



# Historically Speaking

Volume 2, Number 7 July 2023

## Sappho



### Sidebar piece

Sappho was born sometime in the latter part of seventh century BCE on the island of Lesbos. Little is known about her life but there are some facts that can be gleaned from her poetry and the work of other authors: she was from an aristocratic family, she had three brothers, she was exiled in Sicily due to political tensions in Greece and she also had a beloved daughter named Cleis. Otherwise, not much can be definitively said. Except for something quite surprising: Sappho appears to have engaged in various same-sex romantic relationships, and she wrote about them publicly. It is generally agreed that gave us the term 'lesbian'.

The primary historical figure in my books so far is Sappho. She was a Greek lyric poet who flourished in the 6th century BCE on the island of Lesbos and has been greatly admired since antiquity for the beauty of her writing style. Her sensual poems written from a first-person perspective speak of domestic life, wedding ceremonies, virginity, motherhood and, above all things, love. Sappho gives voice to a whole sphere of society generally ignored by male writers at the time.

Sappho doesn't make the slightest effort to censure herself. Instead, her poetry is all raw and genuine emotion. However, it's the way she pulls these various emotions together in such clear, simple and eloquent prose that's so remarkable.

In a short fragmented poem Sappho discusses her daughter Cleis: I have a beautiful child who is like golden flowers in form, my beloved Cleis, for whom I would not take all of Lydia or lovely ... It's not a lot, but what is remarkable is how this poem showcases Sappho's pride in her daughter. Daughters weren't typically seen as symbols of prosperity and wealth in ancient Greece. Sons were. They were the ones to bring fortune and status to a family. Yet it is clear how much Sappho adores Cleis. She compares her to golden flowers. She also articulates that she would trade nothing, no matter how substantial a prize, in place of her.

In writing of Cleis with such high praise, Sappho speaks as a mother who loves her daughter. But she also does something else. By assigning a value to Cleis, Sappho assigns a value to all women. She advocates for women's worth. She celebrates women's existence.

In a world dominated by male voices, Sappho spoke and gave voice to a silent realm of women. Furthermore, she placed women in an admirable light. She weaves poems about female individuals who are mesmerizing and clever and delightful. Flawed to be sure, but complex and real. This article is gleaned from Blue Riband Weekly.

Ouranian Publishing of Spokane  
304 N. Adams Rd.  
Spokane Valley, WA 99216-2062  
(509) 710-7185



# Historically Speaking

Volume 2, Number 7 July 2023

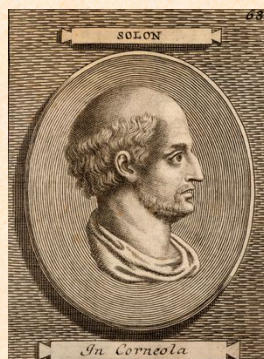
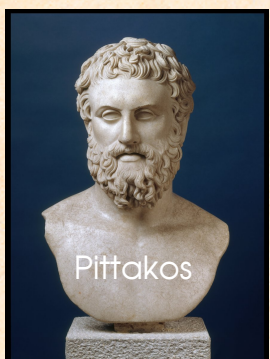
## Two More Historical Figures

**Pittakos** was a native of Mytilini and is mentioned in *SINON OF KIRRA* by name. He became a general who, with his army, was victorious in the battle against the Athenians. As a result of this victory, the people of Mytilini held Pittacus in high esteem and gave him power to govern. After ten years of reign, he resigned his position and the city and constitution were brought into good order.

When the Athenians were about to attack Sigeion, Pittacus challenged their general to a single combat, with the understanding that the result should decide the war, and much bloodshed be thereby avoided. The challenge was accepted, and he killed his enemy with a broad sword. He was then chosen ruler of his city and governed for ten years, during which time he made laws in poetry, one of which was to this effect: "A crime committed by a person when drunk should receive double the punishment that it would merit if the offender were sober." His great motto was this: "Whatever you do, do it well."

Polyaenus in his *Stratagems* write that Pittacus had secretly concealed a net under his shield. He caught Phrynon with the net, dragged him down and killed him. According to Polyaenus, this stratagem of Pittacus gave rise to the use of nets in duels between gladiators.

He lived about the forty-second Olympiad. Having lived more than seventy years, he died in the third year of the fifty-second Olympiad (568 BCE).



**Solon** (c. 630 – c. 560 BC) he is referred to, but not named in my books. He was a constitutional lawmaker and poet. He is remembered particularly for his efforts to legislate against political, economic and moral decline in archaic Athens. His reforms failed in the short term, yet Solon is credited with having laid the foundations for Athenian democracy. His constitutional reform also succeeded in overturning most laws established by Draco.

Modern knowledge of Solon is limited by the fact that his works only survive in fragments and appear to feature interpolations by later authors and by the general paucity of documentary and archaeological evidence covering Athens in the early 6th century BCE.

It is recorded that he wrote poetry for pleasure, as patriotic propaganda, and in defense of his constitutional reform. Ancient authors such as Herodotus, Plutarch and Philo of Alexandria, are the main sources, but they wrote about Solon long after his death. Fourth-century BC orators, such as Aeschines, tended to attribute to Solon all the laws of their own, much later times.

