

# 2017 VCE History: Ancient History examination report

## General comments

The 2017 Ancient History examination was the second examination for the study. The examination was divided into three sections on three civilisations, with two parts for each civilisation. Students were required to select two sections and answer both parts for each section.

Overall, students handled the examination sections and parts well, and the quality of the essays was good. Students with high-scoring responses understood each question's requirements, incorporated specific primary sources and used the arguments of historians to support their responses; however, there were areas for improvement. In the responses to Part 1, many students provided general opening sentences that simply restated the question. This type of sentence was not necessary and contributed nothing to their result.

Many responses – essays, in particular – did not use any dates. Students need to understand that establishing a clear historical/chronological context is paramount in historical writing. Furthermore, essay responses were often too broad in their approach and lacked specific details. Many students were unprepared or lacked knowledge of historical interpretations. Some essays did not address the question, and these students appeared to have a predetermined idea of what they wanted to write about (for example, Lysander and the First Triumvirate). Other essays addressed the question in one body paragraph and then appeared to ignore the question for the rest of the essay. More broadly, students should integrate the source or sources into their writing – for example, using 'According to ...', rather than citing the point and writing 'Source 1' in brackets – thereby making their response more fluent. Students should also be exposed to a range of sources of evidence. They should show that they understand what primary sources are and how they are collected and presented; for example, students incorrectly cited Breasted and Malouchou (the translators and editors) as the authors of the Thutmosis and the Erythrai decrees respectively. Students can be assured that they will not be penalised (nor rewarded) for using non-English historical terms.

Part 1 – Living in an ancient society comprised one question with three parts requiring responses to an extract from one or more sources. Question 1a. invited students to respond to the extract without the need to provide a great deal of additional detail for their response. Consequently, most students were able to answer Question 1a. well. They focused on showing comprehension of the source(s) provided and identified the relevant points that were requested, and they succinctly quoted from the source to show that they understood the meaning of the source. In contrast, students with lower-scoring responses simply transposed slabs of text from the source, with little demonstration that they understood the point being made by the source, or simply listed multiple items that they could extract from the text. Some students used the extra space and wrote lengthy responses to this question; conciseness needs to be emphasised.

Students needed to use the source(s) provided (that is, a quote from a written source) and also include their own knowledge to supplement evidence from the source. This should have taken the form of specific historical details (dates, names, facts, figures, people, places, statistics, etc.). A student could also have included historical interpretations, if they were relevant and helped to

substantiate the explanation. It should be noted that students cannot gain full marks by relying exclusively on the source, or by using only their own knowledge. Students should be aware of how to respond to the specific requirements of a contextual question and be encouraged to move beyond the evidence provided in the source.

Question 1c. required students to demonstrate an understanding of a historical period within the Area of Study. This was the least well-answered question part across the three civilisations, with many students struggling to produce answers that used more than half the allocated space. The questions covered a wide historical period and required a wide range of knowledge. They required students to create a response using their own knowledge base and show evidence from other sources. Equally importantly, the task phrase ‘Evaluate the extent to which ...’ required students to make a judgment about the significance of one or more factors (indicated in the question) in relation to a broader historical situation (also indicated in the question); that is, they needed to weigh up and argue the pros and cons of the question.

Higher-scoring responses presented a concise and balanced evaluation that focused clearly on the question. They considered change and continuity, and they assessed change, and then developed their response by considering the importance of other factors that were not specified in the question. Assertions of historical fact were supported by specific historical details, while interpretations of the historical significance of the facts were supported by reference to historians or historical figures. Mid-scoring responses tended to be too general, lacking specific dates and historical detail. Lower-scoring responses made a couple of relevant points, relied too heavily on the source or did not construct an effective evaluation of the question. These responses tended to describe factors in a narrative style, rather than weighing up their significance in relation to the specific question.

The use of both primary sources and historical interpretations was applicable to both parts of the examination. It would be more beneficial if instead of using meaningless ‘quotes’ of primary sources – for example, “‘The sword brought into the Assembly” (Appian)’, which was used to highlight political violence under Pompey and Caesar – students identified an opinion or point – for example, ‘Thucydides attributes the Peloponnesian War to x, y factors’. This point also applies to secondary sources. Students should avoid superficial use of historical interpretation; they should use historical interpretations that are substantial and appropriate in support of their argument.

## Specific information

**Note: Student responses reproduced in this report have not been corrected for grammar, spelling or factual information.**

This report provides sample answers or an indication of what answers may have included. Unless otherwise stated, these are not intended to be exemplary or complete responses.

The statistics in this report may be subject to rounding resulting in a total more or less than 100 per cent.

Civilisation chosen	none	Egypt	Greece	Rome
%	0	39	83	78

## Section A – Egypt

### Part 1 – Living in an ancient society

#### Question 1a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	2	1	19	29	50	3.2

While students with lower-scoring responses simply transposed a list of booty or tribute from the source, students with higher-scoring responses included more than two or three points and built a coherent overview in response to the question, using succinct quotations to support their response.

#### Question 1b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	3	2	15	23	26	19	12	3.7

Higher-scoring responses gave precise historical detail and careful explanation. They incorporated a clear understanding of traditional roles of the pharaoh; recognised the extraordinary nature of a female pharaoh, while contextualising it with traditional Pharaonic roles; used specific examples and evidence of Hatshepsut's exercise of Pharaonic power (for example, the Divine Birth and Coronation scenes to legitimise her claims to the throne or trading in Punt seen on the reliefs at Deir el Bahri); and showed an understanding of the conservative nature of ancient Egyptian society – a female pharaoh could destabilise ma'at, hence Hatshepsut's need to refer strongly to her legitimacy according to traditional Egyptian Pharaonic ideals.

Lower-scoring responses gave an unbalanced view of Hatshepsut as a grasping woman who took the throne away from the rightful male heir or alternatively relied entirely on the source to construct a response and made a couple of points about representations of Hatshepsut as a male.

#### Question 1c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	16	2	5	6	9	15	15	13	10	6	2	4.7

Most students were able to highlight some basic similarities and differences between Thutmose III and Ramesses II. Lower-scoring responses tended to compare and contrast the events and outcomes of the Battle of Megiddo and Battle of Kadesh. Very few responses demonstrated that they understood the command 'evaluate the extent to which'. Students need to learn to structure an argument (rather than just present information) that weighs up the extent to which they agree with the statement.

### Part 2 – People in power, societies in crisis

Question chosen	none	2	3
%	7	21	72

#### Essay

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	Average
%	7	0	1	1	2	2	2	3	5	8	8	8	7	6	9	8	8	6	7	0	1	11.3

### Questions 2 and 3

Question 2 was a not popular question and the responses varied in quality. The question covered the reigns of numerous pharaohs and required comparisons between pharaohs. The majority of students responded to Question 3 and generally identified a strong understanding with respect to Pharaonic traditions and how Akhenaten's reign was such a contrast to these. Many essays just provided a simple overview of changes. Students with higher-scoring responses were able to use detailed historical examples and set their response in the context of a discussion of 'established Pharaonic traditions'.

Students need to have a better grasp and understanding of the key primary source evidence that is available to support arguments. Archaeological evidence should be used, as well as historical interpretations. Students need to have a clearer understanding of the conservative nature of ancient Egyptian society and the concept of ma'at. This can be used to contextualise many aspects of change and continuity, cause and consequence.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response to Question 3.

*Akhenaten's reign (1353-1336 BC) was defined by his radical departure from tradition as much of his reign is concentrated on reform and activities that contrast to the norm set by 2000 years of history. However, it is also defined by how he was merely a more radical representation of reforms already beginning to take place, as Gardiner said, "revolution was already in the air". Akhenaten's departure from tradition can be identified as his creation of a monotheistic cult as well as a change in military policy and representation*

*"Akhenaten thus chose, from the Egyptian pantheon, one god, removed from it all human or animal representations, and created around it a monotheistic cult to replace all others" (Butersen 1995) and this single reform is the total departure from tradition that cause the religious upheaval that defined his reign. Moving the capital to Akhetaten in year 6 of his rule displays this departure physically as the geographical shift was a move away from Thebes and Luxor, heavily defined by the worship of Amun and his triad that included Mut and Khonsu as it was the land where Amun was said to have stood during creation. This move was a defining feature that represented all other reforms particularly religiously as he created a new space dedicated to Aten worship "O god like whom there is no other (Hymn to the Aten) to conform to his new religious concept that placed his relationship with the Aten at the centre. (There is no other who knows you" Hymn to the Aten.) This meant people began to worship the royal relationship between mortal and divine rather than the gods themselves, seen in the removal of domestic shrines to gods, replaced by images of Akhenaten and the royal family. The celebration of religion was altered as "the king's daily chariot ride ... replaced the festivals of old" (Wilkinson 2010) and festivals such as the Opet, Sed and Wadi were abandoned for the first time in thousands of years. These changes define Akhenaten's reign as one of a religious reform of huge proportions.*

*One aspect that Akhenaten's predecessors had begun before him that he adopted and took to new heights was a lack of military involvement. "Thutmose IV began a foreign policy that favoured diplomacy over militancy", continued by Amenhotep III and Akhenaten" (Watterson 1997), and this attitude is seen extensively in Akhenaten's reign and is a complete departure from the pharaonic traditions of warrior pharaoh. Cohen and Wentbrook argue extensively that Akhenaten's lack of military involvement indicate strong diplomacy instead as despite growing Hittite power, no confrontation ensued. This was a new concept thought to be attributed to Ramses II's treaty however displayed strongly by Akhenaten's Amarna letters, correspondence with foreigners such as the Mittanians.*

*Assyrians and Babylonians, evidence of a marriage alliance with a captive wife and a possible treaty with Cyprus and the Assyrians. Akhenaten maintained face as a warrior pharaoh however "the military was no more evident in Egyptian art than during his reign" (Chadwick 1996) and is depicted as a sphinx, with the Khepresh crown and with smiting scenes. The departure from*

*tradition here lay within two diplomatic actions inherited from Thutmose IV and yet blown to massive proportions with a severe lack of campaigns compared to his predecessors, and yet significant alliances, defining his rule.*

*The most visibly profound departure from tradition however live in his alteration of art and cultural representation especially of his wife Nefertiti. Figures developed elongated fingers and skulls, rounded bellies and thighs and breasts on males. Static images of the past became flowing and shockingly intimate with scenes of Akhenaten embracing his family at Akhetaten and Genpa'ater at Karnak. These two sites are home to a revolutionary style of building and creation; the talatat, small blocks heavily inscribed with images of Akhenaten and worship of the Aten images developed of the sun disc expanding hands holding ankhs to Akhenaten and Nefertiti, a revolting depiction. Nefertiti's is an unprecedented example as she is depicted twice as often as Akhenaten at Karnak and equally at Akhetaten. This extensive depiction of his chief wife is a defining feature of his reign alongside the fact that she is depicted in ways that even suggest co-regency. Depicted wearing the pharaoh's Atef crown in Ay and Parbery's tombs and recorded "All things she says are done," alongside depictions of her in full regalia, bare to the waist like a king and her name encased in a cartouche all found at Akhetaten are representative of an aspect of Egyptian culture, the wife, that was totally unprecedented and heavily define Akhenaten's reign.*

*Akhenaten was undoubtedly a "radical pharaoh" and his departure from tradition in art, military and religion all define his reign as a complete abnormal period in Egyptian history.*

## Section B – Greece

### Part 1 – Living in an ancient society

#### Question 1a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	1	2	16	31	49	3.2

This question was well handled by most students, who were able to identify the relevant points. It was noticeable, however, that some students who struggled did not read the question carefully and ignored the crux of the question – namely, 'at its foundation' – or outlined why the Delian League was formed and not the structure.

#### Question 1b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	3	7	14	24	24	20	8	3.5

Even students with knowledge of the Delian League needed to construct their answer better to explain change. Also, the specific dates were a guide to the parameters of the response. Most students picked out the main point from the sources (particularly Source 2) about increasing Athenian imperialism and control. Higher-scoring responses provided a historical explanation that showed development in the relationship and included historical detail to support their explanation of change.

#### Question 1c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	14	7	8	10	9	13	14	12	9	4	1	4.3

Overall, this question was not well handled. Most students did not address key terms in the question – namely, ‘contributed’ and ‘by 454 BCE’ – but instead provided detailed narratives of the battles. The opportunity to include alternative reasons for change was not really taken up by many students, even those who produced higher-scoring responses. Students needed to focus on discussing the political and social impact of the Persian wars on Greek societies rather than the events of the wars themselves. The political factors could have included the rise of Athens and Sparta together with the Delian and Peloponnesian Leagues, Greek unity, and the social change included confidence, medism and the rise of the Athenian aristocracy. Economic changes, such as Athenian Black Sea trade, were outside the question.

## Part 2 – People in power, societies in crisis

Question chosen	none	2	3
%	8	57	35

### Essay

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	Average
%	9	3	3	2	6	2	4	3	6	6	6	5	5	6	8	7	7	6	4	2	2	10.1

### Questions 2 and 3

The two essay questions both generated good responses, although again chronological knowledge either lacked specific accuracy or was not used at all. Question 2 looked at causes and Question 3 at the outcome.

Question 2 was the more popular question, with students evaluating the cause of war by analysing short- and long-term causes (namely the military and political tensions between the main players). Higher-scoring responses were able to structure a historical argument that highlighted both and explored the rising tensions and responsibility of the three city-states, while weaving in an analysis of the role played by Athens and Sparta in these disputes. Lower-scoring responses tended to tell a story or ignore Corcyra, Potidaea and Megara in their discussions.

Responses to Question 3 were more problematic. Lower-scoring responses tended to go back to the early phases of the war (Pericles’ role, the plague, Sicilian expedition) or gave potted biographies of Alcibiades and Lysander, and gave only cursory attention to the internal political problems in Athens in the later stages and Lysander’s leadership. Higher-scoring responses tended to examine and evaluate Lysander’s role in the context of other factors that contributed to Sparta’s victory, including Athenian failures.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response to Question 2.

*Athens, Sparta and Corinth were largely responsible for the war, however, Thucydides distinguishes between “grounds for complaint”, or “points of difference”, and the “truest cause” of the Peloponnesian war, which was the “growing greatness of Athens and the fear this inspired” in Sparta. However, many modern historians disagree, to some extent, with Thucydides view and describe it as too simplistic. It is important to remember that Thucydides is unreliable and “sometimes almost incomprehensible” (Beard), for example with his recounts of speeches he was not present for. Thus modern historians such as Lendon, Rhodes and Hanson attribute different reasons to the cause of the war.*

*Thucydides’ truest cause was the “growing greatness of Athens and the fear” this inspired in Sparta and especially Corinth. Following this model it is possible to blame Sparta for declaring war in 431 BC, with their first annual invasion of Attica. However, in contrast to Thucydides,*

*Plutarch states that the Megarian Decree in 432 BC was the main cause of the war. Whereas Thucydides does not acknowledge the Megarian Decree as a large cause. Thucydides also describes how their were “such great underlying differences between the two powers... that minor disagreements must eventually lead to a catastrophic face-off” (Hanson). Thus, Thucydides model implies that Sparta, and especially Corinth, caused the war.*

*Thucydides also describes “grounds for complaints” which were the crisis at Corcyra and Potidaea (432 BC). Thucydides and Adcock describe these events as “operations of war” (Adcock), with Thucydides placing the blame on Corinth for their retaliation at Potidaea. Therefore, from Thucydides viewpoint it is possible to blame Corinth for being responsible for causing the war.*

*However, the truest reasons for the war are described by modern historians such as Lendon, Rhodes and Hanson. Lendon emphasises the issue of rank and “hegemonia” (supreme rank. The model Lendon applies is the “refusal of a proud state to defer to another which considers itself superior in rank. Thus, he describes that neither Athens, Corinth nor Sparta can be blamed for the war as all had valid reasons to do what they did. Rhodes describes the war as “a war over the power of Athens.” (Rhodes) This is due to the fact that Athens and especially Pericles knew the war was “inevitable” (Rhodes) and so put themselves in “better circumstances than their enemies” (Rhodes) and where they could “claim to be in the right” (Rhodes). We view this in the Megarian Decree, where Pericles tried to make Megara submit in order to gain access to the Corinthian gulf. Lastly, Hanson describes the cause as Athens “combining its’ lust for power” (Hanson) with its support “for radical democracy abroad” (Hanson).*

*In conclusion, despite Thucydides implying that Sparta and largely Corinth were responsible for the cause of the war, as modern historians have proved there are differing opinions on who truly caused the war.*

## Section C – Rome

### Part 1 – Living in an ancient society

#### Question 1a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	1	0	5	25	68	3.6

This question was well handled by most students.

#### Question 1b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	4	6	20	22	25	18	7	3.4

Question 1b. asked for an explanation with respect to plebeians and patricians. Higher-scoring responses showed change over time, inserting important historical markers (laws and events) as evidence; however, most students relied too heavily on the source and only a few students could demonstrate a clear understanding of the changing political structures and institutions that impacted the plebs’ political involvement. Some students continued beyond the 287 BCE date and included information about the Gracchi, etc., which was not relevant.

**Question 1c.**

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	11	6	10	12	12	13	13	12	8	4	1	4.4

This question was not well handled. Question 1c. asked for an evaluation of the Struggle of the Orders resulting in a distribution of power. It seemed that students saw the Struggle of the Orders and plebeians and patricians as essentially the same thing. Many students struggled to distinguish between the requirements of Questions 1b. and 1c. and their answers were often quite repetitive. In general, the key concepts (distribution of power, Roman social groups) were not handled well. Lower-scoring answers repeated some points about plebs and patricians and perhaps mentioned the impact of wealth. Only the highest-scoring responses were able to weigh up what was going on in Roman politics and society in the middle of the second century BCE. They demonstrated an insightful knowledge of what happened to power relations between the Senate, social classes and the military, and explained that the distinction between patricians and plebeians had largely disappeared, and were able to discuss other groups, such as equestrians and women. The key date of 146 BCE was ignored by many students.

**Part 2 – People in power, societies in crisis**

Question chosen	none	2	3
%	6	77	17

**Essay**

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	Average
%	6	1	1	3	4	3	4	6	6	6	6	7	7	4	8	8	7	5	5	1	2	10.5

**Question 2**

Most students attempted Question 2. Responses varied, from a detailed consideration of the First Triumvirate to a broader, though no less relevant, approach to the period 133–27 BCE where students discussed the impact of a number of politicians on the fall of the Republic. Many students were particularly well prepared for Marius and Sulla. However, lower-scoring responses paid only cursory attention to the role and significance of the First Triumvirate, providing historical information rather than a focused argument on why the Republic fell. Many paragraphs did not include a sentence that linked the discussion back to ‘how did this contribute to the fall of the Republic?’ The highest-scoring responses explored the First Triumvirate in depth, in terms of the dangers it posed in its formation and its collapse, and also recognised the longer-term flaws in the Roman Republic that culminated in the actions of the First Triumvirate. This question invited agreement or disagreement with the contention and students could provide an alternative proposition.

**Question 3**

Question 3 was not popular and the responses tended to focus on storytelling or regressed into the trope ‘Cleopatra as seductress/temptress equals the fall of the Republic’. Higher-scoring responses evaluated her role in the fall of the Roman Republic by assessing her influence on key figures at the time, such as Mark Antony and Julius Caesar, and either her effect on their political decisions or how those relationships were perceived by the Roman political class and the effects of these perceptions.

The following is an example of a mid- to high-scoring response to Question 2.



*The so-called 'First Triumvirate', or alliance between Caesar, Pompey and Crassus of 60 BC was a significant cause of the Fall of the Roman Republic. However, the 'end' of the Republic occurred later, in 23 BC when Augustus was granted maius imperium or supreme pro-consular command, which thus undermined the very core of the Republic which was run by a large body rather than an individual. Therefore, the 'First Triumvirate', while not being solely responsible for ending the Republic, can be considered a significant alliance as it weakened the Republic. The weakening of the Republic must be contextualised to reflect the significance of the 'First Triumvirate', the former of which began in 133 BC: the tribunate of Tiberius Gracchus.*

*The end of the Roman Republic came as a result of years of political violence and shifts in power, which is represented by Caesar's alliance with Pompey and Crassus, but did not begin with them. In 133 BC, the tribunate of Tiberius Gracchus caused great controversy in Rome. His lex Agraria, or land bill, proposing the leasing of land to poorer farmers resulted in a great amount of violence in which Tiberius himself was killed. Modern historian Sallust writes that 'Tiberius Gracchus shattered the stability of the State', illustrating how the Roman Republic was greatly weakened by the political violence that he caused. The state was once again weakened in 107-101 BC, when Marius, as a successful commander in the Jugurthine War, was elected to consulship six times in seven years in absentia, with his province allotted by the people. This action was illegal on three fronts: it undermined the Senate's traditional right to appoint the consul's province and it went against the traditional rule that consuls were not to be elected in absentia, or consecutively. As such, Marius' command was significant in the end of the Roman Republic as it challenged key traditional values of the state.*

*Forty years later, the 'First Triumvirate' was formed in 60 BC. Polybius writes that the alliance 'would lead to ruin for Rome, the world, and even 'at different times' for each of the three men', illustrating how dangerous it was seen to be in ancient times. The combined wealth, popularity and power of the three men was so immense that it completely undermined a pillar of the Roman Republic: that the state was governed by a body of citizens, rather than a few individuals. As such, it severely weakened the state. In terms of ruining the three men, the triumvirate, in its late years was first broken when Crassus died in 56 BC, and was destroyed when Pompey left it just a few years later. As such, Caesar was left to act without consulting others, and his dictatorship – first for ten years in 45 BC and then for life the following year – contributed significantly to the fall of the Roman Republic. His successful leadership and generous payment to his troops left him a leader of the people. As such, the 'First Triumvirate' is shown to have strengthened the individuals, Caesar particularly, into men who could significantly weaken the Roman Republic, by undermining it as powerful individuals.*

*The 'end of the Republic' recurred in 23 BC when Augustus, a successful commander who had defeated Antony and Cleopatra at the Battle of Actium in 31 BC, was granted supreme command. His powers of consular imperium and pro consular imperium gave him as an individual supreme control of all Rome and its provinces, thus ending the Republic. Hence, it is clear that while the 'First Triumvirate' severely weakened the Roman Republic, its actions were foreshadowed by the triumvirate of Tiberius Gracchus and Marius, and followed by those of Augustus, who ultimately ended the Republic.*