

⊗⊗⊗ Ποικιλόθρον· ἄθανάτα· Ἐφρόδιτα,
παῖ Δίος δολόπλοκε, λίσσομαί σε,
μή μ' ἄσαισι μηδ' ὀνίαισι δάμνα,
πότνια, θυμόν,
_____]

5 ἄλλα τυίδ' ἔλθ', αἶ ποτα κατέρωπα
τὰς ἔμας αὖδας αἴοισα πῆλοι
ἔκλυες, πάτρος δὲ δόμον λίποις
χρύσιον ἤλθες
_____]

10 ἄρμ' ὑπαδεύσαις· κάλοι δέ σ' ἄγον
ᾧκεες στρουθοὶ περὶ γὰρ μελαίνας
πύκνα δίνεντες πτέρ' ἀπ' ὠράνω· αἶθε-
ρος διὰ μέσσω·
_____]

15 αἶψα δ' ἐξίκοντο· σὺ δ', ᾧ μάκαιρα,
μειδιαίσεις· ἄθανάτω προσώπῳ
ἥρε' ὅτι δηῦτε πέπονθα κῶττι

	δηῦτε κάλημι	
	_____]	
20	κῶττι μοι μάλιστα θέλω γένεσθαι μαινόλαι θύμωι· “τίνα δηῦτε πείθω —] . . ἀγην ἐς cὰν φιλότατα; τίς c', ὦ Ψάπφ', ἀδικήει;	
	_____]	
	καὶ γὰρ αἰ φεύγει, ταχέως διώξει· αἰ δὲ δῶρα μὴ δέκετ', ἀλλὰ δώσει· αἰ δὲ μὴ φίλει, ταχέως φιλήσει κωὺκ ἐθέλοισα.”	
	_____]	
25	ἔλθε μοι καὶ νῦν, χαλέπαν δὲ λῦσον ἐκ μερίμναν, ὅσσα δέ μοι τέλεσσαι θῦμος ἰμέρρει, τέλεσον· cὺ δ' αὐτα cύμμαχος ἔσσο.	⊗
	⊗⊗⊗ _____]	
	Ornately throned, immortal, Aphrodite, child of Zeus, weaver of deceit, I beg you, do not, lady, subdue my spirit with pain and anguish,	
5	but come here, if ever on another occasion on hearing my voice from afar you listened, and, leaving your father's golden house, arrived	
10	after yoking your chariot. Beautiful swift sparrows were drawing you above the black earth, thickly whirring their wings, from the sky through the middle of the air,	
15	and they arrived straightaway. And you, blessed lady, smiling with your immortal face, asked what I suffered again and why I was calling again	

20 and what I want most of all to happen
 in my maddened heart. 'Whom am I to persuade again
 ... to your affection? Who, Sappho, is doing
 you injustice?

 For if she flees, soon she will pursue.
 If she does not receive gifts, she will rather give them.
 If she does not love, soon she will love,
 even if she is not willing.'

25 Come to me now too, free me from
 grim worries, and all those things which my spirit
 longs to achieve, achieve them. You yourself
 be my ally.

⊗

Open a modern edition of Sappho, and this is the first poem that you will find. Originally it stood at the head of the ancient edition too, the first poem of the first book of the nine-book collection of Sappho's complete output edited at the Great Library of Alexandria during the Hellenistic period, probably by Aristophanes of Byzantium (c. 257–c. 185/180 BC).¹ The fundamental organising principle for that edition was metre, and all the poems of Book 1 were in the sapphic metre, which was named after Sappho.² In the ancient edition, that metre was arranged over four lines, as indicated in the following scheme, where — represents a metrically long syllable, ~ a metrically short syllable and × an anaceps syllable, one that can be long or short:

— ~ × — ~ — —
— ~ × — ~ — —
— ~ × — ~ — ×
— ~ — —

Sappho's works do not survive in a continuous manuscript tradition, so for knowledge of her poetry we long depended on quotations in other authors whose works did survive—and such quotations tell us nothing about the lineation of the Sappho manuscripts from which they were taken. Our knowledge of this lineation derives rather from the fragmentary ancient manuscripts whose publication, from 1880 onwards, has so increased our knowledge

¹ Texts and translations of Sappho come from Finglass ([forthcoming-a](#)), though the numeration used is the one found in existing editions, the most recent of which is Neri (2021); for the line numeration of fr. 10, however, whose line-numbers are all four lines greater than they are in Neri (2021), see D'Alessio (2023: 1–2). One symbol requires explanation: ⊗ indicates poem-beginning or poem-ending, ⊗⊗⊗ the beginning of an edition. For the ancient edition of Sappho, see Prauscello (2021); Finglass ([forthcoming-a](#)). The evidence for the position of this poem at its head is set out in Finglass ([forthcoming-b](#)).

² For Sappho's metres see Battezzato (2021); for the sapphic metre in particular see Pitotto (2022).

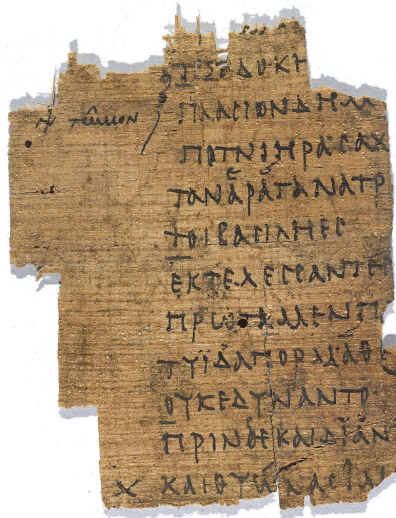


Fig. 1: P.S.I. 123 (M-P³ 1444 = LDAB 3894 = TM 62706); <http://www.psi-online.it/documents/psi;2;123>. Florence, The Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, ms. PSI 123. Reproduced with permission of MiC. Further reproduction by any means is prohibited.

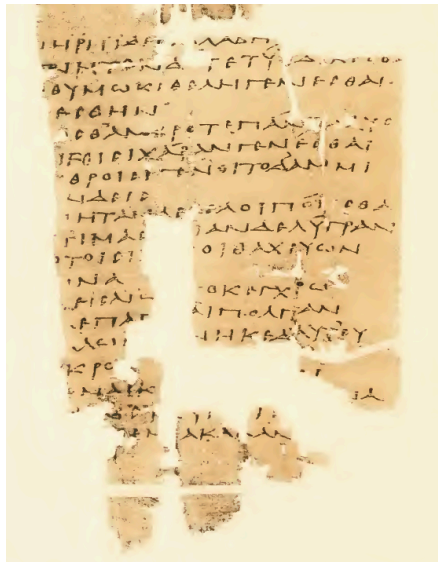


Fig. 2: P.Oxy. 7 (M-P³ 1442 = LDAB 3897 = TM 62709), London, British Library P.739. Image from Grenfell and Hunt (1898): plate II.

of Sappho's poetry; these are usually written on papyrus, though parchment manuscripts are attested too, and we even have an ostrakon.³ Book 1 is by far the best attested in the papyrological record, with parts of eight separate manuscripts from this book having survived. Thanks to a colophon at the end of one of these manuscripts, we know that the book contained 1320 lines, or 330 Sapphic stanzas; calculations based on typical poem-lengths in this metre suggest that these stanzas made up something of the order of fifty-nine separate poems (Finglass 2026a: 15 n. 5; see further D'Alessio 2023; Finglass 2022: 5–6). Figs. 1 and 2 show two of these fragmentary manuscripts, both from papyrus rolls excavated at Oxyrhynchus in Egypt: the first one (P.S.I. 123) from the late first or early second century AD and the second one (P.Oxy. 7) from the third century AD.

In both papyri, the alternation between three long lines followed by one short line can be clearly discerned. In the first, whose left-hand margin is preserved, we can observe the horizontal stroke, called a *paragraphos*, indicating the break between stanzas after four lines.

This lineation, then, can be traced back at least to the third or second century BC—perhaps earlier, since lyric manuscripts predating the Alexandrian edition, including one by Sappho, show texts already arranged according to metrical patterns.⁴ The question of whether Sappho herself would have written the stanza over four lines naturally presents itself; but that question requires modification, since it is virtually certain that she would not have thought in such terms, but would rather have written her poems without metrical lineation. We need to reframe our inquiry, and ask instead how Sappho and her audiences would have understood the metrical form of the stanza. That question is answerable, because we can observe from Sappho's poetry that she employed the stanza that would come to be named after her as a three-verse unit, not a four-verse one. Verse-end is where we find metrical pause, always marked by word-end, and sometimes by hiatus as well—the kind of hiatus that would not be possible inside a verse. But a word often crosses over from line 3 into line 4 of the metrical scheme used in ancient manuscripts. This is found in line 11 of the opening poem of Book 1 cited above; and in line 19 of the same poem, we find the vocative ὦ 'o' at line-end, the name with which it is connected standing at the start of the following line, also something illicit across verse-boundary. In other words, Sappho's use of this stanza shows that there was no verse-end at this point. She was composing in a three-verse unit, whose verses can be represented in our notation as follows:

³ For these different sources see Finglass (2021).

⁴ E.g. the third-century-BC P.Köln 429+430 (containing two poems that would be included in Sappho Book 4) and also the Lille Stesichorus, P.Lille 73, 76, 111C (fr. 97 F. in Finglass 2014b; see Finglass 2014a: 68; 2014c: 367–70; forthcoming-c), which is from roughly the same period as P.Köln 429+430 or a little later.

— ∪ — x — ∪ ∪ — ∪ — —
 — ∪ — x — ∪ ∪ — ∪ — —
 — ∪ — x — ∪ ∪ — ∪ — x — ∪ ∪ — —

This is well known among metrical specialists and not remotely controversial (cf. [Hutchinson 2001: 150–1](#); [Budelmann 2018: 116](#)). It mirrors other metrical forms found in the poetry of Sappho and of her Lesbian contemporary Alcaeus in which two identical verses are followed by a longer one ([West 1970: 308 = 2011–13: II 29](#); [1982: 32–3](#); [Battezzato 2021: 126–9](#)). It was also the form of sapphic stanza used by Catullus, whose poems in this metre exhibit the use of a long third line, as can be identified in the same way as for Sappho.⁵

It is no surprise that the lineation found in the papyri does not offer an optimal reflection of the metrical structure. First, such ancient lineations, devised long after the poetry itself was composed, regularly fail to represent the reality of the metres concerned ([Parker 2001](#); [Itsumi 2007](#)). Second, even if the metrical form was observed in this case—as it may well have been, the fact of word-overlap between lines 3 and 4 being so obvious a phenomenon—metrical considerations would nevertheless have yielded to practical and economical ones. Two lines followed by an extra-long line is a less efficient lay-out on a papyrus roll than three normal lines followed by a short one; in the former case, the column of text becomes significantly wider, and there is a lot of empty papyrus as a result, since only a third of the lines actually need that extra space. By contrast, the four-line arrangement wastes only a little space at the end of every fourth line.⁶

We observe here the tension between oral and written versions of a text, with the latter introducing a division which had no basis in the former. In accordance with his later dictum that ‘in analysing lyric poetry generally one must be guided not by ancient lineation but strictly by objective internal criteria’,⁷ Martin West once pointed out how ‘in quoting from Sappho’s first book in this article I have given her back her long third line instead of snipping off the Alexandrian colometrists’ sad little “adonian”’ ([West 1970: 308 = 2011–13: II 29](#)). This three-line arrangement of the sapphic stanza had been adopted by two previous scholars. First, by Angelo Taccone in his anthology of Greek lyric, who justifies it by reference to new metrical theories, now abandoned ([Taccone 1904: 102–8](#); theories on p. 88). Second, by George Thomson, who in his precocious monograph on Greek metre remarks: ‘Unfortunately, many Greek rhythms are spoiled, or at least obscured, by the way in which they are printed. Take the Sapphic stanza ...’ Of his preferred arrangement, over three lines, he asks, ‘Is not this very beautiful?’ ([Thomson 1929: 18, 19](#)).

⁵ Contrast Horace’s sapphics, in which the third papyrus line virtually always coincides with word-end. For the sapphic stanza in Latin literature, see Morgan (2010: 181–283); Rezende (2017). For Sappho in Latin literature, see Morgan (2021).

⁶ For issues of impagination in Greek manuscripts more generally, see Most (2021).

⁷ West (1982: 33); used as the epigraph to Itsumi (2007: 306).

Other editors did not however follow suit. The conditions that produced the four-line arrangement—the need to conserve papyrus—have long passed; paper is far cheaper, and the quantity of Sappho that we have to print is unfortunately small. Digital editions, of course, remove the need for a physical means of transmission altogether. Yet the four-line arrangement endures. Compare the QWERTY keyboard, a suboptimal arrangement measured purely by the speed with which it allows typists to type, which nevertheless became successful in part because of a practical consideration, namely that it prevented early typists from jamming their machines. Once this inferior system had become standard, it was never changed, even when the coming of better typewriters, and after that the personal computer, made the threat of such jamming a thing of the past.⁸

Is it worth upsetting this editorial inertia? I believe that it is, for two reasons. First, so little survives to us from the wreckage of antiquity—and the loss of such a great proportion of Sappho's works is particularly painful given her status as the most important woman writer of Classical antiquity—that we owe it to the past to identify, analyse and edit whatever has been preserved with the greatest conceivable care, and in a manner that best conveys its essential characteristics to a modern audience. That is a duty which imposes itself independently of all other considerations. But in the present case, there is also the hope that if we do scrutinise the actual structure of Sappho's poetry, we may appreciate its quality with a keener eye. After all, a poet who was instantly recognised as a classic in her own day, and at least some of whose works have been read during the twenty-six centuries since her death, presumably knew what she was doing in terms of the mutual relationship of metre and sense. In the remainder of this article I put that idea to the test, taking some examples of Sappho's use of the long third verse, and collecting them, for the reader's convenience rather than out of any desire to schematise for its own sake, under three loose headings.

A. Climactic third line

- | | | |
|-----|---|---|
| (i) | ⊗ | Ποικιλόθρον' ἀθανάτα· Ἀφρόδιτα,
παῖ Δίος δολόπλοκε, λίσσομαί σε,
μή μ' ἄσαισι μηδ' ὀνίαισι δάμνα, πότνια, θῦμον |
| 3/4 | | |
| | ⊗ | Ornately throned, immortal, Aphrodite,
child of Zeus, weaver of deceit, I beg you,
do not, lady, subdue my spirit with pain and anguish |
| 3/4 | | |

fr. 1.1–3/4

⁸ David (1985); for the phenomenon involved ('path dependence') see further Vergne (2013).

As Hutchinson (2001: 151) puts it: ‘The request itself comes in the largest of the three periods: the form of the stanza is effectively exploited.’ Or in the words of Thomson (1929: 18), criticising the four-line arrangement of this stanza: ‘Is that the right way to read it? Does not the ear feel instinctively that the third and fourth lines should be taken more closely together?’ Each of the three verses ends with a pause, though the invocation of Aphrodite continues from the first into the second, which ends with a brief statement indicating that a request is being made, before the request itself takes place as a climax. Not just the position of the third verse, but also its length, is put to use: the balanced expression *μη ... ἄκαισι μηδ’ ὀνείασι* (‘not ... with pain and anguish’) with virtually synonymous nouns lends rhetorical weight to the request, and the vocative *πότνια* recapitulates the initial address with a respectful term through which the speaker acknowledges the goddess’s authority even as she presses home her petition. There is a pause immediately before *πότνια* (‘lady’), but also one immediately after it, as happens with a vocative—there is no sense of a break, and the meaning across *δάμνα ... θῦμον* (‘subdue my spirit’) is continuous. Writing *πότνια, θῦμον* (‘lady, spirit’) as a unit on its own line would be false to the articulation.

- (ii)
- | | |
|------|--|
| | καὶ γὰρ αἶ φεύγει, ταχέως διώξει· |
| | αἶ δὲ δῶρα μὴ δέκετ’, ἀλλὰ δώσει· |
| 23/4 | αἶ δὲ μὴ φίλει, ταχέως φιλήσει κωὺκ ἐθέλοισα.” |
| | For if she flees, soon she will pursue. |
| | If she does not receive gifts, she will rather give them. |
| 23/4 | If she does not love, soon she will love, even if she is not willing.’ |
| | fr. 1.21–23/4 |

The three-verse architecture is even more starkly apparent here, with a single verse dedicated to each of the conditional clauses used by Aphrodite to assure Sappho of her support. This allows the opposition in each case between what is happening now, and what soon will be happening, to be clearly marked, and each confident future, delivered with an almost incantatory effect, to receive its own metrical unit. Here too Hutchinson remarks on the structure: ‘The last instance of the three, in the “long line”, might seem at first to lack the neat extremity of the first two, merely repeating the verb; but it in fact produces the greatest extreme: the girl will love even though she does not want to’ (Hutchinson 2001: 158). Indeed, the three clauses reflect a relationship of growing intimacy: pursuit, then gifts, then love. The third promise comes as a climax not just by being the last and longest; it also refers to love, and reveals the sex of the beloved, something that the poem had previously concealed.

- (iii) ⊗ Πότνιαι Νηρηίδες, ἀβλάβη[ν μοι
 τὸν κασίγνητον δ[ό]τε τυίδ' ἵκεσθα[ι
3/4 κῶττι Φῶϊ θύμῳ κε θέλη γένεσθαι κῆνο τελέεσθην·
- ⊗ Lady Nereids, grant that my brother
 should return here [to me] unharmed,
3/4 and that whatever he wants to happen in his own heart, that should be accomplished.
- fr. 5.1–3/4

As in (i), this prayer at the start of a poem falls into three parts, yet with a different articulation: the address to the Nereids is brief, allowing a move to the first request part-way through the first verse, which continues until the end of the second. The culminating idea expressed in that third verse is appropriate for a poem where the attitudes and actions of Sappho's brother, rather than the mere fact of his safe return, will be to the fore; and again, the extra length of that verse is put to use, with the coordination of $\kappa\omega\tau\tau\iota$ ('whatever') and $\kappa\eta\nu\omicron$ ('that') introducing both the thing desired and the request for its fulfilment.

- | | | |
|-------|---|-----------------|
| (iv) | τὰ δ' ἄλλα | |
| | πάντα δαιμόνεςσιν ἐπιτροπωμεν· | |
| 19/20 | εὐδίαί γὰρ ἐκ μέγαν ἀήταν αἶψα πέλονται. | |
| | As for the rest, | |
| | let us entrust all these things to the gods; | |
| 19/20 | since after great winds, straightaway fair weather appears. | |
| | | fr. 10.17–19/20 |

This stanza culminates in a gnomic statement that takes up the whole of the long verse, one that comes with greater force through its taking up an entire metrical unit. There is no sense pause within the maxim.

- | | | | |
|-----|----|--|---|
| (v) | 25 | καῖόμεν, αἶ κε τὰν κεφάλαν ἀέρρη
Λάριχος καὶ δῆποτ' ἄνηρ γένηται,
27/8 καὶ μάλ' ἐκ πόλλαν βαρυθυμίαν κεν αἴψα λύθειμεν. ⊗ | ⊗ |
| | 25 | And as for us, if Larichus should lift his
head and become a man some day,
27/8 straightaway we would indeed be freed from our deep despondency. ⊗ | ⊗ |
| | | fr. 10.25–27/8 | |

This long verse is syntactically linked to what precedes, with only a weak preceding pause. But again, it clearly is a unit in its own right, and there is no pause five syllables before

the end; such a delay would absurdly split up the particle *κεν* from the verb, *λύθειμεν* ('we would be freed') with which it coheres.

- (vi) τᾶ]ς κε βολλοίμαν ἔρατόν τε βᾶμα
 κάμαρυχμα λάμπρον ἴδην προσώπω
 19/20 ἢ τὰ Λύδων ἄρματα κᾶν ὄπλοισι [πεσδομ]άχεντας. ⊗
- I would rather see her lovely step
 and the bright radiance of her face
 19/20 than the chariots of Lydia and infantry fighting in arms. ⊗
- fr. 16.17–19/20

Here too is a poem-ending long verse, again with no internal pause. Sappho places the chariots and infantry at the end of the stanza to produce ring composition, since it was with the weapons of war that the poem began. The length of the climactic verse allows both chariots and infantry to be mentioned (just as the priamel which began the poem—passage (x) below—divides up the basic idea of 'the military' under different headings) and given descriptive colour (a development from the opening, which did not describe the options), while still maintaining a structural opposition between the dispreferred alternatives in one verse and Sappho's beloved in the preceding two.

- (vii) πρὶν σὲ καὶ Δί' ἀντ[ίαιον] πεδέλθῃν
 10 καὶ Θυῶνας ἱμε[ρόεντα] παῖδα·
 11/12 νῦν δὲ κ[— × — ∪]. . — . πόημεν κατὰ τὸ πάλ[αιον]
- before they approached with prayer you [i.e. Hera], and Zeus of suppliants,
 10 and Thyone's child, who brings desire.
 11/12 But now ... we do ... according to old custom
- fr. 17.17–19/20

Here the long verse marks not a climax to the stanza, but a pivot for the poem. Exactly half-way through this five-stanza work, the narrator shifts from describing the heroic origins of the festival to an account of what is happening at the festival now in accordance with those heroic origins. That shift is achieved through this verse; and although its middle is missing, the key parts are clearly the opening phrase (bringing things into the present day) and the closing one (highlighting how the present draws on the past), an arrangement which makes clear the integrity of the verse as a unit in its own right. Enough remains, too, to confirm that there is no sense pause where the traditional lineation would enforce a new line.

- (viii) 5 καὶ γελαίαις ἱμέροεν, τό μ' ἦ μὰν
 καρδίαν ἐν στήθεσιν ἐπτόαιεν·
 7/8 ὥς γὰρ ἔς σ' ἴδω βρόχε', ὥς με φώνησ' οὐδὲν ἔτ' εἴκει·

	—]	ἀλλὰ κὰν μὲν γλῶσσαι ἔαγε, λῆπτον δ'
10		αὐτίκα χροὶ πῦρ ὑπαδεδρόμηκεν,
11/12		ὀπάτεσσι δ' οὐδὲν ὄρημι', ἐπιρρόμβεισι δ' ἄκουαι,
5		and laughing in a way that provokes desire, something that indeed
		shakes the heart in my breast;
7/8		for when I look on you briefly, nothing remains any longer for me to speak,
		but my tongue breaks, a thin
10		fire straightaway steals over my skin,
11/12		I see nothing with my eyes, my ears are whirling,
		fr. 31.5–11/12

Sappho's most famous poem⁹ makes effective use of the long verse in both these stanzas, each of which is climactic, though in different ways. In 7/8, 'the description proper begins with the "long" line' (Hutchinson 2001: 172), as Sappho opens her detailed account of the impact which the sight of her beloved in conversation with a man has on her. The repetition of co-ordinating *ὥς* parallels Homer, *Iliad* 14.293 *ὥς δ' ἶδεν, ὥς μιν ἔρωσ πικινὰς φρένας ἀμφεκάλυψεν* ('and when he saw her, at that moment love enfolded his shrewd mind'), describing the visual impact of Hera on Zeus; but whereas in Homer this line expresses the entirety of the narrator's account of Zeus's inner reaction, Sappho's verse, despite its coming at the end of a stanza, is just the opening of a longer series.

Then in 11/12 comes another climactic use of the long verse, which nevertheless sustains the momentum into the stanza to come; the placing of eyes and ears at beginning and end employs the verse as a single unit, whose elegant chiasmus structure belies the emotional trauma which Sappho is experiencing.

B. Climax begins part-way through third line

These passages can be dealt with more briefly, since they do not heavily articulate the third verse as such. They underline the absence of any sense pause five syllables before the end—the kind of pause that we would expect to observe if the papyrus lineation corresponded to anything real in Sappho's poetry:

⁹ Finglass (2026b).

- (ix) 25 ἔλθε μοι καὶ νῦν, χαλέπαν δὲ λῦσον
 ἐκ μερίμναν, ὅσσα δέ μοι τέλεσσαι
 27/8 θῦμος ἰμέρρει, τέλεσον· σὺ δ' αὐτὰ σύμμαχος ἔσσο. ⊗
 25 Come to me now too, free me from
 grim worries, and all those things which my spirit
 27/8 longs to achieve, achieve them. You yourself be my ally. ⊗
 fr. 1.25–27/8

Sappho's final request takes up only a part of the long final line, but the pause clearly occurs not five but eight syllables before the end. Recent remarks on this line, referring to how 'short punchy questions and statements accumulate in parallel constructions and the stanzas culminate in the short final line with emphatic words and ideas' (Cazzato 2021: 160), or how 'this is the first extant usage of the term σύμμαχος ('ally') that subsequently appears in verse-initial position (with emphatic enjambment) in the final declaration in Sappho's song, where the speaker calls on her tutelary deity to be her martial ally (28)' (Steiner 2021: 81), reveal how the four-line lineation actively misleads us;¹⁰ there is no short line here, no enjambment.

- (x) ⊗ Οἱ μὲν ἱππῶν στροφήν οἱ δὲ πέδων
 οἱ δὲ νάων φαῖς' ἐπ[ι] γὰρ μέλαι[ν]αν
 3/4 ἔμμεναι κάλλιστον, ἔγω δὲ κῆν' ὅττω τις ἔραται·
 ⊗ Some say that a host of horsemen, others of infantry,
 others of ships is the finest thing
 3/4 on the black earth, but I say it is whatever a person loves.
 fr. 16.1–3/4

The climactic statement here begins nine syllables before the end; five syllables before the end there is not even a word-boundary.

- (xi) 5 ὅσσα δὲ πρόσθ' ἄμβροτε πάντα λῦσα[ι]
 καὶ φίλοις Φοῖσι χάραν γένεσθαι
 7/8 κώνϊαν ἔχθροισι, γένοιτο δ' ἄμμι μηδ' ἅμα μηδ' εἷς·
 5 and that whatever offences he committed in the past should all be forgiven
 and that he should become a source of joy to his friends
 7/8 and of pain to his enemies; but may there not be even one anywhere for us.
 fr. 5.5–7/8

¹⁰ I was the co-editor of the volume which includes those remarks, and so am responsible for not picking up on this at the time.

Sense pause occurs ten syllables before the end. After a stanza which saw a strongly articulated third verse—passage (iii) above—Sappho varies the arrangement of the requests in this one.

- | | | |
|-------|------|---|
| (xii) | 21 | τῶν κε βόλληται βασίλευς Ὀλύμπω
δαίμον' ἐκ πόνων ἐπάρων ἤδη |
| | 23/4 | περτρόπην, κῆνοι μάκαρες ἐέλονται καὶ πολύολβοι |
| | 21 | For those whose fate the king of Olympus
wishes to change around so that it now provides |
| | 23/4 | help out of troubles, they are blessed and rich in prosperity. |
| | | fr. 10.21–23/4 |

Sense pause occurs quite early in the third verse. Any additional pause five syllables before the end would be futile, splitting up the corresponding adjectives μάκαρες ('blessed') and πολύολβοι ('rich in prosperity').

- | | | |
|--------|-------|---|
| (xiii) | | κατ' δέ μ' ἴδρωσ' κακχέεται, τρόμος δὲ
παῖσαν ἄγρει, χλωροτέρα δὲ ποῖα |
| | 15/16 | ἔμμι, τεθνάκην δ' ὀλίγω 'πιδεύην φαίνομ' ἔμ' αὖτ[αι]. |
| | | sweat pours down over me, a trembling
shakes me all over, I am greener |
| | 15/16 | than grass, and I seem to myself to be little short of dying. |
| | | fr. 31.13–15/16 |

The last of the famous list of the symptoms of love is given almost the complete long verse; its length, coupled with its content, marks an ending, but by allowing an enjambment of just one word at the start of the verse Sappho continues the disorienting metrical effects used throughout the passage. Again, there is no sense pause five syllables from the end, which would break up τεθνάκην ('to be dying') and φαίνομ' ('I seem').

C. More complicated interactions between the third verse and the first two verses

- | | | |
|-------|-----|--|
| (xiv) | 5 | πά]γχνυ δ' εὖμαρες σύνετον πόησαι
π]άντι τ[ο]ῦτ' ἄ γὰρ πόλυ περσκέθοισα |
| | 7/8 | κάλ]λοϛ [ἀνθ]ρώπων Ἐλένα [τ]ὸν ἄνδρα τὸν [~ ἀρ]ιστον |
| | | καλλ[ίπο]ις' ἔβα 'c Τροΐαν πλέοισα |

10 κωὺδ[ἐ πα]ίδος οὐδὲ φίλων τοκήων
 11/12 π[ά]μ[παν] ἐμνάσθη, ἢ ἀλλὰ παράγαγ' αὐταν [— ~ ~ —]σαν

Κύπρις.]

5 It is very easy to make this
 understandable to every person; for the woman who far surpassed
 7/8 mortals in beauty, Helen, leaving her husband,

the best [], went by ship to Troy,
 10 nor did she give any thought to her child or
 11/12 to her dear parents, but she was led astray ...

by Kypris.]

fr. 16.5–11/12

The first long verse here has no sense pause, as Sappho moves from Helen, to Menelaus, to the powerful καλλ[ίποι]σ' ('leaving') at the start of the following stanza, which establishes the decisive syntactical relationship between the pair. A further enjambment from the long verse over stanza boundary, this time denoting not what Helen did to Menelaus, but what Aphrodite (safely supplemented here) did to Helen, underscores the power of love, the poem's dominant theme.

(xv) ἀλλ' αἱ θρύλησθα Χάραξον ἔλθην
 10 νᾶϊ σὺν πλήϊαι. τὰ μὲν οἴομαι Ζεὺς
 11/12 οἶδε σύμπαντες τε θεοί· σὲ δ' οὐ χρὴ ταῦτα νόησθαι,

ἀλλὰ καὶ πέμπην ἔμε καὶ κέλεσθαι
 πόλλα λίσσεσθαι βασιλῆαν Ἥραν
 15/16 ἐξίκεσθαι τυίδε σάαν ἄγοντα νᾶα Χάραξον

κάμμ' ἐπεύρην ἀρτέμεας.

But you are always babbling that Charaxus is coming
 10 with a full ship. This, I think, Zeus
 11/12 knows, and all the gods. But as for you, it is not right that you should think this,

but you should send me and bid me
 make many entreaties to Queen Hera
 15/16 that Charaxus should come here bringing his ship safe

and should find us untroubled.

fr. 10.9–17

A new sense unit begins part-way through the long verse in 11/12, reaching its end in the next stanza but one. The key part of this request is expressed in the long verse in 15/16, bookended by Charaxus' name and the crucial verb denoting his return, but the following phrase in enjambment emphasises that it is not just Charaxus' fortunes which concern her, but those of the family as a whole. The long verse is thus used as a unit even when it is not preceded or followed by a significant sense pause.

These examples show great variety in the deployment of the long verse; from a climax to a tightly ordered group of three parallel utterances in (ii), to the more complex interactions with the surrounding stanzas found in (xiv) and (xv).¹¹ In none of them, though, can a sense pause be found five syllables before the end, and attempting to provide one only obscures our awareness of Sappho's own articulations.

Practical considerations in antiquity produced a suboptimal representation of the sapphic stanza on the written page. Centuries later, long after those considerations have fallen away, we are stuck with that suboptimal representation, which persists as firmly in our editions as if they were written by Aristophanes of Byzantium himself. Their faulty nature can be fully appreciated only when we abandon the layout which, though ancient, dates from long after Sappho's day, and return to articulating the stanzas as Sappho herself would have done, in three verses, thereby aligning our visual representation of Sappho's poetry with its real structure. Moreover, when we read these poems, whether aloud or in our head, we must be careful to avoid any pause at that point, but to treat the verse as its own integral unit, as it would have sounded in its original performance contexts. After so many years of reading these stanzas with precisely such a pause, this is difficult; but it is worth it, if we are serious about trying to appreciate Sappho's poetry on its own terms, free from the dead hand of distorting editorial activity. There is no time like the present, so here by way of conclusion is the poem of Sappho with which we began, this time lineated as Sappho herself would have understood it. Is not this very beautiful?

⊗⊗⊗	Ποικιλόθρον' ἀθανάτα, Ἀφρόδιτα,
	παῖ Δίος δολόπλοκε, λίσσομαί σε,
3/4	μή μ' ἄκαισι μηδ' ὀνίαισι δάμνα, πότνια, θῦμον,
	—]
5	ἀλλὰ τυῖδ' ἔλθ', αἶ ποτα κᾶτέρωτα

¹¹ Cf. Battezzato (2021: 134): 'Sappho varies her less flexible isosyllabic strophes with the skilful use of caesura and enjambment, creating a series of rhythmic ripples not obvious at first sight, which subtly intensify crucial shifts in meaning and content.'

7/8	τὰς ἑμας αὖδας αἴοισα πῆλοι ἔκλυες, πάτρος δὲ δόμον λίποις χρύσιον ἦλθες _____]	
10	ἄρμ' ὑπαδεύξαις· κάλοι δέ σ' ἄγον ὤκεες τροῦθοι περὶ γὰρ μελαίνας 11/12 πύκνα δίνεντες πτέρ' ἀπ' ὠράνω· αἴθερος διὰ μέσσω· _____]	
15/16	αἶψα δ' ἐξίκοντο· σὺ δ', ὦ μάκαιρα, μειδιαίσεις· ἀθανάτῳ προσώπῳ ἦρε' ὅττι δηῦτε πέπονθα κῶττι δηῦτε κάλῃμι _____]	
19/20	κῶττι μοι μάλιστα θέλω γένεσθαι μαινόλῃ θυμῷ· “τίνα δηῦτε πείθω —] . . ἀγῆν ἐς σὺν φιλότατα; τίς σ', ὦ Ψάφ', ἀδικήεις; _____]	
23/4	καὶ γὰρ αἶ φεύγει, ταχέως διώξει· αἶ δὲ δῶρα μὴ δέκετ', ἀλλὰ δώσει· αἶ δὲ μὴ φίλει, ταχέως φιλήσει κωὺκ ἐθέλοισα.” _____]	
25	ἔλθε μοι καὶ νῦν, χαλέπαν δὲ λῦσον ἐκ μερίμναν, ὅσσα δέ μοι τέλεσσαι 27/8 θῦμος ἱμέρρει, τέλεσον· σὺ δ' αὐτὰ σύμμαχος ἔσσο. ⊗ ⋈ _____]	
⊗⊗⊗	Ornately throned, immortal, Aphrodite, child of Zeus, weaver of deceit, I beg you, 3/4 do not, lady, subdue my spirit with pain and anguish, 5 but come here, if ever on another occasion on hearing my voice from afar 7/8 you listened, and, leaving your father's golden house, arrived after yoking your chariot. Beautiful swift sparrows 10 were drawing you above the black earth, 11/12 quickly whirring their wings, from the sky through the middle of the air, and they arrived straightaway. And you, blessed lady, smiling with your immortal face, 15/16 asked what I suffered again and why I was calling again	

19/20	and what I want most of all to happen in my maddened heart. 'Whom am I to persuade again . . . to your affection? Who, Sappho, does you injustice?
23/4	For if she flees, soon she will pursue. If she does not receive gifts, she will rather give them. If she does not love, soon she will love, even if she is not willing.'
25	Come to me now too, free me from grim worries, and all those things which my spirit
27/8	longs to achieve, achieve them. You yourself be my ally. ⊗

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