

## A Sophistic Performance: Atticist Rewriting of Sappho in Aelius Aristides

The Second Sophistic, a period of linguistic and cultural renewal in the 1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> centuries CE, produced many of the most impressive Greek texts of the Roman Imperial period. The development of the Atticizing movement into a full-fledged linguistic imitation of classical Attic has long captured scholars' attention (Kim 2017; de Jong 2008). However, minimal attention has been paid to one of the most striking examples of Atticizing *editing* of earlier, non-Attic texts: Aelius Aristides' quotations of and allusions to Sappho. This paper contends that Aristides' rewriting of Sappho, in light of his apparent favoring of certain lyric poets as authoritative (Sappho, Alcman, Terpander, and Alcaeus) is to be explained by the intersection of prestige dialects and the "local hero" phenomenon: Aristides has a special affinity for Sappho because she, like he, is from the easternmost edge of the ancient Greek-speaking world, and this affinity manifests itself in his Atticist adaptation of certain elements of her work.

In section 1, I will examine Aristides' biography and his rhetorical style. Examples will be taken from the *Sacred Tales* and two of his *Orations*. Specifically, his praise of the Attic dialect in *Or.* 1.322-330 demonstrates that, for Aristides, Attic was the most prestigious mode of Greek communication, while his imitation of Demosthenes (Asirvatham 2008) in *Or.* 9 and 10 is the linguistic backdrop against which to analyze his use of Sappho. In addition, the autobiographical passages of *Sacred Tales*, as well as Philostratus' account of Aristides' early life, rhetorical style, and interaction with Marcus Aurelius, will show that he was so meticulous an orator – and Atticist (Anderson 1993; Swain 1996) – that any Atticist rewriting in his orations should be seen as deliberate.

In section 2, where I will devote the most attention, I will analyze Aristides' interaction with four lyric poets (Sappho, Alcman, Terpander, and Alcaeus), devoting particular attention to his quotations and allusions to Sappho. The Atticized elements will be contrasted with contemporary

and later quotations of Sappho that retain the Aeolic dialect throughout, including specific words that are Atticized by Aristides. I will also analyze the quotations of Plato in *Oration 2*, demonstrating that Aristides' precision when citing earlier authors does not apply in the Atticized Sappho quotations. Here I argue that, due to the previously noted high regard for Attic as the prestige dialect, this Atticizing of Sappho is likely indicative of respectful adaptation to second-century CE style, rather than a disregard of her original Aeolic dialect.

Finally, in section 3, I will propose geographical origin as an explanation for Aristides' interest in Sappho. In particular, the familiarity that sophists like Aristides had with the lyric poets, extending even into their biographies (Modini 2020), will provide the evidence that a sophist of Aristides' meticulousness would certainly be aware of traditions surrounding Sappho's origin. This explanation will be further supported with a few examples of a "local hero" motif appearing in Greek authors from the Hellenistic period through to the late Empire.

In conclusion, I propose that Aelius Aristides engaged in Atticizing Sappho's poetry because: a) she was an eastern poet, hailing from the same general region as Aristides himself; and b) intentionally Atticizing an ancient work was a sign of respectful updating in the context of the Second Sophistic.

## Bibliography

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