

2020 VCE Ancient History examination report

General comments

The 2020 Ancient History examination was based on the *VCE History Adjusted Study Design for 2020 only*. It was divided into three sections on three civilisations, with two parts for each civilisation. Students were required to select two civilisations and answer both parts for each one.

As a very broad general observation, student responses showed satisfactory engagement with historical thinking concepts but were often undermined by a lack of meaningful evidence. Many student responses also did not effectively address the requirements of specific task words in the questions. As a result, the strategies employed in developing responses did not consistently result in satisfying the key descriptors. It is important, therefore, that students understand and practise the different skills required in the examination, including the use of sources, constructing essays, writing shorter responses and addressing the task words.

In Part 1, students should use sources to identify what is required by the different task words (specifically, 'outline', 'explain' and 'evaluate').

Question 1a. asks a student to identify a range of key points relevant to the question, whereas 1b. requires a discussion of causes and effects. A 1b. question should consider a range of factors – not just those in the source(s) – and make it clear how they contributed to some historical situation or development. It was common for students to treat 1a. and 1b. as requiring much the same kind of response – comprehension of the source(s) provided. While this is true for 1a., in 1b. students are expected to demonstrate their own historical knowledge and to be able to discuss the source(s) in a broader context. Evidence drawn from a student's own knowledge was particularly needed here (and in 1c.).

Question 1c. proved challenging and students with high-scoring responses responded to the demand for an evaluation; such responses went beyond just discussing the historical factor stated in the question. Students who were able to consider the relative significance of different historical factors were better able to create cohesive and thoughtful responses. Many students did not challenge the question; if the question asked for an evaluation of the importance of one specific event or person, for example, most students proceeded on the assumption that the importance of that factor was absolute and unambiguous. The best responses took a nuanced approach to such an assertion. One of the particular challenges of this question is that it usually requires a sound knowledge of a particular point of key knowledge within a big picture understanding of the area of study. Students who could find the balance between depth and breadth tended to do well in this question. The lowest-scoring responses often rewrote significant portions of the source(s) provided.

In Part 2, essay responses are assessed according to the criteria printed on the back of the examination booklet. These criteria are applied holistically, which means that students must aim to meet all of the criteria. The criteria relating to the construction of an argument and the use of historical thinking concept tended to be addressed well overall. The strength of the essays was, however, frequently undermined by a limited application of the other criteria: the demonstration of historical knowledge and the use of primary sources and historical interpretations. Indeed, this last criterion was clearly the least well addressed.

A number of essays seemed to be prepared responses, rather than considered responses to the question asked. Students who scored highly were able to adapt their knowledge and evidence to respond to the question at hand.

A number of essays lacked effective structure. Although there is no mandated structure that a student must use, the conventions of academic writing – such as a clear contention, topic sentences or paragraphing – help students to meet the assessment criteria (especially the first criterion). The construction of a historical argument, rather than simply recounting a narrative, is also expected. The essay is a test of the ability of students to think, demonstrated by their ability to form a relevant argument supported by appropriate evidence. Knowledge is important but the essay is not merely about showing how much information is known about a civilisation.

A small number of students wrote responses to questions for all three civilisations, although usually only for the 1a. and 1b. questions. Students should be reminded of the examination requirements. Many students used the extra writing space in which to continue their responses. They generally labelled their responses appropriately but it is worth reminding students to do this to ensure their work can be clearly followed.

Specific information

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

Part 1

Question 1a.

Section A – Egypt

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	1	0.4	11	21	66	3.5

Section B – Greece

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	0.2	1	17	36	46	3.3

Section C – Rome

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	0.3	1	9	22	67	3.5

The task word for this question was 'outline'. This means that students were expected to list a number of specific features from the source (for example, 'the problems in New Kingdom Egypt' or 'the reasons why the Persians went to war against Greece'). In all cases, students needed only to draw on material in the source provided. Providing additional information (that is, from the student's own knowledge) did not add value to the response since that was not what the question asked for. Quoting from the source (or describing specific visual elements) was the clearest way to make links to the source.

The highest-scoring responses identified at least three distinct features from the source and expressed a clear understanding of these points within the context of the source. Almost all students tried to provide some sort of organised paragraph of information. Students who did not score well tended to list relevant points but without demonstrating a clear understanding of the material provided. A very few students provided a dot-point list (which would not show understanding of the material).

In order to achieve full marks, students needed to use their source references to provide a range of separate points, rather than use their chosen source elements to reinforce one main point.

For example, in the Greece question about why the Persians went to war against Greece, a student might refer to the source, saying that the Persians wanted to 'get satisfaction and revenge' and 'punish the Athenians for the outrage they committed' by burning Athens 'to the ground' in order to get 'revenge for the injury which the Athenians' did when they 'burnt the temples and sacred groves' of the Persians. Although these are all valid quotations, they are all really making the same basic point about revenge so they do not count as separate, distinct reasons as required by the question. High-scoring responses made one or two references to revenge and then included other reasons such as to win glory and wealth for Persia and to extend the empire of Persia.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response to Question 1a.:

The Persians went to war against Greece in order to 'get satisfaction and revenge' for the former's defeat in the first Persian War. The Persians also desired 'glory' and wealth, as Herodotus states. Greece was 'richer' than Persia. Also they wanted to gain vengeance for the Athenians' burning of Persian 'temples and sacred groves'. Lastly, Persia wanted to gain more territory so that it might 'extent the empire' and make them invincible; not one city 'will be able to withstand [Persia]'.

Question 1b.

Section A – Egypt

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	3	3	8	27	27	20	12	3.8

Section B – Greece

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	4	5	14	29	23	19	7	3.5

Section C – Rome

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	4	6	18	29	21	15	7	3.3

Question 1b. required explanation of some historical event or situation, taking the source(s) provided as the starting point but then developing beyond the source with additional knowledge.

The expectation for this question was for a student to explain the event or situation in the question (such as 'the role of Ramesses III in the defence of Egypt against the Sea Peoples' or 'how the Roman Senate used its political influence before 287 BCE'). The task word asked the student to explain causes and effects, that is, to present reasons why things happened the way they did and what the outcomes of these things were.

Students were generally able to show comprehension of the source(s) provided but tended not to develop their response with meaningful additional historical details. Such details can include dates, names, people, places, events, statistics and other numbers. A response that did not go beyond summarising the source was not eligible to receive full marks.

In the Egypt question, for example, a high-scoring response might include the student's own knowledge, such as references to conflict with the Sea Peoples in Years 5, 8 and 12 of Ramesses III's reign, as well as mentioning the specific Battles of Djahy and the Delta in Year 8. A discussion of the conventional,

propagandistic nature of the depiction of the Pharaoh (in terms of size and regalia) in the source would also be appropriate.

The answers to the Roman Question also tended very much towards an outline of the points presented in the source. Other causal relationships that could have been discussed included how the Senate handled political, financial and military matters on the basis of prestige but its recommendations (the *senatus consultum*) had the force of law; or how as the Republic expanded, the Senate determined the regulations for the provinces, setting up senatorial governors and juries, deciding who would collect tax and determining which conquered peoples would become allies and which would become tribute-paying subjects.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response to Question 1b.:

The naval defeat of Persian in 480 BCE can be attributed to many factors. Firstly, the construction of a fleet by Athens in 483 BCE led by the 'preternaturally farsighted' Themistocles (Cartledge) allowed Athens to fight the Persian forces. Additionally, the unification of Greek city-states – even bitter rivals Athens and Sparta – allowed the Greeks to combine their resources to defend the 'freedom of their homeland'. At the Battle of Salamis in 480 BCE, the Greeks utilised their advantage in entering the naval battle in the straits which were familiar to them. Through the tactic of luring the Persian fleet into the narrow straits (as seen in Source 2), the Greek forces took the enemy by surprise. As Aeschylus notes (Source 3), the Greek forces 'suddenly' showed themselves to the enemy. Additionally, the Greeks possessed 'good order and discipline' which contributed to their victory over the Persians.

Question 1c.

Section A – Egypt

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	8	5	8	16	13	17	10	9	6	5	3	4.5

Section B – Greece

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	11	8	11	10	14	12	11	11	9	4	1	4.3

Section C – Rome

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	7	7	9	11	16	12	11	9	8	8	3	4.7

This question required 'evaluation', which means making some kind of judgment or assessment of the factors given in the question.

The three main barriers students faced in order to receive full marks for this question were understanding what is meant by 'evaluation', understanding what is meant by 'significance' and using sufficient evidence. Without a meaningful attempt at evaluation supported by evidence, responses tended to be generalised, descriptive narratives that typically did not score well.

Evaluation

For all three civilisations, Question 1c. asked students to ‘evaluate the extent to which’ something was the case. It may be useful to imagine these questions rephrased as, ‘How significant was the impact of the first and second Persian invasions on Greece?’ or ‘How much did the Senate and the people of Rome share political power during the Roman Republic?’.

Evaluation requires students to make a judgment and then to support that judgment with explanation and evidence. High-scoring responses started with statements that acknowledged the premise of the question and provided an outline of the how the answer would be structured. Such statements could be phrased as, ‘The impact of the first and second Persian invasions on Greece was very significant in three main ways’ or ‘The Senate and the people of Rome did not equally share political power during the Roman Republic’. The highest-scoring responses provided genuine evaluation, either by comprehensively showing the significance of the event or situation in the question or because they considered both change and continuity. For example, the best discussion of the impact of the Persian invasions considered how it was a catalyst for political and social change (seen in the formation of the Delian League) while also pointing out that many aspects of Greek life (such as the roles of women and slaves) did not meaningfully change.

Significance

Most students recognised that the question required a judgment about the impact of specific factors, events or situations (often in relation to wider circumstances). In general, a cohesive response focused on those factors and considered a range of impacts arising from those factors (in terms of both change and continuity). Some students, however, also introduced entirely different factors and then evaluated the significance of those other factors. For example, some students discussed how the reforms of Lycurgus, Solon and/or Cleisthenes also had an impact on Greece. In this way, they were trying to evaluate the significance of the Persian invasions compared to other important factors. While this approach isn’t completely incorrect, its relevance depends on the question. If the question asked, ‘Evaluate the extent to which the first and second Persian invasions was the most significant factor in the development of Athenian democracy,’ then it would be necessary to consider these invasions in comparison to a range of other factors. But in this examination, such an approach diluted the focus on what the question was actually asking. Careful reading of the question is important.

Evidence

Evidence tended to be used sparsely. Claims made about historical circumstances were generally not supported with specific dates, names, people, places, events or statistics. Note that quotations from historical sources or from historians can be used in this answer and will be considered as evidence (but it is not necessary to use such quotations).

The highest-scoring answers also used the sources thoughtfully, drawing on select elements to inform, shape or enhance the answer without clinging to the source. Some responses that did not score well relied on rehashing lengthy portions of the sources.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response to Question 1c.:

The people of Rome did not share equal or representative political power until the Lex Hortensia law (287). Whilst there were Assemblies established to grant the idea one could take part in political representation, many were corrupted by senatorial influence.

Following the first secession, the plebeians gained the right to veto laws that infringed on plebeian rights. This however was not fully effective before 287 as not only could the Plebeian Council not pass laws that were not approved by the Senate, some sense of corruption also remained. As at the end of office tribunes could progress into the Senate, present tribunes were influenced by future senatorial seats. The Licinian

Sextian Law allowing one consul to be a plebeian had only a moderate effect in establishing equal political control.

The Centuriate Assembly, established by Servius as a way to rank military, became a means of ordering the Republic's political power. Patricians held most of the first two orders' vote and therefore 'it was highly unusual' (Polybius) for plebeians to take political power. The Senate could also veto the decision of the Centuriate Assembly.

The First and Second Punic Wars stabilised the 'rocking boat' (Livy) of political interference. In the Second Punic War 'the Senate did not hold back any means of power' (Silverman) and therefore elevated their own political representation. However, threatening a fifth secession, the Plebeians forced the Lex Hortensia (287) in which the Plebeian Council could legally create laws and pass them without the approval of the Senate. This would be legally binding to the whole of the Roman Republic. Whilst not traditional, this, in the unprecedented actions of the Gracchi, became the pivotal change in the people's representation against the Senate.

Part 2

Section A – Egypt

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	Average
%	11	3	5	4	7	6	6	4	7	6	7	3	4	4	7	4	5	3	2	1	1	8.2

Section B – Greece

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	Average
%	15	6	4	4	4	6	4	6	7	4	3	3	4	5	7	3	5	3	3	2	1	8.1

Section C – Rome

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	Average
%	4	4	6	6	4	5	5	6	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	4	2	2	1	8.2

There was a broad range of quality in the essays, including many very short essays. A conventional structure – introduction, an appropriate number of body paragraphs to respond to key ideas, and a conclusion – served most students well. Most students accepted the premise of the question and made an effort to focus on that.

The following comments are organised according to the essay criteria. The essay criteria should be recognised clearly; the criteria are marked holistically, which means that students should address them all.

Construction of a coherent and relevant historical argument that addresses the specific demands of the essay question

High-scoring responses were consistently relevant and used the key words of the topic throughout the essay. These responses also recognised the difference in the topics between 'Discuss the extent to which ...' and 'Discuss how ...' and used that difference to enhance the coherence of the essay.

'Discuss the extent to which ...' lends itself much more readily to an approach where the key factor in the topic might be contrasted with one or two other distinct but relevant points. The questions 'Discuss the extent

to which Alcibiades was responsible for the defeat of Athens by 403 BCE' and 'Discuss the extent to which the political actions of Augustus caused the fall of the Roman Republic' are of this type.

A number of high-scoring Alcibiades essays either focused on Alcibiades throughout or else wrote one paragraph on Alcibiades and then other paragraphs on factors such as the role of the Athenian democracy itself, Sparta, Persia and/or Lysander. Lower-scoring responses all but ignored Alcibiades and focused on other things entirely (such as Pericles). This is a common problem with essays about historical persons and tends to be an ineffective way to respond because it is hard to meet the first criterion. The essays about Augustus tended to be low-scoring; few students were able to write in a sustained way about Augustus' specifically political actions and those that tried to contrast his actions with other factors (such as earlier civil conflicts) often did not construct a fully coherent argument. The topic about the Mytilene Debate is also of this kind (the format of 'prompt statement' followed by the instruction 'discuss' invites the student to construct an evaluative argument). Most students were able to express a point of view about the Athenian empire, although there was little specific information provided about the Mytilene Debate itself.

In a 'Discuss how ...' topic, the focus should be much more on the key factor in the topic. Any contrast or comparison with other factors needs to be very strongly argued to be relevant. The two Egypt essays were of this type – students who did not focus on 'moving the capital from Thebes to Akhentaten' or 'how the building projects of Amenhotep III reflect changing religious beliefs and practices' risked writing irrelevant material. A number of students who responded to the second of these topics did not adequately focus on the building projects, writing instead about the religious innovations of Amenhotep III and/or moving into a discussion of Akhentaten. The topic about Pompey also expected a focus on Pompey. Many students wrote good surveys of his career; those whose answers relied on comparisons with the Gracchi brothers, Caesar, Marius and Sulla, or Octavian and Antony were less relevant.

Demonstration of historical knowledge that is accurate and appropriate for the essay question

When it came to showing historical knowledge, many essays were too general. Many essays contained no dates at all, for example. Students are expected to support their claims about the past with specific details from the past (such as dates, names, facts, figures, people, places and statistics).

Use of historical thinking concepts

The criterion about 'historical thinking' refers to concepts such as the significance of an event or person; continuity and change; causes and consequences; the perspectives of historical actors; and beliefs, values and attitudes of people in the past.

Overall, there was an impressive degree of sophistication in the way students discussed these points, especially in topics that centred on these notions (such as the question about religious change in the time of Amenhotep III or the way Athens treated its empire).

Note that students should avoid counterfactuals when arguing for the significance of a person or event. A number of students wrote statements such as, 'If Alcibiades had not betrayed Athens, then Athens would have won the war and that shows how Alcibiades contributed to Athens' defeat'. This is not good practice for history writing and could undermine the strength of an argument.

Use of primary sources and historical interpretations as evidence

The last criterion is probably the biggest weakness in essays, with most students providing no evidence of this kind. Students must provide quotations from relevant sources in order to address this criterion. There is no precise number as to how many quotations are expected – the key is to cite the references accurately. As these criteria are applied holistically, students should not approach the essay thinking that doing well in the

other criteria will compensate for disregarding this criterion. All the criteria are equally important and if a student provides no quotations at all, that is a full quarter of the criteria that they miss out on.

Note that textbook authors are not historians and should not be quoted as such in the essay.

Examples of high-scoring responses

Section A – Question 2 (Egypt)

Discuss how moving the capital from Thebes to Akhetaten contributed to tensions during the Amarna Period.

The mobilisation of moving the capital from Thebes to Akhetaten contributed not just to the tension between the Pharaoh and the priests of Amun but also to the tension between the king and the people as a whole. Akhenaten's radical and sudden action went against the established institutions of Egypt and was part of an egotistical political agenda rather than for the prosperity of Egypt. Therefore, by changing the capital, culture, social factors, religious factors and economic policies were reformed and tensions arose.

The religious reforms made by moving the capital exacerbated tensions present from Amenhotep III's reign. Both pharaohs saw the wealthy Amun priests as 'a threat to the kingship' (Bradley) and therefore in year 8 of his regal years, Akhetaten was made the capital, based on the religion of Aten as the sun coming out of the mountains was the premise which angered the Amun priests. Whilst these tensions already existed, the moving of the capital gave an area in which Akhenaten could fully encompass a full cultural reform of Egypt. As Duston calls it, a 'religious revolution'. First through the use of the talatat materials to build, he then changed anthropomorphic gods' appearance to the sun-ray icon to shift Egypt from a polytheistic religion to monotheism. This in effect elevated the pharaoh's status to a god-like presence and attempted to diminish other gods. However, archaeological research has found small offerings to familiar gods of fertility and wealth, suggesting the people of Egypt did not fully embrace this change.

Economically, Akhenaten's mobilisation of the capital resulted in growing tensions with the priests of Amun. In creating Akhetaten, he barred the state-god Amun's Temple as well as other smaller religions. Sir Allan Gardiner correctly asserts that this was a 'struggle for the crown' as Akhetaten felt threatened by their wealth. However, Amun was the single largest employer and therefore in diminishing such an institute, Akhenate 'destroyed a system of production...without a system to replace it.' Thus, unemployment rose as well as hunger seeing as surplus was no longer present in what was 'in many ways an inhospitable' (Bradley) capital. Archaeological digs also further found 260 skeletons with the cause of death being stress-induced from the mobilisation. Thus, Akhenaten's economic downfalls within his new capital was extremely pertinent to the rising tensions of the populous and the temples of Egypt.

Akhenaten's new capital also contributed to foreign tensions. His reforms, as recorded by the 'Amarna Letters', show whilst Akhenaten was busy doing three daily rituals, Hittite rebellions were infecting the Egyptian administrative system. Foreign letters record pleas in year 11 for 'immediate relief' in military aspects which Akhenaten neglected to return. Azuru, an Egyptian general, was incredibly influential in such rebellions, in Akhenaten's 'distraction and ignorance' while making the new capital, Azuru's fleet captured Sagnitum[?], the administrative capital of Egypt. Although there is evidence in foreign leaders' mortuary temples of inscriptions of delegates being invited to Akhetaten, ruins have also been found of pathways of foreign faces Akhenaten would 'trample' in his daily proceedings, suggesting further foreign tensions.

Akhenaten's short 17 year reign hoped to reform a 'new millenia' (Bradley) but was the cause of both external and internal social and economic tensions.

Section C – Question 2 (Rome)

Discuss how Pompey's military and political career contributed to the fall of the Roman Republic.

Pompey's military and political career undermining the tradition of the republic significantly contributed to its downfall however this would not have been possible without the actions of his predecessors. The precedents set by figures such as Marius and Sulla provided the framework upon which Pompey was able to rapidly gain control of the political system in Rome.

Pompey's early military career, made possible by Sulla's support, enabled the former to achieve military glory at a very young age. As Syme notes, Pompey's career 'opened with fraud and violence'. Pompey had utilised the powers of the tribuneship to attain significant command. The Lex Gabina and Lex Manilia in 67 and 66 BCE gave Pompey outstanding powers and this was achieved by undermining the political system in Rome. Additionally, he flouted traditional norms by celebrating three triumphs after his campaigns which not only increased his popularity with the masses, thus garnering the suspicions of the Senate, but was also unprecedented. Long established laws decreed that only those who have held consulships could celebrate triumphs but Pompey, being very young age and hence never having held office, successfully did so. The military glory that came with this is the reason why Beard suggests Pompey 'had good claim to be called Rome's first emperor'. Pompey's military career contributed to the fall of the traditional Republican system.

Additionally, by entering into the 'world-shattering agreement' (Martin) that is the First Triumvirate with Crassus and Caesar in 60 BCE, Pompey's political career greatly challenged the powers of the Senate. Combining their influence gave these three ambitious individuals power to control the Republic. Moreover, when the triumvirate was broken, Pompey was named sole consul in 52 BCE, yet another feat that is unprecedented and can be considered another step towards single man rule. Lucan explains that 'Pompey could not accept an equal' in terms of control over Rome and hence he decided to wage civil war against Caesar (49 BCE) thus plunging Rome into more chaos and instability.

However, none of this would have been possible without the actions of those who came before Pompey. After all, it was Marius' military reforms in 107 BCE which created armies that were loyal to their generals. This allowed Pompey to have the support of his veterans during his political career and also contributed to the violence in politics. Additionally, Sulla's dictatorship beginning in 82 BCE furthered Rome desensitisation to this violence in politics (proscriptions). Moreover, the actions of his colleague in the Triumvirate, Julius Caesar, also contributed equally to the fall of the Republic, as both their ambitions meant that conflict between the two warlords was inevitable. Hence Pompey, 'a slave to his own idea of glory' waged civil war against Caesar as the champion selected by the Senate. In this way, Pompey was the only individual in Rome who could be pitted against Caesar, due to his early military career. Also his political career aided this as Pompey worked to demolish all of Sulla's reforms, including restoring the powers of the tribuneship. These tribunes would again play a key role in undermining the Senate and contribute to the fall of the Republic.

Ultimately, while Pompey's actions greatly contributed to the disintegration of the Republic by flouting traditional norms, it should be acknowledged that many other individuals made this possible. Without setting those precedents, Pompey would not have been able to cause harm to the traditional political system in Rome.