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FIG. 1. - RAPHAEL. *Parnassus*. Vatican. Stanza della Segnatura. Photo Alinari.

SAPPHO, APOLLO, NEOPYTHAGOREAN THEORY, AND NUMINE AFFLATUR IN RAPHAEL'S FRESCO OF THE *PARNASSUS*

BY

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PAINTED by Raphael in 1510 for the Stanza della Segnatura, the *Parnassus* fresco (fig. 1) well deserves all the attention it has so far received from scholars¹. Its composition, which has been much discussed since Vasari's time, clearly was an ingenious one in transforming the dark, narrow wall of the north side of this chamber – using the unfortunate circumstance of the presence of a window in the center of the wall to advantage in building the mountainous landscape – into a resplendent classical re-creation which not only marks Raphael's maturity of style in Rome but also his maturity as a landscape painter. Scholars have studied and debated antique models for the various figures in

the painting who form a narrative communication between antique and contemporary poets selected to be honored in this painting². Yet the precise identities of many of the personalities who inhabit this fresco are still uncertain. There is nothing surprising about this difficulty. Unlike many series of *uomini famosi*, or famous men, who historically were separately represented and separately identified with *tituli* (or inscriptions) both in classical art and in Renaissance art, the figures of the *Parnassus* mingle with one another, simultaneously conducting conversation, experiencing inspiration, listening to the music of the various instruments represented, and singing in the harmonizing spaciousness of a sylvan mountain set-

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ting. Only one figure carries a *titulus*, and that figure is the only female inhabitant not only (aside from the mythological Muses) of the *Parnassus*, but of the entire chamber. This is not, however, the reason why she holds aloft, above her left shoulder, a scroll clearly indicating to the beholder that she is SAPPHO (fig. 2). The use of the Latin, rather than the contemporary Italian (Saffo), spelling of the name of this ancient Greek poetess announces the distinctly classical climate into which the beholder is invited.

The object of the paragraphs that follow will be to assess the full meaning of this peculiarity in terms of the relation of Sappho, as the only figure who Raphael was careful to identify, to the setting and to the other figures in the fresco, as well as to the rest of the chamber in general, a matter which has not until now been considered. Since Pope Julius II, the patron of this elegant and erudite *stanza*, which was originally designed as his private library³, did not read Greek, nor did he own any examples of Greek poetry among the volumes in his collection⁴, the puzzle might seem all the more intriguing.

Though it would be useful to survey the history of the design of this painting as well as the history of its criticism⁵, this essay will refrain from the temptation to repeat established information about this fresco and will, instead, concentrate on presenting a new interpretation of the significance of the figure of Sappho in order to determine what may have been her role in the meaning of the ideal intellectual world projected by the adornment of this grand classical chamber.

Never before represented, to our knowledge, in series of *uomini famosi* or *donne illustri* in Italian art⁶, the presence of Sappho in the single scene dedicated to the art of poetry is all the more curious since this previously unknown heroine is endowed with a major role in the design as the one who introduces the beholder into the scene, curiously beguiling him through the torsion of her movement, to enter and ascend into the rarified world of Mount Parnassus. The identifying scroll heralding her presence precludes the possibility that, even among the initiated who formed her

first audience, anyone might mistake her identity. Thus her significance for the iconography, as well as for the design, is made concomitant and explicit. Her presence is unmistakably important.

Though many scholars have acknowledged a classical flavor, or accent, in this painting seen, in the case of this figure, in the amplitude of form and the complex dignity of posture⁷, this important observation has been accompanied by a distinct reticence to study the archaeological implications of her presence and presentation in this scene. While Apollo and the Muses are appropriate inhabitants of this lofty mountain summit which, secondarily to Mount Helicon, was associated with the worship of Apollo and the Muses throughout the history of Greek literature, Sappho is not shown on its rounded verdant hillside, but, rather, at its base. This is appropriate, since no passage in classical literature connects her with this locale.

Raphael was careful to define this famous mountain, known through the work of the Greek geographer Strabo and the *Natural History* of Pliny the Elder, both works which Julius owned in his library, as luxuriant with laurel trees⁸. A stream that gushes from the base of the trees where Apollo has rested his left foot and trickles down into the lower right regions of the hillside may represent the Castalian Spring, named after a nymph pursued by Apollo, who threw herself into this spring on Mount Parnassus⁹. The spring was held sacred, in popular belief, to Apollo and the Muses. It is also possible that the penetrating space of the window itself suggests the Corcian Cave, according to Strabo and Pausanias the best known and most beautiful cave of Mount Parnassus, another of the sacred sites on this sacred mountain¹⁰. However the choice of Mount Parnassus, rather than Mount Helicon, for the site of this painting may signal the influence of another work which, well known in medieval manuscript tradition, had just received its first printing by the Aldine press in Venice in 1504.

In the second *Homeric Hymn*, the *Hymn to Pythian Apollo*, Telphusa advised Apollo to build an altar on Parnassus. Shortly thereafter Apollo

found himself on a beautiful mountain ridge of this mountain, well beneath the snows of its jagged twin peaks. Below an overhanging cliff, the softly curving ridge contained a hollow, rugged glade. Nearby was a gently flowing spring, where Apollo killed the cruel she-dragon Typhaon, who was a plague to men. Following this event, Apollo, according to the hymn, made for himself an altar in a wooded grove by the clear-flowing stream which had been humbled by himself. He then led his followers, singing and playing the lyre he held in his hands, to the soft ridge below Parnassus, which was "*the lovely place where they were to dwell honoured by many men. There Apollo brought them and showed them his most holy sanctuary and rich temple*"¹¹. Poised at the entrance to the verdant earthly glade, Sappho, because she was known as the Tenth Muse through the words of Plato¹², is not inappropriate company to the assembly of great poets represented in the presence of Apollo and the Muses in this high and sacred terrain.

Widely known as the first poetess in Greek and Roman literature in works that played a vital role in defining classical antiquity to the learned of the early Cinquecento, and as the inventor, or one of the inventors, of lyric poetry, Sappho must have been better known to Roman humanists in the court of Julius than she had been in the 13th century, when her name does not appear in the list of Greek poets known to Vincent of Beauvais. Though he does not name her, Petrarch was the first to describe her to late medieval audiences, in his *Tenth Eclogue*; this entry suggests he had little information beyond the fact that she was a wise young woman¹³. Little more is available from his friend, Domenico Bandini d'Arezzo who, in the vast encyclopedia he authored (now in the Biblioteca Laurenziana), says that she wrote about love, citing Ovid as his only source¹⁴.

As the first poetess and as the first, or one of the first, practitioners of lyric poetry, the early position of Sappho, who lived in the 7th or 6th century B.C., at the beginning of this new art appears to be symbolized by her position as introductress to the lofty landscape scene that rises

above. Fitting also is the instrument she lovingly caresses, which assumes an important role in the composition not only for its form, which echoes that of its possessor, but also for the peculiarity of its shape, wide and curved, with an animal horn serving as its topmost part – the part designed to be held in one hand allowing for the freedom of the other to pluck its strings. The instrument, a lyre, clearly signifies Sappho's role as the most important lyric poetess of ancient Greece.

The connection between the lyre and lyric poetry lies in the history of the lyre as the most ancient instrument of Greece, an instrument believed to have been invented to provide musical accompaniment to songs¹⁵. Two antique sources, both of which were known in Renaissance times, discuss the invention of the lyre. The fourth *Homeric Hymn*, the *Hymn to Hermes*, contains an eloquent passage describing the making of the first lyre from the back of a tortoise, and the shaping of its gut into strings¹⁶. Early versions of this instrument were made, as well, using horns and antlers in the frame, and, as Dionysius of Halicarnassus specifies, ivory¹⁷. While according to the *Hymn to Hermes*, it was Hermes who planned and made the first lyre, an invention which he later amicably shared with Apollo. Pausanias presents evi-



FIG. 2. — RAPHAEL. *Parnassus*, detail showing Sappho. Photo Alinari.

dence that would dispute this claim for he describes a bronze statue on Helicon representing Apollo fighting with Hermes for the lyre¹⁸. Plutarch, on the other hand, in his essay *On Music*, informs us that this invention, which he traces to the most remote times of antiquity, was an invention of the god Apollo himself, an invention which he says was commemorated in his time through surviving hymns and sculptures¹⁹. Plutarch names as his sources for this information Aristoxenus, Dionysius Iambus, and Pindar. While indeed Pindar praises the "golden" lyre of Apollo and the Muses, he in fact says that Apollo and the Muses 'owned' lyres and that they made joyful music from this instrument to accompany singing and dancing²⁰. Citing Alexander's *Notices on Phrygia*, Plutarch mentions the theory that Orpheus was the first singer to the lyre. Not only, he adds, did Apollo invent the lyre, but also the flute:

*"I on the other hand, have learned that the inventor of the blessings of music was not a man, but one graced with every virtue, the god Apollo... the god is the inventor both of the music of the aulos [the flute] and the cithara [the lyre]"*²¹.

Plutarch is careful, however, to specify that singing to the accompaniment of the lyre preceded the use of the flute for this purpose.²²

Relying on Glaucus' *On the Ancient Poets and Musicians*, Plutarch names Terpander as the first ancient mortal to sing to the accompaniment of the lyre, while, relying on Duris of Samos and Aristoxenus, he credits Sappho with being the first to invent the Mixolydian, or "tragic" (passionate) mode of accompanying poems with the music of the lyre²³. The significance of Sappho in this regard is heightened by Pausanias' comments that Hesiod was unable to learn to play this instrument in order to accompany his singing and Homer, though he had learned to play it, was unable to do so after losing his sight²⁴.

Little is known about the relation of the architecture of the early lyre in relation to the production of sound. However it is known, largely through vase paintings, that a bridge or yoke over which the strings were mounted was characteristic to the many forms of the ancient lyre. Though

originally the number of its strings was three, as the instrument developed their number was increased to four and, gradually, to more until in about the 5th century B.C., the number was brought to seven, the same number that was known in Roman versions of the instrument. Later versions are thought to have occasionally had as many as nine, eleven, and even twelve strings²⁵. Not only was the significance of the different kinds of lyre, of which the Boetian (cithara) and Aeolian (or "Asian") appear to be the oldest, notable for Plutarch who treats them as separate instruments²⁶, but it may well be important for the fresco of the *Parnassus*.

The Aeolian lyre, which was distinguished by its larger, graceful, curved shape and whose strings were plucked with the fingers, was preferred, according to Duris of Samos, Plutarch, and Horace, by musicians from the island of Lesbos in the northern territory of Greece, close to the western coast of Asia Minor, where it was developed²⁷. Since Sappho came from Lesbos, her instrument, as noted by Horace and others, was the Aeolian lyre, which came also to be known by its Latin name *barbiton* or *barbitos*²⁸.

The Boetian lyre, or cithara, came, on the other hand, to be known as the instrument of Apollo. This instrument, which underwent a variety of modifications in its form, eventually being carved of wood, was characterized by the fact that it was held by one arm while the other played its strings not with the fingers but with a long thin quill known by the Latin term *pecten*, or the English plectrum, the ancestor of the bow. Though this instrument is known in vase painting from the 6th century B.C. as Apollo's instrument, gradually, in its later forms, it came to be used by mortals as a fresco painting from Pompei informs us²⁹.

Though the instrument played by Apollo in the *Parnassus* fresco is played with a bow, it is not entirely comprehensible as a violin which, developed as a smaller form of the viola, was not brought into existence until the later 16th century, about a half century after the *Parnassus* was painted by Raphael³⁰. Indeed, the instrument played by Apollo has seven strings, rather than



FIG. 3. — Marcantonio RAIMONDI. *Parnassus*, engraving, detail showing Apollo playing the lyre. Washington, D.C., National Gallery of Art. Photo museum.

the four of the future violin. A preferred instrument in Italy, where the great interest in archaeology prevailing, in the late Quattrocento and early Cinquecento regarded it as a descendant of the ancient Greek lyre, the *lira da braccio* was well known in Renaissance times³¹. The descendant of an older medieval form known by its Latin name, *fidula*, which was at first played with a plectrum which later came to be substituted by the bow, this instrument appears to have developed from the *lira ad arco*, or the lyre played with a plectrum, the instrument of Apollo known to Plutarch as the cithara. Raphael had ample occasion to know the *lira da braccio* for not only was it depicted among the decorations of the ducal palace at Urbino, but it was also the favorite instrument of Leonardo da Vinci as well as of Raphael's own teacher, Timoteo Viti, as we are informed by Vasari³².

In this light, it appears that not only did Raphael have a specific model from which to work but, further, that he was attempting to carefully distinguish between the different kinds of lyre in his execution of the *Parnassus*, allowing Sappho to be accompanied by the Aeolian lyre on which, according to Horace, she "complained"³³, while at the same time giving to Apollo his proper instrument, as Italians knew it, the *lira da braccio*. The fact that, as some scholars have noted³⁴, Raphael changed the instrument of Apollo from the first project for the design, known through an en-

graving by Marcantonio Raimondi (fig. 3), where the type of lyre was not appropriate, to the final painting, where Apollo plays his seven-stringed instrument with a bow, appears to reflect a yearning for archaeological precision that can only have been imparted to him by a learned humanist informer. It is not unlikely that this change reflects new information that came to be available to him during the execution of the fresco.

Early Cinquecento humanists had good reason to be interested in Apollo who was well known to them not only as the most famous god of antiquity but also as the patron of libraries. His importance in the Stanza della Segnatura is signaled by the fact that he is represented three times, more often than any other character in the chamber: in the *Parnassus* as the god not only of poetry but also of music; in the ceiling, where he appears in a scene with Marsyas (which will be discussed below); and in the large fresco representing the *School of Athens*, where he is prominent as a sculpture in the avenue of *uomini famosi* that lines the architecture.

Interest in Sappho, however, required greater erudition. Though Sappho is mentioned by Herodotus, Plato, the so-called Longinus, Demetrius of Tarsus, Strabo (who cites her as the greatest of all women poets), Pausanias, Horace, Cicero, and others who had high regard for her wisdom and her use of language, and imitated by Catullus³⁵, her reputation began to change in the hands of Ovid. In the *Heroides* this Roman poet popularized an old legend, first mentioned by Strabo, concerning Sappho's love for Phaon. According to this story, Sappho threw herself over a cliff as a result of her disappointment in the affair³⁶. Writing somewhat later, Plutarch disregards this legend in the many praises he bestows on the most renowned poetess of antiquity in the *Moralia*. Not only is Sappho discussed as the inventress of tragic (or passionate) lyrical music in the *On Music*, one of the group of essays which, separately known throughout late medieval times, is now contained in the *Moralia*, Plutarch also frequently quotes from her verses³⁷. Because Plutarch's work was known to Renaissance scholars,



FIG. 4. — RAPHAEL. *Poetry*. Vatican, Stanza della Segnatura. Photo Musei Vaticani, archivio fotografico.

her work was known, at least in this fragmentary form presented by Plutarch, to Renaissance humanists. Evidence that Marsilio Ficino knew Sappho's verses is presented in his *Commentaria* on Plato's *Symposium*³⁸.

These humanists had more specific reason to become interested in Sappho, for their curiosity was surely stimulated by a *Commentary* on the Ovidian letter which forms the account provided in the *Heroides* authored in 1481 by Angelo Poliziano³⁹. While the "*epistola*" that stimulated Poliziano has been questioned as spurious by some later authors, the study of Domenico Comparetti eliminated the doubts connected with it and showed it to be the same letter that Ovid himself said, elsewhere, that he had composed⁴⁰. That considerable discussion must have been provoked at the time as a result of the commentary of Poliziano is suggested by the fact that not all humanists accepted the Ovidian story. Particularly interesting, in this respect, is the brief biography of Sappho that appeared in Rome in 1506, the year before the Stanza della Segnatura was presumably conceived. In the great humanist encyclopedia of Raffaello Maffei, the *Commentaria Urbana*, the entry under "Sappho" reads:

"Sappho: A Lesbian lyric poetess of the 42nd Olympiad in the time of Alceus and Stesichorus. As brothers she had Iaricus, Charaxus, and Eurichus. Her husband was Cercyla, a very wealthy man from Andros, by whom she had a daughter named Clis. She wrote nine books of lyrics. She was the first [woman] to play the lyre. In addition, she wrote epigrams, elegies, iambs, and monads. They say there was another woman, also a Lesbian, another player on the lyre, who because of love for Phaon, a young man, wrote verses and threw herself down headlong from a cliff. According to Suidas. Some think they are the same woman. Plato writes that Sappho was the wise daughter of Scamandronymus. But Aelian says that Sappho on Lesbos was not a poet, but a well known prostitute⁴¹.

The fact that this encyclopedia, which also notes Parnassus as the home of the Muses⁴², was dedicated to Julius II, in whose curia its author served, and that among the close humanist friends of Maffei was Tommaso Inghirami, the librarian of the Pontiff, suggests that this information was well known at the papal court at the time of the planning of the Stanza della Segnatura. Not mentioned by Maffei, but well known to Inghirami, who authored a commentary on Horace's *Ars Poetica* and maintained a keen interest in Horace, was the fact that Sappho played the Aeolian lyre⁴³.

The importance of the lyre in the Stanza della Segnatura is not limited to Sappho and Apollo of the *Parnassus*. One of the poets who stands, seen from the back, near Sappho, holds a simple version of this instrument, which he plucks, while one of the Muses in the company of Apollo holds a more elaborate variant. Apollo himself, in the painted statue dedicated to him in the *School of Athens*, painted just previously to the *Parnassus*, holds a lyre similar to the one that was at first given to him in the *Parnassus*. The fact that the supervising personality in the ceiling above, the personification of *Poetry* (fig. 4), holds as well an elegant lyre of yet another design shows not only that Raphael was made aware of the different kinds of lyre and appears to have taken interest in their variants, but that poetry and music are,

as suggested by the history of this instrument, intricately connected to each other.

This point was well made by Aristotle in Chapter I of his *Art of Poetry* and by Horace, who in the *Ars Poetica* referred to Apollo as the god of singers⁴⁴. It was clearly reflected by Inghirami in the little codex on poetry mentioned above⁴⁵. In discussing the structure and content of poetry, Inghirami stresses the importance of the style of language – its sound, rhythm, melodiousness, discipline, and variation – which in turn enhances its intended imagery⁴⁶. Surely this attitude is reflected in the 'musicality' of the pose of Sappho, whose richly rounded plastic suppleness translates into a composition of subtle contrapuntal rhythmic sequences – precisely the kind of cursive sequences of form that produce the elegant and passionate sonority for which her language was famous.

Yet another instance of the inclusion of the lyre in the Stanza della Segnatura occurs, again in the ceiling, in the scene representing Apollo and Marsyas (fig. 5). Though it has not been discussed before, it is perhaps significant that its chief subject is not the *Flaying of Marsyas*, a subject well known in the history of art. Rather, the subject emphasized here is an unusual variant of this theme, the celebration of the victory of Apollo over Marsyas. Indeed, Apollo is shown being crowned with laurel. Herodotus, Plutarch, Pausanias, and other Greek writers describe contests and competitions that took place between players of the lyre and players of the flute, the two major instruments known in ancient Greece, as explained by Aristotle in his *Art of Poetry*⁴⁷.

The contest between Marsyas, who Plutarch describes as the inventor of the flute (though elsewhere he credits Apollo with this invention)⁴⁸, and Apollo, the inventor of the lyre, which took place according to Strabo in Asia Minor at Apameia, which is situated on the river Marsyas (though Herodotus informs us that the skin of Marsyas hung in the market place of Celaenae in Phrygia)⁴⁹, was essentially a contest between the flute and the lyre. In this sense Raphael's work represents the *Victory of the Lyre*. Not only did

the lyre win the contest, but, according to Pausanias, the practice of singing to the accompaniment of the flute came to be dropped, for "the music was ill-omened to listen to. For the tunes of the flute were most dismal, and the words sung to the tunes were lamentations"⁵⁰. A low opinion of the flute, which he notes was out of fashion in his day, is also expressed by Horace in the *Ars Poetica*, where he equates the playing of this instrument with the taste of "a crowd of uneducated men enjoying a holiday from work, when country bumpkins rubbed shoulders with townfolk..."⁵¹. Horace compares the "wanton movements" that it introduced with the gravity, eloquence, and power of the lyre. Though in his praise of music ("...music is helpful for every occasion and all serious activity, but especially for meeting the perils of war"), Plutarch has great praise for the music of the lyre, which "is in every way a noble pursuit, being an invention of the gods", he has little to say about the virtues of the flute, "feeble and undistinguished though the music is", thereby confirming its decline in his time⁵².

The subsequent history of the rivalry between these instruments, and the victory of the lyre.



FIG. 5. – RAPHAEL. *The Victory of the Lyre*. Vatican. Stanza della Segnatura. Photo Musei Vaticani, archivio fotografico.

appears to have a so-far unrecognized importance for the Stanza della Segnatura. It was well known to ancient Romans, and particularly to Neopythagoreans, who eventually merged with Neoplatonists and who would later be of special interest to humanists of the late Quattrocento and early Cinquecento⁵³, that the contest between Apollo and Marsyas symbolized the victory of the lyre, which was the divine instrument that transports souls to heaven, over the flute, which was a baser instrument because it excited impure passions⁵⁴. Roman sarcophagi show the contest between Apollo and Marsyas taking place in the company of the Muses, who, as symbols of immortality⁵⁵, supervise the judging of this competition.

In detaching mankind from material concerns, the victorious lyre was regarded as provoking in man the desire for divine love. And, because the lyre as known to Romans had seven strings, it came to be regarded by Neopythagoreans, who not only attached a great importance to music but as well to numbers, as an echo of the harmony of the spheres. "The greatest consideration", wrote Plutarch, "one that particularly reveals music as most worthy of all reverence... is that the revolution of the universe and the courses of the stars are said by Pythagoras,... and the rest of the ancient philosophers not to come into being or to be maintained without the influence of music; for they assert that God has shaped all things in a framework based on harmony"⁵⁶.

With its seven strings, a mystical aspiration was evoked by the lyre, reproducing the harmony of the seven planetary spheres which maintained a constant movement around a central fire. In imitating the harmony of the spheres, a concept which had been noted by (the Ionian) Heraclitus of Ephesus as well as by (the Western) Pythagoras⁵⁷, the seven strings of the lyre echo the harmony of the cosmic symphony which, in producing in man a wish for heaven, symbolizes the purification of the soul⁵⁸. Both Heraclitus and Pythagoras are represented in the *School of Athens*.

The significance of these ideas was not lost on the Romans. In his discussions of the harmony of

the universe, Cicero alludes to the Pythagorean notion of the constant movement of the celestial spheres which, as elaborated by Plato in the *Timaeus*, remain at constant intervals in relation to each other and their relation to the music of the lyre: "That... is a concord of tones separated by unequal but nevertheless carefully proportioned intervals, caused by the rapid motion of the spheres themselves. The high and low tones blended together produce different harmonies. Of course such swift motions could not be accomplished in silence and, as nature requires, the spheres at one extreme produce the low tones and at the other extreme the high tones... Gifted men, imitating this harmony on stringed instruments and in singing, have gained for themselves a return to this region, as have those who have devoted their exceptional abilities to a search for divine truths. The ears of mortals are filled with this sound, but they are unable to hear it... But the sound coming from the heavenly spheres revolving at very swift speeds is of course so great that human ears cannot catch it; you might as well try to stare directly at the sun, whose rays are much too strong for your eyes"⁵⁹.

In his *Commentary* on Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis*, Macrobius invokes the authority of Hesiod and Plato in his discussion of Cicero's concept of universal harmony, suggesting that Apollo as the sun god is the leader of the harmony in the spheres, a harmony in which the Muses participate. "That the priests acknowledged that the heavens sing is indicated by their use of music at sacrificial ceremonies... the lyre or cithara [Apollo's instrument]"⁶⁰. He is even more explicit in the *Saturnalia*: "... just as in the 'seven strings of Apollo's lyre' [quotation marks mine] we may see a reference to the movements of the seven celestial spheres, which nature has placed under the control of the sun"⁶¹. Citing his admiration for the Pythagoreans, Pico della Mirandola organized his *Heptaplus*, completed in 1489⁶², into seven books each containing seven chapters, based on the organization of the planets in the cosmos described by Plato in the *Timaeus*, a work central to Neopythagoreanism and the very book which Plato holds in his hand in the *School of Athens*.

In this context, the pair of signs accompanying the personification of *Poetry* above, which spell the words *NUMINE AFFLATVR*, acquires a grander meaning than has previously been imagined. Though Plato allowed no place for poets in his *Republic*, except begrudgingly, in the *Phaedrus* he explains why. The inspirations of poets, he says, are akin to insanity or madness. However, he allows for a broader view of the concept of inspiration, which he is the first to discuss, as a divine release of the soul from the constraints of convention and therefore a great blessing and a gift of the gods⁶³.

While Horace seems to agree that rational minds are exchanged for native genius in the case of poets⁶⁴, and Virgil noted the breath of the Deity that transformed the maiden into the Cumaean Sibyl⁶⁵, it is Longinus, in the famous essay attributed to him, *On the Sublime*, a work of the first importance that was known from medieval times, who was the first to specifically express this term. Writing in the 1st century A.D., the author describes exactly the concept of *Numine Afflatur*: "For many authors catch fire from the inspiration of others – just as we are told that the Pythian priestess... breathed out a divine vapour... impregnated thence with the heavenly power, and by virtue of this afflatus is at once inspired to speak oracles. So too, as though also issuing from sacred orifices, certain emanations are conveyed from the genius of the men of old into the souls of those who emulate them, and, breathing in these influences, even those who show very few signs of inspiration derive some degree of divine enthusiasm from the grandeur of their predecessors"⁶⁶.

Later in the same work the author speaks of "surges of divine inspiration", noting that through this event inspired poets are able to rise above the human level and come close to the majestic mind of God⁶⁷. Writing somewhat later, Plutarch echoes this concept in his essay *On Music*:

"Again, of the senses which are engendered in our bodies because of harmony those that are celestial, sight and hearing, being divine and having God as their helper in providing men with sensation, reveal this harmony to the accompaniment

of sound and light; and other senses too that come in their train are by virtue of being senses composed in conformity with a harmony. For these senses also in all of their effects have some harmony, and while inferior to the first are not severed from them. For the first, as they appear in our bodies along with the presence of God by way of reasoning, have a powerful and novel nature"⁶⁸.

While Petrarch and Boccaccio appear, in late medieval times, to have reinstituted this concept in formulating their ideas concerning the role of the poet⁶⁹, especially Petrarch who regarded the poet as an inspired oracle of divine truth⁷⁰, Dante also recalled it in the *Divina Comedia*, in describing the breath of Minerva that hastens the arrival of Apollo⁷¹. The concept was continuously reaffirmed during Quattrocento times, as Charles Trinkhaus has shown, in the work of Coluccio Salutati, Giovanni Caldiera, and Cristoforo Landino, all of whom mirror the antique idea of the divinity of the poet, or, more properly, the divinely inspired poet⁷².

Not only does the divine inspiration of the motto *Numine Afflatur* relate to the history of poetry and its criticism, it applies equally well, through the archaeologically correct significance of the lyre that is accorded in this chamber, to the inseparability of poetry and music as seen in the *Parnassus* and its ruling personification above. Hardly a casual choice, the lyres held by Sappho, Apollo, and their companions refer to the music of the spheres so important not only to Plato but to later followers of Pythagoras. Thus Aristoxenus of Tarentus, Porphyry and Iamblichus include Sappho in the great Pythagorean scheme for the sublime harmonies she created through the music of her lyre⁷³.

The music of the spheres thereby elevates pagan poetry to the status of a universal cosmological meaning that, in contributing to the unifying concept of the magnificent chamber that was the library of Julius II, might have given cause for concern to Plato, whose great cosmological work it seeks so eloquently to complement.

C. J.-G.

NOTES

1. Among the most recent studies of this fresco is that of Paul F. WATSON, "To Paint Poetry: Raphael on Parnassus", in *Renaissance Rereadings*, ed. M.C. Horowitz et al., Urbana and Chicago, 1988, pp. 113-41.

2. See for example Luisa BECHERUCCI, "Raffaello e la Pittura: Il Parnasso", in *Raffaello*, ed. M. Salmi, I, Novara, 1968, pp. 522ff; and Giovanni BECATTI, "Raffaello e l'antico", in *op. cit.*, II, esp. pp. 527-31.

3. On this see John SHEARMAN, "The Vatican Stanze: Functions and Decoration", in *Proceedings of the British Academy*, LVII, 1971, pp. 369-424 (including bibliography).

4. An inventory of the books owned by Julius is contained in *Vatican Cod. Lat. 3966*. The list was published by Léon DOREZ in "La Bibliothèque Privée du Pape Jules II", *Revue des Bibliothèques*, VI, 1896, pp. 96-124. It should be added that Julius did possess a copy of Homer's *Iliad*, however in the Latin translation of Lorenzo Valla.

5. Roger JONES and Nicholas PENNY devote considerable attention to summarizing and discussing these matters in *Raphael*. New Haven, 1983, pp. 68ff.

6. Though little is known through literary sources of Sappho's appearance, several portraits of her are recorded in antique sources. Portraits showing her seated (playing the lyre) and in bust form are extant on coins and vases. An inscribed herm (which has now disappeared) was extant in the 17th century. Regarding these see Gisela M. RICHTER, *The Portraits of the Greeks*, I, London, 1965, pp. 70-72 and *op. cit.*, rev. ed. R.R.R. SMITH, Ithaca, 1984, pp. 194-96.

7. See, e.g., Sydney J. FREEDBERG, *Painting in the High Renaissance in Rome and Florence*, I, Cambridge, 1961, esp. pp. 122f; and BECATTI, *op. cit.*

8. See STRABO, *Geography*, IV.6.12, VIII.6.21, IX.2.25, IX.3.1-3, IX.3.15, IX.4.1, and LX.4.12; and PLINY THE ELDER, *Natural History*, XV.x1.

9. See PINDAR, *Pyth. Odes* I.35-40 and PAUSANIAS, *Description of Greece*, X.viii.9-10.

10. STRABO, *op. cit.*, IX.3.1 and PAUSANIAS, *op. cit.*, X.vi.1-5.

11. *Homeric Hymn III: To Pythian Apollo* (III.280-525). Trans. H.G. EVELYN-WHITE, in *Hesiod: The Homeric Hymns and Homericica*, London and New York, 1914, p. 361.

12. PLATO's epigram is contained in *The Greek Anthology* IX.506: "Some say the Muses are nine but how carelessly! Look at the tenth, Sappho from Lesbos". Trans. W.R. PATON, *The Greek Anthology*, III, London and New York, 1917, p. 281.

13. PETRARCH's eclogue reads:
"Altera solliciti laqueos cantabat amoris
Docta puella, choris doctorem immixta virorum,
Cinnameus roseo calamus cui semper ab ore
Pendulus et dulces mulcebant astra querelae".

Cited in Domenico COMPARETTI, *Sull'autenticità della epistola ovidiana di Saffo a Faone*. Florence, 1876, p. 14.

14. COMPARETTI, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

15. The most important ancient sources on the lyre, including fragments and works of ARISTOXENUS, EUCLID, NICOMACHUS, ALYPIUS, GAUDENTIUS, BACCHIUS, Aristide QUINTILIANUS, and Martianus CAPELLA, are contained in *Antiquae Musicae Auctores Septem*, ed. Marcus MEIBOM, Amsterdam, 1652; and PLUTARCH, *On Music*, contained in the *Moralia*. Other sources that mention this instrument abound and some will be mentioned in the text below. Among modern sources are François Auguste GEVAERT, *Histoire et théorie de la musique de l'antiquité*, Ghent, 1875-81; Karl von JAN, *Die griechischen Saiteninstrumente*, Leipzig, 1882; Théodore REINACH, *La musique Grecque*, Paris, 1894; Gabriella BATTAGLIA, "Lira", *Enciclopedia italiana*, XXI, Rome, 1934-XII, pp. 249-50; James F. MOUNTFORD and Reginald P. WINNINGTON-INGRAM, "Music in Greek Life", *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, ed. N.G.L. Hammond et al., Oxford, 1972, pp. 705-13; and Solon MICHAELIDES, *The Music of Ancient Greece*, London, 1978.

16. *Homeric Hymn IV: To Hermes* (IV.30-530).

17. DIONYSIUS OF HALICARNASSUS, *Roman Antiquities*, VII.725-26. See also BATTAGLIA, *op. cit.*, p. 249.

18. *Homeric Hymn IV*, *loc. cit.*; cf. Pausanias, *op. cit.*, IX.30.1.

19. PLUTARCH, *op. cit.*, 1132 and 1135-36.

20. PINDAR, *op. cit.*, I.1-10.

21. PLUTARCH, *op. cit.*, 1135. Trans. B. EINARSON and P. DE LACY, in *Moralia*, XIV, Cambridge and London, 1967, p. 383.

22. *Ibid.*, 1132-33.

23. *Ibid.*, 1132, 1133, and 1136.

24. PAUSANIAS, *op. cit.*, X.vii.3-4.

25. BATTAGLIA, *op. cit.*, pp. 249-50.

26. PLUTARCH, *op. cit.*, cf. 1132 and 1133.

27. See PLUTARCH, *op. cit.*, 1133 and HORACE, who refers to "the Lesbian lyre" in *Odes* I.1.34.

28. See HORACE, *Odes* II.xiii.25. See also Alberto GENTILI, "Barbiton", *Enciclopedia italiana*, VI, Rome, 1930-VIII, pp. 146-47 and P.E. ARIAS, "Saffo", in *Enciclopedia dell'arte antica classica e orientale*, VI, Rome, 1965, pp. 1062-63. See also C.H.E. HASPELS, "Saffo, Pittore di", in *loc. cit.*, for a reproduction from a vase painting of Sappho with the Aeolian lyre.

29. See n. 14 *supra*. For examples see esp. Francesco VATTIELLI, "Cetra" (cithara), in *Enciclopedia italiana*, IX, Rome, 1931-IX, pp. 900-02.

30. On the history of the violin see Pierre BAILLOT, *L'art du violon*, Paris, 1835; Ercole FOLEGATTI, *Storia del violino e dell'archetto...*, Bologna, 1873; and Wilhelm J. WASIELEWSKI, *Die Violine und ihre Meister*, Leipzig (1869), 1927. See also Mario CORTI, "Violino e violinisti", *Enciclopedia italiana*, XXXV, Rome, 1937-XV, pp. 415-17. Regarding early violins in paintings by Gaudenzio Ferrari and his school following

the emergence of this instrument after the middle of the 16th century. see Emanuel WINTERITZ, *Musical Instruments and their Symbolism in Western Art*. New Haven and London, 1979, pp. 99ff.

31. Regarding the *tira da braccio*, an instrument as popular in Italy as it was scarce in France, and its interpretation as an attribute of humanists in paintings, intarsie, engravings and book plates, see WINTERITZ, *op. cit.*, pp. 89, 92, and 96-98.

32. See Giorgio VASARI, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori scultori ed architettori*, ed. G. MILANESI, IV, p. 28 and pp. 498-99 (regarding Leonardo and Timoteo respectively). Regarding its depiction in the Palazzo Ducale at Urbino see WINTERITZ, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

33. See HORACE as cited in n. 28 *supra*.

34. See, e.g., JONES and PENNY, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

35. See, e.g., HERODOTUS, *History*, II.135; PLATO as cited in n. 12 *supra*; *Idem.*, *Phaedrus*, 235C; "Longinus" (authorship unknown), *On the Sublime*, X; DEMETRIUS TARSUS, *On Style*, 132 and 166-67; STRABO, *op. cit.*, I.2.33, X.2.9, XIII, 2, 3, XIII.2.4, and XVII.1.38; PAUSANIAS, *op. cit.*, I.xxv.1, VIII.xviii.5, IX.xxvii.3, and IX.xxix.8; HORACE as cited in n. 28 *supra*; *Idem.*, *Epistles* I.xxix; CICERO, *In Verrem actio*, II.LVII. For many other antique sources see *Lyra Graeca*, ed. J.M. EDMONDS, I, London and Cambridge, 1934, pp. 141-299; and *Greek Lyric*, ed. D.A. CAMPBELL, I, Cambridge and London, 1982, esp. introduction and pp. 1-195. See also CATULLUS, poems 62 and 63.

36. See STRABO, *op. cit.*, X.2.9 and OVID, *Heroides*, XV.3.155, 183.

37. PLUTARCH, *Moralia*, *passim*.

38. See Ficino's reference to the words of Sappho in *Ficino's Commentary on Plato's Symposium*, ed. S.R. JAYNE, Columbia (Mo.), 1944, p. 196.

39. Angelo POLIZIANO, *Comento inedito all'epistola ovidiana di Saffo a Faone*, ed. E. LAZZERI, Florence, 1971.

40. COMPARETTI, *op. cit.*

41. Raffaele MAFFEI, *Commentaria Urbana*, Rome, 1506, fol. cclxviii (r). Grateful acknowledgment for assistance with this translation from the original Latin is due to Warren Smith.

42. *Ibid.*, fol. cxx (r).

43. INGHIRAMI's commentary on Horace is contained in *Vatican Cod. Lat. 2742*. Re: HORACE see n. 28 *supra*.

44. HORACE, *Ars Poetica*, 405-10. On this see Paul Oskar KRISTELLER, "Music and Learning", in *Renaissance Thought and the Arts*, Princeton (1964), 1980, pp. 142-62 (with bibliography).

45. See n. 43 *supra*.

46. INGHIRAMI, *op. cit.*, esp. fol. 32 (r).

47. See, e.g., HERODOTUS, *op. cit.*, referring to a Phrygian legend, VII.26; PLUTARCH, *On Music*, *passim*; PAUSANIAS, *op. cit.*, X.vi.4. See also ARISTOTLE, *The Art of Poetry*, Introduction and Ch. I.

48. PLUTARCH, *On Music*, *op. cit.*, 1133.

49. Cf. STRABO, *op. cit.*, XII.8.15 and HERODOTUS, *op. cit.*, VII.26.

50. PAUSANIAS, *op. cit.*, X.vii.5-6. Trans. W.H. JONES, in *Pausanias: Description of Greece*, IV, London and New York, 1918, p. 405. This view had been expressed as early as the 4th century B.C. by PLATO (cf. *The Republic* III.399 D-E).

51. HORACE, *Ars Poetica*, *op. cit.*, 200-20. Trans. T.S. DORSCH, in *Classical Literary Criticism*, London, 1965, p. 86.

52. PLUTARCH, *On Music*, *op. cit.*, 1140. Trans. B. EINARSON and P. DE LACY, *op. cit.*, pp. 385 and 413.

53. On Pythagoreanism and Neopythagoreanism see Armand DELATTE, *Études sur la littérature pythagoricienne*, Paris, 1915; Isidore LÉVY, *La légende de Pythagore de Grèce en Palestine*, Paris, 1927; and Jérôme CARCOPINO, *La basilique pythagoricienne de la Porte Majeure*, Paris, 1927. See frequent references of Pico della Mirandola to Pythagoreans in *De Hominis Dignitate* and *Heptaplus*, both contained in Pico della Mirandola, *Opera Omnia Ioannis Pici, Mirandulae*, Basel, 1557, pp. 313-31 and 10-62 respectively.

54. On this see Franz CUMONT, *Recherches sur le symbolisme funéraire des Romains*, Paris, 1942, esp. pp. 17-19 and 146-47.

55. CUMONT, *op. cit.*, pp. 18-19, and re: *the Muses*, pp. 259-81.

56. PLUTARCH, *On Music*, *op. cit.*, 1147. EINARSON and DE LACY trans., pp. 453-55. Cf. PLATO, *Cratylus*, 405C-D and *The Republic*, X.617C.

57. PLUTARCH (in *On Exile*, 604A) cites a fragment according to which Heraclitus says that each planet revolves on its own sphere and preserves its station.

58. CUMONT, *op. cit.*, pp. 17-19 and 146-47.

59. CICERO, *Somnium Scipionis* V.1-3 (This work, which appeared at the end of a larger work, *De Re Publica*, essentially lost during medieval times, survived and came to be well known during this period and the Renaissance because of the fact that Macrobius had written a commentary on it). Trans. W.H. STAHL, in *Macrobius, Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, New York, 1952, pp. 73-74.

60. MACROBIUS, *Commentary* III.4. Trans. STAHL in *op. cit.*, p. 194.

61. MACROBIUS, *Saturnalia* I.XIX.14. Trans. P.V. DAVIES, in *Macrobius: The Saturnalia*, New York and London, 1969, p. 135.

62. See n. 53 *supra*. Cf. Philo JUDAEUS, *On the Creation*, 126.

63. PLATO, *Phaedrus*, 244-65.

64. HORACE, *Ars Poetica*, *op. cit.*, 290-300.

65. "... adflata est numine quando iam propiore dei" (*Aeneid*, VI.50-51).

66. LONGINUS, *On the Sublime*, XIII. Trans. DORSCH, in *Classical Literary Criticism*, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

67. LONGINUS, *op. cit.*, XXXIII.

68. PLUTARCH, *On Music*, *op. cit.*, 1140. Trans. EINARSON and DE LACY, *op. cit.*, p. 411.

69. Regarding PETRARCH see *Invective contra medicum*, ed. Pier Giorgio RICCI, Rome, 1950, esp. Bk. III. Cf. BOCCACCIO at the end of the *Genealogie deorum* (esp. XV.8). On these poets and their ideas of heavenly grace see the important dis-

cussion of Charles TRINKHAUS, "From Theologia Poetica to Theologia Platonica", in *In Our Image and Likeness*, Chicago, 1970, esp. pp. 689ff.

70. TRINKHAUS, *op. cit.*, p. 690.

71. DANTE, *Divina Comedia, Paradiso*, II, 8-9.

72. TRINKHAUS, *op. cit.*, pp. 697-715, *passim*.

73. On this subject see CARCOPINO, "Sappho et le pythagorisme", in *De Pythagore aux Apôtres: Études sur la conversion du monde romain*, Paris, 1956, esp. p. 31.

RESUMÉ. — *Sappho, Apollon, la théorie néopythagoricienne, et "Numine Afflatur" dans la fresque du Parnasse de Raphaël.*

Mise en évidence par la position qu'elle occupe dans la fresque du Parnasse et par l'inscription qu'elle tient, l'importance de Sappho dans cette œuvre n'a pas encore été suffisamment étudiée. Unique dans cette peinture, la figure de Sappho n'avait tout d'abord pas été intégrée à la composition pour des causes accidentelles. En tant que joueuse de la lyre éolienne, Sappho est ici reconnue comme inventeur non seulement de la poésie, mais aussi de la musique. L'importance de la lyre dans cette œuvre, méconnue à ce jour, s'étend à l'instrument dont joue Apollon, qui n'est pas un violon mais une *lira da braccio*, qui revêtait une signification archéologique particulière au regard des humanistes de Rome. Cette signification s'étend à son tour aux sept cordes : elles se réfèrent clairement au nombre et à l'activité mesurée des planètes lesquelles, selon les idées pythagoriciennes, sont l'objet même des préoccupations de Platon. La *Victoire de la Lyre*, représentée au-dessus à la voûte, offre une relation consommée entre le *Parnasse* et les autres fresques de la Stanza et conduit au thème de l'inspiration divine annoncée par la figure de la *Poésie*, suggérant une impulsion néopythagoricienne unificatrice qui sous-tend l'ensemble du programme de la Stanza.