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Citation
Nagy, Gregory, 2009. The “New Sappho” Reconsidered in the Light of the Athenian Reception of Sappho. In Classics@ Volume 4. ed. Ellen Greene and Marilyn Skinner. Cambridge: The Center for Hellenic Studies of Harvard University.

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The "New Sappho" Reconsidered in the Light of the Athenian Reception of Sappho

Gregory Nagy

The text of the "New Sappho," found in a Cologne papyrus dated to the third century BCE (P.Köln inv. 21351 + 21376), is different from a later text of Sappho, found in an Oxyrhynchus papyrus dated to the second or third century CE (*P.Oxy*. 1787). In the two papyri, the songs of Sappho are evidently arranged in a different order. Both papyri contain fragments of three songs, but only the second of the three songs in each papyrus is the same. The other two songs in each papyrus are different from each other. The sameness of the second song in each papyrus is evident from an overlap between the wording of lines 9–20 in the earlier papyrus (Π^1 in the working edition of Obbink) and of lines 11–22 in the later papyrus (Π^2). But even this same song, which is about Tithonos, is not really the same in the two papyri. The text of Sappho's "song of Tithonos" in the later papyrus is longer: after line 22, which corresponds to line 20 of the earlier papyrus, the song seems to keep going for another four lines, all the way through line 26, before a third song starts at line 27. By contrast, the text of Sappho's "song of Tithonos" in the earlier papyrus is shorter: after line 20, there are no further lines for this song, and a third song starts at line 21. This difference between the two texts of Sappho's "song of Tithonos" leads to a question: which of the texts is definitive—the shorter one or the longer one? In what follows, I will formulate an answer based on what we know about the reception of Sappho in Athens in the fifth century BCE.

This reception, as I argue, was an aspect of the actual transmission of Sappho's songs, starting from their foundational context in Lesbos around 600 BCE. In other words, the Athenian reception of Sappho was not some revival of an Aeolian lyric tradition that had been discontinued. This is not a story of Sappho interrupted and then revived. Instead, it is a story of Sappho continued—and thereby transformed. As an analogy for the reception of Sappho in Athens during the fifth century I think of the reception of Homer in the same city during

the same period. This Athenian Homer was not some revival of an Ionian epic tradition that had been discontinued: rather, the Homeric tradition in Athens was an organic continuation of earlier epic traditions stemming from Ionia.[1]

An essential aspect of Sappho's reception in Athens, I argue, was the tradition of performing her songs in a sympotic context, which differentiated these songs from what they once had been in their primarily choral context.[2] Before proceeding further, I pause for a moment to review what I mean by sympotic and choral contexts.

When I speak of a choral context, I have in mind the general idea of performances by a *khoros*, conventionally translated as 'chorus'. I offer a working definition of the *khoros*: it is a group of male or female performers who sing and dance a given song within a space (real or notional) that is sacred to a divinity or to a constellation of divinities.[3] In the case of songs attributed to Sappho, they were once performed by women singing and dancing within such a sacred space.[4] And the divinity most closely identified with most of her songs is Aphrodite.[5]

When I speak of a sympotic context, I have in mind more specifically the idea of comastic performances, that is, performances by a *kōmos*, which is a group linked with an occasion conventionally termed a 'revel'. Pragmatically speaking, we can say that the *kōmos* is both the occasion of a 'revel' and the group engaged in that 'revel'. I offer a working definition of the *kōmos*: it is a group of male performers who sing and dance a given song on a festive occasion that calls for the drinking of wine.[6]

Here I review the implications of this definition. The combination of wine and song expresses the ritual communion of those participating in the *kōmos*. This communion creates a bonding of the participants with one another and with the divinity who makes the communion sacred, that is, Dionysus.[7] To the extent that the *kōmos* is a group of male performers who sing and dance in a

1 Nagy 2007b.

2 Nagy 2007a and c. Hereafter I refer to Nagy 2007c as "SA." My views on the transmission of Sappho's songs converge with those of Deborah Boedeker, who has kindly shared with me a copy of a forthcoming work of hers (see the Bibliography) about the transmission of Sappho's songs in sympotic as well as choral contexts.

3 SA 211. Also PP 53–54, with extensive references to Calame 1977/2001; Bierl 2003:98–101.

4 Nagy 2007a:24–43; PH 371 [12§62]; PP 87; cf. Lardinois 1994 and 1996.

5 Nagy 2007a:26–35; PP 96–103; cf. Gentili 1988:216–222.

6 SA 212. For the *kōmos*, see in general Bierl 2001:ch. 2 pp. 300–361; also Pütz 2003 and the review by Bierl 2005.

7 SA 212. Frontisi-Ducroux and Lissarrague 1990:230.

space (real or notional) that is sacred to Dionysus, it can be considered a subcategory of the *khoros*.[8]

The concept of the *kōmos* is linked with the more general concept of the symposium.[9] That is why I have found it convenient to use the more general term <u>sympotic</u> as well as the more specific term <u>comastic</u> in referring to the context of the *kōmos*. I should note, however, that the ancient symposium, in all its attested varieties, could accommodate other kinds of singing and dancing besides the kinds we find attested for the *kōmos*. And, for the moment, I concentrate on the specific concept of the *kōmos*.

Back when Sappho is thought to have flourished in Lesbos, around 600 BCE, we expect that her songs would be performed by women in the context of the *khoros*. Around the same time in Lesbos, the songs of Alcaeus would be performed by men in the context of the *kōmos*. This context is signaled by the use of the verb *kōmazein* 'sing and dance in the *kōmos*', which is actually attested in one of his songs (Alcaeus F 374.1).

There is an overlap, however, in performing the songs attributed to Sappho. I argue that such songs could be performed not only by women in a *khoros* but also by men in a *kōmos*.[10] To avoid any misunderstanding here, I should note that the *kōmos* involves forms of "high art" as well as "low art." A prominent example of the higher forms is the epinician poetry of Pindar and Bacchylides, which is stylized as comastic performance. And, within the mythological framework of the stylized *kōmoi* of Pindar and Bacchylides, the male singers and dancers could be imagined at special moments as female singers and dancers who are performing in a chorus. A case in point is Song 13 of Bacchylides, which features a mythically performing *khoros* 'chorus' of nymphs embedded within a ritually performing *kōmos* of men.[11]

I trace this kind of embedded choral performance from Lesbos to Samos, where it became part of the court poetry of Anacreon:[12]

> Anacreon was court poet to Polycrates of Samos, the powerful ruler of an expansive maritime empire in the Aegean world of the late sixth century. The lyric role of Sappho was appropriated by the imperial court poetry of Anacreon.

[8] SA 212.
[9] SA 212; PP 85; Nagy 2004:31n17.
[10] SA 212.
[11] Power 2000; cf. Stehle 1997:106 and Fearn 2003:359n48.
[12] SA 226–227.

This appropriation can be viewed only retrospectively, however, through the lens of poetic traditions in Athens. That is because the center of imperial power over the Aegean shifted from Samos to Athens when Polycrates the tyrant of Samos was captured and executed by agents of the Persian empire. Parallel to this transfer of imperial power was a transfer of musical prestige, politically engineered by Hipparkhos the son of Peisistratos and tyrant of Athens. Hipparkhos made the powerful symbolic gesture of sending a warship to Samos to fetch Anacreon and bring him to Athens ("Plato" *Hipparkhos* 228c). This way, the Ionian lyric tradition as represented by Anacreon was relocated from its older imperial venue in Samos to a newer imperial venue in Athens. Likewise relocated was the Aeolian lyric tradition as represented by Sappho—and also by Alcaeus.

The new Aegean empire that was taking shape under the hegemony of Athens became the setting for a new era in lyric poetry, starting in the late sixth century and extending through most of the fifth. In this era, Athens became a new stage, as it were, for the performing of Aeolian and Ionian lyric poetry as mediated by the likes of Anacreon. The most public context for such performance was the prestigious Athenian festival of the Panathenaia, where professional monodic singers performed competitively in spectacular restagings of lyric poetry. The Aeolian and Ionian lyric traditions exemplified by Anacreon figured prominently at this festival.

This kind of poetry, despite the publicity it got from the Panathenaia as the greatest of the public festivals of Athens, could also be performed privately, that is, in sympotic contexts. Most telling are the references in Athenian Old Comedy to the sympotic singing of Aeolian and Ionian lyric. I cite an example from Aristophanes (F 235 ed. Kassel/Austin), where singing a song of Anacreon at a symposium is viewed as parallel to singing a song of Alcaeus: ᾆσον δή μοι σκόλιόν τι λαβὼν Ἀλκαίου κἈνακρέοντος 'sing me some *skolion*, taking it from Alcaeus or Anacreon'.[13]

[13] The word *skolion*, as used in the time of Aristophanes, is a distinctly sympotic term. Details in Nagy 2004:37n31.

> Elsewhere, in the *Sympotic Questions* of Plutarch (711d), singing a song of Anacreon at a symposium is viewed as parallel to singing a song of Sappho herself: ὅτε καὶ Σαπφοῦς ἂν ᾀδομένης καὶ τῶν Ἀνακρέοντος ἐγώ μοι δοκῶ καταθέσθαι τὸ ποτήριον αἰδούμενος 'whenever Sappho is being sung, and Anacreon, I think of putting down the drinking cup in awe'.
>
> In general, the Dionysiac medium of the symposium was most receptive to the Aeolian and Ionian lyric traditions exemplified by the likes of Anacreon, Alcaeus, and Sappho. There is an anecdote that bears witness to this reception: it is said that Solon of Athens became enraptured by a song of Sappho as sung by his own nephew at a symposium (Aelian via Stobaeus 3.29.58).[14]
>
> The correlation of Aeolian lyric with the Ionian lyric of Anacreon in these contexts is relevant to an explicit identification of Anacreon with the Dionysiac medium of the symposium. In a pointed reference, Anacreon is pictured in the lavish setting of a grand symposium hosted by his patron, the tyrant Polycrates, in the heyday of the Ionian maritime empire of Samos. The reference comes from Herodotus (3.121), who pictures Polycrates in the orientalizing pose of reclining on a sympotic couch in the company of his court poet Anacreon: καὶ τὸν Πολυκράτεα τυχεῖν κατακείμενον ἐν ἀνδρεῶνι, παρεῖναι δέ οἱ καὶ Ἀνακρέοντα τὸν Τήιον 'and he [= a Persian agent] found Polycrates reclining in the men's quarters, and with him was Anacreon of Teos'.[15]

In a future project, I will have more to say about the convergence of private and public in media controlled by tyrants. I will focus on such media as the poetry of Anacreon in Samos, which incorporated the earlier poetry of Sappho and Alcaeus in Lesbos. The performance traditions of Anacreontic poetry, which explicitly combined the private with the public, lived on in Athens, where the performance traditions of this poetry were further shaped and reshaped by

[14] PP 219.

[15] Commentary by Urios-Aparisi 1993:54 on the explicitly sympotic features of the description given by Herodotus.

both the private conventions of the symposium and the public conventions of the Panathenaia.

A symbol of the convergence of sympotic and Panathenaic traditions of performing the songs of Anacreon—and of Sappho and Alcaeus—was an exotic string instrument of Lydian origin known as the *barbiton* (a byform is *barbitos*), as we see from references in the visual as well as the verbal arts.[16] The morphology of this instrument made it ideal for a combination of song, instrumental accompaniment, and dance. With its elongated neck, the *barbiton* produced a low range of tone that best matched the register of the human voice, and its shape was "ideally suited to walking musicians, since it could be held against the left hip and strummed without interfering with a normal walking stride."[17] What is described here as "a normal walking stride" could modulate into a dancing pose, as we see in pictures representing Anacreon himself in the act of singing and dancing while accompanying himself on the *barbiton*.[18]

The figure of Anacreon as a performer at the Panathenaia is parodied in the verbal as well as the visual arts:

> A case in point is *Women at the Thesmophoria*, a comedy by Aristophanes. Here the tragic poet Agathon is depicted as wearing a turban and a woman's *khitōn*—costuming that matches the costume of the lyric poet Anacreon as depicted by the Kleophrades Painter (Copenhagen MN 13365).[19] In the comedy of Aristophanes, the stage Agathon even says explicitly that his self-staging is meant to replicate the monodic stagings of Ibycus, Anacreon, and Alcaeus (verses 159–163). This reference indicates that Agathon as a master of tragic poetry was strongly influenced by the tradition of performing lyric poetry monodically at the Panathenaia.[20]

Another source of influence was the tradition of performing lyric poetry in an ensemble like the *kōmos*. There is a potential for choral as well as monodic parody in Old Comedy:[21]

16 SA 233, 237–238–246.
17 Price 1990:143n30.
18 SA 238.
19 Price 1990:169, with further bibliography.
20 For more on Anacreon in Aristophanes' *Women at the Thesmophoria*, see Bierl 2001:160–163; on Agathon as a stage Anacreon, see Bierl p. 158 n137, 165; on Agathon as parody of Dionysus see Bierl pp. 164–168, 173, 321n60.
21 SA 246.

> The case in point is again the *Women at the Thesmophoria.* In this comedy of Aristophanes, the Panathenaic persona of the tragic poet Agathon extends into a Dionysiac persona when the acting of the actor who plays Agathon shifts from dialogue to chorus. Once the shift takes place, there can be a choral as well as monodic self-staging of the stage Agathon.[22] And such choral stagings would most likely be comastic in inspiration.

Returning to the symbolic value of the *barbiton*, I next consider two conflicting myths about the invention of this string instrument. According to one myth, the inventor was Anacreon (Athenaeus 4.175e); according to the other, the inventor was an archetypal poet from Lesbos known as Terpander (Athenaeus 14.635d). I interpret the symbolic value of these myths as follows:[23]

> Just as the figure of Anacreon was associated with the *kithara* as well as the *barbiton*, so too was the older figure of Terpander. In fact, Terpander of Lesbos was thought to be the prototype of *kitharōidoi* '*kithara*-singers' (Aristotle F 545 Rose and Hesychius s.v. μετὰ Λέσβιον ᾠδόν; Plutarch *Laconic sayings* 238c). Pictured as an itinerant professional singer, he was reportedly the first of all winners at the Spartan festival of the Karneia (Hellanicus *FGH* 4 F 85 by way of Athenaeus 14.635e).[24] Tradition has it that the Feast of the Karneia was founded in the twenty-sixth Olympiad, that is, between 676 and 672 BCE (Athenaeus 14.635e–f).
>
> Not only was Terpander of Lesbos thought to be the prototypical *kitharōidos* or '*kithara*-singer' ("Plutarch" *On Music* 1132d, 1133b–d). He was also overtly identified as the originator of *kitharōidia* or '*kithara*-singing' as a performance tradition perpetuated by a historical figure named Phrynis of Lesbos; just like Terpander, Phrynis was known as a *kitharōidos* ("Plutarch" *On Music* 1133b). And the historicity of this Phrynis is independently verified: at the Panathenaia of 456 (or possi-

22 Price 1990:169–170.
23 SA 244.
24 PH 86–87 [3§§6–9], with further discussion.

> bly 446), he won first prize in the competition of *kitharōidoi* (scholia to Aristophanes *Clouds* 969).[25]

Given the interchangeability of *barbiton* and *kithara* in traditions about Terpander as the prototypical *kitharōidos* '*kithara*-singer', I return to the traditions about Anacreon as shown in Anacreontic vase paintings: here too we find an interchangeability of *barbiton* and *kithara*.

In both cases of interchangeability, it is implied that the *kithara* is the more traditional of these two kinds of instrument, since the *barbiton* is figured as something invented by the Asiatic Ionian Anacreon according to one version (Athenaeus 4.175e) or by the Asiatic Aeolian Terpander according to another (Athenaeus 14.635d).

Pursuing further the idea of a Panathenaic context for the performance of songs attributed to Anacreon—and, by extension, of songs attributed to Sappho and Alcaeus—I turn to the evidence of a picture painted on a red-figure vase of Athenian provenance. This vase, a krater shaped like a *kalathos* and made in Athens sometime in the decade of 480–470 BCE (Munich, Antikensammlungen no. 2416; *ARV2* 385 [228]), shows on its two sides two paintings attributed to the so-called Brygos Painter. I analyze these two paintings with reference to two line drawings I have provided, Image 1 and Image 2:[26]

> In Image 1 we see two figures in a pointedly musical scene. The figure on the left is Alcaeus playing the specialized string instrument known as the *barbiton*, while the figure on the right is Sappho playing her own *barbiton*. [...] The two figures in the painting are described as follows by a team of art historians:
>
> [They are] side by side in nearly identical dress. But under the transparent clothing of one—a bearded man—the sex is clearly drawn. The other is a woman—her breasts are indicated—but a cloak hides the region of her genitals, apparently distancing her from any erotic context. She wears a diadem, while the hair of her companion is held in a ribbon (*tainia*). Each holds a *barbiton* and seems to be playing. The parallelisms of the two figures, male and female, is unambiguous here. A string of vowels (O O O O O) leaving the man's mouth

[25] PH 98 [3§32]. On the date 446 see Davison 1968 [1958] 61–64.
[26] SA 233–234, 237.

Image 1

indicates song. An inscription, finally, gives his name, Alcaeus [ΑΛΚΑΙΟΣ], and indicates the identity of his companion, Sappho [ΣΑΦΟ—*sic*]. [...] The long garment and the playing of the *barbiton* are [...] connected with Ionian lyric.[27]

Next we turn to Image 2 as painted on the Munich vase. Here we see two figures in a pointedly sympotic scene. The figure on the left is Dionysus, while the figure on the right is a female devotee, that is, a Maenad. Sympotic themes predominate. Dionysus, god of the symposium, is directly facing the Maenad, who appears to be coming under the god's possession, transfixed by his direct gaze. The symmetry of Dionysus and the Maenad is reinforced by the symmetrical picturing of two overtly sympotic vessels, one held by the god and the other, by his newly possessed female devotee: he is holding a *kantharos* while she is holding an *oinokhoē*. The pairing creates a sort of sympotic symmetry.

27 Frontisi-Ducroux and Lissarrague 1990:219.

Image 2

> Matching the sympotic symmetry of Dionysus and the Maenad in Image 2 is the musical symmetry of Alcaeus and Sappho in Image 1. Both Alcaeus and Sappho are shown in the musical moment of striking all seven strings of the *barbiton* in a sweep of the *plēktron* held in the right hand. Each of the two figures has just executed this masterful instrumental sweep, and now the singing may begin. Alcaeus has already begun to sing, but Sappho has yet to begin. She appears to be waiting for her own turn to sing.

The idea of taking turns in performing a song, as I have just expressed it, is essential for the rest of my essay. What I have just described as a musical scene in Image 1 of the Munich vase is more specifically a Panathenaic scene, which is symmetrical with the sympotic scene in Image 2. I say Panathenaic scene because Sappho and Alcaeus are being pictured here as if they were citharodes competing with each other at the festival of the Panathenaia in Athens.[28] And

[28] SA 234–254.

the idea of taking turns in performing a song is a defining feature of singing in competition.

This idea of taking turns in performing a song brings me back full circle to the question I asked at the beginning of this essay, with reference to the two different texts of Sappho's "song of Tithonos" as written in two different papyri. The question was: which text of the song is definitive—the shorter one as written in the earlier Cologne papyrus (Π^1) or the longer one as written in the later Oxyrhynchus papyrus (Π^2)?

My answer is this: I think that the shorter and the longer texts of Sappho's "song of Tithonos" are actually two versions of the same song, and that both the shorter and the longer versions can be considered definitive. This definitiveness, however, has to be viewed in terms of performing the song, not in terms of writing the text of the song.

Viewed in this light, the longer version of Sappho's "song of Tithonos" as written in the later Oxyrhynchus papyrus did not result from a textual addition. Conversely, the shorter version as written in the earlier Cologne papyrus did not result from a textual subtraction. Rather, both the addition and the subtraction were a matter of alternative performances. And the differences in addition or subtraction correspond to differences in the contexts of alternative performances.

I think that the longer version of Sappho's "song of Tithonos," where the additional four lines express a hope for an afterlife, would have been most appropriate for performance in the context of choral singing and dancing at public events like the festivals of Lesbos. As for the shorter version, which is without those four lines and without an expression of hope for an afterlife, I think it would have been more appropriate for performance in the context of monodic singing at (1) public events like the competition of citharodes at the festival of the Panathenaia in Athens or at (2) private events like the competitions of symposiasts at symposia. Such Panathenaic and sympotic events are analogous to (1) the Panathenaic scene and (2) the sympotic scene as depicted in Images 1 and 2 of the Munich vase.

I do not mean to say, however, that the longer version of Sappho's "song of Tithonos" would have been inappropriate for Panathenaic or sympotic performances at Athens. That version too could have been appropriate. I am only saying that there was something special about the shorter version that made it particularly appropriate for Panathenaic or sympotic performances. That special something is what I call the mentality of relay performance. In terms of this mentality, it is not that the speaker has given up hope for an afterlife. Rather, the hope for an afterlife is being expressed indirectly, by way of a relay from one performance to the next.

In the the epigrams of Posidippus, we find a learned reference to such a mentality of relay performance in the poetics of Sappho. This reference has to do with the noun *oaros*, which I propose to translate as 'song of courtship'. In the dictionary of Liddell and Scott, I should note for background, this noun *oaros* is said to be the synonym of the noun *oaristus*, which is glossed as 'familiar converse, fond discourse'. But there is more to it: from a survey of attestations, we find that these nouns *oaros* and *oaristus* refer specifically to love songs.[29] Viewed in this light, the combined use of the terms 'familiar' and 'fond' in the definition of Liddell and Scott is apt. And it goes without saying that the 'familiar converse' or 'fond discourse' indicated by the words *oaros* and *oaristus* may be seen as songs of homoerotic as well as heterosexual courtship.

With this background in place, let us consider a reference in the epigrams of Posidippus to the medium of Sappho as *oaros*: Σα<π>φώιους ἐξ ὀά<ρ>ων ὀάρους '*oaroi* of Sappho, one continuing after the next' (Posidippus 55.2 ed. BA). In the poetics of Sappho, as we see from this learned reference, one *oaros* comes from another, over and over again. Each *oaros* is a coming full circle from the previous *oaros*. Each song extends from the previous song into the next song. The singing of the songs of Sappho is envisioned as an unbroken cycle of song, a singing by relay. Such relay performance, I argue, is analogous to what we see in the competitions of citharodes—and of rhapsodes—at the festival of the Panathenaia in Athens.

Just as Sappho's medium comes full circle from one *oaros* or 'amorous converse' to the next, so also Sappho herself comes full circle, for eternity. She is a girl who becomes a woman who becomes a girl again, coming full circle. That is the perennial poetic theme of Sappho.

In order to come to terms with this theme, I begin by returning to the poetry of Posidippus. In one of his epigrams (52 ed. BA), the closing words of the sixth and last verse focus on the image of the beautiful sun (52.6: τὸν καλὸν ἠέλιον), and the beauty of the sun is linked with the accumulation of years (52.6: σωρὸν ἐτέων), which is being measured by a *skiothēron* 'sundial' set up to commemorate a dead man named Timon (52.1). Observing the sundial is a *pais* 'girl' named *Astē* (52.3), whom the dead man has left behind just as he has left behind the sundial. On the surface, the girl seems to be the dead man's surviving daughter. But there is more to it, as we may glimpse from the conclusion of the epigram, where this girl *Astē* is addressed as a *korē* 'girl' (52.5). The adjective *astos*, including the feminine *astē*, is conventionally used to indicate a native of a given city, and so it seems perfectly appropriate to a local girl who is native

[29] GM 200n123, with reference to *Iliad* XXII 126–127; also GM 253.

to the city where the sundial is located. But there is still more to it, as we see from the fact that the feminine substantive byform of this adjective, *Astos*, is attested as the epithet of the local *Korē* in Paros (*IG* 12[5] 225, 5th century BCE). In such a sacral context, *korē* refers to the goddess nymph par excellence. In such a context, *korē* refers to the primary local nymph worshipped by the local population.

In the epigram of Posidippus (52), the name *Astē*—whether or not we read it as an epithet—may evoke the idea of a local *Korē* or nymph goddess in the making. It seems as if this local nymph is pictured as part of the object of art that functions as a sundial. The dead man who notionally commissioned the sundial expects the *parthenos* 'maiden' to keep time, 'to watch the time go by' or *hōrologeîn*—even as the sundial watches the time go by (52.4: ἐνδέχετ' ἐλπίδ' ἔχειν παρθένον ὡρολογεῖν). There she is, this *parthenos* or 'maiden' who is ever watching time go by. It happens on her ancient watch, as it were, which is a sundial ever watching the movement of time, ever observing the solar radiance that is ever loved by this lamenting *pais* or 'girl'. The sundial 'measures one *hōra* after the next *hōra'*—let us translate *hōra* here as 'hour' (52.1–2: ἵνα μετρῇ | ὥρας). That is its purpose. That is why the sundial is there, marking time to compensate for the death of the dead man. The sundial measures time, which is the passage of one seasonal phase or *hōra* to the next. The sundial measures one *hōra* at a time, counting the hours from one *hōra* to the next one. The plural of *hōra*, *hōrai*, is a metonymic expression of this eternal passage of time. As we hear in a song of Sappho, παρὰ δ' ἔρχετ' ὤρα 'and time [*hōra*] goes by' (PMG 58.3).

The maiden in this epigram of Posidippus (52) is herself measuring time just as the sundial measures time, and, as she is measuring, she is addressed as *korē* 'girl': ἀλλὰ σὺ γῆρας ἱκοῦ κούρη· παρὰ σήματι τούτῳ | σωρὸν ἐτέων μέτρει τὸν καλὸν ἠέλιον 'So now, come to the point of old age [*gēras*], you *korē*: at this marker [*sēma*] of yours, keep on measuring [*metreîn*] the accumulation of years, the beautiful sun' (52.5–6). If we apply terminology that suits the poetics of the Hellenistic era, we may say that there is an *adunaton* or 'impossibility' at work here at the close of this epigram. The fact is, this closure cannot really be a closure because the wording leaves everything openended. The *korē* cannot ever reach *gēras* 'old age' because the sundial cannot ever finish counting one *hōra* after the next—just as the lamenting girl cannot ever finish measuring the radiance of the sun that shines its light for the sundial to measure time. So the *korē* cannot be simply a 'girl' interrupted.[30] The girl cannot be interrupted by

[30] The expression "girl interrupted" comes from the title of the 1993 book of Susanna Kaysen.

gēras 'old age'. She cannot grow old with the passage of time, despite the abrupt command for her to reach *gēras* 'old age' finally. That is because she measures the passage of time by observing the sun just as the sundial observes the radiance of the sun. She can be a 'girl' for eternity because the passage of time can never come to an end, just as the sun can never lose its radiant light.

Such a sense of *pais* as 'girl' is evident in the invocation addressed to the ensemble of singers and dancers at the beginning of Sappho's "song of Tithonos" as written down in the Cologne papyrus of the "New Sappho" (Π^1). The song begins at line 9 of the papyrus. The invocation is being made to *paides* 'girls' (Π^1 9). The speaker in the song speaks to them as she laments the passage of time and the coming of *gēras* 'old age' (Π^1 13). The theme of old age persists till the end of the song as we see it written on this papyrus: in the last line, we hear of the *gēras* 'old age' that afflicts Tithonos, mortal lover of Eos the goddess of dawn (Π^1 20). In the later papyrus (Π^2), however, the song keeps going for four more lines, culminating in an affirmation of hope for the afterlife. In the last line, the speaker affirms her 'love of the sun'—her ἔρως ἀελίω (Π^2 26).[31] This love is what makes it possible for the speaker to possess everything that is bright and beautiful in life – and to prevail over old age and death.

Here is my translation of the last line of the longer and later version of Sappho's "song of Tithonos" (Π^2 26): 'Love [*erōs*] of the Sun has won for me its radiance and beauty'.[32] In terms of an alternative interpretation, the translation would be this: 'Love [*erōs*] has won for me the radiance and beauty of the Sun'.[33] I prefer the first of these two translations, which makes the Sun the objective genitive of *erōs* 'love'. Such a genitive construction would be parallel to the phrase ὄττω τις ἔραται 'whatever one loves' in another song of Sappho (F 16), where this 'whatever' (16.3–4) is described as κάλλιστον 'the most beautiful thing' in the whole wide world (16.3).[34]

There are three things to compare with 'the most beautiful thing' in this song of Sappho (F 16), but each one of them pales in comparison to 'whatever' that thing is that 'one' loves. These three things to be compared are three radiant visions of beauty. The first of these visions is the dazzling sight of magnificent chariot-fighters in their luminous war-chariots massing for frontal assault against their terrified enemy; the second vision is of footsoldiers on

[31] The noun ἔρως in the phrase ἔρως ἀελίω (F 58.26) is a byform of ἔρος in the diction of Sappho (as also at F 23.1).

[32] GM 261–262; PH 285 [10§18]; PP 90, 102–103. For more on this interpretation, see Boedeker in this volume.

[33] Again, see Boedeker in this volume.

[34] For more on this song, see Bierl 2003.

the battlefield; and the third vision is of battleships at sea (16.1–2). But none of these three radiant visions of beauty can match that ultimate brightness radiating from the speaker's love-object, Anaktoria (16.15–16). When Anaktoria sings and dances in the chorus, the loveliness of her steps and the brilliant light you see radiating from her looks (16.17–8: ἔρατόν τε βᾶμα | κἀμάρυχμα λάμπρον ἴδην προσώπω) cannot be surpassed by anything in the whole wide world. That radiance of Anaktoria is now directly compared with the radiance of the luminous chariots and the other two luminous foils (16.19–20).

According to the logic of Sappho's poetic cosmos, nothing can surpass the radiance of the sun. So the all-surpassing radiance of 'whatever' it is that the speaker says she loves more than anything else in the whole wide world must be the same thing as the sun—or at least it must be a metonymic extension of the sun, such as the radiance of Anaktoria herself as she sings and dances in the chorus.

Similarly in the song of Sappho about the terrors and sorrows of dark old age, the speaker's declared love for the sun is what turns her life into a world of radiance and beauty. As we read in the text of the later papyrus, she loves *habrosunē* 'luxuriance' (Π² 25: ἔγω δὲ φίλημμι' ἀβροσύναν), which is associated with the sun. In the poetics of Sappho, this association extends to the beautiful heroes Adonis and Phaon, lovers of Aphrodite and projected lovers of Sappho: they are *habroi* 'luxuriant' and they shine like the sun in their radiant attractiveness.[35]

In this song of Sappho, then, the sun is the promise of recycling for the girl who fears the interruption of her youth by old age, for the woman who fears the termination of her life. The love or eros (ἔρως) for the sun as experienced by Sappho in the longer and later text of this song (Π² 26) is the converse of the love or eros (ἔρος) for Tithonos as experienced by the goddess of dawn, Eos, in the shorter and earlier text that we now call the "New Sappho" (Π¹ 18). As we see from the wording that survives in the earlier papyrus, the beauty of Tithonos, who was *kalos* 'beautiful' as a *neos* 'young man' (Π¹ 19), will be ruined by what is described as a *polion gēras* 'gray old age' (Π¹ 20), just as the speaker's beauty has been ruined (Π¹ 11) by the graying of her hair (Π¹ 12) because of *gēras* 'old age' (Π¹ 11)—after all, no human can remain *agēraos* 'ageless' forever (Π¹ 16). For a human to remain *agēraos* 'ageless' is *ou dunaton* 'impossible' (Π¹ 16). This impossibility, this *adunaton*, is keenly felt by the speaker as she laments her inability to dance any more—now that her knees are no longer nimble for dancing – no longer nimble like the limbs of playful fawns (Π¹ 13–14).

[35] PH 285 [10§18], 298 [10§29] n113; GM 235, 255, 257, and especially 261–262; PP 90, 102–103.

Such a poetic *adunaton* is a specifically choral poetic *adunaton*, as we see from a comparable expression in a choral song of Alcman (Song 26) where the speaker declares that he is too old and weak to dance with the chorus of women who sing and dance his song: by implication, he continues to sing as the lead singer—even if he cannot dance any more.[36]

The promise of the girl who comes back full circle, as expressed in the longer and later version of the text of Sappho's song when the speaker declares her love (ἔρως) for the sun (Π^2 26), is withheld in the shorter and earlier version of the song. As Lowell Edmunds has shown, the shorter version fails to return to the present poetic situation that had started the song—and had introduced the myth of Tithonos.[37] There is no return to the start, which is the present. Such failure to return to the present suspends the coming full circle that is being promised by the present. And this suspension creates a sense of suspense. It is not so much a truncation of something that is thereafter left out of mind as it is a withholding of something that is thereafter kept in mind. I find this effect comparable to the suspense created by the narrative device of ending one performance with a *men*-clause ('on the one hand') and then beginning the next performance with a *de*-clause ('on the other hand').[38] Such a device is typical of transitions in the relay-performances of rhapsodes competing at the Panathenaia, as we see for example in the transition from Rhapsody ii of the *Odyssey* (ending with a *men*-clause at verse 434) to the subsequent Rhapsody iii (starting with a *de*-clause at verse 1).[39]

Such transitions are to be expected in the relay-performances of citharodes as well as rhapsodes. If it is true that the songs of Sappho were included in the repertoires of citharodes competing at the Panathenaia, then the shorter and earlier version of Sappho's song featuring the myth of Tithonos and Eos may be viewed as a variant stemming from the performances of citharodes competing at the Panathenaia.

I should add that both the shorter and the longer versions of Sappho's song may also be viewed as variants stemming from the performances of participants in private symposia. Variations in the singing of Sappho's songs by men and boys at Athenian symposia help explain differences in the textual

[36] PH 352 [12§32]; Nagy 2007a:22.

[37] Edmunds 2006.

[38] PP 161–162, with reference to Plutarch *Quaestiones convivales* 736e.

[39] PP 161–162n30. Further examples in PR 61–69. Relay-performances in rhapsodic contests at the Panathenaia require collaboration as well as competition: see PR 22. For a comparative perspective on the concept of competition-in-collaboration, see PP 18.

Image 3

transmission of Sappho—including differences that have come to light with the discovery of the "New Sappho."

In the case of Song 2 of Sappho, for example, we find two attested versions of the closure of this song. In the version inscribed on the so-called Florentine ostrakon dated to the third century BCE, at lines 13–16, the last word is οἰνοχόεισα 'pouring wine', referring to Aphrodite herself in the act of pouring not wine but nectar. In the "Attic" version of these lines as quoted by Athenaeus (11.463e), on the other hand, the wording after οἰνοχοοῦσα 'pouring wine' continues with τούτοις τοῖς ἑταίροις ἐμοῖς γε καὶ σοῖς '(pouring wine) for these my (male) companions [*hetairoi*], such as they are, as well as for your (male divine) companions [= Aphrodite's]'.[40] Both kinds of sympotic closure, I argue, are compatible with the singing of Sappho's songs by men and boys at Athenian symposia.

[40] On the relevance of this wording to questions of genre, see Yatromanolakis 2004 [2003]:65. On the "Attic" transmission of the sympotic songs of Alcaeus, see Nagy 2004:37–41. The term *Attic* here is used not only to indicate the Attic dialect but also the Athenian cultural context of transmission.

Image 4

On the basis of such sympotic contexts, I infer that the shorter version of Sappho's song, attested in the earlier papyrus containing the "New Sappho" (Π[2]), is not necessarily an earlier version than the longer version as attested in the later papyrus (Π[1])—or the other way around. Without making judgments about the relative lateness or earliness of the version containing the "New Sappho," I conclude this essay by comparing a parallel from the visual arts, dated to the fifth century BCE.

In the case of the "New Sappho" as transmitted in the older papyrus, the failure of the song to return to its own present time, back from the timeless myth of Tithonos and Eos, means that the speaker's contact with the *paides* 'girls' whom she addresses (Π[1] 9) has been for the moment suspended. There is a comparable sense of suspension between Sappho and her *paides* 'girls' in the visual arts of Athens in the fifth century. I have in mind an image of Sappho that is painted on a red-figure kalyx-krater dated to the first third of the fifth century BCE and attributed to the Tithonos Painter (Bochum, Ruhr-Universität Kunstsammlungen, inv. S 508). On the obverse side of this vase (Image 3) we see the image of a woman in a dancing pose that resembles the "walking stride"

of Anacreon.[41] She is wearing a cloak or *himation* over her *khitōn*, and a snood (net-cap) or *sakkos* is holding up her hair. As she "walks," she carries a *barbiton* in her left hand, while her gracefully extended right hand is holding a *plēktron*. The inscribed lettering placed not far from her mouth indicates that she is Sappho (ΣΑΦΟ).

This picture of Sappho on the obverse side of this vase painted by the Tithonos painter must be contrasted with the picture on the reverse side (Image 4), as Dimitrios Yatromanolakis has shown.[42] Applying an anthropological approach to the images painted on both sides of this vase, he argues that the obverse and the reverse must be viewed together. He sees a symmetry in the depiction of Sappho on the obverse and the depiction of another female figure dressed similarly on the reverse: she too, like Sappho, is wearing a cloak or *himation* over her *khitōn*, and a snood or *sakkos* is holding up her hair. This symmetry as analyzed further by Yatromanolakis:

> The symmetry is clarified as soon as we realize that there is a second, hitherto unknown, inscription on the reverse of this vase. Near the *sakkos* holding up the hair of this female figure paired with Sappho is lettering that reads ΗΕ ΠΑΙΣ (= *hē pais*), meaning 'the girl'. If the viewer's eye keeps rotating the vase, the two female figures eternally follow each other, but because their position is symmetrically pictured, they can never gaze at each other. Nor can a viewer ever gaze at both figures at the same time—at least, without a mirror.[43]

So the *pais* 'girl' is eternally pursued by the singing and dancing Sappho as painted by the Tithonos painter. But Sappho is in turn eternally pursued by the girl. The girl of the present time will become the woman of a future time who will pursue a girl of that future time just as she herself had once been pursued in time past. As we hear from Sappho's own wording in another song, καὶ γὰρ αἰ φεύγει, ταχέως διώξει 'for if she fleeing now, soon she will be pursuing' (Song 1 line 21).

[41] I have more to say in SA about the stylized dance implied by such a "walking style" in fifth-century Athenian paintings.

[42] Yatromanolakis 2001, 2005; also 2007: 88–110, 248, 262–279.

[43] SA 239, following Yatromanolakis 2001 and 2005, who was the first to read and publish this inscription. Yatromanolakis 2001 features photographs of the obverse and the reverse sides. See also Yatromanolakis, Forthcoming-1 and 2008.

So the moment of catching up is eternally deferred. The woman cannot catch up with the girl she once had been, and the girl cannot catch up with the woman she will become. This is not just *amor versus*, it is *amor conversus*. It is a yearning for a merger of identities as woman pursues girl pursues woman. Such a merger could conceivably happen, but only in the mentality of myth fused with ritual. I have studied this mentality elsewhere, comparing it to the concept of the "Changing Woman" in the female initiation rituals and songs of the Navajo and Apache peoples:[44] as we learn from interviews with women who experience such rituals, Changing Woman defies old age even as she grows old, since "she is always able to recapture her youth."[45]

I come to the end of this essay without being able to come to the full stop. I end with a glimpse of Sappho as she heads off to Hades, holding in her hand a lyre of one kind or another. All three of the songs contained in the new Cologne papyrus offer variations on the theme of Sappho the citharode holding on to her exotic lyre, holding on to her exotic life for just an hour longer.

But Sappho is not a woman whose life is about to be terminated. She is a woman to be continued. More than that, she is the girl who comes back full circle. This girl will not be interrupted.

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[44] PP 101–103.
[45] Basso 1966:151.

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