Echoes of Sappho in two epigrams of Posidippus

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Echoes of Sappho in two epigrams of Posidippus

November 19, 2015 By Gregory Nagy listed under By Gregory Nagy, Sappho Comments off Edit This

Epigrams 52 and 55 of Posidippus, a poet who flourished in the third century BCE, contain references to the songs of Sappho. That is what I argue here. Further, I argue that these references seem to be evoking the main themes that we see Sappho's Tithonos Song, which is quoted and analyzed in my posting for 2015.11.12.

Charles Fairfax Murray's "Replica of Beata Beatrix," c. 1900-1910. [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons; "Beata Beatrix," by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, c. 1864–1870.

Introduction

§0.1. This posting for 2015.11.19 picks up from where I left off at 2015.11.12. That earlier posting in turn picked up from where I had left off at 2015.11.05. In the posting for 2015.11.12, I highlighted the use of the word paides in Sappho's Tithonos Song, line 1, and I interpreted this word to mean 'girls' in that context, comparing the use of the word pais in the sense of 'girl' as inscribed on a vase painting that I analyzed in my posting for 2015.11.05. That painting, as we saw, shows the pursuit of a girl by a woman who is in turn pursued by the girl in a seemingly eternal cycle. At 2015.11.12, I argued for a comparable use of the word pais in the Tithonos Song of Sappho. Here at 2015.11.17, we will see yet another comparable use of the word pais in the sense of 'girl'—this time in an epigram of Posidippus, a poet who flourished in the third century BCE. I have in mind Epigram 52 (here and elsewhere, my numbering of this poet's epigrams follows the original edition by Bastianini and Gallazzi 2001, as listed in the Bibliography below). Basically, I will argue that Epigram 52 reveals echoes from Sappho's Song of Tithonos. And the fact is, I have already made such an argument in an article I published on the Song of Tithonos (Nagy 2010, as

listed in the Bibliography), but I now see, by hindsight, that I had not make my argumentation clear enough in that article. Nor had I made it clear enough that another poem of Posidippus, which I compared with Epigram 52 in that same article, likewise reveals echoes of Sappho's Tithonos Song. That other poem of Posidippus is his Epigram 55, which actually refers to Sappho by name. Viewing the words of Epigram 55 together with the words of Epigram 52, I will also argue that the poetry of Posidippus is echoing the references to a choral interaction between paides 'girls' and the persona of Sappho in the Tithonos Song. And such a reference to choral performance, as we will see, does not rule out the possibility that the same kind of reference could also be made in sympotic and concertizing performances of Sappho's songs.

Epigram 52 of Posidippus

§1. Here is the text as re-edited by Francesca Angiò 2015 (the translation is my own):

> |1 Τίμων, ὃς σκιό[θηρον ἐθή]κατο τοῦθ', ἵνα μετρῇι |2 ὥρας, νῦν ιδεχ[±10 letters]αι πεδίον |3 Ἄστη ναῖς θ[±10 letters ὁ]δοιπόρε, τὴν ἔλιφ', εἴως |4 ἐνδέχετ' ἐλπ[ι±6 letters π]αρθένον ὡρολογεῖν· |5 ἀλλὰ σὺ γῆρας ἰκοῦ, κούρη· παρὰ σήματι τούτωι |6 σωρὸν ἐτέων μέτρει τὸν καλὸν ἠέλιον.
>
> |1 Timon, who set up this sundial for it to measure out [metreîn]|2 the passing hours [hōrai], now [. . .] ground. |3 The girl [pais] Astē [. . .]—I say this to you the passerby—she was left behind by him for as long a time as |4 is possible to hope [. . .] that the girl [parthenos] will continue to read the passing hours [hōrai]. |5 As for you, O girl [kourē], you will approach old age at this marker [sēma] as you, |6 for piles and piles of years to come, will be measuring out [metreîn] the beautiful sun.

Posidippus Epigram 52[1]

Epigram 55 of Posidippus

§2. Here is the text as re-edited by Bernd Seidensticker 2015 (again, the translation is my own):

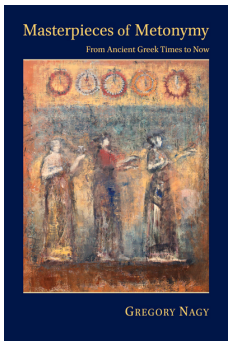
> |1 πάντα τὰ Νικομάχης καὶ ἀθύρματα καὶ πρὸς ἑώιαν |2 κερκίδα Σαπφώιους ἐξ ὀάρων ὀάρους |3 ὥιχετο Μοῖρα φέρουσα προώρια· τὴν δὲ τάλαιναν |4 παρθένον Ἀργείων ἀμφεβόησε πόλις, |5 Ἥρης τὸ τραφὲν ἔρνος ὑπ' ὠλένος· ἃ τότε γαμβρῶν |6 τῶν μνηστευομένων ψύχρ' ἔμενον λέχεα.
>
> |1 Everything about Nikomakhe, all her pretty things and, come dawn, |2 as the sound of the weaving shuttle is heard, all of Sappho's love songs [oaroi], songs [oaroi] sung one after the next, |3 are all gone, carried away by fate, all too soon [pro-hōria], and the poor |4 girl [parthenos] is lamented by the city of the Argives. |5 She had been raised by the goddess Hera, who cradled her in her arms like a tender seedling. But then, ah, there came the time when all her would-be husbands, |6 pursuing her, got left behind, with cold beds for them to sleep in.

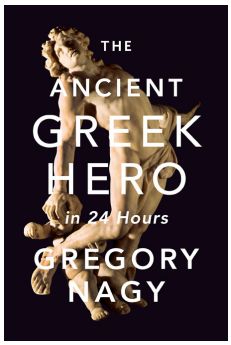
Posidippus Epigram 55[2]

Echoes of Sappho in Epigram 55 of Posidippus

§3. I start with the second of these two epigrams by Posidippus. As I interpret it, Epigram 55 pictures those happy times long ago when a girl named Nikomakhe would be partying all night with her girl-friends while singing and listening to the love songs of Sappho. I focus here on the expression we read at line 2, Σαπφώιους ἐξ ὀάρων ὀάρους, which I have just translated as 'Sappho's love songs [oaroi], songs [oaroi] sung one after the next'. 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.[3] 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. But there is still more to it. The expression Σαπφώιους ἐξ ὀάρων ὀάρους 'Sappho's love songs [oaroi], songs [oaroi] sung one after the next' at line 2 of Epigram 55 indicates that the songs are sung in relay, from one song to the next. Each singer is followed by the next singer in singing her song. Such relay singing, as I have argued in other projects, is typical of performances at private symposia arranged by and for male participants, as also at public concerts where kitharōdoi 'kithara-singers' or aulōidoi 'aulos-singers' compete with each other for prizes as they take turns in singing citharodic or aulodic songs respectively.[4] Similarly in Epigram 55, I argue, we see a reference here to the taking of turns in singing citharodic songs of Sappho at a symposium—but the difference here is that the singers are represented as girls, not as boys or men. Essentially, we see here a female symposium.

§4. In my posting for 2015.11.12, I had argued that the shorter of two versions we have of Sappho's Tithonos Song was suitable for relay singing at private symposia or at public concerts. Now I can take the argument a bit further: the shorter version of the Tithonos Song would have been suitable also for relay singing at private female symposia at well. At least, that is what we have seen being represented in the stylized wording of Posidippus at line 2 of Epigram 55.





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Echoes of Sappho in Epigram 52 of Posidippus

§5. In Epigram 52, as I have already quoted it above, the closing words of the sixth and last line 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 out 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.[5] But there is more to it. I now focus on the conclusion of the epigram, where Astē is addressed as a kourē 'girl' (52.5). This alternative way of saying 'girl' is relevant to the name Astē. 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 to the city where the sundial is located. But, as I say, there is more to it. The fact is, 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 or kourē refers to a goddess nymph par excellence. In such a context, the word for 'girl' refers to the primary local nymph worshipped by the local population.[6]

§6. In Epigram 52 of Posidippus, the name Astē—whether or not we read it as an epithet—may evoke the idea of a local Kourē or nymph goddess in the making. I think that this local nymph is pictured as part of an object of art, probably a statue, which functions as an accessory of the sundial. So, I agree with those who think that the sundial here is figured together with the statue of a girl.[7] 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' ἐλπ[. . . π]αρθένον 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 is meant to metreîn or 'measure out' the hōrai or passing 'hours' (52.1–2: ἵνα μετρῇ | ὥρας). It measures out one hōra after the next hōra. 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 out 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' ὥρα 'and time [hōra] goes by' (PMG Fragmentum Adespotum 976.3). I quoted this song already in my posting for 2015.10.22.

§7. The maiden in Epigram 52 of Posidippus is herself measuring out time just as the sundial measures out time, and, as she is measuring, she is addressed as kourē 'girl': ἀλλὰ σὺ γῆρας ἰκοῦ, κούρη· παρὰ σήματι τούτωι |6 σωρὸν ἐτέων μέτρει τὸν καλὸν ἠέλιον 'As for you, O girl [kourē], you will approach old age at this marker [sēma] as you, |6 for piles and piles of years to come, will be measuring out [metreîn] 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 closing cannot really be a closure because the wording leaves everything openended. The kourē or 'girl' 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 out time. So the kourē cannot be simply a 'girl' interrupted.[8] The girl cannot be interrupted by 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 out 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.

Comparing the Tithonos Song of Sappho

§8. The uninterrupted pais or 'girl' of Epigram 52 as I have interpreted it can be compared to the use of this same word pais in the invocation addressed to the ensemble of singers and dancers at the beginning of Sappho's Tithonos Song as quoted in my posting for 2015.11.12. I quote the song here again:

> |1 [. . . words missing . . . ἰ]ǫκ[ό]λπων κάλα δῶρα, παῖδες, |2 [. . . words missing . . .τὰ]ν φιλάοιδον λιγύραν χελύνναν· |3 [. . . words missing . . .] n̥οτ' [ἔ]ǫντα χρόα γῆρας ἤδη |4 [. . . words missing . . .]ἐγ]ένοντο τρίχες ἐκ μελαίναν· |5 βάρυς δέ μ' ὁ [θ]ῦμǫς πεπόηται, γόνα δ' [ο]ὐ φέροισι, |6 τὰ δή ποτα λαίψηρ' ἔον ὄρχησθ' ἴσα νεβρίοισι. |7 τὰ ⟨μὲν⟩ στεναχίσδω θαμέως· ἀλλὰ τί κεν ποείην; |8 ἀγήραον ἄνθρωπον ἔοντ' οὐ δύνατον γένεσθαι. |9 καὶ γάρ n̥[ο]τ̣ǫ̣ Τίθωνον ἔφαντο βροδόπαχυν Αὔων |10 ἔρωι φ..ǫ̣θ̣ε̣ισαν βάμεν' εἰς ἔσχατα γᾶς φέροισα[ν], |11 ἔοντǫ̣ [κ]ǫ̣λ̣ǫν καὶ νέον, ἀλλ' αὖτον ὔμως ἔμαρψε |12 χρόνωι n̥ǫ̣λ̣ιǫ̣ν γῆρας, ἔχ[ο]ν̣τ' ἀθανάταν ἄκοιτιν. |13 [. . . words missing . . .]ιμέναν νομίσδει |14 [. . . words missing . . .]αις ὀπάσδοι |15 ι̣ἔγω δὲ φίλημμ' ἀβροσύναν, . . .ȷ τοῦτο καί μοι |16 τὸ λάι̣μπρον ἔρως ἀελίω καὶ τὸ κά̣λ̣ον λέι̣λ̣ȷογχε.
>
> |1 [. . .] gifts of [the Muses], whose contours are adorned with violets, [I tell you] girls [paides] |2 [. . .] the clear-sounding song-loving lyre. |3 [. . .] skin that was once tender is now [ravaged] by old age [gēras], |4 [. . .] hair that was once black has turned (gray). |5 The throbbing of my heart is heavy, and my knees cannot carry me |6 —(those knees) that were once so nimble for dancing like fawns. |7 I cry and cry about those things, over and over again. But what can I do? |8 To become ageless [a-gēra-os] for someone who is mortal is impossible to achieve. |9 Why, even Tithonos once upon a time, they said, was

taken by the dawn-goddess [Eos], with her rosy arms |10 —she felt [. . .] passionate love [eros] for him, and off she went, carrying him to the ends of the earth, |11 so beautiful [kalos] he was and young [neos], but, all the same, he was seized |12 in the fullness of time by gray old age [gēras], even though he shared the bed of an immortal female. |13 [. . .] |14 [. . .] |15 But I love delicacy [(h)abrosunē] [. . .] this, |16 and passionate love [erōs] for the Sun has won for me its radiance [tò lampron] and beauty [tò kalon].

Sappho, Tithonos Song

§9. At line 1 of the Tithonos Song, the first-person speaker speaks to paides 'girls', and she goes on to lament at line 3 the passage of time and the coming of gēras 'old age'. The theme of old age persists till line 12, where we hear of the gēras 'old age' that afflicts Tithonos, mortal lover of Eos the goddess of dawn. Then the song stops, right then at there at line 12, in the papyrus labeled Π^1 by Dirk Obbink.[9] In another papyrus, however, labeled Π^2 by Obbink, the same Tithonos Song continues from line 12 and keeps on going for four more lines, 13–16, culminating in an affirmation of hope for an afterlife. These lines 13–16 of the Tithonos Song are the equivalent of lines 23–26 in a text that used to be known simply as Fragment 58 of Sappho.[10] I should note the special formatting at lines 15–16 (= Π^2 25–26) of the Tithonos Song as we see these lines quoted above: the wordings enclosed in half-square brackets are restorations based on a quotation by Athenaeus 15.687b (Clearchus F 41 Wehrli).[11]

§10. The longer text of the Tithonos Song of Sappho as recorded in Π^2—a text that extends through line 16, as we just saw in the quotation above—is a version designed for choral performance. By contrast, the shorter text of the same song as recorded in Π^1—a text that extends only through line 12—is a version repurposed for sympotic or concertizing performance. That is what I argued about the longer and the shorter texts in my earlier work, as I already noted in my posting for 2015.11.12.[12]

§11. At line 16 (= Π^2 26), which is the last line in the longer version of the Tithonos Song, the speaker affirms her 'passionate love of the sun'—her ἔρως ἀελίω.[13] 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.

§12. I repeat here my translation of the last line in the longer version of Sappho's Tithonos Song, line 16 (= Π^2 26): 'passionate love [erōs] of the Sun has won for me its radiance and beauty'. This translation is based on the reading ἔρως ἀελίω. I must note, however, that there is also an alternative reading, ἔροc τώελίω, which would require a different translation for the whole line: 'Passionate love [erōs] has won for me the radiance and beauty of the Sun'. I prefer the first of these two readings, ἔρως ἀελίω, which makes the Sun the objective genitive of erōs 'passionate love'.[14]

Comparing Song 16 of Sappho

§13. Such an objective genitive construction ἔρως ἀελίω 'passionate love of the sun' would be parallel to the phrase ὅττω τις ἔραται 'whatever one loves' in Song 16 of Sappho, where this 'whatever' (16.3–4) is described as κάλλιστον 'the most beautiful thing' in the whole wide world (16.3). Here is the text of that song, along with my translation:

|1 [ο]ἰ μὲν ἰππήων στρότον οἰ δὲ πέσδων |2 οἰ δὲ νάων φαῖc' ἐπ[ὶ] γᾶν μέλαι[ν]αν |3 [ἔ]μμεναι κάλλιστον, ἔγω δὲ κῆν' ὅτ-|4-τω τις ἔραται· |5 [πά]γχυ δ' εὔμαρες cύνετον πόησαι |6 [π]άντι τ[ο]ῦτ', ἁ γὰρ πόλυ περcκέθοισα |7 κάλλος [ἀνθ]ρώπων Ἑλένα [τὸ]ν ἄνδρα |8 τὸν [πανάρ]ιστον |9 καλλ[ίποι]c' ἔβα 'c Τροΐαν πλέοι[cα |10 κωὐδ[ὲ πα]ῖδος οὐδὲ φίλων το[κ]ήων |11 πά[μπαν] ἐμνάcθη, ἀλλὰ παράγαγ' ἄϝταν |12 [. . .]cαν [. . .] |15 [. .]μες νῦν Ἀνακτορί[ας ὀ]ϝέμναι-|16 [-c' οὐ] παρεοίcας, |17 [τᾶ]c <κ>ε βολλοίμαν ἔρατόν τε βᾶμα |18 κἀμάρυχμα λάμπρον ἴδην προcώπω |19 ἢ τὰ Λύδων ἄρματα †κανοπλοιcι |20 [πεcδομ]άχεντας.

|1 Some say a massing of chariots and their drivers, some say of footsoldiers, |2 some say of ships, if you think of everything that exists on the surface of this black earth, |3 is the most beautiful thing of them all. But I say it is that one thing |4 that anyone passionately loves [erâtai]. |5 It's really quite easy to make this understandable |6 to everyone, this thing. You see, that woman who was by far supreme |7 in beauty among all mortals, Helen, |8 she [. . .] left her best of all husbands, |9 him she left behind and sailed to Troy, |10 caring not about her daughter and her dear parents, |11 not caring at all. She was swept along [. .] |15 [All this] reminds me right now of Anaktoria. |16 She is [not] here. [15] |17 Oh, how I would far rather wish to see her taking a dancing step that arouses passionate love [= eraton], |18 and to see the luminous radiance from the look of her face |19 than to see those chariots of the Lydians and the footsoldiers in their armor |20 as they fight in battle [. . .].

Sappho Song 16[16]

§14. There are three things to compare with 'the most beautiful thing' in Song 16 of Sappho here, 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 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).

§15. In 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.[17]

Back to the Tithonos Song of Sappho

§16. Similarly in the Tithonos 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 toward the end of the longer version of the song, at line 15 (= Π^2 25), she loves habrosunē 'luxuriance': ἔγω δὲ φίλημμ' ἀβροσύναν, and this love is associated with her passionate love for 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.[18]

§17. In the Tithonos 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 passionate love or eros (ἔρως) for the sun as experienced by Sappho in the longer text of this song, at line 16 (= Π^2 26), is the converse of the passionate love or eros (ἔρος) for Tithonos as experienced by the goddess of dawn, Eos, in the shorter text that we now call the "New Sappho," at line 10 (= Π^1 18). As we see from the wording that survives at line 11 (= Π^1 19) of the shorter text, the beauty of Tithonos, who was kalos 'beautiful' as a neos 'young man', will be ruined by what is described as a polion gēras 'gray old age' at line 12 (= Π^1 20), just as the speaker's beauty has been ruined (line 3 = Π^1 11) by the graying of her hair (line 4 = Π^1 12) because of gēras 'old age' (line 3 = Π^1 11)—after all, no human can remain a-gēra-os 'ageless' forever (line 8 = Π^1 16). For a human to remain a-gēra-os 'ageless' is ou dunaton 'impossible' (line 8 = Π^1 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 (lines 5–6 = Π^1 13–14).

§18. 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.[19]

§19. The promise of the girl who comes back full circle, as expressed in the longer version of the text of Sappho's song when the speaker declares her passionate love (ἔρως) for the sun at line 16 (= Π^2 26), is withheld in the shorter 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. [20] 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').[21] Such a device is typical of transitions in the relay-performances of rhapsodes competing at the festival of the Panathenaia, as we see for example in the transition from Rhapsody 2 of the Odyssey (ending with a men-clause at verse 434) to the subsequent Rhapsody 3 (starting with a de-clause at verse 1).[22]

§20. Such transitions are to be expected in the relay-performances of kithara-singers, not only of rhapsodes. If it is true that the songs of Sappho were included in the repertoires of kithara-singers 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 kithara-singers competing at the Panathenaia.

§21. 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 transmission of Sappho—including differences that have come to light with the discovery of the Cologne Papyrus showing a different version for the closure for the Tithonos Song.

§22. In the case of Song 2 of Sappho, for example, we find two attested versions for 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]'.[23] Both kinds of sympotic closure, I argue, are compatible with the singing of Sappho's songs by men and boys at Athenian symposia.[24]

§23. On the basis of such sympotic contexts, I infer that the shorter version of Sappho's Song of Tithonos, attested in the Cologne 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.

§24. In the case of the Tithonos Song 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 at line 1 (= 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 started this essay by comparing the use of the word pais in the sense of 'girl' as inscribed on a vase painting that I analyzed in my posting for 2015.11.05. I now come back to that painting, which as we saw shows the pursuit of a girl by a woman who is in turn pursued by the girl in a seemingly eternal cycle. So, the moment of catching up is eternally deferred. The woman, who is Sappho, cannot catch up with the pais or 'girl' she once had been, and the girl cannot catch up with the woman she will become. As I said in the posting for 2015.11.05, we see here not just amor versus, but amor conversus. It is a yearning for a merger of identities as woman pursues girl pursues woman.

§25. But Sappho, addressing her paides 'girls' while lamenting her old age in the Song of Tithonos, 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.

Circling back to Epigram 55 of Posidippus

§26. Here I return to the expression Cαπφώιους ἐξ ὀάρων ὀάρους 'Sappho's love songs [oaroi], songs [oaroi] sung one after the next' at line 2 of Epigram 55, where the wording indicates that the songs of Sappho are sung by girls in relay, from one song to the next.

§27. In the poetics of Sappho, as we see from this learned reference, one oaros or 'love song' continues after 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.

§28. Just as Sappho's medium comes full circle from one oaros or 'love song' to the next, from one amorous converse to another, 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. This girl will not be interrupted.[25]

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Notes

[1] For an apparatus criticus that tracks till 2011 the editorial work that has been done on this text since its original publication by Bastianini and Gallazzi 2001, see Angiò, Cuypers, Acosta-Hughes, and Kosmetatou 2011.

[2] For an apparatus criticus, see again Angiò, Cuypers, Acosta-Hughes, and Kosmetatou 2011.

[3] Nagy 1990b:200n123, with reference to Iliad 22.126–127; also Nagy 1990b:253.

[4] Nagy 2007a, 2010.

[5] Such is the interpretation of Angiò 2015:215–20.

[6] Starting with this paragraph, I offer an improved version of what I published in Nagy 2010.

[7] See the remarks of Bowie 2002:161. In the context of a viva voce discussion that had led to those published remarks, as E.B. has kindly confirmed for me in an e-mail exchange, he may have brought up the idea of a statue as figured together with a sundial. Angiò 2015:217 expresses her doubts about such an idea. She does not mention my relevant observations in Nagy 2010:187–188.

[8] The expression "girl, interrupted" comes from the title of the 1993 book of Susanna Kaysen. I first used this phrase in relation to Sappho in a 2010 article titled "The 'New Sappho' Reconsidered in the Light of the Athenian Reception of Sappho." This article also appears in the online journal Classics@ Volume 4, edited by Ellen Greene and Marilyn Skinner.

[9] Obbink 2010.

[10] Again, Obbink 2010.

[11] The last two lines of this version of the Tihonos Song, 15–16 = Π^2 25–26 = Sappho F 58.25–26 V, are highlighted in H24H Hour 5 Text I.

[12] Nagy 2010.

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

[14] On the reading ἔρως ἀελίω instead of ἔροc τὠελίω, see Nagy 1990a:285 [10§18], Nagy 1990b:261-262; Nagy 1996:90, 102–3. More in Nagy 2010.

[15] In the papyrus fragment, the negative 'not' is not visible, but its restoration is supported by editors.

[16] H24H Hour 5 Text H.

[17] I offer a fuller analysis of Sappho's Song 16 in H24H 5§§73–77. For more on this song, see Bierl 2003.

[18] Nagy 1990a:285 [10§18], 298 [10§29] n113; Nagy 1990b:235, 255, 257, and especially 261–62; Nagy 1996:90, 102–3.

[19] Nagy 1990a:352 [12§32]; Nagy 2007b:22.

[20] Edmunds 2006.

[21] Nagy 1996:161–62, with reference to Plutarch Quaestiones convivales 736e.

[22] Nagy 1996:161–62n30. Further examples in Nagy 2002:61–69. Relay-performances in rhapsodic contests at the Panathenaia require collaboration as well as competition: see Nagy 2002:22. For a comparative perspective on the concept of competition-in-collaboration, see Nagy 1996:18.

[23] 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.

[24] Nagy 2010: 191–92.

[25] Once again, I note that this expression "girl, interrupted" comes from the title of the 1993 book of Susanna Kaysen.

Tags: Posidippus, Sappho, weaving

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