



**General Certificate of Education
June 2011**

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 candidates for this unit. The standard of the best work was again extremely high, and there were some scripts of outstanding quality. Examiners were pleased to observe that candidates recognised that this paper requires the capacity to examine the 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.

Many candidates had well-developed analytical skills which they demonstrated in their answers to the 10 and 20-mark questions. As last year, there was less evidence than in the previous specification of difficulty in time-management, though a small number of candidates still devoted too much time to the 20-mark essay at the evident expense of the 40-mark synoptic question. There is still a tendency to devote more time than is sensible to extending the scope of answers to the 5-mark questions as a narrative rather than concentrating on the key details for which they ask. There was encouraging evidence of detailed textual knowledge and sophisticated judgement, and of some excellent and committed teaching. Once again, however, the examiners noted some candidates with extremely poor writing and spelling skills. There is still a visible tendency for a few less sophisticated candidates to provide narrative rather than analytical answers, or to use everything they remember about a particular topic, whether appropriate to the question or not.

Section One

Option A

Option A was marginally the less popular of the two stimulus questions. Correct answers to Question 01 identified the oracle quoted as the second Delphic response to the Athenians' attempts to extract satisfactory advice on their reaction to Xerxes' advance; a common mistake was to confuse this episode with the decision to use silver for the fleet, and so give the wrong circumstances. Correct answers to Question 01 led to some excellent responses to Question 02 on Herodotus' treatment of the subsequent debate on interpretation of the oracle and the significance of the 'wooden walls'. This was frequently followed in Question 03 by knowledgeable accounts of, and judgements on, Themistocles' reactions and his later career, and their importance to Athens' survival.

Option B

Option B was slightly more popular than Option A. A number of answers to Question 04 discussed the speech itself and effectively anticipated the content of Question 05, rather than providing a short account of the immediate circumstances of its delivery just before Darius and Atossa give way to the returning Xerxes. The best answers to Question 05 recognised Aeschylus' use of Darius as a superior template for Xerxes and were also able to argue that Aeschylus covers up Darius' own dubious military record to emphasise the comparison. Most candidates were able to respond to Question 06 in the light of the visible connections between the possible messages expressed by *The Persians* and the socio-political context of Athens in the 470s BC; there was less readiness to respond on its dramatic conventions and consequent effects.

Section Two

Option C

Question 07 was by far the more popular of the synoptic questions and very evidently seen (perhaps by the unwary) as the easier. The better answers recognised a need for an analytical approach to the use by both Herodotus and Aeschylus of individuals as a focus, and used themes, comparisons and explanations rather than descriptive narrative. The best answers were indeed able to analyse and compare the ways in which the authors used their characters, occasionally ably counterpointing this with their use of 'masses' too.

Option D

Option D may perhaps have been selected by some slightly more able candidates as a slightly more obvious stimulus for debate. It was generally well answered, and some quite sophisticated and nuanced work emerged here, with able analyses of concepts of culture as well as knowledge and reportage of individual behavioural stories.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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