



2011 History: Renaissance Italy GA 3: Written examination

GENERAL COMMENTS

Most students were able to complete the 2011 History: Renaissance Italy examination, although some students did not answer some questions. Students should always attempt a question, even if they are unsure, as there is always the possibility of gaining some marks. While some students found the examination challenging, there were some very good responses. It was good to see that most students had developed effective examination strategies and time management skills and were therefore able to complete the questions on the examination. The most successful students addressed the terms of the question with a clear point and supported their answer with appropriate material.

Some students misused evidence this year. Including a quotation without citing the historian or the primary source is not an accurate use of evidence. Students often used the wrong historian's name; for example, citing Patricia Fortini Brown or Frederick Lane, both historians of Renaissance Venice, as evidence for a point concerning Renaissance Florence. There were also examples of inaccurate figures and statistics. It is important that students try to be as accurate as possible with evidentiary material as poor use of evidence weakens the standard of answers.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

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

Section A

In their Section A answers on the political and economic structures of the Italian Peninsula and the political and economic interactions that occurred between these states, students can fulfil the demands of the question with the use of accurate detail. While the views of historians can add weight to a particular point, there is no need for students to feel they must include them. Irrelevant quotes from historians merely take up space that would be better used for including the details of events, dates and institutions relevant to the question.

Question 1

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	1	2	5	8	10	13	17	15	16	7	6	6

Most answers looked at the relationship between the geography of Venice and economic activity, such as its location on the sea and the development of a maritime empire and the place of the city as an entrepôt between East and West. The detail of the particular items in which the city traded added to the substance of answers. The importance of the ship-building at the Arsenal, which also grew out of its location on the lagoon, was significant. The location of Milan at the base of the Alps and on the Lombardy Plain led to good discussions of the imposition of tariffs on trade. The iron ore mined in this area and the consequent manufacturing industries of weapons, armour and jewellery and the trade in agricultural products were all relevant. Other good answers looked at the development of wool and textiles in Florence from its location on the Arno and how the wealth generated from this manufacturing led to the development of the banking industry. There were also student responses on Naples and the Papal States, which were less successful as the links between geography and economic activity were not sufficient. Students writing on Naples had trouble making connections between the geography and the economy. Some did not seem to understand how the poor soils and isolated valleys helped lead to small-scale subsistence farming. Venice had trade bases in Naples to take advantage of the grain-producing areas. Students were not required to discuss the political reasons for Naples' poverty, but those who had studied Naples and its Court should have known that the Bay of Naples is a magnificent harbour and Naples was not isolated from the rest of Europe.

The following is the beginning of an excellent answer.

Venice's unique geographical location was central to the economic activity that drove the Republic. Located in a lagoon, the primary produce of Venice was fish and salt, made possible only through this geographic location. Glass was also an export of Venice which came from the sand and salt in her lagoon, particularly made at the island of Murano. Venice's geographic location at the head of the Adriatic, with sea access also shaped the possibility of the Venetian Arsenal, which Crowley contended employed up to 80% of the population in some periods.

2011 Assessment Report



Question 2

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

In relation to the ways in which the investment of public and private patrons contributed to the growth and development of art, students should know that the patron commissioned art. Many students did not seem to know the right verb to use in this instance. It was important to make the link between patron and artistic innovation. Some less successful answers merely listed the patron and the artist.

Some points that could have been used in answer to this question included:

- the development of capitalism meant the emergence of a new class of wealthy private patrons
- the growth in portraiture
- the power of the patron in determining the subject and detail of the artwork
- the importance of the interest in classical ideas and motifs that grew out of humanist studies which provided new areas in subject matter
- the power of humanist thought leading to a greater naturalism and realism
- the influence of the civic humanists in their understanding of the use of art and architecture to celebrate the nature of the city
- the competition between corporations like the guilds in Florence in pushing artists to develop different techniques, seen in the statues of Orsanmichele
- the competition between the signorial courts.

In their answers to this question many students attributed, solely, to Cosimo de Medici, the patronage of Brunelleschi for the dome of the Florence cathedral, Santa Maria del Fiore. While Medicean money was certainly important to the Florentine republic during the 15th century, the construction of the dome grew out of a commission of the wool merchants who administered the Opera del Duomo.

The following is an extract from a high-scoring response.

The greater realism and naturalism, as can be seen in Giotto's frescos in the Arena Chapel in Padua, whose figures have 'sculptured mass...Roman solidarity (Graham –Dixon) show the desire of patrons to see art 'imitating nature' (Alberti). Similarly the focus on man and the rise of portraiture is evidence of 'the history of renaissance art reflecting the changing consciousness of the social group at the forefront of urban life' (Martines). Portraits became a 'mark of distinction' (Fortini Brown) and patrons perceived art as a means of gaining prestige.

The following high-scoring answer concentrated on the role of the Guilds in the development of art and architecture.

The investment of both public and private patrons such as the guilds and individuals respectively contributed to the growth and development of Renaissance art and architecture in several ways. During the C15th Florence's Orsanmichele church asked each major guild to commission a sculpture which would represent their guild. An example includes St George which represented the Armourer's Guild; this public patronage not only illustrated the guilds but developed public competition for artists to create the best possible sculpture for public display, therefore developing technique.

Section B

Question 1

Marks	0	1	Average
%	47	53	0.6

Guild membership was the essential condition for election to office.

Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	2	13	85	1.9

Restrictions on who could be elected to office included (two of):

- men already in positions of power; for example, heads of guilds, one of the Good Men
- men who had recently held office
- not an active guild master
- a knight
- two or more from the same guild.

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Question 3

Marks	0	1	Average
%	41	59	

The people placed severe restrictions on magnates because this was a way of splitting the elite and punishing certain families, serving as a warning to others.

Question 4

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	28	5	12	11	15	15	13	

With this question it was important to take note of the date, and unfortunately some students did not do this and discussed changes that occurred within the 15th century, which were not relevant to a question that focused on changes in the 14th century. The most successful students discussed the regime of Walter of Brienne and the Ciompi. With the Ciompi Revolt it was important to specify the establishment of the new guilds and the expansion of the participatory base of electors. The most successful answers provided a detailed discussion of the changes brought about by the Ciompi Revolt.

Students could have chosen to discuss:

- Walter of Brienne – short-term signori. The attempt by the Duke of Athens to win support from the wool workers and lesser guildsmen, but his attempt to end republicanism, and as such to narrow distribution
- Ciompi – short-term gains for the Ciompi (new guild for the unskilled). Immediately following the Ciompi, magnates reinstated two new guilds. Broaden distribution
- 1382 Constitution – tightening of the power of the major guilds. Creation of a clearly defined oligarchy, which led to the narrowing of the distribution of power.

Question 5

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

This question asked students to include both primary and secondary sources as part of the discussion and many students failed to include these. Some of the primary sources used gave little support to the point being made. Some students discussed Cosimo's regime, which was not relevant to this question. Successful answers were able to analyse the changes Lorenzo made to both the organisation and distribution of power in their assessment of whether the guild-based regime survived in form and in substance.

In a 10-mark question such as this it is important that students set out a clear argument.

The following is the beginning of a very good answer.

As Najemy said, much of the success of the Medici was 'their continued operation within the traditional, constitutional framework.' This means that even during the role of Lorenzo, the guild-based republic created in the 1295 Ordinances of Justice was still existent; however it must be argued that it held very little real power. Najemy states that 'by 1471, the Republican constitution was... an empty shell.

The following answer discussed the constitutional means that Lorenzo employed to subvert the republic and then went on to discuss personal and civic patronage.

Lorenzo also used unofficial means to assert his control. Marion Murphy argues that the Medici used 'personal and institutional patronage to achieve and maintain their dominance. Fra Vincenzo Marchese noted that Lorenzo offered many delights to the Florentines, so that they would not realise that their liberty had been taken away from them.

Section C

Question chosen	None	1	2
%	0	71	28

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

In this section students needed to show detailed and comprehensive knowledge of the social structures and social map of Renaissance Florence or Venice. To score well, students needed to demonstrate a sophisticated analysis of the



importance of different aspects of social life in the city they chose to write on. Students had to construct an argument and use both primary and secondary sources in support of this.

Question 1

Florence

This question asked to what extent Florentine social structures were shaped by the desire for a 'good name'. This question called for an examination of the nature of the social structures, and many students used the *gonfalone*, family and marriage in their analysis of how Florentines were affected by this desire for name and reputation. It could be argued that the importance of reputation transcended everything, but it was equally possible to argue that while the desire for a good name was important, there were other equally important elements of the social structures for the individual. Students who established an argument were more likely to achieve high marks. The most successful answers started with social structure itself and then moved on to the effect of these structures on the individual and the family.

It was also important to show how the desire for a good name and reputation prompted the actions and relationships of Florentines. Some students made a valid point in saying that this was important only to those with wealth and position, that for the poor it was not a consideration. But a good approach would have been to show how membership of religious institutions like the confraternities may have been prompted by the desire to appear honourable or pious in the eyes of their fellow Florentines. This would have allowed the student to blend a discussion of a social structure and the confraternity to the desire for a good name. Equally important was the point that for some Florentines, it was not all about a good name but rather about personal piety and a desire to help the poor.

The following is an extract from a mid-range essay. The student attempted to address the terms of the essay question and argued that the structure of civic ritual could be utilised to enhance one's reputation and standing.

Civic ritual provided Florentines means not only to advertise themselves but to establish a sense of belonging which was integral to one's social identity. Historians such as Diana Webb acknowledge how civic ritual allowed leading citizens and rulers to advertise themselves through 'manipulating the cult of saints ...to display both their piety and authority'

The following is an extract from a high-scoring response that explored the complexity of membership of social structures.

However, not all social structures within Florence were shaped by the desire to gain a 'good name'. Weissman notes that charity was a 'deeply felt personal bond, a temporary suspension of class and respite from the richly textured and multifaceted ties of neighbourhood'. Through confraternities Florentines were able to forge relationships which were not primarily motivated by the desire to enhance one's standing in society. Eckstein states that 'being a good Christian and a good citizen were two sides of the same coin' and charitable activity carried out in confraternities and relationships forged within were motivated by the desire to be a good Christian citizen as opposed to enhancing one's standing in society. Mazzei, an artist, refers to Lorenzo as his 'spiritual brother' demonstrating how members from different ranks in society interacted within the confraternity.

The following is an extract from a mid-range essay on Florence that attempted to link the idea of a good name to the pressure to form fruitful marriage alliances.

Florentines were aware of the social prestige one could gain by marrying into a family who had a good name. One example of this was Lorenzo de Medici's marriage to Clarice Orsini. Clarice Orsini was a Roman noblewoman and by marrying someone of high social prestige and standing, Lorenzo was able to appropriate the prestige of this name for himself.

The following is an extract from an excellent response.

Socially, honour was crucial for any Florentine who wanted to claim a virtuous existence and this was only possible if he maintained a good name. Florentines used social structures to ensure honour of themselves through 'loyalty to friends and the maintenance of numerous friendships which brought honour to men'. (Kent) However, incredibly crucial to honour was family honour and so Giovanni Rucellai wrote that if a family member needs help 'one must do whatever one can to help them, even sacrificing one's life for the honour of the family'.

Question 2

Venice

The most successful answers set out an argument in the introduction. Many students struggled to identify 'special interests', but the most successful answers made reference to the way particular Venetian social structures such as the scuole and the parishes were places where the ambition of the *cittadini* for social prominence and the desire to provide for the 'general welfare' could be met. High-scoring responses referred to the way the laws were used to maintain



‘general welfare’ and also made reference to the regulation of foreign groups as a means of protecting the ‘special interests’ of the Venetians.

The following is an extract from an excellent essay on Venice.

Muir contends that the Venetian state, in an act of communal genius, ‘entwined the threads of parochialism, patriotism and the ideal of la vita civile’ to imbue its citizens with a real sense of ‘republican, popular piety’ (Romano). This was achieved through a delicate balance of special interests promoted and protected in the Serrata of 1297 and the special concessions made to the cittadini class with the preservation of a ‘general welfare’ through special legislation. Hence by creating social institutions ‘so outwardly stable, harmonious and just’ (Muir) that the Venetian state was able to repress inherent social tensions and subdue the populace through a combination of strict interventionist policies and altruistically inclusive institutions.

The following is an extract from a response that showed how the use of detail supported the argument the student had established.

The Scuole were a social structure particular to Venice, whose centrality to Venetian social life can be seen by their prominent position in Bellini’s ‘The Miracle of the Bridge of San Lorenzo’. Both within the scuole and through its charitable endeavours social harmony was achieved, while the ‘special interests’ of the cittadini were met. Contarini suggests that the ‘cittadini are encouraged to exert themselves in the scuole to the end that they should not think themselves deprived of political authority’. In this way, by reserving official positions for the cittadini, they were given social prominence.

Section D

Question 1

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	1	9	17	31	42	3

It is generally accepted that the ideas of unique location, liberty, justice, harmony and concord, wealth and piety are the components of the Myth. These are the elements that students should be looking for when being asked to identify elements of the Myth in particular paintings. While students could also discuss the cosmopolitan nature of Venice and its beauty, it is important to be able to discuss these elements.

In this question, it was important to accurately identify which elements of the Myth the de’ Pitati painting reflects. The man-made environment is not an element of the Myth. The Venetians were particularly clever with their architecture and their engineering, but this is not part of the Myth. Saying that Venice is a successful city is also not part of the Myth. These statements are descriptions of Venice, because, for example the wealth of the state and its political and economic power meant it was a successful city, but that is a result of the elements of the Myth rather than part of it.

Another weakness in a number of answers to this question was the repetition of the same point in different words. Students are reminded that two expressions of the same point will only attract one mark.

Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	5	10	15	18	21	15	17	3.5

This question asked how the Venetian Government used the Piazza San Marco to promote unity and maintain control. Most students stated that the Piazza was a central meeting and ritual space where festivals were held and the Venetians of all classes were joined together. The naming of particular festivals such as the Marriage to the Sea celebrated on the Sensa or the Ducal Processions added detail to this point. Some good answers noted that the Piazzetta was the place where public executions took place and these served as a warning to those who might conspire against the State. Some successful answers discussed the order of the processions that worked as a public statement of the control of the patrician government.

Question 3

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	8	7	11	9	10	12	9	11	8	6	8	4.9

It was important to take note of the dates in this question. The question asked for crises that occurred in the 15th and 16th centuries, so discussion of the Falier and Tiepoline conspiracies was not relevant. Students could have discussed the crises associated with the expansion onto the Terraferma and the dogeship of Francesco Foscari; the advance of the Ottoman Empire and the shrinking of Venetian territory; and the loss of the spice monopoly. A discussion of the effect



of the League of Cambrai and the continued losses of income from the Maritime Empire in the 16th century would also have been relevant.

The following is an extract from a very good answer.

As Muir notes, the Myth of Venice seemed to grow 'in inverse proportion' to her actual power'. Venice's decline became clear in 1470 with the loss of Negroponte to the Turks. The Milanese ambassador spoke of the news to Venice. 'The whole city was in such shock that the citizens seemed dead'. Furthermore, in the 1440s Venice's empire and trade monopoly in the Mediterranean was under assault as the Portuguese discovered a sea route to India in 1498-9 and Modone and Corone were lost after a humiliating defeat at Zonchio, 1499. Priuli, a banker spoke of this disaster, 'if the Venetians can no longer make their voyages, they will wither away'. (1499) He also noted the banks were failing, 'the first to fail was the most famous and with the highest credibility...so there was no confidence in the city'. In order to prevent chaos from such lack of confidence and maintain the 'Serenissima the myth went into overdrive.