



History 7042
Additional Specimen Question Paper 1E (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 1E (A-level): Additional specimen question paper

01 Using your understanding of the historical context, assess how convincing the arguments in these three extracts are in relation to why Catherine the Great did not reform the social structure of Russia.

[30 marks]

Student response

The argument put forward on Extract A is that Catherine did not emancipate the serfs, which would have completely changed Russia's social structure, because she needed to reward those who had put her on the throne - the nobility, Church and army. The only way to do this was to give them wealth and 'wealth meant serfs'. The argument in this extract is that Catherine was intellectually opposed to serfdom but that circumstances prevented her from carrying out what she believed in. The extract also suggests that Catherine probably intended to emancipate the serfs in the longer term, once she was fully settled on the throne and that 'the reversal of her (enlightened) belief' was only 'temporary' in 1762, the year she began her rule.

This is quite a convincing argument. As an 'outsider', both German and a female, who had been brought to Russia to marry the weak Tsar Peter III, and whose position as Empress was the result of dubious political intrigue, she could not afford to risk causing offence to the powerful nobility at the beginning of her reign. An attack on the social structure of Russia could have led her lose the throne as quickly as she had acquired it. Nevertheless, the extract rightly comments on her familiarity with the ideas of the Enlightenment philosophies and her concern to bring about social change. It is known that both before and after she seized the throne, Catherine enjoyed exchanging letters with Voltaire, Diderot, Montesquieu and the Grimm brothers.

Although the Extract suggests that Catherine's enlightenment ideas went into reverse once she became Empress, this argument could be challenged. Catherine tried to put some reforms into effect, compiling the 'Great Instruction' in 1767 -which expressed her views on matters such as education and fair punishment and by summoning an elected Legislative Commission to revise Russian Law in 1767 -69. These measures showed a positive attempt to bring about social reform. She included almost all groups in society, from the nobility and Church to state peasants, although not the privately-owned serfs, in her Legislative Commission.

However the argument in Extract A is again confirmed by noting that the 'Great Instruction' merely repeated traditional views of society, stating that that a 'fixed order' was necessary, with some to govern and others to obey. It also talked about the danger of sudden emancipation, which is the point made in the extract.. This would confirm that whilst Catherine had reforming intentions, she did not, at that stage of her reign, have any thoughts of serf emancipation. The pressures from the nobility and the need to suppress popular revolts would help to explain this behaviour and corroborate the view in Extract A.

Extract B offers the argument that Catherine was unable to effect change because 'the problems turned out to be larger than the Empress had anticipated'. It also argues that

Catherine was herself to blame for the failures of the Legislative Commission because she did not prepare adequately for it and allowed its proceedings to be 'confused'.

It is certainly true that Catherine had little real knowledge of the state of her empire when she came to the throne. Her life had been sheltered and lived behind palace walls, so Extract B has some validity in arguing that the Empire's problems were probably greater than she had expected. She did make an attempt to get to know her Empire, however, after becoming Empress. For example, she went on expeditions into the Russian provinces, attended meetings of the Senate, studied Russian finances and reviewed the fleet. All these activities must have shown how difficult it would be to impose Enlightenment values on a very traditional and backward country.

However, Extract B is too critical of Catherine's failure to make the Legislative Commission work. Summoning it in the first place was a sign of her commitment to progress and its failures were more to do with her praiseworthy attempt to bring together a diverse range of interests, than from her failure to 'plan'. She produced the Great Instruction for the Commission to work from and supplied it with clear guidelines for action. The Commission provided plenty of opportunity for discussion and some of its ideas were used in the later legislation which reformed local government so it is unfair to suggest it was a complete write-off, as Extract B does. Its closure was more to do with the demands of the war with Turkey and the issue of Poland, than disorganisation and an abandonment of the whole idea of social reform.

Extract C is different from Extract A and B because it refers to a later period in Catherine's reign -after the Pugachev revolt of 1773-4. The argument of this extract is that the revolt ended any ideas Catherine might previously have had, to emancipate the serfs and reorganise society, because she needed the nobles solidly behind her in the aftermath of the revolt. It argues that she thought emancipation would be 'dangerous' after 1773 and suggests that the nobles and landlords were the 'pillars of the Empire'. It also argues that the revolt reinforced conservatism in Russia -so other possible reforms, such as reform of taxes were also abandoned in favour of 'immobility'.

The argument given in Extract C is supported by knowledge of the fears brought about by Pugachev's revolt. The rebel's claim to be Peter III produced a widespread and, for Catherine, potentially devastating rebellion in the south of Russia during which Kazan was seized and set on fire giving rise to fears that St Petersburg would be next. Around 3 million serfs gave their support and it is not surprising that Catherine rapidly concluded the Turkish War in 1774 in order to deal heavy-handedly with the uprising. The legislation Catherine passed following the crisis was, as Extract C suggests, an understandable reaction to a dangerous time. Provincial and municipal government were overhauled and in the Charter to the Nobility in 1785, the nobles' absolute power over their serfs was confirmed along with other long-standing rights such as the nobles' exemption from personal taxation. These rights were proclaimed without any comparable need for the nobility to serve the state (as had happened in the past).

Source C argues that Catherine 'preferred toughness to conciliation' but she had very little choice. Catherine had only survived the Pugachev revolt because of the loyalty and superiority of her military and she was determined to prevent further peasant revolt by repression. The Charter was issued to ensure full noble support for the autocracy and this had become particularly important by this stage because of the expansion of the empire also. Although Extract C does not point this out, Catherine desperately needed loyal nobles to take control of here conquered territories and land was of no use to nobles without serfs to work it.

So, all three extracts offer convincing arguments and show how Catherine's motivation changed in the course of her reign. Whilst in theory she would have liked to reform the social structure of Russia and put her Enlightened principles to good effect, in practice the circumstances stood in her way.

Commentary – Level 5

This is a very effective answer, demonstrating comprehensive awareness of the arguments advanced and, in each case, assessing the extent to which the arguments are convincing. The answer is controlled and consistently focused with appropriate deployment of knowledge of context. It would be quibbling to suggest that the knowledge of context could be developed further. This is a controlled, analytical answer with clear judgements and is clearly a Level 5 answer.