

## 4.2. Sappho / Selected Poems

Sappho was born ca. 630–612 BCE. Her wealth allowed her leisure to study the arts on the isle of Lesbos, which was a cultural center in 7th century Hellas. She wrote her poems to be performed with the accompaniment of a lyre, innovating the music and meter.

Source: Sappho. *Sappho*. Trans. Mary Barnard. Berkeley: U. of California Press, 1958.

### I have not had one word from her

I have not had one word from her  
Frankly I wish I were dead  
    When she left, she wept  
a great deal; she said to me, “This parting must be  
    endured, Sappho. I go unwillingly.”  
I said, “Go, and be happy  
    but remember (you know  
    well) whom you leave shackled by love  
“If you forget me, think  
    of our gifts to Aphrodite  
    and all the loveliness that we shared  
“all the violet tiaras,  
    braided rosebuds, dill and  
    crocus twined around your young neck  
“myrrh poured on your head  
    and on soft mats girls with  
    all that they most wished for beside them  
“while no voices chanted  
    choruses without ours,  
    no woodlot bloomed in spring without song...”

### To Andromeda

That country girl has witched your wishes,  
    all dressed up in her country clothes  
    and she hasn't got the sense  
    to hitch her rags above her ankles.

### On the throne of many hues

On the throne of many hues, Immortal Aphrodite,  
    child of Zeus, weaving wiles—I beg you  
    not to subdue my spirit, Queen,  
    with pain or sorrow  
but come—if ever before  
    having heard my voice from far away  
    you listened, and leaving your father's  
    golden home you came  
in your chariot yoked with swift, lovely  
    sparrows bringing you over the dark earth  
    thick-feathered wings swirling down  
    from the sky through mid-air  
arriving quickly—you, Blessed One,  
    with a smile on your unaging face  
    asking again what have I suffered  
    and why am I calling again  
and in my wild heart what did I most wish  
    to happen to me: “Again whom must I persuade

    back into the harness of your love?  
    Sappho, who wrongs you?  
For if she flees, soon she'll pursue,  
    she doesn't accept gifts, but she'll give,  
    if not now loving, soon she'll love  
    even against her will.”  
Come to me now again, release me from  
    this pain, everything my spirit longs  
    to have fulfilled, fulfill, and you  
    be my ally

### Please

Come back to me, Gongyla, here tonight,  
    You, my rose, with your Lydian lyre.  
    There hovers forever around you delight:  
    A beauty desired.  
Even your garment plunders my eyes.  
    I am enchanted: I who once  
    Complained to the Cyprus-born goddess,  
    Whom I now beseech  
Never to let this lose me grace  
    But rather bring you back to me:  
    Amongst all mortal women the one  
    I most wish to see.

### Some an army of horsemen

Some an army of horsemen, some an army on foot  
    and some say a fleet of ships is the loveliest sight  
    on this dark earth; but I say it is what-  
    ever you desire:  
and it is possible to make this perfectly clear  
    to all; for the woman who far surpassed all others  
    in her beauty, Helen, left her husband—  
    the best of all men—  
behind and sailed far away to Troy; she did not spare  
    a single thought for her child nor for her dear parents  
    but [the goddess of love] led her astray  
    [to desire...]  
[...which]  
    reminds me now of Anactoria  
    although far away,

## To me is seems

To me it seems

that man has the fortune of the gods,  
whoever sits beside you, and close,  
who listens to you sweetly speaking  
and laughing temptingly;  
my heart flutters in my breast,  
whenever I look quickly, for a moment—  
I say nothing, my tongue broken,  
a delicate fire runs under my skin,  
my eyes see nothing, my ears roar,  
cold sweat rushes down me,  
trembling seizes me,  
I am greener than grass,  
to myself I seem  
needing but little to die. But all must be endured, since...

## To Atthis

Though in Sardis now,  
she thinks of us constantly  
and of the life we shared.  
She saw you as a goddess  
and above all your dancing gave her deep joy.  
Now she shines among Lydian women like  
the rose-fingered moon  
rising after sundown, erasing all  
stars around her, and pouring light equally  
across the salt sea  
and over densely flowered fields  
lucent under dew. Her light spreads  
on roses and tender thyme  
and the blooming honey-lotus.  
Often while she wanders she remem-  
bers you, gentle Atthis,  
and desire eats away at her heart  
for us to come.