Oxford Cambridge and RSA

Thursday 23 May 2024 – Morning

A Level History A

Y309/01 The Ascendancy of the Ottoman Empire 1453–1606

Time allowed: 2 hours 30 minutes

You must have:
- the OCR 12-page Answer Booklet

INSTRUCTIONS
- Use black ink.
- Write your answer to each question in the Answer Booklet. The question numbers must be clearly shown.
- Fill in the boxes on the front of the Answer Booklet.
- Answer the question in Section A and **any two** questions in Section B.

INFORMATION
- The total mark for this paper is **80**.
- The marks for each question are shown in brackets **[ ]**.
- Quality of extended response will be assessed in questions marked with an asterisk (*).
- This document has **4** pages.

ADVICE
- Read each question carefully before you start your answer.

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SECTION A

Read the **two** passages and answer Question 1.

1 Evaluate the interpretations in **both** of the two passages.

Explain which you think is more convincing as an explanation of the impact of the fall of Constantinople in 1453. **[30]**

Passage A

In the West the fall of Constantinople changed nothing and everything. To those close to the events, it was clear that the city was undefendable. As an isolated enclave its capture was ultimately inevitable. If Constantine had managed to stave off the Ottoman siege, it would only have been a matter of time before another assault succeeded. For those who care to look, the fall of Constantinople was largely the symbolic recognition of an established fact: that the Ottomans were a world power, firmly established in Europe. Few were that close. Even the Venetians, with their spies and their endless flow of diplomatic information back to the Senate, were largely unaware of the military capabilities available to Mehmed II (Mehmet). They had not understood the power of the guns or the determination and resourcefulness of Mehmed II (Mehmet) himself. What the capture of the city underlined was the extent to which the balance of power had already shifted in the Mediterranean – and clarified the threat to a host of Christian interests and nations that Constantinople, as a buffer zone, had encouraged them to ignore.

Throughout the Christian world the consequences were religious, military, economic and psychological. At once the terrible image of Mehmed II (Mehmet) and his ambitions were drawn into sharp focus for the Greeks, the Venetians, the Genoese, the Pope in Rome, the Hungarians, the Wallachians and all the peoples of the Balkans. Step-by-step the very incarnation of the Antichrist seemed to be moving inexorably against the Christian world.

R. Crowley, Constantinople: The Last Great Siege, 1453, published in 2006.

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Passage B

The result of the fall of Constantinople was the redrawing of the world maps in the minds of men. The fall of that great imperial city contributed to a movement that was already taking place in Europe, the Renaissance.

Older books used to claim that Greek-speaking scholars, writers, and intellectuals had fled Constantinople as it fell, taking with them ancient classical texts, and that these texts fired the Renaissance. Actually, the picture is more complicated. Intellectuals had been leaving Constantinople long before 1453. They'd been transferring texts and their personal knowledge for a long time. The texts that Byzantine scholars brought with them to the West didn't cause the Renaissance. What their Greek texts did was to feed the second wave of Renaissance activity, which was based on the rediscovery of Greek texts. Most important of all was that the Greek scholars who arrived in the West taught the Greek language to the Italian humanists and enriched their understanding.

Further, the fall of Constantinople presented a geographic problem for Europeans. Trade routes with the Orient, which had run through the Byzantine Empire, were now in the hands of the Ottoman Turks. These routes were not entirely closed, because trade continued, in part helped by the merchants of Venice and Genoa trading with the Turks. But the desire of Europeans to outflank the Turks and to find alternative routes for the trade would spur European voyages of discovery, including the voyage which led Columbus to what was for him a new world.

This drive to outflank the Turks also had a strategic and religious dimension, which recalled the Crusades. The key geopolitical location of earlier authority, Constantinople, had been lost.

V. G. Liulevicius, The fall of Constantinople: A Turning point in Modern History, published in 2020.

SECTION B

Answer any **two** questions.

2* ‘The power of the Sultans was at its greatest during the reign of Suleiman the Magnificent (1520–66).’

How far do you agree? **[25]**

3* To what extent did the Ottomans establish a meritocratic society in their vassal states during the period from 1453 to 1606? **[25]**

4* ‘The failure of the siege of Vienna was the greatest success for European rulers in resisting Ottoman expansion in the period from 1453 to 1606.’

How far do you agree? **[25]**

END OF QUESTION PAPER

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