

Introduction

Anton Bierl and André Lardinois

In the spring of 1914, B.P. Grenfell and A.S. Hunt published Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 1231, containing a large number of fragments from the second half of Book 1 of a copy of a Hellenistic edition of Sappho, including the famous fragment 16.¹ One hundred years later, almost to the day, a new set of papyrus fragments, derived from the same section of Book 1 of Sappho, was published by the papyrologists Simon Burris, Jeffrey Fish, and Dirk Obbink in the *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*.² This new set represents the largest find of Sappho fragments since the discovery of the Oxyrhynchus papyri. It will greatly influence our understanding of individual poems as well as the corpus of Sappho's poetry as a whole for years to come. This volume is intended to start this discussion.

The new discovery consists of five papyrus fragments, preserving the remains of six columns. P. GC Inv. 105 fragments 1–4 preserves small parts of five columns, which provide significant new readings and additions to five previously known songs of Sappho (frs. 5, 9, 16, 17, and 18), as well as traces of two previously unknown songs (frs. 16a and 18a). Most spectacular, however, was the discovery of another papyrus fragment with five complete stanzas of a previously unknown song, which Obbink has labelled the Brothers Poem or Brothers Song.³ This song is followed on the papyrus by the first two stanzas of a less well-preserved poem, the Kypris Song, which seems to overlap with the old fragment 26 from the Oxyrhynchus papyri.

One of the first occasions for scholars to discuss these new papyrus fragments was provided by Anton Bierl in Basel in the summer of 2014. As a core member of the *Network for the Study of Archaic and Classical Greek Song* he had taken it upon himself to organize the group's meeting for 2014. He had already decided to devote the conference to Sappho, but initially planned to focus on new methodological developments in Sapphic research. However, when in January 2014 it became known that Dirk Obbink was about to publish two previously unknown songs of Sappho, followed by the publication of

1 Grenfell and Hunt (1914). We would like to thank the contributors to this volume for their remarks and comments on this introduction.

2 Burris, Fish, and Obbink (2014) and Obbink (2014b). Figs. 2.1–2.3, pp. 37–39.

3 P. Sapph. Obbink: see Obbink (2014b) and ch. 1, this volume.

a series of smaller fragments together with Simon Burris and Jeffrey Fish, he decided to devote a large part of this conference to a discussion of the new material.

At the same time, André Lardinois, when he learned about the discovery of the new papyrus fragments, organised a panel for the annual meeting of the Society for Classical Studies (formerly the American Philological Association) in New Orleans in January 2015. Here Dirk Obbink discussed the provenance of the papyri, something reported further since then in *ZPE* and in this volume,⁴ and several Sappho specialists cast light on the significance of these fragments for our understanding of Sappho (Lidov and Stehle), for her reception in Latin literature (Morgan), and for the presentation of her poetry to the larger public (Rayor).

In Basel we decided to join forces and try to publish as quickly as possible the papers presented on these two occasions with a few changes (a few participants at the Basel conference originally presented papers on a different topic) and additions (the papers of Kurke and Raaflaub, which came later to our attention). With great effort the contributors wrote their papers and submitted a first draft in March 2015. Some papers have retained their original size, others have been enlarged and expanded. Some contributions (Bierl, Lidov, Obbink) have been reorganised and divided over different sections of the book. As editors we commented on each contribution. Then we circulated the papers so that the contributors could engage with each other's arguments, provide further criticism, and include cross-references in their papers. Our aim was not to reach a consensus: that is impossible in the case of Sappho, and in the case of brand new material, which opens up new avenues for interpretation, it is not even desirable. Many differences of opinion remain, for example about who the enigmatic addressee in the Brothers Song might be: Sappho's mother (Obbink, Kurke), her uncle (Bierl), Larichos (Stehle), her third brother Eurygios (Lardinois, Caciagli), or Doricha (Bowie). We asked the contributors to debate these differences of opinion in the main text or the footnotes of their papers. All contributors subsequently revised their articles and resubmitted them in June 2015. In July we sent the manuscript to Brill to be reviewed by an outside reader, who responded promptly at the end of August. We offered our contributors the opportunity to revise their papers one more time, using the comments of the outside reader, in September 2015. Articles on Sappho or the new material that have appeared since then could only sporadically be taken into account.

4 Obbink (2015a and b) and ch. 2, this volume.

Right from the start we had asked Dirk Obbink to provide the textual basis for the volume. He has prepared a new critical edition with critical apparatus and translation of the poems represented in the new find, including fragment 15, which in P. Oxy 1231 precedes fragment 16 (ch. 1). The reading of the Kypris Poem has changed considerably since the *editio princeps* in *ZPE* 2014, and Obbink has added P. Oxy. 2289 fr. 5 to the text of the Brothers Song, which adds four lines to the numbering of this fragment.⁵ The contributors in this volume all follow the new numbering of the Brothers Song, but the old one is often included between brackets.

Combining the different papyrus fragments from Oxyrhynchus, the Green Collection and P. Sapph. Obbink, we now possess a stretch of ten more or less readable poems of Sappho as arranged by the Hellenistic editors: frs. 15, 16, 16a, 17, 18, 18a, 5, 9, the Brothers Song, and the Kypris Song. It is now also apparent that the Hellenistic scholars arranged these poems alphabetically by first letter only. This stretch of poems is derived from the section beginning with the letters 'ο' and 'π' in the latter half of Book One of Sappho.

In his second contribution to the volume (ch. 2), Obbink discusses the subject of these ten fragments and their possible arrangement within the letter groupings. It is revealing that in this stretch of ten fragments only two are obvious love poems (fr. 16 and the Kypris Song), while no fewer than three (frs. 15, 5, and the Brothers Song) and possibly four (fr. 9) are devoted to family members. This is not the impression we get from the indirect transmission, which clearly favoured Sappho's love poetry: before the discovery of the Oxyrhynchus papyri the only two substantial fragments, preserved through the indirect transmission, were both love poems (frs. 1 and 31).

This is just one way in which the new material throws new light on the poetry of Sappho. The other chapters in Part 1 (Sappho in the New Fragments) discuss more ways in which the new papyrus fragments force us to think differently about her work. Joel Lidov (ch. 3) provides an overview of the major songs now identified in Book 1, all in the Sapphic stanza. He discovers one group of songs about love and one about sailors, including Charaxos, and draws attention to the great variety within these two sets that suggests a variety in the personas represented by the singer. He also provides a commentary on some of the major editorial problems in the new material, and cautions against drawing hasty conclusions on the basis of the new fragments: he questions, for example, the commonly-accepted translation of the Brothers Song, lines 7–10 (3–6), and points out that the brother in fragment 5 is not identified as Charaxos, while

⁵ See also Obbink (2015b) 1.

Charaxos in the new so-called “Brothers Song” is never explicitly identified as a brother. He therefore prefers to refer to it as the Charaxos Song.

Richard Martin (ch. 4) points out that the new Brothers Song lends credence to the ancient tradition according to which Sappho wrote poems of critical evaluation or attack in the manner of *iambos*. He argues that while the main focus in the surviving portion of the song is the return of Charaxos, the poem’s indirect object of critical attack is the brother Larichos, poetically shamed for not yet living up to the responsibilities of a grown man.

Kurt Raaflaub (ch. 5) sketches the historical background against which Sappho’s songs about her brother Charaxos has to be seen. In particular, he asks what the new texts contribute to our knowledge of the connections between the Greek and Egyptian (or, more broadly, Near Eastern) worlds. Traditions about Charaxos’ trading wine at Naucratis and being involved with a high-class courtesan there situate him in a network of elite “high-end” merchants, specialists, mercenaries, and adventurers. They shed light on the possible role of such elite persons in serving as “carriers” of useful knowledge about Egyptian and Near Eastern culture.

Following a recent suggestion of Renate Schlesier (2013), Ewen Bowie (ch. 6) argues that the new material supports the idea that the first context of performance of many of Sappho’s songs was the male symposium, and that Sappho herself was an outstanding singer to the accompaniment of a *barbitos* or *lyra*, a singer whose virtuosity was such that she was also in demand for weddings and perhaps civic religious rituals. He shows how several well-known pieces of Sappho’s poetry that involve expressions of desire might be understood on this hypothesis. Next he turns to the Brothers Poem and suggests that it was one of a number of songs in which male symposiasts, some of them known to Charaxos and perhaps even seeing themselves as his comrades (ἑταῖροι), were entertained by Sappho’s expressions of loyalty to her brother and of her hostility to the entertainer in Naucratis, Doricha, who had led him astray.

The second part of the volume, explicitly devoted to the Brothers Song, continues the discussion of this poem. It starts with a contribution by André Lardinois (ch. 7), who argues for the authenticity of the Brothers Song in the sense that it most likely does go back to Lesbos in the sixth century BCE. He further examines the biographical tradition about Sappho and her brothers and argues that there were many more songs about these brothers within the poetry of Sappho, including fragments 5, 9, and 15. The Brothers Song is not unique in this respect. After discussing the text of this song in some detail, he provides his interpretation. He argues that Charaxos, Larichos, and the speaker should be considered brothers and sister and that the addressee is most likely the person who in the biographical tradition is identified as Sappho’s third brother,

Eurygios. He further argues that Sappho's brothers were probably fictional characters and that her songs about them address themes that are familiar from other archaic Greek poets as well, such as the loss of family capital and reputation, the risks of trading at sea, and strife between family members.

Deborah Boedeker (ch. 8) raises the question why Hera is the god whom the speaker proposes to beseech for Charaxos' safe return. This directive is noteworthy, for Hera is not widely associated with seafaring, although that is consistently her role in the corpus of Sappho. Like Obbink and other readers, Boedeker links this directive to Hera's cult at Messon, which the goddess shared with Zeus and Dionysus. She argues that Messon was one of a number of archaic Hera sanctuaries in the Mediterranean world that honoured the goddess as protector of seafarers and traders. In this respect, as well as in the concern the speaker expresses for young Larichos, Hera is the *dieu juste* for the song's scenario. Her role thus contrasts with that of Zeus in the song: Hera should be asked directly for help with Charaxos' homecoming, whereas Zeus is linked with spontaneous turns to good fortune.

Dirk Obbink, in what amounts to his third contribution to the volume (ch. 9), continues the association of the Brothers Song with the cult of Hera, Zeus, and Dionysus at Messon by arguing that the *daimon* whom Zeus can send as a helper in the poem can be plausibly identified with Dionysus. Obbink further offers a reading of the poem as setting forth the fortunes of a mercantile family of traders on seventh century Lesbos and the hopes expressed by the speaker for success in the face of misfortune through correct religious observance and favour.

Anastasia-Erasmia Peponi (ch. 10) asks in what way representations of the *domestic*, and more specifically of the *familial*, may have been culturally vital in Sappho's times. She introduces a comparandum from a different era and artistic medium, that of Pieter de Hooch from the Dutch Golden Age. Peponi argues that despite their evident differences, Sappho's and Pieter de Hooch's representations of the domestic and the familial can be mutually thought-provoking, especially as explorations into the aesthetic and mythopoetic potential hidden in the mundane. She also discusses sisterly discourses in established heroic narratives of the archaic period that Sappho was possibly emulating while creating her own mythopoetics of the domestic and an alternative type of narrative. Peponi argues that this distinctive mythopoetic model encouraged a dual-reception-register and enabled a synergy between poem and audience, whereby audiences played an active role in the formation and dissemination of the imaginary surrounding a poem's circulation.

Leslie Kurke (ch. 11) agrees with Peponi that the Brothers Poem seems to offer a quotidian, even behind-the-scenes, look into the life of Sappho, but she

adds a gendered perspective to this. Sappho offers a 'behind-the-scenes' view of private conversation between two women of the family and then, through the imagined prayer to Hera, transforms that private conversation into public, performative speech. In addition, Kurke argues that various mythic models lie behind the representation of the conversation in the song. While other scholars (e.g. Nünlist 2014) have aligned Sappho's brothers Charaxos and Larichos with Odysseus and Telemachus, with the poet herself cast in the role of Penelope, Kurke argues for an additional, implicit parallel between Sappho's brothers and the Dioscuri as *daimones* sent by Zeus to save sailors in danger at sea. On this reading, in addition to being cast in the role of the long-suffering Penelope, Sappho would play Helen in relation to two asymmetrical or unlike brothers.

Eva Stehle (ch. 12) agrees with the other contributors that the Brothers Poem represents a piece of fictional or otherwise fictionalised drama in which a sister attempts to persuade another family member, but argues that the addressee is not her mother or another brother, but Larichos. She thus agrees with Martin (ch. 4) that Sappho is critical of her younger brother in the poem. In lines 5–6 Sappho, according to Stehle, describes him as insisting that Charaxos will return with a full ship, which she takes as his mantra to deflect pressure on him to act. She then traces Sappho's response to this assertion, showing that in a sequence repeated four times she first undercuts his fixation on what Charaxos will bring and then urges a different attitude and action supportive of the family. In the course of the poem Sappho changes persona from sister to wisdom-speaker and defeats Larichos' claim of certainty by revealing cause and effect at the divine level. From the same perspective she gives a portrait of Larichos as the cause of difficulty for his family. As part of her argument Stehle discusses Sappho's audience and her turn to the third person for Larichos at the end of the poem.

With the paper of Llewelyn Morgan (ch. 13) we leave ancient Lesbos briefly to focus on the reception of Sappho in Latin literature. Morgan finds echoes of the new Brothers Poem in Horace's *Odes* 1.9, and similar observations are developed in relation to *Odes* 3.29, with particular attention to a shared interest in Mediterranean trade. Morgan further notes the formal prominence of these two poems in Horace's collection, and thus the significance of an extensive allusion to Sappho in a collection allegedly owing a special debt to Alcaeus. Some concluding thoughts based on Sappho's autobiography in the *Epistula Sapphus* pursue the question of Sappho's attitude to commerce, and thus to the relative merits of the lifestyles of Charaxos and Larichos, merchant and young aristocrat.

Anton Bierl's contribution (ch. 14) rounds off the section on the Brothers Song in the volume, although subsequent contributors will have more to say

about it as well. Bierl agrees with most of the previous contributors that the Brothers Song is not a personal, biographical, or intimate expression of family matters but functions rather within a public dimension. He takes this idea, however, a step further by arguing that it was originally publicly and chorally performed and that it communalizes erotic experiences and acts out discourses of power relations in the polis and the clan. He connects the Brothers Song with the traditional idea of a myth-and-ritual scenario, creating new myths and narratives for ritual performance. Thus the original occasion for this song was most likely the choral performance during the public festival at Messon. Bierl also argues that there are important thematic parallels between the Brothers Song and the new Kypris Song. He argues that the Brothers Song does not really offer an alternative, but like the new Kypris Song and many other erotic poems, deals with the consequences of love. Sappho portrays erotic entanglement as a programmatic feature of her clan.

Bierl (ch. 15) continues his discussion of the Kypris Song in the next section of the volume, which is devoted to this poem. He provides an analysis of the structure, texture, and meaning of this song. First, he presents some recent reconstructions and addresses their problematic hermeneutical presuppositions in a monodic performance setting. Next, he develops several hypotheses regarding the original choral performance occasion as well as secondary reperformance contexts, and he discusses the metapoetic relevance of the song. He argues that Sappho's audience would have envisaged her body pierced and transfixed, and associated her with a heroic existence in an antagonistic relation to Aphrodite. Thus Aphrodite somehow becomes a reflection of a heroic Sappho. The image of the hero(ine) and Sappho merges through the performance of *kleos* and love, which, Bierl argues, is the medium and essence of Sapphic song.

Boehringer and Calame (ch. 16), in a contribution translated by Paul Ellis and Chiara Meccariello from the French, agree with Bierl that the Kypris Song is representative of Sappho's love poetry. Whereas the Brothers Poem provides new data for the biographical fiction of the poet, the Kypris Song, they argue, with its ritualized language and poetry, affirms Sappho's reputation as a poet of *eros*. They draw extensive parallels with Sappho's other love poetry and conclude that, while almost all these poems speak about the love of one woman for another, the *eros* she describes applies equally to men, which is one reason why Sappho's poetry was popular in the male symposia during the classical period. *Eros* is the same for everyone in a society "before sexuality"; its essential characteristic is not a gender issue but lies, as Boehringer and Calame maintain, in the effect it produces.

Renate Schlesier (ch. 17) also starts her discussion of the new Kypris Song by drawing on parallels with other songs of Sappho, notably on the names she uses

for different aspects of the goddess Aphrodite. She argues that most of the textual reconstruction in Obbink's *editio princeps* (Obbink 2014b) can be defended, unlike different assumptions about the text suggested by Martin West (2014) and Franco Ferrari (2014), but she proposes a different reconstruction of the third line of the poem than the one Obbink suggests in this volume (Obbink, ch. 1). She further argues that the poem is a general reflection about love and is addressed to Aphrodite as a kind of "alter ego" of the poetic persona in Sappho's work.

Diane Rayor (ch. 18) discusses the challenge of presenting Sappho's poetry to the larger public through translation. She points to the significance of the new material for translators of Sappho, because it necessitates shedding previous assumptions about the meaning of words and sentences in Sappho to incorporate the new discoveries. Rayor focuses in particular on the translations of the Kypris Poem, which overlaps with the old fragment 26, and of fragment 17, which is the subject of the next section in this volume. While the different reconstructions and translations of fragment 17 demonstrate how tenuous are our guesses in filling gaps, the new Kypris poem so radically changes the reading of fragment 26 that it now constitutes a new song. The paper ends with some recommendations for future translators of Sappho.

The last section of this volume is devoted to fragment 17, sometimes referred to as the Prayer to Hera. We prefer the more neutral designation of Hera Song. Both the beginnings and ends of lines are preserved on P. GC Inv. 105 fragment 2, thus adding considerably to our reconstruction of the text of the poem. Despite the new evidence, however, large parts of the poem are still very difficult to reconstruct. This holds true in particular for the opening stanza of the song. Joel Lidov (ch. 19), in his second contribution to the volume, summarizes the problems and possibilities for readings and supplements in this first stanza and in lines 11 and 20. His survey of the different choices for the first two lines concludes with an exploratory reading of them as an expression of the joy the festival gives to the god. Lidov further argues for Hera as the antecedent of the relative pronoun in the third line and against reading the letters $\tau\omicron\iota$ at the beginning of line 4 as a personal pronoun.

Stefano Caciagli (ch. 20) draws a connection between fragment 17, the Brothers Song and other family poems of Sappho. Based on the fact that the same goddess is addressed in this poem as the one Sappho wishes to pray to in the Brothers Song, and that fragment 17 seems to be concerned with procuring a safe sea voyage for someone, he argues that Sappho in this song prays to Hera for the safe return of her brother Charaxos, as she promises to do in the Brothers Song and similarly in the prayer she offers to the Nereids on behalf of her brother in fragment 5. Caciagli discusses the different possible audiences and

performance contexts of Sappho's family poetry and concludes that fragment 17 may well have been performed at the shrine of Hera at Messon in the presence of her family and friends and perhaps a wider audience as well. The paper concludes with some reflections about pragmatic approaches to archaic Greek poetry in general and Sappho's audience in particular.

Greg Nagy's paper (ch. 21) forms a fitting conclusion to this section and to the volume as a whole. Through an extensive analysis of the Brothers Song, fragment 17, the Kypris Song and fragment 5, Nagy traces the presence of a distinct persona in Sappho's poetry, that of the concerned sister, which both had ritual significance on the island of Lesbos and could be appreciated at male symposia throughout Greece. At the end of his paper he provides evidence that Sappho's name might actually mean 'sister'. Like Obbink, Bierl, and Lidov in the case of the Brothers Song and Caciagli in the case of fragment 17, Nagy situates the initial performance of these songs at Messon in the shrine of Hera, Zeus, and Dionysus. He discusses the evidence for this cult and draws a parallel with the cult of Hera at Argos. He also examines its connection to traditions about the visit of the sons of Atreus to the island in mythical times.

With this contribution we come to the end of the volume, but not to our discussion of these new fragments. Leslie Kurke in the first footnote of her article in this volume remarks that one of the great pleasures of a brand new Sappho poem is that the work of interpretation is necessarily collaborative and "choral". This volume has been a choral endeavour from the start. We hope that it will inspire other people to join the choir and that one day we can sing about even more "newest" songs of Sappho.

Postscript March 2021

In the years following the first publication of this book, serious doubts have been raised about the provenance of the newest Sappho papyri (P. Sapph. Obbink and P. GC inv. 105). Last summer, the Green collection/Museum of the Bible released a statement according to which their fragments (P. GC inv. 105) were acquired from a Turkish dealer on January 7, 2012, without any document proving their legal provenance. Most recently, Mr Green has restituted to Egypt ca. 5,000 papyri, including P. GC inv. 105, on the basis of their illegal acquisition circumstances.

P. Sapph. Obbink appears to have been part of the same bookroll to which P. GC inv. 105 belonged. In an article published in 2017, Simon Burris showed that a fragment found among those of the Green collection physically joined with P. Sapph. Obbink (*ZPE* 201: 12–14). This evidence suggests that P. Sapph.

Obbink too came from the same source as P. GC inv. 105. In the meantime, Michael Sampson has published an article that also questions the provenance of the papyri as reported in chapter 2 of this book (*Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* 57 [2020] 143–169). Dirk Obbink, the author of this chapter, was given the opportunity by Brill publishers to respond to this evidence, but so far they have not received a substantive response. He has told them that he is working on an academic article in which he disputes the findings of Sampson, but he has not mentioned a timeline. Considering the above, in consultation with Brill publishers, we therefore have retracted this chapter, although it will remain accessible.

The repatriation of the Green Sappho fragments has restored these papyri to its rightful owner. We hope that they will be made available to the scholarly community in their new location both directly and through on-line digital reproductions, so they can be studied further. The status of P. Sapph. Obbink remains problematic, however, not only because its provenance is tainted, but also because the papyrus, which is the main testimony of the Brothers and the Kypris poems, is inaccessible. We sincerely hope that it will also be made available to the academic community soon and its acquisition circumstances will be fully explained. So far we have not seen any evidence to suggest that either P. GC inv. 105 or P. Sapph. Obbink is not authentic.

We as the editors of this volume will continue to monitor the developments around these papyri and we will, in consultation with the publisher, update this postscript or take further measures when necessary, on the basis of new scholarly evidence.