

The new Sappho fragments offer a tantalizing part of one poem, previously unknown, and the near completion of another, 58 Voigt. Juxtaposed as they are in this pre-canonical collection, the two poems highlight two opposed modes of Sappho’s self-representation in relation to time.

In the first poem, lines 1-8 of the main fragment, Sappho twice uses the temporal deictic *nun*, first in line 3 (*nun thalia*) and then in line 6 (*ōs nun epi gas eoisan*): “now festivity . . .” and “as now being on the earth.” It points to the scene of performance and asserts presence — ultimately that of song and singer, since the final word is *aeidō*, “I sing.” (Cf. Bakker 2005 on deictic *nun* as signaling presence.)

The second poem, lines 9-20, also involves singing and time but here the indefinite adverb *pota*, referring to the past, occurs three times. Twice it refers to Sappho’s youth *once*, now absent (11, 13). Then it marks the transition to the myth of Tithonos in an undefined past (17). The end of the second poem, “an immortal wife,” leaves us with the paradox of unrecoverable human time even within myth.

In both poems the speaker, “Sappho,” apparently refers to herself (so West 2005). Thus *pota* marks both her lost ideal self and paradigmatic myth, while *nun* marks her presence as singer and creator of poetic “reality” for herself (and an audience). For Sappho there is a mythic and emotional fullness to the indefinite past, which she can (not restore but) replace in the present through song. Here, indeed, she (plausibly) says that she will have presence in and through her poetry after death, and one could describe her as the (re)creator of myth. The two temporal markers, separated and insisted on in these two poems, reveal clearly how Sappho configures her self-representation through presence and absence. In other poems she combines them. Poem 1 Voigt is structured by *pota* and *nun*. In 16 and 96 V a mythic (16) or indefinite past (96, marked by the imperfect) is juxtaposed with *nun* to poetic “making present” of an absent woman through vivid language. Other fragments (notably 17 V) show signs of the same structure.

Bakker, Egbert. 2005. *Pointing to the Past: From Formula to Performance in Homeric Poetics*. Hellenic Studies 12. Center for Hellenic Studies.

West, M. L. 2005. “The New Sappho.” *ZPE* 151, 1-9.