



A Level

History

7042/2L Italy and Fascism, c1900-1945

Report on the examination

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General comments

The paper produced a wide variety of responses, both in the quality and depth of the contextual information deployed, and the understanding of the requirements of the questions.

Approaches to the sources in Q01 continue to develop. This year the sources on ‘support for Fascism in Italy in c1930’ were largely understood and gave contrasting provenances which led to perceptive evaluation. The contextual background in which these sources sat was extensive and most students did not have difficulty in finding context they could deploy to support and/or challenge the content of the sources. Knowledge of the Lateran Treaty, the ONB, the OND, education in Fascist Italy, the role of OVRA, the management of elections and the importance of propaganda were well known and often deployed. Stronger answers were able to identify arguments in the sources which they were able to both support and challenge from context, which led to balance in evaluation.

The assessment objective to evaluate source material requires the use of provenance to provide a judgement on the strengths and weaknesses of the sources for the issue in question. All students were able to make some comment on the provenance, using the attributions given, but the more successful answers developed these comments and linked them to the content of the sources. This could be described as the use of provenance, rather than merely the description of relevant aspects of provenance. It was not uncommon in less successful answers for students to describe a source as ‘objective and therefore valuable’, despite having used context to criticise arguments made within the source.

The essay questions this year were at times variously interpreted, particularly Q03. Where the variance was a valid response to the issue this was credited, although the focus of the issue, including the dates mentioned in the question title, need to be observed. Q04 was the most securely understood, with the stem ‘to what extent’ allowing for a wide range of responses explicitly commenting on the reasons for Italy’s failures.

Question 01

The sources defined the issue, as they all dated from Italy circa 1930, and this coincides with a period when the Fascist regime appeared to be successful and widely supported. A wide range of content was deployed, and this was credited if it supported the points made in the source. The order in which the students deal with the three aspects of this question (source content, context and provenance) varies but it is important that the three elements are brought together in the judgement and not treated separately.

Source A was an accessible opening source and successful in assessment. The arguments made, that the Lateran Treaty had influenced the support for Fascism, and that Fascism was uniting the nation, were recognised and subject to scrutiny from contextual knowledge. The more successful answers recognised that there was a superficiality to some of the comments

made by Cicely Hamilton, which she partly acknowledges herself. Good understanding of the provenance enabled these answers to link the authorship to the judgements made, thereby giving a balanced response. Such answers accessed Levels 4 and 5. Less successful answers tended to either only support the source, or sometimes challenge it, and failed to comment meaningfully on the provenance to reinforce these comments. Students should be encouraged to do more than rewrite the provenance given in the exam paper, and should avoid 'stock' evaluations of provenance, such as that 'journalists make up stories to sensationalise'. More perceptive students could see that, although the source was written and published in Britain, it was very possible that the author had been influenced by Fascist propaganda.

Source B proved to be the most challenging source of the three. The provenance called for a little more reflection. Less successful answers assumed that Gentile, being a Fascist, would be 'biased'. Often this was not further elaborated on, but sometimes it was assumed that Gentile would favour the Fascists, would not be critical, and would exaggerate the levels of support. The source content suggests the opposite. More successful responses recognised that this was a statement from the heart of the regime, recognising the limits of Fascist support. It was argued that Gentile's view of what constituted support for Fascism was extreme. There was good understanding across many answers that Italians supported Fascism for a variety of reasons, and context from later in the 1930s was also deployed to show that Gentile was not successful in instilling 'iron military discipline'.

Source C provoked interesting and varied responses. As in the other sources, those who made their mind up rather too quickly about the source provenance were the less successful. For example, deciding that Lajolo became a Partisan and so would be against the Fascists and therefore unreliable. Knowledge of education in Fascist Italy is secure, and the role of teachers in promulgating Fascist ideas well understood. More successful answers interrogated the source more thoroughly, recognising that the influence of Fascism was felt throughout society, and that there appeared to be no effective opposition which could reach Lajolo. Successful answers also commented thoughtfully on the tone of the piece, reflecting on the feelings of the writer when looking back, and found the descriptions of life in Northern Italy to be authentic, even remorseful. Provenance was successfully used to comment on the temporary nature of Fascist support, and on the possibility that the North of Italy was not necessarily representative, with supporting context.

Question 02

The focus of this question was the consequences of the Libyan war on Italy in the years 1911 to 1914. The contention that the war weakened Italy was widely understood, but there was some variance in the focus of the counterarguments deployed. The most successful were able to explain a trail of consequences arising from the war, which encompassed economic problems and political stability, including the rise of the Nationalists and the challenge of the Socialist party. Balanced comment on this included the recognition that Italy had achieved a colony and that, in the short-term at least, the war was widely supported. There is a concentration of focus on the weaknesses of Italy in the years to 1914. An alternate counterargument was offered that the weaknesses of 1911-1914 were wider than the Libyan war. These responses were credited if they maintained the focus on the period. Less successful answers gave a more general commentary on the problems of Italy before the First

World War. More successful answers showed understanding of a wide range of consequences of the war, including its international impact and effect on the decision of Italy not to intervene in the First World War in 1914.

Question 03

The focus of the question was the appointment of Mussolini as prime minister. The question referred specifically to the year 1922. Whilst there were long term reasons for the rise of Fascism, it was not inevitable that Mussolini would become prime minister in 1922, and the strongest answers showed a depth of knowledge about the circumstances which had made Mussolini an acceptable candidate for the King, including the March on Rome. Context from earlier years could be used to illustrate the issues but, to be rewarded as specific and precise support, such knowledge needed to be explicitly linked to the situation in 1922. Answers which showed an awareness of the issues, but drew on context from more distant periods, for example with detailed description of the impact of the First World War, tended to be less successful. Most students were able to balance the strength of the Fascists with the weaknesses of the opposition. Many saw the opposition as including the King as well as the Liberals, which produced a good focus. Stronger answers saw the role that the Socialists inadvertently played in helping the Fascists to consolidate their relationship with the elites in 1922. The significance of Mussolini's renunciation of republicanism in 1922 is not widely known.

Question 04

The focus of the question was Italy's war effort. This was the most popular question. The more successful answers maintained an analytical approach across a range of factors. Knowledge of Italy's military unpreparedness is well understood, as is the inadequacy of Italy's military command. Less successful answers made limited reference to the campaigns of 1940-1943. They also produced a more generalised narrative showing awareness of issues but not secure context. A less sophisticated response was to describe the strengths of the allies, or to describe excessively the foreign policy of the 1930s which had left Italy relatively weak. There is some misconception that Mussolini had no choice other than to enter the war after signing the Pact of Steel. More successful responses showed very precise knowledge of a range of factors and were able to argue the relative responsibility of Mussolini for the ultimate failure of Italy's war effort.

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