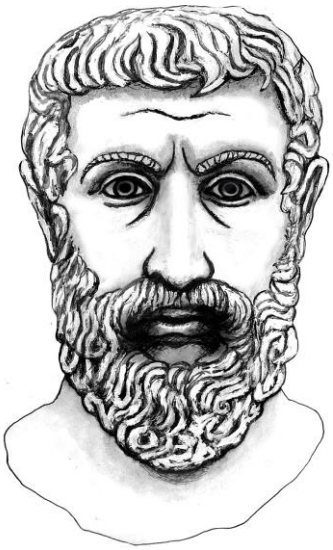
Contents

Parmenides of Elea



Drawing of a Roman portrait of Parmenides. Dating from the first century BC, it is possible that the marble copy was made from a Greek original. Held by the Archaeological Park of Paestum and Velia, the work is on display in the Palatine Chapel at Velia.

Please note that in the following, page numbers and foot notes have been adapted for the sample

Life and Times

Of the Greek philosopher Parmenides, who lived in the Greek colony of Elea (now Velia in Southern Italy), little is known except that he must have been born around 515 BC and that he wrote a philosophical poem, fragments of which have survived.[1] Though often called *On Nature* this title is an assumption, as at that time, books on the nature of the world were often entitled so. Parmenides' poem is known to have consisted of three parts: a proem, a part that was entitled *The Way of Truth* and a part that was called *The Way of Opinion.* Where the proem has come down to us intact, quoted in its entirety by a reliable source, *The Way of Truth* has survived as a series of fragments quoted by different authors. Though fragmented, it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that what has survived is complete. Of *The Way of Opinion*, only a few fragments have survived and these are mainly concerned with cosmology. As shall be argued, these titles are not so much "A Way of Truth" as something that is then contrasted with "A Way of Error" but rather are to be understood as two facets of a single philosophy. This suggests that Parmenides' work if not entitled *On Nature* may have been entitled *The Way of Truth and The Way of Opinion.* A portrait made in around 1 BC and found in Elea, though not necessarily made with reference to a genuine portrait, rings true with a description given by Plato at the beginning of his *Parmenides* in which the philosopher is described as:

[1] Kirk, Raven & Schofield, 1983, p. 240

"well advanced in years – about sixty-five – and very grey, but a fine looking man".[2]

(Kirk, Raven & Schofield)

With respect to Parmenides, Plato (428/7-349/8 BC) has Socrates quote Homer saying:

"… but there is one being whom I respect above all. Parmenides himself is in my eyes, as Homer says, 'a reverend and awful figure'.[3] *I met him when I was quite young and he quite elderly, and I thought that there was a sort of depth in him that was altogether noble."*[4]

(Cornford)

It is from the circumstances of these descriptions that Kirk, Raven and Schofield deduce the date given above for Parmenides' birth and one has the impression that Plato is drawing from a source that connects directly with the philosopher. Although the meeting of Socrates, who was born in around 470 BC and Parmenides, is almost certainly fictional, it can be assumed that Plato will have taken care that the dates of the meeting were arranged so as to be believable. According to Diogenes Laertius in his, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, Parmenides came from a distinguished family[5] and his father was a certain Pyles.[6] Well-off, he was converted to "the contemplative life" by Ameinias, a follower

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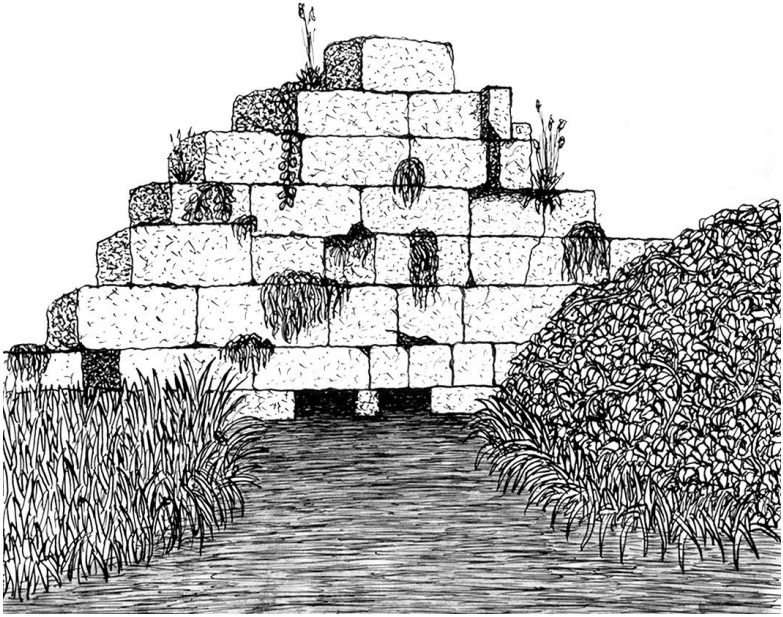
[2] Plato, *Parmenides*, 127b, KRS 286
[3] Homer, *Iliad* 3.172/*Odyssey* 8.22 & 14.234
[4] Plato, *Theatetus*, 183e
[5] Diogenes Laertius, *Lives,* IX, 21-3 (DK28 A1)
[6] Ibid., IX, 25

of Phythagoras. When Ameinias died, Parmenides paid for a monument to be erected in memory of him. According to Diogenes Laertius, Speusippus in his work, *On the Philosophers*, said that Parmenides legislated for the citizens of Elea, suggesting that Parmenides had a sense of duty and moral obligation and took his duties seriously.

Bronze statuette of a philosopher, latter half of the third century BC, Cabinet des Medailles, Paris.

According to Herodotos,[7] the Greek colony of Elea was founded in 535 BC by Ionian Greeks fleeing their native city of Phocaea, which was situated in modern day Turkey. Their town besieged by an army of Persians, the Ionians took to the sea and after an Odyssey of some ten years, finally arrived at a place called "Hyele". This was named after a sacred spring on the southern side of a rocky outcrop that if it was not already an acropolis soon enough became one.



The sacred Hyele spring at the foot of the acropolis.

[7] Herodotos, *Histories*, I, 165

The Way of Truth

Up in the sky, beyond the gates of Day and Night, the goddess Aletheia revels to Parmenides *The Way of Truth,* distinguishing between the only true way and *The Way of Opinion* "in which there is no true reliance". The single, one, all-encompassing truth, the goddess tells him is that *which is, is.* From this, the rest of Parmenides' philosophy follows. From the certainty that which is, is, Parmenides argues that whatever is, is related to everything else that is. There is thus a single and undivided reality that underwrites the plurality of experience. As that which is, cannot suddenly come into being from out of nothing, Parmenides argues that whatever is, is and ever was. Likewise, that which is, cannot suddenly disappear for then that which is, becomes that which is not and as this is a contradiction, this is something that cannot be. Accordingly, the world of that which is, is and is so without beginning and without end. Following the dictum that, that which is, is, that which is, can only be one thing and cannot be many for if it were many that would imply that there was a plurality of is'es, which again cannot be. Further, that which is, has neither a boundary nor a centre for either of these would imply that it had parts and that has already been ruled out. As all this goes counter to common sense, Parmenides is forced to conclude that the world of the senses and of everyday life is nothing but a series of deluded, ill-founded projections. Though essential for life, these projections and assumptions about the world are nevertheless, distortions of the one, eternal and timeless nature of reality as a whole. Where in philosophy, Parmenides' predecessors were concerned with establishing what it was that the world was made out of and according to which principles it

functioned, Parmenides, in his *The Way of Truth*, is at pains to identify a modality of being that enables all the things that exist, to exist. Accordingly his ultimate question is not "What is or are the basic units of that which exists?" but rather "How can anything exist at all?" or "What is it that existence requires as a prerequisite?" Consequently, for Heinrich,[8] Parmenides' philosophy is to be understood as countering the perceived threat posed to existence by the possibility of denying and negating that which is. Fully expressed, Parmenides' position is that, that which is, is, whilst that which is not, is not and cannot even be:

"Come now and I will tell you (and you must take my account away with you when you have heard it) of the only ways of enquiry that are open to thought. The one, according to that which is, is and it is impossible for it not to be, is the path of Persuasion (who serves Truth); the other is that which is, is not and it is needful that this is not the case, this I tell you leads nowhere: for you cannot know what is not – that is impossible – nor even formulate it."[9]

(Kirk, Raven & Schofield)

From his mantra, that that which is, is, Parmenides derives the conclusion that that which is, is whole and one and undivided. Called by Parmenides, ον (on), or "The One", it is the "Being" or "be-ing" of the verb "to be". And yet this unshakeable and undivided being-ness of Being, though one and undivided nevertheless has something associated with it. Established as whole and perfect in its oneness, this oneness is underwritten as something that is. There is therefore

[8] Heinrich, 1964/1982, p. 84-128
[9] DK28 B2, KRS 291

something that belongs to Being, which Parmenides calls, εοντος or "of-Being" and which enables one to say of Being as a whole that it is. For Parmenides, it is of-Being that underwrites Being and guarantees its existence, yet in underwriting Being, of-Being hangs in the air as a suggestion of presence. There is therefore, that which is and its presence, this latter however, whilst guaranteeing that that which is, is, also raises a question, the question of "Being what?" Thus although that which is, is, and is whole and one and undivided, two-foldedness has been hinted at and with it, a question has been raised. From out of Being, the certainty of Being implies that Being is something. There is therefore Being and something that Being is and which is accordingly "of-Being" in that it belongs to Being. Even though anything one might care to say about Being will inevitably be a distortion and a metaphor and there will never be a description that will exactly match up with that which Being is, a demand that a predicate should be sought for Being has been voiced. Moreover and this is the crux of the matter, this takes place through the very means that guarantees that that which is, is. Thus Parmenides says:

"Accordingly of-Being (εον) *cannot be justly incomplete for if it were deficient in one thing it would be deficient in everything.*
This (truth) is there to be thought and is why there is thought."[10]

After which he asserts:

[10] DK28 B8

"For without of-being (εοντος) *you will not, in all that has been said, find thought. Nothing that is or will be, can be, unless provided by of-being* (εοντος) *..."*[11]

For Heidegger this last sentence is "the sentence of sentences" and it is here that a duality is opened up that was not there before.[12] Where ον is Being, εον is of-Being and occurs in the fragment in its genitive form as εοντος. This shows that in Parmenides that which one might have been able to translate as "of being it can be said …" has now become a concept in itself and has acquired some form of existence. To contain the duality and underwrite the certainty that which is, is, Being is bound to of-Being and Parmenides concludes the sentence by saying:

"… after the Fates had fettered it to oneness and changeless-ness."[13]

Though the of-Being of Being guarantees that Being is, as seen, it throws doubt on the oneness of Being. As that which can be divided once can be divided again, duality emerges as a something that can be implemented repeatedly. Thus from out of duality, the three-foldedness of the Fates emerges and indeed their name, η Μοιρα (e Moira), means "share" or "allocation". Overseen by Dike, or Justice, the Fates continue to implement duality, resulting in the manifolded-ness of the world that we know. For Heidegger:

"This allocation is the collected and unfolded sending of presence from that which is present to that which is perceived as present. Fate is the

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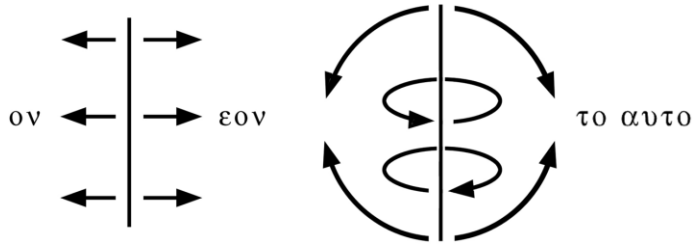
[11] DK28 B8

[12] Heidegger, 1954, p. 251

[13] DK28 B8

distributing of of-being. In Parmenides' sentence Fate has released the 'it' of of-being from two-foldedness and bound it back into oneness and changeless-ness. Thus it is both from out of and within this oneness and changeless-ness that the presence of that which is present takes place."[14]

Though one and whole and changeless, The One of Parmenides is rift and torn apart, yet at the same time, the oneness that it itself is, holds it together. Through the oneness that it alone has, The One is able to contain plurality. In Greek, this containing aspect, "itself", is the reflexive pronoun το αυτο (tow auto). Thus there is the ον of Being itself, the εον of of-Being and the το αυτο of Being brought back to itself. As Heidegger observes, it is this latter that allows of-Being to emerge from Being whilst at the same time always being bound back to Being.



Being, The One (ον), both divides (εον) and holds itself together (το αυτο). By turns it reveals and underwrites presence, by turns it denies and withholds, shielding the presence of that which is from view.

From this process of rifting and binding together, that which is seen and experienced, emerges as that which is by turns

[14] Heidegger, 1954, p. 252

revealed and by turns shielded and hidden. That which Being is, is not something that can be pinpointed and defined for that would run contrary to the wholeness and oneness of Being. For if Being were one thing, it would by definition, not be those things that this one, singled out thing was not. This however would mean that The One was in some way lacking in something, which in turn would entail that Being was in some way compromised and was therefore no longer whole and perfect. Consequently the underwriting of Being by of-Being, whilst guaranteeing that Being is and raising the question of "Being what?" automatically engenders the overriding mechanism of tow auto identified by Heidegger that binds of-Being back onto Being. This three-folded modality is what lies behind Parmenides' conception of Being and in everyday life is what allows things to both be and not be as they are in reality all part of The One all-consuming reality of The One.

Contrary to what one would expect, Parmenides' analysis of the statement that which is, is, shows that whilst a tautology, it is nevertheless laden with tacitly implied implications. For in saying that something is, we are automatically asserting a modality of being and logic that assumes that it is possible to make statements about the world – even if they are forever destined to be distortive metaphors and humble similes with only limited areas of application. Though all we can say is that which is, is and any claims we might care to make go beyond this and so distort the whole, unchanging nature of The One, it is possible to stumble on fragments and fleeting glimpses that hint at what Being is and might be.

A Translation of the Poem

According to Kirk, Raven and Schofield, both ancient and modern scholars are agreed in seeing Parmenides' literary talents as limited:

"He has little facility in diction, and the struggle to force novel, difficult and highly abstract philosophical ideas into metrical form frequently results in ineradicable obscurity, especially syntactic obscurity. On the other hand, in less argumentative passages of the poem he achieves a kind of clumsy grandeur."[15]

For Popper however this judgement is mistaken:

"I think that his writing is more lively and often more beautiful than his subject matter leads one to expect …"[16]

Here it should be observed that seeing the proem of the poem as an allegory and not a description of an actual experience immediately makes the work appear as a lumbering, laboured affair, with this impression then being confirmed by the difficult subject matter of *The Way of Truth*. Coupled with this, is the fact that the fragments are invariably presented as fragments, interspersed with interpretations and detailed explanations. The loose translation given below is not to be seen as an attempt at reconstructing that which cannot be reconstructed but rather is intended to give an impression of how a philosophical poem can work. To this effect, a number of interpolations have been made. The first

[15] Kirk, Raven & Schofield, 1983, p. 241
[16] Popper, 1998/2012, p. 90 & p. 118

is simply to connect B2 and B3. Two longer interpolations then interrupt the B8 fragment preserved by Sextus Empiricus. These are so as to define the concept of of-Being for the modern reader and to introduce some additional clarity. If the B8 fragment is complete (as it may well be), then it is possible that Parmenides explained the concept of of-Being at a later stage, for example in a part of *The Way of Opinion* that dealt with perception. Between B7 and B8, Theophrastus' fragment concerning perception has been inserted (B18). This, along with the interpolations that accompany the fragments that anticipate Parmenides' cosmology, is done so as to indicate how, in Parmenides' philosophy, the sensual and the rigorously intellectual were not necessarily held at arm's length but may have been playfully combined. Here then, with the translations in italics and the interpolations in non-italics, is Parmenides' poem rendered as a tidal wave of intellectual energy, that by virtue of its rigour, energy and radicality, has the capacity to sweep all before it:

"Horses carried me up towards my heart's desire,
setting the pace they bore me along the famed road.
Over cities, I, the one who knows, was carried
by well-versed mares that strained and sweated at the yoke
whilst maidens showed the way that led to the goddess.
Held in its clams the axle howled like a panpipe,
a glowing rod held by wheels on either side,
well-turned they were and verily driven in haste
by the sun's own daughters, who, raising their veils,
brought me from dormitories of darkness to light.
With lintel and threshold a gateway separates
the paths of Night and Day; high in the sky it is,
with great doors and bolts that run contrary so as to
prevent the crossing of ways as Justice looks on.

Beguiled with calming and persuading words, Justice
drew back the bolts, releasing that which bared our way.
The brass-bound doors were fastened with dowels and rivets
and shrieking in alternation, they swung open,
exposing a yawning gap as Pan played his pipes
and as with ardour, we sped along the broad way,
the maidens guiding both horses and chariot.
Placing her hand in mine the goddess greeted me,
addressing me, this is what it is that she said:
'Oh Youth who travels with divine charioteers
and who has come to this my dwelling drawn by mares,
I greet you for that which has led to your travelling
this road (far removed from human paths though it be)
is far from being an evil fate but is Justice
and Righteousness, that you may come to understand
everything about an indestructible Truth,
as well as the passing opinions of mortals,
though these too you shall learn for that which is believed
must be believed that belief may pervade all things.'"

(DK28 B1)

"Listen now and hearing, carry my words away,
for two ways of enquiry are open to all:
one is that that which is, is and cannot not be.
This is the way of persuasion which attends Truth.
The other, that that which is, is-not, cannot be
for as a way it cannot even be made out.
For how can that which cannot be, be known or said
(it is impossible)" and so I maintain that

(DK28 B2)

"that which can be thought, can be" and indeed must be.

(DK28 B3)

Yet there is also that which can be thought and which
need not be and which is but a fancy, thought up
within that which encloses all and is perfect.
And this passing aberration I name 'of-Being'
– for it belongs to Being but cannot say of Being
that which it would but must always fall short of this.
And so in spite of the fact that it has a name,
the being of of-Being is neither complete nor whole,
for as its name says, it is not Being but 'of-Being'.

"Look therefore at things near and far as if the same
– that in its fever of-Being does not cut Being short
of its far-reaching extent and nature or of
the compacted unity that makes it unique."

(DK28 B4)

"Thus where I begin and end is one and the same,
everywhere my return is inevitable."

(DK28 B5)

"That which is thought and said, comes from Being – and so is,
consider what would be, if that which is, were not.
From this latter and contrary way I hold you back.
Likewise I dissuade from the way that mortals take,
always in two minds, their thoughts wander without aim,
guided by the helplessness they carry within.
Dazed and undecided they are both blind and deaf.

Behaving as if Being could both be and not be,
the path they take is bent back with contradiction."

(DK28 B6)

For to live their lives all mortal things must embrace
and take the way of seeming offered by of-Being,
a way of glittering jewels that hints at that which
lies beyond and points to the adamantine logic
of my words and the all-encompassing, noble
magnificence of that which is and truly is.

"Never proven shall be, that that which is, is not.
So banish all such inquiry and practices
both from thought and from the habits of your body:
a lazy eye, a deaf ear, a waggling tongue.
Judge yourself, with reason, my controversial words."

(DK28 B7)

"As each has a combination of erring limbs
so too it is, that the body is mixed with thought.
It is what is thought and felt that the body knows,
a grown balance of thought that fills each living thing."

(DK28 B18)

And thus in your lives, you mortals must err and stray
for that which is finite can do no more and yet,
thou blessed among mortals and bearer of The Truth,
I say that you have reason and so challenge you
to follow the logic of my words with your mind.
And so I say to you, noblest of passengers:

Sappho of Lesbos

Drawing of a Roman portrait of Sappho.
The marble copy derives from an original that
dates from the Hellenistic period with the drawing
glossing over the fact that the nose is damaged.
Found in Izmir, the work may be seen in the
Museum of Archaeology in Istanbul.

Life and Times

Although the Greek poet Sappho was not a philosopher, she did lead her life according to principles that, expounded in her poems, operate according to the conception of truth articulated above and which presuppose some form of philosophy. On a vase, the oldest known image of Sappho shows a woman holding a lyre with the letters "PHSAPHO" next to her. Despite the lively pose and the smile – indicative a vivaciousness and energy that one would associate with Sappho – the image is a standard representation of a woman, to which no claim of likeness can be attached. Dating from the late sixth century BC, this image is likely to have been made some fifty years after Sappho's death. Of all the later images that have come down to us, only a head in Istanbul depicts a face with character and personality. Nevertheless this still does mean that this is Sappho, only that it is a depiction that goes beyond the stock in trade. Writing much later, in his *Speech against Verrus*, Cicero mentions that in the administrative buildings of Syracuse, there was once a statue of Sappho with "a very famous Greek epigram" inscribed on its base.[17] Thereafter a fragment of papyrus from Oxyrhychus that dates to the late third or early fourth century AD, says that Sappho was neither fair of face nor of graceful limb. This however belongs to the *testimonia*, the snippets of hearsay, rumours and literary embellishments that accumulated over the centuries and then snowballed into a polarised and distorted view of Sappho and her achievements. In all likelihood Sappho was most probably neither stunningly beautiful nor noticeably ugly.

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[17] Campbell, 1982, testimony 24

In an anonymous epigram preserved in the Palantine Anthology and which is attributed to Plato, the philosopher is said to have praised Sappho as the tenth muse:

"Some say the Muses are nine: how careless!
For look there's Sappho, from Lesbos, the tenth."[18]

Continuing in this vein, Discorides concludes a longer epigram dedicated to Sappho with the words:

"Wherever you are noble lady, I greet you as a god,
for still your songs, your daughters, lead us to immortality."[19]

A few details of reliable information on Sappho are provided by an entry in the *Suda*, a Byzantine encyclopaedia compiled from earlier sources during the tenth century AD.[20] This informs that Sappho lived in Mytilene, the capital of Lesbos. The daughter of a merchant whose name may have been Skamandros, her mother was called Kleis and was from the Lesbian town of Eresus. In addition to Sappho, the couple had three sons, Larichos, Eurygios and Charaxos.[21] In 1627, on the island of Paros, a key event in Sappho's life was brought to light through the discovery of the remains of a plaque.[22] Dating to the third century BC, the fragmented marble slab was a record of Greek history from 1581 to 299 BC and mentioned that, during the reign of Aristokles in

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[18] Anonymous, in: Paton, 1917, IX.506 and in: Campbell, 1982, testimony 60
[19] In: Paton, 1917, VII.407
[20] See Campbell, 1982, testimonies
[21] Campbell, 1982, testimony 2
[22] Von Schirnding, 2013, p. 151

Athens and when the landowners held power in Syracuse, Sappho was forced to leave Mytilene and live in exile in Sicily.[23] The reasons for this will have been political unrest, with Sappho's family either being exiled by the tyrant, Pittacus, or alternatively, the young girl was sent away by her father so as to avoid being kidnapped. Another poet in exile was Alcaeus, who is supposed to have described Sappho as "violet-haired, holy" and "sweetly smiling".[24]

Sappho and Alcaeus as shown on an Attic black-figured kalathos-psykter or wine cooler, first half of fifth century BC. National Collection of Antiquities and Glyphs, Munich.

[23] Campbell, 1982, testimony 5
[24] Alcaeus 384, in: Campbell, 1982

Poetry and Visions of Truth

Poetically, Sappho's palette is wide and ranges from lyrical evocations to sharp reprimands, whilst in between worlds of emotion unfold:

"In full glory did the moon show itself
as around its altar the women stood"[25]

"What rustic bumpkin has charmed your heart?
ignorant even of how to undress!"[26]

"Eros has grasped my soul,
a storm descending from the mountain, overwhelming the oaks."[27]

Concerning Sappho's style, Dionysus of Hallicarnassus, wrote:

"The next style is the elegant or spectacular, preferring refinement to majesty. It always chooses the smoothest and softest of words, hunting for euphony and melodiousness and the sweetness that is derived from them. Secondly, it does not think it right to place these words just as they come or to fit them together thoughtlessly; rather, it judges what juxtapositions will be able to make the sounds more musical, and examines by what arrangements the words will produce the more attractive combinations, and so it tries to fit each word together, taking great pains to have everything planed and rubbed down smooth and all joints neatly dove-tailed … These in my view are the characteristics of the style. As

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[25] L-P 154
[26] L-P 57
[27] L-P 47

examples of it I take among poets Hesiod and Sappho and Anacreon, among prose authors Isocrates the Athenian and his followers."[28]

(Campbell)

In the following translations of Sappho's poems, whilst the scheme of von Schirnding's restorations has been followed, the wording has been chosen so as to stay closer to the Greek as (unlike von Schirnding), here no attempt has been made at rendering the verses in metre. Rather, emphasis has been placed on reproducing the precision of Sappho's imagery and the charmed meaning of her words. The following longer fragment is addressed to Kleis and whilst not mentioning the years in exile, makes no bones about who was responsible for the family's decline in wealth and status:

(…)

"My mother once said to me:

She who would bind and greatly
adorn her hair would do well,
tying with a purple band

a seemly and splendid thing.
But if it is blond her hair,
shinning brighter than a torch,

[28] Dionysus of Hallicarnassus, *Demostenes*, 40, in: Campbell, testimony 42

it is better crowned atop
with flowers in fullest boom.
A befitting turban Kleis,

from Sardes with many colours
as worn in Lydian cities
of which you did of late speak,

for you, such a coloured thing
I would procure but cannot.
Among the Mytilians

is one from whom you could ask
and beg your coloured turban.
He is rich while we are poor.

This, Cyclad rulers wishing,
made us flee, while in the town
slur and slander freely spread."[29]

At the *thiasos* that Sappho ran, what was learned was performed in dedicated, consecrated places.[30] Festivities and celebrations, chiefly in honour of Aphrodite, can be assumed to have been held regularly and will have given meaning to the day-to-day events of life in the community. By first invoking and then honouring the goddess with the graces of what they had learnt, the girls were being prepared for the deployment of their charms in the world beyond. Yet what was learned was not simply learnt by route but was also lived

[29] L-P 98
[30] Von Schirnding, 2013, p. 123

and believed in.[31] By virtue of being summoned and invoked through the rituals that were performed in their honour, the divine presence of the muses and other deities was endowed with a tangibility, that for the participants made it real.[32] As papyrus was relatively expensive, letters, messages and notes were often written on sherds of unglazed ceramic. A poem found on a piece of pottery dating from the second century BC, is a prayer and invocation addressed to Aphrodite that testifies to the ritual aspects of community life:

(…)

"Come hither to your sacred temple
and secretly manifest yourself,
unknown pleasures await you: a grove
of apple trees and an altar of
smoking incense.

Beneath apple branches cool water
chuckles and everywhere is shaded
by roses and foliage flutters
on the wind's breath.

In the blooming meadow, horses graze
amid scented flowers and the wind,
smelling of honey infects the air
with its sweetness.

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[31] Von Schirnding, 2013, p. 154-156
[32] Williamson, 1995, p. 132