



Finglass, P. J., & Kelly, A. (2021). Introduction. In P. J. Finglass, & A. Kelly (Eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Sappho* (pp. 1-8). Cambridge University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316986974.001>

Peer reviewed version

License (if available):
Unspecified

Link to published version (if available):
[10.1017/9781316986974.001](https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316986974.001)

[Link to publication record in Explore Bristol Research](#)
PDF-document

This is the accepted author manuscript (AAM). The final published version (version of record) is available online via Cambridge University Press at <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316986974>. Please refer to any applicable terms of use of the publisher.

University of Bristol - Explore Bristol Research

General rights

This document is made available in accordance with publisher policies. Please cite only the published version using the reference above. Full terms of use are available: <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/red/research-policy/pure/user-guides/ebr-terms/>

Introduction

P. J. FINGLASS AND ADRIAN KELLY

No ancient poet has a wider following today than Sappho; her status as the most famous woman poet from Greco-Roman antiquity has, down the centuries, ensured a continuing fascination with her work. The ancient edition of her poems, which filled probably nine books and thus over 10,000 lines, did not survive; but the fragments of those poems which have been preserved, both as quotations in authors whose works did outlast antiquity, and on ancient papyrus manuscripts recovered from the sands of Egypt, offer many glimpses of her poetic brilliance. The publication of quotation fragments from the sixteenth century onwards, and of papyrus fragments from the late nineteenth century, have inspired the imaginations of classical scholars and creative artists alike, but her reception within and beyond antiquity has always had a complicated relationship with her poetry and with the ancient biographical traditions that surrounded her.

The chapters in this volume illustrate how every age both makes its own Sappho and reuses motifs identified and canonised by its predecessors. The Phaon-theme, treated by several contributors, well illustrates this. The story originally held that Sappho became infatuated with Phaon, who piloted the ferry between Lesbos and the mainland; when he rejected her advances, she committed suicide by jumping from the Leucadian rock (KIVILO pp. YYY). No fragments of Sappho refer to the story; the only ancient reference to her even writing about Phaon comes from an isolated and shadowy source, 'Palaephatus' (perhaps fourth century BC). Whatever the origin of their association, the very idea of a male lover,

with the accompanying tale of suicide, authorised a reassuringly heterosexual Sappho for audiences unsettled by the openly homosexual orientation of her poetry (MUELLER). This need, felt by audiences throughout the history of her reception, underlines how extraordinary the sexual and poetic perspectives found in Sappho's work were felt to be; the quality of her poetry demanded its transmission, but also a biographical carapace to insulate audiences from its more unsettling aspects. The association between Sappho and Phaon also led to a bifurcated biographical tradition – two Sapphos, one the famous poet and the other a courtesan linked with Phaon – which lived on well after antiquity: Guy Morillon, correspondent of Erasmus, detailed it in the preface to his edition of Ovid's *Heroides* (GILLESPIE pp. YYY).

In the Roman world, Plautus' *Miles Gloriosus* modelled on Sappho the female character Acroteleium (literally 'cliff-top end', probably an allusion to the story of Sappho's suicide) in her apparent pursuit of the male hero, Pyrgopolynices, modelled in turn on Phaon (MORGAN pp. YYY). Sappho's most devoted Roman reader, Catullus, does not mention the Phaon story, but the positioning of his poetic self in an amatory relationship with 'Lesbia' invigorates a heterosexual narrative which the Phaon story had done so much to crystallise (*ibid.* pp. YYY). The story also assimilated her to other literary types, such as the abandoned heroines who formed the basis for Ovid's *Heroides*. Though probably not by Ovid, the fifteenth letter in that collection (the *Letter to Phaon*) had an influential afterlife (GILLESPIE pp. YYY, PIANTANIDA pp. YYY, JOHNSON ch. 26 pp. YYY). A late fifteenth-century manuscript of Octovien de Saint-Gelais' French translation of the *Heroides* contains an illumination depicting Sappho just before her leap (Oxford, Balliol College 383, fol. 167v.) [Fig. 11]: standing on the rock, her musical instruments abandoned on the ground, looking into the waters below. The roll held by Sappho in Raphael's fresco *Parnassus* (c. 1509–11) [Fig. 12] is probably a copy of that same poem (Most 1995: 19 ≈ Greene 1996b: 17).

Alexander Pope's poem 'Sappho to Phaon' (1712) draws on Ovid to tell the story of a woman who rejects all her other qualities and abilities for her love for the ferryman, while Maria Fortuna's play *Saffo* (1776) portrays Sappho as the wronged woman, abandoned to her death by an unworthy Faone; a similarly virtuous portrait in Alessandro Verri's novel *Le avventure di Saffo di Mitilene* (1782) was linked by the author with his horror at the bisexually promiscuous Sappho of antiquity, and Vincenzo Imperiali's *La Faoniade* (1780) had Sappho compose a ten-book poem in Phaon's honour. A painting *Sappho and Phaon* by Jacques-Louis David (1809) [Fig. 13] presents a disturbing take on the story, with Phaon cradling Sappho's head as they both gaze directly at the viewer, with Sappho reaching for but separated from her lyre (Goldhill 2006: 260–1 ≈ 2011: 72–3).

Maria Rosa Gálvez's *Safo* (1804) used the tale as a paradigm for the author's life, as she struggled to assert independence and freedom as an artist (PIANTANIDA pp. YYY). Her Sappho was not afraid of her passion, though not redeemed by it either. Then Franz Grillparzer's *Sappho* (1818) reversed the relationship: now Sappho was the distant, artistically pure object of Phaon's affections (added to those of Anacreon and Alcaeus), won specifically by the quality of her poetry. The emigré English writer Adele Nicholson (1865–1904) was compared, approvingly, to Sappho in this respect (and others) by the Indian poet Kamala Das (1934–2009), herself a vital figure in the reception of Sappho (VANITA pp. YYY). In the twentieth century more generally, Phaon retreated a little, though he was prominent in works as varied as Lawrence Durrell's *Sappho. A Play in Verse* (1950, JOHNSON ch. 26 pp. YYY), Christine Brückner's prose monologue *Don't Forget the Kingfisher's Name* (1983) (PIANTANIDA pp. YYY), and even Erica Jong's suggestively named novel *Sappho's Leap* (2004, GOFF AND HARLOE pp. YYY). Nowadays, given a change in attitudes to the expression of homosexuality and the discovery of papyrus fragments which openly expressed

her desire for women, Phaon is a curious footnote in Sappho studies, a manifestation more of the desire to inoculate her sexuality than to appreciate and understand her poetry.

Contemporary mores thus shaped the themes and qualities of Sappho's poetry through an amatory biography that allowed her reputation to overcome the obstacles frequently put in its way. Phaon has been a comforting fiction, a source of heavy moralising, a symbol of triumphant heterosexism, and even the defeated rival left in Sappho's wake; but throughout he has served to conceal or reveal Sappho herself in ways that her audiences could understand and enjoy.

The volume is divided into four sections. The first, 'Contexts', examines Sappho in her own time and place: her biography, with all its unreliable traditions (KIVILO), the historical status and identity of her home, Lesbos, in the archaic world (THOMAS), Sappho's position in, and contribution to, ancient discourses on sexuality (MUELLER), and the relationship of her works to other poetry of the archaic period (KELLY, RÖSLER, STEINER). The second, 'Poetics', evaluates Sappho's poetic achievement from many different perspectives, considering questions of performance (KURKE), genre (FERRARI), metre (BATTEZZATO), and dialect (TRIBULATO); of her poetic language (CAZZATO), lyricism (PURVES), and self-construction (LARDINOIS); and of the role of myth and the gods in her work (SCODEL, SWIFT). The third, 'Transmission', looks specifically at how (a fraction of) Sappho's poetry has made it to our own day: the ancient edition of her poetry (PRAUSCELLO); the discovery of the papyri and what they have told us about the survival and loss of her work in late antiquity (FINGLASS ch. 18); the editions which have popularised her work in the modern period (FINGLASS ch. 17).

The fourth, 'Receptions', is the biggest, containing over 40% of the book. Classical reception has been a major part of Cambridge Companions in our discipline for over two

decades now, thanks to the pioneering work of Charles Martindale in the 1990s (Martindale 2013: 170). Our volume follows in that tradition, while taking it further by emphasising Sappho's influence across the globe. It begins with her ancient and medieval receptions, which set up the major lines along which her poetry and persona would be handed on to subsequent ages: fifth- and fourth-century Athens (COO), the Hellenistic world of the third and second centuries (HUNTER), Rome (MORGAN), the Greek world under Rome (BOWIE), and finally Byzantium (PONTANI).

We then move into an early modern and modern world, though still largely European in focus. From the fifteenth to nineteenth centuries, our contributors find Sappho's presence and influence in England and France (GILLESPIE, JOHNSON ch. 26), Italy, Germany, and Spain (PIANTANIDA), and Greece (KARGIOTIS). Finally, the volume expands its focus worldwide: to the United States and Anglophone world more generally (JOHNSON ch. 26, GOFF AND HARLOE), Australia and New Zealand (JOHNSON ch. 29), Latin America (DE BROSE), Hebrew literature (JACOBS), India (VANITA), and China and Japan (CHEN).

Inevitably there are gaps: Africa, Russia, Poland, modern France; music, film, popular culture; more besides. A companion and not an encyclopedia, our book has no ambitions to completeness – something that the richness of Sappho's reception would in any case particularly resist. Nevertheless, we hope that the volume sketches at least some aspects of that reception in cultures diverse across time and space, and offers a stimulus to fill the many gaps that remain. Moreover, in our view it is high time that global reception becomes an established feature of classical Cambridge Companions. The old Eurocentric way of doing things is looking increasingly out of date; we must do justice to the worldwide impact of Greco-Roman antiquity if our subject is to flourish.

A note on the text. There is (remarkably) no complete critical edition of Sappho's fragments, or of her testimonia (that is, ancient evidence, whether textual or material, that sheds light on Sappho's life and work while not actually preserving text from her poetry). The most recent critical edition, by E.-M. Voigt, was published in 1971; a major work of scholarship, it is a rare and expensive book, and considerably out of date thanks to the publication of new papyri. As a consequence, our volume cites the fragments and testimonia of Sappho using the numeration of the Loeb Classical Library edition by D. A. Campbell (1982, reprinted with corrections 1990), since this book is easily available both in print and online (www.loebclassics.com), and because it is equipped with an English translation. (Fragments and testimonia are cited without 'Campbell' or 'C.' after the number; testimonia not in Campbell's edition are cited from Voigt's, with a 'V.', as are occasional poetical fragments which Campbell omits.) But a commitment to using Campbell's numeration does not imply a commitment to using his text. No edition of Sappho could be definitive; contributors to the volume take responsibility for the textual choices made in the fragments that they cite. (The above also applies to Sappho's contemporary Alcaeus, whose fragments and testimonia are edited by Campbell in the same Loeb volume that contains the remains of Sappho's poetry; so too are those fragments found at the very end of Campbell's volume, which are by either Sappho or Alcaeus.)

Recent papyrological discoveries pose their own referencing problems. For instance, Sappho's poem on Tithonus (the 'New Sappho') was known in part, from several papyri, to Voigt and Campbell, who printed them as their fr. 58; but the most recent witnesses of this poem could not be included in their texts, and so a full reference to that poem would now look something like the cumbersome fr. 58.11–22+P.Köln 429+430. Equally, her poem on her brothers Charaxus and Larichus (the 'Newest Sappho') has no fragment number; although the relationship between Sappho and her brothers was known to Herodotus, we

lacked an actual poem on the theme until the publication of this text in 2014

(P.Sapph.Obbink). Such a confusing situation means that the new papyri published after Campbell's edition are cited not by number but as the Tithonus Poem, Brothers Poem, and (for another new poem first published in 2014) Cypris Poem; where relevant individual contributors specify a particular published text.

Some technical symbols necessitated by the printing of papyrological texts require explanation. ⊗ denotes the start of a poem. A dot printed under a letter indicates that the letter is doubtful; a dot printed under empty space indicates that ink is present, but the letter in question cannot be identified. Gaps on a papyrus are represented by square brackets, []; attempts by scholars to fill in such gaps are found within the brackets. Letters printed that are not found on the papyrus are placed within angular brackets, < >; letters found on the papyrus that are not printed are placed within curly brackets, { }.

Cross-references to other chapters are indicated by the use of small capitals for the chapter author's name. Translations from the Greek are by the author of the chapter unless otherwise indicated.

The recent papyrological discoveries just mentioned are problematic in ways beyond mere referencing. The provenance of the 'Newest Sappho' papyri is unknown; the identity of the owner of one of these papyri, P.Sapph.Obbink (which contains the Brothers Poem and the Cypris Poem), is unknown; the location of that papyrus is unknown; whether Dr Dirk Obbink, apparently the only person (apart from its owner) who has seen this papyrus, is aware of its current location, is unknown. This lack of key information about priceless

cultural artifacts is more than regrettable; see Mazza 2019, which links to earlier pieces documenting deep concerns over the uncertain origins of these papyri.

Such uncertainty forces us to confront the question of whether these texts are in fact authentic. At the time of writing, six years after their original publication, no-one has argued that they are not. Forging a new poem of Sappho would be no easy business, and if it is a forgery, it has fooled many leading scholars; it contains not a single linguistic or metrical slip. Accordingly, these papyri are treated as authentic throughout this volume. But we repeat that the circumstances surrounding the discovery and publication of these papyri fall very far short of ideal.

For advice on specific points in different chapters we are indebted to Dr Sofia Gil de Carvalho (Coimbra), Miss Martina Delucchi (Bristol), Dr Aneurin Ellis-Evans (Oxford), Dr John Gilmore (Warwick), Professor Stephen Harrison (Oxford), Dr Michael Hawcroft (Oxford), Professor Michael Hockx (Notre Dame), Professor Simon Hornblower (London), Dr Laura Jansen (Bristol), Dr Anna Lamari (Thessaloniki), Professor Elena Lombardi (Oxford), Professor Rana Mitter (Oxford), Professor Diane Rayor (Grand Valley State), Professor Yoshinori Sano (Tokyo), and Professor Alan Sommerstein (Nottingham). Two referees made valuable comments which improved the typescript. Cambridge University Press's production team, led by Nigel Graves, were a pleasure to work with; and our copy editor, Jane Burkowski, significantly improved the accuracy and presentation of the finished volume. Finally, we thank Michael Sharp for seeing the volume through the whole publication process, and for suggesting that we undertake it in the first place.