

Examiners' report

A LEVEL

CLASSICAL CIVILISATION

**OCR Level 3 Advanced GCE in
Classical Civilisation**

H408

For first teaching in 2017

H408/34 Summer 2025 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 responses 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.

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Paper 34 series overview

There were fewer candidates this year than last. Most seemed to have practised responding to questions by using past papers. This was sometimes disadvantageous, as some candidates clearly produced prepared responses which did not answer the question. Others had clearly thought carefully about what they wished to say and there were many very competent responses, particularly to Question 8.

There were some problems where centres had issued incorrect stationery to candidates, or where candidates had used only 4-page Continuation booklets. Handwriting was still an issue, although less so than in the past, as more scripts were typewritten.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
• read the questions carefully • knew the prescribed literary sources • produced well-structured, tailored responses to the 20 and 30-mark questions • showed knowledge of the source material on Solon • correctly identified the economic, political and legal reforms of Solon • were aware of chronology • made good use of the views of scholars in answering Section B • had clearly read beyond the prescribed literary sources.	• demonstrated confused recall of the prescribed literary sources or thought that the extracts comprised the entire work • produced prepared and somewhat general responses to the 20 and 30-mark questions, regardless of the wording on the paper • confused Solon and Cleisthenes • did not consider Questions 6 and 7 together, despite advice in previous reports and feedback. This was sometimes because they answered Question 7 first, producing a general overview of the reforms of Solon • had no or limited awareness of chronology • produced irrelevant quotations from scholars, or provided limited, if any, evidence of scholarship.

Misconception



Candidates are increasingly using the word 'plebeian' to describe either the 5th century Athenian *demos* or the Athenian non-Eupatrids in the time of Solon. We understood it as convenient shorthand for 'the ordinary citizen' - the sense in which it appears to be used by the authors of the OCR-endorsed Bloomsbury resource book. The Eupatrid families claimed descent from the gods via specific heroes and comprised only a small minority of the population of Attica. Cleisthenes chose the names of the new tribes very carefully, avoiding all reference to those from whom the Eupatrid families claimed descent. His own family, the Alcmaeonids, seem to have lost their Eupatrid status as a result of their involvement in the sacrilegious killing of the followers of Cylon in 632 BC. They were, however, extremely wealthy and had made many useful allies in other Greek states.

Strictly speaking, the term 'plebeian' should be used only in Roman context. Patrician families in the early Roman Republic were defined as those claiming descent from the first 100 senators appointed by Romulus. A list appears to have existed. Any citizens and families not on that list were plebeian and were not necessarily undistinguished or poor. Later legislation gave the plebeians the right to hold office. The office of plebeian aedile was created in 494 BC. The *Lex Licinia Sextia de consule plebeio* (367 BC) established that one of the two Roman consuls elected each year had to be plebeian. 'Plebeians' are not the same thing as the Athenian *demos* and we feel that the word should not be used in a Greek context. 'Non-Eupatrid' is a suitable alternative to use before the creation of the four Solonic property classes.

Chronology



Candidates are often confused by the chronology. Many seemed to think that the tyranny of Peisistratus followed on immediately from the departure of Solon in 593 BC. Others discussed Cleisthenes in an essay whose title focused on the 5th century. We have previously advised that candidates should create a visual method of creating awareness of the timeline. It's really helpful if they can. Most of them know from their own lived experience that nearly 30 years can be seen as a long time (e.g. Draco to Solon, or Solon to Peisistratus) or that the mid-20th century AD/CE is not the same thing as the early 19th century (e.g. Solon to Pericles).

Section A overview

Candidates seemed generally to have apportioned their time well, although, even though sometimes at the expense of continuity. Once more, candidates who did not consider Questions 6 and 7 as a pair tended to repeat information or by discuss specific reforms of Solon in the wrong question. This was the commonest reason for candidates producing less successful responses to these questions. Candidates need to give more thought to distinguishing between the actual economic, political and legal reforms as opposed to the economic and political consequences of Solon's reforms. It was also clear that some candidates had an insecure grasp of the events of the 580s - 560s BC or had misunderstood the information in the OCR-endorsed Bloomsbury resource book. Candidates who did the higher-tariff questions in reverse order sometimes forgot about Question 3 – a pity, as this was probably a question on which they could have gained marks quite quickly.

Candidates are encouraged to develop their knowledge of the Key Thinkers by using the available ancient sources. Candidates who had done so generally did better in Questions 5 and 7. There is far more ancient source material on Solon than on Cleisthenes, including the surviving extracts from Solon's poems written before and after his time as Archon. These can be found in the various available ancient sources (in Penguin and other translations) and are collated in volume 1 of the Loeb *Elegy and Iambus*, which contains both the Greek originals and English translations. The main sources for both reformers are clearly signposted in the Bloomsbury resource book as well as in most of the older textbooks or in reputable on-line sources.

Question 1

Source A

Old Oligarch, 2.17–20

Furthermore, oligarchic cities need abide by their oaths and alliances. If they ignore agreements, or if some injustice is done, then there are the names of the handful of people who made the agreement in the first place. But the agreements made by the common people can be thrown out by laying the blame on whoever spoke or took the vote, whilst everyone else claims they were absent or didn't approve of what was agreed in the full Assembly. If it seems like a good idea for their decisions to be ineffective, they make up all sorts of excuses for not doing what they don't want to do. If the common people's policy produces bad results, they blame a small number of people working against them and destroying them while if the policy produces good results, they take all the credit for themselves.

5

They do not allow the common people to be ridiculed in comedy, so they won't be heard of badly. If anyone wants to ridicule a private individual, however, they ask the poet to write it in because they know that the person who gets ridiculed in comedy doesn't generally come from the common people, but is someone who is rich, noble, or well-known. A handful of poor, plebeian types are mocked in comedy, yes, but only if they've been meddling where they shouldn't and trying to rise above their station. This is so the common people don't feel put out by seeing people like them mocked.

10

I believe that the common people in Athens recognise which citizens are good and which are bad, but despite knowing this they tend to like those who are the easiest and most useful for them to like, even if they're bad, and they are also inclined to hate the good. You see, they think that the good are naturally virtuous to the detriment of the people, rather than for their benefit. Of course, on the other hand, some people are not naturally sympathetic to the common people, yet are truly on their side. I excuse the common people for their democracy – one must forgive the everyday man for looking after his own interests. But a man who isn't one of the common people, yet still prefers to live in a democracy rather than an oligarchy, must be preparing to do wrong and has realised that it's easier for evil to go unnoticed in a democracy than in an oligarchy.

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20

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1 '.....oligarchic cities' (line 1). What does the term 'oligarchic' mean?

[1]

Possibly because of the association now with wealthy owners of football teams, many candidates defined 'oligarchic' simply as 'ruled by the wealthy.' We needed something which clearly showed awareness of the idea of 'few' or 'small number'. The strongest responses showed awareness of the meaning of the Greek words from which the term is derived.

Question 2

2 'The full Assembly' (line 6). During the period in which the Old Oligarch was writing, where in Athens did meetings of the Assembly take place?

[1]

Most candidates knew the correct answer, even though many could not spell 'Pnyx.'

Question 3

- 3 The author has been nicknamed the 'Old Oligarch'. Explain how this passage shows that this nickname is justified.

[10]

Candidates were able to distinguish comments which showed that the author preferred oligarchic rule to democratic, and pointed out the patronising tone of 'I excuse the common people for their democracy.' Some addressed 'old' as well as 'oligarch' but it was possible to gain full marks without doing so. We generally found that candidates selected relevant quotations from the passage. Some candidates added limited explanation and AO2 was somewhat lacking. Good answers picked out a range of ideas such as O.O.'s concerns about accountability, the self-serving nature of democracy and his worries about corruption.

Exemplar 1

3		The 'Old Oligarch' has fully earned his nickname, which is clear as he openly disapproves of those who "still prefer to live in a democracy rather than an oligarchy". This outlines his dislike for democracy and his personal favour of oligarchy ^{as he dislikes those who don't favour it.} He can also further be shown to earn the 'Oligarch' part of his nickname as he outlines his dislike for, what he believes is, the inequality between the rich and poor.
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The response above illustrates how a candidate could make their point clear using a quotation from Source A.

Question 4

Source B

At the start of the 6th century BC there were major problems in Athens. Solon was appointed to the post of Archon because people of all classes knew his opinions. He made a wide range of economic, political and legal reforms and introduced several new laws.

- 4 Give the year in which Solon's Archonship began. [1]

Most candidates were able to answer this question correctly. We accepted any response which contained the year 594, even though, strictly speaking, 594/3 – a common response – covers the whole period of Solon's Archonship.

Question 5

- 5 How did Solon make his opinions known to the Athenians?
Make **two** points. [2]

This question was not answered well, possibly because candidates saw the word 'Solon' in Source B and read nothing else. The wording of the question is directly related to Source B. Some knew that Solon had written and given public readings of his poetry and publicised his opinions in general discussion before 594 BC. This information is available in the standard ancient source material. Some had not considered the meaning of the word 'opinions.'

Question 6

- 6 Explain how the economic reforms made by Solon benefitted Athenian citizens. [10]

Many candidates were unsure what constituted 'economic' reforms, discussing instead the economic consequences of other reforms. The seisachtheia needs careful consideration as much of that was in fact an instant solution to the issue of mass discontent among the less wealthy. The basic summary provided in the OCR-endorsed Bloomsbury resource book should be supplemented by further research and discussion.

Question 7*

7* Solon was regarded as one of the wisest men who had ever lived.

Assess how far you think Solon's political and legal reforms and subsequent events support this view. [20]

There was some good awareness of the political and legal reforms and of Solon's decision to leave Athens at the end of his time as Eponymous Archon. The events of 592 – 560 BC were less well known, with many thinking that Peisistratus' tyranny followed almost immediately after Solon's period of office. A few jumped straight into the reforms of 462 – 460 BC, with no awareness that over a century had elapsed since Solon's reforms. We were impressed by those who also produced an objective analysis of the evidence for Solon's wisdom, as suggested in the question. We credited any soundly-argued views based on accurate evidence.

Note that not all non-Eupatrids were Hektemoroi. Some candidates had clearly not understood this.

Exemplar 2

		Solon created many legal reforms which aimed to improve the legal system and make it more accessible to the demos. Firstly, he had the laws inscribed on kyrbeis, revolving tablets, and placed in the agora. The agora was the main hub of society and business in at Athens, so this gave many people the opportunity to know the laws and their rights. However, the success of this reform is
		limited as most of the demos would not have been literate. Also, Solon introduced laws dealing with

Clarity was important in explaining whether, objectively, Solon showed wisdom in his political and legal reforms. This is a good example of a clear explanation which shows understanding of the context.

Assessment for learning



Teaching point:

Solon's new property classes broadened access to the main offices of state (the three senior Archons - Archon Basileus, Polemarch, Eponymous Archon) to the non-Eupatrid rich - the pentakoskomedimnoi – which could now include some of the richer citizens who were not Eupatrid (e.g. Solon himself, we think). The Hippeis could then be appointed to the six lesser Archonships - the Thesmothetai - and, if they eventually found themselves in the higher class, could become senior Archons and be eligible for the council of the Areopagus. This reform also dealt with the issues posed by the recall (at some point before 594 BC) of the Alkmaionidai and other influential families who had been exiled for sacrilege at the time of the conspiracy of Cylon and had lost Eupatrid status. These were potential tyrants. Note, however, that a poem by Solon seems to be warning the Athenians against trusting someone using the very tactics employed by Peisistratus in 561 BC. The material in the Aristotelian Constitution of Athens regarding this period is confused and confusing.

Solon did not change Eupatrid dominance in the phratries, but confined these institutions to the religious sphere only.

Section B overview

Question 8 proved more popular than Question 9, possibly because candidates thought they had discussed this essay before. We do our best not to repeat questions. Some candidates compared and contrasted the views of scholars, with discussion of the validity of their views in relation to the evidence. Weaker responses used name-dropping with no indication of the scholars' views. Candidates have, on the whole, given up inventing scholars, which is encouraging to see. Where we are uncertain of the identity of a scholar, we do our best to check, and it was clear that some candidates were still inventing the names of scholars – this practice should be discouraged.

Question 8*

8* 'Plato is the only Greek author to make serious criticisms of Athenian democracy.'

Evaluate to what extent you agree with this statement. In your answer you should discuss the works of Plato **and at least 2 other** authors you have studied. [30]

Most candidates considered all three extracts from Plato's *Republic*, with the two analogies being broadly understood. Discussion focused mainly on the bias of Plato in choosing the 'Philosopher ruler' as the best form of government. The plays of Aristophanes were discussed, with mostly accurate knowledge but often a notable lack of attention to the role of the *parabasis* in delivering a serious message. Those who knew the second half of *Frogs* made good use of that knowledge. The Old Oligarch, Thucydides and Euripides also featured, with sensible use of the Theban Herald's speech in *Suppliants*. Weaker candidates confused authors and works. The dialogue structure of Plato's works led some to think that he wrote plays. The word 'serious' was often ignored, with candidates focusing instead on 'effective' – no doubt recalling a question from a previous paper. As mentioned above, we do our best to avoid repeating questions, so candidates should read each question carefully and avoid repeating essays they may have written for past papers.

Question 9*

9* Evaluate to what extent Athenian citizens participated effectively in 5th century Athenian public affairs. In your answer you should include details from **at least 3** of the authors you have studied. [30]

Responses to this question were either very strong or very weak. The very strong ones showed close focus on the question and good use of the available sources, most often citing Aristophanes, Thucydides and the extract from Euripides' *Suppliants*. There was some good use of non-prescribed material too, showing evidence of individual research and wider reading of ancient sources. We got the impression that the less successful responses came from those who felt insufficiently sure of their material to attempt Question 8 or wanted to show their knowledge of the reforms of Cleisthenes. As the question was specifically about the 5th century, we were unable to give much credit to responses which focused firmly on the 6th century. We did, however, see some very thoughtful responses, such as this one. [Exemplar 3]

Exemplar 3

		to order. This laconic participation is shown in Aristophanes' <i>Acharnians</i> , through Dicaeopolis' opening monologue. Here he laments the fact that he is alone in the <i>Praxia</i> , while all other assemblygoers linger in the <i>Agora</i> and have to be herded in later by the <i>Scythian</i> archers. This clearly demonstrates citizens' ineffective participation in the assembly. Barrett says that "Aristophanes was able to show the life of an ancient Athenian unlike any other writer", if this is true then the assembly as shown in his comedies reflects the actual state of it, with people increasing and later extremely ineffective participation. Other
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The response above illustrates that a good way to answer the question and integrate scholarship is to approach the subject thematically. Here, the candidate moves from discussing the evidence of Euripides and Thucydides to cover a lot of material about participation in the Assembly. They successfully integrate Aristophanes, a scholarly comment by Barrett and their own conclusions about what this could indicate.

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