

Thinking with Brothers in Sappho and Beyond

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The steady stream of discoveries in Greek lyric continually challenges our beliefs about what is typical about a genre or an author. This is particularly true in the case of Sappho, a poet whose work since antiquity has been most strongly associated with erotic or hymeneal themes.¹ The publication of the newest fragment of Sappho, known as the ‘Brothers Poem’ (P. Sapph. Obbink 1-20), reminds us that she is also a poet who has much to say on archaic morality. It has long been known that Sappho wrote poems about her family, even if few remnants survived, but these themes have been relatively neglected. The new discovery is not only fascinating in its own right, but helps us to reframe Sappho’s work and focus on how and to what purpose she uses these biographical stories. This contribution will argue that Sappho’s stories of her brothers do not merely represent the creation of a biographical background for the poet (whether true or fictional), but rather her family dynamic is constructed so as to investigate familial and civic responsibilities.² By comparing Sappho’s family to the types of brothers we find elsewhere in early Greek literature, I will argue that brotherhood is a recurrent theme in archaic poetry, and the relationship between siblings is used as a way to explore broader moralising ideas.

Sappho and her brothers

The Brothers Poem is crucial for any analysis of how Sappho represented her relationship with her brothers, but it fits into a pre-existing web of evidence on Sappho’s biography, and in particular her sibling relationships.³ The story of Charaxus’ travels and adventures is attested in many places.⁴ Scholars have long suggested that Sappho fr. 5 V was a sister’s prayer for the safe return of her brother, and this interpretation of the poem has been strengthened by the new papyrus discoveries.⁵ The sister prays to the Nereids, addressed as πόντιαι (1): we therefore have a sea-voyage, and a risky one at that, since the cultic epithet

¹ Cf. Demetr. *On Style* 132, which defines ‘all Sappho’s poetry’ as ‘gardens of the nymphs, wedding-songs, love-affairs’ (οἷον νυμφαῖοι κῆρι, ὑμεναῖοι, ἔρωτες, ὄλη ἢ Σαπφοῦς ποίησις). Nevertheless, as Lefkowitz 2012: 41 notes, we find fuller biographical information about Sappho than any other archaic poet, which suggests that family themes were central to her poetry.

² This is not to rule out the possibility that the historical Sappho really did have two brothers, or that there is some truth behind the stories told of them. However, Sappho’s poetic goals in telling stories of her brother go beyond the simple recounting of biographical facts, and the historicity or otherwise of Sappho’s family is not directly relevant to the roles they adopt as poetic constructs.

³ For an overview of the tradition and the evidence, see Kivilo 2010: 175-7; Lefkowitz 2012: 41-4.

⁴ Lidov 2002 argues that the testimonia about Charaxus are a later invention which did not originate in Sappho’s poetry, but the new poem, as well as the new supplements to fr. 5, demonstrate beyond doubt that Sappho wrote poems about her brothers (even if the affair must be supplied from the testimonia).

⁵ *P. GC. inv. 105* fr. 3 col. ii 10-29 restores the previously damaged opening and line-beginnings of this poem, including the reference to a brother (καὶ γνητόν, 2) and sister (καὶ γνήτην, 9), whose existence had previously been conjectured by scholars (see e.g. Lobel 1921; Milne 1933). For the publication of this papyrus, see Burris, Fish and Obbink 2014. Lidov 2016 warns that we cannot be certain the sister is the speaker, but it seems most likely, given Sappho’s tendency to speak *in propria persona*.

πότνια elevates the deities' status and their protective powers.⁶ The brother in this poem is not named, but we would expect Sappho herself to be the poetic 'I' as elsewhere in her poetry, and we have play on Charaxus' name in the hope that he will be a joy (χάρων, 6) to his family and friends.⁷ We also have a possible reference to Charaxus' adventures in fr. 15 V, where Sappho appears to mention a woman called Doricha, and hopes that an unnamed third party will not return to her love. A biography preserved on papyrus describes Doricha as an Egyptian courtesan (P. Oxy 1800 = Sappho T. 252), and on this interpretation, the poet would be hoping that her brother will break free of a relationship she disapproves of. The story of Charaxus' involvement with a courtesan in Egypt and his quarrel with his sister is frequently found, beginning with Herodotus, who identifies her with the famous courtesan Rhodopis and adds the detail that Sappho responded with a poem abusing Charaxus (2.134-5). The discrepancy over the woman's name is discussed by later authors (Strab. 17.1.33, Ath. 13.596c-d), but the details of the story remain the same.⁸ The story is mentioned in Ovid (*Her.* 15.63-8) and is also the subject of an epigram by Posidippus (17 Gow-Page). The sources, then, give a consistent account of Charaxus' 'life' which most likely had its origins in Sappho's poetry: he is a seafaring merchant, formed an inappropriate relationship on which he wasted money, and was upbraided by his sister for this (presumably in poems which do not survive).⁹ The other brother, Larichus, seems to act as a foil to the irresponsible Charaxus, and Athenaeus tells us that Sappho praised him for acting as a wine-pourer in the *prytaneion* (10.425a).

The Brothers' Poem shows the same pattern, and moreover one which is informed by the audience's knowledge of Sappho's biographical tradition:¹⁰

π[
[---]
....]λα[
..]σέμα[

ἀλλ' ἄϊ θρύλησθα Χάραξον ἔλθην (5)
νᾶϊ cὺν πλήαι. τὰ μὲν οἴομαι Ζεῦς
οἷ δε κύμπαντές τε θεοί· cὲ δ' οὐχρῆ
ταῦτα νόησθαι,

ἀλλὰ καὶ πέμπτην ἔμε καὶ κέλεσθαι
πόλλα λίσσεσθαι βασιλῆαν Ἴηραν (10)

⁶ Cf. Burris, Fish and Obbink 2014: 23; Ferrari 2014: 6. For the possibility that fr. 17 V also deals with Charaxus' seafaring, see Cagiagli 2010: 226-7, 2016: 434-7.

⁷ This play is imitated in later poetry about Sappho and Charaxus, cf. Posidippus *Epigr.* XVII Gow-Page (122 Austin-Bastinani); Ovid *Her.* 15.117. Word-play on the meaning of names is common in archaic poetry: cf. Archil. fr. 167, 182, 185 W.

⁸ Some scholars have suggested that Rhodopis ('rosy') was a nickname, e.g. Page 1955: 49 n.1; Campbell 1982: 15, though others have questioned the association between these two women: see Lidov 2002; Ferrari 2014: 9-10. Martin 2016: 119 suggests that Doricha is a negative nickname invented by Sappho, punning on δῶρον, to counter the positive nickname, Rhodopis, that the courtesan normally used for her work. It is also possible, as suggested by Yatromanolakis 2007: 322-3, that Sappho's Doricha is assimilated with the more famous Rhodopis.

⁹ For an overview of the testimonia on Charaxus and the issues interpreting them, see Gribble 2016. On abuse as a motif in Sappho's poetry, see Martin 2016.

¹⁰ I print Obbink's most recent text (Obbink 2016). For the *editio princeps*, see Obbink 2014, and for the addition of lines 1-4, see Obbink 2015.

ἐξίκεσθαι τυίδε ράαν ἄγοντα
 νῆα Χάραξον

κᾶμμ' ἐπεύρην ἀρτέμεας. τὰ δ' ἄλλα
 πάντα δαιμόνεσσιν ἐπιτρόπων·
 εὐδαίαι γὰρ ἐκ μεγάλαν ἀήταν. (15)
 αἶψα πέλονται.

τῶν κε βόλληται βασίλευς Ὀλύμπω
 δαίμον' ἐκ πόνων ἐπάρων ἤδη
 περτρόπην, κῆνοι μάκαρες πέλονται
 καὶ πολύολβοι. (20)

κᾶμμες, αἶ κε ρῶν κεφάλαν ἀέρρη
 Λάριχος καὶ δὴ ποτ' ἄνηρ γένηται,
 καὶ μάλ; ἐκ πόλλαν βαρυθυμίαν κεν
 αἶψα λύθειμεν.

... but you are always babbling about Charaxus coming with a full ship. It is Zeus and all the other gods who know these things, I think. You ought not to be thinking like this, but you should be sending me and instructing me to pray repeatedly to Queen Hera that Charaxus should return here, bring his ship undamaged, and find us safe and sound. As for the rest, let us entrust it to the gods, for fair weather quickly arises from huge storms. Those whom the king of Olympus wishes to have a divine helper to turn them from troubles, it is they who become blessed and fortunate. But for us, if Larichus raises up his head and one day becomes a man, we would be swiftly released from the many sorrows that weigh down our hearts.

The poem is filled with anxiety about Charaxus and his safe return, but as well as Charaxus' physical safety, the speaker and her addressee are concerned with how the manner of his return will affect their economic well-being.¹¹ The addressee is obsessed (αἶ θρύλησθα, 5) with whether Charaxus' ship is 'full' (νῆα δὲ πλῆλαι, 6), meaning whether it contains valuable cargo, and Sappho picks up on this concern in line 20, where she responds that it is divine help that makes men πολύολβοι, a rare word which can mean 'fortunate' in general terms, but which has particular connotations of prosperity.¹² Thus Charaxus is important not only for his own sake, but for the role he plays in ensuring his family's stability and good fortune. Later in Sappho's biographical tradition (though not in this particular poem), it will emerge that the truth is more complex than the speaker has anticipated. While Sappho here assumes that Charaxus' safe and prosperous return can only be endangered by bad weather or divine hostility, it will turn out that he will return safely, but without the wealth he ought to bring, having wasted his money on his Egyptian girlfriend. The poignant tone of the Brothers' Poem

¹¹ On economic vs. physical safety in the poem, see Nünlist 2014.

¹² Cf. LSJ s.v. πολύολβος. The word is extremely rare in archaic Greek, found only here and in Sapph. fr. 133 V, where the 'riches' Aphrodite provides are metaphorical for the riches of love. Extrapolating a word's meaning when it is only attested later is risky, but it is often necessary given the small size of the corpus of lyric, where parallels can sometimes only be found in later Greek.

is much more effective if we presume the audience knew this story, and hence the wider tradition of what became of Sappho's brothers.¹³

Reflecting on the family's fortune prompts Sappho to think of her other brother, Larichus, and the role that he might play in the future. Hope is mixed with anxiety: the family is oppressed by troubles (πόλλαν βαρυθυμίαν, 23), and while Larichus may have the potential to release them, he has yet to find the strength to do so (21). The wish that Larichus should 'raise up his head and become a man' may indicate his youth and vulnerability, but it may also be a criticism: Larichus must pull himself together and show himself worthy of his family's faith in him.¹⁴ That we know Charaxus will not live up to his sister's expectations makes the pressure on the younger Larichus all the more intense.

In the Brothers' Poem, then, and elsewhere in Sappho's work, we see a contrast between two brothers, the older disappointing, the younger a source of hope, but who has yet to fulfil this. The testimonia tell us that Sappho had three brothers, but the Brothers Poem creates a pairing of the eldest and youngest, and so encourages us to see them as foils to each other.¹⁵ As we shall see, pairing two brothers is a familiar pattern in archaic poetry, and Sappho here is drawing on a tradition that makes brothers good to think with.¹⁶

Brother pairs in archaic poetry

In his commentary on *Works and Days*, Martin West argued for the historicity of Perses on the grounds that a brother instructing a brother is a deviation from the usual patterns of didactic literature.¹⁷ In fact, however, archaic literature is filled with pairs of brothers whose relationship investigates ideas of proper behaviour.¹⁸ While the advice may be embedded in a mythological narrative rather than offered in explicitly didactic form to the audience, brotherly relationships are commonly used as a moralising strategy in the Greek tradition. The most famous of these is the pairing of Hector and Paris in the *Iliad*, where the responsible Hector highlights Paris' fecklessness. This is an opposition constructed by the poet rather than inherent to the myth, since Priam has many sons, and if we are to believe his comments at the end of the *Iliad*, many of them were brave, and many others useless (*Il.* 24.255-62). Yet whenever Paris appears in any significant context in the *Iliad*, the poet brings Hector in to upbraid him, and to contrast their opposing temperaments.¹⁹ Thus Homer creates

¹³ I hope to discuss the implications of this more fully elsewhere. The idea that the audience knows the end of the story is implied by Obbink 2015 3 when he describes the voice of the Brothers' Poem as being a young woman in her teens, but notes that there is no reason to assume the song was actually composed by Sappho as a teenager.

¹⁴ Cf. Martin 2016: 121-3; Stehle 2016. If there is criticism here, however, I take it as being exhortatory rather than hostile, to fit with the testimonia that Sappho was fondest of her youngest brother (thus Lardinois 2016: 181).

¹⁵ The third brother is named as Erigyus at *Suda* Σ 107 and probably also P. Oxy. 1800 fr. 1 (the name is damaged, but a third brother is certainly mentioned). Lardinois 2016: 183-4 suggests that this poem is addressed to Erigyos, but I am not convinced by this (see below on n.36).

¹⁶ Christopher Brown suggests to me that this motif may be connected with the Indo-European motif of twins (reflected more prominently in the Roman tradition than the Greek, though the Dioscuri are a good example, and reflect the possibility of a devoted fraternal relationship: cf. Pind. *Nem.* 10). On the tradition of twins, see Harris 1906; Ward 1968; Frame 2009: esp. ch. 3.

¹⁷ West 1978: 34.

¹⁸ For a discussion of brothers and 'doubles' as a didactic device, see Martin 2004.

¹⁹ *Il.* 3.38-66, 6.313-41, 13.768-87. Hector's criticism is unfair in this last instance (as indicated in Paris' reply), which demonstrates Hector's inability to interact with Paris in any way other than to criticism him, whether or not it is warranted.

a pattern involving a socially responsible older brother who has to remind his wayward sibling of his duty to the family and the wider community.²⁰ Hector talks repeatedly of the shame that Paris brings upon Priam's house and on Troy: for example, when he rebukes Paris for withdrawing from the duel with Menelaus, he describes the shame that the Trojans incur in the Achaeans' eyes as a result of Paris' cowardice (3.39-45), while in Book 6 he describes his personal shame before the other Trojans (521-5). The motivation that drives Paris is the pursuit of personal enjoyment, specifically sexual desire, and this is highlighted in the scene where instead of returning to the battlefield he persuades Helen to have sex with him (3.437-47), and so underscores his original fault in stealing her from Menelaus. In terms of the values that govern the *Iliad*, the opposition between Hector and Paris offers a straightforward way of contrasting positive and negative *exempla* to explore the responsibilities that an elite male holds to the wider group.

This pattern of the hardworking and the useless brother is reflected in Hesiod's *Works and Days*, where Perses illustrates a negative model of brotherhood.²¹ Since the poem is set in the world of small-scale farmers rather than that of heroes, the issues at stake are different from those facing Hector and Paris, but clear similarities emerge. Whereas Hesiod understands the value of hard work, and knows that life does not offer easy solutions, Perses is lazy and corrupt, and tries to obtain more than his fair share of their inheritance by bribing the kings (35-8). Thus Perses not only lacks any sense of responsibility to the wider community (by failing to work hard), but also fails in loyalty to his own family, trying to swindle his brother. Yet like Hector, Hesiod cannot simply abandon his feckless sibling, but must try to redeem him by pointing out his failings and offering guidance as to how he should be acting. Just as Hector's speeches fulfil a poetic function, since they illustrate the obligations placed upon a hero, so too Hesiod's narrative uses the wayward brother to justify the composition of a poem about the need to work and man's place in the cosmos.

Both these cases present a fairly uncomplicated dynamic, with a clear delineation between 'good' and 'bad' brother, and where the responsible brother offers uncontroversial and wise advice. However, the *Iliad* plays with the motif of fraternal advice to present other pairings which deconstruct this simple model. The most prominent other set of brothers in the poem are Agamemnon and Menelaus, and an analysis of their relationship reveals how the poet can use sibling relationships to explore broader issues of character and values. As with Hector and Paris, we find a dominant older brother who adopts the role of advisor and mentor to his younger sibling, and criticises his actions. Moreover, the older brother has been forced to resolve a problematic situation caused by the personal life of the younger, in this case, marshalling an army to retrieve Menelaus' errant wife. However, the dynamic between Agamemnon and Menelaus is more complex than that of Hector and Paris. Menelaus may be a feeble warrior, but he is not irresponsible or worthless, while it is far from evident that Agamemnon himself represents a good role model for his brother to aspire to. We therefore see the poet drawing on the tropes that we find in the Hector-Paris relationship, but adapting this pattern.

²⁰ It is not made explicit in the *Iliad* that Hector is the older brother, but is the case elsewhere in the tradition: e.g. Apollod. 3.12.5; Hyg. *Fab.* 90, and this would fit with the prominence given to age as a marker of authority elsewhere in the *Iliad* (e.g. Patroclus' right to advise Achilles as the elder at 11.787, Nestor and Phoenix's status as advisers, Diomedes' wisdom despite his youth (9.57-8), and the authoritative elder brothers in the poem discussed in this chapter).

²¹ I assume that Perses is a construct for the sake of illustrating these themes within the poem, whether or not the historical Hesiod happened to have a disappointing brother. The patterns of brother-pairs discussed in this article strengthen the case against Perses being treated biographically. On Hesiod's persona and his relationship with Perses as a construct that elucidates poetic themes, see Griffith 1983; Martin 1992; Canevaro 2014, 2016.

For example, we find a play on the motif of the elder brother as wise advisor in the scene in *Iliad* 6 where Agamemnon advises Menelaus to reject the ransom offered by Adrestos (51-62). At the end of Agamemnon's speech, the poet tells us that he has given 'correct advice' (αἴσιμα παρεϊπών, 62), but this statement begs the question. Accepting a ransom elsewhere in the *Iliad* is presented as appropriate behaviour, and so it is not immediately clear why Menelaus' hesitation is wrong.²² αἴσιμα παρεϊπών is not an empty formula, but invites the audience to ponder why Agamemnon advises as he does, and whether this is self-evidently αἴσιμον: is the problem that Menelaus specifically must not accept ransoms as the injured party, or does it reflect Agamemnon's own brutality?²³ We are reminded of the principle that older brothers are wiser and can guide their siblings to the right path, but are left to reflect upon whether Agamemnon fulfils this role. Agamemnon is also said to speak αἴσιμα in *Iliad* 7, when he tells Menelaus that he is not a good enough fighter to take Hector on in single combat (109-22). Here the motif of the mentor-brother is adapted for humorous effect. Agamemnon's advice is clearly 'right', in that Menelaus is not capable of defeating Hector, and none of the Achaeans want him to try. We are told that the other kings try to restrain him (106), his servants are glad when he decides not to fight (122), and the narrator himself comments that Menelaus would have been killed if he had made the attempt (104-5). Yet there is also humour in the idea that the 'correct' advice is to shrink from the battlefield, and that the other Achaeans are relieved rather than ashamed of Menelaus' behaviour. Agamemnon's speech is diplomatic in that he plays up Hector's ferocity, claiming that even Achilles is afraid to meet him in battle (113-14), yet it also undermines Menelaus' attempts to act heroically by describing them as ἀφροσύνη (110).²⁴ Here, acting as the responsible brother involves delivering some uncomfortable home truths about Menelaus' abilities, and saying things that would usually be insulting. The fact that shrinking from combat is normally considered shameful is reinforced by Nestor's speech that follows, where he upbraids the rest of the Achaeans for their reluctance to fight Hector, and claims that it brings sorrow upon the whole land of Achaea (ὤπόποι ἦ μέγα πένθος Ἀχαιῶν ἰκάνει, 124). Thus in this passage the poet once again uses the formula αἴσιμα παρεϊπών in a situation where it is ambiguous whether Agamemnon's advice is correct, and to invite the audience to question how Menelaus should have behaved.

Agamemnon's speech when he believes Menelaus to be dying from the arrow wound he receives from Pandarus (*Il.* 4.155-82) also represents a light-hearted adaptation of the idea (espoused by Hector) that the mishaps of a brother bring shame on the wider family. Agamemnon's response to his brother's imagined death is to dwell on the shame it would bring him, since he would have to abandon his expedition. Agamemnon gives a mere two lines to his feelings of grief (169-70), but devotes twelve lines to the effect it would have on his own reputation (171-9). Even Menelaus' tomb is imagined not as his memorial, but a testament to Agamemnon's failure to sack Troy (176-80). Rather than sympathising with the beleaguered elder brother, as we do with Hector, the audience can appreciate the humour in Agamemnon's self-centred attitude, whereby his brother's painful and untimely death makes him think only of his own embarrassment. The dynamic between Agamemnon and Menelaus

²² Scodel 2008: 82 comments 'The poet nudges his audience to admire the Achilles of the past, who took and ransomed prisoners, more than the Achilles of his *aristeia*, who simply kills relentlessly'. On battlefield supplications in the *Iliad*, see Gould 1973; Giordano 1999, and on this passage see Goldhill 1990; Naiden 2006: 143-4.

²³ Scodel 2008: 83-4 argues that Menelaus' special relationship with the war is relevant here. Even if this is the right interpretation of Agamemnon's advice, the fact that Menelaus must behave differently to other characters invites the audience to consider the ethics for themselves.

²⁴ On the contradictions in Agamemnon's speech, see Scodel 2008: 70-1.

thus plays on a set of expectations regarding what the relationship between a pair of brothers symbolises, and how it should be managed. Agamemnon offers moral guidance to Menelaus, and by so doing takes on the role of the wise older brother. However, not only is his advice questionable, but the audience is also aware that Agamemnon himself falls short of being a good role model, since his judgement is highly questionable elsewhere in the *Iliad*.

We find other brother pairings in Homer that offer adaptations of the same basic tropes. For example, Teucer is nearly always mentioned in connection with his half-brother Ajax, and the more powerful (and legitimately born) Ajax acts as a protector to him.²⁵ Teucer is no weakling: he causes great damage to the Trojans through his archery, and is praised by Agamemnon (8.281-91), yet the poet compares him to a child running to his mother when he hides behind Ajax's shield (8.271-2). Here too we have a dominant and a lesser brother, but Teucer contributes in the most effective way he can, and his brother's role is to protect rather than upbraid him, as is highlighted by the nurture implicit in the simile. The image of Teucer sheltering behind Ajax's shield represents the two as a single warrior, and since the shield is a marker of Ajax's identity, Teucer becomes assimilated to his brother.²⁶ By working together in a way that plays to each of their strengths, the brothers become a formidable team, and it is noteworthy that when Menestheus requests Ajax's help, he asks that Teucer come with him (12.362-3). Indeed, the relationship between the two is so close that scholars have argued the dual form Αἴαντες can refer to Ajax and Teucer as well as the two Ajaxes.²⁷ Achilles and Patroclus' relationship also echoes the motif of the brother-pair. Although they are unrelated, their relationship is configured as that of siblings, brought up from childhood in the same household.²⁸ In this case, Nestor points out the paradox that age and dominance do not go hand in hand, as one might expect, and argues that Patroclus, as the elder, nevertheless has the right to take up the role of the brotherly advisor (11.787). Yet Achilles challenges this portrayal of their respective roles when he compares Patroclus approaching him to a little girl running to her mother (16.7-10).

Conversely, the relationship between Zeus and Poseidon illustrates the rivalry between two brothers who consider themselves to have equal status, and where neither will accept the role of the advisee.²⁹ This becomes apparent when Poseidon first helps the Achaeans, since the poet suggests that being from the same generation makes them in some sense equal (ἦ μὲν ἀμφοτέροισιν ὁμὸν γένος ἦδ' ἴα πάτερ, 13.354), but Zeus' age and wisdom gives him authority (13.355). Rather than respecting Zeus' authority, however, Poseidon perceives it only as meaning that he must help the Achaeans covertly (13.356-7). When Zeus later wakes from his slumber to find Poseidon has been openly disobeying him, he sends Iris to upbraid him, and stresses his right to tell Poseidon how to behave, since he is the older and the more powerful (15.165-6 = 181-2). Poseidon, however, challenges this interpretation, and insists that although Zeus is older, the two gods possess equal honour and an equal share of the world (15.185-9). According to Poseidon, threats and instructions should not be issued between brothers, who are of comparable status, but only from a father to his children (15.197-9). In her reply, Iris alludes to Zeus' status as the elder brother, and hints that age comes with inherent authority, irrespective of other issues (15.204). Yet while Poseidon acknowledges that Iris has spoken correctly (κατὰ μοῖραν, 206) and agrees to give way, he

²⁵ On Ajax and Teucer as a pairing, see Edgeworth 1985; Ebbott 2003: ch. 2

²⁶ See further Ebbott 2003: 41. For Ajax's shield as his distinctive feature, cf. *Il.* 7.219, 246, 266, 11.485, 536-7, 17.128, and see Page 1959: 232-5.

²⁷ See Wackernagel 1953: 538-46; Page 1959: 236; Kirk 1985: 158; Janko 1992: 48.

²⁸ See Frame 2009: ch. 4.

²⁹ For this relationship as a parallel to that of Agamemnon and Menelaus, see Reinhardt 1961: 285; Janko 1992: 245.

continues to insist on his equal status, describing the brothers as equal in station and in fate (ἰσόμορον καὶ ὁμῆ πεπρωμένον αἴσῃ, 15.209). It is worth noting that the *Iliad*-poet has chosen to make Zeus the elder brother, as elsewhere in the tradition it is Poseidon who is the senior.³⁰ The divine family is therefore constructed in a fashion which reflects the brother-pairs elsewhere in the poem, and the ideas surrounding age and authority that these other relationships explore. We find a similar theme in myths where two brothers compete for a throne, as for example in the myth of Danaus and Aegyptus, or Pelias and Iolcus. The motif of rival brothers who consider themselves equal offers a route for exploring power relationships that cannot be easily resolved.

The relationship between siblings, and in particular the conflict between brothers with opposing attitudes is therefore a recurrent motif in archaic poetry. Indeed, myths surrounding the children of Oedipus show the power of this trope in later literature, since the contrast between Eteocles and Polynices (and in Sophocles' *Antigone* between Antigone and Ismene too) represents perhaps the most fully developed treatment.³¹ Brothers are mirror images of one another, since they are in the same position in terms of generational and hierarchical status, and so allow for an exploration of how different people might choose to behave in a given situation. Tension between two brothers raise the question of what responsibility one has to one's kin, and how an individual's actions can safeguard or damage the family unit and its standing in society.

Sappho's family in the light of tradition

When we turn back to the Brothers Poem, the wider tradition of brothers in Greek poetry sheds light on Sappho's strategy. We find in Charaxus and Larichus a variation on the model of the responsible and the feckless brother. Charaxus threatens his family's hopes both materially and in terms of status, and his actions are thus reminiscent of a Paris or a Perses. Like these feckless brothers, he is motivated by his personal desires, and forgets any wider sense of duty. By situating the poem before Charaxus' return, and expressing the anxiety felt by the women of the household, Sappho draws her audience's attention to the damage that an irresponsible brother can cause others in the family unit. This idea is also explored in other accounts of Charaxus' life. In fr. 5 the speaker hopes that her errant brother will be willing to give his sister greater honour in the future (τῶν κασιγνήταν δὲ θέλοι πόησθαι / μέ]ιδονοῦ τίμας, 9-10) and refers to a 'grievous sorrow' ([ὄν]ίαν δὲ λύγραν, 10). We can infer that Charaxus has failed to respect his sister, and has caused pain to his family through his past behaviour. In Ovid's account of Charaxus' biography (*Her.* 15), the idea that Charaxus has brought disaster to the family through his personal desires is made explicit. Charaxus acts out of lust (*meretricis captus amore*, 63) and the consequences are both shame and financial loss (*mixtaque cum turpi damna pudore tulit*, 64). According to Ovid, Sappho had to take on the role of a Hector or a Hesiod, reminding her errant brother of what is acceptable, and this didactic role apparently led to a breakdown in sibling relations (*me quoque, quod monui bene multa fideliter / odit*, 67). There is an irony in the love-poet Sappho, who elsewhere sings of the overwhelming power of *erōs*, criticising her brother for succumbing to desire.

³⁰ *Od.* 13.142; *Hes. Th.* 477-80.

³¹ On Antigone and Ismene, see Griffith 2001; Goldhill 2006. On sisterhood as a bond in Greek tragedy, see Coe 2013, and for the need to situate the Brothers Poem within the tradition of sisterly speech, see Peponi 2016. Sophocles in *OC* makes the ousted Polynices the elder brother, in order to emphasise the harshness of his treatment and encourage sympathy when his supplication is rejected by Oedipus.

It is striking that the elder brother in Sappho's family is the feckless one, and Charaxus' behaviour is doubly shocking since he overturns the usual claims of the elder brother to moral authority. This allows the poet to set Larichus up as a hope for the future, as at the end of the Brothers Poem, where it is only if he can 'become a man' (Λάριχος καὶ δὴ ποτ' ἄνηρ γένηται, 22) that the family may be released from their βαρυθυμία (23-4). In the biographical tradition, this contrast between the brothers is elucidated in the detail that Larichus gains esteem as a wine-pourer, while Charaxus loses it as a wine-trader.³² But as far as we know, Larichus features only as a boy in Sappho's poetry, and we are left in doubt as to whether he will fulfil his family's hopes. Larichus' role as a wine-pourer is significant, for other sources indicate that adopting this role was associated with young men who had not yet reached full adult status.³³ The situation of Sappho's family is thus constructed as particularly fragile, since the useful brother exists only in potential form. As a wine-pourer, Larichus brings the family honour through the social and symbolic role of wine, yet it is ultimately its economic importance (as shown through Charaxus' choice of cargo) that is needed to save them from the ruin caused by his losses.

The most striking additional component to the brotherly relationship is of course the presence of Sappho herself. As the poet, she is able to adopt the role of the sibling with moral authority, and (according to the testimonia) upbraids the feckless brother and praises the virtuous one. Thus unlike the two-way relationship we have seen in other examples, we have a triangular one. Sappho is not simply a poet passing abstract judgement, but construes herself as a family member with a personal stake in the situation. In the Brothers Poem her involvement is emphasised at the opening and close, in the anxious relationship with the addressee (5-12) and in the first person plurals used to describe the family's crisis (21-4). Similarly in fr. 5 the mention of her honour and her grief (9-10) indicates that Sappho has been harmed by Charaxus' past behaviour. Hector and Hesiod offer examples of brothers who present themselves as personally affected by their brothers' failings, but the gender dynamic of Sappho's family makes the difference an important one.³⁴ As a young female, Sappho cannot take an active role in managing the family's wealth or status, and can only offer advice and comment from the sidelines. Whereas Hector and Hesiod themselves represent the positive *exemplum* to which their wayward siblings should aspire, Sappho is powerless to do so. Thus the implicit criticism of the brothers takes on additional force: Charaxus is the only capable adult man, and his failings therefore have serious consequences, while the significance of Larichus' actions also becomes greater, since he must act as the vehicle for Sappho's ideals.

If we take the addressee of this poem to be Sappho's mother, the poet foregrounds issues of gender and age within the family still more prominently. This was posited by Obbink in the *editio princeps*, and when the first four lines of the poem were published the following year, Martin West noted that line 4 could be restored with a vocative address *σε, μάτερ*.³⁵ Sappho's description of the family's βαρυθυμία, and the claim that all their hopes rest on

³² Lardinois 2016: 180 suggests that both Charaxus and Larichus are adopting strategies to gain access to the elite for their family, Charaxus through amassing wealth, and Larichus through gaining honour.

³³ Cf. *Il.* 1.470, *Od.* 15.141, while Ganymede and Pelops offer mythological examples (e.g. Pind. *Ol.* 1.44-5). Wine-pouring as a pedagogical activity is attested in the classical period in Sparta (Xen. *Lac.* 5.5) and Crete (Strabo 10.4.20), while in Athens it was reflected in ritual roles, such as the story that the young Euripides served as wine-pourer at the Thargelia (Ath. 10.424e). For discussion of the role of the wine-pourer, see Bremmer 1990: 141-2; Topper 2012: ch. 3.

³⁴ For further discussion of sisterhood in Sappho, see Bierl 2016; Nagy 2016.

³⁵ See Obbink (2014) 41, and for West's suggestion see Obbink 2015 and 2016: 26. See also West 2014: 8; Ferrari 2014: 4; Neri 2015: 59-60 for arguments in favour of the mother.

Larichus, suggest that there is no capable adult male present, and so the speaker must be another woman.³⁶ This is strengthened by her description of the addressee as ‘babbling’ (θρύληθα, 5), which suggests the useless chatter stereotypically associated with women.³⁷ This woman must be someone who is personally involved in the situation, has the authority to instruct Sappho how to behave, and yet cannot do anything more active than talk or pray, and this makes a mother the most plausible candidate.³⁸ The vulnerability of the two women, and their dependence on their menfolk, permeates the poem.³⁹ Sappho’s mother hopes for Charaxus’ return, and chatters of the wealth he will bring with him (5-6), and her daughter upbraids her for this kind of talk (7-8). Yet the only alternative Sappho can recommend is prayer (9-12). The poem’s ending makes it clear that action can be taken to save the family, but neither the speaker nor addressee is capable of doing so, and instead they must wait and hope that Larichus will show himself to be capable (21-4). The presence of Sappho’s mother also sheds light on the poet’s own persona, since she presents herself here as a young woman, who still expects guidance from her mother. Archaic poetry offers other examples of maternal authority figures who offer advice to and are owed respect from men, for example the Iliadic Hecuba, and the Queen in Stesichorus’ *Thebais* (fr. 97 Finglass), and we might expect the mother to take some responsibility for the βερυθυμία of the family. Instead, she fails to instruct her daughter properly or to manage her share of domestic affairs, and can only offer empty chatter (ἀλλ’ ἄϊ θρύληθα, 5). In telling her mother what advice she should be giving, the poet therefore shows a further way in which family dynamics are unravelling. The only responsible and morally aware individual in the family is the one with least agency, the unmarried daughter.

Thus Sappho adapts the traditional motif of the brother-pair in order to explore issues of family status from a female perspective. Charaxus’ shortcomings highlight the limitations that govern the lives of other members of the family, and thus allude to men’s responsibility to behave properly towards their female relatives. Whereas most brother-pairs explore the ways in which two individuals of equal status may in fact differ in authority, Sappho explores how individuals of more marginal status can influence their situations, whether young boys, older women, or girls. While their influence may be slight, the subtle criticism of Larichus, and of Sappho’s mother, suggests that everyone in the family has a role to play. Even young girls can offer their prayers, and should be encouraged to do so.

Reading Sappho’s poem in the light of brother pairings elsewhere in Greek archaic poetry thus guides us away from biographical interpretations, and encourages us instead to look for the moralising strategies that lie behind her use of brothers, and the motif of the brother pair more generally in archaic thought. On analysis, brothers are used repeatedly to elucidate themes to do with personal and familial responsibility, and to explore the choices individuals make as to how they behave, and the impact that these decisions have on others around them.

³⁶ I therefore disagree with Lardinois 2016: 183-4, who suggests that the addressee is Sappho’s third brother, Erigyios (and with Bierl 2016, who argues for an important male family member such as an uncle). If there is a capable male with the authority and age to instruct Sappho how to behave, it is unclear why everything depends on Larichus. A male addressee is also favoured by Stehle 2016, who argues that it is Larichus himself, but I find the shift to the third person problematic, as well as the addressee’s exclusion from the ‘we’ who may be saved by his future actions (24).

³⁷ A point made by Kurke 2016: 239, though I would not go as far as her in stating that it is ‘almost impossible’ to believe Sappho could have used this verb of male speech, as it could (in theory) be a derogatory tactic, comparing a useless man to a woman.

³⁸ Bettenworth 2014 suggests a nurse, but while a trusted nurse might offer advice, she would not have the authority to ‘instruct’ Sappho in how to behave (κέλεθα, 5).

³⁹ Cf. Ferrari 2014: 4.

The essential similarity of brothers draws our attention to ways in which individuals are not the same as each other, regardless of familial and social markers, and so raises issues to do with how character affects our lives. The motif of the worthy and useless brother, as most clearly illustrated by Paris and Hector, creates polarised extremes as a way of exploring these ideas. Other brother-pairings, such as Agamemnon and Menelaus, complicate these extremes, by portraying brothers who fall short of this model. When we acknowledge that Sappho is adapting a traditional pattern, rather than simply narrating her personal experiences, we are better able to appreciate the ingenuity of her biographical stories. We have long known that Sappho adapts the tropes of epic to her own (and female-oriented) ends, as for example in fr. 16 V, where the value and beauty of an army is set against that of one's beloved. In the new fragment, we see how Sappho uses the motif of the brother pairing to explore family dynamics from the perspective of the females of the household. As a young girl, Sappho's agency may be limited, but the poem reminds its audience of the duty that adult men owe their dependents, and the moral authority that sisters as well as brothers can claim.

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