

Greek Lyric: Sappho and the Individual

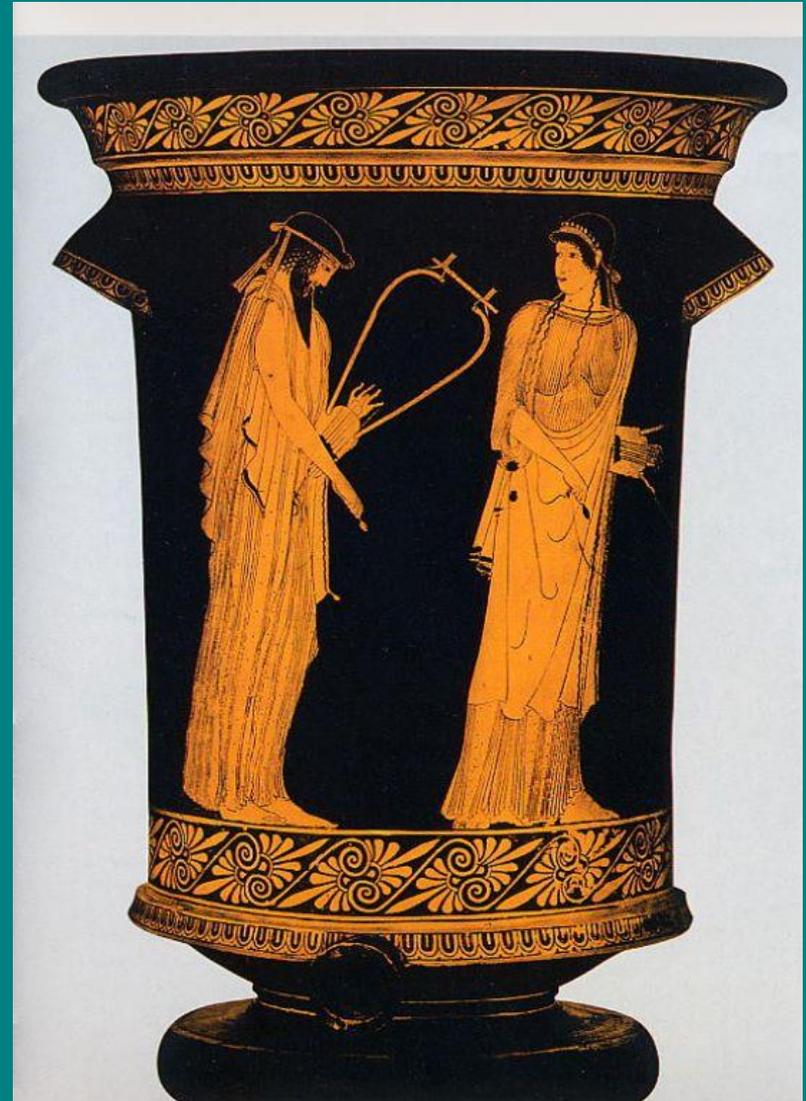
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Poetic Evolution

- Lyric arose most likely out of Epic; early lyric makes use of dactylic hexameter in the 7th century. Early themes are martial in nature, much like epic.
- The Choruses of tragedy are lyric (a variety of metres) and the dialogue is iambic trimeter. After the rise of tragedy in the fifth century we see lyric disappear.

- Lyric is accompanied to a lyre
- Choral Lyric
- Solo Lyric
- Sappho and Alcaeus

Lyric and Lesbos



- Born at Mitylene in Lesbos, late 7th c.
- Nine books were collected by Alexandrian scholars
- Little is known about her for certain
- Married and had children
- Wrote many different types of lyric, not only erotic (elegiac, dactylic pentameter, Epithalamia)

Sappho



It seems to me that man is equal to the
gods, that is, whoever sits opposite you
And, drawing nearer, savors, as you speak,
The sweetness of your voice
And the thrill of your laugh, which have so
stirred the heart in my own breast,
that whenever I catch sight of you,
even if for a moment, then my voice deserts
me.
and my tongue is struck silent, a delicate fire

suddenly races underneath my skin,
My eyes see nothing, my ears whistle like
The whirling of a top
And sweat pours down me and a trembling
 creeps over
My whole body, I am greener than grass,
At such times, I seem to be no more than
A step away from death;
But all can be endured since even a
 pauper...

Some an army of horsemen

Some an army of horsemen, some an army on foot
And some say a fleet of ships is the loveliest sight
On this dark earth; but I say it is whatever you
desire:

And it is possible to make this perfectly clear
To all; for the woman who far surpassed all others
in her beauty, Helen, left her husband—the best
of all men--

Behind and sailed far away to Troy; she did not
spare

A single thought for her child nor for her dear
parents

But the goddess of love led her astray to desire...

...which reminds me now of Anactoria,

Although far away,

Whose long-desired footstep, whose radiant,
sparkling face

I would rather see before me than the chariots

Of Lydia or the armor of men

Who fight wars on foot....

Old Age

Already old age is wrinkling my
Skin and my hair is turning from black
To grey; my knees begin to tremble
And my legs no longer carry me...
Oh but once, once we were like young deer
...what can I do?....
...

Sadness at a Lover's Parting

- ...frankly, I wish that I were dead:

She was weeping as she took her leave
from me.

And many times she told me this:

'o what sadness we have suffered,

Sappho, for I'm leaving you against my will.'

If not, then I would you...of all the loveliness
that we have shared together;

For many wreaths of violets,
Of roses and of crocuses
...you wove around yourself by my side
...and many twisted garlands
Which you had woven from the blooms
Of flowers, you placed around your slender neck
...and you were anointed with
A perfume, scented with blossom,
...although it was fit for a queen
And on a bed, soft and tender...
You satisfied your desire...

It is not possible
To return to my youth; for even Eos
The Dawn—whose arms are roses,
Who brings light to the ends of the earth—
Found that old age embraced Tithonous,
Her immortal lover

I know I must die...
Yet I love the tenderness of life
And this and desire keep me here in
The brightness and beauty of the sun
And not with Hades...

Marriage of Hector and Andromache

- A herald came...Idaeus...swift messenger.
‘Hector and his companions are bringing a woman
with sparkling eyes, graceful Andromache, from
sacred Thebe,
From the ever-flowing streams of Placia, in their
ships across the salt-filled sea;
And with her they also carry many golden
bracelets, purple clothing, engraved trinkets,
ivory and silver goblets too numerous to count.’
This was Idaeus’ speech.

Mother-Daughter

- ...my mother used to say that
In her youth it was thought to be
Very fine to bind up your hair
With a dark purple headband—yes,
Extremely fine indeed, although
For a girl whose hair is golden
Like a torch flame, it is better to wreathe
In it garlands of fresh flowers;
Recently I saw a headband

Brightly colored, from Sardis...

But for you, Cleis, I do not have

A brightly colored headband nor

Do I know where I may find one...

Gnomic Wisdom Poems

- 1) Sappho's advice was: when someone sows anger in your heart, keep quiet;

Curb your thoughtless, barking tongue.

- 2) Beauty endures only for as long as it can be seen;
Goodness, beautiful today, will remain so tomorrow.

- 3) Wealth without virtue is

a harmful companion;

But a mixture of both,

the happiest friendship.

Summary

- Lyric previously existed in Egypt
- Greek lyric develops the meters that will be taken up by Romans and later Renaissance writers
- Genres of lyric are formed
- Sappho writes about erotic and romantic love, family, marriage, woman's work, death, and wisdom/advice.