



A brief note about the picturing of apples in the poetics of Sappho

Citation

Nagy, Gregory. 2019.03.29. "A brief note about the picturing of apples in the poetics of Sappho." Classical Inquiries. http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:hul.eresource:Classical_Inquiries.

Published Version

<https://classical-inquiries.chs.harvard.edu/a-brief-note-about-the-picturing-of-apples-in-the-poetics-of-sappho/>

Permanent link

<http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:42177426>

Terms of Use

This article was downloaded from Harvard University's DASH repository, and is made available under the terms and conditions applicable to Other Posted Material, as set forth at <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:dash.current.terms-of-use#LAA>

Share Your Story

The Harvard community has made this article openly available. Please share how this access benefits you. [Submit a story](#).

[Accessibility](#)

Classical Inquiries

Editors: Angelia Hanhardt and Keith Stone

Consultant for Images: Jill Curry Robbins

Online Consultant: Noel Spencer

About

Classical Inquiries (CI) is an online, rapid-publication project of Harvard's Center for Hellenic Studies, devoted to sharing some of the latest thinking on the ancient world with researchers and the general public.

While articles archived in DASH represent the original *Classical Inquiries* posts, CI is intended to be an evolving project, providing a platform for public dialogue between authors and readers. Please visit http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:hul.eresource:Classical_Inquiries for the latest version of this article, which may include corrections, updates, or comments and author responses.

Additionally, many of the studies published in CI will be incorporated into future CHS publications. Please visit http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:hul.eresource:CHS.Online_Publishing for a complete and continually expanding list of open access publications by CHS.

Classical Inquiries is published under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](#). Every effort is made to use images that are in the public domain or shared under Creative Commons licenses. Copyright on some images may be owned by the Center for Hellenic Studies. Please refer to captions for information about copyright of individual images.

Citing Articles from *Classical Inquiries*

To cite an article from *Classical Inquiries*, use the author's name, the date, the title of the article, and the following persistent identifier:

http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:hul.eresource:Classical_Inquiries.

For example:

Nagy, G. 2019.01.31. "Homo Ludens at Play with the Songs of Sappho: Experiments in Comparative Reception Theory, Part Four." *Classical Inquiries*. http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:hul.eresource:Classical_Inquiries.

[Home](#) » [By Gregory Nagy](#) » A brief note about the picturing of apples in the poetics of Sappho

A brief note about the picturing of apples in the poetics of Sappho

March 29, 2019 By Gregory Nagy listed under By Gregory Nagy

Comments off

2019.03.29 | By Gregory Nagy

§0. In the course of recent communications with my dear colleague Lucia Athanassaki, she has generously shared with me a wealth of further insights and bibliography concerning the poetics of Sappho as imitated by Catullus. In this brief essay, I concentrate on one detail, having to do with the picturing of apples.



Image credit William M. Todd, 2006.

§1. In Poem 2 of Catullus, the speaking 'I' focuses first on a pet sparrow of a puella 'girl', lines 1–10 (puella at line 1), and then on a beautiful apple that attracts the attention of a puella 'girl' who is pictured as a most desirable love-object, lines 11–13 (puella at line 11). Both focal points, the pet sparrow and the beautiful apple, can be analyzed as features of Sapphic songmaking that Catullus imitates in his Poem 2. Such an analysis, as my friend Lucia Athanassaki has pointed out to me, appeared in an article by Jennifer Ingleheart (2003), cited below in my brief Bibliography. As Ingleheart observes in her article, both the pet sparrow and the beautiful apple are poetic themes that can be traced back ultimately to the songs of Sappho. What I admire most about the work of Ingleheart is her decisiveness in arguing that these same two themes are actually linked to each other—and that this linkage happens not only in Poem 2 of Catullus but also already in the songs of Sappho. In the brief essay I present here, as I noted already in my introductory paragraph, I will concentrate on the second of the two linked themes, which is, the picturing of a beautiful apple. And the illustration that accompanies my essay here shows exactly how such an apple was pictured in the original poetic world of Sappho, which was the island of Lesbos.

§2. Before I can concentrate on the theme of a beautiful apple that becomes a plaything for Catullus in his Poem 2, I need to make an additional remark about the linked theme of a pet sparrow. This remark is in agreement with another observation made in the article of Ingleheart (2003:552 and 554, with bibliography), who notes that the pet sparrow as we find it in Catullus 2 is comparable to other pets belonging to other desired girls that populate epigrammatic poems dating as far back as the Hellenistic period, and that such beloved pets have an afterlife in Roman epigrammatic poetry postdating Catullus, especially in the epigrams of Martial (as in Epigram 1.7), where the randy little bird gets endowed with further erotic features, even becoming a "phallic symbol" of sorts (I cite here the interpretation of Thomas 1993, especially at p. 138; also cited by Ingleheart pp. 552–554). I must add emphatically, however, that such symbolism cannot be traced all the way back to the songs of Sappho.

§3. That said, I can now go on to say that the theme of the beautiful apple in Poem 2 of Catullus, linked as it is to the theme of the pet sparrow, likewise undergoes an epigrammatic phase. In this case as well, however, such a phase cannot be traced all the way back to Sappho. Accordingly, I concentrate here only

Share This



Classical Inquiries (CI) is an online, rapid-publication project of Harvard's Center for Hellenic Studies, devoted to sharing some of the latest thinking on the ancient world with researchers and the general public.

Editor

Keith Stone
kstone@chs.harvard.edu

Search for:

Subscribe Now!

Subscribe to this site to receive email updates about the latest research—just one or two notices per week.

[EU/EEA Privacy Disclosures](#)

Now Online

on an early attestation of this theme—in a song of Sappho. And, in this song, even the look and feel of the apple is different. Here is the description of the apple, in Fragment 105a of Sappho:

οἶον τὸ γλυκύμαλον ἐρεύθεται ἄκρῳ ἐπ' ὕσδῳ, | ἄκρον ἐπ' ἀκροτάτῳ, λελάθοντο δὲ
μαλοδρόμῃες, | οὐ μὲν ἐκλελάθοντ', ἀλλ' οὐκ ἐδύναντ' ἐπίκεισθαι.

Just like the sweet apple that blushes on top of a branch, | the topmost apple on the
topmost branch. It has eluded the notice of the apple pickers. | Oh, but no. It's not that
they haven't noticed it. They just couldn't reach it.

§4. Relevant to this description is the illustration for my essay here: it is a photograph, taken by my friend William M. Todd in 2006, when Bill and Eva and Holly and I were traveling together on the island of Lesbos. The photograph pictures the local variety of apples native to the island of Lesbos (together with the mainland across the strait). These apples, as we see in the photograph, are yellow when they ripen, showing only a 'blush' of red.

§5. On the cultivation of apples in ancient and modern Lesbos, I cite an illuminating study by Hugh Mason (2004). On the symbolism of apples in the poetics of Sappho, I cite my analysis in [Nagy 2013 5](#)§§100–102. As for the symbolism of apples in poems directly imitating Sappho, I have more to say especially at §§12–15 in [Nagy 2019.03.08](#).

Bibliography

Athanassaki, L. 2019.03.18. "A Turkish Angora Cat in Paris: An insight into Catullus' 'Sparrow Poem' (c. 2) arising from a Modern Greek Song." *Classical Inquiries*. <https://classical-inquiries.chs.harvard.edu/a-turkish-angora-cat-in-paris-an-insight-into-catullus-sparrow-poem-c-2-arising-from-a-modern-greek-song/>.

Ingleheart, J. 2003. "Catullus 2 and 3: A Programmatic Pair of Sapphic Epigrams? *Mnemosyne* 56: 551–565.

Mason, H. J. 2004. "Sappho's Apples." *Metamorphic Reflections: Essays Presented to Ben Hijmans at his 75th Birthday*, ed. M. Zimmerman and R. Van Der Paardt, 243–253. Leuven.

Nagy, G. 2013. *The Ancient Greek Hero in 24 Hours*. Cambridge, MA. http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:hul.ebook:CHS_NagyG.The_Ancient_Greek_Hero_in_24_Hours.2013.

Nagy, G. 2019.03.08. "A scenario for exchanges of comments on a planned monograph about the ancient reception of Sappho." *Classical Inquiries*. <https://classical-inquiries.chs.harvard.edu/a-scenario-for-exchanges-of-comments-on-a-planned-monograph-about-the-ancient-reception-of-sappho/>.

Nagy, G. 2019.03.15. "Analyzing a song to a sparrow: 'I'm for you the girl, you're for me the joy'." *Classical Inquiries*. <https://classical-inquiries.chs.harvard.edu/analyzing-a-song-to-a-sparrow-im-for-you-the-girl-youre-for-me-the-joy/>.

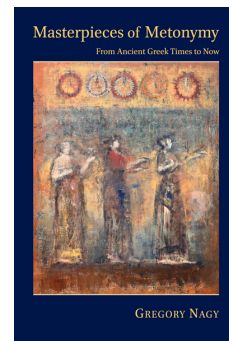
Thomas, R. F. 1993. "Sparrows, Hares, and Doves: A Catullan Metaphor and its Tradition." *Helios* 20:131–142.

Tags: [apples](#), [Catullus](#), [Catullus 2](#), [Sappho](#)

Comments are closed.

« A personal checklist of memorable wordings in Albert B. Lord's *The Singer of Tales*

What Pausanias saw when he looked up at the pediments of the temple of Zeus in Olympia »



Top Posts & Pages

[The Last Words of Socrates at the Place Where He Died](#)

[A Roll of the Dice for Ajax](#)

[Helen of Troy: Unwomanly in Her Sexuality](#)

Most Common Tags

[Achilles](#) [Aphrodite](#) [apobatēs](#) [Archilochus](#)
[Ariadne](#) [Aristotle](#) [Artemis](#) [Athena](#)
[Athens](#) [Catullus](#) [chariot fighting](#)

Commentary [Daphnis](#)
[and Chloe](#) [Demodokos](#) [Dionysus](#)
[etymology](#) [Euripides](#) [Gregory Nagy](#)
[H24H HAA](#) [travel-study](#) [Helen](#) [Hera](#)
[Herodotus](#) [Hippolytus](#) [Homer](#)

Homeric epic Iliad
[Jean Bollack](#) [lament](#) [Lelantine War](#) [Lesbia](#)
[mimesis](#) [Mycenae](#) [Odysseus](#)

Odyssey [Pausanias](#)
[Phaedra](#) [Pindar](#) [Plato](#) [Poetics](#) [Posidippus](#)
Sappho [Theseus](#) [weaving](#) [Zeus](#)

Archives

Users

[Log in](#)



Classical Inquiries, edited by Keith Stone, is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](#).

[EU/EEA Privacy Disclosures](#) [Cookie Policy](#) [CHS GR Privacy Notice](#)

Classical Inquiries powered by [WordPress](#) and [The Clear Line Theme](#)