

A LEVEL

Examiners' report

HISTORY A

H505

For first teaching in 2015

Y312/01 Summer 2019 series

Version 1

Contents

Introduction3

Paper Y312/01 series overview4

Section A overview.....5


 Question 15


Section B overview.....6

 Question 26

 Question 37

 Question 47


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Introduction

Our examiners' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates. The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

Where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report. A full copy of the question paper can be downloaded from OCR.

Paper Y312/01 series overview

Y312 is one of twenty one units for the revised A Level examination for GCE History. This unit tests an extended period of History of at least one hundred years through an Interpretation option on a named in-depth topic and two essays. The paper is divided into two sections. In Section A candidates are required to use contextual knowledge to test the views of two historians about one of the three named in-depth topics or an aspect of one. The question does not require them to comment on the style of writing or the provenance of the interpretation. In Section B candidates are required to answer two essay questions from a choice of three.

To do well on Section A, candidates need to explain the view of each interpretation in relation to the question and then evaluate the interpretation by the application of contextual knowledge. Responses should show an understanding of the wider debate connected to the issue.

To do well on Section B, candidates need to make connections and links across the whole period, explaining similarities and differences between the events they are discussing in order to show an awareness of continuity and change across the whole period unless instructed otherwise. The comparisons made may be either between periods within the topic or between regions. The strongest answers will test a hypothesis and reach a supported judgement.

<i>Candidates who did well:</i>	<i>Candidates who did less well:</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • showed a clear understanding of the views of the two interpretations in relation to the question • were able to use contextual knowledge to test the interpretations, linking that knowledge directly to the interpretation through evaluative words • were able to consider both the strengths and limitations of both interpretations using contextual knowledge • in answering the essay questions, covered the whole period in a balanced way • adopted a thematic approach • made links and comparisons between aspects of the topic • explained the links and comparisons • supported their arguments with precise and relevant examples • reached a supported judgement about the issue in the question • demonstrated an understanding and familiarity with the different command verbs e.g. identify, describe, explain and discuss. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • showed a limited understanding of one or both of the interpretations • did not go beyond a basic explanation of part of the interpretation • did not link any contextual knowledge directly to the interpretation and therefore did not evaluate the interpretation • in answering the essay adopted a chronological rather than thematic approach • did not make links or comparisons even if events from different parts of the period were discussed in the same paragraph • did not cover the whole period • did not focus on the precise wording of the question • made unsupported comments about issues which were no more than assertions.

Section A overview

To do well on Section A, candidates need to explain the view of each interpretation in relation to the question and then evaluate the interpretation by the application of contextual knowledge. Responses should show an understanding of the wider debate connected to the issue.

Question 1

- 1 Evaluate the interpretations in **both** of the two passages and explain which you think is more convincing as an explanation of the increase in the persecution of witches in Southern Germany in the period from c.1590 to 1630. [30]

Responses showed a good understanding of the two interpretations with candidates able to identify and explain the main features of both. Most responses commented that A focused on the autonomy and lack of unity of the regions and the judicial environment found in South Germany. In contrast, most were able to identify that Interpretation B focused heavily on the religious divisions within the area, but there was also some mention of the legal and political situation. The strongest answers focused on evaluating the two interpretations, while a number just explained the interpretations and did not link their knowledge to the actual interpretations. Those that did evaluate often showed a considerable depth of knowledge, ranging from the contrast between states where there was strong central authority, such as Bavaria or Austria, to those such as Trier and Bamberg where central authority was almost non-existent and the wishes of the Emperor were ignored. Most responses commented on the functioning of the judiciary within these autonomous regions and commented on how it allowed the Prince Bishops to engage in acts of torture with the building of a torture house. Knowledge of the prince bishops was often very detailed but if the higher levels are to be attained it does have to be used to evaluate and not simply imparted or used to explain the interpretation – how does it show that the interpretation is either valid or invalid? There were also comments about issues such as the Carolina and how persecutions ceased with the conquests of Gustavus Adolphus. In discussing Interpretation B, candidates showed a good understanding of issues surrounding the development of the Thirty years war and some challenged the role of religion by noting that the Reformation had begun some one hundred years earlier. Some also argued that persecutions did not always follow religious divides with Lutherans reporting fellow co-religionists. Candidates also showed a good awareness of both religions seeking to establish a 'godly state' and the role this played in the persecutions and also commented on the importance of the Jesuits. In challenging the interpretation, responses also considered whether some Prince Bishops were more concerned with acquiring wealth and provided some detailed examples of what was gained. The depth of knowledge on display was often very encouraging, but the key to a strong answer was using it to evaluate and not simply explain.

There were a significant number of responses where there was too much focus on what was missing from the interpretations and this will not score highly. It is important to focus on what is there as historians will not consider every issue in the relatively short number of words provided. Similarly, candidates should avoid commenting on the author and provenance of the interpretations.

Section B overview

To do well on Section B candidates need to make connections and links across the whole period, explaining similarities and differences between the events they are discussing in order to show an awareness of continuity and change across the whole period unless instructed otherwise. The comparisons made may be either between periods within the topic or between regions. The strongest answers will test an hypothesis and reach a supported judgement.

Question 2

- 2* To what extent did participation in popular culture change in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries? [25]

This was a popular question and the strongest answers were able to focus on 'to what extent' rather than why, which was a feature of many responses in the middle and lower end of the mark range. The strongest answers were able to provide a range of precise examples of involvement in popular culture from across Europe and make contrasts between much of Northern and Southern Europe in terms of participation in events such as Carnival. Many approached the question by looking at the participation of different elite groups, such as the clergy or nobility and this provided an opportunity to make comparisons, but in too many responses the comments were often quite general or sweeping. Some were able to explain how the concept of popular culture as a 'safety valve' became a concern for authorities because of the troubles witnessed in places such as London, or how some events became an excuse for excess which went against the idea of establishing a 'godly state.' Responses also considered the extent to which the nobility retreated from participation, dining on their own or indulging in masques. However, stronger answers also noted that participation and belief remained in some areas, for example witchcraft and white magic was still accepted across the whole social strata by many. However, weaker answers focused on issues such as the development of the printing press, Enlightenment ideas and the Reformation to explain why there was a change and while this provided a partial focus it did not really get to grips with the demands of the question and kept answer in Levels 3 and 4.

Question 3

- 3* How far did the geography of the European witchcraze change in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries? [25]

This was the least popular of the three questions on this unit and while there were some good answers, some found it quite challenging. The strongest responses argued that there was a change as the later hunts were located east of the River Elbe and the earlier ones to the West. These responses also noted that there were fewer hunts in certain regions such as Spain, Italy and Ireland, with the great majority found in a narrow region close to the French border with the Empire. This allowed candidates to explain these patterns and also consider the chronology and when hunts were found in particular regions. The focus of the question should have been on 'how far' the geography changed, but a number focused more on why and wrote about religion, central and jurisdictional power and economic factors rather than on the actual location of the hunts. There were some responses that tried to consider whether the hunts were rural or urban, but again this often resulted in responses that explained why they were either urban or rural. Knowledge of hunts in Eastern Europe was often superficial or non-existent, while there were a number who wanted to write about Salem, which is not European. Many were able to describe the main areas where hunts took place, but found it more difficult to see any patterns of change and continuity, which was disappointing given that this is a major area of historiographical debate. Some stronger responses also used knowledge of the decline in hunts to help construct a thesis, again showing how the decline in the use of torture, initially in the west, had an impact on the geography. The strongest answers focused on the geography of the hunts, while less strong responses sought to explain why hunts took place.

Question 4

- 4* How important was the use of torture in the development of witch hunts in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries? [25]

This was the most popular question and provided many with the opportunity to make comparisons between regions and show and explain similarities and differences which helped take the responses into the higher levels. Many were able to use a range of examples to show how the use of torture led to an increase in rates of conviction and there was some good use of statistics to support the argument and also contrasts within the same country. Candidates often made use of developments within England in the Civil War to show how important torture was in leading to the development in hunts and contrasted this with periods when a strong central authority prevented them. Parallels were drawn with much of Southern Germany and this was also contrasted with developments in areas such as France, providing candidates with plenty of opportunity for synthesis. Candidates also commented on the dates at which torture was abolished and used this to support their argument that it played a crucial role. Responses often used this to go on and discuss central control and the judicial processes present and once again this provided ample opportunity for comparisons, with gain candidates drawing on examples from England, Scotland the peripheral regions of France and the Holy Roman Empire. Responses usually discussed a range of factors and both religious divisions and economic crises were often used to explain the development of hunts, although this was also linked to the role of individuals. Some responses were able to compare the relative importance of these factors, for example many pointed out that economic dislocation was a feature of many regions and that some did not see hunts develop and suggested that this showed it was not of primary importance. Similarly some argued that religious division was not a major factor as many hunts began over one hundred years after the Reformation and also there were hunts before. The same argument was used over literature, with candidates noting that the Malleus had been published long before hunts began. Many concluded that it was often a combination of factors that led to hunts and that it was important for most, if not all, the factors to be present.

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