

GCSE (9–1)
Candidate Style Answers

HISTORY B

(SCHOOLS HISTORY PROJECT)

J411
For first teaching in 2016

J411 – Viking Expansion c. 750-c. 1050

Version 1



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Introduction

This resource has been produced by a senior member of the GCSE History examining team to offer teachers an insight into how the assessment objectives are applied. It illustrates how the sample assessment questions might be answered and provides some commentary on what factors contribute to overall levels.

As these responses have not been through full moderation, they have not been graded and are instead, banded to give an indication of the level of each response.

Please note that this resource is provided for advice and guidance only and does not in any way constitute an indication of grade boundaries or endorsed answers.

Question 2

Write a clear and organised summary that analyses Viking contact with the Arab world. Support your summary with examples.

High level response

The contact between the Viking and Arab world was limited compared to the contact between England, France and Ireland; however, it was significant. Trade was one of the key causes of Viking contact with the Arab world; when high quality silver coins from Arabia started appearing up the Volga trade route, the Swedes were intrigued and it gave them an incentive to push on with their expansion and visit these kingdoms. Using the great rivers that run through Russia, and the use of portage to change from river to river, the Vikings made it into the black sea. Though the journey was long, Viking merchants sailed to Baghdad, Itil and Samarkland with the goal to trade in the exotic markets of Arabia. This trading relationship was mutually beneficial between the two. Viking goods such as furs, amber and slaves were in high demand in the markets of the middle east, whilst the desire for silk cloth was huge back in Europe. Furthermore, the fact that the Arabs paid in silver, the Vikings preferred precious metal was incredibly convenient.

Contact was not one sided, Arab traders ventured as far as Hedeby and Birka, we know this from their written accounts; the most well-known was Ahmad Ibn Fadlan who offered interesting and informative interpretations of the Vikings. Evidence of the importance of this contact can be seen by the desertion of Hedeby and Birka when the flow of Arab silver ran dry, when the silver mines of Arabia became depleted. However, not all contact was based on trade; the raids on the Iberian peninsula of Moorish Spain caused conflict between the two as the Vikings raided the coastline. Furthermore, famously the Varangian guard were made up of Scandinavian warriors who would have had varied contact, peaceful and violent with Arabic world.

Examiner commentary

Top Level 3

The answer demonstrates a well-selected range of valid knowledge of characteristic features that are fully relevant to the question. A secure understanding is shown by the range and depth of discussion about the contact between the two cultures in regards trade and raiding (AO1).

The way the summary and structure is organised shows sustained logical coherence, demonstrating clear use of at least one second order concepts by distinguishing between positive and negative contact whilst also referencing the impact of when contacted ended and why. By doing this the answer provides a logical chain of reasoning to summarise the historical situation in the question (AO2). The answer could be developed by discussing the extent to which Arabs traded in Viking trading centres and the significance of this.

Medium level response

Viking contact with the Arab world through raiding began in Spain, whilst the Vikings had some success, the Moors in Spain were more united, were well practiced in fighting wars and managed to prevent the Vikings from having any long term success like they had in Europe. However, there was notable contact between the Viking and Arab world due to trade.

The Vikings began to trade with the Arabs through the Volga trade route through Russia. By doing this they could carry their most common goods such as furs, slaves and amber to meet and trade with Arab merchants in the markets of Baghdad. Viking traders wanted Arabian silver coins, with which they were paid in by weight, due to Vikings paying for goods in the weight of silver. They also wanted to trade for silk which was a very rare and exotic cloth which would sell for a large amount in the markets of Hedby and Birka.

Examiner commentary

Top Level 2

Demonstrates a range of knowledge of characteristic features that are relevant to the question, in ways that show understanding of them (AO1).

The way the summary is organised shows some logical coherence, demonstrating use of at least one second order concept in finding connections and providing a logical chain of reasoning to summarise the historical situation in the question by discussing the extent of the contact due to various factors (AO2). To develop this answer more of a focus is need second order historical concepts.

Question 3

What caused Viking raids in the west between 793 and 850? Support your answer with examples.

High level response

One reason Vikings raids were caused was by geographical factors; for example, the lack of farmable land in Scandinavia for the growing population. Combined with this argument is the “youth bulge effect” theory where the second sons were unable to inherit land, causing them to seek income elsewhere. It is debatable how big a factor the geographical location and population of Scandinavia was as a driving force in causing the Viking raids. However, it what can be argued that these factors were further exacerbated by the refusal from Charlemagne’s Christian empire to trade with the pagan Scandinavians.

The unique religion and culture that formed in Scandinavia was a long running contributing factor to the causes of Viking raids; for example, the Viking warrior culture and religion that had contempt for the weak. They saw raiding as a challenge rather than a violent theft, Snorra Edda provides supporting evidence of this. The big incentive to raid for many Vikings was not just financial but the fact that many Vikings would want to win fame and the favour of the Gods to guarantee entrance into Valhalla. Therefore, raiding and invading were seen as ways of building kudos, not only within Viking society but with the Gods who lived in Asgard.

Overall the temptation to raid was too much for some Vikings; the monasteries were a big factor in this, the fact that they were isolated and undefended, containing silver and gold, made them too tempting for Viking raiders not to steal from. However, overall it can be argued that it was the Vikings’ technical ability in ship building and navigation that allowed them to raid so extensively against countries with larger armies and economies than their own. The design of flat bottomed Viking long ships made navigating internal rivers easy, allowing lightning strikes on areas with little chance of reprisal meaning low risk, huge reward for the raiders.

Examiner commentary

Top Level 5

Demonstrates strong knowledge of key features and characteristics of the Viking raids in ways that show secure understanding of them (AO1).

A sophisticated understanding of second order concepts in a fully sustained and very well-supported explanation (AO2) has been made to explain how a range of facets linked and culminated into a variety of causes. To develop this answer more of focus could be on the development of raids and how the nature and scale of raiding changed.

Medium level response

One of the main causes of Viking raids is the fact that the Vikings built excellent longships that could navigate the seas and the rivers of Europe allowing them to raid at will. The design of flat bottomed Viking long ships made navigating internal rivers easier and they could strike and retreat before the country they were raiding had chance to defend themselves. This meant that they could also attack monasteries and reap huge rewards by stealing from churches. The churches would contain gold and silver and were poorly defended because they were sacred and no one that lived in the host country would think about stealing from them, such as the famous Lindisfarne church and monastery.

The Vikings however had no problem with this due to their pagan beliefs, and once word travelled home about these places it would only serve to tempt more warriors and opportunists to go and raid the coastlines of Europe.

Examiner commentary

Top Level 3

Demonstrates sound knowledge of key features and characteristics of Viking raids in ways that show some understanding of them (AO1).

Uses these to show sound understanding of one or more second order concepts in a generally coherent and organised explanation when discussing the causes of Viking raids (AO2).

Question 5

How far do you agree that the Vikings were quickly converted to Christianity? Give reasons for your answer.

[18]

High level response

Overall I would argue that the Vikings did not quickly convert to Christianity. If we look at Scandinavia's conversion as a whole, it was a slow process born out of convenience as opposed to actual true religious conversion. For a time, on the whole, Jesus was incorporated as another God to be worshipped alongside Odin and Thor. Moreover, as with Sweden and Iceland, conversion came with the threat of violence by kings and rulers who wanted the economic and political benefits of becoming a Christian kingdom. This led to public acceptance of Christianity whilst privately practicing the old pagan Norse religion. Norway is a clear example of this where, when Olaf became king in his revolt against the pagan king Hakkon, Olaf burnt pagan temples and slaughtered those who would not convert, leading to Norway becoming Christian but only in name.

However, there is no question that the Vikings did convert to Christianity and there were a number of factors which sped up this process. The first being trade; Viking traders would happily wear a cross to put their European counterparts at ease and then happily change this back to Thor's hammer once they returned home. As long as Vikings were not baptized it was acceptable for them to acknowledge the Christian religion to help grease the wheels of trade. Secondly was the work of Christian missionaries, not always welcome in Viking kingdoms, missionaries spread the word of Jesus and there is no doubt that this did appeal to ordinary people. Under the Viking belief ordinary people would not necessarily inherit a favourable afterlife compared to say warriors who die in battle. Christianity on the other hand did, on the basis that they were good Christians, which is arguably easier than being a famous warrior.

Furthermore, these missionaries managed to gain influence over Viking rulers which was key to a quicker conversion of the Viking homelands. They brought with them literacy and knowledge of government and taxation, key elements needed in building wealth and power within a kingdom and securing this for future heirs. This was quite powerful, alongside this they brought the idea of the king being anointed by God and therefore his future heirs having rightful claim over the throne something alien in Viking culture. An excellent example of this happening can be seen by the actions of Harald Bluetooth, whose baptism and creation of the Jelling stones were a huge statement of intent for how he saw the conversion of his people as an eventually rather than a possibility. Harald knew that it was more justified for Christian kingdoms to attack pagan lands. Therefore Harald wanted to reap the rewards of becoming a Christian kingdom which would protect from invasion from Germany, secure his throne and improve tax revenue by adopting a more European model of kingship.

Overall, I would argue that the conversion of the Vikings was due to external political and economic pressure from Europe, supported by the work of missionaries and the desire of kings to become as rich and as secure in their powers as their European counterparts.

Examiner commentary

Top Level 6

Demonstrates strong knowledge of key features of Viking conversion to Christianity and the important characteristics of the period which eventually led to their conversion. The answer shows a very secure and thorough understanding of the process of conversion and distinguishing between each Scandinavian country (AO1).

The answer shows sophisticated understanding of appropriate second order concepts, such as the difference in cause and the effectiveness in each of these causes in Vikings converting to Christianity. In sustained, consistently focused and convincing explanation is given as to why conversion took so long and a very well-supported judgment is made on the issue in the question (AO2).

There is a well-developed and sustained line of reasoning which is coherent, relevant and logically structured which shows that rulers were influential but limited in their conversion of the people they ruled. To improve this answer reference to the first churches and archbishops could have been made in regards the fact that they came into existence in the early 12th century arguably the end of the Viking age. Secondly more focus needed on the practicalities of how the two religions co-existed and how this halted complete conversion.

Medium level response

Viking conversion to Christianity did happen quite quickly once the rulers of the three different Scandinavian countries converted to Christianity. However, this was not straight away because the Norse people were very attached to their own Gods such as Thor or Odin. This began to change when the Frankish priests began to do missionary work. They tried to convert the people by baptizing them and also converted some Viking rulers who then insisted that the people they ruled were converted. This meant that some people had no choice and practiced their pagan religion in secret or some simply did not listen and kept the old Gods and pagan ways. Over time though most of the country did convert but this took a long time. For example in 995 Olaf Trygvason became King Olaf I and decided to convert Norway and Iceland to Christianity. He did this by forcing the people and trying to destroy their religion by burning or destroying Viking temples and killing those who would not convert.

This is very similar to what happened in Sweden, when the king Olof Skotkonung decided to destroy sacred groves and have statues of the Gods dragged through the streets this caused an uprising amongst the people. This is an example of why Sweden was the very last to fully convert, this could also have been because it was the last to have missionaries enter their kingdom. By converting many Viking rulers were wise because it allowed them the protection of the church from other Christian countries that may try and attack them such as Germany and also allow their children to inherit the crown from them. This is because the Christian kingship beliefs held that the king had been chosen by God so therefore the crown must go to his eldest son when he died.

Due to the fact that it took two centuries for the Vikings to finally become Christian and the fact that they were in most cases forced to become Christian I would say overall that the Vikings were not converted to Christianity quickly. It can be argued that it was a long process in which the two religions co-existed for a long period of time.

Examiner commentary

Top Level 4

Demonstrates sound knowledge of key features and characteristics of the conversion of the Viking people. Secure understanding is shown through a range of examples and historically factual content (AO1). Shows strong understanding of appropriate second order concepts in setting out a sustained and generally convincing explanation to reach a supported judgment on the issue in the question in regard the length of time the conversion took and the mitigating factors within this (AO2). There is a developed line of reasoning which is clear, relevant and logical structured.



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