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SAPPHO'S EPITHALAMIA AND THE LESBIAN ADONIA*

ABSTRACT

This article concerns the paradoxical state of Sappho's wedding poems: while her epithalamia are exceptional when set alongside the remainder of her work and her transgressive persona, several songs became identified with the genre. This article distinguishes between wedding songs, songs sung at weddings, and songs about weddings, to explore how public performance is easily mistaken for wedding performance. By discussing the tenuous grounds behind the theory that epithalamia closed her metrical books, I read frr. 27 and 30 as being connected to the Lesbian Adonia. These poems were concerned with the divine wedding of Aphrodite and Adonis, rather than with wedding rites.

Keywords: Sappho; epithalamium; wedding rite; book design; Adonia; public performance; chorality

Sappho's nuptial production violates our understanding of the poet in a significant manner. This is a traditional, uncultured and lowbrow output,[1] against the evocative, refined, sophisticated and delicate remainder of the *œuvre*.[2] It is the choral exception (alongside a few hymns for public performance) for an author traditionally perceived as monodic.[3] It is a collection that promotes normativity, heterosexuality and monogamy vs her para-nuptial receptions as a prostitute, promiscuous woman, manly woman and queer figure.[4] It makes us imagine Sappho's function in Lesbos as a teacher that prepared girls for the wedding.[5] Moreover, it impacted Sappho's Alexandrian edition deeply: were there eight books indicated numerically and a book called *Epithalamia*; a book called *Epithalamia* and epithalamia scattered throughout the *œuvre*, particularly as book ends;

* I am indebted to Professor Richard Janko for our discussions and his careful reading of this piece, as well as to *CQ*'s readers and Editor for their remarkable intellectual generosity.

[1] D. Page, *Sappho and Alcaeus: An Introduction to the Study of Ancient Lesbian Poetry* (Oxford, 1955), 119; C.M. Bowra, *Greek Lyric Poetry from Alcman to Simonides* (Oxford, 1961), 216; G.M. Kirkwood, *Early Greek Monody: The Study of a Poetic Type* (Ithaca, NY and London, 1974), 139.

[2] T. McEvilley, *Sappho* (Thompson, CT, 2008), 186; L. Kurke, 'Sappho and genre', in P.J. Finglass and A. Kelly (edd.), *The Cambridge Companion to Sappho* (Cambridge, 2021), 93–106, at 95–6.

[3] H.N. Parker, 'Sappho schoolmistress', *TAPhA* 123 (1993), 309–51; E. Stehle, *Performance and Gender in Ancient Greece: Nondramatic Poetry in its Setting* (Princeton, 1997), 262–88; E. Bowie, 'How did Sappho's songs get into the male sympotic repertoire?', in A. Bierl and A. Lardinois (edd.), *The Newest Sappho: P. Sapph. Obbink and P. GC Inv. 105, Frs. 1–4* (Leiden and Boston, 2016), 148–64, at 164.

[4] For the testimonia relating Sappho's different faces, cf. T.S. Thorsen and R.E. Berge, 'Receiving receptions received: a new collection of testimonia Sapphica *c.* 600 BCE – 1000 CE', in T.S. Thorsen and S.J. Harrison (edd.), *Roman Receptions of Sappho* (Oxford, 2019), 289–402. For Sappho and sexuality, see J.P. Hallet, 'Sappho and her social context: sense and sensuality', *Signs* 4 (1979), 447–64; A. Lardinois, 'Lesbian Sappho and Sappho of Lesbos', in J. Bremmer (ed.), *From Sappho to De Sade: Moments in the History of Sexuality* (London and New York, 1989), 15–35; K. Gilhuly, 'Lesbians are not from Lesbos', in R. Blondell and K. Ormand (edd.), *Ancient Sex: New Essays* (Columbus, OH, 2015), 143–76; M. Mueller, 'Sappho and sexuality', in P.J. Finglass and A. Kelly (edd.), *The Cambridge Companion to Sappho* (Cambridge, 2021), 36–52.

[5] C. Calame, 'Sappho's group: an initiation into womanhood', in E. Greene (ed.), *Reading Sappho: Contemporary Approaches* (Berkeley / Los Angeles / London, 1996), 113–24; F. Ferrari, 'Il pubblico di Saffo', *SIFC* 1 (2003), 42–89; D. Loscalzo, *Saffo, la* hetaira (Pisa, 2019).

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or only eight books?[6] These overlapping issues have caused an overestimation of Sappho's epithalamic output: 'since the *epithalamion* is an easily imagined social occasion, Sappho's poems are forced to be *epithalamia* whether they wish it or not'.[7] With this, a plethora of fragments, including some of her most recognizable work, such as frr. 16, 27, 30, 31, 43, 44, the Tithonus Song, 94, etc., are taken to be nuptial.[8]

Are scholars, though, too quick to accept Sappho's epithalamic face to the detriment of other genres? Caciagli notes how Athenaeus' reception of Sappho highlighted her sympotic attributions, a matter further explored by Schlesier.[9] Bierl and Lardinois, in turn, warn about an over-representation of erotic matters in Sappho's reception.[10] In the same vein, I argue that, even if Sappho became central to the epithalamium and was seen as an originator of sorts, the wedding songs are over-represented in modern scholarship. To approach this discussion, my argument follows three steps. First, I focus on Sappho's Alexandrian edition to defend the idea that frr. 104–17b should be seen as part of a stand-alone ninth book, *Epithalamia*, and that the possible book ends (namely, frr. 27, 30, 43, 44) are different in nature from these scraps, even if they appear epithalamic on a first reading. Then, I briefly touch on fr. 31 to show how easily an epithalamic reading can arise. Finally, I turn to frr. 27 and 30 to offer a new reading for these poems: not wedding songs, but songs of the Adonia.

I begin with some caveats. I use 'epithalamia' and '*hymenaia*' interchangeably. The ancients had several words for the wedding song, but their limits are not always clear.[11] Modern scholars frequently try to place fragments or parts of songs within specific moments of the ceremony.[12] The evidence is thin for such determinations, as similar

[6] The scholarly debate is summarized by G. Liberman, 'L'édition alexandrine de Sappho', in G. Bastianini and A. Casanova (edd.), *Atti del Convegno internazionale di studi: "I papiri di Saffo e di Alceo", Firenze, 8–9 giugno 2006* (Florence, 2007), 41–65; C. Neri, *Saffo, testimonianze e frammenti: introduzione, testo critico, traduzione e commento* (Berlin and Boston, 2021), 8; I favour the nine-book model with a distinctive volume dedicated to the epithalamia, following L. Prauscello, 'The Alexandrian edition of Sappho', in P.J. Finglass and A. Kelly (edd.), *The Cambridge Companion to Sappho* (Cambridge, 2021), 219–31.

[7] Parker (n. 3), 337. In fact, Kirkwood (n. 1), 138–9 long before noticed an overestimation of Sappho's epithalamic production and how it affects the analysis of her production.

[8] E.g. A. Lardinois, 'The new Sappho poem (*P. Köln* 21351 and 21376): key to the old fragments', in E. Greene and M.B. Skinner (edd.), *The New Sappho on Old Age: Textual and Philosophical Issues* (Washington, DC, 2010), 41–57, at 51–2 for frr. 16, 31 and the Tithonus Song; C. Pernigotti, 'Tempi del canto e pluralità di prospettive in Saffo, fr. 44 V.', *ZPE* 135 (2001), 11–20 and C. Calame, 'Les noms de la femme dans les poèmes de Sappho: traits érotiques, statuts sociaux et représentations genrées', *EuGeStA* 3 (2013), 6–24, at 13 for fr. 44; S. Larson, 'Τεθνάκην δ' ἀδόλως θέλω: reading Sappho's "confession" (fr. 94) through Penelope', *Mnemosyne* 63 (2010), 175–202, at 197–8 for fr. 94. I discuss frr. 27, 30, 31 and 43 below.

[9] S. Caciagli, 'Sympotic Sappho? The recontextualization of Sappho's verses in Athenaeus', in B. Currie and I. Rutherford (edd.), *The Reception of Greek Lyric Poetry in the Ancient World: Transmission, Canonization and Paratext* (Leiden and Boston, 2020), 321–41; R. Schlesier, 'A sophisticated *hetaira* at table: Athenaeus' Sappho', in B. Currie and I. Rutherford (edd.), *The Reception of Greek Lyric Poetry in the Ancient World: Transmission, Canonization and Paratext* (Leiden and Boston, 2020), 342–72.

[10] 'Introduction', in A. Bierl and A. Lardinois (edd.), *The Newest Sappho: P. Sapph. Obbink and P. GC Inv. 105, Frs. 1–4* (Leiden and Boston, 2016), 1–10, at 3.

[11] E.g. *gamêlion*, *kateunastikon*, *harmateion*, *katakoimêtikon*, *diegertikon* and *orthrion*. Cf. A.L. Wheeler, 'Tradition in the epithalamium', *AJPh* 51 (1930), 205–23, at 207. Theoc. *Id.* 18 exemplifies the permeability of terms: it was transmitted as ἐπιθαλάμιος, but called ὑμέναιος (8) by the narrator.

[12] G. Lambin, *La chanson grecque dans l'antiquité* (Paris, 1992), 77–104; T.P. Badnall, 'The wedding song in Greek literature and culture' (Diss., The University of Nottingham, 2008); G. Tognazzi, *La voce de imeneo: aspetti della performance nuziale greca* (Rome, 2015); C.A. Faraone, 'Stationary epithalamia in hexameters? The evidence from Sappho, Theocritus, and Catullus', *AJPh* 141 (2020), 317–48.

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topoi appear at different stages and the fragments do not offer enough context. Finally, the provocation in my title is not meant to deny Sappho her role as a singer of wedding songs. She excelled at this genre and became its central model, undermining even Alcman when it came to the reception of the epithalamium.[13] The Lesbian performer, however, had other possibilities of presentation in her community. The references to the wedding rite in Sappho's poetry are connected to the importance of marriage for the life of the woman and for the maintenance of the *polis*; the poetic use of recurring characters (such as the nubile girl, or the married woman who continues to transpire charm); and the nature of life in a traditional society, where women learn from and grow up with other women before being ready to share their lives with the men of those (or of neighbouring) societies.[14] That said, an overestimation of her *hymenaia* has hindered both a better understanding of that genre (well represented in later generations) and the true breadth of Sappho's production.

THE *EPITHALAMIA* AND WEDDING PERFORMANCE

Sappho's virtuosity made her canonical early on,[15] so much so that both textual transcription and reperformance guaranteed her Panhellenic renown.[16] This means circulation independent of original context. Sappho received local editions, such as those of Athens and Mytilene.[17] It is unclear how these crossed the sea to Alexandria, but it is generally agreed that the lyric authors received previous editorial work before arriving there.[18] There is a chance that Sappho's verse (like that of Alcaeus) was first handled by Aristophanes of Byzantium,[19] with the so-called Alexandrian edition prepared by Aristarchus.[20] Its final product is a contentious matter. Yatromanolakis[21] believes there were eight books, with most epithalamia in the last one and some scattered in the earlier

[13] Theocritus (*Id.* 18) appears to be the last author in the epithalamic tradition to evoke Alcman, as his song is Spartan and recalls the *partheneion.* Alcman was dubbed ὑμνητῆρ' ὑμεναίων ('singer of wedding songs', *Anth. Pal.* 7.19.1), a formulation that reappears quoted in the *Suda*, when the genre *hymenaion* is explained (υ 104 Adler). E. Contiades-Tsitsoni, *Hymenaios und Epithalamion: das Hochzeitslied in der frühgriechischen Lyrik* (Stuttgart, 1990), 46–60 analyses (unconvincingly) frr. 13, 16 and 241 in such a light. Cf. C. Calame, *Alcman, introduction, texte critique, tèmoignages, traduction et commentaire* (Rome, 1983), 337, 379, 626 for a rebuttal. By Calvus' and Catullus' time, Sappho is the main poetic model, remaining relevant as late as Claudian (*Epith. Hon.* 235).

[14] C. Calame, *Les choeurs de jeunes filles en Grèce archaïque I: Morphologie, fonction religieuse et sociale* (Rome, 1977), 400–4; A.L. Klinck, 'Sappho's company of friends', *Hermes* 136 (2008), 15–29, at 20.

[15] Neri (n. 6), 9.

[16] T.A. Hadjimichael, *The Emergence of the Lyric Canon* (Oxford, 2019), 188–91.

[17] Prauscello (n. 6), 219–21. The early Ptolemaic fragments of *P.Köln* inv. 21351 + 21376 ('New Sappho') are the oldest surviving papyrological evidence: M.L. West, 'The New Sappho', *ZPE* 151 (2005), 1–9, at 1. It 'preserves the original usage of ζ that must have been standard in the poet's original manuscripts; in the Alexandrian edition ζ has been replaced in non-initial position by cδ, while ζ is used in initial position for the Lesbian pronunciation of δι-': R. Janko, 'Tithonus, Eos and the cicada in the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* and Sappho fr. 58', in C. Tsagalis and A. Markantonatos (edd.), *The Winnowing Oar: New Perspectives in Homeric Studies. Studies in Honor of Antonios Rengakos* (Berlin and Boston, 2017), 267–92, at 269. This proves the existence of pre-Hellenistic treatments of Sappho.

[18] Neri (n. 6), 5–6. Cf. Hephaestion (test. 236), Apollonius Dyscolus (test. 236A).

[19] D. Yatromanolakis, 'Alexandrian Sappho revisited', *HSPh* 99 (1999), 179–95, at 180; Liberman (n. 6), 41; L. Prauscello, 'Sappho's Book 4 and its metrical composition: the case of *P.Oxy.* 1787', *MD* 76 (2016), 53–71, at 76.

[20] Hadjimichael (n. 16), 235.

[21] Yatromanolakis (n. 19).

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books. Tsantsanoglou,[22] in turn, defends the existence of two books of epithalamia (Books 7 and 8), one with songs for mortal weddings and one with songs for the marriage of Heracles and Hebe. I agree with Prauscello, who proves on papyrological grounds that the edition had nine books, with the last one called *Epithalamia*, which is also attested in Servius Auctus.[23] This confirms Liberman's assumption of one book for each Muse, with eight organized metrically—with metrical homogeneity in the earlier books and increasing metrical heterogeneity starting in Book 4[24]—and a final book marked by a different criterion of organization, the generic one.[25]

The following picture then arises: nine books, one called *Epithalamia* (frr. 104–17b), not only metrically heterogeneous but also metrically disparate, while other epithalamia were placed in the end of previous books, if they fit metrically.[26] As such, frr. 27 and 30, for instance, would be epithalamia in the sapphic strophe, and frr. 43 and 44, in glyconics with double dactylic expansion (gl^{2d}). This has an impact on how we understand the ordering of poems within each book. The evidence is scarce, but the Newest Sappho indicates two principles: an ordering by topic[27] and an alphabetical ordering (by the first letter only) within that topic.[28] That is, the epithalamia were so important that they were chosen to close Sappho's scrolls and they were so abundant that whatever did not fit the metres of the previous books would be clumped together in the *Epithalamia*. This model makes Sappho strongly invested in a nuptial production. As such, it caused some discomfort. Obbink, for example, notes of the ends of Books 1 and 2: 'they were explicitly songs about participation in weddings, which does not necessarily mean that they were *epithalamia*.'[29] Prauscello warns about a possible overestimation of this production: 'there is no reason to argue that the book entitled *Epithalamia* would not have included all of Sappho's wedding-songs proper.'[30] Both are correct.

We must note important differences between the longer poems read as epithalamia[31] and frr. 104–17b, attributed to the *Epithalamia*. These all survive in quotations rather than on papyrus, were imitated by later poets,[32] and decodified (to some extent) by

[22] K. Tsantsanoglou, *Studies in Sappho and Alcaeus* (Berlin and Boston, 2019), 86–113.

[23] On Verg. *G.* 1.31; L. Prauscello, 'Sappho's Book of *Epithalamia* and *P.Oxy.* 2294 (LDAB 3892 = MP3 01455) = fr. 103 Voigt = *PLF* 103: a new proposal', in M. Alexandrou, C. Carey and G.B. D'Alessio (edd.), *Song Regained: Working with Greek Poetic Fragments* (Berlin and Boston, 2022), 197–216.

[24] Prauscello (n. 19).

[25] Liberman (n. 6).

[26] This theory, in fact, was already proposed by Page (n. 1), 126: 'Sappho's epithalamian poems were arranged according to two different principles: those whose meters qualified them for inclusion in the metrically homogeneous books (esp. the first four books) were added at the end of such books; the miscellaneous remainder were put together to form a separate book, the ninth.' Reiterated in D. Obbink, 'Ten poems of Sappho: provenance, authenticity, and text of the new Sappho papyri', in A. Bierl and A. Lardinois (edd.), *The Newest Sappho: P. Sapph. Obbink and P. GC Inv. 105, Frs. 1–4* (Leiden and Boston, 2016), 34–54, at 45: 'two 'Epithalamian' poems at the end of Book 1 seems like too much of a coincidence …, making the conclusion almost irresistible that the final poem or poems were artificially positioned there (thus out of alphabetical sequence) at the end of the book.'

[27] C. Neri, 'Il *Brothers Poem* e l'edizione alessandrina (in margine a *P. Sapph. Obbink*)', *Eikasmós* 26 (2015), 53–76, at 71–2.

[28] M.L. West, 'Nine poems of Sappho', *ZPE* 191 (2014), 1–12, at 1 and Obbink (n. 26), 41–5 are strongly invested in the alphabetical order. Neri (n. 27) sees the thematic criterion as primary and the alphabetical secondary.

[29] Obbink (n. 26), 45 n. 37.

[30] Prauscello (n. 23), 203.

[31] E.g. 16, 27, 30, 31, 43, 44, the Tithonus Song, 94; cf. n. 8.

[32] Compare: Theoc. *Id.* 18.9, 18.19 to frr. 112.1, 113.2, 115.1 V.; *Id.* 18.20 to fr. 113.1–2; *Id.* 18.37 to fr. 112.3–5; *Id*. 18.38 to fr. 108; *Id*. 18.29–30 (Helen compared to a cypress) to fr. 115 (groom compared

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epideictic rhetoricians, such as Menander Rhetor (2.399.11–412.2). These songs were choral,[33] metrically disparate[34] and offered at ceremonies that were at once public, communal and private, related to the union of families of Lesbos and neighbouring communities.[35] They are marked by a 'common' use of language[36]—that is, popular and traditional in tone—and, in addition to the metrical variation, they can use refrains to separate entire strophes or single lines.[37] These are features connected with ad hoc rites, and their deictic quality is apparent, as they focus on a ceremony happening here and now. At times, characters such as the father, the bride or her virginity appear to be impersonated by the chorus (frr. 107, 109, 114). The fragments are marked by humour (frequently sexual), use of hyperbole (frr. 105a, 105b, 106, 111, 113, 115), similes (especially botanical ones), *makarismos* (frr. 108, 112), apostrophes and the presence of Hesperus. These qualities introduce and entice the bride to the groom in apotropaic fashion. Their focus is the woman and her transition, as they consider female fear, separation from the family and the anxieties related to the uncertainties she faces. It is likely that the choral education prompted by these poems prepared the younger girls for their own wedding day while soothing the bride at the brink of womanhood. The songs could end in farewells, as the couple entered the bedroom to consummate the ceremony (frr. 116, 117). Ancient readers found them to be graceful, charming and beautiful.[38]

These characteristics prove that these were songs used for the nuptial rite, wedding songs properly understood. Hence it would be strange if these poems were placed in the *Epithalamia* simply because they slipped through the cracks of other (mechanical) forms of arrangement, such as metre. This leads to the next question: beyond these, what else

to the slender sapling); *Id*. 18.30 (Helen compared to a Thessalian horse) to fr. 194a (groom compared to a horse); *Id.* 18.49 = frr. 116–17. For the Roman *neoteroi*, the use of metres identified with Sappho's epithalamic production (glyconic strophes closed by a pherecratean; hexameters) in Calvus' frr. 29–33; Ticida, fr. 102; Catullus 61 and 62; as well as reuse of Sappho in Catull. 61, 56–9 and 62.21–2 (fr. 104a V.); 61.87–9 (fr. 105b V.). In his *Medea*, Seneca uses these metres as well (75–92 glyconic; 110–15 hexameter, rare to the poet), but Sapphic echoes are not as easy to spot. As late as Claudian, his Maria, Honorius' bride, reads Sappho in anticipation to her wedding (*Epith. Hon*. 228–40).

[33] In some cases, the monodic reading is so prevalent that there is resistance to a choral reading of the wedding songs: Kirkwood (n. 1), 139–40 considers fr. 111 to be 'the only identifiable example of poetry written by Sappho for choral performance', but concedes that fr. 110 'may also be choral'; E. Stehle, 'Greek lyric and gender', in F. Budelmann (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Lyric* (Cambridge and New York, 2009), 58–71, at 65 considers that only frr. 104–5 and 110–17 V. were intended for choral performance. Two important and recent contributions that complicate such a view are F. Ferrari, 'Performing Sappho', and A. Lardinois, 'Sappho's personal poetry', both in P.J. Finglass and A. Kelly (edd.), *The Cambridge Companion to Sappho* (Cambridge, 2021), 107–20 and 163–74 respectively.

[34] Ten different metres can be identified, not to mention verses of uncertain scansion. In fact, some songs appear to follow ad hoc metrical structures that do not resemble the strophes observed elsewhere in Sappho or Alcaeus, as F.J. Meister, 'The text and metre of Sapph. fr. 111 V.', *Mnemosyne* 72 (2019), 705–16 and 'The text and metre of Sapph. fr. 114 V.', *Mnemosyne* 72 (2019), 1–11 notes.

[35] See J.-P. Vernant, 'Le mariage', in *Mythe et société en Grèce ancienne* (Paris, 1974), 57–81; J. Redfield, 'Notes on the Greek wedding', *Arethusa* 15 (1982), 181–201; G. Ferrari, 'What kind of rite of passage was the ancient Greek wedding?', in D.B. Dodd and C.A. Faraone (edd.), *Initiation in Greek Rituals and Narratives: New Critical Perspectives* (London and New York, 2003), 27–42; M. Finkelberg, *Greeks and Pre-Greeks, Aegean Prehistory and Greek Heroic Tradition* (Cambridge and New York, 2005), 90–108.

[36] Cf. Demetr. *Eloc.* 167; Men. Rhet. 2.411.26–412.2; Ps.-Dion. Hal. *Rhet.* 266.13–16.

[37] Hephaestion (*Poem*. 7.1) preserves fr. 111 as an example of 'mesymnion' (a refrain that occurs after a single line).

[38] χαριεντίζεται, Demetr. *Eloc.* 141, fr. 104 V.; ἔστι δέ τις ἰδίως χάρις Σαπφική, Demetr. *Eloc.* 148, fr. 111; χάριτες, Demetr. *Eloc.* 140, fr. 114; ἡδέα, Syrianus in Hermog. *Id.* 1.1, fr. 105a; κόσμος σαφῶς καὶ κάλλος, Demetr. *Eloc.* 106, fr. 105b.

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could be performed at a wedding? We do not know what wedding celebrations in archaic Lesbos looked like, and extant descriptions tend to be lavish and mythological, as in fr. 44 and Catullus 64, or late, as in Lucian's *Symposium*, and, as such, questionable. The picture is not clear even when focussing on the earlier sources, which depict the rite and the banquet preceding it. For the first, in Homer we hear of a procession marked by *hymenaia*, the sound of flute and lyre and young men who accompany and dance (*Il*. 18.491–5), while Sappho describes a splendid ceremony, with pipe, *kithara* and castanets, not to mention songs by the virgins, the older ladies and the gentlemen of Troy (fr. 44). The banquet, too, was marked by entertainments, as we hear about solo lyre performance (*Il*. 24.62–3) and a solo singer accompanied by acrobats (*Od.* 4.17–19).

The most extensive extant description of the banquet is in Lucian's *Symposium*, a much later source. It has speeches, readings from books, a Homeric and Pindaric cento, encomia, wedding songs and even a clown show that displeased the guests of this botched ceremony (*Symposium* 16–18). At any rate, this was a busy event, open to different types of presentation with different tones, from the serious and celebratory to the ridiculous. This was not only a moment for revelry, but it also marked the departure of the girl from her father's house and the start of the alliance between the parties involved,[39] which explains the extreme emotions elicited by Lucian. Wedding banquets are somewhat personal, and one must assume that families had flexibility to choose what kind of party they would have. One notable testimony is that of Aristoxenos and Phillis the musician, who say that 'at weddings, putting many seats around one table and bearing myrtle, they sing in succession proverbs and serious love-songs'.[40] Several poems of Sappho fit the category of ἐρωτικὰ σύντονα, 'serious love-songs', which makes her figuration as a wedding banquet singer seductive.

If only the book ends and excerpts from the ninth book were wedding songs, one could imagine the following scenario: in the early stages of textual fixation (before Alexandria), those in charge of Sappho's local collections, such as the one of Mytilene or Athens, made a distinction between songs for the rite and songs for the banquet. The Alexandrian edition would have reflected this, with the former placed in the *Epithalamia* and the latter in the book ends. This does not resolve, however, how other fragments were read as epithalamia owing to tenuous references to a wedding.[41] Moreover, the 'end of book' theory stands on shaky grounds. Take fr. 44 for example. Book 2 ended with fr. 43, and 44, of different execution but probably written by the same scribe underneath its end-title, was a late addition, a blow to the epithalamic ending theory.[42] Moreover, while it engages with the celebratory tone of the wedding song, it also responds to the epic tradition, fitting neither determination quite precisely.[43] This makes one question whether

[39] A.-M. Vérilhac and C. Vial, *Le mariage grec du vi^e siècle avant J.-C. à l'époque d'Auguste* (Athens, 1998), 299.

[40] ὡς δὲ Ἀριστόξενος καὶ Φίλλις ὁ μουσικὸς ὅτι ἐν γάμοις περὶ μίαν τράπεζαν πολλὰς κλίνας τιθέντες, παρὰ μέρος ἑξῆς μυρρίνας ἔχοντες ἦδον γνώμας καὶ ἐρωτικὰ σύντονα, fr. 125 in F. Wehrli, *Die Schule des Aristoteles, Texte und Kommentar. Heft II: Aristoxenos* (Basel and Stuttgart, 1967).

[41] It is impossible to know exactly which songs made their way into the wedding ceremony, particularly its banquet. One can consider the analogous case of work songs, which also present flexibility: 'the context of labor becomes a metaphor for poetic composition and performance but also provides a platform for a repertoire that ranges from songs directly associated with the task at hand … to traditional female performances … among other genres and types of songs': A. Karanika, *Voices at Work: Women, Performance, and Labor in Ancient Greece* (Baltimore, 2014), 2. That said, the presence of a unique book of *Epithalamia* (as well as the later developments of the genre) show that the ancients understood that this genre was concerned specifically with the transition of the woman.

[42] M. de Kreij, 'The length of Sappho fr. 44', *ZPE* 214 (2020), 7–11.

[43] H. Spelman, 'Sappho 44, Trojan myth and literary history', *Mnemosyne* 70 (2017), 740–57.

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the song was ever meant to be presented at a wedding banquet. I summarize the issue in the following way: there are significant questions regarding the theory that epithalamia closed Sappho's books, while frr. 104–17b—undoubtedly epithalamic—are markedly different from the songs in the book ends. Moreover, critics can be too quick to catalogue songs that mention weddings as wedding songs. Hence, I consider that these poems are not epithalamia, but they simply evoke Sappho's group activities more broadly.

FR. 31

Fr. 31 exemplifies this discussion well, as it has been read as an epithalamium to present Sappho as a female tutor who instructs her girls with regard to the wedding,[44] when other performative possibilities are more viable.[45] The theory is not new (Wilamowitz defended it first),[46] relies on little textual grounding, and has attracted both support and staunch criticism. The poem received this fame for two reasons, the use of ἴσος θέοισιν ('equal to the gods', fr. 31.1), similar to ἶσος Ἄρευι ('equal to Ares', fr. 111.5), an undisputed wedding song; and the setting, that of a man sitting in front of a woman, which would be possible at a wedding party.[47] Snell carefully analyses the song as praise poetry, without, however, denying its marital context.[48] Page, in turn, calls the epithalamic reading a 'modern misinterpretation'.[49] For Page, it relies on preconceived notions about Sappho, a reconstruction that overestimates what we know about gendered interactions in Lesbos and a disregard for the fact that the song mentions no bride, groom or wedding.[50] Indeed, the *eikasia* might be common in the epithalamium, but it is by no means exclusive to it. Moreover, as frr. 104–17b demonstrate, not only is the comparison to gods less common,[51] but fr. 111 uses an epic form.[52] An epithalamic reading, therefore,

[44] Kirkwood (n. 1), 121–2.

[45] The reading of fr. 31 as a wedding song is less prevalent, but still finds proponents, such as A. Lardinois, 'Who sang Sappho's songs?', in E. Greene (ed.), *Reading Sappho: Contemporary Approaches* (Berkeley / Los Angeles / London, 1996), 167–9. E. Livrea, 'Novità su Saffo nella poesia alessandrina: la chiusa del fr. 31 V. e due letture ellenistiche dell'ode', *Eikasmós* 27 (2016), 57–71 reconstructs the final strophe and argues that the poem is either a true epithalamium or a reflection of the epithalamic situation within the *thiasos*. K. Wasdin, *Eros at Dusk: Ancient Wedding and Love Poetry* (Oxford, 2018), 26 prefers to explore how the discourse of wedding (marked by the *makarismos* and the bride-like figure who talks to a man) 'informs a poem about passionate longing'.

[46] U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *Sappho und Simonides: Untersuchungen über griechische Lyriker* (Berlin, 1913), 58.

[47] Bowra (n. 1), 187. He acknowledges that there is not enough information about social relations in Lesbos at this period to be certain.

[48] B. Snell, 'Sapphos Gedicht φαίνεταί μοι κῆνος', *Hermes* 66 (1931), 71–90.

[49] Page (n. 1), 30.

[50] Page (n. 1), 32–3.

[51] Taking together Sappho's fragments and testimonia, one finds eight similes connected to the *Epithalamia*: two are mythological—the groom is compared to Achilles (105b) or Ares (111)—and six relate to the natural world—the bride is compared to a sweet apple (105a), hyacinth (105c), purple flower (105c) or rose (194a); the groom is compared to slender saplin (115) or horse (194a). Catullus paints a similar picture with his use of the simile in his epithalamia, with two that are mythological—bride and groom are compared to Venus and Paris (Catull. 61.16–20); wife and son to Penelope and Telemachus (61.221–3)—while the other six refer to the natural world: the bride as Asian myrtle (Catull. 61.21–5), or chamomile or yellow poppy (Catull. 61.186–8), or the flower that blossoms unperturbed (Catull. 62.39); bride and groom as the vine that grows clinging to a tree (Catull. 61.34–9; again in 61.102–5); a spinster as the vine that cannot thrive because it has no tree to cling to (Catull. 62.42).

[52] Meister (n. 34), 712 notes that Sappho uses ἶσος Ἀρηΐ (cf. Hom. *Il.* 11.295, 11.604, 12.130, etc.) rather than the expected ἴσος Ἄρ-. The shortened ἴσος appears in frr. 31, 58 and 68. Despite the

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requires the reader to ignore the language and formal structure of everything that follows the first stanza,[53] if it indeed evokes a wedding.

With regard to the setting, Ferrari concedes the nuptial tone of the first verse, but notes that, as far as later examples testify, men and women would have sat separately in a wedding banquet, which complicates the interaction between the characters.[54] One can add that the scene does not mention the procession to the groom's house, the most commonly described moment of the ceremony.[55] Furthermore, it presents a severe emotional outburst on the part of the poet: the voice fails (7–9), the hearing is impaired (11–12), the body stops responding in an orderly manner (10, 13–16). The intense fretfulness constricts the vocal instrument and bewilders the senses that produce the flow of movement. Such a physical response prevents proper performative functioning—a singer at a complete musical loss. Even if we understand the physical effect as a jest (that is, as a hyperbolic compliment to an attractive bride), this is the opposite of what is necessary in a wedding rite, which is typically marked by loud singing, instrumental accompaniment and choreographed dancing.

Different contextual solutions have been posed: an evocation of the epithalamic situation within Sappho's group,[56] a symposium where a solo performer sings to her lyre while seeing young men and *hetairai* who sit and recline together,[57] or a religious festival, which would have allowed for men and women to interact, prompting courting inside the sanctuary (as in Archilochus' Cologne *Epode*).[58] I am inclined to take the last as correct. Moreover, owing to its central position in the island of Lesbos, connection to a pan-Lesbian identity, and shared cult of a unique divine triad (Zeus, Hera and Dionysus), a sanctuary like the one at Messon appears to be a likely location for this.[59] In such a setting, the choral body could materialize the failure of the singer's body. This is how Bierl reads the Kypris Song, which similarly describes the bodily effects of unrequited desire.[60] Such a description can fit the worship of Aphrodite, or of Dionysus given the emphasis on manic excitement and the *sparagmos*. That said, the epithalamic

similarity in the *eikasia*, M. Marcovich, 'Sappho fr. 31: anxiety attack or love declaration?', *CQ* 22 (1972), 19–32, at 24 and 29–32 holds that the word serves different purposes in each poem. In fr. 31 it reflects a strong man who can interact with the object of desire without suffering terribly in the process, unlike the narrator.

[53] Kurke (n. 2), 98.

[54] F. Ferrari, *Sappho's Gift, the Poet and her Community*, transl. B. Acosta-Hughes and L. Prauscello (Ann Arbor, 2010), 184.

[55] The procession and adornment of the bride are the most commonly depicted scenes in vase painting and gravestones: J.H. Oakley and R.H. Sinos, *The Wedding in Ancient Athens* (Madison and London, 1993), 5–6. In literature it is the procession and the singing of the wedding song.

[56] Livrea (n. 45), 70.

[57] Bowie (n. 3), 156.

[58] Ferrari (n. 54), 184. J. Winkler, 'Gardens of nymphs: public and private in Sappho's lyrics', in E. Greene (ed.), *Reading Sappho: Contemporary Approaches* (Berkeley / Los Angeles / London, 1996), 98–100 and A.P. Burnett, *Three Archaic Poets: Archilochus, Alcaeus, Sappho* (London, 1983; repr. Bristol, 1998), 232–5 dismiss the notion of a speaker who sees the interaction between a man and her beloved one altogether. They note that the male figure is generalized, representing any man who sits in front of a person and possesses an emotional control which that person does not.

[59] Cf. L. Robert, 'Recherches épigraphiques', *REA* 62 (1960), 276–361; S. Caciagli, 'Il *temenos* di *Messon*: uno stesso contesto per Saffo e Alceo', *Lexis* 28 (2010), 227–55; V. Pirenne-Delforge and G. Pironti, 'Héra et Zeus à Lesbos: entre poésie lyrique et décret civique', *ZPE* 191 (2014), 27–31; R. Thomas, 'Sappho's Lesbos', in P.J. Finglass and A. Kelly (edd.), *The Cambridge Companion to Sappho* (Cambridge, 2021), 22–35, at 24–5.

[60] A. Bierl, 'Sappho as Aphrodite's singer, poet, and hero(ine): the reconstruction of the context and sense of the Kypris Song', in A. Bierl and A. Lardinois (edd.), *The Newest Sappho: P. Sapph. Obbink and P. GC Inv. 105, Frs. 1–4* (Leiden and Boston, 2016), 339–52, at 350.

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misattribution is not trivial, as it reveals a common feature of Sappho's fragments—namely, that they 'envisage performance situations, but very rarely situate themselves straightforwardly as the focal point of the performance itself'.[61] This is particularly relevant in the case of wedding poetry, as nuptial language can be used in erotic discourses and vice versa.[62] The proposal of a religious festival is an important alternative reading to poems that are commonly read as wedding songs.[63] Fr. 16, for example, could very well be performed at the *Kallisteia*, an annual festival and beauty contest held as a celebration of Hera in Messon; the Tithonus Song targets a large audience, allowing itself to be performed publicly by both girls and boys; fr. 94, finally, is a *propemptikon* to a friend (or a pupil), analogous to fr. 5 or the Brother's Song, not an epithalamium.[64]

FRR. 27, 30 AND THE ADONIA

Considering this, I turn to frr. 27 and 30. Both are commonly read as wedding songs,[65] particularly because the first mentions a wedding (8) and the second a bride (4–5). I propose, instead, that we read both together as pertaining to the Adonia. It is impossible to say if these poems were indeed performed at once, but they share significant thematic similarities. The focus on girls (27.10, 30.2), performance (27.5, 30.2) and the wedding attests to this. Moreover, taken together, they propose a narrative. The first enacts an encounter between chorus leaders (who share a memory about their past), as one of them makes her way to a wedding, while the second describes how the girls who have been singing about the bride all night call the boys to join the rite. I believe that the songs show a progression in the night and that the wedding in question is the failed union of Aphrodite and Adonis. Both fragments lack their incipits, so it is hard to tell to what extent the alphabetical ordering would have prevailed, but the logic of the situation persists.

[61] G. D'Alessio, 'Fiction and pragmatics in ancient Greek lyric: the case of Sappho', in F. Budelmann and T. Phillips (edd.), *Textual Events: Performance and the Lyric in Early Greece* (Oxford, 2018), 31–62, at 58. Different theoretical models such as Sappho's 'choral mimesis' (G. Nagy, 'Genre, occasion, and choral mimesis revisited, with special reference to the "Newest Sappho"', in M. Foster, L. Kurke and N. Weiss [edd.], *Genre in Archaic and Classical Greek Poetry: Theories and Models* [*Studies in Archaic and Classical Greek Song* 4] [Leiden and Boston, 2020], 31–54) or 'parachorality' (T. Power, 'Sappho's parachoral monody', in M. Foster, L. Kurke and N. Weiss [edd.], *Genre in Archaic and Classical Greek Poetry: Theories and Models* [*Studies in Archaic and Classical Greek Song* 4] [Leiden and Boston, 2020], 82–108) are solutions—choral and monodical—for this phenomenon.

[62] Cf. Wasdin (n. 45), 4.

[63] Nagy (n. 61), 39 urges that 'festive choral lyric performance, as the primary genre for Sappho's songs, was also the primary occasion for these songs', and Ferrari (n. 5), 89 points out that Sappho's poetry presents plenty of internal evidence (nightly vigils, temples, song and dance, rites) that confirm Sappho's function to the civic life of her city and island.

[64] For fr. 16 and the *Kallisteia*, cf. O. Thévenaz, 'Sappho's soft heart and Kypris' light wounds: the restoration of the Helen poem (Sa. 16, esp. l. 13–4) and Ovid's Sappho epistle', *ZPE* 196 (2015), 31–43; for the Tithonus Song, Janko (n. 17), 279; for the Brother's Song and Messon, G. Nagy, 'Poetics of sisterly affect in the Brothers Song and in other songs of Sappho', in A. Bierl and A. Lardinois (edd.), *The Newest Sappho: P. Sapph. Obbink and P. GC Inv. 105, Frs. 1–4* (Leiden and Boston, 2016), 449–92, at 458–60; Nagy (n. 61), 38–44. Menander Rhetor (395, 4–32) highlights the *propemptikon* wherein the teacher says goodbye to a pupil or a friend to a friend. Sappho's practice attests, too, to the farewell of the family member and the desire for their return.

[65] E.g. Lambin (n. 12), 103; Parker (n. 3), 232; A. Lardinois, 'Subject and circumstance in Sappho's poetry', *TAPhA* 124 (1994), 57–84, at 61; Liberman (n. 6), 46; Stehle (n. 33), 267, 279–80; Calame (n. 8), 9, 13; Neri (n. 27), 72.

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The Adonia was a community-wide event that brought smaller groups of women together, marked by both younger and older women.[66] The scraps surrounding frr. 27 and 30 are mostly illegible, but fr. 29 names Gorgo (a rival) and Girinno (a friend), so it is likely that the female conversations surrounding this event were present in the missing songs as well. My hypothesis chances upon a difficulty and a potential problem. The difficulty is that we know little about the genre of songs to Adonis. Proclus, for example, preserved in Photius, simply remarks that 'we call Adonisian the verses attributed to Adonis'.[67] The potential problem is that most evidence for the Adonia is from Classical Athens or Hellenistic Alexandria. Lesbos and/or Cyprus, however, are taken to be the possible conduits of the cult from the East to Greece,[68] so the different versions of the celebration may share similarities. Following the Athenian example, these festivals happened yearly and revolved around women who mourned the death of Adonis by bringing pots of sprouted seeds to their rooftops to conduct mock funerals to the youth.[69] Sappho's fr. 140 focusses exactly on the lamentation of girls over the dead Adonis. There, the chorus dialogues with the goddess (impersonated by a solo singer or a half chorus, it seems), who mourns for the dead just like a mortal would have.[70] Frr. 27 and 30, in turn, revolve around previous steps of the festivity, as the girls prepare the nuptial celebration for the goddess, before they display their grief.

That the festivity takes the form of a wedding is no surprise. Theocritus 15,[71] for example, indicates a two-day festival, with a celebration of the union of the couple on one day followed by ritual mourning the next (127–34).[72] Moreover, the singer of the Ptolemaic festival calls Adonis γαμβρός (129), which unites 'Sappho's marriage songs and Adonis-songs in a single literary pedigree'.[73] Bion's *Epitaph*[74] is even more explicit, as the singer wakes up to mourn (1–5) the death of Aphrodite's husband (πόσιν, 24), while the goddess perceives herself as a widow (χήρα, 59). Even Hymenaeus makes an appearance (87–90), as he had adorned the city for the nuptials, but his songs will be replaced for lamentation.[75] The similarities also appear in iconography, as accounts of the Adonia take from nuptial contexts.[76] It becomes clear, therefore, that the Adonia was contiguous to marriage and borrowed imagery and vocabulary from it.[77] This explains the misreading of frr. 27 and 30. Another relevant account is Aphrodite's seduction of Anchises as related in the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*. Sappho knew this poem,[78] and it

[66] Stehle (n. 33), 262.

[67] Following R. Henry, *Photius, Bibliothèque. Tome V: Codices 230–241* (Paris, 2003), 320b, 30–1: Ἀδωνίδια δὲ λέγεται τὰ εἰς Ἄδωνιν ἀναφερόμενα.

[68] R.R. Simms, 'Mourning and community at the Athenian Adonia', *CJ* 93 (1997), 121–41, at 124.

[69] M.P.J. Dillon, '"Woe for Adonis": but in spring not summer', *Hermes* 131 (2003), 1–16, at 3.

[70] A. Lardinois, 'Keening Sappho: female speech genres in Sappho's poetry', in A. Lardinois and L. McClure (edd.), *Women's Voices in Greek Literature and Society* (Princeton, 2001), 75–92, at 77.

[71] Following A.S.F. Gow, *Theocritus. Volume I* (Cambridge, 1952).

[72] Cf. R.S. Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings: Women's Religions among Pagans, Jews, and Christians in the Greco-Roman World* (Oxford, 1994), 32.

[73] J.D. Reed, 'Arsinoe's Adonis and the poetics of Ptolemaic imperialism', *TAPhA* 130 (2000), 319–51, at 320.

[74] Following J.D. Reed, *Bion of Smyrna: The Fragments and the* Adonis (Cambridge, 1997).

[75] Given the state of Sappho's fragments, I cannot determine whether these resonances in later authors are actual allusions to Sappho. Praxilla's fragmentary *Adonis* (page 12 below) offers no help.

[76] E.J. Stafford, 'A wedding scene? Notes on Akropolis 6471', *JHS* 117 (1997), 200–2; L. Reitzammer, *The Athenian Adonia in Context: The Adonis Festival as Cultural Practice* (Madison, 2016), 32.

[77] Cf. J.-P. Vernant, 'Préface', in M. Detienne, *Les Jardins d'Adonis. La mythologie des aromates en Grèce* (Paris, 1989), ix–xvii.

[78] Janko (n. 17), especially 282–9. He argues that the hymn predates the lyric treatments of the Tithonus myth found in Mimnermus and Sappho to compare verses 220–45 to lines 9–12 of the Tithonus Song. Both versions presume Tithonus' immortality, metamorphosis and rejuvenation.

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concerns the unions between mortals and gods. In 126–44, for example, Aphrodite vehemently frames her sexual entanglement as a marriage. For Adonis, however, the event becomes a marriage to death.

The Adonia encompassed the extremes of hilarity and mourning,[79] and frr. 27 and 30 focus on the former. In the first song, Sappho and her chorus encounter a woman, and the leader says 'we are going to a wedding' (σ]τείχομεν γὰρ ἐς γάμον, 8). This is the only (and inconclusive)[80] evidence that suggests an epithalamium.[81] Contrary to the expectation of a present ceremony, the poem expresses the possibility of a future performance.[82] Upon closer inspection, however, it suggests a reflexive account of Sappho's practice: the circumstance of celebrating through song and dance (μέλπεσθαι, 5), the memory of a past connection with the interlocutor (ποτε, 4), the interaction between women of different generations, some of whom are at the threshold of womanhood (παῖς, 4; παρθένος, 10), while the wedding is central to these girls.[83] Some speculate that Sappho's interlocutor is a bride.[84] This cannot be, as the addressee is described as a mature woman in charge of younger girls.[85]

Ferrari analyses fr. 27 in terms of rivalry, as an unnamed[86] chorus leader (addressee) interacts with another (Sappho) to share a past memory before they part.[87] To uphold the epithalamic reading, he connects it to *Il.* 18.495–6, where women by their doors watch a wedding procession. This is only conjectural. The women in the shield see the celebration as it happens, but Sappho's setting seems to be earlier. The state of preservation of fr. 27 does not help, but two possibilities emerge. If the women are rival *chorodidaskaloi*, Sappho abuses the interlocutor, demonstrating she is invited (or hired) to perform at the ritual, while the other one is not.[88] Or, perhaps, they are friendly and head to the same celebration (ἀλλ' ὅττι τάχιστα[| πα]ρ[θ]ένοις ἄπ[π]εμπε, 9–10). This is a scene of female life at Lesbos, and Sappho shows how to dodge an unwelcomed interaction in a public setting (after a brief conversation), owing either to enmity or to haste. Hence, she models specific and important communal behaviours, teaching how to engage and disengage with an acquaintance (in positive or negative terms) without losing standing.

The verses that follow connect this interaction to the Adonia more specifically:]ὅδος μ[έ]γαν εἰς Ὄλ[υμπον | ἀ]νθρω[π]αίκ .[(12–13). The gnomic ending[89] points to the impossibility of human ascension. While Reitzammer defends fr. 27 as a wedding song, she notes that these words evoke the cosmic ladder that the Adonia proposed. This

[79] A. Burnett, 'Brothels, boys, and the Athenia Adonia', *Arethusa* 45 (2012), 177–94, at 183.

[80] A. Dale, 'Sapphica', *HSPh* 106 (2011), 47–74, at 56.

[81] S. Caciagli, 'Sapph. fr. 27 V.: l'unità del pubblico saffico', *QUCC* 91 (2009), 63–80, at 78 connects this to the preparation of the alcove before the wedding, and Loscalzo (n. 5), 131 envisions this as a procession to the *thalamos*.

[82] D'Alessio (n. 61), 50.

[83] Caciagli (n. 81), 63.

[84] G. Tognazzi, 'Il fr. 27 V. di Saffo', *QUCC* 91 (2009), 51–62 argues that the woman in question is the mother of the bride and that the poem is set right before the procession.

[85] Ferrari (n. 54), 32 interprets σὺ πάις ποτ[(4) to indicate the difference in age.

[86] L. Benelli, *Sapphostudien. Zu Ausgewählten Fragmenten Teil I* (Leiden and Boston, 2017), 139 reconstructs the name 'Mika'.

[87] Ferrari (n. 5), 51.

[88] A. Hardie, 'Sappho, the Muses, and life after death', *ZPE* 154 (2005), 13–32, at 15–16 considers the possibility of a Sappho paid for her threnodic output. The same might be true with regard to the remainder of her work. Payment does not need to be made in currency, but in ties of patronage, exchanges of services, imported goods, etc.

[89] Benelli (n. 86), 150 disputes that the verses belong to the same poem. Since frr. 27, 28, 29 and 30 are placed where they are on shared thematic grounds (as I argue), this is not a problem.

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stairway to heaven reminded the women participating in the ritual that the attempts to climb to the realm of the gods would fail. Simultaneously, it made the revellers experience the ladder through the ritualized wedding scene, as they played the role of Aphrodite and the fellow mourners.[90] I believe that the verses are connected to the Adonia, as they indicate the human fear of meddling with divine matters. This is a common theme in Aphrodite's unions. For example, attempting to fly to heaven and marrying the goddess appear in Alcman's Louvre *partheneion* (fr. 1.16–17 *PMGF*), perhaps as an admonition against marrying above one's station.[91] This is a recurring fear of Anchises in the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*. The hero begs for his life when he first sees Aphrodite in disguise (105–6), claims he will be ready to descend to Hades after sharing a bed with her (153–4), pleads for his life once he realizes who she was (185–90), and is only allowed to live if he conceals her identity (281–90). In Praxilla's song for Adonis (fr. 747 *PMG*), the hero speaks from the underworld.[92] In Bion (94–6), the Moirai call Adonis back from the underworld, but he cannot return.[93] These testimonies demonstrate that Sappho not only referred to the limitations of human experience generally, but also foreshadowed the death of Aphrodite's lover and his unavoidable descent to the underworld, the setting for fr. 140.

While fr. 27 evokes the setup of Adonis' wedding and hints to its unfortunate outcome, fr. 30 focalizes another moment of the Adonia, specifically when the male youths are asked to join in the celebration.[94] It is night (1), girls have been singing (2–5) 'of your love with the violet-girdled bride' (σὰν ἀείδοισ[ι]ν φ[ιλότατα καὶ νύμφας ἰοκόλπω, 4–5), and ask their interlocutor to bring out youths of the same age as his (ἠϊθ[ε | … σοὶς ὐμάλικ[ας, 6–7) so that they can all see a night of little sleep (6–9). For an epithalamic reading, the addressee is a groom hymned in his wedding night,[95] and there is an assumption that a chorus of unmarried men (like the *iuuenes* of Catullus 62) will follow the girls' song.[96] A *pannychis*, however, does not need to evoke a wedding.[97] Rather, this poem addresses Adonis himself, rather than a groom, and his lover is Aphrodite. Euripides dubs Adonis 'the nearest and dearest' [ὃς ἂν μάλιστα φίλτατος] of Aphrodite (*Hipp.* 1421), a nod to his relationship of φιλία with the goddess. The epithet used of the bride (ἰόκολπος, 5) confirms this. It is a rare word, attested mostly in Sappho.[98] It has an epic flair and, like other compounds formed by ἰός, is used to refer to deities, overwhelmingly the Muses, but also Dionysus, Persephone and Thetis.[99] In the

[90] Reitzammer (n. 76), 58–9.

[91] E. Robbins, 'Alcman's *Partheneion*: legend and choral ceremony', *CQ* 44 (1994), 7–16, at 13.

[92] Sappho, too, sings from the underworld: cf. Hardie (n. 88), 23–4. One wonders if the stories are somehow related.

[93] *Id*. 15 seems to indicate the possibility of Adonis' reunion to Aphrodite. While his myth is connected to renewal, as the flower that grows out of his blood is a feature already in the Near Eastern origins of the story (Reitzammer [n. 76], 5), the issue of resurrection appears to respond to Egyptian beliefs. Cf. Reed (n. 73).

[94] The festival has a strong female focus, but two inscriptions from Piraeus indicate that Phoenicians celebrated a separate festival marked by male involvement. Cf. Reitzammer (n. 76), 23.

[95] Ferrari (n. 5), 53.

[96] Ferrari (n. 5), 55. Contiades-Tsitsoni (n. 13), 100 and Burnett (n. 58), 218 discuss the development of the epithalamic reading.

[97] Dale (n. 80), 57.

[98] Cf. T. Myakin, 'An Sappho sacerdos Artemidis fuerit? (Sive de epitheto ʾIόκολπος Sapphico dissertationes quaedam)', *Hermes* 140 (2012), 391–416 for possible connections of the word with Artemis.

[99] A. Romè, 'L'uso degli epiteti in Saffo e Alceo con riferimento alla tradizione epico-rapsodica', *SCO* 14 (1965), 210–46, at 234.

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Tithonus Song, the word refers to the Muses. Elsewhere (for example fr. 103.3–4) it points the audience to Aphrodite,[100] which should be the case here.[101]

The night of celebration needs further explanation. It is true that this festival is frequently understood as a form of public self-expression for women,[102] but men are not absent from it. In *Lysistrata*, for example, Aristophanes remarks that the women celebrating the Adonia drink and indulge in *paidia* ('amusements'), while Moschion in Menander's *Samia* has sex with one of the women who celebrate it.[103] Furthermore, Burnett reminds us that the festival joined the women of the *gynaikeion* to the ones of the brothels, to celebrate Adonis' introduction to adult sexuality in a relationship that is fruitless.[104] This makes one reconsider the role of men in this festival. Burnett argues that through Adonis the women lament and celebrate the men of society who reach sexual maturation and will have sexual relationships with women before the wedding is in sight.[105] Understood as such, this is a rite of passage for the men as well, as they left behind their boyhood, but were not yet at marriable age. As Sappho puts it, they are ἠίθεοι and the chorus calls Adonis to invite them to join the rite, not to sing epithalamia.

If the Lesbian Adonia, too, allowed the women of the *gynaikeion* to 'act with the women in the brothels in defining this inaugural experience as extra-familial, unproductive and brief',[106] fr. 30 can be connected to the moment before when the women bid farewell to the boyhood of their sons or brothers.[107] Then the boys would be stirred by Adonis (ἐγέρθεις ἠϊθ[ε] | στεῖχε σοὶς ὐμάλικ[ας, 6–7) to successfully transition into the heterosexual world. Sappho's attack against the Egyptian courtesan, who has a love affair with her brother Charaxos,[108] and her prayers to Hera for him to return home and for Larichos to reach maturity and be ready for marriage[109] indicate that women had real anxieties surrounding this moment of the man's life. Without the help of the women of the community, the young men could be lured by their desires instead of waiting to establish long-lasting relationships through marriage. The same festival, therefore, had distinct functions for the community. In the case of the men, it intended to guarantee a sexual maturation that did not interfere with their family lineage.[110] For the women, it

[100] B. Acosta-Hughes, *Arion's Lyre: Archaic Lyric into Hellenistic Poetry* (Princeton, 2010), 65.

[101] Alcaeus' pun and description of Sappho as ἰόπλοκ' ἄγνα μελλιχόμειδε Σάπφοι ('violet-haired, holy, sweet-smiling', fr. 384), the oldest testimonium we have, points to the connection between Sappho, Aphrodite (who is holy and smiles in fr. 1) and the violet colour.

[102] Reitzammer (n. 76), 23.

[103] Dillon (n. 69), 4–5.

[104] Burnett (n. 79), 187. The lack of offspring between Adonis and Aphrodite explains the symbolism of destroying the *ostraka* of sprouted seeds that were thrown away before the plants flourished; cf. Dillon (n. 69), 4.

[105] Burnett (n. 79), 189. Roman festivities around the *Fortuna Virilis* appear to fulfil a similar function of sexual initiation.

[106] Burnett (n. 79), 189.

[107] Reitzammer (n. 76) understands the ceremony in close connection to female rites, the wedding in particular. Burnett's (n. 79) and Reitzammer's readings are not mutually exclusive. The first engages with the male transition prompted by the women of the community, while the second focalizes on female reinterpretation of the wedding based on the Adonia. Both are complementary, making the Adonia one step (of the many) that marked the maturation of men and women. The myth deals with two characters whose identities (male, mortal and young; female, immortal and older), in intersection or not, are challenged in the process of growing up.

[108] Nagy (n. 64), 453.

[109] D. Boedeker, 'Hera and the return of Charaxos', in A. Bierl and A. Lardinois (edd.), *The Newest Sappho: P. Sapph. Obbink and P. GC Inv. 105, Frs. 1–4* (Leiden and Boston, 2016), 188–207, at 207.

[110] This would rely on the men interacting only with the prostitutes. The evidence of Menander's *Samia*, however, points to the possibility of sexual assault and pregnancy that would have the opposite outcome.

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allowed public expression of joy and grief that made them akin to Aphrodite. For fr. 30, one can envision glimpses of both, as the girls identified with (and singing about) Aphrodite interact with an Adonis figure who leads a group of young men.

In its final image, the boys, up all night, see less sleep than the cleared-voice [bird?][111] (ἤπερ ὄσσον ἀ λιγύφω[νος] | ὕπνον [ἴ]δωμεν, 8–9). This has a parallel in the *Iliad* (19.340–54). As the Trojans grieve Patroclus' untimely pre-marital death (like Adonis'), Zeus commiserates because Achilles refuses to eat. Then, Athena takes the shape of a loud-sounding bird of prey to soothe him (ἣ δ' ἄρπῃ ἐϊκυῖα τανυπτέρυγι λιγυφώνῳ, 350). In Sappho's case, the shrill bird is Aphrodite, whom the girls join in mourning as the wedding becomes a funeral. Just as Aphrodite becomes Sappho's ally in fr. 1, her chorus suffers with and for the goddess. The healing nature of group grieving soothes the entire female community. The boys, in turn, presumably are up to celebrate their maturation. One wonders if this situation relates to Sappho's complicated relationship to Phaon as preserved in her testimonia, which is presumably analogous to Aphrodite's and Adonis'.[112]

Taken together, frr. 27, 30, 140 and 168 offer an overarching view of the Adonia which has not been noticed before. Fr. 140 does not fit Book 1 metrically, but fr. 168 (ὦ τὸν Ἄδωνιν), not assigned to any book, could fit in it. One envisions a cluster of Adonis songs rather than epithalamia. Fr. 43, for instance, the end of Book 2, also evokes a *pannychis*, enacting an interaction between the poet and her companions at the end of a nightly celebration.[113] Perhaps the first two books highlighted Sappho's ritual functions, not just the wedding. The Newest Sappho shows that Book 1 offered a succession of songs related to family relations, then participation in cult and, lastly, unrequited love.[114] It makes sense that the Adonia appears in this work. The cult joined these different attributions, as the rite cultivated the family and community, while the unrequited love of Aphrodite was akin to the impossible desires of the girls of the chorus. Just as Aphrodite caused pain to the singer in the Kypris song (formerly fr. 26), the goddess herself becomes a target of her own powers (again, just like in the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*, where she is pushed to unite to a mortal for imposing that to the other gods).

Beyond the symposium, the Adonia contributed to Sappho's association with prostitution. As Schlesier notes, the character Laurensius in Athenaeus references a 'comedy by Diphilus (*Theseus* fr. 49 *PCG* = 10.451b–c) in which three *hetairai* from Samos are posing, and obscenely solving, a riddle at a banquet during the Adonia—a further allusion to Sappho in whose work the first extant evocations of this festival occur'.[115] This may indicate that prostitutes participated in the Lesbian Adonia, making it close to the picture Burnett paints for Athens. At any rate, frr. 27 and 30 show that Sappho's functions as a leader went much beyond preparing girls for their wedding. She helped them navigate a traditional society and understand their role in a community devoted to epiphanies, music, movement and beauty. Knowing both male and female codes, she was able to interfere in the male sphere as well: Lesbian women presented themselves publicly when specific rites called them to do so, while they respond to the events in the lives of the males in their community. This correlates to the Hellenistic

[111] The bird is present in the iconography of the Adonis myth. Cf. Reitzammer (n. 76), 45.

[112] G. Nagy, 'Phaethon, Sappho's Phaon, and the white rock of Leukas: "reading" the symbols of Greek lyric poetry', in E. Greene (ed.), *Reading Sappho: Contemporary Approaches* (Berkeley / Los Angeles / London, 1996), 35–57, at 40–1; cf. fr. 211.

[113] Ferrari (n. 5), 56.

[114] Obbink (n. 26), 50.

[115] Schlesier (n. 9), 353.

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understanding of Sappho's *poikilia*:[116] generic variety (correlated to performative variety) reflects the true nature of her corpus, rather than being a feature later authors saw in her.[117] The brevity of her songs, another characteristic appreciated by the Alexandrians, means that clusters of songs were performed together. Their reperformance and the impositions of their edition now obscure their original context, causing some distortion. The reading of wedding songs beyond those of the *Epithalamia* is certainly a product of this process; the erasure of songs for Adonis, too.

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[116] Acosta-Hughes (n. 100), 13.
[117] Sappho's figuration in the Suda (σ 107, first notice, IV 322–3 Adler), too, attests to her generic variability.

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