



# OXFORD UNIVERSITY

## HISTORY APTITUDE TEST

Wednesday 31 October 2018

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### INSTRUCTIONS TO CANDIDATES

Please read this page carefully, but do not open the question paper until told to do so.

A separate 8-page answer booklet is provided. Please check you have one.

Read the instructions on the answer booklet and complete the information requested in the spaces provided. Please write very clearly in black or dark blue pen.

Applicants for:

- **History**
- **Ancient and Modern History**
- **History and English**
- **History and Modern Languages**
- **History and Politics**
- **History and Economics**

You have **one hour** for this test. We recommend that you read the 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.

If you find the text 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 the question: you will be judged on the intelligence of your argument, how clearly you make it and how effectively you support it. You should use your own words in answering the question.

**This question paper consists 4 printed pages and 4 blank pages**



## OXFORD UNIVERSITY HISTORY APTITUDE TEST 2018

**NOTE: This test is made up of one question, based on a passage from a primary source. You do not need to know anything about the author of the source or the context in which he was writing to answer the question. Candidates will be penalised for making use of any outside knowledge.**

*This passage is an extract from The Notable Men and Women of our Time, written in the late 1520s by Paolo Giovio, an Italian man of letters. It is written in the form of a dialogue, an imaginary conversation between real individuals: the general Alfonso d'Avalos, the statesman Antonio Muscettola, and Giovio himself. The setting is Ischia, an island near Naples, at the estate of the noblewoman Vittoria Colonna. Over three days, the men explore the estate and the small offshore islands, discussing their notable contemporaries. At the end of the last day, they discuss their hostess:*

D'AVALOS: 'What fine tools, like those of the highest kind of sculpture, will allow us to depict the true likeness, image, and character of our Vittoria Colonna? For this one woman prevails over all the others. And this description is certainly not composed to flatter her, but will be recognized as absolutely true by the universal consensus of all women and men.

'Let us speak later on about her renown, brilliance, and modesty, which are safeguarded by conspicuous reminders of her morals and achievement and by unwavering public opinion. Right now we need to describe her beauty. In this way those who are absent or don't know her, but revere her from reports of her other virtues, may more fully admire her beauty from our brief description. In this woman there are three things which nature, playful amid its serious business, appears to have fashioned for the purpose of admiration: namely, her eyes, hands, and breasts. In those sites most of all, as the poets relate, shameless desires have been accustomed to dwell while they lie in ambush for unfortunate mortals, and from there they let loose the arrows and flames of love.'

Then I [GIOVIO] said: 'D'Avalos, these are indeed the rare endowments of a noble girl, and they entice young men rather than old ones. But there exist in her far more outstanding and splendid attributes which men advanced in age and her closest friends admire – groups that include, not least, both Muscettola and myself. But you know all these things perfectly well, since you were raised with her almost from the cradle.

'Her house lies open not only to good and learned men but also to unknown people and immigrants whom various difficulties have brought to her. The serving women keep particularly silent during feasts. No domestic worries torment the household, no hidden quarrels trouble it, and no verbal altercations destroy the harmony, seeing that all these things are governed by the rules – at once liberal and stern – of the mistress keeping watch over the house. From the earliest age she has always been someone who rewards all deference of servants or old obligations and goodwill, and is also a tireless helper of the deserving poor; to them, she has always provided support with a generous hand – although by the same token she has always been an enemy of impudence, criminality, faintheartedness, and pretence.

‘But what need is there to produce instances of her good judgment from her household management, when she has provided much more illustrious examples when governing her territories and her father’s towns – all places she kept tranquil and loyal by enforcing the law with restraint and impartiality. And in providing peace and wealth she acted in such a way that, although she was more often lenient and showed clemency and mildness, sometimes she was perceived by the restless and criminal as too harsh, having exacted justice with manlike severity. You can see this strength and divine virtue in her: that is why the leaders of the Colonna family have wanted her participation in all their deliberations when undertaking the most serious matters. Even a wise and successful commander like her husband<sup>1</sup>, when absent in order to wage a war more energetically and with innovative stratagems, often felt the need to consult his wife and gave great weight to her views in every one of his actions. For who ever exercised judgment more reliably than she about the secret objectives of princes, or more profitably about military discipline, or more clearly about the difficulties of provisioning troops with money and food, or with more foresight concerning the overall outcome of wars? And don’t imagine that she just picked this knowledge up from books. In fact, she learned it all from her manly upbringing in a household filled with arms and trophies.

‘She endured with great composure and patience, and without grumbling, the well-known love affairs and dalliances of her absent husband, because she understood that he truly loved and respected her above all other women. But while her husband was alive, she safeguarded her chastity – than which nothing in a woman can be more becoming – with great strength and keenness of mind. Even now, though bereft of him, she has fenced it in with garrisons of religious observances and watchfulness. Two elderly women, fierce, proud, and unremitting thanks to their own stern virginity, maintain a guard over her like two huge and wild dogs keeping watch at her feet. No more cautious or secure step could have been taken to thwart sudden, unforeseen urges of lust as well as chance, insane acts of rashness on the part of members of her household or other persons encountered. Thus both at that time when she was living in the greatest luxury and enjoying the delights of human life in the bright light of day, and also now when, deprived of her husband, with all the charms of life cast off, and scarcely sustaining life with a single scant meal a day, she still commits no superstitious or foolish action, and has given no occasion at all for gossip in a suspicious city that turns so easily to slander.

‘Distinguished and elegant scholarship shines forth in her to the admiration of men. From a tender age she cultivated an enormous desire for learning in nearly all fields, so that philosophers praise her argumentation and writing; theologians are thrilled as they listen to her; and poets and men of letters admire her without reservation, since they believe that she has not acquired her many great thoughts from attentive reading, but rather from divine inspiration. Consider her Tuscan<sup>2</sup> poems, which are in circulation despite her bashful resistance and absolute unwillingness that this should be so. Then there are her almost innumerable letters: what authority, what manly decorum, and what charm these display, written as they are to the loftiest and most learned men and to the greatest kings? These accomplishments merit immortal praise. The scholarship that so many and such great

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<sup>1</sup> Ferdinando Francesco d’Avalos, cousin of the Alfonso d’Avalos speaking in the dialogue.

<sup>2</sup> An Italian dialect; it had become the most prestigious form of the language by Gioivo’s time, and modern Standard Italian is based on it.

virtues have placed in the control of this one divine woman shines forth in such a way that it is certainly very like those massive fires which are stirred up by Egyptian kings at the summit of pyramids.'

While I was making these remarks, the servant boys reported to us that the gatekeepers were greatly vexed that we had so long delayed them in the discharge of their duties. So, our conversation interrupted rather than completed, we descended from the delightful Queen's Rock<sup>3</sup> into small boats and went back into the citadel.

**What can we learn from this passage about the social and cultural values of the author's time?**

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<sup>3</sup> One of the small offshore islands.

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