



2008 History: Renaissance Italy GA 3: Written examination

GENERAL COMMENTS

The quality of responses to the 2008 examination was mixed. There were some students who were very well prepared and wrote fully and accurately, and others who used vague and general material with little use of evidence. Few students left sections blank and most students were able to fully complete all sections.

The effective use of evidence remains an integral component of a high-scoring paper. Some students continued to use unidentified or misattributed quotations. While it is easy to make a mistake in the name of the historian, it is important to be sure of the material's source and not to place single words in quotation marks without linking them to a point made by a primary or secondary source.

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	5	7	7	13	14	18	18	9	7	6.3

This question was generally well done. Most students wrote on Florence or Venice, although some chose Milan, Ferrara or Naples. Strong answers contained a high level of detail, for example, discussion of the development of a trading empire (both land and sea) in Venice, ship building in the Arsenal and the associated industries of the Tana and hemp making, lace making, glass blowing and the printing press. The importance of wool and silk making, and banking in Florence could have been discussed. A discussion of the accounting procedures and the importance of the florin as a means of exchange could also have been included.

Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	2	4	10	6	9	14	12	14	13	9	5	5.6

A number of students found this question difficult as they were less certain of the particular appreciation of Latin texts. The best answers showed knowledge of specific classical writers and philosophers and the importance of their work and ideas. Classical scholarship provided guidance and justification for Italian humanists.

Following is an extract of a fine answer.

Claims that 'the supreme science of governing is rhetoric' reflect most clearly the implications of the rediscovery of classical scholarship for the humanist education program. Owing to the work of authors like Quintilian, republican politicians like Salutati were able to 'bring conviction to different minds' (Vergerio) based on their study of classical precedents. In the same way, the study of the Latin language informed the historical writing of Bruni who had modelled his Panygeric to the City of Florence on the work of Sallust and Livy so that the style of the medieval chroniclers was replaced by state propaganda: justifying the success present as a direct product of past triumphs (Martines)

Section B

Most students dealt with Questions 1 and 2 of Section B very competently.

Question 1

Question 1a.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	6	33	61	1.6

Both of:

- motivated by a desire to protect the safety of neighbouring cities
- had outstanding civil institutions and laws.

2008 Assessment Report



Question 1b.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	0	1	99	2

Both of:

- justice
- freedom.

Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	0	0	2	3	11	26	56	5.3

Students needed to provide six of the following eight points:

- to ensure that there is no one in Florence who stands above the law
- the sovereignty of the state is controlled by a system of checks and balances
- that nine magistracies exist, instead of one
- the term of the magistracies is for two months rather than one year, so as to curb any insolence
- the city is divided into four quarters so that each section can never lack its own representative
- the quarters elect two men who have the approval of the citizens
- the governing of the state is entrusted to one man, outstanding in virtue and authority, chosen in rotation
- these representatives will only live at the Palazzo Vecchio so that they may be in a better position to govern the city.

It is important to recognise that simply identifying the element was not enough in Question 2. In order to receive full marks, there needed to be an explanation of why this element had prevented the Florentine government from falling into the hands of tyrants. So, for example, stating that the city was divided into four quarters was not enough; the student needed to say that this meant that each quarter would have its own representative.

Question 3

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Average
%	3	4	8	8	12	12	13	11	14	8	5.5

This question required students to identify the challenge to the organisation **and** distribution of power **and** the response of the ruling group. While there were some outstanding answers, many students appeared to be expecting a question on Medicean dominance and struggled to adapt their knowledge to the demands of the question. Most students emphasised the challenge to power and glossed over the response of the ruling group.

Better answers explained how, for example, the Pazzi Conspiracy led to a narrowing of the ruling elite and discussed the constitutional changes that Lorenzo made.

The following was a successful example of this approach.

The 1295-97 Ordinances of Justice outlined the political structure of Florence as a 'guild republic' with the eligibility for public office only guaranteed to members of the guilds. The 1378 Ciompi Revolt was motivated by the semi skilled, unguilted worker's desire to have their own guild to represent their interests and to facilitate their inclusion into public life. Taking the Signoria by force the workers installed wool carder Michele di Lando as Gonfalonier of Justice. In the weeks following the revolt three new guilds were created to accompany the already existing 7 major and 14 minor guilds. While the Ciompi government was short lived, upon the taking back of the Signoria, the patricians dissolved the new guilds and historian Najemy argues the event left the ruling classes 'profoundly frightened' by the possibility of the popolo overpowering them again. In response the ruling elite proceeded to tighten its control.'

Section C

Question chosen	None	1	2
%	3	73	25

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	Average
%	4	2	3	4	5	5	5	4	4	3	7	4	5	7	7	9	8	5	5	3	1	10.7

The essay questions asked for an evaluation of the aspects of neighbourhood; many students appeared to find the question too restrictive. Students were expected to provide an analysis of the nature of the social relationships that



existed in the neighbourhood and whether these relationships were cooperative or competitive. Again, this year there were too many essays with no evidence. While some students discussed the cooperative or competitive aspects of the social life of the city as a whole rather than the neighbourhood, others discussed aspects of neighbourhood without evaluating the nature of these relationships. The best essays responded clearly to the question and discussed interactions within neighbourhoods in detail. These essays had a clear argument and analysed a range of primary and secondary sources.

Question 1 – Florence

This question provided students with the opportunity to discuss the cooperative aspects of Florentine neighbourhoods and the advantages the individual could derive from the neighbourhood. Points could have been made about the heterogeneous quality of the neighbourhood and the cooperation that institutions like the parish and the confraternity could bring. This could have been balanced against the struggles that many individuals and families experienced in their competition for political representation and tax relief. A discussion of the desire for advantageous marriage alliances and constructive friendships was important for a successful response. Students could also have commented on the differences between the experience of neighbourhood for the rich and the poor.

The following is a competent introduction to this essay.

Gonfalones in Renaissance Florence can be described as both competitive and cooperative. As Weissman noted ‘personal relationships were perceived to be at the same time competitive encounters...and social encounters’. This meant that social relationships within the gonfalone were entwined with ‘competition and animosity’ and a need to be socially active and have a network of support.

Question 2 – Venice

Some students who attempted this question appeared to have prepared a response to a more general question on social harmony in Venice and struggled to adapt that material. It is important that students do not try to prepare essays for the examination as their answers generally lack the capacity to engage with the particular question using a strong and clear argument. A discussion of the social welfare activities of the parishes and scuole in Venice would have been helpful in evaluating the cooperative aspects of the neighbourhoods within this society and the heterogeneity of these neighbourhoods. The nature of the state-sponsored festivals was one aspect that many students argued was an example of the cooperation between the different groups within this highly ordered society. Denis Romano’s point that Venetian society was ‘rife with conflict, strife and clashing interests’ could have been used with other primary examples of competition like the activities of the Scuole Grande and the regulation of foreign communities.

Following is an example of a high-scoring response.

Petrarch describes Venice as ‘built solidly on a foundation of civic concord’ while Contarini asserts that Venice was free from ‘internal sedition’. Various levels of competition and cooperation, in Venice’s sestieri and some 60 campi provided a moderate level of concord. Romano argues that the canals of Venice ‘demarcated the city’s borders’ and just as the city was broken into 6 sestieri which operated as communities, the central campos and island parishes which were found in these sestieri, in effect, acted as a series of networks within networks. Within these campi various classes were forced to interact and communal activities such as the bridge fights of the Guerre de Pugnì elicited cooperation within various neighbourhoods in mutual competition against others.

Section D

The visual was well known to most students and was used very effectively by many students in their answers.

Question 1

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	2	8	18	28	44	3.1

This question was answered well by the majority of students. It is important to reiterate, however, that merely repeating the aspects of the Myth of Venice was not adequate and that students needed to link these aspects of the Myth to elements of the painting.

The following example provides a model for this sort of link.

The presence of the Doge represents Venice’s belief in its perfect constitution...The Lion of St Mark highlights Venice’s piety as ‘the bosom of Christianity’(Sanudo) as well as representing Venice’s divine dominion and connection with the Evangelist. The sword of justice carried by Venetia emphasizes Venice’s unequivocal justice which was ‘meted out to all’ (Sanudo)

2008 Assessment Report



Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	2	7	14	16	22	22	16	3.8

This question required students to discuss the way the image represented the 'confrontation' between the League and the Republic of Venice. Students who were unable to do this did not score well in this question.

The following response considers a number of these aspects.

Palma depicts Venice on the verge of defeating the League of Cambrai with the bull falling back and the horseman holding up the shield to protect himself. Venice has the divine protection of her patron saint as well as the figures of Venetia, Peace and Abundance fighting with her to depict Venice's virginal and inviolate status.

Question 3

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Average
%	2	5	10	12	10	12	10	13	13	8	5.5

Many students responded to this question in general terms. Good answers needed to discuss the use made of the Myth by the Venetian Patriciate and use a number of primary sources, both visual and literary in their answers. These answers needed to show how the particular examples suggested that Venice was still powerful and triumphant. The discussion could also have included the need to boost the morale of the Venetian people. There were many images that students could have referred to in their answer, and the best responses used a variety not only of paintings but also the accounts of Venetian diarists and panegyrist.

The following extract was part of an excellent response to this question.

Muir argues that the Myth seemed to grow in 'inverse proportion' as the reality of the Myth disintegrated. Art, both allegorical and narrative was produced to compensate for the decline in Venice's power. Many of the Scuole paintings were produced to show Venice as a harmonious state. Gentile Bellini's 'Procession in the Piazza San Marco' portrays displays of civic concord in the ducal procession. The exceptionally pious nature of the state is also endorsed through the symbolic representation of their patron saint, Mark, the winged lion. Carpaccio's 'Lion of Saint Mark' moderates this relationship; the lion's paws both on land and sea is also a suggestion of the wealth acquired through the Maritime and terraferma empires.