

PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION IN ANCIENT AND MODERN HISTORY
EXAMINERS' REPORT 2021

Part I

Statistics

All candidates

| Class | Nos | | | | | | % | | | | | |
|-------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| | 2021 | 2019 | 2018 | 2017 | 2016 | 2015 | 2021 | 2019 | 2018 | 2017 | 2016 | 2015 |
| D | 6 | 5 | 7 | 7 | 8 | 7 | 35.3 | 26.3 | 31.8 | 35 | 42.1 | 35 |
| P | 11 | 13 | 15 | 13 | 11 | 13 | 64.7 | 68.4 | 68.2 | 65 | 57.9 | 65 |
| PP | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5.3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Fail | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |

All candidates, divided by male and female

| Class | Number | | | | | | | | | | Percentage (%) of gender | | | | | | | | | |
|-------|--------|---|------|---|------|---|------|---|------|---|--------------------------|----|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|----|
| | 2021 | | 2019 | | 2018 | | 2017 | | 2016 | | 2021 | | 2019 | | 2018 | | 2017 | | 2016 | |
| | M | F | M | F | M | F | M | F | M | F | M | F | M | F | M | F | M | F | M | F |
| D | 4 | 2 | 4 | 1 | 6 | 1 | 6 | 1 | 6 | 2 | 44.4 | 25 | 37.5 | 12.5 | 37.5 | 16.7 | 54.5 | 11.1 | 66.7 | 20 |
| P | 5 | 6 | 7 | 6 | 10 | 5 | 5 | 8 | 3 | 8 | 55.6 | 75 | 62.5 | 75 | 62.5 | 83.3 | 45.5 | 88.9 | 33.3 | 80 |
| PP | - | - | - | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 12.5 | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Fail | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |

Part II

A. GENERAL COMMENTS ON THE EXAMINATION

17 candidates (9M, 8F) sat the examination this year, with 6 (4M, 2F) awarded a Distinction and 11 (5M, 6F) receiving a Pass. Only one candidate this year took a language *ab initio*, although both advanced author options in Greek (Herodotus) and Latin (Sallust) were taken.

The Chair is especially grateful to Erica Clarke, who prepared the ancient papers, and to Andrea Hopkins and Isabelle Moriceau and others in the History Faculty office for all their invaluable assistance in facilitating the smooth operation of the examinations at all stages in an unprecedented year. Andrew Dixon's guidance to FHS assessors regarding Inspira (see below) was helpful to AMH Prelims assessors.

Administration

For the first time the examination was conducted wholly electronically, in accordance with procedures dictated by the ongoing presence of Covid. While assessors and examiners had set exams electronically in pre-Covid 2019, the submission of marks and comments had been conducted using hard copy. Candidates wrote their answers using the software Inspira, which

were uploaded for marking by assessors. The format was open book, which permitted the consultation of books and notes by candidates. That the process overall went as smoothly as it did owes most to Classics and History office staff. To judge from the scripts, candidates found *Inspira* manageable, with some quirks here and there.

Medical certificates and Factors Affecting Performance

The Board considered three medical certificates. No classifications were affected.

B. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES AND BREAKDOWN OF THE RESULTS BY GENDER

[Probably for internal consumption: The gender disparity at the top (Distinction) is more or less consistent with preceding years, but stands out in the overall cohort given that the M-F ratio is near-equal (9M, 8F). While the small cohort makes analysis and interpretation difficult, it might be useful to compare the percentages with those in Classics, and History (including other Joint Schools) at the level of the FPE, as well as for FHS in AMH, Classics and History and associated Joint Schools.

The Chair hesitates to open a can of worms that most may find objectionable or otherwise unwanted or unnecessary, but in the current cultural climate there may in time come to be resistance from some students to the binary category M-F]

C. DETAILED COMMENTS ON CANDIDATES' PERFORMANCE IN EACH PART OF THE EXAMINATION

Greek History from 650 to 479 BC

6 candidates took the paper. The majority of answers falls into the top of the 'pass' range: the highest mark – 70, the lowest – 64. Most popular was question 5 ('What was democratic about Cleisthenes' reforms?'), the least popular, question 13 ('How does material culture help us to understand this period?'); questions 1, 6-8, 10-11, 14 were not approached by any of the candidates. It seems that in general the candidates present good knowledge of the period studied, and especially of Athens and its politics (questions 3-5), but they seem less comfortable with the thematic topics of 'foreign relations', 'trade and economy', 'oral culture', 'warfare' and 'gender' (main focus of the unapproached questions); surprisingly, no attention was given to 'Ionian Revolt' (question 8). In the candidates' answers, there is also visible an imbalance between literary sources and archaeological evidence (only two candidates engaged with the latter, to varying degrees; only one approached question 13). Some minor mistakes or misspellings are present (e.g., 'hippias' instead of 'hippeis'), as well as some omissions of detail (e.g., *aisumnetes*, *isonomia*) and confusions (e.g., no. of demes and their dates).

Roman History 4 241–146 BC

There were 10 candidates. Candidates generally displayed a very good amount of knowledge in this paper, although there seemed to be a greater degree of familiarity with the West of the Mediterranean than with the East. Stronger candidates were able to apply their knowledge to make precise arguments that paid close attention to the specific demands of the question (e.g. engaging with the concept of 'inter-state anarchy' in qu. 1, as opposed to talking about

interstate relations generally, and focusing tightly on manpower in qu. 2). Weaker answers were less closely focused on the question and talked around the themes in general terms or were too descriptive, with limited attempts to push at the implications of the evidence and examples they cited. In general, the best essays showed both engagement with the specific question asked and an ability to consider the question within a broader framework and context (for example, qu. 1, the most popular, in which the best answers weighed the Carthaginian empire up against other factors leading to war, and considered both ancient and modern takes on causation; weaker answers focused generally on the Second Punic War). Qu. 9 deserves fuller comment. It was the second most popular on the paper, but very few candidates understood the question properly: several thought it was asking about changes to Roman militarism rather than about the relationship between militarism and the growth of luxury. Even beyond this misunderstanding, answers were quite general and based on less substantive evidence than seen elsewhere in the paper. This question also highlighted an issue that could be seen on the paper more widely: in general candidates did little with quotations attached to questions, despite the fact that these quotations gave them material for approaching and critically evaluating the question (and indeed here was key to understanding it). Here the strongest answers were those that engaged carefully with the Livy quotation and challenged his statement in various ways.

The World of Homer and Hesiod

8 candidates sat this paper, 3 from AMH and 5 from History. All gobbets were attempted; far the most popular were a) *Iliad* 9.114-134, on Agamemnon's gifts to Achilles, and c) *Works and Days* 225-237, on the rewards of administering 'straight judgments.' Candidates had varying degrees of success in answering the gobbets. The best ones addressed both the context of the passage and the contents fully (rather than a small part of it). Weaker ones were in some cases too selective in addressing the contents and thus missed significant sections that needed comment, and in others, inadequate context led candidates astray. The great majority of the discussions were serious attempts to engage with the broader significance of the passages (e.g. in passage a), assessing Agamemnon's 'boundless ransom' in terms of status and honor, or in c), contextualising Hesiod's views of justice as expressed in the passage within representations of justice elsewhere in the work and in Homer. All but three essays were attempted with some superb results. Qu. 2, on whether Penelope conformed to the role and treatment of women generally in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, was the most popular, with some essays treating the question in a nuanced and sophisticated way; less successful were those that contained parts that read much like a tutorial essay on women in the epics. All in all, most candidates demonstrated control over the epics and a willingness to think hard about them; due attention to material culture was paid but not to the extent that might have been expected (e.g. in a qu. on the Phoenicians, and another on Homeric warfare, which specifically called for attention to archaeology).

Herodotus

3 candidates (1 First, 2 upper-seconds) took this paper. The new prescription of Hdt. VI in Greek turns out to have been an excellent change. The best answers combined a good understanding of Herodotus' historiographical and literary methods, with historical judgement about how modern historians can treat it as a primary source.

Augustan Rome

8 candidates sat this paper, which in general was done quite well, with some really impressive scripts at the upper end. The lowest mark was 62, the highest 75; four candidates got marks of 69 or above.

Gobbets: The gobbets, which in some ways form the most challenging aspect of the paper, were overall quite well done, with evidence that candidates knew the texts and had used them effectively. Nevertheless, some recurrent problems suggest that tutors might spend more time practising gobbets with students. Weaker answers tended to provide sketchy and narrow answers (saying nothing about the praetorians in a gobbet which mentions them, for example), and were unable to gloss important points. Even some stronger answers could miss the ‘significance’ while providing a wealth of detail. There were some excellent discussions of Augustus’ honours. There was recurrent uncertainty about: Dio’s date and his take on the Augustan principate; the constitutional ‘settlements’ and the differential status of the provinces; the meaning of *imperator*; *recusatio* was a term notable by its absence; ‘patricians’ and ‘consuls’ were used to denote the wider aristocracy. Poetic extracts were often not seen as poetry; Ovid and Propertius tended to be lumped together as contemporary and interchangeable. Candidates are advised to avoid repetition of material from gobbet to gobbet, or from gobbet to essay: this cost some candidates marks.

Essays: Generally well-informed, and engaging even when they were less convincing; there was a lot of evidence of effective study of this complex period, and also some genuinely sophisticated and granular answers. There was, outside a few very strong answers, noticeably less on monuments and archaeological evidence than on historical texts and inscriptions: no candidate discussed architectural styles. The Ara Pacis best known, although some answers placed it on the Via Appia as a victory monument. Other important buildings were less discussed: there was little evidence that candidates have absorbed the ‘new orthodoxy’ on the House of Augustus (and some showed no knowledge of the old orthodoxy!); the Forum of Augustus featured in various implausible capacities, including as a leisure centre, with no discussion of the *summi uiri*! It was generally thought that aqueducts were an Augustan innovation; and Rome at one point even sported an *acropolis*. A significant number of answers did not tailor their respectable level of knowledge to *answering the question set* (terms like ‘monarchical’, or ‘legitimacy’ needed to be used more thoughtfully). Even some otherwise quite impressive answers started with an axiom and hammered the evidence until it supported the pre-selected conclusion. Largely or wholly absent from answers, where they would have helped: the Secular Games; the *Laudatio Turiae* and the *Lex Iulia theatralis*. Some answers were marred by dodgy attempts to render Latin terms. There was a recurrent use of *democracy* and *democratic* to describe Augustan Rome (perhaps under the influence of Wiseman?), which was sometimes allied to a Mommsenian view of a powerful and independent Senate co-operating with Augustus (and sometimes legislating for good measure).