level of Distinctions for the Examination as a whole. Female candidates secured 46.8% of the Distinction level marks.

The division into specialisms means that the paper's setting presented considerable logistical difficulties. The Preliminators are very grateful to the large number of colleagues who agreed to mark, some, given unexpected events, necessarily at a late stage.

As the marking was the work of eight hands, it is difficult to generalise about performance. There follows a selection of the reports submitted by markers, all of whom marked whole scripts, rather than particular sections.

Comments were generally, but by no means uniformly, positive. Criticism took the form of complaining about 'over-generality bordering on vagueness' on the one hand, and 'extreme narrowness, for instance in which a response to a notionally global or period-no-specific question employed examples drawn entirely from one period or locality.'

One marker pointed out that almost no-one answers questions from three sections. He suggested that henceforth the rubric should require candidates to answer from three sections. After all, those doing historiography are required to discuss at least three authors.

Here are two examples of the reports submitted, one from a marker who was generally positive, and the other from someone who was less impressed:

1.)

#### Section A: Anthropology and History

With the marking complete (15 scripts) the quality of essays was high with a range of marks from 62 to 76. There was a low of 58 for an individual question and a high of 78 for individual questions.

The topics chosen varied but some questions proved popular. The breakdown is as follows. Five questions were available and candidates answered 4 of them.

A1 x 1

A2 x2

A3 x2

A4 x 3

A5 – not answered. (How effective has the attempt to write the history of mentalities been?)

#### Section B: Archaeology and History

Five questions were available. Only 1 candidate answered one question (B1: How has archaeology changed the way we write history?) [**Note from editor: other markers complained about the neglect of this Section. His suggested solution was that it should be re-titled 'Material Culture'.**]

#### Section C: Art and History

Five questions were available. Candidates answered 3 of them.

C1 x 3

C2 – not answered (Have patrons determined the content of art more than the artists themselves?)

C3 x1

C4 – not answered (Why have some religious movements found the power of visual images so troubling while others have found it appealing?)

C5 x1

#### Section D: Economics and History

Five questions were available. Candidates answered 3.

D1 x1

D2 – not answered. (On some estimates, real wages in England were as high in the mid-15<sup>th</sup> as in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Can things really have been so good in the 15<sup>th</sup> century?)

D3 x2

D4 x3

D5 – not answered. (Did major inflationary episodes of the past result from a lack of constraints on the power of rulers?)

### **Section E: History of Women, Gender and Sexuality**

Five questions were available. Candidates answered 4 of them.

E1 – not answered. (How have gender roles shaped the distribution of labour?)

E2 x1

E3 x 2

E4 x4

E5 x 4

### **Section F: Sociology and History**

Five questions were available. Candidates answered 4 of them.

F1 x 1

F2 x 3

F3 x 2

F4 – not answered. (Can there be a general theory of why revolutions happen?)

F5 x 4

### **Section G: Histories of Race**

Six questions were available (Q2 allowing a choice of two). Candidates answered only 2.

G1 – not answered. (How does race intersect with either gender or class as a category of historical analysis?)

G2 x 3

G3 x 1

G4 – not answered. (How can historians recover the voices of enslaved people in the absence of written sources created by them?)

G5 – not answered. (How important has historical consciousness been in anti-racist movements?)

2.)

I marked 21 Approaches scripts. 1 scored a Distinction, 15 a 2.1-level mark, and 5 a 2.2 level mark. Very few candidates reached above mid-2.1 anonymity, due variously to a preference for narration and description over analysis, to a prevalence of airy, abstract answers that did not root themselves satisfactorily in individuals, texts, and concrete cases, and to the evergreen cardinal sin of answering questions different from those actually set. The one Distinguished script demonstrated how this paper can be made to work, effectively connecting the theories and methodologies behind different Approaches with specific pieces of historical scholarship. But it is clear that most candidates struggled with the fact that the intellectual demands of the growing number of available Approaches are so radically different from one another.

### **Historiography: Tacitus to Weber**

78 candidates offered the Historiography paper, of whom eleven were awarded marks of 70 or over, fifty-four marks in the range 60-69, and one failed in the first instance, passing on the Long Vacation re-sit.



In some cases there was a striking discrepancy between the popularity of the two questions devoted by convention to each prescribed historian: few chose to answer on Tacitus' epigram about causes being 'hidden', on Augustine's attitude to pagan historiography, on Machiavelli's to the same, on Gibbon's analysis of 'immoderate greatness', on Ranke's statement that history finds 'its perfection within itself', on Weber's putative hostility to notions of progress, etc. Two possible explanations for this partiality spring to mind, and they may be linked. First, candidates were reluctant to tackle unpredictable questions which might involve fresh thought in the examination room. Second, with the striking exception of Macaulay, they had not considered how the prescribed historians exploited their predecessors. Those sitting this paper in the future should be aware that what appears to be an unrehearsed response by a candidate working things out on the spot can give rise to a more compelling answer. They should also remember that one of the paper's main premises is the progressive rewriting of Roman history, so should have been reflecting on this theme throughout the year. The comparative questions at the end seemed for the most part a refuge for the desperate. 'Twas ever thus.

A surprising number of scripts displayed little consistency in quality between different answers. The most plausible explanation would seem to be that these candidates had devoted a lot more attention to some authors than others. This is a paper in which, exceptionally, virtue is rewarded in a straightforward fashion. If you have read and think about the texts intensively, this is likely to show through in your answers, and you will do well. Concentration on secondary literature, especially exclusive concentration on it, does not pay off; *a fortiori* depending on lectures. It was difficult to believe that the candidate who attempted to write an essay about 'Machiavely' had read anything by or about him. Having made that point, the difficulty which many candidates' experience as they encounter Augustine – because, presumably, they have little prior knowledge of Christianity – would be allayed by a careful reading of R.A. Markus's *Saeculum* (Cambridge 1972). However, the candidate who reported that after Adam ate the apple, he lost control of his erections, had certainly not found that arresting detail addressed in Markus's brilliant book.

The general impression of examiners was that candidates fared rather better with this text-based paper than they did with outlines papers. If they know the texts reasonably well, it is difficult for them to go seriously awry. Nevertheless, the standard this year seemed on the whole a little lower than last year.

### **Quantification in History**

In 2024 five students sat the Quantification in History exam, all from the history main school. As for the last three years, History and Economics students were excluded from the course because of overlap with their Economics curriculum. Attendance at tutorials was strong and consistent, while lecture attendance was mixed. It was a small cohort of students who were generally enthusiastic about statistical methods and their application. Consequently, all the students did well and revealed clear competence in the course and subject (scores clustered in the II.1 bracket). As in previous years, the exam paper included a mixture of definitional questions, practical application of statistical tests to historical data and short essays on sources and methods. The students showed an excellent grasp of how to apply statistical tests to historical data, answers in section 1 of the exam were mostly correct, and they generally showed all the steps in their calculations. The main weaknesses

were in failures to develop full essay answers (section 2 of the exam) in ways that showed mastery not only of the methods, but also an ability to tie the methods to research questions in history. However, there was little to differentiate answers to questions in section 1 (which counted for 50% of the mark), which meant that the marks were quite clustered. In coming years, the section 1 questions may need to be changed slightly to require students to provide more interpretation, or alternatively the bar could be set higher, to better differentiate between strong and excellent performances.

### **Foreign Texts: Einhard and Asser**

#### **Foreign Texts: Machiavelli**

No takers in 2023-24

#### **Foreign Texts: Meinecke and Kehr**

Five candidates sat the Meinecke and Kehr paper in 2024. Two candidates were awarded Distinctions, and there were three Passes, of which two were at a 2:1 level. The overall quality of responses was therefore generally creditable, and occasionally excellent, with a periodic admixture of disappointing answers. The first question, which is the compulsory gobbets section of the paper, was on the whole well answered; but it also drew two responses which garnered relatively weaker marks in the 50s. The strongest gobbets showed a forensic engagement with the terminology of the gobbet, supported by a clear grasp of textual context and historical detail. Weaker responses took the form of vaguer discussions of what the candidate took, sometimes unconvincingly, to be the main point of the gobbet.

Amongst the six essay questions, of which candidates had to choose two, the most popular were question three, on Kehr's approach to class; and question six, which asked candidates to compare and contrast Meinecke's and Kehr's treatments of mass politics. No candidates attempted question two, on Kehr's political stance in relation to other German historians, or question four, on Meinecke's relation to the *Geistesgeschichte* tradition. Candidates thus tended more towards questions which evaluated the patterns and plausibility of Meinecke's and Kehr's arguments, than towards questions which invited a more intellectual-historical approach to the two historians' identities and contexts. Candidates are free to exercise choice within the terms of the rubric, and several answers to the more popular questions were at Distinction level. Intellectually ambitious candidates in the future should nevertheless consider answering questions which invite them to work out how to relate Meinecke and Kehr to their German contexts, as this is where there remains particular scope for them to identify fresh connections and analytical depths.

#### **Foreign Texts: Tocqueville: *L'Ancien Régime et la Révolution***

This year there were ten takers for the Tocqueville paper, which is lower than some past years, though reflective of parallel decreasing rates of students taking French A-Levels. Despite this relatively low number of students taking the paper, a good range of the gobbets and questions were answered: each of the eight gobbet extracts were answered by at least two students and all bar one of the six essays were answered by at least two students too. The two most popular extracts were 1b – an extract from Book 1, chapter 3 about the

revolution sharing characteristics with religious revolutions – with nine out of ten students choosing it, and 1.e – an extract from Book 2, chapter 8 about the shifting fortunes of the bourgeoisie and nobility – with seven out of ten students choosing it. Only one essay was disproportionately chosen above others, with Q. 5 on whether Tocqueville overestimated the influence of the philosophes being answered by eight out of ten students.

The average mark was 64. Two scripts were marked in the 55-59 band, three in the 60-64 band, three in the 65-69 band, and two in the 70-75 band. A major reason for the disparity in marks on this paper is how centrally students treated the set text. This is not a paper about old regime France, the Enlightenment, and/or the revolution in general terms: it is fundamentally a paper geared around Alexis de Tocqueville's *l'Ancien Régime et la Révolution*. Therefore, while some responses displayed decent knowledge of eighteenth and/or nineteenth century France, unless Tocqueville and the set text were treated with depth and sophistication, there was a limit to how well the responses met the criteria for this paper. Some scripts made no specific reference to the set text or specific parts of it at all, which was disconcerting to read. Meanwhile, stronger scripts were those which could deftly zoom into specific chapters and think about the multifaceted nature of Tocqueville's arguments across the whole text, before then zooming out to place this text in a wider historiographical landscape.

This inconsistent focus on the set text was really evident in the disparity in quality in the gobbet responses. While the average mark across all questions was 64 for the paper, the average marks for q.1 alone (i.e. the gobbet responses) was 61 and there was a 21 mark range from 50-71 across all the scripts. Disaggregating further, some individual gobbet responses were barely of passing standard while others were firmly in the mid-70s. Weaker responses made no attempt to situate the extract within the set text or Tocqueville's wider works, often merely translated or paraphrased what the extract said, and often misconstrued the extract. The strongest responses were able to pinpoint the specific book and chapter that extracts came from and to use this level of detailed knowledge to contextualise the role that this extract played in Tocqueville's wider arguments in that chapter/book/the whole text. Future students should pay close attention to the set text at the centre of this paper and tutors should ensure enough time is spent on structured reading of the set text and communicating good gobbet technique.

### **Foreign Texts: Trotsky**

Fewer than five candidates

### **Foreign Texts: Vicens Vives**

Fewer than five candidates

Examiners:

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Dr. F. Bessard

Prof. G. Garnett (Chair)

Dr. G. Marocchi (Secretary)

Prof. L. Wooding

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