2012 Assessment Report

2012   History: Renaissance Italy GA 3: Examination

GENERAL COMMENTS

There were some excellent responses to the 2012 History: Renaissance Italy examination. Some students responded to the questions with a degree of complexity and accuracy that meant they achieved very high scores. However, it was disappointing to see the number of questions that were left unanswered. This shows the need for students to carefully review the *VCE History: Renaissance Italy Study Design* and make sure, prior to the exam, that they know and understand the meanings of terms and the elements of the dot points.

It was good to see that most students had developed effective examination strategies and time management, and were thus able to complete the examination in the time allowed.

Good answers addressed the terms of the question with a clear point and were supported by appropriate material.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

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

This report provides sample answers or an indication of what the answers may have included. Unless otherwise stated, these are not intended to be exemplary or complete responses.

Section A

Question 1

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	7	3	6	10	12	13	15	15	12	6	1	**5.2**

Students needed to discuss the similarities and differences between the two different kinds of political structures. Therefore, a response that simply recited the elements of the different structures was not a complete answer. Most students chose Florence/Venice and Milan. While many students were able to discuss the republican structures of Florence and Venice, very few had a firm idea of the structure of Milan, beyond saying it was an example of despotism with a single ruler. A few students chose to write on Rome/Papal States. It is important to note that there is a difference between the organisation of Rome as the centre of the Catholic Church and Rome as the centre of the political entity of the Papal States. Some students chose the Kingdom of Naples but their answers lacked detail about the political structure of this Kingdom.

Students could have approached this question in a number of ways. It was appropriate to divide the question into paragraphs and analyse the features of each, but this meant there had to be a final paragraph that directly addressed the similarities and differences. Some students chose to compare both city-states point by point. Either of these approaches was appropriate.

The following points could have been made.
- The Signories: a single ruler or rule by a powerful family and their absolute power is supported by military force.
- Signories may have a Council, but this was little more than a rubber stamp. For example, Naples: absolute power of the King; had to work with the Baronial Council, which also supplied military leaders.
- Milan with the Council of 900.
- The political structure of the Republics was based on election and selection of office, from citizen class or nobility.
- Republics were dominated by small councils and magistracies.
- Short terms of office.
- Rotation of offices.
- Regular elections.
- Checks and balances in place to try to prevent despotism.
- Signories could be hereditary, but republics should not be.
- Both had increasingly important bureaucracy (emerging feature of Renaissance government, the emerging public service).

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Following is the beginning of a good answer.

> *In 1295 the Ordinances of Justice created a guild republic in Florence, whereas at this time, in Milan, up to the mid C14th, Milan was considered an hereditary signore, until Gian Galeazzo Visconti purchased the title of Duke from the Holy Roman Emperor in 1395. The Milanese Duchy with the Duke as Head of State and three levels of bureaucracy, the Privy Council, the Chancellery and the Exchequer created by Filippo Maria Visconti, centralised power and concentrated it on the position of the Duke. In contrast to this, the Florentine guild republic which idealised the Roman republic had no permanent head of state and had a series of institutions such as the Tre Maggiore, the Council of the Commune and the Council of the Popolo that distributed legal power more equally…*

Another answer concentrated on the similar nature of the councils of both forms of city-state.

> *Republican states and duchies were both in practice oligarchies, with only 2-5% of citizens holding the right to public office. While duchies did not generally have a formal constitution, republics like Florence did and had various guidelines for governance, like the Ordinances of Justice. Republics were not hereditary while duchies were. Milan, for example, was a hereditary state under the absolute rule of the Visconti, then the Sforza families. In Florence, positions were not hereditary and at most held for only six months and generally selected by lottery. Both, however, had appointed councils and civil servants…*

Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	8	8	12	10	10	9	11	15	8	8	2	4.7

The question required students to discuss two or three problems associated with the use of the term 'Renaissance'. Students who chose to focus on two points needed to include a greater level of detail than students who chose to write on three points. If students chose to discuss three points, they still needed to include a detailed examination of the views of historians.

This question called for a historiographical discussion of the different approaches of historians. Students approached this question in one of two ways. Both approaches needed to be supported by a sustained historiographical discussion.

The first approach was to analyse the problems with Burckhardt's understanding of the term 'Renaissance'. Students should have addressed some of the following (or similar) points.
- not a comprehensive break with the past
- not a comprehensive movement across the Peninsula
- the fact that the movement did not include women

The other approach was to examine the differing ideas of historians as to the nature of this movement – whether it was simply a literary, educational movement or whether it was also a movement that embraced a philosophical change of mind as to the role of man in society. Students should have addressed some of the following (or similar) points.
- no widely held agreement of precise dates for the Renaissance or what the movement entailed
- concerns over the use of historical labels for periods – Medieval, Renaissance, the Dark Ages and other terms
- the problems associated with identifying a period of time, a style of thought, artistic or architectural movement

Following is the beginning of a good answer.

> *A problem associated with the Renaissance is whether it constituted a distinct break from the Middle Ages. Historians like Lynn Thorndike and Charles McIlwain argue that the Renaissance was a 'transition period' and that many aspects of it existed already in the Middle Ages. Thorndike and McIlwain were primarily refuting the contention adopted in 'The Civilisation of the Renaissance in Italy' written by Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt in 1860 in which he argues that there was a break between Middle Ages history and the beginning of modern history.*

The following answer dealt with the spread of the classical culture.

> *The term Renaissance also implies a widespread revival of ancient values and ideas typical of the age. Although this period did display an 'intense almost obsessive emphasis on classical culture' (Ferguson) it is obvious that a large part of the population was totally unaffected (Brown). Thus the majority of occurrences in the Renaissance ignored the lower classes and also women – who did not 'stand on a footing of equality with men' (Burckhardt), but lived in a time which reinforced male supremacy both in the public sphere and in politics' (Brown).*

Another answer made the following point about the term 'Renaissance'.

Brown claims this was not the first revival of classical culture. Hole also contends that the Medieval era 'was a time of immense intellectual achievement' and hardly primitive as Burckhardt thought. Ferguson agrees that the Renaissance was more of a 'transitional era' than a radical rebirth'.

Section B

Question 1

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	2	36	62	**1.6**

Student answers should have addressed some of the following ideas and content. According to Bruni, the strengths of the Florentine Government were

- it was not dominated by the power of a few
- all share the same liberty
- it was governed only by law
- in it, everybody has the same hope of improving his condition
- it aims to achieve liberty and equality for all.

Question 2

Marks	0	1	Average
%	39	61	**0.6**

Cosimo de' Medici claimed

- taxation – the 'bitter cup' – needed to defend liberty
- taxes will be equalled out.

Question 3

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	14	28	58	**1.5**

Student responses should have included the following.

- It is not the ideal form of government, although it may be the best for the north and for the south
- In Florence, where strength and intellect abound, this should not be the form of government, as it will result in tyranny.

Question 4

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	30	11	10	13	8	28	**2.4**

Student responses could have included

- Great Council: rotation of offices and return to sortition
- broadened the group of those who participated in the government to 3000 citizens
- revived the pre-1434 scrutiny lists
- abolition of Medici councils: Cento and the Settanta
- Soderini made Gonfaloniere for life
- social reform.

Question 5

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	9	9	8	7	9	10	10	11	13	9	6	**5.1**

Historiographical discussion was essential for a high score in this question. Students were expected to support their discussion with primary source material. They could have used contemporary accounts of Florentines such as Rinuncini, Marco Parenti, Cavalcanti, Vespasiano, Machiavelli and Guicciardini, and many others, as well as the views of historians concerning this period.

Student responses should have addressed some of the following ideas and content.
- A definition of the values of liberty and equality, even if only implied, in order to show how they were challenged in the Medicean period.
- The Medici constantly subverted the system with constitutional changes and electoral manipulation.
- The Medici all paid lip-service to liberty as it was an ideal that was constantly utilised when citizens felt their rights were being impugned.

In relation to the retention of liberty and equality, it was good to see that students recognised the attempts to maintain the idea of liberty in the Medicean era. It was important for students to argue that despite the Medici trying to maintain the appearance of liberty and equality, their electoral manipulation, constitutional changes and extensive use of patronage was directed to the extension of their own control and dominance, and was an attempt to subvert the liberty and equality of the Florentine republic.

Following is the beginning of an excellent answer.

Cosimo de Medici, in following his father Giovanni di Bicci's advice to not 'draw attention to [him] self', governed Florence from behind the scenes in an unofficial manner. Although the city appeared to have liberty, it is suggested that Cosimo was actually an 'uncrowned prince' (Najemy) and 'king in all but name and state' (Pope Pius 11). Liberty and equality were not important, in fact, during his rule, despite claiming himself to be 'a private man satisfied with the moderate dignity of a private citizen'. Cosimo manipulated the constitution by establishing a 'symbolic relationship (Kaborycha) between himself and the state. His introduction of the 'Cento' in 1458 and his blatant rigging of the electoral system so that his term as Gonfaloniere of Justice coincided with the 1439 Ecumenical Council and Pope Eugenius 1V's arrival strengthened 'his image as Head of State' (Najemy).

Section C

Option chosen	none	1	2
%	1	81	18

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

An acknowledgment of the given quotation was needed to score highly. Both essays required a discussion of social institutions that helped those who were marginalised within these societies by class, wealth or gender to be included within the society itself. It was important to include the nature of these social institutions and how they were able to promote inclusivity, as it was not always in the same way or for the different social groups.

Florence
This question asked about the marginalised groups within Florentine society and what access they had to social institutions. Some students writing on Florence gave generic responses on parenti, amici and vicini; however, the responses were significantly better than those in previous years, with many students also considering the confraternities and festivals. Students needed to go beyond a discussion of political eligibility. A discussion of the guilds, on their own, as a social institution that promoted inclusion was not helpful, and it was important to understand that political exclusion was different to social exclusion. With essays on inclusiveness, it is important to identify the difference between being included in the social map and the social institutions, rather than simply reciting the eligibility requirements for political representation. As the question asked 'to what extent', students could have used the political selection process as a contrast to the inclusiveness of social institutions. The political system was exclusive of the poor and of women, although it was comparatively broadly based, but the social institutions like the parish, the confraternities, festivals and the neighbourhood all, to a certain extent, included those who were disenfranchised. However, the political structure also allowed for the possibility of social mobility, so that while the Guilds were, in essence, exclusive, there was the possibility of the economic success of the popolani, meaning that they were able to join these social institutions that they had previously been denied.

Good essays could have included a discussion of social legislation, the position of women (both respectable women and women who were forced onto the margins of society and became prostitutes) as well as foreign populations, such as the Jews. Essays could also have covered the nature of the Florentine neighbourhoods that allowed for some inclusion of those marginalised groups, and there is evidence of friendship that crossed class lines. The interaction between the Florentine elite as patrons and the artists whose work they commissioned cannot be regarded as evidence of inclusiveness. This was the relationship between a rich man and an employee who essentially worked for him.

The most successful answers acknowledged the complexity of these social institutions. Some students argued that, in Florence, the family was a social institution that was inclusive. They then followed this with a paragraph on women, claiming they were excluded. Some expression of the complexity of these ideas was needed.

Many students pointed to the exclusion of homosexuals, women, prostitutes and the Jews from Florentine society. The most successful answers supported these points with some documentary evidence that was used in support of these claims. For example, there could have been a discussion of the legislation that was used and what it demanded of these groups.

Although students are becoming more aware of the need to support their points with a range of evidence, both primary and secondary, too many students still provided very little evidence to support their claims. Apart from the accounts of contemporary Florentines, students could have cited particular festivals and the participation of particular groups in them. They could also have cited particular pieces of social legislation that were the basis of regulation of certain groups and their exclusion from ordinary social life.

Following is an excellent answer that considered the neighbourhood.

> *The neighbourhood not merely provided support and charity, it allowed inclusion amongst guildsmen and others. Kent writes that in the Red Lion 'the rich and poor, powerful and humble intersected. The wealthy frequently patronised the shops of the local poor, and the poor rented these shops from their neighbours'. In this sense the neighbourhood facilitated interaction and the formation of social bonds…Don Benedetto requested a friend to defend 'one of our peasants' in the podesta courts because in fact the guilty party is Lazzaro Riari's peasant and 'because we try to be neighbourly. I take it badly we are being treated this way'. But not merely integrating the local poor into patronal networks of obligation, the neighbourhood provided women inclusion…'.*

Another high-scoring response included the following.

> *Confraternities numbered over one hundred in Florence by 1450. Primarily locally concerned citizens advancing their local district (Weissman), the membership included 'Renaissance Italians from all walks of life'(Kaborycha). Involved in charitable work, it was a way for rich and poor to work side by side as Lorenzo de Medici himself was a member of several notably that of St Agnes in the Oltrarno. Described by Eckstein as 'more socially heterogenous than any other group' confraternities were an overly inclusive aspect of Florentine society'.*

The following excellent answer included a contrast of the nature of the guilds with the confraternities.

> *Through a variety of social organisations, most Florentines were included in this vibrant society. While some corporate bodies like the guilds 'manifested a preference for substantial citizens of property' (Trexler) the confraternity 'recruited from every level of society save the lowest' (Brucker). In allowing 'humble artisans and great patricians to become Christian brothers together' (Kent), 'Florentines of a variety of occupations and classes, even women, were given a framework within which to develop devotional and social impulses' (Henderson).*

Venice
The most successful essays on Venice used the quotation as an introduction to the social institutions that were a vehicle for inclusiveness in a highly stratified and patriarchal society. The question asked 'to what extent…' and this should have encouraged a discussion of these institutions and the way they allowed those who were excluded from the political structure to be included in other aspects of Venetian life.

The fixed political structure of Venice meant that most people, rich and poor, were not part of the decision-making process, but there were parts of the social map that gave the cittadini an important social position and role. Equally, social institutions such as the neighbourhood in its different forms, parish and scuole gave a voice and a status to those who were not included in the political structure. Venice's attitude to foreigners was complex, and this was an opportunity for students to discuss the contradictions inherent in a policy that allowed foreign populations to settle in Venice and then closely regulated all their activities. A number of examples could have been used for this discussion, including not only their policy towards the Jewish population but also the Germans, Greeks and others.

Students writing on Venice could have also discussed the confraternal life and organisation of the scuole, and how these institutions acted as a mechanism for inclusion for those who were excluded from the political structure, both rich and poor.

Following is a very good answer that included a paragraph on the attempt to include the cittadini in the social institutions of the city.

> *The Serrata of 1297 created rigid social classes in Venice. The Serrata or 'lock up' excluded many families from government except the approximately two hundred who formed the Patriciate, the ruling class of Venice. Every adult male patrician was a member of the Great Council of Venice, 'the foundation of the eternity of this Republic'. However, the Serrata excluded many different groups from society, the women, foreigners and the cittadini. The Venetian Patriciate showed their desire to include the cittadini when in order to placate them for their disenfranchisement; they were given control of the administration of the Scuole. Contarini asserts that they were 'encouraged to exert themselves in the scuole so that they should not think themselves deprived of public authority'.*

The following excellent answer began by noting the difference between the Venetian claims of inclusivity and the reality.

> *Priuli argued that 'the whole world flocked to Venice' and the Venetian state celebrated themselves as the 'one home of liberty, peace and charity for men of good will' (Petrarch) through the presentation of the Myth of Venice. Yet whilst the Venetians aimed to present themselves as an inclusive society, reality was not always congruent with this ideal.(Muir) Through various charitable endeavours, both institutionalised and independent/private, the Venetian government and individuals sought to 'include' and welcome the poor endeavouring to enrich their lives. Similarly certain deviants - prostitutes for instance - were the focus of certain inclusive impulses, as were the abundance of foreigners who resided within Venice.*

Section D

Question 1

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	3	8	21	33	36	2.9

While some students provided excellent answers to this question, other students did not score highly. Some students repeated the same point using slightly different language; for example, identifying wealth and then prosperity, or the lion of St Mark and then piety as separate points. Some students did not appear to know the key aspects of the Myth identified in the study design or in the discussions of historians like David Rosand or Patricia Fortini-Brown. Thus, some students claimed the title of the painting, *The Voluntary Subjugation of the Provinces,* reflected one element of the Myth of Venice, which it did not. Some students used inaccurate expression. However, most students knew the key elements of the Myth and many were able to gain full marks.

Responses could have included
- divinity, divine protection, piety
- wealth associated with Empire
- stability
- liberty
- harmony.

Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	19	14	16	15	14	13	9	2.7

This question asked about the reality of Venetian life in the 16th century but some students ignored this time frame. While the Battle of Zonchio and the Portuguese discoveries were accepted as aspects that countered the Myth, examples of the anti-myth, like the Tiepoline conspiracy, that were clearly outside the designated period were not accepted. High-scoring answers addressed both the reality of Venetian society as well as power. There was some confusion over the battle of Lepanto and Venice's supposed loss of Crete.

The following points could have been included.
- The painting reflects the triumphalism of the Myth, but the reality was that the power of Venice was reduced in the 16th century.
- The painting does not reflect the reality because of the changes to Venice in the first decade of the 16th century.
- The Portuguese threat to Venice's maritime power was part of this reality.
- League of Cambrai, which meant that the subject cities had been lost, but gradually through diplomacy were returned to Venice, largely by 1516.

- The advance of the Ottoman Empire into Venetian territory.
- Venice's retreat into the Myth, which meant the promotion of the Myth in inverse proportion to the reality.
- Political restrictions placed on those who can be members of the Grand Council.

Following is an example of an excellent answer.

The painting is somewhat idealistic. By the C16th Venice had suffered many setbacks in her empire, having suffered progressively, losing more territory like Negroponte, Thessalonika and Modon and Coron to the Turks. However, in her land based terraferma Venice also suffered a humiliating defeat at Agnadello at the hands of the League of Cambrai, nearly losing all her territory but gaining them all back by 1517. Venetian society was not as harmonious as Tintoretto depicted. Due to the Interdict during the League of Cambrai and famines, Venetian society had suffered discord as well as economic setbacks. Venice's relationship was not always so benevolent with her subject territories.

Following is another acceptable approach to answering this question.

Whilst in 1454 Bernado Guistiniani proclaimed Venice to be a 'third sword alongside the Pope and the Holy Roman Emperor' by the C16th the Venetian Empire was contracting. With the League of Cambrai and the Battle of Agnadello 1509, 'Venice lost in a day what it taken them 800 years to conquer' (Machiavelli). Tintoretto displays a Venetian state as consisting of stato da terra, which was only recovered in 1516. However even as Venice did have a mainland empire for most of the 1500s, Tintoretto proposes a harmonious society even as Marin Sanudo proclaimed 'votes are sold for money...may God help this poor republic'.

Question 3

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	13	7	9	8	9	11	10	11	11	9	3	**4.8**

There were some very fine essays written on this question. It was clear that students knew the internal and external factors that challenged the Myth. Many drew on a range of quotes to support their responses. Students are reminded that the accuracy of the source of the quotation is important. The less rigorous responses tended to identify aspects of the Myth in a range of sources, including artworks. Reading the question carefully and responding to it relevantly should be emphasised.

The following points could have been addressed.
- internal political challenges: Tiepoline Conspiracy, Doge Falier, Doge Barbarigo, Doge Foscari
- internal social conditions of the poor that challenged the Myth
- Portuguese discoveries: advance of the Turks, the League of Cambrai
- perceptions by contemporaries: for example, Priuli, Machiavelli, Pius 11, Duke of Milan

External challenges
- trade challenges
- corruption
- social problems (the creation of a much more elite group)

Students should have been able to refer to some events concerning the political threats associated with some of the Doges as well as a range of the written (both foreign and Venetian) documents.

One approach was to start with the social fabric, as the following example demonstrates.

Ferraro writes that Venice had a long tradition of constructing and immortalising the city's history; and the Myth acted as a mechanism of state sponsored propaganda to reconstruct social and political realities. The calli and the campi were full of exotically clad foreigners and immigrants...among them Spanish Jews, Dalmatians and Albanians, such that one remarked 'most of their people are foreigners'. Yet the Jews were segregated in the ghetto after 1516 as an attempt to 'placate God's wrath'.

Other answers, such as the one below, considered the significance of the Council of Ten.

Internally challenges to political power came from the ruling class, challenging the Myth's political stability component. The 1310 Tiepoline Conspiracy demonstrated that the Patriciate was not content or as universally admired or respected as the Myth stated. The subsequent creation of the Council of Ten further goes to show a lack of both political stability or social harmony; the very need for this council demonstrated a need for suppression of dissent and sedition.

The following very good answer began with the reversals of Venice's trading empire.

Up until the C15th Venice had enjoyed a prosperous trading empire. However with the Portuguese discovery of alternative trade routes around the Cape of Good Hope, Venice's wealth and fortunes started to decline, but Edward Muir and Chabod claim that the Myth did not contract along with Venice's fortunes but instead 'grew in inverse proportion' to them…In order to maintain a perception of their city being 'first among all the cities of the world'(Doge Loredan) the Venetian Patriciate commissioned paintings both narrative and allegorical to promote the position and understanding of Venice.