

SAPPHO'S IAMBICS

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ABSTRACT: *Although at least three ancient sources list specifically iambics as a type or form of poetry written by Sappho, few scholars seriously address the issue. The question is complicated by the lack of agreement about the sense in which archaic poets and their audiences understood the term iambos. This article explores the nuances of the term, and then addresses two main questions: first, is there convincing evidence that Sappho did indeed compose iambics? I argue that some of her work definitely belongs to the broader group of invective poetry to which iambos also belongs. And second, why are scholars so resistant to the notion of Sappho composing and performing invective verse? I suggest that scholars have tended to associate Sappho with more proper “feminine” melic content, and may have attributed to Alcaeus some of her verses that did not fit their idea of lyric propriety.*

KEYWORDS: *iambics; charis; invective; symposion; Sappho; Alcaeus; Lesbos; Poseidippus; Andromeda; Atthis.*

The title of this article is meant to elicit the question, “Did Sappho really compose iambics?” Although at least three ancient sources list specifically iambics as a type or form of poetry written by Sappho, few scholars seriously address the issue.¹ The question is complicated by the lack of agreement about the sense in which archaic poets and their audiences understood the term *iambos*. In what

¹ The question is addressed by Antonio Aloni in his edition *Saffo Frammenti* (Florence 1997) lxxi – lxxxii; also “What Is That Man Doing in Sappho, fr. 31 V.?” , in A. Cavarzere, A. Aloni, and A. Barchiesi, eds., *Iambic Ideas* (Lanham 2001) 29-40. Other references to Sapphic iambics appear in works specifically on *iambos*, e.g. Cavarzere, Aloni, and Barchiesi (2001) 30: “this text includes...some features and attitudes of an iambic nature”. Andrea Rotstein, *The Idea of Iambos* (Oxford 2010) similarly argues for iambic

follows, I will explore the nuances of the term, and then address two main questions: first, is there convincing evidence that Sappho did indeed compose iambs? And second, why are scholars so resistant to the notion of Sappho composing and performing invective verse?²

1. Iambic as a generic term for invective verse

Iambos has a long and complicated history: it emerges as a recognizable literary form in Archilochus in the 7th c. BCE; acquires a definition of sorts in Aristotle (*Rhet.* 1418b28) in the classical period; and resurfaces with new vigor in Hellenistic and Roman authors. But my intention here is not to resolve the debate about iambic as a generic term in antiquity; I limit my discussion of the iambic genre to those elements that may help us better interpret the sources that attribute iambs to Sappho.

Scholars often approach *iambos* with a kind of checklist mentality, hoping to find necessary and sufficient features for a generic taxonomy. With this approach, the most obvious identifying feature would be meter, but, and of particular relevance for Sappho, even as early as the 7th c. BCE, the term “*iambos*” is not always restricted to verses in iambic meter.³ Archilochus and Hipponax are generally regarded as the definitive iambic poets of Archaic Greece, and neither of them limited their invective verses to iambic or even choliambic meters.⁴ Verbal aggression is another marker that comes immediately to mind: both Aristotle (*Pol.* 1448b) and Pindar

content, but not meter, in some of Sappho's songs. See also Laurie O'Higgins' chapter “Women's Iambic Voices” in her *Women and Humor in Classical Greece* (Cambridge 2003) 86-97; Martin Steinrück includes a few references to Sappho's verses, but focuses more generally on the possible audience for iambic performance in his *Iambos* (Spudasmata 79; Zurich 2000).

² Aloni (2001) 30: “To argue for an aggressive temper of the iambic type in Sappho's poetry goes against the grain of received opinion”.

³ That is not to say that *iambos* might not have been *originally* a metrical term; for an argument in support of its metrical origins, see Rotstein (forthcoming 2010); for an argument against, see C. Carey, “Iambos”, in F. Budelmann, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Lyric* (Cambridge UK 2009) 149-67.

⁴ Ralph Rosen, *Making Mockery* (Oxford 2007) 206 note 53: see West (1974) 22-25; Rosen (1988) 3-7; Brown (1997) 13-16. Also Carey (2009) 149: “Aristotle (*Rhet.* 1418b28) uses the word of a poem in trochaic tetrameters and of another in iambic trimeters; Herodotus (1.12) uses the term of the same trimeter poem. It is likely therefore

(*Pyth.* 2.52-55) associate *iambos* with mockery and abuse (*psogos*), perhaps tracing it back to the actions of its namesake, Iambe in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, whose use of mockery is represented as beneficial in cheering up the grieving divinity. Other generic markers include references to physicality and (sometimes graphic) sexuality, a focus on food or eating and drinking, and the frequent use of a low linguistic register (e.g. indecent language, insult, scatology, etc.).⁵ If we tried, however, to limit the use of the term “*iambos*” to only those verses that exhibit all (or a high percentage) of these markers, we would rapidly find ourselves unfairly excluding far too much. I agree, therefore, with Ewan Bowie’s understanding of *iambos* as constituting “a more loosely linked network of poetic types” based on an analogy to family resemblance.⁶ This allows us to focus on verbal aggression in Sappho without having to worry about the absence of e.g. indecent language.⁷

Andrea Rotstein has recently developed a new way of looking at the “idea” of *iambos*, starting with a careful examination of the sense in which the archaic iambic poets and their audiences used the term. She assumes that *iambos* already has a clear generic identity when it first appears in Archilochus 215W (“I don’t care about *iamboi* or enjoyment”), but that it shifts in meaning as Archilochus becomes identified in the 5th c. BCE primarily as a poet of blame. According to Rotstein’s brilliant reconstruction of the history of *iambos*, the meter stayed the same, but the content changed, so that *iambos* eventually became most closely identified with its content, namely invective (*psogos*). Thus by the 4th c. BCE, *iambos* was directly associated with invective and obscenity.⁸ She concludes that Sappho, and other archaic poets as Xenophanes and Timocreon, while not primarily poets of invective, were linked to *iambos* by virtue of a salient feature of their work

that *iambos* in origin designates either content or occasion or both”. For another perspective on the defining characteristic of *iambos*, see Ewan Bowie, “Early Greek Iambic Poetry: The Importance of Narrative”, in *Iambic Ideas* (2001) 1-27.

⁵ See Carey (2009) 149-51.

⁶ Bowie (2001) 6.

⁷ For a useful discussion of the clash between low-register language and “high” genres, see David Bain, “Low Words in High Places”, in P.J. Finglass, C. Collard, and N.J. Richardson, eds., *Hesperos* (Oxford 2007) 40-57.

⁸ Rotstein (2010) 130-36 uses evidence from Photius’ 9th-century *Bibliotheca*, summarizing a handbook by Proclus, which in turn is thought to preserve material from the 1st-century BCE scholar Didymus, transmitting the work of his Hellenistic predecessors.

that was shared by the genre of *iambos*.⁹ The salient feature could, of course, differ in each case. As we consider ancient *testimonia* below, it will be important to try to distinguish which particular dominant or salient feature is being used at any given time by an ancient author attributing iambs to Sappho, as “dominant features need not remain stable throughout the history of a literary genre”.¹⁰

Rotstein’s approach to the term *iambos* acknowledges the difficulty of formulating a definition to suit all occasions, and accepts instead the existence of iambic moments within a poetic corpus that includes varied meters and topics.¹¹ This more inclusive conceptualization of *iambos* is also adopted by Angela Andrisano, in an article on iambic motifs in Alcaeus’ lyric poetry; she points out that Aristophanes (*Frogs* 372ff.) identified iambic moments over a spectrum that ranged from blatant aggression (*skoptein*) through sly joking (*chleuazein*), to friendly teasing (*paizein*).¹² In this scenario, as Ralph Rosen puts it in the context of his study on literary satire,

...a poet situates himself in an antagonistic relationship with some character marked out as a target of righteous indignation. This relationship can manifest itself in many ways – straightforward, vituperative, blaming, for example, or milder off-color innuendo, irony or sarcasm – but the antagonism itself is always explicit, for it is in the poet’s interest to clarify who is the blamer and who the target.¹³

The relationship between blamer and target along the iambic spectrum is made more complex by the presence of a hypothetical audience, imagined to be

⁹ Rotstein (2010) 55.

¹⁰ Rotstein (2010) 11: “For Catullus, for example, it seems that invective alone, even when written in ‘lyric’ metres, is enough to refer to a poem as *iambos*, whereas Lucian seems to conceive of *iambos* in prose (*Pseudol.* 2)”.

¹¹ In this vein, Angela Andrisano, “Iambic Motifs in Alcaeus’ Lyrics”, in *Iambic Ideas* (2001) 45 finds in certain fragments of Alcaeus an “iambic attitude” that is cleverly camouflaged. See also Davies (1985) 31-39 on invective in Alcaeus.

¹² See Andrisano (2001) 42-43, who adds that Aristotle (*Rhet.* 1379a29) similarly subdivided types of insults, but replaced *paizein* with *katagelan*. On κωμᾶζειν and σκώπτειν, used by Maximus of Tyre (19.9s) and Athenaeus (1.21b-c) to introduce Sappho fr. 57, see also Rotstein (2010) 37; O’Higgins (2003) 90 labels these verbs “classic iambic indicator[s]”.

¹³ Ralph Rosen, *Making Mockery* (Oxford 2007) 19; based on a quotation from Frederic Bogel, *The Difference Satire Makes* (2004) 1-2.

sympathetic to the poet's complaints. Thus, adapting Rosen's approach to the particulars of archaic Greek invective, the iambic mode can be understood to be "a self-consciously literary and essentially performative mode that cannot exist without an audience"; *iambos* becomes a kind of performance, a showpiece for the audience rather than purely a vehicle of harm against its target, and poetic verbal abuse can be read as "a fictionalized, mimetic representation of aggressive human behavior".¹⁴

Particularly appealing about this approach is its self-distancing from poetic autobiography. We can leave behind questions of historicity and focus on the rhetoric of iambic performance and audience response. Does the poet convince us, her audience, of her moral righteousness?¹⁵ Do we trust her representation of her target(s)? What does she stand to gain (or lose) by exposing the faults of her target(s)? How does her style of verbal aggression compare to that of her (male) contemporaries? To begin to answer these questions, we must turn to the iambic elements in Sappho's poetry, beginning with the evidence from ancient *testimonia*.

2. The ancient evidence: *testimonia*

We have three pieces of ancient evidence linking Sappho directly to the term *iambos*. The earliest is that of the 1st-century BCE poet-philosopher Philodemus, who asserts that Sappho composed "some verses in the manner of iambics": καὶ Σαπφῶ τινα ἰαμβικῶς ποιεῖ (*de Poem.* 2 Janko fr. 117).¹⁶ The larger context of the passage argues for Sappho's ability to write in various modes, including iambic (*de Poem.* 2 Janko fr. 117):¹⁷

οἱ γ[ὰρ] ἰαμβοποιοὶ τραγικὰ ποιῶσιν, καὶ οἱ τραγωδοποιοὶ
πάνην ἰαμβικά, καὶ Σαπφῶ τινα ἰαμβικῶς ποιεῖ, καὶ Ἀρχίλοχος

¹⁴ Rosen (2007) 20; he also discusses (20-27) how mockery and abuse must be interpreted very differently dependent on the venue (symposium vs. law court) and audience (strangers in the streets vs. close friends in a private house).

¹⁵ Rosen (2007) 179: "As self-proclaimed figures of moral righteousness, satirists generally do not present themselves as gratuitously rancorous or prone to excessive anger".

¹⁶ This passage is discussed briefly in S. Koster, *Die Invektive in der griechischen und römischen Literatur* (1980) 61.

¹⁷ Ewen Bowie (2001) 4 sees the Philodemus passage as a direct response to a passage in Aristotle's *Poetics*, in which each poet is understood to write in the genre that best suits his nature.

οὐκ ἰαμβικῶς. ὥστε φύσει μὲν [οὐ ῥ]ητέον ἰαμβοποιὸν [ἢ
ἄλλ]ο τι ποιῶντα γένος, ἀλλὰ νομῶι ...

For poets of iambs compose tragic verses, and conversely tragic poets compose iambs. Sappho composes some verses in the manner of iambs, while Archilochus composes some not in the manner of iambs. Therefore one must say that a composer of iambs or some other genre exists not because of his nature, but by convention.

Philodemus implies here that, while Sappho's main focus may have been other types of poetry, she also composed verses that resembled iambs on some level.¹⁸ It is not clear from this passage whether her iambic "manner" was related to meter, content, performance context, or some other benchmark.¹⁹ But Philodemus has clearly chosen two poets who represent opposite poles on the stylistic spectrum to make his point. He argues that Archilochus, infamous in antiquity for his harsh iambs, also sang in other modes, while Sappho, known to ancient poets and literary critics alike for her sweetness and elegance, participated in her share of invective.²⁰ Implied in this discussion is a sense of potential resistance to the idea of Sappho s(l)inging insults. Philodemus assumes an audience comfortable with a stereotypically gendered (female) image of Sappho: sweet, refined, and in love. We will return later to the topic of stereotyping. But it seems

¹⁸ While he does not specify which other poetic types, we can assume from our extant verses that he means marriage hymns, love lyrics, dactylic hexameter narratives, hymns to divinities, etc. A scholiast on Horace *Ode* 2.13.24 mentions Sappho as "skilled in tragedy". The epigrammatist Dioscorides (*AP* 7.407) lists the Sappho's attributes in such a way that they can be read as generic markers: love songs, epithalamia, and laments for Adonis.

¹⁹ Rotstein (2010) 136-43 interprets this passage as referring to contents perceived as typical of iambic poetry.

²⁰ On Sappho's sweetness as the antithesis of *iambos*, see E. Degani, *Studi su Ipponatte* (Bari 1984) 79. On the assessment of her poetry as smooth, soft, and melodious, see also "Longinus" on Sappho's fragment 31; Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Dem.* 40; Demetrius *On Style* 132; Apuleius *Apol.* 9 "dulcedine carminum"; Aulus Gellius *Noct Att* 19.9.3 – "erotica dulcia et venusta". The term "charm" (*charis*) is often applied to her poetry (e.g. in *A.P.* 7.718.2,9; *A.P.* 184.2; Plut. *Pyth Orac.* 397a. Charm also appears as a topic of her verse: Demetrius *On Style* 132: "charm (*charis*) is sometimes inherent in the subject matter, such as nymphs' gardens, wedding hymns, erotic situations, and all the poetry of Sappho"; Himerius (*Or.* 28.2) says that Sappho made a girl's beauty and charm (*charis*) the pretext for her songs.

that we, too, still need to be convinced that Sappho, like any poet, composed not according to her own personality traits or personal experiences, but rather according to generic conventions and specific performance opportunities.

The juxtaposition of Sappho and Archilochus is surprisingly common in ancient sources, even when iambs are not the central topic. This may be partly explained by the popularity of Sappho in New Comedy, where iambic might feel more at home. Athenaeus' *Deipnosophistae* is our best source for such evidence (Athen. 13.598bc; 599cd = Loeb test. 8).²¹ Athenaeus reports that the comic dramatist Diphilus, in his play titled *Sappho* (Kock 2.564), presented Archilochus and Hipponax as Sappho's rival lovers, an automatically suspect pairing, since the two most famous male iambic poets lived a full century apart from one another. In the same passage, Athenaeus blames the early Hellenistic elegiac poet Hermesianax (fr. 7.47-56 Powell) for mistakenly reporting that Anacreon and Sappho were lovers, another chronological impossibility.²² This last example suggests a certain interchangeability among Sappho's male lovers.²³

These purported scholarly discussions on Sappho, imagined by Athenaeus as elite sympotic table talk, reveal a whole host of cultural assumptions. Ancient authors were eager to pair off Sappho heterosexually with poets who overlapped her sphere of influence in some way or another. While we cannot reconstruct their motivations (were they trying to be funny? revealing some cultural or literary anxiety about status?), we can make an educated guess at their reasoning: Sappho is matched with Alcaeus because of their shared Lesbian homeland, and with Anacreon because of their mutual interest in love poetry.²⁴ Along the same lines,

²¹ For more examples of Sappho in New Comedy, see D. Yatromanolakis (2007) 222-24.

²² Powell, *Collectanea Alexandrina* (1925); also in Diehl, *Anthologia Lyrica Graeca* vol. 2 (Leipzig 1925) 217-18. For further discussion, see Yatromanolakis (2007) 348-52.

²³ See also Chamaeleon (quoted by Athen. 13.598bc, 599cd), who reported that Anacreon 358 PMG was addressed to Sappho, and that some believed (erroneously) that Sappho replied to Anacreon with a song of her own (fr. 953 adesp.); see also Yatromanolakis (2007) 351-58.

²⁴ For examples of antiquity's pairing of Sappho and Anacreon, see e.g. Horace *Ode* 4.9.9-12; Themistius, *Or.* 13.170d – 171a; Aulus Gellius, *Noct. Att.* 19.9.3s; Plutarch *Mul. Virt.* 243b. Ovid *Tristia* 2.363-65 pairs Sappho and Anacreon as *eratodidaskaloi*. Benjamin Acosta-Hughes, *Arion's Lyre* (Princeton 2010) 102 mentions a papyrus (P. Mich. inv. 3498r) with "incipits" of Sappho, Anacreon, and Alcaeus. For further observations on the "cluster" of Sappho and Anacreon, see Yatromanolakis (2007) 222-24. The rediscovery of the anacreontic corpus gave further impetus to the scholarly association

I have argued elsewhere that the connection of Sappho with Homer underscores that each was pre-eminent in his or her particular field of poetic expertise.²⁵ But the fictional erotic triangle between Archilochus, Hipponax, and Sappho needs more explanation, as Sappho is not best known today for her iambic verse.²⁶

The emergence of Sappho's connection with *iamboi* seems to coincide with the appearance in the Hellenistic period of comedies starring Sappho, which survive as titles in catalogues or as textual fragments.²⁷ In these plays, Sappho appears as a clever, witty, and acerbic character, precisely the sort one could imagine composing iambs in her spare time. Athenaeus (11.487a) tells us that the comic dramatist Diphilus staged Sappho toasting Archilochus, a telling juxtaposition. Diphilus' contemporary Antiphanes (noted in Athen. 10.450e) shows Sappho propounding riddles to a male citizen body that fails miserably to guess the answers, and again we sense an invective or iambic undercurrent in this dramatic situation: a clever female poet reveals her own intellectual powers at the expense of others.²⁸

of Anacreon and Sappho: see P.A. Rosenmeyer, *The Poetics of Imitation* (1992); *ibid.*, "Greek Lyric Poetry in the French Renaissance", in *The Classical Heritage in France*, ed. G. Sandy (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2002): 393-424; and P. Michelakis, "Greek lyric from the Renaissance to the eighteenth century", in Budelmann (2009) 346-49.

²⁵ P. A. Rosenmeyer, "Her Master's Voice: Sappho's Dialogue with Homer", *MD* 39 (1998): 123-49.

²⁶ According to O'Higgins (2003) 87, "There was something in her style and subject matter that drew her into the orbit of Archilochus and the others".

²⁷ We have references to six plays titled *Sappho*: in addition to Diphilus (Kock 2.564) and Antiphanes (Kock 2.94-96), there were similarly titled comedies by Timocles (Athen. 8.339c = Kock 2.464), Ephippus (Athen. 13.572c = Kock 2.262), Ameipsias (Kock 1.674), and Amphis (Kock 2.246). Possibly related are comedies by Plato Comicus (Kock 1.648) and Antiphanes (Kock 2.104), who both wrote a *Phaon*, while five comic poets (Alexis, Amphis, Antiphanes, Diphilus, and Menander) used the title *The Leucadian*. Also possibly relevant is the comic poet Epicrates' reference to Sappho's erotic verses (Athen. 13.605e).

²⁸ We may be reminded here of the tradition of wise courtesans who show off their intellectual and cultural superiority in the company of their lovers at dinner parties. See L. McClure, *Courtesans at Table* (2003). To go one step further, the tradition of a "second" Sappho who earned her living as a courtesan may be one (albeit drastic) way to deal with the perceived threat of an iambic Sappho. One could even argue for a connection between Aristophanes' representation of women from Lesbos as sexually "perverse" or subversive with the concept of women singing *iamboi*: see Aelius Dionysius, the 2nd c. CE Atticist lexicographer: λεσβιάσαι = τὸ αἰσχρῶς μολύναι τὸ στόμα. In this version, Sappho becomes a poetic descendant of Iambe.

It is difficult to determine whether the tradition of Sappho as iambic poet emerged before or only in conjunction with her appearance on the comic stage. Has our evidence been compromised by the biographical bias of comedy, as in the case of the exaggerated depictions of Socrates in the plays of Aristophanes, which tends toward extreme stereotyping? Is it possible that Sappho's iambics are really just hints of lost comedies in the manner of Antiphanes and Diphilus? Or did the ancient writers have evidence of an earlier tradition linking Sappho to *iambos* that we no longer possess?

Two other direct references to Sappho's iambics occur in later authors. The 4th-c. CE pagan emperor Julian, in one of his many letters, compared Sappho's iambics with those of Hipponax and Callimachus (Jul. *Epist.* 10 Bidez-Cumont).²⁹ And the 10th-c. *Suda* claims that Sappho "wrote epigrams, elegiacs, iambics, and solo songs": ἔγραψε δὲ καὶ ἐπιγράμματα καὶ ἐλεγεία καὶ ἰάμβους καὶ μονωδίας (*Suda* 107 Adler = *test.* 235 Voigt). The latter piece of evidence may simply be repeating and elaborating on the Philodemus passage, cataloguing as well her non-iambic poetry. Finally, there is a less direct allusion to Sapphic invective, not specifically *iambos*, in Athenaeus (*Deipno.* 1.21.b-c): Athenaeus speaks of Sappho's attack on Andromeda (Sappho fr. 57 V), using the term σκώπτειν, already noted above as a term on the spectrum of invective in Aristophanes' *Frogs*.³⁰

What are we to make of these *testimonia*? As discussed earlier, the reference to iambics, or to a poem composed "in the manner of iambics" (ἰαμβικῶς), may be limited to the metrical pattern and performance context, or it may extend more generally to an invective content.³¹ Let us briefly consider each of these three categories, reviewing the ancient evidence external to Sappho's own verses.

²⁹ See the discussion in Degani (1984) 79, which sets Hipponax's and Callimachus' iambics against those of Sappho, describing two different iambic types, one aggressive and the other more moderate. Cf. A. Rotstein (2010) 34-38, who denies the relevance of this letter to the debate on Sappho's iambics, arguing that Julian is actually praising iambic trimeters that read more like lyric poetry (Sappho) than invective (Hipponax and Callimachus).

³⁰ Discussed in Andrisano (2001) 43. Latin terms should be treated with caution; when Horace (*Ode* 2.13.24ff.) writes that Sappho is "complaining to her lyre about the girls of her city", the word "querentem" points toward elegiac rather than iambic.

³¹ Koster (1980), Rosen (2007), and Rotstein (2010), *passim*.

We can only speculate about the details of performance, as there are no clear statements of specifically iambic contexts for Sappho's poetry; the best information we have of any public recitation of Sappho's songs are three allusions to the sympotic re-performance of some of Sappho's songs, all dated to the 2nd c. CE. Plutarch (*Quaest. Conviv.* 622c, 711d) describes songs of Sappho sung at table as lyric "golden oldies", the classic tunes of the symposium.³² Aelian, quoted by Stobaeus (*Flor.* 3.29.58), records the tradition of Solon learning Sapphic songs from his nephew over wine. Aulus Gellius (*Noct. Att.* 19.9.3s) paints a picture of Roman sympotic entertainment in the 2nd c. CE: wine is passed and conversation enjoyed, as singers and musicians sing anacreontics, "Sapphica", and some sweet and charming ("dulcia et venusta") modern erotic elegiac compositions. While sympotic entertainment could easily incorporate invective verse, and we assume that most of Archilochus and Hipponax were indeed sung at such parties, the specific Sapphic songs that Solon's nephew and Aulus Gellius' entertainers perform appear to be more closely associated with sublimity or sweetness than with scurrility.³³

Turning to meter, none of Sappho's surviving fragments were composed as iambs. That is not to say, however, that there couldn't have been Sapphic iambs that have not survived.³⁴ Ancient grammarians commenting on Sappho's meters noted her metrical flexibility. A scholiast on Pindar mentions tangentially "the Sapphic hendecasyllable, in which the whole of Sappho Book 1 is written" (*Schol. metr. Pind. Pyth.* 1); elsewhere Hephæstion (*Poem.* 1.2) mentions stanzas divided by metrical marks (*paragraphoi*) in later redactions of Sappho's archaic poetry. The grammarian Terentius Maurus (*de metr.* 2550), like the Suda mentioned earlier,

³² Yatromanolakis (2007) 88-110 brings in further evidence for the popularity of Sapphic songs at symposia from the remains of material culture, e.g. the Bochum kalyx-krater, a red-figure vase inscribed with the poet's name.

³³ Yatromanolakis (2007) 367 is right to remind us that none of this evidence is necessarily representative of "actual realities".

³⁴ Although note Rotstein (2010) 36: "the iambic meters used by Sappho's roughly contemporary Archilochus were not a medium available to Lesbian poets in the seventh century BCE. On the contrary, both Sappho and Alcaeus employ 'lyric' metres for a range of contents, including invective". See also A. Aloni, "La performance giambica nella Grecia arcaica", *Annali Online-Lettere (Unife)* 1.1 (2006) 83-107, esp. 99. Rotstein, in her 2009 paper presented orally at the Classical Association of the Midwest and South (Minneapolis MN), sees content and meter as defining features of the *iamboi*, and points to a split of iambic meter and iambic content in Catullus, for example, who writes blame poetry but in a variety of meters.

refers to Sappho's poems of varied rhythm ("carmina disparis figurae"). There is a unique reference in Photius (*Bibl.* 161) to a Book 8 by Sappho; it may be that this book (or other missing books) contained some metrically identifiable iambs.

It is tempting, however, to conclude that Sappho did not compose in the iambic meter. First, Demetrius (*Eloc.* 132) implies that "all the poetry of Sappho", not just her material on "nymphs' gardens, wedding hymns, and erotic verses", is inherently charming; we would be hard pressed to describe iambs as "full of *charis*". Similarly, as noted earlier, the Greek literary tradition insists on beauty and charm (*charis*) as the trademarks of Sappho's verses (e.g. Dion. Hal. *Dem.* 40; Himer. *Or.* 28.2; etc.), and Roman authors as disparate as Ovid (*Trist.* 2.365: "Lesbia quid docuit Sappho, nisi amare, paellas?") and Apuleius (*Apol.* 9: "dulcedine carminum") fall in step, emphasizing Sappho's sweet and elegant love poetry. The epigrammatists summarize this tradition well when they characterize Sappho's poetry as "roses" (e.g. *AP* 4.1, Meleager), or rhapsodize on the sweetness of her songs (*AP* 7.407, Dioscorides; *AP.* 9.189, Anon., line 5: γλυκὺν ὕμνον). But we must move with caution here, as a familiar example should remind us: scholars continue to resist characterizing Anacreon's invective against Artemon as typical of the poet, although it is the single longest fragment of his we possess. It is difficult to accept that the poets who sing of love and divine epiphany can turn around and compose scathing invectives against victims who are presented as blameworthy for simply wearing the wrong kind of clothing (Anacreon fr. 82 Gentili) or not knowing the proper way to "pull her dress around her ankles" (Sappho fr. 57).³⁵

In addition, before we chalk up Sappho's *charis* to a stereotype of a female poet, whose "natural" sphere is that of love, we must deal with a tantalizing statement by Horace in his *Epistles* (1.19.28):

temperat Archilochi musam pede mascula Sappho.

Masculine Sappho tempers Archilochus' muse with her [choice of] meter.

There is more than one way to read this single hexameter line.³⁶ One way follows the lead of two ancient scholiasts. Porphyrio (in Hor. *Epist.* 1.19.28) explains

³⁵ This prejudice may have led to the attribution of *P*Oxy. 1788 to Alcaeus, when it may very well be by Sappho, targeting Doricha and Charaxus; see Yatromanolakis (2007) 332-33.

³⁶ See, for example, O'Higgins (2003) 88: "Sappho is *mascula* in Horace's eye possibly because she participated in what had developed as an assertively "male" genre".

that Sappho is “mascula” either because she is famous for her poetry, an area in which men more often excel, or because she is said to have been a “tribas”, a lesbian. The scholiast Dionysius Latinus supports Porphyrio’s first scenario, insisting that “mascula” implies nothing sexually suggestive: “non mollis, ... nec impudica”. Yet another way to read this line is that Sappho adapted the “musa” of Archilochus, i.e. *iambos*, by changing his meter (“pes”). She is labeled masculine because she could compose invective with the best of them, but she chose not to follow his metrical lead, and instead sang “in the manner of iambs”: invective verse in non-iambic rhythms.³⁷ This latter reading seems to me to most likely, but it must be acknowledged that we probably will never be able to find a good solution to the metrical question until more papyri are unearthed with new evidence.

As for the third category under discussion, we find ourselves on safer ground: Sappho’s corpus does include invective content. The 2nd-c. CE sophist Maximus of Tyre, for example, claims that Sappho occasionally “scolds other women” in her poems: *νῦν μὲν ἐπιτιμᾷ ταύταις* (Max. Tyr. 18.9), and a number of Sappho’s lines could fit this description. Herodotus (2.135) mentions a poem by Sappho attacking her brother Charaxus; he uses the word *σκώπτει*, suggesting iambic content. Aristotle reports a dialogue (*Rhet.* 1367a) between Sappho and Alcaeus where the text, although quite corrupt, seems to present Sappho accusing her interlocutor of stirring up trouble; shame then overcomes Alcaeus, and he is unable to respond to her (apparently) justified complaints.³⁸ In the section below, I will present these and a variety of other Sapphic passages that might be understood *ἰαμβικῶς*.³⁹

3. The ancient evidence: Sappho’s poetry

The most obvious place to look for invective in Sappho’s verses is in the poetry directed against her brother Charaxus.⁴⁰ It is entirely possible that this

³⁷ Acosta-Hughes (2010) 95 suggests that Catullus’ choice of the Greater Asclepiad for his poem 30 may reflect Sappho’s use of this meter for mocking others (e.g. fr. 55-57 on aesthetics and the target’s lack of poetic skills).

³⁸ The scholiast on this passage attributes both parts to Sappho herself. See Sappho fr. 137.

³⁹ See O’Higgins (2003) 86-97 for mockery and abuse in Sappho’s corpus. Unless otherwise noted, the Greek text is that of D.A. Campbell, *Greek Lyric* (Cambridge MA 1982), and the translations are my own.

⁴⁰ Ovid *Her.* 15.117-18 depicts Sappho’s brother as rejoicing and exulting in her grief: “gaudet et e nostro crescit maerore Charaxus / frater...”

story is an elaborate autobiographical fiction, but other ancient sources are aware of the tradition in which she supposedly scolded her brother for his irresponsible lifestyle and attacked the character of his mistress.⁴¹ Herodotus (2.135) claims that Sappho abused her brother in her verse: πολλὰ κατεκερτόμησέ μιν; Athenaeus (13.596bc) reports that Sappho also attacked (διαβόλλει) Doricha/Rhodopis directly. Both authors use terminology that emphasizes the invective nature of Sappho's words.⁴²

According to Athenaeus (13.596cd), the Hellenistic epigrammatist Poseidippus often mentioned Doricha in his poetry, although not always in the context of blame. One particular epigram (Pos. 17 G-P; 122 Austin-Bastianini) seems at first glance to mimic Sappho's insistence on poetry's power to recall pleasures or praise a true friend, even one who has departed, whether to another island or to Hades. The poet apparently stands in front of Doricha's tomb,⁴³ addressing her directly:

Δωρίχα, ὅστέα μὲν σὰ πάλαι κόνις ἦν ὁ τε δεσμός
 χάιτης ἢ τε μύρων ἔκπνοος ἀμπεχόνη,
 ἦι ποτε τὸν χαρίεντα περιστέλλουσα Χάραξον
 σύγχρους ὀρθρινῶν ἦψαο κισσυβίων·
 Σαπφῶναι δὲ μένουσι φίλης ἔτι καὶ μενέουσι
 ὠιδῆς αἰ λευκαὶ φθεγγόμεναι σελίδες
 οὖνομα σὸν μακαριστόν, ὃ Νάυκρατις ὠδε φυλάξει
 ἔστ' ἂν ἴηι Νείλου ναῦς ἐφ' ὄλος πελάγη.

Doricha, your bones were dust long ago, and the ribbon
 of your hair, and the perfume-breathing shawl,
 wherewith you once wrapped the lovely Charaxus,
 skin to skin, until you took hold of the morning cups.
 But the lucid columns of Sappho's lovely ode
 are still here and they will go on celebrating

⁴¹ For further discussion, see Joel Lidov, "Sappho, Herodotus, and the *hetaira*", CP 97 (2002) 203-37; Yatromanolakis (2007) 312-37.

⁴² On iambic terminology in Sappho, see also fr. 213A (c) and (g); 214B; 214C. Also Yatromanolakis (2007) 325 note 178, and 343 note 256 on *κερτομέω*.

⁴³ According to a passage in Strabo's *Geography* (17.1.33), one of the pyramids near Memphis was called the "tomb of the prostitute"; he identifies the woman buried inside as Doricha, the mistress (*ἔρωμένη*) of Sappho's brother Charaxus.

your most fortunate name, which Naucratis will thus treasure
as long as ships sail from the Nile on the waves of the sea.⁴⁴

Poseidippus begins in a manner familiar from many of the epigrams in the *Greek Anthology*, focusing on what the dead person has lost. The poet lists in detail all the pleasures of *eros* that the departed has left behind: hair bands, perfume, shawls, boyfriends, drinking parties, cups of wine. Many of the terms Poseidippus uses are borrowed from Sappho's own poetry. But the epigrammatist cleverly undermines Sappho's message: he reflects on the evanescence of pleasure, identifying it as that which is left behind by the beloved, long ago turned to dust, rather than precisely that which is to be remembered as a comfort by separated lovers (cf. Sappho fr. 94).⁴⁵ In Poseidippus' (re)vision, the only thing remaining as a comfort for Doricha is her name, preserved forever in writing on Sappho's "white echoing pages", destined literally to travel with papyrus rolls and other luxury goods on ships traveling between Egypt and Naucratis, even as her bones remain in the grave nominally celebrated by the epigram. Yet in the poem Poseidippus used as his source text - and it was surely a written text at this point -, Sappho had actually composed a much stronger and more effective rebuke, as we will see below, by carefully omitting the name of the woman she imagines dead, deep in Hades with "no share in the roses of Pieria" (Sappho fr. 55).

External references to Doricha are complemented by Sappho's own poetry targeting her brother's mistress, especially fragments 3, 5, 7, and 15. In fragment 15.9, Sappho invokes Aphrodite as a vengeful goddess, calling down her divine ally's wrath on the woman who, to her mind, has ruined her brother's good reputation: "may she [Doricha] find you [Aphrodite] very harsh (πιικροτάταν); let her not boast (καυχάσαιτο)...". Charaxus also bears the blame for his own actions: fragment 5 mentions past ills endured by his patient sister (5.8: πῆμα, 5.10: ονίαν δὲ λύγραν); fragment 7 highlights his arrogance (7.4: ἀγεροχία); and fragment 3 is full of words for the shame and embarrassment brought about by Charaxus' evil habits (3.4: λύπη; 3.5 ὄνειδος; 3.6]οιδήσας; 3.12 κακότατο[ς). One could imagine fragment 26 (P. Oxy. 1231 fr. 16.2-4) ὁ]ττινα[ς γὰρ | εὖ θέω, κῆνοί με μά]λιστα π[ό]ντων | σίνοντα]ι ("those whom I treat well harm me most of all") reflecting what Sappho might have expected from her brother,

⁴⁴ Text and translation from C. Austin and G. Bastianini, eds., *Posidippi Pellaei quae supersunt omnia* (Milan 2002) 158-59.

⁴⁵ Yatromanolakis (2007) 327 also notes this tension: "Poseidippus playfully exploits the discrepancy between his apparent eulogy and Sappho's negative poetic reaction to the affair between Kharaxos and Dorikha".

and then her disappointment at his foolish attachment to a woman who leads him astray. All this material may mirror the tension in the poet's mind between culturally normative family loyalty and a very personal stance of moral outrage.⁴⁶

Several bits of verse seem to showcase Sappho trying to curb her own tongue and resist the urge to compose invective. Fragment 158, according to Plutarch (*de cohob. ira* 456e), is set at a symposium, as the poet promotes (self-) restraint: σκιδναμένας ἐν στήθεσιν ὄργας / μαψυλάκκαν γλῶσσαν πεφυλαχθαι - “to guard against the uselessly barking tongue when anger spreads in the chest”. Elsewhere Sappho speaks in the first person, denying any hint of spitefulness: ἄλλὰ τις οὐκ ἔμμι παλιγκότων | ὄργαν, ἀλλ' ὀβάκην τῶν φρέν' ἔχω... - “I am not one of those people who have a spiteful temper; no, I have a heart that is gentle” (fr. 120).⁴⁷

While Sappho acknowledges in fragment 158 that self-control is the proper way to deal with difficult situations (unlike the Roman satirists who define their poems as logical reactions to a rotten world), she is aware of the temptation to mock or scold. Fragment 103 mentions a woman “putting aside anger” (103.7: ὄργαν θεμμένα); it also blames someone who is “annoying” (103.11: ἄσαροι) possibly to her companions. In addition to her rebukes to her brother and Doricha, Sappho expresses in her lyrics anger and annoyance with a variety of people: divinities, Pittacus' allies, and especially members (or former members) of her own group of friends. In the following paragraphs, I marshal the evidence of iambic terminology (blaming, maligning) and situations (betrayal, jealousy, etc.) in Sappho's own verses.

For a poet recognized in antiquity as sweet and charming, Sappho has left us a surprising number of verses dealing with anger, vengeance, and insult, in terms that are certainly iambic in spirit. Iambic terms in connection with divinities appear even in the famous first “Ode to Aphrodite”. The goddess asks, “Who wrongs

⁴⁶ The anxiety expressed in her poems about the propriety of invective may have contributed to the resistance on the part of scholars to acknowledge Sappho's iambic modes. Yatromanolakis (2007) 332-33 makes the acute suggestion that certain poems attributed to Alcaeus because of their “compromising” content (e.g. Alc. fr. 117b, which mentions prostitution, the sea, business deals, and suffering) may actually be genuine Sappho; he follows the attribution of Alc. fr. 117b to Sappho, found in the edition of G. Liberman, *Alcée: Fragments*, 2 vols. (Paris 1999).

⁴⁷ Sappho at one point seems to denigrate the behavior of the sons of Tyndareus precisely because they did not restrain their insolence (68a8: κόρον οὐ κατισχε. [sic]).

you, Sappho?" (τίς σ', ὦ | Ψάπφ', ὀδίκησι; 1.19-20); the poet's presentation of herself as the victim of a crime suggests the iambic impulse to defend oneself and attack one's enemy, and Sappho's plea for a divine "σύμμαχος" (1.28) sustains the martial metaphor. On another occasion, Aphrodite is said to "blame" Sappho for praying (22.15 = P. Oxy. 1231 fr. 12, 15: ἐμέμφετ'), and Sappho may allude elsewhere to anger (ὄργα) in the context of the gifts of the Muses (44b.5-8).⁴⁸ But more commonly Sappho adopts the role of injured party among her mortal companions. Former friends are blasted with harsh words: ἔμεθεν δ' ἔχησθα λάθων / "you have forgotten me" (129a); ἢ τιν' ἄλλον ἀνθρώπων ἔμεθεν φίλησα / "or you love some other [more] than me" (129b). Fr. 37 V seeks revenge for those who have dared to blame Sappho: *Et. Gen.* (p. 31 Calame): τὸν δ' ἐπιπλάζοντ' ἀνεμοὶ φέροειν | καὶ μελέδωναι "may wind and worries carry off the one who rebukes me".⁴⁹ In fragment 88 (=P. Oxy. 2290), which is admittedly very lacunose, we can reconstruct a line (88.17) to read φίλα φαῖμ' ἐχύρα γέ[νεσθαι] / "I say that I have been a firm friend, and then two lines later (88.19-20) ὀνιαρ[.]σ[|] . πίκρος "grievous...bitter". A plausible context for these lines was already observed in fragment 26 ("for those whom I treat well harm me most of all"); Sappho's invective is contextualized and explained by her sense of injustice; mistreatment at the hands of friends and family gives an excuse to lash out.

Loyalty to the group (whatever the nature of that group) informs Sappho's poetry as much as Alcaeus', to use a clichéd comparison. Personal and political betrayal, whether real or only perceived, provide a context in which Sappho's invective mode flourishes. Laurie O'Higgins puts it well: "a complex of affectionate relationships on the one hand and adversarial relationships on the other defines the figure at the center of the literary, social...web".⁵⁰ In an environment where *charis* is almost fetishized, to call a girl σμικρὰ . . . κῶχαρις (49) may imply, as Plutarch asserts (*Plut. Amat.* 751d), that the girl in question is still too young for marriage.⁵¹ But the phrase sets up an antagonism between those who have *charis*

⁴⁸ See M.L. West, "Burning Sappho", *Maia* 22 (1970) 307-30, esp. 319.

⁴⁹ O'Higgins (2003) 91 compares Sappho 37 with similar sentiments in Archilochus 79 (or Hipp. 115), which calls down revenge in the form of a shipwreck on a disloyal friend.

⁵⁰ O'Higgins (2003) 89.

⁵¹ Plutarch *Amat.* 751d: "addressing a girl who was still too young for marriage, Sappho says... 'You seemed to be a small, graceless child'."

and those who do not, friends and enemies, those “in the know” and those who are ignorant. Politically, this can reveal itself in what appear to be rival groups or affiliations. The name of one particularly hated rival reappears with some frequency in Sappho’s verses: Andromeda. We already noted Maximus of Tyre’s claim in his *Orations* 18.9 (“Sometimes she censures them” [Gorgo and Andromeda]), as well as Athenaeus’ (*Deipn.* 21 bc) observation on Sappho’s derision for Andromeda. Sappho derides Andromeda by depicting her as infatuated with an uneducated and graceless country girl (fr. 57, uncertain text):

τίς δ' ἀγροῖωτις θέλγει νόον . . .
 ἀγροῖωτιν ἐπεμμένα στόλαν . . .
 οὐκ ἐπισταμένα τὰ βράκε' ἔλκην ἐπὶ τὸν σφύρων;

And what country girl enchants your heart...
 Dressed in country clothes...
 Not even clever enough to pull her dress over her ankles?

The explanation Sappho gives for Andromeda’s flight is that another girl has beguiled or enchanted (θέλγει) her.⁵² Looking closely at the negative example provided, we can reconstruct what sort of person Andromeda would have been when she was still a true friend to Sappho, before her lapse in good judgment and taste: she was, like Sappho, urban(e), elegantly dressed, knowledgeable of style and deportment, and culturally privileged. We may want to read Sappho’s mockery of “country clothes” here more specifically as a “metaphor for a style of literary expression antithetical to Sappho’s own”.⁵³ Thus Sappho, self-identified as a member of the aristocracy, represents herself losing a friend to a rival whose faults are represented as bad clothing choices and a lack of sophistication; but the emphasis on class as an issue of distinction may be another way of denigrating her rival’s claims to fame in the practice and performance of song.⁵⁴

⁵² The idea of seduction through trickery will become a standard rhetorical trope and excuse for infidelity.

⁵³ O’Higgins (2003) 91; she also points out that Sappho’s elite perspective is quite different from the perspective of the male iambicists Archilochus and Hipponax, who fashion themselves as socially inferior (if morally superior).

⁵⁴ Along the lines of my comments above, Benjamin Acosta-Hughes (2010 [95]) argues convincingly that fragments 55 and 56 in particular “seem to be concerned not only with aesthetics but specifically (esp. fr. 56) with the addressee’s poetic skill”. Fr. 56

In another fragment (Sappho fr. 131, preserved in Hephaestion's *Metrical Handbook: Ench. 7.7*), Sappho's previously beloved Atthis is shown rejecting her and flying off to Andromeda:

Ἄτθι, σοὶ δ' ἔμεθεν μὲν ἀπήχθετο
φροντίσδην, ἐπὶ δ' Ἀνδρομέδαν πότῃ

Atthis, any thought of me has become hateful to you,
And you fly off to Andromeda.

Other names also appear, as Sappho bitterly resents being abandoned. A certain Mica shifts her allegiance to the house of Penthilus, an elite Lesbian family connected to the hated Pittacus by marriage. Sappho responds with "I will not allow you..." (71.2 = *P. Oxy.* 1787 fr. 6), presumably either denying Mica some former privilege (e.g., "you may not come crawling back to me") or desperately trying to hold her back. Sappho accuses her former friend of being evil-minded (κακότροπ' 71.4) or treacherous; the betrayal, as most of the cases under discussion here, can be understood as sexual, political, or aesthetic: while Sappho's family was known to be hostile to the Penthilids, the second half of the fragment focuses on words for sweetness and singing, suggesting that Mica joins a rival choir or seeks more artistic freedom. As Laurie O'Higgins puts it, "the nature of the broken and newly formed alliances is not always clear, but there are hints of both amatory and literary elements".⁵⁵

Another character insulted by Sappho is Irana, although we are not told what Irana has done to deserve these lines (fr. 91), preserved again by Hephaestion for metrical reasons (*Ench.* 11.5):

ἄσαροτέρας οὐδάμια πω Εἴρανα σέθεν τύχοισαν

...having never yet found you more annoying, Irana

("I do not think that any girl who has gazed on the light of the sun will, at any time in the future, be as wise..."), however, supports the argument for an aesthetic response through praise rather than blame.

⁵⁵ O'Higgins (2003) 90.

This fragment was confusing enough to readers of Hephaestion that the scholiast Choeroboscus stepped in to try to interpret Sappho's words:

ὃ δὲ θέλει εἰπεῖν, τοιοῦτόν ἐστι· Βλαβρωτέρως οὐδαμῶς πού ποτε, Εἰρήνη, σοῦ ἐπιτυχούσαν.

What she means is this: having never yet met you when you were more harmful, Irene

One could imagine Sappho insisting that she has never met anyone more annoying and therefore harmful to friendly co-existence than this particular woman. However one understands the line, it fits well with the invective mode of exaggerated insult.

But Sappho saves her strongest invective for a woman whose crime and name are both unknown (fr. 55).⁵⁶

Καθάνοισα δὲ κείση οὐδὲ ποτα μναμοσύνα σέθεν
ἔσσειτ' οὐδὲ πόθα εἰς ὕστερον· οὐ γὰρ πεδέχης βρόδων
τῶν ἐκ Πιερίας, ἀλλ' ἀφάης κῶν Αἶδα δόμῳ
φοιτάσης πεδ' ἁμαύρων νεκύων ἐκπεποταμένα.

When you die you will lie there, and afterwards

There will never be any recollection of you or any longing for you
Since you have no share in the roses of Pieria. But unseen even in
the house of Hades,
Flown from our midst, you will go to and fro among the shadowy
corpses.

The poem opens with a mocking inversion of an address to the dead. Instead of a tomb saturated with memory – an altar or mound of earth marking the spot, public memory coalescing to keep the person alive in stories or poems, or private longing

⁵⁶ Note that Plutarch says in one essay (*conjug. praec.* 145f-146a), that these lines were addressed “to a wealthy woman”, but in another (*quaest. conviv.* 646ef), that they were addressed “to an uncultured, ignorant woman”. While ignorance is usually associated with the country (see. fr. 67, Andromeda's new beloved), an excess pride in wealth can also corrupt.

among the decedent's loved ones – this individual will just lie there, unnamed, unlonged for, unremembered. Not only does Sappho threaten this woman with eternal oblivion by refusing to give her name (another perversion of the custom of honoring the dead), she extends her curse “even in the house of Hades”, where the shade will flit unseen (ἀφώρητος), not just in the usual way of shadowy corpses, but made markedly invisible by her exile from Sappho's inner circle. There is a hint of megalomania here familiar from invective: the poet's words are strong enough to curse, to harm, even to kill; one thinks of the unfortunate Lycambes in Archilochus. Sappho here asserts that she can completely blot this woman's history from the earth, and make it as if she had never existed, even in the afterlife.⁵⁷

The reason given for this woman's fate is that “she has no share in the roses of Pieria”. We can interpret Sappho's words according to Stobaeus (3.4.12), who preserved these lines for us in his work *On Foolishness* (περὶ ἀφροσύνης): this is directed, he says, “at an uneducated (ἀπαίδευτον) woman”, the implication being that she did not deserve fame or respect in Sappho's educated eyes. Elsewhere in her poetry Sappho can seem personally offended by stupidity, ugliness or bad manners (see fr. 82). But I suspect that lack of education or beauty may not be quite enough to justify the depth of feeling expressed here. It may well be that the term “uneducated” is shorthand for “outside the group”, and that Sappho is ostracizing her with a *damnatio memoriae* that is more metaphorical than real; as stated above in the case of Andromeda's new beloved, invective verse can use negative images of such concrete items as clothing or behavior to express distress about class status and literary allegiance. This unnamed woman will be dead to Sappho and her group because she has offended them on some level. Given the other verses discussed above, it seems likely that this woman is part of the catalogue of women (Mica, Atthis, Irana, etc.) whom Sappho portrays as having betrayed her and her friendship. And it is hard to think of a better description for this poetic mode than ἰαμβικῶς.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ It would be a wonderful instance of intertextual opportunism if Poseidippus were referring to this epigram when he named Doricha as the target in his epigram 17.

⁵⁸ Note Yatromanolakis (2007) 333: “This song may reflect aspects of social competition in the turbulent political milieu of late-seventh- and early-sixth-century Mytilene. Even so, reciprocally antagonistic language was part of Sappho's poetic discourse”. One could easily fit the “New Sappho”, along with fr. 58, both railing against old age, into an iambic context.

4. Scholarly resistance to Sapphic invective

Now that we have searched the ancient *testimonia* and the poetry itself for iambic references, we may be in a better position to assess the anxiety surrounding the notion of Sappho composing *iambos*. Most scholars shy away from the idea that Sappho's verses belonged to the same tradition as that of Archilochus, Semonides, or Hipponax. There are no entries for "blame poetry" in the indices of scholarly monographs on Sappho. Alcaeus is usually made to take the blame (so to speak) for any extant Aeolic iambs. When Sappho is allowed an iambic voice, it is usually in the context of research specifically on *iambos*, not on lyric, as seen in the recent work of O'Higgins (2003) and Rotstein (2010). A welcome addition to the scholarship is the chapter on *iambos* in the most recent *Cambridge Companion to Greek Lyric* (2009); but even as it acknowledges that "invective finds its way intermittently into lyric...", it immediately qualifies the statement with "especially in Alcaeus".⁵⁹ The same frustrating deflection away from authors such as Sappho (or Anacreon) and towards a more acceptably invective lyric poet occurs in a later chapter on the presence of low-register language in lyric: "Lyric...rarely descends to crudity, and then almost exclusively (in what survives) in the hands of Alcaeus".⁶⁰ One begins to imagine a vast conspiracy of blaming Alcaeus for all of Sappho's potential iambic moments.⁶¹ Even if a critic accepts the flexibility of lyric modes, too narrow a definition of *iambos* can complicate the matter: thus the chapter on Sappho and Alcaeus in the *Cambridge Companion* may boldly assert that "certainly invective was part of Sappho's poetic discourse", but the only evidence marshaled in support of this statement is the non-controversial Sappho fr. 55.⁶²

Perhaps the most telling example of ongoing concern about Sappho's possible involvement with invective is the scholarly response to fr. 99, a 3rd c. CE papyrus (P. Oxy. 2291) attributed by Voigt to Alcaeus (303A), but listed as Sappho's in David Campbell's 1982 Loeb volume (*Greek Lyric I: Sappho and Alcaeus*). Responding to the uncertainty of the fragmentary lines $\chi\acute{o}\rho\delta\alpha\iota\sigma\iota\ \delta\iota\alpha\kappa\rho\acute{\epsilon}\kappa\eta\gamma\ \dots$

⁵⁹ Carey in Budelmann (2009) 150.

⁶⁰ Carey in Budelmann (2009) 24.

⁶¹ Yatromanolakis (2007) 332-33 makes the acute suggestion that certain poems attributed to Alcaeus because of their "compromising" content (e.g. Alc. fr. 117b, which mentions prostitution, the sea, business deals, and suffering) may actually be genuine Sappho; he follows the attribution of Alc. fr. 117b to Sappho, found in the edition of G. Liberman, *Alcée: Fragments*, 2 vols. (Paris 1999).

⁶² Yatromanolakis in Budelmann (2009) 218.

ὀλισβ . δόκοισ<ι>, Campbell's notes read, "strings which welcome the plectrum?" (West) or 'women who use the dildo', perhaps with hostile reference to the descendants of Polyanax; text uncertain." One version of Sappho sings, the other abuses women who depend on sex toys. Invective evokes the threat of active, uncontained sexuality, and an aggressive power to humiliate and harm. The desire to transfer over to Alcaeus any indecorous Lesbian lyric fragments is indicative of how much some readers have at stake in "their" Sappho.⁶³

This anxiety can be traced back to prejudices at play already early on in Sappho's literary history. As mentioned above, Pseudo-Demetrius (*de Eloc.* 132) viewed *iambos* as the antithesis of grace and beauty, and he placed Sappho squarely on the positive side of that antithesis.⁶⁴ The perception of Sappho's verses as the epitome of charm and beauty is reflected in classical and Hellenistic Greek as well as Roman and later imperial authors. She is, in a nutshell, the poet of female sensuality, perfume, and roses. Once a poet's reputation has been established, the verses chosen by editors for recopying, quoting, and anthologizing tend to fit into, rather than challenge, that reputation, further limiting the variety of modes and genres associated with the poet. As neatly expressed by O'Higgins, "If one wanted an example of vituperation, it was natural to cull the Archilochean corpus, not the Sapphic".⁶⁵ Antonio Aloni summarizes the difficulty involved in challenging this stereotype:⁶⁶

However, to argue for an aggressive temper of the iambic type in Sappho's poetry goes against the grain of received opinion. On the one hand, as a woman Sappho does not take part in the symposia, which, with a certain mental inertia, are considered the sole ground for iambic aggression; on the other hand, more decisively, the fact that Sappho is a woman means for many ancient and modern scholars, males for the most part, that she is to be confined in the framework of a system, no matter if positive or negative, but certainly feminine; a picture therefore far from the jokes, obscenities and aggression of the iambic style.

⁶³ On this debate see also O'Higgins (2003) 95; Aloni (2001) 30.

⁶⁴ Cf. E. Degani, *Studi su Ipponatte* (1984) 79.

⁶⁵ O'Higgins (2003) 97.

⁶⁶ Aloni (2001) 30; *ibid.* (1997) xx-xxvi. Aloni (2001) 29-42 convincingly analyzes "features and attitudes of an iambic nature" in Sappho fr. 31.

Aloni rightly points out two reasons why it may be difficult to accept the presence of an “aggressive temper of the iambic type” in Sappho’s corpus: first, she did not perform at symposia; and second, she was firmly ensconced in a “feminine framework”. These two reasons are worth further consideration.

Limiting the performance of invective to the symposium reveals, according to Aloni above, a dearth of imagination. Much of Sappho’s extant poetry (other than the wedding songs) cannot easily be assigned to specific performance contexts; the fragmentariness of her verse involves intricate ‘gaps of indeterminacy’”, using Wolfgang Iser’s terminology.⁶⁷ We can certainly try to reconstruct some sort of original context for each fragment – religious festivals, social gatherings, civic choruses – but there will most likely always be some controversy surrounding our reconstructions.⁶⁸ Still, given the variety of performance contexts available to her or any of her fellow poets, it would be foolish to equate her absence from the male symposium with the absence of *iambos* in her repertoire. Whatever the nature of her “circle”, it surely offered an alternative performance context for the female voice. And later evidence tells us that even if Sappho herself did not perform at symposia, Sappho’s songs were re-performed at symposia long after her death. So “Sappho” certainly found her way into the room, even if Sappho did not.

In addition to the symposium, there are other ways to think about the connection between *iambos* and the civic environment on Sappho’s Lesbos. One could argue that the stressful social and political milieu of late 7th and early 6th century Mytilene, full of in-fighting, shifting allegiances, and rapid changes in fortune, was ideal for nurturing the “us vs. them” mentality expressed conventionally in iambic or elegiac modes.⁶⁹ And within her own family politics, Sappho’s willingness to berate her brother and air the family’s dirty laundry for the sake of her art suggests that her insistence on her personal discomfort with a scolding tone or bitter outburst is just another part of the artist’s strategy of self-presentation.

It has been suggested that the anxiety expressed in Sappho’s own poems about the propriety of invective may have contributed to the resistance on the part of scholars to acknowledge Sappho’s iambic modes.⁷⁰ But, of course, the more

⁶⁷ Yatromanolakis (2009) 216.

⁶⁸ Yatromanolakis (2009) 220; see also A. Lardinois, “Who sang Sappho’s songs?”, in *Reading Sappho: Contemporary Approaches*, ed. E. Greene (Berkeley 1996) 150-72, on choral aspects.

⁶⁹ Yatromanolakis (2009) 218.

⁷⁰ Yatromanolakis (2007) 332-33.

Sappho protests, the more it sounds like a *topos*: the ancient version of Professor Henry Higgins' insistence that he is, indeed, a "reasonable sort of man", not usually prone to outbursts of temper.

A further possible explanation for scholarly reticence to admit Sappho to the ranks of (occasionally) invective poets is, oddly enough, Sappho's pairing with Anacreon and their mutual identification with love poetry. As Pantelis Michelakis argues,⁷¹

...their literary marriage maintained its position in the popular imagination well into the nineteenth century, largely promoted by their editorial pairing in numerous editions and translations. But Sappho's literary wedding with Anacreon also replicated on the poetic register a gender hierarchy which turned Sappho into the lesser poet of the two and helped consolidate the view that her feminine poetry should be associated with simplicity, grace, softness, and the 'primitive voice' of the poet, to be celebrated for its proximity to nature, song, and folklore.

This observation works as well for the twenty-first century as it does for the nineteenth.⁷² While editors now tend to pair Sappho with Alcaeus rather than Anacreon, the stereotyping based on the dyadic structure continues: Alcaeus writes manly invective and lyrics on contemporary politics, while Sappho writes of broken hearts and shifting friendships. One can imagine Alcaeus adapting some of Sappho's topics, but the reverse still makes us uncomfortable.

While I have tried to argue here that poems incorporating a variety of iambic ideas, from gentle mockery to stronger forms of direct abuse, flourished within Sappho's poetic corpus, it is clear that Sappho's invective modes, as far as we can tell from the extant material, are distinguishable from those of Archilochus or Hipponax.⁷³ To answer the questions raised at the beginning of this paper, Sappho's verbal aggression is milder than that of her (male) counterparts; but

⁷¹ Michelakis (2009) 347-48.

⁷² See also P. Tomory, "The fortunes of Sappho", in *Re-Discovering Hellenism: The Hellenic Inheritance and the English Imagination*, ed. G.W. Clarke and J.C. Eade (Cambridge 1989) 121-35, esp. p. 123.

⁷³ See O'Higgins (2003) 97.

fragments of stronger stuff may have been exiled early on to the Alcaean corpus.⁷⁴ Do we trust Sappho's representation of the targets of her invective? Only to the extent that we trust Hipponax's requests for a warm cloak: both use poetry to claim authority, insist on certain status, and to "win friends and influence people", as it were. Sappho's motivation in exposing the faults of others may be economic, emotional, ritual, or artistic. But I maintain, along with Philodemus, whose references to Sappho's iambs were presented at the beginning of this paper, and Antonio Aloni, that Sappho is mistress of many modes. Sappho is not limited to iambic, obviously, but some of her work definitely belongs, as Andrea Rotstein phrases it, to "the broader group of invective or scoptic poetry to which *iambos* also belongs".⁷⁵ The literary tradition has curiously limited her to more proper "feminine" verse forms while at the same time condemning her for the "masculinity" of her supposed love affairs. We have managed to move beyond moral disapproval of the sexuality represented in her verses; perhaps now we can also open our minds to the idea of Sappho as an author of invective.⁷⁶

ROSENMEYER, P. A. *Os iampos de Safo*.

RESUMO: *Embora ao menos três fontes relacionem, em particular, os iampos como um tipo ou forma de poesia escrita por Safo, poucos especialistas dedicaram-se ao problema. A questão torna-se mais complicada pela falta de acordo sobre o sentido em que os poetas arcaicos e seu public entendiam o termo íambos. Este artigo explora nuances do termo e, então, propõe duas questões. Em primeiro lugar, há evidência*

⁷⁴ I should acknowledge here that one can find instances of coarser humor in the wedding songs: Demetrius, commenting on Sappho 110a, says that Sappho mocks (σκώπτει) the men at the wedding "in prosaic rather than poetic language"; see O'Higgins (2003) 93-95. I have chosen not to explore the *epithalamia* in this paper; the cultic context complicates the literary issues.

⁷⁵ Rotstein (2010) 55.

⁷⁶ I would like to thank Giuliana Ragusa for the invitation to publish, and for all the wonderfully rich intellectual exchanges we have had, in person and at a distance, over the years; I greatly look forward to many more. I also acknowledge Andrea Rotstein and Benjamin Acosta-Hughes, for their inspiring insights into the Sapphic corpus and the idea of *iambos*. The work has been improved by the critical eyes of Giuliana Ragusa, Andrea Rotstein, S.M.F. Jones, and Kristin Ehrhardt.

convincente de que Safo tenha realmente composto iampos? Meu argumento é que algumas de suas composições pertençam, de fato, ao grupo mais amplo da poesia de invectiva, à qual pretence também o iampos. Em segundo lugar, por que os especialistas são tão resistentes à idéia de que Safo tenha composto e executado versos invectivos? Minha opinião é que os especialistas tenderam a associar Safo a um conteúdo mélico mais propriamente “feminino”, e talvez atribuíram a Alceu alguns dos versos dela que não se enquadravam na idéia deles de propriedade lírica.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: jambo; kháris; invectiva; simpósio; Safo; Alceu; Lesbo; Posidípo; Andrômeda; Átis.