

A LEVEL

Examiners' report

CLASSICAL CIVILISATION

H408

For first teaching in 2017

H408/21 Summer 2023 series

Contents

Introduction	3
Paper 21 series overview	4
Section A overview	5
Question 1	5
Question 2	6
Question 3	9
Question 4	9
Question 5	10
Question 6	10
Question 7*	12
Section B overview	13
Question 8*	13
Question 9*	15
Copyright information	16

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 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 OCR.

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Paper 21 series overview

Candidates showed good knowledge of the content of the plays. They were able to express opinions about the questions, and use evidence from the plays to back up these opinions. It was also evident that the candidates had good background knowledge of the social and cultural context of the plays, and were able to include this into their responses. Some candidates used a plan for their essay, which tended to help with the organisation of the response.

There were some very good responses which showed the obvious enjoyment candidates have had in studying the plays. The responses showed the personal reaction of the candidates to the plays and the issues they raised. It was pleasing to see that quite a number of candidates had seen productions of a play, which aided them in treating Greek Theatre as a performance, rather than just as literature.

Finally, legibility and quality of written communication is still an issue. This can particularly be seen in the spelling of names and technical terms. Candidates should be advised to read through what they have written to make sure that their work communicates their ideas clearly and effectively.

Assessment for learning



Candidates are reminded to:

- follow the instructions carefully
- start each 10-, 20- and 30-mark question on a new page of the answer booklet. Very few candidates did this, sometimes not even leaving a gap between responses. This can make it difficult for the examiner to work out where one response ended and the next one began
- number questions carefully
- write clearly and legibly.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:

- read the questions carefully
- displayed good examination technique
- separated points clearly by using paragraphs
- used both literary and material culture evidence in the extended writing questions
- 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
- discussed the plays as pieces of drama, rather than literature.

Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:

- made little reference to the actual plays in the extended writing 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 firm opinion, and then disagreed with their introduction as they continued their response, leading to a confusing argument
- used technical terms such as peripeteia and anagnorisis without understanding what they mean
- made little/no reference to scholars in the essay.

Section A overview

The majority of candidates had good knowledge of the plot and details of Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*. Overall, candidates dealt adequately with the plot, but there was evidence that some candidates were not familiar with the background knowledge of the pot.

Question 1

Source A
Choregos Vase

Figure 1



1 Identify Figure 1 on the vase in Source A.

[1]

The majority of candidates were unable to identify Figure 1 correctly. Candidates simply stated that he is a tragic actor.

Assessment for learning



For short response questions, there is no need to write a sentence. In most cases, a one or two word response will do.

Question 2

2 Analyse how useful **Source A** is in telling us about costumes in Greek comedy at the time of Aristophanes.

[10]

The majority of candidates were able to pick out features of costumes from the pot. These included masks, short tunics and phalluses. Many candidates mentioned the padding and body suits. Better responses were able to link this to the purpose of comedy and different types of humour, such as vulgarity and slapstick, but other responses simply stated that the pot was useful as it showed these features of comic costume. Some candidates spent time discussing the tragic costume of Aegisthus (although better responses did state that the pot is useful as it provides a contrast between costumes in tragedy and comedy) or discussing the staging.

The minority of candidates mentioned the date and location of the pot, or discussed other reasons why the pot may not be useful, such as the lack of colour, and the image being static. Candidates who did mention the date seemed unaware that Aristophanes was still writing plays in the 380s BC.

Assessment for learning



Candidates should be aware of the provenance of material culture sources.

Exemplar 1

This source is useful in showing the fagsuits comic actors would wear - there is sagging, wrinkled flesh visible on the 3 actors' arms and legs. Further, one can see where the sleeves and legs of the fagsuit end at the wrists and ankles, showing that they were indeed full-body suits. The fagsuits are also shown to round out the actors' figures, as the old man has a protruding behind and the other two fagsuit-wearers have widened hips.

This source also shows that comic actors wearing short tunics, much like how Dionysus in Aristophanes' "Frogs" is seen wearing a "little yellow number". These short tunics not only show of the comedy strap-on phalluses actors would wear, but also allow for unimpeded movement. This freedom of movement would have been useful for scenes with lots of energy, such as the spanking scene before the parabasis in "Frogs". The short tunics might have also been easier to put on and remove, facilitating quick-change scenes such as when Dionysus gives Xanthias the Hercules costume.

This vase ~~to~~ might show the masks the actors would have worn. The masks are suggested by the old man's gaping mouth, and the grotesque scowls of the other comedy actors. However, it is unclear as to whether or not these are indeed the comic masks or if this vase shows an actor arguing during a rehearsal ~~or~~ behind the scenes, as Agasthus does not appear to be wearing a mask.

This vase only shows the costumes of the actors, and not the chorus members, as it only shows the actors onstage. There is no indication of what the chorus members look like, whether they are wearing the elaborate ~~bird~~ speckled bird costumes shown on the Pella painter's vase or if they are dressed in rags like the chorus of Initiates in "Frogs" is suggested to be.

Exemplar 1, which scored a mark from the bottom of Level 5, shows a good approach to the question. The candidate has considered both sides of the argument and used references to Aristophanes' *Frogs*.

Question 3

Source B**Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* 408–431**

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3 Give the names of Oedipus' mother and father (line 14).

[2]

The majority of candidates correctly identified Oedipus' parents.

Question 4

4 What is Cithaeron (line 20)?

[1]

The majority of responses were correct although some candidates thought it was a part of the Underworld.

Question 5

5 Give the name of **one** of Oedipus' children (line 25).

[1]

The majority of candidates correctly gave the name of one of his daughters.

Question 6

6 Explain how successfully Sophocles makes the scene in **Source B** an exciting piece of drama.

[10]

The majority of candidates were able to produce a reasonable analysis of the text. Candidates were able to use quotations from the passage and explain how they made the scene an exciting piece of drama. Candidates generally showed a sound appreciation of different dramatic techniques, such as foreshadowing and dramatic irony, although they did not always appreciate the difference between irony and dramatic irony. Responses which were divided into paragraphs made it easier for different points to be distinguished from each other.

Exemplar 2

Tiresias then uses the metaphor the 'fatal harbour' to refer to Jocasta, potentially foreshadowing her later suicide and engaging the audience as the likening of Thebes to a ship (and therefore naval imagery) has been used before.

Tiresias closes his speech stating that 'no man will ever be rooted from the earth as brutally as Oedipus, further enforcing his exile while also accepting Oedipus' criticism as he knows he will fare better than Oedipus in the end.

The passage closes with ~~Oedipus' short~~ a series of short phrases from Oedipus, with ~~to~~ two final imperatives of 'get out' and 'vanish' emphasising his discomfort and

making the passage exciting as Oedipus' short sentences are contrasted against Tiresias' long speech.

Exemplar 2, which is about half of the overall response, is a good example of how the candidate has been able to demonstrate a clear line of analysis and division between points.

Question 7*

7* 'The imagery of sight and blindness is vital to the success of Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*.'

Explain how far you agree with this statement.

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

[20]

The majority of candidates were able to make some points about the imagery of sight and blindness. Candidates used the passage in Source B as a launchpad for their response, but in some cases that is as far as they got. Candidates were able to discuss the parallels between physical and metaphorical sight and blindness, and how these related to knowledge and ignorance, with the comparison between Oedipus and Tiresias being a prime point. The majority of candidates struggled to use the whole play in their essay, with many candidates not mentioning the messenger speech describing Oedipus' self-blinding, and especially his appearance on stage following this. More perceptive responses also appreciated that Oedipus' decision to blind himself was his own, not a part of the prophecy he received. There were also instances of associating sight and blindness with other themes in the play, such as prophecies and Oedipus' peripeteia.

These other themes, such as fate, prophecies and characterisation, were used as a counter argument. This is an acceptable approach to the question, but the other themes should have been mentioned in addition to sight and blindness. Quite often, the candidates used a brief analysis of sight and blindness, and used the majority of the essay to discuss other themes they were more confident about. This limited the marks given, especially in AO2, as in this type of question, the focus should have been on sight and blindness.

Misconception



A common misconception is that the prophecies given to Laius and Jocasta, and to Oedipus were identical. Laius and Jocasta were only told that their son would kill his father.

Section B overview

Candidates showed good knowledge and understanding of the plays studied. The use of modern scholarship was intermittent, with most responses containing some mention of scholars, but not all. Better responses integrated the scholars into the discussion and engaged with their views, but sometimes use of scholars was just a 'name dropping' exercise. There were also occasions when there was an excessive use of scholars which at times hindered or even drove the narrative. 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.

Of the two questions, Question 9 was by far the most popular.

Question 8*

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.

- 8*** Analyse whether the first half of Aristophanes' *Frogs* (Dionysus' travels) contributes more to the success of the play than the second half (the contest between Aeschylus and Euripides). Justify your answer with close reference to Aristophanes' *Frogs*. **[30]**

The majority of candidates were aware of the main details of events within the play. The vast majority of the responses examined the two halves of the play separately and compared them to each other. Better responses discussed not only the comedy of the play, but also the visual and political aspects.

The first half of the play was mostly discussed in more detail than the second half, which was often limited to the political debate at the end and missed out the contest between Aeschylus and Euripides. Candidates mostly had a good appreciation of the comic techniques used by Aristophanes, but often used terms such as 'scatological humour' or 'slapstick' without understanding what these terms actually mean.

Better responses showed an awareness of the political and social context of the play. Many candidates also discussed the *parabasis*, noting it as a cross over point between the *katabasis* and the *agon* between Aeschylus and Euripides. There were also some good discussions of the difference between the reactions of a contemporary audience, and this of a modern audience.

Assessment for learning



Candidates should appreciate that the success of a comedy by Aristophanes is dependent on more than just how funny the play is.

Misconception



There were candidates who had a misconception of what exactly the different forms of humour employed by Aristophanes are. Sexual innuendo was often described as being scatological, or the costume swapping as slapstick.

Exemplar 3

Yet, Bettendorf states that the "primary function of the play is -- is not literary critique but political action" which is made clear through the agon between Aeschylus and Euripides. Although both Aeschylus and Euripides are mocked and judged by Dionysus for the "weight" of their dramas and lyrics, they are ultimately judged by the solutions they offer to aid the political situation in Athens which is supported by Hall's idea that "comedy is intimately linked to democracy". Pluto's slave and the interaction with Xanthias reveals that Dionysus is chosen to judge the agon due to his "experience" which highlights the meta-theatrical nature of 'Frogs' due to Dionysus' awareness of his role as judge of the City Dionysia. The fact that Dionysus acts as the judge of the contest gives the solution provided to replace Athens' leaders validity. The critique of politicians is further done through the chorus who use the analogy of coinage and state "it is the same with politicians". The chorus describes politicians as "copper-topped foreigners and criminals we rely on for everything" and state that Athens' political state must be changed.

Exemplar 3 is a good example of how a candidate can engage with the views of scholars and integrate references to the play and quotations into the response.

Question 9*

9* 'The gods and religion are at the heart of ancient Greek Theatre.'

Assess how far you agree with this statement. Justify your answer with close reference to **at least two** of the plays you have studied. **[30]**

The majority of candidates showed sound knowledge of the plays studied. While some responses concentrated solely on the plays, most candidates used contextual knowledge of the origins of theatre and the circumstances in which the plays were produced as the basis of their discussion. There was mention of the dithyramb and the komos, and also the processions and sacrifices which were made during the festivals. The majority of candidates also used material culture evidence, not only the physical remains of the theatres, but also some pots, such as the volute krater by the Pronomos painter and the Basel Dancers column krater.

Discussion of the plays centred on the role of Dionysus as a leading character in both Euripides' *Bacchae* and Aristophanes' *Frogs*. Candidates discussed their presentation, the vengeful figure and the pathetic coward, and their contribution to the plots of the plays. *Oedipus the King* was discussed less, with some candidates claiming that the gods were not central to the play, as they did not appear in it. Some candidates recognised their indirect influence through fate and oracles, and also the plague in Thebes and the prayers made to remove it. Some responses also mentioned that the worship by the Bacchantes of Dionysus and the role of the Chorus of Initiates in *Frogs* were evidence of the role of religion in ancient Greek Theatre.

Another approach was the messages of the plays. The majority of candidates noted the warnings of both *Bacchae* and *Oedipus the King* to respect the gods, but some also used the counter argument that these two plays were more about anti-tyrannical messages than religious, while *Frogs* was more about politics than religion, which meant that religion was not at the heart of ancient Greek Theatre.

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