

ANCIENT HISTORY

OCR Classics: Ancient History (H407)

<http://www.ocr.org.uk/qualifications/as-a-level-gce-ancient-history-h007-h407-from-2017/>

'To be ignorant of what occurred before you were born is to remain always a child. For what is the worth of human life, unless it is woven into the life of our ancestors by the records of history?' The ancient orator Cicero's words were quoted by a government minister, the aptly named Lord Adonis, in a parliamentary debate when he was arguing for the continuing relevance of this A-level to modern education. In the same debate Baroness Warnock described ancient history as 'an extraordinarily useful subject... which teaches pupils in a manageable way what it is to seek and use evidence, both literary and archaeological. It is an ideal A-level subject.'

The new OCR ancient history syllabus lives up to this billing. It offers the opportunity to study the civilisations of Greece and Rome, two of the most influential cultures in world history. Our study of Greece includes the Persian Wars, the creation of the world's first democracy in Athens, and its ruin during the first 'world' war between the various Greek states; and that of Rome the tumultuous years which saw the collapse of the Republic, the establishment by Augustus of a military dictatorship and its evolution under the other Julio-Claudian emperors, such as Caligula and Nero. No knowledge of Greek or Latin is required, since all sources are studied in translation, and to have studied Ancient History GCSE is not a requirement.

Ancient History is traditionally considered to be an ideal complement to the study of English, History, Latin, Greek, or Politics, though the broad nature of the syllabus and the skills involved make it relevant whatever one's discipline. The ability to select relevant information from a mass of raw data is crucial; candidates will also be expected to argue a case in essays, make artistic judgments upon literature and architecture, and draw parallels with later history and politics. A willingness to read outside class is essential if a pupil wishes to profit fully from the course.

The focus is ancient sources, not only literary and historical texts, but also archaeological, inscriptional and architectural evidence. The ancient history section of the school library is very strong, and the department holds a wide selection of visual material of relevance to the topics being studied. In addition the department runs annual Classics trips abroad as well as trips to the British Museum and to Greek drama productions. There are also conferences and lectures to broaden perspectives still further.

In the first year we study fifth-century Greece and the establishment of the principate at Rome by Augustus and subsequent emperors: the former includes a detailed study of the wars (and diplomacy) between Greeks and Persians, and the increasingly fraught relations between the different Greek states, culminating in the thirty years of the Peloponnesian War. The latter encompasses the emperors' transformation of the government and appearance of the city of Rome and its place as the centre of the Empire. We will explore the way in which the Roman world was completely altered in this period, the impact of which is still felt across Europe to this day.

In the second year we turn to more detailed studies. First, we focus on Athens in greater detail, both studying the workings of the democracy and the development of Athenian culture during the fifth century BC, one of the richest ages of human creativity of any

period, witnessing the birth of drama, history and philosophy to name but three areas. Secondly in Rome we study the late Republic, focusing on the causes for its collapse: the violence, corruption and competition between the various military leaders. The story of Sulla, Pompey, Caesar and Octavian tearing Rome apart is one of the great narratives of world history.

The Greek and Roman halves of the course carry an equal weighting of 50%.

Hugh Price
hugh.price@abingdon.org.uk

CLASSICAL LANGUAGES: Latin and Greek

OCR Classics: Latin (H039 for AS; H439 for A level)

OCR Classics: Classical Greek (H040 for AS; H440 for A level)

<http://www.ocr.org.uk/qualifications/as-a-level-gce-latin-h043-h443-from-2016/>

<http://www.ocr.org.uk/qualifications/as-a-level-gce-classical-greek-h044-h444-from-2016/>

Latin and Greek are demanding A level subjects, but ones which are endlessly rewarding. The chance to read timelessly powerful texts in the original is hugely exciting, whether it be Sophocles' painfully dramatic explorations of the human condition, Tacitus' scathing exposé of the Roman imperial system, Homer's epic yet profoundly human perspective on war and its consequences, or Vergil's triumph in the impossible challenge of writing a sequel to Homer in his Roman national epic, the *Aeneid*.

The pattern of the courses for Latin and Greek is identical and we will be following the new OCR syllabuses. There are four papers in total, two language papers carrying a 50% weighting, and two literature papers (one prose and one verse) making up the other 50%.

The language element expects candidates to build on the skills they have developed at GCSE so that after the two years they are able to tackle the translation of actual passages of Latin and Greek authors. There is a greater focus on understanding the way in which the languages work, whether that is through linguistic comprehension or translating English into Latin or Greek. Indeed, on the linguistic side, the aim of the courses is that those who take the A level are at the point where they are happy to take on the challenge of reading any Latin or Greek text independently and make their teachers a redundant presence!

These courses will offer plenty of opportunity to read beyond the syllabus: indeed the department sees it as an essential element to the study of the subject that the syllabus provides a framework for pupils to pursue their own interests rather than a straitjacket to restrict them. However, the literature that is actually on the syllabus includes some of the finest authors in the classical canon, such as Vergil's *Aeneid*, Ovid and Tacitus in Latin and Homer, Sophocles and Thucydides in Greek.

The teaching of each group will usually be split between two teachers in the L6 and three in the U6 to provide a range of approaches and responses to the literature. The department is keen to encourage pupils to see the importance of the study of the past to an understanding of the present, and to this end runs annual Classics trips abroad (recent

destinations have included Croatia, Provence, Tunisia, Italy, Greece, Sicily, Turkey and Crete) as well as trips to the British Museum and to Greek drama productions in Oxford and London. Pupils also attend A level conferences of relevance to their set texts where possible, and speakers are regularly invited to the school to talk on a variety of associated topics.

We expect boys to own a copy of a particular dictionary and grammar in the language(s) they are studying, which we obtain for them at the start of the lower sixth and which they will need throughout the sixth form.

Latin and Greek can be – and are – studied in combination with just about every subject offered in the Sixth Form at Abingdon; they complement studies in both the arts and sciences. The literature covers a wide range of human experience, and the skills required for the study of a classical language are much in demand amongst employers, not only in ‘traditional’ professions (such as the civil service, accountancy, the law, management and teaching) but also in financial institutions and computing firms. Employers realise that Classicists have an eye for detail and a great deal of adaptability. Recent research has shown that graduates with degrees in Classical languages are more likely to be in employment immediately after university than any other graduates.

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hugh.price@abingdon.org.uk