



Sexuality

Let's return to the earlier question: was Sappho a non-heteronormative woman?

According to some interpretations, Sappho's erotic poems extolling the beauty of the female body are wedding songs, and their lyrical subject is supposed to be the bridegroom, while the author herself is considered to be a kind of teacher preparing girls for marriage.

The above view is as legitimate as possible. However, it seems that the rendering of this kind of eroticism in the poems would have been impossible if Sappho had not felt sexual attraction to women. Certainly, a wealthy woman from an aristocratic family was surrounded by young girls, who were expected to acquire commodiousness and learn everything a future wife was supposed to know. There are accounts that in such situations sexual relations may have taken place between the 'mentor' and the 'pupil.'

So what is the answer to the question of Sappho's sexuality? Well... we don't know. And most likely we will not know. Nevertheless, just as in antiquity, the figure of the poetess from Lesbos has become mythologized and will last in human memory as the 'first lesbian.'



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**EQUAL
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY:
SAPPHO - THE
'FIRST' LESBIAN**





Biography

For someone who had a tremendous influence on literature and superstar status in the ancient world, Sappho of Lesbos remains very mysterious. Only a few facts from her biography are certain. Sappho lived at the turn of the 7th and 6th centuries BC and came from an aristocratic family. At some point in her life she had to leave her native island due to political turmoil. She married and gave birth to at least one daughter named Kleis. And that is all we can say with certainty about the life of the greatest ancient poetess.

We do not know the exact years in which Sappho lived, the names of her parents and husband, as well as whether she had any children other than Kleis. We are not sure about her hometown, the reasons for leaving Lesbos are unknown, nor whether Sappho was allowed to return to her hometown. The question that is most troubling, however, is whether Sappho was a non-heteronormative woman?

Works

Sappho's main source of fame, as well as information about herself are her works. This explains why we know so little about their author herself - only about 700 lines of text have survived to this day, and only one poem, "Hymn to Aphrodite," has been read in its entirety. All other works by Sappho are known only in fragments, which makes their analysis and interpretation difficult.

Surviving accounts say that Sappho was an extremely prolific author. The famous Bibliotheca Alexandrina preserved 9 scrolls of papyrus inscribed with more than 10,000 lines of text of the Lesbos poet's works. Unfortunately, over the centuries these works have deteriorated.

A distinctive feature of Sappho's work was the use of a stanza composed of three 11 - sentence lines and one 5-sentence line. Such a construction is called a Sapphic stanza. The popularity of Sappho's work caused many later poets, including Jan Kochanowski, to use the Sapphic stanza in their works.



Superstar

The works of Sappho gained immense popularity in the ancient world. They were commonly recited and sung during various ceremonies, and they also became one of the basic elements of education throughout the world to which Hellenistic culture had come. It was particularly popular among the Romans.

The popularity that Sappho's works gained made the poet a kind of superstar of the time. Works were written not so much inspired by her work, but dedicated to Sappho herself. Biographical works were also written.

Sappho even became the heroine of a myth. According to it, while in exile in Syracuse, Sappho met a fisherman named Faon, with whom she fell head over heels in love, and when he rejected her advances in despair she threw herself from a rock into the sea.