Directions: Read the two documents below and answer the 5 multiple choice questions. These questions relate to the skills of interpretation, periodization and argumentation.

**JACOB BURCKHARDT: The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy (1860)**

Modern interpretations of the Renaissance almost uniformly start with the Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt’s *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, first published in 1860. Burckhardt rejected a chronological approach and pictured the Italian Renaissance of the 14th and 15th centuries as a whole, strikingly distinct from the preceding Middle Ages and clearly a superior civilization. Until the 1920s, historians almost unanimously accepted his interpretation. After that time various aspects of this thesis were attacked, particularly by medievalists. In recent decades, however, Burckhardt’s work has gained new respectability, at least as an idealized cultural history of the Italian Renaissance. In any case, all historians who approach this topic must deal with Burckhardt’s argument, some of the central points of which appear in the following excerpt.

In the Middle Ages both sides of human consciousness—that which was turned within as well as that which was turned without—lay dreaming or half awake beneath a common veil. The veil was woven of faith, illusion, and childish prepossession through which the world and history were seen clad in strange hues. Man was conscious of himself only as a member of a race, people, party, family, or corporation—only through some general category. In Italy this veil first melted into air; an objective treatment and consideration of the state and of all the things of this world became possible. The subjective side at the same time asserted itself with corresponding emphasis; man became a spiritual individual, and recognized himself as such. In the same way the Greek had once distinguished himself from the barbarian, and the Arabian had felt himself an individual at a time when other Asiatics knew themselves only as members of a race…

In far earlier times we can here and there detect a development of free personality which in Northern Europe either did not occur at all, or could not display itself in the same manner….But at the close of the 13th century Italy began to swarm with individuality; the charm laid upon human personality was dissolved; and a thousand figures meet us each in its own special shape and dress. Dante’s great poem [*The Divine Comedy*] would have been impossible in any other country in Europe, if only for the reason that they all still lay under the spell of race. For Italy the august poet, through the wealth of individuality which he set forth, was the most national herald of his time. But this unfolding of the treasures of human nature in literature and art—this many-sided representation and criticism—will be discussed in separate chapters; here we have to deal only with the psychological fact itself. This fact appears in the most decisive and unmistakable fore. The Italians of the 14th century knew little of false modesty or of hypocrisy in any shape; not one of them was afraid of singularity, of being and seeming unlike his neighbors.

Directions: Answer the following multiple choice questions based on the above passage.

1. According to Burckhardt, during the Middle Ages
   a. people viewed themselves as distinct and unique individuals, molded by God to do great things.
   b. people viewed themselves as part of a family or a people (a nation), but did not view themselves in terms of race or any other generalized category.
   c. people viewed themselves as a part of some larger group and did not identify as individuals like they had in the ancient world.
   d. people viewed themselves as part of a global community of man, where all people were connected to each other regardless of race, gender, wealth or occupation.

2. Where did changes begin during the Renaissance in how man viewed himself in relation to the world?
   a. France
   b. Italy
   c. Arabia
   d. Greece
3. Which primary source document could be used to support Burckhardt’s argument?
   a. Church records showing the number of births in Florence every year between 1400 and 1500
   b. A painting of a French prince which depicted him without idealization as he actually was.
   c. An entry in the diary of a Roman merchant who discusses his personal views on religion which contradict those of the Catholic Church and his family’s reaction to them.
   d. A book by a historian composed in 2013 which discusses the Renaissance characteristics of humanism, individualism and secularism.


PETER BURKE: The Renaissance (1987)

Many historians attacked Burckhardt’s interpretation and the legacy built up around it. These historians argued that Burckhardt overemphasized how modern the Renaissance was. They stressed how much the Renaissance, even in Italy, was still part of the medieval world. Other historians have responded that the criticisms of Burckhardt go too far. In the following selection, Peter Burke criticizes Burckhardt’s idea of the Renaissance as a myth and describes the main objections to it.

Jacob Burckhardt defined the period in terms of two concepts, ‘individualism’ and ‘modernity.’ “In the Middle Ages,” according to Burckhardt, “human consciousness…lay dreaming or half awake beneath a common veil…Man was conscious of himself only as a member of a race, people, party, family or corporation—only though some general category.” In Renaissance Italy, however, “this veil first melted into air…man became a spiritual individual, and recognized himself as such.” Renaissance meant modernity. The Italian was, Burckhardt wrote, “the first born among the sons of modern Europe.” The 14th century poet Petrarch was “one of the first truly modern men.” The great renewal of art and ideas began in Italy, and at a later stage the new attitudes and the new artistic forms spread to the rest of Europe.

This idea of the Renaissance is a myth….

Burckhardt’s mistake was to accept the scholars and artists of the period at their own valuation, to take this story of rebirth at face value and to elaborate it into a book. To the old formulae of the restoration of the arts and the revival of classical antiquity, he added new ones such as individual, realism, and modernity…

This 19th century myth of the Renaissance is still taken seriously by many people. Television companies and organizers of package tours still make money out of it. However, professional historians have become dissatisfied with this version of the Renaissance, even if they continue to find the period and the movement attractive. The point is that the grand edifice erected by Burckhardt and his contemporaries has not stood the test of time. More exactly, it has been undermined by the researches of the medievalists in particular. Their arguments depend on innumerable points of detail, but they are of two main kinds.

In the first place, there are arguments to the effect that so-called ‘Renaissance men’ were really rather medieval. They were more traditional in their behavior, assumptions and ideals that we tend to think—and also more traditional than they saw themselves. Hindsight suggests that even Petrarch, “one of the first truly modern men,” according to Burckhardt, had many attitudes in common with the centuries he described as ‘dark’…..

In the second place, the medievalists have accumulated arguments to the effect that the Renaissance was not such as singular event as Burckhardt and his contemporaries once thought and that the term should be used in the plural. There were various ‘renaissances’ in the Middle Ages, notably in the 12th century and in the age of Charlemagne. In both cases there was a combination of literacy and artistic achievements with a revival of interest in classical learning, and in both cases contemporaries described their age as one of restoration, rebirth or ‘renovation.’

Directions: Answer the following multiple choice questions based on the above passage.
1. According to Burke,
   a. Burckhardt’s assessment that the Renaissance marks a break with the medieval world is incorrect because it has been proven untrue by the work of later historians.
   b. Burckhardt’s assessment that the Renaissance marks a break with the medieval world is incorrect because it cannot be supported by primary sources from the period.
   c. Burckhardt’s assessment that the Renaissance marks a break with the medieval world is incorrect because he only discusses the revival of individuality, but does not discuss secularism or humanism.
   d. Burckhardt’s assessment that the Renaissance marks a break with the medieval world is incorrect because there was no sense of individuality during the period of 1450 to 1550; people continued to think of themselves as a part of a larger collective.

2. If you were a supporter of Burckhardt, which of the following response might you give to refute Burke? IF YOU DO NOT KNOW WHAT “REFUTE” MEANS, LOOK IT UP!!!!!
   a. People who lived during the Renaissance were, in reality, very similar to people living during the medieval period in terms of religion, government and occupation.
   b. The Renaissance clearly marks a break with the medieval period because no one during the Middle Ages expressed an interest in the classical world.
   c. The Renaissance should be seen as a distinct period in terms of literature and art, but not in terms of political thought or social advancement.
   d. Although there were multiple “renaissances” where classical thought was revived throughout the course of the Middle Ages, the Renaissance deserves special attention because it was more influential to the modern period and helped to develop our current worldview.