

Examiners' report

A LEVEL

CLASSICAL CIVILISATION

**OCR Level 3 Advanced GCE in
Classical Civilisation**

H408

For first teaching in 2017

H408/32 Summer 2025 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 responses 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 [Teach Cambridge](#).

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Paper 32 series overview

The series this year has seen some excellent responses across all questions, with candidates really enjoying the opportunity to examine Plato and Sappho in the 20 mark extended response. Many candidates laid the groundwork for this with detailed and developed responses to the two 10 mark questions which asked them to think about the nature of Sappho's relationship with Atthis, one of her potential female lovers, and Plato's differentiation of desire for body and for mind. Responses to both the philosophical and the poetry based 30 mark questions demonstrated sound knowledge of Ovid and Seneca as well as the two authors set for previous questions on the paper.

More candidates this year found the short answer questions challenging, especially Question 3 about when Plato was writing and teaching philosophy. In terms of the extended response questions, it is pleasing to see scholarship being utilised and engaged with much more, with candidates at all levels incorporating multiple different scholars into their 30 mark essay questions, embedded and interweaving the arguments and using them as a foundation to explore their own personal responses.

The best 20 mark answers showed even knowledge between Sappho and Plato, comparing them at every stage of their argument and had a clear direction or plan at the outset. The 10 mark questions elicited a lot of good responses but the very best demonstrated a clear understanding and evaluation of the development of Atthis and Sappho's relationship (in whatever form they chose to interpret this) and showed significant range of knowledge and a wide variety of examples of both desire for the mind and body in Plato's works.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
- used very specific paraphrases or direct quotations from the prescribed works of Sappho and Ovid - used detailed and clear references to specific, named works of Plato and Seneca - developed their ideas and extended their points to their fullest conclusion and linked their ideas together - made judicious use of technical vocabulary or appropriate key terms - answered the questions incisively with a developed argument - compared the different authors or thinkers in each paragraph in their responses to the 20 and 30 mark questions - used two different named scholars in their 30 mark responses and engaged in a critical way with the arguments they were using - gave a clear personal response in their extended writing.	- relied heavily on the poems of Sappho printed on the paper for Questions 6 and/or 8 - made too general a reference to the ideas of Plato in Questions 5, 6 and 7 without using specific examples or named works - made broad assertions using little or unspecific evidence - misapplied technical vocabulary such as <i>erastes/eromenos</i> - lost focus on what the questions were asking or made comparisons outside of the remit of the questions - were imbalanced in their discussion of different authors or thinkers in their 20 and 30 mark responses - used scholarship in a tokenistic way or omitted use of scholarship altogether in their 30 mark answers - did not give their own opinions or judgements in their extended responses.

Section A overview

The stimulus 10 mark question on Sappho was answered generally to a high standard but there were relatively few excellent responses which really got to grips with the nuances and shifts in the relationship presented. Relatively few candidates, for example, noted that the line 'a clumsy little girl' could be interpreted in an affectionate, playful tone instead of in a derogatory or insulting way.

The Plato 10 mark question elicited some very strong knowledge of the various different speakers of the *Symposium* with some apposite examples from the *Phaedrus*, *Charmides*, *Laws* and *Republic* all cited also. The best responses to this question foregrounded their ideas of how desires for body and mind were presented 'differently' in Plato's works, rather than this being implied through their argument.

The 20 mark extended response was answered most effectively by candidates who took a more thematic approach, comparing and contrasting evidence from Sappho and Plato about same sex relationships in every paragraph. A small number of candidates referred erroneously to same sex marriages and conflated Sappho and Plato's timeline. The best responses made incisive commentary about the significant societal differences between Sappho and Plato's historical backdrops relative to the homoerotic experiences their works describe.

Source A**Sappho *Collected fragments* (Loeb 49, 96, 131)****Loeb 49**

I used to love you, Atthis,
 But that was a long time ago!
 I thought you were like
 A clumsy little girl.

Loeb 96**Often she turned her thoughts here**

...Sardis

[...]*

Often she turned her thoughts here

[...]*

She honoured you as if you were a goddess
 And she liked your songs best of all

5

But now she stands out among Lydian women!
 Like the rosy-fingered moon

Among all the stars after sunset!
 The light spreads over the salty sea
 And the flowery fields!

10

The beautiful dew falls,
 The roses and
 The tender chervil
 And the flowering melilot
 Bloom.

15

She paces up and down,
 She remembers gentle Atthis,
 And the longing consumes her flighty soul!

Loeb 131**Atthis, the thought of me**

Now repulses you
 and you run off
 to Andromeda.

Question 1

- 1 Sappho was thought to have run a **thiasos** (a school for wealthy young women). State **two** things Sappho's students might have been taught. [2]

A broad range of creditworthy answers to this question was included on the mark scheme and many candidates were awarded both marks. Those who did not receive full marks for this question often provided two ideas which were too similar e.g. religious worship and worship of Aphrodite. The clearest responses used ideas from Sappho's poetry, for example, about how to write poetry, how to dress, what to expect from a marriage/sexual relationship.

Question 2

- 2 Explain how Sappho presents her relationship with Atthis in **Source A**. Use references to **Source A** to support your answer. [10]

As reported above, there are many nuances and different perspectives to be explored in these passages which allow candidates to bring in a variety of interpretations to their response. Not enough advantage was taken of this to explore the three quite differing poems about Atthis; especially the ambiguity of perspective in poem 96. Many responses recognised and discussed well the clear progression and development of Atthis and Sappho's relationship, from having been in love (or potentially of Sappho having unreciprocated feelings for Atthis) to their relationship ending in a bitter way, either because Atthis entered into a relationship with Andromeda or went to Lydia, perhaps to be married. However, the very top responses used the nostalgic tone of both poems to contrast with the acerbic bitterness of poem 131, using the word 'yearning' to good effect to describe how Sappho has been left broken hearted as a result of her relationship (whether intimate or not) with Atthis.

The best responses also made full use of all three poems, drawing quotations directly from the printed passage, embedding them into their response and then actively developing and engaging with them to hit the 'perceptive, critical analysis and interpretation of the provided source' part of the Level 5 descriptor for the 10 mark questions.

Misconception



A significant number of candidates mistook 'Sardis' from poem 96 to be a woman and based arguments on this. Sardis is the capital city of the ancient province of Lydia in Asia Minor, a place close to Lesbos renowned for luxury and beautiful things.

Exemplar 1

Sappho presents her relationship with Atthis in 106b 49 as potentially maternal. This is seen by how she refers to Sappho as a 'clumsy little girl', this suggests that Sappho knew her as a little child and perhaps remembers her through a maternal lens. So, their relationship may have been similar to mother and daughter.

This candidate's development and support of their point is strong and demonstrates thoughtful interpretation of the question. This is the first paragraph in the candidate's response and demonstrates well the early part of Sappho and Atthis' relationship as one of potentially maternal affection. The candidate has made use of the quotation 'clumsy little girl' to provide evidence for their argument and expanded upon this to round off the point they are making.

Question 3

Plato gives a variety of perspectives about how love is expressed in his writings, most of which refer to a connection between souls beyond physical attraction.

3 State **one** of the two centuries in which Plato wrote and taught philosophy.

[1]

As mentioned above, there was a significant number of candidates who did not answer this question correctly. There were a variety of incorrect answers given ranging from 8th century BCE to 1st century BCE but a common error was candidates writing '4 BCE', which is in the 1st century BCE, rather than 4th BCE. The response '4 BCE' was not credited. Candidates who wrote 400/300s BCE were credited.

Question 4

4 State the name of any **two** of Plato's philosophical works.

[2]

This question was generally answered well. Where full marks were not awarded it was usually because only one work was offered (usually *Symposium*) or because descriptions of different examples of Plato's ideas were given e.g. Diotima's Ladder of Love and Heavenly and Common Love (both of which also come from the same text, *Symposium*).

Misconception



A number of candidates lost marks here for writing *Phaedra* when the work of Plato is called the *Phaedrus*. *Phaedra* is a play by Seneca and thus benefit of the doubt was not given and no mark was awarded for *Phaedra* in this question.

Question 5

5 Explain how Plato presents desire for the body and desire for the mind differently.

[10]

This question allowed many candidates to showcase their extensive knowledge of Plato's thoughts on desire, especially from the *Symposium*. The best responses delineated between the various different speakers in *Symposium* with commonly cited examples being the difference between Common and Heavenly love developed segueing into discussion of the various rungs on Diotima's Ladder of Love to indicate different but related presentations of desire for the mind and body.

Effective examples from outside of the *Symposium* came from *Phaedrus* (the charioteer analogy), *Charmides* (Socrates resisting his urge to pursue a sexual relationship with the eponymous Charmides) and *Laws* (describing Plato's change of opinion on especially the pederastic homosexual relations propounded in the *Symposium*).

The highest calibre of responses focused on the word 'differently' in the question, ensuring to provide comparison between desire for the mind and desire for the body throughout their response and signposted this well in the construction of their points.

Assessment for learning



While *Symposium* is an excellent basis for understanding a variety of perspectives on desire, love and relationships, it is not representative of the development and diversity of Plato's views on the subject which are mentioned and explored in many other dialogues and works. It is useful for candidates to have a broad experience of Plato's works alongside the foundational *Symposium* to help them illustrate their arguments and provide more nuanced answers.

Question 6*

- 6*** Assess whether Sappho or Plato gives the more positive view of same sex relationships in ancient Greek society.

You may use **Source A** and the other poems of Sappho you have studied **as well as** your knowledge of Plato's ideas as a starting point in your answer.

[20]

This question requires significant comparison between Platonic and Sapphic views on same sex love and relationships in order to achieve the highest levels of marks. The best candidates, as mentioned above, took a thematic approach and compared Sappho's and Plato's ideas about same sex love in each paragraph and interspersed their argument with shorter conclusions leading up to their main conclusion. Responses which considered the degree to which Sappho and Plato present same sex relationships as positive (or not) throughout their answer rather than leaving it to the conclusion tended to score more highly because their evidence was contextualised by a strongly signposted argument. There was no set conclusion for this question; candidates could argue for either Sappho's or Plato's work showing the more positive viewpoint in equally creditable ways.

Less successful responses tended to conflate the historical time periods of Sappho and Plato or give a more general overview of how 'tolerated' same sex relationships were in their respective societies, which was not tightly focused on the question of positivity.

Where candidates used the Sappho fragments on the paper or developed the ideas they used in questions 2 and 5, this was generally done skilfully and enhanced the quality of argument and answer. Common arguments employed were about the inevitable end and resulting heartbreak of many of Sappho's homoerotic interactions (as evidenced by the Atthis poems in Source A) making Sappho's presentation more negative and about Plato's condemnation of same sex and pederastic relationships as purely for pleasure and not the benefit of the state in *Laws*. The best responses offered arguments taking into consideration Plato's contradictory and changing views on homoerotic relationships, Sappho's heavily personal and emotional depictions of her relationships with other women and discussed the fact that Plato writes mainly about same sex relationships between men whereas Sappho mainly between women.

Creditworthy counterarguments about Sappho's epithalamia celebrating heterosexual marriages or about Plato's negative views in *Laws* and *Republic*, or about the foregrounding of pederastic relationships needing to end once the eromenos was too old or using same sex love as a way to move beyond bodily desire to something more enriching were also offered as part of strong responses to this question.

Exemplar 2

Plato also conveys homosexual relationships negatively in his works 'Laws' and 'Republic'. In 'Laws' Plato outrightly states that homosexual relationships are bad as they do not lead to procreation, and are only there to fulfill lustful desires. This idea can be backed up by Alcibiades in 'Symposium', who states how he is incredibly offended at having 'slept with Socrates' as more than he would with his father, implying that the only thing he actually wants from this ~~relationship~~ same sex relationship is the fulfilment of his lust and desires. In 'Republic', Plato implies that homosexual relationships have no place in the Greek world and proposes a cast system of marriage that's sole purpose is reproduction, conveying no use for homosexual relationships displaying a negative view of it.

This extract of a Level 5 response to Question 6 demonstrates an effective argument about Plato's negative portrayal of same sex relationships using two examples from *Laws* and *Symposium* which are then further developed from an example from *Republic*. The candidate has signposted their argument with a clear topic sentence at the opening of their paragraph and made use of quotations or detailed and specific examples from their knowledge of Plato's works. The end of their paragraph develops their argument, demonstrating a sound understanding of Plato's cultural context as well as of the development of Plato's own beliefs about same sex relationships. It exemplifies a well-developed, clear and well evidenced point in the context of an effective overarching argument.

Section B overview

There was a fairly even split between candidates who chose to answer Question 7 and Question 8 with a good range of responses for both options. The best responses to both of these questions used a wide range of very specific evidence from the authors to illustrate well planned arguments. It was pleasing to see many plans on the papers indicating that candidates had invested valuable time in thinking about what examples, what scholarship and what overarching argument they wanted to use in order to answer the question in the most effective way.

The best answers to Question 7 tended to use a thematic approach, comparing Seneca and Plato's ideals of e.g. love and desire in each paragraph. Strong use of scholars embedded into arguments and then extended by the candidates' own views helped these candidates to reach the highest marks in AO2. Motto, Gloyn, Nussbaum, Hall and Dover's scholarly opinions were all cited regularly in answers to this question.

Question 8 also had a good range of scholarship cited, including Karanika, Beard, Poochigian, Lefkowitz and Sharrock. Candidates showed a very impressive and detailed knowledge of Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* III in particular, yet the same level of specific knowledge was not always in evidence for the poetry of Sappho. As for Question 7, a thematic approach considering Ovid and Sappho together tended to yield higher marks.

Using similar arguments in different questions



It is not unusual for candidates to use similar points, evidence and ideas to answer different questions about the same author (on this paper, Sappho and Plato in particular).

However, overreliance or repetition without adapting the evidence and argument to make sure that it is answering the question at hand is unlikely to be effective.

Make sure that, even when using similar poems or ideas from a set author, your argument is tailored to the specific requirements of the question.

Question 7*

7* Discuss to what extent you agree that Plato's and Seneca's ideals of love were different. **[30]**

There were a significant number of strong responses to this question which compared Plato and Seneca's ideals on a variety of topics such as marriage, attitudes to same sex love and relationships, cultural context, how to deal with lust and desire alongside some interesting commentary on philosophical principles. High level analysis of both philosophers' similarities on same sex relationships was common in the best responses, with candidates arguing that the attitudes displayed by Seneca about men such as Hostius Quadra and the viewpoint put forward in Plato's *Laws* were similar but emerged from very different starting points; Plato from an initially positive outlook on homosexual love in *Symposium* but Seneca from a Roman Stoic perspective of not indulging in any kind of sexual activity which was not for reproductive purposes. Many candidates pointed out that both philosophers advocated for pursuing relationships which benefitted the state, but Seneca's Stoic principles forbade seeking love for personal gain whereas much of Plato's thinking on love and relationships was about the idea that desire was a basic starting point for further advancement of the soul.

More basic responses tended to point out only the similarities or differences between the two authors, or offered more generalised assertions about the schools of thought, sometimes thinking that Plato himself was a Stoic philosopher when he was not.

Exemplar 3

On the one hand, Seneca has differing views to Plato on love occurring in homosexuality. Lin Glahn states that Seneca's contempt to do with homosexuality is due to romantic nature and the natural flow of age-aging. ~~Sen~~ Glahn states that Seneca does not outrightly resist homosexuality in a cultural way, instead it is not in accordance to secundum naturam. In ~~his~~ Seneca's

moral letters, Seneca states men that go against nature men as cross classing are doing a wrong/mis act that does not act in accordance to their sex and rightful order. This implies that he thinks ~~that~~ of homosexuality is simply a law of bodies and derive for men rather than progressing with laws of nature and procreating as he emphasises in the 'Consolation to Helvia' (last is for the 'propagation of the human race'). This contrasts to Plato, ~~in which~~ specifically in the 'Symposium', in which ~~homosexual~~ love of other men does not seem to act against nature, rather it is in accordance to it. ~~Aristophanes~~ states this is seen in Aristophanes' speech to which 'dis-people' were been cut in half, creating foss but ~~desires~~ separation of joined individuals felt to are attracted to men, women or both. Aristophanes' speech gives a natural explanation of love of to other men. This is seen in Pausanias' speech to which love of men to other men is derived and ~~higher~~ ~~was~~ expression of love.

This extract demonstrates two qualities of a high level response: excellent scholarship and strong thematic comparison between authors. The candidate has begun with some commentary from Gloyne and then used this scholarly opinion to enhance their own argument and used appropriate technical terminology also. There are two references to works of Seneca with lucid explanation which the candidate then links to Plato's *Symposium*. They then offer two further examples, from specific named characters in *Symposium* and draw both sets of examples together to reach a mini conclusion. This is a skilfully constructed paragraph.

Question 8*

- 8* 'The poems of Sappho give a much better education about love and relationships for women than those of Ovid.' Discuss to what extent you agree with this statement. You should refer to the poems of **both** Sappho **and** Ovid in your answer. [30]

The arguments offered by candidates in their answers to this question were wide ranging, from suggesting that Sappho's intensely emotional and personal tone was more useful in telling women what sort of things they might experience in love or in a relationship to arguing that Ovid's mock didactic *Ars Amatoria*, while sometimes humiliating the women he purported to advise, contained more specific and explicit instruction which women might draw from. The strongest responses weighed evidence from both Sappho and Ovid and explored the advantages and disadvantages offered by using both poets as an education for women.

Some candidates read this question as being an education for the modern audience about what love and relationships was like for women in the ancient world; it was decided that this was a reasonable interpretation and was credited as being equally valid as giving an education to women in the ancient world about love and relationships.

Less successful responses tended to offer arguments about Sappho being female and thus giving a better education for women without much further development, or gave a more general overview about Ovid's position under Augustus in Roman history without linking this back to whether this made him a better educator on love and relationships for women than Sappho.

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