



A-LEVEL HISTORY

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

7042/2L
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General Comments

There was an increase in the entries for this component and students showed motivation and commitment in producing essays with thought and insight. Answers were of considerable length on many occasions. Sometimes, especially with the source question, this can be counter-productive. There is still evidence that students do not always plan their time appropriately. There were more rubric errors than previously seen and students who opt to do the essays first should be warned of the significant consequences of missing out one of the sources if they run out of time. It is a requirement of the compulsory question to address all three sources.

Identifying the specific requirements of a question is always the key to success. With regard to the essays the students should note particularly the main factor or issue highlighted and the time period specified, as well as the focus of the question. The time period of 1933 to 1938 caused some challenges in question 3, as well as the need to focus on Europe. The factor of ‘the appeal of Fascist ideology’ was related causally to the ‘successful establishment of the Fascist state’ in the years 1922-29. Material offered using social policy as examples of ideology was credited if it was linked to the question and the time period. Assessments of the success of social policy were not required.

The sources were chosen to reflect a mainstream issue in the specification and to give a variety of views, which it was hoped would encourage the students to interrogate the sources. Many students are still dealing with the provenance as a separate category, almost with no reference to the content of the source. It is not uncommon to see speculative challenges to the source, for example ‘this will be biased’, with no identification from the content of the source where the bias lies. Indeed, the content is often found to be ‘valuable’ because it can be corroborated with other known knowledge. Students should be encouraged to use their contextual knowledge to both support and challenge the content of the sources, where possible. Stronger answers recognise that there is more to a source than information alone, and make good use of contextual knowledge around both the provenance and the content to identify, for example, the purpose of the author.

Question 1

The source selection reflected the issue in the specification ‘Caporetto; the impact of war and defeat on the Home Front’. The sources were understood by the students, with source B perhaps being the trickier because of its predictive nature. Source A captured the imagination of the students, although some went into great length to explain the imagery and construction. A very common response was to agree with Soffici that the soldiers were the victims, with some context about their peasant background and war experience, and also that the government was responsible, with the context of *trasformismo*, and the changes of government. It was also common to recognise that Soffici might be biased because he was a soldier – he would not blame the soldiers, or because he was a Nationalist – he would be against the government. However, a weakness of these answers was that this analysis often went no further. The source was not challenged and the possible purposes of Soffici in writing, and publishing, were not considered. Therefore, the assessment of value remained rather one-sided. Good and very good answers identified a possible motivation behind the source and related this to the value of the source. It showed the impact of Caporetto on the criticism of the government in the years to come, a theme that was central to source B.

Many students were able to make a link between Source B and the rise in radical politics in 1919. Weaker answers thought that Mussolini was already a Fascist, stronger answers knew that he was in a process of transition and good answers recognised that the elements of Fascist movement might be evident in the phrase 'class and nation'. It was more common for the word 'class' to be prominent in the students' minds which led to comments on the rise of socialism, which was relevant. Weaker answers commented generally on newspapers as sources for historians, or took the source literally in terms of the conditions at the front. Students with a stronger contextual understanding related the experience of the soldiers in the trenches to their eventual support for the Fascist squads. Again, the successful identification of the purpose of the author, which involved a combination of provenance, content and context, usually made for a very effective assessment of the value of the source.

Source C was accessible. Students knew who Giolitti was and could understand what he was arguing. There were some general and rather unhelpful comments on 'memoirs' as a source. It should be emphasised that the attribution is given to be read alongside the content of the source. Better answers pointed out their lack of surprise that Giolitti thought everything got better after he returned, and argued that the piece was a one of self-promotion. There was knowledge about the changes made in the last year of the war and of the debate about the significance of the victory at Vittorio Veneto. Many knew about this victory and offered this as evidence that the source was valuable. There were very strong answers which commented on the significance of the publication being in 1923, at a time when they knew that Giolitti was supporting Mussolini. Those with less secure context thought Giolitti might have been subject to Fascist censorship.

All students respond to the source question at length. The best answers recognise that this question is also about their historical knowledge. Historical context should be used to assess the provenance as well as the content of the source, for example by identifying the purpose of the source. The stronger answers link the assessment of provenance to the content, for example by locating bias in the actual text. Stronger answers use contextual knowledge to both support and challenge the sources, where appropriate.

Question 2

This was the most popular question. The establishment of the regime is a popular topic and this question gave the students the opportunity to reflect on the period from the March on Rome to the Lateran Treaty and the election of 1929. The key to a successful answer was the identification of the appeal of Fascist ideology and the linking of that to significant groups or events. Students showed good knowledge of nationalism and Mussolini's promise to make Italy a great nation, which they linked to the early foreign policy successes. They were also confident on the Cult of the Duce and the importance of the relationship with the Catholic Church. There was also a good understanding that Fascist ideology was a flexible thing. Issues such as anti-Socialism and Corporatism were used as alternate factors in the main, violence for the former, and defeat of the opposition, trade unions, for the latter.

It was commonly argued that Mussolini made allies with big business by cutting taxes, but references to de Stefani tended to overlook the fact that he was not a Fascist and was not following 'Fascist' economic policies. Credit was given to references to OND and ONB where they could argue that it had an impact on the regime in the 1920s, though in such responses the time frame began to be lost. The stronger answers identified the change to be explained, showing clear knowledge of the situation in 1922 and 1929, and handled the main factor and at least one alternate factor with analysis and precise support. Weaker answers were drawn into narrative

accounts, particularly of Fascist violence. There is good knowledge of the legal changes that were ultimately made. The view persists that Mussolini himself ‘passed the Acerbo Law’, some seeing this, mistakenly, as the use of decree powers.

Question 3

The question gave students the opportunity to write about Mussolini’s foreign policy aims, his role as a ‘statesman’ and the early part of the ‘slide towards war’ (to 1938). Most students understood what this question was looking for and were able to offer some balance. The weaker answers were characterised by lack of detail, a vagueness about the time period, and a lack of focus on Europe. Abyssinia proved to be an irresistible temptation to many, who adapted the question to one of ‘commitment to peace’. However, there were many very good responses that used Abyssinia as a turning point in their answer and successfully explained how it impacted directly on Mussolini’s attitudes and actions in Europe.

There was some evidence of a limited understanding of Mussolini’s role at the Munich Conference, which potentially could be used on either side of the argument in this essay. Common errors were bringing the Pact of Steel and the invasion of Albania forward by a year. The strongest answers showed their understanding with a clear overview of Mussolini’s aims and intentions. Various interpretations were presented, including one of periodisation; that everything changed after Abyssinia. Another argument was for underlying consistency of aim, that Mussolini was pursuing Italy’s best interests in changing circumstances.

Question 4

This question focused on the final collapse of Fascism in the years 1943 to 1945 and put forward the ‘weaknesses of Salò’ as the given factor. Students had to be able to offer some view and support on the weaknesses of Salò, as merely dismissing it as not important did not convince. A number of very strong answers were seen and this question received the highest percentage of Level 5 marks. Most students were aware that Salò was essentially a puppet state of the Germany, and of its geographical limitations and loss of support. Stronger answers were also aware of the radical policies Mussolini introduced, his loss of key personnel and his poor health. It was argued that where the Fascists had some strength, in the Black Brigades, their brutality caused more opposition.

The argument was balanced, most commonly, with the role of the partisans in the Italian civil war, the advance of the allies and the collapse of the German war effort. Good answers also commented on the position of Italy in 1943 and how Mussolini’s position was weakened by the actions of the Fascist Grand Council after the fall of Sicily. It was relevant to comment on Italy’s war effort to explain this situation, but answers which went back into the 1930s, in seeking the explanation for the final collapse of Fascism were losing focus. A good argument made was that the execution of Mussolini and the circumstances of his public humiliation showed how the failure of Salò finally destroyed the last vestiges of the Mussolini cult.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.