

CALL FOR PAPERS (extended version)

(Re)inventing Sappho: New Approaches to Sappho from the Greek Fragments to the Twenty-First Century

Panel at the 13th Celtic Conference in Classics
(Lyon, France, 15-18 July 2020)

Proposal submission deadline: **6th March 2020**

Confirmed Speakers:

Sandra Boehringer (Université de Strasbourg)

Jacqueline Fabre-Serris (Université Charles-de-Gaulle Lille 3)

Ellen Greene (The University of Oklahoma)

Andre Lardinois (Radboud University)

Thea Selliaas Thorsen (Norwegian University of Science and Technology)

οἱ μὲν ἰππῆων στρότον οἱ δὲ πέσδων
οἱ δὲ νάων φαῖσ' ἐπ[ί] γᾶν μέλαι[ν]αν
ἔ]μμεναι κάλλιστον, ἔγω δὲ κῆν' ὄτ-
τω τις ἔραται·

“Some say a force of horsemen, some say footsoldiers
and others say a fleet of ships is the loveliest
thing on the dark earth, but I say it is
the one you love” (Sappho, fr. 16 Voigt)

Sappho is one of the most debated figures in Greek and Latin literature, and has often elicited not only contrasting but also controversial readings. Named “the tenth muse” for the excellence of her poetry (AP 7.14, 9.66, 9.506, 9.571), Sappho was condemned for centuries by more traditionalist voices. As a result, her poetry has been censored, and her figure (hetero)normalised or discredited because of her allegedly lascivious and perverse sexual behaviour (Hallett 1996; Snyder 1997). However, the fragmentary nature of Sappho’s poetry, which articulates an ambiguous, complex and (gender-)fluid sexuality, has also enabled her to be widely imitated, (re-)adapted, and even manipulated (Lefkowitz 1996). In reception, she has become an icon for feminist and LGBTQ+ movements and has informed queer approaches to the Classics.

At the end of the eighties, Joan DeJean demonstrated in her groundbreaking work *Fictions of Sappho* (1989) how Sappho’s poetry widely influenced literary and cultural expressions from the Renaissance to the twentieth century, eventually entering into conversation with Francophone feminist writers such as Cixous and Irigaray. Yet Sappho’s position “beyond gender” (owing, in part, to linguistic gender-ambiguity in her texts), as well as her queerness in the widest sense, has also marked the reception of her poetry since Antiquity.

As both a poet and a historical figure, Sappho played a central role in Hellenistic Greek poetry and comedy, as well as archaic Latin theatre, from which the account of her licentiousness, unhappy relationship with Phaon, and consequent suicide most likely originated. Catullus sees Sappho as a poetic model and connects her poetic excellence to his own literary and personal experiences through the name of Lesbia. (Ovid’s) *Heroides* 15 fluctuates between a portrait of a masculine Sappho and a more multifaceted, ambiguous version of Sappho as a poet and an elegiac lover (Fabre-Serris 2009). With the advent of Christianity, Sappho began to be maligned and accused of immorality (Tatian, *Oratio ad Graecos* 33, about 180 CE; cf. Thorsen 2012) and the first censure of her work is said to have occurred in the fourth century (Cardan *De sapientia* 2.62).

Despite these attempts to destroy her name and poetry, Sappho survived the Middle Ages and was recognised as a great poet by the early Humanists. In most cases, however, her homoeroticism was completely erased (cf. Boccaccio *De mulieribus claris* 47; Christine de Pizan *Book of City of Ladies* 1.30). Undergoing contradictory and opposite judgements through the ages, Sappho was diversely received by classical scholars in the 19th and 20th century. While Sappho's queer sexuality seems to have influenced Housman's scholarship and poetry (Ingleheart 2019), Wilamowitz (1913) tried to restore Sappho's (hetero)normativity by interpreting her homoerotic relationships as part of her role as a schoolmistress, thus overlooking the narrator's homoerotic desire as expressed in the absence of any pedagogical dynamics in the text (frs. 1 and 31; cf. Parker 1996). Very recently, the "Newest Sappho" has opened new avenues for the interpretation of her poetry (Bierl & Lardinois 2016).

These various interpretations, (re)adaptations and (re)constructions have produced a "Sappho" who is now as fluid and queer as she has ever been. Concurrently, recent Sappho scholarship has given rise to a plurality of productive methodologies and perspectives (e.g. comparative, philological, reception-based approaches). Our panel will embrace and integrate this plurality by providing a playing-field upon which these contrasting methodologies and perspectives can inform and bolster one another. By re-examining the notion of who (and what) Sappho is, moreover, this panel will problematise the "invention" of Sappho and resituate her, along with her poetry and later reception, in contemporary scholarly discourse.

We welcome papers in the fields of Classics, Ancient History, and Reception Studies, with a preference for talks which fully and boldly engage with new approaches to Sappho's life, work, and reception. In keeping with the bilingual tradition of the Celtic Conference in Classics, and this year's venue (Lyon), we are especially keen on contributions about the reception of Sappho by French poets, scholars and translators, as well as Francophone feminist writers such as Wittig, Kristeva and Irigaray. The panel will be fully bilingual and we therefore accept papers both in French and English. Papers might fall within but are not limited to the following categories:

- Sappho's fragments
- Sappho as a historical personage
- Sappho and literary theory, queer theory, feminist theory, and other ideological approaches
- Ancient, medieval, or modern receptions of Sappho, including theatrical re-adaptations, Sappho in pedagogy and education, and multimedial representations of Sapphic poetry
- The role played by Sappho within LGBTQ+ communities

To encourage a variety of approaches, we will welcome two different paper lengths: **20 minutes** and **40 minutes**. Please, submit a proposal of **300 words** for a 20-minute paper and **500 words** for the 40-minute option. Abstracts must be written either in French or English. The submission deadline for abstracts is **6th March 2020**.

Submissions and queries should be directed to the following address:
reinventingsappho@gmail.com.

Please, include a short biography and specify your affiliation in the body of your email: attach the abstract as a separate file with no personal identification.

Notification of acceptance will be given in early April.

For further information on the Celtic Conference in Classics, please refer to the conference permanent website: www.celticconferenceinclassics.org.

Select Bibliography

- Bierl, A. and A. Lardinois. 2016. *The Newest Sappho: P. Sapph. Obbinik and P. GC inv. 105, Frs. 1-4. Studies in Archaic and Classical Greek Song, vol. 2.* Leiden.
- De Jean, J. 1989. *Fictions of Sappho, 1546-1937.* Chicago.
- Fabre-Serris J. 2009. "Sulpicia: an/other female voice in Ovid's *Heroides*: a new reading of *Heroides* 4 and 15", *Helios* 36: 149-73.
- Hallett, J. P. 1996. "Sappho and Her Social Context: Sense and Sensuality", in E. Greene (ed.), *Reading Sappho: Contemporary Approaches*, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London: 125-42.
- Ingleheart, J. 2018. *Masculine Plural*, Oxford.
- Lefkowitz, M. R. 1996. "Critical Stereotypes and the Poetry of Sappho", in E. Greene (ed.), *Reading Sappho: Contemporary Approaches*, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London: 26-34.
- Parker, H. N. "Sappho Schoolmistress", in E. Greene (ed.), *Re-Reading Sappho: Contemporary Approaches*, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London: 146-83.
- Snyder, J. M. 1997. *Lesbian Desire in the Lyrics of Sappho.* New York.
- Thorsen, T. S. 2012. "Sappho, Corinna and Colleagues in Ancient Rome. Tatian's Catalogue of Statues (*Oratio ad Graecos* 33-4) Reconsidered", *Mnemosyne* 65.4-5: 695-715.