

Examiners' report

A LEVEL

CLASSICAL CIVILISATION

**OCR Level 3 Advanced GCE in
Classical Civilisation**

H408

For first teaching in 2017

H408/23 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 23 series overview

2025 saw candidates perform well on this paper when they were careful to focus their attention on the specific question that had been set. Unfortunately this was not always the case, which resulted in a cluster of modest responses, particularly on the 20 and 30 mark essays. It is perhaps worth noting that the specification has now been established for some years, and so candidates must take care not to wheel out 'stock' answers that have been prepared in response to past paper questions. There were signs that questions 7, 8 and 9 were mistaken for different questions that candidates had perhaps practised from examples in past years.

One mark questions proved trickier this year; many candidates did not have a detailed knowledge of the statue of Darius, nor know much about Demeratus. As a result there were far fewer candidates who secured 4 or 5 of the marks on this section of the paper. Performance on the 10 mark questions was better on the visual than the literary source. Where most candidates used the visual source as the basis for their answer, there was not a similar commitment to use the extract from Herodotus. Many candidates seemed to think that this was an essay question, preferring to deploy their own knowledge than use the source. Candidates should be reminded often that the 10 mark question is a source-based one.

It should be noted that the longer form essays require both AO1 and AO2. There are still a large number of candidates who approach these questions by writing all that they know about the subject. But this results in imbalanced outcomes where the AO1 is much more highly rewarded than the AO2. Examiners rewarded highly essays that took a position, presented evidence to back it up, and were willing to explain why their view was robust even in the face of a counter-argument.

It was common to encounter candidates who changed their view half way through and used the second half of their essay to contradict the first (see Exemplar 2 in section B below).

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
- demonstrated a strong understanding of both visual and literary sources on the topic - took careful note of both the command word in questions as well as the specific subject material that was required - used the image of Darius and the passage from Herodotus to make sure that Questions 4 and 7 were led by the sources - understood that successful essays will be driven by a well exemplified line of reasoning, and constructed paragraphs to fulfil that.	- didn't answer the question that had been set, preferring instead to answer a question of their own design - deployed details on Medea even though this was not required on this paper - wrote extremely long answers to the 10 mark question to the detriment of time for the 20 and 30 mark questions - composed essays which listed of facts but lacked much analysis in essay questions.

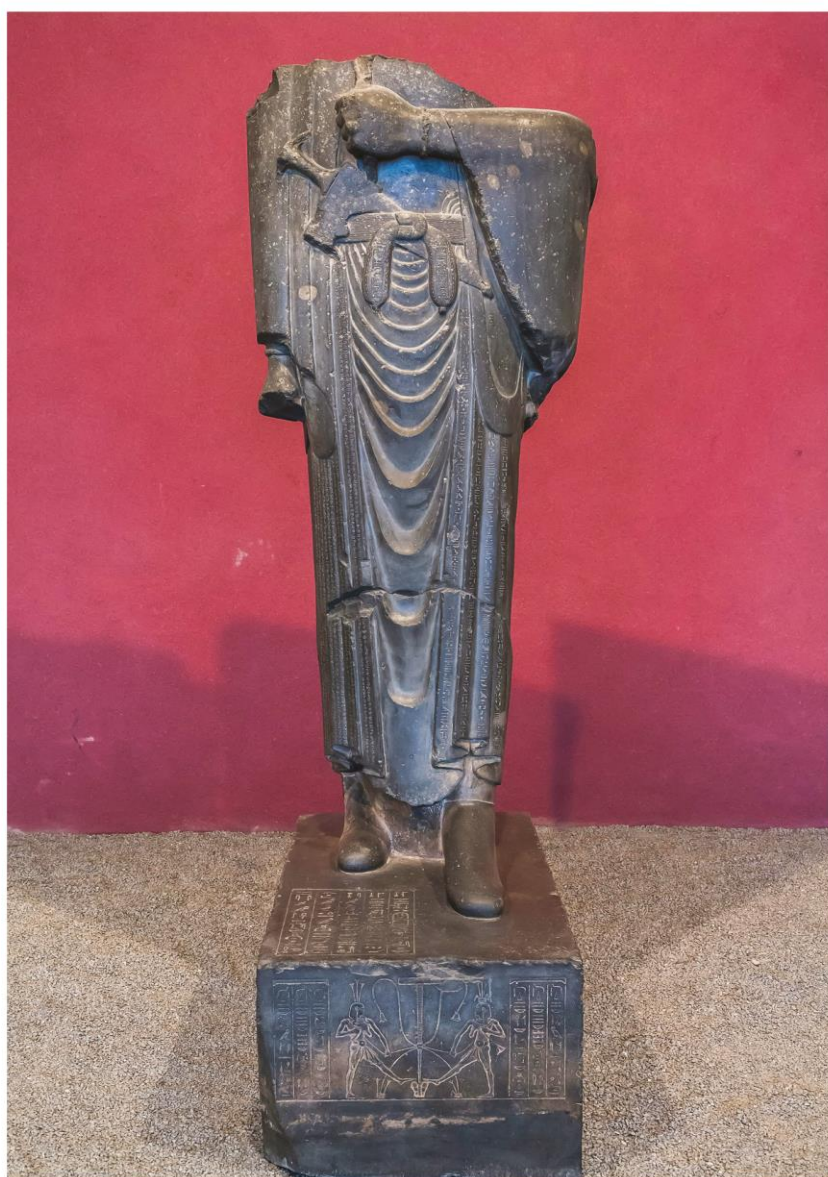
Section A overview

One mark questions proved more difficult for candidates this year, with a variety of inaccurate answers being offered. Candidates should be reminded that the visual and literary sources in the specification do need to be studied with precision. The 10 mark questions were tackled more effectively, and it was good to see most candidates base their answer on the stimulus material that they had been given.

The 20 mark question revealed issues that were familiar from earlier exam series. In many cases lots of AO1 with far less developed AO2. Examiners are always impressed by candidates who engage with the question right at the start of their essay, and then argue a case in a consistent way until the end (see Exemplar 1 below). There are many candidates who rely on unsupported assertion to meet AO2, but this is not what is required.

Question 4

Source A Statue of a Persian king



4 Evaluate what we can learn about Persian kings from Source A.**[10]**

Examiners were impressed when candidates used the specifics of the visual source very carefully; it was very difficult to score highly without doing this. As with all source-based questions, careful observation of the image offered candidates the best rewards. Many of the best answers took a relatively simple approach: saying what could be seen (to meet AO1) and then explaining what that told the viewer about the nature of Persian kings (to meet AO2).

Question 7**Source B****Herodotus The Histories 7.103**

At this Xerxes laughed and said: ‘ <u>Demaratus</u> , what sort of a story is this, that a thousand men would fight against an army like mine? Come, tell me, you claim to have once been king yourself of these men. Are you willing at this very moment to fight against ten men? Yet if your state is just as you say it is, you, as their king, should face against a <u>double portion</u> according to your laws. For if each of them is capable of dealing with ten men in my army, I demand that you be capable of dealing with twenty. In this way the story you have just told me would be proved true. If they are in fact like you and the other Greeks who have conversed with me, you are bragging a great deal; beware that what you say may be an empty boast. How could one thousand or ten thousand or fifty thousand men face an army as great as mine, especially when they are all equally free and not controlled by any one person? If they were controlled by one man as we are, through fear of him they might behave more bravely against their own nature or they might go into battle forced by the whip, a smaller number against a greater. However, as they are completely free, neither of these things would happen. In my opinion, even if the numbers on either side were the same, the Greeks would find it difficult to fight against the Persians alone. In my army there is this same attitude that you mentioned, yet it is found only rarely: there are those amongst my spearmen who want to fight with three Greeks at the same time. You have no experience of this and you are talking nonsense.’	5
	10
	15

7 Explain how Source B shows reasons for the Greeks to resist the Persians.Use details from **Source B** to support your answer.**[10]**

Successful answers to this question recognised that it required a focus on the source. The wording was such that candidates were required to explain reasons for Greek resistance to the Persians by taking their evidence *from the source*. Nevertheless there were lots of candidates who chose to offer a wealth of reasons for Greek resistance based only on their own knowledge of the topic. While these were often comprehensive and detailed, they were very difficult to reward.

Once again, it should be reiterated that the 10 mark question is a source-based task, so there should be a full use of the source itself to be successful. Some candidates believed that Demaratus was a Greek king, or even king of all the Greeks. This confusion led to a number of flawed responses, and demonstrated the importance of having a secure contextual knowledge of the key passages from Herodotus that are part of the specification.

Question 8

8 Assess the role of the Persian wars in defining and confirming Greek views of the Persians.

You may use **Source B** as a starting point in your answer.

[20]

Examiners were particularly pleased when they found candidates who engaged with the words 'defining and confirming' in the question. However, many candidates drifted into an 'invention of the barbarian' set essay, missing the requirement to look at how the Persian wars had contributed to the fashioning of the Greek view. There is clearly a limited amount to say about how the Greeks had viewed the Persians before the wars, but there were some very well-argued points about the nascent view that existed around the time of the Ionian revolt and immediately afterwards. The main body of the essay allowed for a wide span of evidence; the best responses drew on the events of the wars to construct convincing answers by linking the things that happened to developments in the view that the Greeks had of the Persians. Often these drew on Aeschylus' experiences of the wars, or Herodotus' juxtapositions of Greeks and Persians.

Less successful responses tended to offer a recitation of some of the key events of the Persian wars and then make assertions about Greek views. Often this was accompanied by an assessment of whether the Persians were really the way that the Greeks viewed them, but this was not part of the question's remit.

Exemplar 1

Prior to the Persian wars of 490 BCE and 480 BCE, the Greeks mainly viewed the Persians as merely a different culture to the Greeks - given that 'Barbarian' merely meant to speak another language that was not Greek - however, following the Persian wars, ~~where~~ sources of art as well as the works of Herodotus (late 5th century BCE) and Aeschylus ~~in~~ the 'Persians' (472 BCE) suggest that the wars encouraged a sense of Persian difference to the Greeks as well as the idea that they were slavish and vastly 'other'. Thus, the Persian wars were ~~the~~ extremely important in deepening and confirming Greek views of the Persians.

The clarity of this introductory paragraph is what makes it outstandingly strong. There is a sense of the range of materials that will be drawn on (AO1), with confident reference made to pre-war barbarians, the works of Herodotus and of Aeschylus. Along with that we are given a well outlined sense of the overall argument (AO2), referring to the change from 'merely a different culture' to 'sense of Persian difference' and 'slavish and vastly other'. This sets the essay up to be a Level 5 response.

Section B overview

One of the main issues for examiners when assessing the essays in this year's paper was a tendency on the part of the majority of candidates to be coy or contradictory about their opinion. Both questions asked for a response to 'explain how far', but this was often met with unclear reasoning. Large numbers of candidates thought that Aeschylus and Herodotus were both accurate and inaccurate. Some who answered on the Amazons claimed that it was Amazon appearance that set them apart, but then changed their minds and claimed that it was behaviour or values. The mark scheme for essays makes it clear that to access Levels 4 and 5, candidates should present well-developed and clear/coherent lines of reasoning. Many candidates seemed to be under the impression that they had to present a survey of points and they only needed to offer a view on these points in their final paragraph. While it is important to offer a range of points and even counterarguments, candidates should be encouraged to be evaluative throughout their response, demonstrating why some points are more convincing than others, and why they have reached the view they are arguing for.

It was pleasing to see that the majority of candidates had taken note of the requirement to use scholars in their work. Some examples were used effectively; however, some candidates mentioned scholars by name without further elaboration. Candidates need to take care to engage with the references they are making, assessing the scholarly views with regard to their strengths/weaknesses/relevance/applicability etc.

Exemplar 2

it displays them as some untouchable fantasy, that is still looked to in modern day. ~~However, following~~ Following this line-of-thinking it is fair to say that many of their other traits are often overlooked in lieu of sexualisation. Thus, their appearance is what sets them apart.

On the other hand, it could be argued that it was Amazonian behaviour that set them apart due to their place as warriors. Art sources such as the Euphronios painter, who depicted the Amazons and Greeks fighting of a krater. The Amazons were not running away, but fighting with weapons. Similarly, Herodotus describes their way of life to be 'outside' "hunting." In addition, they explain their inability to intergrate with the Scythians because their "customs are not the same as theirs" [Herodotus]. As a result, the Scythian men join them, leaving their homes and families. Therefore, this presents them as different from Greek women, as they

This is a classic example of an essay that does a shift half way through. At the end of the paragraph, the candidate confidently asserts that appearance is what sets the Amazons apart, having given a well-reasoned set of ideas (with AO1) to support this. However, the next paragraph just offers the opposite view, without any explanation for the shift of direction. The response goes on to offer AO1 in support of the idea that it is Amazon behaviour that sets them apart, leaving the reader with no strong indication as to which view is the more convincing one. This makes it difficult to award more than Level 3 in AO2, as there is no evidence of a 'well-developed and clear line of reasoning'.

Question 9*

Use classical sources, and secondary sources, scholars and/or academic works to support your argument. You should also consider possible interpretations of sources by different audiences.

9* 'The depictions of Persians by Aeschylus and Herodotus are equally accurate.'

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

[30]

Examiners were looking for candidates who recognised that this question necessitated engagement with the word 'equally'. The best responses took a measured approach in assessing Herodotus and Aeschylus in a range of areas. While nearly every response looked at details from the events of the Persian wars, this essay needed an engagement with the nature and significance of the authorial influences of the two authors. Stronger responses took care to weigh up the different strengths and weaknesses of 'history' versus 'drama', and then assess how that affected their relative accuracy. In addition, the background of the two authors had a considerable impact on their accuracy, and the stronger answers considered the personal backgrounds of both Herodotus and Aeschylus.

Too many responses attempted to argue that Aeschylus and Herodotus were entirely equal in their accuracy, then went on to describe the content of the two authors with occasional unsupported claims of accuracy or inaccuracy.

It was uncommon but a feature of generally stronger responses when a candidate took up a clear position and argued for one author or the other. The question had, of course, asked for an assessment of how far you agreed that they were equally accurate, and while it was possible to argue for complete equality, it was perhaps more plausible to attempt to pick a side.

Exemplar 3

I believe it is incorrect to say that Aeschylus' depiction of the Persians in his tragedy 'The Persians' is equally accurate to Herodotus' in his 'Histories'. Whilst Rosenbloom agrees and I certainly agree that Aeschylus was an eyewitness at Salamis and certainly fought at Marathon, one must consider that the purpose of Herodotus' text is to record the actions of the Greeks and Persians as well as the fact that Aeschylus' play was likely a piece of propaganda enforcing the idea that the depiction of the Persians in Herodotus is more accurate than that in Aeschylus' play 'The Persians'.

This extract is a good example of what examiners are looking for from an essay that has engaged with the question. The candidate uses the very first sentence of their response to make their view clear: 'I believe that it is incorrect to say...', addressing the fundamental element of AO2. There is a strong sense given that the essay will focus on the appropriate material for AO1 (references to Aeschylus' background and Herodotus' method, as well as recognition of their authorial intent. There is even deployment of a scholar with engagement with that view. In short, this opening paragraph contains all the essential features of a strong Level 5 essay: sound AO1, clear AO2 and critical deployment of scholarship.

Question 10*

10* 'Their appearance, rather than their behaviour or values, set the Amazons apart from the Greeks.'

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

[30]

Many candidates were able to deploy an impressive amount of AO1 knowledge in answer to this question, and it was very pleasing to see that there was a strong knowledge of both Herodotus' views on the Amazons as well as plenty of engagement with the visual sources. Having said that, there were still some candidates who, perhaps inspired by the Amazons and their portrayal in wider popular culture, seemed content to merely speculate as to Amazon appearance and behaviour without rooting their ideas in the original source material. Imaginative though many of these descriptions were, they were hard to match to the mark scheme's requirements.

Noticing the phrase 'rather than' in this question was critical to successful engagement with what examiners were looking for in AO2. There was no particularly dominant answer that was advocated by most candidates, and this made for a range of engaging responses. Again, while there is no 'correct' answer, it is always sensible for candidates to pick a position and then defend it. Where candidates presented a well-reasoned discussion that weighed the comparative merits of each of the three factors suggested and picked on, they were often rewarded very highly. Those who simply described the three factors without showing much in the way of an analysis or evaluation tended to achieve much more modest marks.

Assessment for learning



There is considerable value in teaching students how to read an essay question and recognise the key 'command' elements within it. For Questions 9 and 10 this year, candidates were asked to explain how far they agreed. It would be worth testing students by asking them *what* they were agreeing to in both these questions. The key to Question 9 was 'equally accurate' and Question 10 was 'rather than'. Where students saw this, they tended to perform well. This exercise can be replicated on any past questions without any need for special preparation of resources.

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