

**A LEVEL**

Examiners' report

# CLASSICAL CIVILISATION

**H408**

For first teaching in 2017

**H408/34 Summer 2023 series**

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## Introduction

Our examiners' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates.

The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. A selection of candidate answers is also provided. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

Where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report.

A full copy of the question paper and the mark scheme can be downloaded from OCR.

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## Paper 34 series overview

This is the second full paper since examinations resumed properly after Covid, and the first of these to focus on Solon in the Key Thinkers section. Many candidates had learned both the historical material and the prescribed literary sources thoroughly and applied their knowledge sensibly. The examiners felt that some candidates might have concentrated on learning from past papers, producing prepared responses and sometimes not really understanding the need to address the questions on the paper. There was a slightly higher entry for this Component than in 2022, bringing the numbers back to approximately where they were in 2019.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>made brief plans of their proposed responses to the questions worth 20 and 30 marks</li> <li>showed good understanding of the reforms of Solon and the main broad issues of the early 6th century BC</li> <li>tackled Question 6 and Question 7 in the order in which they appeared on the question paper</li> <li>used Scholars well in Question 8 and Question 9 and engaged with their arguments and chose quotations or references from the Scholars which directly contributed to their argument or to the point they were making</li> <li>showed detailed knowledge of the prescribed literary sources.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>misunderstood the nature of the reforms of Solon or confused them with the reforms of Cleisthenes</li> <li>did not read Question 6 and Question 7 properly and/or did Question 7 first</li> <li>had limited or no concept of the chronology of the period being studied</li> <li>produced prepared responses to the questions worth 20 and 30 marks</li> <li>had a limited knowledge of the prescribed literary sources.</li> </ul>

### Assessment for learning



Please make sure that candidates have a clear understanding of the timelines – for example, that there are over eighty years between the reforms of Cleisthenes and those of Solon, or that there are approximately thirty years between the performances of *Acharnians* and *Assemblywomen*.

In the past we have recommended that students create a 'timeline' wall display which can be consulted easily in the classroom. Obviously, that will be more difficult if learning does not take place in a dedicated Classics classroom.

## Section A overview

This section requires candidates to demonstrate knowledge of one of the prescribed literary sources and its context, plus understanding of the Key Thinkers. It is very helpful to go through this section in order, as the level of demand increases as candidates progress. Those who chose to respond to the Section B question before tackling Section A were sometimes at a disadvantage, as the material in Source A can often be used as one piece of evidence in a Section B response. It was also unwise to tackle Question 6 and 7 in the reverse order, as these two questions were designed to be complementary.

Candidates ran out of time less often than in the past, although this was more frequent if they started with the 30-mark question. Candidates who organised their responses to Questions 3 and 6 into short paragraphs, one including evidence for each point made, generally made better use of their time than those who produced rambling essays. Bullet points could be perfectly acceptable for these questions if the explanations are clear and logical. Answers to the questions worth 1 or 2 marks do not have to be complete sentences.

We do not require discussion of modern scholars' views in responses to questions in Section A. Including references to them is therefore not a good use of candidates' time. Reading all the questions carefully is much more useful.

### Question 1

#### Source A

#### Aristophanes, *Knights* 211 – 252

1 The character Paphlagon is based on a real Athenian politician.

Give the name of this politician.

[1]

The majority of candidates gave the correct response.

### Question 2

2 Give **two** types of activity which went on in 'the Agora' (line 8) in Athens.

[2]

The key words are 'activity' and 'Agora.' The majority of candidates gained full marks on this question. Many candidates named structures or buildings rather than activities, and were unaware of the distinction between the Agora and the Pnyx or the Hill of the Areopagus. Some responses were not correct due to misunderstanding of the dialogue in Source A.

## Question 3

- 3 Explain how in **Source A** Aristophanes gives a negative view of the politician on whom the character of Paphlagon is based.

[10]

The majority of candidates were able to make some sensible points about the characteristics of Cleon and by extension, demagogues as seen by Aristophanes, and supported their views with clear, precise quotations from the passage. Less successful responses just quoted random words or made generalisations. Some candidates did not seem to understand that Paphlagon/Cleon and the Sausage-Seller were two different people.

The reference to the absence of a portrait mask was commonly misunderstood. Even candidates who showed, either in this response or in Question 9, that they knew about Cleon's prosecution of Aristophanes over the play 'Babylonians', seemed not to have made the connection. It would be helpful for candidates to know that caricature portrait-masks (as in Spitting Image puppets) were a common feature of Old Comedy. The most well-known other example being Socrates in 'Clouds'. In other words, Aristophanes (via Demosthenes) is saying to the audience 'Look, the actor concerned is going to wear a stock mask because none of the costume/props team wanted to be prosecuted like I was, but you'll be able to tell by other clues who Paphlagon is meant to be.'

The reference to 'crown yourself' was also misunderstood as indicating that Cleon/Paphlagon or the Sausage-Seller wanted to be king. In fact, this refers to the normal practice of putting on a garland of appropriate leaves or flowers before a religious ceremony ('....sacrifice to the god Blockhead').

## Exemplar 1

therefore presenting cleon as a bad leader. Similarly, aristophanes says 'win the people over with elegantly prepared rhetoric' which portrays cleon negatively because it ~~exposes~~ emphasises his manipulative qualities and implies that his speeches are all manipulation. Again, aristophanes calls paphlagon 'the villain, hit the villain' which at first portrays cleon/paphlagon as a bad person.

Exemplar 1 demonstrates this question requires no more than clear points illustrated by appropriate and precise quotation from the passage. Candidates wasted time if they went into detail about historical or cultural context beyond the passage on the question paper. This response shows that clarity and simplicity are a priority. This candidate makes two valid points very clearly and concisely here.

## Question 4

**In 594 BC Solon introduced a range of reforms in Athens, including some to the legal system.**

- 4 What official position did Solon hold when he made these reforms? [1]

The majority of candidates were able to give a correct response.

## Question 5

- 5 Solon changed a law code which made excessive use of the death penalty. Give the name of the person who had created the law code which Solon changed. [1]

The majority of candidates gave the correct response.

## Question 6

- 6 Explain how Solon's changes to the previous law code might have made life fairer for ordinary Athenians. [10]

Responses to this question varied. Less successful responses consisted simply of rephrasing of the stimulus sentence and vague comments about not being killed for stealing a small-value food item. Those who had answered Question 7 first seemed to have been at a loss, having included the legal reforms with the political and economic ones.

Several candidates made the point that we have a limited amount of information but that the key issues were about access to the law and justice. They gave clear information about the 'Heliaia' and the publication of laws in the Agora. They also discussed the right of appeal, third-party redress, public lawsuits and representation. Other relevant points were given marks – notably the law banning the enslavement of citizens for unpaid debt – the only part of the 'seisachtheia' that was relevant to this question.

## Exemplar 2

The fact that everyone was bound by the same rules ensured fairness as aristocrats and poorer citizens were treated equally under the law. Secondly, Solon's display of the law code was a new innovation as Draco's laws were previously not seen in public, whereas the introduction of the kyrkeis ensured all in the agora had access to these new laws, giving every citizen the opportunity to view and understand them. However, this was limited by the fact that the ordinary Athenian citizen may not have been able to read. ✓

Exemplar 2 demonstrates that conciseness and clarity are important as illustrated in this extract from a candidate who gained full marks on this question.



## Question 7\*

7\* Analyse how successful you think Solon's political and economic reforms were in solving the problems in Attica which had led to him being appointed. [20]

There were some very good responses to Question 7 giving the political and economic reforms equal treatment, although not necessarily equal space. Some candidates had obviously read the relevant ancient source material carefully and were able to refer to it in some detail. There were some good references to the problems following Solon's departure from Athens, including difficulties with the appointment or resignation of Eponymous Archons and the development of the three factions (Hills, Coast, Plain). Some candidates highlighted that Peisistratus reinforced some of Solon's reforms and that neither he nor Cleisthenes revoked any of them.

The political reforms were usually well known, although not necessarily explained well. Most candidates were able to name the four property-classes with accurate references to their respective qualifications, rights and military obligations. A few candidates simply credited all Cleisthenes' reforms to Solon.

Economic reforms were not explained well. The main gap was in the understanding of the diversification of the Athenian economy as a result of the emphasis on new skills such as the boom in the luxury end (= Athenian black-figure ware) of the pottery industry. Good responses mentioned the influx of 'foreigners' welcomed into Athens if they could pass on new manufacturing skills to those who could not realistically make a living off the land. Such candidates were able to link new sources of wealth with the possibility of mobility between the property-classes. The standardisation of weights and measures was often omitted.

The best responses also showed an awareness of the main underlying issues and problems notably the serious risk of tyranny, which had possibly led to the choice of Solon in the first place.

The majority of candidates seemed to confuse debt-slaves (i.e. Athenians who had become bonded labourers/'hektemoroi' in Attica or had been sold abroad by their creditors) with enslaved 'barbarian' people in Attica. It was the former who were freed and/or brought back to Athens under the package of reforms known as the 'seisachtheia'.

In view of the uncertainty about the existence and/or nature of the Council of 400, the examiners gave marks for any sensible comments about this body, but candidates could, and did, get full marks without mentioning it at all.

Some candidates were unaware of the time scale stating that Peisistratus became tyrant 'very soon' after Solon's departure. It might be worth reminding Year 12 and Year 13 candidates that they probably think of thirty years as a long time, and that Peisistratus' first unsuccessful attempt at a tyranny took place at least thirty years after Solon's departure. Other candidates seemed to think that 546 - 510 BC and 508 BC were earlier than 594 BC. Some candidates seemed to have thought that the reforms of Solon preceded his appointment as [Eponymous] Archon. Perhaps they had misread the question.

## Section B overview

Examiners were pleased to see a fairly even split between the two questions in this section and a similar performance range over both options. There were some very good responses to both questions. It was clear that some candidates had read well beyond the sources prescribed for study.

Some candidates had become over-preoccupied with meta-analysis i.e. comparing the views of different scholars, with little or no reference to the focus of the question or content from the prescribed literary sources. As a result, they were unable to gain many marks on AO1 and provided little evidence to support their arguments, a disadvantage when it came to AO2. A few candidates, who probably could not recall the supporting material they had read, or who had been over-reliant on collections of unattributed quotations, were creative in their citation of scholars.

### Misconception



The majority of candidates are under the impression that the Aristophanes extracts printed in the Prescribed Literary Sources booklet comprise the entire plays in question. This resulted in some poor responses to Question 9. It could be helpful for teachers to explain this and to put the extracts in context.

## Exemplar 3

Suppliant. Although Euripides aims to praise democracy in this play, he presents us the negative point (through the character of the Theban Herald) that a "mindless herd" could never run a city properly, and that democracy is essentially anarchy. Therefore, the Assembly is not a very efficient as it is too busy with irrelevant responsibilities (like festivals) and it could never be managed properly by such a large mass of people. The Herald points out however that although the Old Oligarch has stated that it is sometimes impossible to have business settled, he, the critic, only says 'sometimes!'. This means that perhaps Old Oligarch just has a grudge against the Assembly as he cannot bribe and corrupt it often to settle his personal business.

Exemplar 3 is from a very strong response to Question 8 and which is a good illustration of well used scholarship. The candidate has just discussed the views of one scholar, then supplements this with what the Old Oligarch says about the effectiveness of the Assembly. The candidate has further backed this up with reference to the Herald's words in Euripides' 'Suppliants'.

## Question 8\*

- 8\* 'The Assembly (*Ekklesia*) was the most important and effective part of the 5th century Athenian democratic system.'

Assess how far you agree with this statement. In your answer you should refer to **at least three** of the authors you have studied. **[30]**

The strongest responses to Question 8 covered both 'important' and 'effective' and discussed 'most' in comparison with either the 'Boule' or the 'dikasteria' or both. Candidates looked at a range of views and gave arguments both for and against the statement. They were able to comment on several prescribed literary sources and authors. The most frequently cited authors were Aristophanes, Euripides, the Old Oligarch and Plato. The debate between the Herald and Theseus in 'Suppliants' was well used, as was the material from 'Acharnians'.

Less successful responses generally demonstrated limited understanding of the Assembly and made general points with no reference to any of the prescribed sources. Alternatively, candidates seized this opportunity to show what they knew about the reforms of Cleisthenes.

Two 'templates' provided the most successful frameworks for a response. The first used historical knowledge as a starting point. Candidates discussed the Assembly and other institutions in distinct paragraphs, showing in each how important and/or effective these institutions were and citing ancient authors, usually the Old Oligarch and Plato, to support the argument. Candidates who used this approach sometimes discussed either the Mytilene debate or the decision to recall Alcibiades after the departure of the Sicilian Expedition. The second used the prescribed literary sources as a starting point. An identifiable author or extract was the focus for each paragraph. Candidates explained how their chosen extracts conveyed the idea that the Assembly was or was not important and/or effective. In each case, the views of named modern scholars were interwoven into the discussion rather than just having a few general words quoted at the end as if to say, 'and this scholar agrees with me.'

The majority of candidates discussed 'Assemblywomen'. First performed in the early 4th century BC, the examiners had included it in the mark scheme. The prescribed extract gives useful information about general procedures, supporting that given in 'Acharnians' (written almost thirty years earlier). However, candidates should be aware that payment for attendance at the Assembly probably dates to after 400 BC, possibly thanks to Agyrrhius (a politician mentioned in 'Assemblywomen'). Many candidates confused pay for attendance at the Assembly (possibly as much as 8 obols per day) with the 2 obols of jury pay introduced by Pericles and increased to 3 obols by Cleon. The amount of jury pay in the early 4th century is unclear.

## Question 9\*

9\* 'In his plays, Aristophanes is not criticising democracy; he is trying to show how it should work.'

Assess how far you agree with this statement. In your answer you should use detailed evidence from **at least three** plays of Aristophanes. **[30]**

The best responses gave clear and precise references to the chosen plays, avoiding mere narration of the material studied and focusing clearly on the element(s) of Athenian democracy being criticised or ridiculed in each case.

The responses depended on the plays chosen by the candidates, and it was obvious that some simply chose the ones they thought they knew best and wove conclusions round them. Better responses came from those candidates who had clearly thought about the question and knew their Aristophanes extracts well enough to make a judicious choice of plays. Sensible choice of quotations or extracts led to good comments about what was being criticised and whether Aristophanes was trying to 'educate and inform' or just 'entertain.' Some supported their views further by reference to scholarly comment.

In many responses, the candidates were aware of the wider context of the play(s) chosen and knew how they ended. Candidates who used the end of 'Frogs' (the 'tiebreaker' questions in the second half) and 'Knights' (the rejuvenation of Demos as a representative of the Marathon generation and the revelation of the Sausage-Seller as a secret supporter of Periclean ideals) commented on the ways in which these plays suggested the values Aristophanes would like to have seen in political life. Other candidates used the depiction of the Assembly in 'Acharnians' and the comments made in 'Assemblywomen' to show what Aristophanes thought about the running of Assembly meetings and the behaviour of Athenian officials. Some commented that Aristophanes was not alone in his views, citing the Old Oligarch or Plato as evidence. This was a very valid point, but probably not sufficient to support the assertion that Aristophanes was, at heart, an oligarch.

Candidates who used the two 'parabases' ('Frogs' and 'Peace'), were most successful in discussing whether or not Aristophanes was trying to show how democracy should work. The 'agon' between Philocleon and Bdelycleon ('Wasps') was also used well by some candidates to support their views. Some candidates discussed whether Aristophanes' obsession (their word) with his feud with Cleon was evidence that he was neither criticising democracy nor showing how it should work. Some candidates attributed all his criticisms to that feud. Other candidates noted, correctly, that by the time of the production of 'Peace', Cleon had died trying to take back control of Amphipolis from the Spartans and that the comments about Cleon in 'Peace' were repeated from the 'parabasis' of an earlier play. Therefore, this feud was not relevant to the criticisms made in the extracts from 'Frogs' or 'Assemblywomen'. Good conclusions were also drawn by candidates who pointed out that Aristophanes was trying to win a Comedy competition, with satire, caricature and exaggeration as his stock-in-trade. Some candidates were aware that the 'parabasis' of 'Frogs', with its very clear political message, had resulted in the play being afforded the unusual honour of a second public performance and that it had probably influenced the subsequent decision to recall the exiled oligarchs. Other candidates pointed out that adverse criticism of Cleon had not been effective, as he was repeatedly re-elected as tribal 'strategos'.

The majority of responses, however, ended with simply a summary of what Aristophanes had criticised in his plays without considering the wording of the question. Perhaps these candidates thought that they had practised this question by using previous examination papers. Question setters try hard to vary questions, so it's a good idea to advise candidates to analyse questions before responding with a pre-prepared essay.

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