QUESTION ONE

(a) According to the author’s argument in the first paragraph, what was the importance of women in royal palaces?

Criteria assessed

The question is intended to assess the ability of candidates to read critically and to understand a targeted section of the passage, and to distil this information into their own words with precision and clarity.

Key points

- These women are important for biological reasons, as they are essential to ensuring the continuity of hereditary rule.
- Palace women were also important because they had an unusual level of access to the king, even if that informal power was often contested or resented.
- In rare cases, it would seem that women were also important because they could be monarchs themselves.

Awarding of marks

**9-10 marks**: Candidates will see that palace women were usually important both because of their biological function and their informal access to power. They will also show some awareness of exceptional cases. This will be expressed in a single grammatical sentence which makes sense, and in the candidate’s own words.

**5-8 marks**: Candidates will, in a single sentence, see that palace women were important as the bearers of the next generation of monarchy, and have some sense that they had wider influence. They will do so, however, in a less nuanced or precise way than candidates in the top band, and will not usually grasp all of the three points. Otherwise excellent answers which use two sentences, are seriously ungrammatical or very long, or which borrow language from the text, belong towards the lower end of this band.
Candidates may have identified none or only one of the reasons why palace women were important. They may comment on the passage as a whole, identify irrelevant information, add outside knowledge, or quote the author verbatim.

(b) According to the author, why should historians study royal palaces?

Criteria assessed

This question tests the candidate’s ability to summarise effectively the main ideas in the author’s argument, to present that argument faithfully, economically, and in the candidate’s own words.

Key points

- The author is arguing against a tendency to dismiss the history of elites/elite spaces, as well as scholarship which diminishes the importance of palace women.

- Palaces represent a lens through which ‘elite’ and ‘commoner’ interactions can be observed and studied. The palace environment provides a ‘structure’ through which these exchanges can be analysed in a comparative context. Palace contexts were not insular, but connected to the world outside.

- Palaces can be studied through the lens of gender and performative sexuality. Ironically, this apparently elite environment allows us to see both men and women gaining and deploying sources of informal power which they might in other contexts have been denied. Equally, status inequality itself helps to highlight the gendered identities which were available (and not available) to non-elite men and women.

- The author is not suggesting that traditional approaches to palaces as sites of elite politics and state governance should be discarded. Rather, she urges a complementary approach, which connects the functions and experiences of palace women with the ‘maintenance of the state.’

- The study of palaces is methodologically important because they have a consistent presence across a range of different societies and time periods. The author suggests that her larger purpose is not only to reinterpret the value that is placed upon palace women, but also to suggest a new way of categorising systems of monarchy.

Awarding of marks
14-20 marks: Candidates will, within fifteen lines, capture the main ideas of the author’s argument and the logic of her reasoning faithfully and accurately. They will almost certainly see both that something is being argued against, and that the author intends her approach to complement and deepen more traditional emphases. The best answers in this band are likely to see something of the author’s methodological vantage and wider purpose as well. They may also show an awareness of how the points of tension operate. Stronger answers will also be well organised, evidence mental clarity, and be written in the candidate’s own words. Weaker answers in this band will be less well organised, may fail to grasp important points fully and clearly, and may make less effective use of the text.

8-13 marks: Candidates will show some awareness of why palaces are an important subject of study, but may miss the more nuanced ways in which the author is seeking to engage with traditional interpretations. At the higher level of this band, candidates may see a wide range of relevant points but tend to list them in no particular order, or rely too heavily on language from the text. Weaker answers may give disproportionate emphasis to one aspect of the author’s argument, or focus more on relatively basic points. Answers in this band may also feature small misunderstandings or contradictions, or be quite unclear in their expression.

0-7 marks: Candidates will have failed to engage with the text perceptively. They will show little sense of the author’s argument, will make limited reference to the text, or will deploy outside knowledge or groundless speculation in lieu of evidence. They may fail to understand the question, or answer it with an excessive reliance on direct quotation or near-quotation. Answers in this band may also be so garbled that the examiner can have no confidence that the candidate understands the material.

N.B. All answers must be within the fifteen line limit, assuming that the candidate’s handwriting is of normal length (around ten words per line.) Deduct one mark for every additional line written.

QUESTION TWO (30 MARKS)

What were the most important means by which any one political or social group maintained its power?

Criteria Assessed

This question assesses the candidate’s ability to respond to a broad, open essay question in a relevant, coherent, and analytically sophisticated manner. It may be helpful to have in mind typical degree class boundaries in assessing this exercise. The relevant criteria are: 1) engagement with the question; 2) coherence of argument; 3) the effective use of evidence; 4)
structural organisation and clarity of communication. N.B., candidates are not being tested here either on the style of their prose, or on the depth and accuracy of their knowledge: answers may therefore qualify for the top band if they are written clearly enough to indicate a high quality of thinking, and if they deploy such knowledge as they have precisely and effectively.

Marking guidelines

Markers must be prepared to show flexibility in how they assess the ways in which candidates approach this question, which will vary very widely depending upon what they have been taught or have learned about. Markers should also be aware that any given candidate may have few case studies available to them which they know enough about to deploy with confidence. Nonetheless, the question is designed to be inclusive, and the better answers will tend to show some common characteristics. Four obvious markers stand out: 1) the question asks the candidate to evaluate significance, and answers which fail to engage on this critical level should be marked accordingly; 2) ‘political or social group’ is a broad term, but one which may require some active definition, especially if the candidate really wants to talk about an individual or the competition between multiple groups; 3) ‘maintenance’ is also a broad term, but it is not an empty one: stronger candidates may see that it implies some sort of threat or opposition, while weaker ones may simply conflate the term with a desire to gain power or to increase it; 4) ‘power’ can be understood in more and less obvious ways, and candidates who think actively about what it means in the context of their essay should be rewarded. Stronger answers will engage critically with at least one of these markers; however, range of critical coverage is not in itself a criterion.

21-30 marks. Candidates will write a relevant, well-organised answer which shows clarity of thought, and presents a prioritised argument. It is unlikely that an answer will be able to enter this band unless they address the theme of ‘importance’, and the best responses may focus on this. Key terms will have been thought through, and better answers may deploy definitions in an active and constructive manner. Responses in this band must answer the question, and the best ones may engage with it in shrewd or imaginative ways, perhaps challenging or even moving beyond the question as it stands. For instance, is the ‘group’ open to differentiation? Can one aim simply to ‘maintain’ power? Does ‘power’ mean different things in different contexts? Answers in this band should prioritise analysis over description, and target their response consistently around the question as set, and ideally as explicitly understood by the candidate in their introduction. Answers that have minor deficiencies in analysis or application of evidence will be in this category if they have managed to answer the question clearly and effectively.

12-20 marks. Candidates will present relevant evidence, and apply it somewhat to the question, but less directly, consistently and forensically. Stronger answers in this band may fall short of higher marks because they are too episodic, disparate, or rely too much on routine description. Responses in this band will answer the question, but may not
demonstrate much thought about what constitutes a ‘group’, ‘power’, or how it can be ‘maintained.’ More tellingly, though, they are unlikely to construct their argument around the criteria of which factor(s) was most ‘important.’ Balanced and sensible essays which fail to prioritise even in the conclusion are likely to belong in this band. Poorly chosen examples may belong in this band if they have actively tried to make the material relevant to the question.

**0-11 marks.** Answers in this band will usually fall into one of two types. Either the candidate will choose a manifestly inappropriate case study and make no effort to achieve relevance (e.g. by talking unproblematically about an individual, or not discussing anything obviously relevant to the theme of power), or they will answer in a manner that is so non-specific that it is unclear that they are seeking to answer the question set. Answers may also fall into this band if they are exceptionally basic in the quality of their analysis, so garbled that it is impossible to see an able mind at work, or otherwise demonstrate a manifest inability to respond to a structured challenge of this sort.

**QUESTION THREE (40 MARKS)**

**What can this source tell us about Ratramnus’s understanding of the world, and the means by which he acquired it?**

**Criteria assessed**

This question assesses the candidate’s ability to provide a thoughtful, judicious and empathetic understanding of the past. In order to achieve this, candidates must read the text carefully and critically, show attention to detail, deploy evidence in an effective and appropriate way, and exhibit historical imagination where necessary. The candidate should also show the ability to communicate their ideas clearly.

**Interpretation of the question**

The question is designed to reflect both the content of Ratramnus’ understanding, and the means through which it is constituted. As such, candidates might legitimately focus upon such issues as the value of letters, the problem of communication, and the bond of trust between Ratramnus and Rimbert. Another approach would be to think in terms of how Ratramnus weighed different sorts of evidence, and the values that mediated his analysis. The connective theme is the ‘dog-headed’ creatures. This subject leads back to the purpose
of the exchange of letters, and is also here the medium through which Ratramnus’ understanding of the world can be discerned.

Summary of the passage

- Ratramnus’ ability to understand his world is dependent upon the knowledge of others. While he seems to be regarded as a learned and authoritative figure – and thus valuable to Rimbert – the implication is that Ratramnus himself initiated the exchange of letters. Rimbert, too, is central: he has offered important information, and almost functions as the unseen co-author of the text.

- Letters are important to the acquisition of information. However, this medium seems to depend upon intermediary figures, such as Sarward, who connect disparate spaces. Therefore, communication itself has a fragile quality, and is valued accordingly.

- Ratramnus understands his world by evaluating a wide range of types of knowledge in a critical manner. He clearly values antiquity and authority, and is steeped in formal learning. But he also places great value on experience, or the ‘experience’ – even at second hand – of people that he trusts. There is clearly some tension between fixed points of knowledge acquired through books and new information based upon reportage.

- The passage presents alternative points of view, and indicates that Ratramnus uses three major criteria to distinguish truth from falsehood. First, the Bible provides a core framework of interpretation – the reference to ‘giants’ is helpful here. Second, trustworthy reportage is capable of challenging even established orthodoxies. Third, the faculty of reason is deployed to test contradictory interpretations.

- The ‘dog-headed ones’ may be taken to reflect Ratramnus’ uncertainty over what the category of the ‘human’ constitutes, and / or his ambivalence about how far exotic creatures should be domesticated into conventional categories. The animal and human seem to belong to different categories, and yet exhibit aspects of fluidity. The capacity of the human to master the animal / natural world is an important point of differentiation.

- Through the dog-heads, Ratramnus can be seen defining the human in terms of individual rationality and moral sense, as well as in relation to a sense of community. Here, society seems to be understood with reference to legal and ethical notions of collective interest.

- Ratramnus is presenting an argument. The letter is designed to test or communicate a proposition, although the implications of this are not wholly self-evident. There is, however, enough evidence to suggest that Ratramnus and Rimbert are not engaging in a purely theoretical debate, but are trying to establish where the limits of evangelical activity should lie.

Marking guidelines
This scheme is not based upon candidates answering in a particular type of way. They might equally well or badly discuss one central theme or make a range of different observations about the text. Examiners should award appropriate marks to any type of response, based upon the criteria that the candidate answers the question, uses evidence from the source appropriate to their interpretation, analyses intelligently, sees the importance of the source, and speculates within effective bounds where necessary. The examples given within each band do not constitute necessary criteria, but are intended to reflect the sorts of insight which might be expected at this level. Two points more specific to this text and question should be borne in mind:

First, the subject of the ‘dog-headed ones’ will appear very strange at first sight to almost all candidates. Markers should give some latitude for off-beat or (more probably) prosaic attempts to establish the concrete basis of this discourse. Attention to textual evidence – even if not a balanced summary of it – might receive appropriate award for historical imagination.

Second, this question does not suggest to the candidate that general comments about the limitations of the source are especially relevant. Stronger candidates may constructively question whether this source tells us only about Ratramnus by discussing Rimbert and Sarward, or think usefully about the problems of communication. More formulaic answers, though, may seek to observe a series of negatives (for instance that the text tells us nothing about non-monks or non-Europeans), and the weaker answers of this sort will tend to ignore the demands of the question and the positive evidence that is available.

**33-40 marks.** Answers in the top band will show that they have read the text closely and perceptively, and are able to talk in a concrete way about the themes that they have identified. They should also show some level of historical imagination and critical insight. It will be difficult for answers to enter this band unless they can see that Ratramnus is a rational, knowledgeable and religious person engaged in a critical debate about categories and spaces which seem deeply uncertain. Answers in this band may see some of the following: that Ratramnus’ ability to understand the world depends not only upon ancient authority, but also upon lowly people like Sarward; that Rimbert is essential to the production of this text, and the text may even tell us something about his understanding of the world; that Ratramnus has some consistent organising principles (e.g. biblical, rational), and tends to filter experience through these; that some types of authority are open to contest, but that others seem to be beyond challenge; that the specific question of whether dog-heads are ‘human’ is of central concern for a reason; that the text can tell us something about what Ratramnus considers the ‘human’ to be; that the categories of ‘human’ and the ‘animal’ are in some ways clearly delineated, but also open to practical challenge; that the need for humans to master the natural world helps to define both categories.

**23-32 marks.** Upper-middle band answers engage actively with the text, connect evidence to interpretation clearly, and toward the higher end will tend to prioritise analysis over
description. Stronger answers, here, may still fall short of the top band because they do not thematise actively or with real insight, lack a deliberately organised structure, or make little distinction between the content and preconditions of Ratramnus’ understanding. Answers in this band may see: that Rimbert is important, and has clear relevance to the question; that Ratramnus understands a lot of things, and has some sophisticated ways of working out truth from falsehood; that Ratramnus engages with authority critically, and that it does not quite fit to see him either a paragon of or rebel against the establishment; that the dog-heads matter and can clearly be connected with wider debates; that Ratramnus has moral values.

13-22 marks. Lower-middle band answers will engage with both the text and the question, but tend toward description or weakly grounded speculation. Better answers in this band may fall short of the higher range because they see some of the important connections, but rely upon description more than analysis, and tend to list points rather than prioritise or thematise. Answers in this range may: feature routine points about the source being subjective; see little important distinction between Ratramnus, Rimbert and Sarward; content themselves with the view that Ratramnus is ignorant, or otherwise have no real sense of him at all; fail to establish that Ratramnus has a critical approach to knowledge; see no textually-based reason why the dog-heads are being discussed. Answers in this band may also feature significant misunderstandings or wholly ignore evidence which challenges their viewpoint.

0-12 marks. Answers in this band may treat the source uncritically, make wild assumptions beyond the text, or focus remorselessly upon one feature of the text in a manner that is extremely basic. They may also try to introduce outside knowledge, or largely ignore the question. Answers which merely paraphrase or quote sections from the text in a manner which implies limited independent thought or engagement should also be placed in this band.