Examiners' Report

Preliminary Examinations in Ancient and Modern History 2025

Part I: Statistics

All candidates

Class	Nos						%					
	2025	2024	2023	2022	2021	2019	2025	2024	2023	2022	2021	2019
D	9	3	6	8	6	5	37.5	16.7	21.4	27.6	35.3	26.3
P	15	15	22	21	11	13	62.5	83.3	78.6	72.4	64.7	68.4
PP	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	5.3
Fail	-	-	-		-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

All candidates, divided by male and female

	Class										Percentage (%) of gender									
	2025		2024		2023		2022		2021		2025		2024		2023		2022		2021	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
D	5	4	2	1	6	0	4	4	4	2	50.0	28.6	16.7	16.7	31.6	0	28.6	26.7	44.4	25
P	5	10	10	5	13	9	10	11	6	6	50.0	71.4	83.3	83.3	68.4	100	71.4	73.3	55.6	75
PP	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-			-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Fail	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-			-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Part II

A. GENERAL COMMENTS ON THE EXAMINATION

24 candidates (10 M, 14 F) sat the examination this year, with 9 candidates (5 M, 4 F) awarded a Distinction and 15 receiving a Pass (5 M, 10 F). All candidates were successfully classified during the final exam board meeting.

Candidates sat three-hour timed written exams in the Examination Schools. Three of these papers were hand-written examinations; the European and World History exams were typed directly into Inspera.

A meeting was held prior to the final exam board meeting to discuss the group MCE concerning the disruption to the start of the examinations on the Monday of Week 9; it had resulted in a three-

minute delay and affected all candidates. As the Exam Schools adjusted the end time of the exams to ensure that candidates received the full allotted duration for each paper, it was agreed that the impact was minimal. The board concluded that no further measure available to it would be appropriate.

No individual MCE submissions were received from candidates this year.

Administration

The Exam Board reviewed the current administrative procedures. It strongly recommends that, in future, the History Faculty's electronic marksheets be used for all Ancient History papers. This will help prevent delays and ensure the timely production of classification lists by the History Faculty Office. Markers of Ancient History papers should return scripts directly to the History Faculty Office, and the guidance for Ancient History markers should be updated accordingly.

The Chair would like to thank all examiners and assessors for their help with this year's examination. The Chair also extends sincere thanks to Erica Clarke and Andrew Dixon for their assistance in co-ordinating the setting of Ancient papers and managing the collection of scripts, and to Callum Kelly for his administrative support throughout the whole process and during the final exam board meeting.

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

While the proportion of male candidates achieving a Distinction (50%) was higher than that of female candidates (29%), the overall number of candidates was small, making it difficult to draw firm conclusions from this variation. It is worth noting that the percentage of female candidates achieving a Distinction has increased and is the highest recorded in the past five years.

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

History Papers:

European and World History Papers – compulsory for all Ancient and Modern History candidates, they have a choice of four periods. The average mark attained by AMH candidates was 66.75; marks ranged from 53 to 75.

Optional Subjects – all candidates took a History Optional Subject. The average mark achieved by AMH candidates was 67.7; the marks ranged from 61 to 72.

Paper IV – 19 candidates chose to take a History Paper IV, with 9 choosing Approaches to History, 8 choosing Historiography: Tacitus to Weber, and 2 taking Sallust. The average mark achieved by AMH candidates was 64.7, with a range from 51 to 74.

Ancient History papers:

Greek History from 650 to 479 BC

The paper was designed to give candidates the opportunity to think about well-known topics in new ways, consider different angles, and to bring to bear a broader, thematic knowledge of the period. There was an even more intense clustering of choices around the most conventional topics than usual. All candidates chose Q4 on Solon. Despite the scope of the paper, many students focused their offering almost exclusively on sixth-century Athens by also answering Q11 on Kleisthenes. By contrast, 9 of the questions had only a single taker or none at all.

With that said, candidates generally did well on the essay questions, with some standout examples. On Q1 ('colonization'), the best answers engaged critically with the concept and adduced a wealth of examples to support their case, drawing on archaeological as well as literary evidence. Since this question required assessment of a wide movement, the use of fewer (potentially unrepresentative) examples made for relatively weaker answers. On Q4 (Solon), some candidates were less certain about the details of the reform or about approaches to the concept of 'fairness'; the best answers combined a rough-and-ready definition of the concept with nuanced analysis of the various reforms attributed to Solon. Q11 (Kleisthenes) presented a problem of interpretation: the question was about the inspiration behind his reforms, which many candidates took as a prompt to write about their motivation instead. The best answers recognised 'inspiration' as referring to the origin of ideas, and explored the Herodotean story about renaming tribes in Sikyon as well as some possible earlier parallels to democratising reforms. Answers to other questions cannot be discussed in detail without identifying the candidates.

Roman History from 241 to 146 BC

This paper was generally handled well, with all candidates scoring at least a solid 2:1. Candidates generally seemed to know the core historical events of the period and were familiar with the literary evidence (especially Polybius). The cohort was rather less sure-footed with the epigraphic sources, which some candidates did not address at all (even when dealing with Greek *poleis* and Hellenistic kingdoms). Candidates were also usually hesitant to reference material evidence, which was a problem for some questions (e.g. Q3, Q6, Q9). Nevertheless, for a Prelims paper the standard here was high.

Q1: Was Roman 'freedom' liberating for the Greeks? (13 takers): This was by far the most popular question; it was selected by all but 2 candidates. In general, responses here were quite solid and were able to expose the tensions between the Roman declaration of "freedom" and the realities of Roman hegemony. Stronger answers addressed the epigraphic evidence, which is obviously central to understanding relations between Rome and Greek *poleis*.

Q2: What role did wealth play in Roman politics in this period? (0 takers): No responses.

Q3: Could we write a history of this period without Polybius? (1 taker): Not enough responses for a detailed commentary, but this question underlines that students should look beyond Polybius, and indeed beyond literary evidence, when studying the period.

Q4: What role did Sicily play in Rome's expansion of power during this period? (3 takers): This question was handled well, with takers recognising Sicily's importance as the first Roman

province. The stronger answers grounded the question in a solid understanding of the strategic importance of Sicily in the central Mediterranean.

Q5: How important was fides (faithfulness) in Roman diplomacy? (0 takers): No responses.

Q6: Whose voices are missing in ancient historical narratives of the period, and what can we do to recover them? (2 takers): Not enough responses for a detailed commentary.

Q7: What cultural impacts did the Italians have on Roman society? (1 taker): Not enough responses for a detailed commentary.

Q8: Do the Illyrian Wars help us understand Roman imperialism? (4 takers): This question was answered very well in general. The strongest answers knew not only the events of the war, but some of the complex problems posed by our different sources.

Q9: How did Roman expansion impact the city of Rome? (2 takers): Not enough responses for a detailed commentary.

Q10: 'She managed the home, she made wool' (Claudia epitaph, CIL VI 15346). Is this an accurate summary of the lives and roles of Roman women in this period? (3 takers): Answers to this were mixed. Strong responses went beyond Polybius and used epigraphic and archaeological evidence to explore women's lives and roles.

Q11: How political was Roman religion in this period? (5 takers): The joint-second most popular question. Answers varied significantly in quality: weaker answers delivered a generic essay on Roman religion, while stronger answers addressed the question asked and brought in several detailed examples.

Q12: How did the Romans respond to military defeat in the Punic Wars? (3 takers): This was generally handled quite competently, with answers focusing on the Fabian strategy, the development of the Roman military, and political cohesion.

Q13: Did Hellenistic kings have a 'Roman policy'? (5 takers): The joint-second most popular question. The answers varied greatly in quality: weaker answers had a shaky understanding of the different Hellenistic kingdoms and made confused over-generalisations about their relationships with Rome, stronger answers fielded more careful arguments and used the (crucial) epigraphic evidence.

Q14: 'In all ages, whatever the form and name of government, be it monarchy, republic, or democracy, an oligarchy lurks behind the façade' (SYME). How accurate is this claim for this period? (3 takers): Some interesting responses to this question. The weaker answers simply provided a general summary of the Roman political system, while strong answers engaged with the specific question asked and supported their case with actual historical examples (e.g. laws, constitutional changes, illustrative political careers, etc.).

The World of Homer and Hesiod

1 taker only

Augustan Rome

Overall, seven candidates (5 AMH; 2 History) sat this paper. The general standard of performance was pleasing.

Q1 (commentaries): With the exception of passages C (Zosimus) and D (Strabo), all gobbets were attempted and attracted at least two candidates. Overall, the commentaries were handled well, producing competent and well-structured responses. The strongest answers demonstrated excellent knowledge and offered rich, nuanced interpretations. Weaker responses tended to rely too heavily on paraphrase, showed insufficient knowledge of the points of historical interest in the passage or did not use any comparative material to illuminate the passage effectively.

The essays were generally of a good standard. Of the seven questions available, four were attempted. The most popular was Q3 (on religious renovation), followed by Q8 (on the Augustan building programme); Q5 (on the 'slavery' of senators) and Q6 (on the Republic as a paradox) each attracted only two and three candidates respectively. The strongest responses to Q3 demonstrated conceptual clarity in distinguishing between 'innovation' and 'renovation', situating the Augustan religious restoration programme within its historical context. These answers covered a broad range of aspects (e.g. priesthoods, temples, festivals), demonstrating a clear understanding of what was restored, what was new, and what may or may not have been intentional. Q8 also attracted several candidates, many of whom wrote with enthusiasm about the city of Rome. The weaker essays tended to list and describe monuments without engaging enough with their broader historical significance, while the best responses explored the question of 'coherence' by identifying thematic and geographical patterns within the building programme, supported by excellent detailed knowledge of the monuments. Q6 likewise produced some strong and thoughtful answers, which considered the nature of the principate, the ideology of the restored republic, and the extent to which this paradox was genuinely perceived throughout.

Sallust, *Jugurtha*

only 2 takers

Herodotus, V.26–VI.131

only 1 taker (0 AMH, 1 History)

Ancient Language Papers

Candidates have been doing well; the unseen passages worked well and were accessible to all candidates; it is encouraging to see so many AMH and CAAH students opting for language work – and to see them doing so well.

Beginning Greek

In the translations from prepared passages, attention to detail (tenses, agreement, number) paid off, and the same goes for the grammar questions: also, in parsing tasks, it is NOT acceptable to offer alternatives – a form has usually one interpretation in a given context; and leaving questions out or giving incomplete answers is not a good exam technique. The unseen translation was well done by most candidates, which is a great testimony to their mastery of Greek after one year.

Beginning Latin

In the translations from prepared passages, attention to detail (tenses, agreement, number) paid off, and the same goes for the grammar questions: also, in parsing tasks, it is NOT acceptable to offer alternatives – a form has usually one interpretation in a given context; and leaving questions out or giving incomplete answers is not a good exam technique (nor are footnotes, even amusing ones). The unseen translation was well done by most candidates, which is a great testimony to their mastery of Latin after one year.

Intermediate Greek

In the translations from prepared passages, attention to detail (tenses, agreement, number) paid off, both in translating and in answering the grammar questions: and this attention to detail creates a transferable skill – candidates who prepare with this attention to detail also do better on the unseen translation.

Advanced Latin

In the translations from prepared passages, attention to detail (tenses, agreement, number) paid off: and this attention to detail creates a transferable skill – candidates who prepare with this attention to detail also do better on the unseen translation.

AMH Prelims Exam Board Members 2024/25

Dr Christina Kuhn (Chair)
Dr Roel Konijnendijk
Prof George Garnett
Prof Avi Lifschitz