



History

Paper 2B (AS) Specimen Question Paper

Question 01 Student 1

Specimen Answer and Commentary

V1.1 10/09/15

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 2B (AS): Specimen question paper

01 With reference to these sources and your understanding of the historical context, which of these two sources is more valuable in explaining why there was instability in England in the years to 1461?

(25 marks)

Student Response

Source A's fundamental value is in its support for the argument that the instability in England in the years to 1461 was due to a lack of governmental control connected to Richard of York's takeover of government. The source is all the more valuable in that London was largely sympathetic to the Yorkist cause and it is at variance with many others. It also provides a contemporary account from the centre of political power in England. The source notes that the times were 'lawless' when it relates that even Queen Margaret was attacked and robbed by her own servant. The criminality that had, according to the impression given by the source, become prevalent is reinforced by the claim that 'the Lords sent forged orders'. The root of this is explained by the early reference to the assertion that 'the Duke of York declared himself king.' Thus, despite the dating of the chronicle's production, it is referring to the events in the previous year (Richard of York was, in fact, dead by 1461). Richard of York had claimed the throne in 1460 by right of his descent from Lionel, Duke of Clarence, the second surviving son of Edward III, whereas the reigning king, Henry VI, could only claim descent from John of Gaunt, the third surviving son. This claim was one of the most dramatic events in fifteenth-century English history and threw government into confusion as the lords did not want to decide upon the matter. The source is suggesting that the chaos that spread throughout the kingdom was a consequence of this action by Richard of York. The reference to the lords who sent forged orders is one that refers to Richard of York's supporters, such as the Nevilles, and more widely, the lords who had agreed to the act of Accord. This compromise had stated that Henry VI would remain upon the throne but that Richard of York and his heirs would succeed after his death thus substantiating source A's claim that 'the King was removed from London against his will' as effective power passed to Richard even though Henry remained as a figurehead. Even those lords who opposed this decision, such as Thomas Courtney (referred to as the Earl of Devon) and Henry Beaufort (the mentioned Duke of Somerset incorrectly identified as an earl) are presented as acting out of greed rather than principle when William Gregory notes that they aided Margaret 'out of expectation of reward than loyalty to her'. The instability was thus caused by the Lords but also by Margaret of Anjou herself because as source A noted she was seen as 'the reason for opposition to their plans'. Indeed Margaret was unwilling to see her son disinherited and she did raise a Northern army which greatly added to the lawless instability as it became notorious for its savagery and acts of plunder.

However, although source A is valuable in presenting this argument it does have some significant limitations. Firstly it is rather focused, unsurprisingly on London and although it was the capital and centre of government instability was much more widely felt and had causes that extended beyond events in London. It also is not entirely credible in its portrayal of Courtney and Beaufort. Both men had reason to support Margaret that was in fact loyalty to her position in opposing Richard of York.

Henry Beaufort's father, Edmund, had been the main rival of Richard of York and had been killed by his forces at the first battle of St Albans in 1455; he would therefore have been opposed to Richard and his heirs succeeding to the throne. Likewise it was not reward that motivated Thomas Courtney but rather the fact Richard of York favoured his Bonville rivals. This lack of knowledge or lack of appreciation of the situation that had led to Richard of York's actions in 1460 calls its value into question.

Both sources acknowledge that the queen was, to some degree, right at the centre of the problems in England leading up to 1461. She was a very divisive figure. She had sought to claim the regency during her husband's mental illness in 1453-54, was single-mindedly determined to protect her son, as noted in source B, and had acted to ensure the attainder of York and his Neville supporters at the Coventry parliament of 1459, the so-called Parliament of Devils. It was arguably this action that led to Richard of York's decision to claim the throne in 1460, the results of which are noted in source A. Therefore it is valuable that both sources acknowledge her role in the instability that occurred in England in the years to 1461 although source B is much more explicit about it than source A noting that she 'ruled England as she liked gathering huge riches to herself.

Source B however, although it shares an acknowledgement of Margaret's presence in the troubled circumstance of instability has a fundamentally different view to source A in explaining its cause. The principal focus for its blame lies at the feet of Henry VI himself and the weaknesses of his character. It notes boldly that 'King Henry VI was simple'. Much has been made, by historians, of, in the famous words of K. B. McFarlane the 'undermighty' nature of Henry VI. It is argued that he had an excessive piety and was easily manipulated and that he had no interest in warfare, which lost him the respect of the polity, as noted when it states that 'the King waged no war at all'. Henry VI was blamed for the loss of the French possessions won by his father, Henry V and this had been one of the key causes of the earlier instability of 1450 known as Jack Cade's rebellion. His excessive generosity as a cause of the instability is referred to when the chronicle comments that 'the royal debt increased daily but he paid off nothing, and all the possessions and lordships in the King's gift had been given away.' In noting this it is contradicting source A because Richard of York is part of the problem in source A but his rise was a consequence of the financial mess noted in source B and he was, in fact, popular because of his attempts to deal with the problem. Richard of York, with the support of the Commons, tried twice to enact resummptions which would have helped to restore royal finances and ease what source B notes were the 'the taxes and tallages imposed on the common people'. He also led opposition to the perceived greed of the royal household and those associated with it, most notably Edmund Beaufort, the father of the duke noted in source A. The narrative view presented by source B is clear and also takes consideration of a longer period of time than the much more narrowly focussed source A and this greatly adds to its value in determining the underlying reasons for instability before 1461.

There are limitations to the value of source B, its anonymous nature does not help and the dating of its composition would put it in the reign of the Yorkist king, Edward IV. In this situation it is unsurprising that it was hostile to the king and queen he had replaced and, by implication, to the political enemies of his father, the now deceased Duke of York. The purpose of this narrative history was very likely to justify the Yorkist usurpation of 1461 and its message must be appreciated through its rather distorted lens. The portrayal of Margaret is particularly unflattering and rather unfairly fails to acknowledge that she had plenty of reasons to fear the dynastic claims of Richard of York who may well have spread the rumours of her son's illegitimacy and certainly had the most to gain from them.

In conclusion there is some value to both sources in that source A is focussed on specific events in the capital at a key moment whereas source B has a longer term approach. However, despite the understandable pro-Yorkist tone of source B it is the more useful in that it more fully explains why the situation had reached the point it had in 1461 whereas source A mainly reports the effects of the instability once it had occurred.

Commentary – Level 5

This is a strong response at AS. The answer demonstrates both an understanding of the content of the sources and employs impressive detail to assess value. In places, the importance of provenance is either somewhat implicit or undeveloped as is the treatment of tone. These are the only weaknesses in what is a bottom Level 5 response.