



**General Certificate of Education
June 2011**

Classical Civilisation 2020

CIV2F: The Second Punic War

Report on the Examination

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CIV2F The Second Punic War

General Comments

This year saw a mixed performance on this unit, with very different mark profiles for each of the essay questions. Almost all the candidates chose Option A in Section One, with only five answering the Plutarch alternative. Perhaps it is worth reminding centres that the Plutarch's *Life of Fabius Maximus* is a prescribed text and will regularly be set for context questions along with Livy. It would be fair to say that none of the candidates who chose Option B reached a high level of performance, even on the questions dependent on the passage. In Option A the short questions were generally well done; most Option B candidates, however, clearly knew little about the siege of Tarentum. The majority of responses to the 10-mark questions (03 and 07) scored quite well without giving full enough answers for Level 4: Question 03 was much better done than Question 07. In the 20-mark questions, over half of all candidates reached Level 4, including a handful of top-notch Level 5 efforts; again the Plutarch question (08) was much less well done than the Livy (04). There was a more even split between the 30-mark alternatives, with slightly more answering Question 09 on Scipio Africanus than Question 10 featuring the two authors as sources. As in previous years, the comparison (Option D) was less well done, candidates tending to generalise rather than referring closely to the two texts; there were over 20% more Level 4 answers to Question 09 than 10, and almost all the weakest answers were on Question 10.

Option A

Question 01 provided a good start for most candidates, who were well aware of the problems facing Hannibal's men in this popular episode. Answers to Question 02 were rather more sketchy, with a degree of confusion between the Ticinus and the other early battles. Most candidates, however, at least remembered the actions of the two Scipios. The passage for Question 03 offered a wealth of information for assessing Hannibal's strengths and weaknesses, although some candidates omitted reference to the passage in favour of general points from elsewhere. Nearly 60% reached Level 3 by considering both sides of the question. It was good to see discussion of the elephants as both 'a blessing and a curse' in many responses. Some saw Hannibal's words as indicating positive leadership skills ('a great pep talk'); others sensed a degree of bravado linked with his later failures. Both approaches were credited, those who recognised both possibilities even more highly. Moving on to the essay question (04), this was clearly a well-prepared and understood topic. Many answers were a delight to read as they used detailed knowledge of Hannibal's decisions and the situation in Rome to argue their case. There was occasional confusion, as in previous years, caused by the gap in set reading between books 22 and 29 of Livy. Some saw Scipio Africanus as setting off for his final victory push shortly after Fabius Maximus was declared Dictator. This led some candidates astray in reaching their conclusions. Occasionally the desire to narrate persisted, resulting in some able candidates only addressing the title in a short closing paragraph, if at all. Overall, though, this question was well done with very few poor answers.

Option B

As outlined in the general comments, this Option was neither popular nor well done. There was a feeling that the few candidates who tried it were shying away from Option A rather than positively selecting Option B. Three of the candidates failed to score on 05, the other two gaining a single mark apiece. Question 06 was even worse, with no marks scored at all. One

candidate wrote a very good answer to Question 07, showing a firm knowledge of the events of 212 and setting the passage in context, but the others only reached Level 2. The essay on Fabius Maximus, for which both set authors provide ample material, produced one answer at Level 4, two at Level 3 and two at Level 2. The Level 4 essay revealed a clear knowledge of the career and tactics of Fabius, acknowledging the potential irony in any comparison with Hannibal, but making a good case for just such an argument. The essay even went so far as to suggest that Fabius was a far more successful general than Hannibal, at least in the simple terms of who came out on top in the long run. Unfortunately, this essay sat alone. It must be repeated that Plutarch is as important to this unit as Livy and that there is no substitute for a good knowledge of the basic facts when answering either short answer questions or the longer essays.

Section Two

Option C

Question 09 asked candidates to assess the importance of Scipio Africanus to the defeat of Hannibal. Some restricted themselves to a chronological survey of his career, leaving any judgement to a final paragraph. These candidates tended to make up the 50% or so whose marks sat within Levels 2 and 3. Most gave good coverage to the major events in his career, but those who went on to consider other factors which weighed against Hannibal (his own judgement, the efforts of Fabius Maximus etc.), and tried to apportion degrees of importance to these made up the 43% who were awarded Level 4 or 5 marks. Nearly 10% of candidates argued their case so well that they reached Level 5, generally rating Scipio's contribution highly; often he was seen as the right man to cash in on the earlier efforts of Fabius and the drift from pre-eminence of Hannibal, although many candidates warned against taking Livy's portrait of perfection at face value. As mentioned earlier, a number of candidates seem to be unaware that eleven long years have passed since Cannae before the events of Book 29 begin. These years do not need to be recounted in detail, but candidates do need to provide an outline of Scipio's progress and show understanding that the change from Fabian tactics to the more aggressive approach of Scipio did not happen overnight in the weeks that followed Cannae. The tensions within the Roman Senate were also often passed over quickly if they were mentioned at all. In conclusion, there was much good work here: most candidates responded with enthusiasm and understanding to Livy's portrayal of Scipio Africanus but, as usual, some failed to focus on the specific question asked.

Option D

The last time a 30-mark essay was set comparing Livy and Plutarch as sources (2009), it was generally badly done. Weaknesses of approach brought out in the report included a failure to use specific examples from each author to support and emphasise points made, a lack of knowledge of the dates and contexts in which each author was writing, little understanding of how these affected their style, purpose and reliability and, perhaps most basically, the fact that one was seeking to write a history while the other was a biographer. Unfortunately, while some candidates showed an awareness of these factors, many still had little or no idea about these key points. As a result, nearly half of the candidates answering this question failed to reach at Level 3, relying on very general accounts featuring wildly inaccurate dates (resulting in Plutarch researching by talking to survivors of Cannae for example), misunderstandings of literary form and, consequently, many heartfelt but completely unsustainable conclusions. Given that the specification for this unit requires study in the areas of history and politics *and literature*, it is not unreasonable to expect candidates to be familiar with the dates, background and genres of literature of the two set authors. On a brighter note, there were some very good responses, setting Plutarch firmly in his 1st century AD Greco-Roman setting and bringing out his skill in

giving us a 3-dimensional view of Fabius the man. Many made the point that, while Livy may give every blow of a battle which Plutarch skirts over in a sentence or two, Plutarch fills in the gaps and adds a human side to the tales of the main protagonists. Importantly, stronger candidates recognised Plutarch's debt to Livy (not the other way round as several essays suggested), while using examples such as Plutarch's stories of Fabius' childhood to point out what the biographer adds. Finally, while concerns over the reliability of both sources are worth mentioning, the inclusion of lengthy prepared paragraphs warning against believing anything from either author tends to jar by the sudden change of style and loss of focus, especially when the message contradicts what has been said earlier.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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