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The New Sappho Poem
 (*P.Köln* 21351 and 21376)
 Key to the Old Fragments

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THE EGYPTIAN DESERT CONTINUES TO REVEAL TO US ITS TREASURES. The most spectacular find in recent years is probably the Milan papyrus, containing over one hundred new epigrams of the Hellenistic poet Posidippus, published in 2001.¹ No less spectacular is the collection of twenty-five papyrus fragments that the German university of Cologne obtained in 2002. On close inspection it became clear that among these fragments were the remains of at least one and probably two poems of Sappho.² This essay will focus on the second of the two Sappho poems found on the Cologne papyrus, the so-called Tithonos poem. I will first discuss the reconstruction of this poem. Next, I will show how the structure of the Tithonos poem can help to elucidate the structure of some older Sappho fragments, especially fragments 16 and 31. Finally, at the end of the paper I will suggest a possible performance context for the new poem.

¹ Bastianini and Gallazzi 2001, re-edited in Austin and Bastianini 2002. This essay is a combination of two papers I delivered at the APA: "A New Sappho Papyrus (*P.Köln* 21351): Key to the Old Fragments" (APA Montreal 2006) and "The New Sappho Poem: Where does it end?" (APA San Diego 2007). I wish to thank the original audiences, also listeners at the universities of Ghent, Iowa and Oxford, as well as Jan Maarten Bremer, Irene de Jong, Richard Rawles and the anonymous referees for their helpful comments and suggestions. I further would like to thank Debby Boedeker for her comments and for sharing with me her forthcoming article, and the two editors for bringing this volume together.

² Gronewald and Daniel 2004a and 2004b. More recently, Gronewald and Daniel (2005) have published the continuation of the third fragment, but this continuation will not concern us here, since it does not appear to contain work by Sappho. Cf. the contributions of Hammerstaedt and Obbink to this volume.

A Reconstruction of the New Sappho Poem: Where Does It End?

A new papyrus often raises as many questions as it resolves. This holds true for the Cologne papyrus as well. While this papyrus considerably helps to supplement an older poem of Sappho, known previously from the Oxyrhynchus papyri (fr. 58), it also raises new questions about the poem's ending, because the Cologne papyrus only overlaps with lines 11 to 22 of the Oxyrhynchus papyrus. The Italian scholar Gallavotti had already suggested that with the address to the *paides* in line 11 of the Oxyrhynchus papyrus a new poem began—a suggestion that now seems to be confirmed by the Cologne papyrus.³ We should in the case of the Oxyrhynchus papyrus therefore speak of at least two fragments: fragment 58a, which runs till line 10, and fragment 58b that begins in line 11. But where does fragment 58b end? Most editors of the Oxyrhynchus papyrus, starting with Lobel, have assumed that lines 23–26 also belong to the poem, but these lines do not appear on the papyrus from Cologne.

The question of the poem's ending is closely related to the way its beginning is reconstructed. I will therefore first discuss the different supplements that have been proposed for the opening lines. According to Gronewald and Daniel, the speaker, whom they identify as Sappho, makes a first-person statement about her own poetic activities to a group of girls in the first two lines of the poem: φέρω τᾶδε Μοῖσαν ἰ]οκ[ό]λπων κάλα δῶρα, παῖδες / [λάβοισα πάλιν τὰ]γ φιλάοιδον λιγύραν χελύνναν ('I bring these lovely gifts of the violet-bosomed Muses, girls, picking up again the clear, melodious lyre').⁴ A similar reading is proposed by Joel Lidov in this volume: νῦν δὴ μ' ἔτι Μοῖσαν ἰ]οκ[ό]λπων κάλα δῶρα, παῖδες / [φίλημι δὲ φῶνα]γ φιλάοιδον λιγύραν χελύνναν ('Now there are still for me the lovely gifts of the violet-bosomed Muses, girls, and I love the song-loving voice of the melodious lyres').⁵ West, however, has suggested that Sappho addresses the young women in a second person statement and commands them with the words: Ὑμμες πεδὰ Μοῖσαν ἰ]οκ[ό]λπων κάλα δῶρα, παῖδες / [σπουδάσδετε καὶ τὰ]γ φιλάοιδον λιγύραν χελύνναν ('You for the lovely gifts of the violet-bosomed Muses, girls, be zealous and for the clear

³ Gallavotti 1957:113. Cf. Di Benedetto (1985:147) and Page (1955:129), who quotes the fragment starting from this line.

⁴ Gronewald and Daniel 2004a:7. Given Sappho's involvement in the setting up of young women's choruses and her use of the word elsewhere in her poetry for girls (e.g. fr. 49.2, 113, 132.1) it is most likely that the word παῖδες here refers to young women as well.

⁵ See Lidov's contribution to this volume, pp. 93–94.

melodious lyre’).⁶ He postulates a sharp contrast between the poetic activities of the young women and Sappho’s inability to dance, on which she comments in the following two lines.

I find the reading of Gronewald and Daniel, especially in the form proposed by Lidov, more appealing than that of West. Sappho is after all singing the song and playing the lyre, while the girls she addresses are probably dancing. By commenting on the gifts of the Muses she is bringing, Sappho emphasizes the fact that she may no longer be able to dance “like fawns” (or “like the girls”—the indirect reference to the girls helps to explain the plural form of νεβρίοισιν), but she is still capable of singing and playing the lyre. This distinction will turn out to be significant, as we shall see. I do accept the contrast West postulates between the first and second couplet, but this is a contrast not between the young women, who are dancing and paying attention to the music, and Sappho, who is not, but between Sappho’s own singing and playing of the lyre and her inability to dance.⁷

The biggest question, however, surrounding the new Sappho poem is the way it ended: more specifically whether or not it originally continued with the four lines that follow in the Oxyrhynchus poem. These four lines were assumed to belong to the poem by Edgar Lobel in his edition of the Oxyrhynchus fragment,⁸ and he was followed by all subsequent editors. In Campbell’s text and translation they read as follows:

Ἰμέναν νομίσδει
Ἰαίς ὀπάσδοι
ἔγω δὲ φίλημμ’ ἀβροσύναν, ...] τοῦτο καὶ μίοι
τὸ λά[μπρον ἔρος τῶελίω καὶ τὸ κά]λον λέ[λ]ογγε.

(he / she) thinks
might give
but I love delicacy... this and love has obtained
for me the brightness and beauty of the sun.⁹

⁶ West 2005:4. σπουδάσδετε in West’s reconstruction of the line does not have to be read as an imperative, but could also represent a declarative statement in the second person plural indicative. West, however, in his translation opts for an imperative, following Di Benedetto (2004:5–6), who wishes to read two imperatives in the opening two lines.

⁷ Cf. Rawles 2006:4 and Lidov in this volume.

⁸ Lobel 1925:26.

⁹ Campbell 1982[1990]:100–101. The last two lines are supplemented on the basis of a citation in Athenaeus 687b.

As Deborah Boedeker points out in her contribution to this volume, a different translation of the last line is possible, connecting τῶελίω with ἔρος instead of with τὸ λάμπρον καὶ τὸ κάλον: “and love of the sun has obtained for me (provides me with) brightness and beauty”. Love of the sun is a common Greek metaphor for love of life and Athenaeus, who quotes the line, interprets Sappho’s words in just this way (τοῦ ζῆν ἐπιθυμία).¹⁰ I believe the ambiguity to be deliberate and that one should construct τῶελίω both with ἔρος and with τὸ λάμπρον καὶ τὸ κάλον: “love of the sun / life has obtained for me the brightness and beauty [of the sun / life]”.¹¹ Constructing τῶελίω both with ἔρος and with τὸ λάμπρον καὶ τὸ κάλον would agree with the idea expressed in the opening priamel of Sappho fr. 16, namely that the most beautiful thing on earth is whatever one loves: the speaker’s love of life makes it for her an object of beauty.

If we add these four lines the tone of the poem changes considerably. Sappho would not just resign herself to her situation of being old, but actually present an alternative. She would admit that she is no longer beautiful herself, but she can enjoy the beauty and brightness of other things. The same would apply to the beautiful gifts of the Muses she mentions at the beginning of the poem: note the possible echo between τὸ κάλον in the last line of the continuation and the κάλα δῶρα in the opening line of the poem. Sappho may be old and unable to dance, but she is still capable of making music: she is singing the song and playing the “melodious lyre” mentioned in line 2. To these activities of the speaker the word ἄβροσύναν in line 15 could refer. Furthermore, if Lidov’s reconstruction of the first two lines of the poem is correct (see above), the speaker’s love (φίλημα) of the sound of the clear-sounding lyres in line 2 would be echoed by her love (φίλημα) of ἄβροσύναν in line 25, and this verb, together with κάλα δῶρα (1) and τὸ κάλον (26), would create a ring-composition, linking beginning and end of the poem.

So these four lines would certainly fit the Tithonos poem. But do they belong to it or not? As regards the ending of the new Sappho poem three possibilities have been advanced over the past three years:

¹⁰ Athenaeus 687b. For a somewhat different translation of the passage, see Hammerstaedt in this volume.

¹¹ A similar construction is found in Sappho fr. 96.15–17, where the genitive Ἄτθιδος should be connected both with the preceding participle ἐπιμνάσθεις(α) and the following noun ἡμέρω: πόλλα δὲ ζαφοίταισ’ ἀγάνας ἐπιμνάσθεις’ Ἄτθιδος ἡμέρωι... βόρηται (“going to and fro, remembering gentle Atthis she is consumed by desire [for Atthis]”).

- 1) The Cologne papyrus only copied part of the poem: it misses the last four lines that are found in the Oxyrhynchus papyrus and originally belonged to the poem.¹²
- 2) We have to assume that the poem in the Oxyrhynchus papyrus also ends at line 22 and that the next four lines belong to a new poem.¹³
- 3) There existed in the Hellenistic period two versions of the poem, one ending on the myth of Tithonos, as in the Cologne papyrus, and another continuing the poem with four more lines, as in the Oxyrhynchus fragment.¹⁴

At first sight the second possibility, which argues that lines 23 to 26 of the Oxyrhynchus papyrus do not belong to the poem, appears to be most likely. Why would the scribe of the Cologne papyrus have only copied part of the poem and not the whole thing? There is little in the Oxyrhynchus papyrus to indicate that lines 23–26 belong with the previous poem, although there are no positive indications that they do not belong either. In most editions of this fragment a coronis is printed after line 26, but this coronis was only a conjecture of Lobel and does not appear on the papyrus itself. In Lobel and Page's Sappho edition it was printed between brackets, but in Voigt's edition the brackets disappeared and the coronis became fixed.¹⁵

Still, I am not entirely convinced that the continuation of the Oxyrhynchus papyrus does not belong to the poem. West refers to Lobel's conjecture as a "naughty coronis",¹⁶ but Lobel, in my opinion, did have some reason to postulate the end of the poem after line 26. If one looks carefully at *P.Oxy.* 1787 fr. 2, which preserves traces of the first letters of line 26,¹⁷ one can see that below these letters a line is drawn, which is slightly longer than the paragraphos that appears two lines lower on the papyrus. This length of the line is not conclusive and the stroke could represent just as well the end of a paragraphos

¹² Gronewald and Daniel 2004a, Puelma and Angiò 2005b, Edmunds 2006, Burzacchini 2007:98–110 and *Livrea* 2007.

¹³ Di Benedetto 2004, Luppe 2004, Janko 2005, West 2005, Bernsdorff 2005, Rawles 2006, Austin 2007 and Ferrari 2007:179–80.

¹⁴ This suggestion is advanced by Boedeker in this volume and in Boedeker forthcoming. Cf. Yartomanolakis 2007:344n259 and 360.

¹⁵ Lobel and Page 1955:41; Voigt 1971:78.

¹⁶ West 2005:4.

¹⁷ See Figure 17 in Hammerstaedt, this volume. One can also consult pictures of the Oxyrhynchus papyri, including the small *P.Oxy.* 1787 fr. 2, on the Oxford Oxyrhynchus website: http://www.papyrology.ox.ac.uk/P.Oxy/papyri/the_papyri.html.

as the cross bar of a coronis, as Jürgen Hammerstaedt argues in this volume. However, I believe that the relative length of the line gave Lobel the idea that it was part of the cross bar of a coronis and not the end of a paragraphos. If a coronis did appear on the papyrus here, it would mean that some poem ended at line 26, and one would either have to assume that it marked the end of a very short four-line poem or that the scribe who wrote the Oxyrhynchus papyrus considered lines 23–26 to be part of the Tithonos poem. The former possibility (a four-line poem) has recently been argued by Di Benedetto,¹⁸ but, for reasons given below, I find the latter option (four lines belonging to the Tithonos poem) more likely.

Another reason why Lobel may have thought that lines 23–26 on the Oxyrhynchus papyrus were part of the Tithonos poem is the quotation of lines 25 and 26 in Athenaeus. Athenaeus, as we have seen, believes that these lines refer to Sappho's desire for life, a meaning which fits the contents of the new Sappho poem and suggests that the words do come from a poem about human mortality. It is certainly possible that the Tithonos poem was followed by another poem with a similar subject matter in the Oxyrhynchus papyrus, but it is also possible that these four lines formed the conclusion in the Oxyrhynchus edition of the poem.

More recently, Mario Puelma and Francesca Angiò have argued that Posidippus in one of his newly found epigrams alludes to the Tithonos poem, including the last four lines of the Oxyrhynchus papyrus.¹⁹ Similarly, Enrico Livrea has discovered possible allusions to Sappho's poem, including the four-line extension of the Oxyrhynchus papyrus, in Callimachus' *Aetia* fr. 1.32–40 Pfeiffer and in Cercidas fr. 7 Powell.²⁰ Posidippus' epigram 52 A-B speaks about a young girl who grows old while watching the grave of her father and the beautiful sun (τὸν καλὸν ἥλιον) in the last line of the epigram. There are several reminiscences of the Sappho poem in this epigram, including old age that reaches the girl eventually, just as it seizes the speaker and Tithonos in the Sappho poem.²¹ Puelma and Angiò further point out that the epithet καλός is very

¹⁸ Di Benedetto 2006.

¹⁹ Puelma and Angiò 2005b.

²⁰ Livrea 2007. Jan Maarten Bremer has drawn my attention to the second stasimon of Euripides' *Heracles*, esp. lines 637–686, which also seem to draw on Sappho's poem.

²¹ Danielewicz (2005), adopting an emendation of Ewen Bowie in line 3, argues that the girl is not a living person, but a representation on the base of the sundial. If so, the parallel with Tithonos would be even more striking: like Tithonos, the girl has been immortalized (as an art object), but still old age reaches her. Bowie's reading is, however, far from certain: see Puelma and Angiò 2005a:19–20n18.

unusual for the sun and reminiscent of the last line in the Oxyrhynchus continuation, where Sappho speaks about the brightness and beauty of the sun. This allusion, of course, would gain in strength if the epithet in the last line of Posidippus' epigram would echo the last line of Sappho's poem, at least in the version Posidippus possessed. What Puelma and Angiò have overlooked is that the likelihood of an allusion to a Sappho poem in this epigram is confirmed by the preceding epigram in the collection. In the last line of this epigram (51 A-B) a group of girls is asked to sing "songs of Sappho" (Σα[πρω]ῶν ἄισμ]ατα) at the grave of a young girl. Posidippus would subsequently allude to just such a song in his next epigram, thus connecting his epigrams in subtle ways that are becoming gradually clearer.²²

Finally, Lowell Edmunds has pointed out in Edmunds 2006 and in his contribution to this volume that it is highly unusual, though not entirely unprecedented, for archaic Greek songs to end on a paradigmatic story and not to return to the speaker or the present situation. One would, for example, expect the speaker to return to the *paides*, who are addressed in the opening lines and remain present throughout the poem. I already referred above to the possible allusion to the girls in the plural νεβρίοισιν in line 6; I also believe that the age of her addressees helps to explain the speaker's use of the imperfect ἔφαντο in line 9: "they used to say" (sc. before you girls were born). As a parallel one can point to Phoenix's use of the imperfect ἔπευθόμεθα, with which he introduces the paradigmatic story of Meleager to his young disciple Achilles in *Iliad* 9.254.²³ A return to the girls at the end of the poem would be accomplished by reading the imperative ἴστε δὲ in the lacuna of line 25, as suggested by Di Benedetto.²⁴

My own work on the fragments of Solon has convinced me that the textual transmission of archaic Greek poetry throughout the classical and early Hellenistic periods was much less stable than is generally assumed.²⁵ I therefore consider it most likely that Sappho's poem survived in two versions, as Boedeker

²² See the various essays in Acosta-Hughes et al. 2004 and in Gutzwiller 2005, as well as Gutzwiller's original study of Hellenistic Greek epigram (Gutzwiller 1998). The reading Σα[πρω]ῶν ἄισμ]ατα in the last line of Posidippus' epigram 51 is, of course, a conjecture, but a very plausible one: the gap does not allow for many other possible readings and there are more references to Sappho's songs in Posidippus' epigrams, including epigrams 55 and 122 A-B. Lapini (2005:239) suggests reading Σα[πρω]ῶν ἄισμ]ατα, which is perhaps preferable, because, as one of the anonymous referees pointed out to me, it avoids hiatus at the midline of the pentameter. This reading would not alter the meaning of the line, however.

²³ Cf. Edmunds 2006:24.

²⁴ Di Benedetto 2006:5.

²⁵ Lardinois 2006. Faraone (2006) has come to the same conclusion after examining the fragments of Tyrtaeus.

also argues in this volume and in more detail in her forthcoming article: one ends on the myth of Tithonos, as in the Cologne papyrus, and the other continues the poem with four more lines, as in the Oxyrhynchus fragment. We should not forget that the Cologne papyrus pre-dates the Alexandrian editions of Sappho's poetry, on which the Oxyrhynchus papyrus is based and of which there may well have been more than one.²⁶ We seldom have the remains of more than one edition of early Greek poetry from antiquity, but when we do, they regularly differ from one another.²⁷ We therefore may not want to assume too readily that different copies of early Greek poetry would have been the same in antiquity, especially before the canonical editions of the Alexandrian scholars. Perhaps we should even adopt the opposite assumption and expect them to diverge, as is, for example, the case with different editions of medieval poetry.²⁸ I believe that the four-line continuation on the Oxyrhynchus papyrus was part of the original poem but, in later versions, had become detached from it, perhaps, as Boedeker suggests, in order to present the poem as a reflection on old age, suitable for performance at a symposium but without the positive twist Sappho had provided it.²⁹

A Comparison between the New Poem and Sappho fr. 16 and 31

With or without the continuation on the Oxyrhynchus papyrus the Tithonos poem reveals a clear structure. Lines 1–2 address a group of girls (παῖδες), who are probably dancing while the speaker is singing and playing the lyre. The following four lines represent the first-person speaker in a difficult situation: she has grown old and, as a result, she is no longer able to dance. The speaker complains about her situation, but at the same time reconciles herself to it, because, as she says, it is impossible for any human not to grow old. She illus-

²⁶ Yatromanolakis 1999 and Liberman 2007:41.

²⁷ Examples are the so-called "wild papyri" of Homer's epics and the different versions of Theognis' poetry preserved in the *Theognidea*, on which see, respectively, Haslam 1997 and Bowie 1997. Ucciardello (2005) argues that different copies of Ibycus' poetry, with their own linguistic variations, must have circulated in antiquity.

²⁸ See e.g. Haustein 1999 and Bein 1999a on the variations in the medieval editions of the German lyrical poet Walther von der Vogelweide. I owe these references to my colleague in Dutch medieval literature, Johan Oosterman. Boedeker in this volume refers to the principle of "*mouvance*" advanced by "new philologists" in medieval studies and Nagy's application of this idea to the transmission of the Homeric epics (Nagy 1996: esp. 7–38).

²⁹ See Boedeker's essay in this volume. For old age as a sympotic theme, see e.g. Campbell 1983:215–220 and Slings 2000:432–434. Note the parallels that have been drawn between this poem of Sappho and Anacreon fr. 395 PMG or Minnervmus fr. 2 and 4 West (Gronewald and Daniel 2004a:3).

trates this gnomic thought with a mythological example: the story of Tithonos, who married the Dawn goddess and was made immortal but nevertheless grew old. If we add the four lines of the Oxyrhynchus papyrus the first person speaker of the poem not only resigns herself to her situation but presents an alternative as well: no longer beautiful herself, she can nevertheless enjoy the beauty and brightness of other things, like the sun.

This structure of the new poem can be used to clarify the structure of some older fragments of Sappho that are less well preserved. First of all there is fragment 31, the famous fragment that begins with the words φαίνεται μοι κῆνος. In this fragment the first person speaker enumerates a series of afflictions she endures while looking at a girl who is talking to a man and laughing. She is even at the point of dying, or so she says in lines 15 and 16. This long list of symptoms is itself reminiscent of the list of complaints Sappho enumerates in the Tithonos poem.³⁰ And, just as in the new Sappho poem, the speaker of fragment 31 resigns herself to her situation. So much is clear from the half line preserved of the last strophe: ἀλλὰ πᾶν τόλματον (“but all can be endured”). The remainder of this line suggests that Sappho illustrated this gnomic thought with the example of a poor man (πένητα), but here the citation of the poem in the text of Longinus unfortunately breaks off. We therefore do not know if Sappho in fragment 31 also offered an alternative to her feelings, as she does in the continuation of the Oxyrhynchus papyrus.³¹

It is commonly accepted that Sappho 31 continued with a gnomic statement in line 17, in which she resigns herself to her situation. In the case of Sappho fragment 16, however, the possible continuation of the poem, after line 20, is disputed and mostly rejected.³² Most commentators (and almost all translators) assume that this poem ends with Sappho’s wish to see Anactoria in line 20, and that with line 21 a new poem begins. There is not much room, however, for a complete new poem, because at the beginning of line 32 traces of a coronis are preserved, so we know that a poem ended here.³³ Moreover, I believe that the new Sappho papyrus offers some evidence that a new poem did not begin in line 21, but that the Anactoria poem continued. It has long been recognized that lines 21 and 22 of fragment 16 preserve traces of a gnomic saying: some-

³⁰ Cf. West 2005:6.

³¹ For possible reconstructions of the closing stanza of Sappho’s poem, see West 1970:312–313, Rösler 1990, Lidov 1993 and, more recently, D’Angour 2006, who suggests that Sappho ended the poem on an extended, gnomic thought.

³² Pfeijffer 2000:1n1 with earlier references. Among those who accept the continuation of the poem after line 20 are Howie 1977, Aloni 1997:25–26 and Bierl 2003.

³³ Cf. Hutchinson 2001:167.

thing, we are told, is not possible (οὐ δύνατον γένεσθαι) for a human being or human beings (ἄνθρωπῳ or ἄνθρωποις). This gnomic statement bears a close resemblance to the one we find halfway the new Sappho poem, where the words οὐ δύνατον γένεσθαι also appear at line end and a general human being (ἄνθρωπον) is presented as subject.

Jakob Sitzler proposed the following reconstruction of the gnomic statement in lines 21–22 of fragment 16: ἀλλ' ἄραν] μὲν οὐ δύνατον γένεσθαι / παῖσ]αν ἀνθρώπ[ωι, π]εδέσχην δ' ἄρασθαι (“but it is not possible that every wish / for a human is fulfilled, but to pray to partake in...”).³⁴ If this reconstruction is even half correct, the speaker in fragment 16 would not only utter a gnomic statement in lines 21–22, but would indicate by it that she resigns herself to her situation. With this gnomic continuation, fragment 16 shows a structure very similar to the one we detected in the Tithonos poem and in fragment 31. The first person speaker first describes a painful situation: she would like to see Anactoria, but cannot do so, because Anactoria is not there. In the continuation of the poem, starting with the gnomic statement in lines 21–22, she then resigns herself to this situation: she realizes that she is asking for the impossible and that she has to settle for something less, perhaps to partake in memories of Anactoria, something with which Sappho consoles herself in other poems as well.³⁵

One of the few commentators who has dared to propose a possible reconstruction of fragment 16 beyond line 22 is the British scholar J.G. Howie.³⁶ Howie postulates that the speaker after line 22 told a new myth, which would provide her with an alternative example from the figure of Helen, mentioned in the first half of the poem, and would have introduced a more modest wish. Howie's suggestion that another myth appeared in the second half of fragment 16 gains some plausibility from the fact that the second half of the new Sappho poem also contains a paradigmatic story that helps the speaker to reconcile herself to her situation. It would also help to counterbalance the somewhat daring comparison of the first person speaker (and Anactoria) to the figure of Helen in the first half of the poem.

The structures of fragments 16, 31 and 58 thus reveal a remarkable similarity. In all three poems, the speaker first sketches a painful or difficult situation. She complains, but then resigns herself to this situation with the help of a gno-

³⁴ Sitzler in his review of Lobel 1925, quoted by Voigt 1971 *ad fr.* 16.21s.

³⁵ For the theme of memory in Sappho's poems, see Burnett 1983:277–313 and Lardinois 2008. Cf. Sappho fr. 94 and 96.15–16.

³⁶ Howie 1977.

mic thought and a mythical or general example. Finally, she may have offered herself an alternative, as she appears to be doing in fragment 16 and in the continuation of the Tithonos poem in the Oxyrhynchus papyrus.

The Performance Context of the New Sappho Poem

The structure of fragments 16, 31 and 58 resembles that of consolation speeches, such as we find, for example, in the *Odyssey*.³⁷ Reinhold Merkelbach has called fragment 16 a consolation poem or, even better, a consolation song (“*ein Trostlied*”).³⁸ In such a song the first-person speaker recognizes the difficulty of her situation, but calls on herself and probably her audience to take heart. In fragments 16 and 31 the speaker has to distance herself from a young woman—a theme we encounter more often in Sappho’s poetry.³⁹ In the new Sappho poem the situation is different: here the speaker bids her youth and her beauty farewell.

This brings me to the possible performance context of these poems. I have argued elsewhere that fragments 16 and 31 were probably performed at wedding banquets.⁴⁰ The performer of these songs praises the beauty and erotic appeal of the bride, while at the same time expressing something of her own sorrow and that of friends and family of the bride in having to let go of her. In the case of the new Sappho poem the performance context is harder to gauge, although I could imagine the song as being performed at a wedding banquet as well. At the wedding feast the assumed advanced age of the singer could be contrasted playfully with the youth of the girls, dancing to her song, on the one hand, and with the blooming adolescence of the bride and groom on the other. The comparison of the first-person speaker with the unhappy Tithonos would also contrast with the usual comparisons of bride and groom with great heroes and heroines in other wedding songs,⁴¹ while at the same time, perhaps, entailing a warning for the happy couple that they too, in time, will grow old.⁴²

The opening of the Tithonos poem bears a resemblance to fragment 26 of Alcman, as was noted already by Claude Calame.⁴³ In this fragment Alcman addresses a group of young women and complains that his limbs no longer can

³⁷ See Howie 1977, esp. 223–227.

³⁸ Merkelbach 1957:13.

³⁹ On the age of the women named in Sappho’s poetry, see Lardinois 1994.

⁴⁰ See my 2001 article.

⁴¹ See Hague 1983:133–135. Cf. Sappho frs. 23, 31.1, 44.34, 105b and 111.

⁴² Rawles (2006:5) analyzes the Tithonos story in terms of the possible significance it would have for the young women addressed in the first line of the poem, including their marriages.

⁴³ Calame 1983:474.

carry him. Antigonus of Carystus, who quotes the fragment, claims that Alcman spoke these lines “weak from old age and unable to whirl with the choruses and the girls’ dancing” (ἀσθενῆς ὦν διὰ τὸ γῆρας καὶ τοῖς χοροῖς οὐ δυνάμενος συμπεριφέρεσθαι οὐδὲ τῆ τῶν παρθένων ὀρχήσει):

οὐ μ’ ἔτι, παρσενικαὶ μελιγάρυες ἰαρόφωνοι,
 γυῖα φέρην δύναται· βάλε δὴ βάλε κηρύλος εἶην,
 ὅς τ’ ἐπὶ κύματος ἄνθος ἄμ’ ἀλκύνεσσι ποτῆται
 νηδεὲς ἦτορ ἔχων, ἀλιπόρφυρος ἰαρός ὄρνις.

No longer, honey-toned, strong (or: holy)-voiced girls
 can my limbs carry me. If only, if only I were a cerylus,
 who flies along with the halcyons over the flower of the wave
 with resolute heart, strong (or: holy) sea-blue bird.”⁴⁴

Alcman’s poem is written in dactylic hexameters, a meter we know to have been used for wedding songs, including Sappho’s.⁴⁵ Since Alcman was reputed to have composed wedding songs, I would not be surprised if his song was performed at the wedding banquet as well.⁴⁶

This interpretation of the performance context of the poem is speculative, I know, but one thing is certain: the poem suggests that Sappho performed her poetry in public or semi-public settings and not in the privacy of her own home. Sappho may have been the singer of the song, but she was probably supported by a group of young girls, the *paides* mentioned in line 1, who were dancing while she was singing. The public performance context of Sappho’s poetry, for which I have argued elsewhere,⁴⁷ is being confirmed by one of the new epigrams of Posidippus as well. This is epigram number 51, to which I already referred earlier. According to the reconstruction of Battezzato,⁴⁸ it reads as follows:

‘δακρυόεσσα[1 ἔπεσθε, θε]οῖς ἀνατείνετε πήχεις’
 τοῦτ’ ἐπὶ πα[ιδὸς ἔρεῖτ’ αὐ]τῶματα, Καρύαι,

⁴⁴ Antigonus of Carystus *Marvels* 23, quoted by Campbell 1988 *ad* Alcman fr. 26.

⁴⁵ Sappho fr. 104a.1, 105a and c.

⁴⁶ For evidence that Alcman composed wedding songs, see Contiades-Tsitsoni 1990:46–63. For references to solo and group performances at wedding banquets, see Lardinois 1996:151n4. Acosta-Hughes (forthcoming) has noted some possible reminiscences of the Tithonos poem in Theocritus’ *Idyll* 18, his so-called wedding song for Helen.

⁴⁷ Lardinois 1996.

⁴⁸ Battezzato 2002.

Τειλεσίης, ἧς [νεῖσθε πρὸς] ἡρίον· ἀλλὰ φέρουσαι
 εἶαρι πορφυρέ[ου φύλλ' ἐς ἀ]γῶνα νέμους
 θῆλυ ποδὴν[εμοὶ ἔρνος] ἀεῖδετε, δάκρυσι δ' ὑμέων
 κολλάσθω Σα[πφῶ]ι' ἄισμ]ατα, θεῖα μέλη.

“[Follow on] tearfully, lift up your arms to the [gods]”,
 this [you will say] spontaneously, o Karyai, for the [child]
 Telesia, to whose tomb [you come]. But bringing
 in spring to the contest [leaves] from the purple glade,
 sing with wind-swift feet the virgin [shoot], and to your tears
 let there be joined Sa[ppho's son]gs, divine melodies.

This epigram of Posidippus imagines a group of girls, named Karyai, dancing at the grave of a girl named Telesia and singing songs of Sappho, assuming the restoration is correct.⁴⁹ What better songs could these girls be singing there than consolation poems of Sappho?

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⁴⁹ See n22 above.

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