

A LEVEL

Examiners' report

CLASSICAL CIVILISATION

H408

For first teaching in 2017

H408/23 Summer 2019 series

Version 1

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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. 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 can be downloaded from OCR.

Paper 23 series overview

The paper is one of the four options for 'Culture and the Arts' and covers the issues surrounding the Persian Wars which gave rise to the concept of the 'barbarian' in the Greek mind. It offers a mixture of low tariff AO1 questions, alongside longer answers which require skills to be demonstrated in both AO1 and AO2.

Candidates responded well to the new component, and the new format of the paper did not seem to pose any particular problems of timing or comprehension. Candidates dealt with the lower tariff questions effectively. For the longer questions they had clearly grasped the sense that they were studying a topic which involved comparing and contrasting the nature of Greeks and barbarians (in this paper's case, Persians).

To do well on the paper, candidates needed to combine a mastery of the prescribed sources with a firm grasp of the context of the Persian Wars. Thus a familiarity with Herodotus and Aeschylus, as well as confidence to deploy the relevant visual material, was a necessity.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally went beyond a simple recitation of AO1 factual materials, and were able to add an analytical approach in order to fulfil AO2. The best extended writing was evident when candidates were able to fashion an argument and then develop that through their writing. This clarity of argument was particularly evident in Question 8, where candidates often applied their skills in order to present well-structured arguments in answer to the Question.

The less successful responses were often characterised by a lack of relevant detail, or an absence of focus on the precise requirements of the question. Candidates used their knowledge less effectively for Question 3, and this may reflect the fact that more careful and specific detail about the visual sources needed to be acquired. Some of the answers to the extended essays were not much more than a survey of evidence, and did not score highly on the AO2 element of the paper. In Question 7, candidates who were keen to demonstrate their knowledge did not always have the analytical skills to deploy this knowledge effectively.

<i>Most successful questions</i>	<i>Least successful questions</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong factual knowledge for Questions 1, 2 and 4a • Candidates were confident in explaining a range of factors in Question 6 • Question 8 saw candidates make substantiated judgements in AO2 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of specific knowledge for Question 3 • Weaker deployment of critical analysis on Question 7

Some candidates were over-keen to include everything that they had learnt, which led to sections of irrelevance in a number of responses. It was not possible to reward the inclusion of details about Medea and the Amazons in most cases, especially as some candidates believed that Medea and the Amazons were actually Persian. Candidates who focused their attentions on Herodotus and Aeschylus produced much more successfully detailed answers, although there was still a tendency to exemplify from a rather narrow range of points.

Section A overview

Candidates' work in Section A was characterised by a reasonably sound understanding of the material, although the depth of knowledge needed to secure the highest marks was often missing. The majority of candidates tackled Section A before Section B, and had clearly planned well enough to allow for sufficient time to complete the 30-mark essay.

Question 1

Source A: 6th century BC baked clay cylinder



- 1 **Source A** shows an object commissioned by a Persian king. What was his name? [1]

Students demonstrated good knowledge in answering this question.

Question 2

- 2 The cylinder in **Source A** commemorates the conquest of a city. What is the name of the city? [1]

Nearly all students answered this question correctly.

Question 3

- 3 Explain how the cylinder in **Source A** helps us to understand how the Persians ruled their empire. [10]

This question required specific knowledge of the content of the Cyrus Cylinder, and those candidates who were able to deploy a range of points tended to score highly. Some candidates' lack of detailed recall led to some rather generalised responses, and others chose to make only one or two points about the cylinder. Such responses did not cover enough detail in AO1, or explanation in AO2, and tended to secure no more than a Level 3 mark.

A focus on the specific requirement to discuss how the cylinder illustrated Persian government was always more successful than those who just discussed Persia without reference to the Cylinder itself.

Question 4 (a)

Source B: Herodotus, *The Histories* 7.35

When Xerxes learned this, in his anger at the Hellespont he ordered that it should receive 300 lashes and have a pair of fetters thrown into its waters. I have also heard that in addition he sent people to brand the Hellespont. He ordered the men who were flogging it to say arrogant and barbarous words: 'O bitter water, your master places this penalty upon you, because you wronged him when you had suffered nothing at his hands. Xerxes the King will cross over you, whether you want him to or not. Rightly no one offers sacrifices to you as you are a muddy and salty river.' Xerxes gave instructions that the sea should be punished in this way and that the heads of those responsible for the building of the bridge should be cut off.

5

- 4 (a) Who was Xerxes? [1]

This question was almost universally answered correctly

Question 4 (b)

- (b) Describe the event that had just occurred to cause Xerxes' anger in **Source B**. Make **two** points. [2]

The majority of students were able to make one point, but struggled to provide any more detail, either about the bridge itself, or another relevant point.

Question 5

5 Explain how this extract is typical of Herodotus' description of Xerxes.

[10]

Candidates tended to take two different approaches to this question, both of which were valid. Some candidates utilised the source in order to provide a range of points about Xerxes, identifying how Herodotus characterised him. Others utilised their knowledge of the rest of Herodotus in order to identify areas that could be described as typical in the passage's portrayal.

There were some who merely summarised the portrayal without identifying typicality, and these answers were more difficult to reward highly.

Question 6

6* Explain why some Greeks were so fearful of the Persians. You may use **Source A** and/or **Source B** as a starting point in your answer.

[20]

Most candidates tackled this question well, and a good range of factors were identified. There was a pleasing grasp of the fears prompted by a sense of "otherness", and of the threat posed by Xerxes' invasion force. The majority of candidates looked to do more than just list the fears, and were able to explain those factors. Some candidates used the existence of medising states as a way to explore the reasons that others feared the Persians.

Candidates were less confident in explaining the context that triggered the Persian Wars, and so tended not to address the background created by the Ionian revolt. Although coverage of this was not essential for high marks, examiners would have liked to see a greater appreciation of the triggers for Persian aggression, and thus Greek fears.

Section B overview

Both essay questions saw strong and perceptive work being produced by candidates. It was especially pleasing to see how candidates had engaged with the work of wider scholarship on the topic, and the majority of candidates had deployed a range of scholars to support their arguments. While it was common to see candidates use secondary scholarship, it was less common to see the critical analysis of such material. As a result, for essays that had reached Level 4 or Level 5 in AO2, examiners were not always able to award the highest marks in the level. Deployment of knowledge was largely sound, and AO1 marks reflected this. However, a fuller mastery of the prescribed sources would have seen higher marks given overall.

As stated at the beginning of Section B, reference to secondary sources, scholars and/ or academic works was expected however when marking these questions it was agreed that the first bullet point in the AO2 marking grid (i.e. the quality of the response overall) would determine which level the answer received. Examiners would then use the second bullet point, which contains reference to scholars, secondary sources and/or academic works, and the quality of extended response statement to determine where in the level the mark should be awarded.

Question 7

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.

- 7* 'The Greeks portrayed the Persians just as accurately in their literature as they did in their art.'
Explain how far you agree with this statement and justify your response. [30]

The majority of candidates chose this question, and were most successful when they engaged with both Herodotus and Aeschylus' portrayals of the Persians, setting those against the art produced by the Greeks. Essays were rewarded highly where they also assessed the overall accuracy of these sources and analysed the partiality of the Greek sources.

Too often the less successful answers had taken this question to mean that all they needed to do was survey the art and literature. The need to compare the accuracy of portrayal was often missing in the weaker answers, and some candidates neglected to engage with a sufficient range of evidence. In addition, some missed the requirement to analyse Greek portrayals of the Persians and chose instead to just summarise the portrayal of the Persians in *Persian* art.

Exemplar 1

7)	<p>Both in Greek literature & in art Persians were portrayed as ^{feminine} feeble, hubristic cowardly and hubristically. This was equally true in accordance to their to their daily life, in battle & in politics.</p>
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Exemplar 2

On the other hand, Greek literature, specifically Herodotus appears to give a much more accurate portrayal of the Persian. Lane Fox believes Herodotus gives a more complex and accurate view ^{of the Persians} compared to other Greeks at the time. This

can be seen when Herodotus write in book 1 'lying is considered the greatest sin of all.' This demonstrates Herodotus' understanding of the importance of truth in Zoroastrian and Persian culture, suggesting his work is more accurate than Greek art. He also

The first response only looks to summarise the portrayal of literature and art, without taking any steps to weight the two genres and compare them. It also illustrates the lack of clarity in the candidate's mind about what exactly was being asked of them. Like a number of less successful answers, they took the essay to be simply asking them to assess how accurate the portrayal might have been.

The second response shows how answers which were more successful had engaged with the central tenet of the question. Here the candidate very clearly identifies that literature is more accurate than art, thus engaging with the comparative element within the question. This argument is given added weight by the deployment of a scholar (Lane Fox) to support the opinion. While the candidate has not assessed the scholarly view with any particularly critical analysis, nevertheless it was pleasing to see the attempt that was made to cross-reference Lane Fox's opinion with the content of Herodotus in order to validate it.

Question 8

- 8* 'All of the Greek states/cities were equally determined to resist Persian rule.' Explain how far you agree with this statement and justify your response. [30]

This was the less popular essay question, but those who attempted it were rewarded for generally strong knowledge of the attitudes of the Greek states towards the Persians. There were some very good answers from those who could identify both the motives for medising as well as those who medised. It was pleasing to see how many students had grasped the fractured nature of Greek unity.

Examiners would have liked to have seen more engagement with the source material from Herodotus, especially regarding the arguments before Salamis and the Athenian answer to the Spartans at the end of book 8.

Exemplar 2

The determination of the Greek city states to resist Persian rule can be seen in the aspects of unity they showed during the wars. Although independent, the poles of Greece can be seen to come together during this period. Hall describes how this was the result of the need to form an alliance against the threat of Persian expansionism. This suggests that the threat of Persian rule was enough to bring them together, which in turn suggests an equal determination. Signs of unity can be seen in Plataeans joining the Athenians to resist the 1st attempted invasion at the battle of Marathon 490BC. Unity can also be seen in the Athenians handing over control to the Spartan commander - this shows an ^{recognition} ~~all~~ of their expertise because of determination to win, despite an personal ^{enmity} ~~enmity~~. ~~Case study~~ In addition,

This extract demonstrates a confident approach to the question. Having made a point over the emergence of Greek unity, the candidate has offered a scholar's view, backing that up with their own knowledge. The candidate has quoted Edith Hall, offered an interpretation of the quote, and then supported it with discussion of the Athenian-Plataean alliance, and the Athenians giving Sparta control of the Hellenic forces 'despite a personal enmity'. This is an effective approach, weaving together the scholar and the evidence in order to support the point made in the paragraph. Where examiners see this approach being sustained throughout an essay, they are able to award Level 5 for both AO1 and AO2.

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Section B, Source B Herodotus, 'The Histories', 7.35

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