



Oxford Cambridge and RSA

A Level History A

Unit Y301

The Early Anglo-Saxons c.400–800

Sample Question Paper

Version 0.14

Date – Morning/Afternoon

Time allowed: 2 hours 30 minutes



OCR supplied materials:

- 12 page Answer Booklet

Other materials required:

- None



* o o o o o o *

First name										
Last name										
Centre number						Candidate number				

INSTRUCTIONS

- Use black ink.
- Complete the boxes above with your name, centre number and candidate number.
- Answer Question 1 in Section A and any 2 questions in Section B.
- Write your answer to each question on the Answer Booklet.
- Do **not** write in the bar codes.

INFORMATION

- The total mark for this paper is **80**.
- The marks for each question are shown in brackets [].
- Quality of extended responses will be assessed in questions marked with an asterisk (*).
- This document consists of **8** pages.

Section A

Read the two passages and then answer Question 1.

- 1** Evaluate the interpretation in both of the two passages and explain which you think is more convincing in explaining the extent to which the Mercian supremacy from the eighth to early ninth centuries has been exaggerated.

[30]

Passage A

The re-establishment of the Mercian supremacy by Offa is the central fact in English history in the second half of the eighth century. But the stages by which it was brought about cannot now be reconstructed. No Mercian chronicle has survived from this period. Charters do exist, though, and give some impression of Offa's place among English kings. They suggest that Kent was the first long-established kingdom to fall under his influence. In Kent and Sussex, Offa was able to substitute his own authority for that of earlier local rulers. In Wessex, which had been a united kingdom for seventy years before his accession, the local kingship was initially preserved by the strength of traditions that had gathered around it. However, by 786 Offa had also managed to bring the West Saxon kingdom under his influence.

The age of Mercian supremacy has been studied less than any other period of Anglo-Saxon history, and unless new materials come to light, its details will always be uncertain. But its general significance is plain. The great Mercian Kings of this age created a political system which included every kingdom in southern England. This system permitted every variety of relationship which could then exist between men of independent kingdoms and an overlord. At its weakest, it meant little more than occasional hospitality shown by the king of the Mercians to local rulers as well born as himself. But overkingship soon passed into political authority when the overlord was an autocrat like Athelbald or Offa and, as time went on, more than one insignificant king exchanged his ancestral rank, and the claim to independence which it implied, for the security of a provincial ealdorman under Mercian patronage. With all its weaknesses the system marks the first advance ever made on a great scale towards the political unity of England. It showed that the particularism of the smaller kingdoms was not an insuperable obstacle to the creation of a greater state.

Adapted from: F.M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, published in 1989

Adapted from: Stenton, F.M. (1989), *Anglo-Saxon England (Oxford History of England)*. Reproduced with permission from Oxford University Press through PLS Clear.

Passage B

For scholars in the first half of the twentieth century the Mercian dominance of this period brought the Anglo-Saxons to within touching distance of political unity. The extensive overkingdoms of Mercian rulers such as Athelbad and Offa were like those of their seventh century Northumbrian counterparts, staging posts on the path to a united England that would be achieved under the West Saxon kings in the tenth century.

Such visions of Mercian supremacy have by now, rightly, receded. The Mercian overkingdoms of the eighth century need to be understood, as much as possible, on their own terms, not as trial runs or failed attempts at English unity. The distinctive nature of successive Mercian overkingdoms and, indeed, of the Mercian form of government as a whole, needs to be appreciated. Mercia remains central to any account of the eighth and ninth centuries but labels such as 'Mercian supremacy' or 'Mercian hegemony (dominance)' may obscure considerable complexities. Mercia's influence over its neighbours was both fluctuating and frequently contested. The danger lies in viewing all events through the lens of an assumed, continuous Mercian pre-eminence.

However, the Mercian kings did gain power and wealth due mainly to their ability to harness the changing economy of Anglo-Saxon England from the late seventh to mid-ninth centuries. International trade expanded considerably and emporia (market places), such as those at York, Ipswich, Southampton and particularly London, increased both in size and organisational complexity in this period. The rural landscape was likewise exploited. Settlements and their associated field-systems were restructured and reorganised. Some settlements shifted from subsistence agriculture to-and perhaps market-orientated-production.

But the rising wealth of Anglo-Saxon England was not only exploited by the royal dynasties. The most obvious beneficiary and perhaps the main driving force of this growing economy was the Church. Rich and powerful monasteries now commanded extensive land resources-in some cases on the scale of small kingdoms-and were the centres of economic and cultural change.'

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

Section B

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

- 2*** To what extent was Augustine's mission to Britain in 597 the most important influence on the process of Christianisation in the period from c.410 to c.800?
[25]
- 3*** To what extent was there a major change in economic activity in the period of the Early Anglo-Saxons from c.410 to c.800?
[25]
- 4*** 'Latin learning was the most important cultural development in Ireland and Britain from c.410 to c.800.' How far do you agree?
[25]