

Examiners' report

GCSE

HISTORY B

(SCHOOLS HISTORY PROJECT)

**OCR Level 1/Level 2 GCSE (9-1) in
History B (Schools History Project)**

J411

For first teaching in 2016

The Mughal Empire, 1526–1707

J411/34, J411/35 and J411/36

Summer 2025 series

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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. A selection of candidate responses is also provided. 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 and the mark scheme can be downloaded from [Teach Cambridge](#).

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The Mughal Empire, 1526–1707 overview

The Mughal Empire, c.1526–1707 is one of three period study units in the Component Group 3 World History GCSE paper. The focus of assessment for the period study is knowledge and understanding, and explaining and analysing events and periods. The paper has three compulsory questions and a choice of one question from two optional questions.

The period study requires candidates to show an ability to analyse evidence using second order concepts as well as displaying their ability to explain evidence in reference to the question.

To do well, candidates need to be able to present a historical summary of an area of content they have learned, offer an explanation in response to a historical question (e.g. explaining the causes or consequences of something), and recall and apply their knowledge to support and challenge a statement in an essay-style question. The focus is on AO1 and AO2 – knowledge and understanding of key features of the period and the ability to analyse and explain this material. These Assessment Objectives have equal weighting. The period studies are broken down into five sections, and questions are framed around these. Candidates who had a clear understanding of these chronological periods were able to deploy relevant material on Question 3, 4 and 5 more effectively.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
- wrote a one word or one phrase specific response (Question 1(a), b and c) - organised their summary around one or more second order concepts and had more than one specific supporting example to support their response (Question 2) - explained their evidence in reference to the question using specific examples of administration to enhance the quality of their response (Question 3) - effectively deployed a range of knowledge in their choice of essay questions, using precise evidence to support their answers. They then explained this evidence thoroughly in reference to the question (Questions 4 and 5).	- wrote more than one response or a paragraph (Question 1(a), b and c) - identified a second order concept such as change within their summary but didn't provide a specific supporting example or wrote a description without organising the response around one or more second order concepts (Question 2) - did not provide specific evidence linked to Akbar's 'administration' (Question 3) - described or identified the knowledge they had used for the essay-style questions rather than explaining the evidence they used in reference to the question (Questions 4 and 5).

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Question 1 (a)

1

(a) Identify **one** reason why Babur invaded northern India.

[1]

The majority of candidates were given the mark for correctly answering this question. The most common valid response was that he was 'looking for new territory to conquer' but any relevant reason was awarded the available mark.

Question 1 (b)

(b) Give **one** piece of evidence which shows that Shah Jahan cared about luxury in his court.

[1]

The majority of candidates were given the mark for correctly answering this question. The most common valid response was 'the Peacock Throne' but any relevant evidence was awarded the available mark. There were a lot of candidates who identified the 'Taj Mahal' as their evidence which was not credited.

Question 1 (c)

(c) Give **one** example of Aurangzeb's military campaigns after 1681.

[1]

Of the three 'short answer' questions, candidates found this the most challenging. While a range of valid responses were seen – most commonly 'The Deccan or campaign against the Marathas' - a large number of responses were too generalised to credit or were outside of the time period of post 1681. Centres are advised to emphasise the importance of the time periods broken down in the specification with their candidates.

Question 2

2 Write a clear and organised summary that analyses the rule of Jahangir (1605–1627).

Support your summary with examples.

[9]

Most candidates attempted this question effectively. The majority of candidates were able to frame their response around at least one second order concept. Most commonly for this question, candidates organised their response around the concepts of 'causation' (the reasons for Jahangir's success or failure) and 'consequence' (the impact of Jahangir's rule on areas such as painting, trade, religion or foreign affairs). Candidates who could successfully organise their analysis around one example of a second order concept and provided one specific supporting example were awarded Level 2, and those who could provide two (or more) specific examples were credited in Level 3.

Candidates do not need to explicitly state which second order concept(s) they are analysing.

Effective answers (see the exemplar below) often approached the answer with two paragraphs which were each focused on one second order concept (this concept could be the same for each paragraph e.g., causation) supported with a specific contextual example. Less effective answers provided a narrative account of Jahangir's life or all they knew about him without analysing his rule.

Exemplar 1

2		The rule of Jahangir can be depicted as inconsistent when dealing with social issues. When this emperor first rose to power in 1605 he made 12 decrees. These were guidelines which he proclaimed he would follow to encourage his subjects to follow them as well to create a peaceful empire. The 12 decrees consisted of no drinking, no drugs and no mutilation. However, this emperor who supposedly acted as a role model for his subjects, quickly disobeyed his guidelines. His Jahangir's business meetings would turn into parties where alcoholic drinks and drugs were consumed, this as well as mutilation being a practice used to control his rebellious son. This evidence is able to illustrate Jahangir's inconsistency within the social aspect of his empire due to his actions contradicting his own proclamations to maintain peace. Overall, through Jahangir's changing actions we are presented with his inconsistency when dealing with social issues as an emperor. //
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The candidate has organised the first paragraph of their summary around the second order concept of causation. They have utilised their knowledge of the 12 decrees as the specific support of their analysis for the cause of Jahangir's inconsistency as a ruler. This allows the candidate to achieve Level 2, 6 marks at this point for a summary based on causation with one clear supporting example: the 12 decrees.

Question 3

3 Why was Akbar's administration so effective during his reign (1556–1605)?

Explain your answer.

[10]

Question 3 required candidates to explain one or more reasons why Akbar's administration was so effective during his reign (1556-1605). Candidates who described elements of Akbar's administration without explaining why they were so effective achieved Level 2. Candidates who identified a valid reason(s) for Akbar's effective administration and explained this without specific supporting knowledge or, candidates who identified a reason and gave precise evidence but did not explain how this made the administration effective, achieved Level 3. Candidates who provided a specific reason for the effective nature of Akbar's administration, supported this with specific knowledge and explained how this proves why the administration was effective were awarded Level 4 (one explained point) or Level 5 (two or more explained points).

The most successful candidates for this question tended to centre their response around the creation of the new civil service: the mansabdari system and Akbar's ability to control this, or the introduction of the new systems of communication, e.g. runners. They then explained how these elements of Akbar's administration enabled it to be effective. Candidates who simply described how Akbar was very tolerant of other religions or how he became wealthy without linking this to administrative practices did not achieve higher than Level 2.

Misconception



Many candidates didn't have specific knowledge of Akbar's administration e.g. the efficient tax system introduced, communication improvements via runners and carrier pigeons or allowing the role of Chief Minister to collapse. Many candidates tried to answer the question by explaining what they knew about Akbar's rule as a whole, rather than tying their response to the success of his administrative systems. This resulted in many candidates providing responses which did not address the demands of the question. Centres are encouraged to revisit their candidates' knowledge and understanding of this topic.

Question 4*

4* 'Humayun was more successful at overcoming problems than Aurangzeb.'

How far do you agree?

Give reasons for your answer.

[18]

Candidates have the option of answering either Question 4 or Question 5, this was the less popular of the two optional essay questions as the majority of candidates chose to answer Question 5. Both questions have the same rationale for awarding levels and marks. Candidates who offer valid material in support or in opposition of the statement are credited in Level 2, with candidates who can then explain why this material proves that Humayun was or was not more successful at overcoming problems than Aurangzeb, being able to access Level 3 and beyond. Level 3 is awarded to candidates who offer one explained reason for either side of the argument. Level 4 credits candidates who offer two explained reasons which could be on the same side of the argument, or one on each side. Level 5 credits candidates who offer three explanations providing there is some balance (e.g., the response needs to have explained points for both Humayun and Aurangzeb) while Level 6 is reserved for candidates who offer four explained points covering both sides of the argument. The final mark – 18 – is reserved for candidates who in addition to reaching Level 6 combine or interact the factors in their answer to offer a supported judgement (or 'clinching argument') about whether the candidate agrees with the statement in the question.

Candidates who achieved well on this question tended to outline clearly whether they agreed with the statement and clearly explain examples of their chosen leader's successes. For example, Humayun's ability to overcome his 15 year exile and recapturing Delhi in 1555 to re-establish the Mughal Empire, or Aurangzeb's successful conquest of Bijapur and Golconda. They then countered this with a clear explanation of the alternate leader's shortcomings, for example Humayun's failure to take Gujarat after the initial victory over Bahadur Shah due to his use of opium which caused indecisiveness, or Aurangzeb's failed military campaigns against the Marathas in the south. This enabled their response to have the element of balance needed to help them to achieve Levels 5 and 6.

Candidates who performed less well attempted to compare leaders within the same paragraph, this led to responses which didn't have a clear line of argument. Candidates should aim to centre their paragraphs on one specific supporting example and explain this clearly in reference to the question.

Question 5*

5* 'Shah Jahan only became an ineffective ruler after he became ill in 1657.'

How far do you agree with this view of Shah Jahan's reign (1627–1658)?

Give reasons for your answer.

[18]

This was the more popular of the two optional essay questions, and candidates who attempted this were able to showcase a wide range of knowledge relating to Shah Jahan's efficacy. Many candidates who opted for this question attempted to clearly explain how Jahan's building projects which benefitted his subjects before his illness in 1657, were proof that he was an effective leader. Other popular explained examples included his effective response to famine and his military campaigns such as the defeat of the Portuguese at Hugli or the fact that he was usurped by Aurangzeb and imprisoned in the Agra Fort after 1657, therefore agreeing with the statement.

The majority of candidates tended to provide strong examples which agreed with the statement however their examples for disagreeing, e.g., his failure to annex Bijapur and Golconda in the Deccan, tended to be less well explained with many candidates providing Level 2 (description) responses.

Candidates were able to effectively organise their response around the date of 1657 showing a clear awareness that this was at the end of Shah Jahan's reign.

Candidates who performed less well on this question tended to simply describe Shah Jahan's architecture of the New Capital City of Delhi and the Taj Mahal without explaining how this made him an effective leader before his illness; as a result these responses remained at Level 2.

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