
AS

HISTORY

The Sun King: Louis XIV, France and Europe, 1643–1715

7041/2F The Sun King, 1643–1685

Report on the Examination

7041/2F

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General

As always, responses to the questions on this year's paper ranged from the clearly-focused, well-argued and conceptually aware to the mistaken, generalised and irrelevant. Students scored slightly better with the source question (mean mark of 12.39) and question 03 (mean mark of 12.64) than question 02 (mean mark of 11.70) but the marks were very even across the questions. On the whole, students were well-prepared for the rigours of a depth exam, which is different to the demands required when the Louis paper included much more breadth.

Both Sections A and B were marked according to the respective generic levels mark schemes which offer a range of five levels of attainment, carefully graded to assess a combination of understanding and knowledge. There was little difference seen in the quality of the responses to the different areas of the specification content, and, to this extent, the questions proved effective at differentiating between students, with a roughly equal number of strong and weak answers being found in response to every question.

Question 01

The source question is a demanding one and students generally fared best when they took time to read both the provenance and the content of the sources carefully, in relation to the focus of the question, before beginning to write. Strong answers usually began with a direct reference to the key insight offered by the source and then related this and some consideration of the provenance to the detailed assessment of the source. Weaker students tended to be very mechanical in assessing provenance first, then tone and then elements of the content without integration and often without own knowledge or understanding.

Those who assimilated the sources as a whole, generally found two key implications in relation to Louis's patronage of art and culture. Source A gave prominence to Colbert rather than Louis and the use of art and culture to promote Louis's 'gloire'. Source B focused on the role of Louis in the patronage of the arts and this was because Louis loved dancing and by implication the arts and culture generally.

Fewer students integrated their understanding of the implication of the source with the provenance. For example, Source A was produced by someone who owed his position to Colbert and therefore might be expected to give a prominent role to his patron and his energies. Source B was produced by a contemporary to his noble patron (not by Louis himself as a couple of students said oddly) and so would have to be careful in what was said. Most students picked up the gift in the provenance that there was censorship at this time. Very few students fell into the trap of criticising the poetic form of the source because the poem was clearly conveying facts.

Although relatively few picked up the key implications of the sources towards explaining Louis's patronage of art and culture, there were lots who made a good deal out of the specific content. Louis's desire for 'gloire' was often raised from source A but few students were able to associate specific events to medals or statues and this had to be done carefully as the question limited students to the early 1660s. It was of course possible to mention later evidence such as Le Brun and the Crossing of the Rhine but care had to be taken to show this was the fulfilment of the plans outlined in the source. This applied to the almost universal use of Versailles which could turn up in reviewing either source, with mention of the Louvre in source A and Louis's entertainments in source B. In this case much depended on whether the information was used to value the source's explanation or simply to display gratuitous knowledge.

When it came to the comparison element of the question, some students attacked Source A's usefulness because it airbrushed Louis out or attacked source B for the emphasis on how the dance was supposed to encourage peacefulness with Louis's notorious bellicosity. Better students realised that Louis had not engaged in a war on his own account in 1663 and that the memory of the Fronde had made a profound impact on the young Louis and so this was part of a wider campaign to control the nobility.

Answers were judged both on the quality of the understanding and on the choice and use of contextual 'own knowledge' to support the comments made. Most students were keen to show what they knew but this could lead to long lists of only marginally relevant information – typically on Versailles. Contextual own knowledge is valid to confirm statements in the source or to challenge them – but not simply to demonstrate that they know something of the period.

Question 02

Students found this the hardest question to answer, yet in many respects students who thought found it reasonably easy to find issues to compare with involvement in war. Most centres probably will start the unit by some consideration of how France was governed in 1643 and what problems were faced by those in government. Students who remembered this had no problems in explaining the lack of communications, the fiscal immunities of the first two estates and some even recalled the distinction between pays d'états and pays d'élections.

Some remembered the situation of France in 1643 – the King had died and there were the issues of the Regency. Others pointed out the influence of Mazarin and some even talked about the resistance of the nobility to Mazarin and Anne both from their foreign backgrounds and as representing the continued centralising tendencies of Richelieu. The weakest talked about the problems Louis XIV faced in 1643 but failed to consider the major one that he was only aged four when he became the king.

However, the key of the question had to be dealt with for students to be able to make their comparisons. Most students could name the war (although some thought it was being fought only against Spain) and many could identify harms that it was doing through increased taxation. Although fewer came up with the number of deaths in the war and the fact that France was fighting against Catholic powers which many French people found distasteful. Unfortunately, many students unavoidably slid into why France was difficult to govern in the decade after 1643 and far too many students discussed the Fronde in detail and so moved away from the difficulties faced in 1643 itself.

Better students often came to the view that war exacerbated the issues which made France hard to govern which they came to interpret in two ways; either that the war was the catalyst that pushed the government over the edge; or that war only served to point up the basic reasons why France was difficult to govern, especially the problems with taxing the rich. Fewer made the point that the regency itself would be a major problem for any monarchy and so the war was not the fundamental issue facing France, perhaps because Anne's overturning of her husband's will was achieved remarkably easily.

Question 03

This question focussed on the war of Devolution and many found it easy to answer by comparing the gains made in prestige and territory against the thankfully almost ubiquitous reference to the Triple Alliance. Some also mentioned the partition treaty which the war prompted as Emperor Leopold was forced to recognise not only the legal claim of France to Spanish territory but its capacity to seize it without consent due to the proven prowess of its reformed army.

Too many students felt the need to provide a lengthy context for the answer by reference to the basis of French claims on the territory, some of which understood the legal complexity. Unless this was done with reference to France's international position at the start of the war, this was not a very fruitful line of approach. Equally some weaker students got their wars mixed up, substituting the Dutch War of 1672-9 for the War of Devolution in part or whole and also confusing Spanish Netherlands with the Dutch Republic.

Few students recognised that France's international position in 1667 needed to be contrasted with that in 1668 to assess the extent that France was strengthened by the war. Better students found ways of forming an argument – for example contrasting specific gains made like Cambrai with the issue of salient, contrasting the “gloire” obtained with the financial costs or the solidity of the Triple Alliance in practice. However, the “loss” of Franche Comté was often seen as a balancing point on territorial gains to show that the war weakened France; surprisingly few students considered the issue that Franche Comté was actually no loss, at least compared to the beginning of the war, as it was not French property then.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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