

HISTORY ADMISSIONS TEST

Marking Scheme for the 2015

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 Rimbart. 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 Rimbart – the implication is that Ratramnus himself initiated the exchange of letters.

Rimbart, 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 Rimbart 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, Rimbart 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.

0-12marks. 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.