MISZELLEN

SAPPHO’S DAUGHTER/CLITORIS/LOVER

(I have a beautiful child, who has a form like golden flowers, beloved Kleis, for whom I [would not take] all Lydia nor lovely . . .)

A great scholar not so long ago wrote:

I would not reject the suggestion that Sappho’s feelings for Kleis, as imagined in fragment 132, were given a consciously lesbian coloring . . . Indeed, taking it a step further, this “child” (pais) may be simply another metaphor for clitoris (Kleis/kleitoris).

This suggestion has recently met with approval. That is, the claim is made that Sappho expected her readers on encountering the Lesbian proper name Kleis to think of the Attic word kleiō̂s, which in turn was to suggest the word klειτωρίς. One can already see the problems in this concatenation. The accidental resemblance of Kleis to klειτωρίς is a good example of where a little learning is a dangerous thing.

Four brief points.

1) To take the last link first, kleiō̂s (and its forms in other dialects) is never used to mean ‘clitoris,’ or indeed any part of the body other than the collarbone (Hom. Il. 8.325, etc., whence English ‘clavicle’). None of the other derivatives of kleiō̂s, nor any other word built to the same root, means ‘clitoris.’ The word klειτωρίς itself, a feminine agent noun with the rare compound suffix -tor-ίς, is clearly a part of the late technical medical vocabulary, attested only once (apart from the lexicographers), and at least six centuries after Sappho (Ruf. Onom. 111).


4) See this chapter for the words normally used for clitoris; also Hsch. κ 2917, Pollux Onom. 2.174, Phot. Lex. μ 281, Suda μ 1462. Cf. also the verb
2) Attic κλείς 'key, bar' and its cognates have nothing to do with Κλέις, the name of Sappho’s daughter. Attic κλείς, κλειδός comes from the root *klâw (cf. Latin clâvis, clau-udo) and the nominal suffix -îd-, with the meaning ‘closer, key, bar,’ etc.5 This *klâw (cf. Doric κλαύς, acc. pl. κλαύδας) developed to *κληίς and with loss of digamma to κληίς (Ionic κληίς, κληίδος).6 In a later (fourth century) Attic development this new η monophthongized to a long high ɘ, spelled -ei- (the famous “spurious diphthong”).7 The predicted Aeolic reflex κλαίς (two syllables, long ə retained, long i, with Aeolic recessive accent) is attested by Hesychius in the form κλάις.8

3) The proper name Κλέις, on the other hand, is equally transparent.9 Κλέις (Sappho 132; dat. Κλεί, 98b.1; always scanning as a pyrrhic)10 is from *klew-is, with the root *klew- ‘glory,’ seen in κλεῦω, etc., and the formant -iw (short i) which creates feminine patronymics.11 The name Κλέ-ίς (loss of intervocalic digamma and Aeolic recessive accent) then means ‘Daughter of Glory,’ or the like. It is attested on Lesbos (IG XII Suppl., Nr. 78, p. 25: iii cent.), and is simply one of the vast series of names built to this root (Κλεο-πάτρα, Περι-κλής, etc.).

4) I am also uncertain precisely what Sappho imagined the reader would make of 98b.1–3:

σοί δ’ ἔγω Κλεί ποικίλαν
ούκ ἔχω πόθεν ἔσσεται
μιτράν
(I do not have a way for you to have an embroidered headband,
O Kleis),

if Κλέις is meant to bring to the reader’s mind κλειτορίς.

If not her clitoris, then, can we at least avoid the plain sense of the text and claim that Kleis is not her daughter, but her lover? However, as Judith Hallett point-

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κλειτοριάζω, attested only in the lexicographers (sometimes amusingly): Diogenianus 5.77 (ἐπὶ τῶν παιδεραστῶν τινὲς φασίν ἢ ἐπὶ τῶν γυναικῶν ἀκολούθων), Pseudo-Plut. Paroem. 1.6, Phot. Lex. κ 168.15, Suda κ 1767, Macarius 5.16. There is a stone called κλειτορίς according to Pseudo-Plut. De fluvii 25.5.


8) κ 2856: κλαίς , κλαίος, the accent may reflect a new analogical short 1, or more likely is merely an error.

9) I do not believe its etymology has been pointed out. However, E.-M. Hamm, Grammatik zu Sappho und Alkaüos (Berlin 1957) 29 (§ 58a.1), lists κλέος, Κλέι, etc. as examples of the intervocalic loss of digamma, and points to the correct root.

10) D. Page, Sappho and Alcaeus (Oxford 1955) 131 n. 4, for the meter.

11) Hamm (above n. 9) 29 (§ 58a.1), 52–53 (§ 111, 111e).
ed out some time ago, in early Greek the adjective ἐγαπητός is used exclusively of beloved only children.12 Despite Hallet’s irrefutable data, some ideas just will not go away.13 One might with equal cogency argue that Ben Jonson was referring to his lover (or his penis or his slave) when he wrote, “Farewell, thou child of my right hand, and joy; / My sin was too much hope of thee, loved boy.”

To this I would add just one well-known point of Greek syntax, and that is the use of the possessive dative. As Cooper points out: “The idiomatic range is not wide . . . Homer uses the possessive dative with εἰμὶ especially in expressions of family relations.”14 Although I do not know that it would be completely impossible for Sappho to have expressed the idea “I have a beautiful girlfriend” by ἔστι μοι κάλα παῖς, it is not the first thing that would have occurred to her audience.15


13) Recent supporters include A. P. Burnett, Three Archaic Poets. Archilochus, Alcaeus, Sappho (Cambridge, Mass. 1983) 279 n. 2: “the possibility remains that παῖς here means what it would in masculine society.” However, παῖς does not mean ‘sexual object’ in masculine society on all occasions. There are no examples in archaic lyric or elegy of παῖς as an unqualified technical term for ‘boy sexual partner’; instead in all cases where we have the context παῖς simply means ‘child/offspring.’ In later poetry, one can always address a beloved as ‘boy’ because he is a boy, but that does not mean that the word ‘boy’ means ‘beloved’ (so in the additions to Theognis 994, 1235, etc.; cf. Theog. 261: παῖς of a desirable girl, under the watch of her parents). Burnett continues: “Elsewhere in the Sapphic corpus it means ‘girl’ ten times, ‘child of x’ five times.” That is, there is no example of the meaning ‘lover’ in the surviving corpus, not even 102 (Page [above n. 10] 128, “a young person”). My own count is rather different. Apart from 132, I find ‘daughter’ 4 times (1.2, 16.10 [this is Hermione; cf. Hom. Od. 4.14], 103.6, 155.1), ‘boy’ or ‘son’ 1 time (164), ‘girl’ (marked feminine) 3 times (49b, 113, 122), and gender unspecified or uncertain 4 times (27.4, 58.11 [not known to be the opening line], 102, 104.2). The new fragment, PKöln 2135, ZPE 147 (2004) 1–8, has placed 58 in context, but there is no justification for translating “girls.” Also, M. Williamson, Sappho’s Immortal Daughters (Cambridge, Mass. 1995) 2: “used of a young girl by her older lover,” but no evidence is given. There is an important methodological consideration here: one cannot simply map male terminology onto female relations. Nor can one simply assume that Athenian social vocabulary meant the same thing in differing areas and ages. No one yet, I believe, has tried to make Kleis into Sappho’s slave (an Athenian use of παῖς) and yet why not?

14) Guy L. Cooper, Greek Syntax: Early Greek Poetic and Herodotean Syntax (Ann Arbor 2002) III: 2119–20 (§ 2.48.3.0–2), citing ll. 5.10,248, 6.142, 20.183,209, Od. 4.94, 6.277, 24.270; cf. Hdt. 6.69.4; to which add ll. 9.144. The dat. can also be used of simple possession of material objects, e.g. Hom. ll. 23.173 (dogs) and Sappho 98b (above); or abstractions, e.g. ll. 10.453 (woe); see P. Chantraine, Grammaire homérique (Paris 1953) 71 (§ 91).

15) One might point to Alcm. 1.74: Ἄσταφίς [τε] μοι γένοιτο and Hipponax 119: εἶ μοι γένοιτο παρθένος κυλή τε καὶ τέρεινα as counter-examples in an erotic context; however, note the optatives and the use of γίγνομαι; Cooper (above, n. 14)
The Attic word κλεῖς ‘key’ did not suggest clitoris. Attic κλεῖς and Aeolic κλάις do not resemble each other. Attic κλεῖς ‘key’ and Aeolic Κλεῖς ‘Daughter of a Glorious Parent’ have nothing to do with each other. The syntax argues strongly against taking πάξις as ‘lover.’ Sappho’s daughter was her daughter, not her clitoris, not her girlfriend.

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III 2119–20 (§2.48.3.1): “When γίνομαι is used instead of εἰμί the range of translation is wide and includes get, suffer, come over, pine (for), etc.”

THE EXILE OF L. CORNELIUS SCIPIO ASIAGENUS

Scipio Asiagenus (cos. 83)\(^1\) was proscribed by Sulla. However, he managed to make his way to Massilia and was there allowed to live out his remaining years. For this rare indulgence scholars have entered various explanations. Scipio was the last descendant of his particular branch of the Corneliis; in Macedonia in 85 he had avoided a confrontation with Sulla; he had negotiated – albeit unsuccessfully – with Sulla in 83.\(^2\)

Recently, however, C. S. Mackay has questioned this widely accepted reconstruction of events, arguing that Sulla most likely pursued Scipio to his place of refuge and there disposed of him as he did his other enemies.\(^3\) I do not believe our evidence will support this revisionist view.

To begin with there is no explicit statement in any source to the effect that Sulla hunted down and murdered Scipio. Lest I be accused of deploying an ‘argumentum ex silentio’ it should be pointed out that all the other consuls of 83 and 82 met with violent ends which are well documented.\(^4\) If Scipio had gone the same way I think we should have heard about it. Mackay\(^5\) naturally emphasises Sulla’s relentless pursuit of his other enemies but in the absence of corroborating evidence I do not believe we necessarily have to infer from this that Scipio met the same fate.\(^6\)

1) MRR 2.62. All dates in this paper are B.C.
4) MRR 2.66,70.
5) Mackay (as n. 3) 201.
6) This is especially so if we are prepared to believe there were circumstances which would dispose Sulla to be lenient in Scipio’s case. If, as some hold, the latter’s