



2006 History: Renaissance Italy: GA 3: Written examination

GENERAL COMMENTS

Students responded well to the 2006 History: Renaissance Italy examination. As in previous years, the examination required sound comprehension of the key knowledge and skills from the study design. Students responded in varying degrees to all questions; few students left out questions and most finished the paper.

A lack of appropriate evidence to support responses continues to be the discriminating factor between mid range and higher scoring responses. Some students tended to quote without acknowledging the source. Students also need to be careful not to manufacture evidence; for example, citing an historian whose research is on Florence in an essay on Venice or vice versa. It is important to cite evidence accurately and to evaluate different forms of evidence.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

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

Section A

Question 1

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	0	1	3	4	11	14	16	17	17	11	7	6.5

This question was generally well answered by students. The majority wisely chose to write on Venice, as this city allowed for more points to be made in relation to trade and industry.

Many responses showed a thorough knowledge of Venice’s trading activity and the impact this had on her economy. Students were less confident with industry, although some made the connection between trade and the Arsenale. The best answers also referred to the glass blowing and lace making industries, and a couple of students even referred to the development of the printing press.

Students who chose to write on Florence tended to struggle in their attempt to describe the nature and form of trade. Those who wrote on Naples or Milan were also disadvantaged as fewer points could be made on those city states’ economies.

Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	5	6	8	8	12	12	12	12	10	8	7	5.3

There were some very sound responses to this humanist question. The best answers revealed considerable knowledge and understanding of the evolution of humanism, from the early humanism stimulated by Petrarch to civic humanism represented by Salutati and Bruni to the Neo-Platonism of Ficino and Pico della Mirandola. Weaker answers tended to gloss over these stages and many turned this question into an analysis of art and the classical influences on painting and sculpture.

The following response is an example of an effective approach to this question.

As Erica Strugnall notes, classicism, the basis of humanism, did not come as a sudden revelation, but ‘grew out of the luxuriant vegetation of medieval thought’. This is seen with the ‘father’ of humanism, Petrarch. Schooled in the medieval scholastic tradition in the 14th century, Petrarch, instead, turned to the ancient Roman models of Cicero and Cato. By venerating Cicero for his oration skills and proposing, ‘what is history but the study of Rome’, Petrarch laid the foundations for humanism as a philosophical movement and an educational program. His ideas were attractive to prominent Florentine scholars such as Salutati and Bruni, who in the late fourteenth century made humanism ‘the cultural standard of the ruling elite’ (Nauert). Both Chancellors of Florence, Salutati and Bruni, looked not only to Roman philosophy but to the classical Greeks such as Aristotle, as they formulated the ‘studia humanitatis’, an education program based on rhetoric, grammar, philosophy and history that prepared one for public life. As Nauert asserts there was a ‘symbiosis between republican politics and humanism’ as Bruni used Aristotle’s Economics to defend the mercantile activities of the Florentine oligarchy. Aristotle argued ‘the condition of liberality is money...deeds require external means’. Hence, it is through its connection with the republican ruling elite that humanism prospered. This is also seen in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries when there was a movement away from Aristotelianism, as Neo-Platonic humanism developed. As humanism ‘spoke for and to the dominant social groups’ (Martines), under the patronage of the Medici, prominent scholars such as Marsilio Ficino, Poliziano and Pico della Mirandola developed a new philosophy based around the ancient works of Plato that they had been collecting, studying and translating.

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Section B

Question 1

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	1	2	10	29	59	3.4

Most students performed well on this question. Some students chose to interpret it as a mere comprehension question and contrasted the difference between Brucker's account and that of Guicciardini. The better answers considered the historiographical issue of the different periods in which the two accounts were written.

Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	3	10	22	22	22	15	6	3.2

It proved difficult for students to score full marks on this question. The best responses acknowledged the changes in leadership from Lorenzo to Piero as well as the changing political climate in Florence which was stimulated by Savonarola.

Most students who mentioned Savonarola were unable to make the connection between his sermons and a desire for a broader republican form. Students also often neglected to include the changes throughout the Italian Peninsula as a result of the French invasion and the diplomatic errors made by Piero de Medici. Weaker responses had only a vague and confused understanding of the personalities and events of this period and relied on the documents provided on the examination paper.

The following response considers a number of the factors involved in the exile of the Medici.

As Guicciardini claimed, Lorenzo had 'worked diligently to maintain the affairs of Italy' and his death supposedly saw 'the end of prosperity for the city'. Lorenzo's death coincided with the French invasion of Italy and Florence and only added to the atmosphere of fear and apprehension latent in the city. In such uncertain times, historians such as Brucker note that the Florentines looked for strong leadership. However this was not to be found in Lorenzo's son Piero. His 'clumsy dealings' (Martines) with the French, when he gave up Florentine territories, without consulting the government, fostered resentment toward the Medici faction. As contemporary, Piero Parenti remarked at this time 'leading citizens were divided amongst themselves' by Lorenzo's death.

Question 3

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	4	4	4	7	9	12	12	17	13	12	7	6.0

This question was generally well answered. The best answers demonstrated considerable knowledge of constitutional changes brought about by the Medici and students' ability to evaluate a range of primary and secondary sources. The question required some definition of the term 'authoritarian regime' and offered students the opportunity to take a position and support their argument with a range of primary and secondary sources. The following answer made use of this opportunity.

Historian Nicolai Rubenstein argued that despite Medici dominance of Florence 'they acted within the framework of the constitution'. Despite this, other historians such as Murphy and Kent draw attention to the institutional reforms and electoral manipulations between 1434-1492. This was seen in the 1440s when Cosimo reduced the number of 'accoppiatori' or borse officials so he could control the number and names of those on the electoral lists for eligibility for office. Cosimo's introduction of the Cento has been viewed 'as almost the complete triumph of unofficial government in the private interest, over constitutional government in the public interest' (Kent). In doing so Cosimo undermined the authority of the Signoria, transferring more power into Medici hands.

Section C

Question chosen	0	1	2
%	1	69	30

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	Average
%	2	1	1	2	3	4	4	4	5	3	7	6	8	7	8	9	10	7	6	2	2	11.9

Question 1

In this question, 'the importance of social life' refers to the face to face interactions of people with other people and with groups within the city. Students often struggled to analyse the nature of these interactions. It was disappointing to



see so many narrative essays with little evidence to support an argument. The generality of the question appeared to baffle some students and those who wrote on Florence often just narrated comments about 'parenti, amici, vicini'. Few students produced answers that examined the complexity of social life in Renaissance Florence and the interlinking of different elements of the city.

It is important for students to understand that quotes do not stand on their own; they need to be used to illustrate or reinforce a point that has been made.

The following answers set up the argumentative basis of the answer effectively.

In the fluid, competitive and at times ruthless society of Renaissance Florence, maintaining an active social life was essential for individuals who wanted to achieve economical, political and social success. Preserving good social relationships was also considered vital if one wanted to succeed in all areas of his life.

Social Life in Renaissance Florence was important in establishing the connections between family, friends and neighbours to ensure political, economic and social success. Primarily Weissman believes that the relationships were necessary to enhance 'social and psychic survival'. Moreover, E.W. Kent believes that the social relations were important to give a sense of 'those who were, those who are and those who are yet to come'. However Gene Brucker argues that the importance of networks such as neighbours, family and friends 'diminished as corporate ties such as guilds and gonfalons declined'.

Question 2

Some students who chose to write on Venice obviously anticipated a question that required them to discuss the importance of social harmony and peace. The more effective answers were able to link aspects of social life in Venice with the existence of social cohesion. The most effective responses considered the complexity of the different elements of social life, and the accounts were substantiated with a wider range of primary and secondary sources.

The following is an extract from a response that scored very highly.

The importance of social life in Renaissance Venice is reflected through the great measures that the government undertook in order to monitor and control the inhabitants of the city. As Marin Sanudo noted, the 'very severe magistracy of the Council of Ten regulated every aspect of city life from dress, housing festivities and even the sexuality of the city's inhabitants. However, for a state obsessed with maintaining control, some aspects of social life such as neighbourhoods, civic ritual and participation in the Scuole played an important role in achieving a measure of social cohesion in the city.

As historian Frederick Lane asserts 'neighbourhoods were the foundation stone' of Venice's stability. 'Constraints on living space' (Chambers) meant that the Venetian Patriciate could not live in isolated splendour. Neighbourhoods and parishes were 'heterogeneous places' (Romano) which often saw patricians and popolani living in the same building. Due to this 'face-to-face society' (Chojnacki) relationships between the social castes were of high importance, due to the function they served in creating communal atmosphere.

Section D

Question 1

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	1	6	19	25	49	3.2

Students need to be more aware of the mark value of each question in section D, as some students wrote more on Question 1, which was worth four marks, than they did on Question 3, which was worth 10 marks. Most students however, answered this question well, demonstrating a clear understanding of the myth of Venice.

The following is one such response.

The inclusion of the Lion of St Mark is designed to project the notion that Venice was an exceptionally pious city; as Doge Loredan noted. Venice portrayed itself as 'the most Christian city'. Similarly, Venice's beauty and unique position was often emphasized by the panegyrist. This is emphasized by the elaborate carvings and detailed motifs on the staircase. The use of the statues of Mars and Neptune are classical references and Muir notes that towards the end of the 15th and 16th centuries Venetians aligned themselves with the classical motifs in a testament to the ideal constitution of its republican structure. Neptune is the God of the Sea and his inclusion is a reference to Venice's Maritime empire and the prosperity provided.

Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	8	18	15	15	17	18	10	3.1

Students needed to read the entire question to answer this effectively. The question focussed on the role of the Doge not just on the Lion of Saint Mark and the statues. Better answers recognised not only the role of the Doge as the servant of the State, but linked the importance of this space, as the place where the Doge was crowned, with the changing role of

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the Doge demonstrated by the addition of the statutes in the mid-16th century. Reference to the past Doges such as Falier and Foscari were helpful.

The following student responses consider a number of these aspects.

This staircase is where the Doge made his oath to obey his 'promissione' after his election. Hence the imposing statues are to remind the Doge against the abuse of his station. The Doge was a symbol of the populace and thus 'he was first among equals'. However, essentially he was 'at the will of the patriciate' (Finlay). This is symbolically represented through the image of the Lion of St Mark above the staircase. The city was 'united around the cult of St Mark' (Passmore) and resting above the Doge's head, the Doge is intended to be reminded of the authority of God and his subordination in the face of the pious power of the city's protector.

The imposing statues of Mars and Neptune along with the overhead relief of the Lion of St Mark allude to the idea that the Republic of Venice was always ahead and more important than the needs of individual leaders. The fact that Venice is represented by the Lion and not by an image of the Doge himself shows that the power of the Doge was very much symbolic rather than real. The nobility of the Venetian government were extremely suspicious of ambitious doges and worked to ensure that no doge had too much power.

Question 3

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	6	8	6	6	10	11	11	16	14	6	6	5.3

This question required an exploration of the way the myth compensated for the decline in Venetian power and wealth. The best answers were able to detail the reverses that Venice suffered (the defeats inflicted by the League of Cambrai, the Portuguese discovery of sea routes to the East) and link these to the triumphant art of the late 15th and early 16th centuries. Students should have discussed paintings like Carpaccio's 'The Lion of Saint Mark' and Palma Il Giovane's 'Allegory of the League of Cambrai', as well as referring to Venetian contemporaries such as Marin Sanudo, Doge Loredan and Contarini who were used by the state to mask defeat or even present defeat as victory.

The following is an excellent response to this question and links visual and primary evidence very well.

While Venice's land and sea empire were both prosperous throughout the Renaissance, by the sixteenth century, Venice's power began to decline due to the discovery of trade routes around the Cape of Good Hope, the disastrous war with the Turks (The Battle of Lepanto) and the League of Cambrai. Throughout these difficulties, the myth did not decline along with Venice's power, instead it, according to Muir, 'seemed to grow in inverse proportion'. Art was created, both allegorical and narrative to compensate for the decline in Venice's power.

After the League of Cambrai, which led Venice to the point of near extinction, paintings such as Carpaccio's Lion of St Mark and Giovane's League of Cambrai were created to celebrate the return of Padua. Veronese's Battle of Lepanto depicts the alleged fact that Venice was favoured by God. In times of decline the government used the legend of St Mark and the idea that Venice was a divine city chosen by God to encourage peace and harmony among its people.

Doge Loredan's speech to the Venetian Senate, which was made in 1509, during the League of Cambrai, is filled with references to the Myth. Deeming Venice a city whose 'liberty has been threatened' Doge Loredan attempts to restore pride among the Venetian nobility. While Loredan alludes to Venice's ideal location which allows her to 'enjoy the convenience of sea and the pleasures of the land', it is clear that Venice's empire, particularly the terraferma, was in decline.