
AS

HISTORY

Italy and Fascism, c1900–1945

7041/2L The crisis of Liberal Italy and the Rise of Mussolini, c1900–1926

Report on the Examination

7041/2L

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General Comments

Students found this paper accessible and were able to engage with the questions in a meaningful and often thoughtful way. There was more consistency in the approach to Question 1, although there is still a significant and obvious divide between those students who treat the sources as sources and those who see them as extracts, the former being more successful in identifying points of value to the historian. Some very good answers to Question 2 were seen, although Question 3 proved to be the more popular question and on the whole more successfully answered. Even so, many students decided that the question was about the methods of consolidation used by Mussolini to 1926, rather than an assessment of the impact of those methods, thereby losing focus.

Question 1 asks about the value of the given sources in a particular enquiry. The issue of the enquiry, in this case 'support for fascism' must be kept in mind. Some students persist in seeing the sources as extracts, as if, for example, Palamenghi had written his diary in order to give a balanced assessment of the reasons for the rise of Fascism. This means that it is still common to be told that the 'limitations' of a source are the things which the source gets 'wrong', or failed to include. Better answers showed understanding that it was the perception of the diarist that mattered to the historian in explaining the rise of fascism. Stronger answers were also prepared to explain possible reasons for the differences in emphasis or the omissions from the sources, showing a good grasp of provenance in doing so.

As a depth paper it is important that students are prepared to answer across the specification, which contains twelve bullet points at AS. Responses to Question 3 suggest that insufficient attention has been paid to 'the Fascist state by 1926' at this level.

Question 1

The sources proved to be accessible to the students and relatable to the issue of the rise of fascism. Contextual knowledge was evident, for example of 'Vittoria Veneto', the 'mutilated victory', the 'March on Rome' and the rise of socialism. Weaker answers recognised phrases in the sources which were then expanded upon, with little reference back to the issue. Often the balance between source and contextual knowledge in these cases was weak, with too much context and not enough source interrogation. Stronger answers were able to summarise the message that the sources could give to the historian in relation to the issue.

Understanding of provenance seems to be getting stronger but is still variable. Many students felt that source A was not valuable because, as Fascist leaders, they would exaggerate the impact of fascism. Stronger answers recognised that this piece of propaganda was important both for identifying the messages that the fascists put forward, and also the way in which they did this, including the tone of the piece. Source B was sometimes dismissed as being just one person's view, or accepted as representative. Stronger answers used the given provenance, along with their own contextual knowledge, to assess how typical this account might be.

The comparative judgement is an important part of the answer to Question 1 at AS. Either source may be chosen as more valuable as it is the reasoning which shows understanding of the three combined elements of source, context and provenance. It is very encouraging to read so many scripts which are genuinely grappling with the problems thrown up by the sources and developing their arguments accordingly.

Question 02

This was the less popular of the two essay questions. A minority of students had only an outline grasp of Giolitti's problems before 1914 and of the impact of foreign policy. More common was an understanding that the Libyan War caused problems to Giolitti, and it was encouraging to see that these answers were often able to cover aspects of the war itself, along with the economic and political implications. It proved more difficult for students to identify a counter-argument, which was a little surprising, given the almost widespread acclaim which first greeted Giolitti's decision to send the troops to Libya and the importance of colonial acquisition for Italy. Stronger answers were more precise on the implications of the Libyan war, including the loss of Socialist support, the rise of the Nationalists and the extension of the franchise.

Question 03

The establishment of Fascist Italy is a popular topic and most of the territory is familiar to the students. However the focus of this year's question presented a challenge. Many students had good knowledge of the means by which Mussolini consolidated his regime but presented their answer as a comparison of these, for example intimidation and changes to the law. Stronger answers had a focus on the impact of these methods and in particular were able to identify areas where opposition continued, for example assassination attempts or in the underground press. The potential for opposition was also recognised in the case of the Church and the Monarchy, as Mussolini had not gained full control.

There was a widespread understanding of the means by which Mussolini gained political control, and also good knowledge of his struggles to control the fascist party itself. For many 'conciliation' was seen as successful repression of opposition, which made it more difficult to achieve a balanced answer as it led to an over-simplified assessment of Mussolini's achievements by 1926.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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