

Primary Source: Sappho, selections (late 7th, early 6th centuries BCE)

Secondary Source: Hallett, J. P., "Sappho and Her Social Context: Sense and Sensuality." / Stehle, Eva. "Romantic Sensuality, Poetic Sense: A Response to Hallett on Sappho."

Winkler, J. J. "Double Consciousness in Sappho's Lyrics," SGCW, 40-58 (read "Sources," which appears at the end of the article first, and then stop reading when you arrive at "Gardens of Nymphs" on page 58).

"This is an examples of what I will refer to below as double consciousness, a kind of cultural bilingualism on our part, for we must be aware of and fluent in using two systems of understanding...What I want to recover in this chapter are the traces of Sappho's consciousness in the face of these masculine norms of behavior, her attitude to the public ethic and her allusions to private reality" (Winkler 40-41).

Aristotle, *Rhetoric*

[1398b] Thus the Parians have honoured Archilochus, in spite of his bitter tongue; the Chians Homer, though he was not their countryman; the Mytilenaeans Sappho, though she was a woman. (Translation W. Rhys Roberts)

Hellenistic Biography: "she has been accused by a few of being undisciplined and sexually involved with women" (Hallett 126).

Ovid, *Tristia*, 2.365: "What did the Lesbian Sappho teach except how to love girls?"

Wilamowitz-Moellendorff: "vehemently denied the possibility of Sappho's homosexuality on the grounds that she was 'an honorable lady, wife, and mother'" (Hallett 129, n. 17).

Some Background

Simonides, Pindar (who reacts "strongly—'melting like bee-stung wax'—to the physical presence of males" Hallett, 136), Bacchylides, Alcman (maiden songs, *partheneia*, written for choruses of young women), Stesichorus (Helen Palinode), Arion, Ibycus, Semonides (An Essay on Women), Archilochus

- Lyric, from *lura*, the lyre, sung poetry performed at drinking parties, weddings, religious events
- Homeric era: anonymous folksongs
- 7th century: names of sung poets mentioned, choral and solo
- Choral poetry: sung by a chorus, dance, costumes
- Monodic lyric: eastern Greece, Sappho, Alcaeus (both from Lesbos), Anacreon of Teos, simple metrical structures, subject matter reflects the life of the poet, personal experience "generalized through the medium of myth"
- Choral poetry common in Dorian states
- 5th century: lyric poetry falls into decline, musical tastes change

I. Archilochus

a) Wretched and full of desire, I lie
lifeless, pierced to the bone
by this divine and dreadful pain. (193)

b) a prostitute is like a working ox (35)

c) Neobule another man may take!
She's [doubly] ripe...
the bloom is off her maidenhood,
the charms she had are gone, for she
can never get her fill...

but, frenzied, shows the measure of her shame.
Crows take her!...

It's you I want

for you don't deal in lies or treachery,
where she is sharp and takes
a hundred [friends]—

Indeed I fear she'll bear litters premature
and blind, for she's as eager as
the fabled Bitch.

So much I said. I took the girl and couched her
where the blossoms opened full,
wrapped her soft

inside my cloak and put my arms about her.
[She trembled] like a fawn in fear
[but then still grew]

beneath the soothing hands that claimed her breasts
where Hebe's touch was openly displayed
upon her new-made flesh,

and then my fingers learnt her lovely body well
before I let the white sperm go,
touching her golden hair. (196)

II. Alcman

- a beautiful woman is compared to a horse, "a sturdy, thunderous-hoofed prize-winner" (1.48):

III. Anacreon

Thracian filly, why do you look at me from the corner of your eye and flee
stubbornly from me, supposing that I have no skills? Let me tell you, I could
neatly put the bridle on you and with the reins in my hand wheel you round the turnpost of the
racehorse; instead, you graze in the meadows and frisk and
frolic lightly, since you have no skilled horseman to ride you. (417)

Suda: "His life was spent on sexual relationships with boys and women, and on poems" (Hallett 127).

IV. Stesichorus

a) Stesichorus, "Palinode," preserved in Plato's *Phaedrus*, 243a

"For those who have sinned in the telling of myths there is an ancient purification, known not to Homer but to Stesichorus: when he was blinded because of his slander of Helen he was not unaware of the reason like Homer, but being devoted to the Muses recognized the cause and immediately wrote,

That story is not true.

You [Helen] never sailed in the benched ships.

You never went to the city of Troy."

IV. Reading Sappho: Evidence of _____?

- 1) What problems do we encounter?
- 2) Perspectives?
- 3) What role, if any, should her sexuality play?

Greek Lyric
translated by
Richard
Cuthmore

ALCMAN OF SPARTA

Alcman is sometimes thought to have been a Lydian from Sardis. The idea comes from the fifth poem, although nothing proves that he is talking about himself. He was probably a Spartan, possibly a Messénian. Definitely younger than Terpánder, he was active in the later seventh century. The only large fragment is the Maiden Song (1), which is here represented only by the second half; the first, which deals with an exploit of Kastor and Polydeúkes, is too badly preserved to translate, and the part given here, though charming, is full of insoluble puzzles. It is clear, however, that Alcman anticipated Stesíchorus and Pindar, both in the matter of triads (strophe, antistrophe, epode) and in the Pindaric habit of combining heroic legend with contemporary occasions and persons (we cannot tell whether or not Stesíchorus did this).

1 · Maiden Song

There is vengeance from the gods;
but blessed is he who blithely

winds out all his day of life
without tears. But I must sing the
light of Ágido. I see
her like the sun, whose shining
on us is witnessed through Ágido.
But our lovely choir leader
will not let me praise her, nor
say she is not fair.
She knows well that she herself is
something dazzling,
just as if among a herd of
cattle one should set a racehorse,
sinewy, swift, and with feet full of thunder,
creature out of a dream with wings.

Look and see. That other is
like a fleet Venetian courser,
but the tresses of my cousin
Hagesíchora! They blossom
into gold without alloy,
and her face is pale like silver.
Must I tell you this so plainly?
There is Hagesíchora.
Loveliest after Ágido,
she will still run,
Lydian horse with Scythian racer
close together;
for the Pleiades against us,
as we carry Órthria's plow
through the divine night, rise up to strive
with us,
blazing bright as a single star.

Luxury of purple dye,
all we have can never help us,
not the carven bracelet-snake,
not the wimple sheer in gold
Lydian, the pride and glory
of the girls with delicate eyes,

not the hair of Nanno, not
Áreta's immortal beauty,
never Kleásiera,
not Thlakis,
nor go to Ainesímbrota's
house and say:
Let Astaphis be on my side;
let Philylla look my way;
give me Damíreta, lovely Ianthemis.
Hagesíchora is all our hope.

Is not Hagesíchora
of the lovely step here beside us?
Does she wait with Ágido,
and with her comment our performance?
But you Gods, accept their prayers,
for the end and the achievement
come from God. My chorus leader,
maiden as I am, I say
I have only shrilled in vain
from the roof tops
like an owl; yet I would also
please our Lady
of the Dawn; for it was she who
came to heal us of our trouble.
Maidens, we have come to the peace desired,
all through Hagesíchora's grace.
All the chariot's course is swung
to the running of the trace-horse,
all the ship must come to heel,
swiftly to the captain's handling.
She has sung her song today
not more sweetly than the sirens
(they are gods). But how we sang,
we ten girls instead of the Eleven!
One is trilling like a swan by
Xanthos river,
one with splendid tawny hair. . . .

SEMÓNIDES
OF AMÓRGOS

Semónides, the sole literary representative of his little island, was probably at work during the middle or late seventh century. Semónides' second appears to have influenced Solon's first. His work suggests the village sage or cracker-barrel philosopher, but it also constitutes a very early form of satire (as distinguished from the personal invective of Archilochus, Hipponax, Anacreon, Sappho, and Alcaeus). He has, at least, isolated two of the favorite themes of satire, namely, "The Women" and "The Vanity of Human Wishes."

It is altogether doubtful whether Semónides is the right way to spell his name, but it is handy to distinguish between his name and that of Simónides of Ceos.

1. *An Essay on Women*

In the beginning God made various kinds of women with various minds. He made one from the hairy sow, that one whose house is smeared with mud, and all within lies in dishevelment and rolls along the ground, while the pig-woman in unlandered clothing sits unwashed herself among the dunghills, and grows fat.

God made another woman from the mischievous vixen, whose mind gets into everything. No act of wickedness unknown to her; no act of good either, because the things she says are often bad but sometimes good. Her temper changes all the time.

One from a birch, and good-for-nothing like her mother. She must be in on everything, and hear it all. Out she goes ranging, poking her nose everywhere and barking, whether she sees anyone about or not. Her husband cannot make her stop by threats, neither when in a rage he knocks her teeth out with a stone, nor when he reasons with her in soft words, not even when there's company come, and she's with them.

Day in, day out, she keeps that senseless yapping up.

GREEK LYRICS

The gods of Olympus made another one of mud and gave her lame to man. A woman such as this knows nothing good and nothing bad. Nothing at all.

The only thing she understands is how to eat, and even if God makes the weather bad, she won't, though shivering, pull her chair up closer to the fire.

One from the sea. She has two different sorts of mood. One day she is all smiles and happiness. A man who comes to visit sees her in the house and says:

"There is no better wife than this one anywhere in all mankind, nor prettier." Then, another day there'll be no living with her, you can't get within sight, or come near her, or she flies into a rage and holds you at a distance like a bitch with pups, cantankerous and cross with all the world. It makes no difference whether they are friends or enemies. The sea is like that also. Often it lies calm and innocent and still, the mariner's delight in summer weather. Then again it will go wild and turbulent with the thunder of big crashing waves. This woman's disposition is just like the sea's, since the sea's temper also changes all the time.

One was a donkey, dusty-gray and obstinate. It's hard to make her work. You have to curse and tug to make her do it, but in the end she gets it done quite well. Then she goes to her corner-crib and eats. She eats all day, she eats all night, and by the fire she eats. But when there's a chance to make love, she'll take

the first one of her husband's friends who comes along.

One from a weasel—miserable, stinking thing. There's nothing pretty about her. She has no kind of charm, no kind of sweetness, and no sex appeal. She's always crazy to make love and go to bed, but makes her husband—if she has one—sick, when he comes near her. And she steals from neighbors. She's all bad.

She robs the altar and eats up the sacrifice.

One was begotten from the maned, fastidious mare.
 She manages to avoid all housework and the chores
 of slaves. She wouldn't touch the mill, or lift a sieve,
 or sweep the dung from the house and throw it out of doors,
 or kneel by the fire. Afraid the soot will make her dirty.
 She makes her husband boon-companion to Hard Times.
 She washes the dirt off her body every day
 twice at least, three times some days, and anoints herself
 with perfume, and forever wears her long hair combed
 and shadowed deep with flowers. A woman such as this
 makes, to be sure, a lovely wife for someone else
 to look at, but her husband finds her an expense
 unless he is some baron or a sceptered king
 who can indulge his taste for luxuries like her.

One was a monkey; and this is the very worst,
 most exquisite disaster Zeus has wished on men.
 Hers is the ugliest face of all. When such a woman
 walks through the village, everybody turns to laugh.
 Her neck's so short that she can scarcely turn her head.
 Slab-sided, skinny-legged. Oh, unhappy man
 who has to take such a disaster in his arms!
 Yet she has understanding of all tricks and turns,
 just like a monkey. If they laugh, she doesn't mind.
 Don't expect any good work done by her. She thinks
 of only one thing, plans for one thing, all day long:
 how she can do somebody else the biggest harm.

One from a bee. The man is lucky who gets her.
 She is the only one no blame can settle on.
 A man's life grows and blossoms underneath her touch.
 She loves her husband, he loves her, and they grow old
 together, while their glorious children rise to fame.
 Among the throngs of other women this one shines
 as an example. Heavenly grace surrounds her. She
 alone takes no delight in sitting with the rest
 when the conversation's about sex. It's wives like this
 who are God's gift of happiness to mortal men.
 These are the thoughtful wives, in every way the best.
 But all those other breeds come to us too from God

and by his will. And they stay with us. They won't go.
 For women are the biggest single bad thing Zeus
 has made for us. Even when a wife appears to help,
 her husband finds out in the end that after all
 she didn't. No one day goes by from end to end
 enjoyable, when you have spent it with your wife.
 She will not stir herself to push the hateful god
 Hard Times—that most unwelcome caller—out of doors.
 At home, when a man thinks that, by God's grace or by
 men's good will, there'll be peace for him and all go well,
 she finds some fault with him and starts a fight. For where
 there is a woman in the house, no one can ask
 a friend to come and stay with him, and still feel safe.
 Even the wife who appears to be the best-behaved
 turns out to be the one who lets herself go wrong.
 Her husband gawks and doesn't notice; neighbors do,
 and smile to see how still another man gets fooled.
 Each man will pick the faults in someone else's wife
 and boast of his own each time he speaks of her. And yet
 the same thing happens to us all. But we don't see.
 For women are the biggest single bad thing Zeus
 has made for us; a ball-and-chain; we can't get loose
 since that time when the fight about a wife began
 the Great War, and they volunteered, and went to hell.

2 • *The Vanity of Human Wishes*

My child, Zeus the deep-thundering holds the ends of all
 actions in his own hands, disposes as he will
 of everything. We who are human have no minds,
 but live, from day to day, like beasts and nothing know
 of what God plans to make happen to each of us.
 But hope and self-persuasion keep us all alive
 in our unprofitable desires. Some watch the day
 for what it brings, and some the turn of years, and none
 so downcast he will not believe that time to come
 will make him virtuous, rich, all his heart's desire.
 But other things begin to happen first; old age,
 which no one wants, gets one before he makes his goal.
 Painful diseases wear down some; others are killed