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FOREWORD

This booklet contains reports written by Examiners on the work of candidates in certain papers. **Its contents are primarily for the information of the subject teachers concerned.**

ISLAMIC STUDIES

GCE Advanced Level and GCE Advanced Subsidiary Level

Papers 8053/01 and 9013/01

Paper 1

General comments

On the whole, this year's performance was marginally better than last year. Many candidates provided some interesting details for particular questions and their discussions seemed more comprehensive than in previous years.

However, there were a number of candidates who either read the questions wrongly or were not sufficiently prepared. There was also a problem with lack of adequate time management. Examiners could detect that some candidates were not able to 'pace themselves' properly and therefore ran out of time towards the end of the examination. This was often disastrous. Candidates have to be able to judge how much time they need for each question and spread the time over the whole paper so that they are able to give adequate attention to every question since all of them are important, especially when a question has subsections, as all these sections have to be attempted properly.

In questions demanding agreement/disagreement, the Examiners are looking for a definite stand with adequate supporting discussion. The candidate is therefore expected to make a clear indication of their position giving reasons for that position. In most cases, this was found to be lacking.

The question of relevant Qur'anic and Ahadith quotations to support points raised in the answer has improved slightly. However, more has to be done for candidates to appreciate the crucial importance of the fact that at this level of their education, they need to support their views with relevant references in order to boost their chances of getting higher scores. There is also the issue of critical stance in the discussion. Islamic scholarship has always demanded critical thinking and this is the level at which they should try and start making use of this principle.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

This theme was very popular.

- (a) Those who attempted the question satisfactorily answered this section. Most candidates were able to identify adequately the various themes in the discussion which have often led scholars to conclude that the period was that of 'ignorance'. However, the discussions were often basic without enough comments. It is expected in a question like this that a good definition of the term *jahiliyyah* would be given because it is this that would enable a decision to be made. Many candidates forgot to mention the intellectual pursuits of the pre-Islamic Arabs and concentrated on the 'negative' aspects of their society. Again, it was expected that mention would be made of the fact that there were values in this same society that Islam accepted, while some were slightly modified and 'incorporated' into the teachings of Islam. Candidates could have discussed or queried exactly what people of that era were ignorant of. There could also have been an issue raised as to whether the whole question is not anachronistic.

- (b) In this sub-section, the discussion focused on application of the terminology. The definition in the first part was necessary. Many candidates just went ahead and made use of the term without giving the definition that was being looked at. A careful distinction was expected to have been made between the types of Arabs to whom the term was being applied. A distinction between the *town dwellers* and the *bedouins* would have helped to clarify the issue to avoid the usual blanket application of the terminology as candidates often suggested.

On the issue of anachronism, Examiners were looking for excellent candidates to question as to whether society in the twenty first century is any better than most of the accusations we make against some of the sixth and seventh century Arabs.

Question 2

This question was also relatively popular. Most candidates who attempted this obtained good marks. They were able to raise and discuss the main points expected, even though in terms of critical analysis more was expected. The question looked for the main religious, political, social, economic and even personal reasons why the prophet and his early followers faced the opposition/persecution in Makkah.

It was expected that a critical approach would enable candidates to look at the issue from the point of view of the Makkans and ask whether they could have behaved differently. Candidates were expected to refrain from making the usual hasty condemnatory statements as to 'how barbaric' they were opposing something they should have known was for their own salvation. Excellent answers could have linked the situation to the methodology of Da'wah in contemporary times and asked how the faith of Islam could be shared with others without causing negative reactions.

Many candidates did well by giving specific examples of people who suffered at the hands of the Makkans.

Question 3

- (a) This question was straightforward and hence those who attempted it did not have much problem dealing with it. Most candidates were able to identify essential events during the process of the *Hijrah*. It was the critical details that were often missing. Even though the question states; *Describe the event...*, candidates could also have asked themselves: *What would have happened if...* This might be seen as being speculative and hypothetical but this approach enables the candidate to bring a different slant to the whole discussion. Excellent candidates were expected to make reference to the earlier *Hijrah* to Abyssinia and lead that to the main *Hijrah* under discussion.

- (b) This section was satisfactorily attempted but, again, some interesting details could have been brought in. Some of the details of *Ahkam* that were mentioned were not discussed.

The issue of political leadership set by the prophet as an example for the *Ummah* could have been mentioned. Another interesting point is the contemporary relevance of the whole concept of *Hijrah* in Muslim piety. One of the dominant issues in the world today is that of refugees and asylum seekers. Could this have been looked at in the context of *Hijrah* since evidence points to the fact that most of these are Muslims by origin? Again, candidates should be encouraged to approach the question from different angles.

Section B

Question 4

Even though many candidates attempted this question, the answers were basic. They were often simple rendering of issues regarding the collection of *Ahadith* without much critical detail. Again, this is one of the questions looking for a clear standpoint and a defence of that standpoint. Many of the scripts could not make this clarification forcefully enough. The question makes an assertion that needs to be investigated, indeed to be challenged if needs be. Unfortunately, this was not done. With modern scholarship on the Qur'an and the fact that candidates are likely to move on from here into higher education, they need to be familiar with some of these issues and skills at a basic level. How do the measures employed by the early compilers of the Qur'an stand up to contemporary scrutiny? How innovative were these methods at the time? What value does Islam put on 'honesty' and 'piety' in the field of scholarly endeavour? How does this compare with principles of contemporary scholarship? To add to their discussions, candidates could have raised some of these questions. It is recommended that the teaching explores some of these issues.

Question 5

This was one of the most popular questions in the whole paper and many candidates who answered it very well.

- (a) Since Muslims use the Surah very regularly, candidates had very little difficulty discussing the basic teachings. The core of the *Surah, Tawhid* that also forms the bedrock of the whole of the Qur'anic message was easily identified by most candidates, together with other relevant themes. However, there was a lack of cross-referencing with other parts of the Qur'an. This approach always brings candidates' answers to life and therefore must be encouraged by teachers.
- (b) The second part of the question sought a reinforcement of the concepts: 'worship', 'service', 'submission', 'guidance' and the consequences of rejecting these. The main issue here is that the *Surah* forcefully sets the tone for people to understand the whole thesis of the Qur'an. i.e.: God creates humankind and expects service under his guidance so that at the end of the day, one would attain success. In the discussion, regular cross-referencing with other parts of the Qur'an would indicate the candidate's familiarity with the Qur'an itself.

Question 6

This question was not very popular and most of the candidates who attempted it wrote short biographies of prophetic messengers.

- (a) The focus should have been on their mission, the rationale for their being human and the main themes of their teachings emphasising the concept of *Tawhid*. This part of the question expected identification of the main messengers and the communities to which they were sent, the experiences at the hands of the people to whom they were sent, the reasons why God sends messengers and the purpose of their teachings. The humanity of the prophetic messengers is crucial because it emphasises the significance of their teachings and their life example to humankind. Candidates were expected to make references to basic passages in the Qur'an about these prophetic messengers.
- (b) The main books mentioned in the Qur'an were expected to be identified and linked to the Qur'an in terms of the harmony of their contents explaining why Muslims generally believe that they are no longer wholly reliable. Good answers could have questioned this traditional understanding, emphasising that the essence of all scripture is the same – that is the worship of one God (*Tawhid*).

Section C**Question 7**

Even though this was one of the most frequently asked questions, it was not the most popular for this particular paper. However, candidates who attempted it did quite well especially in the first part.

- (a) In this section candidates were required to give a straightforward account of the main aspects of *Hajj*. Most of those who attempted it had no problem giving long narratives of the *Hajj* except that many gave basic information without much critical detail.
- (b) Candidates were expected to indicate clearly the principles of equality and universality in the institution of *Hajj*. Many were able to provide one or two points but these often lacked critical detail as well. Examples could have been: the wearing of *Ihram*, participation of people from around the world of diverse backgrounds, all people coming under the same restrictions, all pilgrims reciting *Talbiyyah*, collectively responding to the call of God, stoning, and shaving/cutting off the hair.

Question 8

This proved to be one of the most popular questions, perhaps due to the fact that it was simple. Most candidates who attempted it gave satisfactory answers especially to part (a).

- (a) Many candidates spent quite some time discussing the historical background of *'Id al-Adha*, the story of Abraham and his son Ishmael. Even though this could be argued as contextual the amount of space many candidates gave to this historical background was disproportionate. In fact, more time was expected to be given to the actual description of the festival in one's own country. That was the focus of the question. It was expected that excellent students would have made references to how some of the local details differ from other places and also how much of the celebration has been shaped by culture instead of religion.
- (b) In this part candidates were expected to identify distinct practices that make the celebration of *'Id al-Adha* differ from that of *'Id al-Fitr*. In many cases the distinctions were not clearly identified and only one or two points were made. It was expected that themes like: the philosophy of the celebration, preparation for the celebration before the prayer, the format of the prayer, the *Khutbah*, sacrifice and celebrations after the prayer would have been discussed.

Question 9

Even though this question was attempted by a number of candidates, the performance was below expectation. Many candidates wrote very short notes without much detail and often so general that it was not very easy identifying it as explaining the importance of any of these themes in Islam.

- (a) It was expected here that a brief discussion of the belief in *predestination* would be made. It was envisaged that candidates would mention the crucial point of the place of free will in this belief. In many of the answers this was omitted. The Islamic teaching on human free will is as important to the Qur'an as God's predestination of all events.
- (b) Many candidates did not have much problem writing on this. However, some important details regarding the basic percentages to be paid for *zakat* on money and agricultural products, for example, were absent in most discussions. Again, it was expected that *zakat* would be differentiated from *sadaqah*.
- (c) The answers to this theme were very interesting. Most candidates read it as 'enjoying' what is *halal* and 'forbidding' what is *haram* and hence spent a lot of time discussing the wonderful things that are *halal* and how to avoid the *haram* things. Even though this has some relevance, the question was expecting a discussion on the principle explained especially in Qur'an 3:104 and 3:110. It relates more to the responsibility of *da'wah*. The thrust of the question was therefore the individual and the collective responsibility in carrying out this duty.
- (d) Generally this was satisfactorily answered, except that some details referring to some passages from the Qur'an would have strengthened the answers.

Section D**Question 10**

Overall, this was also a popular question and many of the candidates who attempted it did well. The question expected that a good definition of *Sunnah* would be given together with references to basic Qur'anic passages relevant to the theme. Again, mention was also to be made of the rationale for the humanity of all prophets and messengers, and Muhammad for that matter, because this provides a solid basis for the importance of the *Sunnah*. Even though some candidates mentioned the importance of *Sunnah* to the practicalities of some of the main pillars of Islam, the lack of Qur'anic references often took the steam out of the discussion. It is recommended that in the teaching of *Sunnah* some basic references from the Qur'an and Hadith are introduced.

Question 11

This question was not very popular and the few candidates who attempted it did not do justice to the question. It was expected that candidates would give a good description of the main sources of *shari'ah* and identifying how these formed the basis of Muslim thinking. The relationship between them and the importance was to be discussed. It was also expected that good candidates would refer to contemporary debates on the need for fresh approaches to legal thought in Islam including applications of *Ijma* and *Qiyas*.

Question 12

This was perhaps the least popular of all the questions. The question takes the position that Islamic teachings are capable of meeting new challenges and the candidates were expected to discuss how this could be done. The basis of this is to be found in the traditional belief that the message of the Qur'an cuts across space and time and therefore even though the Qur'an was revealed in the seventh century, the central teachings are still relevant to the present time and to the future. Answers were expected to refer to the traditional methods of interpreting the Qur'an with the help of the *Sunnah* and applying *Ijma* and *Qiyas*. Excellent candidates could have referred to current situations in particular countries and the challenges faced in the introduction of Islam into public life.

Paper 9013/02

Paper 2

General comments

The performance on the whole was comparable to that of previous years. The most popular questions were **1, 2, 4, 8** and **12**. **Questions 9** and **10** were the least popular and together with **Questions 5** and **7** they proved to be the most challenging. With respect to the most popular questions, most candidates gave extensive discussions often with information that was not crucially relevant. Time management was still a problem with some candidates spending so much time on certain 'favourite' questions that they did not have enough time to adequately address the others. This often happened in questions with multiple sections. It is important that candidates learn that since all questions carry equal marks there is always a huge risk of not giving adequate attention to any of the five questions to be attempted. The issue of the inability of candidates to show familiarity with relevant Qur'anic and Ahadith passages is still problematic and this also needs to be addressed.

Comments on specific questions**Section A****Question 1**

This question was perhaps the most popular of the whole paper and many candidates did quite well. They were able to identify the main factors that contribute to the perception that the Umayyad rulers were generally 'unIslamic'. Many of the candidates were able to distinguish the general characteristics of these rulers from the period of the Prophet and the Khulafa'a al-Rashidun. The period of Umar ibn Abdul al-Aziz (Umar II) was correctly identified as one of the brightest periods during the Umayyad rule.

Question 2

This question was also popular and since it was a follow-on to **Question 1**, many candidates found it advantageous to answer both. Those who did performed well, often giving a lot of detail in identifying some of the activities of Umar II. They often emphasised his Islamic credentials in order to differentiate him from the other Umayyad rulers. It was, however, expected that excellent answers would attempt to question the whole perception of the rule of Umar II mentioning that there were great overall military and political achievements in the period of the Umayyad in general. Unfortunately this was lacking.

Question 3

This question did not receive as much justice as was expected. Perhaps candidates have not been studying the biographies of certain personalities beyond those of the period of the Prophet and his companions. The question expected identification of the specific contribution of each of these rulers to Islamic history. Activities having to do with the development of the religion, socio-political issues, economic development, science and arts, philosophy and education in general and military campaigns were expected to be raised. Most candidates did not seem confident enough to discuss these. Since this is part and parcel of the syllabus it is important that candidates show familiarity with the main events.

Section B**Question 4**

This was attempted by quite a number of candidates but some read the question wrongly as asking for a discussion on the importance of the Sunnah. Even though this could be background information the question was specifically looking for detailed accounts of the methods employed to ensure that the Ahadith were authentic. Candidates were therefore expected to discuss the oral stage of transmission, early collections and the six canonical works. Candidates were to mention among other things the general criteria in the investigation of the narrator, the chain (*isnad*), the text (*Matn*) and the methods of comparison.

Question 5

This question was fairly popular and many of the candidates who attempted it performed satisfactorily.

- (a) In this section there were some very good answers with most of the candidates focusing on Imam Abu Hanifah and Imam Malik. Most candidates were able to identify the basic characteristics of the teachings of the Imams mentioning, for example, Abu Hanifah's careful blend of revelation and practical reason while emphasising Imam Malik's reliance on the precedents of the early companions and the early generations especially the people of Madinah. Many candidates showed clearly that they were familiar with the life and teachings of the four main Sunni Imams.
- (b) The second part of the question proved a bit more challenging with many candidates not being able to adequately draw out the differences in the main lines of emphasis in the schools. It should have been easy since the main principles would have been identified in **Section A**. It is perhaps important to recommend that such comparative accounts must often form part of the teaching and learning process.

Question 6

This question was attempted by quite a number of candidates but much of the discussion seemed a little biased against the Mu'tazilah. It appears that much of the candidates' knowledge does not have a positive appreciation of this group.

- (a) In this part many candidates were able to give basic accounts of the main teachings of the Mu'tazilah even though some of the finer details provided left much to be desired. It was expected that candidates would focus on the Five Principles of the Mu'tazilah and their attempts to defend Islam rationally. Excellent answers were expected to explore the historical context in which the Mu'tazilah was operating and also the rationale behind some of their teachings.
- (b) This second part was to look at specific issues in the ideas of the school that are found problematic by some Muslims. Better answers were expected to mention their pedantic emphasis on reason and the problem they created in interpreting divine attributes. Excellent answers were expected to raise the question as to whether the Mu'tazilah has made any positive contribution to the development of Islamic thought.

Section C**Question 7**

It is rather unfortunate that most of the candidates who attempted this question either misread the question or allowed their own biases to overshadow their answers. Most candidates were merely enumerating what they thought were 'anti Islamic practices' amongst the Shi'a. Some discussed at length the 'incorrect beliefs' of the Shi'a even though the question has nothing to do with evaluation of doctrinal issues. The question merely expected candidates to identify events in the history of Islam that brought about the formation of the Shi'a and answer the simple question: why are these often considered tragic in Islamic history? A balanced view was needed here but unfortunately this was very rare. Discussions of the battles of the Camel, Siffin, Nahrawand and the Karbala tragedy were expected to feature in the answers. Candidates were to show how these caused divisions within an Ummah that was meant to be one and united.

Question 8

This question was also popular as candidates showed familiarity with many aspects of Sufism in terms of history and doctrine.

- (a) Many candidates were perhaps expecting a question about al-Ghazzali and therefore they wrote on him anyway. They concentrated on al-Ghazzali's evaluation of and contribution to Sufi thought. They might have studied al-Ghazzali's critique so some wrongly read the question as asking for a focus on al-Ghazzali. In many cases, signs of strong anti Sufi bias were detected in their analysis of so-called 'beliefs' and 'practices' of Sufism that cannot be recognised by authentic Sufi practitioners. The paper was looking for Sufi emphasis on the inner meaning of things as against the outward observances; the importance attached to individual experiences as against the communal; the place of the Sheikh etc.
- (b) This part of the question requests identification of specific issues to be compared with orthodox beliefs and practices. Among other things the following are relevant to such discussion: *Dhaka* sessions, singing and dancing, special/extra recitations in *Salah*, total obedience to the Sheikh, visits to shrines etc. Better answers were to refer to some specific contemporary practices among certain Sufi brotherhoods.

Question 9

Questions on philosophy have often been the least popular in this examination and also in this paper. Only a handful of candidates attempted this question; the main reason for this lack of interest is not clear, beyond the most obvious that it is probably found to be difficult/challenging. The question being descriptive, points could have included: The authority of Greek philosophers, the place of Aristotle, great value attached to human reason, and less emphasis on revelation. Good answers were expected to refer to some of the leading figures, especially al-Arabia and Ibn Sina and their critique of the existing philosophical ideas. It is being recommended that institutions play a role in creating interest in philosophy amongst students because of the enormous contribution to the widening of their horizon.

Section D**Question 10**

This was one of the less popular questions in the paper and only a handful of candidates attempted it giving some basic discussions. The question was asking for clear identification of the main features of the teachings of these two figures. Similarities and differences were then to be outlined. The paper was looking for the subject of socio-political justice and emphasis on education as the core of their teachings. With regard to the differences the emphasis was to be on the methodology of education and also the glaring difference between the two in their appreciation of the West. While Hasan al-Banna focused on Islam as the foundation of education, Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan was more infatuated with modern western educational principles. It is important that candidates are made to focus on contemporary Islamic personalities in addition to the classical ones.

Question 11

This was not a very popular question and the few candidates who attempted it did not seem to have done it enough justice to it. The question sought to encourage candidates to see themselves as part of a global society that is becoming increasingly plural. It was the expectation that candidates would be able to outline some major references from the Qur'an relating to the People of the Book. Good answers were expected to place Islam in religious history *vis a vis* Judaism and Christianity. Better answers were expected to explore how Qur'anic teachings on the subject are implemented in contemporary society.

Question 12

A very popular question, most candidates gave some very interesting answers with some fine details. Generally, the candidates were able to identify the main issues confronting Muslims in minority situations around the world. Some of the themes expected to be discussed were: food, dress, education, places of worship, marriage, financial issues, health care, death and burial and inheritance. Unfortunately, many candidates who discussed the European scene appeared a bit biased and in some cases displayed a clear misunderstanding of the situation of Muslim minority communities. In some cases, instead of a 'named country', candidates merely recounted so-called problems in Europe in general. Better answers were expected to also refer to the opportunities available in such places in the face of the challenges.