

Faculty of Classics: Guidance on Picture Questions

(i) *Introduction.* The following suggestions are concerned with tackling picture questions in exam papers that involve classical art and archaeology. Depending on the subject of your paper and on the category of item shown in any given picture question, not all of the suggestions and aspects covered below will be equally applicable. The guidelines offer ways of approach, aspects that might be discussed, and a sequence in which they might be addressed. Others are possible. Lectures will also provide guidance for dealing with picture questions.

(ii) *Not primarily an identification test.* A crucial sentence in the rubric governing all picture questions in Special Subject papers says they 'will not necessarily be of things of which you are expected to have prior knowledge'. In other words, the pictures may show familiar things that you quickly recognise, or they may equally show things that you are unlikely to have seen before. There are so many objects that some candidates might have come across, others not, that Examiners are not thinking in terms of what should or should not be recognised. So: **identification is not the main point of the picture question.** Examiners want to see you bring wide knowledge of the subject to bear in assessing a single specific example, and to see how you can use a specific example to make telling general points. In the Text & Contexts paper all pictures will be from the images published on WebLearn; but identification is still not the main purpose of the exercise.

(iii) *Aspects, headings.* The following headings and aspects might be covered, some briefly, some more fully, as relevant.

A: TITLE. Give a brief summarising title to your answer. If you recognise the item, give its **familiar name** and state quickly anything else you can remember of its **material, subject, date, provenance, and current location**: 'Artemision Zeus. Bronze statue, c. 470-60 BC, from Cape Artemision. Athens, National Museum'. If you don't recognise the item, give a plain **descriptive title**, perhaps mentioning a preliminary assessment of its broad date and likely place of manufacture, if you know them, which you might come back to in your discussion: 'Athenian black-figure cup, 6th century BC'. 'Marble portrait bust of bearded man, 2nd century AD'. After the title, you might need to say **what kind of picture** you have been set: photo, photo detail, drawing, reconstruction. Drawings of sites and buildings are of course different: state plan, restored plan, elevation, section, reconstruction.

B: OBJECT (material, scale, function). What is it? What kind of object or structure is shown? What is it made of? Gold earring, silver drinking cup, bronze helmet, terracotta statuette, marble temple. What was its function, what was it for? Often this is self-evident (helmet, earring) or obvious enough to be quickly stated: 'black-figure krater for mixing wine and water', 'marble grave stele', 'amphitheatre for gladiatorial games and beast hunts'. Sometimes function requires discussion: a marble statue might be, for example, a cult, votive, or funerary figure, or a piece of Roman villa decor. Function might lead to discussion of contexts of use and to the effect of such an object in a sanctuary, cemetery, or villa.

C: SUBJECT (iconography). If the item is figured, what does it represent? Give a brief description of the subject, its iconography: pose, action, clothes, hairstyle, action, attributes of a statue; the action, participants, subject of a narrative scene. How do you recognise the figure(s), what is the action, occasion, setting represented, how is the story told? For non-figured artefacts and structures, briefly describe their form and main components: 'a pebble mosaic floor with alternating black and white lozenge pattern', 'an engaged tetrastyle Ionic tomb facade with brightly painted red and blue pediment and akroteria'.

Learn and use the appropriate professional terminology – for example, for pot shapes or parts of classical buildings. This is not exclusionary jargon but a way of being accurate and concise. In describing a temple, 'amphiprostyle' is shorter and clearer (once you have learned it) than 'has columned porches on both short ends but no columns on the long sides'. If you do not recognise the subject or the building type, you will spend longer here providing a careful description of what you see. Remark on any interesting details: show you have *looked*.

D: STYLE (with technique, date, place). How is the subject represented, how is the figure styled, how was the object or structure made? This can be shorter or longer, but the key is to find good descriptive words and to **find one to three parallels or comparanda** between or beside which the item in question can be placed. From this process you should make an assessment of **place and date of manufacture**. Style and technique are usually among the most time- and place-specific aspects. **Do not be more precise than you can sustain from your knowledge** or than the category of object in question can sustain. Remember that not all things can be dated or placed with equal precision. Sometimes we may say confidently 'Corinthian aryballos, c. 650 BC'. Other times we must be broad: 'marble statue, probably 4th century BC'. If unsure, give a broad specification.

Any points of interest that you know or can see in the picture that relate to **technique, craft, or manufacturing** can be discussed with style. They are often closely connected to stylistic effect, and often carry indications of date. For example, whiteground lekythoi with 'second' white belong 480-450 BC. Roman portraits with drilled eyes belong after c. AD 130.

E: SIGNIFICANCE. If you have recognised the object or have been able quickly to diagnose its function, subject, date, and place, you will spend most time on this aspect. You will score higher the more you can **make your points come out of observation or assessment of the specific item in question**. You might think about the object's significance in relation to one or more of the following overlapping questions.

How **typical or unusual** is it? How well does it fit into a larger category? If not typical now, how unusual was it in antiquity? Remember that few things that survive can have been unique. What was the **original effect** of the object compared to the state we see it in now? What needs to be restored – limbs, attributes, attachments, colours, pedestal, base, explanatory inscription? What were the **contexts of use** – public, private, political, religious, in public square, sanctuary, house, andron, bedroom, grave? How was the object used and how do the contexts of use affect our assessment of it?

What was the **social level** of the object, who commissioned and paid for it, with what target audience in mind? How might the object's social level affect our assessment. For example, temple projects could be aimed at the whole community, while private funerary monuments might be aimed at a particular social group. What kinds of things would ancient viewers/users do or say around this object, image, or structure? What **ideas, priorities, values** did it articulate for its user group?

What kinds of **scholarly interpretation** have been proposed for this object or for the category to which it belongs? Do you agree with them, find them persuasive? What weaknesses do they have? Are other views possible, better? What do **you** think is the important point?

(iv) Sample A: item recognised.

Artemision Zeus. Bronze statue, over life-size, c. 470-60 BC, from the sea off Cape Artemision (N. Euboea). Athens, National Museum.

The statue was probably a major votive in a sanctuary. It represents a naked and senior god, in striding pose, left arm held out, aiming, right arm bent holding a missile (now missing). The missile was either a trident (for Poseidon) or a thunderbolt (for Zeus). The best parallels in small bronzes from the late archaic and early classical periods (good example in Berlin) as well as the latest scholarship all suggest a thunderbolt and Zeus. The square head, regular features, and above all the long hairstyle wound in a plait around the head, visible in the back, indicate a senior god (rather than hero or mortal). The strong, simplified features, the hard-muscled body, and the organic pose and proportions all indicate a date in the 460s alongside the Olympia sculptures. The large eyes, now missing, were inlaid and were vital to the effect of the figure.

The statue belongs in the period after the Persian Wars, when the hard, new realistic-looking style we know as 'Severe' was created in big votive figures like this one, set up in sanctuaries of the gods often as thank offerings paid for from Persian-war booty.

The figure is a powerful fifth-century-BC visualisation of a warring Hellenic divinity – imperious, all-seeing, potentially devastating. It belongs in the same environment as the Riace bronzes, the Olympia pediments, and the statuesque figures on the large pots of the Niobid Painter and his group.

(v) Sample B: item not recognised.

Reconstruction drawing of terrace sanctuary. Probably central Italian. Probably later second or first century BC.

The drawing shows a huge raised platform (c. 130 by 70 m, according to scale), terraced against a steep slope that falls away to the left (north). The terrace is supported here on tall, buttressed substructures that are cut away in the drawing to show they are made up of parallel, probably concrete vaults. The mouth of a tunnel emerges from the substructure and is shown as a road or passageway(?) running under the terrace from front to back.

The terrace is enclosed on three sides by complex triple-aisled, two-storeyed stoas or portico buildings. The drawing seems to show these stoas have three aisles at terrace or ground level, stepped back to two aisles in the upper storey – an architectural configuration hard to parallel(?). The temple is shown as prostyle hexastyle (its architectural order is not specified in the drawing) set on a tall podium with a tall flight of steps at the front only. In front of the temple, the terrace is open and looks out over the surrounding country.

The massively engineered temple platform suggests a terrace sanctuary of the late Republic, like those at Praeneste and Terracina, built in central Italy in imitation of (and in competition with) hellenistic terraced sanctuaries such as those at Kos, Lindos, and Pergamon. The scale, concrete vaulting, strict axiality of the plan, and the prostyle design of the temple are all typical Italian-Roman features – as also is the small theatre sunk into the front of the terrace. The money and ideas for such sanctuaries came from the new business and cultural opportunities opened by the Roman conquest of the hellenistic east.

(vi) *Conclusion.* Your task is to use careful description and relative comparison to make the item shown speak or look as it did for its ancient audience and users. You need to use your knowledge of the subject to create a useful context for it and so bring out its significance. Don't guess, and equally if you know what the item is, don't waste time pretending you don't recognise it! Both are counterproductive. A good Type B answer will score highly even for a well known monument: it is the quality of the answer not identification that counts. Conversely, a Type B answer that only pretends not to recognise the thing and 'deduces' what it is (a) will be easily spotted, and (b) will not score more highly than one that immediately says what the item is. To repeat: If you do not know what it is, **don't guess – look, describe, compare, deduce!**