

A LEVEL

Examiners' report

CLASSICAL CIVILISATION

H408

For first teaching in 2017

H408/32 Summer 2023 series

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Introduction

Our examiners' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates.

The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. A selection of candidate answers is also provided. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

Where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report.

A full copy of the question paper and the mark scheme can be downloaded from OCR.

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Paper 32 series overview

The most effective responses to this paper were those in which candidates rooted their responses in knowledge and understanding of the four key authors: Sappho, Plato, Ovid and Seneca. Starting from a basis of clear and appropriately selected material from these authors, whether in direct quotation or close reference and paraphrase, the strongest performing candidates were then able to manipulate and extrapolate from their examples in order to provide a full discussion about the question at hand. These responses also got stuck in to answering the question and outlining their argument immediately, rather than giving an overview of the lives of the authors, the genres of their works, or the time periods in which they were living.

In the 30 mark questions, scholarship was used to best effect by those candidates who incorporated and embedded ideas from two or more named critics into their argument and made evaluative comments about how far they agreed or disagreed with these scholarly ideas. Those who did not use scholars in the 30 mark essay were unable to achieve the higher marks within a level for AO2. The highest level of AO2 for the 30 mark questions were given to those who had a balanced treatment of the authors required by the question, often with direct comparisons or contrasts being drawn between them all. Also, those candidates who explored the key words of these questions were more often able to argue effectively and reach a sustained judgement, which is also applicable to the 20 mark question.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • incorporated short, direct quotations from the Sappho extract and gave clear analytical interpretations of their chosen material in Question 3 • offered specific examples from Plato's work of how he advises men to deal with desire in Question 5 • compared and contrasted Plato and Sappho with specific examples from both in Question 6 • cited and discussed ideas from two separate, named scholars in the 30 mark question. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • made vague or generic points on the 10 mark questions not focused on the passage or the specific question asked • confused the philosophy or works of Plato and Seneca • focused too much on one author where two (or more) were prescribed • did not explore or think carefully enough about what exactly each question was asking.

Section A overview

Candidates generally performed well on the short response questions and we saw many very good analyses of both the Sappho and Plato 10 mark questions. Candidates seemed to find Question 6 more demanding, with focus sometimes being lost in listing examples of how each author defined love rather than evaluating which gave the clearer definition.

Strong responses to the 10 mark questions gave specific, short examples either from the source or from the required author's ideas and explained clearly and briefly how they answered the question.

Strong responses to the 20 mark questions compared and contrasted Plato and Sappho's definitions of love, returning frequently to discussion and analysis of which was the clearer and why.

Question 1 (a)

Source A

Sappho, *He is as blessed as a god* (Loeb 31)

1 (a) On which island did Sappho live? [1]

Most responses to this question were correct with the occasional spelling error e.g. Lesbos which was not generally penalised.

Question 1 (b)

(b) Give **one** of the two centuries in which Sappho composed her poetry. [1]

Responses to this question were varied. A range of responses were given, from the correct 7th/6th century to 1st century AD. Some candidates gave a year, rather than a century (e.g. 250 BC) which was not given a mark.

Question 2

2 Give **two** types of occasion when Sappho might have performed her poetry. [2]

Candidates responded well to this question, with a range of correct answers given. More generic responses such as 'at parties' were not thought to be specific enough and were not given a mark. A few candidates offered more than two responses, which was not necessary, and if one was incorrect, cost them a mark.

Question 3

3 Explain how Sappho creates a powerful description of desire in **Source A**.

Support your answer using evidence from **Source A**.

[10]

The best responses selected quotations which covered the whole passage and directly addressed why these were examples of Sappho creating powerful desire. The 'delicate fire' metaphor was identified and discussed effectively, but interpretations of 'greener than grass' to signify illness or jealousy rather than the ancient meaning of filled with desire, or a Homeric reference to fear, while very frequently used, were considered weaker. Better responses noted the strong sensory theme, particularly pointing out the irony in Sappho the lyric poet being struck dumb by the sight of her former lover, and understood the potential reference to orgasm in the poem.

Misconception



Some candidates thought the object of Sappho's affections in the poem was the male character rather than the female, which prevented them from accessing the highest marks on AO1.

Question 4

In his writing Plato attempts to define love and offers descriptions of the power of desire.

4 In which city did Plato live for most of his life?

[1]

The majority of candidates gave the correct response to this question, however a number thought that Plato spent his life in Rome.

Question 5

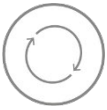
5 Describe how Plato suggests that men should deal with feelings of desire.

[10]

Effective responses recognised that Plato suggests many conflicting and sometimes contradictory ways for men to handle feelings of desire, including encouraging pederastic relationships in the *Symposium*, but being vehemently opposed to homoerotic relationships of any kind in the *Laws*. The most successful responses identified a variety of examples such as restraining desire like Socrates for either Alcibiades (in the *Symposium*) or Charmides (in the *Charmides*), or indulging in it for the benefits of procreation or the state. Candidates explained Plato's stance in each case. Many candidates referred to Socrates as a mouthpiece for Plato's own beliefs, which was felt to be a useful viewpoint.

Weaker responses struggled to identify specific examples and instead wrote more generically about an Athenian/Platonic stance on desire.

Assessment for learning



Although there is no prescribed text for Plato (or Seneca), candidates still need to show their knowledge of each author's philosophies, beliefs and ideas through specific examples from their works. Strong marks for AO1 are gained from citing key ideas and notable examples given in paraphrase from named works by the authors.

Exemplar 1

In the speech of Diotima, Plato also notes that desire ought to be overcome as it merely ~~represents~~ appears the bottom rung on the ladder of love. Diotima states that first one loves the beauty in one body, followed then by all bodies; these two stages represent common love and sexual desire. Diotima states that, from this, the individual must then find appreciation of the mind, institutions, knowledge and, finally, beauty itself. In this speech, Plato presents desire as something which must therefore be overcome in order to achieve true being or at least gain a greater understanding of love itself.

In Exemplar 1, the candidate has stated their example right at the start of their paragraph and explained the stages of Diotima's ladder in more depth. This demonstrates both knowledge and understanding. In the final sentence they have used some of the words of the question to demonstrate how their well explained example answers the question of how Plato advises men to deal with desire. This last sentence also distinguishes between love and desire, a marker of high level understanding.

Question 6*

6* Assess whether Sappho or Plato gives a clearer definition of love.

You may use **Source A** as a starting point in your answer. You should make reference to Sappho's poems, as well as Plato's ideas on love.

[20]

The best responses to this question set out immediately what each author's definition of love was and explored how they were similar and different. Some candidates created a set of criteria, e.g. what does each author say about homoerotic relationships, marriage, and sexual relationships, which gave a strong steer to their responses. This allowed candidates to select a range of relevant and appropriate examples to support their judgements. These responses often used the fact that Sappho and Plato were writing for different purposes to good effect, highlighting that Sappho's poetry is designed either as very personal or for public celebrations of love (epithalamia) whereas Plato was developing an intellectual ideal.

The best responses included discussion of different types of love, including Sappho's poems about her daughter, mother and brother and explored the conflicts within Plato's works in greater depth. Less successful responses were often limited on either Sappho or Plato, relying too heavily on Source A, or lacking in the specificity or depth of knowledge on Plato's ideas about love.

Misconception



Some candidates became confused not just with the names but with the philosophy and events of Plato's works the *Phaedrus*, Phaedrus the character in the *Symposium* and Seneca's *Phaedra*. This was commonly seen in both the 20 mark and 30 mark questions, meaning candidates were drawing conclusions and basing arguments on inaccurate information.

Exemplar 2

Sappho on the other hand, gives clear definitions of love through the lens of her own relationships - not only does she define romantic love but also familial; her love for her daughter is intense, and her love for her brothers makes her protective of them. In this sense her definition of familial love is clearer than Plato's. She is also clear on the importance of love as part of its definition - it is "the most beautiful sight in all the world", and her love for her daughter renders the latter more important to Sappho than "all of Lydia" - Sappho is clear that in love, one's lover becomes the most important thing. Sappho is also extremely clear on the emotions that are part of love, such as the happy memories it can create - "we had good times", or the anguish and pain ~~as~~ it can cause - "weeping, she was leaving me". Sappho is very clear in ~~the~~ her definition of love ~~includes~~ which includes the emotions it provokes.

In Exemplar 2, the candidate has begun the Sappho section of their response by signposting what they are going to discuss which is Sappho's personal, familial relationships. This indicates this candidate's understanding of different types of love which Sappho presents in her poetry. The candidate goes on to give a judgement, that Sappho is clearer than Plato on familial love and then gives examples both in paraphrase and quotation from four separate poems. These examples are effective because they are short, focused on illustrating familial love and then expand out into a comparison with romantic love. This shows high calibre development.

Section B overview

There was a preference among candidates for Question 7 over Question 8 for the 30 mark question. Successful responses to Question 7 assessed each of Seneca, Sappho and Ovid equally and weighed counter arguments about whether Seneca ever celebrated desire and whether Sappho or Ovid ever feared it. Less successful responses focused too heavily one or two of the authors, not leaving enough time for the other(s).

Question 8 tended to produce very good or much weaker responses. The best responses addressed both the 'positive force' and 'self-improvement' aspects of this question with close reference to examples from Seneca, Plato and Ovid. Less successful responses tended to take more from Sappho, from whose work it was more difficult to address self-improvement, or attempted to tackle all four authors on a more superficial level. The majority of candidates lost sight or did not define self-improvement clearly enough and resultingly did not respond to the question effectively.

There was no advantage to approaching either essay on an author by author basis, or taking a more thematic approach. Both approaches were seen in successful responses.

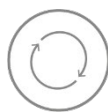
Question 7*

7* 'Seneca fears desire, but Sappho and Ovid celebrate it.'

Assess to what extent you agree with this statement. Justify your response with close reference to the poetry and philosophy you have studied. [30]

Candidates showed generally very good knowledge of examples from each of these authors, although there is notably less specificity of examples from Seneca. The best responses discussed that, as a Stoic, Seneca feared not desire itself but the effects of an excess of desire. It was felt that arguments about Seneca's accrued wealth, status and potential hypocrisy were useful in forming part of this discussion. Knowledge of Sappho's wedding night poems and understanding of the fear of virginity loss that accompanies the bawdy tone of e.g. 'Raise the roof' and 'The doorkeeper' were also deployed well as examples of Sappho fearing desire. The very best responses considered Ovid's mock didactic tropes and the context of the *'leges Iuliae'* and Augustan moral climate when assessing whether Ovid was truly celebrating desire. Less successful responses were heavily reliant on Sappho discussion which they had used elsewhere in the paper and did not give enough of a definition of desire.

Assessment for learning



Where there are terms such as 'fear' or 'celebrate' in a question, it is useful for candidates to define these at the outset and state their position in a short introduction. This, alongside a plan, is very helpful to candidates in organising their ideas, managing their time and in making their arguments clearer and more obvious to the examiners reading it.

Question 8*

8* 'Love is a positive force for self-improvement.'

Assess to what extent you agree with this statement. Justify your response with close reference to the poetry and philosophy of **at least three** writers/philosophers you have studied. **[30]**

The best responses to this question fully explored what being a positive force for self-improvement meant in the context of the authors they had selected. This question lent itself more naturally to incorporating discussion of Seneca, Plato and Ovid's works. All authors have a plethora of examples of how love can and cannot encourage people to improve themselves and the more successful responses recognised this. Better responses considered Seneca's marriage with his wife Paulina and him wanting to be better by virtue of her love. There was also discussion of Diotima's ladder of love and references to Pausanias' defence of erastes/eromenos relationships in the 'Symposium' and explored Ovid's motivations in helping women attract a partner. Weaker responses tended to focus more on whether love was positive or negative and gave no or only cursory treatment of the idea of self-improvement. Use of scholarship in this question was generally weaker and not as appositely chosen to illustrate arguments as in Question 7.

Assessment for learning



The two named scholars required for the 30 mark essay should be selected on the basis of relevance. There is no advantage to quoting or referring to many scholars if their arguments have only a passing relation to the topic at hand. It is better to include two well selected ideas and to discuss the relative merits of their critical perspectives than to pepper the essay with multiple ideas without consideration of how salient or useful the quotations or ideas are to your argument.

Exemplar 3

While Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* appears entirely about self-improvement, it is unclear whether love or lust is the positive force driving this. According to Bishop, 'Ovid is writing about lust, not love', and, due to the advice on how best to have sex and trying many lovers, I'm inclined to agree. However, lust and love are not always separate. The *Ars Amatoria* goes into great detail about how to make oneself more attractive, in looks as well as many other things including mind, talent in terms of performing, and even laughter. These aspects elevate the individual, implying that, even if the purpose is not solely love, there is definitely self-improvement.

In Exemplar 3, this candidate has stated their position on Ovid's poetry at the outset of this paragraph and has addressed both the 'positive force' and 'self-improvement' aspect of Question 8. They have made use of a named scholar, Bishop, and engaged critically with the scholarly perspective by offering a comparison with the ancient material and then forming a judgement of their own. The candidate then develops this perspective with some overarching examples of Ovid's work and reaches a clear judgement on self-improvement. This response could be improved by more specific reference to the prescribed text of Ovid when the candidate is giving their broad examples.

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