



**General Certificate of Education
June 2011**

Classical Civilisation 2020

CIV2A: Homer *Iliad*

Report on the Examination

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CIV2A Homer Iliad

General Comments

Once again it was pleasing to see the obvious interest, enthusiasm and attention to detail exhibited by the majority of candidates who had opted to study the *Iliad*. As last year there were few very poor papers, and a large number of 20 and 30-mark essays which reached at least Level 4. 89% of candidates chose Option B. Although the short answer questions here were less well done than the equivalent questions in Option A, the reverse was very much the case for the 10-mark questions, where three quarters of those answering 04 reached at least Level 3, a figure ten percent higher than for 09. It is worth repeating yet again that successful candidates here were invariably those who paid close attention to the passage in constructing their responses. It was again disappointing this year to see a significant number of able candidates scoring low marks for not incorporating a single direct reference to the passage in their answers. In the 20-mark questions, it is interesting to note that, although the more popular Question 10 on Agamemnon saw a significantly higher proportion of candidates reach Level 3, there was little difference between the proportions of candidates on each question reaching Level 4. The best Level 5 answers tended to be on Odysseus (Question 05). In both questions, successful candidates avoided narrative, but instead selected key incidents for detailed analysis. This applied to the 30-mark questions too. About a third of candidates offered Question 12 on old men, and these significantly outscored the larger number who chose the essay on the immortals.

Section One

Option A

The short questions were dealt with very well by most candidates. Almost everyone identified Helen in Question 01 and knew at least in general terms where the scene was set (02). Similarly, the duel between Menelaus and Paris was often described in detail, 90% of candidates gaining all 3 marks for 03. Question 04 produced some highly evaluative answers bringing out differences between the two heroes. Some candidates missed the top grade by restricting their response to either character or appearance; both were required for the higher marks. Many candidates started by discussing the epithets 'godlike' and 'warlike', producing some interesting comments, before moving on to suggest reasons why Odysseus might have been 'more imposing' when seated than the taller Menelaus. There was a degree of confusion over what Homer was suggesting about the relative merits of the two as speakers; in particular, while many spotted the contrast between Odysseus' apparently 'surly' and 'stupid' appearance and his skill with words, the brief simile 'like the snows of winter' often left them puzzled. Overall though, this question was well answered. Question 05 was also generally answered successfully. Good responses were produced, arguing both ways as to whether the portrayal of Odysseus here was typical; the best answers started from the passage and introduced similarities and differences found elsewhere before coming to a balanced conclusion. It was pointed out that Odysseus' words of wisdom were often under-utilised in the *Iliad*, with his role in leading the mission to Chryse being little more than that of a messenger boy. Similarly, his failure to move Achilles in Book 9 hardly suggested the great speaker identified in the passage. His common sense in calming down the rampant Achilles in Book 19 was often noted, but fewer candidates took the opportunity to analyse Odysseus' physical achievements in the Book 23 games in line with the description in the passage.

Option B

As with Option A, the three short questions here presented few problems for most candidates, just about all of whom named Patroclus for Question 06 and Hephaestus (with various spellings) for Question 08. An exception was Question 07, where rather too many lists of the gifts contained spears and other military items not mentioned by Homer; many gave very full details of the shield, but a maximum of two marks was awarded for this item alone. Again the passage contained a wealth of material for candidates to address the 10-mark question (09) and some made good use of the opportunity. Too many, however, tended to paraphrase the speech rather than selecting key words and phrases to show how effectively Homer shows Agamemnon's mood. A number of candidates seemed to see the opening call for silence as being an attack on Achilles, with the term 'shrillest speaker' in the Rieu translation (interestingly rendered as 'clearest' in Hammond') seen as mocking Achilles. The point here is surely that Agamemnon's repeated appeals indicate his own unease at the semi-apology which he is about to make – Achilles has, after all, already spoken and been heard. Agamemnon's subsequent order for the Argives to 'listen' and 'mark well what I say' would then represent his reestablishment of control of the situation, while his rhetorical question 'what could I do?' which follows the 'apology' shows a rare awkwardness and indecision on his part. His attitude to the gods as represented here was often well explained and then followed up in Question 10. This essay was generally well done, with most candidates finding the bullet points a helpful framework. The best answers, as ever, considered both sides of the question, while the weaker ones often spent the first half of the essay retelling the story of Chryses in great detail. This episode is highly relevant, but only in so far as it reflects Agamemnon's 'typical' behaviour (or otherwise). There seemed to be general agreement that, although the passage marked a degree of 'climbing down' on Agamemnon's part, many of his earlier weaknesses are still visible here. How far this was so proved a good line of discussion for more able candidates.

Section Two

Option C

This option was much more popular than Option D, but not always as well done. While there were very few poor answers to Question 11, perhaps because the subject matter of gods appeals to a wide range of candidates, it seemed that a number of prepared answers to a slightly different question were being regurgitated without the necessary realignment to fit this particular title. Often the story was told in a lengthy way and candidates went on after each episode to ask, by way of analysis, what would have happened if the deity had acted differently. In some answers every intervention of Athene and Apollo was described, but that was all. The theme of Zeus / fate / human responsibility was often dealt with cursorily, or not at all. The best answers examined this wider perspective, often in very interesting ways: would there have been a war to write about without Aphrodite's initial machinations? Can the gods be seen, to some extent at least, as metaphors for characteristics of the mortal characters? The Zeus / Sarpedon episode produced some thought-provoking debate about how much power Zeus actually possessed. A number of candidates misunderstood the term 'human responsibility' and stated, for example, that Agamemnon's leadership style was not a very responsible one. A few tried to reassess the likely outcome of the Achilles / Hector fight claiming that there was no firm evidence that if Athene were removed, Achilles would have won. Most agreed that a second, divine level of action added to the poem, bringing variety and a sense of awe, not to mention comic relief provided by the all-too-human spats of Zeus and Hera. In summary, many candidates would do better to cut the quantity of information provided, but focus instead on employing a more limited but relevant range to answer the specific question set.

Option D

Although there were fewer answers to this question, in general those candidates who tackled it did so to good effect. The topic of old men has a clear focus with a relatively small number of characters. The three main contenders (Priam, Nestor and Phoenix) were usually examined in detail, while a number of candidates introduced Zeus, often to very good effect. It was particularly pleasing to read those answers which looked from both points of view at the importance of Phoenix. He may only appear once, but it was good to see an understanding that, while he may fail to persuade Achilles to return to the fighting, his speech does mark a softening of Achilles' mood and causes him to drop his threat to sail at once, with long-term repercussions. The character of Nestor was well analysed by some, his extreme verbosity being set against his knack of picking the right moment to make a key contribution; in particular the importance of his suggestion to Patroclus in Book 11 was often noted. There was a tendency to narrate when looking at Priam. The best answers here discussed in detail the significance of his meeting with Achilles in Book 24, as well as his relationships with his family. Too often his appearances were listed in chronological order with perhaps a sentence here and there to provide analysis. Some candidates revealed a great empathy for the role of fathers in Homeric society; one made a good case for the importance of Peleus to the *Iliad*, despite his lack of a single appearance in the storyline. All in all there were many pleasing answers and, as with Question 11, a reassuring lack of really poor answers.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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