

Examiners' report

A LEVEL

CLASSICAL GREEK

OCR Level 3 Advanced GCE in
Classical Greek

H444

For first teaching in 2016

H444/01 Summer 2025 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 responses 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 [Teach Cambridge](#).

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Paper 1 series overview

This is the Unseen Translation paper. At this level, an amount of interpretation and even speculation is required. In both passages, candidates who read the English introduction carefully found that there was a great deal of information to help them.

Previous examiners' reports have remarked that it tends not to be esoteric vocabulary or complex syntax that cause most difficulty, but insecurity over the 'basics' (whether in learning or application). The same was true this year. Both passages were accessible from the start, and candidates frequently got into the swing of both, writing confident English translations. Where candidates went off track, it was often because, for example, they had missed the tense of a participle or confused two similar words, where knowledge of the tense or vocabulary in question might well be expected and tested at GCSE.

For example, on this paper, the candidates who did not make a distinction between ἐπεὶ and ἔπειτα – both words regularly encountered at GCSE – were (for obvious reasons) led into structural problems and lost more marks than they might have done by making an unsuccessful guess at the meaning of θέμις.

With this in mind, following the approach documented in previous examiners' reports, on both Paper 1 and Paper 2, examiners made reference to the Defined Vocabulary Lists for both GCSE and AS when making choices about what to accept, and what alternative meanings to expect. This is not because either list is prescribed for A Level, but because examiners consider the lists to represent a scope of knowledge that an A Level candidate is expected to surpass substantially. In the comments below, 'GCSE' and 'AS' indicate that a word appears on those lists. The intention is constructive: to help centres and candidates by drawing attention to Greek words that some candidates find difficult to identify correctly even after some years of study, most especially where more than one distinct meaning may be in use. In this paper for example, there appeared various appearances of the root ἀρχ-, whose two key (and very different) meanings appear, for both verb and noun, at GCSE.

Brackets or slashes should be a tool of last resort only.

The slashes in the translations offered in the MS are to illustrate some possible alternatives that should all be accepted; brackets indicate words that are not necessarily required to express the meaning of the Greek in English. Neither of these have a place in candidate responses, except in the very limited example below.

Candidates should have the confidence to write communicative English: they will only lose marks on this paper if their English does not put across the whole of the meaning of the Greek. Sticking closely to the Greek sentence structure is not, in itself, required. A quick re-read should make it obvious whether the meaning has been put across.

The rubric states that contradictory responses will not be credited: this clearly applies to 'come/go' or 'come [go]' even if either option would be acceptable on their own, so candidates should make a choice and offer a committed translation. On rare occasions, brackets may help to clarify a metaphorical expression (e.g. 'he told him to get his head out of the gutter [lit. to think better thoughts]'); but of course, if the metaphor is an appropriate translation of the meaning of the Greek, the brackets will not be necessary. Examiners see perhaps one candidate response a year where a candidate's bracketed explanation was helpful, and – to reiterate – brackets that offer any kind of alternative meaning are likely to be harmful.

Handwriting was generally good; almost all candidates wrote as requested on alternate lines. Candidates are reminded that it is completely acceptable to put an asterisk or number and rewrite a tricky sentence in full underneath the main response. Very often where words are squeezed in, an essential word ends up crossed out and not rewritten; such a word cannot be given marks. Again: take the time to proof-read before submitting. Many candidates had rewritten their translation of (only) the verse passage in full; this usually led to improved English in the fair copy and was well worth the time.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
- showed signs of checking their translation through carefully - were unafraid to make clear, legible alterations to their English, or rewrite entire sections - paid attention to punctuation and particles, most especially μέν ... δέ - identified the constructions following words such as ὥστε - considered the two very different groups of meanings of ἀρχή (GCSE) and related words.	- confused the different clauses, and/or didn't let the punctuation and word order guide them - appeared unsure about the multiple meaning(s) of important words such as ὅπως (AS) - were unclear on the distinction between ἐπεὶ and ἔπειτα (GCSE) - allowed 'impossible' agreements.

Section A overview

Candidates generally had a good grasp of this passage, moving convincingly from the description of Cyrus to the discussion of the Persian customs. The accusatives of respect and the genitives following τοιαύτην were key differentiators, and indeed time spent learning the different pronouns was rewarded well throughout the passage.

Question 1

- 1 Translate the following passage into English. **Please write your translation on alternate lines.** [50]

In his account of the nature and character of Cyrus the Great, Xenophon describes the Persian system of education, which promotes moral character from childhood.

The father of Cyrus is said to have been Cambyses, king of the Persians. This Cambyses was descended from the Persidae, and the Persidae derive their name from the hero Perseus. The mother of Cyrus, it is generally agreed, was Mandane.

ἡ δὲ Μανδάνη αὕτη Ἀστυάγους ἦν θυγάτηρ τοῦ Μήδων γενομένου βασιλέως. φῦναι δὲ ὁ Κῦρος λέγεται καὶ ἄδεται ἔτι καὶ νῦν ὑπὸ τῶν βαρβάρων εἶδος μὲν κάλλιστος, ψυχὴν δὲ φιλανθρωπότατος καὶ φιλομαθέστατος καὶ φιλοτιμότατος, ὥστε πάντα μὲν πόνον ἀνατλήναι, πάντα δὲ κίνδυνον ὑπομῆναι τοῦ ἐπαινεῖσθαι ἕνεκα. φύσιν μὲν δὴ τῆς μορφῆς καὶ τῆς ψυχῆς τοιαύτην ἔχων μνημονεύεται· ἐπαιδεύθη γε μὴν ἐν Περσῶν νόμοις· οὗτοι δὲ δοκοῦσιν οἱ νόμοι ἄρχεσθαι, τοῦ κοινοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἐπιμελούμενοι, οὐκ ἔνθεν ἐν ταῖς πλείσταις πόλεσιν ἄρχονται. αἱ μὲν γὰρ πλείσται πόλεις ἀφείσαι παιδεύειν ὅπως τις ἐθέλει τοὺς ἑαυτοῦ παῖδας, καὶ αὐτοὺς τοὺς πρεσβυτέρους ὅπως ἐθέλουσι διάγειν, ἔπειτα προστάττουσιν αὐτοῖς μὴ κλέπτειν μηδὲ ἀρπάζειν, μὴ βία εἰς οἰκίαν παριέναι, μὴ τύπτειν ὃν μὴ δίκαιον, μὴ μοιχεύειν, μὴ ἀπειθεῖν ἄρχοντι, καὶ τᾶλλα τὰ τοιαῦτα ὁμοίως· ἦν δὲ τις τούτων τι παραβαίνει, ζημίαν αὐτῷ ἐπιτιθέασιν. οἱ δὲ Περσικοὶ νόμοι οὕτως καθίστανται ὥστε τὴν ἀρχὴν οὐ τοιοῦτοι ἔσονται οἱ πολῖται οἳ πονηροῦ τινος ἢ αἰσχροῦ ἔργου ἐπιθυμεῖν.

Xenophon *Cyropaedia* 1.2.1–3 (adapted)

Names

ἡ Μανδάνη, -ης	Mandane (mother of Cyrus the Great)
ὁ Ἀστυάγης, -ους	Astyages (a Mede)
οἱ Μῆδοι, -ων	the Medes (an ancient Iranian people)
ὁ Κῦρος, -ου	Cyrus the Great (king of Persia)
οἱ Πέρσαι, -ων	the Persians
Περσικός, -ή, -όν	Persian

Words

ἔφυν (aorist)	I am (by nature)
ἀνέτλην (aorist)	I endured
ἐπιμελέομαι (+ gen.)	I take care (of)
ἀφίημι	I permit
μοιχεύω	I commit adultery

Question 1 (i): Most candidates translated this correctly except for writing 'herself' for αὐτή. Some responses showed a correction from 'herself' to 'this', indicating a fruitful checking process.

(ii): ᾄδεται, 'he is sung', was often evidently seen as αἰδεῖται (AS 'he is revered'); considering the overlap in sense, such translations were accepted if they suggested *active* praising comparable to the act of singing, such as 'celebrated'. εἶδος was the first of a series of troublesome words to do with seeing and knowing; as so often, μέν ... δέ gave a clue to the contrast between two accusatives of respect. Many candidates overlooked the superlative aspect of the adjectives, and some translated the first as superlative but the rest as simply positive, which was not allowed (the exception being a translation that ran 'most loving of people, and of learning, and of honour', for obvious reasons.) For τῶν βαρβάρων, 'foreigners' and 'non-Greeks' were popular and welcome alternatives to simple 'barbarians'.

(iii): This section generally went well, but some candidates missed the construction with ὥστε altogether. Others disregarded the word order and turned the sentence round, writing 'such that he was praised on account of enduring ...'.

(iv): This section went well for those who paid attention to the particles and were comfortable with μέμνημαι (AS) and the following nominative participle. Some candidates were unfamiliar with the particle μήν and included 'month'.

(v): δοκοῦσιν (AS) was often challenging for meaning, with frequent suggestions of 'thinking' and even 'teaching'. ἄρχεσθαι (GCSE) was often translated as 'rule', usually where the sense of ἐνθεν was unclear.

(vi): This section was generally well done despite the opaque syntax, with the 'how' meaning of ὅπως better known than 'so that' as required in Question 2 (vi). It was very common to treat ἀφειῖσθαι as a finite verb and follow with 'and' before προστάτουσιν, which worked well.

(vii): The meaning of διάγειν caused some trouble – thoughtful renderings included 'conduct themselves'. παρίέναι appeared quite often as 'to be present'.

(viii): ὃν μὴ δίκαιον needed to be 'someone who ...' rather than 'that which ...', so careful consideration of the relative pronoun was wise. One thoughtful response was worded 'not to strike someone who does not deserve it,' which is a good example of a non-literal translation that could only have been written by someone who fully understood the Greek. The frequent translation '... and other such similar things' was not accepted. The adverbial form of ὁ μὲν οὕτως indicated that the point was to treat these issues similarly, as τοιαῦτα had already done the work of 'such similar things'.

(ix): ἦν was translated by some candidates as 's/he was'; ζημίαν was generally recognised. The second sentence was almost always done well.

(x): Even though οἶοι (AS) was generally known, the construction quite often went astray, perhaps because of the challenging τὴν ἀρχήν. ἐπιθυμεῖν was quite often left out altogether; otherwise the vocabulary was well known and the written English tended to be of good quality, even where the meaning wasn't accurate.

Section B overview

This passage seemed accessible to most – the English introduction seemed very helpful – and candidates did well to stay the course and make a coherent story. Very few responses were unfinished, and there were hardly any gaps left either. It was evident from most candidates who translated words such as θέμις and κατέφθιτο appropriately that candidates and their teachers had put a lot of effort into learning the vocabulary of tragedy.

Assessment for learning



Make time to read examples of tragic speeches and stichomythia (including interactions with the Chorus), in Greek but also out loud in English, to learn to recognise the common features of passages from tragedy.

Later in the course, once students are familiar with these features, candidates may appreciate A E Housman's spoof tragic episode. It can be found, together with an introduction and D S Raven's translation into tragic Greek, at [Fragment of a Greek Tragedy, in English and Greek – Antigone](#).

Question 2 (a)

2
(a) Translate the following passage into English. **Please write your translation on alternate lines.** [45]

Neoptolemus, the son of Achilles, is telling his friend Philoctetes how he went to Troy to see the body of his father with Phoenix and Odysseus, who had told him that he alone would capture Troy.

PHILOCTETES I do not know what to do first – should I ask about your experiences or should I mourn your dead father?

NEOPTOLEMUS Your own afflictions are enough for you, I think. You unhappy man, you do not need to mourn the next man's troubles.

Φιλοκλήτης ὀρθῶς ἔλεξας· τοιγαροῦν τὸ σὸν φράσον
αὕτις πάλιν μοι προᾶγμ', ὅπως σ' ἐνύβρισαν.

Νεοπτόλεμος ἦλθόν με νηὶ ποικιλοστόλῳ μέτα
 δῖός τ' Ὀδυσσεὺς χῶ τροφεὺς τοῦμοῦ πατρός,
 λέγοντες, εἴτ' ἀληθεὺς εἴτ' ἄρ' οὖν μάτην,
 ὥς οὐ θέμις γίγνοιτ', ἐπεὶ κατέφθιτο
 πατὴρ ἐμός, τὰ πέρανα ἄλλον ἢ μ' ἐλείν.

ταῦτ', ὦ ξέν', οὕτως ἐννέποντες οὐ πολὺν
χρόνον μ' ἐπέσχον μή με ναυστολεῖν ταχύ,
μάλιστα μὲν δὴ τοῦ θανόντος ἡμέρω,

ὅπως ἴδοιμ' ἄθαρπτον· οὐ γὰρ εἰδόμην·
ἔπειτα μέντοι χῶ λόγος καλὸς προσῆν,
εἰ τὰπὶ Τροίᾳ πέρογαμ' αἰρήσοιμ' ἰών.

ἦν δ' ἡμαρ ἤδη δεύτερον πλέοντί μοι,
 καγὼ πικρὸν Σίγειον οὐρίῳ πλάτῃ
 κατηγόμην· καί μ' εὐθύς ἐν κύκλῳ στρατὸς
 ἐκβάντα πᾶς ἡσπάζετ', ὁμνύντες βλέπειν
 τὸν οὐκέτ' ὄντα ζῶντ' Ἀχιλλεῖα πάλιν.

Sophocles, *Philoctetes* 341–358

Names

ὁ Ὀδυσσεὺς, -έως

ή Τροία, -ας

τὸ Σίγειον, -ου

ὁ Ἀχιλλεύς, -έως (acc. -έα)

Odysseus

Troy

Sigeion, a city near Troy

Achilles

Words

τοιγαροῦν

ποικιλοστόλος, -ον

τὰ πέρυγμα, -ων

ὁ ἡμέρος, -ου (+ gen.)

οὐρίῳ πλάτῃ

ἀσπάζομαι

therefore

with a decorated front/prow

towers (of Troy)

longing (for)

'with a favourable voyage'

I welcome kindly, I receive with joy

2 (a) (i): As always, candidates did need to write (in the English alphabet) the names of the characters speaking, or otherwise they lost a mark. ἔλεξας was almost universally handled well, suggesting that candidates – perhaps more so than in previous years – were expecting to see second-person verbs in tragic speech. The more challenging aorist imperative φράσον was recognised by more than half of candidates. The emphatic αὖθις πάλιν was frequently under-sold, though many candidates offered ‘tell back to me again’ or similar, which worked well. Interestingly the final clause ὅπως σ’ ἐνύβρισαν (AS) here caused frequent problems, even though the person and tense of the verb would be unremarkable at GCSE.

(ii): For τροφεύς, many candidates, perhaps familiar with the word τροφός and noting the gender, made good sense of this word. Some even enterprisingly offered ‘Phoenix’, which was not seen as contradictory if they had already offered a word such as ‘educator’. The main challenges turned out to be μέτα + accusative, identifying the subject of ἡ λήθη (frequently seen as first-person plural), and recognising the two nominatives joined by the very emphatic τε ... καί. (The crasis of χῶ, while unusual, was comparable to the aspirated elisions in 2023 – and the preceding τε gave a clue.) δῖος was quite often neglected altogether, or mistranslated as ‘son of Zeus’.

(iii): ἄρα (AS) was found to be elusive – ‘prayer’ was suggested frequently by those who may have suspected ἄρά, although this would have implied a nominative ending. The main challenge here was to identify the indirect statement construction, which about half of all candidates did. Interestingly, most candidates translated κατέφθιτο as ‘wasted away’ or ‘died’, and, of those who did not, only one or two connected the verb with φθάνω. The context given in the introduction was especially helpful here, with some candidates offering ‘fell’ or similar.

(iv): ἄλλον ἢ με was a strong differentiator, with many instances of ‘another or me’; the meaning ‘than’ (GCSE) was apparently unfamiliar. The second sentence was generally well done.

(v): ἐπέσχον was translated well by a substantial minority; otherwise there were many sensible guesses such as ‘persuaded’. The apparently more straightforward accusative οὐ πολὺν χρόνον caused problems, with ‘in a little time’ being quite popular – and not always corresponding with a guess such as ‘persuaded’ where it would make good sense. The double με (literally ‘they did not hold me back from me sailing’) did not cause many issues; in practice no meaning was lost by leaving it out.

(vi): While the case of ἰμέρω was generally handled well, τὸ ὑθανόντος was very often translated as ‘death’. Here a different meaning of ὅπως (AS) was needed; the purpose construction was often missed. As in the prose passage, the similarity between forms of οἶδα and εἶδον caused issues; although both words are met (the first in limited forms) at GCSE, they are difficult to differentiate.

(vii): This was perhaps the trickiest section, because of the unusual nature of the conditional clause with εἰ that seemed to translate best as an indirect statement. A close/literal rendering was of course acceptable. It was important to notice the προσ- prefix on the verb and write ‘there was in addition’ or similar, but many candidates left it out. Many candidates wrongly saw αἰρήσοιμι as middle and wrote ‘choose’. Examiners noted that six meanings are listed for λόγος in the GCSE and AS DVLs, and that ‘reason’ or perhaps ‘account’ would work far better than, for example, ‘word’, which was therefore treated as a slight error.

(viii): Candidates who had difficulty with the previous section did well to get back on track here and the section was well done by most. The poetic ἥμαρ was handled well. Most candidates recognised πικρόν and of those who did not the most common guess was the very reasonable 'small'.

(ix): The first part was generally handled well. The most common slip was with the agreement of the participle, or its tense: very often it appeared that the army was in the process of emerging. παῖς was omitted rather often. However, the second half often suffered structurally where the indirect statement was missed; 'swearing to see' appeared frequently. Within that construction, an effective approach was to take the first few Greek words in order: 'swearing that they were seeing the no-longer-being Achilles, living again'; the translations that took Achilles first ('... seeing Achilles, who was no longer alive') often found no use for ὄντα. The general sense of this clause, however, was grasped by almost every candidate, making for a good end to the passage.

Question 2 (b)

(b) Write out and scan lines 2 and 3.

[5]

αὖθις πάλιν μοι πράγμ', ὅπως σ' ἐνύβρισαν.
ἦλθόν με νηὶ ποικιλοστόλῳ μέτα

2 (b): This was well done by almost all candidates. The challenge was with νηί, which needed to be treated as two syllables (heavy then light). Although vertical markings showing the metra are not assessed, examiners noted that almost every candidate had marked these correctly.

Exemplar 1

2	b	αὖθις πάλιν μοι πράγμ', ὅπως σ' ἐνύβρισαν.
		ἦλθόν με νηὶ ποικιλοστόλῳ μέτα

This is a well-presented example of the scansion, showing clear word divisions and anceps on the final syllables.

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