

LESBIANTIQUITY

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SAPPHO

**YET AGAIN
LONGING
FLUTTERS**

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Sappho translation, introduction, and notes © Georgina Barker 2024

Greek text from: Eva Maria Voigt, ed., *Sappho et Alcaeus: Fragmenta* (Amsterdam: Athenaeum – Polak & Van Gennepe, 1971), with conjectures from various commentaries, primarily Camillo Neri, ed., *Saffo – testimonianze e frammenti: Introduzione, testo critico, traduzione e commento* (De Gruyter, 2021)

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THE TRANSLATOR

Dr Georgina Barker

I am the inventor of the Root & Branch translation method, which I developed to highlight the queerness of selected classical texts, drawing on my experience as a translator from Russian. I am the author of *SPQR in the USSR: Elena Shvarts's Classical Antiquity*, and the compiler and director of the verbatim play *Princess Dashkova, the Woman Who Shook the World*. I am currently researching receptions of Greek and Roman 'lesbianism' by Russian lesbians and bisexual women. I live in Scotland with my wife and my parrot.



Sappho¹ came to fame during the early sixth century BC² on Lesbos, probably in the city Mytilene.³ She was born into a rich family, and was probably mixed up in power struggles between aristocratic families, spending time in exile in Sicily.⁴ She says she had brothers whose conduct concerned her,⁵ and a daughter called Kleis, who was the apple of her eye.⁶ She lived long enough for her black hair to turn white.⁷ The rest of what is 'known' about Sappho's life is speculation.⁸

¹ The spelling of Sappho's name is a matter of debate. When she calls herself by name (fragments 1, 65, 94) she 'spells' it Ψαπφω, 'Psappho' (remembering that Sappho perhaps did not write – no writing survives from archaic Lesbos). But almost everyone else in antiquity spells her name Σαπφω, 'Sappho'. Zuntz's (1951 pp. 13–22) theory that scribes mistook a *sampi* – an obsolete letter sometimes written like a more angular Ψ, representing an Asianic sibilant 'ss' or 'sh' sound – for Ψ is compelling, but does not explain why scribes would continue to write Ψ despite knowing that her name began with Σ. I am more convinced by Nagy's (2016 pp. 489–92) theory that 'Psappho' was a phonetic variant on 'Sappho' functioning as a sort of playful, affectionate nickname. This fits with the tone and context of the fragments where 'Psappho' occurs. His idea that Sappho's name may have meant 'sister' is also interesting.

² Estimated dates: 630 to 570 BC. See Kivilo (2021) pp. 19–20.

³ Sappho mentions Mytilene in fragment 98b.3; ancient authors make Mytilene or sometimes Eresos her home town. See Kivilo (2021) p. 12.

⁴ Though exile was a standard feature of a poet's biography, so perhaps invented: Kivilo (2021) pp. 12, 19, 20.

⁵ Fragment 5 & 'Brothers Poem' – unless they were fictions invented by Sappho for her persona. Three brothers are attested (in a late-second- / early-third-century AD papyrus): Charaxos (mentioned by Sappho but not called 'brother'), Larichos (called 'brother' by Sappho), and Eriguiois (or similar; not mentioned by Sappho). The same papyrus names her parents Skamander/Skamandronumos and Kleis (*Testimonia* 1).

⁶ Fragments 98b & 132 – unless she was fictional.

⁷ Fragment 58 – unless this was fictional.

⁸ This is a sceptical-minimalist biography. For exemplary sceptical biographies, see Kivilo (2021); and Boehrer (2021 pp. 38–9), who, to avoid biographical fallacy, separates the author Sappho from the lyric I of Sappho's poems by calling the one 'Sappho' and the other 'Ego'.

Sappho was a successful composer and (probably) performer of lyric poetry: songs in a variety of metres sung by a soloist, as a duet, or by a chorus, often with dancing, and accompanied by a variety of stringed instruments and possibly also by wind instruments and percussion.⁹ These were popular enough to be written down, perhaps in her lifetime but probably later, and numerous enough to fill nine papyrus rolls.¹⁰ Her songs may have had various performance settings, public and private: at weddings and female festivals (certainly); at rituals and ceremonies for the gods (probably); at symposia to entertain men (perhaps); at home for a circle of female companions (perhaps).¹¹ She sang about a wide range of themes – love, marriage, fashion, duty, family, myth, the gods, politics, philosophy, poetry itself... – and often in a first-person voice grammatically (and otherwise) marked as female.

As the first female voice in world literature – the first female celebrity, even – that we know of, Sappho has been at the centre of patriarchy's patrolling of women's possibilities and sexuality for the past two-and-a-half thousand years... and of women's fight back against this for the past hundred-and-fifty or so. Besides as a great poet, she has been seen as: a whore; a tragic heterosexual lover; a nationalist; a school teacher; and, intermittently, a lesbian.¹² Such

⁹ Sappho mentions the 'lyre', 'chelōnē' (tortoise), and 'paktis'; she is attested as mentioning the 'barbitos' or 'barōmos', which a vase depicts her playing; she also mentions 'auloi' and 'krotaloi' (castanets) playing at Andromache and Hektor's wedding. Battezzato (2021) pp. 131–2.

¹⁰ *Testimonia* 2.

¹¹ Since so little is known of archaic Lesbian society, any or all of these options could be correct; the suppositions must be drawn from her texts, or from Alkman's choral works in Archaic Sparta (a society we also know very little about), or even from contemporary anthropology. See especially Bowie (2016) pp. 148–64; Ferrari (2021) pp. 107–20; and Greene, *Reading Sappho* (1996), particularly the perspectives of Lardinois, Hallett, Calame, and Skinner.

¹² See especially Greene, *Re-Reading Sappho* (1996).

categories – even the last – misunderstand archaic Lesbos and impose later modes of thinking on a poet who is culturally far distant, and whose works are mostly lost.

But what is sure is that the world Sappho evokes is predominantly female: in her extant songs, besides gods and mythological characters, she gives the names of just two men (Charaxos and Larichos) as opposed to seventeen women ([Ab]anthis, Anaktoria, Andromeda, Archeanassa, Atthis, Dika, [D]oricha, Eirana, Gongula, Gorgo, Gurinno, Kleis, Lato, Megara, Mika, Mnasidika, Nioba – with several more attested). And her songs to and about women are distinctly erotically charged – without, however, being explicitly sexual (with the possible exception of fragment 94). I give here my selection of all Sappho's fragments that can present a homoerotic reading.¹³

¹³ Connoisseurs of lesbian Sappho may miss certain fragments which I have omitted. 47, 48, and the 'Kypris Song': these all intimately describe the effects of love on Sappho, but do not mention a love object. 99: the 'dildo' poem is suspect in text, authorship, and import. 132: Kleis has been claimed as one of Sappho's lovers, based on erotic meanings of the word *pais*, 'child', but I am convinced by Hallett's (1996 p. 131) argument that the adjective Sappho gives Kleis, *agapata*, 'cherished', is used in Homeric epic 'exclusively for a family's male hope and heir'. And 49 appears in a different form from usual, reflecting the scholarship. But to compensate, I have added several fragments not usually included in the 'homoerotic fragments'.

SAPPHIC SEXUAL GLOSSARY

Sappho's words for sexual desire occupy an overlapping realm. As they are crucial to understanding the nature of her feelings for women, here they are with translations and explanations, in order of increasing intensity:

filotas, fileō, filē; 'affection', 'I feel affection / I kiss', 'affectionate/dear': love that may be platonic, familial, or romantic; may have a physical side (especially kissing); always implies esteem and friendship.

pothos; 'longing': implies the absence of the longed-for person or thing; usually (but not always) sexual.

imeros, imerrō, imerta, imeroen; 'desire', 'I desire', 'desirable', 'desirably': strong desire, longing, wishing, and attraction; often (but not always) sexual; implies delight in the desired object.

eros, eramai, erata/eroessa/epērata; 'love/Eros', 'I love' (sexually), 'lovely/sexy': almost always sexual; a hint of the god/personification of sexual love, Eros (aka Cupid), lurks behind it.

ROOT & BRANCH READING GUIDE

Our translations branch out to explore
a variety of options for the text:
any variants in the original < ^{Greek} _{Latin} > texts
and the various possible meanings in English.

Our translations are rooted in the words
of the original text, replicating when possible
word order, root meanings of words, and
grammatical gender $\left(\begin{matrix} [n] \\ [f] \\ [m] \end{matrix} \right)$ of words about people.

You, the reader, will choose which branches you prefer to follow.

THE SAPPHO TEXTS

READING GUIDE

The fragments I present here are often lacunose (full of holes). While reconstruction of these fragments is extremely difficult – with reconstructed versions of the texts impossible to be agreed upon with any certainty – it is hard to make much sense of certain fragments without filling some gaps. So I have assembled my own texts, on the basis of Voigt's (1971) text & commentary, with conjectures from other commentaries, primarily Neri (2021). In my texts I include not only supplements (reconstructions that are accepted as probably correct) but also conjectures (reconstructions that have been proposed but not added to the official text). I have used my own judgement over which conjectures to include. All additions to Voigt's text are noted and attributed to the scholar who originally proposed them.

The key below explains the various typographical measures used, mostly, to distinguish extant text from non-extant text.

KEY

- [] = lacunae; dots in the Greek show how many letters are lost
-] [= untranslatable text between lacunae
- [grey roman text] = supplement (accepted reconstruction)
- [grey *italic text*] = conjecture (proposed reconstruction)
- [black text] = words added to the translation for clarity
- underdot (e.g. π̣) = a doubtful letter in the Greek
- < > = corrected text in the Greek
- † † = corrupt text in the Greek
- { } = text in the Greek that should be deleted
- () = de-abbreviated text in the Greek

All names are given in the Lesbian dialect, Aeolic. Aeolic, put simply, differs from Attic (Athenian) dialect ('standard' Greek) in having no initial aspiration, and α instead of η (for more, see Page 1959 pp. 327–9).

Numeration of fragments is LP (Lobel & Page), unless labelled V (Voigt).

(ornate
fancy >-throned
<fickle-thinking
dapple-herbed } deathless
immortal > Aphrodita,

child of Zeus, trick-weaver, I entreat you,

do not with <annoyances
nauseas >, do not with anguishes tame,

mistress, my soul,

5 but come here, if ever, elsewhen,

these my <speeches
songs > hearing from afar

you listened, leaving <[your]
[the] > father's house -

golden - you came -

chariot yoked: bringing you, <beautiful
fine >



<ποικιλόφρον'
ποικιλόθρον' > ἀθανάτ' Αφρόδιτα,

παῖ Δίος δολόπλοκε, λίσσομαί σε,

μή μ' ἄσαισι μηδ' ὀνίαισι δάμνα,

πότνια, θῦμον,

5 ἀλλὰ τυίδ' ἔλθ', αἶ ποτα κατέρωτα

τὰς ἔμας αὔδας αἰόισα πῆλοι

ἔκλυες, πάτρος δὲ δόμον λίποισα

χρύσιον ἦλθες

ἄρμ' ὑπασδεύξαισα· κάλοι δέ σ' ἄγον

NOTES

1.1 *ποικιλόφρον’/ποικιλόθρον’*; *fickle-thinking / ornate/fancy-throned / dapple-herbed*: Sappho’s opening epithet for Aphrodite is controversial, as there are two manuscript readings of the second half of the compound adjective, and three possible meanings. Even the unquestioned first half, *ποικιλό-*, ‘varied’, is translated differently depending on how the second half is interpreted. *ποικιλόθρον’*, ‘ornate/fancy-throned / dapple-herbed’, is the manuscripts’ majority reading. *θρον’* may come from *θρόνος*, ‘throne’; depictions of goddesses seated on ornate thrones were frequent on vases of Sappho’s time (and later), and in Homeric epic (see Page 1959 p. 5). Or *θρον’* may come from *θρόνα*, a rare word of uncertain meaning, found in Homer and Theokritos, to do with flowers/drugs/charms; this magical meaning aptly suggests love potions (see Winkler 1990 pp. 43, 49–50). But I prefer the manuscripts’ minority reading, *ποικιλόφρον’*, ‘fickle-thinking’. This epithet is also used by Sappho’s contemporary, Alkaios (Alcaeus), who calls a Lesbian military leader (probably Pittakos) *ὥς ἄλωπα | ποικ[ι]λόφρων*, ‘like a fox[] fickle-thinking’ (69.6–7). It fits well with Sappho’s characterisation of Aphrodite as cunning in the next line, and announces the song’s major theme: the ever-shifting fortunes of love.

1.3 *δάμνα*; *tame*: a metaphor from horse-breaking.

1.8 *χρῦσιον*; *golden*: describing either *δόμον*, ‘house’, in the line before, or *ἄρμ’*, ‘chariot’, in the line after, or both.

10 swift sparrows over black <earth
Gaia>

fast whirling wings away from heaven-

<sky
air> through the middle,

straightway arrived: you, o blessed one [f],

smiled with your <deathless
immortal> face,

15 asked what yet again I'd suffered and why
yet again I'm calling,

and what I most wish to happen for me

with maddened soul: "whom yet again do I persuade,
going to bring them to your affection? who, o



10 ὤκεες στρουῦθοι περὶ γᾶς μελαίνας
πύκνα δίννεντες πέρ' ἀπ' ὠράνῳ ἴθε-
ρος διὰ μέσσω,

αἶψα δ' ἐξίκοντο· σὺ δ', ὦ μάκαιρα,
μειδιαίσαις ἀθανάτῳ προσώπῳ

15 ἦρε' ὅττι δηῦτε πέπονθα κῶττι
δηῦτε κάλημμι,

κῶττι μοι μάλιστα θέλω γένεσθαι
μαινόλαι θύμῳ· τίνα δηῦτε πείθω
βαῖς' ἄγην ἐς σὰν φιλότατα; τίς σ', ὦ

1.10 **στροῦθοι**; *sparrows*: sparrows were associated with sex in Ancient Greece. Sparrow meat and eggs were used as aphrodisiacs; the word ‘sparrow’ was slang for ‘penis’; and riding sparrows is mentioned in connection with sex in two literary works (both probably punning on the slang) – Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata* 723–4 and Xenophon of Ephesus’s *Ephesiaca* 1.8 (Page 1959 pp. 7–8; Henderson 1991 p. 129). **στρουθός** can mean ‘ostrich’, but usually only with a modifier (**μεγάλη**, ‘big’, or **κατάγαιος**, ‘terrestrial’: CGL p. 1294), so I rule ‘ostrich’ out here.

1.10–14 These lines contain conspicuous allusions to Homer. 11 has a near quotation of *Odyssey* 2.146–51, when Zeus sends a pair of eagles to earth, who **ἐπιδινηθέντε** [...] **πτερά πυκνά**, ‘whirled [...] fast wings’; and Aphrodite’s smile in 14 recalls Homer’s frequent depictions of the goddess smiling (Page 1959 pp. 8, 15). Sappho then deflates this Homeric diction in the following lines with Aphrodite’s straightforward questions.

1.14 **μειδιαίσαισ’**: the papyrus (P. Oxy. 2288) reads **μηδιαίσαισ’**, which (I believe) is an Aeolic form; this does not affect the meaning.

1.19 **βαῖσ’ ἄγην**: restoration – Parca (Nagy 2015 # 5). The beginning of this line has been mangled in transmission (see Page 1959 pp. 9–10). Nearly all the manuscripts read **καισαγην** (etc.), except one, where the first three letters are **μαι** corrected to **βαι**. A papyrus strip preserving the start of the first 20 or 21 lines (P. Oxy. 2288) provided the reading **α]ψ.ἄγην**[, ‘ba]ck you to bring[’. However, looking at the papyrus, I can see no trace of the alleged **ψ**. I therefore rule out **ἄψ σ’** in favour of the manuscript readings, **καισ/μαιο/βαιο**. Both **και σ’** and **(πείθω-)μαιο σ’** run into grammar and sense problems if the text that follows (which the manuscripts are unanimous about) is not emended: ‘whom do I persuade | and to bring you back to your affection’; ‘whom should I be persuad-|ed to bring you back to your affection’. Edmonds’s emendation of **σὰν**, ‘your’, to **ἐὰν**, ‘her’, does not solve this problem (as it does for the **ἄψ σ’** reading). So I opt for **βαῖσ’**. Aside from being the only reading that makes sense without emendation or convoluted explanations, **βαίνω**, ‘go/walk’, + infinitive has the recommendation of being a common Homeric form (*Iliad* 2.183; 4.199; 11.617, 805; 12.352; 13.27; 14.354; 17.119, 698; 18.416; *Odyssey* 14.501; 22.19). See Nagy (2015) ## 5–6.

1.19 *to bring them to your affection*: Aphrodite was known for ‘bringing’ women to their lovers: Helen accuses Aphrodite of this in *Iliad* 3.399–412. Petropoulos (in Nagy 2015 ## 9–16) argues that Sappho is using spell language: in a second-century AD love spell, a woman repeatedly demands that her beloved woman be ‘brought’ to her (see LESBIANTIQUITY 22).

20 Sappho, injures you?

and so if – flees, quickly will chase:

if gifts does not accept, instead will give:

if does not <feel affection
kiss>, quickly will <feel affection
kiss>

even not willing – she.”

25 come to me now too, free me from hard
concern, however much to be fulfilled for me
the soul desires, fulfil: you yourself
<fellow-fighter
ally> be.



20 Ψάπφ', ἀδικήει;

καὶ γὰρ αἱ φεύγει, ταχέως διώξει·
αἱ δὲ δῶρα μὴ δέκετ', ἀλλὰ δώσει·
αἱ δὲ μὴ φίλει, ταχέως φιλήσει
κωὺκ ἐθέλοισα.

25 ἔλθε μοι καὶ νῦν, χαλέπαν δὲ λύσον
ἐκ μερίμναν, ὅσσα δέ μοι τέλεσσαί
θῦμος ἰμέρρει, τέλεσον· σὺ δ' αὐτὰ
σύμμαχος ἔσσο.

1.24 *κῶύκ ἐθέλοισα*; even not willing – she: this line, with its crucial word containing the song’s sole indication of the gender of Sappho’s beloved, is transmitted in the manuscripts in three variants, ‘none of which can be correct because none both makes sense and fits the meter and dialect’ (Williamson 1996 p. 249 n. 4). Most of the manuscripts make Sappho the unwilling one: *κῶύ κ’ἐθέλοις*, ‘even should you not be willing’; *κῶ εἰ καὶ θέλεις*, ‘if too you are not at all willing’. Just one manuscript refers to Sappho’s beloved, and identifies her as female: *κῶυ κεθέλουσα*, ‘and not even willing’ (Most 1996 p. 33 n. 79). In 1835 Bergk suggested emending this to the metrical *κῶύκ ἐθέλοισα*; this is now accepted more or less universally.

1.27 *the soul desires*: it is unclear here whether the soul is Sappho’s or Aphrodite’s.

“COME, APHRODITA”

Sappho prays to Aphrodite to come to help her again, flying down from Olympus on a sparrow-drawn chariot. Sappho relates what Aphrodite had said when she came before, first in indirect and then in direct speech. The goddess’s tone is amusedly mocking. She asks Sappho who her latest target is, and promises to make the girl fall in love. Sappho returns to her prayer at the end.

This is Sappho’s only surviving complete song, which probably stood as the first song in her first book, and was therefore considered in antiquity as the most characteristically Sapphic. It contains an entirely casual, blink-and-you’ll-miss-it reference to Sappho’s habitual lesbianism: in an apparently typical conversation between goddess and singer – who is named as Sappho – Aphrodite simply assumes that Sappho’s newest beloved is female. This moment has been afflicted by textual problems,¹ and it seems unlikely that this is coincidental: Sappho is often vague about the identity of her beloveds (something that makes her songs extra-relatable),

¹ See my note on 1.24 above.

and this means her love of women can easily be obscured – especially by homophobic scribes and editors.

Song 1's structure is similar to what we can see of fragment 94: a frame narrative in the present (Sappho's prayer) enclosing a memory related by Sappho (Aphrodite's visit). But here Sappho uses the technique to create irony (something the apparently sincere fragment 94 does not do) and to add another temporal dimension to the song's insistence on repetition.

Repetition is perhaps song 1's most prominent feature. First, its very form derives from the traditional wording of prayers to the gods – including the repetitious phrases 'if ever, elsewhen' (line 5) and 'now too' (line 25). Sappho's pains (line 3) and songs (line 6) are *plural*, so took place on various occasions. Aphrodite's thrice-said *dēute*, 'yet again' (lines 15, 16, 18), flags Sappho's repetitiveness for all to see; *dēute* also appears in a love context in fragment 22b. She also flags the anonymity of Sappho's beloved(s) (lines 18–24) – implying their multiplicity. Finally, 'however much' (line 26) may imply Sappho's amatory excesses!

Sappho's prayer to Aphrodite is reminiscent of Diomedes' prayer to Athene in *Iliad* 5.115–18:

κλῦθί μευ, αἰγίοχοιο Διὸς τέκος, Ἄτρυτώνη,
εἴ ποτέ μοι καὶ πατρὶ φίλα φρονέουσα παρέστης
δηῖω ἐν πολέμῳ, νῦν αὖτ' ἐμὲ φίλαι, Ἀθήνη·
δοῖς δέ τέ μ' ἄνδρα ἐλεῖν καὶ ἐς ὀρμὴν ἔγχεος ἐλθεῖν

heed me, aegis-holding Zeus's offspring, Atrytone,
if ever to my father also affectionately thinking you stood beside
in < martial / destructive > war, now again to me feel affection, Athene:
give both for me to < catch / kill > the man and into my spear's onrush for
him to come

Homer's Athene indeed grants Diomedes strength: he even wounds Aphrodite, who flees to heaven in a borrowed chariot, and near the end of book 5 Athene flies down with Hera in a gold-bronze-and-silver chariot to join Diomedes in fighting. Like (yet also unlike) in fragment 16, Sappho takes the Homeric scenario and brings it into her female realm of love lyric, casting love as no less important a battle and Aphrodite as no less powerful a goddess (in direct contradiction to Homer), and aligning herself at once with many of the Homeric figures.² Her *summachos*, 'fellow-fighter/ally', the penultimate word, cannot but be a reference to her Homeric parody.

² For more on Sappho's appropriation of Homer here, see Winkler (1996) pp. 92–6.

they [m] – ‘of cavalry a host’, they [m] – ‘of infantry’,
 they [m] – ‘of <black> ships’ – declare on <black X earth>
 to be <beautifullest>, I – that’s ‘what-
 finest
 ever someone loves’:

- 5 altogether easy to make comprehensible
 to all is this, for she who much surpassed
 in <beauty> humans – Elena – her <man>
 fineness> husband>,
 the [best-of-all-men],
 she <abandoned> behind-left>, went to Troy sailing,



οἱ μὲν ἱππῶν στρότον οἱ δὲ πέσδων
 οἱ δὲ νάων φαῖσ' ἐπ[ι] γᾶν μέλαι[ν]αν
 ἔ]μμεναι κάλλιστον, ἔγω δὲ κῆν' ὄτ-
 τω τις ἔραται·

- 5 πά]γχυ δ' εὔμαρες σύνετον πόησαι
 π]άντι τ[ο]ῦτ', ἃ γὰρ πόλυ περσκέθοισα
 κάλλος [ἀνθ]ρώπων Ἑλένα [τ]ὸν ἄνδρα
 τὸν [πανάρ]ιστον

καλλ[ίποι]σ' ἔβα 'ς Τροίαν πλέοι[σα]

NOTES

16.2 *μέλαιναν*; *black*: this adjective could go either with ‘ships’ or with ‘earth’; as Page (1959 p. 53) notes, both expressions are conventional. The structure of the stanza makes the ‘black earth’ reading more natural, and Sappho uses ‘black earth’ in song 1 – however, both meanings are probably intended to sound at once.

16.4 *ἔρται*; *loves*: *sexually*.

16.8 *[πανάρ]ιστον*; [*best-of-all-men*]: conjecture – Page. I prefer it to other viable conjectures because it harmonises with all Sappho’s other ‘*pan*’s. What is clear from the remaining letters and context is that this was probably a superlative adjective praising Helen’s husband Menelaos.

10 and not child nor <affectionate
dear> parents

at all she remembered, but astray-led her

< – not even wishing]
– who was <sensible
safe-thinking>]> –

<Cypris:] for [an unbending] mindset [she has]>
<desire:] for [a bending] mindset [it leads]>

and fulfils] lightly [whatsoever] <she
it> is minded to:

15 this] me now of Anaktoria has remind-
ed, not] <present
beside-being>:

<her
whose>] – I would prefer – <lovely
sexy> walk
and sparkle bright – to see – of her face



10 κωὺδ[ἐ πα]ῖδος οὐδὲ φίλων τοκήων
πά[μπαν] ἐμνάσθη, ἀλλὰ παράγαγ' αὐτὰν
<κωὺκ ἐθέλοι]σαν>
<σώφρον' ἔοι]σαν>

<Κύπρις· ἄγν]αμπτον γὰρ [ἔχει]> νόημα
<ἡμερος· γν]άμπτον γὰρ [ἄγει]>
καὶ τέλ]ει κούφως τ[ό κέ ποι] νοήσῃ·

15 τῷ με νῦν Ἀνακτορί[ας] ὀνέμναι-
σ' οὐ] παρεοίσας·

τᾶ]ς κε βολλοίμαν ἔρατόν τε βᾶμα
κάμάρυγμα λάμπρον ἴδην προσώπω

16.12 Only the last syllable of this line survives, **σαν**, ‘-ing [f acc.]’, presumably the end of a present active participle relating to Helen. I give a couple of options for the line, which show radically different potential stances from Sappho. Conjectures – Obbink (adapting Martinelli Tempesta); West. (Any conjecture must take into account an accent visible above a letter near the beginning of the line: Neri 2021 p. 120.)

16.13 The lost subject of **παράγαγ’**, ‘astray-led’ (two lines before) was probably at the start of this line, and is almost certainly desire or the personification of it. For this reason I have preferred conjectures that make a strong stop after this word to start a new clause, otherwise the phrase (beginning line 11) becomes very cumbersome. Conjectures – Thévenaz; Burris & Fish.

16.14 Conjecture – Lidov. All the other (substantively different) conjectures rely on introducing a personal pronoun either at the beginning of this line or in the line before, which I feel does not fit with the structure of Sappho’s argument, and undermines the suddenness of her turn from the mythological and the general to the immediately personal in the next line.

16.15 Lidov’s arguments for this supplement – which follows the same structure as fragment 31 line 5 – are convincing (Lidov 2016 pp. 91–2).

16.18 **κάμαρυγμα**; and *sparkle*: **ἀμάρυγμα** means ‘bright rapid movement’; it is conventionally used of eyes or glances, but is also used about lips, and wrestling (CGL p. 69).

than the Lydians' chariots and all-armoured
20 foot]fighters.



ἢ τὰ Λύδων ἄρματα <καὶ παν>όπλοις
20 πεσδομ]άχεντας.

21] not able to happen
] human[] to share to pray
] me myself [f]



21]. μεν οὐ δύνατον γένεσθαι
].ν ἀνθρωπ[...(.)π]εδέχην δ' ἄρασθαι
]ῃ ἔμ αὐται

16.19 <καὶ παν>όπλοις; all-armoured: κὰν ὅπλοισι, the papyrus reading, does not fit Sappho's prosody, so I take Page's (1959 p. 54) simple emendation. πανόπλοις has the additional advantage of harking back to the many 'pan's earlier in the song.

16.21–3 These lines may have been part of the next song on the papyrus (for more on this, see below).

16.23 *me myself*: feminine dative (probably) or vocative (possibly).

"BEAUTIFULLEST"

Nothing in the world is more beautiful-and-fine than beauty itself, and beauty is in the eye of the beholder, especially when s/he is in love.

This is the essence of Sappho's argument in this song, which hinges upon the dual meaning of the word *kalliston*, 'beautifullest/finest', superlative of *kalos*, an adjective that can mean simply 'beautiful', but more often implies in addition an inner, moral beauty or suitability: 'fine', 'noble', 'good', 'fair'.¹

Sappho begins by setting up a group of straw men (both grammar – *oi ... oi ... oi*; they [m] ... they [m] ... they [m] – and context indicate that these are specifically men) who say military forces (in a mock-catalogue) are the beautifullest/finest thing. She butts in with a forceful *egō*, 'I', to say that actually love – sexual love – is the deciding factor (definitively ruling out the straw men's claims), and what's more, she can easily prove it.

With rhetorical genius, she turns to Homeric epic – the most famous glorification of combat – for her example of sexual love's power. As everyone knows, the love between Paris and Helen of Sparta/Troy started the Trojan War; without love the fighting would not even have happened – she has implicitly proved her point already.

¹ For an in-depth discussion of beauty in fragment 16, see Konstan (2015).

But Sappho has more rhetorical tricks in her arsenal. She fills the second (especially) and third stanzas with derivatives of *pan*, 'all' – *pagchu*, 'altogether', *panti*, 'to all', *panariston*, 'best-of-all-men', *pampan*, 'at all' – emphasising her hyperbole and preparing her listener/reader for a generalisation based on the mythological example. She also plays upon *kalliston*: Helen has *kallos*, 'beauty (physical)', surpassing all humans' ... yet even this objectively beautifullest of humans is susceptible to what she finds subjectively beautifullest (her beloved Paris) ... which trumps her husband Menelaos, who is merely *panariston*, 'best-of-all-men' ... so she *kallipois*', 'abandoned/behind-left', him. The assonance reinforces the causal link Sappho draws between beauty and the overriding impulse to pursue it. Sappho then paints a picture of all the family ties Helen severed to follow love-and-beauty.

A lacunose few lines follow, in which Sappho almost certainly made a general point about love/Aphrodite's power, which was so strong as to tempt Helen away against all reason. What remains of lines 13–14 is reminiscent of fragment 41, which also links beauty and (un)changeable minds. Words related to 'mind' occur at the end of all three long lines in the fourth stanza, helping Sappho make the abrupt transition to her own situation, being 'reminded' of her own love, Anaktoria, who is not with her at present.

She concludes (perhaps) the song by describing Anaktoria's beauty – in Sappho's eyes – which she would rather see than any military forces, however impressive. This looping back to the song's beginning suggests that the song ended here, after five stanzas: it makes for a perfectly self-contained whole. However, the same might be said of fragment 31, which could (to modern sensibilities) easily end with Sappho's 'death' in stanza 4, but actually continued into a fifth stanza with some sort of gnomic statement. As the sign for a break in songs is missing from the papyruses, we cannot know (pending further papyrus finds) whether the remnant of the next stanza is the end of fragment 16 or the start of fragment 16a.²

² For a summary of the textual arguments for and against fragment 16 continuing,

What we do know is that Sappho created and performed a female-centred song, in contradiction to male-centred Homeric tradition, in which she gives agency to perhaps four women (the speaker, Helen, Aphrodite?, Anaktoria³), and philosophically elevates women's sexual desire to 'the beautifullest/finest thing'.⁴

see Lidov (2016) pp. 92–3. It should be noted that the phrase 'not able to happen' has been used by certain translators and editors to make the homophobic assumption that Sappho's love for Anaktoria was doomed or forbidden by the gods. But this does not mean that Sappho did *not* end the song with a statement expressing her submission to the will of the gods and the status quo.

³ Anaktoria's movement – her sparkling face implying a gaze of her own, and especially her *bama*, 'walk', which echoes Helen's *eba*, 'went' – makes her more than just an object of Sappho's desiring gaze.

⁴ For other excellent analyses of fragment 16, see Snyder (1997) pp. 63–71; DuBois (1996) pp. 79–88.

- 9] I <command
call on> you [to sing of
Gongula, [o *Abanthis*], taking [f] [
the paktis, while yet again longing [
around you <flutters
flies>
the beautiful [f]: for the <katagōgis
down-drape-dress> [(itself
of hers
set [her] <aflutter
aflight>
set <aflutter
aflight> the one) sighting [f] it, I, though, rejoice:
set [you] <aflutter
aflight>
15 and for she herself indeed once was complaining[<to me
of them>,
the-Cyprus-born-[one [f],



- 9 .] . ε . [. . . .] . [. . . κ]έλομαι σ' ἀ[είδην
Γο]γγύλαν [ῶ 'Αβ]ανθι λάβοισα . α . [
πᾶ]κτιν, ᾗς σε δηῦτε πόθος τ . [
ἀμφιπόταται
τὰν κάλαν· ἀ γὰρ κατάγωγις (αὔτα[ν
αὔτα[
αὔτα[ς σ']
ἐπτόαισ' ἴδοισαν, ἐγὼ δὲ χαίρω·
15 καὶ γὰρ αὔτα δὴ πο[τ'] ἐμέμφ[ετ' <ἄμμι
ὑμμε>
Κ]υπρογέν[ηα,

NOTES

22b.9 Line numbering continues from fragment 22a (a separate poem; two fragments were mistakenly joined together: Neri 2021 p. 129).

22b.9 Conjecture – West.

22b.10 *Γογγύλαν*; *Gongula*: conjecture – Wilamowitz (widely accepted). ‘Gongula’ is how the name is pronounced; it is spelled ‘Goggula’. It is a nickname meaning ‘round woman’ (Schlesier 2013 p. 218). ‘Gongula of Kolophon’ is named in the *Suda* as one of Sappho’s students (*Testimonia* 2). A Gongula appears multiple times in Sappho’s songs, notably in fragment 95 and commentary on fragment 213.

22b.10 *ῶ Ἀβανθί*; [*o Abanthis*]: though the accepted interpretation of this line – woman’s-name (acc.) woman’s-name (voc.) – is, I believe, correct, the lacuna in the papyrus after *ΓΥΛΑΝ*, ‘gulan’, and before *ΝΘΙ*, ‘nthi’, is too large for the conjecture frequently printed, *ῶ ἈΒΑ*, ‘Aba-’, to be correct: there is space for about four mid-sized letters. An addition that fixes the length without substituting a different name is *ῶ* (conjecture – Ferrari). *LGPN* returns 25 women’s names ending -anthis (‘flower’). Nearly all could conceivably fit, but 5 are of exactly the right length for the gap: *Abranthis*, *Bruanthis*, *Dēmanthis*, *Kleanthis*, *Melanthis*. *Melanthis* is the only of these 5 names attested in Sappho’s time (mostly in Boeotia). But an *Abanthis* is addressed in fragment i.a. 35 V (by Sappho rather than Alkaios, I think), which sways me towards ‘*Abanthis*’ here.

22b.11 *paktis*: Lydian twenty-stringed lyre.

22b.13 *τὰν κάλαν*; *the beautiful* [*f*]: this adjective could refer to either woman.

22b.13–14 *αὔτα* / *αὔτα*[*v*] / *αὔτα*[*ς σ’ ἐπ’*οἰσ’ *ἴδοισαν*; [*itself*] *set* *aflutter/aflight* *the one sighting* [*f*] *it* / *set* [*her*] *aflutter/aflight sighting* [*f*] *it* / [*of hers*] *set* [*you*] *aflutter/aflight sighting* [*f*] *it*: the three possible endings to the cut-off feminine pronoun *αὔτα* make a big difference to the sense of these lines. 1. *αὔτα*, ‘itself (the dress)’; 2. *αὔτα*[*v*], ‘her (Gongula?)’; 3. *αὔτα*[*ς σ’*], ‘of hers (Gongula?) ... you (Abanthis?)’. Conjectures – Hunt; Diehl (the most popular among textual scholars: Neri 2021 p. 130); West.

22b.14 *ἴδοισαν*; *sighting* [*f*]: again, this participle could refer to either woman. The aorist suggests a completed action (in the present), so ‘catching sight of’ rather than simply ‘seeing’.

22b.15 Conjectures – Milne, Di Benedetto.

22b.16 *the-Cyprus-born*-[*one* [*f*]: *Aphrodite*.

as I pray[

this [

19 I wish[



ὥς ἄρα μα[ι

τοῦτο τῷ[

19 β]όλλομα[ι

"DOWN-DRAPE-DRESS"

The poet tells one woman to sing about another to the accompaniment of the paktis (a Lydian lyre, called 'pleasant-singing' in fragment 156), while feeling or inspiring or somehow emanating desire. One or other of the women is called beautiful. The dress one of them is wearing – a katagōgis, literally 'down-leading-thing' – perturbs the other with desire. The poet is pleased by all this, and segues into singing about Aphrodite, who is cross about something.

This fragment is incomplete in ways that make it very hard to work out to whom things are happening, while what is happening is left fairly clear. It begins with (probably) two women. The name of one is probably Gongula – she also appears in fragment 95 (possibly as Sappho's beloved?), and was apparently romantically linked in antiquity with a woman called Gorgo (fragment 213). The name of the other ends -anthis – she may be the Abanthis who is also addressed in fragment i.a. 35 V.

Two of Sappho's erotic keywords – *dēute*, 'yet again' and *potaomai*, *ptoaō*, 'flutter/fly', 'set aflutter/aflight' – link this fragment with 1, 31, and 130 V. And the importance of movement, centred on the 'down-flowing' dress which is subject (not object) of the woman's gaze and which sets her aflutter, links this fragment with Anaktoria's desirable movement in fragment 16.¹

¹ See Snyder (1997) pp. 38–42.

] <love's
Eros's X hoped
pained>[

]

for when from opposite] I look at [you,
seems to me not] Ermiona – somesuch as[she

5 to be,] but to <yellow
blonde> Elena you to liken

was not <unseemly
unlikely>]

] <to
for> mortals [f]: this know – with your
heart], all my concern



]ἔρωτος <ἡλπ[
ἡλγ[>

]

ὥς γὰρ ἄν]τιον εἰσίδω σ[ε,
φαίνεται μ' οὐδ'] Ἑρμιόνα τεαύ[τα
5 ἐμμεναι,] ξάνθαι δ' Ἑλέναι σ' εἰσ[κ]ην
οὐδ' ἐν ἄει]κες

]ις θνάταις· τόδε δ' ἴσ[θι] τὰι σᾶι
καρδίαι] πάσαν κέ με τὰν μερίμναν

NOTES

23.1 The fragment begins halfway through a Sapphic stanza.

23.1 Readings – Neri.

23.3 Conjecture – Hunt. The (partially reconstructed) wording of this line is very similar to the phrasing of fragment 31 lines 2 and 7.

23.4–5 Conjectures – Page.

23.4–5 *Ermiona* ... *Elena*: Helen of Sparta/Troy and her daughter (with Menelaos) Hermione.

23.6 ἄει]κες; unseemly/unlikely]: conjecture – Wilamowitz. If correct, this complements εἴσκην, 'liken', in the line before, and may have echoed other words of seeming/comparing in the lacunae.

23.8 καρδία]; heart]: a three-syllable feminine noun is missing here, and the context suggests a sexual meaning, so this conjecture (by Diehl) fits very well (in Ancient Greece the chest and abdomen was the seat of emotions, including love and desire). Sappho uses this word in the same line position in fragment 31.

10

] (^{opposite}
~~in return~~
^{instead}) [] you would
]

dewy] < heights
 slopes >

for us] both [f]

to all-]night-long-it

] [



10

<] λαισ'
] δαισ' > ἀντιδ[. .]' [.] αἰθοις δὲ
]

δροσόεν]τας ὄχθοις

]ταιν

παν]νυχίς[δ]ην

] [

23.9 opposite / in return / instead: ἀντι always bears these senses, whether it stood alone as a preposition or continued into the lacuna as a verb.

23.9 ἴαθαι; you would: this word was probably a second person present optative (e.g. λάθαι, 'you would forget', or μάθαι, 'you would learn').

23.11 Conjecture – Lobel. This copies the (lacunose) line in fragment 95.

23.12 ἴταιν; for us] both [f]: although it is impossible to say for sure, I think this is a feminine dual form of 'both'.

23.13 παν]νυχί[δ]ην; to all-]night-long-it: according to the recently updated Cambridge Greek Lexicon, the verb παννυχίσδω has sexual connotations when used of men; of women it means to 'celebrate an all-night festival' (CGL p. 1058). I think the sexual connotations here are fairly evident, and apply to women.

"TO ALL-NIGHT-LONG-IT"

The poet looks at a beautiful woman and wants to compare her to Helen of Sparta/Troy, the most beautiful woman in the world (as Sappho tells us in fragment 16), having first considered comparing her to a lesser beauty, Helen's daughter Hermione. The poet speaks of spending the night, probably outside, doing something with someone or someones.

The first word of this fragment makes its topic clear: sexual love. Sappho (or whoever is the speaker) is in the same position as 'that man' in fragment 31: opposite the beautiful woman. Could the resonance with 31 mean that the addressee is the same? Two moments may indicate that the speaker is female: when she refers to 'mortal women', probably grouping herself among them; and in a possible feminine dual, 'for us both'. The dual (if that is what it is) may represent the seclusion of probably-Sappho and her female beloved just before the fragment's final legible word, one which reverberates with sexual potential: *pannuchisdēn*, 'to all-night-long-it'.

seems to me, he equal to gods
 is, the man, whoever opposite you
 sits and, close, to [you] pleasantly speak-
 ing [f] – sub-listens –

- 5 and [to you] laughing [f] desirably, this really my
 heart in breast sets <aflutter
 aflight>,
 for when I look briefly, then my speak-
 ing's not still yielded,



φαίνεται μοι κῆνος ἴσος θεοῖσιν
 ἔμμεν' ὦνηρ, ὅττις ἐνάντιός τοι
 ἰσδάνει καὶ πλάσιον ἄδω φωνεί-
 σας ὑπακούει

- 5 καὶ γελαίσας ἰμέροεν, τό μ' ἦ μὰν
 καρδίαν ἐν στήθεσιν ἐπρόαισεν,
 ὥς γὰρ <εἰ>σίδω βρόχε' ὥς με φώναι-
 σ' οὐδὲν ἔτ' εἴκει,

NOTES

31.1–2 There has been much debate about the importance of the man whom Sappho introduces after ‘me’ and before ‘you’; heterosexualising translations have made the man the object of Sappho’s affection. Linguistically, **κῆνος ὤνηρ**, ‘that man’, may be a real man (within the song), but **ὅστις**, ‘whoever’, gives him a certain hypotheticality, and shows that his identity is irrelevant.

31.4 **ὑπακούει**; *sub-listens*: the prefix gives the verb **ἀκούω**, ‘hear/listen’, the additional senses ‘attentively/subserviently/obediently’.

31.5 **τό**; *this*: characteristically vague. May refer just to what immediately precedes it (the woman’s desirability), or to everything that has come before (the man and woman’s whole interaction).

31.6 **ἐππρόαισεν**; *sets aflutter/aflight*: flight is an important erotic metaphor for Sappho. In 1 she gives a whole stanza’s description to Aphrodite’s sparrows; in 22b longing ‘flutters/flies’ around [Ab]anthis and a dress sets her or Gongula ‘aflutter/aflight’; and in 130 V Atthis ‘flies/flutters’ to Andromeda.

31.7 **<εἰ>σίδω**; *I look*: standard editions read **ἐς σ’ ἴδω**, ‘at you I look’, for the manuscript’s metrically defective **σίδω** (understandable by itself as **σ’ ἴδω**, ‘you I see’). However, I am convinced by Most’s (1996 pp. 30–1) argument in favour of **εἰσίδω** (proposed by Hermann two centuries ago): ‘From the point of view of paleography, it is much likelier that the letters that fell out were not epsilon-sigma but instead epsilon-iota – especially in uncials, the similarity of epsilon to sigma is such that a scribe could easily have omitted epsilon-iota before the following sigma-iota by haplography [...] Now the object of the verb is no longer specified as ‘you’ but is left unexpressed, as often happens, and can easily be supplied from the context: what Sappho beholds is **τό**, ‘it’ [...] leaving open what Sappho seems to have wanted to leave open’.

31.7 **βρόχε’ ὥς**: I far prefer the Homeric **ὥς...ὥς**, ‘when...then’, to joining the second **ὥς** to **βρόχε’** (‘briefly’) as **βρόχεως**, ‘briefly’), a countersensical drawing-out of the word which subtracts from the line’s immediacy.

31.7–8 **φώναι-σ’**; *speaking’s*: I take Page’s (1959 pp. 23–4) reading of this as an aorist infinitive: **φώναισ(αι)** = **φωνῆσαι**, which particularly recommends itself due to its consonance with **φωνείσας** (lines 3–4). Sappho is matching herself to the woman of the first stanza, putting their verbs in the same position in the stanza in forms that closely resemble each other, **φωνεῖ-σας**, ‘speaking’ / **φώναι-σ’ οὐδέν**, ‘speaking’s not’ – making her own speechlessness (as the poet/singer) even more shocking.

31.8 **εἴκει**; *yielded*: an unusual impersonal sense, which governs **με**, ‘me’, in the previous line, and from context seems to mean ‘it is (not) possible’. An alternative conjecture is **ἴκει**, ‘comes’, making ‘to speak does not still come to me’. (See Page 1959 p. 23.) But as good sense can be made of the manuscript’s **εἴκει**, I prefer to use it. I understand ‘yield’ in the sense of ‘grant’ (one of its possible meanings), so: ‘it does not still yield/grant me to speak’. Perhaps this suggests the idea of (poetic) speech being god-given?

but < totally tongue has
silent tongue I've > broken, delicate –

10 at once under skin – fire has gone running,

eyes – nothing see, (a-whirl-
a-bullroar-)
a-whoosh-

ing are ears,

down sweat cold pours, trembling

all [f] of me seizes, (paler
greener) than grass
moister

15 am I, dying – little short of < , about to be, >
[f]

I seem to be to myself[[f].



< ἀλλὰ καὶ μὲν γλῶσσα ἔαγε >, λέπον
< ἀλλ' ἄκαν μὲν γλῶσσαν ἔαγα >

10 δ' αὐτίκα χρωὶ πῦρ ὑπαδεδρόμακεν,
ὀππάτεσσι δ' οὐδὲν ὄρημ', ἐπιρρόμ-
βεισι δ' ἄκουαι,

καδ δ' ἴδρω ψυχρος χέεται, τρόμος δὲ
παῖσαν ἄγρει, χλωροτέρα δὲ ποίας

15 ἔμμι, τεθνάκην δ' ὀλίγω < 'πιδεύσην
< 'πιδεύης >
φαίνομ' ἔμ' αὐτ[αι].

31.9 In the manuscript, this line reads: ἀλλὰ κᾶν μὲν γλῶσσα ἔα γελέπονδ'. The reading of κᾶν as κᾶμ = κατὰ i.e. part of a verb κατέαγε is partially supported by Plutarch, who quotes this line and the next in a very garbled form (at least, in the surviving manuscripts): κατὰ μὲν γλῶσσά γε λεπτὸν αὐτίκα χρῶ ὑποδέδρομεν, 'down tongue delicate at once under skin went running' (Moralia 81d: Babbitt 1927 vol. I p. 434 n. 1). Page (1959 p. 24) sees a problem of meaning, as κατὰ γυνυμι means 'break to pieces / destroy' – but a little hyperbole does not seem out of place to me. The bigger problem is the hiatus between γλῶσσα and ἔαγε (see Page 1959 p. 24). The hiatus has, however, been read as a deliberate evocation of Sappho's broken tongue (O'Higgins 1996 p. 71). The second option I give for this phrase – based on conjectures by Lobel & Page and West – solves the problem of the hiatus, while sticking closer to the manuscript with ἄκαν. But I think it loses something by putting the tongue in the accusative; and the nominative tongue is supported by both Catullus's (51) and Lucretius's (3.155) versions of this line. (For more on Sappho's tongue, see O'Higgins 1996.)

31.9–10 *delicate...fire*: Sappho makes us wait for four words to find out what is 'delicate', making her pairing of it not with 'skin' but with the following word, 'fire', all the more startling.

31.11–12 ἐπιρρόμ-βεισι; *a-bullroar-ing/a-whirl-ing/a-whoosh-ing*: this word's root, ῥομβος, is a 'whirling or circular motion' (used about javelins, eagles), or a 'bull-roarer', a 'piece of wood whirled round on a string to make a whirring noise' (CGL p. 1254).

31.13 *κάδ δ' ἴδρωσ ψυχρὸς χέεται*; *down sweat cold pours*: the manuscript reads ἐκαδεμ' ἰδρῶσ ψυχρὸσ κακχέεται (Page 1959 p. 25). Neri's (2021) edition gives the best restoration of this phrase: it deletes μ', 'me', a pronoun Sappho avoids in this section, and the tautologous prefix κακ, 'down', in favour of ψυχρὸς, 'cold', which editors usually omit.

31.8 *χλωροτέρα δὲ ποίας*; *greener/paler/moister than grass*: 'greener' is the usual literal translation; 'paler' the usual conventional translation; and 'moister' follows Snyder's (1997 p. 33) argument that the simile is haptic rather than visual: 'Eleanor Irwin demonstrates that in early Greek *chloros* means "liquid" or "moist", and only later comes to take on the visual connotation of "green", because of its application to plants. [...] [The] exact sense [of] "more moist than grass" is left to the hearer's imagination – whether Sappho means sweat, tears, or vaginal secretion.'

31.15 *πιδεύσῃν / πιδεύης*; *short of, about to be / short of [f]*: the manuscript reads *πιδεύσῃν*, 'to be about to be short of'. Page (1959 p. 26) could find no example of a future infinitive governed by φαίνομαι, so ruled it out. The conjecture *πιδεύης*, 'short of [f]', has replaced it in most editions. But I think that the manuscript reading makes sense, even if it has no precedent.

31.16 The text here is corrupt. This may have been the end of the song, but most scholars think it continues (Prins 1999 p. 30 n. 5).

17 but all is to be braved, since even a poor [m]



17 ἀλλὰ πὰν τόλματον, ἐπεὶ ἤκαὶ πέννητα†

31.17 The manuscript quotation ends here. Sappho's fighting/enduring spirit and reference to a poor [man / masculine object] (acc.) led West (1970 pp. 312–13) to conclude that the song ended with a gnomic statement of a possible reversal of fortune (something that Longinus – in whose text fragment 31 is preserved – did not feel the need to quote).

"WHEN I LOOK BRIEFLY"

A man (who is far from the song's focus) is listening to an entrancing woman (who is also not the focus, but whom Sappho ostensibly addresses); the sight of this causes Sappho a series of debilitating physical symptoms, which are extremely violent.¹ Nevertheless, she stays brave...

The introspective catalogue which immerses the listener/reader in Sappho's body is the focus of the song, and the reason for fragment 31's enduring success – it is immensely relatable. And part of its relatability is due to its deliberate unspecificity. No names are given, few pronouns, no backstory, and no explicit explanations. We intuit that love is the cause of Sappho's reactions (although some have argued against this), and there is a case to be made for jealousy too. We are told that the woman is desirable – there is no reason to think that Sappho does not desire her. We are also told that the man is 'equal to gods' – perhaps for his luck, or perhaps for his apparent equanimity in the face of such beauty (something Sappho cannot maintain), or perhaps because he, too, is beautiful. Sappho does speak rather contemptuously of him, but attraction to him cannot be ruled out. Speaking in modern terms, someone of any sexual orientation could read themselves into this song. Speaking in ancient terms, Sappho has created a song that any singer or choir could adapt to themselves.

to the beautiful ones [f] – you – this mindset of mine
is not changeable



ταῖς κάλαις ὑμῖν <τὸ> νόημα τῶμον
οὐ διάμειπτον

NOTES

- This fragment is the second half of a Sapphic stanza.

“UNCHANGABLE”

Sappho¹ is perhaps declaring her unshakeable attraction to beautiful women.

¹ If Sappho is the speaker.

loved I you, who [f] of old once



ήράμαν μὲν ἔγω σέθεν ἅ τε πάλαι ποτά

NOTES

- *ἠράμαν*; I loved: sexually.

“I LOVED YOU”

Sappho states that she has loved, or used to love, a woman, sexually. A long time ago this beloved woman...

Although Sappho does not name herself as the speaker here, it seems very likely that this comes from her own persona, especially given the line's original prominent position at the beginning of a book, where it was probably placed as being especially representative of Sappho and the book's themes. So, Sappho is entirely open about her sexual (*ἠράμαν* is unambiguous) love for another woman. She places their emphatic pronouns together, evoking their closeness. What the beloved woman did once of old, we will probably never find out.

This line has been leading a double life for the past two centuries, in more ways than one. Parker (2006) has conclusively demonstrated that the line originally stood in the form I give here.¹ It was probably the opening line of Sappho's second book, cited as an example of the book's metre; its incompleteness led two eighteenth-century scholars to resolve certain manuscripts' textual corruptions of ἃ τε, 'who [f]', into the more satisfying ἄτθι, 'Atthis'.² It was subsequently linked with another line (in fact, one-and-a-half lines) from a different book by Sappho, in a different metre, on a different subject, with incompatible grammar;³ this/these lines read σμίκρα μοι παῖ<ς> ἔμμεναι φαίνῃ κάχαρις,⁴ 'small [f] to me, a child/girl to be you seemed and graceless/charmless'; the apparent oxymoron has been puzzling people ever since.

¹ I summarise Parker's main points here.

² Parker (2006) pp. 374–5.

³ The 'small child' line does not have the obligatory δὲ to match the opening line's μὲν, and therefore simply cannot follow on from it (Parker 2006 p. 380). The incompatibilities of the two lines were not lost on editors, who printed the lines together but never claimed they were consecutive, but the distinction was lost on translators, who have generally read the lines as firmly joined (Parker 2006 p. 381).

⁴ On the correct form of 49b, see Parker (2006) pp. 377–8.

who, a <^{rustic}country bumpkin> [f], bewitches your mind ...

who, clothed [f] in a <^{rustic}country-bumpkin <~~outfit~~ dress> ...

not knowing to pull her rags over her ankles?



†τίς δ' ἀγροΐωτις τοι θέλγει νόον ...

τίς δὲ ἀγροΐωτιν ἐπεμμένα στόλαν ...†

οὐκ ἐπισταμένα τὰ βράκε' ἔλκην ἐπὶ τῶν σφύρων;

NOTES

57.1 *your*: Andromeda's – Athenaeus, who quotes the lines, says 'Sappho sneers about Andromeda'.

57.1 –2 These two lines are not metrical.

"COUNTRY BUMPKIN"

Andromeda has fallen for an uncouth girl/woman.

Andromeda was apparently Sappho's rival in poetry (*Testimonia* 20) and in love (130 V). This fragment (and 130 V) shows that lesbianism was not a peculiarity of Sappho's, but widespread in her social circles.

]put away[

quick]est [

] [

you, o Dika, put <lovely
sexy> garlands around your locks,

5 sprigs of dill you've gathered with soft hands:

a well-flowered one (for so it is) the <Graces
Charites> too, blessed ones [f],

more <look upon
are before>, from those ungarlanded they turn away.



]απύθεσ . [

τά]χισταλ[

]εμπ[

σὺ δὲ στεφάνοις, ὦ Δίκα, <π>έρθεσ ἐράτοις φόβαισιν

5 ὄρπακας ἀνήτω συν<α>έρραισ' ἀπάλαισι χέρσιν·

εὐάνθεα †γὰρ πέλεται† καὶ Χάριτες μάκαιραι

μᾶλλον †<προτόρην
προτέρην>†, ἀστεφανώτοισι δ' ἀπυστρέφονται.

NOTES

81.1 *απύθεσ*; *put away*: this may be a second person imperative, ‘put away, you’, or the word may continue into a different ending. The first option seems likeliest to me, given the probable appearance of a verb with the same root in the same form in line 4 (see note 81.4 below).

81.4 *Dika*: her name means ‘Justice’. *Dikē* is the name of one of the three *Horai* (goddesses of the seasons) in Hesiod’s *Theogony* (901–2); the *Horai* clothe Aphrodite in the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* 6 (Schlesier 2013 p. 202). *Dika* may be the same as *Mnasidika* (fragment 82a).

81.4 <π>*έρθεσ*; *put around*: the text is corrupt here. The word has been reconstructed as <π>*έρθεσ<θ>*, ‘put around, you [pl]’, which does not work with the singular ‘you’. I take the conjecture of Waddell (<http://digitalsappho.org/fragments/fr81/>).

81.6–7 This phrase is corrupt: neither *πέλεται*, ‘it is’, nor *προτόρην/προτέρην*, ‘to look upon / be before’, have an apparent subject. There are no scholarly emendations that solve the problem, so I have tried to make the best of this bad grammatical situation.

“GARLAND YOURSELF”

Sappho tells Dika to put garlands in her hair; this will make her more appealing to the goddesses of charm.

Sappho stresses the (erotic) importance of garlands (which is also apparent in fragments 94 and 98). Dill might be a surprising component, but dill flowers are sweet-scented, delicate yellow umbrellas. I take Sappho’s¹ *καὶ*, ‘and/too’ (line 6), to imply that she joins the Graces/Charites in liking to look at a well-garlanded girl/woman.

The three Graces/Charites were important in Sappho’s works not only as inspirers of song, but also as inspirers of desire,² and as well as connecting them with Aphrodite elsewhere (fragment 194, *Testimonia* 50), here she gives them the epithet she uses for Aphrodite herself, *makaira*, ‘blessed’.

¹ If Sappho is the speaker.

² Snyder (1997) pp. 81–3.

< ^{shapelier}
well-formed-er > Mnasidika than the soft Gurinno



εὐμορφοτέρα Μνασιδῖκα τὰς ἀπάλας Γυρίννως

NOTES

- Fragment 82b may have directly preceded this fragment. It reads:

καίτ' ἐ[and <indeed yet> [
μηδεν[nothing[
νῦν δ' α[now [
μὴ βόλλε[not wish[
εὐμορφο[τέρᾱ	<shapel[ier well-formed[-er]>

- *Mnasidika*: her name means 'Justice Remembered' (Schlesier 2013 p. 202); she may be the same as Dika (fragment 82a).
- *Gurinno*: her name (a nickname) means 'Tadpole' (Schlesier 2013 p. 201).

"SHAPELIER"

Sappho compares two women/girls, complimenting both, but finding one better-looking.

Sappho's expert eye on female beauty? Or an Alkman-like *partheneion* with Sappho's girls singing the praises of their chorus leaders?¹ We do not know who the speaker is.

Gurinno is listed among Sappho's 'Socratic' lovers (*Testimonia* 20); she also appears in the (extremely fragmentary) fragments 29 and 90. *Mnasidika* may also appear in fragment 81. She was cast as the lover of the Sappho-like poet Bilitis in Pierre Louÿs's *fin-de-siècle* pseudotranslations *Les Chansons de Bilitis*.

¹ See Hallett (1996) p. 141.

(a)

] [

] [

] $\left(\begin{array}{c} \text{from} \\ \text{towards} \\ \text{against} \\ \text{at} \end{array} \right)$ [*possible*] [*to be*] *slack*[ened

5

] you'd wish: not [

] $\left\langle \begin{array}{c} \text{you'd bestow} \\ \text{bestowing} \end{array} \right\rangle$ *[f]* little[] to be $\left(\begin{array}{c} \text{borne} \\ \text{carried} \\ \text{gained} \end{array} \right)$ [

(a)

].ε[

]μαν προ . . [

]ονως πρόσ πότ[

*δυ]*γατον χάλα[*σθαι*

5

]ρ ἐθέλοις· οὐ δυ[

 $\left\langle \begin{array}{c} \text{ὁ]πάσδοις} \\ \text{ὁ]πάσδοις} \end{array} \right\rangle$ ὀλιγα[

] . ένα φέρεσθα[ι

NOTES

- Fragment 88 is made up of two papyrus fragments – (a), which is a long strip from the middle of the lines, and (b), which is a very thin strip with the beginnings of lines 9–18 on it. The fragment begins in the last line of a three-line stanza.

88.4 Conjecture – Voigt / Neri.

88.6 ὁ]πάσδοις / ὁ]πάσδοις; you'd bestow / bestowing [f]: the surviving part of the verb in the papyrus could be either a second-person optative or a feminine participle. ὁπάσδω (if this was the verb: conjecture – Neri) has different meanings depending on context, including: 'pursue', 'cause (someone) to attend upon, follow, or go with (another or others)', 'cause (good or bad things) to come to (people)' (CGL p. 1015). As almost no context survives here, I have chosen a verb in keeping with the more likely contexts: gods bestowing something on someone; or brides or companions being bestowed on someone.

$\langle \begin{smallmatrix} [to] \\ [for] \end{smallmatrix} \rangle$ me[*myself*] would not pleasanter [to] look at

10 *this* [] you'd understand, too, yourself [f]:

and $\begin{pmatrix} \text{she} \\ | \\ \text{he} \end{pmatrix}$ forgot you, but anguish[es,

[Mika,]anguished you: what [

[if someone said [

the truth, all of it: for I

15 to ^{feel affection}_{kiss} - if I declare, while there is in me [^{breath}_{to sing}],

$\langle \text{beautiful}[\text{f}] \rangle$ to be $\left(\begin{array}{c} \text{girlfriend's} \\ \text{beloved's} [\text{f}] \\ \text{companion's} [\text{f}] \end{array} \right) \langle \text{darling} \rangle$: [



(b)] . φατίσ . . . [

ἐμ[οιγέ] κεν οὐδ' ἄδιον εἰσόρ[ην]

10 τοῦ[το] συνίησθα καὺτα·

κ[αί μ]έν [σ]ε λέλαθ', ἀλλ' ὀνία[ι δὲ

σε, Μ[ῆκ', ὁ]νίαισαν· τι ῥαδ[

ἡ[] αἱ τις εἶποι [

ἀλάθειαν π[α]ῖσαν· ἔγω τε γαρ[

15 φιλην αἱ φαῖμ' ἄς κεν ἔνη μ' [*αὐτμα*
ἀείδην]

κᾶλ . [] δ' < $\begin{smallmatrix} \acute{\epsilon}[\acute{\rho}\acute{\alpha}\tau]_{\alpha\iota} \\ \acute{\epsilon}[\tau\acute{\alpha}\rho]_{\alpha\iota} \end{smallmatrix} \rangle$ μελήσῃν . []

88.9 Conjecture – Benelli. If this restored full line is more or less correct, fragments (a) and (b) are closer together than they are usually printed.

88.9 εἰσόρ[ην; [tō] look at: this verb is almost certainly εἰσοράω, ‘look at’, but as the ending is missing we do not know its person or tense.

88.10 Conjecture – Neri.

88.11 κ[αί μ]έν[σ]ε; and though ... you: restoration – Benelli.

88.11 ἀλλ’ ὀνία[ι δὲ; but anguish[es: my conjecture; making this a plural noun gives a subject to the third-person plural verb ὀνίασαν in the next line. The meaning here changes completely depending on where the space between words is placed; the other way to read this is ἄλλον ἰα[, ‘another [m acc.] [’, but this doesn’t fit the grammar of the restored phrase.

88.12 Μ[ῖ]κ’; Mika: restoration – Steinrück. This reading is partially supported by Benelli, who also reads a mu on the papyrus here (Neri 2021 p. 206), but it remains uncertain. Sappho mentions a Mika in fragment 71; her name (a nickname) means ‘Tiny’ (Schlesier 2013 p. 201).

88.12 ὀνίασαν;]anguished: the other possible restoration for this verb is μα]νίασαν, ‘]maddened’, but this does not fit with the restoration of Μ[ῖ]κ’, and the scholarly consensus is for ὀνίασαν (Neri 2021 p. 206).

88.14 ἀλάθειαν π[α]ῖσαν; the truth, all of it: restoration – Steinrück / Benelli. Accusative, presumably depending on ‘said’ in the previous line.

88.15 φιλην αἶ φαῖμ’: restoration – Benelli.

88.15 αὐτμα/αείδην; breath / to sing: conjectures – Treu; Benelli. Treu’s conjecture perhaps has the edge, since it is based on Homeric parallels, and still implies singing.

88.16 κᾶλ . [; beautiful[/fine[: as the adjective’s ending is missing, we cannot know what it describes.

88.16 ἐ[ράτ]αι / ἐ[τάρ]αι; beloved’s [f] / girlfriend’s/companion’s [f]: restorations and conjectures – Benelli; Steinrück.

to this[] a secure <affectionate
dear > one [f] I declare I've be[come,

] a <graceful[
charming[>]girl
child [f] >): [

] anguish[ing

20] bitter [m] <[together
[alike >

] [

] this know[-

] what you ! [

] I'll <feel affection
kiss > [

25] [



ἐς το[ῦτο] . . . φίλα φαῖμ' ἐχύρα γέ[νεσθαι

.]χα[ρισ]δ[ο]μενα[π]αίς· ἄ . [

] . . δ' ὄνιαρ[. .]σ[

20] . πίκρος ὕμ[οι

]ωτᾱδεθᾱσ[

] . α τόδε δ' ἴσ[θ(ι)

] . ὥττι σ' ἐγώ [

]α φιλήσω[

25] . ωτᾱλο[

88.17 *ἐς το[ῦτο]*: restoration – Steinrück.

88.18 *χα[ρισ]δ[ο]μενα[π]áis*; *graceful/charming[]child [f] / girl*: restorations – Steinrück; Prauscello & Ucciardello. Nominative. Is this Sappho speaking as herself, or as another character?

88.20 *ὔμ[οι]*; *[together]/[alike]*: conjecture – Di Benedetto. My preferred of several possibilities. If it is correct, then a pairing of two antithetical adjectives could be expected here. Sappho's usual pair for *πίκρος*, 'bitter', is *γλυκύς*, 'sweet', as in fragment 130 V, *γλυκύπικρον*, 'sweet-bitter'; and its usual complement is *ἔρος*, 'love/Eros'.

88.22 *know*: second-person singular imperative. The phrasing here recalls Sappho's apparent statement of love in fragment 23 (line 7 onwards).

88.23 *you*: accusative.

88.23 *ἐγώ*: restoration – Treu.

88.23–4 *σ'*, 'you', could be the object of *φιλήσω*, making (if so) 'for you I'll feel affection / you I'll kiss'.

] for [
 { dart[s
 spear[s
 missile[s
 arrow[s
 bolt[s] }
]

28

] [



]σσον γὰρ . [
]σθαι βελέω[v
] . . [

28

88.27]*σθαι*: a passive infinitive, presumably governing the genitive *βελέω*[v that follows it.

88.27 *missile*[s/*spear*[s/*arrow*[s/*dart*[s/*bolt*[s: *βελος* is any thrown weapon, and can be both literal and figurative (in the same way as English), e.g. a 'thunderbolt', a 'stroke of misfortune', a 'pang of pain', a 'darting glance' (CGL p. 278).

'ANGUISHES'

This fragment is extremely fragmentary, without a single complete line – though more of its text has been recovered and reconstructed in recent years. It is addressed to a woman (lines 10, 12) by a woman (line 17). The woman addressed may be called Mika. The speaking persona could be Sappho – the vocabulary is similar to other fragments from Sappho's persona, and the voice is a very personal one (the fragment is full of 'I's and 'you' singulars) – although the speaker apparently calling herself a 'child/girl' (line 18) may contradict this interpretation.

The most frequent significant roots in the song's vocabulary, with three occurrences each, are *onia*, 'anguish' (lines 11, 12, 19), *fileō*, 'feel affection / kiss' (lines 15, 17, 24) – both of which are also prominent in Sappho's song 1 to Aphrodite – and *faimi*, 'declare' (lines 8, 15, 17). Besides *fileō*, there are lots of erotic keywords: *adion*, 'pleasanter'; *kal-*, 'beautiful/fine'; *erata/etara*, 'beloved' / 'girlfriend/companion'; *melēsēn*, 'to be the darling/care'; *charisdomena*, 'graceful/charming'; *pikros*, 'bitter' (perhaps with *glukos*, 'sweet'?); and potentially also *beleōn*, 'missiles' (etc.).

The all-female cast plus the abundance of erotic vocabulary makes me almost certain that this song was a lesbian love song.

< annoyinger
 nauseatinger > ~~X~~ [I've]
 [she's] > never yet, Eirana, than you, < happened
 hit
 upon [f] >



άσαροτέρας ούδάμα πω, Είρανα, σέθεν τύχοισαν

NOTES

- *Eirana*: the Aeolic of Eirēnē (Irene). Her name – perhaps ironically – means ‘Peace’. Eirēnē is the name of one of the three Horai (goddesses of the seasons) in Hesiod’s *Theogony* (901–2); the Horai clothe Aphrodite in the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* 6 (Schlesier 2013 p. 202). Eirana also appears in fragment 135.

“THE MOST ANNOYING”

A woman (Sappho?) finds *Eirana* exceptionally annoying/nauseating.

This may not seem erotic – but Sappho uses the same word, *asa*, in song 1.3 about the love-pains that Aphrodite brings.

to be dead <tricklessly
honestly> I wish":

she me was behind-leaving, weeping

muchly, and said this [to me:

"oh me! what ills we've experienced,

5 Sappho, really you unwillingly I away-leave'.

to her I this responded:

"farewell, go, and me myself

remembering, for you know how we (~~attended~~
~~followed~~
pursued) you:



τεθνάκην δ' ἀδόλως θέλω·

ἄ με ψισδομένα κατελίμπανεν

πόλλα καὶ τόδ' ἔειπέ [μοι·

ῶιμ' ὥς δεῖνα πεπ[όνθ]αμεν,

5 Ψάπφ', ἦ μάν σ' ἀέκοισ' ἀπυλιμπάνω.

τὰν δ' ἔγω τάδ' ἀμειβόμαν·

χαίροισ' ἔρχεο κᾶμεθεν

μέμναισ', οἶσθα γὰρ ὥς σε πεδήπομεν·

NOTES

94.1 The fragment begins in the second line of a three-line stanza, with a woman/girl in the middle of speaking.

94.7 *χαίροισ'*; *farewell*: this participle literally means 'rejoicing', but is a conventional way of saying goodbye; it possibly carries a tinge of 'cheer up', but this is very buried under the standard, metaphorical, meaning (Page 1959 p. 77).

94.8 *πεδήπομεν*; *we followed/attended/pursued*: this verb (Attic *μεθείπομεν*) has rather baffled translators, who usually translate it 'we cherished', though its literal meaning is 'we followed'. This can imply attending upon someone (and by extension, caring for them). But as Burnett (1979 p. 26) points out, it could equally imply Sappho and her other women literally following her, in a chorus dance. And as I now point out, it could also imply erotic pursuit (like in song 1), which is one of the meanings given for the verb (a lion pursuing its mate: CGL p. 902).

if not, but you I wish

10 to remind []

[] and <beauties
finenesses> we experienced:

[for many garlands] of violets

and [roses] and <[crocuses]
[sages] together
alike >

[] <beside
with> me you put <around
on> ,

15 and [many] fragrant leis -

plaited[- around]soft neck

[you threw] - of flowers made,



αἱ δὲ μή, ἀλλὰ σ' ἔγω θέλω

10 ὄμναισαι [. . . .] . [. . .] . ξαι

ὅσ[.] καὶ κάλ' ἐπάσχομεν·

πό[λλοις γὰρ στεφάν]οις ἴων

καὶ βρ[όδων <κρο]κίων
<σφα]κίων> τ' ὕμοι

κα . . [.] πὰρ ἔμοι πε<ε>ρεθήκα<ο> ,

15 καὶ πό[λλαις ὑπα]θύμιδας

πλέκ[ταις ἀμφ' ἀ]πάλαι δέραι

ἀνθέων ἔ[βαλες] πεποημμέναις,

94.9–11 Sappho directly counters the woman's/girl's lament from the first two stanzas, shifting the emphasis from the bad things that have just happened to the good things that used to happen. She echoes her wording, in the same line-positions: *thelō*, 'I wish' – but adding a forceful *egō*, 'I' (lines 1/9); *deina peponthamen / kal' epaschomen*, 'ills we've experienced' / 'beauties/finenesses we experienced' (lines 4/11).

94.13 *κρο]κίων / σφα]κίων*; *crocuses* / *sages*]: assuming another flower or herb in the list of garland ingredients, and if the dubious kappa is correct, then these are the only two options, both equally plausible (Page 1959 p. 78).

94.15 *ὑπα]θύμιδας*; *fragrant leis*: the exact meaning of this word is unknown. We know from context that it is a kind of garland, worn around the neck so that its fragrance would rise up to please the wearer. The same word was also used for a kind of bird which nested on the ground under herbs – perhaps a wheatear (CGL p. 1432). Breaking the word into its parts, *ὑπα-* means 'under', while *-θύμις* is related to the word *θύμα*, 'sacrificial offering', *θύμια*, 'burn incense / fume', *θύμον*, 'a kind of aromatic shrub, probably thyme' (and also 'garlic'), and *θύμος*, 'breath/spirit' (CGL pp. 694–5). I speculate that the garland may have been made of herbs, including thyme.

94.17 *ἐ]βαλες*; [*you threw*]: conjecture – Theander (my favourite of several very different conjectures).

and with much [oil-shiny] perfume –

floral [–] [abundantly]

20 you daubed yourself – and[regal],

and on a <soft
springy> bed,

<[for]> soft []

you'd let out longing[<for>] ,

and not <anybody> [] nor any

25 holy nor []

there was <whencesoever
whatsoever from which> we were <away>
absent> ,



καὶ πολλῶι λ[ιπάρ]ωι μύρῳι
βρενθείῳι. [] ῥύ[δο]ν

20 ἐξαλ<ε>ίψας κα[ὶ] βασιλῆϊ,

καὶ στρώμ[αν ἐ]πὶ μολθάκαν
ἀπάλαν παρ[] ὀνων
ἐξίης πόθο[ν] . νίδων,

κῶύτε τις[] οὔ]τ' τι

25 ἴρον οὐδ' ὑ[]

ἔπλετ' ὅππ[οθεν ἄμ]μες ἀπέσκομεν,

94.18 Conjecture – Lasserre (after others along similar lines).

94.19 *βρενθείωι*; *floral*: probably a particular flower that a perfumed unguent was made from, now unknown (see Page 1959 p. 79).

94.19 *ρύ[δο]ν*; [*abundantly*]: conjecture – Zuntz.

94.22 *άπάλαν*; *soft*: either genitive plural or feminine accusative singular. Sappho usually uses this adjective about people or body parts (fragments 81, 82, 126; the exception is fragment 96), so the (missing) noun that follows almost certainly referred to a human (Page 1959 p. 78).

94.22–3 [*for*] *soft* [] *you'd let out longing* / *soft* [] *you'd let out longing* [*for*]: *ἐξίης πόθο[ν]*, 'you'd let out longing' (meaning 'satisfy desire' – see below), takes an object in the genitive. This could be the 'soft' people / body parts (which in this case would have to be plural, because of the genitive) in line 22, or whatever concluded line 23 (Page, pp. 79–80).

not a grove []

] noise

29

]



οὐκ ἄλσος . [] . ρος

] ψόφος

29

] . . . οιδῖαι

‘ON A SOFT BED’

A woman, leaving Sappho (whom she calls by name) against her will, expresses the wish to die.¹ Sappho comforts her with reminiscences of their time together: they did ‘beautiful/fine things’, put on garlands and perfumes (literary markers of women’s preparation for sex²), and ‘let out longing on a soft bed’. The next scene in the fragment is barely legible, but perhaps shows a ritual or festival that the women used to frequent.

The most explicitly homosexual of all Sappho’s extant songs, as it appears to contain a sex scene: *strōmnan epi molthakan apalan ... exiēs pothon ...*, ‘on a soft/springy bed [(for)] soft ... you’d let out longing [(for)] ...’. The phrase was controversial: nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century scholars tried to make the bed a symposium couch or a seat; Denys Page finally put the matter ‘to rest’ in 1955, stating definitively that *strōmnē* was ‘a bed, a place where you lie down for the night’.³ At the same time he elucidated the phrase *exiēs pothon*, ‘let out longing’, via the Homeric phrase *ex eron eiēn* (ἐξ ἔρον εἶην), ‘let out / send forth desire’,⁴ which meant ‘get rid of desire by indulging/satisfying it’.⁵ So here we have a picture of two (or more) women in bed, surrounded by flowers, sweet scents, and softness, satisfying their desire.

¹ Or it could be the Sappho-persona who speaks these opening lines, since the beginning of the song is lost – but this seems unlikely in light of what follows. Scholars’ assumption (pre-1970s) that the ‘death wish’ is spoken by Sappho betrays a homophobic attitude to lesbian love: that it must be doomed and miserable (Burnett 1979 p. 26 n. 37).

² Burnett (1979) pp. 23–4. Anointing with perfume was usually done after bathing, while naked (Stehle 1996 p. 146).

³ Page (1959) p. 79.

⁴ *Iliad* 24.227; although Homer uses the usually sexual word *eros* (literally ‘love/eros’) for ‘desire’, his use of the phrase is non-erotic, unlike Sappho’s.

⁵ Page (1959) p. 79.

[

$$\left(\begin{array}{c} \text{it} \\ | \\ \text{she} \\ \text{he} \end{array} \right) \text{lifted [}$$

[

Gongula [

5 surely some sign [

most of all [of

$$\left(\begin{array}{c} \text{yours} \\ \text{ours} \\ \text{mine} \end{array} \right) [\text{f}] \left(\begin{array}{c} \text{she} \\ | \\ \text{he} \end{array} \right) \text{went in [}$$


ου[

ἦρ' ἀ[

δηρατ.[

Γογγυλα . [

5 ἦ τι σᾶμ' ἔθε . [

παισι μάλιστα . [

μας γ' εἴσηλθ' ἔπ . [

$$\left(\begin{array}{c} \text{ὕμ-} \\ \text{ἀμ-} \\ \text{ε-} \end{array} \right)$$

NOTES

95.1 The fragment begins in the last line of a three-line stanza.

95.4 *Gongula*: see note on 22b.10.

95.6 *παισι*; : as the fragment stands, this word (at the beginning of the line) means ‘to/for children’, but it is more likely that it is the second half of a word from the end of the previous line (in the lacuna) (Page 1959 p. 84). Such split-word enjambements very clearly occur in lines 6–7 and 12–13; they also occur frequently in fragment 96, which is probably in the same metre.

95.6–7 ἀμ- / ὑμ- / ἐ-]μας; of ours/yours/mine] [*f*]: my conjectures. This is another split enjambed word. If the metre follows that of fragment 96, the last syllable of the middle line of each stanza is an anceps, so any syllable could fit. The syllable usually supplied for the beginning of this is Ἔρ-, to make Ἑρμας, ‘Hermes’ (conjecture – Blass). However, Page (1959 p. 85) points out that the intensive particle γ’ that follows the word does not occur in Sappho (or her fellow Lesbian poet Alkaios) except with personal pronouns. I have therefore supplied all Aeolic personal pronouns ending -μας: ἀμμάς, ‘ours’; ἐμᾶ/άς, ‘mine’; ὑμμᾶ/άς, ‘yours’; all are feminine and either genitive singular or accusative plural. The noun this pronoun goes with must be in a lacuna.

I said: "ο <mistress
master>, [

]for by the blessed [f] [<goddess
one !>

10]not at all pleased am I { to be lifted too much [{ in fortune
by longings
by anguishes
by wings
upon <the earth [Gaia[> being [f]

to down-die desire of some kind [has me and

the <lotusy
clovery> dewy [<h-
s]-

eights
opes> to see of Acheron[



εἶπον· ὦ δέσποτ' ἐπ . [

ο]ὐ μὰ γὰρ μάκαιραν [<θέαν
ἔγωγ>

10 ο]ὐδὲν ἄδομ' { ἔπαρθ' ἄγα[ν { ἐπ' ὄλβῳ
πόθοισι
ἄσαισι
πέροισι } ,
ἔπερθα γὰ[ς ἔοισα

καθάνην δ' ἡμέρος τις [ἔχει με και

λωτίνοις δροσόεντας [ὄ-

χ[θ]οις ἴδην <Ἀχέρ[οντος
Ἀχέρ[οισίοις]>

95.8 *mistress/master*: δέσποτ' is usually presumed to be masculine, addressing the conjectured Hermes (see note 95.6–7 above), even though the gendered ending of δέσποτις [f] / δέσποτης [m] is elided, and could just as likely be feminine. In fact, 'mistress' seems far more likely to me: an address to Aphrodite would be more in keeping with what we know of Sappho's oeuvre, and of the lines that follow.

95.9 μάκαιραν [θέαν / ἔγωγ'; blessed [f] [goddess/one: in Sappho, usually Aphrodite. Conjectures – Lavagnini; Edmonds.

95.10 The readings of the extant part of this line follow two paths, both employing unusual words. In Schubart/Blass's text (chosen by Voigt) ἔπαρθ' is understood as a form of αἴρω (middle/passive perfect infinitive = ἡρθαι), 'to be lifted', and is followed by ἄγαν, 'too much', then virtually any conceivable noun that fits the metre (conjectures – 'fortune' Blass; 'wings' Blass; 'anguishes' Di Benedetto; 'longings' Ferrari). In West's text (chosen by Campbell) ἔπερθα is understood as a form of ὑπερθα, 'above', probably modified via ἐπί to mean 'upon', and followed by γᾶς, 'the earth / Gaia', then the conjecture ἔοισα, 'being [f]'.
95.11 Restoration – Blass.

95.13 Conjectures (with no effect on the meaning) – Lobel; Fränkel.

] [

 15] [

 (advice

 may no one

 skills

 plans) [



.] . . δεσαιδ . [

 15 .] . γδετον[

 μητιφε[

95.16 *μητις*; *may no one / skills/advice/plans*: without context this could either be the pronoun *μήτις*, 'may/let no one [do...]', or the (plural accusative) noun *μητις*, 'skill/cleverness/counsel/advice/plan/scheme'.

"TO SEE ACHERON"

*Sappho*¹ mentions *Gongula*, appeals (probably) to *Aphrodite*, and speaks of her desire to die and see the slopes of *Acheron*.

Her description of the slopes of the underworld river *Acheron* is evocative of female sexuality (like fragment 96's extended simile). The death wish is clearly inspired by love – an irony she highlights by her use of the sexually charged word *imeros*, 'desire', and immediate qualification of it, *tis*, 'of some kind'. Was this love unrequited, or perhaps entirely fulfilled? The 'little death' of orgasm comes to mind – though too little of the song remains to know what exactly is happening.

¹ If *Sappho* is the speaker.

] Sardis[

]often hither [her] mind bringing [f]

[] we , [] [-]

you as like [f] a goddess ever-so-

5 well-known, and <sup>she_{he}> most of all enjoyed your song-dance:now she (^{is pre-eminent}
stands out
_{is conspicuous}) among Lydian wom-en as when, with <sup>sun
Aelios>set, <sup>silvery-fingered
the [f] rosy-fingered X moon would
Selanna

] Σαρδ .[. .]

πόλ]λακι τυίδε [v]ῶν ἔχοισα

ὥσπ . [. . .] . ὠομεν, . [. . .] . . χ[. .]

σε θέαι σ' ἰκέλαν ἀρι-

5 γνῶται, σᾶι δὲ μάλιστ' ἔχαιρε μόλπαι·

νῦν δὲ Λύδαισιν ἐμπρέπεται γυναι-

κεσσιν ὥς ποτ' ἀελίῳ

δύντος <ἄργυροδοδάκτυλος>
ἀ βροδοδάκτυλος X <κε> μήνα
<σελάννα>

NOTES

96.1 The fragment begins in the second line of a three-line stanza.

96.1 *Sardis*: the capital of Lydia (modern-day Sart, in Turkey), only a hundred or so miles from Lesbos.

96.3 *we*: the end of a first-person plural present/imperfect verb can be read on the parchment.

96.3–4 *σε*: as the fragment stands, this word (at the beginning of the line) means ‘you [acc]’, but it is more likely that it is the end of a split enjambed third-person singular aorist verb from the end of the previous line (in the lacuna) – especially given that ‘you [acc]’ is already there later in the line. Page (1959 p. 89) suggests as an example *ἔτι-σε*, ‘she honoured [you...]’.

96.4–5 *ἀρι-γνώται*; *ever-so-well-known*: ‘a suitable adjective for a goddess making herself manifest to mortals’ in Homeric diction (used of Artemis in *Odyssey* 6.108), and definitely not the name of a woman/girl (‘*Arignōta*’) as scholars used to think (Page 1959 p. 89).

96.7, 8 *Aelios ... Selanna*: Helios; Selene.

96.8 As transmitted in the parchment – *δύντος ἃ βροδοδάκτυλος μήνα* – the text of this line is corrupt: it is one syllable short; uses the definite article *ἃ*, ‘the [f]’, in a way not found elsewhere in Sappho; and counter-intuitively applies a Homeric epithet canonically used of *Ἑώς*/dawn to Selene / the moon (although this can be, and has been, defended). (See Page 1959 p. 90 for a fuller explanation of the textual corruption.) I find Hindley’s (2002) arguments in favour of his emendation *ἀργυροδάκτυλος* very convincing: it is logical, metrical, solves the definite article problem, and it’s easy to see how a scribe could have mistakenly changed *ἀργυρο-* to *ἃ βροδο-* (perhaps expecting the more familiar Homeric epithet, or seeing the word *βρόδα* five lines below). Sappho is even reported in antiquity as saying the moon was like silver and obscured the stars – presumably in this very song (Julian, *Epistle* 19: Hindley 2002 p. 375). And I would add that this is a characteristically Sapphic revision of Homer. While *σελάννα* simply fixes the metre, I like Privitera’s even more simple addition of *κε*, ‘would’, that allows the parchment’s *μήνα* to remain.

surpass
surpassing > all the stars: light <sup>she_{it} > di-

10 refts on sea salty

and equally for many-flowered fields:

the [f] dew <sup>beautiful_{fine} > is sprinkled, blos-

som roses and soft cher-

vils and <sup>sweet-clover_{melilot} > flowery:

15 muchly roaming about, rem-

embering [f] gentle Atthis with desire

[her] delicate <sup>chest_{core} > surely <sup>mightily_{jaggedly} > is eaten up:



πάντα περρέχοισ' ἄστρο· φάος δ' ἐπί-

10 σχει θάλασσαν ἐπ' ἀλμύραν

ἴσως καὶ πολυανθέμοις ἀρούραις·

ἀ δ' ἔέρσα κάλα κέχυται, τεθά-

λαισι δὲ βρόδα κᾶπαλ' ἄν-

θρουσκα καὶ μελίλωτος ἀνθεμώδης·

15 πόλλα δὲ ζαφοίταις, ἀγάνας ἐπι-

μνάσθεις Ἄτθιδος ἱμέρω

λέπαν ποι φρένα <sup>κ[α]ρτέρω<i>_{κ[α]ρχάρω<i>} > βόρηται·

96.9–17 Wherever possible I have preserved the word order and the split-word enjambements. In normal English syntax, these jumbled phrases would read: ‘she/it directs light’; ‘salty sea’; ‘beautiful/fine dew’; ‘roses and soft chervil and flowery sweet-clover/melilot are blossoming’; ‘with jagged/mighty desire’.

96.15–16 *rem-embering*: the woman remembering Atthis is presumably the woman from line 6.

96.16 *Atthis*: an *ethnikon* (nationality-name) meaning ‘woman from Attika’ (Schlesier 2013 p. 218) – the region of Athens. Atthis was widely known in antiquity as one of Sappho’s lovers (*Testimonia* 2, 20; Ovid *Heroides* 15 – see LESBIANTIQUITY 10), and appears as such in fragment 130 V.

96.17 κ[α]ρτέρω<ι> / κ[α]ρχάρω<ι>; mightily/jaggedly: I find the image of the heart tormented by powerful or painful desire characteristically Sapphic, so I have chosen these similar conjectures (Kamerbeek; Bonanno) over that doubtfully posited by Page, κ[ἀ]ρι σᾶ<ι>, ‘by her doom’. To preserve the force of Sappho’s delay of the adjective qualifying ‘desire’ to just before ‘is eaten up’, in my translation I have turned it into an adverb (see note 96.9–17 above).

thither to go < $\frac{we}{us}$ > [] this not

< $\frac{mind}{us\ both}$ > [] [] much

20 ($\frac{she\ utters}{you\ utter}$) [] [] the middle:
he utters

it's easy – I don't declare – goddesses in < $\frac{sha-}{fo-}$

pe \times lovely
rm \times sexy > to equ-

al [] you'd < $\frac{have}{bring}$ > []

] []

25 []

and [] Aphrodita



κῆθι δ' ἔλθην ἀμμ . [. .] . . ισα τόδ' οὐ
νωντα[. .]υστονυμ[. . .] πόλυς

20 γαρύει[. . .]αλον[.]το μέσσον·

ε]ὔμαρ[εσ μ]ἐν οὐ φαῖμι θέαισι μόρ-
φαν ἐπή[ρατ]ον ἐξίσω-
σθαι συ[. .]ρος ἔχρισθ' ἀ[. . .] . νίδηον

]το[. . . .]ρατι-

25 μαλ[] . ερος

καὶ δ[.]μ[]ος Ἀφροδίτα

96.20–21 Many scholars have thought that this is the end of one song and the start of another, but there is nothing in the parchment, topics, or metre to support this, and the echo between the second and eighth surviving stanzas (line 4: ‘like a goddess’ / lines 21–3: ‘to equal goddesses in lovely/sexy shape/form’) strongly connects this as a single song (Page 1959 pp. 95–6 n. 2; Lardinois 1996 p. 161).

96.21 *φαῖμι*; I ... declare: parchment reading – Gallavotti. This line is very indistinct and this reading therefore uncertain, but I find it makes the best sense and is most characteristic of Sappho’s style out of those suggested by scholars. (Edmonds’s and Lobel & Page’s conjecture οὐκ ἄμμι, ‘not for us’, does not fit the grammar or the gaps well: Voigt 1971 p. 109.)

96.23 A popular conjecture (Edmonds) for the end of this line is Ἀδωνίδην, ‘Adonis’s’, which fits into the pattern of divine names ending the stanzas, but there are too many other possibilities to accept this one.

[] nectar [she] poured from
 a golden[]

] [] < ^{to}_{with} > hands < ^{Peitho}_{persuasion} >

30]

]

]

]to the Geraistion

] < ^{to}_{for} > [an] < ^{affectionate}_{dear} > [f]

35] not [

] come[



καμ[] νέκταρ ἔχευ' ἀπὸ
 χρυσίας[] γαν
]απουρ[] χέρσι Πείθω

30]θ[. .]ησενη

]ακις

] εἶδα . . .αι

]ες τὸ Γεραίσιον

]ν φίλαι

35]υστον οὐδενο[

]ερων ἰξο[μ

96.27 *nectar [she] poured*: Aphrodite.

96.29 *Peitho/persuasion*: Sappho apparently called this goddess/personification 'daughter of Aphrodite' (fragment 90) – with evident erotic connotations.

96.33 *Geraiston*: shrine of Poseidon at Geraistos in Euboea? (Campbell 1982 p. 123.)

'ALL-SURPASSING'

Sappho sings of the superlative beauty of a woman who is either *from* or *in* Lydia (an Asian country very near Lesbos, redolent of opulence). 'You' is likened to a goddess, and someone enjoys 'your' dancing. Sappho conjures a lush night-time scene – in a very feminine Homeric simile – comparing the woman to Selanna / the moon, who/which casts light across the world, draws up the dew, and causes flowers to blossom: all powerful metaphors for female sexuality.¹ This abundance is paralleled in the flurry of split-word enjambements, where words spill over from the end of one line to the beginning of the next.² The woman explicitly desires Atthis,³ who is perhaps the 'you' singing and dancing at the beginning of the fragment; their separation causes the woman to pace up and down and her heart to hurt. Like fragment 94, this song seems to be couched in a memory; and also like fragment 94, it descends into incomprehensibility with tantalising moments of legibility. The end perhaps shows a divine scene or a ritual or a journey?

¹ For an excellent analysis of fragment 96's feminine sensuality, see Snyder (1997) pp. 48–52.

² Sappho also employs split-word enjambements (more sparingly) in other fragments: 1, 16, 31, 95.

³ Atthis is Sappho's beloved in another fragment, 130 V.

(a)

] : for my mother[<declared once
said to me >]:

]in her <day
youth >, the big[

]adornment, if someone had locks[

wrapped with a purple [<braid
garland > ,

5 was very much this, for [sure:

but she who has <yellowier
blonder > [

hair than a torch <shining[
clear[<er
est >



(a)

. .] . θος· ἂ γάρ με γέννα[τ' <ἔφα ποτά
ἔειπέ μοι > .

σ]φᾶς ἐπ' ἀλικίας μέγ[αν

κ]όσμον, αἵ τις ἔχη φόβα<ι>ς[

πορφύρῳ κατελιξαμέ[να <πλόκῳ
στέφει > ,

5 ἔμμεναι μάλα τοῦτο δ[ή·

ἀλλ' ἂ ξανθοτέρα<ι>ς ἔχη[

τα<ι>ς κόμα<ι>ς δαΐδος <προφ[ανεστέρας
προφ[ανεστάτας >

NOTES

- The two fragments of this song come from the same column of a papyrus. 98a came from the top of the column. 98b lines 1–3 came from the very bottom of the column, with horizontal strokes in the margin at the beginning of each line, apparently signifying that the scribe had accidentally missed them out from their place higher in the column. 98b lines 4–9 (not given here) immediately preceded 98b.1–3 in the column. (See Page 1959 p. 98.) Due to the great similarity in topic between 98a and 98b.1–3, and the great dissimilarity of topic from them of 98b.4–9, which seems to be about politics, I have concluded that 98a and b.1–3 are parts of the same song, while 98b.4–9 is from a separate song.

98a.1 The fragment begins in the third line of a three-line stanza. The metre is two 8-syllable lines, then an 11-syllable line.

98a.1 Conjectures – Snell. The accusative and infinitive construction that follows in lines 2–5 shows there must have been a verb of saying in this lacuna.

98a.3 *κῶσμον*; *adornment*: the word *kosmos* fundamentally means ‘order’, but takes on very different specific meanings in different areas of Greek life.

98a.4 Conjectures – Vogliano.

98a.5 When anyone waxes lyrical about the sublime laconic beauty of Sappho’s songs, this line could be brought as a counter-argument: it is very clunky and tautologous. I think Sappho is poking fun at her mother’s way of talking.

98a.6 *she who has*: the Greek subjunctive means this is not ‘the (specific) girl/woman’, but rather ‘whatever girl/woman’.

98a.3, 6, 7 <ι>: these iotas correct the papyrus’s ‘correction’ of the Aeolic accusative into its Attic (iota-less) form.

98a.7 Conjectures – Vogliano.

should] <^{fit}_{pair}> [it] with garlands

of flowers ever-so-lush:

10 a]headband just now [

(^{fancy}
^{ornate}
^{colourful}), from Sardis[

12]Maeonian cities

(b)

1 – for you, Kleis, I (^{a fancy}
^{an ornate}
^{a colourful}) one

– don't have nor where it'll be got –

3 – a headband: but for the Mytilenean [m]



σ]τεφάνοισιν ἐπαρτία[ι

ἀνθέων ἐριθαλέων·

10 μ]ιτράναν δ' ἀρτίως κλ[

ποικίλαν ἀπὸ Σαρδίω[ν

12 . . . Μ]αονίας πόλ[ε]ις

(b)

1 – σοὶ δ' ἔγω Κλέϊ ποικίλαν

– οὐκ ἔχω πόθεν ἔσσεται

3 – μιτράν<αν>· ἀλλὰ τῷ Μυτιληνάω

98a.8 *ἐπαρτία*[; *should*] fit/pair: *ἐπαρτία*- does not fit into any vocabulary we know (see Page 1959 p. 101), but it probably belongs to the cluster of **ἄρτ* stem words with meanings such as 'suit/fit/pair', 'equip/prepare', 'hang/suspend'. The line is already metrically complete, so *ι*, *ις*, and *ν* are the only possible completions for this final long syllable. If it is taken as an adjective ending *-αῖς* or *-αν*, its nouns (*κόμαις*, 'hair' or *μῖτράναν*, 'headband') are rather far away, and the necessary verb (which would be in the lacuna) even further, and split off by an apparent shift in topic. So I follow Page in viewing this as an unknown verb. He wants it to be an infinitive depending on a verb in the lacuna at the end of the previous line (*προφ[έρει*, 'it is preferable') – but this does not fit the possible endings for *ἐπαρτία*[. However, if it is taken as a third-person aorist optative – *ἐπαρταί*, its subject the 'she' of the preceding lines – it can stand alone.

98a.10, b.3 *μῖτράναν*; headband: an unusual form of *μίτρα*, 'band/headband', only found in these two fragments; it might be a slightly different kind of headband. Alkman speaks of a 'headband from Lydia, delight of girls with violet/delicate eyelids' (1.67–9, *LESBIANTIQUITY* 2).

98a.10 *κλ*[at the end of this line may have been the beginning of the name Kleis, which would be supported by her name appearing in the following fragment (98b) from the same papyrus column in a very similar context, but there are too many possibilities to say for sure.

98a.11 *Sardis*: capital of Lydia in the Persian empire (now Turkey), very near Lesbos; 'the centre of feminine fashion' (Page 1959 p. 100).

98a.12 *Maeonian*: Lydian. Virgil writes derogatively of Paris wearing a Maeonian *mitra*, 'headband' (*Aeneid* 4.216). The word may also have read 'Ionian', but the context makes this far less likely.

98b.1 *Kleis*: a nickname meaning 'Key' or 'Bolt' (Schlesier 2013 p. 202). Kleis was known in antiquity as Sappho's daughter (named after her mother) (*Testimonia* 1, 2), and also appears as such in fragment 132.

98b.2 The grammar of this line is unusual (see Page (1959) p. 101; Waddell <http://digitalsappho.org/fragments/fr98/>).

98b.3 *Mytilenean*: a masculine person or thing from Lesbos's capital.

"HAIR BRIGHTER THAN A TORCH"

Sappho and her mother discuss how best to dress a beautiful girl's hair.

It is unclear whether the context is homoerotic – the presence of Sappho's mother (whom Sappho amusingly ventriloquises) and (probably) daughter makes a non-erotic, familial context more likely. But the rich language of feminine beauty and fashion has much in common with homoerotic fragments by Sappho, especially 22, 81, and 94.

sweet mother, I'm not able to strum the loom,

tamed [f] by longing for a $\left\langle \begin{smallmatrix} \text{child} \\ \text{babe} \end{smallmatrix} \right\rangle$ [n] through slender Aphrodita.



γλύκη ματὲρ, οὔτοι δύναμαι κρέκην τὸν ἴστον
πόθῳ δάμεισα παῖδος βραδίναν δι' Ἀφροδίταν.

"UNABLE TO STRUM THE LOOM"

A woman is in love, and cannot do her weaving.

The speaker is gendered as female, and may or may not be Sappho. Her beloved is ungendered: the word *pais*, literally 'child', can be either feminine or masculine in Greek; here there is no indication which it is. *Pais* applied equally to girls and boys, as well as to slaves (male or female), and – at least in the male sympotic context – to the junior partner in a homosexual relationship, as an endearment.¹

This fragment has been seen as expressing folk motifs,² a conclusion perhaps supported by the lines' intense assonance: repeated 'k' sounds in the first line and 'p/b' and 'd/t' sounds in the second. However, the repetition of erotic vocabulary from other fragments – notably, the horse-breaking metaphor from song 1 – somewhat undermines the 'folk song' idea. So does a possible metapoetic moment: the verb Sappho uses for working the loom, the onomatopoeic *kekēn*, is one more commonly used of 'striking' the lyre, 'striking up' a tune, 'singing' to an accompaniment, and 'playing' the aulos.³ Is Sappho winkingly showing herself swapping the lyre for the loom, about to swap back to sing about her new love?

¹ Balmer (2013) p. 63.

² Snyder (1997) p. 109.

³ CGL p. 832.

ο < ^{beautiful}
fine > [f], ο < ^{graceful}
charming > [f] *bride*



ὦ κάλα, ὦ χαρίεσσα <νύμφα>

NOTES

- <νύμφα>; bride: the first four words of this line are quoted by the fourth-century AD Greek rhetorician Himerius as by ‘the Lesbian [f]’. Since he quotes the line in a wedding speech, the likelihood is that he took it from one of Sappho’s *hymenaios* (wedding songs) – but it could have had an entirely different context. Voigt reconstructs this line with κόρα, ‘girl’ (based on Theokritos 18.38). But I follow Meister’s (2021) reconstruction, based on the compelling argument that Himerius missed out the (standard) word νύμφα, ‘bride’, because he had already said it just before the quote. Meister scans the line as Aeolic metre rather than dactylic – so the line could be complete in itself, or end with a long-short disyllable (κόρα, which is short-short, does not fit this metre).

“THE BRIDE?”

A woman is highly praised (at her wedding?).

fortunate groom, for you marriage indeed as you prayed
is fulfilled, you have the maiden for whom you prayed.

you a <graceful
charming> appearance, <eyes
glances> [*have, bride,*

<mild
kindly>, <love
Eros> has poured on [your] desirable face

5] <honoured
rewarded> you exceptionally has Aphrodita



ὄλβιε γάμβρε, σοὶ μὲν δὴ γάμος ὥς ἄραο
ἐκτετέλεστ', ἔχῃς δὲ πάρθενον, ἂν ἄραο.
σοὶ χάριεν μὲν εἶδος, ὅππατα [<δ'> *ἐστί, νύμφα,*
μέλλιχ', ἔρος δ' ἐπ' ἰμέρτῳ κέχυται προσώπῳ

5 <.....> τετίμακ' ἔξοχά σ' Ἀφροδίτα

NOTES

112.3 ἐστί, νύμφα ; have, bride: we are nearly sure that the addressee of this fragment changes from groom to bride partway, because the fifth-/sixth-century AD rhetorician Choricus introduces a quotation of lines 3–5 in his epithalamium (wedding poem) for his pupil Zacharias by saying ‘the bride [...] with Sapphic lyric I’ll adorn’ (*Dialexis* 4.19: Richtsteig (1972) pp. 86–7). This conjecture (Wilamowitz) is the only one that deals with the change of addressee. If the bride was not mentioned in the lacuna, then perhaps the song took some kind of amoebean (alternating) form?

“DESIRABLE FACE”

A lucky groom gets an exceedingly beautiful bride.

Although this is a *hymenaios* (wedding song) celebrating heterosexual love, Sappho’s description of the bride is unambiguously erotic.

{sleeping [f]} on soft {girlfriend's
 you'd sleep companion's [f]} breasts



{δαύοισ'} ἀπάλας ἐτα<ί>ρας ἐν στήθεσιν
 δαύοις

"BREASTS FOR HER PILLOW"

A woman is sleeping, or someone would like to sleep, on another/a woman's breasts.

The homoeroticism of this fragment hinges on the grammatical interpretation of the first word: is it *dauois*, a feminine participle, 'she, sleeping', or *dauois*, a second-person optative, 'you would (like to) sleep'? There are no pronouns to guide the choice. Translators choose the feminine participle far less often than the second-person optative, even though choosing the feminine participle allows us to imagine the sleeper as the lyric 'I', Sappho.

In either case, the female-centred Lesbos of Sappho's songs makes a female sleeper more likely. However, when Theokritos alludes to this line, he imagines the scene as a heterosexual one, between the newly wed Helen and Menalaos: 'εὔδεται ἑξ ἀλλάλων στέρνον φιλότατα πνέοντες καὶ πόθον', 'sleep, on each other's breast breathing affection and longing' (18.54–5), so he may have taken it from one of Sappho's *hymenaios* (wedding songs).

There is little doubt that the line is sexual (especially given Theokritos's reception of it). The word Sappho uses for 'sleep' does not necessarily mean that the couple are asleep: its basic sense is 'spend the night (in rest or awake)'.¹ Softness is a common Sapphic erotic feature (see fragments 81, 82, 94). The word *etaira* (Attic *hetaira*), literally 'female companion', is also potentially sexual: in Sappho's time it had begun to be used by men (stemming from symposium culture) to mean 'courtesan' or 'mistress', and the word also bore homosexual connotations.² In Sappho's other uses of *etaira* (fragments 142, 160) it's unclear if there was a sexual component, but here it is pretty unambiguous. Finally, 'breasts' are not only literal but also metaphorical, the seat of emotions.

¹ CGL p. 700.

² Carson (2002) p. 378; Calame (1996) p. 121 n. 30. See Plato's *Symposium* (LESBIANTIQUITY 5) for another homosexual take on the word *hetaira*.

<^{love}
Eros> yet again – the limb-loosening – shakes me,

sweet-bitter <unmanageable
helpless > (^{reptile}
beast
creepy-crawly)

Atthis, for you of me it's become hateful

to think, to Andromeda you <^{fly}
flutter>



Ἔρος δηῦτέ μ' ὁ λυσιμέλης δόνει,
γλυκύπικρον ἀμάχανον ὄρπετον

Ἄτθι, σοὶ δ' ἔμεθεν μὲν ἀπήχθετο
φροντίσδην, ἐπὶ δ' Ἀνδρομέδαν πότῃ

NOTES

• These four lines were cited together by the grammarian Hephaision, but have usually been separated into two fragments by editors because of the apparent change of topic – which is not necessarily a change of topic at all! Lobel & Page print the lines as fragments 130 and 131, but Voigt (1971 p. 131) reunites them in her edition.

130V.1 *λυσιμέλης*; *limb-loosening*: Alkman uses the same word about desire in *Partheneion* 3, among many other writers – it is rather cliché, but Sappho shakes it up with the very unusual description of love/Eros in the following line.

130V.2 *ἀμάχανον*; *unmanageable/helpless*: ‘whatever is *amachanon* is something that one has no way of dealing with’, literally “‘without device”, “without a *mechane*” (Snyder 1997 p. 22); ‘helpless’ should be taken in the sense of ‘can’t-be-helped’.

130V.2 *ὄρπετον*; *beast/reptile/creepy-crawly*: any animal that crawls on the ground (Pindar uses it of a dog, Theokritos of a serpent, Semonides of a beetle) (CGL p. 601).

130V.3 *Atthis*: see note 96.16 above.

130V.4 *Andromeda*: a name from mythology meaning ‘the woman who rules over men’ (Schlesier 2013 p. 218). Andromeda was apparently one of Sappho’s poetic rivals (*Testimonia* 20) but here appears to be her rival in love; Sappho sneers at Andromeda in two other fragments (57, 133).

“SWEET-BITTER EROS”

Sappho is suffering the vicissitudes of love; her lover has left her for another woman.

Sappho describes love/Eros with a series of contradictions – powerful and desirable yet unwelcome and despicable. And despite all its/his power, she implies – with her erotic keyword *dēute*, ‘yet again’ – that she has withstood it/him before and will do so again. She then tells of Atthis’s abandonment of her for Andromeda, with another erotic keyword, *potaomai*, ‘flutter/fly’. (This vocabulary links 130 V with Sappho’s best-preserved erotic songs, 1 and 31.)

why me, o Eirana, does Pandion's swallow



τί με Πανδίωνις, ὦ Εἴρανα, χελίδων

NOTES

- *Eirana*: see note on fragment 91, where Eirana also appears.
- *Pandion*: King of Athens, whose daughters Proknē and Philomela were transformed into a swallow and a nightingale.

"THE SWALLOW"

*Sappho*¹ asks *Eirana* why the swallow is [doing something to] her.

The swallow was (and is) traditionally a herald of Spring.² Though we don't know what the swallow does to the speaker, springtime is often associated with sex.

¹ If Sappho is the speaker.

² And also a metaphor for unintelligible twittering (of foreigners, poets, etc.). CGL pp. 1498–9.

Lato and Nioba were very $\left\langle \begin{array}{c} \text{affectionate} \\ \text{dear} \end{array} \right\rangle$ \times $\left\langle \begin{array}{c} \text{girlfriends} \\ \text{companions} \end{array} \right\rangle$ [f]



Λάτω καὶ Νιόβα μάλα μὲν φίλαι ἦσαν ἑταιραι

NOTES

- *Latō and Nioba*: in myth, Lētō, the mother of Apollo and Artemis, killed all of Niobē's many children to punish her for boasting about having borne so many more than Lētō.

'LATŌ & NIOBA'

Lovers or just good friends?

This short fragment has two words – *filai* (see Sexual Glossary) and *etairai* (see fragment 126) – that could be sexual, or could simply be about friendship.

Although the fragment refers to the myth of Niobē and Lētō, Athenaeus, who quotes this fragment (and would have had access to the entire song), understands the women as real-life friends of Sappho's. So she was probably playing on the irony of women who are namesakes of mythological enemies being lovers/friends.

these now <for to X girlfriends companions [f]>
 of mine delighting, <beautifully finely> I'll sing



τάδε νῦν ἐταίραις
 ταῖς ἔμαις <<τέρποισα>> <<τέρποντα>> κάλως ἀείσω

NOTES

160.2 *τέρποισα/τέρποντα*; *delighting*: the transmitted text, *τέρπνα*, 'delightful things', does not fit the metre. Depending on which conjecture (Sitzler; Hoffmann) you choose, it is either Sappho or 'these' (her songs) who is / which are delighting her friends/lovers.

"TO MY GIRLFRIENDS"

This fragment is Sappho's only indication of how she¹ performed her songs: for her *etairai* (see fragment 126).

¹ If Sappho is the speaker.

] [

[] my and Archeanas[-

sa Gorgō's <yokemate
partner >



]..[.] τ...[

... [.]. σε ἔμα κ'Ἀρχεάν[ασ-

σα <Γόργω<ς>> > σύνδυγο(ς)

NOTES

213.2 *my*: feminine singular, feminine dual, or neuter plural. It could belong with the (lost) preceding text, or with either 'Archeanassa' or 'yokemate'.

213.2–3 *Archeanassa*: a nickname meaning 'Ruling Mistress', which suggests aristocratic provenance (Schlesier 2013 pp. 202, 204). She also appears in the extremely fragmentary fragment 214 in proximity (lines 4 & 7) to the adjective *epērat*], 'lovely/sexy'.

213.3 *Γόργω<ς> / Γόργω<ι>*; *Gorgō's*: supplements – Lobel (who also notes that the last three words could have come from a Sapphic stanza: Neri 2021 p. 312). *Gorgō* is a mythological nickname meaning 'The Gorgon' (Schlesier 2013 p. 201), i.e. the snake-haired sisters *Sthenō*, *Eurualē*, and *Medusa*. *Gorgō* was apparently Sappho's rival in poetry (*Testimonia* 20); she appears in fragment 144, where some people are 'sated by / fed up with' her.

"YOKEMATES"

Two women are partners – in life or just in work?

Sappho's use of the word *sundugos* (Attic *suzux*), 'yokemate/partner', about two women is very interesting, as it's often used of married couples (deriving from the practice of yoking together pairs of animals like oxen or horses for pulling ploughs or chariots).

The commentary where this is quoted gives another woman's name, *Pleistodika*, instead of *Archeanassa*, and says *Gongula* (see fragments 22b & 95) is also *Gorgō's* 'yokemate/partner'.

I.A. 35 V

] [

Aphro]dit[α

] [

] having unloosed [f]:

5] [apple]-cheeked [f], <^{to}_{for}> you indeed

] [] of women

] [] <^{tempestuous}_{through-blowing}> [f]

] you'd dance[, <^{love}_{sex}ly> [f] Abanthis:



]ημ[

Ἀφρό]δ{ε}ιτ[α

]ακεφα [

'].αν λύθεισα·

5] . [μαλ]οπάραυε, σοὶ μὰν

]'. δε . β[]ν γυναίκων

] . . . οισαν μ[] . ζάεισαι

] . ἰν ὄρχησθ[ἐρό]εσσ' Ἄβανθι·

NOTES

- Scholars are unsure whether this fragment is by Sappho or Alkaios: while Lobel & Page assign it to Alkaios, 261b col. i, Voigt has the fragment as i.a. (*incerti auctoris*: uncertain which author's) 35, and Neri as *dubia* (uncertain) 301. For me, multiple facets point to Sappho as author: the probable appearance of Aphrodite near the beginning of the fragment, the unswervingly feminine focus, and Abanthis – the final word, in the vocative – who may also be the addressee of Sappho's fragment 22b.

i.a. 35V.2 Supplement – Lobel.

i.a. 35V.5 *μαλ[ο]πάραυε*; apple]-cheeked: conjecture – Lobel. Theokritos uses this epithet about Agauē, queen of the Maenads, in the first line of his *Idyll* 26 (Voigt 1971 p. 372).

i.a. 35V.8 Supplement – Lobel.

i.a. 35V.8 *Abanthis*: I think this name means 'youth's flower'. She may appear in fragment 22b (though the name there is supplemented based on this fragment – see note 22b.10).

"DANCING UP A STORM"

Sappho sings to Abanthis.

A series of feminine participles and adjectives lead up to Abanthis's name, and if they are all about her, we know she unloosed someone/something, has cheeks like apples (red? round? shiny?), is one of the women, is stormy, likes dancing, and is sexy.

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