

A LEVEL

Examiners' report

ANCIENT HISTORY

H407

For first teaching in 2017

H407/12 Summer 2024 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.

A full copy of the question paper and the mark scheme can be downloaded from OCR.

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Paper 12 series overview

Performance in this option was generally good, in line with performance levels from the previous series. There was still a number of scripts this year that did not give the correct number for the question being answered, or, worse, no number at all when they started a new question.

Engagement with the modern interpretation was impressive showing that over the lifetime of the specification, answers have become aligned with the principle of analysing 'how convincing' in relation to the historical arguments put forward in the extract rather than simply showing what the ancient sources said on the factual content of the extract. There was still many examples of ancient source evaluation in the answer to Question 3.

Among weaker answers, in both the period and depth essay questions, there were still comments such as 'the sources tell us ...' without any mention of which source(s) was/were being referred to, and there were also several responses with no reference to sources at all. There was also in weaker responses incorrect attributions to Herodotus/ Thucydides/ Xenophon; it should not be difficult to establish a simple timeline of source authors to overcome this. The same applies to confusion over the Hellenic/ Delian/ Peloponnesian Leagues. There were many comments that Herodotus and Aristotle were Athenian and Plutarch Roman.

There was also the use of 'ostracism' as equivalent to exile from Athens; the last ostracism was in 417, and Thucydides was not ostracised after Amphipolis.

In evaluation, it was commonly stated that Thucydides lived in Sparta in his exile, but all he says is that he had 'access to the Peloponnesian side' (V.26).

However, the vast majority of answers dealt well with the subject material. Convincing conclusions were often reached, well supported by the evidence. Answers demonstrated a strong understanding of the Peloponnesian War, particularly its causes and effects.

Depth study answers showed a good understanding of the key issues in the questions and on the whole answers were well argued with many examples of sustained analysis. In addition, there was a pleasing use of a wide range of evidence across the paper.

Answers who did well on this paper generally:	Answers who did less well on this paper generally:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> demonstrated a thorough understanding of the studied period maintained an accurate and clear understanding of the timeline chose sources specifically relevant to the question's terms prioritised addressing the question's terms, using evidence and knowledge to support the explanation evaluation focused on assessing the reliability of the specific point being made. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> incorrectly attributed an event to the wrong person or group did not concentrate on the main issue of the question, instead giving a general overview of the period provided a descriptive account of events rather than an analysis offered a general evaluation rather than a specific one.

Section A overview

Overall, candidates demonstrated a solid understanding of the key events in the two periods addressed by the essay questions. Successful responses effectively utilised the evidence to draw convincing conclusions. The strongest answers adhered closely to the specific terms of the question, with the evaluation of the evidence often being compelling and relevant.

Question 1*

- 1* 'The emergence of Athens as a superior naval power significantly affected relations with other states in the period 478–446 BC.'

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]**

This was the less popular of the two option questions, however, it was generally well answered.

A common comment in evaluation was that Thucydides was a contemporary of the *pentecontaetia*, but this is not really valid for at least the first 40 years as he was born in c.460. In considering the effect of Athenian growing power on Sparta many mentioned the (re-)construction of Athens' walls by Themistocles in the 470s. However, the vast majority of these referred to these as the 'Long Walls'; these were not constructed until c.457 (Thucydides 1.107).

Those who were able to use the evidence of Athenian decrees received due credit and, due to the debate over the dating of some, those which could be either 440s or 420s were allowed (Coinage Decree).

Many answers mentioned Thucydides' judgement at 1.23 and this was given if it was related to events of the specified time period.

There were references to the Corinthian complaints in 432 (outside the specified timespan in the question), specifically Corcyra, Epidamnus and Potidaea; this was allowed if it was related to events within 478–446.

Many better responses did discuss relations with Persia, while weaker ones confined themselves to Greek states, or even just those on the mainland, ignoring the Delian League.

Some responses included discussion of other factors affecting relations with other states (economic, attitude of allies), but only the best related this back to naval power; the question did not require discussion of other factors.

Responses often explored the Athenian relationship with allies/ Delian League members – revolts of Thasos and Naxos being commonly identified.

The roles of Pericles and Cimon were sometimes explored in some detail and the Athenian relationship with Persia in the years 478–446. There was some good use of some of the epigraphic evidence integrated well with good use of Thucydides and Plutarch.

Misconception



A large problem among weaker scripts was using evidence from outside the dates in the question (where mentioned) or the dates of the specification (especially in Section B), and not reading the question and extracts carefully; details of this for individual questions are detailed below.

Question 2*

2* How important was the quality of the leadership of Athens and Sparta in the events of the period 446–404 BC?

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

The more popular of the Section A optional questions. Again, it was generally very well answered.

Some answers chose to interpret the question as the leadership of the cities of Athens and Sparta within the wider Greek world, and this was given due credit.

The biggest issue for weaker answers (and some stronger ones) was discussing examples from the whole period 492–404 instead of 446–404 as specified in the question.

Evaluation of the sources, for obvious reasons, tended to centre on Thucydides and Xenophon. Discussion of the Corinthian complaint in Thucydides either mentioned that Thucydides was present in Sparta, or that no Athenian could have known what was discussed. Thucydides actually tells us that some Athenian representatives were in Sparta at the time. Others stated that these representatives would have been present for the debate between Archidamus and Sthenelaidas, but Thucydides tells all 'outsiders' were asked to leave the assembly.

There were several answers who confused Thucydides discussion and praise of Pericles' leadership with the Funeral Speech which was actually delivered by Pericles.

Responses identified a good range of leaders—most commonly Pericles, Cleon, Alcibiades, and Nicias for Athens, and Brasidas, Lysander, and Archidamus for Sparta. Less commonly, the following leaders were identified: Demosthenes, Gylippus, Sthenelaidas, and Agis II. The mark scheme also identified Pleistoanax and Lamachus, but these leaders did not seem to have been used at all in responses.

Events typically explored included Pericles' strategy of remaining within the Long Walls during the Attic invasions and the impact of the plague on this strategy, the Athenian victory at Pylos, and Brasidas' successes in Thrace/ Chalcidice. The Sicilian expedition, the occupation of Decelea, and the battle of Aegospotami were also explored.

Some responses also considered the role of leadership in a wider sense, with the leadership of Athens or Sparta being examined over the period in relation to their allies. The role of Persia was also addressed in this question, with leaders' relationships with Persians such as Cyrus and Tissaphernes explored in relation to Lysander and Alcibiades.

There was confusion over the chronology of events around Amphipolis in discussion of Brasidas, some giving the battle in which Brasidas and Cleon died as 424, others stating that Thucydides failed in 422 and then went into exile.

Weaker answers did not answer with reference to the whole period mentioned in the question, concentrating only on 432-404.

Exemplar 1

It seems the importance of the qualities of the Athenian and Spartan leadership in the events between 446 and 404 BC were dramatically important in shaping the outcome of the Peloponnesian war according to our sources, which evaluate their military strategies and moves as they correspond with each other. However these Greek leaders didn't only communicate amongst themselves, Alcibiades is a prime example of Greek

leadership communicating with Persians for aid, which he gets Sparta gets, due to Lysander and Cyrus coming to agreement based off of Lysander's great reputation. Again, Lysander's qualities secure funding for the Spartan navy, displaying its importance. Plutarch breaks off his account here, failing to ever consider the effects of Persian aid or economic factors in the war, but we get most of our information from Xenophon, who seems to ^{place} ~~import~~ most of the securing of funds as a product of Lysander. Although this shows the importance of leadership all the same, it is likely because Xenophon was entranced by Spartan life and figures, having been welcomed there by the king after his exile from Greece Athens. We know he was in admiration of Lysander, and so it is a valid assumption he might paint Spartans in a better light over others when given the chance.

		Alcibiades made this even easier to do too, as although
		politically, his qualities speak to two ends of a spectrum,
		in terms of values and morality, his constant side-swing-
		ing was a quality that made many dislike him in
		the ancient ancient world, although we must
		acknowledge how it was still instrumental in its events.

This is the conclusion of the essay, and it is very strong. It revisits arguments from the main body of the essay and draws together multiple themes explored to reach an overarching judgement which is convincing. There is a good blend of interpretation, analysis and evaluation of the evidence in this conclusion.

Misconception



There was also confusion over the trial of the generals after Arginusae with six, eight or ten being executed; eight of the year's ten generals were put on trial of whom six were executed and two (who did not return to Athens for trial) went into exile.

Question 3

3 Read the interpretation below.

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How convincing do you find B. Strauss' interpretation of the importance of the battles of Salamis and Plataea for the Greeks' final victory in the war against Xerxes?

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

Generally speaking, this passage question was engaged with well by many answers. Points were identified that were convincing/ unconvincing typically included – the battles of Salamis and Plataea, the role of Themistocles and Thebes and Macedon.

Additional own knowledge was usually integrated to support discussion and often this knowledge included; battles of Mycale and Thermopylae, the evidence of the serpent column, the retreat of Xerxes and the impact that this had on Persian forces, the role of other Greek states – notably Corinth at Salamis and the clever actions of Themistocles – leaving messages for the Ionians and the message to Xerxes on the eve of Salamis. The most common ancient sources used in relation to this question were Herodotus and Plutarch. When Thucydides was mentioned, it was usually in error.

Only very occasionally were the following potential discussion points identified; the role of Aegina at Salamis, the role of Tegea at Plataea, the low Spartan casualties in the battle at Plataea and the role of Pausanias. Very occasionally, answers demonstrated problems with chronology and incorporated Darius' invasion into the response.

Due credit was given for mention of Mycale as the question does refer to 'the war against Xerxes', so even discussion of Eurymedon was allowed if appropriately set in context; however, others went further to discuss Cimon's victory in Cyprus and the ensuing Peace of Kallias, which were after Xerxes' death.

In discussion of specific points in the interpretation, many picked out the concentration in the interpretation on Sparta and Athens, with several mentioning the Serpent Column as well as Herodotus as evidence of the number of Greek states involved at Plataea. There is still some confusion over the number of states mentioned on the column – it is thirty-one (31).

Many questioned the statement that Themistocles would receive no glory with most discussing his portrayal in Herodotus and Plutarch.

Athens would gain glory too' was frequently discussed, with the best answers able to refer to the references to Athens' part in defeating the Persians in the debate at Sparta in 432.

Most did pick out the statement about 'sea of Spartan blood' to criticise, with a few noting the small numbers (ninety-one) of Spartan dead. Some, however, thought 'sea' meant this was a reference to a naval battle.

Several suggested that Strauss had fallen for the 'Spartan mirage' created by Leonidas at Thermopylae.

Section B overview

The responses to Question 4 were much better this year showing a good understanding of the material in the extracts as well as how useful it was in terms of the central issue being discussed.

The essays in the depth study were most pleasing as candidates were often able to provide detailed references to the sources and put forward compelling and often sophisticated arguments reaching sensible and well thought out conclusions.

Question 4

- 4 Look at the archaeological evidence and read the passage below.

Marble relief (Block V) from the east frieze of the Parthenon. The frieze shows the procession of the Panathenaic festival, the commemoration of the birthday of the goddess Athena.

Item removed due to third party copyright restrictions

How useful are these sources for our understanding of the significance of the worship of Athena in Athenian religion? **[12]**

There was a commendable discussion of the content of both sources, with a particularly strong focus on the Pausanias extract. Many responses included some evaluation of the authors, particularly addressing the challenges associated with interpreting archaeological evidence as presented by Pausanias. Additionally, there were good examples of candidates demonstrating wider knowledge, referencing other temples and statues dedicated to or featuring Athena.

Some candidates also effectively discussed the possible role of the peplos in the procession, adding depth to their analysis.

However, the evaluation of Pausanias was often quite generic and not sufficiently tied to the specific focus of the question. Many candidates did not delve into the archaeological evidence in detail, missing opportunities to strengthen their arguments. There was also frequent confusion regarding which statue of Athena Pausanias was describing, which affected the clarity of some responses. Lastly, some answers had limited discussion of the content of either source, which hindered a comprehensive analysis.

Exemplar 2

		<p>One way in which the sources are useful is by showing how Athena was the patron goddess of Athens and how her worship was the most significant. The archaeological source shows how the main festival of Athens revolved around Athena. This is useful in helping us understand the worship of Athena by how the festival was for everyone. Women were a key part in the procession, making the Peplos presented to Athena as seen on the Parthenon frieze. This demonstrates how the worship of Athena in Athenian religion wasn't only for men. This can also be seen in Pausanias where the statue of Athena is in the Parthenon for everyone to see. This gives everyone the option to worship her. The statue is made of cryselephantine (ivory and gold) which shows how much they value the Goddess. The value monetary value of the statue reflects the value that she had on in society as they are willing to pay large expenses on the materials as a tribute to her. This shows how the sources are useful in demonstrating how important the worship of Athena was in Athenian religion. However, Pausanias only attempts to describe the scene being a geographer. He doesn't acknowledge the embellishment</p>
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of Phedon (Plutarch Pericles 31) showing not everyone respected and feared Athena.

Another way in which the sources are useful is how they show the worship of Athena in Athenian religion was also important in guaranteeing military victory. Pausanias 1.24.5 describes Athena's military symbolism with the 'victory about four cubits high' and 'a spear' and 'a shield' by her. This shows how Athena was venerated as a military figure and that her worship in Athenian religion was significant in wartime to guarantee victory. This can also be seen through the temple of Athena Nike (to bring victory and success to Athens) as well as the statue Athena Promachos. Pausanias was writing as a geographer, this means that he doesn't consider the motives behind the building of the Acropolis. He doesn't write about the religious significance nor the political propaganda. Despite this, the sources are still useful in showing how significant the worship of Athena was in Athenian religion.

Overall, the sources clearly show the high level of significance Athena held in Athenian religion. She was the founder of the state (as seen in the Parthenon pediment of her fighting Poseidon) and was seen as an important figure for all elements of religion and for everyone. She features heavily across the Acropolis in multiple forms. Whilst other

		Gods are honoured, such as Poseidon in Samos, Athena
		is the key figure of Athenian religion. Athena is the
		first view when entering the Parthenon, showing her importance
		In the statue Athena parthenos

This response received a mark in the top level for its discussion of how useful in relation to the importance of the worship of Athena. The archaeological and literary material is mined very well with convincing conclusions reached. The answer draws on own knowledge and the answer is supported with detailed factual information giving context to the Parthenon sculpture. Evaluation is specific and focused.

Question 5*

5* 'The real reason for Socrates' prosecution and execution was his attitude to democracy.'

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. [36]

There were some excellent explanations of Socrates' views on democracy, with the use of analogies effectively supporting his criticisms. Responses often explored the different charges against Socrates and utilised a range of accounts of his teachings to examine whether these charges led to his execution. Notable discussions included references to *Clouds*, Xenophon, and Plato's *Apology*. The evaluation of the sources on Socrates was often strong, with candidates skilfully highlighting the biases present in the works of Plato, Aristotle, and Xenophon.

However, some candidates appeared to take *Clouds* at face value, inaccurately portraying Socrates as a sophist, which he was not. Additionally, a significant number of responses did not delve deeply into Socrates' views on democracy, resulting in some overly assertive judgements. Some candidates also merely mentioned the source author after an explanation without further analysis, which could not be adequately given as a demonstration of source evaluation.

Question 6*

- 6*** How far would you agree with the view that the main purpose of Athenian playwrights was to entertain the audience?

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

Many responses demonstrated a strong focus on the question, with well-developed arguments discussing the various purposes of dramatic writers and festivals, such as entertainment, political commentary, and moral messaging. There was often detailed analysis of specific plays, their contexts, and interpretations, with additional plays like *Medea* being used effectively. Candidates also provided good detail about the nature of dramatic festivals, including how the timing of these events could influence the messages conveyed by the playwrights.

However, some responses merely mentioned the source author after an explanation, lacking sufficient critical analysis or source evaluation. Additionally, there was occasional confusion between plays, particularly Aristophanes' *Wasps* and *Knights*. Some candidates also misunderstood the broader context in which Aristophanes was writing, such as the timing of Cleon's death in relation to the plays. Furthermore, some answers did not provide much detail about the dramatic festivals, missing an opportunity to support arguments about the entertainment aspect of these events.

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