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A poetics of sisterly affect in the Brothers Song and in other songs of Sappho

Gregory Nagy

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In this on-line version, the page-numbers of the printed version are indicated within braces ("{" and "}"). For example, "{449|450}" indicates where p. 449 of the printed version ends and p. 450 begins. These indications will be useful to readers who need to look up references made elsewhere to the printed version of this book.

Introduction

§1. The Brothers Song and other new papyrus texts, including the first stanza of what is now known as the Kypris Song, reveal some heretofore missing pieces of the poetic personality whom we know as Sappho.¹ In what I have to say here about this personality, I concentrate on the identity of Sappho as sister.

§2. My approach builds on my previous publications about not only Sappho but also Alcaeus.² My general argument in all these publications is that we can see the personalities of Sappho and Alcaeus come to life only if we view them as poetic creations of their songs. To say

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¹ The relevant texts have been published by Obbink 2014 and Burris, Fish, and Obbink 2014.

² Especially Nagy 2007b.
it another way, the songs of Sappho and Alcaeus were meant to be heard by the public who did hear them. They were not meant for private readers. And, in the case of compositions like the Brothers Song and the Kypris Song, my specific argument is that the expressions of sisterly affect in such songs were sure to delight the listening public.

§3. But what exactly would be so delightful about songs expressing an aristocratic woman’s tormented feelings about a brother who squandered his family’s wealth on a courtesan in Egypt? That is what her brother named Kharaxos seems to have done, as we learn from a variety of ancient sources, starting with Herodotus (2.134–135). So, where is the delight here? In attempting to answer such a question, I focus on the mixed feelings of the sister, as expressed by the poetics of Sappho. {449|450}

**Poetic expressions of mixed feelings**

§4. I start with the first three stanzas of Song 5 of Sappho:

| Πότνιαι Νηρήιδεϲ ἀβλάβη[ν μοι] | τὸν καϲίγνητον δ[ό]τε τυίδ’ ἱκεϲθα[ι] |,
κῶττὶ φῶι θύμωι κε θέλῃ γένεϲθαι |, κῆνο τελέϲθην, |, ὅϲϲα δὲ πρόϲθ’ ἄµβροτε
πάντα λῦϲα[ι] | καὶ φίλοιϲι φοίϲι χάραν γένεϲθαι |, κώνιαν ἔχθροιϲι, γένοιτο δ’ ἄµμι |,

| Πότνιαι Νηρήιδεϲ ἀβλάβη[ν μοι] | τὸν καϲίγνητον δ[ό]τε τυίδ’ ἱκεϲθα[ι] |,
κῶττὶ φῶι θύμωι κε θέλῃ γένεϲθαι |, κῆνο τελέϲθην, |, ὅϲϲα δὲ πρόϲθ’ ἄµβροτε
πάντα λῦϲα[ι] | καὶ φίλοιϲι φοίϲι χάραν γένεϲθαι |, κώνιαν ἔχθροιϲι, γένοιτο δ’ ἄµμι |,

| O Queen Nereids, unharmed [ablabēs] | may my brother, please grant it, arrive to me here [tuide], |, and whatever thing he wants in his heart [thūmos] to happen, |, let that thing be fulfilled [telesthēn]. |, And however many mistakes he made in the past, undo them all. |, Let him become a joy [kharā] to those who are near-and-dear [philoi] to him, |, and let him be a pain [oniā] to those who are enemies [ekhthroi]. As for us, |, may we have no enemies, not a single one. |, But

| O Queen Nereids, unharmed [ablabēs] | may my brother, please grant it, arrive to me here [tuide], |, and whatever thing he wants in his heart [thūmos] to happen, |, let that thing be fulfilled [telesthēn]. |, And however many mistakes he made in the past, undo them all. |, Let him become a joy [kharā] to those who are near-and-dear [philoi] to him, |, and let him be a pain [oniā] to those who are enemies [ekhthroi]. As for us, |, may we have no enemies, not a single one. |, But
may he wish to make his sister [kasignētā] |10 worthy of more honor [tīmā]. |11 The catastrophic [lugrā] pain [oniā] ... in the past, he was feeling sorrow [akheuōn]... .

Sappho Song 5.1–11

§5. Here in Song 5, the loving sister is expressing a wish that her errant brother should become a kharā or ‘joy’ to her loved ones (6), not an oniā or ‘pain’ (7)—a pain that is then described as luğrā ‘catastrophic’ (10).³ It should be the {450|451} other way around, she is saying, so that the family will have the joy—while the enemies will have the pain. But the family itself should have no enemies at all—nor any pain, as expressed twice by the noun oniā (7 and 10).

§6. Later on in Song 5, the speaking persona of Sappho turns to Aphrodite, addressing her as Kypris and describing her with the epithet semna ‘holy’ (18: cǔ [δ]έ Κύπρι[ς] φ[έμ]να).

Although the fragmentary state of the papyrus here prevents us from seeing the full context, it is clear that the sister is praying to the goddess to prevent further misfortune from happening to her brother, who ‘in the past was feeling sorrow [akheuōn]’ (11: π[ά]ροιθ’ ἀχεύων).

§7. But the pain that torments the family because of the brother’s misfortunes is not the only kind of torment we find in the poetics of Sappho. The same word oniā ‘pain’ that refers to the torment experienced by the family of Sappho refers also to the torment of erotic love experienced by Sappho herself. In Song 1 of Sappho, her speaking persona prays to Aphrodite to release her from such torment:

| μή μ’ ἀσαίὶ μὴδ’ ὀνίαιὶ δάμνα, | πότνια, θῦμον

| Do not dominate with hurts [asai] and pains [oniai], | O Queen [potnia], my heart [thûmos].

³ It is possible, of course, that [ὁν]ίαν ... λύγρα is a genitive plural, not an accusative singular.
§8. Similarly in the first six lines of the Kypris Song, the speaking persona of Sappho once again turns to Aphrodite, praying that the goddess may release her from the torment of erotic love:

| 1 πῶϲ κε δή τιϲ οὐ θαμέω̣ϲ̣ ἄϲαιτ̣ο, | 2 Κύπρι δέϲ̣π̣ο̣̣ι̣ν̣', ὅτ̣τ̣ι̣ν̣α [δ]ή φιλ[ή]ει | 3 [κωῦ] θέλοι μάλιϲτα πάθαν χά[λ]αϲ裀άι | 4 [ποῖ]ον ἔχηϲθα | 5 [νῶν] κάλοιϲι μ’ ἀλεμάτωϲ δαϲ̣ζ̣δ̣[η]ν] | 6 [ιμέ]ρω<τ> λύ[ι]ϲαντι γόν’ ωμε.[

| 1 How can someone not be hurt [= asάsthai, verb of the noun asά ‘hurt’] over and over again, | 2 O Queen Kypris [Aphrodite], whenever one loves [phileîn] whatever person | 3 and wishes very much not to let go of the passion? | 4 [What kind of purpose] do you have | 5 [in mind], uncaringly rending me apart | 6 in my [desire] as my knees buckle?

Sappho Kypris Song 1–6

§9. The ending of this song was already known before the discovery of the new supplements for the beginning as I just quoted it. At this ending, we find the {451|452} persona of Sappho declaring the poetics of her own self-awareness:

| 11 ἔγω δ’ ἐμ’ αὐταί | 12 τοῦτο κυνοίδα

| 11 And I—aware of my own self—| 12 I know this.

Sappho Song 26.11–12

§10. Such self-awareness as we find it at work in the songs of Sappho brings me back to the question I was asking from the start: what exactly is so delightful about songs expressing an aristocratic woman’s tormented feelings about a brother who squandered his family’s wealth
on a courtesan in Egypt? I think that the answer to this question does in fact have to do with the delight of sensing that a woman’s veiled self-awareness about her own feelings is making a connection here with an unveiled love story—about an upper-class man’s self-destructive affair with a lower-class woman whose charms he finds utterly irresistible.

§11. The songs of Sappho reveal an awareness of two kinds of torment. First, there is the torment experienced by a whole family in fearing a disgraceful loss of wealth and prestige. But then there is also the torment—and the delight—of a passionate love affair. This second kind of torment is experienced not only by the brother of Sappho but also by Sappho herself. The song-making of Sappho reveals here not only an awareness but also a self-awareness. And here is a special delight for the hearer of Sappho’s songs—to hear about the torment of her own passionate loves.

§12. The poetic language that expresses this torment—this oniā and this asā—envelops both the errant brother and the anxious sister. Both are afflicted by the torment—and the delight—of passionate love. And this delight can be experienced by all who hear the songs of Sappho. Among these hearers, as we will see, is Herodotus himself.

§13. Before I proceed to Herodotus, however, I am aware that I will first have to explain why I speak here of torment and delight in referring to the love story of Sappho’s brother. I am thinking of Act 1 of La traviata, a romantic opera composed by Giuseppe Verdi (first performed in 1853), where the two lovers Alfredo and Violetta sing to each other about their passionate love affair. Both lovers express this love as a ‘torment and delight’, croce e delizia. Then, in Act 2, the father of Alfredo intervenes, confronting Violetta by singing to her an aria of his own. In this aria, the father expresses his own form of torment: how he fears that the reputation of his unmarried daughter, the sister of Alfredo, will be destroyed by the news of her brother’s love affair. Here I ask myself a question. Suppose there existed an aria sung by the aristocratic sister
herself: what feelings would she express? Perhaps, at first, she would be most aware of her own tormented fears about her reputation, which is now endangered by the love affair of her brother with a courtesan. But she could also be aware of the torment caused by passionate love—if she had experienced it herself. And \{452\|453\} she could even be aware of the delight. Without pushing an analogy too far, I reconstruct here the *croce e delizia* of a woman’s own passionate loves—as expressed most forcefully in the veiled but self-aware songs of Sappho. That said, I can now concentrate on the delight of hearing songs about the torment caused by such passionate love.

**Starting with Herodotus**

§14. I have already mentioned the passage in Herodotus (2.134–135) where he refers to the love affair of Kharaxos, brother of Sappho, with a courtesan who lived in Egypt. The historian adds that Sappho scolded Kharaxos—or the courtesan—for this affair, and that the scolding was done by way of *melos* ‘song’: ‘Sappho scolded [kata-kertomeîn] him [or her] in many ways by way of her singing [*melos*]’ (2.135.6: ἐν μέλει Σαπφώ πολλὰ κατεκερτόμηϲ ἡμιν).\(^4\) So, how did Herodotus know about such songs of Sappho? I will be arguing that he himself could have heard such songs being sung—and was eager to show off his appreciation of the songs—but, before I can undertake such an argument, I will need to consider the possible occasions for someone like Herodotus to listen to such singing. And, even before that, I will need to consider the original occasions for singing the songs of Sappho.

§15. In order to engage in such considerations, I will now examine the problem of *reception* in analyzing the songs of Sappho. An ideal place to start is a formulation by Dirk Obbink, who

\(^4\) Ferrari 2014:10 argues that the μιν here refers to the courtesan, not the brother. See also Obbink 2014:41.
writes: ‘The recorded reception of Sappho begins with Herodotus.’ I propose to build on this most helpful formulation by highlighting a qualification noted already by Obbink. The fact is, the text of Herodotus shows the first recorded case of reception. But the reception of Sappho can be reconstructed further back in time—back to earlier phases of reception. It can even be reconstructed all the way back to its original phases.

§16. The reception of Sappho, as I will now argue, goes back to the original creation of the songs attributed to her. And a similar formulation applies to the reception of Alcaeus.

§17. When I say ‘original creation’ here, I mean simply the earliest attested phase of the relevant songmaking. In terms of such an earliest phase, I will argue, the reception of songs attributed to Sappho and Alcaeus is already at work in the overall tradition of composing and performing such songs. {453|454}

** Viewing diachronically the reception and the transmission of Sappho and Alcaeus **

§18. I said already in the Introduction that we can see the personalities of Sappho and Alcaeus come to life only if we view them as poetic creations that are shaped by their songs. But now I argue further that this view needs to be diachronic as well as synchronic. Here I continue a line of argumentation that I have been developing in all my previous publications about Sappho and Alcaeus. In using the term *diachronic*, I am applying the formulation of Ferdinand de Saussure concerning language as a system. As Saussure explains, a synchronic approach views a current phase of a system while a diachronic approach views different phases in the evolution of that given system.

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5 Obbink 2014:32.

6 Especially Nagy 2007b.

7 Saussure 1916:117.
§19. In the case of the poetic language represented by Sappho and Alcaeus, as also in even earlier cases represented by the likes of Hesiod and Archilochus, a diachronic approach involves not two but four aspects of poetic creation: there is not only composition and performance but also reception and even transmission.⁸

§20. In any poetic system that depends on the performance of a given composition, the reception and the transmission of such a composition can be viewed in terms of a process that I describe as recomposition-in-performance. In terms of such a process, a reperformed composer can even become a recomposed performer.⁹

§21. Here is what I mean. In the first place, the performer of a reperformance does not have to be the same person as an earlier performer, who can be viewed as the original composer. Still, such a performer of a reperformance can persist in appropriating to himself or herself the persona of the earlier performer—even if the historical circumstances of performance have changed. But then, in the process of recomposition-in-performance, even the persona of the performer can change over time, becoming different from the persona of the notionally original composer, and the differences in personality can be all the more pronounced if the venue of performance changes. That is how the persona of a reperformed composer can become recomposed in an ongoing process of recomposition-in-performance. And that is how the reperformed composer can become the recomposed performer.

§22. This formulation, as I have just summarized it, applies to the poetic personalities of Sappho and Alcaeus, as I have argued at length in my previous publications.¹⁰

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⁸ On the four factors of composition, performance, reception, and transmission in the case of the poetry attributed to Hesiod, see Nagy 2009a. For similar arguments applied in the case of the poetry attributed to Archilochus, see Nagy 2008b. More on the concept of reception in Nagy 2008|2009 ch. 2 §277.

⁹ Nagy 1996:60.

¹⁰ Nagy 1990, 1993, 1994–1995, 1996, 2004, 2007a, 2007b, 2010.
reperformances in different times and in different places, the songs of Sappho and Alcaeus could become recomposed-in-performance, and their personae could thus become recomposed as well. That is how Sappho and Alcaeus, as reperformed composers, could become recomposed performers. And that is what I meant when I said, from the start, that Sappho and Alcaeus can be viewed as poetic creations of their own songs.

§23. Here I return to Herodotus. In his era, dated to the second half of the fifth century BCE, the poetic personalities of Sappho and Alcaeus were already significantly different from what they had been in earlier times. In the contexts where Herodotus refers to Sappho (2.135.1 and 6) and to Alcaeus (5.95.1–2)—as also to other comparable poetic figures such as Anacreon (3.121.1)—we can see in each case that these figures were by now viewed as poets who created monodic songs. Such songs, in the era of Herodotus, were performed solo, and there existed primarily two kinds of venue. On the one hand, there were amateur monodic performances at private symposia, while, on the other hand, there were professional monodic performances at public concerts, the most prestigious of which were the competitions of singing self-accompanied by a string-instrument at the Athenian festival of the Panathenaia.

§24. What I just said is a most compressed formulation of a lengthy argument that I developed in a study entitled ‘Did Sappho and Alcaeus ever meet?’, where I analyzed diachronically the reception and the transmission of songs attributed to Sappho and Alcaeus. In terms of this argument, the poetic personalities of both Sappho and Alcaeus were actually reshaped in the historical contexts of the two venues that I have just highlighted for the era of Herodotus, namely, (1) private symposia and (2) public concerts. In these contexts, especially as we see them take shape in Athens during the fifth century BCE, the songs originally attributed to Sappho and Alcaeus would be reperformed by performers who could re-enact the

11 Nagy 2007b.
personae of Sappho and Alcaeus themselves, but, in the process of reperformance, these personae could be recomposed. That is how Sappho and Alcaeus could become recomposed performers. In the process of recomposition-in-performance, their poetic personalities could be recomposed by sympotic and concertizing performers, and, in this way, *Sappho and Alcaeus themselves could be re-imagined as sympotic and concertizing performers in their own right.*

§25. At a later point, I will offer further arguments to back up this formulation. For now, however, we have to deal with a more important question: how were Sappho and Alcaeus imagined before they became re-imagined as sympotic and concertizing performers? The answer is twofold. In the case of Sappho, as I have been arguing since 1990, she had been previously a *choral* personality, that is, someone who performs in a singing and dancing ensemble known as a *khoros* or ‘chorus’. In the case of Alcaeus, on the other hand, he had been previously a *comastic* personality, that is, someone who performs in a singing and dancing and wine-drinking ensemble known as a *kōmos* or ‘group of male revelers’. And secondarily, Alcaeus could also be a *choral* personality in his own right, like Sappho herself: a likely example is Song 34 of Alcaeus, which is a prayer to Castor and Pollux.

**Distinguishing between sympotic and comastic occasions**

§26. I will now trace the ramifications of the distinction I am making between sympotic and comastic occasions.

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12 Nagy 2007b; see also Bierl 2010. On citharodic traditions in performing the songs of Sappho, see Nagy 2011b:155–158, following Power 2010:258–263.

13 I first used this expression ‘choral personality’ in Nagy 1990:370, with reference to Calame 1977:367–377 (also 126–127). See also Lardinois 1996 and the remarks of Calame 2009:5. Also Ferrari 2014:17.

14 There is an earlier formulation in Nagy 2007b:212.
§26a. The term *sympotic*, as I use it here, is meant to be generalizing. It can refer to any grouping of male drinkers who attend a symposium. I say *generalizing* because we can find no single criterion for defining a group of male drinkers who attended any ancient Greek symposium.

§26b. By contrast, my term *comastic* is meant to be more specific, in the sense that male drinkers who were grouped together in a *kōmos* must have felt bound to each other by special ties that bind: such a grouping, as it becomes evident in the poetic language of Alcaeus, consisted of men who were *etairoi* or ‘comrades’ to each other.15

§27. Another distinction between *sympotic* and *comastic* occasions is the fact that a sympotic song, as we see it attested in the era of Herodotus and thereafter, was ordinarily performed by a solo singer, in monodic form, to the accompaniment of a wind- or a string-instrument, whereas a comastic song would have been performed by a group that could both sing and dance. This is not to say that an individuated singer—or a succession of individual singers—could not dominate the overall group performance of a *kōmos*. But I do insist that any exclusively solo performance of a song would have been incompatible with the mentality of a group that sings and dances in a *kōmos*.16

**Distinguishing between *sympotic* and *choral* occasions**

§28. A similar distinction applies in the case of *sympotic* and *choral* occasions. A sympotic song, I repeat, was ordinarily performed by a solo singer, in monodic form, to the accompaniment of a wind- or a string-instrument. By contrast, a choral song was performed by

15 Nagy 2004, with special reference to the insights of Rösler 1980 and 1985 concerning the poetics of *etairoi* ‘comrades’.

16 Nagy 2007b:212, 218–219, 230, 240, 242.
a group, known as the *khoros* or 'chorus', which both sang and danced to the accompaniment of a wind- or a string-instrument.

§29. Here too in the case of the *khoros*, as in the case of the *kōmos*, I am not saying that an individuated singer—or a succession of individual singers—could not dominate the overall group performance. But I do insist, once again, that any exclusively solo performance of a song would have been incompatible with the mentality of a group that sings and dances. Such a group, I maintain, was the *khoros*.¹⁷

**A split between monodic and non-monodic performance**

§30. In view of these distinctions between monodic and non-monodic performance, I reconstruct a split between the later personae of Sappho and Alcaeus, who were both pictured as monodic singers, and the earlier personae, who need to be viewed in the historical context of group performances. I have already described these earlier personae as a *choral Sappho* and as a *comastic Alcaeus*, and I have left the door open for a *choral Alcaeus* as well. But before I can say anything more about such *choral* and *comastic* personae, I first need to explore the historical circumstances of the earliest attested venue where such personae could actually come to life. {457|458}

**The earliest known venue for Sappho and Alcaeus**

§31. From a diachronic point of view, the earliest attested venue for performing the songs of Sappho and Alcaeus can be located in a space known in ancient times as *Messon*, now called *Mesa*, which figured as a politically neutral 'middle ground' for the entire island of Lesbos. The basic arguments proving this localization were published in a 1960 article by Louis Robert,¹⁸

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¹⁷ Nagy 2007b:215–216.

¹⁸ Robert 1960. His article is prominently featured in a collection of influential French research papers translated
whose work has been foundational for my own diachronic analysis of the poetic venues for both Sappho and Alcaeus.\textsuperscript{19}

§32. The published reactions to the work of Robert have been thoroughly reviewed and tested in a 2010 article by Stefano Caciagli, whose own conclusions validate most of the original arguments advanced fifty years earlier by Robert.\textsuperscript{20} Although he does not say so, the conclusions offered by Caciagli also validate—for the most part—what I had argued in a 1993 article entitled ‘Alcaeus in sacred space’, published in the Festschrift for Bruno Gentili.\textsuperscript{21} In that article, I supported the argument, originated by Robert, that the poetry of Sappho and Alcaeus actually refers to Messon—as that place existed at a time that corresponds to the traditional dating of these poetic figures, around 600 BCE.\textsuperscript{22}

§33. I start with the references to Messon in Songs 129 and 130b of Alcaeus. The name of the place is not mentioned, but the identification is clear. The songs refer to the place as a \textit{temenos} ‘precinct’ (129.2 and 130b.13: τέμενος), pictured as a great federal sacred space that is \textit{xunon} ‘common’ (129.3: ξῦνον) to all the people of the island of Lesbos. The precinct is sacred to three divinities: they are Zeus, ‘the Aeolian goddess’, and Dionysus (129.5–9). As we will now see, the Aeolian goddess (129.6: Αἰολήιαν ... θέου) must be Hera.

§34. I highlight already here another relevant reference, this one in Song 130a of Alcaeus, to the same precinct: it is called the \textit{teikhos basilēion} ‘the queenly wall’ (15: τεῖχος βασιλείου),

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{19}] See especially Nagy 1993, 1994–1995, 2004, 2007a, 2007b.
\item[\textsuperscript{20}] Caciagli 2010:228, 238. See now also Liberman 1999 I 61 n. 127.
\item[\textsuperscript{21}] Nagy 1993; this article is not mentioned by Caciagli 2010, who cites only one of my relevant works on Sappho and Alcaeus, Nagy 2007b. At a later point, I will have to disagree slightly with what he says I argue in Nagy 2007b.
\item[\textsuperscript{22}] Nagy 1993; I elaborate further in Nagy 2007b.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
glossed as ‘Hera’s wall’ in a scholion written next to the text (τὸ τῆς Ἡρᾶς). I translate basileion here as ‘queenly’, not ‘kingly’, in {458|459} the light of what we read in the newly-found Brothers Song of Sappho: the speaking Sappho in this song says that she needs to be sent off to pray to basilea Hēra ‘Queen Hera’ (line 10 [6]: βασίλεια Ἡρᾶ). As I will argue at a later point, the queenly status of the goddess Hera subsumes even the kingly status of her consort, the god Zeus, who is described as the basileus Olumpō ‘king of Olympus’ in the Brothers Song (line 17 [13]: βασίλευς Ὀλύμπω).

§35. I continue my argument that the queenly residence of the goddess Hera must be the precinct at Messon. In the Brothers Song, it is in this precinct that Sappho will pray for the safe return of her brother Kharaxos from a sea voyage. Even as she pictures herself as praying, she expresses the hope that the brother is sailing his way back home (lines 11–12 [7–8]).

§36. Where is home? It is a place that is signaled by the deictic pronoun tuide ‘here’ in the words of the Brothers Song (line 11 [7]: τυίδε). And where is ‘here’? The answer, in terms of my argument, is that this place ‘here’ is Messon.

§37. Sappho will not be praying alone to Hera. She will be part of a procession that must be sent off to the precinct of the goddess, as we can see from the expression pimpēn emē ‘send me’ in the Brothers Song (line 9 [5]: πέμπην ἔμε), which I argue refers to the sending of not one person in this case: rather, it is the sending of a procession, the classical Greek word for which would be pompē. Not only will Sappho be a part of a procession; she will also have the leading part, as indicated by the focus on ‘me’ in the expression pimpēn emē ‘send me’ (again, line 9 [5]: πέμπην ἔμε).

§38. Once the sacred procession reaches the precinct of the goddess, as we will now see, the processing ensemble will transform itself into a chorus of singing and dancing women who are charged with the sacred imperative of supplicating Hera, as expressed by the word lissesthai ‘implore’:
§39. In Song 1 of Sappho, we see a comparable situation where Sappho is supplicating a goddess—this time, it is Aphrodite—and again the word for the ritual action that I translate as ‘implore’ is lissesthai (2):

|, ποικιλόθρον’ ἀθανάτ’ Ἀφρόδιτα, |, παῖ Δίος δολόπλοκε, λίςσομαι εἐ, |, μή μ’ ἀσαίει μηδ’ ὄνιαιει δάμνα, |, πότνια, θύμον, |, ἀλλὰ τυίδ’ ἔλθ’, αἱ ποτα κάτερωτα |, τὰς ἔμας αὖδας ἄιοια πῆλοι |, ἔκλυε, … {459|460}

|, You with pattern-woven flowers, immortal Aphrodite, |, child of Zeus, weaver of wiles, I implore [lissomai] you, |, do not dominate with hurts [asai] and pains [onias], |, O Queen [potnia], my heart [thūmos], |, But come here [tuide], if ever at any other time, |, hearing my voice from afar, |, you heeded me ...

Sappho Song 1.1–7

§40. Here too in Song 1, we see the deictic pronoun tuide ‘here’ (5: τυίδ’). Sappho implores the goddess Aphrodite to come tuide ‘here’ to the place where she is praying, just as she will implore the goddess Hera to bring back her brother tuide ‘here’ to the place where she is praying in the Brothers Song (line 11 [7]: τυίδε).

**Processing to the precinct of Hera**

§41. A moment ago, I started to argue that Sappho’s prayer to Hera in the Brothers Song can be seen in the overall context of a sacred procession that proceeds to the precinct of Hera, at which place the processing ensemble will transform itself into a chorus of singing and
dancing women who are charged with the sacred imperative of supplicating the goddess. As I will now argue further, the procession is in fact already a chorus in the making. Pursuing this argument, I now cite a parallel kind of event that took place at the precinct of Hera—not the one at Lesbos but the one near the city of Argos. I start by quoting here a description of the pompē 'procession' of the Hekatombaia, which was the Argive name for the seasonally recurring festival of the goddess Hera at Argos:

Ἑκατόμβαια δὲ ὁ ἄγων λέγεται ὡτι πομπῆς μεγάλης προηγοῦνται ἐκατὸν βόες, οὐς νόμος κρεανομεῖθαι πᾶσι τοῖς πολίταις.

This festival-of-competitions [agōn] is called Hekatombaia because one hundred cattle are led forth in a grand procession [pompē], and their meat is divided by customary law among all the citizens of the city.

Scholia for Pindar Olympian 7.152d 1

§42. The name of this festival, Hekatombaia, refers to a hekatombē 'hecatomb', which is the sacrificial slaughtering of one hundred cattle in honor of Hera. And the procession that led up to this sacrifice in honor of the goddess at her festival {460|461} in Argos culminated in a choral performance of Argive girls who participated in that procession. This culminating ritual event can be reconstructed on the basis of what we read in the Electra of Euripides.23 The role of the chorus that is singing and dancing in this drama is twofold: the performers in the chorus here represent not only the girls of Argos in the mythical past but also the girls of Argos who participated in the rituals of the seasonally recurring festival of Hera in the historical present of the drama. In the Electra of Euripides, the male Athenian chorus of his drama is representing

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23 What follows here recapitulates what I say in Nagy 2015 ch. 4 §§149–150 concerning relevant passages in the Electra of Euripides.
a female Argive chorus participating in a contemporary version of Hera’s festival, and this female Argive chorus is in turn representing their prototypical counterparts in the mythical past. Already back then, in that mythical past, a chorus of Argive girls is participating in the festival of Hera. In the Electra of Euripides, there are explicit references to the upcoming choral performance of these mythical girls at Hera’s festival. And the festival itself, as we will now see, is explicitly called a thusiā, meaning literally ‘sacrifice’ (172). Here is the way the word is used in the song that is sung and danced by the chorus of Argive girls:

\[167\, \text{Ἀγαμέμνονος ἤ κόρα, Ἡλυθον, Ἡλέκτρα, ἔμολεν γαλακτοπότας ἀνήρ} \]
\[168\, \text{ποτὶ σὰν ἀγρότειραν αὐλάν.} \]
\[169\, \text{ἐξομέλε τις ἐμολεν γαλακτοποτότας ἀνήρ} \]
\[170\, \text{Μυκηναῖος οὐριβάτας ὁ ἄγγελλει δὲ} \]
\[171\, \text{ὅτι νῦν τριταίαν καρύσσουσιν θυσίαν Ἀργεῖοι, πᾶσαι δὲ παρθενικαὶ τείχειν.} \]

O Electra, daughter of Agamemnon, I [= the chorus, speaking as a singular ‘I’] have arrived at your rustic courtyard. He has come, a milk-drinking man, he has come, a Mycenaean, one whose steps lead over the mountains. He announces that, on the third day from now, a sacrifice is proclaimed by the Argives, and that all the girls [parthenikai] to Hera must proceed [steikhein].

Euripides Electra 167–174 {461|462}

§43. This word thusiā here (172) is referring to the ritual centerpiece of the festival, which is the hecatomb, that is, the sacrifice of one hundred cattle. But the same word thusiā is also referring, by way of metonymy, to the entire festival. Each and every girl from each and every part of the Argive world must steikhein ‘proceed’ to Hera—that is, to the festival of Hera. Each

\[24\, \text{For more on the self-representation of the chorus as chorus in the Electra of Euripides, see Baur 1997.} \]
girl personally must make the mental act of proceeding to the goddess. Each girl collectively must join in, that is, join the grand procession that will lead to the precinct of the goddess, where the hundred cattle will be slaughtered in ritual sacrifice. We see here a religious mentality that shapes the idea of the pompē ‘procession’ as we just saw it described in the scholia for Pindar Olympian 7.

§44. It is this procession of girls from Argos that leads to the festival proclaimed by the Argives at line 172 of the Electra. The relevant words, to repeat, are pompē for ‘procession’ and thusiā for ‘sacrifice’. And the word thusiā, as we have just seen, is a metonymic way of saying ‘festival’. After the procession reaches the precinct of Argive Hera, what happens next is the sacrifice of one hundred cattle, followed by festive celebrations. And these festivities will include the choral singing and dancing performed by the girls of Argos. So, the pompē ‘procession’ extends into the choral performance, by way of the sacrifice that will take place after the entry of the procession into the precinct. We see here a validation of the formula proposed by Anton Bierl concerning processions as represented in Greek theater: he argues that any procession that leads into a choral performance will thereby become part of the choral performance.\(^\text{25}\) There is a metonymy at work here.\(^\text{26}\) Further, in the case of the drama composed by Euripides, Electra is potentially the prima donna who will lead the procession that will be transformed into the choral performance of the Argive girls when they reach the precinct of Hera. In fact, the word that Electra herself uses in referring to the upcoming performance of the girls at the precinct is khoros (χοροῦ 178). For the moment, though, Electra declines the ‘invitation to the dance’ (178–180).\(^\text{27}\)

\(^{25}\) Bierl 2009:57n152, 107, 272–273, 284, 294–295, 318–319. See also Bierl 2011.

\(^{26}\) Nagy 2015 ch. 4§150.

\(^{27}\) For more on the Electra of Euripides, see Zeitlin 1970.
A festival for Hera at Lesbos

§45. Similarly in the Brothers Song of Sappho, I propose that Sappho herself is potentially the *prima donna* who must lead a procession to the precinct of Hera at Lesbos, and, once this precinct is reached, the procession will then be transformed into a choral performance of girls celebrating a festival that climaxes in the sacrifice of one hundred cattle to the goddess. And the leader of this choral performance must be Sappho herself, just as she must be the leader of the procession that leads up to the performance.

§46. Such a role for Sappho, as a *prima donna* who leads the procession to the precinct of Hera and who then leads a chorus of girls who sing and dance there to celebrate a festival held in honor of the goddess, is based on a precedent, as it were, that goes back to the age of heroes. To explain such a precedent, I start with a point of comparison involving the traditions of Argos.

§47. In the text of a fictional narrative attributed to Dictys of Crete, we find a detail that can be reconstructed as part of a local Argive myth concerning the precinct of Hera at Argos. According to the myth as retold by the fictional Dictys (1.16), it was in this precinct that the hero Agamemnon was chosen to lead the expedition to Troy.\(^{28}\) Such a formal beginning that takes place at the precinct of Hera, where the festival of the goddess was celebrated by the Argives, must have been a sacrifice, which can be identified with the seasonally recurring *thusiā* at the festival of Hera in Argos. Here I must highlight again what I already highlighted in the text I quoted from Euripides: the word *thusiā* refers metonymically to the festival itself, though its basic meaning is ‘sacrifice’.

§48. This detail about the precinct of Hera at Argos is a most valuable piece of comparative evidence, since it helps us understand what happened once upon a time in the corresponding

\(^{28}\) Nagy 2009:2010:294.
precinct of Hera at Lesbos—not in the age of Sappho but in the heroic age. As we are about to see, there existed a local myth about what happened there in that precinct, and this myth functioned as an aetiology for a festival—and for the ritual centerpiece of that festival, which was a sacrifice of one hundred cattle.

§49. I will postpone until later my working definition of aetiology and, for the moment, I will concentrate instead on the festival that is being aetiologized. I will show that this festival, celebrated in honor of Hera at Lesbos, highlighted a sacrifice of one hundred cattle inside the precinct of the goddess. A reference to both the festival and the sacrifice, I argue, has been preserved in the Alexandrian lexicographical tradition, as represented by Hesychius. In the dictionary of Hesychius (v. 2 p. 652 ed. Latte 1966), we find the entry mesostrophōnīai hēmerai, which I translate as ‘days that turn at the middle’ (μεσοστροφώνιαι ημέραι), and this entry is defined as follows: ‘these are the days during which the people of Lesbos arrange [epiteleîn] a thusiā that is common [koinē] to all of them’ (ἐν αἷς Λέεβιοι κοινὴν θυσίαν ἐπιτελοῦσιν). In the wording of this definition, the word thusiā refers not only to the sacrifice but also, metonymically, to the festival itself.

The festival in Song 17 of Sappho

§50. I argue that Song 17 of Sappho actually refers to a myth about this festival at Lesbos. The myth is telling about a time in the heroic age when the Atreīdai ‘Sons of Atreus’—that is, Agamemnon and his brother Menelaos—made arrangements for the institution of a festival of Hera to be celebrated inside her precinct at Lesbos after their victory at Troy. Here is the relevant text:

29 There may be a connection between the semantics of mesostrophōnīai and Messon: see Robert 1960:303–304, also Pirenne-Delforge and Pironti 2014:28 n. 13.
Close by, ..., O Queen [potnia] Hera, ... your [...] festival [eortā], |, which, vowed-in-prayer [arāsthai], 33 the Sons of Atreus did arrange [poieîn] |, for you, kings that they were, |, after first having completed great labors [aethloi], |, around Troy, and, next [apseron], |, after having set forth to come here [tuide], since finding the way |, was not possible for them |, until they would approach you (Hera) and Zeus lord of suppliants [antiaos] |, and (Dionysus) the lovely son of Thyone. |, And now we are arranging [poieîn] [the festival], |, in accordance with the ancient way [...] |, holy [agna] and [...] a throng [okhlos] |, of girls [parthenoi] [...] and women [gunaikes] |, on either side ... |, the measured sound of ululation [ololūgā].

Sappho Song 17.1–16

30 Ferrari 2014:16 proposes to read ēört[αν], but this alternative reading does not affect my interpretation here.

31 West 2014:4 suggests that we read πόηϲαν τοι, not πόηϲαν τοῖ. But I defend the accentuation preserved in the new papyrus, τοῖ. This reading τοῖ (with the acute accent preserved in P.GC inv. 105 fr. 2) differs slightly from the reading τοῖ as accepted by Obbink in Chapter 1 of Bierl and Lardinois 2016. I interpret the acute as a marker of a rise in the melodic contour, and such a rise here indicates an emphatic use of the pronoun.

32 On this restoration, I follow Ferrari 2014:18.

33 In the analysis that follows, I will fine-tune this translation ‘vowed-in-prayer’ for arāstä(n), which is a verbal adjective of the verb arāsthai ‘pray’.
§51. Although the first line of Song 17 here is too fragmentary to be understood for sure, the next line makes it clear that the persona of Sappho is praying to Hera herself, speaking to her about the eortā ‘festival’ (2: ἐόρτ[α]) that is being arranged in honor of the goddess. The speaking Sappho goes on to say that the festival that ‘we’ in the present are arranging (11: πόημεν), as ‘we’ offer supplications to Hera, is being arranged ‘in accordance with the ancient way’ (12: κατ τὸ πάλ[αιον]) of arranging the festival, just as the heroes of the past had arranged it (3: πόηκαν). In these contexts, I am translating the word poieîn ‘make’ {465|466} in the specific sense of ‘arrange’, with reference to the observance of a ritual. I find in Thucydides (2.15.2) a striking parallel in wording: ‘and the Athenians, continuing what he [= Theseus] started, even now arrange [poieîn] for the goddess [= Athena], at public expense, the festival [heortē] named the Sunoikia’ (καὶ ξυνοίκια ἐξ ἑκείνου Ἀθηναῖοι ἔτι καὶ νῦν τῇ θεῷ ἑορτὴν δημοτελῆ ποιοῦϲι). In the case of the eortā ‘festival’ at Lesbos, the heroes who ‘arranged’ it were the Atreïdai or Sons of Atreus, that is to say, Agamemnon and Menelaos, and they made these arrangements primarily for the goddess Hera, who is indicated here by way of the emphatic personal pronoun τοῖ ‘for you’ in the dative case (4: τοῖ). (In a minute, I will defend this reading τοῖ ‘for you’, which is actually transmitted in the new papyrus fragment.) Similarly, in the wording of the passage I just cited from Thucydides, the seasonally recurring arrangements of the Athenian heortē ‘festival’ known as the Sunoikia are being made ‘for the goddess’ in the dative case (τῇ θεῷ).

§52. So, what kind of a festival did the Sons of Atreus arrange ‘for’ Hera? To formulate an answer, I start with the word that describes the eortā ‘festival’ at line 2 of Song 17: it is the verbal adjective arātos in the feminine gender, ἀφάτας, which I translate for the moment as ‘vowed-in-prayer’ and which is derived from the verb arāsthai ‘vow-in-prayer’. My initial translation of this adjective arātā as ‘vowed-in-prayer’ is based on the Indo-European linguistic
heritage of the verb *arâsthai* and of its synonym *eukhesthai*. Most relevant here is a chapter entitled ‘The Vow’ in a book by Emile Benveniste, *Indo-European Language and Society*, where the analysis focuses on Greek *eukhesthai* and its Latin cognate, *vovēre*.

The Latin verb *vovēre* can be translated as ‘vow’ in contexts where someone is *praying to a divinity* and asking for a favor to be granted, in return for which favor a vow is made to do something that is meant to gratify the divinity. Such a translation also applies in comparable contexts of the Greek verb *eukhesthai*. So, when you *make a vow in a prayer*, as expressed by way of the word *eukhesthai*, you are saying to a divinity that *you will do or are doing or have done something* in the hope that the divinity to whom you are praying will grant *what you are wishing for*. For a most pertinent example in the *Iliad*, I cite a situation where the hero Pandaros is being urged (misleadingly, by Athena in disguise) to make a vow-in-prayer as expressed by the verb *eukhesthai* (4.101: εὔχεσο): this hero, by way of making a vow-in-prayer to Apollo, would be vowing that he would perform an animal sacrifice (4.102) in the hope that the god would grant him what he is wishing for, which is a safe homecoming {466|467} (4.103). Pandaros then goes ahead and makes a vow-in-prayer (4:119: εὔχετο), vowing that he will in fact perform an animal sacrifice (4.120) in hopes of a safe homecoming (4.121). So, as Benveniste says about the meaning of *eukhesthai*—and his formulation applies also to the synonym *arâsthai*—‘the “prayer” is not distinguished from the “vow”: it is one and the same operation’. Or, as I would prefer to say it, the *wish-in-prayer* is not distinguished from the *vow-in-prayer*. I can paraphrase in terms of the Latin noun *vōtum*, translated as ‘vow’, which is a derivative of the Latin verb *vovēre*, translated as ‘vow’. When you pray to a divinity, the word for *what you vow to do* is *vōtum*, but the word for

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34 Benveniste 1973 part 6 sub-part 4. For the online version of this chapter, see http://chs.harvard.edu/CHS/article/display/3967.

35 Again, Benveniste 1973 part 6 sub-part 4.
what you wish for is likewise vōtum. In the case of the hero Pandaros in the Homeric Iliad, his wish—and therefore his prayer—is a failure, since he will soon be killed on the battlefield (5.290–296).

§53. Here I must stop to adjust the formulation of Benveniste. As Leonard Muellner has shown, the English translation ‘vow’ for such words as eukhešthai works only in situations where the human who prays to a divinity is announcing an act that will happen in the future. But the fact is, the act of gratifying a divinity can happen in the present or even in the past. What you announce in prayer does not have to be a promise about the future: it can also be an announcement about the present or even about the past. So, the translation ‘vow-in-prayer’ for eukhešthai—and for arâsthai—does not cover the full range of meanings for these verbs. From here on, accordingly, I will translate these verbs simply as ‘announce-in-prayer’, not ‘vow-in-prayer’. And I must emphasize that, in each case of an announcement-in-prayer, the other side of the coin is a wish-in-prayer.

§54. With this background in place, I return to the noun eortā ‘festival’ at line 2 of Song 17 of Sappho, and to the verbal adjective arâtā that describes this festival at line 3 (ἀράταν). Now translating arâtā as ‘announced-in-prayer’, I interpret the wording here to mean that Agamemnon and Menelaos, the two Sons of Atreus, had once upon a time announced-in-prayer the celebration of the festival or eortā that is still being celebrated in Sappho’s song. And, by virtue of making this announcement-in-prayer, these two heroes were simultaneously

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36 In the light of this Indo-European semantic background, we can better understand the following attestation of the verb arâsthai in the diction of Sappho: ‘they wished [arâsthai] all the best for the bridegroom’ (141.6–7: ἀράσαντο δὲ πάμπαν ἔςλα γάμβρωι). In other words, they wished-in-prayer that the best possible things should happen to the bridegroom.

37 Muellner 1976:55–56

38 For a survey of Homeric examples, see Muellner 1976:36–37, 55–56.
making a wish-in-prayer. So, what did they wish for? The wording makes it quite clear that their wish was to find the best way to make a safe homecoming, literally, ‘to find the way’ (7: [ὅ]δὲν ... εὐρη[ν]). Thus the verbal adjective ἀράτα here refers simultaneously to the festival that the heroes announced-in-prayer and to the safe homecoming that they wished-in-prayer.

§55. Accordingly, I disagree with the idea that the adjective ἀράτα (ἀράταν) at line 3 of Song 17 of Sappho is combined here with a supposedly enclitic τοί (τοι) at line 4, as if the combination had meant ‘wished by you’, that is, by the goddess Hera. Such an idea is advocated by Martin West, who emends the wording πόηϲαν τοί as written in the text of the new papyrus and reads instead πόηϲάν τοι.39 And I defend the accentuation that is actually preserved in the new papyrus, τοί.40 As I will argue, we see here an emphatic use of the pronoun, ‘for you’, not an enclitic use. This non-enclitic and emphatic τοί ‘for you’ (τοί) at line 4 goes with the verb poēsan ‘arranged’ (πόηϲάν) at line 3, indicating that the Sons of Atreus arranged the festival for the goddess Hera.

§56. Now I offer further support for my resisting the idea that the adjective ἀράτα (ἀράταν) at line 3 of Song 17 is combined with a supposedly enclitic τοί (τοι) at line 4. If we look at uses of the dative case in combination with this adjective, we can see that such a dative refers to the human who offers an announcement-in-prayer, not to the divinity who might have wished to receive such a prayer. In Homeric diction, we can see situations where this adjective ἀράτος describes what is wished for—or wished away—by way of an announcement-in-prayer. In positive contexts, for example, I cite the compound form polu-arētos in Odyssey 6.280, with reference to a god whose coming is wished-for in prayer.41 And here is an even more telling

39 West 2014:4; see also Ferrari 2014:17.

40 The acute accent appears in the new P.GC inv. 105 fr. 2, but not in the older PSI 123 and P.Oxy. 1231.

41 In negative contexts where something is wished-away, not wished-for, the non-compound form ἀράτος is more
example, where Eurykleia is narrating what she as the nurse of the infant Odysseus had once upon a time said to the boy hero’s grandfather, Autolykos:

| 403 Αὐτόλυκ’, αὐτὸς νῦν ὄνομ’ εὗρεο, ὅτι κε θεῖο Παίδος παιδὶ φίλωρ πολυάρητος δὲ τοὶ ἐστί. {468|469} |
| 403 Autolykos! You yourself must find a name, whatever name you give him, | 404 for the dear child of your child, since he is the one who has been very much wished-for [polu-ărētos] by you [toi].

Odyssey 19.403–404

§57. The dative toi here (404: toi) refers to the maternal grandfather himself, who had been very much wishing for a grandchild. As we can see most clearly from this Homeric example, the dative refers to the human who makes an announcement-in-prayer, not to the divinity who is offered that prayer.

§58. I should add that, when a divinity actually grants something that is wished for in an announcement that is made in prayer, this granting of a wish does not come without an obligation to return the favor, as it were, in terms of the system of gift-giving that is inherent in any prayer. So, the thing that you wish for may have to be dedicated to the divinity who granted you the wish. Let us return to the example of polu-ărētos in Odyssey 19.404: here we see that Odysseus, as the maternal grandchild that Autolykos had always wished for, will have to become, as soon as he is born, a devotee of the divinity who granted the wish to the usual (as in Iliad 24.741); but polu-ărētos too is attested in negative contexts (as in Theognis 1.819). Such uses of arētos, derived from arâsthai, correspond to some specialized uses of euktos, derived from eukheusthai ‘pray’, as we see in the gloss of Hesychius: ἀπάρατον ἀπευκτόν, where both forms refer to something to be wished away; see also DELG s.v. εὕχομαι. This example can be added to the discussion of Neri 2014: 15-16 regarding the attested uses of arâsthai.
grandfather. In this case, that divinity was Hermes, to whom Autolykos had offered sacrifices of sheep and goats (19.396–398).

§59. In this example, we see most clearly a situation where the sacrifice that was announced in prayer was an event that happened in the past—not an event that was promised for the future. I emphasize here once again the importance of the fact that whatever you announce in prayer does not have to be a promise about the future: it can be, to repeat, an announcement about the present or even about the past. That is why, as I already argued, the translation ‘vow-in-prayer’ for eukheštai and arâsthai does not cover the full range of meanings for these verbs. And that is why I have substituted the translation ‘announce-in-prayer’, the other side of which is ‘wish-in-prayer’.

§60. A moment ago, I used the expression return the favor in referring to the consequences of a situation where a divinity heeds a prayer offered by a human, thus doing a favor for the human. In such a situation, the human will feel obligated to return the favor. Conversely, as we will soon see, the divinity to whom a human prays is not obligated to heed a prayer. So, the divinity is not obligated to return the favor of, say, a sacrifice that is announced-in-prayer. The making of a sacrifice that you announce in prayer—whether that sacrifice takes place in the past, present, or future—does not guarantee that you will get your wish from the divinity to whom you are praying.

§61. Applying these comparanda to Song 17 of Sappho, let us consider again the wording at lines 2-4: ᾲ[πότνί Ἦρα, σὰ χ[…] α[ […]]τάν ἄραταν Ἀτρέιδαι πόηϲαν , τόι βαϲίληεϲ . I now fine-tune my translation: ‘|, O Queen [pōntia] Hera, … your […] festival [eortā], |, which, announced-in-prayer [arâsthai], the Sons {469|470} of Atreus did arrange [poieîn] |, for you, kings that they were …’. So, the eortā ‘festival’ (2: ēort[α]) was arâtā ‘announced-in-prayer’ (3:
ἀράταν), and the Sons of Atreus ‘arranged’ it, poēsan (3: πόησαν), for the goddess Hera, that is, τοί ‘for you’ (4: τοί). This form τοί, as I have argued, is non-enclitic and emphatic.

§62. If, on the other hand, we were to accept West’s interpretation, the text would read: |, τὰν ἀράταν Ἀτρέιδαι πόησαν | τοι βασίληεϲ, and the supposed meaning would be ‘which [= the festival], wished by you [= Hera], the Sons of Atreus, kings, made’. As I argue, however, the interpretation ‘wished by you’, where the supposedly enclitic τοι ‘you’ refers to a wish that is supposedly made by Hera, is unjustified. Also, it would be difficult or perhaps even impossible to justify the postponed word-order of such an enclitic τοι.

§63. For the moment, in any case, I prefer to follow the reading of the text as written in the new papyrus fragment. In terms of this reading, as we have seen, the use of poieîn in the active voice (3: πόησαν) means that the Sons of Atreus ‘arranged’ the festival ‘for’ the goddess Hera in the dative, that is, ‘for you’ (4: τοί), and this syntactical construction corresponds to the use of the active voice of poieîn that we already saw in the wording of Thucydides (2.15.2) regarding the festival ‘for’ the goddess Athena, likewise in the dative: ‘and the Athenians, continuing what he [= Theseus] started, even now arrange [poieîn] for the goddess [Athena], at public expense, the festival [heortē] named the Sunoikia’ (καὶ ξυνοίκια ἐξ ἐκείνου Ἀθηναῖοι ἔτι καὶ νῦν τῇ θεῷ ἑορτὴν δημοτελῆ ποιοῦϲιν).

A sacrifice of one hundred cattle as the centerpiece of the festival for Hera

§64. As I reconstruct it, the seasonally recurring festival for Hera at Lesbos would have centered on a grand sacrifice, comparable to the sacrifice of one hundred cattle for the festival

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42 This context of poieîn in the active voice with heortē as direct object is I think different from contexts of poieîsthai, in the middle voice, again with heortē as direct object, as in Herodotus 1.150.1 and Plato, Republic 1.327a. In those two cases, the emphasis is on the participation of the community in celebrating a festival, whereas, in the case of poieîn in Thucydides 2.15.2, the emphasis is on the actual arranging or organizing of the festival.
of Hera at Argos. I will argue that the centerpiece of the festival of Hera at Lesbos was a hecatomb, comparable to the centerpiece of the festival of Hera at Argos. And a word that suits the essence of such a festival is thusiā, which as we have already seen means simultaneously ‘sacrifice’ and ‘festival’. I repeat here the precious information we find in the dictionary of Hesychius, where the term mesostrophōniai hēmerai, which I translated as ‘days {470|471} that turn at the middle’ (μεσοστροφώνιαι ἡμέραι), is glossed as follows: ‘these are the days during which the people of Lesbos arrange [epiteleîn] a thusiā that is common [koinē] to all of them’ (ἐν αἷς Λέςβοι κοινὴν θυσίαν ἐπιτελοῦσιν). We see here a seasonally recurring event of a sacrifice, which is at the core of the festival described in Song 17 of Sappho—a festival that the Sons of Atreus themselves had ‘arranged’, as expressed by the word poieîn ‘make’ at line 3, when the two of them announced-in-prayer the performing of the very first such sacrifice. With regard to this usage of poieîn ‘make’ in the context of ‘arranging’ a festival that centers on a sacrifice, an obvious semantic parallel comes to mind: in Latin, the verb facere can mean not only ‘make’ but also ‘sacrifice’, as we can see most clearly in the case of the derivative noun sacrificium ‘sacrifice’.43

§65. The project of a prototypical sacrifice at Lesbos, as envisioned in Song 17 of Sappho, would have required a great deal of effort, commensurate even with the earlier effort that went into the grand project of conquering Troy. In the case of that earlier effort, the Sons of Atreus had been faced with the megaloi aethloi ‘great labors’ of the war itself (5: μ[εγά]λοις αἰθλίοις)—‘and, next’ (6: ἄψερον δὲ), there was now the later effort, which was the arranging of a grand sacrifice at Lesbos—a sacrifice that was meant to make it possible for the Sons of Atreus to find the best way to achieve a successful homecoming. For the arrangement of such a sacrifice, an announcement-in-prayer would be needed. As I will argue, this prayer originally

43 Benveniste 1973 part 6 sub-part 1. For the online version of this chapter, see http://chs.harvard.edu/CHS/article/display/3964
took place before the Sons of Atreus ever came to Lesbos, while they were still at Troy, but then there was an iteration of the prayer at the time of actually sacrificing one hundred cattle in the precinct of Hera at Lesbos.

§66. As we see from the wording that survives in Song 17 of Sappho, the Sons of Atreus needed to perform their prayer of supplication to Hera, Zeus, and Dionysus (9–10). And, in terms of my argument, their announcement-in-prayer was correlated with a sacrifice that became the foundation for the festival of Hera at Lesbos. According to the myth that is signaled in Song 17 of Sappho, such a sacrifice, as announced in a prayer expressing a wish to find the best possible way to achieve a homecoming from Troy, became the foundational act for creating the festival of Hera as it is still celebrated in the present, when the speaking persona of Sappho must perform her own prayer of supplication to the goddess Hera (11).

§67. It is in the context of this prayer in the present, as actually performed in Song 17 of Sappho, that we can understand the announcement-in-prayer that was once performed by heroes in the heroic age. Once upon a time, according to the myth, the Sons of Atreus needed to perform their prayer to Hera, Zeus, and Dionysus, in that order (again, 9-10), and, in their prayer, these conquerors of Troy announced the arrangement of a ‘festival’, ἐόρτα (2: ἐόρτ[α]), which was thus ‘announced-in-prayer’, ἀράτα (3: ἀράτας). And it is at this festival that the persona of Sappho is ‘even now’ praying to Hera, nun de (again, 11). As Claude Calame observes, ‘the temporal return of the heroic past to the present of the cult performance of the poem is ensured by the expression nun de’.44 This expression is what I have just translated as ‘even now’ (11: νῦν δὲ ...).

[[In the printed version edited by Bierl and Lardinois 2016, §§68–109 have been excised.]]

44 Calame 2009:6.
A different heroic visit to Lesbos

§68. So far, we have seen in Song 17 of Sappho a myth about a visit to Lesbos by Agamemnon and Menelaos, the Sons of Atreus. This visit, as we have also seen, centered on a sacrifice that needed to be announced-in-prayer—a sacrifice that would in the future become the centerpiece of a seasonally recurring festival that was celebrated at that island in honor of the goddess Hera. To be contrasted, however, is another heroic visit to Lesbos, as narrated at Odyssey 3.130–183. This narrative, as we will see, contradicts in many ways the narrative that we find in Song 17 of Sappho.

§69. In Odyssey 3.130–183, Nestor is telling a tale to the boy Telemachus about the various homecomings of the Achaeans after they succeeded in conquering the city of Troy.45 The tale is told from the perspective of Nestor’s own experiences, and we find that he and a group of his fellow Achaeans stopped over at the island of Lesbos on their way home from Troy (169). I will come back later to this detail that we see here concerning a stopover at Lesbos, but first I must focus on the fact that, one time before and one time after their stopover at Lesbos, Nestor and his group participated in making sacrifices. So, there were two sacrifices, and the story about the first of these two, as we will now see, contradicts in a big way the story about a single sacrifice announced-in-prayer by the Sons of Atreus in Song 17 of Sappho.

§70. The first of the two sacrifices mentioned by Nestor in Odyssey 3 takes place at the island of Tenedos (159), which is situated directly to the west of Troy. By contrast, the island of Lesbos is further away, to the southwest of the Trojan coastland. In Odyssey 3, the divine recipients of the sacrifice at Tenedos are designated only in general terms, as ‘the gods’ (again,

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45 Nestor’s tales of homecoming in Odyssey 3 reflect poetic traditions of great antiquity, which are analyzed most incisively and intuitively by Frame 2009:180–193.
Then, continuing their voyage back home from Troy, Nestor and his group set sail from Tenedos, and their next stopover is the island of Lesbos (169).

§71. As I already said, I will in due course analyze the significance of this detail in *Odyssey* 3 about a stopover at Lesbos. For now, however, I will simply keep following the thread of the narrative. After their stopover at Lesbos, Nestor and his group continued their sea voyage back home. Next, they sailed over the open sea, with no more stopovers, until they reached the city of Geraistos, at the southern tip of the island of Euboea (177). By now the homecoming of this group of heroes was nearly complete, since the island of Euboea is situated right next to the European mainland. And here, at Euboea, Nestor participated in the second of the two sacrifices to which I have been referring (178–179). This second sacrifice involving Nestor was meant as a signal of thanksgiving for the successful homecoming of his group of Achaean voyagers, and the divine recipient of the sacrifice here is specified as the god Poseidon (178), whom Nestor and his fellow Achaeans honored by slaughtering, according to his tale, a multitude of bulls (again, 178–179).

§72. So, the second sacrifice attended by Nestor and his group, which took place on the island of Euboea, was a success. But the first sacrifice, which he had also attended and which had taken place on the island of Tenedos, was a failure. The failure, as narrated by Nestor in *Odyssey* 3, can be linked with a quarrel that broke out, evidently in the context of the feasting that followed this first sacrifice. And who quarreled with whom? The narrative answers the question: the two heroes who quarreled with each other were Nestor and Odysseus (161–166).

§73. This quarrel between Nestor and Odysseus cannot be understood without first considering an earlier quarrel that is central to the narration of *Odyssey* 3, and the narrator is once again Nestor. According to the tale as Nestor tells it, the two Sons of Atreus, Agamemnon and Menelaos, had quarreled with each other right after their victory at Troy, and, as a result
of this quarrel, all the Achaeans had split into two groups, so that half of them followed Menelaos as he sailed off from Troy to Tenedos while the other half stayed with Agamemnon at Troy (130–158). In terms of this story, *Agamemnon intended to perform a sacrifice of one hundred cattle to the goddess Athena before leaving Troy* (143-144), but Menelaos, leading half of the Achaeans, had sailed off together with Nestor and Odysseus and Diomedes *before such a sacrifice could take place* (153-154). It was only after Menelaos and his half of the Achaeans stopped over at the nearby island of Tenedos that they arranged for their own sacrifice there (159). And it was there at Tenedos that a second quarrel broke out—the quarrel between Nestor and Odysseus (again, 161–166).

§74. This second quarrel in the tale told by Nestor in *Odyssey* 3 resulted in a splitting of the group that had sided with Menelaos after the original splitting of all the Achaeans into one separate group siding with Menelaos and another separate group siding with Agamemnon. What resulted from the new split after the quarrel between Nestor and Odysseus was that Odysseus, together with his followers, now sailed off from Tenedos back to Troy in order to rejoin Agamemnon there (160–164), while Nestor together with Diomedes sailed on from their stopover at the island of Tenedos and arrived with their followers at the next stopover, at the island of Lesbos (165–169). When Nestor and Diomedes were already at Lesbos (again, 169), they were joined there by Menelaos, *who arrived later* (168).

§75. And here I stop to highlight the biggest contradiction between the story as told here in the *Odyssey* and the story as told in Song 17 of Sappho. In the *Odyssey*, we see that Menelaos came to Lesbos, but there is no mention here of Agamemnon. In Song 17, by contrast, it seems that both brothers came to Lesbos.
Variations on a theme in *Odyssey* 3 and 4

§76. At this point, I am ready to shift focus. Now I start to concentrate on the island of Lesbos as we see it signaled in the tale told by Nestor in *Odyssey* 3 (169). Here I bring into the analysis a relevant detail that we encounter further on in the Homeric narrative, in *Odyssey* 4, where we get to know more about the adventures of Agamemnon and Menelaos after Troy. In *Odyssey* 4, it is Menelaos himself who is telling the boy Telemachus a tale about these adventures and, in this tale, there is a detail about Lesbos that contradicts the tale told by Nestor in *Odyssey* 3.

§77. While telling his tale to Telemachus in *Odyssey* 4, Menelaos expresses a wish that the boy’s father, Odysseus, will return to Ithaca and will defeat the suitors of Penelope—just as this hero of the *Odyssey* had once upon a time defeated an opponent named Philomeleides in a wrestling match that had taken place on the island of Lesbos (342–344).  

§78. In terms of what Menelaos says here in *Odyssey* 4, he too was at Lesbos when Odysseus performed his heroic feat there. After all, according to the narrative in *Odyssey* 3, Menelaos had sailed from Tenedos to Lesbos—and so too had Nestor and Diomedes, who were already at Lesbos by the time Menelaos arrived there (again, 168–169). But the problem is, Odysseus himself did not sail from Tenedos to Lesbos in the narrative of *Odyssey* 3: rather, as we saw earlier, Odysseus together with a sub-group of Achaean followers had already sailed from Tenedos back to Troy in order to rejoin Agamemnon, who was still there (160–164), while Nestor and Diomedes together with their Achaean followers sailed on from their stopover at the island of Tenedos and arrived at the next stopover, which was the island of Lesbos (165–169). There, at Lesbos, Nestor and Diomedes were joined by Menelaos, who as we have seen

46 The lines here at *Odyssey* 4.342–344 are repeated at 17.133–135, where Telemachus retells to Penelope the story told to him by Menelaos.
arrived later (168-169). In short, then, the parting of ways for Odysseus in *Odyssey* 3 had already happened on the island of Tenedos, when he had left Nestor and Diomedes and Menelaos in order to rejoin Agamemnon. In *Odyssey* 4, by contrast, Odysseus seems to be still there in Lesbos when Diomedes and Nestor and Menelaos are there. And that is how Menelaos could have witnessed the victory of Odysseus in a wrestling match at Lesbos.

**Two variant myths in *Odyssey* 3 and *Odyssey* 4**

§79. I will now argue that there were two variant myths at work in *Odyssey* 3 and 4, and that these myths could never be completely reconciled with one another. Nor, as I will also argue, did they ever really need to be reconciled. In Homeric poetry, there is a built-in awareness of mutually contradictory local variations in mythmaking, and there are many examples where the poetry shows this awareness by ostentatiously including, without overt self-contradiction, details from recessive as well as dominant versions of any given myth. A striking example is *Odyssey* 4.512–522, with reference to the final phase of the sea voyage of Agamemnon as he sails his way back home after the Trojan War. At first, the winds carry him around the headlands of Maleiai, bringing him toward Spartan territory, but then, before he can land there, the winds correct themselves, as it were, and they now carry him in a different direction, toward Argive territory, which is where he finally lands. This way, the Spartan myth that localizes the home of Agamemnon at Amyklai in Spartan territory is recognized—before it is overruled by the rival Argive myth that localizes his home at Mycenae in Argive territory. In Homeric poetry, the Argive version of the myth is dominant, while the Spartan version is recessive.47

47 My formulation here is indebted to the perceptive analysis of Brillante 2005, especially pp. 13–14.
§80. Keeping in mind the Homeric capacity to track such variations, let us consider the myth, as we see it at work in *Odyssey* 3, about a grand sacrifice that took place on the island of Tenedos. Of the two Sons of Atreus, only Menelaos was present, while Agamemnon had stayed behind at Troy and was arranging a correspondingly grand sacrifice back there, to be attended by his half of the Achaean. That sacrifice was intended for Athena. As for the sacrifice at Tenedos, as I already noted, the divine recipients are not named. And, at this competing sacrifice on the island of Tenedos, arranged by Menelaos and attended by his half of the Achaean, a quarrel broke out between Nestor and Odysseus, with the result that Odysseus and his followers went back to Agamemnon. After Tenedos, the only Achaean leaders who sailed on homeward with their followers were Nestor and Diomedes—to be joined later by Menelaos at Lesbos.

§81. From here on, I refer to this ‘Tenedos version’ of the myth as Myth One. But there is also a Myth Two, which is the ‘Lesbos version’. According to Myth Two, as we see it at work under the surface in *Odyssey* 4, there was a grand sacrifice that took place on the island of Lesbos, not on the island of Tenedos. At Lesbos, Odysseus was still together with Nestor and Diomedes—to be joined later by Menelaos. Unlike Myth One as we read it in *Odyssey* 3, which is a myth originating from Tenedos, this second variant myth originates from Lesbos. A signature of this Myth Two in *Odyssey* 4 is the reference, initiated by the speaking persona of Menelaos, to that primal wrestling match between Odysseus and Philomeleides on the island of Lesbos (again, 343–344). In fact, there are traces of this Myth Two in sources external to Homeric poetry. As we learn from Hellanicus of Lesbos (*FGrH* 4 F 150), the people of Lesbos had their own local stories about Philomeleides: he had been a king of theirs in the age of heroes, and he used to
challenge visitors to engage with him in a wrestling match—but then his reputation for invincibility was undone by Odysseus, helped by Diomedes, when these heroes visited Lesbos.\(^48\)

§82. I have so far left out a further detail in Myth Two as I have reconstructed it. According to this myth, which would be compatible with the myth as we see it at work in Song 17 of Sappho, Menelaos was not the only one of the two Sons of Atreus who visited Lesbos. Also visiting was his brother Agamemnon.

§83. We have already seen that Myth One, compatible with the mythological traditions of Tenedos, situates the quarrel between Menelaos and Agamemnon at Troy, even before Agamemnon arranges for a sacrifice of one hundred cattle there. But now I argue that Myth Two, compatible with the mythological traditions of Lesbos, situates the quarrel of Menelaos and Agamemnon not at Troy—and certainly not at Tenedos—but rather at Lesbos. In Myth Two, as we are about to see, both Sons of Atreus visited Lesbos, and they quarreled there with each other. Further, we will see that such a quarrel between Menelaos and Agamemnon at Lesbos happened not before but after a grand sacrifice of one hundred cattle there. And, even further, we will see that the quarrel was linked with the ultimate failure of that sacrifice.

**Failure for ritual in the past time of myth, success for ritual in its own present time**

§84. The clearest sign of failure, in terms of the narrative embedded in Song 17 of Sappho, is the wish that we see being formulated in heroic times—when it was announced-in-prayer that a festival is to be arranged at Lesbos. The eortā ‘festival’ (2: ἐόρτ[α]) that was arātā ‘announced-in-prayer’ (3: ἀράταυ)—in the context of an animal sacrifice, as I reconstruct it—was instituted in hopes of ‘finding the way’ back home from Troy (7: [δ][δ][δ][δ] ... εὔρη[ν]). Hera, as the primary divinity to whom it was announced-in-prayer that there would be a seasonally

\(^48\) On Philomeleides of Lesbos, I have more to say in Nagy 2008a:57.
recurring festival at Lesbos, would be heeding the Sons of Atreus, who had prayed to her, imploring her to help them find their way back home safe and sound. But did she heed their prayer?

§85. In the mythical world of heroes, a wish expressed by a hero who makes an announcement-in-prayer to a divinity is often not heeded by the divinity. For example, at Iliad 2.402-429, when Agamemnon sacrifices an ox to Zeus (402-403, 422), he makes a wish-in-prayer, as expressed by the verb eukheštai (411), that he will conquer the city of Troy (414-415) and kill Hector together with as many other enemies as possible (416-418)—all within the space of one single day (413). But Zeus refuses to bring this prayer to fulfillment (419)—even though the god accepts the offering of the sacrifice (420) and even though Agamemnon and his guests go ahead and cook the meat after killing the ox, dividing the beef among themselves and then feasting on it together (421-429). Although the narrative leaves it open whether, one fine day, Agamemnon will still succeed in his wish to conquer the city (419), it is made clear that the present wish-in-prayer, as performed by the hero on the occasion of this particular sacrifice, is a failure (again, 419). To paraphrase in Latin terms: the vōtum as a ‘wish-in-prayer’ is not granted here. And we have already seen another relevant example in the Iliad: when the hero Pandaros makes his announcement-in-prayer, as expressed by the verb eukheštai (4.119), he says that he will perform an animal sacrifice (4.120) in hopes that Apollo, the god to whom he is praying, will grant him what he is wishing for, which is a safe homecoming (4.121). But the wish—and therefore the prayer—is a failure, since Pandaros will soon be killed on the battlefield (5.290-296). To paraphrase again in cognate Latin terms: the vōtum as an ‘announcement-in-prayer’ is a failure here because the same vōtum as a ‘wish-in-prayer’ is not fulfilled: the hero Pandaros will never return home safe and sound.

§86. Similarly, in terms of my reconstruction of the announcement-in-prayer made by the Sons of Atreus in Song 17 of Sappho, the sacrifice that was announced-in-prayer by these
heroes was a failure, since their wish to find the safest way back home was not granted to either one of them. In the case of Agamemnon, we will see that he was killed after having sailed home safely. As for Menelaos, he will be sailing around aimlessly for eight years before he finally finds his way back home. At least, that is what we read in the version we are about to consider in the Homeric Odyssey.

§87. Before I can proceed with my reconstruction, I must first situate its relevance to Song 17 of Sappho. In this song, I argue, we see a reference to a sacrifice of one hundred cattle in the precinct of Hera at Lesbos, and this sacrifice is viewed, I also argue, as a failed ritual in the heroic past of a myth. In the myth, there is an announcement-in-prayer about performing the sacrifice, which will turn out to be a failure, whereas the seasonal reperforming of this sacrifice at the same place during the festival of Hera is expected to be a successful ritual in the present time of reperformance as signaled in the song. In Song 17, as we have already seen, the persona of Sappho is praying to Hera herself, speaking to her about the ἐόρτα ‘festival’ (2: ἔόρτα[α]) that is being arranged in honor of the goddess. The speaking Sappho goes on to say that this festival, which ‘we’ in the present are arranging (11: πόημεν) as ‘we’ offer supplications to Hera, is being arranged ‘in accordance with the ancient way’ (12: κατ提供优质{το} πάλι[αον]) of celebration. In terms of the reading that we find in the papyrus, both Agamemnon and Menelaos had arranged (3: πόησαν) such a festival in ancient times by virtue of having announced-in-prayer the arrangement of such a festival in the first place. These conquerors of Troy needed to offer their prayer to Hera, Zeus, and Dionysus (9-10), and, in that prayer, they were to announce the arrangement of the ἐόρτα ‘festival’ (2: ἔόρτα[α]), which was thus ἀράτα ‘announced-in-prayer (3: ἀράτα[α])’. It is at this festival that the persona of Sappho is ‘even now’ praying to Hera, nun de (11). And, in terms of my reconstruction, the centerpiece of such a
seasonally recurring festival at Lesbos was a hecatomb, that is, the sacrificial slaughter of one hundred cattle.

§88. So, the central question is this: if such a ritual of sacrificing one hundred cattle was a failure in the past time of the myth, how could it become a model for the success of that ritual as it exists in its own present time?

§89. Such an idea of failure in myth and success in ritual is typical of an aetiology. And here I have reached the point where I offer a working definition, postponed till now. By aetiology I mean a myth that explains and even confirms the stability of a ritual in the present by narrating a primordial event of instability for that ritual as performed in the mythical past. My formulation here is a compressed version of a more elaborate explanation originally developed by Walter Burkert49 and further developed by myself,50 which I now restate: an aetiology focuses on a foundational catastrophe in the mythologized past that explains and thus motivates continuing success in the ritualized present and future.51

§90. An example that I have studied elsewhere in some detail is a complex of rituals and myths involving the god Apollo and the hero Pyrrhos at Delphi, where the overall ritual of slaughtering sheep and distributing in an orderly way their sacrificial meat inside the precinct of Apollo stands in sharp contrast with a myth, as reflected in Pindar’s Nemean 7 and Paean 6,

49 Burkert 1985:105–107.

50 Nagy 1990:118, 125–130; 141–142; 386; 395–397.

51 Nagy 2011a §68. See also the relevant formulation of Bierl in Bierl and Lardinois 2016: “In archaic poetry ritual often frames and interacts with myth. Myth usually tells narratives about deeds that fail, whereas in the complementary ritual they are felicitously achieved.”
about a disorderly distribution that resulted in the slaughtering of Pyrrhos himself when the hero arrived at Delphi to make sacrifice inside the precinct of the god.\footnote{Nagy 2011a §§67–68, 70–72.}

§91. For another example of such an aetiology, I cite a story as retold by Herodotus (1.31.1–5) about a priestess of Hera and her two boys, named Kleobis and Biton. The mother and the two sons, all three of them, are involved as major characters in an aetiological myth about the ritual practice known as the hecatomb, which as we have seen was a sacrificial slaughtering of one hundred cattle in the precinct of the goddess Hera at the climax of the festival celebrated in her honor at Argos. Also involved as major ‘characters’ in the story are two sacrificial oxen. The two boys, described as āthlophoroi ‘prize-winning athletes’, willingly took the place of the two sacrificial oxen, chosen to pull the wagon carrying the priestess across the plain of Argos—over a distance of 45 stadium-lengths—along a sacred way leading up to the precinct of Hera (1.31.2). The oxen had been late in arriving at the starting-point of the procession (again, 1.31.2), \textit{and this lateness, in terms of the story, is the aetiological explanation for their replacement by the two athletes.} If these two oxen had not been late, they would have been slaughtered along with the other ninety-eight oxen that had been chosen for the mass sacrifice of one hundred cattle at the finishing-point of the procession, inside the precinct of Hera. At the feast that followed the sacrifice inside the precinct, the two boys died a mystical death after having pulled the wagon of the priestess from the starting-point all the way to this finishing-point of the procession (1.31.5).\footnote{See Nagy 2015 ch. 4§142*1, with references to further commentary.} Thus, by way of this death that they shared with each other, the boys became sacrificial substitutes for the two premier victims of the animal sacrifice.\footnote{The analysis that I cited in the previous note provides documentation of the ritual practice of choosing two premier animal victims out of a mass of animals destined for slaughter at a sacrifice. Here is a question that may arise: if the two oxen had really been destined for sacrifice, how would the priestess expect to get back to Argos}
Homeric traces of a failure to perform a sacrifice

§92. With these examples of aetiology in mind, I focus on a passage in Odyssey 4 where Menelaos, narrating for Telemachus and the assembled company the tale of his own homecoming from Troy, explains why the gods had temporarily checked the winds that could bring him back home in the final phase of his sea voyage (351–362). At one point in the tale, Menelaos is stranded on the island Pharos, offshore from Egypt (354–360). And, in telling this part of the tale, the explanation that he gives for his temporary failure to sail on and to reach his homeland is this: because (352: ἐπεὶ) he had not performed a sacrifice of one hundred cattle to the gods. Here is the wording:

| 351 Αἰγύπτῳ μ’ ἐτι δεῦρο θεοὶ μεμαῶτα νέεσθαι | 352 ἔσχον, ἐπεὶ οὐ κλίνει ἔρεξα τεληέςσας ἐκατόμβας | 353 οἱ δ’ αἰεὶ βούλοντο θεοὶ μεμνήσθαι ἔφετμέων.

| 351 In Egypt did they hold me up, the gods did, though I sorely wanted to make a homecoming [neesthai] back here [deuro = at home, where I am speaking now].

| 352 Yes, they held me up, since [epei] I did not perform for them a perfect sacrifice of one hundred cattle [hekatombai]. The gods always wanted their protocols to be kept in mind.

Odyssey 4.351–353

from the precinct of Hera? My response is that such a question is based on a false assumption, since any procession that proceeded from its point of origin to its point of climax would not retrace its steps on the way back to the point of origin. Rather, the participants in the procession would disperse after the climactic sacrifice, and they would find their way back home on their own. I cite as an example Xenophon of Ephesus 1.3.1, where we see a specific reference to the dispersal of a procession to the precinct of Artemis after the participants arrive at the precinct and complete the sacrifice.

55 Although I consistently interpret hekatombē as a sacrifice of one hundred cattle in Homeric contexts, as here, there are some cases where the sacrifice is scaled down, referring not to cattle but to other sacrificial animals. In Iliad 4.102, for example, the hekatombē involves sheep, not cattle.
§93. By contrast with this temporary failure of Menelaos in his homecoming, Agamemnon had already succeeded in sailing home, and Menelaos himself mentions this detail as he tells his own tale in *Odyssey* 4. In telling the tale, the explanation that Menelaos gives for his brother's successful sea voyage is this: *because the goddess Hera had saved Agamemnon*. Before I quote the relevant Homeric passage, I note here the background: Proteus had told Menelaos about this salvation of Agamemnon from the sea, and that is how Menelaos knows about it. As he retells the tale to Telemachus, Menelaos quotes the words of Proteus about the success of Agamemnon at sea, to be contrasted with the temporary failure of Menelaos himself. Here, then, are the words of Proteus:

\[ 512 \text{οὐδὲ θάνατος ἔκφυγε κηρὰς ἄδελφες ἤδη ὑπάλυξεν ἐν νηὺς γλαφυρῆς} \\
513 \text{κάωσε δὲ πότνια Ἡρη.} \]

*Odyssey* 4.512–513

§94. As we learn, then, from the words of Proteus here in *Odyssey* 4, Agamemnon was in fact saved at sea, since his voyage by sea was successful. But then he was killed after he landed near home, ambushed by Aigisthos, and so the rest of his voyage, by land, became a failure (514-537). After treacherously hosting him at a dinner, Aigisthos had slaughtered Agamemnon as if that hero were some sacrificial ox that is being fed in a manger (535). By contrast, the voyage of Menelaos by sea was ultimately successful, because he finally got around to making a sacrifice of one hundred cattle in Egypt (4.581–586). In making this sacrifice, Menelaos was following
the instructions of Proteus (472–480), and, this way, he appeased the anger of the gods (583). Now Menelaos could at long last sail back to his homeland, safe and sound (584–586).

§95. We have seen, then, from the narrative of Menelaos in Odyssey 4, that Agamemnon was saved at sea by the goddess Hera (again, 512–513). But why had Hera saved him? It was because, I argue, Agamemnon had at least tried to make a perfect sacrifice of one hundred cattle at Lesbos. By contrast, Menelaos had somehow failed to do his part in the corresponding sacrifice. In terms of my interpretation, based on the wording of Song 17 of Sappho, both Sons of Atreus had made an announcement-in-prayer about performing a sacrifice at Lesbos, but only Agamemnon succeeded in following through on that announcement.

§96. I have already quoted the passage in Odyssey 4 (351–353) where Menelaos says that the final phase of his sea voyage as he headed back home was held up by the gods precisely because he had not made a sacrifice of one hundred cattle. From the context, it is clear that this failure that made the gods so angry was a sin of omission, not commission. And his sin, I argue, was that he somehow failed to perform a sacrifice of one hundred cattle at Lesbos. But later on, when Menelaos does finally get around to performing a sacrifice of one hundred cattle in Egypt (581–586), his performance is successful, and thus he finally appeases the anger of the gods (583).

§97. The reader’s first impression may be that the sin of omission on the part of Menelaos, that is, his failure to perform a successful sacrifice of one hundred cattle, happens in Egypt: after all, the finding of a solution for the sin happens at this place—when Menelaos finally gets around to performing such a sacrifice. But such a first impression is wrong, I think, since Egypt was merely the last possible place as an occasion for such a sin of omission. There were many

56 In the Iliad, 5.714–717, Hera remarks to Athena that the two of them had promised to Menelaos a safe homecoming after the conquest of Troy.
other places that Menelaos had visited before he ever reached Egypt, and Egypt had been for him merely the final stopover in the course of a most problematic overall sea voyage back home from Troy. Yes, the gods were in the process of punishing Menelaos in Egypt for his sin of omission when we see them interfering there with his sea voyage. And yes, the gods kept on interfering until Menelaos finally made the sacrifice, in Egypt, which was the place that turned out to be his point of departure in the very last phase of his sea voyage. But, as we will now see, the gods were already interfering with Menelaos in earlier phases of his sea voyage, and so the divine punishment for his sin of omission can be viewed as an ongoing series of misfortunes that kept on interfering with his travels after Troy.

§98. The first such misfortune is already narrated by Nestor in Odyssey 3, concerning the death, at Cape Sounion, of the hero Phrontis, who had been steering the ship of Menelaos (276–283). That death, caused by the god Apollo (279–280), now holds back Menelaos from sailing ahead. Only after he conducts a proper funeral for his comrade (284–285) does he recommence his sea voyage. Then, as Menelaos sails past the headlands of Maleiai, his ships are blown off course: some are swept away to Crete, where they run aground and are shattered (286–299), while five of them reach Egypt (299–300). In sharp contrast, the hero Nestor has a safe and swift sea voyage back home to Pylos (182–183), having evidently rounded successfully the headlands of Maleiai. Meanwhile, once he reaches Egypt, Menelaos takes to plundering and looting there, and he amasses vast treasures (301) as ‘he was wandering around with his ships’ (302: ἠλᾶτο ξὺν νηυ ςι). Later, in Odyssey 4, we learn from the narrative of Menelaos that his sea voyage had reached not only Egypt but also other exotic places, including Cyprus and

57 The details here are parallel to what is narrated in the epic Cycle (Nostoi Proclus summary p. 108 lines 20–23 ed. Allen).

58 I follow here the acute analysis of Frame 2009:184 n. 79.
Phoenicia (83), even Libya (85). After experiencing all these adventures, he was still just ‘wandering around’ in an aimless way (81 and 83: ἐπαληθείϲ, 91: ἠλώμην). As Menelaos himself remarks, he spent eight years just wandering around (82).

§99. Already in the narrative of Nestor in Odyssey 3, the aimlessness of the sea voyage of Menelaos is anticipated: whereas Agamemnon got back home from Troy relatively soon, only to get killed by Aigisthos, Menelaos kept on wandering from one place to the next in his many sea voyages, and the word for his directionless maritime wanderings is plazeto ‘he was veering’ (254: πλάζετ). Comparable, of course, are the even more extensive veerings of Odysseus in the overall Odyssey, as expressed by the same word plazesthai ‘veering’ already at the beginning of the epic: Odysseus is a hero ‘who veered [plangthē] in very many ways’ (1.1–2: ὦς μάλα πολλὰ | πλάγχθη).

§100. So, where did all the veering begin for Menelaos? Where did his sea voyage start to go off course? According to one version of the myth about this hero’s travels by sea after Troy, as I will now argue, the veering can be traced all the way back to something that happened at Lesbos. I focus here on a detail we find in the tale told by Nestor in Odyssey 3. In that tale,

Menelaos was late in arriving at Lesbos:

| 168 ὄψε δὲ δὴ μετὰ νῷᨦ κίϲ ξανθὸϲ Μενέλαοϲ, | 169 ἐν Λέϲβῳ δ’ ἐκιϲεϲ ὀδωϲ ὁρμαίϲαι
πλόϲν ὄρμαίϲονταϲ

| 168 He came late, golden-haired Menelaos did, after the two of us [= Nestor and Diomedes]. | 169 It was at Lesbos that he [= Menelaos] caught up with us, as we were planning the long part of our sea voyage.

Odyssey 3.168–169
§101. I interpret this wording to mean that Menelaos arrived too late to participate fully in a sacrifice of one hundred cattle at Lesbos. And the place for this sacrifice to happen would have been the precinct of Hera on that island. From the standpoint of the local myth that originated from Lesbos, as I have argued with reference to Song 17 of Sappho, both Agamemnon and Menelaos had announced-in-prayer, already at Troy, the arrangement of a festival for Hera at Lesbos, and what was wished-for in return was to find the best possible way to achieve a safe homecoming from Troy. So, in terms of my argument, what was announced-in-prayer was the performing of a sacrifice as the centerpiece of the festival to be arranged, but only one of the Sons of Atreus did his part in at least trying to make the sacrifice a success. That was Agamemnon. As for Menelaos, he somehow failed to do his part. And, in terms of my reconstruction, it was because he arrived too late for the sacrifice. Similarly, as we see in *Odyssey* 4, Menelaos arrived too late in his homecoming: by the time he got home, he was too late to save his brother—and he was too late even to avenge his brother’s death, since Orestes, son of Agamemnon, had already done so by killing Aigisthos (546–547).

§102. This theme of *failing by being late* is an essential piece of my overall reconstruction of the myth about a sacrifice of one hundred cattle at Lesbos—a sacrifice that is featured as the climax of the festival that was announced-in-prayer by the Sons of Atreus. In terms of this reconstruction, Agamemnon sailed to the island and arranged to sacrifice one hundred cattle to Hera there, but Menelaos joined him only after the sacrifice was already in progress, since he did not arrive at Lesbos on time. In terms of this reconstruction, the quarrel between the Sons of Atreus must have happened during the feast that followed the sacrifice at Lesbos, just as the quarrel between Nestor and Odysseus happened at the feast that followed the sacrifice at Tenedos.
§103. Menelaos seems to be idiosyncratic in his arrivals at sacrifices. For a striking example, I return here to the passage at *Iliad* 2.402–429 where Agamemnon sacrifices an ox to Zeus (402–403, 422) and makes a wish-in-prayer, as expressed by the verb *eukhesthai* (411), that he will conquer the city of Troy (414–415) and kill Hector together with as many other enemies as possible (416–418). To attend this sacrifice as well as the feast that follows the sacrifice, Agamemnon invites six heroes (404–407). But the hero Menelaos is not included in this group of six. Nevertheless, Menelaos does manage to attend, arriving as the seventh hero, *without having been invited to the sacrifice* (408–409): rather, he comes *automatos*, which is conventionally interpreted to mean ‘of his own accord’, or, to put it into popular idiom, ‘automatically’ (408). But the reason that is given here to explain why Menelaos comes *automatos* is uncanny: it is because, the narrative says, Menelaos can read the mind of his brother (408–409). The ability of Menelaos to read the mind of Agamemnon indicates a special meaning for the adjective *automatos* here, as I will now explain.

§104. On the one hand, if Menelaos comes to the feast ‘on his own’, then we can expect his mind to be ‘operating by itself’—which is the meaning built into *automatos* as a compounding of the element *auto-* ‘self’ with the element *ma-t-*, derived from the root *men-/mn-* meaning ‘mind’. So, Menelaos has a mind of his own. On the other hand, however, something unexpected is going on here: this mind of Menelaos, exceptionally, can read the mind of the brother, and so *automatos* in this context means not only ‘having a mind of his own’ but also ‘having the same mind’ as the brother has.\(^\text{59}\) In terms of this interpretation, Agamemnon and Menelaos have the same mind because they share their own selves with each other.\(^\text{60}\)

\(^{59}\) There is an allusion in Plato *Symposium* 174b-d to this passage in *Iliad* 2.402–429. On the basis of Athenaeus 1.8a, we can reconstruct a relevant proverb, to which Plato’s text is also alluding. This proverb can be reconstructed as *αὐτόματοι δ’ ἀγαθοὶ ἀγαθῶν ἐπὶ δαίμον᾽ ἵπποι* ‘automatically do the noble go to the feasts of the noble’. In such a context, I add, not only does each noble person have ‘a mind of his own’ that mind is also the ‘same’ mind that the other noble persons have. The point is, ‘like-minded’ or ‘same-minded’ people congregate with each other.
§105. At Lesbos, by contrast, it seems that the mental link of Menelaos with his brother has somehow been broken. That is why he fails to arrive on time. And now the quarrel between Menelaos and Agamemnon ensues. So, who is to blame? Perhaps it was Menelaos, who was late. Or perhaps it was Agamemnon, who might have forgotten to invite Menelaos, assuming that his brother was still reading his mind.

§106. But what was the quarrel about, anyway? Here I must add one last relevant detail that I have found in Odyssey 3. As Nestor is recounting the moment when Menelaos arrives late at Lesbos (168–169), he himself adds the detail that I have in mind here: the fact is, Nestor and Diomedes and the other Achaeans who were there at Lesbos were already ‘deliberating’ (169: ὠρμαίοντας) about two alternative ways of continuing their sea voyage. I argue that, in the version of the myth originating from Lesbos, Agamemnon was also part of these deliberations, and then the latecomer Menelaos joined in as well. I must stress that, although Menelaos was late for the sacrifice at Lesbos, he would have been there for the feasting that happened after the sacrifice. That was when, in terms of my reconstruction, the deliberations took place—and that was when the quarrel between the Sons of Atreus broke out in the version of the story that originated from Lesbos.

§107. In these deliberations, as narrated in Odyssey 3, about two alternative ways of sailing home, one of the two ways was to take the sea route north of Chios, thus venturing into the open sea and heading straight for the island of Euboea (170–171). The alternative way was to take the sea route south of Chios (172). That was the safer way. Nestor goes on to say that he automatically at dinners.

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60 On twin-like mythological patterns in Homeric descriptions of Agamemnon and Menelaos, and how these patterns affect their behavior and even their thinking, see Frame 2009:177, with a further reference at pp. 72–73 n. 156. Further, as Frame pp. 209–215 demonstrates, Menelaos in the Iliad consistently fails to take the initiative whenever he undertakes an activity together with his brother. In such situations, Menelaos is recessive in his twinned thinking, while Agamemnon is dominant.
and Diomedes and their followers, before deciding which sea route to take, had consulted a divinity, not named, who advised that they should head straight for the distant island of Euboea, thus taking the more direct sea route (173–178). In this version of the story as transmitted in Odyssey 3, Menelaos and his followers sailed along with Nestor and Diomedes (276–277). Or, to say it more precisely, Menelaos sailed with them at least as far as Cape Sounion.

§108. Here I reconstruct another aspect of the alternative version of the story, originating from Lesbos, that told about the deliberations following the sacrifice performed by Agamemnon at Lesbos. After the deliberations, Agamemnon did not sail along with Nestor and Diomedes, and, instead, he took the more indirect sea route after he left Lesbos, while Menelaos, unlike Agamemnon, had taken the more direct sea route, choosing the same way that was chosen by Nestor. In terms of this alternative version, I argue, the deliberations about choosing between more direct and less direct sea routes led to a quarrel between Agamemnon and Menelaos, who disagreed about which way was the right way. I see an irony built into the idea that the setting for the quarrel would have been the sacrifice at Lesbos—and that Menelaos had been late in arriving at that ritual event. And, as we have already seen, he will also be late—eight years too late—in arriving back home, even though he chooses the more direct route from Lesbos.

§109. By contrast with Agamemnon, who was saved at sea by Hera because he had at least tried to make a perfect sacrifice to her—at Lesbos, according to the Lesbian tradition as I reconstruct it—Menelaos got no such direct help from the goddess. After he sailed off from Lesbos, as we see from the narrative of Odyssey 4, his sea voyage did not take him back home right away, since he was diverted many times to many different places—though the final phase of his sea voyage, from Egypt back to his homeland, turned out to be successful. In the end,
Menelaos succeeded because he finally got around to making a perfect sacrifice of one hundred cattle in Egypt (581–586)—not in Lesbos—following the instructions of Proteus (472–480). This way, Menelaos appeased the anger of the gods (583), and now he could at long last sail back to his homeland, safe and sound (584–586).

[[In the printed version edited by Bierl and Lardinois 2016, §§68–109 have been excised.]]

A ‘smoking gun’ in the Homeric narrative

§110. For me the ‘smoking gun’ in the Homeric narrative about the sea voyages of Agamemnon and Menelaos after Troy in *Odyssey* 3 and 4 is the action taken by the goddess Hera. As we have seen it said explicitly in *Odyssey* 4.512–513, Hera acts as the savior of Agamemnon in the course of his own final sea voyage. The salvation is temporary, since Agamemnon is killed after he makes his landing, but this salvation-at-sea is explicitly highlighted in the *Odyssey*. By contrast, the corresponding sea voyage of Menelaos fails to bring him back safe and sound to his homeland right away. This contrast between success and failure in the sea voyages of the Sons of Atreus is correlated, I argue, with a contrast between the complete and the incomplete performance of a sacrifice to Hera at Lesbos. The successful sea voyage of Agamemnon matches his observance of the sacrifice, whereas the unsuccessful sea voyage of Menelaos matches a non-observance.

§111. The fact that the narrative of *Odyssey* 4 shows Hera as the savior of Agamemnon at sea signals a Lesbian origin for this part of the overall Homeric narrative—but only for this part. The other parts of the narrative are adjusted to fit other versions that originate not from Lesbos. A salient example is the fact that the savior of Nestor in *Odyssey* 4 is certainly not Hera but Poseidon, who is the principal divinity of the sea in the overarching Homeric narrative. That is why, as we saw in *Odyssey* 3, Nestor arranges for a sacrifice of bulls to Poseidon as his
act of thanksgiving to that god for letting him sail safely from Lesbos to Euboea (178–179).

§112. I argue, then, that the role of Hera as a savior of Agamemnon at sea signals, exceptionally, the connection of the narrative in Odyssey 4 with the worship of Hera at Lesbos. And I must add that, from the new evidence of the Brothers Song, we can see clearly that Hera was worshipped in Lesbos as a divinity of the sea. In this song of Sappho, her persona speaks of praying to Hera by imploring the goddess to save her brother at sea—and to save also his ship and its cargo and thus even the wealth of his family (lines 5–6 [1–2], 9–13 [5–9]). And I highlight here the independent evidence showing that Hera was worshipped in her function as a divinity of the sea elsewhere as well in the Greek-speaking world.61

Praying before sacrificing

§113. A question remains: if Menelaos failed in the performance of the sacrifice at Lesbos, did he fail also in the performance of an announcement-in-prayer that came before the sacrifice? Here I consider two different explanations.

§114. According to one explanation, Menelaos did indeed fail to perform such a prayer, since he did not attend the sacrifice of the hundred cattle, which would have been preceded by an introductory prayer.

§115. As for an alternative explanation, which I prefer, it allows us to keep the reading of the text as transmitted in the papyrus. As I read Song 17 of Sappho, Menelaos as well as Agamemnon did plan to make a sacrifice at Lesbos, and that is why we see at line 3 the plural form of the verb πήσαν ‘they arranged’, the direct object of which is the relative pronoun referring to the festival that was ‘announced-in-prayer’, ἀράτας. In terms of the syntax, the

61 See Pirenne-Delforge and Pironti 2014:28, with reference to de Polignac 1997; see also Caciaglì 2010:236.
subject of this verb is Ἀτρέιδαι, a nominative plural referring to ‘the Sons of Atreus’, further defined at line 4 as βαϲίληεϲ ‘kings’ and then further described at line 5 as the achievers of great tasks like the capture of Troy. To my mind, this word for ‘kings’ must refer to Agamemnon and Menelaos together, who not only achieved the conquest of Troy together but then set out for Lesbos together: we can see this detail at line 7, where we read τυίδ’ ἀπορμάθεν[τεϲ] ‘having set forth to come here [tuide]’. So the two brothers must have planned together the sacrifice that led to the festival that is described as ‘announced-in-prayer’, ἀράταν. When I say planned together I could also say wished together, in that the sacrifice was wished by the two of them together. But the problem was, the sacrifice was not performed by the two of them together. Earlier, I had said that ‘wishing-in-prayer’ is the other side of ‘announcing-in-prayer’ as expressed by verbs like eukhesthai and arâsthai. And now we see that this two-sidedness of prayer can help explain why ἀράταν ‘announced-in-prayer’ both applies and does not apply to Menelaos: this hero wished that Hera would let him find the way for a safe homecoming, but he did not get to perform the final announcement-in-prayer that comes with the wish-in-prayer, since he did not get to participate in the sacrifice where the final announcement was made by Agamemnon. But the wish is there, and Menelaos surely participated in the wish expressed by way of the adjective ἀράταν ‘announced-in-prayer’ that describes the festival that was ‘made’ by both brothers, according to this reading.

§116. In terms of this explanation, there were at least two phases of the announcement-in-prayer here. First, the two Sons of Atreus jointly made the prayer when they were still at Troy, expressing their shared wish for a safe homecoming and at the same time making a commitment to the sacrifice that would be performed at Lesbos. But then, by the time the sacrifice was finally performed there, it was Agamemnon alone who performed it. And this sacrifice would have been introduced by a reiteration of the announcement-in-prayer that had
originally been made at Troy. As I said before, following the formulation of Muellner, what you announce in prayer does not have to be a promise about the future: it can also be an announcement about the present or even about the past. And something that is wished for can be prayed for many times, as we see even from the contexts of polu-arātos, which I have so far translated simply as ‘very much wished-for’. As we see from those contexts, we could also translate ‘very often wished-for’.

**Choral performance in the precinct of Hera at Lesbos**

§117. I now turn to the question: how are we to envision the performance of song at the festival founded by the Sons of Atreus? As I will argue, Sappho as the main speaker of Song 17 is the main performer of such a song and, as such, she is speaking for all of Lesbos in the context of a grand sacrifice that replicates the hecatomb that had once been announced-in-prayer by the Sons of Atreus. And such a grand sacrifice is already anticipated, I argue, in the Brothers Song, where the speaking persona of Sappho refers to the procession that will lead to the precinct of Hera as the site of a choral performance that will celebrate the hecatomb.

§118. I start by highlighting here a relevant detail that we find in the new evidence of the supplemented version of Song 17 of Sappho and in the older evidence of Song 130b of Alcaeus: in both songs, the women of Lesbos made a ritual cry of ololūgā ‘ululation’ in the context of celebrating the festival of Hera in the precinct of the goddess at Lesbos (Sappho 17.15 and Alcaeus 130b.20). As I argued in my previous work on Alcaeus 130b, such ululation is an aspect of the choral performance of women who are participating in the festival. And I now add that the actual cry of ululation could signal a climactic moment in an overall choral performance. One such moment is *when cattle are slaughtered at a sacrifice*. A striking example is

62 Nagy 1993. For more on ululation as an aspect of choral performance by women, I refer to Bierl in Bierl and Lardinois 2016.
the description in *Odyssey* 3 of a bovine sacrifice arranged by Nestor at Pylos: at the moment when the slaughter actually takes place there, the womenfolk signal that moment by performing a ululation (450: ὀλόλυξαν).\(^6^3\)

§119. I conclude, then, that the sacrifice to Hera that takes place in her precinct on the occasion of her festival in Lesbos is a hecatomb, that is, a sacrifice of one hundred cattle. It was this sacrifice that Agamemnon and Menelaos had vowed-in-prayer to perform for the first time, according to the myth retold in Song 17 of Sappho.

§120. And here I can come back full circle to a myth, originating from Argos, about the precinct of Hera at Argos. According to the myth, as retold in Dictys of Crete (1.16), it was inside this precinct that Agamemnon was chosen to lead the expedition to Troy. This formal beginning within the precinct of Hera, where the festival of the goddess was celebrated by the Argives, must have been a sacrifice, corresponding to the seasonally recurring thusiā at the festival of Hera in Argos. As I have already shown, this word thusiā refers to the festival itself, though its basic meaning is ‘sacrifice’. At Argos, such a sacrifice is what was called a hecatomb, that is, the ritual slaughter of one hundred cattle. In the story as reflected in Song 17 of Sappho, on the other hand, Agamemnon is inside the precinct of Hera at Lesbos, not at Argos. Together with Menelaos, Agamemnon had vowed-in-prayer to perform a hecatomb at Lesbos to signal a correct ending for the war by expressing a formal wish to find the best way home. But, in terms of my reconstruction, Menelaos failed to arrive in time for the actual sacrifice.

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\(^{6^3}\) For still more on ritual ululations performed by women, see the seminal observations of Burkert 1983:5, 12, 54 and 1985: 56, 72, 74.
Looking back diachronically at the precinct of Hera

§121. In analyzing the aetiological myth that motivated the seasonally recurring festival of Hera at Lesbos, I have taken into account the evidence of the new textual supplements to Song 17 of Sappho together with the evidence of indirect Homeric references to the festival in *Odyssey* 3 and 4. With this evidence in place, I now proceed to analyze diachronically the basics of what we now know about the venue for the festival, understanding that this venue was the precinct of Hera.

§122. I start with the order in which the speaking persona in Song 17 of Sappho names the three divinities: they were Hera herself, addressed as ‘you’ (9), and then Zeus (again, 9), and then Dionysus (10).

§123. These three divinities in Song 17 of Sappho are the same three divinities whose sacred space is the *temenos* ‘precinct’ that we see pictured in Song 129 of Alcaeus. The speaking persona in Song 129, Alcaeus himself, is literally pointing to this *temenos* (129.2) with the deictic pronoun *tode* ‘this here’ (129.1-2: τόδε ...πέμενος) as he identifies the three divinities that occupy the sacred space of this precinct:

1) The first divinity to be identified is Zeus, who is given here the epithet *antiaos* (5: ἀντίαον), which is the same epithet we saw in Song 17 of Sappho (9: Δί’ ἀντίαον). There I translated this epithet as ‘lord of suppliants’, and now we can see why such a translation applies: a scholion in the papyrus explains this word *antiaos* here in Song 129 of Alcaeus as meaning *hikesios* (ἵκεσιον) which is a classical Greek epithet meaning ‘receiving suppliants’.
2) The second divinity is ‘the Aeolian goddess’, who is addressed as ‘you’ by the speaking persona (6: cē δ’ Αἰολήιαν ... θέον). As I have already argued, this ‘Aeolian goddess’ must be Hera herself.

3) The third divinity is Dionysus (9: Ζόννυϲϲον), about whom the speaking persona speaks as ‘this one here’ (8: τόνδε).§124. So, ‘this precinct here’ in Song 129 of Alcaeus (1-2: τόδε ... τέμενοϲ) matches the place signaled in Song 17 of Sappho as the setting for a sacrifice once announced-in-prayer by Agamemnon and Menelaos. The prayer of these kings in Song 17 had addressed the same three divinities, offering a supplication (9–10) by announcing-in-prayer (arâsthai) a festival (eortâ) to be held at this precinct (2), and the kings thus established (poieîn) the festival ‘for you’ (4: τόι), that is, for Hera. {476|477} And, just as we saw in Song 129 of Alcaeus, we see also here in Song 17 of Sappho a deictic reference that ties the speaker—in this case, Sappho herself—to the place that Louis Robert identified as Messon in Lesbos: according to Song 17 of Sappho, it was announced in heroic times that the festival of Hera should take place tuide ‘here’ (7: τυίδε). In this context, I draw attention to the fact that Hera, occupying her own place in the sacred space ‘here’, is addressed directly as ‘you’ by the speaking persona of Sappho (again, 4: τόι, also, at 11: cē). And the eortâ ‘festival’ of Hera is signaled as ‘your’ festival (2: cā ... ἐόρτ[α]). As Claude Calame remarks, most incisively, about the use of the grammatical second person here in Song 17 of Sappho, ‘Hera is always present as you’.65

64 On the epithet ὀμήστεσ ‘eating raw flesh’ applied to Dionysus here in Song 129 of Alcaeus (9: ωμήϲταϲ), see Henrichs 1981.

65 Calame 2009:6.
§125. As the eternally present ‘you’ of the precinct, the identity of the goddess Hera subsumes even the identity of her consort, the god Zeus, who is in this context ranked after rather than before Hera in the Brothers Song. Zeus functions as the coefficient of Hera in bringing favorable winds for voyagers at sea (lines 13-20 [9–16]), and, in this role, he is described as basileus Olumpō ‘king of Olympus’ (line 17 [13]: βαϲίλευϲ Ὀλύμπω). By now we can see that even this role of Zeus as basileus ‘king’ is subordinate to the role of Hera as basilēa ‘queen’ (line 10 [6]). Here I return to the reference in Song 130a of Alcaeus to the precinct of Hera as the teikhos basilēion (15: τεῖϲ βαϲιληίον), glossed as ‘Hera’s wall’ in an adjoining scholion (τὸ τῆ ᾨρα). In the light of this gloss, I had already translated teikhos basilēion as ‘the queenly wall’, not ‘the kingly wall’.

§126. So, all aspects of Hera’s precinct at Lesbos are understood primarily in terms of her omnipresence. Even more than that, the entire island of Lesbos belongs to Hera as its queen, and that is why, just as Zeus belongs to Hera as his queen, so also he belongs intimately to the landscape of her island. A case in point is the epithet of Zeus, basileus Olumpō ‘king of Olympus’, in the Brothers Song (again, line 17 [13]: βαϲίλευϲ Ὀλύμπω). The fact is, this Olympus is a mountain local to Lesbos. It is situated to the south of Messon and to the west of Mytilene, and it is still called Olympus to this day (the Modern Greek name remains Ὄλυμπος). Unlike the Panhellenic Olympus of Homeric poetry, which is situated on the mainland of European Greece, this Olympus of Lesbos is part of an integrated local mythological landscape that fits the local ritual landscape of Hera’s precinct.

§127. I should add that the dyad of Hera and Zeus in the local mythology of Lesbos is a model of divine coefficienty, as we can see even from sources exterior to the songs of Sappho and Alcaeus. A shining example from the early Hellenistic era is a decree recorded in an
inscription from the city of Mytilene in Lesbos, [477|478] SEG 36.750, dated to the 330s BCE, where we see that the goddess Hera was predominant among the gods of the city, since even her consort, Zeus himself, is qualified by way of the epithet Hēraios, which means ‘belonging to Hera’ (6–7: τῶι Διὶ τῶι Ἡραίωι).

§128. I turn next to the god Dionysus, third in the triad of divinities who figure in Song 17 of Sappho (again, 10). The relationship of this divinity with the dyad of Hera and Zeus is not clear at first glance, but, in this case as well, I see a pattern of syncretism where the status of Dionysus, like that of Zeus, is subordinated to the predominant status of Hera. A sign of such subordination, as I am about to argue, is the fact that the poetic language of Sappho and Alcaeus as spoken in the precinct of Hera actually integrates the idea of an omnipresent Hera with the idea of a selectively present Dionysus in moments of heightened emotion.

Choral performance by girls and by women and by Sappho herself in the precinct of Hera at Lesbos

§129. Now that I have considered the omnipresence of Hera as a ‘you’ in the precinct of the goddess at Lesbos, I turn to the ‘we’ who celebrate the festival of Hera on the occasion marked by Song 17 of Sappho. Who are the ‘we’ here? My answer, in general, is that the ‘we’ stands for the people of Lesbos. More specifically, however, the ‘we’ in Song 17 stands for both the speaking persona of Sappho and the attending okhlos ‘throng’ of parthenoi ‘girls’ together with gunaikés ‘women’ (13-15: [ὁ]χλὸς ... παρθενοὶ ... γυναῖκων). I see an imitation of this concept of okhlos ‘throng’ in the Ovidian Letter 15.199-202, referring to a turba ‘throng’ (202) of Lesbides

66 The text is printed by Pirenne-Delforge and Pironti 2014:28–30, with commentary.

67 I read with interest the commentary of Pirenne-Delforge and Pironti 2014:30 on the syncretism of Zeus and Hera as reflected in the concept of Zeus Hēraios. I would add that there is further evidence of such syncretism in Homeric poetry, as in the epithet of Zeus as posis Ἡρέη ‘husband of Hera’ (Iliad 7.411, etc.: πόσις Ἡρῆ).
'Lesbian women' (199, 120, 121), described as *nupturaque nuptaque proles* 'soon-to-be-married and already-married offspring [of the island]' (202). I highlight, as a new piece of evidence, the wording I have just quoted from Song 17 (13–15). We see here a collocation of the words for ‘girls’ and ‘women’, situated in a context where the persona of Sappho herself is speaking for all of them. In this role of speaking on behalf of all the women of Lesbos, Sappho is the lead singer of a choral performance at the festival of Hera within a space {478|479} that is evidently the precinct of the goddess. And, as I will argue, this choral performance represents, as it were, not only all the women but also all the people of Lesbos in general. Such is the role of the speaking ‘we’ of Song 17.

§130. The new piece of evidence, as I have just described it, concerning the participation of girls and women together with Sappho herself at the festival of Hera, can be used to counter an older interpretation of Song 17, according to which this song did not necessarily refer to the festival of Hera as celebrated in the precinct of the goddess. In terms of this older interpretation, the speaking Sappho could have been referring only to girls who were present at the precinct, not to women. But now we see in the supplemented version of Song 17 that the speaking persona of Sappho is in fact referring to the festival of Hera as celebrated in the precinct of the goddess. And now we see also that women as well as girls are pictured as participating in this festival of Hera. Further, the collocation of the word *okhlos* ‘throng’ with the words *parthenoi* ‘girls’ together with *gunaikes* ‘women’ (17.13–15: [ὁ]χλοϲ ... παρθέ[νων ... γυναίκων]) is parallel to what we see in Song 44 of Sappho describing a choral scene of celebration at the wedding of Hector and Andromache. In this song we see the collocation of *okhlos* ‘throng’ with *gunaikes* ‘women’ and *parthenikai* ‘girls’ (44.14-15: ὁχλοϲ | γυναίκων τ’ ἁμα

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68 For background, see Caciagli 2010:239 and 2011:155–156.
Also, this song shows that the entire aggregate of women and girls, *pais okhlos* ‘the entire throng’, are participants in the celebration (44.14: παῖς ὀχλος).  

§131. Here I return to Songs 129 and 130b of Alcaeus, referring to a *temenos* ‘precinct’ (129.2 and 130b.13: τέμενος) that is *xunon* ‘common’ (129.3: ξῦνον) to all the people of the island of Lesbos. As we have seen, Song 130b says that this precinct is sacred to three divinities: Zeus, Hera, and Dionysus (5–9). Evidently, then, the setting here is the same as the setting in Song 17 of Sappho, which likewise shows that the precinct is sacred to these three divinities (9–10).

§132. Further, in Song 130b of Alcaeus, we see a reference to *Lesbiades* ‘women of Lesbos’ (17: Λεσβιάδες) who are explicitly described as *gunaikes* ‘women’ (19: γυναίκων). According to the older interpretation that I just mentioned, this wording refers to an event involving only women at the precinct—and not to any event involving girls. In terms of this older interpretation, Song 130b of Alcaeus {479|480} excludes girls just as Song 17 of Sappho supposedly excludes women. But now we know, on the basis of the supplemented version of Song 17, that the event to which Song 17 refers does in fact include women as well as girls, and that this event is in fact the festival of Hera.

§133. That said, I am ready to argue that Song 130b of Alcaeus, like Song 17 of Sappho, is referring to a choral performance by the women of Lesbos at the festival of Hera that is being celebrated in the precinct of the goddess. Bruno Gentili had drawn attention to two words in this Song 130b of Alcaeus that actually refer to choral performance: the first word is *ololūgā* (20: [ὀ]λολύγα), with reference to the ‘ululation’ of the women of Lesbos, and the second word is

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69 It may be that the actual groupings of women and girls are separate from each other in the rituals of participation. In Song 17, I note the form ἀμφὶς[...] (line 16): as Leonard Muellner points out to me, this form may mean ‘separately’ here. I see a comparable situation in Song 44, where the ritual actions of the daughters of Priam are signaled by the expression χωρὶς δ’ αὖ (line 16), meaning ‘separately’.
the accompanying epithet ἴρα 'sacred' (20: ἴρα[ϲ]). A third word that is relevant here in Song 130b of Alcaeus is another epithet that accompanies oλoλύγα 'ululation': the ritual cry of the women of Lesbos is not only ἴρα 'sacred' (20: ἴρα[ϲ]), it is also eniusiά 'yearly' (again, 20: ἐνίαυςια). On the basis of these three words, we can see that the ritual described in Song 130b must have been a part of the seasonally recurring festival of Hera, featuring some kind of choral performance by the Lesbiades ‘women of Lesbos’, as indicated by the reference to ‘the sacred seasonally-recurring ululation’.

And now the new textual supplements for Song 17 of Sappho show decisively that girls as well as women participated in choral performance at the festival of Hera. Moreover, these new supplements show also that the choral performance of the Lesbiades ‘women of Lesbos’, as they are called in Song 130b of Alcaeus, involves not only the girls and the women of Lesbos in general but also, even more important, the speaking persona of Sappho in particular. In Song 17 of Sappho, as we can see in the light of the new textual supplements, this persona speaks for both the girls and the women of Lesbos.

§134. The newly-supplemented evidence of Song 17 of Sappho, showing the choral performance of girls and women and Sappho herself at the festival of Hera, fits what we already know from the wording of a poem in the Greek Anthology (9.189). This poem refers explicitly to a choral performance led by Sappho herself at the precinct of Hera in Lesbos. Sappho is pictured as the lead singer in a khoros ‘chorus’ (3: χορόν) of Lesbides ‘women from Lesbos’ (2: Λεσβίδεσ) who in turn are pictured as dancing inside a temenos ‘precinct’ sacred to the goddess Hera (1: τέμενος ... Ἀρης). {480|481}

§135. In my 1993 essay on Songs 129 and 130b of Alcaeus, ‘Alcaeus in sacred space’, I backed up the argument published in the 1960 article of Louis Robert concerning the points of

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70 Gentili 1988:220, 306 n. 30. In Nagy 1993:222, I highlight the argumentation of Gentili.

71 Nagy 1993:222–223. This argument is recapitulated in Nagy 2009|2010:238.
reference that we read in the poem taken from the *Anthology*. Robert had connected the choral scene as described in that poem with a ritual event we see described in the scholia for *Iliad* 9.30: ‘the people of Lesbos celebrate a beauty contest [agôn] of women [gunaikes] in the precinct [temenos] of Hera, and it is called the Kallisteia’ (Παρὰ Λεσβίοις ἀγών ἀγεται κάλλους γυναικῶν ἐν τῷ τῆς Ἡρα τεμένει, λεγόμενος Καλλιστεία). Supporting Robert, I argued that the ritual event of this ‘beauty contest’ at Lesbos was a kind of choral performance in its own right, matching the description of the choral performance in the poem taken from the *Anthology*. And now, on the basis of the new evidence supplementing the text of Song 17 of Sappho, I argue further that both this beauty contest of the Kallisteia and the choral performance of the *Lesbiades* in Song 130b of Alcaeus were integral parts of one and the same festival of Hera in Lesbos.

§136. In making this argument, I now consider yet another reference to such a beauty contest. In the dictionary of Hesychius (v. 3 p. 213 ed. Hansen 2005), we find this entry: ‘pulaiíde: this is the name for those who are judged [krinesthai] in a beauty contest of women and who win [over the others]’ (πυλαιΐδε ἐν καλλει κρινόμεναι τῶν γυναικῶν καὶ νικῶσαι). The wording here is strikingly similar to the wording in Song 130b of Alcaeus, where the female participants in the choral performance taking place at the precinct of Hera are described as ‘women of Lesbos, judged [krinesthai] for their beauty’ (20: Λ[εσβία]δες κριννόμεναι φύαν).

§137. Taking into account such similarities in wording, I now have further reason to argue that the beauty contest of the Kallisteia is a choral event, just as the performance of song and

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72 Nagy 1993:222, with reference to Robert 1960.

73 Nagy 1993:222.
dance by Sappho together with her chorus of Lesbides in the poem taken from the Anthology is pictured as a choral event.

**A diachronic view of Hera’s festival at Lesbos**

§138. Essential for my argumentation here is the use of the word that refers to the festival of Hera in Song 17 of Sappho, ἑορτά (2: εὑρτ[α]). The same word for ‘festival’, in its Attic form ἱεορτή, is attested in another reference to the local custom of organizing beauty contests in Lesbos. The reference comes from Theophrastus, Fragment 564 (ed. Fortenbaugh), as cited by Athenaeus 13.610a, where we {481|482} read about ‘judgments of women’ (κρίσεις γυναικῶν) held at Lesbos, and where it is specified that the contest is ‘concerning beauty’ (περὶ ... κάλλους). In the context of what is also said in Athenaeus 13.610a, which is the text that frames this reference from Theophrastus, other examples of such beauty contests are also cited, and it is made clear that the actual setting for these events is a ἱεορτή ‘festival’, as in the case of a seasonally recurring beauty contest held in honor of the goddess Demeter in Arcadia, highlighted in Athenaeus 13.610f (ἐορτή).

§139. Most remarkably, the reference from Theophrastus as cited by Athenaeus specifies that the observance of such a custom, where local women participate in a beauty context, is typical of two ancient Greek communities in particular. Besides highlighting the people of Lesbos as practitioners of beauty contests, the same report highlights, symmetrically, the people of Tenedos: ‘just as it [= the custom] is observed in the regions of the people of Tenedos and of the people of Lesbos’ (Athenaeus 13.610a: καθάπερ καὶ παρὰ Τενεδίοις καὶ Λεσβίοις).

§140. Here it becomes vitally important for me to emphasize that the island of Tenedos, like the island of Lesbos, was an Aeolic community. For background, I now refer to a separate
project that focuses on the Aeolic traditions of Tenedos. Here are two details that I highlight from that project.

§141. The first detail comes from the testimony of Strabo 13.1.32 C596 and 13.1.46 C604. As you travel south along the Asiatic coastline near Troy, passing a site named τὸ Ἀκήλλειον, which means ‘the place of Achilles’, you come to a region named τὸ Ἀκχαῖον, meaning ‘the place of the Achaeans’. This region, Strabo says, is the περαιά of Tenedos, by which he means the part of a ‘mainland’ that belongs to an outlying island. In this case, the outlying island is Tenedos, and Strabo refers to the city of this island-state as a πόλις Αἰολίς ‘Aeolian city’, highlighting its two harbors and a shrine that is sacred to Apollo Smintheus (13.1.46 C604).

§142. The second detail comes from Pindar’s Nemean 11, a song created for the praise of an aristocrat from the island of Tenedos. According to the song, this aristocrat was descended from ancestors who came from Amyklai with Orestes to settle Tenedos (34), and these settlers of the island are imagined as ‘a bronze-clad horde of Aeolians’ (35: Αἰολέων στρατιῶν χαλκεντέα).

§143. These two details about Tenedos, in view of the Aeolic traditions of this island, are relevant to the report we read from Theophrastus (again, Fragment 564 as cited in Athenaeus 13.610a) concerning the parallelism between the {482|483} traditions of Tenedos and Lesbos in celebrating beauty contests for women. In view of the existing parallelism, I am ready to argue that the beauty contests held in Aeolic Tenedos were choral events, just as I argue that the beauty contests held in Aeolic Lesbos were choral events. Further, since the choral events at Lesbos were part of a festival that was aetiologized, as I argue, in a myth about a sacrifice

74 Nagy 2009|2010:184–185.

75 Already at the first mention of Ἀκχαῖον, Strabo combines the name with the article τὸ (13.1.32 C506; see also 13.1.46 C604, 13.1.47 C604).
arranged by the Achaeans when they visited the island of Lesbos, as mentioned in Song 17 of Sappho, I can also argue for a parallel at Tenedos: there too, the beauty contests would have been choral events that were part of a festival that was aetiologized in a myth about a sacrifice arranged by the Achaeans when they visited the island of Tenedos. And such a pairing of aetiological narratives would correspond to the pairing of epic narratives in Odyssey 3 and Odyssey 4 about the visits of Achaean heroes to the Aeolic islands of Tenedos and Lesbos after their victory at Troy.

§144. Ultimately, the Homeric narrative privileged the local myth of Aeolic Tenedos over the local myth of Aeolic Lesbos. In Odyssey 3, as we saw, the grand sacrifice that took place after the conquest of Troy is localized at Tenedos, where only Menelaos participated in that sacrifice, while Agamemnon stayed behind at Troy in order to make his own separate sacrifice there and not at Tenedos. In terms of this version, evidently derivable from Tenedos, Agamemnon was planning to make his sacrifice to Athena at Troy. In terms of the version derivable from Lesbos, on the other hand, he was planning to make his sacrifice to Hera at Lesbos.

§145. By contrast, in Odyssey 4, neither Agamemnon nor Menelaos is shown in the act of making any grand sacrifice that is localized at Lesbos, and the island is mentioned only the context of accentuating, without explanation, the lateness of Menelaos in arriving at that island. This way, in terms of my argument, Homeric poetry slights the prestige of the grand sacrifice that was annually observed in the precinct of Hera at Lesbos—a prestige that continued to be recognized in Song 17 of Sappho.

A synchronic view of Hera’s festival at Lesbos

§146. From a diachronic point of view, then, I have argued that the institution of beauty contests was in fact a traditional aspect of the festival of Hera as celebrated at her precinct in
Lesbos. Accordingly, I think there is no reason to doubt that the word referring to the festival of Hera in Song 17 of Sappho, eortā (2: ἐόρτα), signals a set of ritual events that includes the beauty contests of women. But there is likewise no reason to doubt that this same set of ritual events also includes the choral singing and dancing of girls. From a synchronic {483|484} point of view, as we have already seen in the text of Song 17, the word eortā signals the participation of girls as well as women in the celebration of Hera’s festival.

§147. And what unifies the roles of girls and women in the course of this celebration is the role of Sappho herself as the speaking persona who leads the choral singing and dancing. The clearest example is Song 17. This song of Sappho, by way of her speaking persona, is presenting itself as a choral event. And, whether or not the girls and the women of Lesbos need to be pictured as performing separately from each other, the figure of Sappho remains the notional leader of the choral singing and dancing performed here by all the women of Lesbos, including the girls. Sappho is speaking for the female choruses of Lesbos, and these choruses are in turn speaking for all of Lesbos.

§148. As I noted already, I have ever since 1990 argued that Sappho is a choral personality.76 Such a personality, we now see, comes to life in the context of Song 17 of Sappho, where the speaker is attending the festival of Hera as celebrated in the precinct of the goddess.

Sappho, Alcaeus, and the theology of Hera’s precinct at Lesbos

§149. Now that we understand more fully the importance of Hera in myths and rituals centering on the precinct of this goddess at Lesbos, I am ready to consider the ‘theology’ of this precinct—as reflected in the poetics of Sappho and Alcaeus considered together. When I say theology here, I mean the system of myths and rituals shared by the overall community that

76 Again I cite Nagy 1990:370, with reference to Calame 1977:367-377 (also 126-127). See now also Lardinois 1996 and the remarks of Calame 2009:5. Also Ferrari 2014:17.
identifies with the precinct of Hera. And, when I say community, I mean what was meant in the songs attributed to Sappho and Alcaeus, where the precinct of Hera was notionally a common ground for the entire island of Lesbos.

§150. To anticipate the kinds of misunderstandings that I expect to encounter, I must add here two qualifications, which are both formulated from a diachronic perspective:

1) When I say that the theology of the precinct of Hera at Lesbos is a system, I am keeping in mind the fact that any system changes over time, and that any changes in a system are conditioned by historical vicissitudes. {484|485}

2) Just as the theology of Hera’s precinct is a system, so also the poetics that generated the songs of Sappho and Alcaeus is a system. Further, just as the theology changes over time, so also this poetic system changes over time, and the changes are likewise conditioned by historical vicissitudes.

§151. These two diachronic considerations affect what I have to say both about the theology of the precinct of Hera and about the poetics of Sappho and Alcaeus. My thesis is this: the theology and the poetics originally coexisted with each other, as systems, but they eventually had a parting of the ways.

§152. Originally, the theology of Hera’s precinct, which Louis Robert succeeded in identifying as the sacred space called Messon, not only coexisted with the poetics of Sappho and Alcaeus: more than that, the theology originally interacted with the poetics.

§153. When I say ‘originally’ here, I have in mind once again the conventional dating for the era of Sappho and Alcaeus, which as we already saw can be placed around 600 BCE. As time went by, however, the system of poetics that we see at work in the songs of Sappho and Alcaeus broke free of its interactive theology as it started spreading, by way of poetic reception
and transmission, beyond the historical context of Messon in Lesbos. By the time of Herodotus, who flourished in the second half of the fifth century BCE, the reception and the transmission of songs attributed to Sappho and Alcaeus had already long ago extended to such diverse places as (1) the city of Athens, (2) the island state of Samos, and (3) the interpolitical Greek emporium of Naucratis in Egypt. In the venues of such diverse places, the poetic personae of Sappho and Alcaeus could break free of their original venue just as readily as the poetics of their songs broke free. I was saying earlier, for example, that Sappho’s original songs, as performed chorally in the context of Hera’s precinct at Lesbos, were later reperformed monodically at private symposia and at public concerts in Athens, and, as a result, Sappho could now be re-imagined as a sympotic or a concertizing performer of monody.

§154. After the theology and the poetics had a parting of the ways, the theology could continue to maintain its existence—now a separate existence—in the myths and rituals of

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77 On the Athenian transmission of the songs of Sappho and Alcaeus, see Nagy 2007b:218–219, 226–227; also Nagy 2010.

78 On the Samian transmission of the songs of Sappho and Alcaeus, see Nagy 2007b:227–232.

79 In another project, I plan to focus on the reception of the songs of Sappho at Naucratis, especially by way of Samos and Lesbos. On the roles of Samos and Lesbos (Mytilene) in the Hellēnion at Naucratis, the primary source is Herodotus 2.178.2 (there is a useful commentary by Lloyd 2007:373 on the importance of the Samian presence at Naucratis). In my project, I argue that the reportage of Herodotus (2.134–135) on the songs of Sappho about her brother’s affair with the courtesan Dorikha shows an awareness of such a reception. Also aware was Hecataeus, who is I am sure the missing link in what Herodotus says about the courtesan Rhodopis. The lore about this courtesan is evidently linked to Naucratis, and this lore is relevant to the reception of Sappho at Naucratis. Such a reception needs to be viewed in the context of ongoing traditions in the sympotic performance of Sappho’s songs. In this regard, I think that the conflation of lore about Rhodopis and Dorikha can be traced back to Hecataeus. Most relevant here is a reference we read in Athenaeus 9.410e to the remarks of Hecataeus (FGrH 1 F 358) about Sappho fr. 101.

80 More in Nagy 2007b; also Bierl 2010.
Lesbos during the centuries that superseded the original era of coexistence between the theology and the poetics. On the basis of ongoing research concerning the myths and rituals connected with the precinct of Hera at Lesbos, we can see that the theology of this precinct lived on, and dynamically so, well into the Hellenistic era of Lesbos. I have already mentioned, as an example from the early Hellenistic era, a decree recorded in an inscription from Mytilene, SEG 36.750, dated to the 330s BCE, where we see that the goddess Hera was predominant among the gods of the city.

§155. But such a separate existence of the theology as it continued to live on in Lesbos was not symmetrical with the separate existence of the songs of Sappho and Alcaeus, which had already found a new life outside of Lesbos. The theology of Lesbos could of course have no control any more over the songs of Sappho and Alcaeus. But such a loss of control would not stop the songs from pointing back to the old theology—pointing back even to the old landmarks of the precinct of Hera as renewed markers for the here and now of an ongoing poetic imagination.

§156. If we consider Alcaeus, a perfect example of such pointing back is his Song 130b, where the speaking persona actually visualizes the choral performance of the women of Lesbos at the festival of Hera in the precinct of the goddess, highlighting their ritual cry of ululation, ololūgā (line 20).

§157. As I suggested in my essay ‘Did Sappho and Alcaeus ever meet?’, the visualization of such a choral event in Song 130b of Alcaeus is voiced by a speaking persona that is not only choral but also comastic, and such a comastic voice is connected with the worship of Dionysus.\(^81\) Here I return to the fact that Dionysus, along with Zeus, shares in the occupancy of Hera’s

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\(^81\) Nagy 2007b:215, with reference to a most helpful consultation with Anton Bierl (per litteras 2006.08.22), some of whose relevant observations I quote there.
precinct at Lesbos, as we see from the explicit wording of Song 129 of Alcaeus (lines 1–9). Such a theological coexistence of Dionysus and Hera at the precinct of Hera corresponds, I argue, to the performative coexistence of comastic and choral voices as represented by Alcaeus and Sappho respectively. In the case of Song 130b of Alcaeus, for example, the voice of Alcaeus, speaking to his comrades in comastic performance, can simultaneously speak about a choral performance of local women in the context of one and the same festival that is being celebrated in one and the same precinct. Thus the context of comastic performance, which is sacred primarily to Dionysus, can be syncretistic with the context of choral performance, which is sacred primarily to Hera. And such performative syncretism is made possible by the theological syncretism of the precinct in which the performances take place.

§158. In terms of such theological syncretism, I am now ready to argue that the poetic language of Sappho and Alcaeus, as spoken in the precinct of Hera, integrates the idea of an omnipresent Hera with the idea of a selectively present Dionysus in moments of heightened emotion. In the case of Song 130b of Alcaeus, for example, the comastic voice signals not only the presence of Dionysus but also the omnipresence of Hera—by way of pointing to the choral performance of the local women of Lesbos in the precinct of the goddess. And the speaking persona of Alcaeus in Song 130b is visualizing such a choral performance in a context where he, addressing his comrades in his own comastic voice, expresses his own highly emotional state of mind as a way of acknowledging most dramatically the presence of the god Dionysus.  

82 As I argued in Nagy 1993:223–225 (also Nagy 2009:237–238), the emotional self-dramatization of Alcaeus in Song 130b—as also in Song 129—is a function of his status as a cult hero who is imagined as speaking from the dead to his former comrades about future generations of women who are singing and dancing in choral performance to celebrate the goddess Hera in her precinct. Elsewhere too in archaic Greek poetry, as in Theognis 1209–1210, we see comparable situations where an alienated poet is imagined as speaking from the dead: see Nagy 1996:212–213, with references to parallel situations in Celtic traditions.
§159. The presence of Dionysus comes alive not only in comastic performance. The god can cross over into choral performance, as when the persona of Sappho in Song 1 speaks of her erotic passion as a kind of maenadic possession, describing her own thûmos ‘heart’ as mainolēs ‘frenzied’ (18: μαινόλαι θόμωι). We can appreciate the heightened emotional effect in this context when we consider the fact that this word mainolēs ‘frenzied’ was a ritual epithet of Dionysus (Cornutus On the nature of the gods 60 ed. Lang, etc.).

The power of mimesis in the songs of Sappho and Alcaeus

§160. The presence of such a Dionysiac theme in a song of Sappho shows that choral songmaking can actually make a mimesis of themes that belong to comastic songmaking. I am using the modern word mimesis here in the ancient sense of the Greek word mîmēsis, which simultaneously conveyed the primary idea of a dramatic ‘re-enactment’ as well as the secondary idea of a mechanical ‘imitation’. Relevant to these two meanings of mîmēsis is what I argued in an essay on the mimetic power of the chorus in general, as indicated by use of the verb mimeîsthai ‘make mimesis’ in the Homeric Hymn to Apollo (163) with reference to a chorus of Delian Maidens, who figure as the local Muses of Delos, sacred island of Apollo.

§161. Conversely, as I have argued at length in ‘Did Sappho and Alcaeus ever meet?’, the comastic songs of Alcaeus can make a mimesis of themes that belong to the choral songs of Sappho. And such a pattern of mimesis only intensifies in a later era when the choral and the

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83 Nagy 2007b:256–257.

84 Nagy 2013. See also Peponi 2009.

85 Nagy 2007b. At this point in my argumentation, I propose to correct a misunderstanding that might have been created, unintentionally, in the article of Caciagli 2010:228 (n. 6) and 248 (n. 75): I need to put on record that I did not argue, in Nagy 2007b, that Sappho and Alcaeus personally ‘met’ at Messon in Lesbos. Such a ‘meeting’ is made possible, I argued, in the context of the reception that we can trace diachronically for the songs of Sappho and Alcaeus.
comastic songs of Sappho and Alcaeus respectively are transformed into monodic songs performed at private symposia and at public concerts. So, it should come as no surprise that we can find examples of monodic mimesis when we trace the reception of Sappho and Alcaeus forward in time, into the classical era of songmaking in fifth-century Athens.\textsuperscript{86}

§162. In the context of Athenian reception, I must add, the figures of Sappho and Alcaeus can now even ‘meet’ each other at symposia and at concerts, as we see when we consider a suggestively maenadic picture of the two of them interacting with each other in a simultaneously sympotic and concertizing duet performance: this picture of the pair graces one side of a red-figure vase of Athenian provenance, dating from around 480–470 BCE, while the other side features a symmetrical pairing of Dionysus and a maenad.\textsuperscript{87}\{488|489\}

A salient example of choral mimesis in a song of Sappho

§163. Moving backward in time, I now return to the original reception of Sappho and Alcaeus, which needs to be viewed in the context of Hera’s precinct at Lesbos. In this context, as I have argued, the speaking voice of Sappho maintains a choral personality that is still actively engaged in the overall myths and rituals connected with the precinct. As I prepare to bring my essay to a close, I highlight one particular example where this choral personality asserts itself in a most salient way. The example comes from the Brothers Song of Sappho, where her speaking voice says that she needs to be sent off to pray to \textit{bāsileā Hēra} ‘Queen Hera’ (line 10 [6]: \textit{βαϲί̣λ̣η αν Hēra}). As we have already seen, it is in the precinct of Hera that Sappho will pray for the safe return of her brother Kharaxos from his sea voyage. Even as she prays, as we have also seen, she is wishing that the brother is sailing his way back home (lines 11–12 [7–

\textsuperscript{86} Again, Nagy 2007b. See also Nagy 2009|2010:238 and Bierl 2010.

\textsuperscript{87} Munich, Antikensammlungen no. 2416; ARV\textsuperscript{2} 385 [228]; commentary in Nagy 2007b:233–237. On the iconography, see also Yatromanolakis 2007:73–81.
In this personal moment, then, Sappho reveals her sisterly affection for her brother, despite all the frustrations. And such a self-revelation can be seen as a masterpiece of mimesis, where a choral voice re-enacts a personal experience.

§164. But the experience of Sappho here in the Brothers Song is not only personal. It is also public. The whole song is staged as a choral performance, which is public, and the speaker will be speaking as a choral personality in the precinct of Hera, which is a public place that is notionally common to all the people of Lesbos. So the personal dimension of Sappho as a caring sister who retains her affection for her brother must be viewed together with her public dimension as a choral personality who speaks for the entire community in the sacred precinct of the goddess Hera. Both the personal and the public dimensions of Sappho are re-enacted in the mimesis of choral performance.

§165. In brief, then, the emotions of Sappho as a sister in the Brothers Song are not only personal but also public, since her personal life is channeled by the poetics of choral performance, which is public. This is what I had meant when I chose the wording *a poetics of sisterly affect* in the title of my essay.

**The name of Sappho**

§166. The poetics of sisterly affect are so deeply rooted in the songs of Sappho that even her identity as a choral personality is shaped by such poetics. I say this because the name of Sappho seems to be a function of her poetic role as a sister. On the basis of linguistic evidence concerning the form *Sapphô*, I propose that her name is derived from a word that actually means ‘sister’. And, in line with my argument about the poetics of sisterly affect in the songs of
Sappho, I propose further that this word for ‘sister’ is a term of affection, a baby word that derives from affectionate baby talk.

§167. I start by considering a pattern of alternation, attested in Greek epigraphical texts stemming from the Roman era, in the formation of names given to women. My point of reference is the name Sappho, which I consider here in contexts where the naming apparently has nothing to do with the famous Sappho. For example, we find a name like Aurēlia Sapphō (Αὐρηλία Σαπφώ) coexisting with names like Aurēlia Apphion (Αὐρηλία Ἀπφίον) and Aurēlia Apphiā (Αὐρηλία Ἀφία). Such coexistence is most suggestive. As we know from the Greek lexicographical tradition, the noun apphion (ἀπφίον) is a neuter diminutive variant of the onomatopoetic form appha (ἄπφα), which means ‘sister’. Clearly, both appha (ἄπφα) and apphion (ἀπφίον) are onomatopoetic baby words, meaning something like ‘little girl’. Another derivative of appha (ἄπφα) is apphiā (ἄφια), which can be explained as a feminine adjective. So, we can see that the names Apphion (Ἀπφίον) and Apphiā (Ἀφία) are based on these baby

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88 I use the expression baby word as a parallel to the expression Lallwort as used by Zuntz 1951, who considers and then rejects the possibility that Sapphō is a Lallname. Although there is no proof, he thinks that this name Sapphō originated from some non-Greek language of Asia Minor (this theory is noted by Caciagli 2011:271), and that this particular language had an initial s- (as in Sapphō) that was not pronounced the same way as was Greek initial c-. I am grateful to Timothy Barnes for sharing with me his impressions of this learned article by Zuntz. For more on word play in Sappho, see Nagy 2009b:69–72.

89 Besides the examples that I am about to show, there are also other such attestations, e.g. SEG 39:840.

90 E.g., IG XII,4 (Paton-Hicks 141); also I.Leukopetra 45, 47, 83.

91 E.g., IG XII,4 (Inscr. di Cos [Fun.] EF 308); also TAM 199.

92 E.g., Ephesos 2221; also SEG 57:1494.

93 Eustathius, Iliad commentary 3.591.7 (ἲπφαν τὴν ἀδελφῆν); 2.111.14 (οἶον ἰπφαν τὴν ἀδελφῆν Ἀττικῶς μόνη ἢ ἀδελφὴ εἰποῖ ἂν); see also Photius, Lexicon α 2759 (ἵπφα: ἀδελφῆς καὶ ἀδελφοῦ ὑποκόρισμα).

94 DELG s.v. ἰπφα.
words *apphion* (ἀπφίον) and *apphiā* (ἀπφία) respectively. And such baby words can apply not only to sisters in particular but also to beloved little girls in general—or even to beloved women. For example, the words *apphion* (ἀπφίον) and *apphiā* (ἀπφία) are both explained by lexicographers as *hupokorismata* ‘terms of endearment’ (ὑποκορίςματα) referring to a ‘young mistress of the household’ (νέας δεσποίνης). Another traditional way of defining the diminutive *apphion* (ἀπφίον) is to say that it is a *hupokorisma* ‘term of endearment’ (ὑποκόριςμα) for a girl or woman who is an object of sexual desire (ἐρωμένης). Lastly, the word *apphō* (ἀπφώ), morphologically symmetrical with the name *Sapphō* (Ϲαπφώ), is explained by lexicographers as another word for ‘sister’.

§168. What is still missing in this set of linguistic evidence is a common noun shaped *sapphō* (*ϲαπφώ), which would mean ‘sister’. (When I say common noun here, I mean a noun that is not a name, as opposed to a proper noun, which is a name.) In the case of a proper noun like *Apphion* (Ἀπφίον), however, we know for sure that it is based on the neuter diminutive common noun *apphion* (ἀπφίον), meaning ‘little sister’ or ‘little girl’. So, I am ready to argue that the proper noun *Sapphō* (Ϲαπφώ) was likewise based on a similar common noun *sapphō* (*ϲαπφώ), so far unattested, which would be a variant of the attested common noun *apphō* (ἀπφώ), meaning ‘sister’.

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95 Pollux, *Onomasticon* 3.74.3

96 Eustathius, *Iliad commentary* 2.111.17 and 3.591.7.

97 Didymus Caecus (MPG vol. 39, p. 656, line 5).
§169. But the question remains: why is the form *Sapphō (Ϲαπφώ) attested only as a proper noun? My answer is that the form *Sapphō (Ϲαπφώ) survived phonologically as a proper noun only because it was a functional variant of another proper noun, *Psapphō (Ψαπφώ), which is attested as a variant form of *Sapphō (Ϲαπφώ) in the textual tradition of Sappho. If *Sapphō (Ϲαπφώ) had not been a functional variant of *Psapphō (Ψαπφώ), it would have become *Apphō (*ѦΑπφώ) at an early stage in the history of the Greek language when word-initial *s- (as in *s-apphō) became *h- (as in *h-apphō), which in turn became simply a glottal stop (as in -apphō) by way of ‘psilosis’. I propose, then, that the form *Psapphō was in fact a playfully affectionate phonetic variant of the form *Sapphō. The variation of *Psapphō / *Sapphō (Ψαπφώ / Ψαπφώ) is comparable to such variations as psitta / sitta (ψίττα / κίττα), which are onomatopoetic calls.98 We {491|492} read in the Onomasticon of Pollux (9.122.3, 9.127.1) that psitta Maliades psitta Rhoiai psitta Meliai (ψίττα Μαλιάδε ψίττα Ῥοιαί ψίττα Μελίαι) is a game played by parthenoi ‘girls’ as distinct from gunaikes ‘women’. According to Pollux, the Maliades and Rhoiai and Meliai are nymphs, and girls call out their names, punctuated by the intervening calls of psitta, in footraces that they run, urging each other to speed ahead. Also, in Theocritus 8.69, a herdsman calls out sitta (κίττα) to his herd, and the scholia (5.3b) explain that sitta (κίττα) as well as a variant form psitta (ψίττα) is a sound made by a herdsman when he calls out to his herd.

§170. The point is, just as the variant form psitta (ψίττα) prevents, by analogy, a phonological change in the variant form sitta (κίττα), which would otherwise be expected to

98 This onomatopoetic alternation psitta / sitta (ψίττα / κίττα) is mentioned by Zuntz (1951:17 n. 31), who compares the modern alternation psst! / sst!—but who in the end rejects the relevance of such examples to the alternation Psapphō / Sapphō. Olga Levaniouk has found another example of such onomatopoetic alternation: in the dictionary of Hesychius under the entry sellizesthai, we see an equation being made with psellizesthai (σελλίζεσθαι · ψελλίζεσθαι). The attested meanings of both these words show clearly that they derive from the onomatopoetics of baby talk. For example, Aristotle explicitly uses the word psellizesthai in referring to childish speech patterns (Historia animalium 536b8).
change from sitta (sylvania) to *hitta (*ίττα) to *itta (*ίττα), so also the variant Psappho (Ψαπφώ) prevents, again by analogy, a phonological change in the variant Sappho (Σαπψώ), which would otherwise be expected to change from *sapho (*σαπψώ) to *hapho (*άπψώ) to apho (άπψώ) in the case of common nouns—but not in the case of hypocoristic names where the alternation of Psappho / Sappho (Ψαπφώ / Σαπψώ) is maintained. 99

§171. I conclude, then, that the name Sappho, like the names Apphion and Apphias, was originally an onomatopoetic baby word derived from terms of endearment addressed to a sister. For an interesting parallel in English usage, as attested in some regions of the United States, I point to such women’s names as Sissy, even Sister.

§172. In the case of ordinary women who happened to be called Sappho in the Greek-speaking world, there would be of course nothing extraordinary about their name if it really meant ‘Sister’. Such a meaning becomes extraordinary, however, when we find it embedded in the poetics of a choral personality who, once upon a time, called herself by the name of Sappho. Hers was an extraordinary persona who could speak to all the people of Lesbos, unveiling her sisterly affections just as memorably as she veiled her womanly desires.

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99 In the case of the form Psappho (Ψαπψώ), which reflects the spelling that survives in the textual tradition of Sappho, we might have expected some kind of formulaic alternation with the form Sappho (Σαπψώ). Within the system of Aeolic songmaking, the placement of Sappho might have been needed after short word-final vowels in order to avoid ‘making position’, whereas Psappho could be used wherever there was no need to avoid ‘making position’. 
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