

QUESTION THREE

What does this source reveal about society in Augsburg in the sixteenth century?

Criteria Assessed

This question assesses the student's ability to act as a historian, that is, to analyse a primary source, and to use that analysis as the basis for a thoughtful, judicious interpretation of the past. As such, the relevant criteria for this question include careful and critical reading, attention to detail, historical imagination, the effective use of evidence, and precision, clarity and facility of writing.

Key Themes in Source

What follows is a brief précis of some of the more striking themes that emerge in the source. Each marker should familiarise themselves with the source, and know that candidates are likely to pay more attention to some themes than others. Not all candidates will address all themes and, importantly, many will come up with additional interpretations of the source that are not mentioned below. (In any case, it is the marking scheme—and not this description of the source below—that offers the clearest guidance on the awarding of marks.)

The source consists of a trial record of the interrogation of a young beggar named Simon Schweyer in the town of Augsburg in Germany in the mid-sixteenth century. The series of questions and answers offer a window into several general themes including, to name only a few, the experience of poverty and poor relief, courts and the legal system, childhood, family structures, crime and punishment, ideas about community, charity, strategies of survival, vagrancy, and everyday life in a German town. In this context, ideas about poverty or the poor seem linked to wider concerns about cleanliness, kinship, foreignness, seasonal work, and social stratification. This is not the first time that Simon has fallen under the suspicions of the municipal authorities, and he appears to have travelled to Augsburg several times before in search of assistance. Simon's activities as a beggar are described in relation to those of his family, Simon's father, mother, and brother all being known to the authorities. The source also reveals something too about the life of the 'working poor'—although the source never uses that term to describe them—as well as the suspicions cast on them by the authorities. Simon's father appears to make a small living out of selling hackles and pots, alongside which the other members of the family appear to be involved in begging. An important distinction emerges in Simon's testimony as to the difference between 'begging' and collecting alms, although it is unclear how this distinction is constituted either in Simon's mind or by the court authorities. The frequency of Simon's run-ins with the authorities suggests the lack of a safety net for his family, although it is also clear that he is part of a wider category of omnipresent beggars such as those who hang around Wertach Bridge. Poverty is, therefore, also rooted in a geographical or spatial context, and the authorities' concerns about beggars seem linked to wider anxieties about outsiders coming into Augsburg from Oberhausen and other areas beyond the boundaries of the city. Some candidates may comment on the nature of the source itself. Unlike a 'straight' narrative source, the trial record was produced in the context of an exchange that took place between at least two people (that is, Simon Schweyer and the official interrogating him) if not three if the scribe is also taken into consideration. As such, the source is as illuminating as a record of the concerns of the court official—as represented in his questions—as it is of the perspective of the young beggar found in his answers. It may be that the official's questions have influenced the boy's answers, and our understanding of the boy's experiences are limited in so much as they may speak only to the matter of the specific questions asked by the official. Although this episode took place amid the upheaval of the Reformation, there are no clear references to religious change per se in the source, although Simon's request for 'mercy' reminds the reader of the presence in this society of ideas of charity and clemency, which may be linked to religion.

Marking Scheme

The marking scheme below is intended to provide markers with the flexibility to reward answers that stand out, particularly in terms of independence of thought and historical imagination. Given the nature of the exercise, some candidates may interpret the evidence in unpredictable or surprising ways, which are, nonetheless, reasonable within the wider context of the passage. Candidates should not be penalised for singular interpretations, so long as they are backed up by evidence from the source.

For **27-40 marks**, candidates will show that they have read the text closely, accurately and thoughtfully and they are correspondingly able to speak in a concrete way about any of the themes raised above. They will link their analysis consistently to specific evidence from the text, and the higher marks in this band will do so with real sophistication and clarity. They will express historical imagination and/or independence of thought in their analysis of the source, especially at the higher marks within this band. Some of the strongest answers in this band will even engage with issues of source criticism, issues of authorship, and the potential for conflicting interpretations of the source (although they will not necessarily use such terms to do so). But merely raising issues of source reliability will not in itself merit the awarding of a mark in this band; rather, answers in this band will present insights that demonstrate a genuine and consistent talent for historical analysis and the strongest answers will show real sophistication and independence of thought.

For **14-26 marks**, candidates will focus mainly on describing or recounting the details contained in the source, without the sophistication or thematic analysis of candidates in the higher band. They will have made some sense of the text and touched on some of the issues raised by it, but their judgements and speculations, though relevant, may be less penetrating, less clearly expressed, or less sustainable from the text. They may have engaged with one or more of the main themes, but they will be less effective at developing their analysis around specific evidence from the source. Their treatment of specific themes may be less analytical or precise, or they may stop short of adopting a specific interpretation of any particular evidence.

For **0-13 marks**, candidates will more or less have failed to offer any analysis of the text, writing comments that simply reproduce what is in it, or are substantially inaccurate. Answers in this category may simply hone in on a few particular details without a wider demonstration of analysing the source in its entirety. Answers in this band may also suffer from the introduction of external knowledge or unreasonable speculation not backed up by evidence from the text. Similarly, some answers in this band may be too short, or poorly expressed. They may simply reproduce a list of observations, without a more comprehensive sense of the wider significance of the source as a window into sixteenth-century Augsburg.