

OXFORD COLLEGES' HISTORY APTITUDE TEST

4 November 2009

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. Question One should take about twice as much time as Question Two.

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.

Please do not turn over until you are asked to do so.

QUESTION ONE (70 marks)

This is an adapted section from a book about the American West. Please read through the extract carefully and think about what it is trying to say. You do not need to know anything about the USA to answer the questions below.

Perhaps the best place to begin a re-examination of the American West is by sauntering along one of its irrigation ditches. In it are important, neglected clues to the meaning of freedom and autonomy, of democratic self-determination and openness, in the historical as opposed to the mythical West. One might choose, for example, the Friant-Kern Canal coming down from the Sierra foothills to the desert lands around Bakersfield in the Great Central Valley of California. Friant-Kern is a work of advanced artifice, a piece not of nature but of technology. It has no watershed of its own but rather draws off water from a reservoir and transports it briskly to deficient areas to raise a cash crop. It means business. For long sections it runs straight as an arrow over the land, cutting across the terrain with a devastating efficiency. Engineers report that it carries, at maximum, 5,000 cubic feet of water per second. In that method of precise calculation is hinted the determination on the part of cattle-ranchers, farmers, industrialists and other modern westerners to wrest every possible return from the canal and its flow. The American West literally lives today by that determination. Though its importance has seldom been well understood, more than any other single element, it has been the shaping force in the region's history. In that determination to exploit to the uttermost, there is no freedom for nature itself, for natural rivers as free-flowing entities with their own integrity and order, and there is very little of the social freedom early Americans expected humans to enjoy in the West. There is nothing harmonious, nothing picturesque about the western world that has developed beside the irrigation ditch. There is little sense of community. There is no equitable sharing of prosperity. Friant-Kern offers a study in ecological and social regimentation.

- (a) Using your own words, explain in a sentence or two what it is about the Friant-Kern Canal that helps us to understand the American West, in the author's view.

(10 marks)

- (b) In not more than 15 lines, and using your own words, summarise the author's view of the role of nature in shaping the society of the American West.

(20 marks)

- (c) Write an essay of one and a half to three sides assessing the importance of the physical environment in determining the character of any one historical event, process or movement with which you are familiar. The physical environment may include factors such as landscape, climate, or settlement patterns, among other things.

(40 marks)

PLEASE TURN OVER FOR QUESTION TWO

QUESTION TWO (30 marks)

This is an extract from a history of St Alban's Abbey, written by Thomas of Walsingham, a monk there in the 1390s.

Abbot Hugh [1339-49] 'caused a new crucifix¹ to be made for the monastery church, whereupon the sculptor carved no specially beautiful or important feature except upon holy days only on which days he himself fasted on bread and water. Moreover he had a naked man before him to look at, that he might learn from his form and carve the crucifix all the fairer. When this crucifix was set up, the Almighty constantly wrought many solemn and manifest miracles through it; wherefore we thought that if women might have access to the crucifix, the common devotion would be increased, and it would bring great profit to our monastery from gifts.... [it was agreed] to admit men and women of good repute to the crucifix, provided only that the women should not enter through our cloister or dormitory or other domestic buildings, excepting only our patroness, or the wife or daughter of our patron; yet even these might not spend the night within the abbey precincts nor enter before Prime nor stay beyond Compline².... [In consequence] 'Women now flock frequently to the crucifix yet only to our own damage, since their devotion is but cold, and they only come to gaze at our church, and increase our expenses by claiming hospitality.'

What does this passage tell us about religious ideas, gender relations, and social structure in the fourteenth century?

(30 marks)

End of paper

¹ An image of Christ crucified on the cross.

² Prime and Compline are the first and last services of the monastic day