



History 7042
Specimen Question Paper 2B (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 2B (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 usurpation of Richard III.

[30 marks]

Student response

Source A presents several arguments that are of value to an historian studying the usurpation of Richard III. Mancini was present in England at the time of Richard's usurpation and was therefore in a position to write about the events that happened in that year. He presents the view that one of Richard's motivations was his fear of the Woodville family. Indeed the tone presented is a rancorous one of mutual suspicion. Fear and anger are common themes in his account. The reference to his 'brother's death' refers to Richard's brother George, Duke of Clarence, was executed in 1478. Mancini suggested that Richard was 'overcome with grief' at this development. There is an argument that the Woodvilles, and especially the queen, Elizabeth Woodville, had played the leading role in arranging for this. Given that Clarence had challenged Edward IV's legitimacy as well as the legitimacy of his half-Woodville children this is quite plausible. In the context of 1483 it is reasonable, as the source contends, that Richard may have feared the power of the Woodville family. Edward IV had made his wife's family particularly powerful. Anthony Woodville, Earl Rivers, had custody of the king's son and heir, the future Edward V. He ruled over Wales from Ludlow in the boy's name. Elizabeth Woodville's elder son from her first marriage, Thomas Grey, was the Marquess of Dorset and was very powerful in south-west England. Furthermore Edward IV had married Elizabeth's many sisters to the most powerful nobles in England. Source A also suggests that the Woodvilles 'were afraid' of what would happen to them if Richard seized the throne because of their treatment of Clarence. This fear would certainly account for their swift actions after Edward IV's unexpected death. The queen pushed for a rapid coronation in an attempt to limit Richard of Gloucester's power as protector so in this sense the source is valuable in explaining these actions. Furthermore, Mancini acknowledges that Richard was at least partially motivated by 'ambition' and 'lust for power' and given that he was replacing his nephew on the throne and that as Mancini acknowledges Edward IV's sons soon 'ceased to appear altogether' Richard would have needed both to take the actions that he did in 1483.

However, there are limitations to the value of Source A. There are real questions as to the reliability of Dominic Mancini. He was in England only for a relatively short period of time. He seems to have spoken no English and this would, undoubtedly, have made it difficult for him to gain a clear account of events. Furthermore, despite his reference to events before 1483, especially the death of Clarence in 1478, there is no evidence that he had any interaction with England before 1483 and the source for his assertions prior to this date are unknown. Mancini's reading of the Woodvilles may well have been influenced by the narrative that Richard presented after the usurpation rather than reflecting the real cause. There is little evidence for major antipathy between Richard and the Woodvilles. He had profited more than most by the death of his brother Clarence through the inheritance of former Neville lands. Anthony Woodville

had also agreed to delay his entry into London with Edward V and meet Richard at Stony Stratford. If he had suspected that Richard meant him harm due to a longstanding grudge he surely would not have done so.

Source B is valuable with regard to the reasons given by Richard for the usurpation of 1483. The main arguments presented by the Great Chronicle of London are that the legitimacy of Edward IV's claim to the throne as well as the popularity of Richard of Gloucester were of major importance. The source is rather matter-of-fact and even in tone. It presents the events as they occurred in a measured manner. Given that the chronicle's purpose was to record events that occurred in London and that the key events of the usurpation happened in the city it has much of value to add to an historian's understanding of events. Furthermore, it was written shortly after the events described. This is important because it means that it was not influenced by Richard's death and the later attempts of the Tudor's to undermine his reputation. Source B claims that there was a direct challenge to the legitimacy of Edward IV. This is a reference to allegations that Edward was the offspring of an adulterous affair of his mother Cecily Neville. One possible alleged father was the archer known as Blaybourne. This rumour had previously surfaced after the king's unpopular marriage to Elizabeth Woodville in 1464 and Clarence is also said to have spread it before his own execution in 1478. The chronicle is valuable in this regard as it shows that this rumour was still in wide circulation even though most accounts of the usurpation claim that the main question was over Edward's children and not over the former king himself. In this context Richard is presented as somebody who took up the responsibility of kingship out of duty necessitated by the situation. Source B is also valuable for its depiction of the centrality of the Duke of Buckingham to the usurpation as it claims that he 'gave a speech' which talked of Richard's 'rightful claim'. Henry Stafford was a prince of the blood with a claim to descent from Edward III himself. His support was important to Richard and again reinforces the view that it was other people that wanted Richard to be king rather than it purely being his own ambition.

However, source B has some significant limitations that challenge its value. Firstly neither the identity of writer themselves nor the person who declared that Edward IV's children 'were not the rightful inheritors of the Crown' are clear. This does lead to questions as to its reliability. The chronicle is focused rather narrowly on London itself and therefore misses the importance of Richard's northern power. Neither opposition nor popular reactions are considered and only the reference to a 'hasty arrangement' for a coronation indicates any dissent.

Source C's principal value to the historian is in demonstrating the hostility that Richard's usurpation in 1483 stirred up. Rous portrays Richard as a villain. He is directly blamed for the secret murder of Edward V and his brother Richard when it claims that few knew 'by what death they were martyred' but that 'within three months he had killed him and his brother Richard' and it directly asserts that Edward V was the rightful king. Richard's murder of his nephews is presented as especially vile in 'he ascended to the throne of the dead princes, whose protector he had been'. Richard is labelled as a 'tyrant' which relates to the impact of his usurpation on government during his reign. Richard's character is impugned in that the alleged certainty of his murderous acts during the usurpation are compared to his claimed previous involvement in the death of Henry VI and his future poisoning of Anne Neville, his wife and queen. The source also demonstrates that attempts were made to equate Richard's supposed physical deformities with deformities in his character. Although, Richard's deformity is clearly exaggerated recent archaeological evidence suggests that Richard did suffer from scoliosis and thus the source's portrayal cannot be entirely disregarded.

However, there are very many problems with the value of source C. John Rous was clearly unreliable. His account was written during the reign of Henry VII who had overthrown Richard III and his account was designed to contribute to Tudor propaganda that justified Henry's slaying of Richard. It is openly partisan, emotive and exaggerated in its tone. The fact that Rous had previously written positive accounts of Richard III during his reign only reiterates this point. There is no evidence to support the argument that Richard had any long term plans to usurp the throne and the reference to his alleged murder of Henry VI is especially misleading. If Richard had been involved in the former king's death in 1471 it was certainly on the orders of his brother Edward IV. There is also no evidence that Anne Neville was poisoned by Richard. Overall this source is useful only in presenting Tudor views of the usurpation rather than the events of the usurpation itself.

Commentary – Level 5

This is an exemplary answer. It is particularly strong in that it offers a balanced assessment of each source, considering in each case how they are and are not valuable to an historian. Knowledge of context is carefully selected and deployed effectively. This careful and incisive answer is clearly a top Level 5 answer.