Sappho
- poems -

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Sappho (c. 600 BCE)

The only contemporary source which refers to Sappho's life is her own body of poetry, and scholars are skeptical of biographical readings of it. Later biographical traditions, from which all more detailed accounts derive, have also been cast into doubt.

An Oxyrhynchus papyrus from around AD 200 and the Suda agree that Sappho had a mother called Cleïs and a daughter by the same name. Two preserved fragments of Sappho's poetry refer to a Cleïs. In fragment 98, Sappho addresses Cleïs, saying that she has no way of obtaining a decorated headband for her. Fragment 132 reads in full: "I have a beautiful child who looks like golden flowers, my darling Cleïs, for whom I would not (take) all Lydia or lovely..."

These fragments have often been interpreted as referring to Sappho's daughter or as confirming that Sappho had a daughter with this name. But even if a biographic reading of the verses is accepted, this is not certain. Cleïs is referred to in fragment 132 with the Greek word pais, which can as easily indicate a slave or any young person as an offspring. It is possible that these verses or others like them were misunderstood by ancient writers, leading to the biographical tradition which has come down to us.

Fragment 102 has its speaker address a "sweet mother", sometimes taken as an indication that Sappho began to write poetry while her mother was still alive. The name of Sappho's father is widely given as Scamandronymus, he is not referred to in any of the surviving fragments. In his Heroides, Ovid has Sappho lament that, "Six birthdays of mine had passed when the bones of my parent, gathered from the pyre, drank before their time my tears." Ovid may have based this on a poem by Sappho no longer extant.

Sappho was reported to have three brothers; Erigyius (or Eurygius), Larichus and Charaxus. The Oxyrhynchus papyrus says that Charaxus was the eldest but that Sappho was more fond of the young Larichus. According to Athenaeus, Sappho often praised Larichus for pouring wine in the town hall of Mytilene, an office held by boys of the best families. This indication that Sappho was born into an aristocratic family is consistent with the sometimes rarefied environments which her verses record.

A story given by Herodotus and later by Strabo, Athenaeus, Ovid and the Suda, tells of a relation between Charaxus and the Egyptian courtesan Rhodopis. Herodotus, the oldest source of the story, reports that Charaxus ransomed Rhodopis for a large sum and that after he returned to Mitylene, Sappho scolded
him in verse. Strabo, writing some 400 years later, adds that Charaxus was trading with Lesbian wine and that Sappho called Rhodopis Doricha. Athenaeus, another 200 years later, calls the courtesan Doricha and maintains that Herodotus had her confused with Rhodopis, another woman altogether. He also cites an epigram by Posidippus (3rd c. BC) which refers to Doricha and Sappho. Based on this story, scholars have speculated that references to a Doricha may have been found in Sappho's poems. None of the extant fragments have this name in full but fragments 7 and 15 are often restored to include it. Joel Lidov has criticized this restoration, arguing that the Doricha story is not helpful in restoring any fragment by Sappho and that its origins lie in the work of Cratinus or another of Herodotus' comic contemporaries.

The Suda is alone in claiming that Sappho was married to a "very wealthy man called Cercylas, who traded from Andros" and that he was Cleis' father. This tradition may have been invented by the comic poets as a witticism, as the name of the purported husband means "prick from the Isle of Man."
A Hymn To Venus

O Venus, beauty of the skies,
To whom a thousand temples rise,
Gaily false in gentle smiles,
Full of love-perplexing wiles;
O goddess, from my heart remove
The wasting cares and pains of love.

If ever thou hast kindly heard
A song in soft distress preferred,
Propitious to my tuneful vow,
A gentle goddess, hear me now.
Descend, thou bright immortal guest,
In all thy radiant charms confessed.

Thou once didst leave almighty Jove
And all the golden roofs above:
The car thy wanton sparrows drew,
Hovering in air they lightly flew;
As to my bower they winged their way
I saw their quivering pinions play.

The birds dismissed (while you remain)
Bore back their empty car again:
Then you, with looks divinely mild,
In every heavenly feature smiled,
And asked what new complaints I made,
And why I called you to my aid?

What frenzy in my bosom raged,
And by what cure to be assuaged?
What gentle youth I would allure,
Whom in my artful toils secure?
Who does thy tender heart subdue,
Tell me, my Sappho, tell me who?

Though now he shuns thy longing arms,
He soon shall court thy slighted charms;
Though now thy offerings he despise,
He soon to thee shall sacrifice;
Though now he freezes, he soon shall burn,
And be thy victim in his turn.

Celestial visitant, once more
Thy needful presence I implore.
In pity come, and ease my grief,
Bring my distempered soul relief,
Favour thy suppliant's hidden fires,
And give me all my heart desires.

Sappho
A Lament For Adonis

Cytherea, thy dainty Adonis is dying!
Ah, what shall we do?
O Nymphs, let it echo, the voice of your crying,
The greenwood through!

O Forest-maidens, smite on the breast,
Rend ye the delicate-woven vest!
Let the wail ring wild and high:
'Ah for Adonis!' cry.
O Sappho, how canst thou chant the bliss
Of Kypris — after such day as this?
'Oh Adonis, thou leavest me — woe for my lot!
And Eros, my servant, availeth me not!' 
So wails Cytherea, grief-distraught.
'Who shall console me for thee? There is none —
Not Ares my god-lover, passionate one
Who sware in his jealousy forth to hale
Hephaestus my spouse from his palace, if he
Dared but to lift his eyes unto me.
Not he can console me, Adonis, for thee!' 

Wail for Adonis, wail!

Sappho
Although They Are

Although they are
only breath, words
which I command
are immortal

Sappho
An Epithalamium

Fragments 91, 92, 99, 106, 104, 103, 100, 105, 101, 102, 96, 109, 93, 94, 97, 95, and 133 combined.

Raise high the beams of the raftered hall,
(Sing the Hymen-refrain!)
Ye builders, of the bridal-dwelling!
(Sing the Hymen-refrain!)
Lo, the bridegroom comes, as the War-god tall —
(Sing the Hymen-refrain!)
Now nay — yet our tallest in stature excelling;
(Sing the Hymen-refrain!)
For stately he towers above all the throng
As the Lesbian singer towers among
All alien poets, a prince of song.

O happy bridegroom! it cometh to-day,
The bridal thine heart hith longed for aye!
At last shall she be thine own, the maid
For whom thou hast sighed, for whom thou hast prayed.
For none other maiden beneath the skies,
O bridegroom, was like unto her in thine eyes.
Whereunto may I liken thee, bridegroom dear?
To a green vine-shoot in the spring of the year.
Now, now let the bridegroom rejoice, for the bride
Into the hall cometh joyful-eyed.
Ethereal-pale is her lovely face.
Hail, bridegroom! Hail, bride, queenly in grace!
How goodly to see thy lord stands there!
And his goodness will keep him for thee ever fair.
Ah, doth she, ah doth she regretfully brood? —
Does her heart still yearn after maidenhood?
Nay, not in this hour she cries:
'Maidenhood, maidenhood, whither away
Forsaking me?'
While maidenhood replies:
'Not again unto thee shall I come for aye,
Not again unto thee!'
No more, no more doth she chant
Proud young virginity's vaunt:
'As the sweet-apple flames on the tip of a spray against the sky,
At its uttermost point, which the gleaners forgot, and passed it by —
O nay, they forgot it not, but they could not attain so high.'
But she thinks of the fate, an evil thing,
That the years fast-fleeting to fair maids bring.
When the roses are faded, the gold turns grey.
And the smoothness is furrowed, as singeth the lay —
'As the hyacinth-flower on the mountain-side that the shepherds tread
Underfoot, and low on the earth its bloom dark-splendid is shed.'
Lo, her hand into thine hath her father given.
And thou ledest her home 'neath the Star of Even;
To thy portal the bridal-train draws near.
And the Chant Processional rings out clear:
'Hail, Hesper, who bringest home all
That radiant Dawn scattered wide,
Bringest back unto fold and stall
The sheep and the goat, and thy call
Brings the child to the mother's side.
Let the rose-ringed Star of the Evenfall
Usher thee on, love's willing thrall,
Bride, garden of loves like roses blowing.
Bride, loveliest image of Paphos' Queen!
So pass to the bride-bower, pass within
To the nuptial couch, for the sweet bestowing
On the bridegroom, whose measure is overflowing.
Of the bliss, wherein honoured is Hera: 'tis owned
Of the Marriage-goddess, the silver-throned.'

Sappho
Anactoria

Yes, Atthis, you may be sure

      Even in Sardis
Anactoria will think often of us

of the life we shared here, when you seemed
the Goddess incarnate
to her and your singing pleased her best

Now among Lydian women she in her
turn stands first as the red-fingered moon rising at sunset takes

precedence over stars around her;
her light spreads equally
on the salt sea and fields thick with bloom

Delicious dew pours down to freshen
roses, delicate thyme
and blossoming sweet clover; she wanders

aimlessly, thinking of gentle
Atthis, her heart hanging
heavy with longing in her little breast

She shouts aloud, Come! we know it;
thousand-eared night repeats that cry
across the sea shining between us

      Sappho
      tr. Barnard

Sappho
And Their Feet Move

And their feet move
rhythmically, as tender
feet of Cretan girls
danced once around an

altar of love, crushing
a circle in the soft
smooth flowering grass

Sappho
Awed By Her Splendor

Awed by her splendor
stars near the lovely
moon cover their own
bright faces
When she
is roundest and lights
earth with her silver

Sappho
Before They Were Mothers

Before they were mothers
Leto and Niobe
had been the most
devoted of friends

Sappho
Blame Aphrodite

It's no use
Mother dear, I
can't finish my
weaving
    You may
blame Aphrodite

soft as she is

she has almost
killed me with
love for that boy

    Sappho
    tr. Barnard

Sappho
Claïs

I have a daughter,
Claïs fair,
Poised like a golden flower in the air,
Lydian treasures her limbs outshine
(Claïs, beloved one,
Claïs mine!)

Sappho
Cleis

Sleep, darling
I have a small
daughter called
Cleis, who is

like a golden
flower
    I wouldn't
take all Croesus'
kingdom with love
thrown in, for her

---

Don't ask me what to wear
I have no embroidered
headband from Sardis to
give you, Cleis, such as
I wore
    and my mother
always said that in her
day a purple ribbon
looped in the hair was thought
to be high style indeed

but we were dark:
    a girl
whose hair is yellower than
torchlight should wear no
headdress but fresh flowers

    Sappho
    tr. Barnard

Sappho
Cyprian, In My Dream

Cyprian, in my dream
the folds of a purple
kerchief shadowed
your cheeks --- the one

Timas one time sent,
a timid gift, all
the way from Phocaea

Sappho
tr. Barnard

Sappho
Dica

With flowers fair adorn thy lustrous hair,
Dica, amidst thy locks sweet blossoms twine,
With thy soft hands, for so a maiden stands
Accepted of the gods, whose eyes divine
Are turned away from her--though fair as May
She waits, but round whose locks no flowers shine.

Sappho
Drapple-Thorned Aphrodite,

Dapple-throned Aphrodite,
 eternal daughter of God,
 snare-knitter! Don't, I beg you,

cow my heart with grief! Come,
as once when you heard my far-off cry and, listening, stepped

from your father's house to your gold car, to yoke the pair whose beautiful thick-feathered wings

oaring down mid-air from heaven carried you to light swiftly on dark earth; then, blissful one,

smiling your immortal smile you asked, What ailed me now that me me call you again? What was it that my distracted heart most wanted? "Whom has Persuasion to bring round now

"to your love? Who, Sappho, is unfair to you? For, let her run, she will soon run after;

"if she won't accept gifts, she will one day give them; and if she won't love you -- she soon will

"love, although unwillingly..."
If ever -- come now! Relieve this intolerable pain!

What my heart most hopes will happen, make happen; you yourself join forces on my side!
Evening

Children astray to their mothers, and goats to the herd,
Sheep to the shepherd, through twilight the wings of the bird,
All things that morning has scattered with fingers of gold,
All things thou bringest, O Evening! at last to the fold.

Sappho
Grace

What country maiden charms thy heart,
However fair, however sweet,
Who has not learned by gracious Art
To draw her dress around her feet?

Sappho
He is more than a hero
he is a god in my eyes--
the man who is allowed
to sit beside you -- he

who listens intimately
to the sweet murmur of
your voice, the enticing

laughter that makes my own
heart beat fast. If I meet
you suddenly, I can'

speak -- my tongue is broken;
a thin flame runs under
my skin; seeing nothing,

hearing only my own ears
drumming, I drip with sweat;
trembling shakes my body

and I turn paler than
dry grass. At such times
death isn't far from me

Sappho
Hesperus The Bringer

O Hesperus, thou bringest all good things--
Home to the weary, to the hungry cheer,
To the young bird the parent's brooding wings,
The welcome stall to the o'erlabored steer;
Whate'er our household gods protect of dear,
Are gathered round us by thy look of rest;
Thou bring'st the child too to its mother's breast.

Sappho
Hymn To Aphrodite

Throned in splendor, immortal Aphrodite!
Child of Zeus, Enchantress, I implore thee
Slay me not in this distress and anguish,
Lady of beauty.

Hither come as once before thou camest,
When from afar thou heard'st my voice lamenting,
Heard'st and camest, leaving thy glorious father's Palace golden,

Yoking thy chariot. Fair the doves that bore thee;
Swift to the darksome earth their course directing,
Waving their thick wings from the highest heaven
Down through the ether.

Quickly they came. Then thou, O blessed goddess,
All in smiling wreathed thy face immortal,
Bade me tell thee the cause of all my suffering,
Why now I called thee;

What for my maddened heart I most was longing.
"Whom," thou criest, "dost wish that sweet Persuasion
Now win over and lead to thy love, my Sappho?
Who is it wrongs thee?

"For, though now he flies, he soon shall follow,
Soon shall be giving gifts who now rejects them.
Even though now he love not, soon shall he love thee
Even though thou wouldst not."

Come then now, dear goddess, and release me
From my anguish. All my heart's desiring
Grant thou now. Now too again as aforetime,
Be thou my ally.

Sappho
I Have No Complaint

I have no complaint
prosperity that
the golden Muses
gave me was no
delusion: dead, I
won't be forgotten

Sappho
I Took My Lyre

I took my lyre and said:
Come now, my heavenly
tortoise shell: become
a speaking instrument

Sappho
tr. Barnard

Sappho
I Took My Lyre And Said

I took my lyre and said:
Come now, my heavenly
tortoise shell: become
a speaking instrument

Sappho
In Adoration

Blest as the immortal gods is he,
The youth whose eyes may look on thee,
Whose ears thy tongue's sweet melody
May still devour.

Thou smilest too!--sweet smile, whose charm
Has struck my soul with wild alarm,
And, when I see thee, bids disarm
Each vital power.

Speechless I gaze: the flame within
Runs swift o'er all my quivering skin:
My eyeballs swim; with dizzy din
My brain reels round;

And cold drops fall; and tremblings frail
Seize every limb; and grassy pale
I grow; and then--together fail
Both sight and sound.

Sappho
In The Spring Twilight

In the spring twilight
the full moon is shining:
Girls take their places
as though around an altar

Sappho
It is the Muses
who have caused me
to be honored: they
taught me their craft

Sappho
It Was You, Atthis, Who Said

It was you, Atthis, who said
"Sappho, if you will not get up and let us look at you I shall never love you again!

"Get up, unleash your suppleness, lift off your Chian nightdress and, like a lily leaning into

"a spring, bathe in the water. Cleis is bringing your best pruple frock and the yellow

"tunic down from the clothes chest; you will have a cloak thrown over you and flowers crowning your hair...

"Praxinoa, my child, will you please roast nuts for our breakfast? One of the gods is being good to us:

"today we are going at last into Mitylene, our favorite city, with Sappho, loveliest

"of its women; she will walk among us like a mother with all her daughters around her

"when she comes home from exile..."

But you forget everything

Sappho
It's No Use

It's no use
Mother dear, I
can't finish my
weaving
You may
blame Aphrodite
soft as she is
she has almost
killed me with
love for that boy

Sappho
Jealousy

He must feel blooded with the spirit of a god
to sit opposite you and listen, and reply,
to your talk, your laughter, your touching,
breath-held silences. But what I feel, sitting here
and watching you, so stops my heart and binds
my tongue that I can't think what I might say
to breach the aureole around you there.
It's as if someone with flint and stone had sparked
a fire that kindled the flesh along my arms
and smothered me in its smoke-blind rush.
Paler than summer grass, it seems
I am already dead, or little short of dying.

Sappho
Leto And Niobe

Before they were mothers
Leto and Niobe
had been the most
devoted of friends

Sappho
tr. Barnard

Sappho
Like The Gods. . .

In my eyes he matches the gods, that man who sits there facing you--any man whatever--listening from closeby to the sweetness of your voice as you talk, the

sweetness of your laughter: yes, that--I swear it--sets the heart to shaking inside my breast, since once I look at you for a moment, I can't speak any longer,

but my tongue breaks down, and then all at once a subtle fire races inside my skin, my eyes can't see a thing and a whirring whistle thrums at my hearing,

cold sweat covers me and a trembling takes ahold of me all over: I'm greener than the grass is and appear to myself to be little short of dying.

But all must be endured, since even a poor [Sappho]
Like The Sweet Apple

Like the sweet apple that reddens
At end of the bough--
Far end of the bough--
Left by the gatherer's swaying,
Forgotten, so thou.
Nay, not forgotten, ungotten,
Ungathered (till now).

Sappho
Like the very gods in my sight is he

Like the very gods in my sight is he who
sits where he can look in your eyes, who listens
close to you, to hear the soft voice, its sweetness
murmur in love and

laughter, all for him. But it breaks my spirit;
underneath my breast all the heart is shaken.
Let me only glance where you are, the voice dies,
I can say nothing,

but my lips are stricken to silence, underneath
my skin the tenuous flame suffuses;
nothing shows in front of my eyes, my ears are
muted in thunder.

And the sweat breaks running upon me, fever
shakes my body, paler I turn than grass is;
I can feel that I have been changed, I feel that
death has come near me.

Translated by Richmond Lattimore

Sappho
Loneliness

Set are the Pleiades; the Moon is down
And midnight dark on high.
The hours, the hours, drift by,
And here I lie,
Alone

Sappho
Love

Sweet mother, at the idle loom I lean,
Weary with longing for the boy that still
Remains a dream of loveliness--to fill
My soul, my life, at Aphrodite's will.

Sappho
Maidens Dancing In Moonlight

Then, as the broad moon rose on high,
The maidens stood the altar nigh;
And some in graceful measure
The well-loved spot danced round,
With lightsome footsteps treading
The soft and grassy ground.

Sappho
Moonlight

The stars around the fair moon fade
Against the night,
When gazing full she fills the glade
And spreads the seas with silvery light.

Sappho
Mother, I Cannot Mind My Wheel

Mother, I cannot mind my wheel;
My fingers ache, my lips are dry;
Oh! if you felt the pain I feel!
But oh, who ever felt as I!

Sappho
Must I Remind You, Cleis,

Must I remind you, Cleis,
that sounds of grief
are unbecoming in
a poet's household?

and that they are not
suitable in ours?
[Note: "A poet's household" is more literally one "dedicated to the Muses."

Sappho
Must I Remind You, Clesis,

Must I remind you, Clesis,
that sounds of grief
are unbecoming in
a poet's household?

and that they are not
suitable in ours?
[Note: "A poet's household" is more literally one "dedicated to the Muses."]

Sappho
My Garden

I've a garden, a garden of dreams,

Where the cool breeze whispering sways
Softly the apple-sprays,

And from leaves that shimmer and quiver
Down on mine eyelids streams
A slumber-river.

Sappho
I have had not 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...''

Sappho
tr. Barnard

Sappho
Ode To A Loved One

LEST as the immortal gods is he,
The youth who fondly sits by thee,
And hears and sees thee, all the while,
Softly speaks and sweetly smile.

'Twas this deprived my soul of rest,
And raised such tumults in my breast;
For, while I gazed, in transport tossed,
My breath was gone, my voice was lost;

My bosom glowed; the subtle flame
Ran quick through all my vital frame;
O'er my dim eyes a darkness hung;
My ears with hollow murmurs rung;

In dewy damps my limbs were chilled;
My blood with gentle horrors thrilled:
My feeble pulse forgot to play;
I fainted, sunk, and died away.

Sappho
Ode To Anactoria

That man, whoever he may be,
Who sits awhile to gaze on thee,
Hearing thy lovely laugh, thy speech,
Throned with the gods he seems to me;
For when a moment to mine eyes
Thy form discloses, silently
I stand consumed with fires that rise
Like flames around a sacrifice.
Sight have I none, bells out of tune
Ring in mine ears, my tongue lies dumb;
Paler than grass in later June,
Yet daring all
(To thee I come).

Sappho
Ode To Aphrodite

Deathless Aphrodite, throned in flowers,
Daughter of Zeus, O terrible enchantress,
With this sorrow, with this anguish, break my spirit
Lady, not longer!

Hear anew the voice! O hear and listen!
Come, as in that island dawn thou camest,
Billowing in thy yoked car to Sappho
Forth from thy father's

Golden house in pity! ... I remember:
Fleet and fair thy sparrows drew thee, beating
Fast their wings above the dusky harvests,
Down the pale heavens,

Lightning anon! And thou, O blest and brightest,
Smiling with immortal eyelids, asked me:
'Maiden, what betideth thee? Or wherefore
Callest upon me?

'What is here the longing more than other,
Here in this mad heart? And who the lovely
One beloved that wouldst lure to loving?
Sappho, who wrongs thee?

'See, if now she flies, she soon must follow;
Yes, if spurning gifts, she soon must offer;
Yes, if loving not, she soon must love thee,
Howso unwilling...'

Come again to me! O now! Release me!
End the great pang! And all my heart desireth
Now of fulfillment, fulfill! O Aphrodite,
Fight by my shoulder!

Sappho
Of Course I Love You

Of course I love you
but if you love me,
marry a young woman!

I couldn't stand it
to live with a young
man, I being older

Sappho
On The Tomb Of A Priestess Of Artemis

Voiceless I speak, and from the tomb reply
Unto Æthopia, Leto's child, was I
Vowed by the daughter of Hermocleides,
Who was the son of Saonaïades.
O virgin queen, unto my prayer incline,
Bless him and cast thy blessing on our line.

Sappho
On What Is Best

Some celebrate the beauty
    of knights, or infantry,
or billowing flotillas
    at battle on the sea.
Warfare has its glory,
    but I place far above
these military splendors
    the one thing that you love.

For proof of this contention
    examine history:
we all remember Helen,
    who left her family,
her child, and royal husband,
    to take a stranger's hand:
her beauty had no equal,
    but bowed to love's command.

As love then is the power
    that none can disobey,
so too my thoughts must follow
    my darling far away:
the sparkle of her laughter
    would give me greater joy
than all the bronze-clad heroes

Sappho
One Girl

I

Like the sweet apple which reddens upon the topmost bough,
A-top on the topmost twig--which the pluckers forgot, somehow--
Forget it not, nay, but got it not, for none could get it till now.

II

Like the wild hyacinth flower which on the hills is found,
Which the passing feet of the shepherds for ever tear and wound,
Until the purple blossom is trodden in the ground.

Sappho
Orchard Song

Cool murmur of water through apple-wood
Troughs without number
The whole orchard fills, whilst the leaves
Lend their music to slumber.

Sappho
Prayer To Our Lady Of Paphos

Dapple-throned Aphrodite,
eternal daughter of God,
snare-knitter! Don't, I beg you,
cow my heart with grief! Come,
as once when you heard my far-off cry and, listening, stepped

from your father's house to your
gold car, to yoke the pair whose
beautiful thick-feathered wings
oaring down mid-air from heaven
carried you to light swiftly
on dark earth; then, blissful one,

smiling your immortal smile
you asked, What ailed me now that
me call you again? What

was it that my distracted
heart most wanted? ` `Whom has
Persuasion to bring round now

` `to your love? Who, Sappho, is
unfair to you? For, let her
run, she will soon run after;

` `if she won't accept gifts, she
will one day give them; and if
she won't love you --- she soon will

` `love, although unwillingly..."
If ever --- come now! Relieve
this intolerable pain!

What my heart most hopes will
happen, make happen; you your-self join forces on my side!
This is my song of maidens dear to me.
Eranna, a slight girl I counted thee,
When first I looked upon thy form and face,
Slim as a reed, and all devoid of grace.
But stately stature, grace and beauty came
Unto thee with the years — O, dost not shame
For this, Eranna, that thy pride hath grown
Therewith? Alas for thee! I have not known
One beauty ever of more scornful mien,
As though thou wert of all earth's daughters queen!
Mnasidica is comelier, perchance,
Than my Gyrinna — ah, but sweetly rings
Gyrinna's matchless voice! In rapture-trance
I listen, listen, while Gyrinna sings.
Hero of Gyara is fleet of foot
As fawns, and as light-footed in the dance,
The dance taught by the measures of my lute.
Ever-impassioned Gorgo! — is it strange
That I grow weary of the change on change
Of thine adored ones? — of thy rhapsodies
O'er each new girlfriend, while the old love dies?
Joy to thee, daughter of a princely race,
For thy last dear one! Lie in her embrace —
Till shines a new star on thy raptured eyes!
Fonder of maids thou art, I trow, than she.
The ghost who nightly steal young girls, to be
In Hades of her woeful company.
This is my fair girl-garden: sweet they grow —
Rose, violet, asphodel and lily's snow;
And which the sweetest is, I do not know;
For rosy arms and starry eyes are there.
Honey-sweet voices and cheeks passing fair.
And these shall men, I ween, remember long;
For these shall bloom for ever in my song.

Sappho
Sleep, Darling

Sleep, darling
I have a small
daughter called
Cleis, who is

like a golden
flower
I wouldn't
take all Croesus'
kingdom with love
thrown in, for her

---

Don't ask me what to wear
I have no embroidered
headband from Sardis to
give you, Cleis, such as
I wore
and my mother
always said that in her
day a purple ribbon
looped in the hair was thought
to be high style indeed

but we were dark:
and a girl
whose hair is yellower than
torchlight should wear no
headdress but fresh flowers

Sappho
Song Of The Rose

F Zeus chose us a King of the flowers in his mirth,
He would call to the rose, and would royally crown it;
For the rose, ho, the rose! is the grace of the earth,
Is the light of the plants that are growing upon it!
For the rose, ho, the rose! is the eye of the flowers,
Is the blush of the meadows that feel themselves fair,
Is the lightning of beauty that strikes through the bowers
On pale lovers that sit in the glow unaware.
Ho, the rose breathes of love! ho, the rose lifts the cup
To the red lips of Cypris invoked for a guest!
Ho, the rose having curled its sweet leaves for the world
Takes delight in the motion its petals keep up,
As they laugh to the wind as it laughs from the west.

Sappho
Sounds Of Grief

Must I remind you, Cleis,
that sounds of grief
are unbecoming in
a poet's household?

and that they are not
suitable in ours?

Sappho
tr. Barnard

Sappho
Standing By My Bed

Standing by my bed
in gold sandals
Dawn that very
moment awoke me

Sappho
Tell Everyone

Tell everyone
now, today, I shall
sing beautifully for
my friends' pleasure

Sappho
The Anactoria Poem

Some say thronging cavalry, some say foot soldiers, others call a fleet the most beautiful of sights the dark earth offers, but I say it's whatever you love best.

And it's easy to make this understood by everyone, for she who surpassed all human kind in beauty, Helen, abandoning her husband--that best of men--went sailing off to the shores of Troy and never spent a thought on her child or loving parents: when the goddess seduced her wits and left her to wander,

she forgot them all, she could not remember anything but longing, and lightly straying aside, lost her way. But that reminds me now: Anactoria,

she's not here, and I'd rather see her lovely step, her sparkling glance and her face than gaze on all the troops in Lydia in their chariots and glittering armor.

Sappho
The Arbor

He seems to he a god, that man
Facing you, who leans to be close,
Smiles, and, alert and glad, listens
To your mellow voice

And quickens in love at your laughter
That stings my breasts, jolts my heart
If I dare the shock of a glance.
I cannot speak,

My tongue sticks to my dry mouth,
Thin fire spreads beneath my skin,
My eyes cannot see and my aching ears
Roar in their labyrinths.

Chill sweat glides down my back,
I shake, I turn greener than grass.
I am neither living nor dead and cry
From the narrow between.

Sappho
This is the lamentation-song
For Adonis — woe for Adonis, woe!
Thus wailed Aphrodite in anguish-throe,
As she strove to hold him back from death:
'Let thine heart not faint, O love! Be strong!
O me, it burns me, thy failing breath!
It kindles through all my being a fire!
My heart is aflame with despairing desire!'  
She calls to her Eros of golden wing,
She bids him steep in the ice-cold spring
Fine linen, and lay on Adonis' brow: —
'O love, let its coolness revive thee now! . . .
Vain, vain! — his eyes see me no more;
They are fixed in a gaze upon Hades' door!
They close — he sleeps — not the sleep of the dead!
Hush, stir not a pebble with heedless tread!
No, no! this is death! Now remaineth to me
No sweetness on earth — nor honey nor bee!'  

Sappho
The Dust Of Timas

This dust was Timas; and they say
That almost on her wedding day
She found her bridal home to be
The dark house of Persephone.

And many maidens, knowing then
That she would not come back again,
Unbound their curls; and all in tears,
They cut them off with sharpened shears.

Sappho
The Fisherman's Tomb

Over the fisher Pelagon Meniscus his father set
The oar worn by the wave, the trap, and the fishing net;--
For all men, and for ever, memorials there to be
Of the luckless life of the fisher, the labourer of the sea.

Sappho
The Moon

THE stars about the lovely moon
Fade back and vanish very soon,
When, round and full, her silver face
Swims into sight, and lights all space

Sappho
The Muses

It is the Muses
who have caused me
to be honored: they
taught me their craft

Sappho
tr. Barnard

Sappho
The Silver Moon

The silver moon is set;
The Pleiades are gone;
Half the long night is spent, and yet
I lie alone.

Sappho
O Queens of Song, descend from your home.
From the golden halls of Olumpus on high!
O shell divine, now, now become
Voiceful, to utter mine heart's wild cry!
O Calliope, vouchsafe thine aid
Unto one whom the Muse of Love hath betrayed!
Ah me, I know not what to do
Who am wildered all, in a strait betwixt two!
I cry from a homeless heart storm-tossed
As a child for her mother, a young child lost.
Yet not after all-unattainable things
Do I strain, nor I hope on passion's wings
To soar to the heavens' empyreal blue.
But oh, I yearn, how I yearn to slake
My thirst where Love's feet brush the dew!
For he who the strength of the mighty can break,
He whose bitter sweetness no tongue may tell,
The dragon whose onslaught none may quell,
Love — mine whole being doth Love's breath shake.

Ah, sleep I cannot: soft-cushioned bed
Wooes never my wearied frame to sleep;
No pillow brings rest to my throbbing head.
From my couch, as one in a nightmare, I leap.
Ever Eros is tossing to and fro
My spirit, as when great storm-winds blow
O'er a tempest-tormented mountain-steep,
And down on its groaning oak-woods sweep;
So groaneth my spirit, love-scourged so.

Sappho
Thy Form Is Lovely

Thy form is lovely and thine eyes are honeyed,
O'er thy face the pale
Clear light of love lies like a veil.
Bidding thee rise,
With outstretched hands,
Before thee Aphrodite stands.

Sappho
To A Bride

Bride, around whom the rosy leaves are flying,
Sweet image of the Cyprian undying,
The bed awaits thee; go, and with him lying,
Give to the groom thy sweetness, softly sighing.
May Hesperus in gladness pass before thee,
And Hera of the silver throne bend o'er thee.

Sappho
To A Girl In A Garden

O soft and dainty maiden, from afar
I watch you, as amidst the flowers you move,
And pluck them, singing.

More golden than all gold your tresses are:
Never was harp-note like your voice, my love,
Your voice sweet-ringing.

Sappho
To A Rich Vulgarian

Fragments 35, 67, 81, 72, 68 combined.

Thou fool — that thou shouldst plume thyself
On rich attire, on jewel-hoard,
On dross of thine ill-gotten pelf,
On carcanet and flashing ring,
On meats and wines that load thy board!
Ay, cup on cup past numbering
Thou drainest with the drunken! Fool,
Who hast not learnt in wisdom's school
That wealth is an accursed thing
Dislinked from goodness! Only when
These twain are wedded, happiness
True and abiding comes to bless
The fleeting life of dying men.
Fool! — yet not as in wrath I speak:
Not I on thee would vengeance wreak.
A quiet spirit dwells in me
That scorns to bruise such worms as thee.
Nay, but the inevitable Fate
Even now decrees thine after-state: —
When thou art dead, so shalt thou lie
Ever: thy very name shall die.
Thy sordid story not outlast
Thy burial; for no part thou hast
In Song-land's roses, whose perfume
Breathes life immortal, o'er the tomb
Triumphant. Unregarded all
Shalt thou stray lost in Hades' hall
Amidst the fameless dead forlorn,
A vile, ignoble thing of scorn!

Sappho
To A Youth Who Wooed A Woman Older Than Himself

Friend, woo me not so earnestly.
Vain is thy prayer.
Nay, if in truth thou lovest me.
Hereafter spare
My wearied ears a suit denied.
Go, choose for thee a younger bride.
Not I will brook to live with thee.
An old wife to a young man tied,
Doomed as the years fleet by to see
A spouse who gazes hungry-eyed
On such as she can never be.
The young and fair.
And waits to enshroud her clay with glee,
And graveward bear.

Sappho
To Anactoria, Who Has Forsaken A Once-Loved Girlfriend Of Sappho

Rushing war-hosts, horsemen or foot or galleys —
These doth one call, those doth another, fairest
Sights on earth: I say that my love of all is
Sweetest and rarest.
Hear the proof, which lightly, I wot, convinces: —
'Mid the comely, Helen would fain discover
One without peer, and of the goodly princes
Chose for her lover
Him who brought the glory of Troy to ruin!
Reckless all of parent and child, she lavished
On the alien love for her own undoing;
Troyward was ravished.
Anactoria — she who contemns the blessing
Near at hand, is like to a reed wind-shaken.
Such are you! — love held in secure possessing
You have forsaken.
Her whose footfall's music myself had rather
Hear, and see her face in its beauty beaming.
Than to gaze where horsemen and footmen gather
Panoply-gleaming.
What is best is set above man's attaining;
Yet, if Fortune smiled on us once, 'tis better
To recall with prayer and with upward-straining
Than to forget her.

Sappho
To Any Army Wife

To any army wife, in Sardis:

Some say a cavalry corps, 
some infantry, some again, 
will maintain that the swift oars 
of our fleet are the finest 
sight on dark earth; but I say 
that whatever one loves, is.

This is easily proved: did 
not Helen --- she who had scanned 
the flower of the world's manhood ---

choose as first among men one 
who laid Troy's honor in ruin? 
warped to his will, forgetting 
love due her own blood, her own 
child, she wandered far with him. 
So Anactoria, although you 

being far away forget us, 
the dear sound of your footstep 
and light glancing in your eyes 

would move me more than glitter 
of Lydian horse or armored 
tread of mainland infantry

Sappho
tr. Barnard

Sappho
To Aphrodite

You know the place: then
Leave Crete and come to us
waiting where the grove is
pleasantest, by precincts

sacred to you; incense
smokes on the altar, cold
streams murmur through the

apple branches, a young
rose thicket shades the ground
and quivering leaves pour

down deep sleep; in meadows
where horses have grown sleek
among spring flowers, dill

scents the air. Queen! Cyprian!
Fill our gold cups with love
stirred into clear nectar

Sappho
tr. Barnard

Sappho
To Atthis The Inconstant

Fragments 33, 57A, 44, 41, 70, 58 combined.

I loved thee, Atthis, — even thee! —

Ah, long ago!
As Aphrodite's handmaid bright
As gold wert thou then in my sight.
A very queen of love to me

Then didst thou show.
Fair gifts I sent thee — 'broidery
Of golden thread whose shimmering light
Flashed mid the purple on thy knee,

A gleam and glow.
Then I knew not thine heart aright:

But now I know!
Thou incarnate false inconstancy —

To whom I grow
A thing to hate! — thou takest flight
On wings of love to — who is she?
A rustic wench whose garments flow
About her heels ungracefully!

O yea, let thy false love requite
Andromeda's worship! Take delight
In her — thou who from my love's height
Hast sunk so low!

Sappho
To Evening

O HESPERUS! Thou bringest all things home;
All that the garish day hath scattered wide;
The sheep, the goat, back to the welcome fold;
Thou bring'st the child, too, to his mother's side

Sappho
To One False In Love

O false as fair
I am forgotten, then, by thee!
Or haply on another shine
The eyes that once looked into mine
Pretence of love — all faithlessly

Out! nought I care
For such as can true love betray!
Love on, forsworn, your little day:

Ye are nought to me.

Sappho
To One Who Loved Not Poetry

THOU liest dead, and there will be no memory left behind
Of thee or thine in all the earth, for never didst thou bind
The roses of Pierian streams upon thy brow; thy doom
Is now to flit with unknown ghosts in cold and nameless gloom.

Sappho
Tonight I've Watched

Tonight I've watched
the moon and then
the Pleiades
go down

The night is now
half-gone; youth
goes; I am

in bed alone

Sappho
We know this much
Death is an evil;
we have the gods'
word for it; they too
would die if death
were a good thing

Sappho
We Put The Urn Abord Ship

We put the urn aboard ship
with this inscription:

This is the dust of little
Timas who unmarried was led
into Persephone's dark bedroom

And she being far from home, girls
her age took new-edged blades
to cut, in mourning for her,
these curls of their soft hair

Sappho
We Shall Enjoy It

We shall enjoy it
as for him who finds
fault, may silliness
and sorrow take him!

Sappho
Wedding Song

Workmen lift high
The beams of the roof,
Hymenæus!

Like Ares from sky
Comes the groom to the bride,
Hymenæus!

Than men who must die
Stands he taller in pride,
Hymenæus!

Sappho
With His Venom

With his venom
irresistible
and bittersweet

that loosener
of limbs, Love

reptile-like
strikes me down

Sappho
Without Warning

Without warning
as a whirlwind
swoops on an oak
Love shakes my heart

Sappho
Words

Although they are
only breath, words
which I command
are immortal

Sappho
tr. Barnard

Sappho
Yea, Thou Shalt Die

Yea, thou shalt die,
And lie
Dumb in the silent tomb;
Nor to thy name
Shall there be any fame
In ages yet to be or years to come:
For of the flowering Rose,
Which on Pieria blows,
Thou hast no share:
But in sad Hades' house,
Unknown, inglorious,
'Mid the dim shades that wander there
Shalt thou flit forth and haunt the filmy air.

Sappho
Yes, Atthis, You May Be Sure

Yes, Atthis, you may be sure

Even in Sardis
Anactoria will think often of us

of the life we shared here, when you seemed
the Goddess incarnate
to her and your singing pleased her best

Now among Lydian women she in her
turn stands first as the red-fingered moon rising at sunset takes

precedence over stars around her;
her light spreads equally
on the salt sea and fields thick with bloom

Delicious dew purs down to freshen
roses, delicate thyme
and blossoming sweet clover; she wanders

aimlessly, thinking of gentle
Atthis, her heart hanging
heavy with longing in her little breast

She shouts aloud, Come! we know it;
thousand-eared night repeats that cry
across the sea shining between us

Sappho
You Know The Place: Then

You know the place: then
Leave Crete and come to us
waiting where the grove is
pleasantest, by precincts

sacred to you; incense
smokes on the altar, cold
streams murmur through the

apple branches, a young
rose thicket shades the ground
and quivering leaves pour

down deep sleep; in meadows
where horses have grown sleek
among spring flowers, dill

scents the air. Queen! Cyprian!
Fill our gold cups with love
stirred into clear nectar

Sappho
You May Forget But

You may forget but
let me tell you
this: someone in
some future time
will think of us

Sappho
Youth And Age

If love thou hast for me, not hate,
Arise and find a younger mate;
For I no longer will abide
Where youth and age lie side by side.

Sappho