Introducing P. Oxy. 2289, Edgar Lobel wrote in 1951 of the then ‘newest’ Sappho papyrus: ‘It cannot be said to add much to our knowledge and in two places it brings new darkness’. Little could he have foreseen that it would overlap with and identify two previously unknown poems and related fragments of Sappho published last year. I begin by summarizing a published report documenting the source of the new fragments and their conservation. I then show how the content and authorship of the fragments were established, and how analyzing the make-up of the papyrus roll yields a strategy for reconstructing its more fragmentary portions.

All of the fragments are written in the same bookhand and formed part of the same papyrus roll. The fragments would have been part of a critical edition of Sappho Book 1 produced at Alexandria. The bookroll would have contained in total about 45 columns, and held 330 Sapphic stanzas, based on the line-count (1,320 stichoi) that appears at the end of the roll containing P. Oxy. 1231, thus at least fifty-some poems—based an average of seven stanzas per poem, the maximum known for any poem of Sappho’s (viz. Sappho fr. 1), although many will have had fewer. Each column would have been about the height of an octavo book and about the width of your hand. It is likely that the roll was at some point taken to the Fayum. Although papyrus rolls did not have particularly great longevity, this one lasted long enough to be damaged and repaired, before eventually being recycled as some type of cartonnage—a common practice.
Provenance and Conservation

As reported and documented by the London owner of the Brothers and Kypris Song fragment, all of the fragments were recovered from a fragment of papyrus cartonnage formerly in the collection of David M. Robinson and subsequently bequeathed to the Library of the University of Mississippi. It was one of two pieces flat inside a sub-folder (sub-folder ‘e3’) inside a main folder (labelled ‘Papyri Fragments; Gk.’), one of 59 packets of papyri fragments sold at auction at Christie’s in London in November 2011. They contained texts ranging from the 2nd to the 4th century AD, probably originally from the Arsinoite nome where many of Robinson's other papyri were purchased or originated. The collection was documented by William H. Willis in a 1961 article, in which the folder labeled ‘Papyri Fragments; Gk.’ (and sub-folders numbered ‘e’ to ‘e12’ within it) are part of the ‘third group’ of Robinson Papyri described by Willis. The ‘Egyptian dealer’ from whom Robinson, then a professor at the University of Mississippi, acquired the papyri in 1954 is known to have been Sultan Maguid Sameda of the Art Gallery Maguid Sameda, 55 Gambhouria Street in Cairo. Other papyri, both literary and documentary are now either in or have sister pieces in several US and European collections (after having been sold by Mississippi or through original acquisition from the same dealer), among them Duke, Cologne, the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, and the Bodmer Foundation, Geneva. Their dispersal has been documented in a fascinating study by James Robinson.

The layers of the cartonnage fragment, a thin flat compressed mass of papyrus fragments, were separated by the owner and his staff by dissolving in a warm-water solution. The owner originally believed that he had dissolved a piece of ‘mummy’ cartonnage. But this turned out upon closer inspection of

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6 Provenance and Conservation: Obbink (2015a) and (2015b); Willis (1961) 381–382; London sale: Christie’s (2011) lot 1. Adjacent in folder ‘Papyri Fragments; Gk.’ to sub-folder ‘e3’ was P. Rob. inv. 22, a receipt for a wheat transaction, ςυναγορ[αϲτικόν], from Bakchias (in folder ‘g’), and part of the extensive 2nd century Sitologoi report from Theadelphia illustrated (in part) in Christie’s (2011) and designated ‘P. Rob.’, but without inventory number. An additional fragment of this papyrus was in folder ‘Papyri Fragments; Gk.’, sub-folder ‘e12’. The coherence and proximity of these fragments and their labelling shows that the Sappho fragments were part of one of a number of catalogued and unpublished P. Rob. fragments.


8 Robinson (2011) esp. 83 with n. 3 on Maguid Sameda, his son Sultan, and Willis’s ‘third group’ of Robinson papyri.

9 Obbink (2014a).