

### Question 3

*For centuries readers of Sappho's songs have made no distinction between the poet Sappho and the speaking subject of the songs (the lyrical I). Also today many scholars still implicitly consider Sappho's song to be personal or even autobiographical. Yet we must keep in mind that the songs were intended for c and needed to answer to genre expectations. Do you find first-person references that express this tension? How would you evaluate the opinion that Sappho was speaking on behalf of a community ('representative I')?*

Helpful Quotes from Introduction:

- "Two further points should be taken into account in assessing these ancient records. First, ancient scholars, like modern ones, had a tendency to identify all first-person speakers in Sappho's poetry with the poet herself and to read her work autobiographically. We will see that there are good reasons to be skeptical about such a reading of Sappho's songs" (2).
- The cultic hymns suggest that Sappho was a respected member of her community. Otherwise it would be inconceivable that she was granted the honor of writing songs for the gods. Most of these hymns were choral songs, meant to be performed in public (9).
- "In fragment 16, for example, when the first-person speaker says that she misses Anaktoria and desires to see her, she acts as a representative of the audience, inspiring the same longing in them. In that case, it does not make much difference for the understanding of the song whether the speaker is Sappho, a chorus, or another woman." (11-12).
- "The cultic hymns suggest that Sappho was a respected member of her community. Otherwise it would be inconceivable that she was granted the honor of writing songs for the gods. Most of these hymns were choral songs, meant to be performed in public. It is notable that they are mostly hymns to female deities. Ancient Greece was a segregated society, in which women publicly worshipped the female gods in particular. They were encouraged to see their own lives reflected in these deities' different manifestations: a Greek woman's life could be described as a transition from the state of Artemis ( parthenos , or girl) to Aphrodite ( numphê , or marriageable young woman) to Hera ( gunê , or wife) and Demeter ( mêtêr , or mother). Sappho composed songs for performances at festivals of all these goddesses" (9).
- Four modern reconstructions of Sappho dominate the literature about her: Sappho the chorus organizer, Sappho the teacher, Sappho the priestess, and Sappho the banqueter. Of these four the suggestion that she led young women's choruses is the most plausible, because it agrees best with the testimonia , her fragments, and the historical period in which she lived. This could mean that more of her poetry was composed for public performances than is generally recognized. However, there is also evidence of solo performances and of songs that may have been composed for more intimate occasions" (14-15).
- "There is no evidence that Sappho performed a religious function, such as that of priestess. It is true, of course, that an archaic Greek chorus did have a religious purpose (as noted earlier). In this sense the idea that Sappho led a religious community is compatible with her role as a composer and instructor of young women's choruses" (15-16).

### Pronouns in Sappho's lyrics and other key names:

- [1]: "I" x5 ; "me" x2 ; "my" x5 ; Mention of "Sappho" ; "you" x5 ; Mention of "Aphrodite"
- [2]: "me" x 1 ; Mention of "Aphrodite"
- [3]: "I" x1 ; "me" x1 ; "my" x1 ; "you" x2
- [4]: "I" x1 ; "me" x1
- [5]: Mention of "Brother" ; "my" x1 ; "you" x2 ; Mention of "Aphrodite"
- [6]: "we" x1
- [8]: "I" x1 ; Mention of "Atthis"
- [9]: "I" x2 ; "you" x1
- [15]: "you" x1 ; Mention of "Aphrodite"
- [16]: "I" x2 ; "me" x1 ; Mention of "Anaktoria" ; "you" x1 ; Mention of "Aphrodite"
- [17]: "we" x1 ; "you" x1
- [18]: "my" x1
- [19]: "we" x1
- [16A]: "I" x1 ; "me" x1
- [22]: "I" x4 ; Mention of "Gongyla" ; "you" x1 ; Mention of "Aphrodite"
- [23]: "I" x1 ; "me" x1 ; "my" x1 ; "you" x3
- [24]: "we" x2 ; "you" x1
- [26]: "I" x2 ; "me" x1 ; "my" x1 ; "you" x1 ; Mention of "Aphrodite"
- [27]: "you" x1
- [30]: "we" x1
- [31]: "I" x4 ; "me" x1 ; "my" x6 ; "you" x3
- [32]: "me" x1
- [33]: "I" x1 ; Mention of "Aphrodite"
- [36]: "I" x2
- [37]: "my" x1
- [38]: "you" x1
- [40]: "I" x2 ; "you" x2
- [41]: "my" x1 ; "you" x1
- [43]: "my" x1
- [44A]: "I" x1 ; "my" x1
- [45]: "you" x1
- [46]: "I" x1 ; "my" x1
- [47]: "my" x1
- [48]: "I" x1 ; "my" x1 ; "you" x2
- [49A]: "I" x1 ; Mention of "Atthis"
- [49B]: "me" x1 ; "you" x1
- [51]: "I" x1
- [52]: "I" x1
- [55]: "you" x1
- [56]: "I" x1
- [pre-58 Oxyrhynchos]: "my" x1 ; "you" x1
- [pre-58 Cologne]: "I" x5
- [58]: "I" x6 ; "me" x1 ; "my" x3
- [60]: "I" x1 ; "me" x1 ; "my" x2 ; "you" x2
- [62]: "you" x2
- [63]: "I" x4 ; "you" x1
- [65]: Mention of "Sappho" ; "you" x1 ; Mention of "Aphrodite"
- [67]: "you" x1
- [68] Mention of "Megara" ; "me" x1
- [70]: "I" x1
- [71]: "I" x1 ; Mention of "Mika" ; "you" x2
- [73]: Mention of "Aphrodite"
- [76]: "I" x1
- [86]: "I" x1 ; "my" x2 ; "you" x1 ; Mention of "Aphrodite"
- [88]: "I" x4 ; "me" x1 ; "you" x4
- [90]: "I" x1 ; "me" x1 ; "you" x1 ; Mention of "Aphrodite"
- [92]: "I" x1
- [94]: "I" x3 ; "me" x4 ; Mention of "Sappho" ; "my" x2 ; "we" x3 ; "you" x6
- [95]: "I" x2 ; "me" x1 ; Mention of "Gongyla"
- [96]: Mention of "Atthis" ; "we" x1 ; "you" x1 ; Mention of "Aphrodite"

- [98]: "I" x1 ; Mention of "Kleïs" ; Mention of "Mother" ; "my" x1
- [99B]: "I" x1
- [101]: Mention of "Aphrodite"
- [102]: "I" x1 ; Mention of "Aphrodite"
- [103B]: "me" x1
- [104A]: "you" x2
- [107]: "I" x1
- [109]: "we" x1
- [111]: "you" x1
- [112]: "you" x4 ; Mention of "Aphrodite"
- [114]: "I" x1 ; "me" x1 ; "my" x1 ; "you" x1
- [115]: "I" x2 ; "you" x1
- [117]: "you" x1
- [118]: "me" x1
- [120]: "I" x1
- [121]: "I" x1 ; "my" x1 ; "you" x1
- [122]: Mention of "Sappho"
- [124]: "you" x1
- [125]: "I" x1
- [126]: "you" x1
- [129]: "me" x2 ; "you" x2
- [131]: "me" x1 ; Mention of "Atthis" ; Mention of "Andromeda" ; "you" x1
- [133]: Mention of "Sappho" ; "you" x1 ; Mention of "Aphrodite"
- [132]: "I" x2 ; Mention of "Kleïs"
- [134]: "I" x1 ; "you" ; Mention of "Aphrodite"
- [137]: "I" x1 ; "you" x3
- [138]: "me" x1
- [140]: "we" x1 ; ; Mention of "Aphrodite"
- [146]: "me" x1
- [147]: "I" x1
- [155]: "my" x1
- [159]: "me" x1 ; "my" x1 (Aphrodite speaking) ; "you" x2 ; Mention of "Aphrodite"
- [160]: "I" x1 ; "my" x1
- [163]: "my" x1
- [168B]: "I" x1
- [169]: "I" x1
- [182]: "I" x1
- [213]: "me" x1
- [214C]: Mention of "Atthis"
- [A 254]: "me" x1
- [A 255]: "me" x1
- [A 259]: "you" x2
- [S/A 18]: "I" x1
- [S/A 23]: Mention of "Aphrodite"
- [S/A 25]: "I" x1
- [256]: Mention of "Atthis"
- [261]: Mention of "Aphrodite"
- [Brothers Song]: "I" x1 ; mention of "Charaxos" and "Larichos" ; "me" x1 ; "you" x1

Notes while reading:

- Can other pronouns be used to signify something about speaker as autobiographical “I” vs “representative I” ? What about names? See listing above
- Can the imaginative addressee from the speaker tell us something? See “I” addressing deities at times, which might be of interest to a representative group rather than just the historical Sappho
- Attention to “I” speaking to/about Aphrodite; this might possibly signify moments of public performance, especially based on notes about Sappho and cult of Aphrodite
- Tension between private desires for specific people, reflections on (apparent) historical family members and general reflections on desire (using certain deities, at times, to do so). Should it be evaluated based on how many “specific” or seemingly “personal” details are given? What can addressing deities tell us?
- Note from Appendix on “Brothers Song”: “The first person speaker in the song may be identified with Sappho; her addressee appears to be a family member. Obbink suggests that she may be Sappho’s mother, but another possibility is her third brother Eurygios or Erygios (see the Introduction, p. 3)” (162).
- “I” can also be understood at times as an “implicit I” who speaks as a god/goddess (such as in selection 1) in which “Sappho” has a discussion with said god/goddess. This seems to create a tension – possibly author Sappho using a speaking god as benefit for others, but also concerns (somewhat) specific details about desire

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Western Literature: Texts and Concepts

Reading Notes 1: Sappho

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