

Examiners' report

AS LEVEL

CLASSICAL CIVILISATION

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

H008

For first teaching in 2017

H008/21 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 21 series overview

The topic has maintained its popularity this year, and as in previous years, it was clear that the candidates enjoyed studying the plays. It was pleasing to see references to performances of the plays which the candidates had seen, such as the productions of Oedipus the King in London. It is not necessary for candidates to see plays in performance or to discuss these in order to achieve full marks, but where candidates were able to do this thoughtfully and with relevance to the questions asked, it often enriched their responses. Candidates generally showed good knowledge of the content of the plays. They were able to express their personal reaction to the plays and the issues they raised, and use evidence to back up their opinions.

Legibility and quality of written communication is once again an issue. Candidates should read through what they have written to make sure that their answers communicate their ideas clearly and effectively. A lack of paragraphing in many responses makes it harder for examiners to follow the train of thought of the candidates.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
• read the questions carefully • used both literary and material culture evidence • provided quotations/close reference to the plays • were aware of the historical and social context of the plays • addressed the question directly • came to a conclusion • were aware of the plays as pieces of drama, rather than literature • made four separate, distinct points in the 8-mark questions • used paragraphs to clarify points made and the line of argument in higher tariff questions.	• made little reference to the actual plays in the higher tariff questions • used information which was not relevant to the question • wrote lengthy introductions to some responses, including lower tariff questions • started a response to higher tariff questions with a conclusion and then disagreed with their introduction, leading to a confusing argument • used technical terms such as <i>peripeteia</i> and <i>anagnorisis</i> without understanding what they mean • wrote a continuous response in both the 8-mark and the higher tariff questions, which made it difficult to follow the argument or the separate points being made.

Assessment for learning



Candidates should be reminded to:

- follow the instructions carefully
- number questions clearly and carefully, especially when identifying which essay is being answered
- write clearly and legibly
- start the response to each 8-, 16- and 25-mark question on a new page of the answer booklet; very few candidates did this, sometimes not even leaving a gap between answers, making it difficult to work out where one answer ended and the next one began.

Section A overview

In general, candidates dealt adequately with content of the pot, but there was evidence that not all were familiar with the background details of where and when the pot was made. Candidates generally had good knowledge of the plot and details of Aristophanes' *Frogs*.

Question 1

Source A

Bell krater by McDaniel Painter



Figure 1

1 What kind of mythological creature is **Figure 1**?

[1]

Most answers were correct, although some candidates identified the creature as a satyr.

Question 2

2 State the name of **Figure 1**.

[1]

Most candidates correctly identified Figure 1 as Cheiron, although he was also identified as Charon, Dionysus or Xanthias by some. Candidates should be encouraged to notice the relationships between questions – Question 1 stated that the character in Figure 1 was a mythological creature and this information may have proved helpful in answering this question correctly.

Question 3

3 What is the technical name given to the building shown in **Source A**?

[1]

Most of the responses correctly stated that the technical name for the building is *skene*. Some candidates confused it with the *proskene*.

Question 4

4 Analyse how useful **Source A** is in telling us how a comedy by Aristophanes might originally have been staged.

Make **four** points and support each point with reference to **Source A**.

[8]

Candidates generally had a good knowledge of the source and could describe it well. They were less successful at linking this to the plays of Aristophanes, or to how his comedies may have been staged. Points were made concerning the costumes, masks and the number of actors.

Misconception



Many candidates were under the misconception as to the number of actors allowed on the stage. The limitation (three actors in Tragedy, four in Comedy) only applies to speaking actors, not to people on the stage in general. Extras were allowed (e.g. Oedipus' daughters in the last scene in *Oedipus the King*).

Most candidates were able to comment well on how the pot is useful, but less so on why it may not be useful. Very few commented on the provenance of the pot but those that did generally used this to reduce the usefulness of the pot.

Assessment for learning



Candidates should be aware of where and when material culture sources were produced.

Question 5

Source B

Aristophanes' *Frogs* 33–56

XANTHIAS	Ah woe is me, poor wretch! Why didn't I fight in that <u>sea-battle</u> ! Then I could tell you to bugger off.	
DIONYSUS	Get down, you idiot. My journey's taken me right up to this door here, my first destination.	
	Slave, I say, slave, slave!	5
HERACLES	Who's that battering the door, flinging himself at it like a centaur? Who the...say, what is all this?	
DIONYSUS	Slave.	
XANTHIAS	What is it?	
DIONYSUS	Did you notice that?	10
XANTHIAS	Notice what exactly?	
DIONYSUS	How scared he was of me.	
XANTHIAS	Oh, yes, by Zeus – scared that you're a maniac.	
HERACLES	By Demeter, I just can't stop laughing. I'm biting my lip, but I just can't help myself.	15
DIONYSUS	My good chap, step forward. I have a favour to ask of you.	
HERACLES	I can't stop laughing – look at that lionskin on top of your little yellow number. What's the idea? Why these boots and club? Where on earth were you heading?	
DIONYSUS	I was sailing with <u>Cleisthenes</u> .	20
HERACLES	You fought at sea?	
XANTHIAS	Yes, and sank – oh, must have been twelve or thirteen enemy ships.	
HERACLES	The two of you?	
DIONYSUS	Yes, by Apollo.	
XANTHIAS	In your dreams...	25
DIONYSUS	And while I was on board, reading <i>Andromeda</i> to myself, a <u>sudden desire</u> filled my heart – you wouldn't believe how strong it was.	
HERACLES	Desire? What kind of desire?	
DIONYSUS	Just a little one – the size of Molon.	

5 Which sea-battle is Xanthias referring to in line 1?

[1]

Most candidates correctly identified the battle as Arginusae, although some said it was Salamis or even Actium.

Question 6

6 Why do you think that Xanthias refers to this battle? Make **two** points.

[2]

Most candidates were able to make valid points concerning the role of slaves in the battle, and the consequences of them fighting.

Question 7

7 Who was Cleisthenes (line 20)?

[1]

Most candidates said Cleisthenes was a politician or a homosexual or both.

Question 8

8 What was the sudden desire (line 26) felt by Dionysus?

[1]

The majority of candidates said it was Euripides, although some only mentioned a tragic poet, which was insufficient to gain the mark. A few confused the analogy of soup with Dionysus' actual desire, or thought it referred to something sexual.

Question 9

9 Explain how Aristophanes makes the scene in **Source B** a successful piece of comic drama.

Make **four** points and support each point with reference to **Source B**.

[8]

Candidates were generally able to make a variety of points with good reference to the passage. There were some very detailed responses with specific focus on the dynamic between Xanthias and Dionysus, and Heracles and the costume. There were also a number of good answers referring to contemporary events and people. Good responses analysed how the chosen examples made the passage successful.

In line 22, Xanthias should have been attributed to Dionysus. This did not cause any issues for candidates. To make sure candidates were not disadvantaged, credit was given for both Xanthias or Dionysus in the mark scheme.

Question 10*

10* 'When the play was first produced, the audience found Aristophanes' *Frogs* to be entertaining because of what they heard, rather than what they saw.'
Explain how far you agree with this statement.

You may use **Source(s) A and/or B** as a starting point in your answer.

[16]

This question was generally answered successfully. Much depended on how 'entertaining' was defined. More successful responses typically argued that both were important, or that verbal humour was more important; although some good arguments were made for physical humour; these tended to lack detail from the play and rely more on contextual knowledge. Details from the play tended to be confined to the first half of *Frogs*, especially when discussing examples of visual humour. The most successful responses used examples that exemplified both verbal and physical humour such as the costume swapping or bottom whacking scenes.

Most candidates discussed the two elements separately and brought them together in the conclusion. This was an effective way of dealing with this question. The quality of the conclusion varied, depending on its length and depth.

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Assessment for learning



Candidates should be aware of the correct definition of different types of humour. Many considered scatological humour to be any crude humour, including sexual, rather than limited to bodily functions. There were also many candidates who regarded any form of physical humour (e.g. Dionysus throwing himself at the door) as being slapstick.

Exemplar 1

		overall it is not as the other which
		makes Aristophanes play frogs entertaining to
		the audience was first produced & it
		was a mixture of both between Agon, Scatological
		humour, Master to the visual
		humour of nature and slapstick which
		made the play entertaining.

The exemplar shows an effective conclusion, bringing both elements together with a valid conclusion.

Section B overview

Candidates generally showed good knowledge and understanding of both tragic plays. They were able to use quotations and close references as evidence for the points they were making. In both questions, there was a tendency for conclusions to be quite short and underdeveloped. Some candidates used a plan for their essay, which tended to help with the organisation of the response.

Question 11*

11* 'Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* is Greek tragedy at its best.'

Assess how far you agree with this statement.

In your answer, you should consider what elements make a great tragedy and how far *Oedipus the King* has these elements. **[25]**

Candidates who answered this question knew the main details of the play. The best responses commented on Aristotle and the Poetics, linking this to the figure of Oedipus as a tragic hero and *Oedipus the King's* plot. They were also able to note the motif of sight and blindness in the tragedy and how this is found in the whole play from the beginning to the end. Theatrical conventions were also discussed thoughtfully showing how all these elements contributed to make the play Greek tragedy at its best. Candidates approached the question from both a contemporary and a modern perspective. However, not many responses presented a counterargument, simply discussing the elements that make a great tragedy. Thoughtful evaluation, for example a counterargument, is a key element of AO2, so candidates should be encouraged to aim to include 'both sides' in their essay responses.

Misconception



Many candidates were under the misconception that the prophecy given to Laius and Jocasta was the same as the one given to Oedipus. They were simply told that Laius' son would kill him.

Some candidates treated the story of Oedipus' life as being part of the play. Candidates need to make it clear that they are aware of the content of the play and not just the myth of Oedipus. The content of the play needs to form the basis of the answer.

Question 12*

12* 'It is impossible for the audience to feel any pity for Pentheus in Euripides' *Bacchae*.'

Assess how far you agree with this statement.

In your answer, you should consider how Pentheus acts and how he is treated by Dionysus. [25]

Candidates were generally able to tackle this question successfully. They were aware of the general elements of the plot and were able to use this as evidence in their discussion. The answers were generally balanced, with Pentheus' blasphemous attitude and treatment of Dionysus, and his tyrannical behaviour being cited as reasons why the audience would not feel pity. Points for feeling pity included his humiliation at the hands of Dionysus and the nature of his death, as well as his young age. Some more perceptive responses contrasted the reactions of a contemporary audience to those of a modern audience.

Exemplar 2

		however later on Dionysus ridicules the king
		groomer by dressing him up in women's clothing
		like the <i>Bacchae</i> that he hates so much.
		when he takes Pentheus up to Mount Cithaeron
		to see the <i>Bacchae</i> he turns all of them
		against him and rips him. The women
		pull down the tree he was sitting in and
		then pull apart his limbs. Even though Pentheus
		tries to stop her by saying "Mother please
		do not kill your son who has wronged, it is
		me Pentheus", again, his mother, kills him
		and marches down to the city with his head
		on a stick. I believe it would be impossible to
		feel no sympathy for Pentheus, even though

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