

A-LEVEL HISTORY

7042/1B: Spain in the Age of Discovery, 1469-1598
Report on the Examination

7042
June 2019

Version: 1.0

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General Comments

This was the third year of the A-level specification on Spain in the Age of Discovery 1469-1598. Many students were demonstrably well prepared with considerable knowledge and many addressed the questions in a positive and determined manner. A large number also demonstrated strong conceptual awareness. However, students need to be reminded of the need to focus on the actual questions set and the importance of selecting relevant material in answers. Students should be encouraged to revise the full specification content and to consider issues from different 'breadth' angles (linked to the key questions), rather than have limited expectations of certain topics.

Section A

Question 01

Students were required to evaluate the arguments given in three separate extracts in relation to Philip II's responsibility for the failure of Spanish policy in the Netherlands. They were then required to assess the extent to which the interpretations were convincing, drawing on contextual knowledge to corroborate and challenge. They were not asked to make comparisons between the extracts and it was good to find that there was less evidence of comparison than in previous years. Similarly, comment on provenance, tone or bias was appropriate and no credit was given for this. While neither introductions nor conclusions were expected for the extract evaluation, sometimes concluding evaluation in relation to the question helped in meeting higher level criteria.

A problem with some answers was the considerable stretches of narrative which were not always relevant to the analysis of the interpretations. This was a well-known topic and students were at pains to demonstrate their own knowledge irrespective of the demands of the question. Some students were also too selective in the parts of the extracts which they addressed, ignoring key parts. This led to some imbalance. Others failed to address the topic 'in relation to' and tried to summarise the whole extract. Students should be mindful that the key argument of an extract is not necessarily in the first line.

Extract A made a comparison between Charles V and his son Philip II. It explicitly stated that Philip failed to understand the complexities and inherent tensions within the Netherlands and that despite his attempts to offer continuity of policy inherited from Charles, Philip's authority was challenged. Whilst Charles and his policies were tolerated, Philip lacked the qualities that had made his father's rule acceptable. Only a few students, however, appreciated the deliberate juxtaposition made in the extract. Many recognised the contextual influences, such as Charles being a Burgundian, Philip a Castilian. Equally, most were able to offer appropriate own knowledge to highlight Philip's mistakes and their impact, while the role of individuals was identified and explained in context.

In Extract B, there was a greater contextual argument linked to the success of the Dutch in their struggle against the Spanish. This extract highlighted the constraints imposed upon Philip and argued that Philip was not always responsible for the failure of Spanish policy in the Netherlands. The most effective answers were those which effectively contextualised the key points made in the extract, in relation to the question, explaining their importance rather than simply listing them. The least effective simply offered narrative.

In Extract C, Parker maintained Philip bore the greatest responsibility for the failure of Spanish policy in the Netherlands. Whilst many students understood the validity of the arguments made contextually, some struggled to evaluate what was written. Mechanistic referencing of 'convincing'

became commonplace as a substitute for more thoughtful and balanced analysis. Students must recognise the need to avoid indiscriminate narrative and mechanistic references to, 'and so this is convincing'. The most able students questioned the credentials of the arguments, offering reasoned and substantiated judgement. Such were also characterised by well supported contextual references and conceptual appreciation.

Section B

Question 02

Question 02 asked students to address the extent Ferdinand and Isabella's religious policies against the Muslims were a religious crusade. This was a very popular question and it generated some high-quality responses. Many students enthusiastically demonstrated their knowledge if not always their evaluative and judgemental skills, and in some cases, answers were overly narrative. The scope of the question was not always fully understood and resulted in some imbalance. It was important, for example, to challenge the term 'Crusade' in more than just religious terms. Furthermore, not all students recognised the use of the discriminator, 'policies'. There were effective answers which understood the concept of 'Crusade,' but which failed to offer understanding of other policies. While a lot of answers successfully included an appreciation of foreign policy and many wrote extensively on the role of the Inquisition, there were those who failed to address wider issues inherent within the scope of the question. The respective roles of Ferdinand and Isabella, especially after 1504-1516 for example, was less frequently considered.

Question 03

This question addressed the impact of New World prosperity on the Spanish economy. It was attempted by a large number of students, most of whom demonstrated understanding of the demands of the question. The majority focused on the key word, 'prosperity'. Fewer challenged prosperity and less able students ignored the phrase 'the most important result for Spain.' The most effective answers acknowledged that the New World brought prosperity to Spain but also understood that much of that wealth did not find its way into the regional economies. Answers that were conceptually strong appreciated that despite, and perhaps because of, the great wealth, there was much mismanagement within the economy.

Less effective responses were unable to make the full connection between New World prosperity and the damaging effects on the Spanish economy. Whilst inflation was often mentioned, it was not explained or developed within the context of the period or well-linked to the question. Other factors relevant to effects were also ignored, consequently offering little balance.

Question 04

This question offered students the opportunity to identify, analyse and evaluate Spain's social and cultural 'Golden Age'. It was the least popular of the questions, and most of those who attempted it showed a greater knowledge of the social 'Golden Age' than of the cultural aspect of the question. There were, however, some very effective responses covering both aspects. An appreciation of change, continuity and significance eluded a small number of students.

The most effective answers acknowledged that, by 1598, Spain enjoyed a social and cultural Golden Age and was the powerful, wealthy, master of a global empire and dominant in Europe. Effective answers considered the role of the Church and noted that, spiritually, Spain was the centre of the Counter-reformation as well as a constitutionally strong centralised monarchy. They

also considered Philip's enthusiasm for the arts. By way of balance, most pointed out that few Spaniards shared Philip's cultural interests and that royal patronage was insufficient on its own. Furthermore despite the many achievements, much of Spanish society remained impoverished, with epidemic disease, unemployment, rising prices and declining agriculture and industry.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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