
A-level

History

7042/2L Italy and Fascism, c1900-1945
Report on the Examination

7042/2L
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General Comments

Once again the students were knowledgeable and thoughtful in tackling the issues raised in this specification. There was evidence of a more uniform and focussed approach to the primary sources although a lack of contextual background on 'The Crisis of Liberal Italy c1900-1915' made it difficult for some students to offer a balanced assessment of the sources. There was much more confidence in the context for each of the essay questions, for which the majority of students demonstrated a range of knowledge. They differed in the degree to which they were able to focus on the specific question asked, both in range and conceptual understanding.

It should be repeated this year that, whilst the sources in question 1 may share common features, being related to a single topic, it is not a requirement of the examination at this level to make direct comparisons between them, in the sense of 'source A is more valuable than source B because...'. Each source is to be treated separately and analysed for what it might contribute to the study in question, in this case 'Italy in the early years of the 20th century'. Students have understood the need to consider both the provenance and the content of the source. The more successful answers understand that these two elements need to be assessed in conjunction with each other rather than separately.

The demands of the essay question are understood, although there is a noticeable minority who overlook the conceptual focus of the question. The questions are targeted at different concepts detailed in AO2. For example the principle focus of question 4 was the consequences of the Abyssinian invasion. A small number of students read the question as 'the disasters faced by Italy and Mussolini in 1940 were caused by the Abyssinian invasion of 1935'. This led to a focus on causation and so a more unbalanced assessment of the issue. Similarly in question 3, a smaller minority of students took the creation of 'a nation of fascists' as a given and described different factors which had led to this, thereby giving a weaker assessment of the impact of social policy.

Question 1

The sources chosen reflected different aspects of the first section of the specification, including the legacy of unification, class divisions, the political system, new political movements and colonial ambitions in Libya. Most students were able to show some understanding of the content of the sources and to link that to the context. For example the reference to the lack of a national language, class division and weak government mentioned in source A. The context around sources B and C tended to be weaker. Information about poverty in the south was accepted as context for B, but did reveal a general simplification of the issues of poverty and class division to one of the 'north-south divide'. The reference to 'a country gentry' in line 8 was frequently misunderstood, so assumptions that it referred to the ruling elite and the country more generally were accepted. The experience of landless labourers in the north and the rise of the agrari was less well known. Students found it more difficult to assess source C without the context of the Libyan war.

Students also showed an awareness of the different viewpoints, taking information from the source attribution. At one level there was a recognition that a source might be critical, for example source A. Better answers used that awareness to challenge the source content, using their context. For example to challenge the opinion of Corradini that the government was 'tiny and timid'. Stronger answers were also able to comment on omissions from the source content with reference to the provenance. For example that Pascoli overlooked the continuing divisions in Italy, the conscription

of soldiers and the political disagreements caused by the Libyan War because he had a specific patriotic purpose.

Students were often able to show a developed understanding of provenance with reference to source B. There were some very thoughtful responses on the circumstances in which Mussolini's autobiography was written and the purpose he intended for it. There was an eagerness to dismiss the source as unreliable propaganda, but more considered assessments reflected on the first hand observations of a child, supported by the contextual background of Mussolini's upbringing, socialism and the plight of the landless labourers in the agricultural north. Answers identified the value of source A as giving us a nationalist viewpoint; stronger answers went on to say what the source revealed about nationalist views, for example the importance of strong government and conquest in developing unity. These views are also reflected in source C.

The most successful responses to question 1 were those which had a secure contextual framework, had read the sources carefully and were able to explain the strengths and weaknesses of that particular viewpoint on the issue. Having identified weaknesses in the sources they were still able to give some indication of how the historian might use the source. Such answers had a balance in the weight of their answer between the source and the context, and used context to comment on both provenance and the source content.

Question 2

This was a popular question and students were able to show a good deal of knowledge about the political developments in Italy after the First World War. There was a good understanding of the impact of the war, the rise of socialism, the weakness of the Liberal government and the role of the King. The notion of the Fascists offering a 'strong government' brought out a range of valid and interesting responses. A common starting point was that the Fascists were strong in comparison to the Liberals, and they were strong in dealing with the socialist threat. This led to some useful inter-linking of the factors. It was also valid to evaluate the strength of fascism at this time, for example by reference to their small parliamentary representation.

The more successful answers responded to the specific focus of Mussolini becoming Prime Minister in 1922, rather than a more general survey of the rise or appeal of fascism. Such answers were able to show good understanding of the events surrounding the 'March on Rome' and the reasons why the king was prepared to offer Mussolini the post of Prime Minister. Weaker answers were excessively descriptive, without making convincing links to the specific issue, and often started the narrative at too distant a time, sometimes before 1914.

Question 3

Fascist social policy is a well-known topic and this was the most successfully answered question, with many students offering an array of evidence on policies aimed at the youth, adult workers and women. There was also relevant material on propaganda and relations with the Catholic Church. Some students explicitly commented on the continuing use of repression as an evaluative tool, which was legitimate and showed good understanding. The use of examples from economic or foreign policy were off focus, unless aspects of the economic policy, for example corporatism, were explicitly linked back to their social effects.

The more successful answers often had a clear definition of what a 'nation of fascists' might look like and used this as a criteria with which to judge Mussolini's success, assessing change and continuity. At one level the essays contained a barrage of information about involvement, outcomes which were presented as two matching opposites, usually concluding that social policy was not successful, or that some aspects were and others were not. Better answers made an attempt to explain why a policy did or did not have an impact, or explained the internal contradictions within the measures, such as the restrictions on the roles of women and policy towards the Church. It was generally concluded that overall social policy was a failure and that the Second World War proved this. Good use was made of the radicalisation of the late 1930s as evidence of lack of support for fascism. The strongest answers made some attempt to explain what Mussolini had actually achieved, balancing the successes and failures of individual policies and giving an overview.

Question 4

This was the least popular essay question and the least successfully answered. However, some very good answers were seen which showed understanding of the short term success and longer term failures of this change in foreign policy. There was understanding of the propaganda benefits, the economic effects and the impact on Mussolini's self-belief, the damage to relations with Britain and France in the international sphere and the movement to a closer relationship with Germany. Supported judgements on the question included the recognition that it was perhaps the war itself that was disastrous and that up to 1940 Mussolini still had to make choices which would determine his fate. Weaker answers which showed balance were either less precise in their use of evidence or focussed on the short term effects only, failing to use the time scale in the question.

Some students offered an unbalanced assessment which recognised only the problems caused by the invasion. Additionally, these negative consequences were sometimes seen only in the short term or in a narrow range, for example economic. There was some loss of focus in answers which described other disasters for Mussolini's foreign policy, without making any links back to 1935. There was also a tendency to overplay the economic problems arising from the invasion and to use exaggerated and assertive argument to support the idea of a 'disaster'.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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