



2003

History: Renaissance Italy GA 3: Written examination

GENERAL COMMENTS

The examination paper was very fair and gave students an opportunity to demonstrate the range and depth of their knowledge. Most students attempted the whole paper and there were fewer blank answers than in previous years. Most were able to organise their time and finish the paper.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Section A

Question 1

How did Venice's position as an *entrepot* between East and West contribute to the wealth of the city's economy?

On the whole, this question was handled well by most students. All answers saw the significance of Venice's trading position in the facilitation of her empire. Very successful answers were more specific, giving examples of goods traded as well as exploring how this generated wealth by stimulating her industry and bringing a variety of foreigners to the city.

A strong answer demonstrates a clear understanding of the question and develops a sound knowledge and understanding of the content being examined. A point of departure could acknowledge that the city of Venice herself was an entrepreneur. Goods were imported and exported by foreign merchants residing in Venice. Merchants traded in fish, salt and furs from the Black Sea; silk, spices, ceramics, cotton and silverware from the Levant; grain, sugar and cotton from Cyprus; slaves and grain from North Africa; honey, leather and wax from Alexandria; as well as minerals, silver and copper from Germany; cloth and wool from England and Flanders. This level of trade created significant profits and tax revenue in the form of tariffs on goods passing through Venice. The trading Empire was an important source of employment for workers in the Arsenale. The Rialto was the place where such transactions took place. Venice's Empire was difficult and expensive to administer, but of fundamental importance to the economy in terms of provision of profit and employment.

It was important for students to emphasise 'how' the East/West situation led to wealth. Many students spent an inordinate amount of time establishing the extent of the empire rather than how this added a diversity of wealth. The following answer did address the requirements of the question:

Venice derived much of its wealth from the constant flow of goods through the city, due to its position as an entrepot between East and West. Positioned between Northern Europe and the Levant and Far East, Venice traded a range of goods. There was a great demand in the west for goods imported from the Far East, such as silks, sugar and spices and goods from the west, such as minerals, silver and copper from Germany brought Venice great wealth when sold in the East. This range of goods meant that Venice attracted foreign traders from both the East and West: Greeks brought manuscripts, Germans mirrors and the Jews worked as bankers, bringing further wealth. The Venetian government taxed traders and often increased their wealth by selling on products e.g. German merchant, were required to sell their goods to the Venetians who would then sell these goods again, thereby making a profit.

Question 2

Why was the Council of Ten established, and what was its role in Venetian politics?

Most students knew this area of study well and could give details regarding the Council of Ten. Some spent too long discussing the Tiepolo Conspiracy and more successful answers went on to acknowledge the specific role of the Council and changes in this position.

Answers should acknowledge that the Council of Ten was established in 1310 as a response to the Tiepolo Conspiracy. Essentially it was a secret body and had an ominous reputation. Sanudo called it 'a very severe magistracy'. Hale defines it as a special executive council for secret affairs and State Security. It was elected by the Great Council, and it was composed of 17 men: the ten ordinary members and six ducal councillors and the Doge. It had a jurisdiction over crimes of high treason, which gradually spread to cover all matters, which were thought to be secret and then such crimes as sodomy and falsification of currency. The importance and authority of the ten lay in its essential duties: the judgment of crimes, offences and infringements committed by the patrician class. It was, Zorzi says, the 'harsh and conscientious curb' of the patrician exercise of power.

This is an answer which addresses the question.

The Council of Ten was introduced into the constitution as a direct response to the Tiepolo Conspiracy in 1310. The Council was originally established to control factions and conspiracies such as the Tiepolo, who attempted to kill the Doge. It was implemented for only 2 months, however as it continually re-instated and

became permanent after the Falier conspiracy in 1335. The induction of this council was a major change within the constitution as they were granted extra power. Not only did they control 'peace, coinage and sodomy' as stated by Sanudo, but held immense power and could dismiss the Doge. They had arbitrary power and the ability to make instant decisions and were responsible for the internal security of the State. No two family members were allowed to sit simultaneously and membership was for one year. Chubb stated 'there is not a Venetian high or low who does not live in deadly fear of the council's activities'

Question 3

Explain how classical ideals were important to the development of either the arts or learning.

This question was not answered well. A number of students did not read the question properly and explained both arts and learning and neither well, even though the question asked for *either/or*. A number of responses concentrated on patronage and others made little or no reference to classical ideals.

Students who misread the question and wrote on both the arts and learning could only be rewarded for one component. Students who successfully addressed the learning component of the question embedded their answer in humanism. They noted that humanism was a curriculum that grew out of a study of classical societies and was the defining intellectual movement of the Renaissance. The philosophical focus was man in society and the movement provided a refinement of values that derived from the needs of the urban ruling class. Their ideas of education, humanity and political order could only be realised in a society of privileged elites. The humanists extolled the life of action and social usefulness. The concept of 'vita activa politica' was promoted as a necessary device to protect Florentine republicanism. Bruni's translation of the Nicomachian Ethics revealed an attitude that supported the upper class elite whereby 'man needs external prosperity because he is a human being.'

Students who focused on the arts component were able to display a wide range of knowledge. They noted that the use of perspective and the accurate depiction of the human figure came from the classical world of Greece and Rome. Students then provided a range of examples. These examples include Masaccio's *Tribute Money* with the imitation of classical heads and stances. Depiction of arches and columns as motifs in both architecture and painting were noted in Botticelli's *Adoration of the Magi*. The appropriation of classical motifs such as arches and columns, which served to glorify the present by linking it to the much admired past, was also noted. The following answer addressed these issues.

The 'studia humanitas' – a curriculum of subjects including poetry, rhetoric, grammar, history and philosophy was the basis of education and learning throughout the Renaissance. Latin was the language of scholars and educated people and for the Italians, knowledge of Latin combined with their deep respect and admiration of the Roman Republic and its ideals led to an explosion of classical studies. Humanists like Petrarch sought old unaltered classical manuscripts and texts- Petrarch believed that 'once the darkness is dispelled, our grandsons can walk back into the pure radiance of the past', the ideas and ideals of the Ancients became of paramount significance. The reading of classical Romans such as Cicero and Livy caused the civic humanists scholars to advocate the learning of rhetoric oratory and politics, emulating the classical ideal of an active political life.

Question 4

Why was marriage an important social relationship in Renaissance Florence?

Some students were looking for a question on family and found this question too specific and consequently knowledge and examples were often lacking.

This question required an understanding of the role of marriage rather than the role of women; hence the focus chosen by students was sometimes skewed. The most successful answers acknowledged that marriage could bring wealth and honour to a family. Promises of marriage were sealed by a financial arrangement. Dowries brought infusions of capital for merchants like Dati. Within the patriciate, marriage was too important to leave to the whims of love. Other considerations also affected decisions about marriage such as political reputation and antiquity of lineage. Marriage was often a strategic alliance between two families: the Rucellai were able to retrieve social standing through a marriage arranged with the Medici. Such considerations were not relevant to poor families, but even girls from the lower classes were expected to have a marriage portion of some kind such as linen or a few articles of furniture. This answer addressed some of the issues of the question.

The family was the nucleus of Florentine life, thus inevitably marriage was paramount. Respectable Florentine women, wishing to live uncluttered life had only option, marriage. More importantly marriages were strategic alliances, especially in the upper classes. A marriage bond with another family was usually of equal rank, but preferably higher which meant an increased network of amici. A marriage meant more people to call on in trouble, more people to ensure the tax collectors that the family was too poor to pay tax. It meant the continuation of the family line of men, sons (and less importantly daughters) to inherit the family business and fortune. Contemporary historians suggest that Lorenzo de' Medici may have brokered marriages to prevent families strengthening themselves and gaining a chance to overthrow the Medici. As Alessandra Strozzi said rather cynically 'whoever wants money takes a wife'. When in dire financial straits, the riches that a wife could bring were crucial. For political, social or economic reasons, marriage was extremely important in Renaissance Florence.

Section B

The answers in this section indicate a growing understanding of the skills required to successfully complete the questions. In particular answers to Question 3 displayed reflective, conceptual detail whereby students synthesised their analysis of a variety of representations, comparing and contrasting in an impressive manner.

Question 1

What does de' Barbari's map tell us about the ways in which the physical terrain affected the political and economic use of space?

Students could include the following points from the detail depicted or go beyond and refer to the entire map. Venice was surrounded and penetrated by water, and therefore the Venetians adapted their limited space to suit their needs. It was a city built upon sandbanks, its buildings rising directly out of the lagoons. The Grand Canal bisected the city and was its principal thoroughfare. Its canals formed the city's boundaries; an open city having neither walls nor drawbridges. The functional shape of Venice evolved over the centuries. The commercial center was the Rialto; docks and wharves were scattered throughout the city and so deep-sea vessels found their way into the urban heart; freight-carrying ships in the foreground. Merchant palaces were built on canal fronts – they served as dwellings and as warehouses for goods; given the pressure on space, rich and poor lived in close proximity. The Doge's Palace as the political center; Piazza San Marco as a religious and political center; the façade of the Doge's Palace all reflected the prosperity of the city and the nobility's desire to display the city's wealth in decorations; the building of the basilica of San Marco nearby to demonstrate a unity of the political and religious. The influence of the East can be seen on the domes of the Basilica of San Marco. The Torre dell' Orologia, built in 1496-99, a symbol of political prestige was built in a prominent position on the north side of the Piazza San Marco. Visitors arriving by boat would see it and be impressed. The two marble columns in the Piazzetta di San Marco – Saint Theodore and St Mark's Lion – were associated with justice. The entrance to the Grand Canal was the ceremonial harbour of the city and many rituals and ceremonies were an assertion of the city's maritime power.

An upper range student response:

Venice's lagoon setting is depicted by Jacopo de' Barbari and it is clear that space on the small islands was limited. For this reason, the only large space was the Piazza San Marco, where the Doge's palace was located. The Ducal Palace was the center of government, thus its prominent position. Barbari depicts Venice among the waters of the calm lagoon and it is evident that Venice's economy was dependent upon maritime trade. Given the limited space on the islands, the Arsenale, the shipbuilding complex, covered an enormous space, although Barbari does exaggerate its size to emphasise its importance. The Grand Canal wound through the centre of the main islands of Venice, and it was at the bridge spanning one section of the canal, the Rialto, where commerce and banking were centred. Since space was limited, Venetians developed specialised economic areas and the Rialto was the centre of trade, joined to the Piazza San Marco by the Mercerie.

Question 2

Explain how de' Barbari's map contributed to the 'myth of Venice'.

Students had to focus on the ideas and values underpinning the myth of Venice. These would include the unparalleled beauty, the façade of the Doge's palace, the prosperity of Venice as a maritime power, the cult of St Mark and his special protection – Basilica of San Marco and the Doge's Palace in close proximity, the civic concord – open porticoes of the Doge's Palace and lack of fortification, justice – two columns, superiority – city's outward looking aspect/lack of fortifications, perfect constitution, heirs to Rome and wisdom.

An upper range student response:

Jacopo de' Barbari's map seeks to further the 'myth of Venice' and includes many elements of it in his woodcut. Venice's unique position in the waters of the lagoon, completely surrounded by, and built on, water was often cited as proof of her divine origin. Venetians saw their position in the lagoon forming a natural barrier against the sea as a sign of the special protection provided by Saint Mark. Venice's unmatched natural beauty is seen in de' Barbari's map as he depicts the Venetian city in tranquil waters. The map also contributes to Venice being seen as a city where justice and liberty were valued. Justice was a significant ideal, and can be seen in the two monumental columns standing in the Piazzetta, between which criminals were hanged. Liberty is seen in the depiction of the open arches of the Doge's Palace representing a free and open government. Piety was another important element of the 'Myth of Venice' and this is emphasised through the prominence given to the Basilica of San Marco. This was the most sacred site in Venice as it supposedly housed the bones of Saint Mark. De' Barbari seeks to remind the viewer of Saint Mark's divine protection over the city. Wealth is alluded to in the enormous galleys, greatly exaggerated in size; the maritime trade being the source of the city's prosperity.

Question 3

Discuss the role played by representations such as de' Barbari's map in adding to the perception of Venice as La Serenissima. Refer to at least two representations in your answer, one of which can be de' Barbari's map.

The discussion of the representations must display an understanding of the concept of La Serenissima. The myth versus reality could also be discussed. While some students referred to other visual and written sources, some students took this as an opportunity to explain the myth ignoring much of the question.

An upper range response:

De Barbari's map presents Venice as peaceful, prosperous and above all, serene. The Doge's Palace does not need to be fortified, the ships own the oceans and the buildings all seem so orderly, while the Piazza is empty and people are not to be seen anywhere in the streets. This is in vast contrast to works such as Carpaccio's 'Healing of the Possessed Man' in which there are people everywhere, the canals are dirty and there is washing hanging from windows and smoke billowing from the chimneys. De Barbari's map presents Venice as clean, orderly and unafraid 'an image that they would like to present to the world.'. Other works such as Bellini's 'Procession in the Piazza San Marco' display the orderly and communal nature of Venetian society. Once again everything is in place and would seem as if the entire city is working together. The Doge can be seen participating in the ceremony. Other works such as the 'Lion of St. Mark' show Venice through the symbol of the smiling, unarmed lion, as a peaceful city with no aspirations to conquer territory or wage war. The calm seas in the background are filled with galleys in full sail showing Venice's mastery of the seas. These representations of Venice reinforce its vision of being 'la Serenissima' or the serene one.

Section C

The two criteria that have an adverse impact on marks are Criterion 10, 'use of evidence to support an argument and conclusion', and Criterion 12, 'understanding of historical sources'. Full marks can only be awarded to relevant arguments that draw on a range of evidence, preferably both written and visual and that sustain the arguments through to strong conclusions. It then follows that essays which display an assured understanding of the sources used to write history and the difficulties faced when using these sources will be rewarded.

Question 1

Historian Gene Brucker wrote in *Renaissance Florence* 'politics is the combination of private and public interest'. How true is this statement of Medicean predominance in 15th century Florence?

This was the more popular of the two essay topics. The most successful answers addressed the topic in the opening paragraph and used a range of evidence to support a clear and consistent argument. Students must resist the temptation to give a narrative of the rise and fall of the Medici. Many had strong arguments and a good body of knowledge but very little use of primary sources or even secondary sources.

Students could include the techniques used by Cosimo to ensure Medicean predominance such as political exile and confiscation, manipulation of the Balia and Accoppiatori, Council of 100, manipulation of people's sentiments through festivals and pageants, cultivating friendship and marriage ties with influential citizens as well as with *gente nuove* (e.g. Matteo Palmieri and Luca Pitti and Benedetto Dei), use of personal wealth within neighbourhood networks and confraternities to reward supporters, use of civic humanism to promote Republican ideals, avoidance of the appearance of princely control and no overt abuse of personal power. The reputation gained by Cosimo for promoting peace and the prosperity the Medici brought Florence enabled a relatively smooth transition of control from Cosimo to Piero where public authority was once again used 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 on his father's death 'in order to protect our friends and property since it fares ill in Florence with anyone who is rich but does not have a share in government'. Under Lorenzo private interest was more openly placed before public interest. There was a tighter Council of 70 and more overt political decision-making. Under Lorenzo, public display became part of the art of government hence the 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.

Upper range student responses that weaved evidence into the argument were:

Cosimo maintained a façade of popular government whilst laying the foundations for a dynasty. His relatively humble political career (gonfalonier of justice three times and membership of minor committees) combined with the rotation of short terms of office disguised growing Medicean influence. Furthermore the lip service Cosimo paid republican ideals through Donatello's Judith and Holofernes and David showed respect for open constitution whilst stifling it through their location in the Medici courtyard.

or

The Medici through many different means used public interest to secure private prominence. Cosimo returned 'by popular wish' in 1434 from exile and his subsequent exiling of his predecessors, the Albizzi and their supporters is a prime example of this private interest improving public status. The Medici used the private sphere of banking to further enhance their position, by using *gentenuove* to make clients loyal to them and provide public support not through free will but out of obligation.

or

An upper range student response that displays a sophisticated understanding of historical sources:

Lorenzo's patronage of the arts was as much a display of public interest as it was of strengthening Medici dynastic claims. Guicciardini, perhaps the most objective contemporary exclaimed 'the people are amused everyday by shows, festivals and novelties. They were also well fed.' But Cooper further asserts through Lorenzo's apparently regal festivals it was the 'domestication of the Golden Age myth by the Medici in the 15th century' that gave them a 'legitimizing tradition.' In this respect Cooper is correct as Lorenzo's flamboyance and role in foreign affairs was not only a 'matter of political defeat or survival' (Clarke) but also essential in maintaining a peaceful and prosperous Florence.

Question 2

In his biography of Machiavelli, Maurizio Vivoli observes that *The Prince* is the product of Machiavelli's 'studies of ancient history and everything he learned during his years as secretary of the Florentine Republic ...' What circumstances prompted Machiavelli to write *The Prince*? To what extent did his writings truly reflect his political sympathies?

The most successful answers addressed both parts of the topic. Successful answers showed the capacity to balance both components and were informed by the understanding that Machiavelli believed in the principle of *necessita*, both communal and personal. 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. Machiavelli wrote to address Italy's precarious world context and to emphasise the necessity for an appropriate political response. Hale asserts that 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. Guicciardini wrote that '1494 was a most unhappy year' for Italy.

The Italian peninsula, at the end of the fifteenth century was in disarray. Grendler refers to the 'shocking vicissitudes of the period' Martines calls it the 'Italian catastrophe' as a result of the invasion of the French and the Spanish and the internal weakness of a number of Italian states. Weissman writes of the 'hunger, plague and public disorder in Florence'. 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. Machiavelli's *necessita* had a personal dimension. He wrote *The Prince* in an attempt to impress the Medici as potential employers and to allay the impression that his position in the Soderini regime made him a threat. Despite the fact that his political sympathies were Republican, Machiavelli addresses the need for strong leadership in *The Prince* 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 *virtu*. He believed that the political success of leaders arose from 'nothing else except to 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.

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