



History

Paper 1B (AS) Additional Specimen Question
Paper

Question 02 Student 1

Specimen Answer and Commentary

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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 1B (AS): Additional Specimen question paper

02 'Ferdinand and Isabella destroyed the power of the nobility in Spain.'

Explain why you agree or disagree with this view.

[25 marks]

Student response

Ferdinand and Isabella was able to destroy the power of the nobility to an extent. There are many examples that would argue that the monarchs were successful in destroying the power of the nobility. Firstly, this was due to the establishment of the Santa Hermandad, also referred to as the 'Holy Brotherhood'. The monarchs needed to assert their authority over the nobility. With this in mind they founded this specific law enforcement body. They were staffed and funded by the municipalities. The role of the Hermandad was significant in destroying the power of the nobility as they punished and prevented nobles who ignored the law. Moreover, since the Hermandad was under the royal control, they had a significant step in restoring royal peace and maintaining law and order. Moreover, with the support of the Hermandad, Ferdinand was able to take control of three military orders between the years 1476 – 1494. This destroyed the nobles power to an extent as it weakened their military influence.

Secondly, the monarchs reinforced royal judicial power over the feudal one and transformed the audiencias into the supreme judicial bodies. For example, local government was reorganised to give power to the professionals with university training (letrados) at the expense of the nobles. Consequently, this lead to the use of letrados in royal councils, whilst grandees were encouraged to live at court and attend, but they were not allowed to vote. This meant the nobles were essentially taken over by the letrados in the council. Therefore, this helped to destroy the power of the nobility as it weakened their influence in the localities and helped turn them into courtiers.

In addition to the use of letrados in royal councils, the monarchs also introduced paid corregidores in towns to destroy the power of nobility. The corregidores were effective in towns to an extent as they came from different localities to the one in which they worked, so that they could not be pressurised. The Queen usually sent a corregidore to safeguard her interests. For example, in 1478, Francisco De Vades replaced Alonso De Aguilar, one of Joanna's staunchest supporters in Carboda. As well as this, they also acted as tax collectors and were expected to ensure that the wished of the monarchs were put into effect. This helped Ferdinand and Isabella destroy the power of the nobility, as the corregidores made sure that the nobles or members of the church were not obstructing the government in anyway. Moreover, along with this the reduction of nobles holding high church office helped to destroy the nobility power.

On the other hand, it can be argued that Ferdinand and Isabella were not successful in destroying the power of the nobility. Firstly, this was due to the monarchs being compromised from the beginning of their reign by making incompatible promises. Isabella was constantly rewarding the nobles. For

instance, for their service in Granada. It can be said that the monarchs did not have power over the nobles and did not destroy their power because Isabella was always negotiating from a weak hand and could only hope that the nobility would remain loyal and obedient. This means a lot of the times the Queen settled for less and the nobles always got the upper hand.

Secondly, another reason why they were not able to destroy the power of the nobility was due to their honorific rights and they retained tax exemptions. For instance, by granting the nobles the right to assess and collect the alcabala and confirming their exemption from direct taxation. Isabella was guaranteeing their economic and social supremacy. If not their political independence. Along with the tax exemptions, the nobles appeared to be financially stronger than the crown. Therefore, it was hard to assert power over them. For instance, when the nobles collected taxes, they used to pocket a large portion. This explained the levels of corruption and why only half of what was collected was received by the crown. As a result, the monarchs always remained financially weaker than the nobles and at times had to rely on them for support; this shows that the nobles power was not destroyed. For instance, high cost of Ferdinand's wars towards end of reign brought new reliance on loans from nobility.

Furthermore, the role of the nobles in military was also a reason why the monarchs could not destroy their power. This is because they were still important in the army. Moreover, the nobles kept retainers were as Isabella and Ferdinand did not have a standing army. Therefore, in times of need they had to call for the support of the nobles and together it would form an army. However, this was an issue as it did not destroy the power of nobility but instead gave them more power. This meant there was little they could do to suppress unlawful behaviour and never have enough strength to openly challenge a disobedient noble. One of the many examples of how nobles got away with unlawful behaviour was when the nobles had fortified castles. Although Ferdinand and Isabella had passed a law to stop this, by 1504 it is estimated that 265 castles had been rebuilt or repaired. This was a great proportion compared to only 84 castles which were destroyed.

In conclusion, Ferdinand and Isabella were only able to destroy the power of nobility to an extent. This is evident when comparing the power of the nobles in Aragon and Castile. For instance, it is clear to see that the nobles lost their independence, particularly in Castile, as they were displaced in royal government. However, this was not the complete case in Aragon. This was because Ferdinand was not able to reduce their power and had to answer to each cortes. This portrayed that the nobility remained strong as he was unable to pass laws, raise taxes or create an army. Consequently, the power of the nobility was stronger in Aragon. Moreover, even though the monarchs asserted a certain degree of authority through the Hermandad and the royal council, it was during this period of time that the nobles preserved much of their wealth and status.

Commentary – Level 4

This is a balanced response which examines contrasting arguments in relation to the proposition and supports the examination with appropriate detail. It is occasionally assertive, especially when challenging the proposition. It is not clear, for example, what is meant by the 'monarchs being compromised' but there is a well-argued conclusion. This is a Level 4 answer.