
A-level History

2A Royal Authority and the Angevin Kings, 1154-1216
Report on the Examination

7042/2A
June 2018

Version: 1.0

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General

It was pleasing to see that the vast majority of students had revised thoroughly for this exam and the level of contextual own knowledge was often very impressive indeed. Time was generally well managed and most students attempted three answers in some detail. A minority had poor written communication skills, including grammar and legibility, which does make assessing extended answers more difficult.

Question 1

With this question, students were required to evaluate the value of three separate sources in relation to an issue – the conflict between Richard and Philip. They were not asked to compare the given sources and those who did wasted valuable time, although they were not penalised for so doing. The answer did not require an introduction or 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.

Students showed a very good level of contextual own knowledge about this topic area, and the vast majority were able to confidently apply this in their assessments of value. Equally, most answers attempted to balance the assessments being made - with consideration of both the strengths and the limitations within the sources. However, there were some students who wasted time by paraphrasing the entire source and then simply saying 'I know this is true'. This 'fact checking' approach does not garner many marks.

Most students made an effort to identify the provenance and the tone of the sources, but many failed to then make specific comments about the value of the source in relation to the question. Students need to go beyond the generic, 'this source is biased and so is not valuable' or 'this was written at the time and so is accurate' and become more nuanced in their assessments. Equally, 'this is valuable because it shows the French view of events' is fairly low-level analysis.

There were many answers which demonstrated a limited awareness of the purpose of certain types of sources, for example saying that 'chroniclers write to tell the truth and so do not lie', 'chronicles are written to inform and so do not have agendas' or 'monks cannot lie as they are religious figures'. This generic and rote-learned approach is often not very effective. It appears that a significant number of students do not fully understand what 'tone' is and very few managed to make effective links to value. Tone does not have to be commented upon to achieve full marks and the most effective answers would link comments on tone to an assessment of the actual content and argument at the same time. Some students thought that a tone which was positive (e.g. A's tone when talking about Philip) made it de facto unreliable and lacking in value. This is not the case and further exploration of the content and argument would need to be made before such conclusions could be drawn. It is worth noting that comments on provenance need to be securely developed in order to access the higher levels of the mark scheme - it is not simply an 'add on' to the rest of the answer.

Those answers which achieved the best marks dealt thoroughly with the main arguments within the sources, alongside a developed assessment of provenance and tone. For example, a good answer might argue that Source A was written by a monk based at the French Royal foundation of St. Denis. As Philip's biographer, Rigord is likely to portray the dispute with Richard through a sympathetic treatment of Philip and a less positive view of Richard. This is clearly backed up by the

tone of the source and the fact that some of the content can be disputed by contextual own knowledge (e.g. Philip's reasons for returning home). This led many students to question the overall value of A, despite Rigord being well placed to have access to relevant information.

It was disappointing to see a persistent minority making very few references to 'value' at all and conflating this with validity, utility, reliability and accuracy, which are not the same thing. It is vital that regular links to the wording of the specific question are made.

Question 2

This was a very popular essay question, which students were clearly very well prepared to answer, showing a very good range of knowledge and understanding in many cases. Most students remained focused on the issues within the specific question and assessed Henry's personality versus his aims with regards to the Church's power. There were very few answers which went off on other tangents (e.g. examples of Becket's personality), which was very pleasing to see. A few answers seemed to get a bit muddled and tried to argue that it was Henry's personality which caused his desire to reduce the power of the Church, but these were in a minority. Most answers achieved balance, and so the main discriminator in terms of marks was the quality of the links between examples and the actual dispute (e.g. being able to identify that Henry wanted to control the problem of criminous clerks which led to conflict in January 1164 over the Constitutions of Clarendon and Becket's refusal to append his seal) and the level of detail and accuracy across the full period of the dispute. There were some areas which showed a more simplistic understanding of the squabble, for example, Henry's actual desires as expressed in the Constitutions were often oversimplified, especially with regards to Clause 3. Many answers quoted Henry as ordering Becket's murder through 'Who will rid me of this turbulent priest', which is not accurate. There were other issues which suggested a less than thorough understanding of the sequence of events within the dispute, or the significance of such events as the debate at Woodstock in 1163 over payments to the Exchequer. However, the standard of knowledge generally was pleasing and, in some cases, was very impressive indeed.

Question 3

This was the least popular essay question, and often became the recourse for students who were less confident with the more mainstream alternatives. This essay was testing the extent to which Henry could be said to have ruled over an empire. There were a number of good answers, which tackled the conceptual idea of what it was to be an 'empire' or an 'emperor' and considered the arguments for and against. Students effectively brought in arguments such as Henry's use of men like Becket across his lands as evidence in favour of empire and then contrasted this with the fact that Henry was a vassal of the French king in his overseas territories as evidence against, for example. It was a shame that some students ignored the dates within the question and so wasted time on lengthy discussions of the Treaty of Montmirail or the invasion of Ireland. A large number of answers, however, attempted to change this question and focused on arguing whether Henry had restored royal authority in England or not. Sometimes these comments could be implicitly linked to the actual question, but often they were not well focused and so there were a disappointing number of low marks for this option.

Question 4

This essay question was also very popular and some excellent responses were produced. The best answers could talk in detail about John's financial policies with specific examples and then make clear and supported links to the clauses of Magna Carta. Good students balanced their answers by considering other factors, and the range here was impressive. Some students chose to look at other things which John had done (e.g. treatment of his English barons and reliance on foreigners), whilst others considered more long-term causes, such as the role of 'Angevin Despotism' over time. The most effective responses maintained clear and regular links to the content of the charter.

Answers which did not achieve such high marks often made only vague reference to the Magna Carta or spent much time describing events such as the murder of Arthur or the treatment of the Lusignans, which do not seem to have directly contributed to the rebellion of the English barons. There were a number of answers which spent time discussing the Interdict and John's excommunication. Whilst it is true that Stephen Langton appears to have played a role in the drafting of the Charter (as indicated by the clause on the freedom of the Church), he was more of a mediator and by 1215 it should be remembered that John had papal support. Indeed, during the Interdict, many barons supported John's approach and so links between this and the charter needed to be carefully handled to avoid inaccuracies. Whilst it was not expected that students could regurgitate entire clauses of the charter, or always remember the specific clause number, clear links did need to be established. For example, many students discussed the treatment of Matilda de Braose and her son and then simply said 'and this caused Magna Carta'. More effective answers could point to the fact that Giles de Braose was a prominent rebel in the baronial war against John in 1215 and the Magna Carta (based upon the so-called Articles of Barons, produced on behalf of such rebels) included a number of clauses about treatment of prisoners and hostages and also demanded that everyone have the right to a fair trial.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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