



Oxford Cambridge and RSA

Friday 23 May 2025 – 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.

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Section A

Read the **two** passages and answer Question 1.

- 1** Evaluate the interpretations in **both** of the two passages.

Explain which you think is more convincing as an explanation of the process of Christianisation during the period from c.400 to 800.

[30]

Passage A

What attracted English kings to Christianity in the late sixth and seventh centuries? Conversion offered advantages to kings beyond the cultural or religious. The presence of strangely dressed religious professionals, with exotic patterns of behaviour and equipped with books, offered a new dimension to a royal court and distinction to its king. The Bible presented a style of kingship which was divinely ordained. It also suggested kings had law-making and tax-raising powers. Support of a literate clergy enabled kings to claim law-enacting powers and introduce changes in keeping with the growing authority of kingship. Letters made it possible for a king to communicate at a distance.

The building of monasteries provided a means of establishing a permanent royal presence in disputed territories. Christianity ensured that identical religious rituals would be replicated at all churches throughout the kingdom, with prayers said for the king. Conversion restructured religious life around the royal family.

Within their own kingdoms, churches and monasteries provided opportunities for kings to establish new institutional focal points of royal authority, around which to remodel local society. By the late seventh century, royal families were investing in family monasteries. Conversion to Christianity provided a new institutional framework which offered cohesion to kingdoms. It was Christianity, above all else, that enabled powerful kings to establish themselves across the seventh century and to create a structure which stressed their superiority.

Nicholas J. Higham and Martin J. Ryan, *The Anglo-Saxon World*, published in 2013.

Passage B

Conversion occurred 'bottom up', as individual Christians or households brought their friends, kin and neighbours over to the new religion. It occurred 'top down' as well, when missionaries targeted leading members of society and then expected the new faith to percolate out from them. Force was sometimes a factor, both in getting the leaders of society to convert, or in pushing the new religion on others.

In practice each story of Christianisation is likely to have embraced some elements of all three of these scenarios. Missionary efforts tend to be the best known. Other more direct techniques could be applied too. Pope Gregory advised one of the earliest English missionaries to forcibly convert pagan shrines to Christian usage. Doing so would serve two goals. First, it would show that the pagans' gods did not punish the missionaries for their desecration, implying the superior power of the Christian God. Second, it enabled the new converts to maintain their accustomed holy places, and potentially even some of the festivals they had celebrated there. Gregory's advice underlines the flexibility that Christian missionaries often displayed in order to get converts to accept the main tenets of the new religion, up to and including the rebranding of existing religious practices. In effect the religion took on, under a new guise, much of what had already been done in the name of earlier beliefs.

Rory Naismith, Early Medieval Britain c.500–1000, published in 2021.

Section B

Answer any **two** questions.

- 2*** 'The reign of Aethelbald (716–757) was the most important turning point in the emergence of the Mercian supremacy in the period from c.400 to 800.'

How far do you agree? [25]

- 3*** 'Theodore played a more important part than any other individual in the development of religion and the Christian Church in Britain and Ireland.'

How far do you agree with this view of the period from c.400 to 800? [25]

- 4*** To what extent did the nature of burials change in Britain and Ireland in the period from c.400 to 800? [25]

END OF QUESTION PAPER

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