

Examiners' report

AS LEVEL

ANCIENT HISTORY

**OCR Level 3 Advanced Subsidiary GCE
in Ancient History**

H007

For first teaching in 2017

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

Where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report.

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Paper 2 series overview

The paper required candidates to have a good understanding of the entire period and responses showed this was largely the case. Key information derived from the ancient sources was used to support answers in Question 2, Question 3, and Question 4 with good factual detail derived from own knowledge used to support answers for Question 1. Question 4 was more popular than Question 3, with candidates being secure on the relationship between the Princeps and the Senate throughout the period. There were a good number of answers which integrated the three assessment objectives well to produce strong arguments underpinned by support from the ancient sources.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
• demonstrated a secure understanding of the historical period studied • showed a clear and accurate grasp of the chronology • used carefully selected sources that directly address the specific terms of the question • built a focused explanation that prioritises the demands of the question, supported by relevant evidence and contextual knowledge • evaluated the reliability of each point made, which ensured that analysis remained closely tied to the argument.	• inaccurately attributed events to individuals or groups • did not address the central issue of the question, instead offered a generalised overview of the period • presented a narrative of events rather than an analytical response • focused too narrowly on a limited part of the timeframe • provided evaluation that is generic and lacked specificity.

Section A overview

Section A produced a range of responses consistent with performance levels from previous years. However, some candidates continued to rely heavily on quotations or close textual references in Question 1 and included evaluation where it was not required. Several responses also focused too narrowly on Augustus, without sufficiently addressing the broader time period required by the question. In Question 2, many candidates did not provide enough support for the more widely accepted view of Tiberius as presented by Suetonius, Tacitus, and Cassius Dio, instead taking Velleius Paterculus at face value without critical comparison. Stronger responses demonstrated a wider contextual understanding and engaged more directly with the question, drawing on a broader range of relevant material to support their arguments.

Question 1

1 Explain the various methods used by the emperors to appeal to the ordinary people of Rome.

[10]

The best responses offered a well-developed discussion of the various methods employed by emperors to gain favour with the Roman populace. Candidates demonstrated secure knowledge of a range of strategies, with donatives, public building programmes, amenities, and games being the most frequently cited. Stronger responses went beyond generalisations, identifying specific buildings, festivals, games, and acts of generosity, and clearly linking them to individual emperors and their motivations. However, many responses showed a limited understanding of the full time period. A significant number focused almost exclusively on Augustus, often relying heavily on the *Res Gestae* and inferring that later emperors followed similar practices without providing concrete examples. This narrow approach restricted the depth of analysis and did not meet the broader demands of the question. More effective responses demonstrated a wider chronological awareness and supported their points with well-selected evidence from across the imperial period.

Exemplar 1

		Largesse, or the providing of lavish goods and money was also commonly used by the emperors to win favour with the people. Nero and Caligula would hand out lavish stones and jewels, even gold and silver upon their succession. Augustus would use largesse frequently, handing out 400 sesterces to each citizen following his victory at Actium mentioned in the Res Gestae. He had reportedly given away 150,000,000 sesterces total to the people.
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Exemplar 1 shows a top-level response to Question 1 because it directly addresses one of the key methods emperors used to appeal to the people, largesse, and supports the point with specific, relevant examples. The paragraph references multiple emperors (Nero, Caligula, and Augustus), showing awareness of the broader time period rather than focusing too narrowly. The figures cited (e.g. 400 sesterces per citizen, 150 million total) add precision and detail. To further strengthen the paragraph, the candidate could have briefly commented on the purpose or impact of such largesse, but overall, it is well-focused, well-evidenced, and clearly relevant to the question.

Question 2

2 Read the following passage.

Could anyone list in detail all that has been achieved over the last sixteen years, since it is perfectly apparent to the hearts and minds of us all? Caesar deified his father not so much by imperial decree as by his own display of religious devotion. ... Respect has been restored to public life; political conspiracy eliminated from it. Scheming for high office has been banished from elections, factional strife 5 from the senate; justice, fairness and commitment to hard work, qualities long buried and forgotten, have been brought back to the body politic. ...

Good deeds are admired; evil deeds punished.

Blind chance has brought losses to citizens and cities alike; the emperor's generosity has made their losses his own. ... Influence gives way to fairness; 10 ambition to merit. Our best of emperors is teaching his citizens by example to do what is right; his power makes him supreme; his example is greater still.

Velleius Paterculus 2:126.1–126.4 [LACTOR 19]

On the basis of this passage and other sources you have studied, how fair an assessment of the reign of Tiberius does Velleius present? [20]

The most effective responses demonstrated a thoughtful engagement with the passage, carefully taking detail from it while also recognising the limitations of Velleius as a source. These responses showed a clear awareness that Velleius presents a highly favourable portrayal of Tiberius, one that contrasts sharply with the accounts of other ancient authors such as Tacitus, Suetonius, and Cassius Dio. The strongest responses were able to draw on specific examples from these sources to either challenge or support Velleius' claims, offering a balanced and well-supported evaluation of how fair his assessment truly is.

In contrast, less successful responses tended to take the passage at face value, accepting Velleius' praise of Tiberius without sufficient critical analysis or reference to alternative perspectives. These responses often lacked depth and did not address the broader historiographical context. Some responses also relied too heavily on generalisations or vague references to Tiberius' reign, rather than engaging directly with the content of the passage and comparing it meaningfully with other evidence.

Overall, the best answers demonstrated a nuanced understanding of the complexities involved in assessing ancient sources and used a wide range of material on the reign of Tiberius to construct a convincing and well-reasoned argument.

Section B overview

Question 4 proved to be the more popular of the two extended responses, with a wide range of responses demonstrating strong engagement with the material.

The portrayal of Claudius by ancient sources appeared to be a less familiar area for many candidates. Although when attempted, responses often demonstrated a good understanding of the contrasting depictions found in Suetonius, Tacitus, and Cassius Dio, though only the strongest answers critically assessed the motivations and reliability of these authors. Similarly, the decline in the power and influence of the Senate during the Julio-Claudian period was addressed with varying levels of depth. While most responses acknowledged the shift in authority, only the better ones analysed the extent of senatorial decline and considered the political and administrative factors that contributed to it.

Overall, responses showed impressive knowledge and understanding of the period shown, particularly where candidates engaged critically with the sources and demonstrated a clear grasp of the broader historical context.

Question 3*

3* How reliable is the presentation of Claudius in the sources?

You must use and analyse the ancient sources you have studied as well as supporting your answer with your own knowledge.

[30]

There were several excellent responses to this question. More successful responses demonstrated a clear understanding of the complexities involved in evaluating ancient portrayals of Claudius, drawing effectively on a range of sources including Suetonius, Tacitus, and Cassius Dio as well as non-literary evidence. These responses explored the biases and intentions behind each author's depiction, considering how Claudius' physical condition, political decisions, and reliance on freedmen and wives were variously emphasised or exaggerated. The best answers also incorporated archaeological evidence, such as inscriptions and coinage, to support or challenge literary claims, offering a more balanced and nuanced assessment of Claudius' reign.

Some responses showed particularly strong analysis by comparing the literary portrayals with material evidence to assess how far Claudius' image was shaped by political agendas or retrospective judgement of non-contemporary writers. These responses were able to critically discuss the reliability of each source, recognising the limitations of relying solely on elite perspectives and sensationalised accounts.

Less successful responses tended to take the sources at face value, accepting Suetonius' anecdotes or Tacitus' criticisms without questioning their accuracy or context. In some cases, candidates focused more on Claudius' policies or achievements without linking these back to the issue of source reliability. This limited the analytical depth of their responses because 'how reliable' should have been the focus of the analysis.

Assessment for learning



Reading the question carefully is essential to producing a focused and relevant response. In this case, the question asked candidates to assess *how reliable* the presentation of Claudius is in the sources, not to evaluate how successful Claudius was as an emperor. However, many responses misinterpreted the scope of the question, offering generalised accounts of Claudius' achievements and policies without engaging with the reliability or bias of the ancient evidence. This led to missed opportunities for critical analysis of key sources such as Suetonius, Tacitus, Josephus and Cassius Dio, whose portrayals of Claudius are shaped by distinct agendas and literary styles. A successful response required candidates to interrogate the veracity and reliability of these accounts, considering factors such as authorial political persuasion, genre, and intended audience. Misreading the question not only diverted attention from the core analytical task but also limited the opportunity to demonstrate higher-level evaluative skills.

Question 4*

4* How far do you agree that the senate's power and influence declined during this period?

You must use and analyse the ancient sources you have studied as well as supporting your answer with your own knowledge.

[30]

Question 4 was the more popular of the two essays, with many candidates showing a strong grasp of the topic. The most impressive responses offered sustained and analytical engagement with the central issue of senatorial decline from 31 BC to AD 68. These demonstrated a clear understanding of how the power and influence of the senate declined under each emperor, with particular attention to the constitutional reforms of Augustus, the increasing dominance of the imperial household, and the role of the Praetorian Guard. The best responses also critically assessed the reliability of the ancient sources, such as Tacitus' senatorial bias, Suetonius' anecdotal style, and Cassius Dio's retrospective judgement, to evaluate how far the narrative of decline is shaped by the perspectives of elite authors.

Some of the most effective essays explored the tension in the senate's role between appearance and reality, noting how emperors maintained the façade of republican governance while consolidating personal control. These responses were well-supported by specific examples, including the creation of additional administrative roles, the use of treason trials, and the sidelining of the senate in military and financial matters.

In contrast, less successful responses tended to be vague or overly reliant on generalisations. Some focused almost entirely on Augustus, failing to consider developments under later emperors. Others lacked source support or misunderstood the question, treating it as a general discussion of imperial power rather than an evaluation of the senate's changing role.

Overall, this question produced a wide range of responses, and examiners were particularly impressed by those that combined detailed knowledge with critical source analysis to address the question directly.

Exemplar 2

		Tiberius would then go on to further remove influence from the senate, casting a "shadow of fear" to control them. The treason trials would
		Tiberius to remove (by murder) any political opponents of the emperors left in the senate.
		The treason trials would leave only the most loyal of followers left in the senate who would do what the emperors commanded.
		An example of senatorial influence being removed from the senate would be in the reign of Claudius who would be described as a "servant rather than an emperor". Claudius would find himself controlled by his wives and freedmen leaving no room for influence from the senate.
		In conclusion, power and influence exerted by the senate would drastically decrease leaving only puppets left in the senate.

Exemplar 2 demonstrates some awareness of relevant themes, such as the use of treason trials under Tiberius and the influence of freedmen and imperial women under Claudius. However, it falls short of the analytical depth required for a high-level answer. The discussion is generalised and lacks specific references to ancient sources, which are essential for evaluating the decline of senatorial power. There is no attempt to assess the reliability of the evidence or to trace changes across the Julio-Claudian period. More importantly, the response does not address the central issue of the question: the senate as an influential political body within the Roman government. Instead, it relies heavily on assertion without sufficient development or source support. The conclusion restates the argument without offering further insight or critical reflection. To improve, the response would need more precise examples, clearer engagement with source material, and a stronger analytical structure focused on the role and authority of the senate.

Misconception: the lost parts of Tacitus' *Annals*



A common misconception which examiners saw this year is that Tacitus' *Annals* offers a complete and continuous account of the entire Julio-Claudian period. In reality, the surviving portions of the *Annals* are incomplete, and significant gaps exist in the historical record. Tacitus began his narrative with the death of Augustus in AD 14 and the accession of Tiberius, and Books 1 to 6, which cover Tiberius' reign up to around AD 31, survive in full. However, Books 7 to 10 are entirely lost. These would have included the final years of Tiberius, the whole of Gaius's reign (AD 37–41), and the early years of Claudius. Books 11 and 12 resume the narrative during Claudius' reign, covering roughly AD 47–54. Books 13 to 16 then continue into the early years of Nero's reign, ending abruptly in AD 66. The final books, which would have covered Nero's downfall in AD 68, are also lost.

The loss of these books likely occurred during the medieval transmission of Tacitus' work. The *Annals* survived in a limited number of manuscripts, and the missing sections may have been lost due to damage or neglect before the earliest surviving copies were made in the 9th and 11th centuries. As a result, our understanding of key parts of the Julio-Claudian period—particularly Caligula's reign and the early Claudian years—relies on other sources.

To fill these gaps, historians turn to Suetonius, whose *Twelve Caesars* includes biographies of all five Julio-Claudian emperors. While rich in detail, Suetonius often focuses on scandal and anecdote, and his reliability must be carefully assessed. Cassius Dio's *Roman History* is also crucial. Although his original text survives only in later summaries and epitomes for this period, Dio had access to sources that are now lost, including the full version of Tacitus' *Annals*. His account often reflects Tacitean themes and structure, suggesting he made use of the missing books.

Understanding the fragmentary nature of Tacitus' work is essential for any serious study of the Julio-Claudian period. It reminds us that our view of this era is shaped not only by what survives, but also by what has been lost.

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