

As readers of the “New Sappho” are aware, twelve of the 33 lines attested on the new Cologne papyrus appear also in P. Oxy. 1787 (published in 1922). The two fragmentary versions complement each other to the extent that it is now possible to read or restore with confidence most of the overlapping lines, which for convenience I will call Passage X. In the Cologne papyrus, these lines, considered by West, Janko, and others to form a complete and satisfying poem, are preceded by eight presumably Sapphic lines in the same meter (Passage A), and followed by 13 (Passage B) that for metrical and other reasons should not be attributed to Sappho. In the Oxyrhynchus papyrus, however, X is preceded by 10 *different* lines (Passage M) and followed by 7 (Passage N), all in the same meter and dialect. Passages M+X+N.1-4 are printed in modern editions as Sappho fr. 58, which has generated much critical attention as a “poem” revealing the speaker’s values. This interpretation of fr. 58 comes largely from the relationship of X to N: (X) I am aging, alas, as all humans must, even Tithonus beloved of Dawn, (N) but I cherish refinement (*abrosúna*) and, thanks to Eros, I have obtained the brilliance and beauty of the Sun (or: thanks to the love of the Sun, I have obtained brilliance and beauty). Passage X by itself makes a tighter and starker poem, which may better satisfy current aesthetic sensibilities, yet a Hellenistic epigram (Poseidippos 52 A.-B.) appears to reflect the longer version XN (Puelma and Angiò, in *ZPE* 152 [2005]: 13-15).

Despite its appeal and significance, I will not focus primarily on the question, “Exactly what did Sappho say/write?” At this early point in our discussion of the New Sappho, we should take seriously the possibility that the two manuscripts reflect different versions, or performance traditions, of a Sapphic song that had fluid boundaries, attested both as X (or AX) in the Cologne papyrus and XN (or MXN) in the Oxyrhynchus. Partial parallels to such variation exist in the corpora of other archaic poets, including Solon, Theognis, and Alcaeus. I examine this possibility by focusing on one line in Passage X: “for a human being, it is impossible not to grow old” (*agéraon...ou dúnaton génesthai*), considering how that statement accords with other *adúnata* in the corpus of Sappho, and with each of the arguably “complete” poems, X and XN. I conclude that in the light of current evidence, *both* texts are paleographically and poetically defensible, and the text of Sappho’s composition may well have been transmitted and re-performed in different versions.

To contextualize these readings, I consider briefly several non-Sapphic poems that deal with unwelcome symptoms of old age, especially Alkman fr. 26, addressed (as X may also be) to young female singers, and Simonides fr. el. 20, which calls to mind the “recompense” of *abrosúna* that in some way comforts the speaker of Passage XN. Despite thematic resemblances, however, these and other fragments on old age diverge from the “new Sappho,” which uniquely provides the unflinching acceptance of poem X and/or the god-blessed recompense of XN.