



General Certificate of Education

Classical Civilisation

CIV2E Roman Architecture

Report on the Examination

June examination - 2010 series

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Set and published by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance.

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CIV2E Roman Architecture

Overall marks on this year's paper reflected a similar level of performance to 2009. There was a rise of approximately 15% in the number of candidates sitting the paper this year.

Appreciation of the topics was generally perceptive and sensitive, reflecting some close observation of the buildings and towns. Given the limited number of specific buildings listed for study in the specification, however, it was still disappointing that a significant minority of candidates kept their answers very general, some using no actual examples to justify their arguments. This was particularly noticeable in some answers on theatres and *insulae*, and also, though less so, on baths. Option B on baths was more popular than Option A on houses, but not dramatically so; nearly twice as many candidates chose theatres/amphitheatres (Question 10) as *fora* (Question 11) for their 30-mark question. By and large answers to the more popular choice, Option B, achieved the higher marks on Section One, while the mean marks for Question 10 and 11 were remarkably similar.

Option A

Most candidates started well by correctly identifying at least two of the three areas of the house in Question 01, but answers to Question 02 were on the whole very disappointing, leading to a feeling, often confirmed in Question 03, that while knowledge of the generic Pompeian *domus* was fine, few candidates understood what made the House of the Menander unique among those named for study. So, in Question 03, answers tended to rise to Level 3 for their general points, but lacked the specific detail to go higher. Performance on Question 04, on housing in Ostia, was very mixed; there was a significant number of excellent accounts which showed a full grasp of both specific solutions and the social context in which problems arose. Many other candidates produced more than adequate accounts, often better on the buildings than the context; others seemed to lack any knowledge of when and why *insulae* arrived in Ostia, contenting themselves with a look round a typical example, sometimes named, sometimes not. A number spoke of the House of Amor and Psyche as an early example of *insulae*, while few were correct in their reasons for the re-emergence of the *domus* in the 3rd century. That said, the better essays here were a delight to read and revealed genuine interest in, and involvement with, the topic.

Option B

Only a few candidates knew roughly when the Forum Baths were built in Question 05, while nearly half recognised at least one of the two rooms requiring identification in Question 06. Water supply (Question 07) fared better, even if some of the systems described seemed more the results of a vivid imagination than scientifically possible. Most candidates understood and explained the workings of a typical suite of baths in Question 08; those who reached a mark of at least 8 out of 10 also showed knowledge of the Forum Baths in particular. It was good to read explanations for the location of these hot and cold rooms, and also of the octagonal sun-bathing room, for the use of glass, and for the provision of large public latrines, rather than to be faced with a simple description of a set of baths (any baths, as it sometimes seemed). Answers to Question 09 on the Baths of Caracalla were generally more convincing; candidates had often assimilated a vast range of factual knowledge, but many also explained well the political background to the building. Only a few fell into the trap of the guided tour approach, but most considered the impact on the users, both practical and aesthetic, throughout. As a result some two thirds of responses reached at least Level 4, while very few failed to achieve Level 3. The majority of answers suggested time well spent in their study of this remarkable sport and leisure complex, as a number described it.

Option C

Although there were very few poor answers to Question 10, there remained a general feeling that candidates should have done better. The inability to distinguish between theatres and amphitheatres (noted last year) was far less obvious in 2010, but many candidates' interest in and knowledge of the two set amphitheatres clearly comes at the expense of the theatres. There are four specific theatres listed for study, each with its distinctive size, use and role in the political and social life of its town. A number of candidates, however, restricted their answer to the amphitheatres (generally both well known with regard to date, purpose, construction and use), so anchoring their response within Level 3 at best. Answers within this level also included those which simply attached a short general summary of 'the theatre' at the end. There were some splendid efforts which scored 25 and above; usually these covered all three towns (including Ostia – often omitted), using firm knowledge of dates to set each building in its social and political context (the needs of those who commissioned it), then adding enough detail, chosen wisely to inform arguments about needs of users, but not necessarily detailing every last variant of stone/marble etc. Essays at A Level require skills beyond GCSE: this is particularly relevant with Architecture, where it is perhaps easier than with Literature or History for candidates to fall into the trap of writing everything they know.

Option D

Many of the general comments in Option C apply equally to the work on the Roman forum. Again, nearly half of all answers scored a mark within Level 3, suggesting reasonable (or partial) knowledge, but a failure to interweave this knowledge with the degree of evaluation required to answer the question as set. Thus a detailed tour of the forum at Pompeii (regularly seen) needed placing within the political and social development of the town. In fairness, a large minority of candidates provided this, in part at least, but there were also many missed opportunities. Of the three towns, once again Ostia tended to be overlooked. There were accounts incorporating a tour of Ostia's forum and setting its development in context, including changes in the imperial period, differences in population from Pompeii, the effects of these on the use/buildings of the forum etc., but such accounts were the exception. Rome was generally better done, and the main reason for almost half of the answers reaching Level 4 or above. Here the political significance was rarely missed and was often woven into a description of the buildings and materials provided. If some accounts overlooked the social side of Trajan's forum, here again they rarely missed the scale and purpose of the complex as a whole. On balance, as with Option C, overall performance was satisfactory, but a firmer grounding of the information supplied within a consistent argument related specifically to the essay title would pay dividends for many candidates.