

A LEVEL

Examiners' report

ANCIENT HISTORY

H407

For first teaching in 2017

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Version 1

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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. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

Where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report. A full copy of the question paper can be downloaded from OCR.

Paper 11 series overview

This series was the first of the new specification and, on the whole, the examiners were impressed with the candidates' engagement with the questions. Question 3 was new to Ancient History A Level and all centres must be praised for the way they have prepared their candidates to deal with the assessment of a modern interpretation. The examiners commented on how impressed they were with the level of engagement of the key issues implicit in the modern interpretation and the credibility of the responses from the candidates themselves.

The overall message is 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 demonstrably running out of time.

Section A overview

Overall candidates showed a good understanding of the main events in the period 492–404 BC. Responses both in the essay questions and the modern interpretation made good use of the evidence to reach convincing conclusions. The better responses stuck to the precise terms of the question; the evaluation of the evidence used was often convincing and pertinent.

To repeat the advice from the previous specification: evaluation of the sources must be specific to the point being made. There was still far too much generic evaluation bolted on at the end of an essay, which, quite reasonably, received very little credit.

Question 1

Section A: Relations between Greek states and between Greek and non-Greek states, 492–404 BC

- 1* 'Athens' allies quickly learned that Athenians always tried to dominate the Greek world.' To what extent 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. **[30]**

Very few candidates managed to deal with both 'quickly' and 'always'. These words require a sound understanding of the chronology of the period and the best answers clearly recognised that there was a difference pre and post 478. Overall, candidates interpreted the word 'allies' to mean members of the Delian League; no-one argued about whether Athens ever wanted to dominate Sparta. The various revolts of member states were well discussed as well as methods used by Athens to control the League members. The various decrees were used with a varying degree of success. Athens' potential motives in establishing an Empire were analysed well but the main weakness of the responses to this question was presenting evidence from a narrow time range. The vast majority of responses dealt only with Athens post 478 and too many answers were restricted to only 478–431. Candidates should be reminded that questions without a specific date range refer to the whole period. Very few candidates explored the source value of examining what the "allies realised" and instead gave their own interpretation of the motives for Athenian domination as put forward by Thucydides.

Question 2

- 2* How far did the Peace of 446 BC address the challenges of the First Peloponnesian War (462–446 BC)?

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

Fewer than 10% of candidates chose to attempt this question. For those who did the responses were polarised with those who had a secure understanding of both the challenges of the First Peloponnesian War and the precise terms of the Peace of 446 and were able to discuss the extent to which the Peace was successful in its aims, receiving marks in the highest bands. The less successful answers showed little understanding of the details of the treaty and occasionally mixed it up with the Peace of Nicias. The various treaties of the period are important, and their details should be known to candidates precisely.

Question 3

3 Read the interpretation below.

How convincing do you find R. Meiggs' interpretation of Sparta's position at the start of the Peloponnesian War?

You must use your knowledge of the historical period and the ancient sources you have studied to analyse and evaluate R. Meiggs' interpretation. **[20]**

This question requires candidates to engage with the interpretation in front of them and, overall, this was done well. There is no expected answer and candidates are free to agree or disagree with all or part of the modern interpretation. There is no need for candidates to look to try to support their judgements with the ideas of other modern interpretations as some responses looked to contrast the views by Meiggs with other authors. The better responses looked at several of Meigg's claims and discussed their credibility by using their own knowledge of the period derived from the accounts of the ancient authors.

Responses occasionally provided evidence against Meiggs (e.g. the lack of support or lack of navy) by referring to an incident in the later part of the War such as the Brasidas campaign or the victories of Lysander). This shows a misconception in that the question clearly refers to Sparta's position 'at the start of' the War and he references events before the War or at the beginning. Better responses clearly knew the period between 446 and 432 and the events and stuck to the claims in the passage.

Exemplar 1

Meiggs accurately claims that the Spartans stated that the Athenians could avoid war in 431 BC by giving their allies freedom. However, the allies could not trust the Spartans. His argument that Sparta failed to support the Samian Revolt and that they were militarily helpless is less convincing.

Meiggs' assertion that the Spartans' final condition to the Athenians to avoid war was that "the Athenians let the Greeks go free" is supported by ~~Herodotus~~ Thucydides 1.139. Sparta did tell Athens to "give the Hellenes their freedom" and this was clearly unrealistic. Thucydides probably witnessed the Spartan delegation to Athens and so is likely reliable in conveying Sparta's terms. They wanted Athens to get rid of Pericles, revoke the Megarian decree and dismantle their empire. Athens would never have accepted such harsh terms because they relied on their empire's tribute to maintain

their navy. It was however a useful angle for the Spartans to claim to be the "liberators of Hellas" as Thucydides 2.8 claims they did.

Meiggs claim that "the allies had no grounds for confidence in their liberators" however seems somewhat exaggerated. Meiggs justifies this by arguing that the Spartans "failed to support the Samian revolt" of 440BC. However, he fails to acknowledge that the Spartans did in fact vote to go to war with Athens over this very issue. Thucydides 1.40 states that at the debate at Corcyra in 433BC, the Corinthians say to the Athenians "at the time when Samos revolted we ~~openly~~ openly sided with you!". Because of the bicameral nature of the Peloponnesian League, this means that the Spartans voted to go to war against the Athenians. Thus, the Spartans actively supported the Samian Revolt, but were blocked by their powerful ally Corinth.

However, I do agree with Meiggs that the democracies in the Pelian League would not "relish liberation by Spartans who maintained their leadership of the Peloponnesian League by encouraging oligarchies". The Old Oligarch, writing around the 420s BC claims that the Athenians encouraged democratic governments in their subject

allies to undermine the oligarchic elite (Constitution of the Athenians 1.14-20). Thus, the democratic allies of Athens would not want to have to undergo a change in government as they were used to democracy being promoted.

Meiggs also highlights how Spartan liberation would be unattractive to Athenian allies who recognised the naval weakness of Sparta. It is true that Athens' navy was more powerful. Thucydides 2.65 records that Pericles stated that "Athens would be victorious if she bided her time and took care of her navy" as it was superior. Thucydides would probably have witnessed Pericles' speech himself and so his reflection of Pericles' policy is likely to be generally accurate even if the precise words used are not.

Although ~~Although~~ Athens had a stronger navy, Meiggs' claim that allies "realised Sparta's military helplessness" is unconvincing. Sparta had a powerful ally in Corinth who also had a large fleet and so was not utterly helpless at sea. Moreover, Sparta was widely recognised as the military super-power in Greece who, according to Herodotus 9.71 and the Serpent Column at Delphi, had decisively defeated the Persians at Plataea. Sparta had a strong land army and so would not have appeared helpless

to the allies. The allies were also not necessarily ~~even~~ "inaccessible" to Sparta as Brasidas liberated Athenian allies as far north as Thrace in 424. He had said to Acanthus "make it your aim to be the first" to be liberated from Athens. Thus, I disagree that the Spartans could not liberate the allies because they could not access them. The allies surely would have acknowledged that.

In conclusion, I ultimately think that Meiggs puts too much emphasis on the opinion of the allies that Sparta would not be able to liberate them from Athens. It was ultimately not up to the allies whether or not to accept Sparta's terms, who were much more aggressive ~~for~~ and threatening to Athens than Meiggs makes out.

This response received 20/20. It shows how the modern interpretation question could be tackled. There is clear engagement with the extract by the candidate and the points made by Meiggs are broken down and discussed convincingly. The candidate's own views on the modern interpretation are supported by reference to the candidate's own knowledge and the ancient source material. There is a good understanding of the period and the chronology.

Section B overview

Section B is the 'Depth Study' and accordingly examiners expect more detailed understanding in these responses than perhaps the larger and more open Period Study. The essay questions were both equally popular and the better answers engaged fully with the precise terms of the question.

There were actually few examples of Level 6 answers for Question 4 with a large number of candidates treating the question as 'what does this passage tell us...' rather than 'how useful...'. It is important that the passage(s)/source(s) are mined for relevant information but that there is also some analysis of source utility.

Question 4

Section B: The Society and Politics of Sparta, 478–404 BC

4 Read the passages below.

How useful are these passages for our understanding of the importance of the kings in Spartan society? [12]

Both passages were mined well and 'the importance of the kings' was discussed. Oddly some responses made no use of the extracts at all and instead discussed 'importance' from their own knowledge and other sources. Needless to say, candidates should make use of any stimulus printed on the question paper – it is there for a reason!

'Useful' was discussed with a varying degree of success. Discussion of Herodotus more widely was common but very few answers went beyond generic evaluation of Herodotus. Some answers were contradictory stating that Herodotus was very useful in the information he gives in these extracts but as a historical source he was unreliable.

The top responses selected appropriate information from both extracts and discussed 'useful' with a convincing assessment of Herodotus' reliability and what we can learn about the importance of the kings outside of these passages.

Exemplar 2

4	<p>Herodotus' accounts of the importance of the kingship can both be supported and questioned by other sources that we have in discussion of the period. Herodotus claims that the king was 'responsible for the safe-keeping of all the oracles' naming two 'Pythias'. This clearly depicts their position as religious authority figures within the state. This is reflected elsewhere in Herodotus' account 'Histories' as he alludes to the fact that the kings of the dyarchies held priesthood, Zeus Lacedaemonia and Zeus Urania. Pseudo Xenophon in his Constitution of the Lacedaemonians tells us of how the king makes all public sacrifices and libations in the state, moreover again showing this religious position. This is seen in the decision of Leonidas to go into battle at Thermopylae knowing of his death from the Oracle at Delphi.</p> <p>Plutarch Herodotus also states that the king decides what happens "if a girl inherits her father's estate and had not been betrothed". Although the king gets the "sole decision" to decide who marries her. Although in a</p>
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a society of where, as Pufach tells us, citizenship depended upon ~~that~~ of property qualification, being able to produce enough food for the menes (Xenophon also supports this). This does not necessarily match up to other sources. Whilst Theodotus wrote in the c. 5th BC around 425, Plato - writing some 50 years later, tells us of how the Spartan women could independently hold property with ~~an~~ an estimate of 40% of the land of Lacedaemon being in the ~~hands~~ ^{hands} of women. ~~but~~ This could be explained by the difference in periods they are writing about, however this does challenge Theodotus' opinion.

Theodotus suggest some power being held by the kings in his statement that "they sit with the twenty-~~two~~ eight Elders", the Gerousia. Xenophon tells us they had ~~the~~ power over capital trials and citizenship ^{status} ~~was~~ low, proving that the kings held importance in Spartan society. However this is perhaps diluted in the fact that he seemingly places it with these other men. He is telling us that the kings

were "joint commanders" or a "expedita", Herodotus shows by the military importance of ~~the~~ ^{his} office. Moreover, as ~~they~~ ^{the} "Clemens" and "Democritus" had dispute, carrying "a new law in Sparta" to be instated, the power of the State government over them is evident. Xenophon tells us that two Ephors and three Hecycibae are always present at a campaign, showing this change in policy and supporting Herodotus' passage. Moreover, whilst Aristotle calls the kingship a "hereditary permanent generalship" and Herodotus also tells us of the sole mirror of Leonidas, with no mention of Spartan, this is questioned, as Thucydides in fact tells us ~~the~~ Agesilaos II in 413 remained at the Gortyn in Decaea so that he could hold onto his full power, which was not in place in the State.

From this it can be concluded that whilst Herodotus' account helps us to see, with the support of other sources as well, that the position of the kings in

		<p>Spartan was society was more religious and pious than is that practical. There are clashes with other sources' perspectives. Although may be however this may be due to differences in when they were written, although still challenge the reliability and usefulness of Herodotus' source.</p>
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This response received 12/12. Both passages are mined for 'importance' of the kings and there is good discussion of the reliability of Herodotus as well as a good discussion of 'importance' outside of the printed extracts. 'Useful' is discussed well and an overall convincing conclusion to the specific question is reached.

Question 5

5* To what extent did the power of the ephors increase throughout this period?

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

On the whole this question caused few problems to candidates who knew the evidence on the ephorate. The best responses appreciated the fact that most of the information about the ephors is not date/time specific so it is very hard to judge whether their power increased or not – too many just slipped into listing the powers of the ephors and although lots quoted Aristotle, their evaluation did not deal with the fact that he is writing outside the time period. The best answers used a chronological awareness of events and the sources used to demonstrate change over time.

Question 6

6* 'The Athenians understood little about the strengths and weaknesses of Sparta.' To what extent do you agree with this statement?

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

Like in Question 5, the better answers looked at the interactions between Sparta and Athens and then analysed whether this revealed an understanding of Spartan strengths and weaknesses. Good examples were the helot revolt of 465, the battle of Tanagra, Periclean policy at the start of the Peloponnesian War, the Sphacteria/Pylos episode and Athenian failure to appreciate Sparta's willingness to send out a commander to Sicily.

Some strong examples explored the way Aristotle was affected by the Spartan mirage or perhaps misunderstood Spartan strengths as weaknesses due to cultural differences.

The evaluation of the evidence is crucial to producing answers in Level 6 and some strong responses assessed what we can actually know about Athenian views of Spartan anything.

There was a lot of Plutarch used without understanding that he is writing way after the period ends and no Athenians could have been influenced by his accounts accordingly!

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