

AS HISTORY

Component 1A The age of the Crusades, c1071-1204
Report on the Examination

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General comments

Many students undertaking this option had reasonable contextual knowledge. In places this was quite impressive, but often this material was not very well deployed in answer to the specific questions being asked. Some students struggled with the breadth element to this paper and wanted to reuse pre-prepared answers to questions which they were clearly more familiar with. It is important that they focus on the specific question wording and consider any dates carefully. Some misuse of terminology affected some responses and there was questionable knowledge of the geography of the Near East and Outremer which did affect the arguments given in some responses.

Question 01

Many students were able to identify the views of the two extracts - although a few students still persisted with a 'line by line' approach, which essentially just meant that the extract had been paraphrased, with little understanding demonstrated. There was some good contextual awareness about the state of Byzantium and the threat posed by the Turks in the years between Manzikert and the outbreak of the First Crusade and the best answers confidently looked at the roles of men like Suleyman, Malik Shah and Alexius I and also considered the internal problems in Byzantium.

There was a great depth of knowledge about the Battle of Manzikert, but often this was employed descriptively and was not used to assess the level of threat in the 70s and 80s. The best answers considered both strengths and weaknesses within the interpretations, but it is important to remember that this should still focus on the extract. It is not sufficient to begin listing all of the things that the extract does not include as this is argument from omission only and should be discouraged. A surprising number of students spent much time essentially agreeing with the facts given in the extracts without offering any of their own knowledge in support. For example, many accepted uncritically that pilgrims could not access the Holy Land. Students do need to ensure that they make a clear and supported decision about which extract they find most convincing. They do not need to list similarities and differences, but support their judgement with evidence. A significant minority of students insisted upon making comments about the authorship of the extracts and when they were written. This is irrelevant and should be discouraged, as should comments on tone.

Question 02

This was the less popular essay question but it did produce some pleasing responses. The vast majority of students were able to consider the role of religious/spiritual motivation versus other possible reasons for visiting the Holy Land, such as desire for territory or loot or the opportunity of social advancement. Better answers specifically tackled the concept of what it meant to be a pilgrim, perhaps by considering how those journeying behaved like typical pilgrims in many instances (marching barefoot, expelling women from the camp etc). Very few answers recognised that there was a breadth element to this question, which was a shame as this limited marks. As the question covered the years 1095 to 1107 it was expected that students might discuss the unofficial crusades in the early years of Outremer or the reasons for visits to Jerusalem after 1099 or even Bohemond's attack on Byzantine land, which was marketed as a pilgrimage.

At the lower end, some students showed very limited conceptual awareness and suggested that 'crusaders' could not be 'pilgrims'. This shows a fundamental misconception about what a 'crusade' or a 'crusader' was. Equally, it is possible for a 'warrior' or a 'soldier' to also be a 'pilgrim'.

Question 03

This was the more popular essay question and many students seemed happy to talk about reasons for the success of the First Crusade and the failure of the Second. As long as balance was achieved, and both crusades were considered, then students had the freedom to choose from a wide range of examples. Many discussed the relative poor leadership of Louis VII and Conrad versus the good leadership from the First Crusade. There was also some good debate on how religious fervour and aims affected each expedition. There was a considerable variation in quality when students discussed the situation in the Muslim Near East. Students needed to go beyond being able to make basic comments about the Sunni-Shia divide or the rise of jihad to be able to achieve higher levels in the mark scheme. Good answers gave clear examples of how the state of the Muslim World directly affected the crusades. For example, they might have talked about Nur al-Din's speedy response to Unur's request for help, which caused the crusaders to abandon their attack on Damascus in 1148.

The more sophisticated responses were aware that there was not really 'Muslim Unity' at the time of the Second Crusade - but showed that the levels of 'disunity' had decreased significantly. Some students wasted time describing examples of Muslim successes against the Franks in the inter-crusade years (Harran, Field of Blood, capture of Edessa) and often this was not effectively linked to the specific question. A number of students were a bit confused about events, for example believing that Zengi was still alive and causing problems for the Second Crusade or even believing that he ended the Sunni-Shia doctrinal split. Poor geographical knowledge also affected the quality of some arguments, with students not knowing where key events happened.

Overall there were some good answers and, as always, the best students were those who made clear judgements and supported them with specific evidence and examples. Students should be encouraged to read the questions and extracts carefully to avoid missing out on marks through irrelevant material. A small number of students had poor legibility and organisation which affected the clarity of their arguments. It was pleasing to see that the vast majority managed their time well.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.