

The sapphic stanza offers a unique opportunity to see if expectations of content or general tone were associated with a particular lyric form. It was used by both Sappho and Alcaeus for a variety of poems, which (as Kirkwood remarked) indicates that it probably preexisted both of them. Given the data available, my conclusions must be very tentative, but the fragments do suggest that the stanza was associated especially with prayers for help or happiness and with celebrations, especially weddings.

For Sappho, there is enough substance to comment on in 19 of the 38 sapphic fragments (in Voigt's edition). Seven poems appear certain to be prayers and three more may be prayers or contain reports of prayer. I would group another four poems together as marriage related, including two that pertain to Helen. There appear to be remains of a group of marriage poems at the end of the book roll (*P.Oxy* 1231). The "pathography" (fr. 31) is the most striking contrary evidence but (despite Voigt's supplement of an initial coronis), it apparently survived as a set-piece and we know nothing of its context.

Although there are approximately 135 items in Voigt in other meters (excluding lexicographical citations), there is only one indication of a similar prayer, fr. 86 to Aphrodite. So notwithstanding two poetic invocations (to the Graces and the Muses), and one apostrophe of Hesperus as the evening, prayer seems to be a distinguishing feature of Sappho's sapphics.

Alcaeus offers five prayers among the eight substantial sapphics, two poems about Helen's marriage, and a one-stanza sympotic fragment. I include among the prayers the unusual imprecation, invoking Zeus, in which, I suggest, the force of the anger is dramatized by contrast to the normal tone—a rhetorical gesture consistent with Alcaeus's sudden uses of coarse language to refer to Pittacus (documented by Kurke, *QUCC* 1994). Among the poems in other meters, there is some evidence of prayer but no clear examples of formal prayer (Book 1 apparently began with a hymn to Apollo in alcaics; fr. 129 shows a mixture of prayer with narrative or description in alcaics).

Horace also wrote sapphics; his work shows his own development of the form, but we can, with caution, find evidence of what he read in Sappho and Alcaeus (although we cannot in the case of Catullus). Most notable are five poems that are or contain prayers in Book One and his choice of the sapphic for the *Carmen Saeculare*.

Typically, the prayers, so far as we can read them, look to the gods as the source of salvation or simply as the source of cheer; they tend to involve gods of local rite or immediate comfort. The mood of the prayer or of the vision of relief reflects the expectations of the rite, festival, or symposium for which many of them may have been intended; it is a mood that accords too with the celebration of marriage. So rather than say that stanza form is intended as a vehicle for prayer, I would say that prayer is the most typical expression of what the stanza itself communicates; once the audience recognized the metrical (and perhaps musical) form, they would understand how to hear the content. For the tone of the stanza is defined, above all, by the peace of release from toil and the pleasure of fellowship with the god or with fellow celebrants—the quality which we usually identify as *charis* ("the beauty and joy that establish friendly, reciprocal relationships" in J. Day's phrase) and which belongs to the domain of marriage as well.