OXFORD UNIVERSITY HISTORY APTITUDE TEST

QUESTION ONE (30 marks)

This is an extract taken from a book about the roles of women in royal palaces, which uses examples drawn from a wide range of societies and across a long period of time. Please read through the passage carefully and think about what it is trying to say. You do not need to know anything about the subject to answer the questions below.

For most of human history in almost every corner of the globe, the most enduring form of government has been that system of rule known as monarchy. Characterized by social inequality and status hierarchies, hereditary succession, and elaborate etiquette in which the household of the ruler also encompassed the administration of the state, such systems spawned court societies whose populace functioned to serve the monarch. From the monarch’s point of view, his most important task was to continue his dynasty. (Female monarchs were few and far between.) For this he needed the military and financial resources most often supplied by men— but at the most basic biological level, he needed women. Although most dynasties were reckoned exclusively through the male line (Southeast Asia saw exceptions), women did far more than simply serve as convenient wombs for the purpose of bearing sons. The requirements of hereditary rule put women right at the centre of power within these palaces, with intimate access to the monarch most men could only envy. What they made of that access and how monarchs and other men tried to restrict what they could do with it provides one way to differentiate monarchical systems.

A focus on elite men and women flies in the face of recent scholarship in social history that examines ordinary lives. On the other hand, more traditional scholarship has tended to diminish the role of palace women. Palaces, however, play a social role disproportionate to the number of people they contain, large though that may be. They stand at the pinnacle of systems of exchange through marriages, reproduction, and labour that bring commoner and elite women together; they serve as models for the demonstration of gender roles; they serve as instruments for projecting the ruler’s authority; and they provide the structure for the everyday ongoing transactions between women, the ruler, and the outside world in which women as well as men might gain informal control over at least part of their lives and the power to influence others. The study of palaces points to the function of sexuality in hierarchical societies, what it means to be a man or a woman given pervasive status inequality, and the symbolic, economic, and political functions of palace women in the maintenance of the state.

(a) According to the author’s argument in the first paragraph, what was the importance of women in royal palaces? Write a single, grammatical sentence in your own words.

(10 marks)

(b) According to the author, why should historians study royal palaces? Answer in your own words, in no more than fifteen lines.

(20 marks)

QUESTION TWO (30 marks)

(IF YOU HAVE APPLIED FOR HISTORY AND ECONOMICS, DO NOT ANSWER QUESTION TWO BUT TURN TO THE END OF THIS PAPER AND ANSWER QUESTION FOUR)

Write an essay of answering the following question: ‘What were the most important means by which any one political or social group maintained its power?’

Please note: You will be assessed on the relevance of your argument to the question, your choice of evidence, and the quality and clarity of your analysis.
QUESTION THREE (40 marks)

This source is extracted from a letter, written in the mid-9th century. The letter is written by Ratramnus, a widely respected monk from Corbie, a monastery and centre of learning in France. The letter is written to Rimbert, who was a missionary priest in a remote part of Scandinavia. This letter contains reflections upon a race of creatures that was thought to exist, referred to in the text as ‘dog-headed ones’ or ‘dog-heads.’ These beings were said to look much like humans, but had starkly canine faces. You do not need to know anything about monks in the 9th century to answer this question, nor should you draw on any information outside the source.

Ratramnus wishes everlasting well-being in the Lord to the venerable priest Rimbert.

I was very pleased that you remembered my request and wrote to me about what you were able to discover about the nature of the dog-headed ones. You should know that the reason I had not responded to your inquiry was not because of a lazy lack of interest, but rather the answer was delayed because no messenger was present. Now, however, with your young assistant Sarward coming here and staying with us awhile, I am able to put down some of my thoughts about your inquiry.

You asked what you ought to believe about the dog-headed ones, namely whether they possess the souls of humans or animals. If we are satisfied with the opinion of our learned churchmen, then these dog-heads should be set among the animals, since the heads of humans are on high and round so we can see the heavens, while those of dogs are long and drawn out in a snout so that they can look at the ground. And humans speak, while dogs bark.

But the letter you kindly sent to me, while it indicated very carefully the nature of them, has taught some things about dog-headed ones which seem to associate them more with humans than animals. You write that they are said to live together in villages and that they make a common collection of their crops. Where any law is kept, it is held together by common consent and for the regulation of morality. To cultivate fields, and to undertake sowing for agricultural gain, reveals a capacity to understand cause and effect. It is also a sign of modesty for the private parts to be covered, and this suggests that dog-heads are able to distinguish between the lewd and the decent.

Respected scholars have written about the variety of marvellous types of human beings. There are the pygmies, which are tiny in height, and the antipodes, which have backwards feet with eight toes. The hippocodes have human forms but horses’ feet. The macrobii rise almost twice as high as normal human height. Concerning giants, there is almost no one who doubts that they are humans born from other humans, because this is set down in the authority of the Bible. And yet, in other accounts we can read of a calf or a snake that was born from a woman. But I would not easily agree from such reports that these creatures have rational human souls.

However, your writing bears witness that every kind of domestic beast kept in our lands is also kept by the dog-headed ones. I recognise from the Book of Genesis¹ that earthly animals have been subjected to humans by God. It has never been believed that animals can take care of other animals. But since the dog-headed ones are said to keep domestic animals, then they cannot be savage because they tame their beasts with gentleness.

Along these lines I would not believe that dog-headed ones consistently possess rational minds, even if they have their beginnings from humans, were I not persuaded by what you wrote about what is reported concerning them. Now, however, there seem to be such strong and numerous things said about them that it would be stubbornness rather than prudence to deny them or to disbelieve. If you encounter them upon your mission, you should speak to them of God’s glory and the generosity of his love. These are the things that I think ought to be observed about the dog-headed ones.

I rejoice and pray that your blessedness remain strong in Christ and that you remember me.

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

¹ The Book of Genesis is the first book of the Bible, which begins with a description about the origins and order of earthly life.
A farmer has sheep and obtains wool from them. When she has $s$ sheep she produces $\sqrt{s}$ units of wool (i.e. $s^{0.5}$, the square root of $s$) and this also equals her profit. The farmer has a flock of 16 sheep. Sheep are vulnerable to a disease. The probability that the flock catches the disease is $1/2$. When the disease is present in the flock 12 sheep catch the disease, and from these affected sheep no wool and hence no profit is obtained. The remaining 4 sheep are unaffected and continue to produce wool.

(a) How much profit does the farmer make when the flock has the disease, and how much profit does she make when the flock does not have the disease? (10%)

(b) Calculate the average profit that the farmer will expect to make, before she knows whether her flock will have the disease or not. (The average or expected profit is the probability of her flock having the disease multiplied by the profit with the disease, plus the probability of her flock not having the disease multiplied by the profit without the disease.) (10%)

Company $A$, which buys and sells sheep, makes a proposal to the farmer. If the disease affects the flock $A$ will give the farmer 5 healthy sheep. If the disease does not affect the flock then the farmer will transfer 7 sheep to $A$. $A$'s profit equals the number of sheep it ends up with after trading. Assume that both the farmer and $A$ want to have as high an average profit as possible.

(c) Explain why $A$ is willing to make this proposal. Compare the farmer’s average profit if she accepts the proposal with her average profit calculated in (b). (20%)

A different sheep-trading company, $B$, makes an alternative proposal to the farmer. If there is the disease then $B$ will transfer 6 sheep to the farmer. If the disease does not affect the flock then the farmer will transfer 6 sheep to $B$. $B$ aims to break even, i.e. to make average profit of zero. (Again, $B$'s profit equals the number of sheep it ends up with.)

(d) Which proposal will the farmer prefer, that of $A$ or that of $B$? Explain your reasons. (20%)

(e) Now suppose that $A$ and $B$ have to verify or confirm that the disease is present. (For example an expert in sheep diseases has to be sent to the farm.) It costs the equivalent of 1 sheep to verify that the disease is present. This cost is not incurred if the farmer does not claim that the disease is present. Explain how the verification cost affects the average profits of $A$ and $B$. Will $A$ and $B$ break even on average? (20%)

(f) A third company, $C$, has found a way to transfer sheep in halves as well as in whole units. It incurs the verification cost if a claim is made. $C$ says that it can make a proposal to the farmer which is better for the farmer than $A$'s proposal and generates average profits of zero for $C$. What might this proposal be? Explain your reasons (you do not need to do detailed calculations). (20%)