



History 7042
Specimen Question Paper 2F (A-level)
Question 01 Student 1
Specimen Answer and Commentary

V1.0

Specimen answer plus commentary

The following student response is intended to illustrate approaches to assessment. This response has not been completed under timed examination conditions. It is not intended to be viewed as a 'model' answer and the marking has not been subject to the usual standardisation process.

Paper 2F (A-level): Specimen question paper

01 With reference to these sources and your understanding of the historical context, assess the value of these three sources to an historian studying Louis XIV's monarchy.

[30 marks]

Student response

For an historian studying Louis XIV's monarchy all three sources would have some value. They comprise an extract from an Italian guest at the French court -so offering the views of an educated outsider, a letter sent by a Bishop, critical of Louis XIV, offering the perspective of an opponent and an extract from Louis' own recommendation to his son which gives the King's own views on monarchy. As a set they could hardly be bettered. All come from the time in question, all are written by influential and literate upper-class people and we have both positive and negative views of the monarchy. A historian studying Louis XIV would obviously need to find further evidence on which to base his judgements, but as a starting point these sources give a well-rounded picture.

One observation that emerges from the three sources is that Louis XIV has seen the King emerge as a powerful central figure in government. In his instructions to his son (Source C) he makes it clear that, on taking personal control of government, he chose not to appoint a prime minister. This is highly significant for an understanding of Louis' reign. He even admits that he did not even seek individuals of 'greater eminence'.

His words are confirmed by the observations of the Italian guest in Source A. Here, he observes that the King is 'not at all dominated by his ministers'. Source A gives us an even fuller picture of Louis' centralisation of government. He 'wants to know everything'... 'there are no intermediaries'....'he expects that every appeal ...be reported to him'. The impression we get is of a king who keeps a firm rein on all matters of government and this behaviour is perhaps explained by the picture he gives of the state of France in the 1670s and 1680s when, 'disorder reigned everywhere' in Source C.

Even Source B testifies to the King's control, despite its unflattering tone. It talks of Louis defending his conquests, imposing taxes and being held out as 'the people's joy. Whilst the Bishop is no friend of the King, he is clearly aware of the absolutist nature of Louis' reign and simply wishes to make it work better. Although we are told that he was critical of the Divine Right of Kings, he does seem to suggest that only Louis can make his kingdom function effectively and, conversely, that Louis is responsible for all its ills.

As well as learning about the nature of the monarchy, these three sources tell the historian quite a lot about Louis himself. He is seen as hard-working and orderly. He likes to run his day to a pattern (Source A), always rising at the same hour, attending meetings and going to Mass. He obviously spends much time with his advisers -the 'flattering counsels' of Source B but this was work, not pleasure. In Source C he talks directly of 'a great deal of work on my part' and the very

fact he chooses to write an instruction manual for his son suggests he is a conscientious ruler - as well as a skilful one (Source A).

It is also hinted that Louis is rather a remote figure. Source B, in particular emphasises Louis' ignorance of the actual conditions in his country where agriculture and trade are stagnating under the heavy taxes demanded for Louis' wars. The picture in Source A also is of a king who spends every moment at court, supervising matters of state and ensuring that he uses his 'extraordinary memory' to coordinate the work of his ministers and reproach them for misdeeds. In Source C he appears to know quite a lot of what went on before his personal rule but, of course, this might well have been reported to him. However, his resolution to rule alone and devote his time to watching his ministers again confirms a king that largely cut himself off from the wider state.

The limitation of these sources lies in their contradictions. Whilst the picture of Visconti in Source A is quite positive, if not entirely praising, that of Fenelon in Source B is certainly negative, suggesting that Louis has wilfully allowed France to become 'desolate and unprovided for'. Louis has, according to this source, lost the people's affection and there are uprisings and plots in abundance which he is ignoring. This dismal picture does not sit well with Source C, where Louis gives the impression he has overcome all the disorder that he inherited and is now in a position to advise his son how to maintain control. It would be necessary to investigate further to resolve these conflicts. Bishop Fenelon obviously has a particular grudge, even though he was appointed tutor to Louis' grandson and maybe his view should not be weighted too highly. On the other hand, he is Frenchman and he both mixes in royal circles and, himself, shows an awareness of the outside world referring to matters that Visconti might not be aware of and which Louis himself almost certainly would not want to comment on.

In conclusion, these are interesting and thought-provoking sources which would certainly be of use to an historian studying Louis XIV's monarchy and particularly if that historian wanted to gain more insight into Louis XIV himself and his centralising tendencies. For an historian to be sure of the veracity of the sources and to know more about other aspects of the reign, he would need to turn elsewhere.

Commentary – Level 3

Answers to Question 1 require detailed consideration of each source and an assessment of the value of each by considering provenance, tone, argument and content. There is no prescribed approach, although a source-by-source assessment is probably the most straightforward, but this answer adopts a different approach. The introduction does indicate some considerations that need to be made: who, when and in what context the sources were written. The points, of course, being in an introduction, are not developed and the value of such introductions is questionable. The answer then identifies what the sources have in common in relation to views on Louis and how they differ and there are some brief references to provenance. The penultimate paragraph then considers the limitations of the sources collectively. The answer suggests an attempt that is intelligent and thoughtful and it is fluent, but, fundamentally, it does not meet the requirements of the question. Much is descriptive of what is said and assessment of value in each case is occasionally tangential and never fully developed. It flatters to deceive and is Level 3 at best.