



2004 History: Renaissance Italy GA 3: Written examination

GENERAL COMMENTS

The examination paper was fair and balanced and gave students the opportunity to display their knowledge in all sections. Most students finished the whole paper and there were few blanks, however many answers went beyond the lines provided and contained lengthy introductions and unnecessary information. There is a need for more training in adapting information to the question asked and answering the specific requirements. There was also a growing tendency to use quotes and not acknowledge them, to make up quotes, or to put anything into quotation marks, like ‘the Renaissance was a European phenomenon’.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Note: Student responses reproduced herein have not been corrected for grammar, spelling or factual information.

Section A

Question 1

How was Venice affected by the challenges to its possessions on the Italian mainland and in its maritime empire?

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	2	4	5	6	8	9	12	20	19	9	7	6.2

- Threats to mainland possessions were particularly caused by the War of the League of Cambrai. Military defeats and the loss of major cities (for example, Padua and Verona) caused temporary but significant loss of morale in Venice. The break-up of the League and the recovery of lost territories then resulted in a boost to Venetian morale. The defeat of the League is one of the elements in the myth of Venice: facing disaster, Venice emerged triumphant.
- Relentless Turkish advance in the eastern Mediterranean imposed great strains on Venice. There were expensive and prolonged military and naval campaigns, costly garrisons and fortifications in threatened bases and colonies (for example, Crete, Nauplion, Modon and Coron), all of which were a great drain on Venetian wealth and manpower.
- Turkish victories resulted in the loss of trade routes and valuable colonies and created a refugee problem for Venice (Christian Greeks and Slavs and expelled Venetian colonists), which made Venetian society more cosmopolitan. Occasional Venetian victories and heroic resistance against overwhelming odds (for example, in Cyprus) contributed to myth of Venice.

Very few students commented on the way challenges **affected** Venice. Most had a thorough knowledge of challenges but could not go beyond this to explain the impact of these, such as the loss of morale, overseas trade routes, food supplies and timber. Some of the weaker responses failed to consider both parts of Venice’s empire, while others recounted battles. The following student response handled this question well.

As the Venetian terra firma and maritime empires grew they were increasingly threatened by challenges from the Ottomans, the Genoese and the League of Cambrai. The loss in the third Genoese War saw Venice’s morale decline, added pressure on the economy and the loss of men. When Venice lost Negroponte to the Turks, the cost of the war was so great that the Venetian treasury was bankrupt. All the profits gained from her Empire had been used to defend it. Following the war with the League of Cambrai, Venice had to increase taxes on its citizens and sell nonvoting seats in the senate in order to boost the treasury. The Signory used artwork in the form of propaganda with works such as Carpaccio’s Lion of St Mark, which reinforced Venetian supremacy over land and sea to boost the declining morale of its citizens. Furthermore, the Spaniards and Portuguese discovery of new trade routes to the East Indies had a considerable impact on Venice’s wealth. Constant immigration from the mainland and Venetian colonies was necessary for Venice to maintain its population as the wars had depleted Venice’s population.

Question 2

How did the political institutions of Venice allow patrician families to maintain their power?

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	3	5	8	7	8	9	13	19	15	8	7	5.9

- Constitutional devices confined power to patrician families; for example, Serrata of Great Council and the Golden Book.
- Most offices, from doge down through ranks of administration, ecclesiastical positions, military and diplomatic appointments were reserved for patricians.



- Other social groups (for example, cittadini) were reconciled to this situation by positions in the civil service and administration of scuole, etc.
- The role of the Council of Ten enforced the hereditary power of patricians.
- Limitations on the power of the doge guaranteed that power was distributed among members of patrician families.

There was confusion about the notion of the institutions maintaining patrician power. This question was not handled well by some students, who highlighted the Serrata and the Golden Book as the factor determining whether patrician families maintained their power but did not go beyond to discuss the political institutions. The following answer did.

The Venetian political system was comprised of the Doge who stood at the pinnacle of Venetian politics, 'the splendid incarnation of power held and manipulated by other' (Zorzi), the Senate, the Signoria and the Maggior Consiglio. The patrician class who attained social, political and economic power and were well educated controlled these political institutions. These political institutions allowed families to maintain power as they elected and nominated each other. The Senate described by Sanudo as the 'real locus of political power' comprised a number of distinct groups, 60 regular senators, and 60 Zonta and the Court of Forty who were all voted on by the Grand Council. The Grand Council was almost purely elective as they elected the posts of government and it was this system that enabled patrician families to maintain power.

Question 3

Explain how civic patronage encouraged the development of the arts in Renaissance cities.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	2	3	5	7	9	12	15	17	15	8	7	6.1

- Architecture: for example, Brunelleschi's dome on Florence's cathedral.
- Painting: for example, pictures that celebrated military victories, such as Leonardo's *Battle of Anghiari* in the Palazzo Vecchio, and paintings in the chamber of the Great Council in Venice such as battle paintings and Veronese's *Triumph of Venice*.
- Sculpture: statues to celebrate the city's image or triumphs, for example, Michaelangelo's *David*, representations of the Lion of St Mark and Verrochio's equestrian statue of Colleoni.
- Costumes and banners, etc., were in demand for civic processions and rituals.
- There were schemes to improve city spaces and make them more impressive.

This question was handled well and gave students plenty of scope to include a range of examples from painting, sculpture and architecture. A number of students were thrown by the term 'civic' and others discussed patronage without considering the development of the arts or artists. The better answers were able to draw on examples such as the competition for the Baptistery doors, competition between guilds, or San Michele in Florence, or examples of scuole patronage in Venice. The following student response considers a number of aspects.

Hale asserts that 'Art was a commercial enterprise' rather than a vehicle for self expression during the Renaissance. Patrons provided the financial support for artists and architects alike which enabled the public display and recognition of artist's talents. Elements of colour, contention and size were determined by the patron and art was used as a means of self advertisement and self promotion. Cosimo de' Medici hired Michelozzo to design the structure for the Medici palace rejecting Brunelleschi's design as 'too grand' which he believed would not accord well with his public image. Although patronage was used to enhance the reputation and status of the patron and also a reflection of wealth, only the wealthy or the state could commission art. Cosimo de' Medici financed the studies of Marsilio Ficino and provided the financial means for the Platonic Academy. Patrons could also commission artists to rebuild and refurbish civic or religious buildings within the city such as Cosimo's employment of Michelozzo to redesign the monastery of San Marco.

Question 4

How important were neighbourhood loyalties to social relationships in Renaissance Florence?

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	2	4	5	8	9	11	14	16	13	8	11	6.1

- Patron-client networks (amici, vicini, parenti) developed within gonfaloni and helped strengthen the social position of certain families.
- Neighbourhood loyalties to friends and family members were important as they could provide support in a number of situations; for example, in arranging marriages, choosing god-parents, raising dowries and obtaining employment.
- In its role as a parish, the neighbourhood was important as the centre of religious life.
- Wealthy members of a district could provide social and economic support for more needy members who were also their neighbours and even their employees.



- Neighbourhoods contributed to social cohesion through the opportunities they provided for neighbours to partake in shared rituals and festivities.

Neighbourhood was too often confused with a discussion of social relationships in general and so there was a great deal of aimless discussion on parenti, vicini and amici, and some answers lacked detailed information about neighbourhoods specifically. This question posed problems for some students which was a surprise considering there have been past examination questions on the role of the neighbourhood. Better answers considered the importance of these relationships within the gonfaloni. The following response scored a very high mark.

Neighbourhood relationships played a pivotal role in Renaissance Florence, for the gonfaloni were the basis of political power in the city and also, after 1427, were economically crucial to leading Florentine families. The gonfaloni were the basis of political power for inclusion on the scrutiny lists assembled in each gonfalone and an essential prerequisite for the holding of political office. For this reason, leading citizens tried to establish networks of parenti, amici and vicini in their neighbourhood in order to levy influence in government. Also, before 1427 when the Catasto was first introduced, the tax system (estimo) was based on assessment by neighbourhood, establishing social networks could ensure favourable tax assessment. For this reason, leading families tended to congregate in the same gonfalone, such as the Rucellai or Tornabuoni in the Red Lion district and foster their political and civic standing within the city. For example, Cosimo de' Medici married Contessina Bardi from a leading family in his gonfalone of the Gold Lion and established a close relationship with her family, strengthening his position. Patronage was also important in the neighbourhood and Giovanni Rucellai commissioned the façade of the Santa Maria Novella, his local church as a kind of promotion, showing his influence within the district.

Section B

Representation: Vittore Carpaccio Healing of the Possessed Man at Rialto
[from the cycle of Miracles of the True Cross, c. 1500, Venice, Gallerie dell' Accademia]

Question 1

How does the scene depicted in Carpaccio's painting reinforce the ideal of Venice as a prosperous city?

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	1	5	17	29	30	18	3.3

- The title of the painting (*Healing of the Possessed Man at Rialto*) reinforces the location of the Rialto as a significant space in Venice. Students should know that the Rialto is the economic heart of Venice.
- The painting conveys a strong cosmopolitan flavour: the two men in the foreground wearing tall brimmed hats represent Armenians or Greeks (cited in Fortini Brown); the turbaned figures of Turks and Arabs can be seen in the distance in front of the columned loggia where merchants met; and there is a black African guiding the gondola.
- The actual subject of the painting, the healing of the young man possessed by the devil, is removed from the centre of the painting. Carpaccio separates it from the hustle and bustle of economic life that is focussed on the Grand Canal and the calli (footpaths).
- The faithful depiction of the palaces lining the Grand Canal is a sign of the prosperity of the merchant class.
- The scene itself is associated with the ideal of Venice as a prosperous city. The scene is bustling with activity; the footpaths (calli) are crowded with merchants and the Grand Canal is filled with gondolas.

Most students had a very clear sense of what was required here and generally the answers were of a high standard. Some students were unsure of the term 'prosperous' but most managed to find four or five points. There was some fanciful imaginings about what the painting suggested, such as that the smog and pollution implying progress; the washing on the lines showing rich and poor living together; or the Maltese dog conveying a cosmopolitan message.

Question 2

What aspects of the 'myth of Venice' are evident in Carpaccio's painting?

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	1	2	2	5	7	10	14	22	18	11	9	6.6

- Favoured by God: under His special protection.
- Pious: so religious that miracles occur in everyday settings and almost go unnoticed.
- Beauty: a 'terrestrial paradise' with gold decorations on the buildings, the expensive dress of the merchants, and a unique water location.
- Civic concord: foreigners mix easily with the Venetians, a harmonious atmosphere exists between servants and masters, and there is a lack of fortifications.
- Wealth: the clothes, buildings and busy activity suggest great prosperity.



Students should be familiar with aspects of the 'Myth of Venice' because they knew that there would be a question about this set of ideas and values. Most were able to demonstrate an understanding of the Myth and better answers were directly relevant to the painting. The following is a very good response to this question.

The 'myth of Venice' is clearly represented in Carpaccio's image. The idea of La Serenissima is clearly shown through the images of floating gondolas and there is no sign of upset or chaos. The healing occurring in a corner of the image shows not only the piety of the city but also its miraculous nature. The wealth of Venice, also a key aspect of the 'myth' is shown in the buildings and clothing of the Venetians. The evidence of foreigners highlights the city's status as an entrepot and a cosmopolitan city. Although the subject of the image is religious, the painting highlights Venice's humanity and society. As Cosgrove stated 'the myth has distinctive utopian characteristics...the perfect union of place and society'.

Question 3

How far do other representations, both visual and written, support Carpaccio's perception of the ideas and values of the Venetians?

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	Average
%	2	2	2	3	2	4	3	4	5	9	10	14	14	12	8	6	9.9

- Both written and visual representations should have been used – there is a wealth of material to choose from.
- A clear understanding of ideas and values should have been displayed – justice, unparalleled beauty, the cult of Saint Mark and special protection, etc.
- The myth versus reality could have been discussed.

A question like this was expected by most students and many wrote extensively and used both visuals and written documents to support their answers. The stronger answers directly related to Carpaccio's painting and some considered aspects of the anti-myth. The following answer considers a number of sources.

Certain ideals represented in this painting are supported by further visual and written representations but the image Carpaccio's painting presents of Venice also challenges those of other paintings. The miraculous nature of Venice, as well as its prosperity can be seen in Jacopo di Barbari's woodcut of Venice, which includes the gods Mercury and Poseidon, suggesting divine links. The prosperity of Venice is also supported by the writing of Philippe de Commines, who refers to the Rialto as 'the best built street in the whole world' and speaks about beauty, richness and the luxury of Venice. Commines also wrote that 'half the people are foreigners' showing the cosmopolitan nature of the city. However, Carpaccio's painting portrays Venice as bustling and chaotic, contrary to Gentile Bellini's 'Procession in the Piazza San Marco' in which Venice is seen as ordered and serene with the lines of marchers. In 'Procession of the Holy League' this same view of Venice appears – that of la Serenissima.

Section C

Question Chosen	0	1	2
%	1	85	15

Criterion 8

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	2	9	14	30	28	17	3.2

Criterion 9

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	2	8	15	27	31	17	3.3

Criterion 10

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	6	13	16	34	21	11	2.9

Criterion 11

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	5	12	14	27	28	15	3.1

Criterion 12

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	27	20	14	18	15	6	2.0

Question 1

In 1434 Cosimo de' Medici laid the foundation for sixty years of Medici rule. To what extent did Medicean predominance involve the use and abuse of political institutions and ideas?

- The use and abuse by Cosimo to establish Medicean predominance included things such as:



- political exile and confiscation, manipulation of the Balia and Accoppiatory and the Council of 100
- the manipulation of people's sentiments through festivals and pageants, cultivating friendship and marriage ties with influential citizens as well as with *gente nuove* (for example, Matteo Palmieri and Luca Pitti and Benedetto Dei), the use of personal wealth within neighbourhood networks and confraternities to reward supporters
- the use of civic humanism to promote Republican ideals, avoidance of the appearance of princely control (gonfalonier of justice only three times) and no overt abuse of personal power. Cosimo worked to maintain the façade of republican government while laying the foundations for the Medici dynasty (for example, by commissioning Donatello's *Judith and Holofernes* and *David* he showed respect for open constitution while at the same time stifling it through their location in the Medici courtyard).
- A relatively smooth transition of control passed from Cosimo to Piero, and political institutions and ideas were once again used and abused in the interests of family, neighbours and friends. Piero was able to overcome the Pitti challenge of 1466 but the electoral procedures were tightened and election by lot was abolished for 20 years and replaced by election by hand.
- Lorenzo assumed power after his father's death. Under Lorenzo, private interest was more openly placed before public interest. There was a tighter Council of 70 and more overt political decision-making. Public display became part of the art of government; hence there were festivals, pageants and civic beautification projects.
- Piero di Lorenzo lost power in 1494 when his interests were no longer identifiable with the good of Florence – private and public interest no longer worked in harmony.

This was unequivocally the more popular essay topic, and answers varied considerably. Many students recited the entire structure of Florentine government from the Ordinances of Justice to Savonarola, including the Ciompi Revolt. While some essays were narrative, others wrote about 'historical problems' in general, without linking them to a discussion of the question. There were also clearly pre-prepared answers which were based on past questions rather than the one given. Quotations proved a challenge for many students and misquoting or inaccurate citation of sources was commonplace. The last criterion was not handled well and a number of answers failed to score any marks because there was no discussion of historians or their views. The better answers discussed the question, drew on a wide range of relevant examples and demonstrated a clear understanding of the complexities and subtleties of Medicean rule.

The following are excerpts from students' answers that addressed the criteria in various ways.

The Medici family while during the 15th century maintained a façade of protecting republicanism as 'private citizens' in reality abused and used the political system to their advantage. They were in such a position of distinction that they could change existing councils and implement new ones. This is seen with Lorenzo who Hole claims 'was born to rule' implementing the Seventy. This was abuse of power as it was the second most supreme council in the Signoria and it also gave Lorenzo a permanent position in office. To a great extent this was an abuse and attack on republican values and ideas which the Florentines held dear.

Ironically at the time of Cosimo's rise, Brucker noted 'there was a surge in republican spirit'. The people were not aware that their precious republic was being penetrated by a citizen and 'a spirit more tyrannical than evil' as Parenti comments.

The compromised state of the constitution had survived Cosimo's death and the conspiracy directed against his son Piero in 1466. It is interesting to note the lack of patrician support harnessed during this conspiracy as it was mainly rich patrician families such as Pitti and Soderini rallying for power and trying to abolish the Cento. This was perhaps because the general populace was content with the state of things, after all Guicciardini later described the city as 'being in a state of perfect peace'.

Historian Hole suggests the Medici dominated but still respected the republican traditions. This may be interpreted as the Medici using the institutions as a republican government should. It is possible to suggest that the manipulation of political institutions was also abuse of power. Brucker says that people became 'passive onlookers' but the manipulation of government by exiling enemies and surrounding themselves with supporters was also used by the Albizzi and the Medici were simply using political institutions as had been done previously.

The pinnacle of Lorenzo's abuse was observed after the Pazzi Conspiracy when he ordered the Dolphin, the Pazzi family symbol to be 'cut down or blotted out whenever it was found' (Hibbert).

He (Cosimo) utilized exile as well as special emergency 'balie' to maintain control. He also 'stage-managed' citizen plebiscites (Hale) and utilized 'ingenious methods' (Fryde) to prevent the Medici from being ousted by rival families.



Question 2

Changes in the political nature of Florence following the French invasion of 1494 gave rise to the works of political theorists such as Machiavelli and Guicciardini. To what extent did these changes influence new approaches to politics and history in the writings of Machiavelli and/or Guicciardini?

- The death of Lorenzo de' Medici left a power vacuum that his son, Piero, was unable to fill. Hale writes that the period from the invasion of Italy by Charles VIII of France to the sack of Rome by Imperial troops wrenched the course of the Peninsula's history so sharply from its track that contemporaries looked on with amazement and despair. Guicciardini wrote that '1494 was a most unhappy year' for Italy. The Italian peninsula, at the end of the 15th Century, was in disarray. Modern historian Weissman writes of the 'hunger, plague and public disorder in Florence'. Machiavelli wrote to address Italy's precarious world context and to emphasise the necessity for an appropriate political response. Machiavelli saw the political necessity for the unification of the 'provincia' and believed in the need for the consolidation of Italian states under one leader. He despaired over Florence's internal weakness (Florence as Ser Nihilo) and he admired Cesare Borgia for his ruthless skills in the Romagna. Machiavelli had witnessed 'the disastrous diplomacy' of Piero in addressing the French invasion. He observed Piero Soderini's attempt to steer a course between a broad based government and patrician oligarchy brought to a shambles. Machiavelli wrote to address the necessity of the times – his 'patria' threatened by factionalism and the external threat of invasion and domination by foreign monarchic states.
- In *The Prince*, Machiavelli addressed the need for strong leadership by advocating princely rule. Machiavelli saw that part of the political reality was the need for the pragmatism of the ruler. He claimed that fortuna could be controlled by virtue. He believed that the political success of leaders arose from 'nothing else except the extent to which their methods are or are not suited to the nature of the times'. Waley argued that Italy was, at this time, 'the scene of nearly uninterrupted war'. And so Machiavelli argued that the sacrifice of more admirable qualities of government had to be made in a time that called for strong leadership and stability.
- Guicciardini was also deeply involved in public affairs, which enabled him to observe the changes in Florentine politics. He emphasised practicality and common sense; seeing things as they were, rather than as they ought to be. He was, at heart, an advocate of a republic run by an elite group of responsible citizens.

Fewer students tackled this question, however most responses showed considerable knowledge and quality. Some students discussed *The Prince* without much reference to the question. Students could use the secondary materials more in relation to Machiavelli especially. There is considerable debate as to why Machiavelli wrote *The Prince*; whether it was a cynical exercise designed to impress the Medici or whether it was a response to the problems that Florence and the Italian mainland were suffering at the beginning of the 16th Century. Generally, the best answers discussed the instability of Florence in the wake of the Medici, the republican regimes of Savonarola and Soderini and the breakdown of the Peace of Lodi. This question also called for a discussion of Machiavelli's principle of *necessita* as well as the ideas of fortuna and virtue. The best responses linked the 'political nature of Florence following the French invasion of 1494' to 'new approaches to politics and history' in the writings of Machiavelli and/or Guicciardini. Most students concentrated on Machiavelli and a few considered both theorists. The following responses addressed the criteria well.

Both Machiavelli and Guicciardini were observers of the same political catastrophe which influenced the formation of their political theories. However, their conclusions were drawn from political experience and whilst ultimately Machiavelli proposes a long term solution which Guicciardini is unable to do, both provide realistic and viable advice.

Machiavelli wrote to address Italy's precarious world context and to emphasise the 'necessita' for an appropriate political response. He argued that a wise prince guided by necessita 'holds to what is right when he can' but 'knows how to be wrong when this is necessary'. It was the 'necessita' of the times that prompted Machiavelli to write 'The Prince'. His approach to a new understanding of politics was drawn from the changes experienced at this time and the need to consider these.