

A LEVEL

Examiners' report

CLASSICAL CIVILISATION

H408

For first teaching in 2017

H408/23 Summer 2023 series

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Introduction

Our examiners' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates.

The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. A selection of candidate answers is also provided. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

Where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report.

A full copy of the question paper and the mark scheme can be downloaded from OCR.

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Paper 23 series overview

The paper is one of the four options in the 'Culture and the Arts' Component Group and covers the issues surrounding the Persian Wars which gave rise to the concept of the 'barbarian' in the Greek mind. It offers a mixture of low tariff AO1 questions, alongside longer responses which require skills to be demonstrated in both AO1 and AO2.

A minority of candidates might have been wrong-footed on this year's paper as in many questions they were required to deploy considerable levels of knowledge and understanding of Persia itself, rather than simply Greek views of Persia. Some candidates attempted to give a response to questions on Persia using knowledge of the invasion of Greece alone.

The 1 mark questions were handled reasonably well, and most candidates were able to recall the necessary details. However, some of the longer questions required the use of the visual sources as a body of evidence in order to succeed on the paper. It was evident that the majority of candidates were not so well equipped for this. It was pleasing, then, when examiners found that the minority had prepared themselves well on the full extent of evidence on Persia. The result was some excellently exemplified responses. Where the main focus of questions was literary evidence, the responses tended to be more securely completed.

The usual issues with essays continued to be on show. Candidates who did well were able to give a broad range of AO1 responses to support their points, and marshalled these to build a convincing argument in AO2. However, there were many candidates who offered just a single piece of evidence per paragraph for their AO1. As noted last year, the majority of candidates seem to believe that a summary of all that they know is sufficient as a response to the question. As a result, they tended to miss the essence of the AO2 response. It is helpful for candidates to be reminded that a clear line of reasoning is the hallmark of Levels 4 and 5 in AO2.

The majority of candidates spent a considerable amount of time learning the names of scholars, as well as a range of key quotes. Examiners were looking for candidates to analyse these critically. Candidates did not use this knowledge in such a way. Candidates needed to take the next step and express a clear view about scholars or their opinions. This is likely to be demonstrated when a candidate explains why the view of a scholar is correct or helpful, perhaps linked to a piece of AO1 knowledge of the candidate's choice.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • displayed good knowledge of both visual and written sources from the specification • used the source stimulus as the basis of their response in Questions 5 and 7. • took heed of the command phrases in the longer questions: 'how effectively' and 'how far you agree' • had learnt and then deployed some key quotes from Herodotus and Aeschylus. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • had a very limited range of knowledge • responding to Question 8, candidates discussed the invasion of Greece rather than life in Persia • responding to Question 9, candidates tended to list what Herodotus and Aeschylus said rather than compare them • responding to Question 10, candidates listed binary oppositions rather than analyse their importance • scholars were scattered throughout essays, but were not analysed.

Section A overview

Levels of knowledge in Section A were good. The majority of candidates scored highly on the 1 mark questions, although some candidates thought that Salamis was the response to Question 6. It was good to see that most realised that there is no need to go beyond a single word/phrase to respond to the questions worth 1 mark. This meant that candidates were left with more time for the longer response questions later.

The questions worth 10 marks were handled well, and it was encouraging to see candidates focus their responses on the source material that they had been given. Less detailed responses to the 10 mark questions were usually characterised by candidates who settled for making only a couple of points in response to the question.

Question 5

- 5 Explain how **Source A** adds to our understanding of how Darius became ruler of the Persian empire. [10]

The key to responding to this question was a careful reading of what was being asked. Candidates who gained the most marks took care to focus their response on **how** Darius became ruler, with a corresponding exploration of his rise to power. What was needed was a sense of Darius' actions to overthrow Gaumata and the other rebels, alongside an understanding of his claim to the throne/the legitimacy that he claimed. By identifying these points from within Source A, candidates were also able to demonstrate a sound grip on AO1. Candidates who gained fewer marks tended to simply describe Darius' leadership of Persia, make general comments about 'propaganda' and lacked any specific reference to the source. Examiners often found themselves reading less detailed responses that addressed the question 'how did Darius rule Persia?'

Question 7

- 7 Assess how far Darius' speech in **Source B** explains the reasons for the failure of the Persian invasion of Greece. [10]

The best responses treated this as a source based task. As can be seen in the mark scheme, there are a range of points that can be drawn out of the source. The best candidates were careful to make sure that they utilised a small quote from the extract and explained it in terms of the reasons for Persian failure. It is perfectly acceptable either to bring in a point of AO1 first and then explain it in terms of AO2, or make the AO2 point first and then illustrate it with AO1. The better responses deployed a number of points, meeting the mark scheme's requirement for 'a range of well-selected' material. When these points were linked to Darius' explanation for Persian defeat, it was easy for examiners to credit in Level 4 or 5.

Some candidates discussed what we cannot learn from the source, such as the tactics of the Greeks or Themistocles' deception. As the question is passage-based this was not necessary to score highly, but those candidates who did this were given credit. It should be remembered, however, that this question primarily requires strong evaluation of the passage as a source.

Question 8*

8* Explain how effectively Persian kings demonstrated their power to their subjects.

You may use **Source(s) A and/or B** as a starting point in your answer.

[20]

This question offered the opportunity for candidates to discuss Persian power from a number of perspectives. The best candidates considered the nature of royal power projection through buildings and objects, administrative organisation and military strength. Most candidates recognised that the question was about the demonstration of power to Persia's subjects. Candidates who wrote about the way that Darius and Xerxes' attacks on Greece usually found it more difficult to maintain a sense of relevance in their ideas.

The Prescribed Sources in the specification could be used to full effect in this question and it was good to see candidates had a confident grasp of that material. The general level of knowledge about Persepolis was especially evident and it was used well to address the question. Examiners noticed the rather narrow range of evidence offered by many candidates. Many essays only offered a consideration of the Cyrus Cylinder, Bisitun monument and the Apadana staircase. While these were all relevant, the essays they appeared in often didn't have a sufficiently broad range of points to gain Level 4.

In addition, care should be taken when candidates discuss Herodotus or Aeschylus as evidence for the Persian empire. There were a number of candidates who displayed an overly credulous acceptance of both authors' views on Persia.

Exemplar 1

The Persians Kings demonstrated their power ~~largely~~ to their subjects largely effectively, through the means of ~~their~~ constructing vast and impressive buildings, conquering other cultures and expanding the Empire, as well as highlighting their achievements through propaganda.

Exemplar 1 illustrates the benefits of a strong introduction. There are a number of points to observe:

- 1) 'largely effectively' – the candidate offers an opinion in response to the question in the opening line of their essay.
- 2) Three elements are identified by the candidate to support their view – 'vast and impressive buildings', 'conquering other cultures and expanding the empire', 'propaganda'.
- 3) the points identified in this opening paragraph form the shape of the essay: the rest of the response offered a paragraph on each of these elements, with appropriate deployment of very detailed AO1.
- 4) in the closing paragraph, the candidate was still holding to the opinion they put forward in the opening line of the essay. This then met the Level 5 requirement for AO2 for 'a well-developed, sustained and coherent line of reasoning.'

Section B overview

It was good to see that the vast majority of candidates had left themselves sufficient time to tackle the 30-mark question. Overall, more candidates responded to Question 10 than Question 9. The main differentiator in the quality of essays continues to be the ability to respond to the question/offer analysis of the question. To access Level 4 or 5, there really needs to be a clear attempt to tackle the central issue that has been set, but there are still many candidates who are reluctant to do that. As a result there were large numbers of essays that for Question 9 seemed content to just summarise the battle of Salamis, and for Question 10 to just describe the binary oppositions.

With regard to the use of modern scholarship, the same points apply this year as in previous exam series. It was rare to find candidates who demonstrated any analysis of a scholar in their essays. The majority of candidates simply 'drop and run' in the sense that they name drop a scholar and then move on to their next point. Examiners are looking for candidates to pause and engage with the scholar, explaining why they do or do not agree with the scholar's view. This could be done, for example, by deploying a piece of AO1 knowledge to reinforce or challenge a scholar's view.

Question 9*

9* 'The way that Herodotus and Aeschylus present the battle of Salamis to their audiences is very different.'

Explain how far you agree with this statement and justify your response.

[30]

This essay was dealt with well by candidates who had a secure grasp of the two authors' accounts of the battle. There was some excellent knowledge of specific passages of Aeschylus, particularly the Messenger speeches. When these were used carefully, it made for an effective means of comparison with Herodotus. The best responses made a point of addressing both the content of the authors' accounts, and their context. These were usually focused on Greek (dis)unity, the roles of Themistocles and Artemisia, and Xerxes' actions in the battle. These essays also tended to spend time assessing the nature of genre in the presentation of the texts. It was good to see how many candidates were able to see either similarities or differences between the two authors in terms of their milieu, time of writing, aims and approach.

It was often the case, however, that candidates had not taken care to acknowledge the specifics of the question. There were too many essays which made generalised comparisons of Aeschylus and Herodotus, with evidence drawn from well outside the battle of Salamis. Sadly it was also too common to encounter basic summaries of the two authors' accounts of the battle. Other essays chose to focus their attention on Xerxes more generally. Little thought was given by some candidates to the extent of similarity/contrast between the two writers.

Exemplar 2

Similarly, both Herodotus and Aeschylus praise the Greeks in their depictions of the battle of Salamis, further showing their similarity. Philip Vellacott states that Aeschylus' purpose in the *Persians* was "the ~~great~~ ^{creative} creation of the national pride of the Athenians in their achievement." This view is convincing ~~because~~ due to the repeated emphasis in Aeschylus of the Greeks' success, particularly the Athenians as their fleet was the largest of the Greek poleis. Aeschylus describes how ~~the~~ "with one fierce roar" the Hellenes rushed forwards... ~~but~~ like butchers", showing the impressive force of the ~~Persians~~ Greeks compared to the Persians. Aeschylus also describes a decisive victory by the Greeks, as the Persians are so devastated by their loss that they "let tears drown every voice". Vellacott's view is therefore correct in terms of Aeschylus' depiction of the Greeks. Herodotus similarly

Exemplar 2 illustrates the approach taken by a candidate who has attempted to use their scholars critically. There is a clear application of the view of Vellacott, and the candidate then explains why they are utilising it. They are making a point about the *Persae* being written to praise the Athenians, and they deploy Vellacott to support this. The candidate then argues that Vellacott's view is convincing as it is backed up by the fact that the Athenian fleet was the largest of the poleis. While the analysis is not perfect (the candidate is a little unclear on whether they are discussing 'Greeks' or 'Athenians') nevertheless, their attempt to be critical of the scholar is praiseworthy.

Assessment for learning



Responding to essay questions.

Examiners found that many candidates do not respond to the question. This could be addressed in class time by helping students to 'break down' a question. While the majority of candidates recognised that this question was about Herodotus and Aeschylus, some missed the fact that the focus was Salamis. Furthermore, others did not acknowledge the 'was very different' element. There is a lot of value in spending time with students to help them see the difference between questions which require comparison, contrast, prioritisation etc.

Question 10*

10* 'Understanding the role of binary oppositions is crucial to understand the Greek view of the world.'

Explain how far you agree with this statement and justify your response.

[30]

This was the more popular essay on the paper and tended to fall into one of two categories. The weaker scripts simply listed a range of binary oppositions; the better scripts went on from there and assessed how far that defined the Greek conception of the world. Candidates were able to marshal some material on Greek/barbarian, women/men and to a lesser extent enslaved/free (although the usual misconception about democracy was evident here). Responses that scored highly in AO2 then extended these differences to a consideration of how they helped us to understand the Greek approach to the world, rather than simply stating that they existed. There were also some well considered responses which grappled with commonalities rather than differences, recognising the importance of medising and the actual meaning of 'Greekness'.

There were some excellent responses which drew together the different strands on the specification. It was especially impressive to see how candidates blended an understanding of Medea, the Amazons and the role of women in Greece. The majority of candidates were also able to link together artistic portrayals of Greeks and Persians with the presentation in literary sources. Fewer candidates were as confident on the binary oppositions of citizen/subjects or enslaved/free. When candidates were able to explain how those binaries affected Greek behaviour, especially when contextualised by the events of the Persian Wars, they tended to demonstrate the analysis that examiners were looking for. The ideas of Cartledge and Hall were often deployed well when incorporating modern scholarship here.

Exemplar 3

Therefore, understanding binary oppositions is crucial to understand how the Greeks viewed not only others, but themselves. It is through binary oppositions that the Greeks defined themselves as a collective, despite there still being various fractures. Binary oppositions are not as unchangeable as is often seen in ~~Greek~~ Greek art and literature, as represented in the complicated duality of barbarian women and the issues ~~set~~ with claiming Greek unity even during the Persian Wars. This lack of unity is evident in Herodotus' Histories, such as the ~~debate~~ arguments over whether to remain at Salamis, the Argives' refusal to join forces, and the fact that many Greeks fought on the Persian side, such as the Ionians. The Argives suggest that they 'would rather be ruled by the barbarian than yield to the Spartans', highlighting this disunity. The Ionians, despite some fighting badly 'in accordance with ~~Themistocles~~ Themistocles' instructions' as well as those who Medised such as Thebes, further portray the issues with assuming everything functioned in complete binary opposition. This suggests how understanding the role of binary oppositions is important, but it is also important to understand how these oppositions overlap, shift, and are ~~not~~ not faultless.

Exemplar 3 is helpful in illustrating what is meant by 'very detailed knowledge' in Level 5 of AO1. In this paragraph, the candidate explored the idea that things are rather more complex than simply binary opposition. To do this, they argued that there are divisions among the Greeks which suggest that a binary definition doesn't tell the whole story. As evidence for that, they mentioned the 'duality of barbarian women', arguments over fighting at Salamis, Ionians who fought with Persia, Argive-Spartan rivalry and medising by Thebes. While most candidates are content to offer two or possibly three responses to support a point, here we can see at least five clear pieces of evidence. There is no set number of points that are needed for Level 5 in AO1 but this paragraph illustrates the highly commendable way that AO1 is deployed throughout the essay.

Misconception – 'Democracy'



There seems to be a widespread belief among candidates that Greece was democratic. It would be great to see candidates describing Greeks as freedom-loving and confining discussion of democracy to Athens. Perhaps a strategy to remind students of this would be to teach them Aeschylus' battle cry: 'Forward you sons of Hellas, set your country free.' This might serve to remind students that it is about freedom, rather than 'set your country democratic'.

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