



History 7042
Specimen Question Paper 2A (A-level)
Question 01 Student 2
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 2A (A-level): Specimen question paper

01 With reference to these sources and your understanding of the historical context, assess the value of these three sources to an historian studying the quarrel between Henry and Thomas Becket.

[30 marks]

Student response

In many ways source A can be viewed as quite valuable as it was written by an eyewitness to many of the events which are being discussed. William FitzStephen's position as a clerk in Becket's household probably means that he had a good understanding of the reasons behind the quarrel. However, this could limit the value of the source somewhat, as FitzStephen is unlikely to be completely objective. He was an employee of Becket's and yet later worked for the King, and so it might be that he sought to limit the blame on either party somewhat. As a 12th century Churchman, writing a life of a recently canonised Saint, historians should be aware that he is unlikely to criticise Becket too openly.

The source is quite valuable in showing clearly the reasons for Henry's increased anger towards the Archbishop. FitzStephen discusses the fact that Henry felt personally insulted by some of Becket's behaviour. This is supported by the evidence; Becket owed his appointment as Archbishop in the first place to Henry and, immediately after being invested, he began to act in a manner which was bound to provoke the King. As shown in the source, Becket argued with the King's vassals over land and rights of appointments and used excommunications in order to get his own way. FitzStephen does not openly blame either the King or the Archbishop for the quarrel, but does give a sense that the two sides had completely different views over the extent to which the secular rulers should interfere within the Church. This was a key reason for the dispute, and the main reason why resolving it became so difficult: both sides felt that the law was on their side. In his attempt to deflect open blame, FitzStephen actually blames 'Satan' for the dispute and suggests that it was nobles who did not like Becket who poisoned the King's mind against him. This is quite interesting as it suggests a reluctance from a churchman to openly criticise the Church, but also a reluctance to completely blame the king. This perhaps limits his value. Having said this, we do know that one of the reasons for the escalation of the dispute over the years was a result of enemies of Becket bringing to the King's attention all of the provocative activities that Becket was engaged in, such as his excommunications of the bishops in 1170, news of which led directly to Henry's angry outburst.

Overall, this source is quite valuable. The tone is certainly measured and seems to be trying to show that the two sides had different views about the Church/ State debate. This was certainly the case as the Becket quarrel was not simply a matter of personalities, there were deep seated principles at the centre of things, which is reflected in Source A's balanced account.

Source B may be of limited value to historians, as it is obviously biased and in favour of Thomas Becket. Herbert of Bosham was one of the few churchmen to go into exile with Becket and thus he is unlikely to be willing to blame the Archbishop, where a lot of the evidence actually suggests that it was Becket's difficult behaviour which caused the quarrel. However, Herbert's

position as an eyewitness to the very important meeting in 1163 means that he does have some value and he can give us a good insight into what Becket thought of Henry's behaviour.

According to Source B the original cause for dispute was over the matter of criminous clerks. Henry wanted these men to receive secular punishments, where Becket refused the Crown this right. The source is quite valuable in this respect as this squabble was a key sticking point between Henry and Becket and led to the formulation of the Constitutions of Clarendon in 1164 as Henry felt that he needed to more securely codify the relationship between Church and State. The source is also valuable as it gives a good indication of Henry's increasing frustration at Thomas as it talks about the confiscation of his honours of Eye and Berkhamstead which he had held since his time as Chancellor. The quarrel certainly escalated in part because of the King's anger and his persistence in pursuing the restoration of his 'Ancient Customs'. However, where the source is more limited is in its treatment of Becket. Throughout this quarrel Becket is portrayed very positively and Herbert even describes him as making a 'convincing' argument. It is Henry who seems to lose his temper whilst Becket is portrayed as remaining calm and willing to negotiate. In reality, the ruling of Canon Law on the issue of Criminous Clerks was confused and Henry had lawyers of his own countering Becket's own arguments. However, in showing Becket's refusal to compromise even a little, Herbert does provide us with a valuable insight into Henry's frustrations.

The tone of Source B is quite calm and measured, but there is some muted criticism of the king, which we would expect, given the source's provenance. This means that historians will need to read between the lines with it, as should the knowledge that this was taken from a biography about a Saint- and so criticism of Becket is unlikely.

Source C is clearly partisan as it was written by a monk based at the Cistercian Abbey where Becket spent a number of years during his time in exile. The monastery is likely to have supported Becket's stance against a 'tyrannical' king, especially after Henry threatened the Cistercian Order within his own domains in retaliation for their support of Becket. However, this source is still valuable to historians as it gives a clear insight, from someone who was present, as to the frame of mind of Becket in the later years of the quarrel. Becket stuck rigidly throughout the dispute to the 'saving my order', as Roger relates here. This was a key reason for the continuation of the conflict as Becket refused to compromise further and this angered the King immensely. The anger of the King can be seen in some of the language used by Roger- he talks of the king wanting to 'force' Becket into submission or that the king 'vehemently insisted'. However, this source does have limitations to its value as it is certainly clouded by the knowledge of Becket's eventual martyrdom in 1170 and his canonisation in 1173. Thus when Roger discusses Becket's willingness to "die for his lord" we cannot be certain that this was even said by Becket in the 1160s. Again, there is also a reluctance to blame Becket which is common in accounts written by Churchmen. In reality many historians argue that Becket's behaviour and stance was unreasonable and provocative, Schama talks about Becket being in a 'theocratic fairyland' and this is what inflamed the quarrel to such unprecedented levels. The tone of the source is clearly in praise of Becket and is almost hagiographical in style, which does cause some problems for historians.

Commentary – Level 5

This is a very effective answer. The assessment of provenance and content in each source is carefully and fully made and the deployment of knowledge of context is wholly appropriate and

adds to the judgements made. It is clearly a Level 5 answer, the only limitation is that there is less than full and explicit assessment of tone for each source.