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A LEVEL

Examiners' report

CLASSICAL CIVILISATION

H408
For first teaching in 2017

H408/11 Summer 2024 series

Contents

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 11 series overview

As ever, the candidates' enthusiasm for the subject was manifest and it was most evident that much time and care had been spent in preparing them over the two years. The questions allowed candidates to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding at all different levels and naturally there was a considerably diverse range of responses. Those who had spent time preparing for the assessment were able to demonstrate this most effectively and performed the best.

The extra time allocation seems to have helped some candidates to complete the whole paper, but there were still a number struggling to complete it, especially Question 7.

The use of modern scholarship in the 30 markers was much sharper with more engagement than in previous series. It does not, however, have to be sprinkled throughout the essay in a confetti-like manner; several well-made references to different scholars is sufficient. The focus of the response needs to be on the epics themselves.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
- had spent time revising the epics and themes laid out on the specification - answered the question asked - made effective use of paragraphing. New point, new paragraph - considered both sides of the argument (when required) - did not overly spend too long on one question.	- possessed insufficient knowledge through lack of revision - had not practised working under timed conditions - had misread what was required of a question.

Section A overview

Timing was not generally an issue in this section of the paper. Some candidates would have improved their responses by not looking for reasons why Hector and Odysseus were seen to be unheroic in the passages in Questions 1 and 3.

Many candidates were successfully adopting a Point Example Analysis approach; it added clarity and direction to the overall response as seen in Exemplar 1 below.

Exemplar 1

> As the suitors are foted to fall this
> allows Homer to employ much dramatic irony
> in the poem which adds excitement and
> drama to the epic. Melanthius wishes that

This candidate's response (an extract from their answer to Question 4) demonstrates successfully adopting a Point Example Analysis approach which added clarity and direction to the overall response.

Question 1

1　Explain how Hector is shown in a heroic way in **Passage A**.

　　Use references to the passage to support your answer.　　　　　　　　　**[10]**

This question was well answered. A few candidates strayed too far from the text, and weaker candidates just generally paraphrased parts of the text in English without directly addressing the text itself. The majority showed good use of technical terminology, *geras* being a particular favourite, and were able to pinpoint features of heroic behaviour, provide evidence of this from the passage and analyse their effect. The ability to analyse is important.

Question 2*

2*　Discuss what you have learned about fate from your study of the *Iliad*. Explain what the existence of fate adds to the epic.

　　You may use **Passage A** as a starting point, and your knowledge of the *Iliad* in your answer.　**[20]**

Generally there were many strong answers, with lots of candidates mentioning Achilles' choice of his fate and Zeus' decision over Sarpedon and Hector. Better responses incorporated the impact of fate on women and gods rather than focusing exclusively on the main triptych of heroes. The best answers considered Homer's authorial intention and what he was trying to use the concept of fate for in his narrative, particularly in creating *pathos* for the characters.

Question 3

3 Explain how Odysseus is shown in a heroic way in **Passage B**.

Use references to the passage to support your answer.   **[10]**

> Many candidates unfortunately made points about Odysseus not being heroic, which meant they did not discuss enough of the points relevant to the question.
>
> Some demonstrated an understanding of how being referenced by a prophet increased Odysseus' heroism. Most answers referred to the desire for *kleos*, and many candidates made interesting points regarding the contradiction of the Cyclops calling him 'puny' but Odysseus still managing to best him.

Misconception

?   There is no need for a counter-argument with an 'Explain how…' type of question.

Question 4*

4* Discuss what you have learned about fate from your study of the *Odyssey*. Explain what the existence of fate adds to the epic.

You may use **Passage B** as a starting point, and your knowledge of the *Odyssey* in your answer.
                                                                                          [20]

> Candidates generally showed a good understanding of the narrative of the *Odyssey*, in particular Odysseus' desire for *nostos*. There was also some impressive knowledge displayed about various omens and prophecies from across the text. Many responses considered both halves of the question; for the latter, excitement and suspense were popular lines of argument. Weaker responses only focused on the travel narratives and did not consider Telemachus or the Suitors. Few candidates mentioned the fate of the Phaeacians, and often it was done in passing rather than analysed for wider relevance within the narrative. There were some whose understanding of fate was just 'death' or the role of the gods and answers could, at times, fall into just listing events and claiming they were fated with no analysis of this argument.

Section B overview

Many candidates were able to appreciate the literary merits of Passage C and to discuss a range of literary devices in an effective and relevant manner.

Some candidates would have improved their responses by making greater references to the passage or not forcing in references to scholars for the 20 marker – they are only required for the 30 marker.

Assessment for learning
Timing was more of an issue in this section with a few responses running short or not attempting Question 6. It was worth using part of a lesson to practise a 10- or 20-marker in timed conditions in lieu of setting a homework perhaps.

Question 5

5   Explain how Virgil paints a pessimistic picture of warfare in **Passage C**.

Use references to the passage and discuss what it says and how it is written to support your answer.   **[10]**

> This was felt to be an accessible passage and offered many opportunities for identification and analysis of both content and style. Most candidates identified how the futility of war is exemplified in the passage and many wrote well on the themes of loss and the abandonment of the gods. There were some perceptive comments on the blasphemy of dead bodies on the shrines of the gods. The simile was well identified and most linked the experience of the desperate soldiers to the animalistic behaviour of the wolves in the image. More impressive responses homed in on the young being left behind and related this to helpless and hopeless Trojan families. Many saw "madness" as *furor*, but too many did not. There was some excellent analysis not just of the ideas in the simile but also of the use of repetition, rhetorical questions and emphatic short sentences. A few answers also impressively identified and analysed the use of pathetic fallacy.

Exemplar 2

5	b	In this extract Aeneas retells the story of Troy and how he rallies his men to fight. The use of first person account by Aeneas adds to the emotion of the scene as we sympathise with our heroes viewpoint.
		Virgil portrays the utter hopelessness of the situation as he conveys how 'All the gods on whom this empire once depended have left' where the adjective highlights the utter abadonment of the Trojans. Thus Aeneas claims that death is their only option as he rallies 'Let us die. Let us rush into the thick of the fighting.' which highlights how hopeless their plight is adding to pessimissm
		Moreover, Aeneas and his men seem to be overcome with 'madness' whilst fighting creating the impression of war as an utterly corruptive force that transforms the 'bravest' of warriors infusing the scene with

pessisim. Virgil uses the epic simile 'like wolves foraging blindly' which accentuates how the men have been ~~reduced~~ dehumanised to savage predators full of furor.

Homer Virgil then includes a thoughtful interjection by Aeneas who laments 'who could unfold the horrors of that night?' where the rhetorical question and the adjective highlight the massacre and create the impression of our hero being ~~so~~ overcome with sorrow at the memory. This highlights the violentia and agony war brings emphasising it's pessimistic nature.

Lastly, Virgil ends the extract by accentuating the extent of the suffering and how 'Bitter grief was everywhere. Everywhere there was fear, and death' where the repeated adverb paints the picture of Troy being overcome with slaughter and suffering from every angle presenting war as causing mass destructing thus highlighting it's pessimistic nature

Overall, Virgil emphaticly paints a gruesome image of war as hopeless and almost always causing loss of life. However, at this moment Aeneas is still behaving as a Homeric hero

> so perhaps this depiction holds most true for Homeric ideas of *Dira cupida* whereas a Roman hero would understand war as an opportunity to spread peace ^thus necessary especially through Augustus example.

Note the clarity with which the candidate has expressed themselves. It is immediately obvious what point is being made; this is then supported by an example which acts as a springboard for discussion of the point which is being raised.

Question 6*

6* 'The Trojans are always presented in a pitiful manner in the *Aeneid*.'

Explain whether you agree with this statement. Do **not** include discussion of Aeneas.

You may use **Passage C** as a starting point, and your knowledge of the *Aeneid* in your answer. Justify your answer. **[20]**

This question required candidates to note that this required comment on the experience of the Trojans and should not include discussion of Aeneas. A few candidates unfortunately paid insufficient heed to this requirement and instead discussed Turnus, the Latins, Dido and Aeneas etc. as part of their answer. A few, perhaps, were also unsure about who the Trojans actually were. Some candidates neglected the opportunity to use Passage C as a starting point. The many that did, used it sensibly to start to develop their ideas on the pitiful experiences of the Trojans at the fall of Troy, often going on to then discuss the wooden horse, Sinon, Laocoon and the deaths of Polites and Priam, all ripe material for good marks. Many mentioned Nisus and Euryalus but sometimes only fleetingly. The better answers developed the theme of the pointless deaths of the young and the ensuing grief that this can cause for bereaved parents. Many candidates flexibly wrote about examples where the Trojans are presented in a more positive light, particularly their bravery and skill in fighting. There were many well-balanced responses where the Trojans were seen as the forebears of Rome and so their legacy was anything but pitiful.

Assessment for learning

Giving candidates plenty of practice of reading the whole of the question and perhaps highlighting or underlining the key points. A number ignored the instruction not to write about Aeneas.

Section C overview

A number of candidates did not read the Question 7 properly. As ever, it only requires discussion of the passages in Section A and B (stated twice on the Question Paper). Timing was also an issue for some with Question 7 but many were adopting a comparative approach between the two passages.

On the whole, the 30-mark essay questions were well-handled and completed in a detailed and informative manner, especially Question 8. Question 10 proved the most popular. In terms of scholarship, nearly all scholars were named and there was greater effort to engage with them. Naturally, this was rewarded more favourably. Most candidates provided at least a couple of examples of secondary sources and scholars' views to support their answers.

> **OCR support**
>
> ℹ️ 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   Assess whom you consider to be more admirable: Aeneas or Hector/Odysseus.

You should refer to the passage from the *Aeneid* and the passage from the work of Homer you have read.   **[10]**

Most candidates were able to provide some comparison between Aeneas and Hector / Odysseus, particularly Aeneas' leadership of his men in the last-ditch defence of Troy and Hector's inspirational leadership / Odysseus' cavalier attitude to the safety of his men. Focus was needed on the personal qualities that made a character admirable and some candidates dwelt a little too much on the aspects of heroism shown by Hector / Odysseus that had already been discussed. It was encouraging to see that nearly the whole of the cohort had adopted a comparative approach when answering the question. Such answers were few and far between several years ago. A very few responses could not be rewarded because they were essays covering the whole of both epics with no attention paid to either passage.

> **Misconception**
>
> ❓ Question 7 **only** requires discussion of the passages printed on the Question Paper and there is no need to make reference to the whole of the epics.

Question 8*

8* 'An anti-war poem.'

Evaluate how far you think this is true of the way fighting and its consequences are portrayed in the *Iliad*. Justify your response. **[30]**

The majority of candidates understood Homer's nuanced perspective on war and recognised the *pathos* and horror on one hand and on the other the requirements for glory. Fewer candidates than expected discussed the vivid and visceral descriptions of war and death. Generally, this was well answered and there were many impressive answers to this question that made interesting reading.

Question 9*

9* Evaluate how far families matter to the story and societies in the *Odyssey*. Justify your response. **[30]**

Most answers were able to identify and analyse the importance of family as part of Odysseus' *nostos* and give evidence of familial interactions in Ithaca. The better answers included discussion of recognition scenes, the reactions of characters like Anticleia to Odysseus and a broadened approach to include reflection on Nausicaa and her family and the gods for example. Though many focused only on Ithaca, when Scherie was considered, it was invariably considered well. Nausicaa as a dutiful daughter anticipating marriage, the sympathetic, gentle father, the brothers, the quietly powerful queen were given close attention. The virtues of each member of the royal family were used to show how they were reflected in the wider society thus paying attention to the arguably more challenging aspect of the task. Similarly, there were good answers showing how the loss of the patriarch in Ithaca led to a son who struggled to find an identity and a society in collapse: no assemblies. A good number of candidates also usefully considered the ways in which Odysseus is seemingly in no particular hurry to get home at times on his journey in questioning the importance of his family.

Question 10*

10* 'No women, no goddesses: no story.'

Evaluate how far everything revolves around women and goddesses in the *Aeneid*. Justify your response. **[30]**

This was the most popular essay question. Many candidates offered discussion of key women and goddesses such as Juno, Venus and Dido. The better answers expanded the range of exemplification and analysis to other female characters and focussed on the contribution of female characters specifically to the story. Many answers responded to the thrust of the question to examine other aspects of importance in the *Aeneid*; Aeneas' fate and Augustan propaganda were common topics. Most candidates were careful not to place too much emphasis on this in the structure of their argument and kept the main focus of their answers on women and goddesses.

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