Item 4 e) PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION IN ANCIENT AND MODERN HISTORY EXAMINERS' REPORT 2024 FINAL

Part I

Statistics

All candidates

Class	Nos						%					
	2024	2023	2022	2021	2019	2018	2024	2023	2022	2021	2019	2018
D	3	6	8	6	5	7	16.7	21.4	27.6	35.3	26.3	31.8
P	15	22	21	11	13	15	83.3	78.6	72.4	64.7	68.4	68.2
PP	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	5.3	0
Fail	-	-		-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

All candidates, divided by male and female

Class	Number										Percentage (%) of gender									
	2024		2023		2022		2021		2019		2024		2023		2022		2021		2019	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
D	2	1	6	0	4	4	4	2	4	1	16.7	16.7	31.6	0	28.6	26.7	44.4	25	37.5	12.5
P	10	5	13	9	10	11	6	6	7	6	83.3	83.3	68.4	100	71.4	73.3	55.6	75	62.5	75
PP	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	12.5
Fail	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Part II

A. GENERAL COMMENTS ON THE EXAMINATION

18 candidates (12M, 6F) sat the examination this year, with 3 (2M, 1F) awarded a Distinction and 15 (10M, 5F) receiving a Pass. All candidates were successfully classified during the final exam board meeting. There were two borderline cases, and two scripts were sent out for second reading, but the results confirmed the initial marks and did not result in reclassification.

The exam board discussed the disruption to the start of exams on Monday 17 June, which affected all candidates. Since candidates were given the full amount of time set for each exam (with minor delay) and no individual MCE notices were received, it was agreed that no instrument at the disposal of the exam board would represent a fair and proportionate mitigation.

The Chair is grateful to Andrew Dixon for his support in instructing setters of Ancient papers and collecting scripts, and to Andrea Hopkins for supporting the process down to the final exam board meetings.

Administration

Candidates took their exams as three-hour timed written exams in Examination Schools. Three of these were hand-written, and the European and World History exams were typed directly into Inspera.

Medical certificates and Factors Affecting Performance

No MCE notices were received this year for candidates in CAMH.

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

The gender balance of this cohort was highly uneven again this year, with twice as many male as female candidates (using the binary data on gender that is available to us). However, the unusually small size of the cohort (only 18 candidates) makes it difficult to comment on the statistics. The ratio of Distinction to Pass was the same for both genders.

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 was 65.9, the highest out of all paper types; marks ranged from 61 to 73.

EWP 1

62 candidates sat this paper. The highest grade was 76, the lowest grade was 59. Of the candidates, 16 were 1sts; 43 2:1; and 3 2:2. The average grade was 67, as it was in the previous year. The first and second markers were largely in agreement across the cohort, with no major reconciliations. This is a very successful batch of marks, even with the three borderline grades at 59. Although in such a large group this is not unexpected, it would be helpful to see if there are any similarities in the failures of these essays, and if so to consider more focus on topics during the paper. Otherwise, a successful batch of grades.

EWP 2

5 candidates (comments reflect a much wider body of scripts from the Main School and other joint schools). The overall level of performance was pretty good, with candidates mostly writing informed, relevant and orderly answers to the questions. Although the question paper tended to favour medieval Europe, many candidates showed a good grasp of the Mongols and the Seljuk Turks, though few answered on the Song, perhaps because they did not know about the dynasty's trade policies. There was some impressive engagement with sophisticated literatures on gender, heresy, space and frontiers. The questions on heresy, the papacy and the crusades were the most popular, and relatively few candidates answered on the image of Constantinople, the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem, monasteries, cathedral schools, mendicants, poverty and the infirm and saints. Candidates could have thought more carefully about why questions were being asked – for instance, the question about 'the key features of

a crusade' was quite often answered without any reference to the very prominent debates over definition; several of the answers on heresy made no reference to the work of Moore or Pegg, which was surprising. It isn't obligatory to comment on the historiography, but awareness of the debates and approaches of historians will often help students to sharpen their arguments and focus their answers.

EWP 3

4 candidates (comments reflect a much wider body of scripts from the Main School and other joint schools). Two main issues seem to emerge from a general consideration of the exam scripts. On the one hand, only a very few questions attracted most of answers. While this may depend on the unexpected phrasing of one or another question, overall, it points to a possible problem of narrow historical knowledge by many candidates. On the other hand, answers to the most popular questions were also those which tended to be more repetitive in their structure, argument, and cited scholarship. This may raise the issue of an excessive dependence on pre-digested information gathered from lectures as opposed to independent study. Answers to q. 4 about religious constraints on women and q. 13 about the Council of Trent, which were the most attempted for Section A (Society and economy) and Section C (Religion) are two cases in point. More generally, it is worth reflecting upon the extremely limited number of answers that major topics such as economy, rural life, poor relief, medieval church, witchcraft, power, sovereignty, and republicanism received. This year candidates' choice demonstrated a marked decline of interest in socio-economic topics and a clear attraction to very specific elements of political history. There was slightly more balance among the choices made for Section B (Culture) and Section C (Religion).

EWP 4

3 candidates (comments reflect a much wider body of scripts from the Main School and other joint schools). There were 20 questions to choose from. All questions were attempted by at least one candidate. The most popular were questions 1 (industrialisation), 18 (resistance to imperial expansion), 2 (urbanisation), 14 (secularisation), and 8 (economic distress and revolution). The least popular were questions 10 (emancipation), 3 (conservatism), and 20 (outbreak of WWI). Some of the questions that allowed for a further degree of selection produced a good mix of answers – question 1 elicited a range of answers on regional and global connections individually and together, and question 12 saw different combinations of identities considered. Others were less well explored – question 2, on urbanisation, was answered overwhelmingly with reference to migration; a few imaginative answers tackled urbanisation and communities; no candidate considered urbanisation and family life. Of the nine responses to question 16, eight focused on antisemitism, and only one focused on racial sciences. Answers to question 19 (on the environment) were largely focused on the effects of industrialisation, though two ambitious candidates attempted to discuss industrialisation and colonialism in conjunction. Given environmental history was new to EWP 4 this year, the question was designed to enable candidates to apply knowledge developed partly through more standard topics; it seems likely that as teaching on this topic expands, candidates will produce a richer array of answers.

The overall quality of these scripts was undoubtedly high. There were relatively few cases of candidates not answering the specific questions asked of them and, on the whole, candidates demonstrated an impressive level of engagement with the themes of this paper. The best answers were analytically sophisticated and supported by precise references to a range of

case studies and relevant scholarship. Generally, those who chose to focus on a small number of territories were hampered in their ability to fully engage with the inherently comparative nature of EWP4 questions. However, this was not universally the case – some answers that focused on only two or three case studies demonstrated impressive depth and sophistication. By far the most common element missing from all answers was contextualisation in, and engagement with, historical debate – candidates should be reminded that this is a part of the assessment criteria. Another common pitfall was candidates pointing to differences between countries and regions but not attempting to account for those differences. Few candidates contextualised European developments in a more global context, and women were rarely mentioned unless the question explicitly demanded it.

All scripts were naturally legible, but the answers were generally clearly organised and well-written. That said, it is also clear that a few answers were rather too long and unwieldy. Candidates should be reminded that they are being assessed on their ability to craft a well-supported argument, which requires a degree of prioritisation of both points and evidence.

Optional Subjects – all candidates took a History Optional Subject, one of 23 available this year. The average mark was 65.4; the range of marks from 60 to 70.

Paper IV – 13 of the 18 candidates chose to take a History Paper IV, with 5 choosing Approaches to History, 7 choosing Historiography: Tacitus to Weber, and 1 Sallust. The average mark was 64.8, with a range from 59 to 73.

Approaches to History

5 candidates (comments reflect a much wider body of scripts from the Main School and other joint schools). This was a particularly strong bunch of Approaches script. The questions answered represented an impressive variety across the exam topics. For the five exams that scored 70 or above three of them answered questions relating to Section F (Sociology and History), although within the section the questions answered did vary. There is no indication that students gravitated towards this, or any other, section because it was deemed as 'easier' or more reliable (from a revision perspective). Out of a total 57 questions answered 9 responses came from Section A (Anthropology); just 3 from Section B (Archaeology and History); 7 from Section C (Art and History); 15 from Section D (Economics and History); 11 from Section E (Women, Gender, and Sexuality); 7 from Section F (Sociology and History); and 5 from Section G (Race). It was striking to see history and economics score so many essay responses, although this may well be due to sample bias.

At least based on this small cross-section the Approaches teaching and exam seem well-suited to each other and fit for purpose. Many thanks to the exam setters. (This was the assessor who marked all the AMH scripts.)

Nearly all questions were attempted at least once (the exceptions were: A2, A5, B5, C2, D2, G5), and most sections generated between 15 and 20 attempts overall. History and Sociology received a higher response rate, half of which is attributable to the secularization question (14 attempts). There were two clear outlier sections: History and Archaeology, with only a handful of attempts, and Gender, with c. 50 attempts (about a third of which attempted E4, on gender and labour). It is a shame that candidates so rarely take on Archaeology.

Only four candidates answered questions from three different sections. Combined with the uneven distribution among sections, this suggests overall a somewhat narrow and unambitious approach to the paper.

Historiography

6 candidates. In some cases there was a striking discrepancy between the popularity of the two questions devoted by convention to each prescribed historian: few chose to answer on Tacitus' epigram about causes being 'hidden', on Augustine's attitude to pagan historiography, on Machiavelli's to the same, on Gibbon's analysis of 'immoderate greatness', on Ranke's statement that history finds 'its perfection within itself', on Weber's putative hostility to notions of progress, etc. Two possible explanations for this partiality spring to mind, and they may be linked. First, candidates were reluctant to tackle unpredictable questions which might involve fresh thought in the examination room. Second, with the striking exception of Macaulay, they had not considered how the prescribed historians exploited their predecessors. Those sitting this paper in the future should be aware that what appears to be an unrehearsed response by a candidate working things out on the spot can give rise to a more compelling answer. They should also remember that one of the paper's main premises is the progressive rewriting of Roman history, so should have been reflecting on this theme throughout the year.

A surprising number of scripts displayed little consistency in quality between different answers. The most plausible explanation would seem to be that these candidates had devoted a lot more attention to some authors than others. This is a paper in which, exceptionally, virtue is rewarded in a straightforward fashion. If you have read and think about the texts intensively, this is likely to show through in your answers, and you will do well. Concentration on secondary literature, especially exclusive concentration on it, does not pay off; a fortiori depending on lectures. Having made that point, the difficulty which many candidates experience as they encounter Augustine – because, presumably, they have little prior knowledge of Christianity – would be allayed by a careful reading of R.A. Markus's Saeculum (Cambridge 1972).

The general impression of examiners was that candidates fared rather better with this text-based paper than they did with outlines papers. If they know the texts reasonably well, it is difficult for them to go seriously awry. Nevertheless, the standard this year seemed a little lower than last year.

Greek History from 650 to 479 BC

8 candidates. The paper was designed to cover broad themes in the history of the period, from overseas settlement and tyranny to life in Sparta and the Persian Empire. Since the AMH version of this period paper is taught in translation, there is less focus on affinity with text, while awareness and critical analysis of historical scholarship is desirable as evidence of engagement with the wider aims of the joint schools degree.

The choice of questions was extremely uneven. With only one exception, all students chose to answer Q4 on Solon's reforms. Furthermore, Q2 on settlement abroad, Q9 on Peisistratus and Q12 on the Ionian Revolt each had four takers (half of the cohort). By contrast, there were no attempts at all for Q1, 6, 7, 10, 13 and 14, leaving nearly half of this exam paper completely untouched. Three additional questions only saw one attempt: Q3 on Archaic poets, Q5 on family and politics, and Q11 on Herodotus and women. The imbalance reflects a cautious and unadventurous approach, erring towards the topics most likely to have had a tutorial devoted to them.

The quality of answers was mixed. The best answers were able to wield a range of evidence critically in order to make a confident and original argument. The best answers to Q4 on Solon's radicalism spent some time defining what conservatism and radicalism might look like in Solon's day. On the other hand, many essays did not have the range or depth of factual knowledge to support the argument they wanted to make. Many students demonstrated a good understanding of the broad developments that characterised the period, and the themes and narratives that have traditionally been highlighted by scholars (such as the notion of popular support for tyrants for Q9 on Peisistratus, or of resistance to tyranny for Q12 on the Ionian Revolt), but often the connection between this bigger picture and the contemporary evidence was either speculative or imposed. Other answers did show good detailed knowledge of the source material but lacked clarity of focus, sometimes devoting too much time on side issues or drifting from the question topic.

Roman History 241–146 BC

10 candidates. This was an impressive set of scripts, with a good number marked at 70+. Almost across the board there was evidence of good knowledge and understanding of the period and candidates generally engaged well with the specific questions asked, which was great to see. Answers at the top end were genuinely excellent, combining precise and critical discussion of evidence with sophisticated and insightful overall arguments. Weaker answers tended to be less well structured and focused, and to answer the question in general terms rather than supporting their arguments with precise examples. Candidates made some good use both of Polybius and inscriptional evidence, suggesting some careful study of the ancient sources; though sometimes they could have pushed the analysis of this evidence further to bring out its wider implications. Candidates also nicely supported answers with reference to modern historiography, although it would have been nice to see them venture into a wider and more recent range of scholarship, especially on Roman imperialism; Badian continued to reign supreme in a striking number of scripts.

A decent range of questions was attempted by the 10 candidates. Qs 7 (on language and literature); 12 (on material evidence); 13 (on social developments) and 14 (on groups overlooked in traditional histories) went unattempted. But in the questions answered candidates tackled a good range of themes; thought about the involvement and experiences of groups like women and enslaved people; and, pleasingly, thought about the problems of a Romanocentric approach to the period, bringing in non-Roman examples even where questions did not explicitly ask for them. The most popular questions, all attracting 4+ takers, were Qs 1, 2, 3, 8 and 10. There were some strong answers to Q1 (on women as a political force) supported by some good examples from the ancient evidence. The best answers thought flexibly and creatively about what was meant by 'political force' to offer sophisticated suggestions about the nature of Roman politics as well as women's roles within this. Weaker answers over-simplified the role of women, and there was a repeated misunderstanding that women were not Roman citizens. Stronger answers to Q2 (on what we gain by starting this period in 241 rather than 220 BC) offered some good discussion of events between 241 and

220 and their significance and engaged well with Polybius' choices about periodisation; weaker answers lacked such precise knowledge of events between 241 and 220. Strong answers to Q3 (on whether Rome learned lessons from their imperial expansion) engaged intelligently with the quotation in the question and supported their argument with specific examples; weaker answers were vaguer and struggled to offer precise examples in support of their argument. Answers to Q8 (on whether Flamininus' proclamation of freedom in 196 can be characterised as 'style over substance') were all good on the stylistic aspects of the proclamation but varied in how convincing their assessment of its substance was: some more knowledge of the content of the promise (and the meaning of the term 'freedom') and of events in Greece after 196 would have been helpful here. Q10 (on how far economic factors explain political decision-making) was the single most popular question on the paper and produced some high-quality answers. The best contained concrete and wide-ranging examples and offered some close and perceptive reading of ancient sources to show how economic factors stacked up against other factors. Weaker answers were able to talk about the relationship between politics and economics in general terms but lacked precise examples.

The World of Homer and Hesiod

Only 1 candidate.

Augustan Rome

6 candidates took this paper and achieved good results overall (one 1st class; five 2.1s). In the commentary section (Q1), the most popular passages were those from Tacitus (1a), the *Res Gestae* (1b), and Suetonius (1d), while the passages on the *Laudatio Turiae* (1c) and Propertius (1f) were not attempted. As always, the best commentaries were those that established thorough historical context and provided rich and detailed commentary on individual points and their significance, adducing evidence for comparison and illustration where appropriate. In the essay section, all questions were attempted with the exception of Q4 (on dissent and opposition in Augustan Rome) and Q6 (on Augustan poetry). The most popular choice was Q3 (on religion as a political instrument), which produced some insightful answers. The strongest answers explored a wide range of aspects, looking at Rome, Italy, and the provinces, and demonstrated excellent knowledge of the set texts, which were used to good effect. Q2 (on the Senate under Augustus) also attracted a healthy number of takers: some candidates made excellent points about the division of power between the Senate and the *princeps* and effectively compared the Augustan Senate with that of the Republican period, demonstrating a good awareness of debates in modern historiography. All the other questions (Q5, Q7, Q8) had only one or two takers. Overall, the candidates made good efforts to engage critically with the terms of the essay questions. It was pleasing to see that the best essays were intelligent, knowledgeable, and creative in their approach and showed a high level of analytical clarity and sophistication.

Sallust, *Jugurtha*

Only 1 candidate.

Herodotus, *Histories*

Only 1 candidate.

Beginning Latin

5 candidates. 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/ 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 – well done.

D. COMMENTS ON THE PERFORMANCE OF IDENTIFIABLE INDIVIDUALS AND OTHER MATERIAL WHICH WOULD USUALLY BE TREATED AS RESERVED BUSINESS

For internal consideration only: the report on Greek History suggests some possible strategies to prevent students all choosing the same questions, usually on core pieces of narrative history. Future setters of this paper might consider reducing the range of questions and instead entering several distinct questions on these central issues (such as tyranny or the Ionian Revolt), or alternatively not having any questions on these perennial favourites.

The report on EWP 3 notes, with regard to the trend of a narrowing range of topics attracting the great majority of attempts and the narrow range of literature used in thos attempts, that tutors may want to address the issue by reconsidering the list of lectures that are offered for this paper or the way in which its various sections and the faculty bibliography are organised.

The report on Approaches to History suggests history and sociology is a 'bread-and-butter topic' that requires more challenging questions, and wonders whether the Archaeology section might be reworked into Material Culture to attract more attempts. It also suggests the narrow range of questions attempted might be addressed by requiring candidates to answer questions from three distinct sections.

E. Members of the Board of Examiners

Dr Roel Konijnendijk (Chair)
Prof. George Garnett
Dr Christina Kuhn
Dr Faridah Zaman