

Examiners' report

A LEVEL

CLASSICAL CIVILISATION

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

H408

For first teaching in 2017

H408/31 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 31 series overview

This paper continues to attract the largest entry for the 31-34 exam. Enthusiasm for the content was evident in the work of many candidates. Their strong knowledge of the subject and deep engagement with a wide range of points relating to Greek religion was excellent. Some candidates engaged with material beyond the prescribed minimum content. In terms of AO1 knowledge, with examiners enjoying the fuller exploration of Greek and Athenian life and how religion was fundamental to that. There were many candidates who had a less secure grasp of religious practice in Greece, with a tendency to operate on assumption and assertion. Some candidates seemed to find discussing the views of philosophers in question 7 difficult, with many answers not including sufficient detail. Questions 8 and 9 were broadly phrased essays, enabling candidates a wide range of options for constructing a response. Some candidates did not take advantage of this opportunity and produced responses which were too narrow and sparsely supported as a result.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
• demonstrated comprehensive AO1, with a strong grasp of detail for oikos, polis AND panhellenic worship • offered arguments in order to address the question for 20- and 30-mark answers • in the case of the 20-mark question, appreciated the need to contextualise their answers within the events of Athens around the time of Socrates' trial • had a sustained focus on answering the question in 30-mark essays: for Question 8, understood the need to compare the experience of women in religion to that of men. For Question 9, proposed an interpretation of Greek religion that offered an underpinning explanation for the Greeks' motives in worshipping the gods • used a range of scholars and looked to engage with them, offering a well-developed view as to their utility and/or strengths and weaknesses.	• had little specific AO1 to support ideas, relying on broad generalisations that were often limited in relevance • showed limited appreciation of what the question paper was asking for candidates to discuss • seemed to believe that describing the practice of Greek religion would be sufficient to fulfil the requirements of AO2 in essays. In Question 8 this manifested as a list of the activities of women in religion. In Question 9 it was a list of ways that the Greeks worshipped • made no reference to scholars in the 30-mark questions.

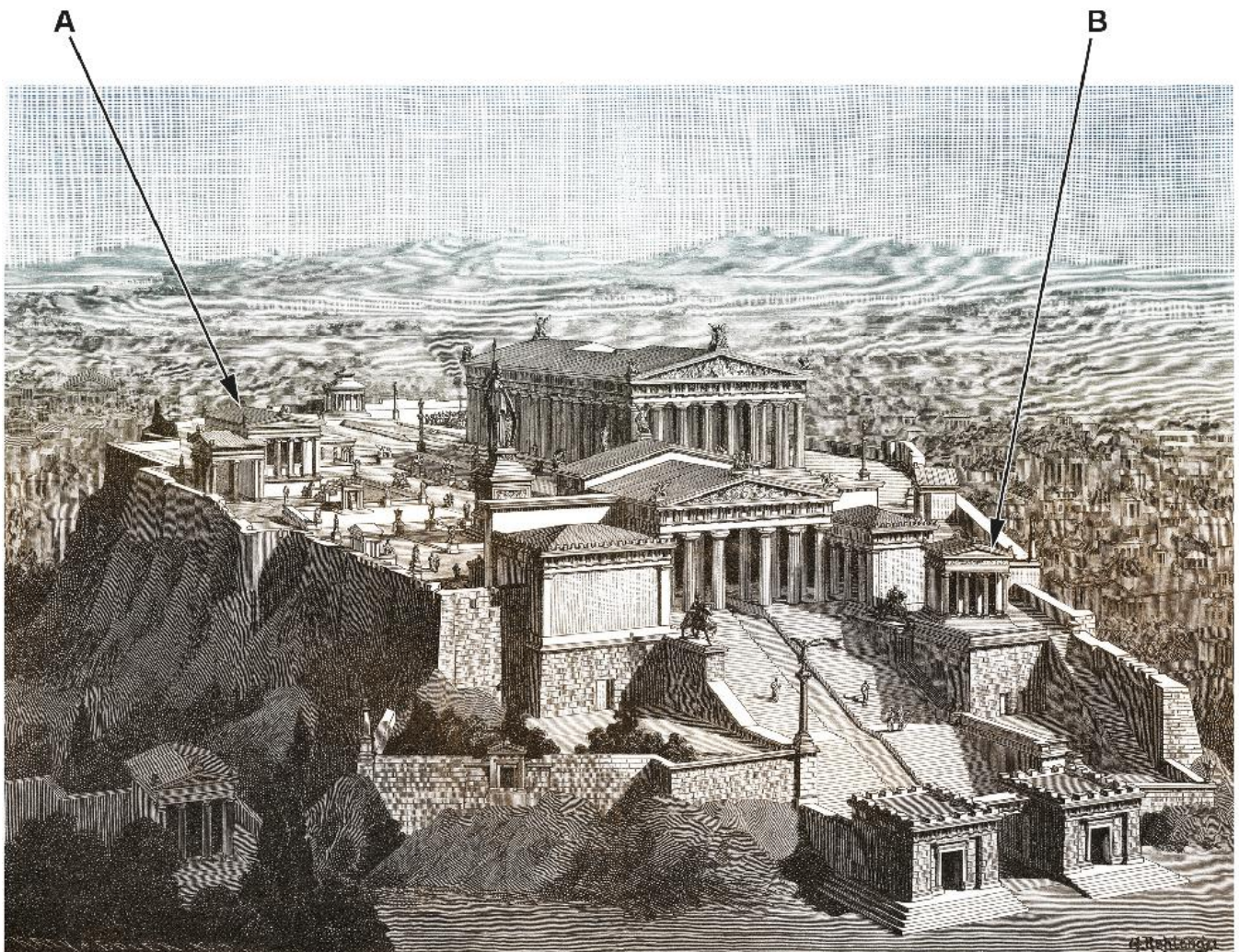
Section A overview

Section A saw some sound knowledge for the 1-mark questions, though a number of candidates did not know the date of Socrates' trial. The quality of responses to the 10-mark questions was divided between those who engaged with the source material, and those who did not. Questions 4 to 7 in this year's Section A drew on some of the elements from the Key Topic: 'Religion and Philosophy', and it was good to see the number of candidates who had a sound knowledge of the subject matter for this. As in previous years, there is still an over-reliance on AO1 at the expense of AO2 in the 20-mark question. This was particularly evident in the 20-mark question, where some candidates did not address the requirement to discuss Athens, which impacted their performance in both AO1 and AO2.

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Source A

A drawing reconstructing an ancient sanctuary



Question 3

- 3 Explain how useful **Source A** is as a source of information for the worship of the Olympian gods in this sanctuary. [10]

Large numbers of candidates did not pay close enough attention to the source material when it came to answering this question. The first 10-mark question on this paper is always based upon some source material, and so candidates need to be reminded that this is not a place to write an extended essay. Many candidates this year took the question to mean that they merely had to talk about what happened on the Acropolis. Examiners found that there was insufficient use made of the source because responses were too full of details about the nature of Athenian religious practice and comments based on elements of the Acropolis that were not visible in the source. When candidates took care to make close reference to the source, they could be credited, particularly where there was a corresponding focus on how the different features of the sanctuary pertained to the worship of the gods.

Exemplar 1

3	Source A is useful for an enquiry into the worship of the Olympian Gods as it shows the different features incorporated into the design of the sanctuary to aid in worship and honouring of the gods. We see the ramp leading up to the Propylaea which we know helped the Athenians lead the oxen up into the Acropolis, ensuring they can to be sacrificed to the gods, ensuring that the oxen would not stumble as they were being led up as that means they could not be sacrificed. We also see how one how much they respected the gods with the Olympian size of the Propylaea that would have towered over anyone who entered, emphasising the distinction between the superiority of the immortal gods to the lesser beings; the mortals. This respect for the gods is further seen with the amount of different temples they have to worship and honour the different gods, seen by the Parthenon, the to Erechtheion and the temple of Athena Nike. The temple of Athena
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This exemplar illustrates how a candidate makes close reference to the source and then answers the question in order to marry AO1 and AO2 together. It also gives a good sense of the concision that is required for the answer to be effective:

- there is an initial point identifying the ramp to the Propylaea, helpfully explaining the practicalities of worship
- the size of the Propylaea is also identified, picking out the distinction drawn between immortals and mortals
- there is also identification of the number of different temples, emphasising the multi-faceted nature of worship.

Question 6

6 Explain why the Athenians executed Socrates.

[10]

This question was answered very effectively by the majority of candidates. It was very good to see how confidently most answers engaged with the reasons behind the Athenian execution of Socrates. Nearly everyone knew about the impiety charge as well as the corruption of young people. Many others discussed the invention of new gods sensibly too. The only major area that caused problems was where some candidates looked to assess whether the Athenians were justified in executing Socrates. This was beyond the remit of the question.

Misconception



Many candidates are under the mistaken impression that the 10-mark task is a form of essay. Some candidates were even writing almost as much as in a 20-mark question. This is unnecessary, and candidates should just focus on making a range of points that make reference to AO1 and then explain them in AO2. There is no requirement for an introduction or conclusion to this question. Examiners are very aware of the tight time constraints on this paper, and are looking for a quantity of work that is consistent with the number of marks available here.

Question 7*

7* 'Traditional beliefs in the Olympian gods and goddesses were beginning to decline in Athens by the time of Socrates' trial.'

Assess to what extent you agree with this statement and justify your response.

[20]

The critical element in this question was recognising the requirement to talk about traditional beliefs in **Athens**. A considerable number of candidates took this to be a question about the nature of Greek belief, and as a result missed the essence of what they had been asked. Many candidates took the existence of pre-Socratics as evidence that traditional beliefs were in decline, and asserted such. More successful answers looked to examine 2 elements: the nature of pre-Socratic ideas, and the state of religious belief in Athens at the time of Socrates' trial. These responses tended to challenge the assumption that the existence of pre-Socratic philosophy suggested a decline in beliefs by questioning whether their message really reached Athens, and even if it did, whether it had an impact beyond a narrow group of elites. This approach was a good example of using AO1 (details from pre-Socratics) and then assessing its AO2 (applying the AO1 directly to the question). Contextualising what was happening in Athens just before Socrates' trial enabled many candidates to focus successfully on the question. There were some excellent discussions of the Acropolis building programme and events in Athens (e.g. mutilation of the herms), as well as sensible use of some of the specification's visual sources in order to deploy AO1 in order to develop AO2.

Section B overview

There were slightly more answers to Question 9 than Question 8, but performance on the 2 questions was almost identical in respect of the overall performance of candidates. As with last year, AO1 was deployed pretty soundly, but AO2 was less strong. There was certainly evidence that many candidates were able to achieve Level 4 for AO1, but this was not always matched by their performance on AO2. This often came down to their engagement with the question, with a tendency to miss its central 'driver'. See below for a more detailed explanation of these points for the specific questions.

Question 8*

8* 'Women and girls had fewer opportunities to experience Greek religion than men.'

Assess whether you think this is an accurate assessment of men and women's participation and involvement in ancient Greek religion. Justify your response. [30]

The most successful responses were careful to address the essence of this question: 'fewer...than'. A sustained comparison between the experience of women and men led to strong AO2, as there was a recognition that in order to fulfil the requirements of the question there was a need to look at both groups. In addition, the most successful responses deployed detail on the experience of both men and women in oikos, polis and panhellenically, and made sure that their AO1 was wide-ranging. This set them up to be able to offer a clear set of ideas for AO2, drawing distinctions between the relevant experience in each of these areas.

Less successful responses tended to fall into 2 categories. One type was a description of the experiences of women, usually in the form of a list of actions with regard to religion. Though this was part of the AO1, it missed the male experience and so tended to be more limited. The other less successful approach did not engage with the AO2 element of the question, so although there was description of men and women's participation in religion, there was no corresponding analysis of the issue of 'fewer'.

Exemplar 2

		However, at Polis level the
		participation of females did
		increase. For instance at this
		level there were female exclusive
		priesthoods like that for Athena
		Polias. Furthermore, Athens
		had a female only festival
		in the fertility focused Thesmoph-
		oria, in which females would
		lead the ritual burial of piglets
		to honour Demeter and Persephone.
		The ionic frieze also portrays

the female role in the great Panathenaia with women and girls depicted carrying vessels in the lead up to the hecatomb. The preparation of the bulls amphora as well as written sources also reinforce the role of females in Polis level sacrifice, as they decorated the animal and cried out the ololygae which marked the period between life and death for the animal. Thus, it ~~can~~ must be said women were significantly more active at Polis than oikos level religion. However, at Polis level males still held a more dominant role. It is Neale who states that 'the privileged status of an Athenian male was clearly visible in the events of the great Panathenaia' and this claim must be deemed accurate ~~in~~ in light of the 8 day festivals many male only events. Indeed, the athletic contests on days two and three as well as the torch race whose winner would light the sacrificial altar were all male only events.

This response is a good example of a section of an essay that has really grasped the central requirements of the question. There is some secure AO1 on the role of women in Polis religion, concluding that women were 'significantly more active at polis than oikos level'. Critically important to this essay, though, is the fact that the response then goes on to compare this to the male experience. In addition, there is a well deployed reference to the scholar Neale, which is also engaged with critically where the candidate says: 'this claim must be deemed accurate', followed by the deployment of evidence to substantiate this point.

Question 9*

9* 'The Greeks only worshipped their gods and goddesses for their own personal benefit.'

Assess the extent to which you agree with this statement. Justify your response.

[30]

Many candidates mistook this question to be an invitation for them to answer the question 'why did the Greeks worship their gods?'. While this is certainly an interesting question, it isn't quite what was set. The better answers recognised the key word in the question, which was 'only'. More successful responses took the idea of personal benefit and interrogated it effectively. There were a number of successful approaches taken to this, particularly the sense of recognising reciprocity in Greek worship and then explaining that. Some good answers argued that as religion was embedded in every part of Greek life that it was reductive to attempt to suggest that everything revolved around personal benefit. Others looked to unpick the whole experience of worship and demonstrate where there was a personal benefit around every corner, and thus the contention of the question could be agreed with.

The less successful responses were overly dependent upon AO1, without sufficient AO2. While it was good to see how much many candidates knew about worship, it was not the focus of the question – reasons for worship was. It was very common to see AO1 being rewarded at a higher level than AO2 on this essay.

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