



General Certificate of Education

Classical Civilisation

CIV2A Homer *Iliad*

Report on the Examination

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CIV2A Homer *Iliad*

The majority of candidates had clearly enjoyed their reading of the *Iliad* and wrote at good length on both of their chosen essay questions. There were few really poor answers this year, and a gratifyingly large number which were a pleasure to read. The short introductory questions in Option B (chosen by approximately three quarters of candidates) were somewhat better done than their equivalents in Option A. For the 10-mark questions, candidates who paid close attention to the passage in constructing their responses did best. Answers from the two options had a very similar mean score, although Question 04 provided rather more high level marks. As last year the highest scoring attempts at all the longer essay questions were those that went beyond mere narrative and offered continuous analysis; it is not enough to leave evaluation to a brief concluding paragraph. Of the two 20-mark questions, Question 09 on Achilles/Patroclus was generally better done than Question 05 on Zeus, although the Zeus essay produced some of the very best responses. The 30-mark question (Question 10) on mortal women was by far the more popular choice and generally revealed sound knowledge of the characters concerned; the minority choice on speeches (Question 11), however, also produced some excellent answers.

Option A

Most candidates started well, showing in their answers to Question 01 that they were well acquainted with the reasons for Hera's antagonism towards Troy. A surprising number, however, then went on to confuse Hera's general request made to Zeus in Question 02 (to send Athene to restart the fighting) with the more specific actions of Athene in carrying out these instructions required for Question 03; this led to a tendency to confuse the two answers or simply repeat the answer to Question 02 under 03. Moving on to the 10-mark question (Question 04) on Zeus, the strongest section of most answers was that relating to his personality; many recognised the mix of awesome power and human fallibility reflected in the passage; often candidates went on to quote widely in support of their arguments. The relationship with Hera was sometimes less well covered; occasionally Zeus' double-edged attitude to her was missed and he was simply seen as happily giving way. The 20-mark Zeus question (Question 05) produced a pleasing number of Level 5 answers; these essays did not merely use the bullet points to catalogue Zeus' actions throughout the poem, but looked at the complexities of his position, caught between Fate, relationships with fellow deities and obligations to humans, as individuals and in groups. Weaker answers failed to consider whether this passage was typical, often discussing instead the Sarpedon episode in isolation and to the exclusion of most other material. There were some interesting debates regarding how much influence Zeus actually had, but some weaker answers revealed serious errors of understanding, in a few cases accusing Zeus quite unfairly of reshaping Fate for his own amusement.

Option B

The two short questions here presented little difficulty to most candidates, many of whom provided in Question 07 a very full account of the fate of Patroclus. References seemingly inspired by the film *Troy* were fewer this year, but there remained an occasional tendency here and in Question 09 to believe that Patroclus was fooling his own Myrmidons by disguising himself as Achilles. Pleasingly in Question 08, most candidates reached at least Level 3, invariably by employing examples from the passage to illustrate Patroclus' shift from exasperation to desperation via a range of other emotions; many made good use of the 'grey sea' metaphor and the insult implied by questioning heredity in the Greek world. Candidates pointed out here (or in Question 09) that nobody else would have got away with such insults. The relatively few weak answers here tended to be over-general, occasionally making no

reference at all to the passage. On the other hand a few candidates quoted two or three line sections (particularly the metaphor) then failed to offer any explanation or analysis of these lines. Question 09 on the Achilles/Patroclus relationship was by far the more popular of the two 20-mark essays; many candidates, however, focused too heavily on the events of Books 16 and 18. Vital as these are, some reference to the earlier books is necessary to examine the proposition thoroughly, while many of the best essays also made use of events after the mutilation of Hector's body to provide balance. The events of Book 11 were often omitted (Nestor gives real insight into the relationship here), while the appearance of Patroclus' ghost in Book 23 was rarely mentioned. Finally, some candidates were over-eager to investigate notions of a sexual side to the heroes' relationship; they would be well advised not to dwell too long on this to the detriment of elements covered by Homer's text.

Option C

This question on female characters offered a good pool of factual material for constructing a response, and consequently there were very few poor answers. Many candidates took a rather black and white approach, sometimes contradicting themselves a number of times as they examined each character. Some identified a possible conflict, with the high importance of a character to the overall plot set against that character's limited role within the storyline; these candidates tended to fare well, often employing a degree of sophistication which reached the higher level marks. This was most obvious when dealing with the slave girls in Book 1, but also led to some very interesting discussions on the position of Helen. One or two candidates spoke well of Andromache symbolically leaving her regular domestic setting for the meeting with Hector in Book 6; many overlooked the subtleties of this encounter, simply relegating her to the background for being 'ignored' by Hector. Much was written about the position of women in Greek society (Hecabe being a regular example here); occasionally this was woven into a fascinating counter-argument to the proposition in the title, even going so far in a few cases as to claim quite convincingly that the men and their fighting represent the background, while the women are up front in the 'real world'.

Option D

The relatively small number of answers to this question suggests that candidates feel more confident in dealing with specific character studies than concepts such as use of speeches. Interestingly, over half of those who wrote on speeches achieved at least Level 4, usually by citing key examples to illustrate a number of the characters referred to in the bullet points. In such a wide ranging question it is not expected that candidates will give an exhaustive analysis of all seven named characters, but a number impressed examiners by focusing on the exchanges between Achilles and Agamemnon, then adding a look at the many sides of Helen as revealed in her speeches; her self-condemnation often provided graphic opportunities for quotation, but there were a number of accounts that looked with great empathy at her predicament. Some weaker attempts either lost sight early on of the need to look at these characters through the medium of speeches or, in a very few cases, did not refer to speeches at all.