THE 2015 COLLEGE GREEK EXAM

In the Spring of 2015, 291 students from 34 colleges and universities took the seventh annual College Greek Exam (CGE), a national exam for students of ancient Greek, typically given in their second semester of a college sequence. This paper gives an analysis of the results of the 2015 exams (as well as a comparison to similar results on previous exams).

OVERALL STATISTICS

The tables below present the overall statistics of the seven College Greek Exams (2009-15) plus the 2008 pilot exam. The exam consists of 40 multiple-choice questions divided into two parts. The first part consists of grammar questions, while the second part asks students questions on a passage about the Amazons. The number of students and institutions taking the exam is given first. The high score (out of 40) follows; the number of students with this score is given in parentheses. The next two rows give the overall average and median scores. The overall average then is broken down into the average score for the first part and the average score for the second part on the passage. From 2008-2013 there were 30 questions for Pt. 1 and 10 for pt. 2. In 2014 the distribution was changed such that Pt. I consisted of 28 questions, while Pt. II had 12 questions. Again in 2015, more questions were added in Pt. 2 so that the distribution was 25 questions for Pt. 1 and 15 for Pt. 2. This distribution places a little more emphasis on testing their grammatical knowledge and comprehension in context. The last row gives the average for the comprehension questions on the passage with the number of comprehension questions in parentheses.

	2008 Pilot	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
No. of students	78	311	239	370	473	366
No. of institutions	10	35	24	33	50	40
High Score	36(3)	38 (5)	40 (2)	39 (1)	40(1)	37 (3)
Overall Avg.	58%	62.06%	65.76%	56.7%	54.15%	56.35%
Median	55.6	62.55	65	57.5	52.5	55.26
Avg. Q 1-30	57.78%	62.91%	65.5%	56.56%	52.12%	55.76%
Avg. Q 31-40	58.46%	59.54%	66.57%	57.17%	60.25%	58.26%
Avg. Comp. Quest.	64.74% (2)	59.55% (4)	62.3% (1)	57.6% (4)	75% (4)	56.28%(4)

	Spring 2014	Fall 2014
No. of students	294	25
No. of institutions	40	4
High Score	39 (1)	35 (1)
Overall Average	51.1%	53.2%
Median	50	50
Avg. Q 1-28	47.57%	49.71%
Avg. Q 29-40	59.08%	61.33%
Avg. Compr. Q.	58.2% (5)	57.6 %(5)

	2015
No. of students	291
No. of institutions	34
High Score	37 (2)
Overall Average	51.97%
Median	50
Avg. Q 1-25	53.64%
Avg. Q 26-40	49.17%
Avg. Compr. Q.	49.47% (6)

You can see that this year's overall average and median scores were about the same as the scores in 2014. The overall average for S2014 was the lowest since the exam began. This year's average is only slightly higer. Also the median score of 50 for 2014 and 2015 is the lowest since the exam began. The difference between the averages for Pt. 1 and 2 are a little over 4% apart, in contrast to the 2014 exams in which the difference was over 10% apart. In the past the averages for the two sections of the exam have been very close (less than one percentage point in 2011), except in 2012, where there was an 8% difference. Finally note that this is also the lowest average for comprehension questions since the beginning of the exam. For the 2015 exam, there were one question in which students scored in the 90% range and one in which they scored in the 80% range; there were seven questions in which the students scored in the 70% range and seven in the 60% range. The rest of the questions fell under 60%.

FORMAT AND ANALYSIS OF THE 2015 COLEGE GREEK EXAM

Let us then turn to the analysis of the exam. Since I will not be able to cover every question on the exam, I shall concentrate on the ones in which the students did well and poorly. I shall begin with the high scores and then turn to the low scores.

Q 19 received the highest score. It asked, "The English noun cephalopod derives from the Greek noun?" 92.1% of the students saw that it derived from κεφαλή. Students have usually done well with these questions scoring as high as 97.5%. However in 2011 and 2012 they had more difficulties seeing that mathematics came from μανθάνω (55.2%) and pathetic from πάσχω (50.7%).

Q 13 was second on the list asking students what was the best translation of the Greek sentence: τῇδε τῇ νυκτὶ ὅδε ὁ ξένος εἰς τὴν τῶν ἀδελφῶν πόλιν ἦλθεν. Here 89% correctly chose C: "On this night this stranger came into the brothers' city." This is the only 'best translation" question from Greek to English on the exam. A conscious effort had been made to reduce the number of such questions since the 2010 exam where there were ten such questions, because it was thought that it was easier for students to translate from English to Greek than vice versa. This is probably one of the factors in the drop in scores after 2010 (65.76%(2010) to 56.7% (2011) = fourth row of the top chart).

Third place went to Q 30, a comprehension question on the passage asking what we can infer about the Amazons from lines 2-3. 79.7% saw that the Amazons (a) were armed with iron and the first to ride on horses."

Q3 on the translation of the aorist participle ποιήσαντες received the next highest score. 78.4% correctly answered "having made." 11.3% took it as a present participle, "being made." So students did well in distinguising the different tenses of the participle.

Another comprehension question rounds out the top five scores. Asked about what is said in lines 3-4, 77.7% saw "that the Amazons were the first to use horsebak riding to pursue the enemy." (answer b) 12.7% chose (c) "the Amazons were riding their horses while the enemy pursued them."

Now let us turn to the low scores. The lowest score was on Q 39, another comprehension question, where students were asked about what is said in lines 5-6. Only 11.3% corectly answered (a) "The Amazons ruled many people." The majority (60.1%) chose (d) "Many nations around their land began to hear of their great glory." 23% chose (c) "The Amazons began to listen to many stories about the great glory of their land." The students clearly had problems in translating this sentence. Is ἄρχουσαι a factor, i.e. begin vs. rule? Does the reference to lines 5-6 play a role? That is to say, were they thinking that the answer should encompass the whole of line 6?

Another comprehension question, no. 34, asking about lines 4-5, also proved problematic for students. Here only 20.6% correctly picked (a) "The Amazons were reckoned more as men than women." 58.4% went with (d) "The Amazons believed that women had more courage than men by nature."; 16.8% chose (c) "The Amazons believed that men had more courage thann woman by nature." Here the difficulty seems to arise because the majority of the students took ἐνομίζοντο as active (i.e. believed) as opposed to medio-passive (were reckoned).

Next, for Q 29, 21.3% of the students correctly answered that the adjective πάντων in line 3 referred to (d) ἄνθρωποι. The majority (62.5%) went with (a) the Amazons.

The fourth lowest score, Q 27, was asked about the contract verb ἔζων in line 1 of the passage. 21.6% saw that it must be taken as a 3rd person plural verb. 44.3% thought that it was the nominative singular participle, ignoring the augment. Also the only nominatives in the sentence are plural. Another 27.8% took it as a genitive plural participle, but again there is no genitive plural for it to agree with. Last year for Q 16 we asked students to translate ἔζων. Here 37% (S2014) vs. 20% (F2014) correctly answered: "they were living." A major distractor was the participle "sitting": 27% (S 2014) vs. 36% (F 2014). Thus, the students had difficulties in recognizing the finite forms of contract verbs.

Finally, we have Q 23 on comparison. Here the students were given a sentence and asked to fill in the blank: ἡ ἀλήθεια κρείττων _____ ἐστίν. 23.4% of the students chose the genitive τῆς ἡδονῆς. 38.8% chose the accusative τὴν ἡδονήν; 26.5% picked the nominative ἡ ἡδονή. Students clearly need to distinguish the various ways in which comparison can be made.

Conclusions

Let me start by reiterating that the scores for Pt. 1 and Pt. 2 were fairly close and this is in line with what we have seen on previous exams, except for 2012 and 2014. What is noticeable for the results of the 2015 exam is that six questions in Pt. 2 (four being comprehension questions) have figured in the top and bottom five scores. In the past few years, this has generally not been the case. For the most part, the top and bottom five scores have focused on Pt. 1 with at most one or two questions from Pt. 2. We have, for example, often spoken about the low scores that have centered around agreement of adjectives and nouns of different declensions. So it is interesting that this year six of the scores are on questions in Pt. 2. While it is difficult to compare the results for questions in Pt. 2, since the passage changes every year, it is something we should watch in the future as the number of questions in Pt. 2 has increased.