



UNIVERSITY OF
CAMBRIDGE

ARCHAEOLOGY ADMISSIONS ASSESSMENT

CONTENT SPECIFICATION

2016

The Archaeology Admissions Assessment will involve reading one or two passages of text, which may be either primary or secondary, of around 500-1000 words and answering a related question. You will have one hour to complete this task; you might wish to spend around a quarter of your time reading and planning and the remainder writing. The task is designed to assess comprehension and the ability to read closely, deploy arguments effectively, and write clearly – all skills which archaeologists will need to use continuously throughout their undergraduate studies.

We will be looking in answers for

- the ability to think analytically
- the ability to produce a coherent argument
- the ability to select and use evidence appropriately
- the ability to address the question directly and clearly
- precision, clarity and facility of writing under time pressure

Not all answers will demonstrate these qualities equally but the best answers will show signs of all, or nearly all, of them.

The assessment does not presume that you have encountered this material or these topics before; it is simply a self-contained exercise in reading comprehension, thinking and writing. It will be set in a way equally accessible to candidates interested in any of the various streams within the Archaeology Tripos.

Sample Admissions Assessment, Archaeology

Extract 1

“As the state arose from the need to hold class antagonisms in check, but as it arose, at the same time, in the midst of the conflict of these classes, it is, as a rule, the state of the most powerful, economically dominant class which, through the medium of the state, becomes also the politically dominant class, and thus acquires new means of holding down and exploiting the oppressed classes. Thus, the state of antiquity was above all the state of the slave owners for the purpose of holding down the slaves, as the feudal state was the organ of the nobility for holding down the peasant serfs and bondsmen, and the modern representative state is an instrument of exploitation of wage labour by capital.... In most of the historical states, the rights of citizens are, besides, apportioned according to their wealth, thus directly expressing the fact that the state is an organisation of the possessing class for its protection against the non-possessing class. It was so already in the Athenian and Roman classification according to property. It was so in the medieval feudal state, in which the alignment of political power was in conformity with the amount of land owned. It is seen in the electoral qualifications of the modern representative states. Yet this political recognition of property distinctions is by no means essential. On the contrary, it marks a low stage of state development. The highest form of the state, the democratic republic, which under our modern conditions of society is more and more becoming an inevitable necessity, and is the form of the state in which alone the last decisive struggle between proletariat and bourgeoisie can be fought out – the democratic republic officially knows nothing any more of property distinctions. In it wealth exercised its power indirectly, but all the more surely.”

Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1887)

Extract 2

“In the great alluvial valleys of the Nile, the Tigris, Euphrates and the Indus system collective effort had created artificial environments. Societies dwelling therein had emancipated themselves from immediate dependence on the caprices of raw nature and had discovered uniformities that permitted rational planning. The organised exploitation of lands reclaimed from swamp and desert was yielding unprecedented supplies of corn, fish, and other foodstuffs. A local failure of crops need no longer mean starvation; for thanks to improved and artificial waterways food supplies could be collected for storage in the city granaries and distributed all over the valleys. State organisations, based on residence instead of kinship, abolished blood-feuds between clans, mitigated the violence of other internal conflicts, and probably reduced the frequency of wars.

The biological consequences had been an immense numerical increase in the species *Homo sapiens* within the valleys. The vast areas of the new cities as compared with any barbarian village, the immense cemeteries attached to them, and the stupendous works executed by the citizens, place this conclusion beyond question. The standard of life had risen, too.

The rulers and the new middle classes certainly enjoyed a variety of food and drink, and comfort in accommodation and clothing that no barbarian chieftain could imagine. Even the masses secured a more varied diet and more salubrious housing.”

V. Gordon Childe, *What happened in history* (1942)

Answer ONE of the following questions:

1. Engels' view contains a narrative about how state polities developed historically as a response to economic classes. If you were studying the remains of early states, what kinds of evidence would you use to see whether his theory is correct or not, and how would you interpret it?
2. Compare and contrast Engels' view with Childe's. What are the main points of similarity and/or difference in how they understand the nature and effects of early states?
3. Childe ventures some ideas on the biological consequences of the first cities. In what ways do you think that early urbanism might or might not have constituted a threshold in humans' biological evolution?

END OF PAPER