



Y301/01 The Early Anglo-Saxons c.400–800

Time allowed: 2 hours 30 minutes

- the OCR 12-page Answer Booklet (OCR12 sent with general stationery)

- Use black ink.
- Answer Question 1 in Section A and any **two** questions in Section B.
- Write your answer to each question on the Answer Booklet.
- Do **not** write in the barcodes.

- The total mark for this paper is **80**.
- The marks for each question are shown in brackets [].
- Quality of extended responses will be assessed in questions marked with an asterisk (*).
- This document consists of **4** pages.

SECTION A

Read the two passages and then answer question 1.

- 1 Evaluate the interpretations in **both** of the two passages and explain which you think is more convincing as an assessment of the achievements of King Offa. [30]

Passage A

Offa died on 26 July 796 at the height of his power. In 792 he had given a daughter in marriage to Aethelred of Northumbria, and during his last years his supremacy throughout England was unchallenged. But he is the obscurest of the leading figures of Anglo-Saxon history and it is easy to underestimate his achievement. No contemporary wrote the history of his reign, and of much that he did there is only a faint tradition. King Alfred ranked him as a legislator with Aethelbeht of Kent and Ine of Wessex, but no copy of his laws has been preserved. His unification of southern England ran counter to the traditions of all the local kingdoms, and aroused resentments which were factors in English politics for a generation after his death. Alcuin, who admired his strength, saw in his son's untimely death a judgement on his ruthlessness.

Nevertheless, as the history of his reign is traced from one fragment of evidence to another, it gradually becomes clear that this formidable and unsympathetic king was a statesman. He grasped the idea of a negotiated frontier. He was the first English king to play an independent part in continental affairs and he was not overshadowed by the greatest ruler of the whole Dark Ages [Charlemagne]. He understood that it was the duty of a king to encourage foreign trade. He used papal authority over the English church for his own political advantage. No other Anglo-Saxon king ever regarded the world at large with so secular a mind or so acute a political sense.

Adapted from Sir F. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, published in 1943.

Passage B

Offa must have struck his contemporaries as a ruler of awesome power. Many would have become familiar with his name or image on his coinage, and some would have been grateful to him for promoting good business practices. The bishops and abbots who gathered at councils convened under the auspices of the archbishops of Canterbury would have seen much evidence of imperious behaviour. The Welsh who had experienced Mercian oppression in 778 and 784 were doubtless greatly impressed by the effort and expenditure that went into the construction of Offa's Dyke.

Yet Offa was no match for Charlemagne, and no model for Alfred the Great. He may have lacked a contemporary biographer, and it may be that we are dependent on reports emanating from his 'victims', whether at Worcester, Canterbury or in Wales; but even to suggest the comparison is to set him up as something that would misrepresent the kind of ruler that he was, and the kind of ruler that he claimed to be. Offa was driven by a lust for power, not by a vision of English unity; and what he left was a reputation not a legacy. Alfred made a point in his law code of remembering Offa's legislation for his people and the chronicler Aethelweard described him as 'an extraordinary man'.

Offa was remade in the twentieth century as a unifying principle of early English history, not so much on the basis of the legend gathered at St Albans [Offa founded St Albans Abbey] as on the basis of the analysis of his character. The notion that Offa claimed to be 'king of the English', or 'king of the whole country of the English', has been shown to depend, however, on charters forged in the tenth century. In his own day he was 'king of the Mercians' and proud enough to be so.

Adapted from S. Keynes, *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Anglo-Saxon England*, published in 2014.

SECTION B

Answer **TWO** of the following three questions.

- 2*** How far did the reasons for the expansion of Early Anglo-Saxon kingdoms in Britain change in the period from c.400 to c.800? **[25]**
- 3*** How successful was the Early Anglo-Saxon Church in dealing with the challenges it faced in the period from c.400 to c.800? **[25]**
- 4*** To what extent was the Early Anglo-Saxon economy dependent on trade in the period from c.400 to c.800? **[25]**

END OF QUESTION PAPER

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