

Examiners' report

A LEVEL

CLASSICAL CIVILISATION

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

H408

For first teaching in 2017

H408/33 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.

A full copy of the question paper and the mark scheme can be downloaded from [Teach Cambridge](#).

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Paper 33 series overview

H408/33, Politics of the Late Republic, is one of four available components in OCR's A Level Classical Civilisation Component Group 3: Beliefs and Ideas.

The examination aims to assess candidates' knowledge and understanding of, and engagement with classical literature and ideas about principle and pragmatism in the politics of Rome in the 1st century BCE.

To do well in the extended responses, candidates are required to deploy detailed knowledge in the service of insightful discussion of the issues raised by the questions.

Candidates who did well in this paper were those who were able to make mature judgements, based on sound factual knowledge, about the political careers of Cicero, Cato, Pompey, Caesar and others, and the parts they played in the events of the 1st century BCE.

Generally, candidates were well prepared to discuss the changing relationships between various historical figures and the reasons for such fluctuations. The motives for Caesar's political reforms and for Cicero's letter-writing were also generally well handled.

It should be noted that while this examination is not designed to test candidates' mere recall of events and their dates, nevertheless, when discussing matters such as Pompey's relationship with Cato, or any given politician's career trajectory, causes and consequences are rarely sensibly discussed without due observance of correct chronology.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
- displayed detailed and accurate knowledge of characters and their relationships, and the drivers and limitations of these, at Rome in the 1st century BCE - displayed detailed and accurate knowledge of the prescribed literary sources - based on this knowledge and sound understanding of it, drew reasoned and convincing conclusions in focused response to questions. - selected appropriate material as evidence in support of reasoned argument - responded to all aspects of each question attempted - made appropriate use of secondary scholarship.	- displayed limited knowledge of characters and their relationships, and the drivers and limitations of these, at Rome in the 1st century BCE - displayed limited knowledge of the prescribed literary sources - presented a narrative account of events with little engagement or analysis in response to questions that required discussion OR - presented a generally discursive response with little basis in accurate factual knowledge from which conclusions could reasonably be drawn. - omitted or misunderstood some aspects of some questions - made little or no reference to or use of secondary scholarship.

Section A overview

Section A consisted of:

- 5 single marks' worth of fact- and knowledge-based questions, concerning the trial of Verres in 70BCE, and its wider political context.
- two short extended writing questions, worth 10 marks each, in response to a passage from Cicero's speech against Verres and a stimulus sentence about Cato the Younger and the optimate faction.
- a longer exploration (20 marks) of the relationship between Cicero and the optimates, in this case, Cicero's defence of the Republic.

Question 1

Source A

Cicero's speech against Verres in 70 BC, *In Verrem* 1. 7–8

Now, that most audacious and insane man thinks this: he knows that I have come into court so well prepared and equipped, so that I might fix his thefts and crimes not only in your ears, but in the very eyes of all. He sees that many senators are witnesses to his audacity, that many Roman knights are too, and numerous citizens and allies besides, to whom he himself has done notable harm. He also sees that such numerous, important embassies from the cities of our closest allies have convened, armed with public authority and evidence from their respective states.

5

Although this is the case, he still thinks so badly of all good men, and still believes the judgements of the senators to be corrupt and depraved to such an extent that he keeps boasting openly that he was not greedy for money for no reason, since he now finds it offers such great protection, and that he has bought the time of his trial itself (which would have been the hardest thing of all), in order to be able to buy everything else more easily afterwards; so that, since he was in no way able to evade the force of the accusations made against him altogether, he might avoid the most violent gusts of the storm.

10

1 Who defended Verres in this trial?

[1]

Nearly all candidates knew that at his trial for extortion in 70BCE, Verres was defended by Quintus Hortensius Hortalus. A simple 'Hortensius' gained the mark.

Question 2

2 What was the final verdict in this trial?

[1]

It is true that after Cicero's opening speech, Hortensius advised Verres that the case was lost, and that Verres declined to return to court. Candidates who understood this, and suggested that, for example, that the trial was abandoned, were awarded the mark, as long as they made it clear that the outcome favoured Cicero, not Verres. Any expression of the fact that Verres 'lost', was 'found guilty', or that Cicero 'won' was credited.

It should be noted that some candidates are on somewhat shaky ground in their use of technical legal jargon: conviction, prosecution, even defence were sometimes confused. Examiners were instructed to give benefit of doubt wherever they reasonably could.

Question 3

3 What did Verres do at the conclusion of the trial?

[1]

Any variation on the fact that Verres left Rome was acceptable here.

Question 4

4 Analyse how persuasively Cicero makes Verres appear guilty in **Source A**.

[10]

Question 4 was generally well done. Centres and candidates were aware that marks were given according to both AO1 and AO2 aspects of responses. Responses which merely quoted from the passage, without proper explanation of how Cicero's words worked to make Verres appear guilty were not likely to be rewarded beyond Level 3. Nor was it enough merely to quote a phrase from the text, followed by a simple, 'this shows that Verres was guilty' – clearer explanation was required. Candidates were required to confine their discussion to the passage provided, 'Source A': details of Verres' delaying tactics, or his former criminal career were not deemed creditworthy.

Exemplar 1

4	Cicero, in his prosecution of Vervres, makes a very persuasive argument for his ^{guilt} prosecution for of extortion and bribery in this passage. Firstly, Cicero uses character assassination tactics to make Vervres seem guilty in this passage, referring to him as 'that most ins audacious and insane man' with his 'thefts and crimes'. This persuasively presents Vervres as guilty as to Cicero portrays him as a man of bad character, who by extension of this bad insidious character, must be guilty of the crimes levied against him. Secondly, Cicero further portrays Vervres as guilty by contrasting the 'notable harm' of Vervres with the 'all good men' (the jury of senators), depicting in this antithesis how Vervres must be guilty because 'public authority' in 'the very eyes of all' ^{bear} sees how 'witness to his audacity', so he is guilty because the good men of the public and jury perceive his crimes in contrast to their goodness. So, Vervres is successfully portrayed as guilty because Cicero establishes a contrasting between the evil Vervres and the good witnesses of his crimes, making him seem guilty by establishing this juxtaposition.
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Exemplar 1 demonstrates the correct Level of AO1/AO2 response required. This response went on to achieve a Level 5 mark, after making several more equally well-argued points, firmly based on sound knowledge (demonstrated by accurate quotation from) and understanding of the text.

Assessment for learning: Cicero as 'literature'



To achieve Level 5 mark in this question type, it should be noted that detailed discussion of particular literary devices is not necessarily required, although it may sometimes be effective.

Candidates should be made aware that they are dealing with a text in English translation from the original Latin, so points alluding to such verbal effects as alliteration are unlikely to be sound. References to punctuation are never creditworthy.

Question 5

Cato the Younger and the *optimates* opposed the rise of individual power in the Late Republic, believing that it went against the traditional Roman political values which they wished to maintain.

5 Which political faction opposed the *optimates* during the Late Republic? [1]

Very few candidates were unable to name the populares in response to this question.

Question 6

6 In what year did Cato commit suicide? [1]

Most candidates knew that Cato died in 46 BCE. Precise chronology is seldom explicitly tested, but centres should be aware that it is reasonable to expect candidates to be able accurately to recall the years in which the most significant events occurred during Cicero's lifetime (106-43 BCE).

Question 7

7 Discuss how Cato's relationship with Pompey was consistent with Cato's principles. [10]

The second of the 10-mark extended responses is more challenging than the first, because candidates must generate for themselves the AO1 material required to discuss, in this case, significant moments of agreement or disagreement between Pompey and Cato, on which to base their AO2 analyses of how far these were to do with Cato's principles. Here, candidates were required – and generally, were able – both to recall what Cato's principles were, and to explain how these affected his relationship with Pompey. The best discussions used a well-selected range of points to cover the period from Cato's opposition to the *leges Gabinia* and *Manilia* down to the death of both figures, united against Caesar in the civil war.

Assessment for learning: perils of the 'broad brush' approach



It is true that Cato was 'anti-corruption'. However, this stance cannot really be deemed a political principle, at least not one unique to him (and especially not the preserve of the *optimates* in general): after all, corruption was illegal. Such an argument seems to suggest that the populares were somehow in favour of corruption, because they used bribery, whereas the *optimates* weren't, because Cato didn't.

Question 8*

8* 'Cicero and the *optimates* had very similar political ideals.'

Assess to what extent you agree with this opinion.

You may use **Source A** as a starting point in your answer.

[20]

The best responses here were alive to the difference between a Roman political faction and a modern political party. Many candidates bluntly stated that Cicero was an optimate. They thus missed important and interesting nuances of the situation, for example that Cicero's equestrian background naturally aligned him with the equestrians of Sicily who had commissioned him to fight on their behalf against the optimate Verres. Similarly, Cicero is clear in this speech of 70 BCE about his support for the populist Pompey.

Furthermore, candidates who suggest that one or other politician behaves in a certain way 'because he was a populist/optimate' are putting the cart before the horse. It is, rather, that because a politician behaves in a certain way that we may then deem him to be a populist/optimate or, more subtly, to be aligning himself at that particular moment with others whom we call populists/optimates. Sensitivity to this aspect of political life at Rome in the 1st century BCE was a distinguishing feature of Level 5 candidates.

Assessment for learning: definition of a 'political ideal'



Many candidates nominated Cicero's desire for peace as one of his political ideals. While perhaps not untrue, this hardly distinguishes him: it does not follow that because we read only Cicero's letters offering to mediate between Caesar and Pompey, therefore only Cicero wanted peace.

Similarly, while *amicitia* may well have been, in Syme's famous phrase, a 'weapon of politics', it was not a 'political ideal', nor was 'the use of *amicitia*' a distinguishing feature of one faction or the other. Several candidates argued that because Cicero worked to establish ties of *amicitia*, this aligned him (due to this very similar political ideal) with the optimates, who also used this convention. Many candidates used the same argument to show that, for the same reason, Cicero was aligned with the populists.

Section B overview

Section B offered optionality in the form of a choice between two topics for discussion, each worth 30 marks.

For AO2 marks in this section, the marking grid refers to 'secondary sources, scholars and/or academic works'. In the first instance, the overall quality of the response determined the Level which it achieved. Thereafter the position within that Level was adjusted depending on each candidate's use of modern scholarship and their quality of written communication.

Examiners noted in candidates' responses all references to secondary and/or modern (post-Gibbon) scholarship. They also noted that not all of these necessarily supported in a meaningful way the arguments being made by candidates. Candidates can hardly be said to be engaging with modern scholarship when they simply mention in passing that they 'agree with Dr Edward Bispham when he says that Cicero was 'a great orator'. A minimum of two modern scholars must be referenced to access the higher marks in each Level.

Question 9*

Use classical sources, and secondary sources, scholars and/or academic works to support your argument. You should also consider possible interpretations of sources by different audiences.

Either

9* 'Throughout his whole political career, Caesar was only interested in reforms which benefited the ordinary people of Rome.'

Evaluate how far you agree with this statement.

[30]

This question was more commonly answered than Question 10 (see below), probably because most candidates felt more confident in their knowledge of the characters and plot of the story of the rise and fall of Julius Caesar than in their ability to handle the minutiae of Cicero's *Letters*. Still, many candidates did not deploy much accurate or detailed knowledge about Caesar's reforms: too many essays were bulked out with narrative accounts of the civil war (which can't be considered a 'reform') and discussions of how it failed to benefit 'the ordinary people of Rome' (because death can seldom be regarded as beneficial). There is perhaps a lesson to be learned here in the benefits of taking one's time to read and consider each of the optional questions carefully, before making a final decision about which to approach.

However, it is pleasing to report that many candidates did display accurate and detailed knowledge of Caesar's political reforms, and were able to engage in thoughtful and insightful discussions of his motives for them. In many cases, a complex picture of an interesting man emerged.

Exemplar 2

		over 3 children. Additionally, the
		law included a clause that stated
		the land couldn't be sold until
		after 20 years of ownership to ensure
		that the land remained in the
		hands of the people and was not
		re-bought by the senate. This shows
		specific dedication to the benefits of
		ordinary people. Malik argues that
		Caesar merely saw the people as an
		important part of politics rather than
		actually caring for them, but the
		clause present shows that Caesar
		was truly interested in the benefit
		for the people as he ensured the
		land would remain in the hands of
		the people.

Exemplar 2 shows, firstly, a good example of the 'use in argument' of a scholar (Malik): the candidate is building an argument about Caesar's Campanian land law and its benefit to the ordinary people of Rome, based on knowledge and understanding of the law, and strengthened by a knowledge of secondary literature. The response as a whole was deemed to have answered the description of a Level 5 response in AO2 (17-20 marks). The Malik reference (coupled with further, similar, engagements with Warner and Wallace-Haddrell) helps to push the mark up to the top of the Level. The final AO2 mark was 20.

Question 10*

10* 'The letters of Cicero show that he was only interested in writing when it benefited his political career.'

Evaluate how far you agree with this statement.

[30]

This question was an invitation to candidates to survey the literary source material, weighing Cicero's various reasons for writing the *Letters* prescribed. Those candidates did well who had studied (not just read) not only supporting scholarship, but the texts of the letters themselves. For higher Level marks, it was important for candidates to be able accurately to distinguish the *Letters*, to know, in each case, details not only of content, but also of recipient and context. Sound AO1 knowledge and understanding of these elements provided the necessary foundation for good and often very good AO2 discussion of the extent to which Cicero wrote in the interests of his political career.

It was pleasing that many candidates displayed much accurate and detailed knowledge of the content and context of several, and sometimes all of the prescribed *Letters*. However, it must also be noted that here, as elsewhere in the examination, many candidates cost themselves credit by not being clear about the chronology of important events of the period. There is no reason why the *Letters* should have been discussed in chronological order of their composition (indeed there are good reasons why this should have been avoided); however, it really is important that candidates are aware of dates, so that they can avoid bringing themselves to indefensible conclusions. For example, it makes no sense to suggest that Cicero's letter to Pompey was written to establish *amicitia* so that Pompey would protect Cicero from a repeat of his exile. Cicero does write to Pompey with a view to establishing (or renewing) *amicitia*; *amicitia* is important for precisely such reasons as 'protection' as suggested here; but since this letter was written in 62 BCE, it is impossible that Cicero could have been seeking to avoid the repetition of an event that didn't happen until 58 BCE. Other examples of the same sort of error include the suggestion that Cicero was writing to Pompey because he was 'out of the political loop', having been away from Rome, serving as *quaestor* in Sicily. It is true that Cicero felt out of the loop on his return from Sicily, where he was *quaestor* in 75 BCE – but then he found his feet and rose through the *cursus honorum* to the rank of consul (63 BCE) before writing this letter to Pompey.

It is important to take note of errors of this nature to alert centres to the sort of easily corrected misconception that can seriously undermine understanding of the material to be studied.

Assessment for learning: secondary source material and 'scholars'



As stated in the Section B overview, in 30-mark essays, the final AO2 mark is first determined by deciding the Level of the response, according to the overall quality of its analysis, interpretation and evaluation of the matter under discussion. Then, within the Level, the mark is adjusted according to the candidate's use of modern scholarship. Mere 'name dropping' or tagging catchphrases will not secure the top mark in the Level. Candidates are encouraged to 'use' modern scholarship in support of their own arguments, to 'engage with' the scholars they have read.

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