



**General Certificate of Education
June 2012**

Classical Civilisation 2020

CIV3B: The Persian War

Report on the Examination

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CIV3B The Persian Wars

General Comments

The examiners were pleased, once again, to see a substantial number of students for this unit. The standard of the best work was again extremely high and there were some scripts of outstanding quality. We were pleased to observe that teachers and students were recognising that this paper makes demands on the capacity to examine its prescribed texts as evidence of early literary response to the events which underlie them, rather than treating them as the basis for a simple military narrative: it seemed clear that Aeschylus was well studied and integrated into answers, rather than treated merely as an appendix to Herodotus. The quality of writing was generally good, as was students' ability to handle concepts and classical values, and there were fewer this year who thought that parading their knowledge of Greek dramatic terms ought to be enough in itself.

Section One

Option A

This option was significantly less popular than Option B, and in general responses were poorer. Few answers to Question 01 could cite Mardonius' alternatives correctly as either an attack on the Peloponnese or for Xerxes to return to Persia, leaving Mardonius to fight on with 30,000 troops. There was a good deal of uncertainty about the circumstances of which Question 02 asked for an outline: an assessment of the Persian position after Salamis; Xerxes has already sent news of defeat to Persia and decided to go home, while obscuring his intentions by appearing to be prepared to fight again. Mardonius fears retribution from Xerxes for having supported the expedition in the first place and proposes his alternatives as both refusal to accept defeat at this point and as face-saving. Answers to Question 03 demonstrated greater familiarity with Artemisia both as a military strategist and as a respected source of advice to Xerxes. Some impressive answers to Question 04 were able to discuss Mardonius' whole career, his motivation, and his influence on Xerxes.

Option B

Answers to Question 05 were generally able to locate the dialogue between Atossa's account of her dream and the arrival of the Messenger. Most could also respond to Question 06 with identification of the 'spring of silver' as the mines at Laurion, though they made less of the significance of archery as a long-distance method of fighting which is presented as inferior to hand-to-hand infantry engagement.

There were some good answers to Question 07, which identified the dramatic significance of the scene as flagging the defeat which will be announced, looking back to Athenian defeat of Persians at Marathon by Athenians (and Plataeans) fighting as described in line 10. There is therefore an implication that the past will feed into the present, and the Persian court had better be very afraid of what they are about to hear. What follows is the account of Salamis, a sea rather than a land battle, but the overall implications of the superior moral position and courage of the Athenians is played against Xerxes' hubris and eventual downfall. Good responses to Question 08 were effective in considering both the content of the text and its form, and thought about the Greeks' and particularly Athenians' conditioning by ideals of democracy, co-operation and freedom, bravery and dedication to these causes, which will carry them through against superior numbers. They were able to contrast them with the Persians, presented by contrast, as disorganised, hubristic and irrational, running an enslaved army. The Persian characteristics are particularly illustrated by the presentation of Xerxes, both in report and actuality, contrasted strongly with the older and more sympathetic personalities of Atossa and Darius

Section Two

Option C

Most answers to Question 09 viewed the question as an opportunity to deal with both human and divine consultation, and were able to provide some well-supported analysis of the role of advisers and conferences as well as oracles in both texts, including Herodotus' accounts of the origins and development of the Ionian revolt, the role of assembly decisions and oracles throughout, the pre-Marathon conferences among the Greek forces, the discussions which led to Xerxes' decision to invade Greece in Book VII, decisions before Salamis and the part played in them by Themistocles, and the roles played by individual advisers. Aeschylus' use of the Persian elders, Darius and Atossa and their interactions figured prominently too.

Option D

Answers to Question 10 were generally very well conceived, usually by students who attempted this question in conjunction with Option B. Most concentrated on the role of Xerxes as an outstanding example of hubris and its consequences in both texts, noting that both texts present him as one who has brought about his own downfall, not least through lack of respect for the gods (Aeschylus' Persian gods are the Greek ones, treated in a Greek way) who take their revenge. Some also found time to look at other examples in Herodotus, such as Miltiades and Mardonius.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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