

A LEVEL

Examiners' report

ANCIENT HISTORY

H407

For first teaching in 2017

H407/12 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 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 12 series overview

The examiners commented on the strong engagement across the exam paper with the specific questions. Candidates seemed well prepared to answer on a range of issues both in the Period and Depth studies.

Many of the responses to the modern interpretation were very short, even from otherwise very successful scripts, with candidates apparently concentrating more on the essays, despite this question being worth over 20% of the total marks. Many of these responses only concentrated on the final sentence. Less successful responses to Question 3 did not focus on who was responsible for the outbreak of war as such but reiterated what Thucydides thought.

Like last year's message: the Assessment Objectives are heavily weighted towards using, analysing and evaluating ancient source material. Answers which give a broad narrative or offer unsubstantiated statements such as 'the sources show that...' are unlikely to achieve marks in AO3 beyond the lower two bands.

The vast majority of candidates coped well with the time constraints with very few examples seen of candidates running out of time.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a secure knowledge of the period studied • a precise and clear grasp of the chronology • selected sources focused on the specific terms of the question • prioritised the explanation in answer to the terms of the question, using evidence and knowledge in support • evaluation is focused on the reliability of the specific point being made. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • attributed an event incorrectly to a person/group • did not focus on the main issue of the question but offered a generalised account of the period • provided a narrative of events, not an analysis • offered generic evaluation.

Section A overview

Overall, candidates showed a good understanding of the main events in the two periods required by the essay questions. Successful responses to the essays and the modern interpretation made good use of the evidence to reach convincing conclusions.

The more successful responses stuck to the precise terms of the question and the evaluation of the evidence used was often convincing and pertinent.

Question 1*

- 1* To what extent do the sources support the view that the Spartans always acted only in their own interests in the period 425–404 BC?

You must use and analyse the ancient sources you have studied as well as your own knowledge to support your answer. [30]

Not many candidates attempted this question. Those who did often chose to interpret the question as referring to the behaviour and interests of individual Spartans, e.g. Pausanias, Brasidas, Gylippus, Lysander and marks were given for these responses.

Most candidates mentioned Brasidas' Thracian campaign, but several used it as an example of Sparta not acting in their own interest as they were 'liberating' Athenian allies, but failing to mention that the purpose was to gain some negotiating points in order to recover the prisoners from Sphacteria – and the reaction of the Spartan authorities to Brasidas' success.

Most candidates were able to highlight the Peace of Nicias as an instance of Sparta acting in her own interests ignoring the wishes of her own allies.

Some of the most successful responses highlighted Sparta's reaction to Syracuse's request for assistance until persuaded by Alcibiades that it would be in their interests.

Less successful responses did not cover the whole period 425–404 BC in the question, omitting the Ionian War and the alliance(s) made with the Persians at the expense of the Ionian Greeks.

Exemplar 1

	The sources often lack detail through the period,
	and there is an unclear picture as to the

extent to which the allies were consulted on various strategies. However, we are able to ~~get a picture that~~ infer that they were not consulted from their reaction to the peace of Nicias ~~in~~ in 421 BC, as described by Thucydides who wrote "they would not sign the treaty unless fairer terms were produced." This refers to the reactions of Corinth and Thebes, who ~~acted~~ Thucydides tells us desert to Athens because of this. This suggests deep dissatisfaction with the peace, suggesting that the only Peloponnesian state it really benefited was Sparta. Thucydides suggests a reason that Sparta was so eager for peace, "Sparta most of all had reason for peace, since they were still anxious to get back the men from the island." This shows that Sparta's 70 men still dictated their policy on behalf of the allies 6 years later. In addition, Sparta's selfishness is shown by ~~the~~ a clause reported by Thucydides within the peace, "the Athenians would come to the aid of Sparta with all their strength in the case of a slave war." This shows that Sparta's internal strife also affected their decision making on behalf of the allies - however it could also be argued that if Sparta suffered an extreme helot revolt they would be weaker which would disadvantage the allies. But

either way, Sparta allows her own interest to influence her decision making - even against the wishes of her most important allies.

Exemplar 1 analyses very well the problems with the sources in assessing the question. It produces high-level evaluation worthy of the top level. The specific question about Spartan self-interest remains the focus of the response as the evaluation, analysis and evidence are all well integrated to reach convincing conclusions about the nature of the evidence in answering this specific question.

Question 2*

- 2* 'It was the unity which the Greeks showed against the Persians between 492 and 479 BC which was the key factor in their victory.'
To what extent do you agree with this view?

You must use and analyse the ancient sources you have studied as well as your own knowledge to support your answer. **[30]**

Evaluation of the sources tended to centre on Herodotus. Some candidates fell into the trap of generic evaluation without reference to the specific passage referred to, which in fact was a common factor across all questions. Some of this for Herodotus was tautologous giving as a weakness that he did not necessarily believe what he was told, but as a strength that he checked his sources. There was also the usual common remark that he was an Athenian (which he wasn't) and so biased.

It was refreshing to see so many candidates using the Serpent Column, but some confusion over what it tells us with several candidates claiming it told us how many men and/or ships each state supplied and that it represented all who contributed throughout the wars rather than just at Plataea. There was also confusion over the exact number of states on the column (31).

As with Question 1, less successful responses did not answer with reference to the whole period mentioned in the question, concentrating only on 480–79. Even among those who did widen their discussion there was very little mention of 492.

There was good discussion of other factors which might have contributed to the victory of the Greeks, but very few came to a conclusion with reference to 'the key factor'. Less successful responses tended not to consider other factors, concentrating just on how united, or not, the Greeks were. In discussing the relatively small number of states on the Serpent Column in relation to the total number of Greek states, very few candidates considered whether some of them actually had a choice.

A common error was to say that Aegina medised; while it is true that they did agree to give Darius earth and water in 491, they are singled out by Herodotus for their contribution at Salamis and are in position 6 on the Serpent Column.

More successful responses acknowledged the contributions of individuals, including Miltiades at Marathon, and some came to the conclusion that it was the, admittedly limited, unity of the Greeks which gave them the numbers to be able to face the Persians. While there was good discussion of unity or otherwise in 480–79, very few mentioned 490. However, the most successful responses highlighted the lack of unity even among the Eretrians and Athenians in that campaign and the importance of Miltiades' persuasive powers at Marathon, along with some discussion of the famous flashing shield. Only one response made the point that one of the reasons that Xerxes may have fallen for Themistocles' trick was because he was aware that there was dissension within the Greek camp.

Question 3

3 Read the interpretation below.

In so far as anyone can be held *immediately* responsible for the outbreak of the war which did so much to eat away the great achievements of fifth-century Greece, I think it is the Spartans (and their allies, in particular the Corinthians) who must bear the blame. We know from Thucydides (7.18.2–3) that the Spartans themselves later realised they had been at fault in 432–1. It may well be that the Spartans and most of their allies conceived themselves as fighting to stop Athens from further increasing her power or wealth, which might take place at their expense; but this, of course, does not excuse them from breaking the Thirty Years Peace and resorting to war.

5

G.E.M. de Ste. Croix, *The Origins of the Peloponnesian War* (adapted)

How convincing do you find G.E.M. de Ste. Croix's interpretation of who was responsible for the outbreak of war in 431 BC?

You must use your knowledge of the historical period and the ancient sources you have studied to analyse and evaluate G.E.M. de Ste. Croix's interpretation. **[20]**

There were many successful responses to this question with many attaining Levels 4 and 5. The phrase 'in so far as' at the start of the passage caused a few problems for some candidates who chose to ignore it and rather interpreted the passage as saying 'anyone' could be held responsible.

More successful responses discussed some other reasons for the outbreak of the war, including the role of Corinth over Epidamnus/Corcyra and Potidaea (and contrasting it with their intervention over the revolt of Samos), but only a few of the most successful commented on 'immediately', despite it being italicised and the crux of de Ste Croix's argument. Some of the most successful responses made the point that 'immediately' implies that there were other, less immediate causes. Many fell into the trap of simply giving a long narrative of the Pentacontaetia, often ignoring the more recent events after the Peace of 446, and 'immediately'.

Some responses sought to lay the blame on Thebes for attacking Plataea, ignoring the fact that Sparta had already given Athens its final ultimatum which Athens had refused to agree to. Many also brought in the Megarian Decree, but not many commented on why the Spartans chose to concentrate particularly on it in their second embassy.

Others sought to blame Athens for the war, citing Athens' aggressive imperialism, ignoring de Ste Croix's comment that it was Sparta who broke the treaty and his comment that they would be fighting 'to stop Athens from further increasing....'; this would have been a good opportunity to bring in Thucydides' immediate and underlying causes, but very few candidates did.

Among the less successful responses there was a fairly common idea that Sparta offered arbitration but Athens refused, or that the Spartans had even asked for peace among their embassies; what Athens did was to refuse to accede to the Spartans' increasingly provocative and aggressive demands, and indeed Pericles suggested that Athens should offer to go to arbitration. There were also several responses which gave the wrong year for the outbreak of the war, despite it being in the question, and some also included events from after the outbreak of the war.

Assessment for learning



There was a trend from many candidates in Question 3 that they apparently thought they should automatically disagree with the interpretation. The passages chosen for these questions normally come from well-respected authors, and candidates would be better advised to consider *why* the author might have come to the conclusion they did. They should also avoid being over-critical, especially about what they perceive as omissions. These are very short passages from often very long books. One such comment was that the writer 'struggles to convince me that he has understood the reasons for the war'. A better approach would be along the lines of 'other points not included in the interpretation are'.

Section B overview

In Question 4, the Aristophanes passage seemed better known than Plato. However, far too many responses focused on what the passages told us about sophists rather than how useful they are. This is very similar to last year and so it is reiterated that the 12-mark question needs to focus on source utility and reliability of evidence, with marks in the highest bands rewarded to candidates who are able to derive evaluative judgements from the passages on the paper as well as using other sources not printed.

The vast majority of candidates attempted Question 5 over Question 6, with examiners commenting on some excellent responses on the control individual politicians had over the Athenian demos.

Question 4

Section B: The Culture and Politics of Athens, c.460–c.399 BC

4 Read the passages below.

How useful are these passages for our understanding of the influence sophists had on life in Athens?

[12]

There were some successful responses to this question which focused closely on the content of the passages and made very good use of external knowledge to support their explanations. Many responses however only covered one or two quotes from the passages, which limited their marks. Generally Plato was evaluated well, with the most successful responses focusing on his relationship with Socrates and explained how this impacted on his coverage of sophists. There were a number of candidates however who misunderstood Plato's opinions on sophists and thought he was praising them. There were also some candidates who did not realise that Socrates is often not seen as a sophist. The evaluation of Aristophanes was often quite basic, focusing on the satirical nature and tended to mention he was aiming to entertain. This evaluation needs to be put into context of the sophists.

Question 5*

- 5* 'Although Athens was a democracy, in reality it was controlled by the politician who held the greatest influence at any one time.'
How far do the sources support this view?

You must use and analyse the ancient sources you have studied as well as your own knowledge to support your answer. [36]

Most responses for this question tended to be in Level 4. There was often coverage of Pericles and Cleon, sometimes Alcibiades or Nicias. For the discussion of Pericles, the most successful responses were able to give specific source evidence and examples of his actions which could show he controlled Athens. The least successful responses gave little extra information. There was often mention of the citizenship law and building programme, which was often quite effective. For the discussion of Cleon, there was often discussion of the Mytilene Debate with some candidates not realising that the decision was overturned, and the prescribed source is actually from the second debate, not the first. This often undermined their point that Cleon controlled the democracy. Alcibiades was sometimes mistakenly said to have been ostracised after Sicily, which was a slight confusion on his career. There were also responses which focused on the military leadership of these individuals and how this meant they dominated, instead of focusing on their control of the democracy.

Many candidates were able to discuss the counter argument to a decent level, using the nature of the democracy and/or ostracism to good effect, although at times there was confusion between the *Boule* and the *Ecclesia*.

Many responses gave limited supporting specific source evidence, and if sources were used, they were often dropped in at the end of an explanation.

Question 6*

- 6* How far was the cultural and political life of citizens and non-citizens in Athens affected by her being the leader of an empire?

You must use and analyse the ancient sources you have studied as well as your own knowledge to support your answer. [36]

This question was less popular, but still a reasonable number of candidates did attempt to answer it. Responses to this question tended to be less successful, with many candidates not being able to clearly show that the Empire leadership was directly impacting on the lives of people living in Athens. The least successful responses tended to go through the different social groups (citizens, women, metics and slaves), giving a quite general essay about what each group could or could not do in the democracy.

More successful responses often discussed the impact of the tribute on the building programme, the funding of festivals, the inclusion of the allies' tribute in processions, and the importance of metics to the Athenian economy.

Some candidates included sophists as part of their response, which generally was not well explained. Specific source evidence was often not included, just general references and this limited the marks candidates could be given for evidence.

Exemplar 2

Women in Athens are non-citizens meaning
 they couldn't vote or take part in politics.
~~although~~ And wives of the rich - were meant
 to stay home. But in Athens some had
 very important roles within the religious and culture
 of Athens with them sorting out and
 responsible for the festivals within Athens. The
 Empire didn't affect them too much due
 to their festivals such as the Thesmophoria being
 a tradition where Aristophanes wrote
 about it but still viewed carefully due to
 it being a comedy and meant to win the
 the competition. Women are also seen on
 the frieze in the Parthenon quite near the
 centre around Athens and Poseidon. Showing
 their importance to Athens. They are also mentioned
 in the old oligarchy

Some accurate statements are made by the candidate about the role of women in Athenian society, but these are significantly underdeveloped and are only made partially relevant to the question. There is one reference to Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae* but this is not detailed enough to be given marks for AO3 in the highest bands, nor is the reference to the Old Oligarchy made relevant. The candidate receives some marks for their knowledge of part of the role women play in Athenian religious life and some marks for trying to support what they say with a reference to the evidence. The paragraph is underdeveloped and does not engage adequately with the question, meeting the criteria of low in Level 3 in all three Assessment Objectives.

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