

Examiners' report

GCSE

CLASSICAL CIVILISATION

OCR Level 1/Level 2 GCSE (9-1) in
Classical Civilisation

J199

For first teaching in 2017

J199/23 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

J199/23 (War and Warfare) constitutes one of the three Literature and Culture components within the GCSE Classical Civilisation course. This component focuses on the different aspects of warfare in the ancient world, including the purposes, conduct and effects of war, as well as how the military interacted with, and impacted on, wider society. The literary sources include both epic poetry and shorter verse, offering a spectrum of portrayals ranging from the celebration of war to its more tragic and harrowing aspects. To achieve success in this component, students must demonstrate a sound grasp of the military structures of Rome, Sparta, and Athens, significant battles and their societal consequences, and the representation of warfare within the literature studied.

The overall standard of the answers to the knowledge and understanding, significance, stimulus and detailed response questions was impressive. However, candidates seemed less confident when approaching extended response 15-mark questions, with many struggling to write in enough depth to access Level 5 on the level of response grid.

There was a good understanding shown of Homer's use of epic features and some very good use of the source in the 8-mark question on the importance of the Gods in human warfare. Nonetheless, a few candidates did not respond to substantial sections of the paper and unfortunately some 8- and 15-mark questions were left unanswered.

Some candidates were unable to complete the final question due to time constraints. Candidates should be advised to reach the midpoint of the paper within 45 minutes to manage their time effectively.

For the most part candidates followed the rubric, for example making the correct number of points when asked to give a certain number. There were some instances where candidates wrote in the white space underneath the lines or in between the questions. Candidates should ideally use the extra answer space starting on page 21 instead.

Overall, candidates demonstrated competent use of the written sources, although there were occasions where a question was answered using the wrong source. In certain instances, greater attention to specific details within the visual sources was required. For questions worth 4- or 6-marks, candidates are expected to provide two or three accurate references to the source, and most succeeded in doing so.

In Section A, candidates showed sound knowledge of military equipment; most knew what the headquarters was although there was some confusion of it with the commanding officer's house. There was good discussion of the Romans' depiction of themselves and the Dacians on Trajan's Column. Responses to the 8- and 15-mark questions were respectable, showing a good knowledge and understanding of both Roman military training and organisation and what happened at the battle of Salamis.

In Section B, examiners were impressed by the candidates' knowledge of the events in the *Iliad*. They were particularly good at quoting the key parts of the text in Questions 15 and 21. However, some responses to Question 15 revealed both a lack of understanding of the source and the smiley, while some candidates did not know what vivid meant for Question 21. Detailed and extended response questions were answered efficiently, with responses on the importance of the Gods in human warfare being thoughtfully constructed and expressed with conviction.

The spelling of names presented difficulties for some candidates, with Hecuba and Patroclus frequently misspelled. However, candidates were not penalised provided that their attempts were sufficiently close enough to the correct form to be recognised by examiners.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
• demonstrated thorough and precise knowledge and understanding of the prescribed material • communicated ideas clearly, making reference to specific details • incorporated quotations from the written sources provided in the insert • examined visual sources attentively, selecting exact and relevant features • drew on a broad range of evidence to substantiate arguments.	• demonstrated only a basic or limited grasp of the prescribed material • communicated ideas indistinctly, with vague details • referred to sources in a superficial manner • showed limited ability to analyse visual sources • represented evidence which lacked range and depth to support arguments.

Section A overview

Section A carries 45 marks and consists of questions relating to the historical and archaeological elements of wars and warfare in Athens, Sparta, and Rome. These include questions that require short responses demonstrating knowledge and understanding, short analytical statements and a detailed response (8-mark) question. All of these are introduced by a stimulus source. Candidates must also write one extended response from a choice of two 15-mark questions.

Knowledge about soldiers living in a fortress was generally sound. Many candidates were familiar with the functions of Athenian and Spartan armour/weapons. Many candidates recognised the Corinthian helmet. Awareness of Trajan's depiction of the Dacian campaign was proficient. Many were able to make good use of the Horace source 'The Cleopatra Ode' as a starting point for the 8-mark detailed response question about the impact of the Battle of Actium on Rome.

In the main, responses to the 15-mark questions demonstrated good knowledge of the material required by the specification, with the best responses making use of a wide variety of source material.

Question 10 on the significance of the organisation and training of the Roman army was a little more popular than Question 11 on the Battle of Salamis. Some candidates paid too much attention to giving facts about the Roman army, rather than concentrating on their importance for the army's success. Candidates who chose the question on Artemisia's contribution at Salamis had generally understood the minimal impact of her actions and the importance of other factors such as Themistocles' leadership and Greek naval superiority.

Question 1

Study Source A

1 What type of structure is shown in **Source A**?

..... [1]

Most candidates were able to identify the structure as a legionary fortress.

Question 2

2 How comfortable do you think it would have been for the people living there?

Make **three** points and support your answer with reference to **Source A**.

1
.....
2
.....
3
.....
[3]

This question was generally answered well, with many candidates referencing the cramped nature of a *contubernium*, the relative comfort of the tribunes and *legatus* as well as the hospital being comfortable if someone was wounded.

Question 3

3 What was the building marked **X** used for?

Make **three** points.

- 1
- 2
- 3
- [3]

Many candidates correctly identified the headquarters or *principia* and its use for meetings, administration and storage of the standards and pay.

Question 4

Study Source B

4 Who would have provided this warrior's equipment?

..... [1]

Most candidates stated that the warrior had to provide the equipment himself.

Question 5

5 What type of helmet is he wearing?

..... [1]

The helmet was correctly named as Corinthian in most answers.

Question 6 (a)

6

(a) Identify **two** useful features of the helmet.

1

.....

2

.....

[2]

References to the nose, cheek and neck protection were popular choices as well as the eye slits.

Question 6 (b)

(b) Choose **one** of these features. Why was it helpful for the warrior in battle?

.....

..... [1]

Protection from wounds to vital parts of the head or neck and ability to see while fighting were common ways to explain the helpfulness of the helmet in battle.

Question 7

Study Source C

7 How does the design of the warrior's equipment help in battle? Do **not** write about the helmet.

Make **two** points and support your answer with reference to **Source C**.

1

.....

.....

.....

2

.....

.....

.....

[4]

References to the shield and greaves with how they helped in battle were the most common, but breastplate, sandals, spear (which is broken off) and sword were also in evidence.

Question 8

Study Source D

- 8 What does the scene tell us about the image of themselves and the Dacians the Romans wanted to project?

Make **three** points and support your answer with reference to **Source D**.

1

.....

.....

.....

2

.....

.....

.....

3

.....

.....

.....

[6]

Many responses mentioned the Dacians on the floor projecting the image of the Romans as victors. References to the Dacians' draped clothing/trousers and their unkempt hair and beards were interpreted as the Romans projecting them as barbarians. The Romans' horses and military equipment depicting military superiority were another frequent choice. Numerous responses included Jupiter fighting for/supporting the Romans indicating divine favour; a good many comments were made about the Romans presenting severed Dacian heads to Trajan projecting the Romans as a formidable opponent.

A few candidates confused the image of the heads and thought the heads were Roman, while some mistakenly thought the Romans were naked. A few responses incorrectly used the idea of Greeks who could afford a horse joining the cavalry and thought that the horses were to project the image that the Romans were wealthy.

Exemplar 1

- 1 The Romans are depicted in source D as being very uniformed in their fighting, which suggests that the Dacians were viewed as chaotic and not very good soldiers.
- 2 Furthermore, the Romans are also shown to be un-bearded and youthful which greatly contrasts with the Dacians. They are shown to have beards and ragged clothes, which
- 3 suggests that they were barbaric. Also, the Romans are shown to be defeating the Dacians, because they are above them, whilst the Dacians are below them on the floor. This suggest that the Romans wanted to be seen as powerful and good fighters. [6]

In exemplar 1, the candidate has identified 'uniformed' Romans contrasted with 'chaotic' and 'not very good soldiers' Dacians; Romans 'unbearded and youthful' and 'beards and ragged clothes' showing the Dacians as barbaric; and Dacians 'on the floor' showing that the Romans are defeating the Dacians. This response gained full marks.

Question 9

Study Source E

9 'Octavian's victory at the Battle of Actium changed Rome forever.'

How far do you agree with this assessment?

Use **Source E** as a starting point **and** your own knowledge in your answer.

[8]

A few candidates did not read the question properly and talked about the battle itself. The most successful Level 4 responses referred to Octavian becoming the emperor/first citizen; the republic changing to an empire; Egypt no longer being a client kingdom but under direct imperial control with all its resources available to Rome; Augustus' ending of the civil war while presenting it as a war against Cleopatra as a foreign threat and Augustus' renovation of Rome and the *pax Romana*.

Exemplar 2

In Source E the Cleopatra Ode they present the aftermath of the battle as a golden age for 'now it is time to drink,' suggests that it is a celebration after defeating the traitors Octavians' Victory led Rome into a golden age for ^{Egypt} ~~Rome~~ was famous for its abundant granaries. Now that Rome had taken over Egypt, the people would never have to live in poverty and starvation. This changed Rome's food supplies forever.

Octavian was viewed as a hero after the battle, allowing Rome to feel safe for they were led by a righteous leader. In the Praeneste Relief, Egypt is clearly depicted as a sly and cunning character in the form of a crocodile emphasising their sinister nature that needed to be overthrown. Octavian defeats these evil forces painting Rome as a heroic and noble place.

...in addition, Octavian's victory induced fear in other cities allowing Rome to lead a peaceful life for 44 years during his reign. This shows that Octavian, leading the Golden age of the empire, was able to become a monarchy despite the people despising it after Tarquinus' tyranny.

In conclusion, I agree with the statement completely as Rome changed a lot after the battles.

This is an example of a Level 4 response and was given 7 out of 8 marks, with credit for the comment on the source, taking over Egypt and its grain supply, the discussion of the crocodile in the relief, and the 'peaceful life'. Mention of ending the civil war or representing the civil war as a victory over a foreign queen would have pushed the response to the top of Level 4.

Question 10

10 'Organisation was more important than training for the success of the Roman army.'

How far do you agree with this assessment?

[15]

This question was a marginally more popular choice for candidates over Question 11. A minority of responses accessed the higher scores on the levels of response grid. In these instances, very good knowledge of both the organisation and training of the Roman army was often shown as well as sensible discussion of the relative importance of each, with most concluding that they are both equally important and that one would not be very successful without the other.

It was unfortunate that some responses confused the testudo with the phalanx and some candidates wrote solely about the Spartan army while referring to it as Roman but including obvious Spartan features such as joining the agoge at age 7 and the idea of never retreating or surrendering.

Misconception



It is a common error for candidates to confuse the Romans, Spartans and Athenians. Perhaps colour coding of notes or developing separate mnemonics might help candidates to separate the three different military systems in their minds.

Question 11

11 'Artemisia's actions were the main reason for the Greek victory at Salamis.'

How far do you agree with this assessment?

[15]

This question was marginally less popular than Question 10, but it elicited some lively and vigorous responses falling into the good and very good descriptor categories. Artemisia's actions were generally accepted as not very important in relation to the Athenian victory and Themistocles' interpretation of the oracle, building of triremes, manipulation of the allies and of Xerxes as well as lighter more manoeuvrable ships with hypozomata, use of the diekplous, the narrow strait, currents and large Persian ships were considered the reasons for the victory.

Section B overview

Section B carries a total of 45 marks and focuses on the prescribed set texts. These include questions that require short responses demonstrating knowledge and understanding, short analytical statements and a detailed response 8-mark question. All of these are introduced by a stimulus source. Candidates must also write one extended response from a choice of two 15-mark questions.

Answers on the *Iliad* book 22 source revealed some misunderstanding of the simile and of Priam's words at the end about his dogs. Comprehension of the Horace passage was good. Many candidates succeeded in choosing suitable quotations for the question on how Virgil made the passage vivid.

There was some really good discussion on the depiction of Gods in human warfare, with the most common starting point being Aphrodite protecting Aeneas. Question 23 on the glory and horror of war was by far the more popular option and many candidates selected a good variety of examples from the full range of authors and discussed the extent to which war came across as glorious or horrific. Question 24 on Pandarus and Paris elicited comparisons between the two archers, their actions within the epic and the extent to which they were heroic by Homeric standards.

Question 12

Study Source F

12 Why does Priam 'beat his head with his hands' (lines 3–4)?

..... [1]

This question was generally answered well with candidates recognising the pre-emptive mourning of Hector's death.

Question 13

13 Who was Hector's mother?

..... [1]

Most candidates could identify Hecabe/Hecuba, although the two were commonly conflated to form Hecube, which was credited.

Question 14

14 Why does Achilles want to kill Hector?

.....
..... [1]

Most responses named Patroclus, although some mistakenly called him Pandarus, which was not worthy of credit.

Question 15

15 How does Homer make use of epic features in the passage?

Make **three** points and support your answer with reference to **Source F**.

1
.....
.....
.....
2
.....
.....
.....
3
.....
.....
.....
[6]

The most frequently chosen features from this section of the set source were pathos, graphic detail and the simile. It was necessary to refer to the correct part of the text and explain the effect in the passage for full marks. There was widespread misunderstanding of the simile, with many candidates thinking the armour was Priam's and others allocating it to Hector. Another issue was that some responses assumed that the 'flesh-eating dogs' were a metaphor.

Exemplar 3

- 1 Homer uses Epithets to make this an epic passage. He describes Achilles as the 'son of Peleus'. Epithets were a key feature of epic poetry and were used to add description to great heroes and Gods.
- 2 Homer talks about Fate, this was a feature of Epic poetry and is seen when Priam is begging Hector to come inside the city and he talks about Priam's 'Dreadful fate'. Fate is inevitable and Priam has suffered much.
- 3 We see an Aristeia which is key to epic poetry, 'fury of Achilles'. Achilles is mourning Patroclus, and this is his day of glory where he is unstoppable.

The candidate has achieved 4/6 here for the first two points: epithets with the example quoted and the explanation that they 'add description to great heroes ...' and fate with explanation and the example quoted. There is no credit for the third point about the aristeia, which is an epic feature, but does not appear in the passage.

Assessment for learning



Answers in which the simile was thought to refer to Priam or Hector indicate possible lack of thorough learning/revision of the set text, or candidates panicking in the examination and failing to read the source correctly. Candidates should be encouraged to annotate their copy of the set text extensively as well as using colour coded highlighting, so that their notes are visible as they read the text each time. In the examination they can use a reading ruler or the edge of another piece of paper under the line they are reading in the source. This will help to focus their eyes and minds on the words, rather than hastily skim reading.

Question 16 (a)

16

(a) In the lines immediately following **Source F**, what does Hector's mother do?

Give **two** details.

1

.....

2

.....

[2]

Many candidates answered with confidence stating two out of three: that she weeps, bared her breast or tries to persuade him not to fight.

Question 16 (b)

(b) Choose **one** of these details. Why does she do this?

.....

..... [1]

Responses were generally well done. Consequential errors were credited, for example if a candidate had answered 'prayed to Athena' in Question 16 (a), 'to ask her to keep her son safe in the fighting' would have been credited in Question 16 (b).

Question 17

Study Source G

17 What is 'befitting' (line 1) for the young?

..... [1]

Many candidates knew that the answer was dying in battle, although some just wrote dying, which was not enough to gain credit.

Question 18

18 Why might each man be 'biting his lip with his teeth' (line 4)?

.....
..... [1]

There was excellent understanding of this line, with 'controlling fear' and 'focusing himself ready for battle' as popular responses.

Question 19

Study Source H

19 From what Horace says earlier in this poem, how would Roman men develop the 'virtue' referred to in **Source H**?

..... [1]

Many candidates were able to identify military service in their response.

Question 20 (a)

20

(a) What does Horace admire so much about Virtue?

Make **two** points.

1
.....
2
..... [2]

This question was answered relatively well given that the poem is quite difficult to understand; many quoted from the passage, while others paraphrased and either was acceptable.

Question 20 (b)

(b) Suggest someone in particular that Horace might have considered 'virtuous'.

..... [1]

Augustus/Octavian was by far the most common response, although Hector did get a few mentions and was credited.

Question 21

Study Source I

21 How does Virgil make this passage a vivid description?

Make **two** points and support your answer with reference to **Source I**.

- 1
-
-
-
- 2
-
-
-
- [4]

Although a few did not seem to understand the word 'vivid', and answered as if it meant the opposite, most candidates were able to answer this question with confidence and had understood the passage. The alliteration/personification of 'wild War' was a popular choice as well as the idea that the Trojans were destroying their own city in their desperation to fight the Greeks, with a quotation such as 'pull down the turrets and roof-tiles...'

Question 22

Study Source J

22 How do the authors you have studied show the importance of the gods in human warfare?

Use **Source J** as a starting point **and** your own knowledge in your answer.

[8]

Many candidates performed well on this question, often referring to Aeneas being rescued by his mother, quoting 'Aeneas would have died, had not Aphrodite ...'. Many then went on to discuss how Diomedes wounds 'the flesh of her wrist near the palm'. From their own knowledge, candidates frequently mentioned Athene having put him up to this, given him the ability to see the Gods and given him extra strength. Zeus weighing the fates of Achilles and Hector in the *Iliad* was another popular choice as was Venus stopping Aeneas from killing Helen in the *Aeneid* and showing him the Gods destroying Troy.

Question 23

23 'Greek and Roman authors highlight the glory of war and ignore the horror.'

How far do you agree with this assessment?

[15]

By far the more popular of the extended responses, this question elicited a wealth of lively and well-argued discussions of the question. Candidates were able to cite many examples of both the glory and horror of war depicted by all of the authors studied. The death of Pandarus was commonly used to illustrate horror, with Diomedes' *aristeia* as glory. Achilles' desecration of the corpse of Hector was another example of horror as well as its effect on his parents and wife. Tyrtaeus was seen as depicting glory in the death of the young man but horror in the death of the old man or the treatment of cowards. Priam's death in the *Aeneid* showed horror as well as the loss of Creusa and the treatment of Cassandra, although Aeneas and his comrades' heroic fighting was seen as glorious. Horace was also judged to be representing both: horror with the tyrant's wife and daughter worrying about the 'royal bridegroom' and the glory of '*dulce et decorum est ...*'.

Question 24

24 'Pandarus is more heroic than Paris.'

How far do you agree with this assessment?

[15]

A few candidates chose this essay question but there were some interesting answers from those who did. There was unanimous agreement that Pandarus is more heroic than Paris, with discussion of their use of bows, but Pandarus choosing to go into the thick of the battle with Aeneas, and Paris being found at home polishing his armour. Surprisingly little was made of Helen's low opinion of Paris. Pandarus' death was seen as heroic but gory, although his boasting was interpreted as hubristic.

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