



Annual Examinations for Secondary Schools 2022

YEAR 11 ENGLISH LANGUAGE
COMPREHENSION TEXT

E. COMPREHENSION

Read the following text and then answer the questions on the Language Paper.

**Ancient Mediterranean diets:
Food study peels back human history 1,000 years earlier than thought**

- Consider the humble banana. This fruit arrived in Europe in the fifteenth century. Since then, it has become one of the most beloved fresh fruit, and one of the most affordable, so that bananas grace fruit bowls across the socio-economic spectrum. Though bananas now mostly come from Central America or the Caribbean, they originally came from half a world away—South Asia. With globalisation in food production and trade, they started as a delicacy for the few and have ended up a staple food.
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- The modern story of the banana mirrors that of ancient man's relationship with food. Philipp Stockhammer, a professor at the Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History in Germany, believes the prevailing idea that ancient humans only ate food grown near their home is all wrong. "We need to get rid of the assumption that people in the past only ate what grew in their immediate surroundings. From early on, humans were interested in different tastes, **exotic** food and rich cuisine, and made a lot of effort to get access to a variety of food."
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- As early as 4,000 years ago, exotic fruits had already made their way onto plates far beyond the Indian Ocean. For decades, the best evidence archaeologists had to understand what ancient humans ate lay in archaeological finds, such as the pots of honey stored in ancient tombs, or in the cooking ash found embedded in pottery shards, for example. Thanks to new techniques involving the analysis of the dental pulp preserved in the teeth of 16 ancient Mediterraneans, Stockhammer and his team of archaeologists are slowly reconstructing the daily diets of these peoples—discovering their tastes and desires may have been far closer to our modern-day eating habits than we previously thought.
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- The new analysis, which takes a close look at the plaque built up on the teeth of Bronze Age humans, was published in the journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. The researchers discovered the earliest evidence yet that the prehistoric people of the Levant—an area of the Southern Mediterranean that today includes Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, and Turkey—had access to turmeric and soybeans.
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- This evidence pushes the entry of these foods into the Mediterranean diet back by 1,000 years. Stockhammer and his colleagues also found that these foods were consumed in **processed** forms—as oils, spices, and dried goods—hinting at an
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ancient food scene far more sophisticated than we had previously imagined.

35 Furthermore, the study reveals how ancient people interacted with one another.
Turmeric, bananas, and soybeans are basic foods in South Asia, not the
Mediterranean—even sesame, a food considered essential to these cuisines, was
imported, the study shows. Christina Warriner, assistant professor of
Anthropology and study co-author, said, "Our findings indicate that the ancient
40 societies of the Eastern Mediterranean and South Asia were trading and
communicating with each other during the 2nd millennium B.C.*. Today, it is hard
to imagine Levantine food without sesame, but sesame was originally imported."

The researchers analysed food remains in the teeth of 16 individuals who once
lived in the region between 1688 B.C. and 1000 B.C. Some, like individuals found
buried in Megiddo, now in Israel, appeared to be wealthy judging by the objects
45 they were buried with. Others, like those found at Tel Erani, another site in what
is now Israel, did not appear so well off. But they all had one thing in common:
bad dental hygiene.

Although the study **expands** our ideas about how ancient humans in the
Mediterranean once lived and ate, the study is limited by the small sample size of
50 just 16 individuals. Only further research can fully reveal the culinary habits of
the Mediterranean people. The study also doesn't shed light on how ancient
traders transported their goods from one corner of the globe to another, or
how local traders would have distributed these foods once they made it to
market. "It is very difficult to describe such markets, as we lack visual as well as
55 textual evidence. We **assume** that they were similar to present-day markets in
the Mediterranean with market stalls offering fruit, vegetables, and spices,"
Stockhammer says.

Nevertheless, by digging into what these ancient peoples ate, the research
provides a window onto the past, revealing that despite being separated by great
60 distances, ancient human societies still communicated with one another. Today,
our diets rely on international trade, too. The idea of not being able to get hold of
foodstuffs like all kinds of fruits and spices shocks many of us in the western
world, and one thing we can identify with these ancient traders about is the
lengths we will go to get *that* one variety of chili, *that* spice blend from that area
65 of Thailand, *that* cheese from that region of France. Ultimately, these findings
connect us with our ancestors—revealing our desires are not so different.

***Note: B.C. means Before Christ**

Adapted from: <https://www.inverse.com/>