

ISLAMIC STUDIES

Paper 9013/01

Paper 1

General Comments

The general performance as compared to that of November 2008 has not been remarkably different even though, as usual, there are instances where candidates scored very good marks and others very low. As for the level of difficulty, this year compares reasonably well with that of last year. The level of difficulty is therefore not very different.

The question of taking time to read the question properly is still a problem and hence I have no option but to draw attention to this constant issue so that institutions would reinforce the skill of reading questions properly before putting pen on paper. Some candidates seem to latch onto particular key words and run with them. Even though focusing on key words or particular 'registers' is very important, candidates have to read the whole of the question so that they get a comprehensive idea about what is being asked instead of what the question might look like.

There has been more improvement in making references to Qur'anic passages, less so of ahadith to support discussions. Most candidates merely make points without much regard to the Qur'an or Hadith. Even in questions where this is specifically asked for, the general performance has been inadequate. **Questions 5, 6, 8, 10 and 12** for example, cannot be satisfactorily dealt with without references to such passages. However, at this level of their education, candidates are expected to show familiarity with basic relevant Qur'anic and Hadith passages to support their arguments. These are the primary sources for Islamic thought and values and hence such references are crucial to the quality of the answers.

The problem of two-part questions being answered as one instead of attempting both parts separately has lessened a bit. However, there is still scope for improvement. This often leaves the Examiner in a very difficult situation because he/she has to spend quite some time looking for possible starting points for part one/[a] and the beginning of the next part. Linked to this is the problem of some candidates numbering their answers consecutively without regard to the actual numbers of the questions chosen. This creates a problem for the Examiner as it might lead to a confusion of one question with another.

Further, some of the answers were just too short and simplistic to make any meaningful inroads into answering the question. Some even merely presented bullet-points, which is not good enough.

Candidates are also expected to conclude their discussions properly. This is especially important in questions where candidates are asked to take a position and offer reasons for the position they have taken.

There is also the consistently recurring problem of candidates writing so much about the background to the theme/topic and only a bit on the focus of the question. This occurred especially in **Questions 1, 2, 3 and 7**. Candidates should be able to weigh up how much of the background is needed so that they will be able to give more time to the main part of the question.

Further, the age-old problems of lack of sufficient preparation, and poor time management still exist. It is important that these problems are addressed in order that candidates will be able to answer questions appropriately. Some candidates only attempted one question and others took so much time in planning that only three questions were attempted.

Comments on Specific Questions

Section A

Question 1

This question was very popular but many candidates read it wrongly. The question is asking for a discussion of 'main religious beliefs and religious practices'. Unfortunately, many read the second part as 'social practices' and hence went on referring to: alcoholism, abuse of women, some burying their new-born daughters, being warlike, etc. The discussion in part [a] was therefore on the general situation in pre-Islamic Arabia. For the burying of newborn females, the image presented by many was that it was practiced by all people. This cannot be historically true!

For part [b], many had the problem of the 'misreading' of the first part and hence ended up raising issues about how the Qur'an criticises the social practices. As in previous sessions, the conclusion was often abrupt and did not reflect the main line of the question.

Many candidates offered only one-sided emotional arguments condemning the pre-Islamic Arabs. This, on its own, is not a problem. The critical issue is if this attitude is defensible. An attempt to be objective is called for in instances like this. At least there were some positive religious values in that society that one cannot completely ignore. There were only a few candidates who made references to the Hunafa.

Question 2

Even though this question looks a bit straight forward, it did not attract attention as others. However, even though some of the few who attempted it did very well, others left the impression that they did not have a proper grasp of the main details of its social, historical and religious significance.

Even though we caution candidates not to give too much space to background information, in this particular case, one expected references to the Hijrah to Abyssinia as a precursor to Medina.

The theme of Hijrah is of such importance in the socio-religious history of Islam that candidates are expected to be familiar with the basic details. It helped the development of Islamic thought have a solid foundation and this is crucial to any discussion in Islamic History. Issues regarding the 'effect of the Hijrah' on the development of Islam and what might have happened without it did not appear in any answer.

Question 3

This was a historical question asking candidates to examine the caliphates of two of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs with a critical eye focusing on main events. The definition of 'main events' is hence key to the answer. Here, there were many who could not make this identification satisfactorily. The question asked for core/main events but many were too general. Some were spot on mentioning events like: apostasy, false prophets, Zakat defaulters, compilation of the Qur'an, styles of administration, expeditions, rebellions and the defence of the realm etc. Many gave too much time to the life background of the Caliphs.

In each case, candidates were expected to cite specific characteristics which made the different periods stand out. The conclusion should then indicate the final comment on the assessment. Unfortunately, in many cases, the discussion was not that critical.

Section B

Question 4

Those who attempted this question did not show much evidence of a basic appreciation of the *surah* as expected by the syllabus. The question asked for an explanation of the 'main themes' and that is exactly what candidates were expected to do. Identifying the main themes was a problem to many candidates. Emphasis was expected on the power of God, the revelation of the Qur'an and the significance of the Night of Power. In many of the answers, there was no explanation and the points were very simplistic. Some even merely provided translations of the *surah*. Again, cross-referencing with other parts of the Qur'an was expected but unfortunately, this was found wanting. This cross-referencing would have enabled candidates to show clear understanding.

Question 5

This question required candidates to examine the significance of the Qur'an in Muslim life. Even though it proved a bit popular, the answers were not that relevant. Many went on and on describing how wonderful the Qur'an is, oblivious of the need to explain its significance to Muslims.

Some of the discussions were an emotional appreciation of the Qur'an.

The question was looking for internal evidence to explain its significance to contemporary Muslims and hence references to various passages were needed. Candidates were expected to show general familiarity with the Muslim scripture but this did not come out clear enough. Muslims understand the Qur'an as the primary source of guidance and hence in both life and thought references are made to it. This is not only about daily rituals but also in social relations and how to face the modern world. If candidates are not able to do this adequately, then there is a problem with their basic familiarity with the text of the Qur'an.

Question 6

This question was deemed to be very open and since there are many passages on the theme of Tawhid in the syllabus. Quite a lot of candidates attempted it and did relatively well. Most of the candidates focused on *Surat al-Fatihah* and *Surat al-Ikhlās*. However, the discussions were basic without much detail and reference to other parts of the Qur'an. If, as the question suggests, the whole of the Qur'anic message is founded on the concept of Tawhid, then the references have to be wider to reflect this.

Candidates could have examined the implication of the whole theme of Tawhid to social relations. For example, one could argue that the concept enables Muslims to see the world as one and hence there should not be any discrimination. Further, interfaith relations could be improved since member of all faiths will see themselves as coming from and serving the same one God. Such details were not found.

Section C

Question 7

This was a popular question but the attempts were not that adequate. The question specifically asks for the historical, social and religious significance. However, most answers merely told the story of the Hajj or just described how it is carried out. Even though the actual practice of Hajj might be useful as background information and to enable one to bring out the significance in any of the three levels, just describing the rituals does not answer the question. This is possibly one of the cases where candidates hang onto registers in the question, in this case being Hajj, and then just carry on. As the mark scheme indicates, reference to the linkage with Adam, Abraham, Ishmael, and Hagar, was important for the historical part. For the other parts, mentioning of social and spiritual cohesion, show of unity among Muslims, the celebration of the *'Id al-Adha* and its social and spiritual meaning, would be very helpful. Candidates might have looked back at the pre-Islamic Arabia and showed how some of the rituals became tainted with idolatry and some uncouth practices. The significance of the changes brought by Islam was then to be emphasised.

Question 8

This question was also relatively popular as it was expected. However, candidates' performance in some of the parts was not very good.

What was not adequately dealt with was citing enough references from the Qur'an and Hadith to make comprehensive discussion.

In [a], the question is looking for a good discussion on events that could be described as 'pre-determined' and those that humankind have control over. However, it was expected that candidates will mention the fact that the nature of God enables Him to know things even before they happen and not that He is necessarily the active cause of all events. The emphasis is hence on the 'Absolute Knowledge of God' or His foreknowledge. Some candidates even read this as 'afterlife' and hence went on talking about the events of the next world.

In [b], and [c], candidates were a bit more satisfactory but many gave basic points with very little reference to the Qur'an.



In [d], some read it 'the prophet' as a general term and hence spoke of 'the prophets' in general even though the definite article should have pointed to the Prophet Muhammad. This reading was accepted as ingenuous though and marked on its own merit.

Question 9

This question was also very popular and many of the candidates who attempted it did well. However, others just described the Five Pillars of Islam without showing how they promote communal solidarity as the question is clearly asking for.

It was expected that candidates would look at each of the Pillars mentioned and explain how it indicates the communal solidarity. The way the *Shahadah* enables every believer to come under the same One God, and all serving Him together; how the various positions of *Salat* instil the consciousness of one family; the way *Zakat* fund is issued to help out the poor; and how *Sawm* trains people to feel for the poor are some of the points expected.

Section D

Question 10

In general, this question was not that popular.

Most of the candidates who attempted it gave basic and simplistic answers. They often explained how wonderful the teachings of Islam are and how the modern world should embrace them.

The question is however specifically asking for an analysis of how new developments in the world could be accommodated within the teachings of Islam. Perhaps, the answers given here were the poorest in the whole paper.

The thrust of the question demands a discussion of the traditional methods of interpreting Qur'an with the help of the *Sunnah*, and by applying *Ijma* and *Qiyas*. Answers could have referred to contemporary issues and how Muslim communities around the world are dealing with them within the ambit of Islam without looking like living in medieval times. Better answers could make reference to the new developments in many Muslim minority communities where special *Fiqh* discussions are going on in order that they will be able to survive the onslaught of new ideas. Unfortunately, there was not much of this in any of the scripts.

Question 11

This was very popular and it was generally well answered. Many candidates were able to identify the four bases and explain them. However, the way they relate to each other was often not adequately explained.

In referring to the 'School of Thought' in Islam, there was no mention of Shi'i Schools. This needs to change.

Candidates should hence say categorically that they are discussing 'the Four Sunni Schools of Legal Thought' to make their statements academically valid. The question is very direct and hence answers were expected to be clear and forthright. The discussion of the four main sources: Qur'an, Sunnah, Ijma [Consensus] and Qiyas [Analogy] and how these relate to each other should form the foundation of the answer. Examples of how this actually takes place in practice would have benefitted answers.

Question 12

In [a], many candidates were able to give some satisfactory points. However, most of the answers were simplistic without much reference to Qur'anic passages reinforcing the significance of the Sunnah. Examples such as: 4:80; 16:44; 21:107; and 33:21, 45 - 46 would have been very useful. If the Qur'an is the primary source of legal thought, then with the Sunnah explaining the Qur'an it goes without saying that its place in shaping and explaining legal thought in Islam is very prominent. No legal thought can be understood properly without recourse to the Sunnah.

For [b], most of the answers were, again, simplistic even though this is a very familiar topic when dealing with Law [*Fiqh*]. Someone, somehow, read this as *Jihad*. Even though the roots might be the same and performing *Ijtihad* could be argued as a form of *Jihad*, the two are not the same and this is not what the question is looking for. Comments on how *Ijtihad* explains the attempt in Islam to encourage people to think for themselves instead of merely following others could have been referred to.



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Paper 9013/02

Paper 2

General Comments

It was pleasing to see that this year; the vast majority of candidates gave answers of suitable length, approximately 2 sides of A4 writing per essay question or more, which is about right for this level of answer. Very few candidates gave responses of less than a side and a half, although some did so, particularly near the end of the paper. It would be beneficial for Centres to go through with candidates how to balance their time equally between the 5 questions, under examination conditions.

Most candidates answered the correct number of questions, five in total, including at least one from each section. In most Centres all candidates correctly followed the rubric. In some Centres a significant number answered only 4 questions. This suggests that those Centres should explain the requirements of the examination more carefully to their candidates so that the candidates do not miss out an answer, which could make all the difference to them attaining a higher grade.

Very few candidates wrote notes but some still did. It is important that all answers at this level are written in coherent sentences and paragraphs, not notes. As a guide, paragraphs should make a clear point, and not ramble on without focus. A clear paragraph of not more than half a side, including a clear point addressed to the wording of the question, with an example or detail or quote to back up the point, was a feature found in the best answers. Candidates are reminded of the need for legible handwriting and it is also good practice to leave one line gap between paragraphs and start answers to new questions on a new page.

By contrast, many candidates still did not focus their answers specifically on the wording of the question. Learning the facts about a topic is one thing, but this is not sufficient for a good answer at this level. It is essential that these facts are applied and discussion added with regard to the wording of the question. Candidates who went into detail, challenged the wording of the question, and put different points of view, gained the best marks. Centres might find it helpful to teach candidates to define the scope of the question and any key words or concepts in the opening paragraph, and then ensure there is a conclusion at the end which evaluates the discussion. This means that there must be a consideration of different points of view or the wider significance of this topic within the answer.

The use of quotations was very varied. Some candidates used them proficiently, clearly relating them to the point they wanted to make. Other candidates did not use them well or hardly referred to them at all, even when the question asked about the Qur'an or the Ahadith.

Comments on Specific Questions

Section A

Question 1

This was a very popular question and most candidates were able to give detailed accounts of the violent events which occurred in the reigns of Mu'awiyha and his son Yazid. However, far fewer candidates took an analytical approach and defined the causes of the violence. The question invited candidates to look in detail at the policies and personalities of the rulers and assess to what extent these caused violence. If a candidate looked at different points of view, then made a discussion and came to a reasoned conclusion at the end, then that constituted an excellent answer.



Question 2

This was a reasonably popular question in which candidates were required to make a critical assessment of the Caliphates of 'Abd al-Malik in part (a) and one other. The temptation again was for candidates to write factual details rather than discuss the influence, successes and shortcomings, of each Caliph.

- (a) Answers were very good at listing the achievements of 'Abd al-Malik, including building the Dome on the Rock, increasing the use of Arabic and even starting a postal service. Many answers only referred to positive points but the question invited candidates to consider negative ones as well, such as how sensitively did he really deal with the Siege of Mecca, before reaching a conclusion.
- (b) Most candidates wrote in detail about the piety of Umar II but few considered any negative points. They could have referred to the problems with the nobility, which led to his being poisoned in the end, before making an overall assessment.
- (c) Very few candidates chose to refer to Marwan II. Those who did emphasized negative points such as his loss to the Kharijite rebellion. Candidates could have balanced this by referring to the inevitable rise of the Abbasids before making an overall conclusion.

Question 3

Few candidate chose this question and those who did tended to either write about the successes of the 'Abbasid Empire or about the failures. The question invited both: the key word was "only". Candidates not only needed to write about why the authority of the Caliphs declined, but also why this was after a considerable period of time. This mean that several pieces of information could be used to justify both perspectives: the use of local officials both strengthened them in that local officials dealt effectively with problems, but also weakened the Caliphs in the long run by increasing the trend towards autonomy. Many candidates wrote about the achievements of the 'Abbasids, possibly from a pre-learned answer. Since a very different question was being assessed here, such answers invariably were not able to achieve high marks.

Section B

Question 4

This was a very popular question which was quite well answered. It was clear, though, that all candidates from some Centres were limited in their knowledge. All referred to the Mu'tazilite rejection of the anthropomorphic descriptions of God and their belief in the createdness of the Qur'an. Fewer candidates were able to articulate the belief in divine justice at judgment and the use of logic and reason in Mu'tazilite thinking. Though this is much more complex to understand it is recommended that teachers spend some time explaining this to candidates so that they can gain a more detailed appreciation of Mu'tazilite theology.

Question 5

This was a popular question which brought many mediocre answers but few good ones.

- (a) This part asked for the "stages" that led to the compilation of the Ahadith. That does not mean write about the Ahadith as words that explain the Qur'an. It means trace the history of the sayings of the Prophet from the time they were uttered and passed down in exclusively oral tradition to the first written notes down to the six main collectors and what they did. Examples of names and quotes from Ahadith, explaining how it was collected in context, made for very good answers.
- (b) Where candidates had learned the methods of Hadith verification, they generally gained a good mark in this section. It was important, however, that these were written in well articulated paragraphs with examples given, and not written as numbered notes of bullet points, which are not appropriate at this level of answer.

Question 6

This question was generally not well answered. Candidates were quite confused over the position of Ijma and Qiyas in Islamic legal thinking. Many wrote that Al-Shafi'i was important because he used Qiyas, but that in itself is not an acceptable answer. In fact, Al-Shafi'i was very restricted in his use of reasoning and more so compared to the other 3 Imams. His interpretations were based on the Qur'an and Sunnah and he limited the use of analogy to where this could be closely shown in the context of the Sunnah. On the other hand, it is not true to say that the other 3 Imams did not also place the Qur'an and Sunnah as their first sources for deriving Shari'ah. Careless references by candidates such as this caused them to write information which read as incorrect and showed a lack of understanding of the topic. It is suggested that teachers encourage candidates to define very clear the key terms in answers to questions such as this and encourage accurate terms of reference.

Section C

Question 7

This was a popular question which was well answered and it is pleasing to note an improvement in the understanding of this topic from answers written in the previous session.

- (a) The Battle of Siffin was described in detail in many answers and the best answers explained the implications of it for the development of the Shi'i and the loss of authority for Ali.
- (b) The details of the battle were again well described by most candidates. Many also appreciated the implications of this for the development of the Shi'i and the importance to them of fighting for what they see as the just and the true. The best answers explained that this also affected their devotional practices and literature in the creation of the Muharram rituals and the literature of sorrow.

Question 8

This was a popular question which was generally not well answered, although in a few cases it was very well answered. Candidates tended to have strong personal views about the differences between sects and this affected their answers. As a result, many wrote very basic answers full of prejudices against one or the other sect. At this level, it is essential that candidates are able to make a reasoned analysis based on factual evidence. Their opinions are not being judged: a candidate with strong views is just as eligible as any other to the full range of marks. But if their views prevent them from making a detailed analysis then this does of course prevent them from gaining more than a very basic mark.

Question 9

Very few candidates chose to answer this question. Some who did appeared to have pre-learned an answer to another question about Sufism. But this question was not really about that. Although some philosophers were also Sufis, this question was asking about why their ideas and thinking were condemned, not their devotional practices.

Section D

Question 10

Very few candidates answered this question, although those who did made a reasonable attempt to respond to it. Most candidates did try to draw parallels between the two figures but those who made these overt and pointed out there were similarities as well as differences showed evidence of critical analysis.

Question 11

This was a popular question. It is important to point out that the question was not asking for what Islam teaches about Isa (Jesus) or about Christianity or Judaism as such, but about the treatment of Jews and Christians as people according to the Qur'an. Some candidates did not pick up on this and it is recommended that teachers train candidates to spot the key words in questions and focus their answers accordingly. The best answers quoted different verses from the Qur'an and developed their essay accordingly, pointing out that each verse should be understood in its context.

Question 12

This was a popular question and generally very well answered. It is important to note that the question referred to the Qur'an and Sunnah. Some candidates did not refer at all to the Qur'an and Sunnah but merely what they thought Islam taught about the position of women. More is expected at this level of response. The best answers quoted verses from the Qur'an as well as Ahadith and then explained them. Several different lines of argument were followed, including that Islam improved the status of women as opposed to the preceding period of Jahiliyah; that some regimes nowadays deny women their Islamic rights; that some women have themselves demanded and achieved their rights such as for inheritance or to initiate divorce; that in some cases Muslims today do not seem to follow the traditions of maintaining modesty within the modern workplace. Any valid argument was acceptable provided this was discussed in detail, different points of view were commented upon, and a conclusion reached.