Oxford Cambridge and RSA

AS LEVEL

Examiners' report

HISTORY A

H105
For first teaching in 2015

Y243/01 Summer 2019 series
Version 1

Contents

Introduction

Our examiners' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates. The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

Where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report. A full copy of the question paper can be downloaded from OCR.

Paper Y243 series overview

The paper worked well with the bulk of candidates choosing Question 2 on Napoleon rather than Question1 on Robespierre, although those who were confident about 1792-4 coped impressively well with the Robespierre question. Question 3, focusing on interpretations of the August decrees, did prove to be more searching, but, again, was answered well and in an interesting variety of ways by more confident candidates.

Section A overview

The majority of candidates chose Question 2, as the material required was a little less specific, although there were some notably strong answers to Question 1.

Question 1

1* Assess the reasons for the fall of Robespierre. 　　　　　　　　　　**[30]**

Providing that candidates were confident of the chronology of 1793-4 and understood the combination of factors that explain this problem, responses were strong. Of the main factors in play, the one most neglected was the course of the war and, in particular, the French victory at Fleurus in June 1794 which undermined the rationale for the Terror and Robespierre's rule. That apart, the escalation of the Terror from March 1794, the dynamic between the Committees, the Convention and the Sans-culottes, and the advent of the Cult of the Supreme Being were all well-handled. Candidates who were not confident of the sequence of events ran into obvious difficulties.

Exemplar 1

There were many reasons for the fall of Robespierre, including his belief in the cult of the supreme being, the loss of support from the sans-culottes, his active role in the Committee of Public Safety and the committee of General Security, and his role in the Terror. To a large extent it can be argued that the main reason for the fall of Robespierre was his role in the Terror as he was blamed for all of the destruction it caused.

Robespierre's active role in the Terror was a major reason for his fall. Robespierre was heavily involved in the Terror as he believed that violence was necessary to preserve revolutionary gains and in making sure that purity and virtue were restored. Robespierre was involved massively in political terror as most of the victims were Robespierre's political enemies, for example indulgents like Danton and Desmoulins and colleagues who were concerned about how far the Terror had gone. This was a major factor in Robespierre's downfall because he was seen as responsible for all of the violence of the Terror

and was labelled as a 'terrorist'. Many people disliked the Terror and thought that it had gone far past what was necessary as the war was starting to settle down so there were less threats, meaning that the need for the Terror decreased. This led Robespierre and his supporters to being a victim of the political terror as they were executed. Therefore, Robespierre's role in the Terror was a very significant reason for his fall because it lost him the support of the people, he was seen as too radical to continue and so became the greatest victim of the Terror he helped to create.

The cult of the supreme being was an important reason for the fall of Napoleon because he received much ridicule over his role as high priest. After dechristianisation, the religious terror spread through France, Robespierre wanted to to establish a new religion which did acknowledge the power of a greater god, hence the reason that he set up the cult of the Supreme Being. This cult recognised a god and held festivals to celebrate and worship, but it won little support from christians and aethists combined. Robespierre took this a step further by making himself high priest of his new religion, which only reinforced how Robespierre thought he had power and made people oppose him further. This led to his downfall because it majorly set him apart from the people and many found it ludicrous that he had tried to establish a new religion and had appointed himself as high priest. This is an important factor in his fall because it seemed unrealistic and made him seem out of touch with the people, he had taken it too far and this lost him support

The loss of support from the sans-culottes was a significant significant reason that Robespierre fell. The sans-culottes were very influencial and often provided the force and pressure needed for change, as seen during the Revolution. Robespierre had used the sans-culottes support to get into power as they were in agreement over many issues. However once in power, Robespierre realised that no secure government could be founded on their support as they had too much influence and were irrational. Therefore, he began to limit their powers and tried to restrict the influence that they had. The major reason that he lost their support was because of attacks on Hebertists and wage reductions. This was an important reason for Robespierre's fall because it meant that when he needed them most to defend him after he was arrested, they did not support him, leaving him to be executed. It also meant that he had lost the force of a major ~~power~~ influence that helped him get into power, which would weaken him. ~~This this~~ Therefore, this an important reason for his downfall because the sans-culottes did not protect him and encouraged others to do the same, which eventually led to his death.

A final important reason for the fall of Robespierre was his role in the Committee of Public safety and the Committee of General Security. Robespierre was a dominant figure in these organisations which were set up to help co-ordinate the war effort and protect the people, however those groups became increasingly radical as the Terror progressed. Robespierre lost support because he had been ill so withdrew from these groups and the convention which helped to lead to his downfall. The most important reason that this led to his downfall though was because Robespierre had made a speech that claimed that there was still conspiracy

in those organisations and promised to name the people involved. Radicals and moderates alike ~~where~~ were afraid that they would be named so combined to accuse Robespierre of dictatorship. Robespierre and his supporters were arrested, escaped, tried to rally their supporters and were re-arrested and accused of being terrorist for which they were executed. Therefore, this was of major importance to the fall of Robespierre as his role made people afraid that they would be the next victim of political terror so they combined against him to kill him.

Overall, although all of the factors were important in contributing to the downfall of Robespierre, to a large extent it can be argued that his active role in the Terror was the most important reason as people thought that it had gone too far, they wanted to end the Terror by getting rid of him - he became a victim of the political terror he had helped to create.

Exemplar 1 is a competent, high-level answer that shows good understanding, largely accurate knowledge and a developed line of reasoning (Level 5).

Question 2

2*   How important was British opposition in the defeat of Napoleon?   [30]

This was a very accessible and popular question which lent itself to a comparison of the main factors contributing to Napoleon's defeat. Obvious alternatives to British opposition were Napoleon's reverses in Russia and Spain (the latter could be used either as an element of British opposition or as an autonomous factor), Napoleon's inability to come to a stable arrangement with rival states, and the growing strength of anti-Napoleonic coalitions. All-too-frequent chronological confusions undermined some responses and a surprising number of candidates muddled the battles of Trafalgar and Waterloo.

Exemplar 2

Napoleon was said to be a great military and governmental leader, he was able to defeat states like Austria and Prussia. However, he was greatly threatened by Britain, especially Nelson and Duke of Wellington; therefore one could say that they were a great threat and did ultimately lead to his downfall.

One major important event, marked as Napoleons failure, was the failure of the continental system. The continental system was meant to deplete Britains resources through no trade between Britain and central Europe; however, this only hit the European countries that Napoleon had under control, as limited trade meant depletion of necmany imports and less income due to exports. Although this wasn't directly Britains action, it was aimed at them yet they weren't harmed severely as they still had trading partners such as Portugal. This then led to the Battle of Trafalgar which Britain won and France faced great defeat. Therefore, one could say Britains ability to continue to trade alongside Napoleons miscalculation about the impact of the continental system were significant in leading to his downfall.

The Egyptian campaign of 1798 also started to show how Britains actions could lead to Napoleons downfall. France was victorious in taking over Egypt, however their fleet was destroyed by Nelson; this

meant that Napoleon was stranded with his soldiers. This led to him having to return to France via a fast boat. Although this was very early on in Napoleon's career and not detrimental it highlighted French weakness against the British navy, and therefore British opposition would be seen as a threat.

The Battle of Waterloo in 1815 was what delivered the final blow to Napoleons defeat. Napoleon entered Belgium, where he was met with the fourth coalition which involved Britain; he could only raise 120,000 men who weren't well trained. Britain and the other countries had far better resources and stronger men and so Napoleon was crushed due to force of numbers and the fact that the armies were so much stronger than him. One could argue that British opposition during Napoleons final years was detrimental, as France had no allies and Britain was so much stronger than them. Therefore, although Britain posed a mild threat throughout Napoleons reign, their involvement in the Battle of Waterloo ultimately led to his downfall, due to his failure leading to a second exile.

However, one could argue that it was Napoleons decline that led to his defeat. From 1808, he had bad health and was losing his military tactical skill; he was growing fat and unhealthy, therefore couldn't be the strong and inspirational leader France needed

in order to win the war. He also lost a lot of enemies.

Another factor which could be more significant than Britains opposition that led to his downfall was his harsh policy making. He implemented conscription and high taxes, and his very aggressive policy towards other european powers left him isolated. One could say that therefore, due to his over-ambition, Napoleon over-reached himself and led to his own downfall. An example of this is when he kidnapped and shot a Bourbon prince due to rumours about him taking over; this led to the formation of the third coalition. One could therefore argue that Napoleons harsh policies and actions were also significant factors which aided in his defeat.

In conclusion, British opposition was a significant factor that led to Napoleons defeat, but it wasn't the most important. Napoleons military decline as shown by his tactical skills declining and his awful defeat in Russia would be argued to be most significant as it showed Napoleons weakness. Although the Battle of Trafalgar and Battle of Waterloo were great defeats which aided the British, one could argue that they were actually brought on by Napoleons decline in terms of skill and leadership.

Exemplar 2 is a reasonably sound response that has some structure and understanding but is not that well developed or detailed; essentially a list of reasonable factors with some explanation (Level 4)

Section B overview

This question offered a lot of scope to candidates but put a premium on having at least some basic, sound knowledge of the August decrees and their context.

Question 3

3   Read the interpretation and then answer the question that follows:

'Although there was still a great deal to be done, they [The August Decrees] marked the end of noble power and privilege of birth by establishing a society based on civil equality.'

Dylan Rees, *France in Revolution 1774–1815*, 2015

Evaluate the strengths and limitations of this interpretation, making reference to other interpretations that you have studied.   **[20]**

A number of approaches could be successfully adopted in response to this question with candidates picking up on the 'still a great deal to be done' as well as on the immediate significance of the decrees. A common, successful approach was to compare the August decrees with other events that helped to establish 'a society based on civil equality', most obviously the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen or major political events in 1789 that helped mark 'the end of noble power and privilege of birth'. Some candidates used material form the Napoleonic period which could be made to work but was mostly less effective as it side-stepped the immediate dynamic of the French revolution from 1789 to 1792 or 1794.

Exemplar 4

The interpretation outlines how the August Decrees, of August 1789, through stating the ending of noble power and privilege of birth, was able to do so by establishing a society with civil equality which set the precedent for the future of French society striving forward with revolutionary morales of equality covered. Other arguments state that it wasn't until the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen were created that such a society was confirmed and others even view that this was the beginning of improvement away from privilege but not the definite end.

The interpretation strongly outlines the purpose of the August Decrees to end noble power and privilege of birth which is valid because the National Assembly were now striving to represent the people and Louis XVI had early earlier crumbled to their demands as he forced the first and second Estates to meet with it after they established the Tennis Court Oath. Furthermore, the decrees covered the aims of the people to develop a society that civil equality as opposed to the feudal rights of the clergy and nobility before which had characterised the Ancien régime, - therefore a definite change was marked in the August Decrees which the interpretation supports. In addition, the interpretation strongly presents that there was still 'a great deal to be done' which reflects effectively on the necessity of the coming October Days , of October 1789 after the August Decrees were declared by the National Assembly, in order to cement the ending of noble power and privileges through Louis XVI who was forced to accept them when women, weaponised, weren't stopped by the National Guard and marched to the royal family. The interpretation strongly recognises the ree nature of the August Decrees requiring further enforcement and I believe this recognises events such as the October Days which essentially made the royal family prisoners and allowed the marking of the end of noble power to be legally cemented and enforced into society.

Nevertheless, the interpretation fails to directly recognise how the August Decrees those couldn't possibly have immediately marked a new society of equality without the further enforcement of these Enlightenment ideas through the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen and and the eventual official reforms of the National Constituent Assembly. Ideas such as

'men are born free' were only cemented in this declaration, with the help of Rousseau and Thomas Jefferson, and ensured further that French society could strive towards these values. Furthermore, the official confirmation of the abolition of noble power didn't come until June 1790 under the Constituent Assembly and even then Louis XVI had veto powers to block laws — further showing the limitations of the interpretation. In addition, under the Constituent Assembly, coming after in the same year as the August Decrees of 1789 — September 1791, only 'active citizens' were allowed to vote over the age of 21, as a rule, which established class distinctions and directly contrasts the marking of the ~~end of noble power and privilege~~ end of 'privilege of birth' presented by the interpretation as you had to ~~be paying~~ have enough money to pay taxes to be able to vote. Therefore, the promises of the August Decrees, made by the National Assembly in 1789, provided the basis for future change marking the unofficial ending of the Ancien régime values the Third Estate resented. Nevertheless, it wasn't until after the monarchy's ~~re~~ removal ~~the~~ on 10 August 1792 that the Legislative Assembly could ensure the removal of divine rights held by a constitutional monarchy which shows that it was more the mark of the beginning of beneficial change away from privilege and noble power by establishing values of equality for all through ~~even~~ the taxation of everyone, for example, and not just the Third Estate.

Exemplar 4 is a strong response (Level 5) that shows a clear understanding of the August Decrees' significance, explaining them accurately and putting them into a relevant context with strong evaluation.

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