

A LEVEL

Examiners' report

CLASSICAL CIVILISATION

H408

For first teaching in 2017

H408/31 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 are 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 31 series overview

This paper is one of the four options for the 'Beliefs and Ideas' component group and asks candidates to explore the nature of Greek religion. Through studying Greek religious beliefs and developing an understanding of the nature of participation in religion, this paper required candidates to show both a conceptual understanding of the topic and mastery of the sanctuary sites and sources from the period. It offers a mixture of low tariff AO1 questions, alongside longer responses which require skills to be demonstrated in both AO1 and AO2.

Familiar themes emerged from candidate responses to this year's paper. Where there had been careful preparation in advance, the majority of candidates found the questions accessible. Dealing with deme religion required some specific knowledge in Question 4 and Question 5, and many were equal to this challenge. Knowledge of philosophers was also dealt with well by the majority of candidates who chose to respond to Question 6. Some candidates, however, lacked the basic building blocks of knowledge to construct convincing responses. Examiners will always struggle to reward work highly where there is only limited evidence offered in response to a question.

There was a reasonably impressive deployment of scholars on essay questions, although this was mainly in the form of a 'name-drop' and elicited only limited critical comment from candidates. In future years it would be good to see an overt effort on the part of candidates to say whether they agree or disagree with the views of scholars, and link that to a piece of AO1 to show the reason for their view.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrated a firm grasp of how Greek religion worked on a daily basis • Knew how religion differed between polis/panhellenic level and local/household level • Had a clear knowledge of the ideas of philosophers on religion for Question 6 • Had a clear knowledge of the many ways that Greeks worshipped the gods in Question 7 • Recognised the need to form a judgement in response to essay questions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tended to have a very limited range of AO1 • Had a very shallow understanding of deme religion • Answered essay questions by listing knowledge rather than analysing the question. • Did not use modern scholarship in Question 6 and Question 7.

Section A overview

Factual knowledge was often the key issue in order for candidates to be successful in Section A. Candidates tended to perform better on Question 2, probably because there was a source stimulus to assist them. In Question 4, the lack of such material often left candidates exposed. Those who had a clear grasp of how household and deme religion worked were well equipped to respond to Question 4 and then develop their ideas in Question 5. However, there were too many scripts which were characterised by a lack of specific knowledge. Examiners found this to be seriously detrimental to strong performance on these questions.

Question 2

2 Analyse how useful the pot in **Source A** is in telling us about Athena's importance to the Athenians.

[10]

The responses to this question were generally done well. It was especially pleasing to see how many candidates had understood that they should use the evidence of the amphora (AO1) in order to explain how Athena was important to the Athenians (AO2). Some did this by identifying the AO1 first, and then explaining it (AO2), others by explaining the importance (AO2) and then exemplifying (AO1). Either approach is completely acceptable.

Examiners were impressed by the sound understanding that the majority of candidates showed about the rear of the amphora as well as the date of its creation. While full marks could be achieved by using details visible on the question paper, the question did say 'the pot in Source A', and so marks were given for the wider knowledge that some responses demonstrated.

Assessment for learning



If there is one issue with many 10-mark question responses, it is in their length. Too many candidates treat it as an essay, and spend correspondingly too long on their response. This has an effect on the time available for the more valuable 20- and 30-mark essays. Please see Exemplar 1 for guidance on how to respond to these questions more effectively.

Exemplar 1

One way in which the pot in Source A is useful in telling us about Athena's importance to the Athenians is through her depicted stance and props. In Source A, we can see Athena depicted holding a spear and shield in a battle stance. From this we can suggest that Athena was important to the Athenians as she acted as their protector in war.

Another way in which the pot in Source A is useful in telling us about Athena's importance is through the meaning behind the pot. The Panathenaic Amphorae was a prize given to the winner of the Panathenaic games and was usually filled with olive oil from the sacred tree on the Acropolis. As it represents the games, we can suggest that Athena is responsible for the bringing together of the community in the games, highlighting her importance.

Exemplar 1 gives two examples of how a candidate has made points in order to respond to this question effectively. In Paragraph 1, they have chosen the 'stance and props' as the AO1 from the amphora, and then made the comment 'important to the Athenians as she acted as their protector in war' (AO2).

In Paragraph 2, they deploy the knowledge that the amphora 'was a prize for winning in the games' (AO1), and then the candidate has explained 'Athena is responsible for the bringing together of the community... highlighting her importance' (AO2).

The candidate then went on to offer two further points in a similar guise, thus meaning that there was a range of well selected material (AO1) as well as a full engagement with the question (AO2) to achieve Level 5.

As can be seen, the style is compact and simply chooses a piece of AO1 and comments on it in response to the question. Nothing more is needed to fulfil the requirements of the 10-mark question.

Question 3

Religious beliefs and rituals were central to all aspects of the lives of the ancient Greeks.

- 3 (a) Name **one** civic religious event in which young, unmarried Athenian girls could participate. [1]
- (b) Give **two** details about what the girls would do whilst participating in civic religious events. [2]

The majority of candidates gave the correct response to Question 3. However, it is worth noting that some candidates did not look carefully at the question, and so offered responses that were either generalised or incorrect. For example, the Thesmophoria was a festival for citizen wives, and so was not rewarded as a response. Question 3(b) required knowledge about the involvement of girls in festivals. Overly generalised responses such as 'prayed' or 'sang' did not gain marks if they were not accompanied by a more specific level of context.

Question 4

- 4 Explain how household and deme rituals show the importance of religious beliefs to everyday life in Athens. [10]

The best responses to this question came when candidates recognised that they had been asked to look at both household and deme rituals. In addition, they also discussed how those rituals demonstrated the importance of religious beliefs. Examiners were particularly pleased with the impressive knowledge that some candidates deployed about the deme of Erchia, both on festivals and hero-worship.

It was more difficult to give high marks to candidates who were only able to mention a more limited range of points, usually confined to the household. As mentioned in the commentary to Question 2, marrying sound AO1 to incisive AO2 was necessary on this question.

Question 5*

5* 'Participation in state and panhellenic religious activity was entirely different from that at a household and deme level.'

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

[20]

There was a tendency on the part of the majority of candidates to take this question as an opportunity to list all that they knew about religious activity. In some cases this led to strong work in AO1, but it should be noted that this question required an element of comparison to do well in AO2. Responses which focused on 'was entirely different' in the way that they approached the essay tended to achieve more highly in AO2.

The vast majority of candidates were able to discuss the Panathenaea and Olympics, and also gave details about household religion. The issues that restricted some candidates in Question 4 were replicated here too. Examiners would have liked to see more candidates consider the nature of the religious experience at panhellenic and polis level. Appreciating the political dimension to such events would have assisted in bringing a clearer sense of comparison to the essays. It is worth noting that some candidates do not seem to understand the difference between panhellenic and state religious activity. A considerable number attributed panhellenic status to the Panathenaea.

Section B overview

The majority of candidates responded to Question 7, rather than Question 6, although the quality of responses was broadly similar. For both questions, there was a reasonably sound deployment of knowledge. The main issue between the two essays was the difference in approach taken by candidates. Question 6 usually saw a sound engagement with the question. There was a tendency in Question 7, however, for many candidates to drift into narration.

Some candidates neglected to mention any scholars, and this had a detrimental effect on their overall mark. It is worth reiterating that the best responses display critical analysis of scholars, and will thus deal with them more fully than just as a quote.

Question 6*

6* 'Xenophanes' and Socrates' views on the gods were radical and controversial, and had a great impact on Greek society.'

Evaluate how far you agree with this statement.

[30]

It was pleasing to see the number of candidates who had understood both the ideas of Xenophanes and Socrates. The majority of candidates had also secured this knowledge within its overall historical context. This meant that when assessing the impact of both philosophers, there was some interesting assessment of the extent to which Homer and Hesiod were challenged, and how far traditional anthropomorphic presentations of the gods prevailed. Many of the best essays also looked to assess Socrates within the politics of Athens at the end of the 5th century and not just through a religious prism.

Weaker responses lacked any detailed knowledge of the specific ideas of either philosopher, or focused only on one. Perhaps inevitably on an essay which required assessment of the impact of ideas, examiners were often met with assertion or sweeping generalisation. In dealing with the ideas of philosophers, many candidates might have been better advised to have taken a more nuanced approach given the nature of the surviving evidence.

Exemplar 2

I agree partially that Xenophanes and Socrates views on the gods were radical and controversial and had a great impact on Greek society.

Firstly it can be argued that the beliefs of Socrates and Xenophanes were radical and controversial because they criticised the works of Homer and Hesiod. ~~as~~ Brink-Zaldman argues that the texts of Homer and Hesiod were the foundation of all Greek religious belief and I ~~totally~~ agree with him. Xenophanes criticised the actions of the gods and called them "immoral" and "immodest". He put forward an argument that it was nonsensical for the gods to be behaving in such a way that was unfit for a divine being. This idea is supported by James Redfield who states "the gods in the Iliad are a chief source of comedy", I agree with Redfield as in book 1 of the Iliad Apollo shows a human trait of anger and rage as he sends a plague onto the Greek camps until they released Chryseis his princess. Socrates similarly criticised the gods and their

Anthropomorphism by stating that Iris was not a cloud and had no involvement over natural events. Such accusations therefore would have been radical and controversial ~~from~~ for an Ancient Greek audience because, as Bruit Zaidman says, Hesiod and Homer were the foundation of all religion in Ancient Greece therefore any criticism against this was seen as radical and controversial. Therefore the criticisms of Homer and Hesiod by both Xenophanes and Socrates ~~to~~ can be argued to be radical and controversial.

Exemplar 2 illustrates the approach that a candidate should take to utilising scholars. The candidate has woven in a reference to James Redfield (possibly making clever use of their knowledge of the *Iliad*) in order to examine a point about Xenophanes' criticism of anthropomorphised gods and their actions. Where this works well is that instead of just quoting Redfield, the candidate goes on to express an opinion ('I agree with Redfield') and then offer confirmatory evidence of their own to show why they agree ('as in book 1 of the *Iliad*...'). This is then linked to the view of Bruit Zaidman as well as addressed at the question. This makes for a paragraph where examiners can easily say that the work has demonstrated 'critical perceptive analysis.'

Question 7*

7* 'Blood sacrifices were the most important method of honouring and worshipping the gods.'

Evaluate how far you agree with this statement.

[30]

There were lots of well-informed responses to this question, with a confident grasp of both the details of blood sacrifice alongside a well understood range of other means to worship the gods. The majority of candidates were able to place blood sacrifices within festivals, mystery cults and sanctuaries. This led to some excellent discussion of the significance of blood sacrifices overall. Examiners were especially impressed by those essays that managed to assess sacrifices alongside more than just one other means of honouring the gods. In these essays, good use was often made of, for example, Sourvinou-Inwood and Zaidman and Pantel. There were a handful of excellent scripts that spent considerable time discussing the nature of sanctuaries and the wealth that was poured into them as a means of honouring the gods.

There were, however, weaker responses which left examiners to work out what the candidate's response to the question might be. These responses tended to focus on a list of the events of a blood sacrifice as well as what happened in festivals and at the Eleusinian Mysteries. Less awareness was given to thinking about the issue of which might be considered the most important means of worship.

Exemplar 3

However, as Robert Garland recognises, ~~sacrific~~ blood sacrifice also served the practical function of providing the Greeks with rarely eaten meat, which may diminish in importance in honouring the gods. Comparatively, festivals may have been a more important method, as they required more time and skill to participate in. For example, the Greater Panathenaia not only included a hecatomb of 100 oxen, but it also included other events such as a procession, games and athletic contest, all honouring the gods, particularly Athena. The pompe ~~method~~ emphasised the large scale nature of the festival's worship, as a Pompeion even had to be later built by the Athenians in order to accommodate all the people participating. This journey, passing the Erechtheion was highly important as the Erechtheion was the most sacred spot on the Acropolis, with the olive tree symbolically marking Athena and Poseidon's patronage battle, which shows how the festival honours both of the Olympian gods. Furthermore, the gifting of the peplos to Athena's statue celebrates her birthday and role as patron, as well as the Pyrrhic Dance in the tribal context, which

it is thought she performed herself. Indeed, the celebration of her birthday through worship in the festival links to the Homeric Hymn describing her birth as she 'sprang' from Zeus' head, which further honours all of the Olympian gods, respecting their hierarchy and family, - which sacrifices do not do.

In the paragraph before this extract, the candidate has argued that sacrifices are very expensive, which suggests their importance. In this section of the essay, the candidate sets out to explain why blood sacrifices, although important, are not the most important means of worshipping the gods.

To do this, there is the use of a scholar (Garland), the AO1 evidence that sacrifices are eaten, and then the use of the word 'comparatively' to show where there is a greater level of importance in festivals. The candidate offers an AO2 reason: 'as they required more time and skill to participate in', and then a good range of AO1 evidence. The paragraph ends with an explanation that this means of worship is more important because it honours the hierarchy of the gods and the family of the gods 'which sacrifices do not do'.

This marriage of AO1 and AO2 fulfils the Level 4 marking criteria of well selected knowledge as well as clear line of reasoning. Examiners are always happy to award Level 4 or Level 5 for essays that have these hallmarks.

OCR support



Some students struggle to bring sufficient levels of AO1 into their essays. OCR has endorsed a number of resources to help with this, and there is a particularly good Massolit series by Dr Emma Aston which supports the nature of worship in Greek religion. Please [click here](#) for resources.

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