

3.7 Absolutist Approaches to Power

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____ **Total: 11 marks**

KEY WORDS absolutism 专制主义 • parliament 议会

Objective

Build the skills to explain **absolutism** 专制主义 as a system.

You must be able to:

- state the theoretical justification of absolutist rule
- name the practical instruments of absolutist government
- explain the bargain between crown and nobility
- state the real limits on absolutist power

1 Worked examples

Study these first. Each one shows the method for a task used later.

■ The justification

Authority is held to derive from God and to be answerable to God alone; the ruler's will is therefore law and is not subject to consent by subjects.

■ The instruments

A standing army, a professional bureaucracy of officials dependent on the crown, taxation collected without consent, and a court that concentrated status where the ruler could observe it.

■ The bargain

Nobles surrendered independent political power and received exemption from much taxation, monopoly of high office, and confirmed authority over their peasants. Absolutism was a settlement with elites, not a defeat of them.

■ The limits

Distance, poor communication, the cost of enforcement, provincial privileges and the practical need for noble cooperation all constrained what a ruler could actually do.

2 Practice

2.1 State the theoretical justification of absolutist rule. [2]

2.2 State two things nobles received under the absolutist bargain. [2]

2.3 A ruler's decree is ignored in a distant province.

(a) State one reason. [1]

(b) State what this shows about absolutism. [1]

3 Exam-style questions

3.1 Under absolutist theory, the ruler is answerable to [1]

- **A** parliament
- **B** God alone
- **C** the nobility
- **D** the courts

3.2 Absolutism is best described as [1]

- **A** the defeat of the nobility
- **B** a settlement with elites
- **C** a republic
- **D** rule by consent

3.3 Nobles are exempted from much taxation.

(a) State what they gave up in return.

[1]

(b) Explain why the crown accepted the exemption.

[2]

Solutions

2.1 authority derives from God and is answerable to God alone, so it is not subject to subjects' consent.

2.2 any two of: exemption from much taxation; monopoly of high office; confirmed authority over peasants.

2.3 (a) distance, poor communication or the cost of enforcement. (b) that absolutist power was limited in practice however it was described in theory.

3.1 B. divine sanction with no earthly check is the claim.

3.2 B. elites exchanged political power for privilege.

3.3 (a) independent political power. (b) noble cooperation was needed to govern the provinces, and exemption bought it more cheaply than coercion.