

A LEVEL

Examiners' report

CLASSICAL CIVILISATION

H408

For first teaching in 2017

H408/23 Summer 2024 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

This year's paper was tackled well by most candidates, and this reflected some excellent factual knowledge and well prepared candidates. There was an impressive range of knowledge displayed by candidates; it was especially pleasing to see this being deployed in the service of the question, rather than addressing a pre-prepared formula that had been revised for the exam.

The 1 mark questions were dealt with effectively by most candidates. Some candidates did not read the question carefully and offered factual details of their own. This meant that there were some errant responses, especially to Question 4, where Medea's more general actions were often cited. On the 10-mark questions examiners were pleased to see how well candidates used the two sources. The vast majority of candidates understood that this question is focused on the stimulus material that they have been given. As might be expected, answers to the literary passage tended to have fuller detail than the visual source.

In the essay questions candidates had been well prepared and there was a very impressive grasp of AO1. However, the main examiner issue is that there are too many responses that are focused on the listing of knowledge. Too few candidates take the time to craft an answer to the question at hand. Many responses surveyed a body of information and only at the end offered an opinion as to its significance. This made it difficult for examiners to feel that the response had 'a well-developed and clear line of reasoning' as is required in Level 4 of the AO2 mark scheme.

As was the case last year, there had been some careful revision of the names of scholars, and an impressive mastery of specific quotes. There has not been a corresponding improvement to the quality of the engagement with scholars. Too many candidates are still content to simply do a 'name drop' and do not make any effort to show critical analysis.

| Candidates who did well on this paper generally: | Candidates who did less well on this paper generally: |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • had a strong factual grasp of Greeks, Persians, Amazons and Medea • used their knowledge to shape an answer to the specifics of the question • in Questions 3 and 5 made sure they based their points on the stimulus material • expressed an opinion in answer to essay questions • managed their time well so that they were able to complete a full essay. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • deployed very limited knowledge, often in the form of a single fact per paragraph • lacked a focus on the question • were determined to offer details on the concept of 'the invention of the barbarian' even when it was not relevant to the question • spent too long on the short answer questions to the detriment of the essays. |

Section A overview

One mark questions were dealt with well, and factual knowledge was sound. The 10-mark questions were handled well by candidates who used the stimulus and there was a wealth of points for them to make. Examiners were encouraged to see that knowledge of the visual source was as sound as the knowledge of *Medea*.

The 20 mark question produced a wide range of responses, many of which were well exemplified and carefully explained. Once again, the main issue with the 20-mark essay was not with the AO1, but in the construction of a well-argued case for AO2.

Question 1

Source A

Attic red figure krater, attributed to Euphronios

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1 Who are Herakles and the Greeks shown fighting in **Source A**?

[1]

This question was answered correctly by the majority of candidates.

Question 2

2 Give **two** details from **Source A** which tell us that the central figure is Herakles.

[2]

This question was generally answered well.

Question 3

3 Using details from **Source A**, explain how the viewer can differentiate between the Greeks and their enemies.

[10]

Given that the question asked how a viewer can differentiate Greeks and the Amazons, the best way to answer was to point out features on the krater. This allowed a mixture of points, both compositional (the central position of Heracles, the falling Amazon) as well as technical (the portrayal of different figures). The best responses were able to appreciate these and comment on them.

What examiners were looking for was a marriage of AO1 and AO2. This means that a candidate could either pick out a feature from the krater and then explain how it shows Greek/Amazon, or the other way around. This is shown in Exemplar 1.

Exemplar 1

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| | | The clothing of the figures in source A also illustrates the difference between the Greeks and Amazons. Heracles is shown in heroic nudity, while Telamon wears a short, plain tunic and helmet. The Amazons are Two of the Amazons are dressed in Persian style attire of a striped suit, and the other three are dressed as Greeks in a similar way to Telamon. However, because they are women they do not have beards, which makes it easy to distinguish them from Telamon despite the similar clothing. The fact that they are wearing men's clothing emphasises how they are not like Greek women, and makes the Greek clothing strange as them. In this way the clothing of the figures in source A allows the viewer to easily differentiate between the Greeks and the Amazons. |
|--|--|--|

Exemplar 1 succinctly shows the point about a mixture of AO1 and AO2. The candidate makes it very easy for the examiner to see how they are addressing issues of AO2. By stating 'illustrates the difference', 'easy to distinguish them' and 'easily differentiate', there is a clear engagement with the question. There is plenty of AO1 selected from the source, with references to Heracles, Telamon, 'the striped suit', 'beards' and 'men's clothing'.

Source B

Euripides – *Medea*, 269–303

| | | |
|--------|---|----|
| MEDEA: | For what offence, Creon, do you banish me? | |
| CREON: | You frighten me – no point in cloaking what I mean. I fear you'll do some irreparable harm To my daughter. I am afraid for many reasons. You are clever, skilled in many evil arts. | 5 |
| | You resent being deprived of Jason's bed. I hear reports that you are threatening <u>Violence</u> on me and <u>on the</u> bridegroom and his <u>bride</u> . I'll make sure that doesn't happen. | |
| | Better make you my enemy now, madam, Than weaken and regret it. | 10 |
| MEDEA: | Oh dear! This is not the first time, my reputation Has often hurt me, Creon, done me so much harm. No sensible man should have his children Taught to be too clever. | 15 |
| | They are called idlers, and excite Resentful envy in their fellow citizens. Present some clever, new idea to fools – They'll think it's you who are useless and a fool. | |
| | As for those who think they have a subtle intellect, If you are thought superior in the state, they take it hard. This has been my fate. Because I'm clever, Some are jealous, to others I'm objectionable. But I'm not really so clever. | 20 |
| | You say you are afraid – that I'll do something unpleasant? I'm in no position – have no fear of me Creon, – To go against those who rule. What wrong have you done me? | 25 |
| | You simply gave your daughter to the man of your choice. It is my husband that I hate. What you did, I think, Was prudent. I do not grudge you your success. Let them marry, and good luck to you! But allow me To live in Corinth. | 30 |

Question 4

- 4 What 'violence' does Medea later use against Jason's 'bride' (line 8)? Make **two** points. [2]

This question was generally answered well. Some candidates did not read the question carefully which meant that there were some errant responses where Medea's more general actions were cited.

Question 5

- 5 Using details from **Source B**, explain how Medea's status as a barbarian might influence Creon's attitude towards and his treatment of Medea. [10]

Questions on *Medea* are usually done very well by candidates, demonstrating a genuine enthusiasm for the play and a strong level of knowledge. The only issue with this is a tendency to get over zealous about the whole play instead of recognising that this is a stimulus question. This question had a very specific focus, but some candidates were too keen to offer everything that they knew about the play.

The most successful responses looked carefully at the passage that was printed on the question paper. The focus was not just on identifying why Medea was a barbarian, but on how that status might affect Creon. As such, points that just listed Medea's barbarian qualities were not very successful. The key AO2 was to look at how those things linked to Creon's behaviour (e.g. she is skilled in evil arts and so he wants to remove her from Corinth).

Question 6*

- 6* Analyse how the Greeks portrayed barbarian women. You may use **Source(s) A** and/or **B** as a starting point in your answer. [20]

This question offered a wide range of areas for discussion. There are a large number of possible 'portrayals' identified in the mark scheme. The majority of candidates tackled a good range of these, and were able to draw on a similarly sound range of evidence. The best candidates organised their thinking into themes, cross-referencing different sources in order to make a convincing analysis. For example, they were able to discuss the threat of barbarian women by referencing Medea and then linking that to Atossa.

Less successful essays tended to use their knowledge as the structure rather than an analysis. As a result these used a piece of AO1 as a paragraph, without much in the way of analysis. For example, a paragraph devoted to the Amazons, then one on Medea, etc. The result of this is that the structure of the essay is it shows little or no sense of having a line of reasoning or any kind of direction to its argument.

Exemplar 2

| | | |
|--|--|---|
| | | <p>Additionally, barbarian women are depicted in politics which is further barbaric as women are inhabiting inappropriate roles and shouldn't be involved in politics. Firstly, Atossa is depicted in Aeschylus' Persians as an eastern barbaric queen who is extremely decadent - from her golden bed chambers to chariot. The council of Persian elites look to her and she doesn't know what to do so she turns to necromancy. This portrayal of barbaric women is wholly negative as it demonstrates that barbarian women are in roles not meant for them yet they cannot function properly either. However, Artemisia is depicted opposingly and more positively. In the Persian councils she provides sound advice and is the only one brave enough to speak against Xerxes. Compared to the other tyrants who fear to speak their truth, Artemisia is strong portrayed as brave and intelligent. Finally, Medea is the ultimately on the other hand, she still is maintaining an inappropriate role when compared to a Greek woman. Finally, Medea destroys the political system of Corinth - her plan ^{led} to the agonising death of both king and princess leading to disarray. This is wholly negative as it represents Greece's portray of barbaric women as ultimately dangerous and powerful. Atossa Medea further posed a threat to Athens through her cunning, making Aegeneus swear an oath yet neglecting to tell her plans of murder & ends up killing his son - a dangerous and cunning portrayal. Her cunning is further highlighted through her manipulation of Creon allowing her to fulfill her plan. This depicts barbarian women as even more dangerous and also cunning and manipulative.</p> |
|--|--|---|

Exemplar 2 is a strong example of the analytical approach to the 20-mark essay. The candidate has identified an area of portrayal 'inhabiting inappropriate roles in politics', which addresses the AO2 issue. They then exemplify that by a range of AO1 evidence, not just a single example. Here they look at the roles of Atossa ('eastern barbaric queen'), Artemisia ('brave and intelligent') and Medea ('dangerous and powerful'). For each of these examples the candidate refers back to the central point of the paragraph, which is to demonstrate how far outside Greek norms the barbarian women fall.

Essay structuring

Candidates should be encouraged to think more carefully about how they structure their essays. The aim is for them to offer a 'well-developed, sustained and coherent line of reasoning'. Those who focus on describing their AO1 knowledge and tagging on a single line of AO2 analysis at the end of a paragraph do not tend to fulfil this target.

Section B overview

Examiners were pleased to find that most essays were of an appropriate length and had also engaged with modern scholarship. The majority of candidates tackled Question 8, although there were still good numbers who did Question 7. There continues to be an issue over the basic approach to essays. Many candidates simply summarise what they know and seem to think that picking an opinion in the final paragraph passes for analysis. What examiners are actually looking for is an approach that fulfils the level descriptors of the mark scheme – specifically, a ‘well-developed’ approach which demonstrates a ‘clear line of reasoning’. For some candidates, there was little to choose in terms of length between the 20-mark response and the 30-mark essays. Such essays tended to be less successful.

With regard to the use of modern scholarship, it was pleasing to see more of a genuine engagement with the scholars cited by candidates. Many candidates have understood that there needs to be more than just a passing mention, but that the scholarship can be folded into the overall argument or critiqued at the point of use. However, large numbers of candidates are still not making any mention of scholars, or simply making a passing reference to individual names.

OCR support



OCR has produced a blog detailing where you can find suitable material that meets the requirement for “secondary scholars and academics”, what we expect candidates to do with it in the exam and how examiners go about marking the scholarship requirement.

Read the blog [here](#).

Question 7*

7* ‘Persian kings used buildings more than sculpture or the written word to convey their authority.’

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

[30]

Question 7 saw most candidates display a sound understanding of the Persian empire, and the deployment of some very good knowledge. Most candidates tended to discuss Persepolis, the Cyrus Cylinder and Bisitun, but it was not common to have a wider range of material drawn on. The best essays engaged with all three elements required by the question and went beyond the most basic outline of AO1. It was pleasing to see detailed knowledge of the specifics of Persepolis which went further than simply the relief sculpture. In addition, analysis of Cyrus’ tomb and the Darius statue were welcome when they made an appearance.

The key factor in this essay was in the ‘more than’ element of the AO2. Too many candidates took the essay to be an opportunity to simply describe the buildings, sculpture and written word. This meant they created a structure which was little more than a description, lacking any of the comparative elements central to the question. Higher performing candidates were able to weigh the three different elements against each other and argue a case for one. They also saw that the essay required an assessment of how Persian kings were conveying their authority, not simply what they were creating. There were some well-considered ideas over the significance of the public role of Persepolis, the position of the Bisitun relief and the reach of Persian messaging.

Question 8*

8* 'The Greeks were united during the Persian wars.'

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

[30]

This essay attracted the bulk of the responses, although the quality was mixed. The best essays recognised the two elements to this question: Greek unity and the medising states. There was some very good knowledge of Greek inter-state rivalry, and an ability in the best responses to explain the motivation of the medising states. Examiners were especially pleased to see a confident understanding that, despite differences, the Greeks had well organised tactics throughout the Persian Wars. In terms of AO2, the best essays had organised this knowledge in order to argue a clear case. This resulted in some candidates arguing persuasively that the Greeks were united, while others were as convincing in suggesting that they were not.

The less effective essays leant, as ever, on lots of AO1 but little application to the question. Many responses did not notice that the question asked about the Persian Wars. Others only discussed ways in which the Greeks were united. There was even some confusion about the essay topic, and some candidates missed the point and discussed the invention of the barbarian instead. It should be noted that essay questions are phrased carefully to test candidates' understanding, and generic responses rarely fit the expectations of the exam.

Misconception



Many candidates are still confused about 'Greeks', 'the Hellenic League' and 'the Delian League'. It would be helpful to reiterate to students the relatively small number of Greek city states who opposed the Persians, and to spend more time in teaching the reasons behind medising. In addition, there are some candidates who seem to think that Athens and Sparta were in a constant state of war, and perhaps think that the Peloponnesian War ran concurrently with the Persian Wars.

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Source B: Lines 270-301 Euripides' *Medea*, 978-0-521-64479-2, Euripides, trans Harrison 1999 pp.19-21

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