
A-level

History

7042/2F The Sun King: Louis XIV, France and Europe, 1643–1715
Report on the Examination

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General Comments

It was encouraging to find that in this, the first year of examinations in a new A-level specification, many students had been well prepared and were able to write with confidence and enthusiasm about specific elements of Louis XIV's reign. It seems that centres have taken on board the changing requirements of the transformation of the old Louis XIV paper into a depth paper and were preparing students accordingly. Strong knowledge of narrow areas of foreign policy was shown in 01 and 04 while there was knowledge of some of the complex issues of the Fronde and of Jansenism in 02 and 03. The compulsory 01 question was answered much better than at AS with almost universal attempts to include tone and provenance in the answers. In the responses to questions 02, 03 and 04, there was also evidence that students could focus effectively on a narrow point of History and find a range of factors to explore, select relevant examples to support a case and provide a substantiated judgement. There were, of course, some, whose knowledge of material or understanding of causation were inadequate for the tasks set. Those who, despite some effective revision, still under-performed may have failed to take on board some of the new A-level requirements and it is largely to help such students that the following comments are offered.

Section A

01

Students were required to evaluate three separate sources in relation to an issue – the reasons for the outbreak of the Dutch war in 1672. Pleasingly, many realised that they were not being asked to compare the given sources unlike the AS paper. Those that did this comparison wasted valuable time, although they were not penalised for so doing. The answer did not require an introduction, nor an overall conclusion, but some concluding judgement on each source in relation to the question posed was helpful to meet the criteria for the highest marks.

The most obvious differentiator between student answers to this question lay in the ability to identify and address the key reasons raised by each source. Far too many found one relevant issue they could write about – whether it was a reason or not – and went no further which neither showed real understanding, nor kept the answer focused on the question demands.

The second key differentiator between the responses was the ability to use provenance and tone not just to assess the value of these sources in a general sense but their value to a historian studying the reasons for the outbreak of war. The integration of these skills with the content of the sources shows a deeper level of understanding and should be aspired to by students seeking the highest marks.

The final differentiator was the ability to ascribe arguments to individuals. For example, Source A was representing the arguments of the Dutch ambassador on behalf of his government and Louis rather than the Marquise; Source C was the view of Temple about the Dutch and the French going to war but some students did not quite appreciate this and some even took the source as fact. On this year's paper, the first source operated on two levels and many students only saw one of these. Most picked up some or all of the stated reasons for the breakdown of Franco-Dutch relations – “the Dutch were stirring up” Louis's enemies, Louis was building up a large threatening army with Louis's explanation that it was to protect his “gloire” and the French state from any surprise attack. However, fewer commented that despite Louis's claims of provocation, his entire conduct made it clear that it was Louis and not the Dutch who were spoiling for war. In this, the provenance and tone was extremely informative; Louis's aggressive actions were reported with praise by a member of his court and so confirmed the accuracy both of the letter and of Louis

being the aggressor. Nearly every student knew that the Dutch had created the Triple Alliance which had stirred up the enemies but few realised that Louis had dismantled this alliance by this point which undermined this as a current cause of war as claimed by Louis. Most students picked up the simple argument in B that Louis's motives were "personal ones" and then moved on to their own choice of personal motive like strengthen the north-eastern border. Better students went on to note that Louis specified that these personal motives were "gloire" and "ambition". Most students reflected on the timing of the writing of the source, the authorship and intended audience. C posed harder issues for students as few realised that Temple was probably not neutral as England fought in the early stages of the war against the Dutch. Few saw the full argument of the source – that it was Dutch overconfidence which made them vulnerable to the French. Many students misunderstood that the alliance made the Dutch a tempting target for the French which is not very easy to argue.

Section B

02

Most students showed some impressive knowledge of the Fronde in this question compared to that shown last year at the AS level. This is to be complemented as it was a very complex series of events and shows that centres are coming to terms with the level of knowledge now required in this unit as a depth study. Most students knew that Condé changed sides in the conflict and went off to fight with the Spanish against France – but few identified what Condé's personal ambition was. While knowledge of Condé was sometimes limited, students were often able to find balance by looking at Mazarin's actions, Louis's coming of age or the lack of unity among the Frondeurs. Some more able students used this last point effectively to show that Condé's personal ambition was a smaller part of a larger problem. Others challenged the assumption in the question that the Fronde failed by instancing the successes of the Fronde parlementaire which was creditable.

03

This question focused in depth on the Jansenists and Louis's reasons for his life long struggle against them. The less able students confused the Jansenists with Huguenots and cited Louis's measures against the Huguenots as evidence for his approach to the Jansenists. This reflected a broader issue; few students explained who the Jansenists were apart from being heretics. A detailed understanding of their teachings was essential to understanding why exactly Louis was so fundamentally opposed to them.

Many students found it difficult to isolate political from religious or personal reasons for Louis's struggle against Jansenism apart from the political threat that they had posed in the Fronde. Relationships with the Papacy could be described as either political or religious and many students seemed to assume that there was only one Pope with a single consistent attitude towards Jansenism and one relationship with Louis. This was not the case! However, the most able students recognised that in Louis XIV's France religion, politics and personality intertwined and overlapped.

Again, to secure higher marks, students were expected to use evidence of Louis's treatment of the Jansenists to support their case. However, a few students who had revised thoroughly tended to give a chronology of Louis's persecution of the Jansenists without really relating this to motive. Better marks tended to be gained by students who used a few key points to support a motive rather than a full chronology. The most able students gained balance by associating the timing of actions against Jansenists with the influence of particular motives; for example, some argued that Louis's final destruction of Port Royal in 1711 was only achieved when Louis knew he was close to death and believed he soon would have to justify his tenure as King of France.

04

This question reflected the need of centres and students to follow the content specification of this unit. The unit now requires knowledge and understanding of the Treaty of Utrecht and its impact on the balance of power in Europe and this is exactly the topic under question. This required consideration of other countries in Europe and this was the key distinguishing factor between students; many students did discuss the impact of the treaty on other countries but there were some who only discussed France and perhaps Spain. Unfortunately, very few students defined “balance of power” but many saw that transformation meant that some countries grew more powerful while others lost power.

Students tried to gain balance most obviously by looking at France’s gains and losses although there were some who thought Louis had not taken over Spain completely while others – curiously when discussing the treaty to end the War of the Spanish Succession did not mention the advantages of a Bourbon, rather than a Habsburg, on the Spanish throne at all. Some tried to gain balance by following a more traditional line in looking at French foreign policy, that the transformative point was at Ryswick in 1698 or indeed Carlos’s death and will in 1700 and arguing that Utrecht represented the confirmation of the transformation of France’s power at either of these points. However, unless these points were couched in terms of the European stage as a whole, and not merely in terms of France, this approach was unlikely to attain the highest marks.

Use of statistics

Statistics used in this report may be taken from incomplete processing data. However, this data still gives a true account on how students have performed for each question.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.