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SAPPHO

The Greek Poems

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Foreword

If there were two names which everyone would immediately associate with Greek poetry, they would probably be those of Homer and Sappho. But there is a huge disparity between the four printed volumes of the Iliad and Odyssey, which come down to us in a well known and readable format from ancient times, as compared with our dozen pages of Sappho gleaned from Hellenistic literary sources and scraps of Egyptian papyrus used as wrapping paper for business accounts. The Homeric texts come in a steady flow of manuscripts confirmed by early samples in essays and many papyri, so there is little question about the authenticity of the text.

Sappho on the other hand was being read in 7th century Byzantium in a collection of some half dozen volumes, but thereafter these were suppressed on the grounds of her supposedly aberrant sexual preferences, and removed from the libraries and the copyists' benches. So one would almost think of classifying her, along with a vast body of what has not come down from Greek times, with the 'lost literature' of a vibrant culture which once had a quarter of a millions volumes in its great libraries. One might think hr name had largely faded out in out times.

But this is not the case. In preparing this study I thought it worth checking with one of the search engines on the Internet for the word "Sappho", a name which is not likely to be conflated with other names or titles. (Homer is not a good search term, it might be an American painter, a baseball term, a pigeon type or either name of generations of American men.) To my amazement, I got a count of 119,000 returns, and examining the first hundred "best choices". I came up with these classes:

First and foremost, "Sappho" appears as the keyword for Lesbian websites, which are operating actively throughout the world. In the last half of the 20th century the volcano of social change which altered the topography of the Western world forever, turned public attention to matters of sexual preference which had been buried since the times of the Greco-Roman civilization.

In the spirit of inquiry which after 1900 unearthed Oedipus and incest as a component of the new Freudian psychology, it soon would be perfectly natural for Sappho to reappear as the patron saint of a new turn in female sexuality. Of course this has become more a topic of popular mythology than a matter of history, since two variables are involved: First, was Sappho actually homosexual? And then did homosexuality have the same meaning in the social world of ancient Greece as it had in the modern Christian West? But for gay rights activists, such details would seem academic and not worth pursing in the light of a new sense of personal freedom.

But a second upheaval of social consciousness also surfaced in that last half century as the Women's Liberation Movement, and academic activists could easily fix upon Sappho as key person in the history of Women in the West. On the one hand Sappho was a fine and well known poet, against a back-drop of a male dominating society where few feminine literary names ap-peared, so this indicates the suppressed potential of women as writers. On the other hand since her case is an exception, we have to face the question about "Why so few women...?". With Sappho as a quasi-deity of Women's Rights, the voice of protest could emerge angrily in public meetings, or more conveniently and persuasively in a college course like "The Role of Women in Antiquity", with sixteen weeks of around the table discussion and college credits as well. This was legitimate study in the history of the West.

But there is third group which I find on my list of a hundred Sappho sites, one which stems from an older line of University scholarship, from the aca-demic tradition of Classical Philology. Since the beginning of a new spirit for an exacting classical scholarship after l800, the search for remnants of Sappho's poetry in the corpus of later Hellenistic writing was on, and each scrap of a line or even a word was sought as avidly as the artifacts for which the archaeologist hunted at Pompeii. But as the 19th century ended, papyrus fragments began to come from Egypt where British and French colonialists had ready cash for antiques, and a new papyrological discipline came to the fore. In the spirit of quasi-scientific investigation, a major of Sappho Scholarship accrued, with books and articles in a dozen languages examining and testing each new scrap of papyrus and each possible notion of poetic interpretation.

This was all couched in a scholarly diction which was of great interest to those in the field of Classical Studies, but hardly readable to lovers of literature outside. My searched list had much from this well developed academic source, under the general area of university publications and library resources, constituting a virtual Sapphic library unto itself.

But there is a fourth group, one which involves a wider circle of literary interest, for which the name of Sappho has always had a magical allure. There have been attempts as translating Sappho into a modern readable format since Mary Robinson's elegantly printed l796 volume and on up to the present day. I even find that my earlier paper on Sappho with several translations, which appeared on the Web in l996, has already been copied, purloined and cached on dozens of sites unknown to me, all of which points to a wildly growing interest in Sappho, whether as Lesbian, Liberation or as Literature. Translations of Sappho continue to appear with new ones coming up with the lillies each year, although Sappho is virtually impossible to translate effectively, and it is clear as Robert Frost warned up decades ago, that "Poetry is what is lost in translation".

But there are problems which arise as soon as you try to translate. The basic one is the matter of interpretation, since words change meaning over the course of the centuries. Words, notions and sentiments are not cross-culturally exchangeable, so reading a text from a far place in a distant time is always going to be difficult. This become worse when we have writing in an obscure dialect like the Aeolic language of Sappho, in which we have little linguistic base for comparison. Add to this the personal poetic component of Sappho's lines, that unforeseen idiosyncratic combination of words and thoughts which makes poetry a special art beyond the usages of ordinary communication, and we have a delicate situation.

Unrolling a papyrus volume is done with the greatest of care, use rough hands and the whole thing is gone. But the same is true of unrolling the meanings of a delicate piece of poetic fabric. And just as a sheet of paper has two sides, a poem has two dimensions glued as it were onto the same verbal framework. There will be a range of denoted verbal data, which we roughly classify under the heading of Meaning. But there is also the matter of the Form, the actual configuration of the words as words, and the sounds as they are arranged in their careful mosaic patterning.

These elements reside on a different plane from the communicative data of Meaning. Translation can do fairly well with Meaning if done conscientiously and with attention to background and historical change, but the Form can only try to match the original at specific points, as it manages to touch base with the original text here and there. A complete re-configuration would be a replication of the original, an exact duplication.

After Davenport surprised the literary world with his re-creation of Archilochus in l963, he went on to translate Sappho's similarly fragmented poems, and did a fine job in his customary style. He has a way of putting his finger on an important point in a poem, and gets the tone across although it may not be the actual tone of the original. This is better than most interpretations of Sappho, but it catches only the peaks of the waves, and misses the depths of her feelings which cannot be caught so easily.

In order to go deeper, we need the Greek. Many people are starting Greek these days, in a college course or simply working on their own, and there seems to be a phil-Hellenic spirit in the air. The Classics have been so long saddled by the idea of "Greek and Latin" as a matched pair, that to many it is assumed that you study Latin first, along with one William Shakespeare, and then do a "little Greek" later if you can. The formidable Dr. Johnson said about Greek, that a gentleman should get as much of it as he can, like the lace on the wrists of his 18th century dress jacket. And it was not really surprising that a man I know who loves Greek literature and signed up for a M.A. program in Greek at a prominent University, was told that he had to take Latin as well as an adamant program requirement. Greek as background for Latin makes sense, but hardly Latin as foreground for Greek!

I remember the little old lady on the fast food advertisement who enchanted the TV world for a time with her remark, as she peered into her hamburger, asking: "Where's the beef?". I peer into the welter of writing on Sappho, and the translations of Sappho, and the cultural discussions of Sappho, and find myself asking the same question: "Where's the Greek?"

This study brings together the actual Greek text of the more interpretable poems of Sappho, accompanied by a new translation for those not reading the Greek, along with detailed discussion of Form as form, as needed for overall interpretation. This approach is aimed at the literary quality of Sappho's artistry, and brings to the literary reader of poetry the closely coupled ranges of both Form and Meaning . For this we have to have the Greek at hand, but for those for whom this is new, I also print a text in Roman characters which may make phonetic reading easier.

For those for whom Greek is new, I suggest imbibing the Greek with meanings foremost as a first step, while later rearranging the words and forms mentally with dictionary and grammar at hand, as the traditional way to approach any new linguistic sample. Since Aeolic language is largely a thing unto itself, re-phrasing it in terms of Attic grammar would be an unnecessary process, something like explaining Chaucer's language in terms of modern English grammar.

We have a bad tendency to teach "the grammar" first and then try to do some reading with it, whereas Grammar is the after-the-fact result of what surfaces from large amounts of intelligent practice in reading. In fact there are no Paradigms except in the grammar books.

But there does congeal after a certain amount of reading, a sense of "paradigmatic unity", which is the mental perception that certain linguistic phenomena (in Greek these are often associated with the "endings") fall into regular classes of behavior. In our native speech we have little awareness of grammar as grammar, but we are inuitively aware of what features fall together into what (unspecified) classifications. This is the grammar of the unconscious mind upon which all use of language depends.

In the case of Greek this is not always easy to grasp, and we will continue to reach for our Smyth grammar or the Liddell & Scott dictionary as our lifesavers in the rough sea of turbulent wave-whipped wording. But what must be kept in mind as paramount is what the words "says" in its context, and when you have clearly understood that , you have made the initial vital step. Seeing the same linguistic item or "tag" later, you will remember seeing it before with a prior meaning in its prior context, and thus you begin to assemble your mental Paradigm in the back of your mind. I strongly suggest this procedure as feasible in reading Sappho, since the amount of text is severely limited and you can have it all memorized and context-sorted very quickly. Then, you can ask grammatical questions, then is the time to check it out and see if you got it completely right.

At the end of the Commentary to Poem I you will find a grammatical analysis of each word in that poem, which should be useful for those just now starting their study of Greek, or others whose Greek has been confined to the Attic mold. A second version of this analysis has the grammatical functions marked in bold, as a review of what grammar has been employed in the poem. If this can possibly aid or encourage, that is all it is intended to do.

Background

Some historical fact and some points of cultural reference are needed to flesh out the bare information about Sappho from her verse. A basic source of information comes from the Suda, reflecting what was known about the poet Sappho in the tenth century Byzantine world. While not considered authoritative information, this is perhaps the best we have on many ancient topics, since much of the information available then is now irretrievably lost to us.

> "Sappho: daughter of Simon or Eumenos or Eerigonius or Ecrytos or Semos or Camon or Etarchus or Scamandronymos. Her mother was Kleis from Eresus on Lesbos......"
>
>> The number of possible parental names is more interesting for the names themselves rather than the actual family line. These have been examined for linguistic links to Near Eastern languages, and there is a suspicion that Sappho's name as well as those of some of these fathers may be of eastern origin. Simon Ecrytos Semos and Camon do not seem to be Greek names, and the final name Scamandronymos is "Named from (river) Scamndros" which was near Troy.

> "Flourished in the 42nd Olympiad when Alcaeus Stesichorus and Pittacus were living......"
>
>> We now calculate the Ol.42 to be 612-608 BC. Alcaeus is thought to have been born after 625, Stesichorus is traditionally dated at Ol.37, and Pittacus born somewhat earlier in OL 32 is said to have died in 570. So this establishes a relative frame of reference for Sappho's date.

"She had three brothers, Larches, Charaxos and Eurygios. She was married to a wealthy man called Cercylas working out of Andros, and she had a daughter from him named Cleis...."

> The name of the daughter is traditional after her grandmother, or it could be the other way around, but by ancient tradition one of the other could well be a real name. The name Cercylas is unusual, and one serious scholar has thought it was a pun on 'kerkos' meaning "tail of an animal; penis ", especially since the island Andros would be taken etymologically to be related to 'andra' or "man". This is the kind of ribald joke Aristophanes would have enjoyed: "Mr. Dick from the Isle of Man". Compare Yiddish "schmuck" as a penile pejorative, also from a normal German word "decoration" as something hanging down. Or it could be the man's legitimate name coming with a punning background, like "Smucker's Strawberry Jam ["With a name like that, it's got to be good"]".

"She had three companions and friends, Atthis, Telesippa and Megara, and she got a bad name for an indecent friendship with them. Her pupils were Anagora of Miletus, Gongyla of Colophon, and Eunica of Salamis...."

> The names are interesting since they are tied to cities at a distance from Lesbos, and a papyrus fragment of a commentary on Sappho notes that her students came from the noblest families of Ionia. This geographical spread across the sea to Turkey on the one side and mainland Salamis on the other implies some sort of school for young women, perhaps a cult oriented academy in the name of Aphrodite as suitable for future brides. In this case it could be seen, perhaps with a whimsical turn of mind, as pre-Jane Austen academy: "St. Aphrodite's Finishing School for Young Ladies of Quality".
>
> The two classification of girls is interesting, since the first group are listed as 'hetairai' which could mean associates, although the word is later used for sexual partners and geishas.

It could be that the Suda is aware of the matter of Sappho's supposed homosexuality, and it is the writer who chooses the word 'hetaira' as being sexual in his time. But the other three girls who are given much more identity by their homeland origins, are clearly listed as "students" or 'mathetai'. Perhaps the two name groups came from different sources, and are only here lumped together while listing girl associates.

"She wrote nine book of lyric poems, and invented the 'pléctron'. She also wrote epigrams, elegaic couplets, iambics and monodic songs."

The number of books she wrote is variable, other sources say seven, but since we have almost nothing of these collections, the number is inconsequential. From what we have, we associate Sappho with pure lyric poetry, but apparently she wrote in a wide variety of styles and forms, and the last term 'monodia' or Solo Song would have been her N us out on the wrong foot when approaching an ancient poet, we miss the message of the acoustic part of the composition, and tend to busy ourselves with what the poem "means" in terms of word and sentence communication. We will go into this in more detail later in the Commentary, as a critical pathway into the full mean of Sappho's poetry.

Curiously the Suda has a second entry for Sappho, which maintains that there were two people of the same name:

"Sappho, a woman from Mitylene on Lesbos, lyre-player (psaltria). This Sappho because she was in love with Phaon of Mitylene, threw herself into the sea from the Leucadian cliff. Some state that she also composed lyric poetry."

It seems odd that the Suda would have two entries, which should mean that there were two sources of information at hand. It has been assumed by some that this is the same Sappho and perhaps someone wished to avoid the associations with various girls as prejudicial to her reputation, but this story have a very different cast. Sappho # I was married, had a child, and some sort of educational projects in hand, while Sappho # II

has none of this but a fatal attraction for a local boy and she commits suicide. Note that Phaon can also be the present participle of the verb 'pha-o' as 'phaon, phaontos' meaning "the bright shining (one)' and this accords with the name of the Leucadian cliff as 'leukados' from 'leukos' or "white". Hesychius has a gloss for 'melanouros' or "black tailed" (of the bullhead fish avoided by Pythagoreans) as 'leuko-kerkos' or 'white-penised', only worth mentioning here because of the Leuk=adian Cliff and the husband Cerkylos of Sappho I. (?).

The geographer Strabo 10.2.9 notes a ritual annually practiced at the Leucadian cliff, involving someone leaping or hurled down into the sea as a rite of aversion of evil. But the person is saved by villagers waiting at the sea level. He mentions this in conjunction with Sappho's supposed leap, but this 'footnote' to her story sounds like something quite different from a lover's leap to death. This will probably remain a mystery.

A papyrus account of Sappho from around 200 AD has much the same account but adds an interesting detail which would surprise the many painters and sculptors of the l9th century who envisioned the poet as soft, delicate and radiantly beautiful.

> "In appearance she seems to have been contemptible and bad-looking, being rather dark skinned (phaios) in appearance, and in stature very short. The same is true of Alcaeus, who was also rather small.... (a part missing)......"

Since we are talking about the eastern side of the Greek world, and there is now much evidence that there were ethnic strains other than Hellenic Greek in that area, it may be tentatively suspected that Sappho might be from an ethnic Hattic population group. Sappho's name is clearly non-Greek, especially with her original and authentic spelling "Psapph-o". Her countryman Alcaeus rejoices in the death of a local tyrant named Mursilos, who has a clearly Hittite name (the dysphonic King Mursilis III of the tablets).

So the trait to follow would seem to be small stature in any skeletal remains from Ionia as compared to stature on the Greek peninsula. But what is more important is to revise our mental portrait of the Greek Lady of Poetry, as less Aphroditic perhaps but more real according to this ancient description, a historical woman of flesh and bone.

Six centuries later the Roman Horace refers in passing to 'mascula Sappho' (Epistulae I 19,28)

temperat Archilochi musam pede mascula Sappho
"masculine Sappho tempers the style (Musam) of Archilochus with meters"

The commentator Porphyrio remarks "mascula autem Saffo, vel quia in poetico studio <incluta> in quo saepius viri, vel quia tribas diffamatur fuisse",

Is this because as a woman she excels in a typically male arena, OR because she was reputedly a masculine style homosexual, a 'tribas' or "dyke"? But another commentator, Dionysius Latinus adds: "non mollis (the usual female word but here used for homosexual) nec fracta voluptatibus ned impudica".

In other words she is at least in his opinion clear on all sexual counts. Could it be that there is some further meaning to Horace's remarks, that he sees what he consider a firm and positive manner of using words, involving daring or unusual expressions, especially expressing her sexual feelings? We know little about women's sexuality in the ancient world, but the only female Roman poet was have, Sulpicia, writes in the few lines we have from her about her erotic emotions in a very man-like mode, which may have surprised Romans who thought that love-poetry was for men to write about women. Horace's word "masculine" could possibly refer to such an expectation, perhaps made the clearer by his own role as a male love-poet writing in the footsteps of the famous Sappho who was a female love-poet.

Since the poem which Dionysos uses for his analysis was famous in antiquity and certainly well known to Horace, it may be that the next-last word in the poem, 'summachos' or "Ally" could have been the reason for his word 'mascula'. This word is used in the world of Hellenic politics by the historians, it is a word from the male-controlled confederations of states and armies, and its use as an emphatic keyword in Sappho's prayer could call up masculine associations for Horace. Why would Sappho ever talk about her treaty-based miitary Ally?

When we read Sappho in our modern print-conscious habit, we must remind ourselves that throughout the ancient world, the craft of poetry was a musical art, and the line between a poem and a song performance was thin or often non-existent. Even as late as the second century AD, the litterateur Aulus Gellius could tell in his academic Noctes Atticae (19.9.3) a story about an evening at the home of a literary gentleman:

> "Is (the rhetorician Antonius Julianus) ubi edulis finis et poculis mox sermonibus tempus fuit, desideravit exhiberi, quos habere eum adulescentulum (the host) sciebat, scitissimos utriusque sexus, qui canerent voce et psallerent. Ac posteaquam introducti pueri puellaeque sunt, iucundum in modum ἀνακρεόντεια pleraque et Sapphica et poetarum quoque recentium elegeia quaedam erotica dulcia et venusta cecinerunt."

What is important here is that a group of youthful singers who could also play the lyre (psallerent) were able to furnish entertainment at a formal sumptuous dinner, and do a set of classical pieces from the Lyric poets of yore as well as recent compositions. This must mean that the ancient modes of song-art were still current in the 2 nd c. AD Greco-Roman world. It is not clear from the wording if the Anacreon and Sappho songs were done in formal classical style, as against the modern compositions which are noted as "love-styled, sweet and charming".

> But what is important to note is that still at this late date Sappho was sung as a set performance by groups of well trained and effective singers along with instrumental accompaniment. It would seem that educated and literary Romans, aware of the supreme position of Greek art of poetry, would probably have tried to be faithful to what they felt were the standards of the ancient poets, just as we try to recreate the original mise en scene by staging Shakespeare in a replica of the Globe theater of l606 . The complete poetry of Sappho was readily available to read throughout the Empire, but here we have an unudusl apercu into an actual performance.

While at Rome, a word is due about Catullus' lady love "Lesbia" and why he applied this name to Clodia, the infamous and profligate sister of an equally profligate brother Publius Clodius. The standard view seems to be that since Sappho was a poet, and perhaps Clodia had (or had had) an interested in poetry and literature in general (?), hence as an educated woman or 'docta' she could also be called Sapphic, i.e. "Lesbia". Clodia was nor "lesbian' in any sense, rather a devourer of attractive young men like Catullus, and anathema to the Puritanical Cicero who attacked her in his speech "Pro Caelio. Could Catullus have named her thus with tongue in cheek, aware of the sexual scandals attributed by then to the poet Lady of Lesbos? Or could Clodia have shown some bisexual inclinations, (not impossible in an age when Caesar was publicly twitted as boyfriend of Prince Nicomedes), something which Catullus could have been tolerantly aware of, but lost to us in the far mist of history?

At a later date, Apuleius somewhere in the second century AD, could make a note in his Apologia (Section 9), speaking about Sappho and erotic or love-poetry:

> "..etiam mulier Lesbia, lascive illa quidem tantaque gratia ut nobis insolentiam linguae suae dulcedine carminum commendet......"
>
> "Aside from the erotic or lascivious quality of her content, the sweetness of her language seems to make amends to us for the unusualness (insolentia) of her writing. "

I

In the term 'insolentia' we can understand the unfamiliar Greek of the Aeolic dialect which even then, in a time when much Aeolic lyric poetry was available to read and study in the academies of the Empire, seemed strange beside normal Attic as currently taught to Roman readers. Just so we might find Chaucer 'unfamiliar' beside modern school anthology reading, and be charmed by his quaintness, as Apuleius is charmed by the 'sweetness' of Sappho.

As a footnote regarding Apuleius, who was certainly well versed in Greek literature, witness his curiously unfamiliar style of writing Latin in a highly Grecistic mode, if he found Sappho hard to read, then her writing was clearly "antique Classical" by then, rather than classical in the sense of belonging to a continuing living tradition. From the large number of papyri from Egypt with poems of Sappho, it would seem she was part of the "background reading " of literature in the academies. So Apuleius' note about the esthetic quality of her poetry points to poetic life of her poetry, which within the school tradition is still valid.

There is a remark about the impression which Sappho's poetry could make on a receptive and esthetic mind, which comes down to us by a circuitous route. It is from the great Lawgiver Solon, as noted by Aelian around 200 AD and re-quoted by Stobaeus several centuries later. This is especially interesting since Solon lived from about 640-560 BC, which makes him a full contemporary of the poet from Lesbos across the sea in the Aeolic isles.
If the story is true, it speaks for a pan-Hellenic literary awareness reaching from Turkey to central Greece, something for which we have no other evidence. It has been questioned whether the story really pertains to Solon at all, but it is the flavor of the content rather than the source of the story which seems important here:

> *Σόλων ὁ Αθηναῖος ὁ Εξηκεστίδου παρα πότον του αδελφιδοῦ αυτοῦ μέλος τι Σαπφοῦς ᾁσαντος, ἥσθη τῳ μέλει και προσέταξε τῷ μειρακίῳ διδάξαι αυτόν. ερωτήσαντος δε τινος δια ποίαν αιτίαν τοῦτο εσπούδασεν, ὁ δε έφη ἱνα μαθων αυτο, αποθάνω.*

> "Solon of Athens the son of Execestides, once when his nephew was singing a song of Sappho's over the wine, was much beguiled by the song, and asked the lad to teach it to him. When someone asked him the reason for this, he replied: I just want to learn it and die!"

Beyond the question of whether the story is about Solon or someone else, this passage does tell something important about the immediate effect of Sappho's poetry. We live now in a world where poetry is usually read in a finely printed edition, in the quiet of one's study and in a contemplative mood which smoothes out the roughnesses of the day. This was precisely the way Cicero thought about poetry, he says as much in his defense of the poet Archias, and it may be less chance than similarity of character which put the Roman and the American so often on the same side of the esthetic gateway.

Critics of the current scene sometimes note the placid and easy subjectivity which much modern poetry evinces, and would wish for a stronger approach, even a mind gripping quality of ecstatic feeling which could re-invigorate the way we think of poetic creativity. In the Greek world which continued after the 4th century into a comfortable literary ambiance well furnished with libraries of Classic Literature and academies whose work was to deal out the libraries of writing to the educated public, the esthetic spark was no longer alive. Love poetry became pre-configured, just as Roman wall painting became room-decoration, and the poetry written in the long centuries from the age of Alexander through the Byzantine beginnings never claimed a place in what we think of as world-literature.

But as we push back even beyond the famous 5 th c. BC into the shape of the Archaic Period, we find much ferment of form and content in a matrix of intense esthetic activity. Homer had an finely focused vision which came from an intense perception of life and men doing things in a re-created epic style tableau. Archilochus reaching against the epic mold, personalized his own world, and was the first poet to speak from his own person, pushing the Homeric curtain back to see little people living seamy lives on isolated islands where the gods never really interfere.

Sappho goes one step further, proceeding inside the heart and mind of a woman who feels things strongly, and somehow she finds words to serve as carriers of her emotional activity. Just so the figures on black-figure vases are always rushing ahead, dancing in a hurry to war, staring with intense gaze across the six inches of a pottery scene. Action, motion, and passion are the earmarks of these centuries, and Sappho is right in the middle of a period of vast change of mentality.

I believe the quotation about Solon may be historically accurate, by the fact that it would take a man from that very period to get the full impact of a poem of Sappho as newly written in that exciting and moving age. If later scholars would commend Sappho's writing as lovely and charming, sweet and delightful, that is a mark of their own later sensibilities. But it would be someone living in that live period who would get the meaning straight-on. Solon's idea about learning the poem and then expiring on the spot, does show what the intensity of a full confrontation with the poems' words. could be like in that alive Archaic Age.

When you see something quite beautiful, it is an overwhelming experience. And you know at that moment that as you go on with your hour and your life, that experience is going to be retained only as a memory of an experience, the shadow of a flash and nothing more. So if there were a way to hold onto it and keep yourself at that point of intense and even excruciating appreciation, it could be done only by something like ceasing to exist completely, staying at that moment forever. Is there a way to stop Time so the beauty can remain? Is Death not like that, a staying at that moment forever?

There are certain books you don't want to finish reading, because when the last page is folded over, there isn't going to be any more. Reading a poem of Sappho is like that, despite the difficulties of the broken papyrus text, the problems with untranslatable words from a distant language written in on obscure local dialect. We want to hold onto the poem, keep the sense of that minute of perception, beyond which everything else is going to be in some way a disappointment. Love is like that, and Sappho is the poet of the world of loving hearts.

But as we step away from the age which contains the creative moment, we tend to see things differently. When T.S.Eliot's "Wasteland" appeared some eighty years ago, it drove right into the solar plexus of a whole generation of thinking readers, just as Duchamps' "Lady Descending a Stairway" or Stravinsky's "Rite of Spring" shocked the public mind into fright first and then learning about new ways to see. But now a century later these experiences are no longer the same, they are items taught in a college course about "Art in the 20th Century", a calm reassessment of the relics of a long buried movement. But it is possible to go back again and get the spirit of the early 20th century volcanic upheaval, which can be done by forgetting the critics and the commentators and going back to face what was then being breathed out of pure spirit and ecstatic improvisation. This can be done with the poetry of the Greek Archaic period, which has a contagious fire about itself, even though represented in scraps and bits and pieces. Yes, scraps, but very rare and precious scraps!

Tzetzes writing in the twelfth century, opens his discussion on the Odes of Pindar, with this sad reminder of the ravages of time:

> *ϵπϵιδη παρανάλωμα του χρόνου ϵγϵγόνϵι*
> *και ἡ Σαπφω και τα Σαπφοῦς, ἡ λύρα και τα μέλη,*
> *φέρϵ, σοι προς παράδϵιγμα ϑήσομαι στίχους άλλους.......*
>
> "Since there has occurred a wasting away of time,
> and Sappho and all her stuff, the lyre and the songs,
> come, I will find you an example of some other poetry...."

These sad words which mark for him the end of the Sapphic trail, could be taken as the threnody for the poet from the island of Lesbos, were it not for the discovery of papyri from the dry sands of Egypt toward the end of the l9th century. Much from that source is broken and useless, but there is a handful of readable poems to add to the old list, and for anything at all we have to be grateful. And as Tzetzes remarks, we do have something else with which we can console ourselves. We do have Pindar.

Censorship and Sappho

The disappearance of the poems of Sappho inevitably brings up the matter of Censorship of Publication, whether in a post-Gutenberg pressing machine or copied out in a scriptorium by a battery of monks. The usual milquetoast explanation is that people only have copied what they need to read in their schools or libraries, and unused materials which naturally deteriorate with age need not be replaced if not in use. But the life of books, whether cartaceae on paper, on papyrus which was used for Papal writs well into the 14th century, or parchment as the standard material once the papyrus reeds of Egypt were endangered, is fairly long. Books of which there are many copies don't disappear unless they are forbidden and then systematically destroyed.

It seems that the allegation of female homosexual behavior which was tentatively drawn from the poems of Sappho, became firmly centered in the mind of a growing Christianity, which from the beginning or even as early as with St. Paul was not favorably inclined toward women in the first place, and certainly not interested in homosexuality, the mark of the earlier centuries of pagan degeneracy. Population growth was one of the keys to the early success of the new faith before Constantine, and anything 'unnatural' which would limit family and children would be anathema politically as well as theologically.

We have had bad times with Censorship since the days of the Western Church's condemnation of the new science in the l6th century, and the Index Librorum Prohibitorum has persisted one wayor another into our times. But this has not been a purely religious matter. Steinbecks' "Of Mice and Men" was outlawed in Boston because Lenny pissed out behind a building, and D. H Lawrence's "Lady Chatterly's Lover" was for years available here only in surreptitious copies printed in Europe. I have the first American edition, which was published in newsprint the very day the censorship bans were lifted in the '60's. There was change in the air.

Now we find ourselves deluged by a free flood of uncensored materials, whether verbal, printed or electronically transmitted as part of the porno trade, and some might wish for a return to censorship, forgetting the lessons of the past.

The right to think one's own thoughts is closely followed by the right of conscience and the right to speak out. Coming from the political and religious control of free speech in Europe, the American constitutional designers stated these rights as inalienable and made them a key part of the American legal framework. Challenged often and sometimes even regretted, these rights remains firm. On the other side of the fence is the Nazi's burning of the books, or a press condoled by the state, with the loss of self-expression down to the grass roots of the individual novelist or poet.

When Sappho disappeared from early Medieval Europe, more was lost than a few hundred pages of exquisite poetry. It was part of something associated with the development of free thought-processes, whether in poetry or astronomy or mathematics, and it took the world a long and painful fight to recover the openness which the old Hellenic world had assumed to be its natural arena for thought.

Lest this argument seem overly alarmist, I should note that this study on Sappho is liable to a new type of automatic censorship, since it contains the word "lesbian" in several instances, and this is one of the key words which can be used to deny access on the Internet on the basis of pornographic material. The web is especially liable to such censorship since nobody is happy with the huge influx of porno sites in public view, but the danger of Censorship on the basis of some person's or some electronic filter's judgment always ourweighs the danger of personal annoyance at bad taste.

Interpretation and Texts

There is a vast difference between Criticism and Interpretation. The scholarly Classical world has long shown its preference for the critics, and been shy of the subjective side of interpretative study. It is as if Criticism, founded in history and cumulative detailed scholarship, were more worthy of honor than intuition and imaginative interpretation. The amount of detailed critical study devoted to Sappho and the history of the actual texts is staggering, more than a literary reader would be able to digest in months of concentrated reading. And it is couched in a scholarly format which makes it unavailable to non-professional readers, and probably unreadable in large party as well. The aim of this study is to interpret the authentic texts which have been established as Sappho's poetry, in their original form, examining their communicative meaning on the one hand, and at the same time investigating the internal microstructure of the poems as poetic artifacts.

All Greek and Roman poetry has an immediate base in form and sound. The sounds of the words themselves are pure musical sound, and since language moves in time with motion, they foretell the way we see moving images in modern cinematic art. Cinematic style viewing does not come from a machine, it is a way of seeing which has deep roots in the past, often ensconced in vivid storytelling, in the ancient Epic, and in the choral parts of Greek drama. We cannot separate a Greek poem from either its explicit sound or from its explicit visual references, since together they present a duplex level of composite meaning which accompanies and amplifies the apparent "meaning" of a written text. Presenting this composite view of Sappho's poetry in terms of sound and its configurations is the specific aim of the present study.

Before turning to the poems, which are here given in Greek text along with a translation and followed by a detailed commentary, it is necessary to discuss several things which impinge on the reading of the Greek. The text itself involves several problems, the first of which is the representation in modern typographical conventions.

The first thing a beginner notices about a page of Greek is the display of several diacritics above the characters, which he is told are "accents", and he dutifully goes about reading the words with these "accents" at a louder amplitude than the unaccented syllable. He has substitute Stress for something else which these marks were put there to indicate --- a musical Pitch. But there are complications:

> The Acute or 'oxu' is a musical pitch sign, which requires the pitch of the vowel indicated to rise up as much as a musical fifth. This is an up-sliding motion, which starts at a base level and moves upward over the indicated length of the vowel. This rising pitch can be associated with a short vowel or a long vowel, and must be employed simultaneously with the duration of the vowel as part of the metrical cadencing of a line of verse.
>
> The Circumflex is more complicated. It starts with an up-sliding pitch like the Acute, but it rests at the top of the rise and then slides down to the original base-line from which it started. This takes more time than is allowed by a regular long vowel, so the circumflexed vowel or diphthong will be "overlong", allowing for the time required for this swinging pitch. The circumflexed sound will seem strange at first, it is something like the "meeouw" of a cat's cry, or the melismatic effect of the Chinese 'hao' for "good", or the English patronizing phrase "Well, now....!".
>
> The Grave is not a pitch at all. It means that a previously up-pitched Acute has been demoted to the base level at which all unmarked syllables reside, and is to be disregarded as a sound of musical intonation.
>
> Some of the papyri intended for school use of for teaching foreigners the right pronunciation of Greek will have the Grave on all syllables which do not have Acute or Circumflex diacritics, a caution to the barbarian learner NOT to raise the pitch level. Stressing this also as loud we make a bad mistake.

Since learning to use the pitch intonation is important in reaching for the authentic sound of Greek poetry, this study prints with the Greek only the pitch markings which involve actual sounds. Thus the Smooth Breathing (which means nothing more than "no aspiration here!) is unnecessary, as is the negative information of the Grave sign (meaning "Keep tone level down, please!). By clearing away unnecessary signs, and indicating only the rising Acute and over-arching Circumflex as real sounds as used in the poetic idiom, we keep he reader's attention on pronunciation, as critical to the understanding of the poetry.

Why does this have to be mentioned at all? It is because we have been pronouncing all three Accent marks as Stresses when we learn our Attic Greek, making the syllables strong and loud. Learning this regularly in reading prose, we have to forget what we have been doing when we turn to verse, and start over again with long and short syllables. But we are so used to this Stress pronunciation, that we then start converting "long" to Loud, and "short" to Weak. This is in direct opposition to the known metrical quality of Greek as a Duration based language which has something like a musical eighth note for a Short, a quarter note for a Long, and a dotted quarter or even a half note for the triple-length Circumflexed syllable.

At long last Classicists are beginning to recognize the fault in our traditional pronunciation of ancient Greek, and attempts have been made to rectify the situation with recorded segments as examples pointing toward an authentic sound. One problem here is that it is very difficult to combine the metrical long-short sequences with a pitch-wise up-down tone, and some of the recorded examples are done by people who are not sufficiently trained in voice manipulation. It takes the practice and experience of a trained professional actor to get these things all right, and make them flow easily in a natural way.

A second problem is the fact that each native language speaker will inevitably pronounced his "authenticized" Greek in the manner of his own speech patterns, and an Italian pronunciation of Greek may be virtually incomprehensible to an English native speaker. So we have a dual set of problems. We want to understand something about the nature of ancient Greek pronunciation, and also find a way to represent it in the phonetic patterns of our own native speech.

People always ask what the pronunciation of ancient Greek was like, but the idea of a corrected pronunciation which will be good for all modern speakers everywhere regardless of their own language usage, is clearly impossible. In such a jumble, one might revert in despair to the old double standard of the traditional "prose or poetry" reading of Greek, but that would completely lose sight of the exquisite refinements of the poetry of ancient Greece. Doing it all right does take work, but like many other things that do not come easily, doing it right will be well worth the effort expended.

There is now much interest in reading Ancient Greek with an authentic pronunciation, but there are two problems which confront us as soon as we start. Let me outline these very briefly:

> First, we all have very specific pronunciations of our basic speech sounds which we have learned in early childhood in accessing our native language. These are deeply encoded in our linguistic memory, and aside from a few of us who are completely bilingual, we retain our native pronunciation throughout life. When we read an ancient language where there is no detailed information about the sounds, we will continue to use the sounds of our native speech, even if we try to make some minor adjustments. A French speaker will read Plato very differently from a native U.S. speaker, and an Italian will read his Vergil in a manner which will be totally foreign to the English speaker trained in his English-based school pronunciation. We can "correct" simple linguistic features like the over-aspiration of a Greek Phi, but we cannot produce the genuine ancient vowels, since we don't know exactly what timbre they originally had, and at the same time we cannot divest ourselves of our own native vowel-patterns.

> Second, it now seems very important to try to use the musical pitch signs which are recorded as the Greek "accents", but there are several problems here. First we have to get rid of the Stresses which have long been associated with the Accents, and replace them by Durations, a difficult process once one has learned Greek in the traditional Western way. Then having mastered a length-based system for reading Greek poetry, we face the doubly difficult business of su-

> perimposing musical pitches atop the length-based readings. In theory this should be possible by reading both lengths and pitches from the printed text as we go along, but anyone who has tried this will attest the difficulty of the triple process of Reading characters, deducing variable Length patterns. and applying musical Intonations to the vocal output all at the same time.
>
> As one who has advocated a better and more authentic way of reading ancient Greek for many years, I know how difficult such a composite process can be. The only way I have been able to combine all three of these disparate levels of reading is by imbibing into memory the composite "triple text" and becoming so familiar with it as a single mind-sound process, that I can read or (better) chant it in a single acoustic flow. But of course this is just what an ancient bard or poet was doing, and following lamely and with difficult in his path at this far removed date, we begin to see why the role of "Poet" was in ancient times so highly regarded. he did things learned by long practice, things which nobody else in the society could think of performing. So if we embark on this route toward authenticity, I suggest we proceed carefully and with much assiduity, expecting the process to be much harder than a scholarly description would state.

Since Greek is always sprinted with diacritics Accents, we have ready-made information on each page which can be read from the text, without reference to rules explaining how they got there. In fact there is much confusion about many of the accented words, which the ancient metrical writers went to great efforts to explain. And modern editorial conventions have regularized the accents, which in many cases have variants discussed in the old treatises or seen in the papyri.

The Accents were invented and first used by the Alexandrian academicians who were faced with teaching a correct pitch pronunciation to a large body of non-Greek speakers in an expanding Hellenistic world. Accented texts were used for school texts, and reading copies of the papyri are often without any diacritics. There is no evidence that an educated reader in the days of Plato had accented texts for any of his reading, and in the Archaic period we are not even clear about the shape of the characters used. Sappho probably recorded her verse in somewhat rounded capitals, but we have no idea of the shape or appearance of her autograph copy.

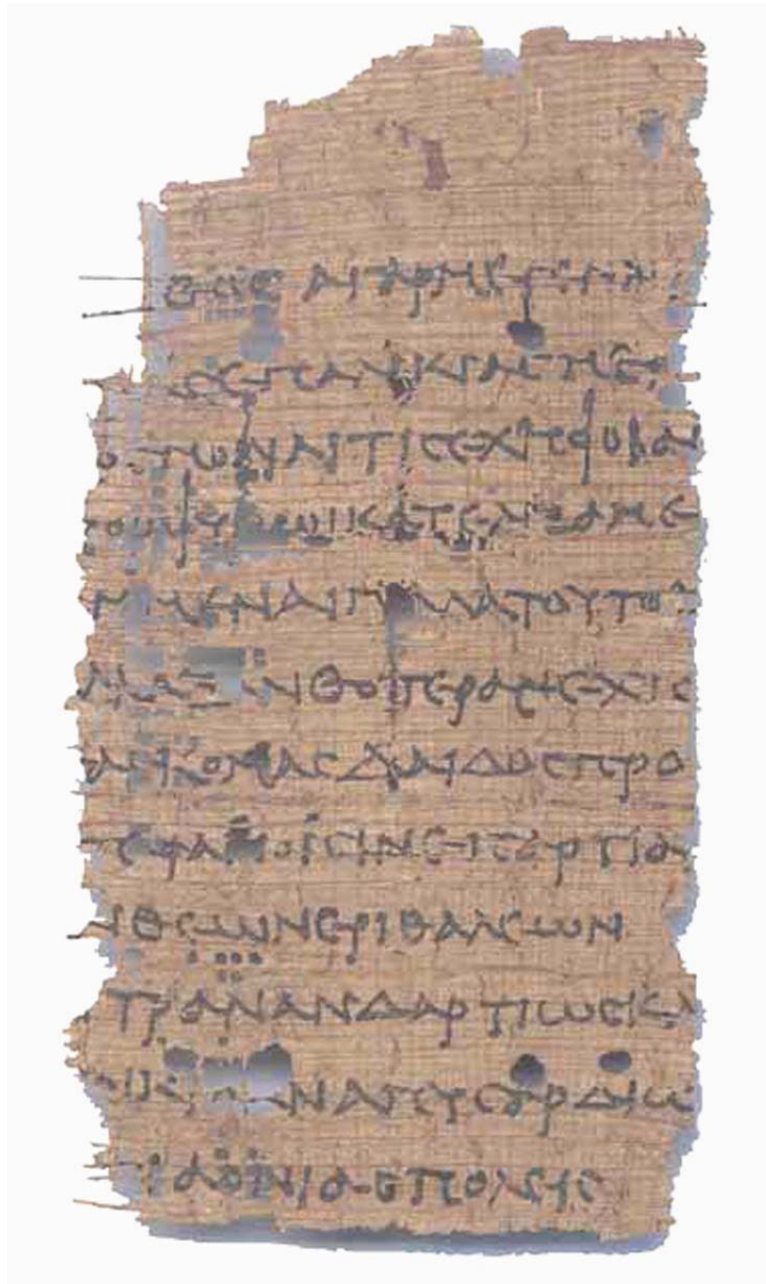
This would be a far cry from the MSS hand on which our printed 16th century editions were based, replete as they were with abbreviations and special ligatures which are unreadable even to a modern trained student of Greek. Our shaded Teubner text is no more original or authentic than the Oxford font derived from the handwriting of Richard Porson in the early l9th century.

Format is important, since it dictates a great deal about how we read a text, the speed of reading and rate of comprehension, as well as the esthetic impressions we derive from a page of written verbal art. The great attention paid to the development of special fonts since the days of William Morris is witness to an improved sense of "readability". A poem of D.G. Rosetti printed on fine handmade paper with a specially designed art-font is quite different from the same poem read from an equally spacing typewriter or Courier font, printed out on cheap paper from a mimeograph machine.

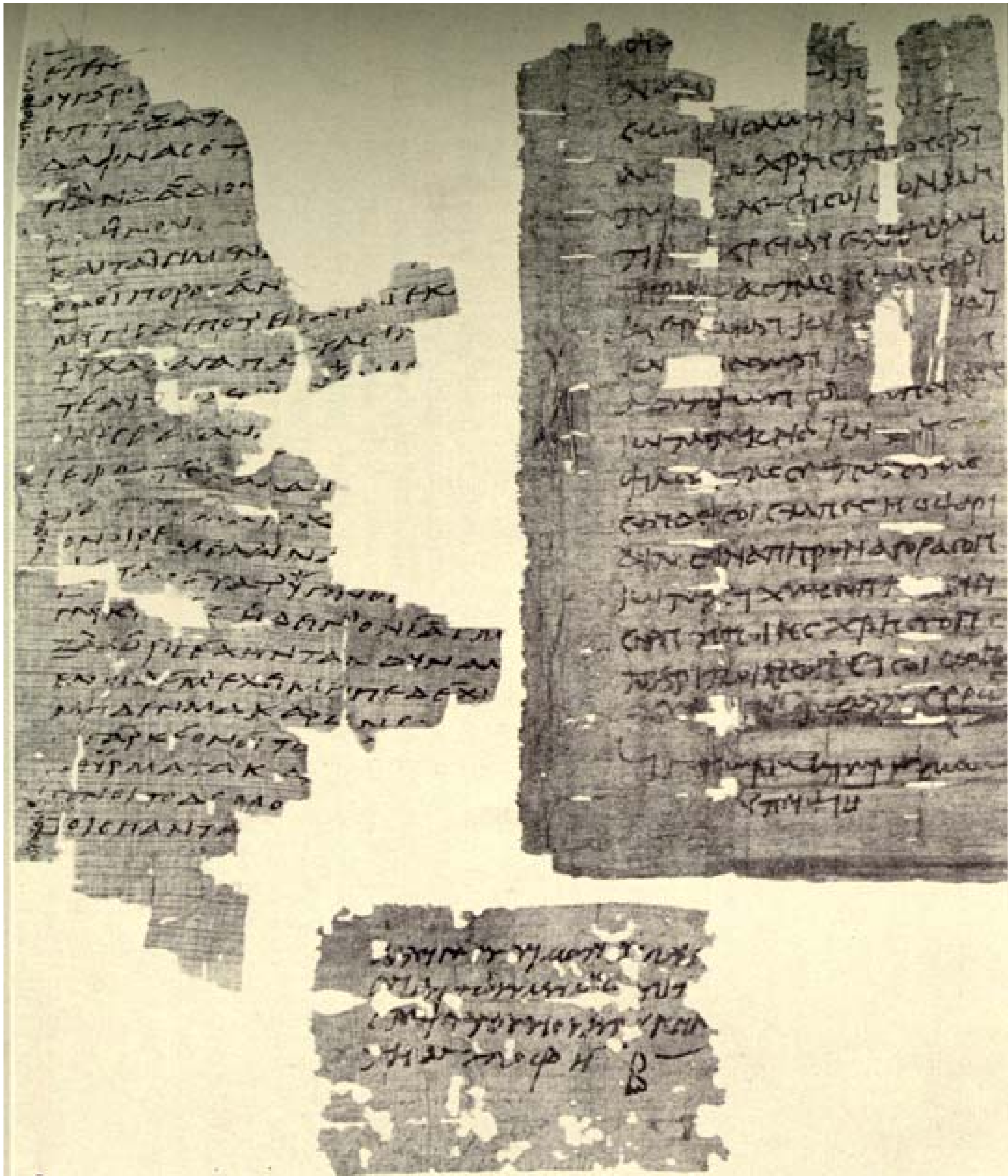
Looking at the verse few lines of an ancient papyrus, we see that an Alexandrian reader must have had a very different approach to his reading. The large characters with their handwritten irregularities would be slow in reading but easier on the eyes than a small print read fast. The papyrus would be white and clear, the ink from octopus sepia or boiled walnut juice would be a dark and permanent brown, and the book unrolling between two hand held roller sticks would have to be perused in a leisurely manner. There was nothing in the ancient world like Aldo Manutio's little portable pocket-book of the early 16th century, nor the need for a micro-printed Elzevier a century later. Reading means absorbing, imbibing the meaning and also the sound of the text, and this is never done at a glance with a swift scan.

A good example of leisurely reading can be seen in this elegant portrayal of Sappho with a scroll of her poetry:

And what she might be reading would be something like this, if we can imagine a clean sheet of new papyrus elegantly handwritten with dark brown sepia based ink on creamy whitened sheets:



Here is another set of Papyri, much reduced, with a piece of Sappho Pap. Oxyrh. 1787 at the left with parts of three poems. At the right is a letter "to my brother Heracleides..." dated from Tiberius 27 AD, and below from third century: "Eudaimon invites to dine at the gymnasium, crowning of son on 1 st a 8th hour."



Microstructure

When reading Sappho, we should try to readjust our expectations of how to proceed in reading an ancient poem. We want to pronounce the syllables of a line of her verse with a clear idea of the Durations of the vowels, from short to long to overlong. At the same time we will want to raise the pitch or our voice musically, remembering that poetry for Sappho is SONG, following specifically the Acute and the Circumflex signals posted on our printed text.

Beyond that we will want to read the sounds aloud with a sense of musical enjoyment, reading slowly and carefully as if from a large sheet of papyrus handwritten with the basic letters of the old style Greek alphabet. We are reading to imbibe the spirit of a poetic mind, something which must be done in a suitably receptive mood or the words will merely be marks on a printed page.

If we find the authentic sounds of Greek verse strange and unfamiliar as here outlined, we must consider the damage we have done to the esthetic of Greek poetry by our clumsy and inauthentic stressing of the delicate articulation of the vowel sounds. Reading Greek as we have been learning it in our schools and colleges might be compared to looking at the paintings of Leonardo in two by three inch black and white textbook illustrations. The identity of the painting is clear, but the whole of the artistry and color are not only gone. They would be completely un-imaginable.

The vowels and consonants have special acoustic properties of their own. The vowels are musical continuants which quite literally "sing" the lines on musical pitches at various tones, while the nasal-liquid sounds (-l- -m- -n- -r-) are continuous drones with a great deal of acoustic persistence. The Stop-Consonants are closures at the front of the mouth which snap-off the above sonant-sounds, short and decisive but with much perceptibility since human speech involves the speaker's lips and hearer's eyes at the same time.

The "air-sounds" of English are quite different from Greek, first because Aeolic Greek had no initial aspiration whatever, one of its most characteristic marks, and second because the Greek phi was certainly no more than a lightly aspirated pi, nothing like our heavy and breathy dental-aspirated -f-. On the other hand Greek chi was a medium aspirated guttural, hardly transscribable by the usual -ch-. The Greek zeta which we often compare to a Roman Z was in Aeolic pronounced not as -z- + -d-, but the other way around, so a rose is by no means still a rose.

There are other things about ancient Greek pronunciations which we do not know, much that we probably can never know. But various alternations and oppositions of the above mentioned sounds stand as a coherent and readable part of every Greek poem, and it is on the differences and the degrees of difference of the sounds in their configurations that the base level of Greek poetry rests. A little study of basic phonetics of English, even at the elementary level, will go a great way toward the understanding of how the sounds of Sappho's verse work.

In the following pages much attention will be given to a study of the Microstructure of the poetry. This term can best be defined as a way of perceiving and elucidating Meaning as the communicative semantic segment of the writing, while at the same time grasping as Form the configuration of the sounds as sounds, the arrangement of words as constructive elements in the building of verse lines and larger esthetic blocks of form. When this approach becomes familiar it is done at reading speed without hesitation, but initially it is a slow process as this study will show.

Since this is not a familiar method of approach to poetry, I want to mention a few studies which may make thing more clear. A good introduction to this may be found in the essay On Form and Meaning , and more on the use of phonetic analysis in another study The Poet and the Spectrograph. For a good example of analysis on a wide variety of language samples, I would like to refer you to Prof. Calvert Watkins' book "How to Kill a Dragon" Oxford l995, which demonstrates especially in the early chapters how micro-analysis is used to combine linguistic acuity with poetic sensibilities.

More of this kind of Form Analysis is bound to appear in the coming years, but it will take time for it to become established in the mainstream of academic criticism, especially in the conservative Classics, and college-taught English where Meaning with its hairsplits, its allusions and literary references, and its semi-literary engagement with the history of it times, seems likely to reign supreme for the while.

Lterary studies which deal exclusively with Meaning in its many sub-categories, seem unaware of the Form only as a semi-significant "carrier" of the ideas. This study is devoted to bringing together Form and Meaning as the two significant planes of poetry, in the belief that lacking the one or the other, we lose the whole purpose of the writing of Poetry.

If the Meaning of a poem is the set of messages sent as communicative items from text to reader, then Form is the total configuration of all the discrete lements of the poem as significant artifacts in their own right. The elemental chunks are the sounds out of which words are constructed, the arrangement of the sounds in words as they constitute patterns in phrases, and the shape of the verse-lines both independently and also in relation to what went before and what goes after. In other words the total tally of everything that occurs within the segment of poetry which we are examining is to be seen as Form, atop which Meaning can be understood as perched. Without the substructure of Form there can be no relaying of Meaning because there is nothing for it to rest on, there is no physical substance for something as transcendental as Meaning to adhere to.

This might be compared to a coin, on which there is impressed a face on the one side and a other information on the obverse. The "meaning" of the coin may be "quarter U.S." and this is all most of us think of when taking it out of a pocket and slipping it into a telephone booth slot.

But there is much more to the coin. The low relief face design is specially contrived to catch light in a realistic way, the detailed work which went into this little piece of relief sculpture is quite astonishing, and the decorative detailing is equally well done. Notice the way the edge is impressed with hundreds of little ridges, originally a way to ensure that silver was not being filed off the coin to sell separately.

Or look at a U.S. dollar bill with its simple message "One Dollar", as against the infinite detailing on front and read, the pyramid with an eye on top, the great seal, the micro-detailing around the edges. All this is the Form of the piece, the part which we can overlook or forget so easily, the part which actually surprises us when we are asked to describe everything that is visible there. The Meaning? Just $1.

Only by paying careful attention to the form of Sappho's poetry that can we get the full thrust of her art, which never lets the denoted informational meanings get separated from the actual form of the words and the phrasing. For a Greek poet Form and Meaning are indissolubly bonded together, because poetry is a performed and acoustic art in which meaning evolves only as the sung-poem is performed aloud. The form is always there first, whereas in our print-culture where we have learned to scan a workaday text quickly for meaning, we generally pay scant attention to the carrier elements of sound and shape. Sappho's poems, read for meaning without form, leave a thin palette of a few notions, but with the Form in close view we savor the sounds as a interlocking mode of communication with the artist poet.

The approach of this study involves this "Microstructure" of form, pursuing via this path the interpretation of Sappho's few precious poems. If the discussion and commentary seem long in relation to the few lines which they describe, that that is because of our culture's insensitivity to sound and the interweaving of acoustic threads into the fabric of poetry. Taught as we are in our college courses to examine divisions and sub-divisions of meaning with infinite care and subtlety, we are novices in the appreciation of finely wrought sound. The Greek would have thrown up his hands in despair at the crudeness of our approach, probably thinking to himself "superficial Barbarians" who cannot hear the sounds and intonations of the Muses, mere clerks untasted of the founts of Hippocrene.

Poem I

This famous poem is in the form of a prayer to Sappho's deity Aphrodite, the only complete poem we have from her work, and we owe its preservation to the literary critic and historian Dionysos of Halicarnassos, who was writing at Rome around 30 BC. His extensive treatise "On Literary Composition" is especially valuable since it gives a detailed analytical account of how an educated Greek would approach the reading of his classics, but its special contribution here is the quotation of this brilliant poem, the longest one we have from Sappho. Having some papyri in bits and pieces with a few lines from this poem, we see how impossible restoration would have been if we had to "reconstruct" it from the scraps, considering the complete poem as here presented.

But Dionysos gives us not only the poem, but also some most revealing remarks about the way he was reading her poetry. These are worth quoting in full, since what he says is quite different from the way we read and analyze poetry today.

> "Here the euphonious effect (ευέπια) and the grace (χάρις) of the language arise from the coherence (συνεχείᾳ) and smoothness (λειότετι) of the junctures (ἁρμοιῶν). The words nestle close to each other and are woven together (συνύφανται literally) according to certain affinities and natural attractions of the letters.........."
>
> "........As a natural consequence the language has a certain easy flow and softness. The arrangement of the words in no way ruffles the smooth waves of sound."

In the middle section of this quotation he goes into a description of some of the phonetic associations of contiguous sounds, which is different from a modern phonetic description, but very revealing since it shows the acoustic approach which an educated Greek would expect in reading poetry.

> "Almost through the entire ode, vowels are joined to mutes and semi-vowels, all those which are naturally prefixed or affixed to one another when pronounced together in one syllable. There are very few clashings of the semi-vowels with semi-vowels or mutes, and of mutes and vowels with one another, such as cause the sound to oscillate. When I review the entire ode, I find in all those sounds and verbs and other kinds of words, only five or perhaps six unions of semi-vowels and mutes which do not naturally blend with one another, and even they do not disturb the smoothness of the language to any great extent. As for juxtapositions of vowels, I find that those which occur in some clauses themselves are still fewer, while those which join the clauses to one another are only a little more numerous."

This complicated outline of the Hellenistic approach to the phonetics and acoustics of poetry must represent a standardized method of interpretation common in the schools of the time. Dionysos explains at this point that going into full detail on the sounds would make the treatise overlong with needless repetition.

The above paragraphs might just as well have been written by the editor of this study, but in fact it is from Dionysos' pen some two thousand years ago. I quote it because it shows that a full phonetic analysis of poetry was at that time not only conceivable, but also done in the course of the teaching of literature, and done in a full and detailed manner. In this study we will be able go into some of the detail in the commentary, things which our critic felt he could not find space for in his general review of literary composition. What I stress here is that phonetic and acoustic analysis was to an ancient literary analyst not only worthwhile doing, but was normally done in great detail.

Dionysos continues with a final remark:

> "It will be open to you as to anyone else, at your full leisure and convenience, to take each single point enumerated by me and to examine and review them with illustration. But really I have no time for this! It is quite enough to give an adequate indication of my views to all who will be able to follow in my steps."

It is interesting that the translator of the above passages (W. Rhys Roberts: Dionysus of Halicarnassos, London l910) comments on the above technical passages: "Dionysus shows good judgment in not subjecting Sappho's Hymn to a detailed analysis, letter by letter." But it that analysis which would have defined for us the Form on which the Ode (not Hymn) is built, in a verifiably authentic manner!

What is remarkable in this description of Sappho's poem is the very physicalness of the wording, which uses Greek terms like "fair-wording" and "grace" resulting from smoothness of the joinery at the junctures. These words are also used in the description of fine joinery of furniture, with phrases like "smooth to the fingernail", which points to care and delicacy in the finishing craftsmanship. Dionysos is not using these words in a transferred or poetical sense. It is clear that they are for him technical terms regularly used in describing this kind of poetry, since he is ranging over the various types of composition which he finds in Greek classical literature.

He is dealing with the inner structure of the sounds in terms which are virtually identical to what I call the Microstructure, or inner configuration of the minimal sound-components. We can take a cue for our interpretation from this unusual description of a lyrical poem, the more valuable since it is written from within the cultural and artistic milieu of the Hellenistic world, by a man who would by his profession give a fair estimate of the tone of acceptable ancient literary criticism.

The Text and its Format

Reading classical Greek we might have the impression that we are reading a book much the same as when it was published in the Hellenistic period, aside from the few critical text variants at the foot of an Oxford Classics Text edition. The elegantly clear font of the OCT Series was based on the handwriting of Richard Porson, the early l9 th century scholar who transcribed and edited thousands of pages from obscure sources, and it is so familiar as the traditional font for schoolbooks, that one may be at first surprised at viewing the upright and shaded fonts used for a century and a half by the German Teubner editions. And now that we have electronic fonts available for reading on the web, we have many more fonts available for our letters, some more rounded, some less shaded, some no longer italic, and others businesslike and less delicate in shape.

But if we look back a few centuries to the first generation of printed Greek in the early 1500's, we find an entirely different and virtually unreadable text, which has characters of different form, abbreviations and ligatures of several letters bound together, and other conventions drawn from the manuscript hand of the middle ages. And this in turn looks nothing like the hand written texts on papyrus sheets which were the reading format of educated readers throughout the Alexandrian Hellenistic world.

The "accents" were written in for school use since educated native speakers of Greek knew them as intuitively as a modern Russian knows his pitch intonations, and ancient readers would read a poem of Sappho in a version much like this one:

ΠΟΙΚΙΛΟΘΡΟΝ' ΑΘΑΝΑΤ' ΑΦΡΟΔΙΤΑ
ΠΑΙ ΔΙΟς ΔΟΛΟΠΛΟΚΕ ΛΙΣΣΟΜΑΙ ΣΕ
ΜΗ Μ' ΑΣΑΙΣΙ ΜΗΔ' ΟΝΙΑΙΣΙ ΔΑΜΝΑ
ΠΟΤΝΙΑ ΘΥΜΟΝ
ΑΛΛΑ ΤΥΙΔ' ΕΛΘ' ΑΙ ΠΟΤΑ ΚΑΤΕΡΩΤΑ
ΤΑς ΕΜΑς ΑΥΔΑς ΑΪΟΥΣΑ ΠΗΛΥΙ
ΕΚΛΥΕς, ΠΑΤΡΟς ΔΕ ΔΟΜΟΝ ΛΙΠΟΙΣΑ
ΧΡΥΣΙΟΝ ΕΛΘΕς
ΑΡΜ' ΥΠΑΔΕΥΞΑΙΣΑ · ΚΑΛΟΙ ΔΕ Σ' ΑΓΟΝ
ΩΚΕΕς ΣΤΡΟΥΘΟΙ ΠΕΡΙ ΓΑς ΜΕΛΑΙΝΑς
ΠΥΚΝΑ ΔΙΝΝΕΝΤΕς ΠΤΕΡ' ΑΠ' ΩΡΑΝΩΙΘΕ-
ΡΟς ΔΙΑ ΜΕΣΣΩ,
ΑΙΨΑ Δ' ΕΞΙΚΟΝΤΟ. ΣΥ Δ', Ω ΜΑΚΑΙΡΑ,
ΜΕΔΙΑΙΣΑΙς' ΑΘΑΝΑΤῼ ΠΡΟΣΩΠῼ
ΗΡΕ' ΟΤΤΙ ΔΗΥΤΕ ΠΕΠΟΝΘΑ ΚΩΤΤΙ
ΔΗΥΤΕ ΚΑΛΗΜΜΙ,
ΚΩΤΤΙ ΜΟΙ ΜΑΛΙΣΤΑ ΘΕΛΩ ΓΕΝΕΣΘΑΙ
ΜΑΙΝΟΛᾼ ΘΥΜῼ. ΤΙΝΑ ΔΗΥΤΕ ΠΕΙΘΩ
ΜΑΙΣ ΑΓΗΝ Ες ΣΑΝ ΦΙΛΟΤΑΤΑ ; ΤΙς Σ' Ω
ΨΑΠΦ', ΑΔΙΚΗΕΙ ;
ΚΑΙ ΓΑΡ ΕΙ ΦΕΥΓΕΙ ΤΑΧΕΩς ΔΙΩΞΕΙ
ΑΙ ΔΕ ΔΩΡΑ ΜΗ ΔΕΚΕΤ, ΑΛΛΑ ΔΩΣΕΙ
ΑΙ ΔΕ ΜΗ ΦΙΛΕΙ ΤΑΧΕΩς ΦΙΛΗΣΕΙ
ΚΩΥΚ ΕΘΕΛΟΙΣΑ.
ΕΛΘΕ ΜΟΙ ΚΑΙ ΝΥΝ, ΧΑΛΕΠΑΝ ΔΕ ΛΥΣΟΝ
ΕΚ ΜΕΡΙΜΝΑΝ, ΟΣΣΑ ΔΕ ΜΟΙ ΤΕΛΕΣΣΑΙ
ΘΥΜΟς ΙΜΕΡΡΕΙ, ΤΕΛΕΣΟΝ. ΣΥ Δ' ΑΥΤΑ
ΣΥΜΜΑΧΟς ΕΣΣΟ

This is less different than it appears on first sight, once we understand the use of the "lunar sigma" which is in the shape of a Roman "C", and the upsilon fashioned after the capital form. In fact it does the mind good to take some time to read this uncial text, since it must be read slowly and carefully, much in the manner of an Alexandrian reader of poetry. Our tendency to scan when reading, discarding the phonetic and euphonic contents as we search out a file away the 'meaning' as the important part of the message, does not suit the reading of Greek poetry at all. I suggest mastering this remarkable poem in the Uncial format as a way to get a new view of the text, one unencumbered by a shower of diacritic accents (which are not used by us as pitches !) or by a font which has become easy to scan as we learned out Greek in school from textbooks. Sappho is emphatically not a textbooks text. The Aeolic dialect, the problems with readings as well as interpretation, and the vivid translucence of the poetry demand special attention, and reading the text in uncials as a kind of "discovery" may be of use in establishing the atmosphere of specialness which is needed for reading lyric poetry.

But we also want to have at hand a clearer reading text, for which this one on th following page seems quite suitable. The diacritical accents have been stripped away in order to present the clearest and least cluttered appearance of the words, but with a familiar font . This text is especially good for a working copy from which to work out the metrical cadencing, since we can concntrate on the longs and shorts of the Sapphic line, without the reminders of "stress pronunciation" which our early training in Greek associates with the Accents.

We should remember that the separation into separate Stanzas is the work of modern editorial practice, as is the familiar indention of the short line, which should be read as different from its metrical configuration rather than from its location on the page.

ποικιλοθρον᾿ αθανατ᾿ Αφροδιτα
παι Διος δολοπλοκε λισσομαι σε
μη μ᾿ ασαισι μηδ᾿ ονιαισι δαμνα
ποτνια θυμον

αλλα τυιδ᾿ ελθ᾿ αι ποτα κατερωτα
τας εμας αυδας αϊουσα πηλυι
εκλυες, πατρος δε δομον λιποισα
χρυσιον ελθες

αρμ᾿ υπαδευξαισα · καλοι δε σ᾿ αγον
ωκεες στρουθοι περι γας μελαινας
πυκνα διννεντες πτερ᾿ απ᾿ ωρανωιθε-
ρος δια μεσσω,

αιψα δ᾿ εξικοντο. συ δ᾿, ω μακαιρα,
μεδιαισαις᾿ αθανατῳ προσωπῳ
ηρε᾿ οττι δηυτε πεπονθα κωττι
δηυτε καλημμι,

κωττι μοι μαλιστα θελω γενεσθαι
μαινολᾳ θυμῳ. τινα δηυτε πειθω
μαις σ᾿ αγην ες σαν φιλοτατα ; τις σ᾿ Ω
Ψαπφ᾿, αδικηει ;

και γαρ ει φευγει ταχεως διωξει
αι δε δωρα μη δεκετ, αλλα δωσει
αι δε μη φιλει ταχεως φιλησει
κωυκ εθελοισα.

ελθε μοι και νυν, χαλεπαν δε λυσον
εκ μεριμναν, οσσα δε μοι τελεσσαι
θυμος ιμερρει, τελεσον. συ δ᾿ αυτα
συμμαχος εσσο

The following "straight" version seems a very good one for perusing once we are familiar with the text and its phrase structure, which must be deduced from the words, not from editorial aides like commas and semicolons. So I will also give on the next page a standard version with the accents and paragraphing which we can use as the base for the following pages of commentary.

Note that the meaningless "smooth breathing" is omitted as well as the aspirating Rough Breathing, which is not used in the Aeolic dialect which is characterized by its "psilosis" or Stripping (of aspiration).. The Grave which only warns not to raise pitch, is a secondary accent and since it can be confused with a "real" pitch diacritic, it not used in this version. We have difficult work if we want to get the Durations of Long and Short right to read verse metrically, and there will be more effort involved in producing the Pitches according to th diacritics, on top of the durative metrical patterns.

Changing the transitional appearance of the Greek text by removing unnecessary accent marks has a single purpose, to clear away space and prepare the text for a closer examination. Unneeded markings can only confuse.

ποικιλόθρον᾽ αθανάτ᾽ Αφρόδιτα
παῖ Δίος δολόπλοκε λίσσομαί σε
μή μ᾽ άσαισι μηδ᾽ ονίαισι δάμνα
    πότνια θῦμον

αλλα τυῖδ᾽ έλθ᾽ αί ποτα κατέρωτα
τας έμας αύδας αΐουσα πήλοι
έκλυες, πάτρος δε δόμον λίποισα
    χρύσιον ῆλθες

άρμ᾽ υπαδεύξαισα · κάλοι δε σ᾽ ᾶγον
ώκεες στροῦθοι περι γᾶς μελάινας
πύκνα δίννεντες πτέρ᾽ απ᾽ ωράνωιθε-
    ρος δια μέσσω,

αῖψα δ᾽εξίκοντο. συ δ᾽, ῶ μάκαιρα,
μεδιαισαις᾽ αθανατῳ προσωπῳ
ήρε᾽ όττι δηῦτε πέπονθα κώττι
δηῦτε κάλημμι,

κώττι μοι μάλιστα θέλω γένεσθαι
μαινόλᾳ θύμῳ. τίνα δηῦτε πέιθω
μαῖς σ᾽ άγην ες σαν φιλότατα ; τίς σ᾽ ῶ
    Ψάπφ᾽, αδικήει ;

και γαρ ει φεύγει ταχέως διώξει
αι δε δῶρα μη δέκετ, αλλα δώσει
αι δε μη φίλει ταχέως φιλήσει
    κωυκ εθέλοισα.

έλθε μοι και νῦν, χαλέπαν δε λῦσον
εκ μερίμναν, όσσα δε μοι τέλεσσαι
θῦμος ιμέρρει, τέλεσον. συ δ᾽αύτα
    σύμμαχος έσσο

(Note: There are several Grammatical aides at p. 88 ff.)

And of course I should include a transcription in Roman letters, a practice somewhat questionably introduced by Perseus throughout its Greek library, but now so familiar to most of us that it will not seem completely out of place. It does offer to the reader who has not yet started with the Greek a chance to experience the sounds and cadences of Sappho's poetry, and for that alone it is worth the small space it takes in this study.

poikilo-thron' athanat' Aphrodita
pai dios doloploka, lissomai se
me m'asaisi med' oniaisi damna
    potnia thumon

alla tuid' elth' ai pota katerota
tas emas audos aioisa peloi
eklues, patros de domon lipoisa
    chrusion elthes

arm' updeuxaisa. kaloi de s'agon
okees strouthoi peri gas melainas
pukna dinnentes pter' ap oranothe-
    -ros dia messo

aipsa d'exikonto, su de O makaira
meidiaisas' athanato prosopoi
ere' otti deute popontha kotti
    deute kalemmi

kotti moi malista thelo genesthai
mainolai thumoi. tina deute peitho
mais agen es san philotata? tis s' O
    Psapph' adikeei ?

kai gar ai pheugei, taxeos dioxei
ai de dora me deket', alla dosei
ai de me philei, tacheos philesei
    kouk etheloisa.

elthe moi kai nun, chalepan de luson
ek merimnan, ossa de moi telessai
thumos imerrei, teleson, su d'auta
    summachos esso.

Translations and the Text

Before entering into a detailed commentary on Dionysius' Poem I, it seems useful to talk for a minute about translations, what they are and what they and intended to do. In the last half of the 20th century, the Classics have gone through a new phrase in the long history of an ancient philological discipline, one in which artistic translations of almost every major classical author have flooded the book market. It is not just a question of getting out one readable translation so that those who do not study Greek or Latin can read the writing of classical authors. We now have a choice of half a dozen translations of each author, some close to the original text, others trying to recreate the feeling of the original in modern wording. Some translations are poetic works in their own right, but many are intended for the college market where copies of a Homer or Vergil are required reading for a Classics course and can sell tens of thousands of copies.

But there is another side to this. After l950 the number of students studying the Greek and Latin language in colleges declined severally, many colleges dropped the Classics as a discipline in those economically tight time. But soon a way for the field of Classics was discovered as a possible salvation. Teach courses in "Classics in Translation" to classes of eighty or more rather than Homer in Greek to a class of five or less.

This caught on and actually saved doomed Classics Departments which had been teaching on a virtually tutorial level. With more students there could be more faculty and tenured security re-cementing translation programs into the stable college curriculum.

With this new and exciting level of activity, more translations appeared, and in many cases obscured the actual texts which from which they were derived. Why read Homer in painful dictionary-based Greek when you can "do Homer" in three weeks in an Epic Course? By the end of the century people starter to realize that the translations and the original were not at all the same thing, and there has been a resurgence of interest in the classical languages, especially in collage Greek in the last decades, as student verge away from easy discussion courses and seek something which requires effort to confer mastery.

But there is more to say about Translation as a process. Robert Frost put his finger on the situation years ago when he said that "Poetry is what is lost in translation.". If you change the words to another language which has different word-associations, and you change the phonetics of the words and phrases, and even the sentence and verse structure (as must often be done to avoid translation-ese effects), you create a new and separate piece of writing. You have not trans-lated or "brought it across" at all, you may have given a fair representation of the overall meaning, but you have demolished the form in the process. Few translations can afford to be form-conscious and at the same time readable, it takes too much effort with too little chance of succeeding.

Coming back to Sappho, the question stands: How does she translate?

I can answer this question best by giving you several translations to examine, before we go on to look in detail at the Greek. Registering on what the translation does without the Greek, you can compare your impression with what you understand after reading through the commentary. There are hundreds of English translations of Sappho dating back over the last two centuries, and there will be still many more coming in this present decade. With patience one could sample them all, and see if they match well with the Greek.

This should be the acid test: If after examining a number of accepted translations, we find that the translation and the text only match in general outline and meaning, and do not have the same detailed traits of sound and configuration of the words, then we would have to admit that Sappho is really not at all translatable.

Let me give first a nicely done but flowery late Victorian translation by A.S. Way, which was considered excellent in its time:

Rainbow-throned immortal one, Aphrodite,
Child of Zeus, spell-weaver, I bow before thee ---
Harrow not my spirit with anguish, mighty
    Queen, I implore thee!

Nay, come hither, even as once thou, bending
Down from far to hearken my cry, didst hear me,
From the Father's palace of gold descending
    Drewest anear me

Chariot wafted: far over midnight-sleeping
Earth, they fair fleet sparrows, through cloudland riven
Wide by tumultuous wings, came sweeping
    Down from thy heaven,

Swittly came: thou, smiling wt those undying
Lips and star-eyes, Blessed One, smiling me-ward,
Said'st, "What ails thee? --- wherefore uprose thy crying
    Calling me thee-ward?

Say for what boon most with a frenzied longing
Yearns thy soul --- say whom shall my glamour chaining
Hale thy love's thrall, Sappho --- and who is wronging
    Thee with disdaining?

Who avoids thee soon shall be thy pursuer:
Aye, the gift-rejecter the giver shall now be:
Aye, the loveless shall now become the wooer,
    Scornful shalt thou be!"

Once again come! Come, and my chains dissever,
Chains of heart-ache! Passionate longings rend me ---
Oh fulfil them! Thou in the strife be ever
    Near, to defend me.

The first problem with this translation is linguistic. My spell-check found a surprising number of words which were not known or in use now, beyond the archaic "thee/thou" pronouns. Some were poetisms which the author invented to give a sense of the Greek wording, others were certainly archaic or bookish even then. Although the language is completely consonant with the Art Nouveau movement of the early century, and quite nicely done if one thinks of the floral decorations and intentional archaisms of the post William Morris period, it is singularly out of step with our stripped, post-Art Deco, straight and minimalist preferences.

The translator did know the Greek well, he knew that something had to be done to carry across some of the loveliness of the Greek words and phrasing, and he did this with the current poetic vocabulary of his time. The result is quite lovely, given the translator's setting from a century ago. For most if us, this translation would not work at all. As Sappho is clear and sharp and direct, Mr. Way is flowery and wordy and indirect. It is useful however as a reminder of the way language continually changes. Here in the span of a single decade ,we see huge changes in today's TV or our children's speech patterns. Is translation going to be done over every few years to keep up with the changes in the way we speak? Yes, and that may be the reason that we are going to experience such a flood new translation of the classics, decade by decade.

Next is a translation which I did a few years ago to accompany an earlier and much simpler Web version of this Study on Sappho. It was intended to serve as a translation accompanying the transliteration of Poem I (Greek on the web was not feasible back then), and I later found that it was linked, cross referenced, lifted and purloined (with or without my name) throughout the Internet, which must mean indirectly that it was not considered a bad translation. Looking it over, I see it has few words or expressions which deviate far from normal common English usage of the year 2000, and it may be the "ordinariness" of this translation which is also fairly literal, which is its best claim to fame.

Many colored throned immortal Aphrodita,
daughter of Zeus, wile-weaver, I beg you
with reproaches and harms do not beat down
O Lady, my soul

But come here, if ever at another time
My voice hearing, from afar
You gave ear, and your father's home leaving
----golden --- you came

Yoking the chariot. And fair, swift
Doves brought you over the black earth
Dense wings whirring, from heaven down
through middle air.

Suddenly they arrived, and you, O Blessed One,
Smiling with your immortal countenance
Asked what hurt me, and for what
Now I cried out.

And what do I want to happen most
In my crazy heart. "Whom then you desire
Persuasion to bring to you, dearest? Who
Sappho hurts you.

And if she flees, soon will she follow,
If she does not take gifts, she will give,
If she does not love, she will love
Despite herself"

Come to me now, the harsh worry
Let loose, what my heart wants to be
Done, do it!, and you yourself be
My battle-ally.

Comment from the translator:

"Many colored" is of course clumsy, but a deficiency in the English language which has no words for the Greek "poikilos" which corresponds fairly well with Latin. "varius". "Colored" can be of a single hue so not suitable. We have had to get along with Joseph's Coat of Many Colors for centuries, and Mr. Way's suggestion of the "rainbow" is a fair effort to supply the right term, but entirely too fancy and not in the Greek at all.

"Wile weaver" does translate 'dolo-ploka' exactly, but the Greek was probably a common adjective for many a woman, whereas this is too strong a neologism in English. But many translations have used it so often that we might almost think it a native English word.

"Beat down" is too brutal and direct, but fits the imperative 'damna', which means dominate, crush. If a suitable word does not come up , I would always go with the simplest expression, as here.

"My voice hearing" follows the Greek word order, as "father's home leaving". This is done to catch the archaic quality of the Greek, it is still understandable now although word inversions are often not registered in today's usage.

"Black earth" has to stay exactly as it is, since it is an allusion to the world of Homer with his own tag expression. Never touch an allusion, this is no place for poetic invention.

"your immortal face" . Face seems to ordinary and daily, while "countenance" is formal and evasive for "prosopó " which stands forth as "pros + op". Nice clear word with immediate meaning but built in formality in Greek usage.

"Asked what hurt me..." This is kept close since the goddess it talking like mother to child, "Why are you hurting", better reversed for English as "who hit you?". But we want to keep the 'hurt' word, the eternal scraped knee needing a bandaid.

"And if she flees..." This paragraph (stanza as it were) has to retain the bipartite nature of each line, slowly building tensions between the present and assured future situations, like a magical incantation bringing the two parts of a broken relationship tougher inexorably. The lines have to look inexorable, until the last word, where in the short line "despite herself" does no justice to the Greek 'ouk etheloisa', which as "(even) not wishing" modifies and caps the unidentified "she" of the whole paragraph.

The reading 'etheloisa=ethelousa' as a nom. sg. fem. has been emended to 3 person plural 'ethelousan' assuming that the person was a man and both of them were unable to restrain themselves. Such was the fear of homosexuality in the l850's that a text could be emended just to change the subject.

The last paragraph has to be translated very simply wiuth a minimum of words and no decoration, as here done. This was done in the translation monosyllabically so far as possible, matching the one and two syllable words of the Greek which express an in-turning of the feelings, until that last most difficult word "battle ally" for 'symmachos'. This was the special word for a sworn ally in the throes of battle, whether Homeric goddess Athena or a confederate ally in the world of Greek politics. She uses the word in a critical sense, since it is an unexpected word for a woman in that male dominated society. For this I never found a good translation into English.

So it would appear that some of the clumsiness of this translation was intentional, in an effort to keep close to the Greek rather than exfoliate into a rival poem of parallel quality. For this age, this may be the best way to go. And again the warning that it is the poetry which is lost in the translation.!

The Poem

ποικιλόθρον᾽ αθανάτ᾽ Αφρόδιτα
παῖ Δίος δολόπλοκε λίσσομαί σε
μή μ᾽ άσαισι μηδ᾽ ονίαισι δάμνα
πότνια θῦμον

αλλα τυῖδ᾽ έλθ᾽ αί ποτα κατέρωτα
τας έμας αύδας αΐουσα πήλοι
έκλυες, πάτρος δε δόμον λίποισα
χρύσιον ἦλθες

άρμ᾽ υπαδεύξαισα · κάλοι δε σ᾽ ἆγον
ώκεες στροῦθοι περι γᾶς μελάινας
πύκνα δὶννεντες πτέρ᾽ απ᾽ ωράνωιθε-
ρος δια μέσσω,

αῖψα δ᾽ εξίκοντο. συ δ᾽, ὦ μάκαιρα,
μεδιαισαις᾽ αθανατῳ προσωπῳ
ήρε᾽ όττι δηῦτε πέπονθα κώττι
δηῦτε κάλημμι,

κώττι μοι μάλιστα θέλω γένεσθαι
μαινόλᾳ θύμῳ. τίνα δηῦτε πέιθω
μαῖς σ᾽ άγην ες σαν φιλότατα ; τίς σ᾽ ὦ
Ψάπφ᾽, αδικήει ;

και γαρ ει φεύγει ταχέως διώξει
αι δε δῶρα μη δέκετ, αλλα δώσει
αι δε μη φίλει ταχέως φιλήσει
κωυκ εθέλοισα.

έλθε μοι και νῦν, χαλέπαν δε λῦσον
εκ μερίμναν, όσσα δε μοι τέλεσσαι
θῦμος ιμέρρει, τέλεσον. συ δ᾽ αύτα
σύμμαχος έσσο

A Word about Meter

Let us divide the business of Meter into two segments, that of Durations and the other side of the coin which involves Pitches. Since we have problems with the length-based metrical patterns coming from our corrupted substitution of Stresses for Lengths, and another set of problems involving the Accents used as another set of Stresses for prose only, it seems best to talk about the Durative or length-based metrics here, and leave the superimposed Pitches for another time.

The first poem which we will work with is written in a metrical form called the Sapphic stanza, which has three lines in a largely similar pattern, followed by a short line.

– ⏑ – ⏓ – ⏑ ⏑ – ⏑ – ⏓
– ⏑ – ⏓ – ⏑ ⏑ – ⏑ – ⏓
– ⏑ – ⏓ – ⏑ ⏑ – ⏑ – ⏓
– ⏑ ⏑ – ⏓

The pattern is not hard to follow, since it has often been used in English, and has a distinctive sound of its own which once heard is easy to remember. Here is a Sapphic strophe in triplex form, since it is a Sapphic in English translating a Sapphic of Horace from his Latin, which in turn is an imitation of Sappho's Greek Sapphic. Perhaps not the best translation but useful as a metrical example.

Once unarmed I was in a forest roaming,
Singing love lays, when i' the secret gloaming
Rushed a huge wolf, which though in fury foaming
    Did not attack me.

In reading, we look for the long vowels eta and o-mega, the diphthongs which are always long, and vowels under a circumflex pitch mark. These will always be Long, but we can also watch for short vowels, the -e-psilon and o-mikron. Furthermore a short vowel before two consonants will generally (sic) be pronounced long as a matter of length compensation.

Between these two searches we can usually get enough of the metrical pattern to read verse decently, perhaps after a try or two, at a normal reading pace. This is what we must aim for, a real-time reading speed which enables us to read aloud, understand and at the same time feel the musical metrics of the verse.

The traditional method of first memorizing the metrical patterns from a written out schema, then pencil marking the little long and short marks over the words in a test, and finally trying to read the Greek with these neo-diacritics in mind ----- this is NOT the way to go about reading Greek verse. Poetry is a musical experience and must be approached acoustically, best by listening to someone who reads the Greek well aloud, and then trying to approximate his sound or her intonation. Listening is the first step, doing some intelligent guess-work comes next, and finally the whole procedure will snap into place on day as you read line after line of your Homeric dactyls and wonder why it has suddenly become so easy.

Remember that you can do in cold and read long/short as you do, and you will come out with the pattern as above outlined for the Sapphic strophe. The sounds are a part of the words and the best way is to derive them from the words as you are reading them. The worst way is to memorize the meter and try to apply the text to it.

Would you condor memorizing the rhythmics of Bach's Brandenberg # I first, and then tapping the pattern out with your finger while listening to the recording?

Interpretation and Analysis

Now we can approach the poem itself, and examine the details of its language, its sounds and configuration of words, and the way its esthetic components are interwoven with the communicative meaning of the poem as a whole.

Let us begin reading carefully, line by line as the text unfolds:

ποικιλόθρον᾽ αθανάτ᾽ Αφρόδιτα

"color throned immortal Aphrodita"

poikilo-thron' athanat' Aphrodita

With that first difficult word "you of the many colored throne", clumsily handling the clear Greek adjective 'poikilos', we start off on a tour of the poem's visual imagery. This initial adjective is in fact the keyword to the setting of the whole poem, and three elements are involved: The coloration, the throne on which the color is painted, and the goddess who is connected with (seated on) the throne.

The seated statue of a goddess is found in several museum holdings of work from Sappho's archaic period. The figure of the deity is carved integral with the rectangular block of marble. This is early statuary and the whole sculpture is heavy and primitive --- one must not think of the later free-standing and lithe Aphrodites. Years ago in Greece I noticed clear traces of several colors of paint on the sides of such block-statues, which didn't seem surprising since I knew that the Greeks regularly painted all statues, the metopes of buildings, they waxed columns to a tan for color and water-proofing.

In short their temple world was a blaze of strong, earth-colors. And so here, the word "many-color-throned" is not an example of imaginative word-painting, it is an exact visual term.

The setting of this poem is clear, since statues are in temples, located in the separated rear-chamber of a small rectangular temple with pillars in front, much like the small temple of Nike at the entrance to the acropolis on the right side. For lack of a complete reconstruction, I am going to take the Treasury of the Athenians at Delphi, which is a small Doric style temple as a model for this discussion. The public did not enter temples, the sacrifice was done out in front, only the priest or special person in charge alone could enter within. Picture now Sappho proceeding from the outside altar where a sacrifice could be done, into the temple itself as she is about to enter the inner chamber where the statue of the seated Aphrodite stands.

This is an approaching front view of an early Doric temple from 515 BC, the Athenian Treasury at Delphi, which should give a fair idea of the kind of temple in which this poem is set. Behind the front columns is a front chamber, there will be in Sappho's temple an interior wall with a doorway, leading into the inner chamber in which the seat statue of the goddess is located. Any initial sacrifice would have been done in the foreground of this picture on an alter on the stone pavement.

Since Sappho is directly addressing the goddess of stone on the painted statue base,. As a person in some special relationship to the religious requirements, she can enter the temple and must be in the doorway of the inner wall and now approaching the statue.

In the back chamber before the seated statue she kneels, her eyes level with the painted designs on the throne. In fact mentioning the "painted throne" puts her in the chamber bending low to see the throne, eyes cast down before she dares look at the goddess' countenance. She must be close to the statue, kneeling before it, since she sees the colors of the statue's polychrome paint. Now the words of her prayer will continue to unfold:

Her prayer begins, as Greek prayers must, with proper identification of the god, but there are two specifications which set sets out first:

αϑανατ᾽ Αφροδιτα

"Immortal Aphrodite"

athanat' Aphrodita

The word "immortal" might seem hardly needed in addressing the goddess, since she is by definition one of the immortal ones, just as we are all the mortals, the "thnetoi" or "mortales" of Latin. But remember that this is a formal prayer, and there are certain ritual words which must be spoken if the addressed deity is to hear the words, as Sappho notes : "If you have ever heard.me before..." We can take 'athanata' as a title, a ritual part of the goddess' name, thus *Αϑανατ᾽ Αφροδιτα,* perhaps like the Christian invoking "Holy Mary".

"O Daughter of Zeus"....but she adds the curious word *δολοπλοκ,* as we somewhat tentatively translate it "Weaver of Wiles". This is interesting expression, in English it may be taken as somewhat charming, or beguiling, but in Greek the noun 'dolos' refers to a "snare, a trap, an ambush" and has clear associations with hunting. the m,ilitaru and even with treachery. The Greek who knew Aphrodite as lovely and delightful could remember that her path was mined with traps and snares for the unaware lover, and it is this dangerous pathway which Sappho knows she is now treading. Is this insulting to the goddess whom she is now begging for mercy? No, it is the nature of Love, and as she cringes and begs release from pain, she surreptitiously refers to her Lady of Pain very quickly, as the truth of the matter.

παι Διος δολοπλοκε λισσομαι σε

"child of Zeus, wile-weaver, I entreat you"

pai dios, dolopoka, lissomai se

"Child of Zeus" is needed for the identification of the suppliant, since one has to get the right access code and that depends on knowing the proper terminology of the address. This will expand later in the poem before Aphrodite can leave the golden halls of heaven, her it is just a word to establish the initial contact. Child is perhaps the better word, since daughter is familiar and human. We only need the relationship to Zeus here, nothing more.

μη μ᾿ ασαισι μηδ᾿ ονιαισι δαμνα
ποτνια ϑυμον

"do not with pains and reproachs crush
O Lady, my soul"

mé m'asaisi med' oniaisi damna
potnia thumon

Do not crush me down, with "harms" and with "reproaches", but these words have more than shows here. The Greek verbal stem 'aaó' does mean "harm" but this is never physical, always purely mental. The noun used here 'asa' is unusual, a shortened from what would actually be 'aasa'. Whether the word is connected with the Greek verb 'aa-zó' meaning breathe out a sigh "Ah!" is not clear, but Sappho would know that sighs are not far away. Now 'onia' as "grief, distress" is a word which shows the distribution of variants in the literary dialects, with an Attic form 'ania', beside the Ionic 'anié' and this Aeolic has a vowel shift to -o-, as 'onia'. Furthermore Epic and Sappho make the -i- long, whereas later authors can use it as long or short as the meter requires. I mention this to make clear that there is no "standard" Greek language until we come to a much later period. Part of the standardization we use stems from medieval scribes and even from modern text editors. And beyond this, words in different periods may have different associations, which makes the use of the Liddel-Scott-Jones dictionary, even with its many columns in small print, absolutely indispensable.

O Lady, Potnia! The Homeric title potnia, powerful Lady, coming from the world of Epic, is used here with specific emphasis, since it stands as a majestic title right in the middle of a sorrowful and wailing complaint about the plights of a lover. Even in this first paragraph of the address to the goddess, there are two strong terms used, one with 'dolor' which traps and ensnares, and the other Lady 'Potnia', which has a complicated and widespread linguistic history. The root from IE "pot-" means "rule" and a despot is the '* dems-pot-es" or ruler of the house, ruler of the social group. It occurs with females as 'despoina' whether goddesses of women, meaning "O Lady, Madame, Ma'am" but used alone as Potnia the powerful element of the root rules. There is even a verb in later use 'despoiniazó' meaning "cry out in distress or alarm 'O My Lady ", used by both men and women.

So when Sappho says "Potnia", especially in this painful situation, she is really crying out " do not crust me down OH MY GOD completely". This is at the same time a proper word of address in prayer, but it is also a cry of desperation, even a scream. We can understand the imperative of the verb 'damna' as crushing down or even "dominating". But the physical crushing does not work here, the word means mental crushing l, as when Zeus in the Iliad 5, 893 it talking about his difficulty controlling his lady Hera, says:

.........την μεν εγω σπουδῇ δάμνημι έπεσσι

"her with effort I control with my words"

ten men ego spoude damnemi epessi

It is this kind of emotional control which Sappho is speaking about, it is not the complaint of a battered wife.

The word ϑυμος is not a simple as it seems, when translated as "soul". We might try to translate as "heart" but that would be a bad mistake following the Aristotelian error of assuming that the heart was the seat of the mind and emotions. We find it more convenient to say "Yes, with all my heart" rather than "With all my brain", but that is a local problem for English!

The Greek for 'thumos' is based in air, mist and smoke, cognate with Skt. dhumas "mist" and Latin fumus or "smoke", and it can be used for a wide range of notions, from anger, heart felt feelings, even desire. English "mind" might be what Sappho is saying here. If you think of soul as part of your mind, that would be reasonable, but not Soul as the personalized part of the self which has a separate identity here and in heaven. This word 'thumos' is not a theological Soul.

Now let us look at the internal Form or Microstructure of this first stanza, which stands complete in itself.

ποικιλόθρον᾽ αθανάτ᾽ Αφρόδιτα
παῖ Δίος δολόπλοκε λίσσομαί σε
μή μ᾽ άσαισι μηδ᾽ ονίαισι δάμνα
πότνια θῦμον

"Many colored throned immortal Aphrodita,
daughter of Zeus, wile-weaver, I beg you
with reproaches and harms do not beat down
O Lady, my soul"

poikilo-thron' athanat' Aphrodita
pai dios doloploka, lissomai se
me m'asaisi med' oniaisi damna
potnia thumon

The first thing to strike us is the number and regular succession of Acute pitched syllables in this passage, a full dozen as against only two circum- flexes. Since the first whole line is an addressing statement, the actual grammar of the sentences starts with the first word of line 2, which is 'pai' "child / daughter" .Then we flow with continually up-rising major fifth pitches (the rest being relegated down to base), and ending with that critical word 'thumon' crowned with the overlong and melismatic tone curl of cir- cumflex accentuation.

This is not a matter of academic diacritics, is it a musical score on the basis of which Sappho performed the song with voice and lyre, following in artistic sequence the pitches where are here marked out. This has to be practiced in reading out loud, only when that is made familar by practice can we sit back and listen to the sound ringing in our ears. This is the way to read Greek poetry, which is not a paper phenomenon, any more than a Mozart Symphony is a graphic design written on score sheet. We have to recreate the score for the musicality of the poem, but with pitches clearly marked out, this will be entirely feasible.

Of course there are problems. The Aeolic dialect is much less known to us than the later Attic Greek. Eustathius (515.37-8) discusses the dialects which did not employ the rough breathing, calling this 'psilosis' or stripping off, and he states that Aeolic was known as one of those dialects. So there are no "rough breathings", whether as sign or as sound. As to accentuation the metricist writer Choreoboskos remarks at various points "The Aeolians accent this differently...", not generally specifying exactly how. We suspect that the accentuation we find in our printed Sappho may not actually be that which she used. On the other hand, since we have the printed accents to work with, we can proceed tentatively with these, observing how they work out in actual recited performance.

The vowel sequencing is always of paramount importance in reading Greek, not only because Greek has a full and pellucid set of vowels, unlike Sanskrit which has suffered considerable vowel consolidation, but because the historical vowel changes within Greek often have grammatical meaning and therefore call for careful attention. The vowel clarity of Greek is one of its esthetic strong points, and they give a certain clarity to the language which is especially brillliant in poetic diction.

Note in this first line the location of the -o- vowels:

ποικιλόθρον᾽ αθανάτ᾽ Αφρόδιτα
poikilo-thron' athanat' Aphrodita

The first word has three -o- based syllables, while the last word sandwiches an -o- between two -a-'s. But the whole line sandwiches the word 'athanta' with its three (+ elided) -a- vowels between the other two -o- bearing words. This is a very balanced and carefully assembled line of verse

But the next line

παῖ Δίος δολόπλοκα λίσσομαί σϵ
pai dios doloploka lissomai se

goes the other way with four -o- sounds in the middle words, while the first and next-last syllables in the line have the strong diphthong -ai-. Intuitively conscious of the balance of the first line, the poet alters the arrangement of the second line to avoid humdrum repetition. And in the third line

μή μ᾽ άσαισι μηδ᾽ ονίαισι δάμνα
me m'asaisi med' oniaisi damna

we find, poised on a pivotal center word "nor", two rhyming words with their ringing -aisi-, each based on an vowel initial stem (aasa / ania = onia).

Then comes the powerful and potent word "Potnia" in a prayerful gasp of breath, culminating in the pitch-heavy sprit-word 'thumon'.

The prayer now goes into the second segment. Sappho is establishing the identity of the goddess being called upon, using the right ritual words in the traditional formula, as was done by the priest Chryses in the Homeric prayer in Iliad I 36 ff:

κλῦθι μϵυ, αργυρότοξ᾽, ὁς Χρύσην αμφιβέβηκας
Κίλλαν ϵτ ζα-θέην, Τϵνέδοιο τϵ ῖφι ανάσσϵις
Σμινθϵῦ....

Hear me, O Silver Bow, who encircles Chrysa
And Killa the holy, and rule with might over Tenedos,
(Mouse-God) Smintheus........

Now having established the address identity, the priest goes on to the second critical segment of any serious and proper prayer with a reminder of services performed in the past in the god's honor:

.... *ϵί ποτϵ́ τοι χαρίϵντ᾽ ϵπι νηον ϵ́ρϵψα*
η ϵι δή ποτϵ́ τοι κατα πίονα μηρί᾽ ϵ́κηα
ταύρων ηδϵ αιγῶν --- τόδϵ μοι κρήηνον ϵϵ́λδωρ

.............if every for you I roofed over pleasing temple
or ever I kindled fat thigh pieces for you
of bull orgoat -----now grant me this wish.

It is not a matter of evening up the score and giving me this for that, it is the mutual contact with a superior power, who when approached in proper ritual mode. As further key to the situation, when the litigant actually establishes that it is HE who is here doing the soliciting ---- then the actual prayer as prayer can take place and reasonably be expected to reach the deity's ear.

This Homeric example of a properly tendered and worded prayer was for Archaic Greece a classic example of how to go about such business, and Sappho follows the formula with remarkable exactness.

αλλα τυῖδ᾽ ϵ́λθ᾽ αί ποτα κατϵ́ρωτα
τας ϵ́μας αύδας αΐουσα πήλοι
ϵ́κλυϵς.........

"But come hither, if ever at another time
My voice hearing from afar off
You did listen....."

One of the difference between the anxious priest Chryses and the suppliant Lady Sappho is that whereas he lists his accomplishments of roofing and legs of goat and bull in workmanlike detail, she says nothing more than that god listened to her once, at some other time and situation . She compacts all that into one telling word 'kai-heterota' as "at some other time". This is archly and deftly done, even to the sutured elision, it saves time and space as this agitated woman goes to the heart (thumos) of the situation directly, wasting no words on the unessential.

τας έμας αύδας αΐουσα πήλοι
έκλυες.........

These words are all auaral and auditory, there is an acoustic poattern to them, moving from words based on the -s- vowel (1 - 4) but encapsulating diphthongs -ae- and -ou- (3 4), then shifting to a long -e- vowel and in 'eklues' shor -e-. If initially the vowel thread is based on -a-, it amplifies and then shifts to the fronted and much higher -e- series. And there is a corresponding pattern in the meaning, which shifts the focus:

"my voice -----hearing ----(for off) you heard"

Following the re-focused attention on the listening goddess, we move to a scene of motion and action, looking toward to an imaginary sun in her mind s eye, all in the darkness of the inner chamber of the Doric temple.

πατρος δε δομον λιποισα
χρυσιον ελθες
αρμ᾽ υπασδευκσαισα

your father's home leaving
---golden --- you came
yoking the chariot.

patros de domon lipoisa
chrusion elthes
arm' updeuxaisa.

The golden home of the Father is of course Zeus in his original role as supreme (= overhead) Sun God. This original function is corroborated by the cognate words Latin 'dies' and Skt. 'dyaus' as the Sun itself and "day". The Greek myths moved slowly from nature forces to divine Persons in a humanizing direction, as suited the anthropocentric Greeks. In this word the original function of Sun shines through, along with "golden" which visually calls up the orb of the bright shining sun.

Some have felt that the adjective "golden" could go with the "chariot" as 'arma' or the 'domon' as home of the goddess in the heaven, but best not consider this an either / or situation. The chariot is a visual burst of the material of the sun, a "sun spot" as it were leaping out of the mass of burning hydrogen.

And the word "golden" can equally well describe the glorious chariot which carries the Sun-born goddess from there to here. Since the "home" comes first, we can attach the "golden " to it and then trail its color onto the moving 'arma' chariot as it leaves home.

The vowels leave a trail too, from the -l- 's of the first of the above lines via the swift -e- 's of 'elthes' as Aphrodite prepares to travel, to the yoking of the chariot with that odd pair of high sounding diphthongs (-eu- -ai-) and inside that very word 'upa-sdeuks-aisa' , with the slick -s- 's of the verb 'zeugnumi'.

> Note the re-spelling in the above version: First the zeta or -z- was certainly pronounced -s- + -d- rather than as later reversed. Then the sigmatic aorist -s- is only graphically combined with the -g- of the stem, so we should see it as -k- + -s-, matching the compounded zeta before it.

But from Sappho's angle, kneeling in the dark room before the great seated statue of her protecting (stone) goddess Aphrodite, it is a swirl of visual imagery. Her mind goes up to heaven, sees the wheel of the sun, sees that bursting off as wheel of the celestial chariot, sees Aphrodite the daughter connecting up the chariot for an appearance on earth, about to fly.....

καλοι δϵ σ᾽ αγον
ώκϵϵς στροῦϑοι πϵρι γᾶς μϵλάινας
πύκνα δ̔ιννϵντϵς πτέρ᾽ απ᾽ ωράνωιϑϵ-
ρος δια μέσσω.
αῖψα δ᾽ ϵξίκοντο

"And fair, swift
Doves brought you over the black earth
Dense wings whirring, from heaven down
through middle air.
Suddenly they arrived"

kaloi de s'agon
okees strouthoi peri gas melainas
pukna dinnentes pter' ap oranothe-
-ros dia messo
aipsa d'exikonto

.........but immediately the flight of the flaring chariot disappears, and the scene shifts to the outside of the temple walls, where as Sappho hears, from the inner chamber a flight of pigeons swirling around the temple roof, with the fluttering noise of many wings together.

What are the birds 'strouthoi"? It is almost impossible to identify birds and plants, as D'Arcy Thompson demonstrated in his studies years ago,. The strouthoi would seem to be relatively small birds in Iliad 2.311 since a snake is devouring down eagerly all eight finding all of them in a nest. On the other hand 'strouthos megas' is an "ostrich" or in Latin 'avis strix', for the mise en scene unthinkable here! I opt for the pigeons since they fly in groups and you can hear the sound of their wings fairly clearly as they swirl in groups.

While considering these philological minutiae, look at the word 'pteron /. ptera" which is originally a feather, as in Odyssey 7.36 ωκϵῖαι ως ϵι πτϵρον ηϵ νόημα "fast as a feather or a thought". But it is also used for the "wings" as Iliad 23.879 συν πτϵρα πυκνα λίασϑϵν with the same adjective 'puknos / pukinos' which cannot be exactly put into English.

> The core meaning of this word 'pukna' is "dense, compact, solid, clever ?, wise ?" in some uses, but Homer uses it for wings as does Sappho, so it must have a meaning which lies outside English usage. Something like "en masse, mass" but not "massive" might do it, but there seems to be no perfect translation.

It is the acoustically massed sound of fluttering wings which Sappho hears winging around the temple roof, a sign that the goddess is approaching on her pathway down from heavenly home to the temple where she is drawn by the prayer of an ardent devotee, calling upon her name.

ώκεες στροῦθοι περι γᾶς μελάινας
πύκνα δινvεντες πτέρ᾽ απ᾽ ωράνωιθε-
ρος δια μέσσω.

αῖψα δ᾽ εξίκοντο

Looking at this section again, we see massed motions of several sorts, the swiftness of the birds in flight, then their motion over the Homeric "black earth", then the actual sounds of fluttering wings, then direction again:

Sappho has to look back to the world of Homer, which is the same world as hers in one sense, but as a world of spear and warfare an entirely different world in fact. The reference to Homer's "dark earth" is actually a forward-going allusion, since it prepares the poem for the next-last word in the last stanza, the military and Homeric word: 'summachos' or "battle ally". Aphrodite flies swiftly over this over-warred earth in her flight to a woman's love-trapped heart, but the note on the geographical identity is a sign of the shift in sense and sensibilities from the epic world to her new one of the emotions and the heart.

"...from heaven through the middle air", a curious but intentional combination of words giving us 'ourano + aithér', here combined as 'óran-aitheros' with dialect shifts of vowels. The combination gives an additional sense of swiftness, as if heaven and middle air are somehow combined in one mad dash, as the sun-chariot swirls in a flash from the upper levels of 'ouranos' down through the middle-air or 'aither', the air-space in which we live our human lives.

With airplane travel we have moved into this middle range between the upper reaches of orbiting shuttles, and now use the term "airspace" again for the territory of powered flight. Sappho was speaking of powered flight in her airspace also, but it was goddess-powered for her then, and the vehicle did not have to be pressurized.

The phrase 'peri gas melainas' as over Homer's black earth doesn't need phonetic reinforcement since it is such a familiar phrase out of the Epic vocabulary, with its own set of images. But look at the birds:

πύκνα διννεντες πτέρ
"dense whirring wings"
pukna dinnentes ptera

This almost untranslatable trio is poised on the central whirring word 'dinnentes', with an untranslatable 'pukna' (whooshing?) of "wings" on either side. But aside from the formal arrangement, there is sheer sound-writing in these three words, as Sappho inside listens to the whirrrrrr of wings outside, as they swing the temple roof again and again, until.......

αῖψα δ᾽ ϵξίκοντο
"There they are..."
aipsa d' exikonto

What is critical here is the rate of speed in the passage from sun to the temple grounds, the holy 'temenos', as the scene changes from the birds and sound of fluttering wings, to black earth below and middle brightness (aither) above and then, all of a sudden : They are arrived.

They have landed, that is the first part of the line. But immediately the words shift focus: "and you......the Blessed One"

αἶψα δ' ἐξίκοντο. συ δ', ὦ μάκαιρα,
μεδιαισαις' αθανατῳ προσωπῳ

"they arrived. And you, Belssed One,
smiling with your immortal face"

aipsa e'exikonto. su d', O Makaira
mediaisais' athanato prosopo

The word which I have translated tentatively as "Blessed" is 'makaira' derived from 'makar' which Homer uses often of the Gods. But this is not the same as English "blessed" which has a special meaning in a Western Christian society, which is quite different from the Hellenic world. The "theoi makares" are not so much religiously blessed as "happy, rejoicing" in a special world which knows no pain or responsibility or death. One might better say "beatific" for their existence, or even call them "the hedonistic heavenly ones" , but these connotations are all wrong. Later the Greek decided that "the happy ones" or 'makarioi' mean the blessed dead, those who have passed on to the fields of flowers, and this meaning which is not found in Epic, becomes the only regular use of the word.

What seems critical is to establish the inner sense of 'makaira' as a word belonging to Aphrodite's joyful and celestially blessed existence, here leading us to that expansive word in the next line, the ethereal Smile of the goddess, which becomes the visual focus of the whole poem.

μεδιαισαις' αθανατῳ προσωπῳ

"smiling with that celestial smile"

mediaisais' athanato prosopo

Obviously I have trouble with 'athanatos' again, which I established at the start of the poem as "holy", but now I find it completely out of place. This is no nun's placid and holy smile, the sign of acceptance of role and a sense of total forgiveness. It is a smile which goes with something entirely different, a beatific smile from a jorful and celestial heaven. And it is also something else. It is a smile which has found a place in our century as the.......

Archaic Smile.

Academic Interlude

We must unfortunately pause at this critical crux in the poem to examine several thingswhich pertain directly to our interpretation, but will return to this very point as soon as we have finished the required discussion.

The above portrait is a good example of a sculptural configuration which is noted in the world of Academe as the "Archaic Smile". This curious uplifting of the edges of the mouth was regularly used in sculpture around 600-500 BC, and constitutes one of the easily recognizable marks of art of the archaic period. But for some reason which I find inexplicable, the term "Archaic Smile" seems to have captured the ear and imagination of our modern world, as a quick search on the Internet shows. There are some 1220 search results on this exact phrase, which range from a band, a men's choral group, a T-shirt manufacturer, a volume of poetry, several Japanese websites which I cannot fathom, and other assorted appearances which seem to have nothing in common beyond the use of these two words in their name.

It is as if every person who had ever taken a course in Greek Art remembered, if nothing else from the syllabus, this one phrase as memorable, and many continued to employ it in later some personal fashion.

Exactly what this Archaic Smile originally was and why it was used then and later suddenly changed to a normal, relaxed mouth counter is not easy to say, but a quick survey of the mechanics of the situation may be of use here: Smiling is a complex facial adjustment involving a number of specialized muscles, which are used in concert to effect the social notion which we identify as a SMILE. Important musculature includes:

> Musculus orbicularis oris, a muscle which goes around the mouth aperture and is able to construct the lips into a circle or pour. This is actually a muscle similar in function to the anal sphincter, but more mobile and probably more communicative in most social situations.
>
> The M. quadr. labii superioris raises the upper lip, and is one of the components of the photograph smile which is evoked by saying the word CHEESE for the photographer.
>
> The M. caninus is which is named after the dog's angry lifting of the upper lip showing the teeth as a warning, usually preceding attack.
>
> The M. zygomaticus as attached to the zygomatic arch reaching from eye socket back to the skull laterally, swings down toward the mouth.
>
> The M. risorius as a laugh-actuator pulls the mouth laterally, one on each side to create a laugh as a further development of the simple smile. Of course several of these muscles will work in concert to produce the classic smile.

It is interesting that the analogous musculo-facial operation in a dog, usually accompanied by a threatening growl, means anger and danger. Chimpanzees have almost the same smile as ours, but it generally denotes irritation preceding anger, although by clever manipulation of camera shots a chimp may seem to be laughing with us, or even learn to give the gesture as a smile for human approval. Smiling too much and especially laughing at a dog makes him very nervous and often angry, and he will return the smile with his very different dental version.

The smile is a universal human gesture which seems to transcend social, cultural and racial frontiers, although it can have different functions in different social settings. The friendly Mid-Western social smile toward strangers is quite different from the conservative girl's apologetic smile. A smile in a singles bar has one meaning, while the silent smile to a waiter means a call for attention in the U.S., but might mean a homosexual come-on in another setting. Many French people regard the American automatic smile as foolish, but this may be merely part of a larger anti-American feeling. The Romans felt the same way about unnecessary smiling, as in Catullus' poem 39 about the Spaniard with white teeth who smiled broadly at all occasions (incidentally one who used urine as his mouthwash!).

The eyes and the mouth are the primary contacts in dealing with another person, which applies equally to artwork of all kinds. The Greeks understood how hard it is to portray eyes realistically in stone, and at timea resorted to ceramic or glazed inserts for the eyeball. Certainly eyes were painted, presumably with colored iris. But the mouth is also very important, since innervation and musculature around the mouth is very complicated. Someone watching or listening to a speaker has equally complex nerve connections called "proprioceptive" , which give visual signals to the brain ahead of the hearing and decoding of the sound signals.

Carving in marble a mouth which represents a real mouth is much more complicated that it would seem. Anything short of a true representation will appear strange, unnerving and perhaps even threatening. Carving a mouth requires awareness of musculature and the underlying bone formation, and since the mouth is an extremely expressive organ, slight changes of shape can suggest sarcasm, a sneer, risibility, unpleasant determination, or gloom. Later sculptors learned how to design a neutral mouth, earlier ones who must have been discouraged by ruining a face with a two millimeter deviation from what was needed, must have found the Archaic Smile not only useful as an artist's salvation, but also as potentially carrying a live-contact impression.

So the question stands, why did the Greeks in that archaic period decide to use the SMILE on their sculpture? Was it that the Greek sculptors could not make a normal mouth contour, a view which many traditional art historians have espoused without explanation? As the Greeks developed their sculpture they incorporated anatomical details which the fast developing medical science had defined, and such matters as the complex knee joint with associated musculature were soon understood and carved into the marble figures. If the knee which is complex, why not the mouth which is very simple?

If you go to a museum and stand before a statue with Archaic Smile, stare at it for several minutes without moving your eyes, until the face becomes normalized and familiar, your eyes will eventually blink, and then you will see in a flash the statue smiling back at you. I have done this many times in the GHreek collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and have asked others go there to take a look and test it out. It is a real psycholgico-visual reaction, and it really works.

I believe that all this is bears on to Sappho's use of the smile on the face of Aphrodite. The visual "apparition" of unconsciously animating the face which although carved in immobile stone, can seem to move and respond with a smiling gesture, would have been a wonderful experience for prayer-ful litigants in the seventh century BC. But like many a devotional process, it would have been overused to the point of finally becoming trite, and this would explain the abandonment of the Smile after 550 BC. Another factor in its disappearance could stem from the increasing accuracy of the medical art in describing the external appearance of the human body, which would make non-typical rendition of surface features somewhat objectionable.

Overused, over-contemplated in prayer and ritual, and a finally mere feature of ordinary temple stonework, it would have lost its original use and meaning. It may have scared children and believers who feared something about a moving stone face, but it seems to have had a definite period of constant use, and if it disappeared over one or two generations, that too cannot have been accidental and without a reason..

End Academic Interlude

Returning to Sappho and the beatifically celestial face of Aphrodite, we must remember that at the start of the poem Sappho was praying to her goddess, kneeling before a seated stone sculpture, which with its painted poly-coloration as suited for all sculpture of that period, was probably a monolith with the seatedgoddess carved out of one piece with the rectilinear marble block.

Now Sappho raises her eyes to behold the sacred face of the Goddess again, seeing her features more closely as she nears the base of the statue. All the workings of her mind in the pervious part of the poem are operating on her psyche simultaneously, from the prayer with the ritual words to the vision of the SUN and Aphrodite the Beatific and Immortal winging her way down through the sky and middle aither, with the sound of her chariot birds whirring winds, and then the SMILE appears.

She stares at the smile for what seems an infinitely long moment of time, as she gazes at the lovely features tinted with a lifelike light tan beeswax skin, thinking of deity and love and longing. But when her mind leaves the statue of stone, suddenly something happens.

There is a transformation, the goddess of marble is no longer cold stone, but a living apparition, a live apotheosis of the goddess has come to talk with her, and walk with her and speak with her alone......Not the first time or last a god has appeared to an island woman in distress or a farmer in the wheatfield, or anyone who prays thus earnestly and with a full heart.

And you
smiling
with that immortal face
asked:

Sappho...
What's hurts you?

ήρϵ᾽ όττι δηῦτϵ πέπονθα κώττι
δηῦτϵ κάλημμι,

"You asked --- what do I suffer and
what do I ask for,

ere' otti deute popontha kotti
deute kalemmi

The apothesis is now complete in the flash of the moment. Sappho has seen the living face of the goddess before her eyes, and since this is as real as her own being, she now can hear the Lady of Love speaking to her in personal and intimate terms, talking the language of a mother whose child has been hurt, the comforting words which only a mother can offer.

It is the mothering words which make this passage real. It is spelled out in short phrases which write across the paragraph ends and even across the verse line, in a state of agitated verbal excitement which contrasts with the quiet tone of the reassuring and mothering language. The simultaneous tension between these two modes of speech is brilliant, absolutely perfect for the agitated girl Sappho with her mothering divine spiritual aide.

ήρε᾽ όττι δηῦτε πέπονθα κώττι
δηῦτε κάλημμι,

κώττι μοι μάλιστα θέλω γένεσθαι
μαινόλᾳ θύμῳ.

"and what do you I want to happen
with this crazy heart....?

The last two words are somehow different, a quote from what Sappho would say about herself, my love mad heart, somehow slipped into the dream world of the divine interview. It brings the situation back into focus, these are not really two person talking but two parts of the same consciousness which sees both persons with the same vision.

Look at the word phrasing, which written across the verse will have the feeling of daily communication:

όττι δηῦτε πέπονθα
κώττι δηῦτε κάλημμι
κώττι μοι μάλιστα θέλω γένεσθαι

"What hurts
Why calling
What do I want to happen?"

otti deute pepontha
kotti deute kalemmi
kotti moi malista thelo genesthai?

And it continues with the same fast pacing phrasing:

τίνα δηῦτε πέιθω
μαῖς άγην ες σαν φιλότατα ;

"Whom then do you want
Peitho to bring to you, dearest?

tina deute Peitho
mais agen es san philotata?

which can also be rephrased more clearly in question form this way:

τίνα δηῦτε πέιθω μαῖς άγην ες σαν' φιλότατα ;

"Whom do you want Peitho to bring back to you, dearest?"

There is a problem with this line and the meaning of 'peitho'. The text has been questioned about first word of the following line. If we follow the reading of P (Parisinus) which has μαι σαγηνεσσαν (bai corr.) and follow Bergk's old correction to μαις and then divide the words thus αγην ες σαν, we get a reading which makes sense and follows the MS fairly well, as above.

The FE reading of 'kai' for 'mai' substitutes an easy word for an less common one (maomai = *maó), while the correcting hand in P which wrote 'bai' points phonetically and visually to 'mai' not to 'kai'. With the verb 'mais' as 2 singular from a unused root verb *maó, not elsehwere attested but listed in LSJ asthe source of the regular middle verb 'maomai', 'peitho' has to be a noun and thus the name of the goddess of pesuasion, Peitho (and not the verb first singular indic./subj. ! So far as the above reading and translation, my opinion is: **stet** !

τίς σ᾽ ω Ψάπφ᾽, αδικήει ;

"Who, Sappho, does you harm?"

tis s' O Sappho adikéei

This last paragraph was highly agitated, first because of Sappho's frantic state of mind, second as a result of the epiphanic appearance of the goddess as a lifelike Vision, one which is not only optically there but can also talk with her.

What Aphrodite says comes in broken clauses, not because Aphrodite is agitated herself, but because she is speaking in the short phraseology which mothers traditionally use when talking to their children.
But this in turn reflects the condition of Sappho's own mind, her agitation as a hurt child to whom her mother is speaking above her broken sobs. This incoherence is here artistically coherent and suits the temper of that moment.

But right after that, everything changes, Aphrodite re-assumes her arch and royal manner and make a series of very orderly statements, in fact predictions, which are voiced in an "if.....then" mode, reassuringly:

και γαρ ει φεύγει ταχέως διώξει
αι δε δῶρα μη δέκετ, αλλα δώσει
αι δε μη φίλει ταχέως φιλήσει
κωυκ εθέλοισα.

"Even if she flees, quickly will she follow
If she gives not gifts, she will give them
If she does not love, she will love
Despite herself"

kai gar ai pheugei, taxeos dioxei
ai de dora me deket', alla dosei
ai de me philei, tacheos philesei
kouk etheloisa.

The arrangement of sounds in this passage is extraordinary. In the first line above, the balanced array of 'pheugei ......(tacheos) ....dioxei' is doubly complex, since the two verbs are opposites, virtually reciprocals. And they rhyme with their final '-ei ' diphthongs, while a thread goes through with ' -eu ' + (eó-) ' -ó-' showing back and heavy sounding vowels.

But the next line breaks into an entirely different patterns, with three ' -d- ' sounds virtually anticipating Beowulvian alliteration with:

δῶρα δέκετ δώσει

while retaining the opposition between receiving and giving gifts.

Then the third line goes back to the compact configuration of the first line with 'philei........(tacheos)........philesei', emphatically using the same verb in present and then future tense, with a structural device of "bringing together" the wording, as subliminally bringing together the two lovers.

This change of mood and manner of speaking is the turning point of the prayer and a promise of fulfillment, while artistically it stands as severely contrastive to the emotional closeness and concern of the previous section. Here is a formal pronouncement in the royal style of a Goddess.

But the last two words must not be under-emphasized. Seen from the goddess' point of view, IF the situation is to be controlled, it must be controlled absolutely, and it must be enforced, and that is the meaning of χηυκκα ϵϑέλοισα.. There will be no choice here, willing or not she will do it this way.

Traditional Classicists have had a problem with this word 'etheloisa' on what seemed then a textual problem but was certainly more of a sexual than textual matter. Smyth (Greek Lyric Poets, p.233) summed it up at the turn of that century, thus:

> "Blomfield's ϵϑέλοισαν was strenuously defended by Welcker RM 11.266, who held that the subject of φιλήσϵι was a man. No MS whose readings were known before l892 settled the dispute. Now Piccolomini's VL show ϵϑέλοισα (Hermes 27)"

This mixture of arguments based on MS authority along with Victorian sensibilities, is interesting, and a caution to anyone involved with the interpretation of a questionable text. One might quote Horace's remark ("Nulla ne habes vitia....?) and wonder if there are any prejudices in our times which we are not aware of. It may be that some equally culpable pro-prejudices can be found in our 21st century thinking, perhaps an overly confident trust in an Oedipal interpretation in one situation, of a Lesbian in another. Best not smile at the Victorians too hard, remembering that the future will be laughing at some of our positive pronouncements.

And so the interview with the Vision concludes, vanishing away in the turn of an instant, as is made clear by the tone of the following stanza. The clue for a return is the very first word 'elthe' ...... "Come (back) to me now..."

έλϑϵ μοι και νῦν, χαλέπαν δϵ λῦσον
ϵκ μϵρίμναν, όσσα δϵ μοι τέλϵσσαι
ϑῦμος ιμέρρϵι, τέλϵσον. συ δ᾽ αύτα
σύμμαχος έσσο

"Come to me now, release the hard
Agitation. What my heart wants
Done, do it! And you yourself,
Be my "Battle Ally".

elthe moi kai nun, chalepan de luson
ek merimnan, ossa de moi telessai
thumos imerrei, teleson, su d'auta
summachos esso.

With the disappearance of her Saintly Guide, Sappho's agitation appears again. There is a string of short words

έλϑϵ μοι και νῦν, συ δ᾽ αύτα έσσο........

but beyond that, the phrases cross the verse line abruptly, something that Greek lyric poetry does not do by chance or mistake:

χαλέπαν δϵ λῦσον
ϵκ μϵρίμναν,

όσσα δϵ μοι τέλϵσσαι
ϑῦμος ιμέρρϵι

συ δ᾽ αύτα
(σύμμαχος) έσσο

In this subdued and checked mood the prayer-poem comes to an end, with only one last thing to consider, the special meaning of that critical word, which is clumsily and dysphonetically translated here as "Battle Ally".

> The verb 'sum-machein' ,or more usually in the historians 'summachesthai' as a medio-passive form, means literally "fight along with....". It is not used in Epic language, so there can be no Homeric allusion to search for when Sappho uses the word in a poem. In fact this is basically a military and political word, used extensively by Herodotus (e.g. I.102) and Thucydides passim. The regular use of the form 'summachos' is adjectival "allied", although as with most adjectives it can be used as a noun "an Ally", as here.

It is surprising is that on a verbal level, Sappho chooses a key word without Epic antecedent, furthermore that she elects a word which would later appear as he keyword for the interminable associations and dissociations of all sorts of political parties in the unstable world of early Greek politics. On the other hand, the fact that Ally is her word for an alliance with the powerful partner Aphrodite, points to her estimate of herself as a real person in the newly developing Archaic world. As with all alliances. she is capable of making connections and treaties with powerful forces .

An Epic hero must have a deic partner, and someone like Ajax who has none is doomed from the start. Sappho struggles to connect herself with a protecting force, seeking alliance in the battle of life, and not illogically she chooses the same word as political writer later use for states aligning themselves with others in warfare.

What is the battle that Sappho faces? It is the battle of a woman of talent, intent on living a life of heart and emotion, in a world of confused political happenings. If any alliance were possible, it would have to be outside the normal frame of reference, it would have to be spiritual and approached with a religious sentiment, and for the poet whose life is devoted to beauty, it would have to be an alliance with beauty itself, with none other than Aphrodite.

So ends a remarkable poem, one which was selected for discussion by the able and sensitive critic Dionysos of Halicarnassos as a prime example of fine lyric poetry, out of a library which contained all of Sappho's writing and a host of other lyric authors of whom we know little more than names. The poem is so fine and delicate, even with the interpretational problems which we have to face in reading it, that it needs no recommendation from Dionysos or any other critic. It is worth noting that his choice means that the educated Greeks of the Hellenistic period recognized this poem as a prime example of lyric art, and this recognition can serve as validation for the long analysis and detailed evocation of this study.

What is perhaps of greater importance is the way Dionysos does his analysis, proceeding from meaning and overall form, down to the microanalysis of the sounds as esthetically acoustic items. For him, this represents the way Greeks approached their poetry, seeing a poem as a woven web of sounds and forms, in short a textural art. This is something which our modern criticism has not understood, concentrating on unraveling and sifting the multiple layers of meaning. The Form generates inner meanings and subtle innuendoes of its own, which stand beside and within the level of the communicated message.

Reading Sappho without this awareness, you have nice little love poems which you can read in a minute or two. Reading Sappho with an awareness of the inner workings of her writing and the faithful care with which she put her words together, you find an entirely different and much richer result. But this is not only important as the way to read Greek poetry. It is a warning to us that unless we devote ourselves to a slower and more inspective method in reading the poetry of our own time, we are likely to miss the depth which the art of poetry can possess. Reading too much, scanning too fast, rushing to the Meaning, we even lose the need for having poetry in our lives at all. When we read Sappho in depth, we get a sense of the possibilities of the poetic art.

Aid to Reading of the Greek

This list will give you everything you need to starting reading the above poem. If not familiar with the Greek chars. you can use the transliteration which will match the word format in this list. Abbreviations are:

n nominative =subject
gen genitive =possessive
dat dative =to / for
acc accusative = object
voc vocative = direct address
adj adjective
masc masculine
fem feminine
neut neuter
cpd compound
imper imperative = an order
imperf imperfect = a semi-past tense
pf perfect = a completed last tense
mid middle voice of verb = like a reflexive ?
inner acc "accusative of the inner object, acc. of reference
inf infinitive
adv adverb
Aeol. Aeolic, Sappho's dialect
Att. Attic = standard Greek
-a stem 1 st Declension
-o stem 2 nd Declension
cons st consonant stem = 3 rd Decl
Missing aspiration in Aeolic
(..) Aeolic spelling

Words are in same order as you read the poem, working with a printout you can read text and this list together. This avoids searching .

poikilo' many-colored = compound with next
thron' cpd. thron-ed = adj. -a (Attic cpds uses masc.only in .)
athanat' a+thanatos immortal = adj. (as above)
Aphrodita Vocative of fem a-stem, same a nom.
pai paid gen paidos child = Vocative
dios zeus, gen. dios (name not adj. dios)
doloploka dolos trick + plok-a weaving =fem. adj cpd; verb pleko
lissomai I beg = pres 1 sg (dictionary form !)
se you = acc sg
mé not = negative particle, long vowel

m'asaisi	me acc sg of ego + asa grief = dat pl
med'	mé not neg particle + de and particle
oniaisi	onia (Attic ania in dict.) =dat pl
damna	damna crush = pres imperative damnémi
potnia	vocative fem -a stem
thumon	thumos soul = acc sg. (as to)-o stem noun (inner acc.)
alla	but
tuid'	to this place, here
elth'	elthe sg imperative : élthon (suppleted to erchomai)
ai	if
pota	pota ever (pote)
katerota	kai and (even)+ heterota at another time
tas	ho masc, gen tou, fem gen tas (Att. tés)
emas	emos gen sg fem emas (emés)
audós	auda (Att. audé) Aeolic gen sg
aioisa	aió listen = -oisa (Att. ousa) pres ppl nom sg fem
peloi	from afar
eklues,	kluó hear = augmented impf / aor 3 sg
patros	pataer patros father = gen sg
de	(.....)
domon	domos home = acc sg
lipoisa	leipo leave = aor ppl (oisa / ousa) nom sg fem
chrusion	chrusios golden = adj acc sg with domon (or arma)
elthes	you came = aor 2 sg (cf imperat elthe supra)
arm'	(h)arma armatos charios = cons. stem neuter acc sg
updeuxaisa.	(h)upa up + zeug-numi yoke = aor. ppl nom sg fem.
kaloi	kalos beautiful = adj nom pl masc
s'agon	se you acc sg + agon led = imperfect 3 pl from ago
okees	okus swift = cons decl.adj nom pl masc
strouthoi	strouthos pigeon = nom pl masc -o- stem
peri	over
gas	ga (Att. gé) earth = fem -a stem, gen sg
melainas	melas, fem. melaina = adj gen sg fem
pukna	puknos dense = adj nom pl neuter -o- stem
dinnentes	dinneo whirr = pres ppl nom pl masc
pter'	pteron, plur ptera wing = acc pl neuter -o- stem
ap	from
oranotheros	compound: o(u)ranos heaven + aither -eros gen. sg
dia	through
messo	mes(s)os middle = gen sg Att -ou, Aeolic -ó
aipsa	suddenly
d'exikonto,	d' + ex-ikonto = 3 pl aor (h)ikneomai - middle verb
su	su you (cf. se acc)

O	Oh
makaira	makar, fem makaira blessed = adj fem adj voc sg.
meidiaisas'	meidiaó smile = aor ppl meidiasa n sg fem
athanato	athanatos immortal (ut supra) adj dat sg
prosopoi	prosopon face = dat sg -o stem
ere'	ere(o) you asked ereomai = 2 sg aor middle vb
otti	what ever
deute	de + aute again, this time (autos same) adv
popontha	you suffered = pascho redup perf 2 sg -tha
kotti	kai (h)otti
kalemmi	Att. kaleó = Aeol. kalém(m)i =pres 1 sg
moi	moi to me = dat sg to ego
malista	most of all
thelo	thelo / ethelo wish = 1 sg pres
genesthai	gen - gignomai be, happen = aor. middle infinitive
mainolai	mainolés , crazy = adj dat sg (subscript i in text)
thumoi	thumos soul = dat sg (subscript i in text) -o stem
tina	tis who, tina acc sg
deute	ut supra
peithó	God of Persuasion = nom / acc sg in ó (cf. Sapphó)
mais	mao wish (rare = maomai) = 2 sg pres Aeol.
agen	age(i)n ago lead = pres inf.,Aeol
es	to
san	= se you
philotata	philos dear = superlative adj Voc fem sg
tis	who?
s'	se you
O	Oh
Psapph'	elided Psapph' = Sappho
adikeei	a+dikeó harm cf. adikia injustice = 3 sg pres
kai	and / even
gar	!!
ai	if
pheugei,	pheugo flee = 3 sg pres
taxeos	adv. quickly tachus adj
dióxei	dioko follow = 3 sg fut
dora	doron gift dora n. pl. = -o- stem
me	not (eta)
deket'	dechomai = Aeol dekomai receive = eto 3 sg pres midd
alla	but
dosei	didomi give dosei = 3 sg fut
mé	not
philei	phileo love = 3 sg pres
tacheos	quickly adv
philesei	phileo love = 3 sg fut
kouk	kai and + ouk not
etheloisa	ethelo wish =pres ppl n sg fem oisa = Att ousa

elthe	come = imperat sg
moi	to me dat sg
kai	even
nun	now
chalepan	chalepos harsh = acc sg fem
luson	luo release = aor imperat.
ek	release..... (off -- split from ek-luson)
merimnan	merimna worry = acc sg fem -a- stem
ossa	what things = neut pl (h)os-tis
telessai	teleo do, accomplish = aor inf
thumos	soul n sg masc -o stem
imerrei	(h)imeiro = Aeol. imerro desire = 3 sg pres
teleson	teleo do = aor imperat
su	you n sg
d'auta	de + autos self, auta =nom sg fem
summachos	adj. used as noun, ally (only masc form)
esso.	eimi Aeol emmi be =aor imperat

Grammatical Review of the Aid Notes-------- next page

Grammatical Review of the Aid Notes

Grammar is elicited from examples of use, there are no paradigms in nature.

We learn from reading a large number of grammatical facts, which will eventually fall into a pattern with a sense of "paradigmatic unity". Now reading through a grammar quickly (Goodwin, Smyth...) we will have these as signposts to tell you where we are. More reading of texts will fill out more grammar from context, and this is the kind of live-grammar which you can use and will never forget. The **bold** expressions are a summary of what we have dealt with in this poem

adikeei	a+dikeó harm cf. adikia injustice = **3 sg pres**
agen	age(i)n ago lead = **pres inf.**,Aeol
ai	if
aioisa	aió listen = -oisa (Att. ousa) **pres ppl** nom sg fem
aipsa	**adv** suddenly
alla	but
ap	from
Aphrodita	**Vocative** of fem a-stem, same a nom.
arm'	(h)arma armatos chariot = cons. stem **neut acc sg**
updeuxaisa.	(h)upa up + zeug=numi yoke = **aor. ppl nom sg fem**.
athanat'	a+thanatos immortal = adj. (as above)
athanato	athanatos iummortal (ut supra) dat sg
audós	auda (Att. audé) **Aeolic gen sg**
chalepan	chalepos harsh = **adj** acc sg fem
chrusion	chrusios golden =acc sg with domon (or arma)
d'auta	de + **autos** self, **auta** =nom sg fem
d'exikonto,	d' + ex-ikonto = **3 pl aor** (h)ikneomai - middle verb
damna	damna crush = **pres imperativ**e damnémi
de	(......)
deket'	dechomai = Aeol dekomai receive = eto **3 sg pres midd**
deute	
deute	de + aute this time (autos same adj. --> adv usage)
deute	ut supra
dia	through
dinnentes	dinneo whirr = **pres ppl** nom pl masc
dios	zeus, gen. dios (name, not adj. dios)
dióxei	dioko follow = 3 sg fut
dolopIoka	dolos trick + plok-a weaving =fem. **adj cpd,** pleko
domon	domos home = **acc sg -o stem**
dora	doron gift dora = **n. pl. -o- stem**
dosei	didomi give dosei = **3 sg fut mi verb**
ek	(release) off (split off **tmesis** from ek-luson)

eklues	kluó hear = augmented **impf aor 2 sg**
elth'	elthe sg **imperative** : élthon (suppleted to erchomai)
elthe	come = imperat sg
elthes	you came **aor 2 sg** (cf imperat elthe supra)
emas	emos **person adj** gen sg fem emnas (emés)
ere'	ere(o) you asked ereomai = **2 sg aor middle** vb
es	to
esso.	eimi Aeol emmi be =**aor imperat**
etheloisa	ethelo wish =**pres ppl oisa** = Att ousa
gar	!!
gas	ga (Att. gé) earth = -a stem,**gen sg fem**
genesthai	gen - gignomai be, happen = **aor. middle infinitive**
imerrei	(h)imeiro = imerro desire = **3 sg pres**
kai	and / **even**
kalemmi	Att. kaleó = Aeol. kalém**(m)i = pres 1 sg**
kaloi	kalos beautiful = **adj nom pl masc**
katerota	kai and (even)+ heterota at another time
kotti	kai (h)otti
kouk	kai and + **ouk** not
lipoisa	leipo leave = **aor ppl** (oisa / ousa) **nom sg fem**
lissomai	I beg = **pres 1 sg middle** (dictionary form !)
luson	luo release = **aor imperat**.
m'asaisi	me acc sg of ego + asa grief =**dat pl -a stem**
mainolai	mainolés , crazy = adj **dat sg** cons stem adj(subscript i)
mais	mao wish (rare = maomai) = **2 sg Aeol**.
makaira	makar, fem makaira blessed = **fem adj voc sg.**
malista	most of all
me	**not** (eta)
mé	not = **negative particle**, long vowel
med'	mé not , neg particle + de and particle
meidiaisas'	meidiaó smile = **aor ppl** meidiasa **n sg fem**
melainas	melas, fem. melaina = **adj gen sg fem**
merimnan	merimna worry = **acc sg fem -a- stem**
messo	mes(s)os middle = **gen sg Att -ou,** Aeolic -ó
moi	**moi** to me =dat sg to ego
nun	now
O	Oh
okees	okus swift = cons decl. **adj nom pl masc**
oniaisi	onia (Attic ania in dict.) =**dat pl -a stem**
oranotheros	compound: o(u)ranos heaven + **aither -eros gen. sg**
ossa	**what** things = **neut p**l (h)os-tis
otti	what ever
pai	pais, gen paidos child = **Vocative cons stem**
patros	pater patros father = **gen sg cons stem**
peitho	God Persuasion = **nom / acc sg in ó** (cf. Sappho)
peloi	from afar
peri	over
pheugei,	pheugo flee = **3 sg pres**

philei	phileo love = **3 sg pres**
philesei	phileo love = **3 sg fut**
philotata	philos dear = **superlative adj** Voc fem sg
poikilo'	many-colored = compound with thron(a)
popontha	you suffered = pascho **redup perf 2 sg -tha**
pota	pota ever (pote)
potnia	**Vocative fem -a stem**
prosopoi	prosopon face = **dat sg -o stem**
Psapph'	elided Psapph' = Sappho
pter'	pteron, plur ptera wing = **acc pl neuter -o- stem**
pukna	puknos dense = **adj nom pl neuter -o- ste**m
s'	s**e** you **acc sg pron**
s'agon	se you acc sg + agon led = **imperfect 3 pl ago**
san	=se you
se	you = **acc sg pronoun**
strouthoi	strouthos pigeon = **nom pl masc -o- stem**
su	su you **n sg pronoun**(cf. se acc)
summachos	**adj. used as noun**, ally (only amsc form)
tacheos	quickly **adv in ós**
tas	ho, **article** masc gen tou, fem gen tas (Att. tés)
taxeos	adv. quickly **tachus adj**
teleson	teleo do =**aor imperat**
telessai	teleo do, accomplish = **aor inf**
thelo	thelo / ethelo wish = **1 sg pres**
thron'	cpd. thron-ed = adj. -a (Attic uses masc. in cpds.)
thumoi	thumos soul = **dat sg (subscript i in text) -o stem**
thumon	thumos soul =acc sg. (as to)-o stem noun (=**inner acc.**)
thumos	soul **n sg masc**
tina	**tis whom**, tina acc sg
tis	**who?**
tuid'	to this place, here

Poem 2

This famous poem has been restored, or rather sutured together from three papyrus fragments, but in one respect it is quite different from much of the Sapphic papyrus . It seems to be a complete poem, although there is one section which is so badly deficient that we either follow rash suggestions or leave that part out completely. The first thing is to give as much of the Greek as we can be sure of and then look at the poem itself, restoring and deciphering as we go along. This versions using a papyrological font, is much the way the poem must have looked in the papyrus, although some of the more obvious missing letters have been put back in place, always tentatively of course.

οι μεν ιππηων ϲτροτον οι δε πεϲδων
οι δε ναων φαιϲ̂ επι γαν μελαιναν
εμμεναι καλλιϲτον, εγο δε κην᾽ οτ-
τω τις εραται

παγχυ ευμαρες ϲυνετον ποηϲαι
παντι τοῦτ᾽, α γαρ πολυ περϲκεθοιϲα
καλλος ανθρωπων Ελενα τον ανδρα
τον παναριϲτον

καλλιποιϲ᾽ εβα᾽᾽ς Τροιαν πλεοιϲα
κωυδε παιδος ουδε φιλων τοκηων
παμπαν εμναϲθη, αλλ᾽ παραγαγ᾽ αυταν
ϲαν

αμπτον γαρ
κουφως τ οης . ν
με νυν Ανακτοριας ονεμναι-
ς᾽ ου παρεοιϲας .

τας κε βολλοιμαν ερατον τε βαμα
καμαρυγμα λαμπρον ιδεν προϲωπω
η τα Λυδων αρματα καν οπλοιϲι
πεϲδομαξεντας

The chunks in the fourth strophe which are missing show how a bad papyrus will look at first sight, although we will possibly be able to get more of it back if we want to experiment a bit. I suggest later coming back to read the Greek in this papyrus format as an exercise in close reading. Puzzling the words out letter by letter will slow down our fast scan visual reading habits, and any effort spent in intimate contact with an ancient Greek text is assuredly not a waste of time.

Remember that the Aeolic dialect with its well attested 'psilosis' or "stripping off" has no aspiration or rough breathing at all, and that the accents are the editing convention of Alexandrian scholarship four centuries after Sappho's time, perhaps touched up a bit by 19 th century text conventions. If we continue to strip off these text-accessories to get a better look at what actually remains of the poem, we get something like this:

οι μεν ιππηων στροτον οι δε πεσδων
οι δε ναων φαισ̑ επι γαν μελαιναν
εμμεναι καλλιστον, εγω δε κην᾽ οτ-
τω τις εραται

παγχυ ευμαρες συνετον ποησαι
παντι τουτ᾽, α γαρ πολυ περσκεθοισα
καλλος ανθρωπων Ελενα τον ανδρα
τον παναριστον

καλλιποισ᾽ εβα᾽᾽ς Τροιαν πλεοισα
κωυδε παιδος ουδε φιλων τοκηων
παμπαν εμνασθη, αλλ᾽ παραγαγ᾽ αυταν
..........*σαν*

αμπτον γαρ
........*κουφως τ οης . ν*
. . *με νυν Ανακτοριας ονεμναι-*
ς᾽ ου παρεοισας .

τας κε βολλοιμαν ερατον τε βαμα
καμαρυγμα λαμπρον ιδεν προσωπω
η τα Λυδων αρματα καν οπλοισι
πεσδομαξεντας

Adding only the the pitch accents which represent musical intonations, we could write the poem thus, as restored for a reading and working copy,:

οι μεν ιππήων στρότον οι δε πέσδων
οι δε νάων φαῖσ᾽ επι γᾶν μέλαιναν
έμμεναι κάλλιστον, έγω δε κῆν᾽ ότ-
τω τις έραται

πάγχυ εύμαρες σύνετον πόησαι
πάντι τοῦτ᾽, α γαρ πόλυ περσκέθοισα
κάλλος ανθρώπων Ελένα τον άνδρα
τον πανάριστον

καλλίποισ᾽ έβα᾽᾽ς Τροίαν πλέοισα
κωυδε παῖδος ουδε φίλων τοκήω ν
πάμπαν εμνάσθη, αλλ᾽ παράγαγ᾽ αύταν
..........σαν

αμπτον γαρ
........κούφως τ οης . ν
. . με νῦν Ανακτορίας ονέμναι-
ς᾽ ου παρεοίσας .

τᾶς κε βολλοίμαν ερατόν τε βᾶμα
καμάρυγμα λάμπρον ίδην προσώπω
η τα Λύδων άρματα καν όπλοισι
πεσδομάχεντας

A transliteration will help those for whom Greek is new or still unfamiliar, as an aid to pronouncing the sounds and the way they mesh in with each other in phrases.

oi men ippéón stroton oi de pesdón
oi de naón phais epi gán melainan
emmenai kalliston, egó de kén ot-
tó tis eratai.

panchu eumares suneton poésai
panti tou`t , a gar polu perskethoisa
kallos anthrópón Elena ton andra
    ton panariston

kallipois' eba es Troian pleoisa
kóude paidos oude philón tokéón
pampan emnasthé, all' paragag' autan
    ....san

....ampton gar
........kouphós t ... .oés . n
. . me nun Anaktorias onemnai-
    s' ou pareoisas .

tás ke bolloiman eraton te báma
kamarugma lampron idén prosópó
é ta Ludón armata kan oploisi
    pesdomachentas

At this point we should look at the translation, to get a rough idea of the meaning of the poem, before going on to close reading and analysis of the words and the inner structure of the sounds. There are some reconstructions in the first three stanzas for lines where most of the meanings surface, but nothing can be done with the missing sections in the fourth, until we are ready to go into the actual words.

Some say an army of horsemen, or infantry,
A fleet of ships is the fairest thing
On the face of the black earth, but I say
 It's what one loves.

This is very easily understandable to do
For each of us. She who far surpassed
The beauty of all, Helen, just went and left
 Her noble husband

Sailing she went far away to Troy,
And thought nothing of child or parents dear,
Nothing at all, but ....led her off,
...........ing.
........................bent.......
...........................lightly.........
...reminds me of Anactoria who is not here
Whose lovely way of walking, and the dark flash
Of her face I would rather see ---- than
War-chariots of Lydians and spear-men struggling
On a dusty battlefield.

The very first words set the tone of the poem in the clearest terms:

οι μεν ιππήων στρότον οι δε πέσδων
οι δε νάων φαῖσ' ....

"Some, an army of hrosemen, some footsoldiers.
Some ships , say........"

oi men ippéón stroton oi de pesdón
oi de naón phais ....

The words 'oi men' are one group of the conventional men of the society, those who decide what is important, what is worthy and honorable, and immediately the ":others", the rest of the aggressive and militant male following, come in quickly with their opinions. Will the war be won on foot with the Infantry, or with spear in hand in the dust of the battlefield, or with the new naval technology?

ιππήων στρότον an army of cavalry

οι δε πέσδων ...... or of foot soldiers

οι δε νάων φαῖσ or they say of ships

In the year of "War on Iraq 2003 ?" it seems the same discussions are still being pursued, whether it will be with the airforce or the men on the ground with naval support, that the war may have to be waged. We might think back over the course of history and wonder if anything has been changed at all......

But Sappho is also looking back in history, as she picks a keyword out of the Homeric warfare scene with the reminiscent words: *ϵπι γᾶν μέλαιναν ,* "over the black earth". The men now claiming to know what is best and finest in Warfare are (as she sees it) mimicking the Epic fashion, they see war now as a continuum from war in the epic days.

(ϵπι γᾶν μέλαιναν) έμμϵναι κάλλιστον

"......is the fairest thing (in the [Homeric] world "

gán melainan emmenai kalliston

These short phrases with their abrupt compression, have a tenerseness which suits Sappho's tense meaning perfectly, as she dismisses the triad of male military preferences quickly with pronouns seriatim,

('oi men.... +....... 'oi de .....+ .....'oi de...)

But then she confronts them in the next words with Herself, the woman

έγω δϵ κῆν᾽ ότ-
τω τις έραται

"I say it's what a person loves"

egó de kén ot-
tó tis eratai.

The stanza stands blocked out, the statement is complete, there is little more today.

But for us reading these words not just as a social document but as a poem, there are many other things to say. This is a poem, not a statement of a Woman declaring independence of mind and thought, a declaration of her-Self against a male dominated political world. Behind the message there is an elaborate kaleidoscopic interplay of sounds and forms, which constitute the difference between a Program and a Poem.

Look at the first line, with its front-mouth labial and dental consonants, loaded with a curl-ipped grimace of distaste:

oi men iPPéón sTroTon oi de Pesdón

But the second line changes the quality of the sounds, stringing toegher seven sounds in the nasal-liquid group, . The third line continues with this strong and heavy series of sounds, but poised in the middle is the key word: 'phais" punctuating the speakers with a terse "THEY say...."

oi de NaóN **(phais')** epi gáN MeLaiNaN

eMMeNai kaLListoN

The Homeric world was rich and heavy with its imagery, its ancient records of long gone wars, it heroes and heroics. Sappho's words call all that up, but that one critical word stands right in the center::

φαῖσ " that's what they say...."

Now as Sappho turns to her own thoughts, the words take a different pattern, there are three with just one syllable, then a disyllabic broken over the line. But the disyllabic EGO starts off emphatically with three vocalic beats of 'tis eratai' at the end . The shortness of these words matches the simplicity and reality of the Doctrine of Love, which ranges from St. Paul's hymn to Love as 'agape', to the l960's song of the Beatles. To say this you need very few words, few but very sharp and very accurately placed, as here.

Then follows a most remarkable virtually gnomic line and a half, which takes the words of the last stanza and expands them with a commentary of six words of an entirely different sound and style.

πάγχυ ϵὐμαρϵς σύνϵτον πόησαι
πάντι τοῦτ᾽

"Completely easily understandable to do
For everyone......this !"

panchu eumares suneton poésai
panti tout' ,

This makes sense and reads understandably in translation even with the original word order untouched. The organization of this first line of the new stanza is balanced, with one disyllabic word leading into the three trisyllabics:

panchu ---> (eumares suneton poesai)

before slowing the pace with:

<-----panti tout '

.....just in time for a Halt. And then in a sudden break, we have an entirely different stream of wording flowing right on down through this stanza, cottoning without stopping into the next, and apparently coursing into the defective and enigmatic fourth stanza, where the thread is finally lost to us.

If we were completely in the spell of the historical view of Helen , we would think of her as a faithless and adulterous wife, who falling in love with the young and handsome (if wimpy) prince of a foreign and enemy State, caused the whole tragedy of the Trojan War. Aeschylus has no hesitation about her witchlike role, "the face that launched a thousand ships", but there is another thread to the Helen story. Already in the Iliad she speaks well and warmly at times, and there is the famous Apology for Helen of Isocrates who insists on taking her side and making it clear that she behaved rightly in leaving Menelaos, whose Homeric character makes that easy to understand. Euripides in the play about Helen follows a strange version which said that Helen went to Egypt and was held there while her "ghost" appeared at Troy and was responsible for the wars.

Behind this odd mixture of Helen-ica, lies the name of Helena with its Mycenenan deic noun ending '-ena' , pointing to an old goddess Helena parallel to the Athenian Athena. Better than the Euripidean ghost-theory is the suggestion that a cult statue of goddess Helena was stolen and taken to Troy, so the reclaiming of this religiously necessary artifact was the original cause of the Trojan Wars.

But Sappho takes the story of Helen's defection as proof of the power of Aphrodite, and treats it as a tribute to the all-compelling power of the great goddess of Love, the force of Aphrodite who, when once seen. cannot be resisted.

α γαρ πόλυ περσκέϑοισα
κάλλος ανϑρώπων Ελένα........

"She who far surpassed
The beauty of humans, Helen....."

a gar polu perskethoisa
kallos anthrópón Elena

We have here a static portrait of the ineffable beautiful Helen, a Greek Bathsheba who cannot be compared to ordinary women, a paragon of beauty. But immediately the words plunge into a different mode, one of motion and action. This might be seen in our terms as something like a frozen still-shot, instantly shifted into full cinematic action and motion :

Ελένα τον άνδρα
τον πανάριστον
καλλίποισ᾽ έβα᾽᾽ς Τροίαν πλέοισα

"Helen, her husband the
Best of men
Leaving ----> went to Troy sailing..."

ton andra
ton panariston
kallipois' eba es Troian pleoisa

Immediately in a whirr and flurry of words, we plunge inside her mind, exploring her lack of peripheral considerations, of parents, of children --------all lost in her magnetic Pied Piper rush after the "Goddess of the Many Colored Throne" , the Immortal Queen Aphrodite.

κωυδϵ παίδος ουδϵ φίλω ν τοκήω ν
πάμπαν ϵμνάσθη, αλλ̓ παράγαγ̓ αύταν
..........*σαν*

"and naught for child or dear parents
at all did she remember, but She led her away...."

kóude paidos oude philón tokéón
pampan emnasthé, all' paragag' autan

Her memory was completely wiped out, under the ecstatic and religious spell of the goddess she experiences a complete amnesia:

κωυδϵ πάμπαν ϵμνάσθη
"nor.................did she remember at all"
oude ....pampan emnasthé

Now we must struggle with the broken words of the papyrus text. Just as Aphrodite leads her away, the test disappears and we are left with the (indented) short line lost except for what appears to be the last three characters of the last word.

αλλα παράγαγ̓ αύταν
.........................*σαν*

If only as an exercise in the dubious art of reconstruction of lost text, let us pursue this fragmentary final word. It is clear that we have with '...san' a feminine (acc. sg.) form , quite possibly a present active participle which would be ending in '-ousan'.

Guessing from the context that it just possibly might have been "willing", we could restore a feminine ϵκοῦσαν beside an Att. ἑκων, but then we would have to improvise two syllables to go before this to flesh out the meter of the line. It is so easy to get tinkering with the Greek, trapped in the ancient and problematic occupation of textual emendation.

.

It has also been suggsted that we have here for that broken line :

αυτικ᾽ ιδουσαν "immediately beholding (her)"

There may be other possiblities, but the meaning of the passage seems contextually clear, so we can go on from this uncertain word, to this tumble of broken and probably irretrievale word-fragments.

αμπτον γαρ

........κούφως τ οης . ν

. . μ

It has been suggested that 'ampton' might be 'kampton' or "bendable" and having got that far someone suggested 'eu-kampton' or "easily-bendable" as something which a male scholar buried in his Greek might think about the mental cast of the fair sex. For 'oés v' where the papyrus shows a one letter gap, the verb 'eptoése' might mean "blew her away", again probably based on nothing more than the airy quality of woman's mind.

For that solitary "m", the accusative plural 'amme' has been suggested, but it means "us" and ties to nothing in the poem,. Perhaps it was 'ana' or ""back" as shortened ' an' + me ' , where 'me' = "me" fits well with the following words. Then this replaced word 'an = ana' would duplicate the 'on = an ' of the verb 'onemnai-se' but that is a possibility for Greek.

We might try a readable view of these words as:

. . με νῦν Ανακτορίας ονέμναι-
ς᾽ ου παρεοίσας .

" re - minds me of Anactoria
who is not here."

. . me nun Anaktorias onemnai-
s' ou pareoisas .

We have to be cautious here since we are interpreting based on a questionable and unproveable restoration, but we must either go on with it or give up in despair. Note the way "re-minds" combines the verb 'anamnaise' or "call (back) to memory" with the hypothetical 'ana' meaning 'back./ again", now appearing cleverly as "re-mind". But whatever the problems with the text, we seem to be on firm ground again as we proceed with another switch in the story line of the poem. Suddenly it is no longer Aphrodite leading away Helen by the hand to her fate, but Sappho as she sings the poem for herself and to us, recalling the girl Anactoria who is in alive in her thoughts but somewhere far away. There is something quite magical about those two words *ου παρεοίσας*, a negative first and then "being present' as the opposite of "present", that is "ab-sent" .

This all occurs in the flash of a thought, an instantaneous link from the mythic world of Aphrodite and Helen of Troy, back to the present world of the poet on Lesbos, and to someone in her present world who is sadly remembered but not present. There is a certain drawing quality about that short line, a reaching out sensation of the words, which then unfolds into a momentary cameo portrait of the girl herself:

τᾶς κε βολλοίμαν ερατόν τε βᾶμα
και-αμάρυγμα λάμπρον ίδην προσώπω.....

"whose lovely gait I would rather see
And the brilliant sparkle of her face......"

tás ke bolloiman eraton te báma
kamarugma lampron idén prosópó

Then she returns in a flash to reality, the real world of political Greek islands in the 7th century BC, the world of men who are thinking of horsemen, footsoldiers and ships as the best thing in the world, and she concludes with her original starting point :

η τα Λύδων άρματα καν όπλοισι
πεσδομάχεντας

"Than chariots of the Lydians and with weapons in their hands
Men fighting on the battlefield."

é ta Ludón armata kan oploisi
pesdomachentas

Note: We had at the start 'pesdoi' or "foot soldiers, infantry" so we might assume that 'pesdo-machentas' is simply "men fighting on foot". But Herodotus has a special use of the word with 'pezomachia' (Hdt/ 8.15) meaning fighting on land as opposed to 'naumachia' or fighting on the sea, and this seems much better reading for this critical place.

Now we should go back and examine the sounds and the way they work in the se concluding lines. There is a clear phonetic patterning of the vowels in

Ανακτορίας ονέμναι-
ς᾽ ου παρεοίσας .

"Anactoria who is not here"

Anaktorias onemnai-
s' ou pareoisas .

This phrase is based on vowels -o- -i- -a- along with driphthogns -ai- -oi-, and this accounts for part of the magic of those strange and enticing words.

But in the next two lines, which describe Anactoria and how she walks and looks, another pattern dominates, one which employs almost a dozen of the sound-rich tones of the nasal-liquid series with -l- -r- -m- -n- .

τᾶς κε βολλοίμαν ερατόν τε βᾶμα
καμάρυγμα λάμπρον ίδην προσώπω

"whose lovely gait I woudl rather see
and the bright flash of her face....."

tás ke bolloiman eraton te báma
kamarugma lampron idén prosópó

But the final word 'prosopo = prosopou (gen. sg.) ' breaks the euphonic pattern with its two stop consonants -p- , and three -o- vowels, causing a slight pause in the progress, after which we return to the point of the poem:

η τα Λύδων άρματα κ᾽εν όπλοισι
πεσδομάχεντας

"Lydian chariots and armed
men fighting on the slaughter field

é ta Ludón armata kan oploisi
pesdomachentas

Note the triple syllable words for the Lydians War carts, and also for the War weapons, while reserving for the last short line a single mind and mouth filling expression, which is based on five fleeting syllables founded on the -e- / -o- vowel series,. This last word somehow manages to convey more than a touch of angry distaste and personal indignation, which is the external shell of a poem devoted to Aphrodite as the sensuous and sensitive core of this remarkably lovely little poem.

There are parts of two lines in the papyrus which follow the above poem, which would be clearly anticlimactic, but also unrelated. They probably belong to another poem of which they are the first words......:

" not possible to happen.......
men.........to (s)hare..to pray"

Poem 3

Compare the origins of the poems we have been examining. In Poem I, Dionysus of Halicarnassos had stressed the formal acoustic qualities of Sappho's poem, going into detailed phonetic analysis of the sounds as sounds, comes from a literary source. This Poem 3 is quoted in Longinus' commentary "On the Sublime" from the 1st or 2nd c. AD. But Longinus comments in an entirely different way, he approaches this poem from an emotional or even psychological viewpoint, noting the complexities of her subjective ranges:

> "......Simultaneously she describes her soul, body, hearing, tongue, sight and complexion, as if they were external to her being, even combining freezing and burning, irrational and rational, fearful and almost expired, so we see her not in one single display of emotions but in a combination of many feelings. ......It is the selections of the vital details and the combination of them into a single poem what has produced the excellence of this poem."

If Dionysus was a formalist interested in the mechanics which constitute Form, Longinus seems to verge much more toward meaning, since his book is largely concerned with "Effect", or the mental impressions produced by the work on the reader's mind. But as we will see in our analysis, this poem also shows the Sappho's close attention to sound and the configuration of the words.

First let us take a look at the Greek and the translation and then proceed to a detailed analysis and interpretation of the form:

φαινεταί μοι κῆνος ίσος θέοισιν
έμμεν᾽ ῶνηρ όττις εναντιός τοι
ισδάναι και πλάσιον ᾶδυ φωνεί-
σας υπακούει

και γελαίσας ιμέροεν, τό μ᾽ ῆ μαν
καρδίαν εν στήθεσι επτόαισεν
ως γαρ ές δ᾽ ίδω βρόχε᾽, ώς με φώναι -
ς᾽ ουδ᾽ εν έτ᾽ είκει

αλλα καμ μεν γλῶσσα μ᾽ ἒαγε, λἒπτον
δ᾽ αύτικα χρῷ πῦρ υπδεδρόμηκεν,
οπάτεσσσι δ᾽ ουδ᾽ εν όρημμι, επιρρόμ-
βεισι δ᾽ άκουαι,

καδ δε μ᾽ ίδρως κακχέεται, τρόμος δε
παῖσαν άγρει, χλωροτέρα δε ποίας
έμμι, τεθνάκην δ᾽ ολίγω᾽επιδεύης
φαίνομ᾽ έμ᾽ αύτα,

(αλλα παν τολματον, επει και πενητα)

As a literal translation which identifies the phrases, the following version may be useful. It tries to keep as close to the Greek as possible, and should not be considered as a "art translation" with imaginative conversion of the words and motifs.

He appears to me like unto the gods,
That man, who opposite to you
Sits and nearby speaking a sweet word,
he replies,
with a lovely laugh. Truly that
Flutters my heart in my breast.
For when I look at you for a moment,
    I can not speak
But my tongue is broken, right then
Over my skin a light fire races,
I see nothing with my eyes, my ears
    Rumble,
And sweat pours over me a trembling
Seizes me entire, greener than grass
I am, just about to die
    I seem to me.

And for those who have no Greek (yet), let me give a phonetic transscription, so we can proceed with sound analysis later.

phainetai moi kénos isos theoisi
emmen' ónér , ottis enantios toi
isdanei kai plasion ádu phónei-
    sas upakouei

kai gelaisas imeroen, to m' é eptoaisen
ós gar es se idó broche', ós me phónai-
    s' oud en et' eikei

alla kam men glóssa m' eage, lepton
d' autika chró púr upadedroméken
oppatessi d' ouden en orémmi, epirrhomb-
    beise d' akouai

kad de m' idrós kakcheetai, tromos de
paisan agrei, chlórotera poias
emmi, tethnakén d' oligó 'pideués
    phainom' em' auta

In the short space of just two centuries after Homer, the world changed for Greece, and incidentally for the whole of the later Western tradition. Homer's language and thought was sure, clear and exact, written in a language which, through long ages of bardic repetition and recasting, had become so firm and polished as to be stand unchanged through the millennia. Homer could be read and perhaps imitated but never improved or really tampered with. Epic poetry appeared as completed in the 9th century, and it was so finely finished and genuine that there could be no more of it written later.. Vergil shines as a poet of many colors, but his Epicism is perhaps his weakest link, a shadow of the master, from whom he once said that stealing one line was less possible than stealing the club from Heracles.

When Archilochus in the 8th c. saw the world around him as the stuff of poetry, which he could sketch out in iambic and trochaic verses inherited from a remote pre-Greek past, this was the first step away from the Homeric mold. Demodocus as the Poet in the Odyssey is a momentary cameo version of a Homeric epic bard, while Archilochus looms large and central in his view of the world around him. Everything is reflected in the eyes of his Ego, everything he has shown us about his world exists only in terms of Himself, the man who saw it all in vivid color in a real-time moving world.

The drive toward personalization and self expression continued, and a century later Sappho, who knew from Archilochus that a poet can look around the world for material for her verse, goes one step further. She goes within, explores and documents what is going on inside the poet, inside Herself, which is a giant stride in the world of Individuality and the subjective strain of the verbal art.

Longinus, whoever he was (because we know nothing other than his name attached to the little book "Peri Hypsos" on the Lofty in Writing.) sees this clearly. He knows by his time that there does exist an inner world, that people in the living Drama of society actually do more than Aristotle's actors who are "doing things" on the stage. And one of the most important things that they do, is that they have feeling, emotions, fears and frights, loves and sexual drives.

Already in the time of Sappho in mid 7th century BC, we have the outline of what makes a person Human fairly well sketched out, a pattern which we have progressively filled in from then right into our own time.

We speak at times of the Greco-Roman world as a composite culture which sutured together elements of Hellenic genius with Roman political and cultural administration, but where we find an interesting parallel between the Greek and Roman attitude on the same topic, we also find great differences. Consider the way Catullus in the 1st c. BC. reworked the Greek of the above poem, in his carefully constructed Sapphics of Poem 51.

ILLE mi par esse deo uidetur,
ille, si fas est, superare diuos,
qui sedens aduersus identidem te
    spectat et audit

dulce ridentem, misero quod omnis
eripit sensus mihi: nam simul te,
Lesbia, aspexi, nihil est super mi
ως γαρ ές δ᾽ ίδω βρόχε᾽, ώς με φώναι -
        ς᾽ ουδ᾽ εν έτ᾽ είκει

lingua sed torpet, tenuis sub artus
flamma demanat, sonitu suopte
tintinant aures gemina, teguntur
    lumina nocte.

(otium, Catulle, tibi molestum est:
otio exsultas nimiumque gestis:
otium et reges prius et beatas
    perdidit urbes.)

(Who knows where that last bracketed stanza came from, or what it is supposed to mean ! A complaint of Catullus to himself about a certain laziness in his habit, a lack of Roman work ethic, a reflection of what other have said about him? One thing is sure, it doesn't belong here. Incidentally, it is the only occurrence of the word 'otium' in Catullus, and sounds like the comment of an educated copyist who was facile with his versification and tired of long hours copying the "classics".)

We see the Roman mentality right away. After the first line which follows Sappho perfectly, the Roman hesitates and waffles with his religious notions. That typically Roman phrase 'Si fas est...' or "If it is religiously permitted to say..." is something which comes out almost automatically. Catullus is bound to say it out of 're-ligio' or set custom, yet he swings to the other extreme saying 'superare divos', even being superior to the gods. The Roman knows what has to be said in formal terms, but also explores what can be said even if it is impious, and Catullus gets both extremes into this one line as a way of showing that he IS a Roman, but not quite a Roman overall.

It is strange that an eighth line is missing. Following Rhys Roberts we might reasonably insert the extant line of the Greek, as here done. It does look from the incomplete phrase 'nihil est super mi....' as if a line had been censored, but there is nothing in the Greek original which would support such a surmise. Perhaps some theologically incorrect innuendo which Catullus had inserted at this point could have been excised, but for this we have no clue.

We must remember that Catullus' poetry as a whole has survived only in Renaissance copies of one lost 9th c. MS , which shows that his writing was not considered favorite reading in the libraries of the middle period. Any lost line could be a censured line, but here no reasonable grounds for such a supposition seem to exist.

Catullus seems to have got the wrong word for 'autika' as "immediately", when he uses 'identidem' from 'idem et idem' meaning "again and again". This loses the momentariness of the flash situation, with a word which is prosy, clumsy and at best used by Plautus only in a comic conversation. He does somewhat better with the sweetly laughing phrase, coining 'dulce ridentem' so well that Horace soon caps it for his bimbo girlfriend Lalage, along with an added 'dulce loquentem'. Horace obviously had one eye on Catullus' and the other on Sappho's poem.

Maybe Catullus thought he was being Hellenic when he wrote in Lesbia in the seventh line, meaning of course tongue in cheek, Clodia of the Roman mafia. He uneasily crosses his metaphors with 'flamma de-manat' as the flame drips ('manare' is liquid) down over the body, while Sappho had the flame run over the body, and the sweat drip down. The tintinnatulation of the ears is nicely done, but there is a heavy Lucreto-Vergilian tone to 'gemina teguntur lumina nocte' with even a final dactylic cadence. All those lovely -o- vowels strung so carefully together on the thread of *οπάτϵσσι δ᾽ ουδ᾽ ϵν όρημμι* ---- are completely lost.

Nobody has ever thought that the last stanza on 'otium', even if meant as a minor un-Roman deity Otium, belonged to this poem of Catullus, any more than the last odd line on poverty belonged to Sappho's poem. Since both poems have an incompletely understood sequel, there may be a secret meaning in there, but none that has been sufficiently understood.

Now we can approach the form of the poem in greater detail, and the first thing we note in the first "stanza" is the split organization of the lines, which have the man in the first part of each line and various kinds of predication in the second:

φαινεταί μοι κῆνος... "he appears....."

έμμεν᾽ ὤνηρ ...... "that man is...."

ισδάναι........ "he sits"

"like the gods" *ίσος θέοισιν*

"opposite to you" *εναντιός τοι*

"near, speaks sweetly" *ἆδυ φωνεί-σας*

Or putting it all together again:

φαινεταί μοι κῆνος ίσος θέοισιν
έμμεν᾽ ὤνηρ όττις εναντιός τοι
ισδάναι και πλάσιον ἆδυ φωνεί- σας
υπακούει

The use of the verb 'up-akouo' is critical here. In an original meaning, the verb is the regular word for hearing 'akouo akouein', compounded with the preposition 'hupo' as "up", for a core meaning of listening to someone, not unlike the current military phrase: "Now listen up..". But it is not pure "hearing" which the verb defines, but the act of hearing and making some sort of response, as a token of the fact that the message has come through. So the line in the Odyssey 4.283 makes it clear than a response is required:

η εξελθέμεναι η ένδοθεν αἶψ᾽ ὑπακοῦσαι

"either come out or from within quickly make a reply"

There are several subsequent usages, one is to listen to, hearken and "be obedient". Another is to respond to a legal charge, or reply to an invitation to dinner. But the "answering" use is not exactly like English "answer" where there is a clear dichotomy between "ask" and "answer", as in the computer code:

```
ask "Is it OK?" with "Yes" or "No"
if it is "Yes" then
answer "Thanks"
```

Here Ask and Answer are exact reciprocals, but it is not so in the Greek use of 'hup-akouo" *υπακούω,* which still has part of its acoustic root alive, and implies "listening (and) responding", in other words a two way conversational relationship of some sort.

That is why the verb *υπακούει* is important here, both as a word embodying a two-way relationship between parties, and also as the summing up word which binds together the three divided lines above. But notice also that the verb is grammatically placed in the middle of the responding situation, thus:

και.....ᾶδυ φωνεί-σας υπακούει και γελαίσας ιμέροεν

Responding by listening, also responding by speaking and laughing, a conversational mise en scene is enacted, even if Sappho seems to be silent. She may be vocally silent, but she also "responds", in very different terms.

> Her response is the rest of the poem, the response of every part of her body which is capable of showing a reaction, and she proceeds in such an orderly manner of description that we must pause to make a lateral observation before going on.
>
> First, there are many examples of curses in the ancient world which tabulate each part of the curséd person's body which is to be afflicted, going from hair on the head through limbs and guts, down through genitalia to feet and toenails, all listed as in a voodoo charm which if written on stone or a lead plate, would ensure dementia if not death, by a publicly advertised incantation.

This is of course not what this poem is about, but in another sense Sappho's plight, her shaking and fear and tremulations are a curse of some sort, and not a happy elevation of the spirits at the idea of having fallen in love. The determination with which Sappho lists her bodily responses may reflect, if only in subconscious mode (for writer and reader alike) awareness of the ancient curse phenomenon.

Second, it was in this period of middle Archaic Greece that the body of study and information which we later know as the Hippocratic Corpus was being assembled. The essential tenor of the Hippocratic method was Observation, which when codified would permit some prognosis and prescribe "attending on the course of the malady" as the role of the medical practitioner. In this same period, as more and more observation of the human body was being tabulated, we see Greek sculpture moving from simple imitation of stiff Egyptian figures, to detailed representation of the human body with accurate muscle and bone representation.

If anatomical observation could improve the idea of what a sculptor should carve on the surface of his marble figures, it is reasonable to see the same observational care becoming part of the poet's representational vocabulary. This is not a case of Sappho following the lead of the medical practice of Cnidos, but simply becoming aware of the physical states of change which a body in love could encounter, and using this information as a part of the poetic art.There is no reason that Ars Medica, Sculpture and Poetry should have followed discrete and separate paths. A society and its culture do not work in that way.

In the second stanza, there are three sections which consist entirely of monosyllabic words, interestingly interposed between Laughter which flutters her sould and Speech which falters and disappears. These are:

και γελαίσας ιμέροεν, τό μ᾽ ῆ μαν
καρδίαν εν στήθεσι επτόαισεν
ως γαρ ές δ᾽ ίδω βρόχε᾽, ώς με φώναι -
ς᾽ ουδ᾽ εν έτ᾽ είκει

αλλα καμ μεν γλῶσσα μ᾽ ε̂αγε,

The single syllabics are marked with a double underline, witha single underline for disyllabics which are less marked. This creates a breaathlessness which is perfectly suited to the second line :

καρδίαν εν στήθεσι επτόαισεν
"..flutters my heart in my breast"

Writing over the verse line in line 1 and 3 pushes this anxiety further, and the third stanza continues with more symptoms in close order:

αλλα καμ μεν γλῶσσα μ᾽ ε̂αγε, λε̂πτον
δ᾽ αύτικα χρῷ πῦρ υπδεδρόμηκεν,
οπάτεσσσι δ᾽ ουδ᾽ εν όρημμι, επιρρόμ-
βεισι δ᾽ άκουαι,

Aphonia	alla kam men glossa m'eage "but my tongue is snapped"
Fever `	lepton d'autika chró púr updedromeken "light fire sweeps over my body"
Hysterical blindness	opatssi d' oud' en oremmi "can't see with my eyes"
Tinnitus	epirrhombeise d'akouai "my ears rumble"

And the symptoms continue into the last paragraph:

καδ δε μ᾽ ἴδρως κακχέεται, τρόμος δε
παῖσαν ἄγρει, χλωροτέρα δε ποίας
ἔμμι,

Sweating	idrós katacheetai
`	"sweat pour down"
Trembling	tromos de paisan agrei
	"trembling grabs my whole body"
Pale complexion	chlorotera de poias emmi
	"I am greener than grass"

These are all recognizable changes of a body under stress, except for the last detail about being "green". English speaks of being green with envy, for some reason probably long lost in the pages of time, but in Sappho's case this probably fits with the ancient description of her appearance as "ugly, short and dark skinned". A dark complex when going "pale" will not turn white as a sheet, but as Sappho puts it, a greenish pale which ressembles the light green of grass in the growing season in a dry climate. Of couse it may be that the historical anecdote stems from the adjective 'chloros' in this passage.

And then as we come to the end, we are reminded of the Hippocratic Diagnostics, which have preserved many cases of the course of an illness, step by step and day by day, and in some of these case histories the records will terminate in the patient's death. So here, Sappho feels herself poised on the edge of death, with the words:

τεθνάκην δ' ολίγω'πιδεύης
φαίνομ' έμ' αύτα,

"I seem to myself almost
about to die"

tethnaken d' oligou epideues
phainomai eme auta

And so the poem ends. But its influence on later Greek writing and on the whole of the Western literary tradition continues, with a vivid statement about the validity of personal response to the emotions, as seen from the inside of the poet's personal consciousness, and alchemized into an alloy rippled with sounds and rhythms. If there are elements of a medical case history embedded in this poem, they are never allowed to dominate the poetic frenzy in the name of Love, and the poem rings true and clear to anyone in any age or culture who has known the depths of unexpected falling in love at first sight.

In part this physical reaction with its hormone and adrenaline driven components is part of the courting and mating procedures which are common to all animals and especially well documented in the higher species. It might be objected that poems are things of the mind and not to be interpreted as physique and body based, but that denies the essential physicalness of humankind. Sappho makes it clear than her emotions have physical counterparts, that what she feels will have external and recognizable signatures. This is not the wail of a love-sick woman mooning over a handsome man whose charms are part of his natural male role with women. It is a recognition of mind and body as one integrated system, which reacts in all its parts to the ancient confrontation of a woman at a special moment facing a man at his counterparted moment. Mental, psychological, physical, painful, entrancing, this is the nature of an emotional life, and Sappho has stated it in mid 7 th c. BC as well as anyone has ever stated it since.

Poem 4

This poem comes in another kind of written material, it is written on a parchment MS, Berolin. 9722.2 , and is a remarkable poem in several ways. Of its twenty nine lines, only twelve are complete, and there are serious enough gaps in five of the three-line stanza to make reading seem somewhat problematical. Parchment, which began to be used in the 2nd c. AD when the Egyptian papyrus swamps began to fail, is a stronger material than papyrus, but since it is an animal product which can deteriorate in a wet atmosphere, it often can fare no better than papyrus from the dry desert. This poem will have to be read in pieces once we get past the first three stanzas which are complete, but it is such a remarkable piece of work that the frustrating effort of reading over the gaps will still be worthwhile.

This poem is different from the others we have been reading here. It has a dialog format in which Sappho and a girl are talking about the pain of parting, employing a very lightly traced dramatic effect. But beyond that it introduces a new poetic idea, the "slice of life" poem in which we have direct quotations from people talking to each other. This has become such a standard device in poetry that we might not recognize how novel it must have been in Sappho's time, something Archilochus would never have thought of, and something quite different from the Homeric dramatic interchanges between heroes. The Iliad has been noted as being almost forty percent "drama", in that it uses direct speech to further the development of the story line, and in one sense Homer is one of the fathers of Greek drama. But this is entirely different inn spirit and tone.

Sappho's dialog in this poem is a personal interchange of highly emotional feelings, it is a cinematic 'scene' shot from up close, and not a part of a narrative. Scholars have long tried to derive biographical information from Sappho's poems, and although this poem clearly refers to a specific personal situation, we must remember that it is a poem and not an entry in a lady poet's diary.

We should look at the text first to get the situation of the gaps in mind before we try to elicit what it says and behind that what it means. The "restored" characters are underlined, less confusing than usual editorial [ ]'s.

τεθνάκην δ᾿ αδόλως θέλω.
ά με ψισδομένα κατελίμπανεν

πόλλα και τόδε εειπέ μοι
ώιμ᾿ ως δεῖνα πεπόνθαμεν
Ψάππη᾿, ῆ μαν δ᾿ αέκοις᾿ απυλιμπάνω.

ταν δ᾿ έγω τάδ᾿ αμειβόμαν.
χάιροισα έρχεο κ᾿άμεθεν
μέμναις᾿, οῖσθα γαρ ώς σε πεδήπομαν.

αι δε μή, αλλά ς᾿ έγω θέλω
όμναισαι .... αι
και κάλ᾿ επάσχομεν.

πόλλοις γαρ στεφάνοις ίων
και βρόδων κροκίων τ᾿ ύμοι
κα.... παρ έμοι παρεθήκαο

και πόλλοις υπαθύμιδας
πλέκταις αμφ᾿ απάλαι δέραι
ανθέων έβαλες ποποημμέναις

και πολλωι μύρωι
βρενθείωι ρυ .....ν
εξαλείψαο και βασιληίωι

και στρώμναν επι μολθάκαν
απάλαν πα..... ....ν
εξίης πόθον ....νιδων

κωύτε τις ούτε τι
ῖρον ουδυ.......
έπλετ᾿ όπποθεν άμμες απέσκομεν

ουκ άλσος　　　　*χόρος*
　　　　　　　　ψόφος
　　　　　　　　　　αοιδαι

It might seem hopeless to try to make a translation of this patchwork text from the manuscript, but as it turns out there are many internal hints of meaning which are fairly solid, and the result is somewhat better than might have been be expected.

"I ......really wish I were dead."
She, shedding many tears, was leaving me
and she said to me:

"Oh my! What awful things we have had to endure,
Psappho. It is really unwillingly that I leave you now...."

And I answered her with these words:
"Go away in happiness, remembering
Me, for you know how I cared for you.

And if you don't know, I want to
Remind you......... (if)
and we felt lovely things

With many garlands of violets
And roses and crocus for you
An... you set down beside me

And sweet scented garlands with many
Braids around your lovely neck
You threw, of flowers fashioned,

And with much ....myrrh
The royal ru n
Then desire........... ....nidón

And nobody or nothing
Holy nor.........
Was there, from which we were lacking

Nor grove dance
instruments
song......"

What is most remarkable about this poem is the way Sappho starts with a strained and word-cramped farewell, introducing the parting girl and her mentor Sappho as two live speakers, in what starts off as a slow and low-key dialog. The first nine lines are in a strained vein with acoustics of the vowels largely in the middle to fronted range (-a- -e- -i-). The back vowels show through in the first line which may be detached from the poem proper, since it doesn't fit the structure well, and is as somber in sound as in meaning:

τεθνάκην δ᾽ αδόλως θέλω.
tethnakén d' adolós theló

But the following line seems to be avoiding the fuller vowel sounds:

ά με ψισδομένα κατελίμπανεν
a me psisdomena katelimpane

while the next line brings back the -o- sounds

ώιμ᾽ ως δεῖνα πεπόνθαμεν
oim(oi) os deina peponthamen

From there through line 10 the vowels are interlaced in similar proportions, although the tense line "go forth happy and remember me..." is all at the front of the mouth.

χάιροισα έρχεο κ᾽άμεθεν
μέμναις᾽

chairoisa ercheo k' amethen
memnais'

But as Sappho proceeds and enters the spirit of the rest of the poem, her acoustics become more full, she leans heavily toward the back vowels, and this sets the acoustic atmosphere for the rest of the poem. Starting off thus:

οἶσθα γαρ ώς σε πεδήπομαν.
αι δε μή, αλλά ς' έγω θέλω
όμναισαι

oistha gar ós se pedepoman
ai de me alla s' ego thelo
omnaisai

From this point on to the end, the sounds are rich and full, using the back vowels (-o- -ó- and -u-) heavily, as Sappho paints a lavish scene in the greatest detail. The comfort for the sad girl leaving this poetic garden of Eden for the outside world, will be in her memories of all that was there, the flowers and smells and the people and the joy ---- all of which Sappho summons up relentlessly before her eyes. This will be what the girl carries away in memory, her mental photograph of the day of graduation and this will be her comfort for the rest of her life as a married woman in a far distant city. Those days at "St. Aphrodite's School for Young Ladies" will be forever encapsulated in the recital of this poem.

It is interesting how Sappho intertwines objects as she lists them with personal touches, the "flowers you threw about your neck", or "you anointed...", and even the enigmatic "nobody there.... and nothing" seem to point to other people in the garden scene, invisible in the broken words of the text.

Notice the delicacy of the word *υπαθύμιδας* , which is a fragrant garland, one which has a 'thumos' or airy mist about itself, exuding sweet odors. We have in English the old word "nosegay" or "posy", but these are different, little hand-held arrangements to sniff at, nothing like the rich garlands hung around the neck in Hawaiian fashion. Sappho is conscious of all sorts of smells in this passage, but the last six fragmentary lines seem to point toward an unimaginably wide display of the delights of mind and sound, including "nothing of which we were not a part", and the culmination is painted in a wooded garden (*άλσος)* where there is song *(χόρος)* and the sound of musical instruments (*ψόφος)*and everywhere, of course, voices resounding with poetry and song *(αοιδαι).* The exuberance of this word-painted description of Sappho's entourage is stunning, even in the dilapidated text which we have before us here.

Poem 5

Here is the complement to the previous poem about parting, which is inevitable in Sappho's world as her girls, now skilled in song and the art of gracious living, go on to their future lives as married women in the cities of Aeolia and the Asia Minor coastal ports. We have insufficient details about the relationship between Sappho and her girls, but some sort of art and educational training seems to have been involved, with personal attachment as is usual in this kind of situation.

The German film from l925 "Maedchen in Uniform" plays out just such a situation, as the emotional bonds between girl and teacher mature within the formal structure of a girls' school, and I suggest seeing this film if possible as a backdrop to Sappho's "school".

Unlike the previous poem, this one is fragmentary at the beginning and also at the end, but some fifteen lines in-between are fairly complete.

Here is the text on the following page:

Σαρδ...
πόλλακι τυίδε νῶν έχοισα

ωσπερ ......ωομεν .χ....
σε ϑεαι σ᾽ ικέλαν αρι-
γνώται, σᾶι δε μάλιστ᾽ έχαιρε μόλπαι.

νῦν δε Λύδαισι εμπρέπεται γυναί-
κεσσιν ώς ποτ᾽ αελίω
δύντος α βροδοδάλτυλος σελάννα

πάντα περρέχοισα άστρα. φάος δ᾽ επί-
σχει ϑάλασσαν επ᾽ αλμύραν
ίσως και πολυανϑέμοις αρούραις

α δ᾽ εέρσα κάλα κέχυται, τεϑά-
λαισα δε βρόδα κ᾽άπαλ᾽ άν-
ϑρυσκα και μελίλωτος ανϑεμώδης.

πόλλα δε ζαφοίταις᾽αγάνας επι-
μνάσϑεις᾽ Άτϑιδος ιμέρῳ
λέπταν ποι φρένᾳ κᾶρι σᾶι βόρηται.

κῆϑι δ᾽ ελϑην αμμ... ισα τόδ᾽ ου
νῶντ᾽ α ....πολ.υστονυμεϑα .... πόλυς
γαρύει αλον το μέσσον

The underlined letters at the end are my tentative guess, which I will follow in the translation.

Translating will need a little aid at the start, where we have the floating word "Sardis", the great city on Ionia as a lead-word to start off with.

.............Sard - .....

She, often turning her thoughts to us here
As .... (Atthis ?)........ (honor-)-ed
You like unto the famous goddess
And took most joy in your singing.

Now she shines forth among the Lydian
Ladies, when as the sun sinks low,
The rosy-fingered Moon

Surpasses all the stars. The light
Spreads over the salty sea
As over the many flowered fields

The delicate dew falls, they bloom ----
The roses and tender anthrusca and
The flowering honey-lotus.

And she, often wandering back and forth
Remembers gentle Atthis with longing
And eats away at her tender heart for your fate.

And to go there.... to us this not
Us she, much-groaning much
Calls out .... the middle.

Here again we need the transliteration, but I will not go into the close reading of the sounds with as much detail as before. You see the pathway into microstructural analysis from the preceding pages, which is something which each reader has to do for himself, reading at full speed and intuitively looking for the acoustic details.

Sard-
pollaki tuide nón echoisa

ósper óomen......
se theai s' ikelan ari-
gnótai, sai de malista echaire molpai

nun de Ludaiso emprepetai gunai-
kessi os pot' aelió
duntos a brododaktulos selanna

panta perrechoisa astra phaos d' epi-
schei thalassan ep' almuran
isós kai popluanthemois arourais

a d' eersa kala kechutai, tetha-
laisa de broda k' apal' an-
thruska kai melilótos anthemódes

polla de zaphoitais' aganas epi-
mnastheuus' Atthidos imeró
leptan poi phrena kari sai borétai

kéthi d' elthén amm... isa tod' ou
nónt' a polustonumena ? polus
garuei ..alon to messon

Reconstruction of the setting. That lone word at the top "SARD-" is broken so we don't know what case or grammatical function it has in the poem, but it does establish a location in the city which was the capital of the ancient and highly developed kingdom of Lydia.

The girl who has apparently left Sappho's group, is now married to a man in Sardis, and shines brilliantly among the Ladies of Lydia. This is her destination, the purpose of her training and schooling in verse and song, and constitutes her "Fate" or 'kér' referred to near the end of the poem. But we flash back to the days when someone, probably Atthis her friend as noted below, admired her like a goddess when they were at school together.

At the sixth line we shift to the girl now living in the rich and luxurious city of Sardis, where she shines above all the other ladies of the city........ This word of shining (prepei) is both social "she is brilliant" and also physical, for "she absolutely gleams", and we turn to an evening scene in her new home, where we can picture our Lady on a balcony overlooking the sea where the sun is going down, and the Moon.......

Homer had sung of the Rosy Fingered Dawn so often that it had become a stock phrase for the start of a new day, something everyone knew and recognized and probably passed over as a fixed formulaic phrase. But when Sappho changes the word and writes "the rosy fingered Moon", we are caught up short, we have to stop and ask ourselves if that was right, and in doing so we see the moon with a reddish cloud ringed around it as something new and startling. Sappho not only gives us a new vision, she also compares what she is writing with what the Homeric world had sung centuries before, and as with "the black earth" before, we find Sappho pointing up the difference between her world and that of the Epic bards.

Now we continue with Light, as is spreads over the rippling sea and the flowering fields, as if we were flying overhead and seeing the spread of territory below us as we mentally range from Lesbos to Lydia, finally focusing on the Lady herself as she walks restlessly back and forth ....

(*ζαφοίταις᾿)* thinking of Atthis in love and desire so far away. It is that FATE of having to leave the gardens of Lesbos and going to a commercial city in Lydia which is her destiny, which eats at her heart.

Here the text becomes very much fragmented, we have just a few words and partials of words to work with, so rather than give up we might as well add a few letters and see what we can come up with.

κῆϑι δ᾿ ϵλϑην αμμ...
kéthi d' elthein amm(e)

"Us to come there......"

This seems good, but what can we do with *.υστονυμ ?*

I suggest, only in order to get a reading which fits the tenor of the poem, while aware of the dangers of "reconstruction and emendation" as disfavored activities , that we add something:

polu + stono + mena

"much" + "groan" + (middle participle ending "-ing")

"She, groaning heavily.........."

Then the last word of that line, 'polus' as "much..." must go with a lost noun, which would be the subject of the verb of the next line 'garuei' "Speaks". If we re-wrote 'polus' as 'pothos' or "desire" and reconsidered our reconstructed 'polu-stono-mena -os ' as going with this new 'pothos' as "much bewailing desire", then this cry of grief in the night could be heard screaming (garuei) over the sea and meadow territories above mentioned, as crossing from Sardis back to Lesbos over the middle ground which is '...o messon".

Edmonds must have had something roughly like this in mind back in l925 in his Loeb Sappho, an unlikely guess which modern editors would reject out of hand. But recognize that we are just playing with the words as if with a jigsaw puzzle, trying to fits something in here or there to tentatively complete the verbal picture. There is clearly not enough here to translate coherently, but there is enough to suggest some possibilities for a few of the broken lines.

Reviewing the poem, there does seem to be a geographical core to its construction, which reaches from the specific mention of the city of Sardis at the start, then connecting with the Ladies of Lydia in the middle, and after describing in overview the salty sea and flowering meadowlands, perhaps re-connecting with a final mention of the land which stand at the middle ('to messon') between Lesbos where the lady once was and Sardis where she is fated to live now. This argument can stand even without this last word 'messon', as its weakest link.

But above this planar view of the layout of the poem's setting we have another aspect, that of light and the moon-shining gleam over wide spaces, reflected in the Lady standing brilliant in the light of the overseeing evening-reddened moon. If we wanted to schematize the progress of the poem, we would come up with

Place at Sardis
Love Atthis and Song
Brilliant Lady in Lydia
Moon beams on sea and land
....and over flowering fields
rose and lotus
Lady longing in moonlight for:
Love Atthis and Song
?Voices in the night ?

Reading the poem again straight through in Greek of course, I find there is little to add, other than admiration for Sappho's bold step of introducing into the mainstream of Western poetry, her protrayal of Life and her recreation of a virtual Dialog of two speakers . And the poem, even in its curiously fragmented state, does still stand as a genuine work a verbal art, by which I only mean to say that after knowing these few dozen words for some fifty years or more now, as teacher and as reader,. this writer still finds this a wonderfully satisfying poem to re-read.

Poem 6

This unique poem comes to us from an entirely different route than the above literary citations and the Egyptian papyri. It was actually scratched on a potsherd and it dates from the 3 c. BC. It is thus earlier than the establishment of the Alexandrian system of accent marking, for which reason I give it first as it comes right off the shard, sans accents and with letters to approximate the character forms used in the third century BC. I think it is worthwhile to read this poem the first time through in the ancient letter form, both for the sake of authenticity, also to slow the rate of automatic reading.

It is not clear why it was written on the shard, perhaps lack of papyrus at hand, perhaps a personal copy someone wanted to keep with him in a hard format, perhaps a school punishment for the student who failed to get it right the first time from memory (like out writing a hundred times on the blackboard after school).

There are only three spots where letters have had to be restored, which you can see in the lower version in usual font, where the restored letters are printed in a smaller font. So here is a very clean copy of a whole poem with only a line and a half missing, otherwise as it was written. This was not known to the earlier editors, and first published in l937 (M. Norsa, Ann. R. Scuola de Pisa, VI l937, 8 ff).

δεῦρο μ᾽ εκ Κρήτας επι τόνδε ναῦον
άγνον, όππᾳ τοι χάριεν μεν άλσος
μαλίαν, βῶμοι δε τεθυμιάμε-
νοι λιβανώτῳ

εν δ᾽ ύδωρ ψῦχρον κελάδει δ᾽ ύσδων
μαλίνων, βρόδοισι δε παῖς ο χῶρος
εσκίαστ᾽, αιθυυσσομένων δε φύλλων
κῶμα κατέρρηει.

εν δε λείμων ιππόβοτος τέθαλεν
ηρίνοισι άνθεσι, αι δ᾽ άηται
μέλλιχα πνέοισαν........
....

ένθα δη συ ....έλοισα Κύπρι
χρυσίαισιν εν κυλίκεσσιν άβρως
ομμεμείχμενον θαλίαισι νέκταρ
οινοχόαισον

Now let me give it again along with the Porson-style font, which is derived from the beautiful calligraphy of Richard Porson 1759-1808, a fine scholar skilled in hand copying MSS while imbibing the spirits of ancient culture.

δεῦρο μ᾽ εκ Κρήτας επι τόνδε ναῦον
δεῦρο μ᾽ εκ Κρήτας επι τόνδε ναῦον
άγνον, όππᾳ τοι χάριεν μεν άλσος
άγνον, όππᾳ τοι χάριεν μεν άλσος
μαλίαν, βῶμοι δε τεθυμιάμε-
μαλίαν, βῶμοι δε τεθυμιάμε-
νοι λιβανώτῳ
νοι λιβανώτῳ

εν δ᾽ ύδωρ ψῦχρον κελάδει δ᾽ ύσδων
εν δ᾽ ύδωρ ψῦχρον κελάδει δ᾽ ύσδων
μαλίνων, βρόδοισι δε παῖς ο χῶρος
μαλίνων, βρόδοισι δε παῖς ο χῶρος
εσκίαστ᾽, αιθυσσομένων δε φύλλων
εσκίαστ᾽, αιθυσσομένων δε φύλλων
κῶμα κατέρρηει.
κῶμα κατέρρηει.

εν δε λείμων ιππόβοτος τέθαλεν
εν δε λείμων ιππόβοτος τέθαλεν
ηρίνοισι άνθεσι, αι δ᾽ άηται
ηρίνοισι άνθεσι, αι δ᾽ άηται
μέλλιχα πνέοισαν........
μέλλιχα πνέοισαν........

ένθα δη συ ....έλοισα Κύπρι
ένθα δη συ ....έλοισα Κύπρι
χρυσίαισιν εν κυλίκεσσιν άβρως
χρυσίαισιν εν κυλίκεσσιν άβρως
ομμεμείχμενον θαλίαισι νέκταρ
ομμεμείχμενον θαλίαισι νέκταρ
οινοχόαισον
οινοχόαισον

And finally the same for serious reading, a normal copy to work with::

δεῦρο μ᾽ εκ Κρήτας επι τόνδε ναῦον
ἄγνον, ὅππᾳ τοι χάριεν μεν ἄλσος
μαλίαν, βῶμοι δε τεθυμιάμε-
νοι λιβανώτῳ

εν δ᾽ ὕδωρ ψῦχρον κελάδει δ᾽ ὕσδων
μαλίνων, βρόδοισι δε παῖς ο χῶρος
εσκίαστ᾽, αιθυυσσομένων δε φύλλων
κῶμα κατέρρηει.

εν δε λείμων ιππόβοτος τέθαλεν
ηρίνοισι ἄνθεσι, αι δ᾽ ἄηται
μέλλιχα πνέοισαν........

ἔνθα δη συ ....έλοισα Κύπρι
χρυσίαισιν εν κυλίκεσσιν ἄβρως
ομμεμείχμενον θαλίαισι νέκταρ
οινοχόαισον

"........here ...me.....frrom Crete to this holy
Temple, where is your lovely grove
Of apples, and altars all smoking
With incense,

Where cold water rustles through the apple
Branches, and the whole land is shaded by roses.
While the leaves are a-rustling,
A deep sleep cascades.

A meadow where horses graze blooms
With springtime flowers, the winds are
Gently breathing..............

There you, Lady of Cypris, taking..........

You, in golden gobets gracefully
Mingled nectar for our festivals
Pour the libations."

There is little to add by way of comment, this is a perfect poem!

The way sounds are conflated with smells of incense, rose trees in colored flower with apple trees in blossoming odor, gentle breathing of winds and a drooping Lethargy falling over the scene, as the Goddess pours red nectar-mixed wine in golden goblets, she Herself.......

This is more than a scene, more than a vista or an occasion of delight. It is a personal perception of the idea of Beauty, worked into the slim fabric of sixty eight words with four hundred and seventy seven Kadmaean characters, all designed to mark one poet's sheer sense of delight in the joy of life and of feeling.

In the previous chapters I have been discussing in detail the "Microstructure" or fine organization of the poems at the sound and word levels, as a base from which to approach the meaning of verses, stanzas and then whole poem. This piece is remarkably rich in this kind of detailing, without which it cannot be really comprehended or appreciated. However each person must find his own way into this intimate poetic area. There is no rule or formula for doing Micro-Analysis by the book, so it seems best at this point to leave the fine-structure of this exquisite poem open, and suggest to the reader to find his own way in.

More Poems

Demetrius One Style (106 Radermacher) takes the first line and half of the second as "helping the meaning" the remaining phrase as "ornamenting the meaning (epikosmesis)", a distinction which must have been meaningful to Demetrius, but seems foreign to our way of criticism. Still as an ancient comment, it should be kept in mind as possibly indicating a unsuspected wrinkle.

> *ταν υάκινθον εν ώρεσι ποίμενες άνδρες*
> *πόσσι καταστείβοισι, χάμαι δε τε πόρφυρον άνθος ....*
>
> "....her - like ---- the hyacinth in the woods the shepherds men
> tread down with their feet, but the purple flower on the ground
> ......(still blooms......?)"

Bergk long ago assigned this un-named fragment to Sappho on the basis of style and meaning.The first word *οιαν* is important to examine carefully. As a grammatical Feminine Accusative Singular it must refer to a girl outside the frame of this poetic quotation. Since the next line is not given, we have to reach for a concluding word, but whatever the actual verb may have been, it must have been in the direction of the pathetic blooming of the downed flower.

One detail more: The flower 'hyacinthos' is normally considered a grammatical masculine in Greek, but has been considered feminine in this passage of Sappho (so s.v. in LSJ, also Theophrastus On Plants and Theocritus).. But since the epic use is masculine (as at Iliad 3.348) I think it is reasonable to take it as masculine here, which separates it from the Fem. Acc. Sg. 'oian' and thus gives us the excellent meaning of the girl, as in the above translation. (I will come back to this in the next passage under discussion, which depends on this very point.)

How different this is from the flower of Catullus 11, which is down under the foot of the plow and gone forever:

> velut prati
> ultimi flos, praetereunte postquam
> tactus aratro' st.

But another passage from Sappho (Syrianus' comment on Hermogenes: On Style (1.15 Rabe) has to be compared with this one for a purely grammatical reason, since its interpretation will be influenced by the meaning of the first word:

> *οιον το γλυκύμαλον ερεύθεται άκρῳ επ᾽ ύσδῳ*
> *άκρον επ᾽ ακροτάτῳ λελάθοντο δε μαλοδρόπηες*
> *ου μαν εκλελάθοντ᾽ αλλ᾽ ουκ εδύνατ᾽ επίκεσθαι*

Again it is that first word which needs attention. It is usually taken as the (neuter) adverbial use of the adjective '(h)oios', meaning "like". But if we take this as adverbial, then we have no subject outside the frame to be likened to the rest of the passage, nothing for the like to be like !

One always hesitates about tampering with the text, but consider how parallel this passage and the one discussed above actually are. I suggest emending this first word to 'oian', taking it as a feminine accusative singular, and referring as above to a girl, who is going to be the subject of the rest of the poem in an allusive manner. Now we can translate with a sense that the poem refers delicately to a shy and lovely girl who stands apart from the others in her world:

> "she (is) like ----- the sugar-apple that grows red on the high branch,
> high on the highest one, but the apply pickers missed it.
> Oh no, they did not miss it, they were not able to reach it...."

This little cameo of a girl has a delicacy which is typical of the way Sappho loves to handle a situation, and the lightness of the handling is just what Sappho was talking about when she said:

> *αβρόσυναν δε μάλιστα φίλημμι*
>
> "It is the delicacy which I love most of all"

This lovely little distich with its origin from country living and the tale-telling of folk life, has a snapshot of early mornings when everyone rushes out of the house, animals to graze and browse, children to run about and play. And so the day passes, until evening comes, and as the Star appears, it calls everyone back home, quite naturally. Until the deep darkness sets in there is life and outdoors activity. But then the gates swing shut and every-one is indoors, then in Sappho's 7th c. world and now wherever you are to-day. This is the intimate part of the eternal circadian circle of life.

> *Ἐσπερε πάντα φέρων όσα φάινολις εσκέδα~ αύως*
> *φέρει~ όιν, φέρεις αῖγα, φέρεις άπυ μάτερι παῖδα*
>
> Evening star, bringing all that the bright Dawn scattered,
> You bring back the sheep, you bring the goat, you
>   bring back child to the mother.

Actually that bright Evening Star is a planet, Venus or Jupiter seen at varying time of the year, appearing brightly in the western sky at evening, but it is the same "star" which rising after midnight appears as the Morning Star. So whether Sappho knew it or not, the circularity of the daytime mo-tion which she describes does continue through the night.

Two things are curious about this passage. First Demetrius notes "Repetition" of the participle as "charming", but it is seen as a figure of speech (anaphora) rather than coming from the mental picture of the scene. This happens when poetry is over-taught over a long academic timeline, and loses the thread of the images in the web of the constructions. Another odd thing is that although Demetrius apparently understood the passage per-fectly, the copyist perverted it strangely, writing "bringing the wine (oinon), and a modern editor even suggests aiga eperon "wooly goat" (sheep?) citing the adjective eperos "wooly" from sole source in Schwyzer 644.15 ! Between the mind of a poet and the mind of the critics there can be a vast space indeed.

This little poem again from Demetrius, which is an "Interior Dialog" of sorts, between the Self and her Sense-of-Self is mysterious, more than a literary personification of the notion of Maidenhood. The self speaking to another part of the self is part of the continual interior conversation we humans maintain with ourselves, musing on half perceived perceptions while going on at the same time with the actual business of life. This is not a matter of retrospective regret (like Housman's "With rue my heart is laden....") but quiet comment on the inevitable stages of life as one passes through.

> *παρθενία παρθενία πôι με λίποισα αποίχῃ ;*
> *ουκέτι ήξω προς σέ ουκέτι ήξω*

> "Virginity, Virginity, leaving me where have you gone away?"
> *"I'll never come back to you, I'll never come back......."*

Demetrius' , that lover of anaphora, must have been overjoyed to deal with the doubled use of it here!

His comment makes it perfectly clear that this passage is in the form of two speakers, the poet in the first line and her Virginity answering her. I think his comment is clear enough to override several editors' hesitation about the text and meter of the second line being questionable. The long academic tradition of Ancient Metrics suggests a metrical rigidity which must apply everywhere, but meter has to be deduced from the wording, not the words forced into our idea of what the typical Sapphic meter should be. Still there may be something missing from line 2.....

If Sappho is an early experimenter in the world of the Subjective in poetry, this is a prime example of a super-subjective dialog of the Mind with the Unconscious Self, in the spirit of Jungian interpretation. Socrates' regular avenue of communication with his 'daimon' is in the same spirit, and this may be as much a part of an inner-awareness which the Mystery religions fostered, as a matter of poetic or philosophical attitude.

Trypho in his essay "On Tropes" or Figures of Speech, give us this tidbit:

μήτε μοι μέλι μήτε μέλισσα

"no honey for me...and no bee"

Diogenes "On Proverbs" moralistically says this refers to people who don't want to take the bad along with the good, a sensible if pedestrian interpretation. But what about the sound of this remarkably seductive line, which archly pushes both honey and honeybee away from Sappho, while almost tasting the sweetness of honey on her sonant -m- pouting lips? "For me no more of this marzipan, no more of this yummy......" but of course this is a weak transposition in a very different and foreign frame of reference.

The commentator follows the moral meaning, while it is the -m-m-m-m- sounds which make the line "much ...more .....memorable". There are many completely alliterative lines in ancient writing, but most are superficial tricks like the old Latin " O Tite Tute Tati tibi tanta tyranne tulilsti". This line from Sappho is so rich with the chocolately heavy -m-sonant consonants, that it cannot be separated from the sense of sound and also anticipate taste.

One more remark: Since bee-sting can induce in susceptible persons anaphylactic shock for which there was then no antidote, the commentators may be nearer the truth than they said. Do the Hippocratic texts refer anywhere to bee sting anaphylaxis?

Musing over this line late one night in a reverie, I came up with an emendation which I offer more for personal amusement than for scholarly review:

μήτε μοι μέλι μέλοι μήτε μέλισσα

"Let there be(e) no concern of honey of bee for me...."

This is clearly what Sappho meant, even without the assonantive verb, which would merely extends the thread of her acoustic fancy.

Sappho just on the basis of sound and meaning, while late in the century the authoritative Lobel-Page reject it as not having Sappho's attribution in Demetrius' citation "On Style", although he often cites Sappho passim. We can make up our own minds, but the four words call up a garden world of bright flowers, yet with a special turn:

ποικίλλεται μεν
γαῖα πολυστέφανος

"The Earth which is much garlanded,
becomes embroidered with color"

We have a curious problem with "embroidery", which in English suggests the working of detail of color into a fabric with elaborate stitchery and craft. But the Greek verb starts with an adjective 'poikilos'. which like Latin 'varius' refers to many colors interlaced in shimmering reflection. Color in our world is so common and cheap, that we often forget the sheer value of special hues in the days before l840 when the brilliant aniline dyes were discovered in the dregs of the coal-tar sludge.

The most brilliant color of the ancient world was Tyrian Purple, squeezed drop by drop from the shellfish Murex, and expensive enough to be used only for Royalty. But most ancient hues were from earth colors, or derived from brightly colored plants. The palette of colors was small and the cost high, so Joseph's "Coat of Many Colors" certainly meant a lot more economically and socially than an expensive dinner jacket.

Greek developed from the color adjective 'poikilos' a verb 'poikillo' which is a little harder to define. Initially it means decorating a fabric with color and bright metal threads, so it would seem much like English 'embroidery'. But this however revolves more about craft and stitchery than the variegation of the color work.

In this passage, the many-garlanded Earth is seen as decorating itself with infinite craft, preparing its coat of many natural hues, and virtually outfitting itself, over the fields of flowering natural garlands, with a mantle of infinitely embroidered design.

"Earth in the season of the many garland time,
has put on her own best dress of myriad hues"

It is the sheer working out of the detail which the word 'poikilletiai' connotes, which makes this poetic figure work, with a worldwide self-decoration as the garlands of the fields flower into a vestment with which to cover themselves.

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There is something charming about the humility of a poet, whose lines have touched the hearts of twenty five centuries of readers, who knows full well that she is after all a short, dark skinned woman, wife and mother of a little girl, experimenting writer of a new poetry ---- when she realizes that after all the sky is high and her reach is very small.

ψαύην δ᾽ ου δοκίμωμ᾽ οράνω δύσι πάχεσιν

"I don't expect to touch the heavens with my two arms"

The last two words have a textual problem, since the codd. come down with a meaningless 'duspachea'. I follow Bergk's ancient but very sensible emendation of a questionable word into two parts , as "two" + "arms " . The Dative Plural dusi is acceptable although 'duo' as indeclinable is also Sapphic, as her phrase elsewhere *δύο μοι τα νοήματα* "I have two thoughts".

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This next fragment comes down to us in a most unusual way. Maxmus of Tyre was speaking of Socrates' complaint that Love is a clever "Sophist", taking many forms and turns, as he is driven to desperation by his love for Phaedrus,. and the passage continues to mention Sappho's similarly shaken feelings. It was Lobel who cleverly perceived that the prose of the passage in Maximus was not a paraphrase of Sappho, but her words in clear metrical form, so he extracted the words to produce the above fragment intact. Whether Maximus was paraphrasing too closely, or a copyist rewrote the poetry into the prose is not important, of course.

Έρος δ᾽ ετίναξε μοι
φρένας, ως άνεμος κατ όρος δρύσιν εμπέτων

"Love has shivvvered my
thoughts, like the wind in the forest falling on the oak trees"

There is something quite remarkable about the emotional shiver which runs over a person's body when startled by Love, skin taut and hairs on end, as compared to the wind falling on the oak leaves on his mountain, rustling with an audible whisper through the forest. Feelings and emotions are everywhere in the world, like the Buddha-nature which the Zen student finally learned was not in the corner post of the room at all.

Sappho's constant reference to the world of nature is certainly part of the religious framework in which she worked as poet, teacher of the art of words and music in her 7th century school of girls preparing to go forth into their real world. She is not decorating her poems with flowers and ferns, she is connecting interior feelings with the apparent connectedness of the universe, the world of animate life everywhere. This connection is somewhat pathetically termed by book-scholars "The Pathetic Fallacy",
a term which marks the sad split between Man and his natural setting.

. ___________________________________

There are two levels to this next little gem of a poem. First there is that ring around a full moon which we all know, and the way the bright moon glow blocks the faint light from the weak and far distant stars, a matter of light interference.

άστερες μεν αμφι κάλαν σαλάναν
αψ απυκρύπτοισι φάεννον εῖδος
όπποτα πλήθοισα μάλιστα λάμπει
γᾶν (επι παῖσαν)

"Stars around the lovely moon
Back....back hide her shining light
When she flushing full, does shine
Over the whole earth.

But then there is the problem of how we feel about the Moon as against the Stars, the difference between the strong and dominant moonlight, which a Greek might have even mentioned being so strong as to read a papyrus by, as compared with the magical light of the embroidery of the stars of the night. But when the moon is not up, the stars resume their gentle glow, with a permanent delicacy which is somehow more refined than the moon's brash sally across the nightly sky. And since the Greeks felt near and close to the heavens in subtle personal ways, perhaps the Moon might to be seen as a brash and flashy Lady coursing with visible glow across the evening sky each lunar period, then stepping off the stage for a time.

But the Stars are different. They are the delicate ladies, the true beauties of the world, are eclipsed in heaven and in our social world, by the bright lights of fame and the cities. They retire like modest Asian ladies of yore smiling behind their fluttering fans, knowing that they will still be there when the famous Actress of the Stage has gone behind the falling curtain of night.

Is this reading too much into there four lines? Perhaps, but the clue to this view is vested in the second line, with the fluttering words αψ απυκρύπ-τοισι "back...back they hide their light". They are now eclipsed, they shyly smile and retire, since they never would complete with showy and brassy moonlight, not ever.

In closing sadly one might wonder if Sappho had any idea of her artistic after-life, whether future ages would even know her name. Surely she would have been shocked to find that most of her many books of poetry had been censored and removed from the shelves of the libraries by the 8th c. AD, with nothing more surviving than the fragments which modern editions can print But by some strange turn of things, her words which are few and in some cases hardly understood, seem to have an aura of poetic imagination about them, so than even from the thin shreds of her poems we still have, we instantly recognize the deep spirit of this lady poet of Aeolia.

But she did say something about her literary afterlife, tentatively and almost questioningly it would seem:

μνάσεσθαί τινά φαίμι και έτερον αμμέων

"I say that some time else will be remembering me..."

Now it is time for me to say goodby to the spirit of Sappho, and she can be best given a parting salutation with two of her own words.   Goodbye.......

πάρθενον αδύφονον

.......you Lady of the Sweet Voice