



General Certificate of Education

Classical Civilisation

CIV3B The Persian Wars

Report on the Examination

2010 examination – June series

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CIV3B: The Persian Wars

General Comments

The examiners were pleased to see a substantial number of candidates for this examination. The standard of the best work was extremely high, and there were some scripts of outstanding quality. Many candidates had well-developed analytical skills which they demonstrated in their answers to the 10 and 20-mark questions. There was little evidence of difficulty in time-management, though a few candidates devoted too much time to the 20-mark essay at the evident expense of the 40-mark synoptic question. There was encouraging evidence of sophisticated judgement, sensitivity and perception, and of some excellent and committed teaching. However, all the examiners noted some candidates with extremely poor writing and spelling skills. There is 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.

In the old specification this topic always had some extremely committed candidates with good historical and evidential sense. The examiners were pleased to see a noticeably enhanced engagement with *The Persians* in the new specification, and some very good discussion of Herodotus' handling of two major battle-narratives in responses to Question 03. That said, there were some obvious confusion between the two authors, notably in answers to Question 04 and 05.

Option A

Most answers to Question 01 identified five key moments or battle-tactics in the development of the battle of Marathon, including the Athenian charge, and the use of a weaker centre and stronger wings to envelop the Persian advance. There were some perceptive responses to Question 02, which noted both Herodotus' interest in the political and strategic preliminaries to the battle and the Homeric echoes in his treatment of it as a significant moment in the collective national memory. Good answers to Question 03 built on this to demonstrate that Herodotus draws some interesting parallels between Marathon and Salamis and the events and actions which preceded them: the priorities of the Persian monarchs, a focus on the principal military leaders, important earlier battles and their consequences, the inter-state rivalries, Athens as a source of leadership, and his accounts of the battles themselves.

Option B

Option B attracted fewer answers. Most could identify the passage as part of the Messenger's account of the battle of Salamis, which informs Atossa and the Persian elders about the outcomes of an expedition about which they already have serious worries. Good answers to Question 05 then enlarged on the dramatic effects of the speech on an audience of Athenians who had been affected by the events recounted, and many of whom had been actively involved. Answers to Question 06 commented on the speech as a central and vivid narrative set-piece in a play without a complex plot; it determines the nature of much of the rest of the play, and it sets up a contrast with both dialogue and choral ode in the way the play is composed.

Option C

Some excellent answers to Question 07 responded to its prompt for a discussion of both authors' emphasis on the differing natures of the opposing sides. Aeschylus gives a sense of an enormous army generated by a widespread and multi-ethnic empire but presented, at least by implication, as a faceless mass below command rank, pitched against much smaller and more intrepid forces (see the exchange between Atossa and the Chorus about the Athenians), with a very high-quality of strategic leadership (hinted at in the Messenger speech). Darius gives a forceful view of the nature and extent of Xerxes' failure as against his predecessors'

successes in the speech to Atossa and the Chorus.

Herodotus's prose account has more space to enlarge on matters of detail. He starts Book 7 with a picture of Darius' reaction to the news of Marathon in terms of military activity and enhancement of an already large force, which Xerxes continues. This sets a scene in which Herodotus can develop his accounts both of Xerxes' strategies and attitude, and of the activities of key Greek leaders, particularly Themistocles. He, like Aeschylus, gives a very detailed account of the make-up and nature of the forces involved, supported by occasional information such as a reference to the time it took for the force to cross the Hellespont on the boat bridge. He gets into numbers not long before he gives us his Thermopylae narrative, which lays emphasis on the small force and its heroic resistance. His account of Salamis in Book 8 reinforces the idea that the Greeks are successful both despite and, to a certain extent, because of their smaller and more mobile and motivated forces, and that is the later perception of the events in question. Herodotus is careful to give the reader a sense of what the Greeks, and the Athenians in particular, are defending. Their conduct of their defence, it could be said, has to depend on superior tactics and the best use of a smaller force of motivated men confronted by a larger force with superior or at least more generous equipment and infrastructure.

Option D

Many good answers to Question 08 discussed the two authors' contrasting accounts of the differences between Greek and Persian attitudes to freedom, often relating them to relative size of states and military manpower. The examples discussed included: the content of Aeschylus' messenger speech, and particularly the call to arms from the Greek ships; the dialogue between Atossa and the Chorus about the nature of Athenian military commitment; Herodotus' presentation of the Greek states and their interactions with each other, not least when negotiating with non-Greeks; Xerxes' assumptions about how he should and can treat his army and deal with dissidents especially in Book 7; the contrast between this and both authors' presentation of the Greeks' strategic consensus tactics and their courage and conviction in defence of their freedoms. Herodotus' account of Thermopylae and of the pre-Salamis activity in Athens as a portrait of the things the Greeks are defending and the lengths to which they are prepared to go is particularly telling.