

Getting Sweaty with Sappho: New College MS 298

Thus Sappho's most famous poem.¹ Its major source is the treatise *On the Sublime*, attributed in its manuscript to Cassius Longinus, though generally not believed today to be by him; its date is also

Translations are mine.

unclear, with the most recent edition suggesting a range that spans from the Augustan period to the early second century.² This treatise, whose sole [manuscript](#) is [Parisinus gr. 2036](#) (where the text appears at ff. [184r](#)–[184v](#)), quotes the first four stanzas and the beginning of the fifth. Here is the citation context:³

φέρε νῦν, εἴ τι καὶ ἔτερον ἔχοιμεν ὑψηλοὺς ποιεῖν τοὺς λόγους δυνάμενον, ἐπικεψώμεθα. οὐκοῦν ἐπειδὴ πᾶς τοῖς πράγμασι φύει συνεδρεύει τινὰ μόρια ταῖς ὕλαις συνυπάρχοντα, ἐξ ἀνάγκης γένοιτ’ ἀνήμην ὑψους αἴτιον τὸ τῶν ἐμφερομένων ἐκλέγειν ἀεὶ τὰ καιριώτατα καὶ ταῦτα τῇ πρὸς ἄλληλα ἐπισυνθέσει καθάπερ ἐν τι σῶμα ποιεῖν δύνασθαι. ὃ μὲν γὰρ τῇ ἐκλογῇ τὸν ἀκροατὴν τῶν λημμάτων, ὃ δὲ τῇ πυκνώσει τῶν ἐκλελεγμένων προσάγεται. οἶον ἡ Σαπφώ τὰ συμβαίνοντα ταῖς ἐρωτικαῖς μανίαις παθήματα ἐκ τῶν παρεπομένων καὶ ἐκ τῆς ἀληθείας αὐτῆς ἐκάστοτε λαμβάνει. ποῦ δὲ τὴν ἀρετὴν ἀποδείκνυται; ὅτε τὰ ἄκρα αὐτῶν καὶ ὑπερτεταμένα δεινή καὶ ἐκλέξαι καὶ εἰς ἄλληλα συνδῆσαι.

<citation of most of the poem>

οὐ θαυμάζεις ὡς ὑπὸ τὸ αὐτὸ τὴν ψυχήν, τὸ σῶμα, τὰς ἀκοάς, τὴν γλῶσσαν, τὰς ὅψεις, τὴν χρόαν, πάνθ’ ὡς ἀλλότρια διοιχόμενα ἐπιζητεῖ, καὶ καθ’ ὑπεναντιώσεις ἄμα ψύχεται καίεται, ἀλογιστεῖ φρονεῖ τὴν γὰρ τὸ φοβεῖται τὴν παρ’ ὄλιγον τέθνηκεν ἵνα μὴ ἐν τι περὶ αὐτὴν πάθος φαίνηται, παθῶν δὲ σύνοδος; πάντα μὲν τοιαῦτα γίνεται περὶ τοὺς ἐρῶντας, ἡ λῆψις δ’ ὡς ἔφην τῶν ἄκρων καὶ ἡ εἰς ταῦτα συναίρεσις ἀπειργάσατο τὴν ἔξοχήν. ὅνπερ οἶμαι καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν χειμῶνων τρόπον ὁ ποιητὴς ἐκλαμβάνει τῶν παρακολουθούντων τὰ χαλεπώτατα . . .

Come now, let us consider if we have anything else that makes words sublime. So since with all matters are naturally associated certain elements that are inherent in the material, of necessity it would follow that for us a cause of sublimity is the continual selection of the most appropriate of the constituent features, and the ability to make these, through combining them with each other, into as it were a single body; since the one attracts the listener through the selection of themes, the other by the density of those selected. For example, Sappho each time takes up the emotions which are attendant on erotic passions from the symptoms which accompany them and from the very truth. And where does she show her excellence? When she is formidable in both choosing the most elevated and intense of those symptoms, and in combining them with each other:

<citation of most of the poem>

¹ It is printed as it will appear in P. J. Finglass (ed., comm., transl.), *Sappho and Alcaeus: The Corpus of Lesbian Poetry*, Cambridge Classical Texts and Commentaries (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming), except in one way, for which see below. (This note as a whole relies on and overlaps with arguments made in that edition, where the poem has the identifier SF 1.86.) ⊗ indicates poem-beginning, ~ a short syllable, — a long syllable, × an anceps syllable which can be long or short; text in 15/16 supplied by a modern editor appears after a bracket, [, and in 17 the obelus, †, indicates the extent of a phrase deemed impossibly corrupt. For the decision to print the sapphic stanza across three lines (matching its three verses) rather than four see id. ‘How many lines in a Sapphic stanza?’, *Manuscript and Text Cultures*, forthcoming.

² Stephen Halliwell, [Pseudo-Longinus: On the Sublime](#) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), pp. xx–xix.

³ [Longinus], [On the Sublime](#) 10.1–3, in D. A. Russell, [Longinus’ On the Sublime](#) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), pp. 14.9–15.19; and Halliwell, pp. 18.13–20.13.

Are you not amazed that, at the same time, she seeks out the soul, the body, the ears, the tongue, the eyes, the skin, everything as if they had left her and were foreign to her, and, by means of oppositions, at the same time she is cold, she is warm, she cannot reason, she reasons, †for or† she fears †or† she almost dies so that it does not appear to be one suffering which envelops her, but a conference of sufferings? All such things are what happen to people in love, but it is the taking of the extreme cases, as I have said, and their combination into one which achieves pre-eminence. In this manner, I think, in the case of storms too, the poet takes the most difficult of the circumstances . . .

The poem was also translated by Catullus and paraphrased by Plutarch (three times) and by Aelius Aristides; it is also cited in the grammatical/lexicographical tradition, and frequently alluded to by ancient authors. *On the Sublime* was not well known at Byzantium, nor is there evidence of engagement with our poem in Byzantine literature. But once *On the Sublime* was printed in 1554, our poem quickly made its way into collections of Sappho's poetry, whence it soon became the most translated of all her surviving fragments.⁴ With its memorable description of the effects of passion, it is not hard to see why.

To avoid prejudging the point under discussion in this note, I have omitted the text and translation at the start of 13. The text there has two sources: first, 'Longinus' himself, whose manuscript offers ἔκαδε μ' ἰδρῶς ψυχρὸς κ' ακχέτατος. Second, the *Homeric Parsings* (Ὀμήρου Ἐπιμερισμοί = *Epimerismi Homerici*), a Byzantine work offering discussion of words and phrases in the *Iliad*, the relevant part of which is transmitted in New College MS 298, a composite manuscript whose relevant section dates to the first half of the 14th century.⁵ The relevant passage, on fol. 195r, reads as follows:⁶

ἰδρώς· τοῦτο παρ' Αἰολεῦσι θηλυκῶς λέγεται. ἀναδέχεται κλίσιν ἀκόλουθον θηλυκῷ γένει·
ἀδε μ' ἰδρῶς κακὸς χέεται.
ὅμοιον τῶι ἡώς·

Hidrōs [sweat]. This is feminine among the Aeolians. It takes a declension that is akin to the feminine gender:

and bad sweat pours from[?] me.

In the same way as *ēōs* ('dawn').

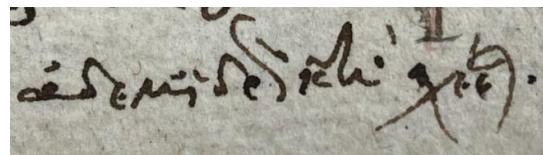
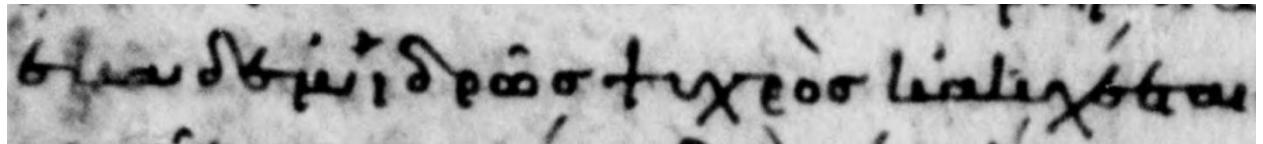
In a note on Homer's use of the noun *ἰδρῶς* 'sweat', the commentator says that it is feminine in Aeolian Greek; as often in grammatical texts, 'Aeolian' is used as a synonym for 'Lesbian' (one of the Aeolian dialects, along with Thessalian and Boeotian), and so the point is illustrated by a citation from Sappho, who was, along with her contemporary Alcaeus, one of the two prominent authors who used that dialect.

Thus we have two different texts for the beginning of line 13: from 'Longinus' via the Paris manuscript, from the *Parsings* via the New College manuscript. Here are the relevant images, followed by transcriptions (the Parisinus first each time),

⁴ For these editions see P. J. Finglass, '[Editions of Sappho since the Renaissance](#)', in [The Cambridge Companion to Sappho](#), ed. P. J. Finglass and Adrian Kelly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), pp. 247–59. For the translations, Stuart Gillespie, '[Early Modern Sapphos in France and England](#)', in *ibid.*, pp. 332–42.

⁵ For this manuscript see Andrew R. Dyck, [Epimerismi Homerici](#), 2 vols., Sammlung griechischer und lateinischer Grammatiker, 5 (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 1983–95), I, 18–20; Alberto Ravani, '[New College MS 298: A Story of the Manuscript](#)', *New College Notes* 16 (2021) no. 2; Mateu Portells Watson, '[A Tale of Two Iliads: Oxford New College 298 and Trinity College Dublin 922](#)', *New College Notes* 20 (2023) no. 1.

⁶ *Epimerismi Homerici* 14 (II pp. 377.95–3 [sic] Dyck). The text of the citation comes from my own consultation of the New College manuscript; Dyck slightly mis-states the evidence, as does Luca Benelli, [Sapphostudien zu ausgewählten Fragmenten](#), 2 vols. *Papyrologica Coloniensia*, 39 (Leiden and Boston: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2017), I, 201, n. 521.



έκαδε μ' ιδρως ψυχρὸς κ' ακχέεται
ά δε μ' ιδρως κακὸς χέεται.

In terms of metre, these two texts give:

— — — — — × — — — — —
— — — — — — — — — — —

whereas what we need is:

— — — — × — — — — —

Already, then, we can see that the New College manuscript hews closer to what is required.

As regards sense, the context shows that the phrase under discussion is a self-contained idea which makes up a single element in a list of symptoms. We expect a connecting particle, almost certainly δέ ‘and’, since all the surrounding symptoms are introduced with that particle; and that particle’s standard place is in second position. (The repeated ‘ands’, which are as unnatural in English as they are natural in Greek, are omitted in the translation above.) Both our texts have δέ, the Paris manuscript in third place, the New College manuscript in the expected second. We can already see that the opening of the Parisinus has gone awry, since it offers two short syllables where we need one long; we may therefore confidently place δέ in second position.

When we combine that with the text which both manuscripts have in common (correcting an accent in the process), we reach the following:

— δέ μ' ιδρως — (-)χέεται

and sweat . . . pours . . . me

So two syllables remains. For the first, we have the meaningless έκα in the Paris manuscript, ἀ ‘the’ in the New College manuscript. The latter reading would satisfy syntax and metre. The feminine article is also in keeping with the citation context in the *Homeric Parsings*, which, as we have seen, quote our passage to show that this noun is feminine in Aeolian. The reading of the New College manuscript was actually proposed as a conjecture by Bergk when he knew only the Parisinus.⁷ Two objections call this solution into question, however. First, it is hard to see why a simple ἀ δέ have acquired an additional έκ. Second, of all the nouns which feature in Sappho’s list of symptoms, not one takes an article. This is no surprise: there is no reason why any should, since none has

⁷ Theodor Bergk, ‘[De scolio Pindari in Xenophontem Corinthium dissertatio et conjecturae in poetas Graecos](#)’, *Acta Societatis Graecae* 1 (1836), 187–208, at p. 202 (as ἀ δέ).

been mentioned before, or counts as something famous in its own right, or qualifies under any other of the headings which would justify that part of speech.

A better approach is to write κάδ ‘down’.⁸ This would normally be κατά, but Lesbian Greek can omit the final vowel of prepositions by the process called ‘apocope’ (Greek ἀποκοπή, ‘cutting off’); and since apocope is not found in the most familiar dialects, it often confuses scribes. The scribe of the Paris manuscript, or an earlier source, turned κάδ δέ into ἐκαδε, perhaps trying to fashion a verb; the source of the New College manuscript turned it into ἀ δέ, changing the strange κάδ into something that seemed to make sense. The latter error must have taken place before Sappho’s text was used to illustrate the grammatical point made in the *Homeric Parsings*, since without the article, the Byzantine scholar would have had no reason to think that Ἰδρως there was feminine.

At the end our sources read as follows:

Paris manuscript:	Ψυχρὸς κ' ακχέεται	— — ˘ ˘ —
New College manuscript:	κακός χέεται	˘ — ˘ ˘ —
Text as established above:	— (-)χέεται	— ˘ ˘ —

As an anonymous scribe/scholar, with access only to the text of ‘Longinus’, saw in the 15th century, Sappho wrote κακχέεται, a part of the verb καταχέομαι ‘pour down’, predicated of the sweat.⁹ Here too apocope of a preposition, this time appearing as a verbal prefix rather than on its own, has confused scribes. The Parisinus virtually has this text, with only an erroneous elision mark. The New College manuscript has misinterpreted κακ as κακός ‘bad’, a common word; since word-endings are often abbreviated in Greek manuscripts, this would have been an easy mistake, and in fact our manuscript has a particular problem with such abbreviations.¹⁰

Thus we are left with κάδ δέ μ' Ἰδρως κακχέεται ‘and sweat pours down over me’. Comparable sentiments are found in Sappho’s contemporary Alcaeus, referring to perfume rather than sweat: κάδ δὲ χευάτω μύρον ἄδυ κάτ τώ στήθεος ἄμμι ‘and may (someone) pour sweet perfume down on our chest’ and Κάτ τὰς πόλλα παθοίσας κεφάλας κάκχε μοι μύρον | καὶ κάτ τώ πολίω στήθεος ‘Pour perfume over my much-suffering head, | and over my grey chest’.¹¹ The latter, like our line, repeats κατά: once as an independent preposition, once as a preverb, both times in apocope.

One point remains. The Parisinus has ψυχρός ‘cold’, so if we adopt the text just advocated, we must presume that this is an erroneous addition.¹² Recent scholars, however, have been most reluctant to do this. They point to how ‘Longinus’ uses ψύχεται ‘she is cold’ in his account of the poem immediately after his citation. According to one recent editor, ψύχεται shows that ψῦχρος (thus, with Lesbian accentuation) was ‘almost certainly’ in that author’s source; another writes that ψύχεται ‘is . . . much more likely than not to imply that [ψῦχρος] was in the text he used’.¹³ Taking

⁸ Thus Franciscus Portus, in *Cantabrigiensis MS Kl.6.34*, his autograph, fol. iir and ap. Marc-Antoine Muret, *Catullus et in eum commentarius* (Venice: Paulus Manutius, 1554), p. 57v. Portus writes καδ; F. W. Schneidewin, *Delectus poesis Graecorum elegiacae, iambicae, melicae. II et III. Poetae iambici et melici* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1839), p. 470, adds the accent.

⁹ Thus *Marcianus gr. Z. 522*, ff. 214v–215r. The manuscript, owned and signed by Cardinal Bessarion, probably dates to 1468; see W. L. Jansen, *Appropriating Peri Hypsous: Interpretations and Creative Adaptations of Longinus’ Treatise On the Sublime in Early Modern Dutch Scholarship* (Doctoral thesis, University of Leiden, 2019), pp. 29–30.

¹⁰ Dyck, 1, 20.

¹¹ AF X.44.3/4, AF C.17.1–2 in my edition.

¹² Thus L. Spengel, *review* of Christianus Fridericus Neue, *Sapphonis Mytilenaeae fragmenta* (Berlin, 1827), *Kritische Bibliothek für das Schul- und Unterrichtswesen* NF 1 (1828), 554–8, at p. 557.

¹³ Felix Budelmann, *Greek Lyric. A Selection* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), p. 136; G. O. Hutchinson, *Greek Lyric Poetry: A Commentary on Selected Larger Pieces* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 174. So also Camillo

account of the context of a quotation is indeed important in the textual criticism of fragments;¹⁴ but the full context must be pondered, not just a word in isolation. *ψύχεται* in *On the Sublime* appears among a series of polar oppositions used by the author to express the extremity of the states evoked by the poem. Yet of the other words used in these oppositions, *καίεται* ‘she is warm’, *ἀλογιστεῖ* ‘she cannot reason’, and *φρονεῖ* ‘she reasons’, none corresponds to a stem used in Sappho’s list of symptoms. In other words, ‘Longinus’ here is paraphrasing without repeating the vocabulary of the poem. Furthermore, *ψύχεται* *καίεται* is a well attested opposition, one that required no inspiration from Sappho’s poem to occur to the treatise’s author.¹⁵ Finally, the phrase ‘cold sweat’ is as clichéd in Greek as it is in English, rendering it an easy insertion by a thoughtless scribe.¹⁶ The notion that Sappho, one of the supreme poets of Antiquity, had recourse to such a humdrum expression should provoke in us sensations every bit as painful as the ones so memorably described by her poem’s narrator. Thankfully, the evidence provided by the New College manuscript, a superior source here overall than the Parisinus, allows us to discern what Sappho actually wrote.

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Neri and Francesco Citti, ‘Sudore freddo e tremore (Sapph. fr. 31,13 V. ~ Sen. *Tro.* 487s. ~ Apul. *Met.* I 13, II 30, X 10)’, *Eikasmos* 16 (2005), 51–62, at pp. 53, 58; cf. Camillo Neri, *Saffo, Testimonianze e frammenti: Introduzione, testo critico, traduzione e commento*, Texte und Kommentare ,68 (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2021), p. 146.

¹⁴ See Virginia Mastellari, ed., *Fragments in Context—Frammenti e dintorni*, *Studia Comica*, 11 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2021).

¹⁵ Cf. Arist. *Probl.* 966a35 διὰ τί ψυχθέντες ἀπὸ τῆς αὐτῆς θερμασίας καιόμεθα μᾶλλον καὶ ἀλγοῦμεν; ‘why is it that after being cooled, we are rather burned from the same heat and feel pain?’; Philo, *Allegory of the Laws* 1.5 Ἰδιον τὸ καίειν πυρὸς καὶ χιόνος τὸ ψύχειν ‘burning is the property of fire, and of snow, cooling’, and often in Galen.

¹⁶ For parallels see G. Aurelio Privitera, ‘*Saffo fr. 31,13 L.-P.*’, *Hermes* 97 (1969), 267–72 and ‘*Ambiguità antitesi analogia nel fr. 31 L.P. di Saffo*’, *Quaderni Urbinati di Cultura Classica* 8 (1969), 37–80 ≈ *La rete di Afrodite: Studi su Saffo*, L’Orizzonte, 1 (Palermo: Aracne, 1974), pp. 85–129; a proximity search in the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*—[<https://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu>](https://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu)—will show how frequent this combination of stems is.