

BOOK REVIEW

Sappho: A New Translation of the Complete Works. By DIANE J. RAYOR and ANDRÉ LARDINOIS. Cambridge, UK and New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2014. Pp. x + 173. Hardback, \$99.99. ISBN: 978-1-107-02359-8

These are exciting times for students of Sappho, largely due to two recent sets of discoveries: the “Tithonus Poem,” reconstructed in 2004 through the join of previously known fr.58 with pap. Cologne 21351 and 21376 (Gronewald and Daniel, *ZPE* 147:1-8); and the “Brothers Poem,” “Kypris Song,” and other new Sapphic materials drawn from the Green Collection in 2014 (Obbink, *ZPE* 189: 32-49; Burris, Fish, and Obbink, *ibid.*:1-28). Clearly occasioned by these recent discoveries, Diane Rayor and André Lardinois’ *Sappho: A New Translation of the Complete Works* is an admirable team effort to provide both translations (Rayor) and contextual materials (Lardinois) for the Greekless reader who wants to see what all the fuss is about.

Rayor’s translations of complete poems and longer fragments (25-95) are eminently readable and reasonably close to the Greek; the English of the shorter fragments also has its own charm and occasional zip. Lardinois’ contribution to the volume consists of a nicely written Introduction (1-16) and a set of notes (97-154) that is as extensive and illuminating as any I have ever seen in a volume of translation. An Appendix (155-164) is devoted to translations and notes for the “Brothers Poem” (P. Sapph. Obbink) as well as a few other newly discovered items that resist placement in the established order of fragments. The shortness of the Bibliography (165-170) probably suits the intended general audience, who will find plenty of leads for further exploration.

Despite the title of the volume, most of the translations are based upon those in Rayor’s *Sappho’s Lyre: Archaic Lyric and Women Poets of Ancient Greece*, University of California Press, 1991. Most revisions are slight, but a few stand out as definite changes for the better. In Poem 1, for example, the *lissomai se mē m’... damna... thūmon* of lines 2-4 had been rendered in 1991 with the stilted “I beg you not to subdue my spirit”; Rayor’s current “I beg you, do not break my spirit” is far superior

in that it both reflects a closer attention to the (surely more exciting) parataxis of the original Greek, and makes use of appropriate English idiom.

Some of Rayor's choices, however, are difficult to understand, especially where they seem to reflect a tendency towards an inappropriate naturalism. She renders the second strophe of Poem 2, lines 5-8 thus:

Cold water ripples through apple branches,
the whole place shadowed in roses,
from the murmuring leaves
deep sleep descends.

Rayor's "murmuring" in line 7 translates the Greek *aithussomenōn*, which properly means something like "shining" (cf. the root verb *aithō* "burn"). By making the participle somehow refer to a soothing sound, Rayor interrupts a chain of shadow-and-light imagery; she is also pushing the poem away from the clearly magical effect of Aphrodite's grove (hence the charmed sleep of *kōma* in line 8) and towards a Romantic scene in which the speaker interacts with Nature in a manner reminiscent of Wordsworth.

Turning to the Introduction and Notes provided by Lardinois, I find many strengths. Lardinois' writing is engaging and leads the inexperienced reader through many important aspects and questions in Sappho studies. The Introduction does an especially good job of negotiating between scholarly detail and the likely capacity of a general audience. Nevertheless, there are a couple of problems that need pointing out. For example, it is incorrect to say that "the relative order in which the first 117 fragments are listed also dates back to the Hellenistic period" (8). A more serious problem, however, is Lardinois' limited and misleading discussion of genre, in which he divides Sappho's output into thematic categories that are certain to confuse the inexperienced reader (8-9). One example of this is his use of "satirical" (page number) to describe poems such as fr.55 ("And having died you will lie... for you do not share in the roses from Pieria [i.e., the songs of the Muses]" *katthanoisa de keisēi... ou gar pedekhēs brodōn tōn ek Pieriās*); such a poem is better considered in relation to Archilochus' iambics than to Juvenal or Molière.

Have Rayor and Lardinois succeeded in their project to present a complete and well-contextualized Sappho? I tend to think that no volume that limits itself to a single archaic lyric poet can sufficiently represent to the reader what that poet was up to. When deciding upon readings for an undergraduate course, I would choose instead something like West's *Greek Lyric Poetry*, Oxford University Press

1994. For those, however, who prefer a book that limits itself to Sappho, or those who absolutely insist on one that covers the most recent discoveries, Rayor and Lardinois' volume is the clear choice.

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