

2016 VCE History: Ancient History examination report

General comments

The 2016 Ancient History examination was the first examination for the study. While there was variation in the quality of students' responses, high-scoring students showed preparation, demonstrated accurate knowledge and wrote highly focused answers. However, there were also many low-scoring responses and a large number of questions that students did not attempt. A noticeable number of students offered their opinions ('While I am unaware ...', 'It is my belief ...') or speculated without providing any supporting evidence on what might have happened; for example, for Pericles, '*until the plague ruined his attempt to outlast the Spartans he would have possibly defeated them*'.

The Ancient History examination is divided into three civilisations, with two parts for each civilisation. Students were required to select two civilisations and answer both parts for each civilisation. Greece was the most popular civilisation selected. The next most popular civilisation selected was Rome, and Egypt was the least popular civilisation selected.

Part 1 – Living in an ancient society

Part 1 comprised three questions requiring responses to a document extract. Question 1a. for each of the three sections asked students to respond to an extract. In answering this, students did not need to provide a great deal of additional detail for their response but should have focused on showing comprehension of the source(s) provided. Students could have provided some historical context but it was not essential and should not have dominated the response. If there are several major points in the source that would be relevant to the question, students should try to identify them and succinctly quote from the source to show that they understand the meaning of the source. Low-scoring students simply transposed slabs of text from the source, with little demonstration that they understood the point being made by the source. Students did not need to include quotations from historians and historical figures here because the question was about the material in the source.

Responses to Question 1b. needed to be built around a focus on cause and effect (as required by the 'explain' task word). Students needed to use the source provided (i.e. a quote from a written source) and 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, numbers, and so on). Students could not be awarded full marks by relying exclusively on the source(s) to construct a response or by using only their own knowledge. Students could also have included quotations from historians and historical figures here if they were relevant and helped to substantiate the explanation. Students need to learn how to respond to the specific requirements of a contextual question that is encouraging them to move beyond the evidence provided in the source.

The task word of Question 1c., 'evaluate', prompted students to make a judgment about the significance of one or more factors (specified in the question) in relation to a broader historical

situation (also indicated in the question). This should then have been developed by considering the importance of other factors that were not specified in the question. It also required some weighing up of a range of factors. In this evaluation, assertions of historical fact should have been supported by specific historical details, while interpretations of the historical significance of the facts should have been supported by quotations from historians or historical figures. This question required students to demonstrate an understanding of a historical period within the area of study. Many students struggled with this question and produced short answers. The highest-scoring responses presented a concise and balanced evaluation that focused clearly on the question. Historical evidence was analysed in terms of the question (change, causation, impact, etc.). Mid-range responses tended to be too general, and lacking in specific dates and historical detail. Low-scoring responses made some relevant points, but higher-scoring responses balanced relevant detailed evidence with a well-constructed overview of a historical period. Low-scoring responses relied too heavily on the source or did not construct an effective evaluation of the question. They tended to describe factors in a narrative style rather than weighing up their significance in relation to the specific question.

Part 2 – People in power, societies in crisis

Part 2 offered students the choice of two essays from each civilisation. Many of the topics required students to take an explorative approach. While it is possible to write an essay that focuses only on the main element in a detailed way, in many cases it was reasonable for students to develop their essay beyond a limited focus of the question. For example, in the question about the role of the Gracchi in the end of the Republic, most students wrote one paragraph about the Gracchi then moved on to consider other significant figures (usually Marius and Sulla in the second paragraph followed by the First Triumvirate – and sometimes the Second Triumvirate as well – in the third paragraph). Similarly, in the topic on the Sicilian Expedition, many students wrote one paragraph on the Sicilian Expedition and then moved on to consider other reasons that Athens lost the war (such as the role of Alcibiades or Persia). These were valid ways of responding to the topic. The highest-scoring responses of this type included a conceptually sustained argument (such as challenges to the traditional power structures of the Republic or the hegemonic attitude of the Athenians) rather than three separate blocks of information. However, students should still have respected the topic and accepted the basic premise. The topic about controversy in depictions of Nefertiti was not an invitation to discuss controversial depictions of other Egyptian figures. Similarly, a question about the problems of the Twentieth Dynasty should not be manipulated into a question about similar problems of the Eighteenth Dynasty. The highest-scoring essays used historical evidence to support claims of historical fact as well as quotations from historians or historical figures that added weight to the interpretation of the significance of historical facts. High-scoring responses stayed with the topic and shaped the material and paragraphs to make the discussion relevant to the specific questions. They constructed a sophisticated and tight historical argument that included a clear thesis, sustained through good use of topic sentences and an effective conclusion. They weighed up historical factors and the role of individuals and showed that historical conclusions are not black and white, thereby recognising different interpretations. In contrast, low-scoring responses lacked supporting evidence that included basic historical detail (such as specific dates and events) and specific references to sources and historians. They also tended to present a narrative rather than build an effective historical argument. Furthermore, many responses moved too far from the specific requirements of the questions and therefore moved into a discussion that was not directly relevant. Many responses gave only cursory attention to the focus of the question before moving on to other factors.

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	0	Egypt	Greece	Rome
%		33	88	79

Section A – Egypt

Part 1 – Living in an ancient society

Question 1a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	1	15	37	24	11	12	2.6

There was a varied range of responses to this question but most scored well. Many students recognised that the threat was international, organised and military. However, many misread parts of the source, misinterpreting the list of peoples ‘overcome’ by the Sea Peoples as the threat to Egypt (that is, Hittites, etc). While most responses explained the confederation of Sea Peoples and located them around Amor, only high-scoring students included the inference that these peoples were a significant threat to Egypt because they had already overcome significant peoples (Hittites, etc) that ‘no land could stand before their arms’.

Question 1b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	1	10	31	37	16	5	2.7

Most students provided a basic summary of the way Egypt responded on land and sea. In general, however, there was far too much reliance on the source. High-scoring responses interpreted the evidence in the source by explaining why the use of chariots was significant and gave an understanding of the role of Ramesses in preparation for the battle. Only a small number of students provided contextual historical detail or evidence that went beyond the points supplied in the source material.

Question 1c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	12	6	16	17	11	13	9	6	3	3	1	3.7

This question was not answered well by the majority of students. Students needed to carefully address the parameters of the question – in this case the decline over the period of the Twentieth Dynasty. The highest-scoring responses analysed the specific internal political problems that contributed to the decline of Egypt during the rules of Ramesses IV through to Ramesses XI. Low-

scoring responses tended to focus on the reign of Ramesses III and again relied far too much on the limited information in the source. Mid-range responses tended to make the point that while Egypt was able to resist incursions during the reign of Ramesses III, over a period of time the Sea Peoples and others (Libyans) moved into Egyptian territory and settled. Students made general points about the decline in trade and the economic pressure that resulted from dealing with threats and shrinking territorial control.

Part 2 – People in power, societies in crisis

Question chosen	none	2	3
%	6	46	48

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	4	3	5	7	5	5	5	7	6	10	4	11	5	5	4	3	1	2	0	1	8.5

Question 2

This was the less popular of the two Egypt essays and was not answered well. Many students focused predominantly on Akhenaten, with little or only passing acknowledgment to Amenhotep III. Amenhotep III inherited an empire stretching from Nubia/Kush in the south to Syria in the north. As with other Pharaohs of the New Kingdom he established his credentials as a warrior early in his reign and worked to elevate the status and power of the Pharaoh at the international level (for example, treaties, marriage) and the national (for example, building program; association with Amun, while lessening the powers of the priests), leaving Akhenaten with a considerable base.

Question 3

Essays written on Nefertiti also varied, although it seemed students found this topic less challenging than the question on Amenhotep III. Students with a reasonable knowledge of Nefertiti provided a limited discussion of particular historical representations of Nefertiti as shown in historical sources. Low-scoring responses were distracted by the 'controversial' (the bust of Nefertiti, and even her origin from another galaxy). The highest-scoring responses provided an overview of relevant historical controversies, pointing out historical debates and highlighting the historical evidence that has led to divergent views.

Section B – Greece

Part 1 – Living in an ancient society

Question 1a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	3	11	28	27	17	13	2.8

The question was answered relatively well. The highest-scoring responses provided a concise explanation of the social and economic issue and used succinct quotes (even just keywords) to support their explanation. Low-scoring responses tended to bring together a number of quotes. At

times it was not clear if students understood the impact of debt slavery and why *seisachtheia* was significant. A number of students did not accurately identify the task as economically focused or answered Question 1a. in the space allocated to Question 1b. and vice versa.

Question 1b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	2	10	25	39	18	6	2.8

Most students identified basic points as provided by the source. Many students seemed to misunderstand the central point that this represented a move away from power in the hands of a hereditary aristocracy to a class system based on wealth and dominated by an oligarchy. Many responses misunderstood Solon's reforms as a challenge to oligarchy and as democratic. High-scoring responses explained the distinctions between the classes in terms of wealth, and political and military involvement. In general, students relied too heavily on the source. Only a small number of responses provided contextual details and points from the student's own knowledge.

Question 1c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	14	7	17	16	12	9	11	8	3	1	1	3.6

This proved to be a challenging question for most students. Students were challenged by the task of evaluating Solon's reforms to the end of the sixth century. Low-scoring responses provided a basic overview of Solon's aims but only very general observations about the extent to which they were effective. These students also did not provide an understanding of how Solon's reforms impacted political developments up to the end of the sixth century. High-scoring responses provided a coherent overview of the period and evaluated how Solon's reforms attempted to find a 'middle course' that in the end neither satisfied the elites nor the common people. The highest-scoring responses evaluated Solon's reforms in the light of their ongoing impact on the period of Peisistratus' tyranny and the relationship to Cleisthenes' reforms at the end of the century.

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

According to Plutarch "Solon was anxious to leave all the top positions of power in the hands of the nobility" and essentially he achieved that aim. Solon aimed at 'Eunomia', 'the reign of good order' and his Timocratic government meant that essentially the rich were the responsible ones and therefore ran government. Solon simply alleviated the distress rather than solving the problems causing this distress. As, initially his reforms "did not please either party" rich or poor, as he did not redistribute land amongst the poor and he put a limit on the size of lands of the nobility. Furthermore the Boule of 400 was not entirely democratic as it did not include the Thetes and the Areopagus still had lots of power as they were made guardians of the constitution. Although Solon was named "Father of Democracy" before Cleisthenes came along, his reforms were mostly disregarded by the tyrant/tyrannos Pisistratus, which does not portray Solon's reform as effective or popular, as Tyrannos was a form of government that was based on its popularity and desperation to resolve the failure of a certain government. Additionally by the end of the 6th century in 508BC, Solon's aim of keep power in the hands of the nobility had deteriorated as Cleisthenes opened his new Boule of 500 to all citizens, broke the monopoly of the wealthy politicians who ran the Areopagus, implementing the use of lot for officials and political and did not aim at eunomia but isonomia "equality of rights amongst all citizens". As Aristotle says, Athens "was more democratic" under Cleisthenes than Solon.

Part 2 – People in power, societies in crisis

Question chosen	none	2	3
%	5	46	49

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	Average
%	8	4	2	5	6	6	5	6	7	5	7	6	5	6	7	3	4	2	5	1	0	8.7

Question 2

Most students who attempted this question were able to construct a basic argument around the ‘best’ and/or the ‘worst’ thing to happen to Athens, and knew some details of Pericles’ life. Responses could have explored the rise of Pericles as being concomitant with the rise of Athens as a power in the Greek world, his influence on the democracy and his hegemonic policies (the conversion of the Delian League into an empire; access to ‘wealth’ in the Black Sea). On the negative side, responses could have explored whether war with Sparta could have been avoided with better management, and whether he was responsible for the war and abuse of allies. Low-scoring responses focused exclusively on a narrow discussion of factors connected to the Peloponnesian War – Pericles built the Long Walls and the Parthenon, but was killed by the plague. The highest-scoring responses demonstrated an understanding of Pericles’ entire career and considered his leadership of Athens prior to the wars, and his political, economic and cultural legacy; and considered his ruthlessness, nationalism and desire for power reflected by historical events. The highest-scoring responses considered the reliability of Thucydides as a major historical source on Pericles.

Question 3

Many essays on the Sicilian Expedition were high scoring. However, many responses that presented a superficial understanding of the impact of the Sicilian Expedition lacked significant specific detail; for example, dates, names, events, etc. Alcibiades featured regularly in these essays and often dominated them. Many students adopted a structure in which they considered the significance of the Sicilian campaign relative to other factors that caused Athens to lose the war. The highest-scoring responses evaluated the Sicilian campaign throughout and discussed a range of long-term factors in the light of the impact of the Sicilian campaign, demonstrating an insightful understanding of its ongoing impact on the military campaign, Athenian leadership and internal politics. Low-scoring responses tended to draw general conclusions and demonstrate a limited understanding of historical events and Athenian leadership. A number of responses limited discussion to the role of Alcibiades. While his leadership was relevant to the topic, the question required a more complex analysis of factors. Responses that blamed the Sicilian campaign for the loss of the Peloponnesian War rarely accounted for the fact that Athens continued to fight for another decade. The highest-scoring responses considered the reliability of Thucydides as a major historical source on the Peloponnesian Wars.

Section C – Rome

Part 1 – Living in an ancient society

Question 1a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	1	8	24	32	24	10	3

The responses to this question varied, but it was generally answered well. Most students identified the main points suggested by the source. Low-scoring responses tended to copy long quotations and string them together rather than provide a coherent explanation supported by short quotes. The highest-scoring responses explained the meaning of key phrases such as the Romans became 'true athletes of war'.

Question 1b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	12	33	28	16	8	4	1.9

This question was not answered well by many students. Low-scoring responses were by students who did not know about Pyrrhus and therefore wrote about Rome from the source in relation to the campaign against Pyrrhus. This was largely irrelevant to the question. Students with high-scoring responses remained focused on attempting to answer the question. These students could glean two or three points from the source. Appropriate references to the source included, the 'people of Tarentum...called Pyrrhus in'; the arrival of Pyrrhus in Italy presented a significant 'challenge' to the Romans; responding to Pyrrhus required the Romans to act 'bravely'; 'Pyrrhus and his army' were also supported by 'those who had joined him'; and the scale of the 'opposition' from Pyrrhus was such that victory for the Romans was 'against the odds'. Students who included external information knew of Pyrrhus' history, military tactics and the importance of Tarentum.

Question 1c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	19	11	11	13	14	11	10	7	3	1	0	3.2

In general, students struggled with this question. On the whole, responses were either very general or read as if the parameters of the question incorporated the entire area of study, and took their discussion to 146 BCE. Many students did not come to terms with the concept of 'social and political features' or show understanding of how military conquest transformed Roman society. High-scoring responses discussed the evolution of power, citizenship, the role of the magistrates and the Senate, as well as the struggle of the orders and the changing political power of the plebs. Some students examined the role of conquered peoples in terms of their legacy to Roman society and gave good points about Etruscan and Greek influences. Some students discussed the impact of the mass importation of slaves to Italy. While slavery was a part of Roman society, the widespread enslavement of conquered people was not a significant part of Roman society prior to the Punic Wars.

Part 2 – people in power, societies in crisis

Question chosen	none	2	3
%	10	84	6

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	Average
%	12	1	3	5	4	4	6	7	6	5	7	4	9	4	7	4	6	2	3	1	1	8.7

Question 2

Overwhelmingly, this was the preferred Roman essay question. Most students approached the question by considering the Gracchi as one factor among a range of important causes of the fall of the Republic. Most students could construct a historical argument and demonstrated some knowledge of the key factors that shaped the late Republic. Low-scoring students only paid minimal attention (one short paragraph) to the Gracchi and then moved on to discussing factors they considered more important. Within the Gracchi paragraph, younger brother Gaius was rarely given more than a sentence or two. Low-scoring responses were characterised by a fairly general overview of events. Mid-range responses often provided narrative that lacked focused explanation of how or why something was significant in causing the collapse of the Republic. In these responses, later paragraphs on Marius and Sulla or the First Triumvirate were somewhat disconnected from the original question. Some students gave a list of names like Marius, Sulla, Pompey, Caesar, Octavian but did not discuss their impact towards the fall of the Roman Republic. Higher-scoring responses identified key factors in the tribunes of the Gracchi such as political violence, the defiance of the Senate, the power of individual leaders, unlawful and unorthodox practices, etc., and traced these factors through to their destructive outcomes in the late Republic. This approach allowed students to analyse later individuals and events in relation to the impact of the Gracchi and helped build a sustained argument that stayed focused on the topic.

Question 3

There was only a small number of responses to the Augustus question. Students tended to know the details of the ‘settlements’ but struggled with the terms of the question, namely explaining the implications surrounding them and their impact on social and political change in Rome.

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

The tribunes of Tiberius Gracchus and Gaius Gracchus were the most important causes of the fall of Rome, since their actions in 133 BC and 123-122 BC respectively triggered a series of events that led to the fall of the Republic. The Gracchi inflamed tensions between rich and poor; relying on mobs and illegal declarations against a fellow tribune to have their way instead of resorting to precedent, a very dangerous thing to do in a “system built on precedent” (Gwynn).

Appian writes that before the tribunate of Tiberius Gracchus there was no “civil slaughter” and the sword was not carried into the assembly”. Whereas previously social change had been the result of the Roman populace demanding a change in the laws, in 133 BC Tiberius Gracchus create strife when he disobeyed the laws so as to enact his own law, the Lex Sampronia Agraria. His ignoring of the Senatorial protest against his proposal to redistribute the Latifundia, his reliance on a violent mob and his deposition of his Fellow tribune (declaring according to Plutarch that since he did not “serve” the interest of the people he had violated his responsibilities) set a precedent for a series of illegal actions by warlords like Marros, Sulla, Pompey, Crassus, Caesar and finally, Augustus. While he may have “Awakened feelings of pity (Plutarch) in his listeners, he also awakened in many of the discontented that the ends to which they strove justified whatever means they might take. When “danger threatened Italy (Plutarch)

the people would turn to a man like Marros, granting him and seven consulships (107BC, 104BC, 103BC, 102BC, 101BC, 100BC, 86BC). It was this blatant disregard for tradition and empowerment of the mob that led to the utter destruction of the Roman Mos Maiorum (the ways of our ancestors) and the fall of the Republic.

While Gaius was indeed the “greater” of the two brothers (Plutarch); passing land reforms that had stalled and been ignored during the tribunate of his brother, his actions, especially in the light of his brother’s demise, were demonstrably foolish. Gwynn writes that no one can “doubt the courage of Gaius Gracchus, “since he chose the path of reform in full knowledge of what happened to his brother”. If, however, he were doing the truly “courageous”, the “knowledge” of what happened because of and to his brother would surely have dissuaded him from attempting to emulate such a disastrous example. Given hindsight, and the comment made by Plutarch that Cornelia (the mother of the Gracchi) would ask the two boys why Rome did “ not yet speak of her as their mother, Gaius’ actions in 123BC and 122BC look less like courage and more like an attempt to gain gloria and dignitas, the “selfish (Gwynn) motivations of the Roman elite. There can be no doubt that the riots his illegal re-election to Tribune in 122BC were a natural and foreseeable side-effect of his illegal actions and his destabilizing effect on Roman politics. Rather than attempt to speak the language of reform, Gaius’ defiance of custom led the Senatorial class (many of whom reportedly had family graves on the land he and his brother had attempted to redistribute) to fight back against what they saw as a populist uprising, killing approximately 2000 of Gaius’ supporters (according to Plutarch) and leading Gaius to kill himself.

Rauh lists the “rise of popular tribunes” as the first stage of the Republic’s collapse. Their exploitation of the roman mob and their provocation of class warfare was undoubtedly the most important cause of the fall of the Roman Republic. While the warlords who followed, beginning with Marius, were not “reforming populists but popular leaders” (Lane Fox), it is difficult to imagine that they would have had the support they did from the common man were it not for the example set by the Gracchi. Sulla, a more reactionary warlord, directly exploited the fear of popular power and mistrust of the populous in the ruling men in Rome that the action of the Gracchi precipitated. When, in 88BC Sulla marched on Rome, it was because a popular Tribune was following the example of the Gracchi and overruling the Senate. “Marius and Sulla overthrew libertas by force of arms” wrote Syme, and in its place “established dominator”. Without the Gracchi it is unlikely that the people of Rome or the Roman Senate would have allied themselves with the popular autocrat and the reactionary dictator respectively. After these two warlords, wrote Syme, the Republic’s days were numbered. It is telling that Tacitus saw the situation by this stage as bring unescapable, not even conceding the restoration of a free state had the “liberators” triumphed at Philippi.

In conclusion, the Gracchi were the most important causes of the fall of the Republic. Their reforms sparked class warfare that led the poor and the rich place their faith in the warlords, the men who were the vehicle by which the Republic was formally destroyed