

History Aptitude Test

2012 Specimen paper

Answer **ALL** parts of **BOTH** questions. You have **TWO HOURS** for this test. We recommend that you read the entire paper before beginning to write your answers. Spend about a third of your time on reading, thinking and planning, and the rest of the time writing. Allow in total about 70-75 minutes for Question One and about 45-50 minutes for Question 2.

If you find the texts difficult and unfamiliar, don't worry: the exercise is intended to be challenging, but we hope you will also find it thought-provoking. There is no 'right' answer to many of the questions: you will be judged on the intelligence of your case, how clearly you make it, and how effectively you support it. You should use your own words in answering the questions.

Question One (60 marks)

This passage is from a historical study of Ancient Egypt. Please read through the extract carefully and think about what it is trying to say. You do not require any other knowledge of Ancient Egypt to answer the questions.

If I visit the pyramids of Giza or the decorated temples and tombs at Luxor I am aware immediately of facing a distinctive creation of mankind. I will feel the same when in the presence of a medieval mosque in Cairo or a castle or cathedral in Europe. All are products of great and distinctive traditions of culture. They leave conveniently different images in the mind. When, on the other hand, as an archaeologist I excavate amongst the dwellings of one of ancient Egypt's poorer communities, the distinctiveness is much less. The men from the local village whom I employ to do the digging will see the outlines of human life not too different from their own; here the kitchen, there the cattle byres [1]. The ordinariness and predictability can be discouraging. I have to remind myself that culture and environment are never the same from place to place and from time to time and that the search for variation within the broad regularities of human life is an essential part of understanding the complete spectrum of human behaviour.

'Great culture' which in time becomes tourist culture, was not the spontaneous creation of the common man. It is no accident that we meet its manifestations in large religious buildings, in palaces, in mansions and castles. Great culture, which requires patronage and the direction of labour, originates in courts. The wealth, size, splendour, craft standards and intellectual novelties are part of the instruments of rule. When well established, a great tradition may have an influence which is felt throughout society. But

to reach this stage it has to expand at the expense of other traditions. It has to colonize the minds of the nation. Whatever does not succumb becomes 'folk culture'.

Ancient Egypt is amongst the earliest of the world's great cultural traditions. We are fortunate in being able to observe, through a relative abundance of material, the great codification of tradition which started at the time of transition to the 1st Dynasty. It had, however, very restricted scope in the beginning. The objects were themselves small in size and were probably very limited in numbers. They expressed the pretensions of a new generation of rulers and the beginnings of an attempt to systematize religion. But should we assume that, from this moment on, all cultural expression in material form took its cue from this source? Did the 1st Dynasty kings throw a cultural switch which instantly lit up the whole country? Was there the will, or the means, or even the interest to convert the whole country to this intellectual outlook? To answer these questions we must investigate how court culture expanded at the expense of other local traditions, and consider not only early works of art, but also the general archaeological record in which we might find traces of 'folk culture'.

[1] sheds.

1a. In the first paragraph what does the author think that we can learn from the remains of buildings about the distinctiveness of past societies? Answer in one sentence, using your own words. (10 marks)

1b. How does the author account for the emergence of distinctive 'great' and 'folk' cultures? Answer in not more than 15 lines, using your own words. (20 marks)

1c. Using a historical example with which you are familiar, write an essay of 1.5 to 3 sides about the ways in which the ideas of elites influenced, or failed to influence, the lives of ordinary people. (30 marks)

Question Two (40 marks)

This is a letter from an Indian soldier to a religious leader in his village, written while he was on active service during the First World War. You do not need to know anything about the First World War to answer this question, and you should not provide information from other sources.

I have seen with my own eyes, hot meats, bread and tea and necessities of every kind taken to the British soldiers in the very firing line. In the same way, however heavy may be the firing, whether of shells or bullets or both, fresh goats flesh, and *dal* [1] and cakes of various kinds with *gur* [2] and tea reach the trenches of the Indians without fail. The

entire force is very pleased with these arrangements. If we have to make a journey by road of fifty miles, we find, when we reach our destination, that our rations are already there, having been sent on by motor cars.

If anyone should become suddenly ill or wounded, he is straight away conveyed on a stretcher to a motor ambulance and in a few minutes he finds himself in hospital. The hospital is a place of the greatest comfort, and there so much attention is shown to him, as he has never in his life experienced before, even in his own home. Government has secured the services of extremely kind and sympathetic men and women for this work. We have become such tea drinkers, that until we get our tea we do not converse. Our principal expenditure of money is in tea, since milk and sugar are very expensive. We get various kinds of vegetables on payment.

Although I am desirous of writing fully about all our Government is doing in this war, in the first place the bombardment around me prevents me collecting my ideas (thousands of shells are being fired from a spot not more than 100 yards behind our trenches and a smaller number from the enemy's side are falling and exploding not very far away from us) and in the second place there are restrictions about writing fully about the war under the cover of a military envelope. I have tried to look at what I have already written with the enemy's eyes and I beg the officer who reads this letter to be just and consider whether I have written anything in it which is likely to be of use to the enemy. If he should find anything in it which he considers objectionable, I very willingly give him permission to erase it and even destroy the letter if he thinks fit.

[1] lentils, peas or beans.

[2] sugar.

What can this letter tell us about the experience of soldiers during the First World War?