

Examiners' report

GCSE

ANCIENT HISTORY

OCR Level 1/Level 2 GCSE (9-1)
in Ancient History

J198

For first teaching in 2017

J198/01 Summer 2025 series

Contents

Introduction	3
Paper 1 series overview	4
Section A overview	5
Question 1 (a)	5
Question 1 (b)	5
Question 1 (c)	5
Question 2	6
Question 3	7
Question 4	9
Question 5	10
Section B overview	11
Question 6 (a)	11
Question 6 (b)	11
Question 6 (c)	11
Question 7	11
Question 8	11
Question 9	12
Question 10*	12
Section C overview	13
Question 11 (a)	13
Question 11 (b)	13
Question 11 (c)	13
Question 12	13
Question 13	14
Question 14	14
Question 15*	14
Section D overview	15
Question 16 (a)	15
Question 16 (b)	15
Question 16 (c)	15
Question 17	15
Question 18	16
Question 19	16
Question 20*	18

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

GCSE Ancient History is continuing to grow in popularity. There were lots of responses which showed that candidates are really engaging with the content of the Persian Period Study and were aware of the development of the Persian Empire over time. There were fewer candidates who attempted all three of the depth studies.

Assessment for learning



Allow students to see the physical layout of the paper before the exam, so that they are aware of which pages to turn to. On their own question paper, suggest that they annotate the sections that they are going to do and to draw lines through the two options that they have not studied.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
- gave specific knowledge related directly to the question - addressed all elements of the question used time to plan In the Period Study: - understood the passage In the Depth Studies - were able to discuss the provenance of sources - understood how to evaluate a source's accuracy in relation to the question.	- reproduced 'rehearsed' answers - were unclear how to approach each question type - were relying on feature film interpretations rather than the sources. In the Depth Studies: - were not confident with the content and provenance of prescribed sources - answered all the options.

Section A overview

The Persian Empire section continues to demonstrate how positively the topic area has been received by candidates, due to the variety of information presented in the question, and in a few responses going well beyond the specification. Most candidates were able to access the essay questions and tell stories about the Persian kings. There was a greater proportion of candidates who were not clear on the most efficient way to approach Questions 3 and 4, so were not able to access the full range of Assessment Objectives and Levels. Candidates are getting better at spelling technical terms and names of places.

Assessment for learning



Regular spelling tests as part of retrieval practice for terms that are likely to appear frequently, especially in Question 5 would be helpful: Herodotus, Cambyses, Xerxes and Egypt.

Question 1 (a)

The Persian Empire, 559–465 BC

1

(a) Name the king of Lydia who was defeated by Cyrus.

[1]

This was answered well, with most candidates identifying Croesus

Question 1 (b)

(b) State the name of the most important Persian god.

[1]

This was answered well. However, there was some confusion among candidates with the god Ptah and Zeus Ammon.

Question 1 (c)

(c) Identify **two** consequences of the Ionian Revolt.

[2]

There were a variety of responses here, and candidates gave a variety of detailed answers, including the sacking of Sardis, the siege of Miletus. Candidates were able to identify the complex consequences of the Ionian Revolt.

Question 2

2 Outline the main changes that Darius introduced to the way that the Persian Empire was run. [6]

The more successful responses included three changes with expanded points focusing on the way that Darius ran the empire. Some candidates focused on the building projects and religious innovations without linking to the terms of the question.

Assessment for learning



As part of the process of practising the question types, encourage candidates to highlight and define key vocabulary items to help with their focus, even in a short answer.

Exemplar 1

2.	Darius introduced satrapies, led by Satraps in order to make it easier to manage a larger empire. It allowed him to have places under his rule without worry.
	He introduced the Royal Roads, see with military outposts, meaning that there was no place which could not be reached by soldiers within one day, in case of attack.
	He also introduced a new capital of Persepolis, changing where the Empire was run from, to allow an easier governing of all lands.

This is a top of Level 3 response, including three clear points, each with development. Responses do not need to be more detailed than this to reach full marks.

Question 3

- 3 Using details from **Passage A** and your own knowledge, what can we learn about the tactics of the Greeks that helped them to win the battle of Salamis? [10]

The most successful responses were able to discuss the importance of the geography of the straits and the Greeks' knowledge of the weather conditions, the negating of the Persian numerical advantage, and the actions of Themistocles as a leader. Furthermore, candidates were covering the whole of the passage, with responses drawing information from the beginning, middle and end of the passage, and giving additional knowledge for each point.

This passage was challenging for some candidates, with less successful responses not understanding key vocabulary items or which navy was carrying out which action.

Misconception



'At first by its huge size our (Persian) fleet withstood them' this extract from Passage A was often interpreted as the size of the boats, rather than the number of ships in the Persian navy.

Exemplar 2

3		One thing I can infer from the passage, about the tactics of the Greeks that helped them win the Battle of Salamis, is that they took advantage of the huge number of Persians and caused them to get stuck in the narrow strait, greatly reducing their manoeuvrability. This is shown in the passage passage where it says that in the "narrow space, our ships were jammed in hundreds". From my own knowledge, I know that the Greek often took advantage of the huge Persian army and chose terrain that would put the Persians at a disadvantage. This For example in the battle of Thermopylae, the Greeks chose to fight in a narrow pass, which greatly reduced the manoeuvrability of the Persians. Another thing I can infer from the passage is that the Greek chose to do repetitive attacks on the Persians to weaken and destroy them. This is shown in the passage: "charge followed
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		charge". The Greeks also chose to do
		strong attacks which is shown in the passag.
		passage where a Greek ship "chopped off
		the whole end of a Phoenician galley" and
		every ship the sea was "carpeted with wrecks".
		From my own knowledge I am aware
		that the Greeks used strong repeated
		attacks using their hoplite forces in the
		battle of Thermopylae which resulted in
		lots of Persian dying.
		Another thing I can infer from the passage
		is that the Greeks used battering rams
		to weaken and destroy the Persian
		ships. This is shown in the passage where
		Greeks used "brass battering rams".
		From my own knowledge I know that
		the Greek attached battering rams
		to their triremes to destroy ships
		in battle.

This is an extract from a full mark response. This candidate had clearly linked their quotation from the passage, which they had shown that they understood, with their own knowledge. This clearly signposts their response to the question. All references to Thermopylae in this response are very clearly linked back to the question and linked directly with the Battle of Salamis.

Question 4

- 4 Using details from **Passage A** and your own knowledge, explain why Xerxes was unable to defeat the Greeks.

[15]

Successful responses to this question took a variety of approaches. Some responses focused on the Battle of Salamis alone and explored the character and impact of Xerxes on just this battle, whereas others looked at the whole campaign. Both approaches were valid and given marks. The term 'hubris' was used effectively in relation to Xerxes, and candidates understood potential motivations for Xerxes' actions. The most successful approaches chose two or three key pieces of information and made direct comparison with their own knowledge and evaluated each point individually, before assessing as a whole.

Assessment for learning



Each answer is treated separately, and the answer to Question 3 does not directly link to Question 4. Centres are encouraged to remind candidates that they can reuse information in their answer to Question 4 if they have used it in Question 3 and they are not penalised for it.

Question 5

5 'The only aim of Persian kings was to live up to Cyrus' example.'

To what extent do you agree with this view?

[20]

The most successful responses chose an element of Cyrus' rule and then made a direct comparison with actions of other kings. The thematic approach gave the opportunity to address the question more directly than those who stated why each king may or may not have lived up to Cyrus's example. Many candidates had considered what Cyrus' intentions were and had also argued against the question, particularly with Xerxes' actions in Greece in retaliation for Darius' forces defeat at Marathon.

The least successful responses did not give evidence of anything that Cyrus himself had done, and there was a tendency to recap the key features of each king's reigns without discussing Cyrus at all.

This is the only question where SPAG is marked, and so candidates do take time over their spelling here.

Misconception



Lots of candidates stated that Cambyses 'only' conquered Egypt and that this was not a major expansion of the Persian Empire. This is not the case.

Section B overview

This continues to be the least popular option.

Question 6 (a)

From Tyranny to Democracy, 546–483 BC

6

(a) Name the tyrant of Athens from 546–527 BC.

[1]

This was answered well.

Question 6 (b)

(b) Name the **two** Spartan kings who were involved in attacking Athens in 506 BC.

[2]

There was some confusion here, with Leonidas being named frequently.

Question 6 (c)

(c) Identify **two** ways that archons were chosen after 508/7 BC.

[2]

Candidates were occasionally confused regarding the time frame in relation to Solon's reforms.

Question 7

7 What can we learn from **Passage B** about the ideas behind the new Athenian democracy?

[5]

Responses were able to cover the passage well and to expand points from it, for example the reference to the whole of Attica so that there was a wider geographical spread of participants to make it fairer.

Question 8

8 Using details from **Passage B**, how accurate do you think Aristotle's account of the new democracy is?

[5]

Most responses recognised the limitations of Aristotle's account based on the time of writing and were able to link their assessment to the passage.

Question 9

- 9** Explain the significance of the rivalry of Themistocles and Aristides to the development of Athens in the 480s. **[10]**

The most confident responses here were able to discuss the impact that each man had on the development of Athens and very few responses focused only on Themistocles or Aristides. In addition, most responses addressed the 'rivalry' in the question.

Question 10*

- 10*** 'The overthrow of tyranny in Athens happened for exactly the same reasons as the assassination of Polycrates in Samos.'

To what extent do you agree with this view?

You must use and analyse the ancient sources you have studied as well as supporting your answer with your own knowledge. **[20]**

This was approached in several ways, and there were those that argued for or against the question, both with success. Very few responses included reference to the tyrants in Corinth. The best responses took elements of the removal of the tyrants in both locations and made direct comparisons, supported with reference to classical sources. The discussion of Herodotus' relationship with Samos, was very helpful in evaluating the events of Polycrates' removal. There were some interesting discussions of the tyrannicides' statue to support Thucydides' account.

Section C overview

This was very accessible to candidates. It continues to be the second most popular option, with about a fifth of candidates being entered for it

Question 11 (a)

Athens in the Age of Pericles, 462–429 BC

11

- (a) Name the political and military leader who was repeatedly elected General of Athens between 443 and 429 BC. [1]

This was often answered incorrectly by candidates, despite Pericles being the focus of the Depth Study.

Question 11 (b)

- (b) Identify **two** reasons for the rising tensions between Athens and Sparta after the Persian Wars. [2]

This produced a wide range of responses which demonstrated a good level of knowledge, ranging from the Megarian Decree, to the repercussions of the actions by both Athens and Sparta during the Persian Wars.

Question 11 (c)

- (c) State **two** criticisms of Pericles' building programme. [2]

This was answered well, with most candidates highlighting the 'vanity project' of the building programme, or the perceived misuse of funds given by the Delian League for protection.

Question 12

- 12 What can we learn from **Passage C** about Aspasia? [5]

This was approached well as candidates were able to pick out details regarding Aspasia's life and how she was unusual compared to other women living in Athens at the time. There was some frequent misreading of the passage with candidates interpreting the passage to suggest that Pericles had divorced Aspasia, rather than his wife.

Question 13

13 Using details from **Passage C**, how accurate do you think Plutarch's account of Aspasia is? **[5]**

The most successful responses were able to discuss Plutarch's focus on Pericles rather than Aspasia and why that would impact accuracy as well as understanding his historical technique and lack of named sources.

Misconception



Plutarch would not have made money from his writing, and this would not have been his primary motivation for producing his text.

Question 14

14 Explain the significance of Athena and Poseidon for Athenians. **[10]**

The most successful responses to this question were able to discuss both Athena and Poseidon and bring in elements of the Parthenon sculptures to expand their points. Candidates did not have to make a judgement regarding which was the most significant. Some candidates discussed the Temple of Poseidon at Cape Sounion. Although this is not part of the specification, and so was not expected in responses, it was included successfully within individual explanations.

Question 15*

15* 'Supporting the institutions of Athenian democracy was the most important role of an Athenian citizen'.

To what extent do you agree with this view?

You must use and analyse the ancient sources you have studied as well as supporting your answer with your own knowledge. **[20]**

This was approached in a variety of ways. Some candidates focused on what it meant to be an Athenian citizen, the mechanisms for it and the responsibilities which came with it. Others looked at what else could be a focus, for example their religious or military responsibilities. The most successful responses understood that there is little separation between all the elements of an Athenian citizen's life, and they were able to discuss this in detail.

Misconception



Aristotle did not think that democracy was the best form of government. He was also not Athenian, so although he lived there, he could not take part in Athenian democracy.

Section D overview

Alexander the Great continues to be the most popular option. Candidates were confident using sources to answer the 20-mark essay questions and able to make direct comparisons regarding Plutarch's and Arrian's approach to events.

Question 16 (a)

Alexander the Great, 356–323 BC

16

(a) How did Alexander's father Philip die?

[1]

Most candidates understood that he was killed.

Assessment for learning



Candidates should be reminded not to add extra details if they are unsure. For example, if they remember that he was killed, but not the manner, just say that he was killed and not add a guess, as it might be classed as a 'Contradictory Response' [Formerly known as HARMFUL ADDITION] which means the answer cannot be given mark.

Question 16 (b)

(b) State **two** reasons why Alexander attacked the Persian empire.

[2]

This was answered well; responses often focused on Philip's existing plan and retribution for the burning of Athens.

Question 16 (c)

(c) Identify **two** reasons why Alexander believed he was a god.

[2]

A variety of responses were offered by candidates, focusing on the influence of Olympias or the events at Siwah.

Question 17

17 What can we learn from **Source D** about Alexander's role on the battlefield?

[5]

The most successful responses to this question took different elements of the image and discussed what Alexander was doing in it and the reactions of the Persians. Many identified his role in the cavalry and his inspirational leadership.

Question 18

18 Using details from **Source D**, how accurate do you think the sculptor's presentation of Alexander's role on the battlefield is? [5]

Most candidates were able to make judgements regarding accuracy based on the nature of the artwork, its purpose, and why it can't be accurate. More confident responses were able to draw comparisons with other sources, such as Arrian's accounts of Alexander's battles, or Plutarch's account of the taming of Bucephalus.

Misconception



The Alexander Sarcophagus is not the tomb of Alexander the Great. It is unclear who it was made for; certainly for someone who wanted to associate himself with Alexander and his qualities, and it was made very close to the time of Alexander.

Question 19

19 Explain the differences between Alexander's relationships with Parmenio and Hephaestion. [10]

The best responses to this question approached it by considering the different elements of Alexander's relationships. For example, how he knew Parmenio and Hephaestion, or the manner in which they died. Some responses included discussion of the reliability of sources which is not needed in this question. Some candidates wrote more for this answer, which was only worth 10 marks, than Question 20, which was worth 20 marks.

Assessment for learning



This question could be used as a revision exercise in the following way: give half the class the AO1 differences and give the other half the AO2 explanation. Students would then move around the class to find their partner. Depending on numbers in the class, you could use different coloured paper to also find their colour. This could also be done as a more static individual matching exercise. Students could then collate the answers, and finish this with writing up an answer to the question.

Exemplar 3

19	Parmenion and Hephaestion were two of Alexander's most trusted advisors and companions on the battlefield, however he had vastly different relationships with each of them. Parmenion was an older general who had fought alongside Alexander's father, Phillip II of Macedonia, as well as Alexander. Hephaestion was the same age as Alexander and had grown up with him, training and learning together as boys and was a member of Alexander's Companion cavalry. Parmenion and Alexander disagreed often, such as Alexander's decision to ignore Parmenion's suggestion of crossing the river river at night at the Battle of Granicus (334 BC). It could also be argued that the only reason Darius escaped at the Battle of Gaugamela (331 BC) was because of Parmenion asking Alexander for reinforcements. Alexander's relationship with Hephaestion was of an entirely different nature, as they were practically inseparable and many historians suspect that they were likely lovers. This is further suggested by Alexander's attempts to link himself and Hephaestion to Achilles and his lover from the Iliad. The difference in their relationships is most keenly portrayed by Alexander's reactions to their deaths. When Hephaestion dies in 324 BC, Alexander is inconsolable and begins drinking extremely heavily, which is thought to be one of the possible causes for his death a year later. Parmenion, however, was extra executed by Alexander's orders after his son, Philotas, was involved in a conspiracy in 330 BC. Alexander shows no remorse for this action despite Parmenion's innocence highlighting his coldness towards him compared to his love for Hephaestion.
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This response covered Alexander's relationship with both men. In order to reach the top of Level 5, all elements on the mark scheme do not need to be covered. This response has chosen three key areas and given detailed explanations, clearly linked back to the question.

Question 20*

20* 'The ancient sources for Alexander all show him in a very positive way.'

How far do you agree with this view?

You must use and analyse the ancient sources you have studied as well as supporting your answer with your own knowledge.

[20]

There were two popular approaches to this question. The more successful of which chose a particular event mentioned by at least two sources, for example the death of Cleitus, and examined how the writers approached this. Some responses listed the provenance of sources and why they were written, either making generic statements or without providing specific context.

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