

Fragments Of Sappho

SAPPHO (C. 630 BCE – C. 570 BCE) WAS A POET FROM THE ISLAND OF LESBOS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA.

In her day, she was considered a great writer and her work was celebrated by many ancient scholars. Sadly, however, much of what she wrote has been lost to the ravages of time. What remains is fragmentary but, nevertheless, these fragments are full of beautiful and sensual imagery. Many of the fragments describe relationships between women. I have chosen one of my favourites for this card.

The piece concerns the Trojan war. Helen is the beautiful Helen of Sparta, who became Helen of Troy. It was her choice of lust over fidelity that brought about the conflict with the Trojans in the first place. Anaktoria appears to be a former lover, upon whose form the narrator's thoughts still rest.

Some call ships, infantry or horsemen
The greatest beauty earth can offer;
I say it is whatever a person
Most lusts after.

Showing you all will be no trouble:
Helen surpassed all humankind
In looks but left the world's most noble
Husband behind,

Coasting off to Troy where she
Thought nothing of her loving parents
And only child but, led astray ...

... and I think of Anaktoria
Far away ...

And I would rather watch her body
Sway, her glistening face flash dalliance
Than Lydian war cars at the ready
And armed battalions.

From *Stung with Love: Poems and fragments by Sappho*. Translated by Aaron Pochigian. Penguin Classics. 2009.