



# SAPPHO

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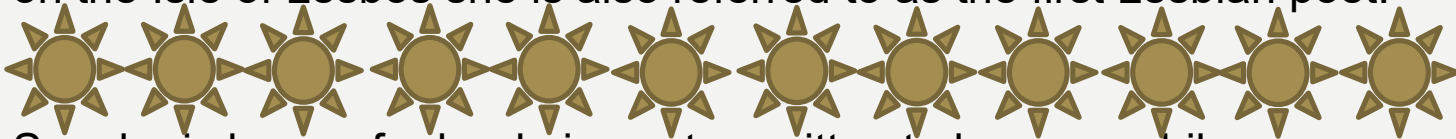


# Who were they and why were they famous?

*Only a handful of details are known about the life of Sappho. She was born around 615 B.C. to an aristocratic family on the Greek island of Lesbos and died approximately 50 years later.*

*She later-on spent most of her adult life in the city of Mytilene on Lesbos where she ran an academy for unmarried young women.*

Sappho was an ancient Greek female poet who wrote lyrical poetry famous for their intense passion and description of love. Being born on the Isle of Lesbos she is also referred to as the first Lesbian poet.



Sappho is known for her lyric poetry, written to be sung while accompanied by a lyre. In ancient times, Sappho was widely regarded as one of the greatest lyric poets and was given names such as the "Tenth Muse" and "The Poetess".

Sappho was a Greek lyric poet greatly admired in all ages for the beauty of her writing style. She ranks with Archilochus and Alcaeus, among Greek poets, for her ability to impress readers with a lively sense of her personality! She was furthermore honoured in statuary and praised by



# SAPPHO'S LIFE

*Due to the severe restrictions on women's lives and their inability to move freely in society and conduct business, it is not surprising to find that no names of important (female) artists have come down to us from this era. Only the poet Sappho received high praise from the Greeks; With Plato referring to her as the twelfth Muse. Significantly, she came not from Athens or Sparta but from Lesbos, an island whose culture incorporated a high regard for women! In turn giving her the opportunity to be acknowledged in the classical era and*



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The historian Wendy Slatkin writes:

**All that is known of her life is that she was raised learning to play the lyre and came to compose songs, may have been married to a man at some point who died, may have had a daughter named Cleis (named after Sappho's mother), had three brothers (Erigyius, Charaxus, and Larichus), came from a well-to-do family, was exiled twice to Sicily because of her political views, and was famous enough to have statues raised in her honor**



# DID THESE FIGURE FACE DIFFICULTIES BECAUSE OF THEIR DIVERSITY?

## GENDER:

*Multiple injustices can also be named but here are a few:*

*Women in the ancient Greek world had few rights in comparison to male citizens. Unable to vote, own land, or inherit, a woman's place was in the home and her purpose in life was to look after the children*

*In ancient Greece, women endured many difficulties and hardships especially in three main areas. The problems women encountered in this era occurred within marriage, inheritance and social life. All three elements shaped and formed the mould of the submissive female.*

*Marriage was considered one of the most important decisions and events in a woman's life, but she had no control over it. However, in ancient Greek society, females were given little voice, if any, in major decisions. Women were denied the freedom to choose who to marry.*

*Furthermore, In ancient cultures, women were seen as objects for they were "given" in marriage by the father to the bridegroom. The social life of women in ancient Greece often mirrored the submissive female image. Women were restricted from participating in outside events in which men were involved. Overall, the society of ancient Greece,*

*especially in the period from 800 to 500 B.C. preserved the issues in marriage, inheritance and social life, As Sappho was indeed a woman who endured these circumstances during the classical era it is obvious to see that a queer woman would face discrimination and homophobia.*

*Especially due to her success and gender.*



# Did these figure face difficulties because of their diversity?

## SEXUALITY:



Homosexuality is the sexual attraction to persons of the same sex. In ancient Greece, this was a normal practice.

Ancient Greece has a reputation in modern culture as a society in which homosexuality was accepted – even encouraged. Realistically, however, my research is only a snip-it of what was acceptable including gender, identity and social structure. Ancient Greece has been seen as an idealised utopia for different sexual identities. Similarly, the attraction of the Greek isle of Lesbos – home of Sappho. Sappho spent her days living in the land of the accepted. Therefore leading us to believe, that Sappho did not face many difficulties due to her sexuality. In conclusion, as Sappho fell into this category, I'm sure she was not penalised because of her sexuality although as time went on and other religions grasped her works and I'm sure her work faced discrimination because she was in fact gay. In conclusion, in Ancient Greece homosexuality was accepted as we know but we cannot say for sure whether Sappho faced personal attacks but none the less Ancient Greece (especially Lesbos) was an island that encouraged and normalized homosexuality.

# Did these figure face difficulties because of their diversity?

When exploring the ancient Greek ideas surrounding homosexuality I came across numerous accounts of male same-sex relations. However, very little is known about female same-sex relations or even female sexuality in general. The only well-known source of lesbianism from ancient Greece appears to be from Sappho.

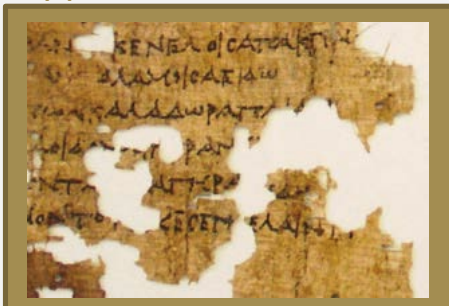
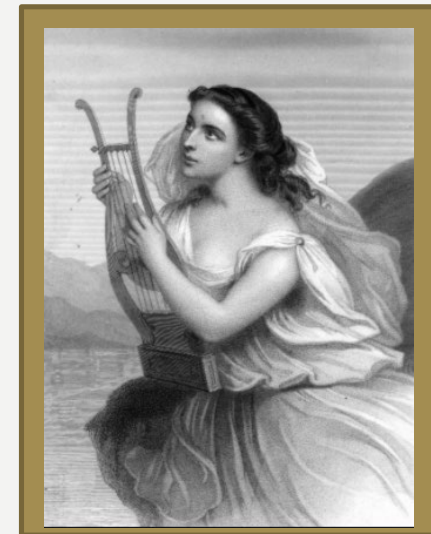
Male homosexuality was widely excepted. There was the value of man's overall dominance and a celebration of their sexuality. In Greek society the act of sex as they understood it required penetration. This resulted in the inability to comprehend female sexuality, especially lesbianism. Homosexuality was a distinct relationship which usually included an older man and younger boy. The older men took in young men or boys to be mentored in intellectual pursuits, but also for them to be their submissive sexually.

Female sexuality throughout ancient Greece was largely invisible.

Where men experienced sexual liberties, women's sexuality was concealed. Their sexuality was restricted to benefiting the polis and bearing children.

Marriage was seen as the only place where women could express their sexuality. Even then it was suppressed, demanded and abused for male gain and control.

Not surprisingly, men experienced more sexual liberties than women, specifically ancient Greece. While women's sexuality was invisible and suppressed to male binaries and submission.



Lesbian women's sexuality was largely misunderstood whereas male homosexuality was publicly celebrated. Women's sexuality was limited, especially that which was incomprehensible in a male-centered society such as ancient Greece. There is very little documentation of lesbian and queer women from antiquity.

**DID THESE FIGURE  
FACE  
DIFFICULTIES  
BECAUSE OF THEIR  
DIVERSITY?**

**WATCH**

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## EXPLAIN SOMETHING THAT YOU FOUND SURPRISING DURING YOUR RESEARCH

1. Hardly any of Sappho's work survives. Sappho is known to have written some nine volumes of poetry, but very little of her work was preserved. Some have blamed this on the activities of the medieval Church, which sought to suppress works which were pagan and, what's more, often probably quite sexy. Sappho is, after all, the poet who inspired the word 'lesbian' for a woman who loves other women; Sappho's home was on the island of Lesbos.
2. Sappho has been credited with inventing the plectrum. An Athenian vase dating from the sixth century BC shows Sappho holding a lyre, which she is plucking with a small device that is recognisable as the forerunner to the modern plectrum.
3. Much of what we do have was only dug up in the last hundred or so years. Around the turn of the nineteenth into the twentieth century, a series of excavations of a rubbish-dump in the city of Oxyrhynchus in Egypt, about 100 miles south of Cairo, led to the inadvertent discovery of some papyrus scrolls. They contained, among other things, a fair bit of long-lost poetry by the lyric poet Sappho. We are still finding her poetry: two more fragments came to light in 2004 and 2012.





**DO YOU THINK  
THESE HISTORICAL  
FIGURES ARE GOOD  
ROLE MODELS?**

**SAPPHO SPEAKS NOT ONLY FOR GIRLS AND WOMEN IN CHORUSES BUT ALSO FOR THE WHOLE COMMUNITY, WHICH IN THIS CASE CAN BE VIEWED AS THE ENTIRE POPULATION OF HER ISLAND, THE ISLAND OF LESBOS. SAPPHO CREATES AN EXCELLENT EXAMPLE BY SHOWING US AS WOMEN THAT WE TWO CAN BE SUCCESSFUL IN A BUSINESS THAT WAS ONCE DOMINATED BY MALES! SAPPHO DEFIED THE NORMS, AS SHE WAS OPEN ABOUT BEING BI/LESBIAN. MAKING THE TOPIC OF SAME SEX LOVE NOT AWKWARD OR BEING LOOKED DOWN UPON BUT SOMETHING THAT SAPPHO A SMART, INTELLECTUAL AND SUCCESSFUL WOMEN MADE NORMAL. THEREFORE, THIS FURTHER PROVES THAT SAPPHO IS A GREAT ROLE MODEL FOR THOSE WHO ARE AFRAID TO EXPRESS THEIR SEXUALITY AND TO THOSE WHO ARE WOMAN WHO ARE MADE TO FEEL LESS THAN BY OUR SEXIST SYSTEM. WHEN SAPPHO PROVES THAT MINORITIES ACHIEVE GREAT THING, SOMETIMES FAR GREATER THAN THOSE WHO ARE GIVEN ADVANTAGES BY THE SYSTEM (WHO HELPS THOSE DEEMED AS NORMAL) SHE IS NOT ONLY GIVING WOMEN EQUAL CHANCES BUT ALSO EDUCATING OUR POPULATION ON HOW WOMEN ARE AND CAN BE JUST AS SMART, SUCCESSFUL AND POWERFUL AS ANY OTHER. SHE ALSO IS AN EXAMPLE OF NOT LETTING CHALLENGES GET IN HER WAY AND RUIN HER SUCCESS DESPITE OTHER OPINIONS!**

# To what extent was their diversity accepted into the ancient world?

- When researching this topic, I came across contradicting information on the topic of homosexuality, and it being accepted into the ancient world as although homosexuality was in-fact accepted and often encouraged. This was only the case for men but when I deepened my research, I came across multiple sites saying different things. Since my in-depth research, I would argue that although homosexuality was not frowned upon, I believe this was only the case for men. Homosexuality in ancient Greece was tolerated and regarded as no big deal, and, by some, even considered fashionable. But apparently not for everybody. Well, what I can deduce from my sources is simply that lesbian relationships did occur in ancient Greece, but we simply don't have anything that we could use to know just how often. Apart from Sappho, there are not any sources that can be without a doubt interpreted as portraying girl love in positive light. The other thing is that female sexuality was very much a taboo: respectable, women were not supposed to enjoy sex or seek out sex (or love) and it was a commendable quality only in prostitutes who represented society's outcasts anyway..Therefore, due to the massive societal disapproval towards lesbian relationships, there are no famous Greek lesbian couples or families that we would know of. Studying female homosexuality in ancient Greece is tiny, and hardly ever spoken of. In conclusion, I believe same sex relationships between woman were not deemed as disgusting but did face difficulties and injustice due to men always benefiting from the sexist system. Sappho and her sexuality most definitely fell into this category, and her and her sexuality was to some extent accepted in the ancient world (by her island lesbos) but being lesbian during the ancient world still most definitely faced injustice and discrimination.

# DO YOU THINK THEIR DIVERSITY WOULD BE MORE OR LESS ACCEPTED TODAY?

Despite major changes in laws and norms surrounding the issue of same-sex marriage and the rights of LGBTQ people around the world, public opinion on the acceptance of homosexuality in society remains sharply divided by country, region and economic development. Attitudes on the acceptance of homosexuality are shaped by the country in which people live. Those in Western Europe and the Americas are generally more accepting of homosexuality than are those in Eastern Europe, Russia, Ukraine, the Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa, and publics in the Asian regions are generally split. This is not only because of economic development of nations, but also religious and political attitudes. There are still and also have been fairly large shifts in acceptance of homosexuality. In many of the countries who have been surveyed, there also are differences on acceptance of homosexuality by age, education, income and, in some cases, gender. In addition, religion and its importance in peoples lives shape opinions in many countries. As well as this political ideology also plays a big role in acceptance of homosexuality. I would say during this century this isn't a sway of liking towards gay men or gay women but in-fact hate towards both and in some places love for both. Although acceptance and love towards gay couples has been granted in some countries and have given them the same rights and opportunity as straight couples we must not forget they are still a minority that are hated on. Millions of people continue to live in places that outlaw same-sex relationships and prosecute people for being gay. In five countries and in parts of two others, homosexuality is still punishable with the death penalty, while a further 70 imprison citizens because of their sexual orientation. Even where homosexuality is legal, many countries treat those in the same-sex relationships differently, such as unequal age of consent or a ban on marriage. Due to Sappho falling into this category I believe her diversity would be accepted more only if Sappho lived in a certain area or country that accepted homosexuality.

# DO YOU THINK THEIR DIVERSITY WOULD BE MORE OR LESS ACCEPTED TODAY?

- Although being gay in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is still frowned upon by many and people who are gay face serious violent acts towards them and discrimination by those who disagree with same sex relationships (homophobic people) In regards with if Sappho would live a more accepted life, honestly I cannot say, due to the fact that gay people will never be accepted just because they don't fit the norm. In conclusion, Sappho would be accepted more depending on where she lived but if she ended up living in a place where gay people were threatened or illegal Sappho and her diversity would be for sure less accepted.

