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The Lesbian Lyre: Reclaiming Sappho For The 21st Century



Synopsis

Hailed by Plato as the "Tenth Muse" of ancient Greek poetry, Sappho is inarguably antiquity's greatest lyric poet. Born over 2,600 years ago on the Greek island of Lesbos, and writing amorously of women and men alike, she is the namesake lesbian. What's left of her writing, and what we know of her, is fragmentary. Shrouded in mystery, she is nonetheless repeatedly translated and discussed - no, appropriated - by all. Sappho has most recently undergone a variety of treatments by agenda-driven scholars and so-called poet-translators with little or no knowledge of Greek. Classicist-translator Jeffrey Duban debunks the postmodernist scholarship by which Sappho is interpreted today and offers translations reflecting the charm and elegant simplicity of the originals. Duban provides a reader-friendly overview of Sappho's times and themes, exploring her eroticism and Greek homosexuality overall. He introduces us to Sappho's highly cultured island home, to its lyre-accompanied musical legends, and to the fabled beauty of Lesbian women. Not least, he emphasizes the proximity of Lesbos to Troy, making the translation and enjoyment of Homer's Iliad and Odyssey a further focus. More than anything else, argues Duban, it is free verse and its rampant legacy - and no two persons more than Walt Whitman and Ezra Pound - that bear responsibility for the ruin of today's classics in translation, to say nothing of poetry in the twentieth century. Beyond matters of reflection for classicists, Duban provides a far-ranging beginner's guide to classical literature, with forays into Spenser and Milton, and into the colonial impulse of Virgil, Spenser, and the West at large.

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Customer Reviews

Duban delivers dazzling erudition while at the same time providing a not just accessible but absorbing read for the uninitiated. Gorgeous translations of Sappho and other ancient Greek lyric poets along with generous background explanations make it an unexpected page turner. Wonderful book all around â€” highly recommend to everyone."

Jeffrey Duban is an independent scholar and assuredly an independent thinker (see pages 404-411, for example). He has studied Greek, Latin, the Old Testament, Sanskrit, and the literary classics at premier universities. The Lesbian Lyre shows Dubanâ€™s ease in translating and discussing ancient poetry. His explanations are written with such clarity that any interested person can follow his objections to the prevailing orthodoxy. The subtitle of *The Lesbian Lyre: Reclaiming Sappho for the 21st Century* sums up Dubanâ€™s learned and engaging study.

Whether you like the classics, read some Greek tragedy in college, or are relatively new to the world of Sappho, Achilles, and Odysseus â€” this book has â€” something for everyone.â€” • Truly, you canâ€™t read even excerpts and leave empty-handed. And the comprehensive index allows you to pinpoint topics of particular interest (try Ezra Pound, for starters). We all like knowing something about Greece and Rome; read this book and youâ€™ll no longer have to pretend! Highly recommend.

More than resplendently presented, *The Lesbian Lyre* "reclaims" Sappho's exquisite lyrics from the clutches of today's solipsistic, agenda-possessed postmodern academics. Moreover, it blazes a path toward the urgently needed revival of the humanities in general. Well done, Duban, faithful servant of the True and Beautiful!

This book begins with Sappho, the lyricists, Homer, and the Old Testament. It gets off to a good start (Chapter 1-12) but then strays, sometimes losing the reader. One wonders about halfway through if the author himself knows where he actually is or ought to be. What's missing in these 800-plus pages is a sense of the whole, and there is nothing about it that a reduction of at least 20 percent would not have cured. The work exemplifies the saying that "Behind every big book is a smaller book refusing to take responsibility." Actually, the credit-deserving book is Chapters 1-12 and PART III: Translations. The notes, though wisely placed at the back, are often belabored, revealing an unruly catch-all approach. Even allowing for the bookâ€™s polemics, it can be

intemperate and tediously over-emphatic in its criticisms of others. One wonders if the book was vetted for libel. Wonderful insights abound, and the concluding send-up of Ezra Pound is a gem (and fitting finale). But the challenge is in finding a balance and giving each element the attention it deserves, which is no easy task. One customer reviewer notes the book has "something for everyone." I say it has too much of everything.

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