

A LEVEL

Examiners' report

HISTORY A

H505

For first teaching in 2015

Y313/01 Summer 2024 series

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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. A selection of candidate answers is also provided. 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.

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Paper Y313/01 series overview

Y313 is one of 21 units for Paper 3 of the A Level examination for GCE History. This unit tests an extended period of History of at least one hundred years through an interpretation question on a named in-depth topic and through two essays.

The paper is divided into two sections. In Section A candidates are required to use contextual knowledge to test the views of two historians about one of the three named in-depth topics or an aspect of one. The question does not require them to comment on the style of writing or the provenance of the interpretation.

In Section B candidates are required to answer two essay questions from a choice of three.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> showed a clear understanding of the views of the two passages in relation to the question were able to use contextual knowledge to test the passages, linking that knowledge directly to the passages through evaluative words were able to consider both the strengths and limitations of the passages using contextual knowledge covered the whole period in a balanced way in the essay questions adopted a thematic approach made links and comparisons between aspects of the topic supported their arguments with precise and relevant examples reached a supported judgements about the issue in the question. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> showed a limited understanding of one or both of the passages did not go beyond a basic explanation of part of the passage did not link any contextual knowledge directly to the passage and therefore did not evaluate the passage adopted a chronological rather than a thematic approach in the essay questions did not make links or comparisons even if events from different parts of the period were discussed in the same paragraph did not cover the whole period did not focus on the precise wording of the question made unsupported comments about issues which were no more than assertions.

Section A overview

There is one compulsory question in this section. This question requires candidates to explain the view of each interpretation in relation to the question and then evaluate the interpretation by the application of contextual knowledge. Responses should show an understanding of the wider debate connected to the issue.

Section A in Paper Y313 is focused on the impact of Versailles.

Question 1

- 1 Evaluate the interpretations in **both** of the two passages.

Explain which you think is more convincing as an explanation of the impact of Versailles. [30]

There were many successful responses to this question, with most candidates able to take a holistic view of the passages and recognise the key points in their arguments about the impact of Versailles. Candidates recognised that Passage A argues that Versailles became important in the administration of France but Louis XIV himself became ever more dominant and Passage B argues that Versailles came to represent all that was wrong with French society. There is no requirement to mention the views of any other historian in relation to this issue.

More successful responses provided key examples to both support and challenge the arguments in the passages and candidates used evaluative language to clearly link their knowledge to the passages rather than just giving further description of the role of Versailles in this period. Responses which attempted a thematic approach were often confused and lacked evaluation, leading to an essay-like approach which did not focus on the views in the passages. Less successful responses often just explained the views in each passage and used phrases such as 'fails to mention', i.e. evaluating by omission rather than engaging with the argument that the historian is making.

Exemplar 1 below is a Level 6 response which shows a good understanding of both passages and the candidate effectively uses their own knowledge to evaluate them in turn before reaching a substantiated judgement.

Exemplar 1

1	Both passages A and B present a fairly negative view of the impact of Versailles. A suggests that Versailles main impact was a breakdown in the quality of central administration, with Louis losing control of his officials, both centrally and in the provinces. B suggests that whilst Versailles represented an expression of the king's will, it also epitomized an an inequality that was rotting France from the core.
	<p>Passage A suggests that the King becoming attempting to run his government alone from Versailles had entirely negative consequences. Pointing out that from 1682 the palace was the admin administrative centre, as well as the home of the court, Brown writes of the that "the vigour of the ministry declined." However, the building of the Grand Commun and the accompanying centralisation improved royal control in many ways, when contrasted with the earlier diverse bodies, ministries and councils. Whilst it is true that the king had "many interests and concerns other than administration" - his string of mistresses from Louise de la Vallière to Madame de Montespan, the constant development of Versailles, such as the Porcelain Trianon followed by the Grand Trianon and would all serve as good examples - this did not much diminish his work ethic, which was considerable. He may have been 'over-</p>

worked", but the benefits of being his own chief minister were manifold, such as reducing the risk of rebellion as it was hard to justify rebelling against the king. Brown writes that "officials... became more and more their own masters", and yet Louis maintained a strong hold over his officials, reading his papers assiduously and having ministers such as Louvois report directly to him & the generals reported directly to Louvois. Whilst it is true that "the intendants were all-powerful in most regions", this was much better than before, when it had been the governors who were "all-powerful". The governors were often hereditary high nobles, such as ~~de~~ d'Alais Conde in Burgundy, whereas the intendants were centrally appointed instruments of royal control, able to mitigate the localised power of the parlements and estates. Finally, Brown suggests that Versailles, with its air of "routine and formality" caused Louis to become "complacent", with the king's ministers "little more than clerks". ~~Not only does the latter statement~~ Whilst it is true that after Louvois' death, none rose to the same prominence, they still played significant roles, such as Douchartre, who introduced the radical capitulation, or Desmarets, with his dixième. Nevertheless, Louis' ~~sur~~ surroundings may have encouraged his vain pursuit of gloire, which resulted in his alienation on the international stage, exemplified by the League of Augsburg, which included ~~a~~ former allies. Overall, then, A mostly

fails to convince that the impact of Versailles was a deterioration in the quality of administration. Brown doesn't consider other factors, nor impacts, such as its symbolic power, nor acknowledge the benefits of centralisation.

*the impact of

B also ~~has~~ However, whilst B also holds a negative view of * Versailles, its author ~~not~~ cites ~~the its~~ in the inequality of France as ~~its~~ Versailles' greatest impact. Firstly, B acknowledges that Versailles is often viewed as "the physical representation par excellence of the Sun King's reign". This is true, with the Apollo symbolism throughout, such as the Salon d'Apollon, at the centre of the state rooms, the Bassin d'Apollon, at the centre of the Grande Allée axis, and the Grotte de Téthys. Furthermore, Louis pursued ~~symbolic~~ symbolism suggesting that Louis, le Roi Soleil, was the centre of the universe. Wilkinson writes that Louis "imposed his conception on reluctant ministers and courtiers". The Palace was certainly an expression of the king's will, as seen in the geometrically regimented and symmetrical gardens by le Vau, the training of the machine and the gargantuan but inefficient machine de Marly, showing the king's control over nature. It is true that Colbert was "reluctant", for financial reasons, pushing for the renovation of the Louvre with Bernini, but Louis

	<p>* which bypassed exemptions</p>	<p>was wholly supportive. Furthermore, so whilst courtesies were removed from their provincial seats, there were advantages, with Versailles being an unparalleled centre of patronage and culture, with events such as the 1664 'les plaisirs de l'île enchantée' and the 1668 'grand divertissement royal'. Wilkinson goes on to suggest that its actual impact lay in the fact that it "epitomised all that was wrong with French society", representing "the scandal of social and so economic or inequality". This is convincing, as the ridiculously lavish Versailles lifestyle, with balls and places such as the bosquet de la ville de l'air with its own waterfalls around a dancefloor, contrasting heavily with a country suffering from famine and ext extraordinary fiscality diff - as Wilkinson writes, the cost of Versailles (and Louis' wars, which he doesn't mention) was "met by the wretched tax-payer". This resulted in tax revolts, such as those in B of the papiers-timbrés in 1675 and those in the 1690s. Indeed, it was "the poor who paid most", due to noble, clergy, and military and privileged town exemptions. The later introduction of the capitation and the dixième* whilst doubling the direct tax income, was met with much resistance and was thus unsustainable. Thus overall, Wilkinson could also have mentioned the deaths of those working on Versailles, which</p>
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were considerable. Thus overall, B is convincing in its assessment that the main impact of Versailles was as a symbol of inequality, whilst also recognising the potency of its symbolism.

To conclude, Passage B is more convincing than A as an explanation of Versailles' impact. Whilst A suggests that its main impact was the deterioration of administrative quality, B sees the main impact as exemplifying the social inequality of the Sun King's reign. A fails to consider the advantages of Louis XIV centralising and running the government himself, whereas B does recognise the ~~advantage~~ powerful symbolism of power at Versailles, which impressed visitors and controlled the nobles. A fails to convince that ministers became yes-men and officials gained personal power, as Louis, the most absolutist monarch (though with limits), retained a significant degree of oversight. B, on the other hand, explains clearly how it was, unfairly, the poorest who paid for the court's extravagance. Whilst both could acknowledge the advantages of Versailles, in particular Louis' control of his nobles, more B offers the more convincing account of the Palace's impact.

Assessment for learning



Candidates should take an overview of the two passages. What is the main view of each passage about the issue in the question?

Section B overview

Candidates are required to answer two questions from a choice of three. To do well on Section B candidates need to make connections and links across the whole period of their study. They should explain similarities and differences between the events they are discussing to show an awareness of continuity and change across the whole period, unless instructed otherwise. The comparisons may be made across the period within the topic or between regions, depending on the topic. It is also important that the comparisons are explained – what is similar or different between the periods or regions.

The most successful responses will test a hypothesis and reach a supported judgement.

Question 2*

2* 'Noble privileges were the greatest limiting factor to the development of absolutism in the period from 1610 to 1715.'

How far do you agree?

[25]

This was the most popular of the essay questions and most candidates were able to establish themes such as noble power and privilege, the role of ministers, taxation and provincial administration which all limited the development of absolutism in the period. More successful responses stayed very focused on the question and made comparisons across the period within their thematic paragraphs and came to a substantiated judgement often concluding that noble privileges were more limiting early in the period than in the later reign of Louis XIV. Many answers benefitted from clearly explaining the main noble privileges early in their answer. Less successful responses often found little to say beyond the 1660s and some candidates misread the question to be only focused on noble privileges and did not compare them to any other limiting factors. A few low scoring essays described the role of Versailles relying on information from the passages in Question 1.

Exemplar 2 below scored at the top of Level 5 and it has a good focus and argument but not enough developed synthesis for Level 6.

Exemplar 2

2*	<p>Although noble privileges were the greatest threat to the development of absolutism as a result of the existential threat the nobility posed to the King and his ministers, it is clear that both the Parlement and France's financial corruption both serve as significant vehicles of undermining royal authority.</p> <p>The most important way in which the nobility were able to threaten the development of absolute monarchy as well as the existence of the Crown itself was through its ability to field large armies and control fortresses. The ability to field large armies is particularly pertinent during the early period as exemplified by Condé's active treason against Louis XIV during the Fronde and allying with Spain, providing allowing even the city of Paris to be brought under threat. Not only were nobles able to recruit armies they also extensively relied on inciting revolt in the provinces, further hampering the crown's control over these already incredibly decentralized regions. The ability for the nobility to retain fortresses also serves as a massive hurdle for the crown as, despite Richelieu's issuing of an edict in 1626 forbidding the use of fortresses not located on the frontier regions, as as the Nobles as on the frontier regions were still capable of rebelling which would be</p>
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incredibly resource intensive given the location of these fortresses as demonstrated by the Duc de Sabois's instigation of the La Rochelle revolt in 1627. Despite this, the nobility only remain a strong threat during the earlier period before Louis XIV's reign as his succession and the establishment of Versailles reduces the nobility's autonomy and capacity to overthrow the rebellion. Another significant privilege of the nobility was the close attachment to the King which is prevalent in both Louis XIII's and Louis XIV's reign. A critical example of how damaging this can be to royal power is the Cinq-mars affair in 1642 where a royal favourite aligns with the Spanish court to displace both Louis XIII and Richelieu, serving as another existential threat to the Crown. Similarly the Day of Dupes in 1630 was also capable of threatening Richelieu's premiership due to the involvement of the King's mother. Noble intrigues continue in Louis XIV's reign as the growing court at Versailles keeps the nobles ever close to Louis XIV with existential threats such as assassination becoming even more pertinent. Finally, the nobility were able to subvert the law in some cases and challenge the crown's authority such as the case of noble duelling which subverted the usual mechanisms of justice, ^{however} which Richelieu was able to execute an offender, Bouville-Montmorancy to reduce as an example in 1627.

which ultimately reduces the significance of this privilege. Overall, the nobility offered the largest existential threat to France.

~~The~~ On the other hand, the Paris Parlement was another significant obstacle to absolutism albeit less so as their goals were aligned with the crown and there was lesser revolutionary sentiment. The ability of the Parlement to resist the crown is best demonstrated by its continuous use of the right to remonstrance, pausing the crown's issuing of legislation and slowing down its legal framework. Even with the Code Richard in 1629 limiting the right to remonstrance to a 2 month interval and the continuous use of *lit de justice* to overturn this parliamentary right, ~~the~~ the magistrates at the French ~~parlement~~ Parlement were still able to go on strike forcing the crown into many concessions such as reducing the number of offices sold by Richelieu in 1635. ~~But~~ The Parlement was also able to put up more dogged resistance to policies imposed by Mazarin during the Fronde and in particular those related to finance, imposing 27 reforms ~~to~~ on the French crown; however these would be reversed upon the defeat of the Fronde. Primarily the parlement could never offer ~~an existential threat~~ ~~armed resistance~~ in the way the nobles could.

Question 3*

- 3*** 'Noble and court unrest was a serious threat to the French monarchy in the period from 1610 to 1715.'

How far do you agree?

[25]

This was the least well done of the essay questions although there were some successful responses which established themes such as political threat, nature of support and numbers involved. They then went on to make comparisons across the period within thematic paragraphs in order to achieve synthesis and often concluded that while the Frondes was a very serious threat which Louis XIV would never forget, noble and court unrest was less of a threat in the later period. However, many candidates mistook this for a comparative essay and included other threats such as the Huguenots and peasant unrest which meant a partial focus on the question and a mark in Level 3. Even those that did focus on noble and court unrest were reluctant to say very much about the later period and therefore did not get a balanced coverage of the period.

Question 4*

- 4*** 'The Treaty of the Pyrenees was the most important turning point in the development of France as an international power in the period from 1610 to 1715.'

How far do you agree?

[25]

This was the least popular of the essay questions. There were some very impressive responses which showed a strong understanding of the patterns of change and continuity in the development of France as an international power over the whole period. More successful responses saw candidates develop themes such as territorial expansion, military strength and the relative strength of France's rivals and make comparisons across the period within thematic paragraphs. There were also candidates who compared the Treaty of the Pyrenees to other key turning points such as the Treaties of Westphalia and Utrecht but often did not score higher than Level 4 as they did not make direct comparisons between these turning points and only considered them in discrete paragraphs. Less successful responses showed some confusion over dates and events and candidates who addressed the question chronologically often got no further than the beginning of Louis XIV's majority which gave them limited coverage of the period.

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