



Oxford Cambridge and RSA

Thursday 26 May 2022 – Morning

A Level History A

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

Time allowed: 2 hours 30 minutes



You must have:

- the OCR 12-page Answer Booklet

INSTRUCTIONS

- Use black ink.
- Write your answer to each question in the Answer Booklet. The question numbers must be clearly shown.
- Fill in the boxes on the front of the Answer Booklet.
- Answer the question in Section A and **any two** questions in Section B.

INFORMATION

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

ADVICE

- Read each question carefully before you start your answer.

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 explanation of the development of Mercian supremacy in the reign of Athelbald.

[30]

Passage A

Athelbald was able to establish Mercian overlordship over all the English kingdoms south of the Humber. We have the testimony of Bede that he had achieved this by the year 731. He maintained this Mercian ascendancy for the rest of his long reign. The signs of it may be read in diverse pieces of evidence. Athelbald could dispose of land in the West Saxon shires of Somerset and Wiltshire. It is not coincidental that during his reign archbishops of Canterbury were of Mercian origin. It was perhaps in his time that London and Middlesex passed definitively under Mercian control. In his charters Athelbald could be styled 'king not only of the Mercians but also of all the provinces which are called by the general name South English' and his name could be subscribed Rex Britanniae, 'King of Britain'.

The language of charters may not convey much about the political realities of the eighth century; or it may. The question has long been a focus for academic debate. What is certain is that Athelbald was a very strong king and, partly by force, he succeeded in maintaining his overlordship for a longer period than any previous southumbrian king.

Adapted from: R. Fletcher, *Who's Who in Roman Britain and Anglo-Saxon England*, published in 1989.

Passage B

Bede, in the penultimate chapter of his *History*, termed him the 'overking' of England south of the Humber. This comment may reflect or may even have inspired statements of authority that can be found in some of Athelbald's own charters, most famously the 'Ismere Diploma' of 736. In this, Athelbald is styled 'king not only of the Mercians but also of all the provinces which are called by the general name South English', while in the witness list he is styled more simply but more grandiosely 'king of Britain'. It is difficult to know what to make of such titles. 'King of the South English' may confirm or echo Bede's assertion of a south Humbrian overlordship but might equally mean specifically southern Anglian peoples rather than all of those south of the Humber. At any rate, such royal styles are rare in Athelbald's reign – indeed, they only occur in texts originating from Worcester.

The overall impression of Athelbald's rule south of the Humber is that he sought to exercise concerted control over a relatively restricted area. Beyond the Mercian heartlands, for large parts of southern England, however, Athelbald must have been at most a distant overlord whose authority, such as it was, impinged little.

Conclusive evidence of Athelbald's direct involvement in South Saxon, East Anglian or East Saxon affairs is likewise lacking. In practice, there is only limited evidence of Athelbald's south Humbrian hegemony as suggested by Bede, and in many areas it probably amounted to little more than the recognition of superiority and perhaps some taking of tribute.

Adapted from: N. J. Higham and M. J. Ryan, *The Anglo-Saxon World*, published in 2013.

SECTION B

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

- 2*** 'The extent of the power of early Anglo-Saxon kings did not significantly increase in the period c.400–800.' How far do you agree? **[25]**
- 3*** 'In the period c.400–800 the Roman Church had a greater impact upon Britain and Ireland than the Celtic Church.' How far do you agree? **[25]**
- 4*** To what extent was there social and economic progress in Britain and Ireland in the period c.400–800? **[25]**

END OF QUESTION PAPER

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