The Artistic Contributions of Women in Antiquity: Art and Spirituality in the Works of Sappho and Hildegard

Aikaterini Grigoriadou
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Under the Direction of Marie Sumner Lott, Assistant Professor

Abstract:

Sappho and Hildegard of Bingen were both extraordinary composers who excelled in the artistic, philosophical, and literary worlds of their time. They were motivated and inspired by divine belief and will, and they devoted their lives to religious expression through art. This essay focuses on Sappho’s and Hildegard of Bingen’s contributions to the development of the spiritual and cultural expression of their societies through lyrical compositions and musical innovations. Comparisons between Sappho’s poems and Hildegard’s sequences and antiphons reveal the similarities and differences between their musical styles and religious beliefs. Through the analysis of Sappho’s and Hildegard’s lives and work, this essay endeavors to remind us that artistic women who are characterized by persistence, hard work, and will may become a source of inspiration for audiences across the world, and contribute to the cultural elevation of human societies.
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Aikaterini Grigoriadou

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Thesis Advisor: Marie Sumner Lott

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Introduction

Many pre-modern societies were organized according to a patriarchal system which limited to a certain extent the role of women in socio-political life. While most men enjoyed the privileges of higher education and engaged in political, economic, and cultural life publicly, women were practicing the roles of proper wife and daughter, which may have implied a lower level of education and a predominant place in the home. However, history of different civilizations and in different periods in antiquity reveals examples of remarkable women who exercised power and excelled in cultural and political arenas (e.g. Cleopatra, queen of Egypt, and Ban Zhao, the first female Chinese historian). Such extraordinary women earned the respect and reverence of important personalities during their eras, and societies across the world today admire them and their accomplishments.

This essay focuses on the life and work of two such extraordinary women: the ancient Greek poetess Sappho (seventh century B.C. E.), and the German abbess and composer Hildegard of Bingen (twelfth century C. E.). Although they lived in different societies and eras, they were both motivated by divine belief and will, and devoted their lives to religious expression through art. To that end, both of them are recognized today as religious composers.
who contributed to the development of the spiritual and cultural life of their societies through lyrical compositions and musical innovations respectively.

In this essay, analysis of the hymns and chants composed by Sappho and Hildegard of Bingen reveals the similarities and differences between their musical and poetic styles, as well as their religious beliefs. A brief examination of the socio-cultural aspects of Sappho’s and Hildegard’s respective societies demonstrates how they overcame obstacles typically associated with being female within a patriarchal regime and how they became key social figures in their societies. To that end, analysis and discussion of both composers’ life and work are provided to examine what family and social factors facilitated each woman’s gifts, and in what ways they were different from other women in their cultural milieu. By studying the lives and work of these exceptional composers, this essay reveals that Sappho and Hildegard of Bingen are shining examples of persistence, hard work, and will, and that they may be described as a source of inspiration for the cultural and spiritual elevation of human societies to this day.

Many centuries and socio-cultural changes separated the lives of these women. During Hildegard of Bingen’s life, Western civilization continued to experience the dissolution of Hellenic beliefs, practices, and ideals; thus, it partially separated its cultural development from that of Ancient Greece, meaning that it followed a different religious approach upon which philosophy, art, and socio-cultural meanings and dynamics were based. Here lies also the main difference between the two examined eras, and the way that Sappho and Hildegard of Bingen interpreted the role of humankind within the universe. For Sappho, the ancient pagan Greek religion suggested a more humanistic and holistic understanding of the world, meaning that culture and humanity are in the center of the world where gods’ characteristics and behaviors are based on human nature, and religious beliefs and rituals are interwoven with all aspects of social
life. The Christian religion of the twelfth century C.E., however, developed the concept of monotheism, which means that everything, including human nature, derives from a superior being, God.

During both periods composers had the same goal in creating music to interpret and understand the universe through religious beliefs and expressions. Music in ancient Greece was an important aspect of the Greek religion, which was viewed as an inseparable part of human nature and life. In the Catholic Church of the twelfth century, music held an important role and became a liturgical necessity and everyday practice, especially in monastic life. To that end, in order to illuminate how Sappho and Hildegard of Bingen influenced music and its expression during their respective eras, it is first necessary to present the musical trends and background within the societies in which these women lived and worked.

Music in Ancient Greece

"Music gives a soul to the universe, wings to the mind, flight to the imagination and life to everything." – Plato

In ancient Greece, research was the fundamental element that formed the basis for the development of human culture, and the outcome of intent and persistence; under these conditions, the marriage between nature and research gave birth to μουσική (music). The ancient Greeks held music to superior scientific levels which featured many aspects of the ancient world, and they “put music high on the list of requisites for a good life.” Thomas Mathiesen further

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notes that music in ancient Greece, “was considered both art and science; it occupied a
prominent place in everyday life, it embodied larger universal principles and was a vehicle for
higher understanding.” The “higher understanding” of which Mathiesen speaks is of the nature
and culture of humanity that finds expression in music. To that end, Mesomede's *Hymn to the
Muse* highlights the union of human nature with the universe.  

Sing Muse, dear to me, and prelude my own song
Let a breeze, come forth from your groves, make my soul tremble
Oh, wise Kalliope who directs the gracious Muses,
and you whose wisdom initiates the mysteries
Son of Latona, Delian, Paian, help me with your favor.

As a gift from the gods to humanity, given by the Muses, the art of making music in
ancient Greece offered a high level of self-development and understanding of the universe. The
invocation of the Muse Kalliope, guardian of epic poetry and rhetoric, confirms the acceptance
of a symbolic group of persons – the nine Muses who represent both Arts and Sciences – as one
inseparable unity that prompts the elevation of humanism within the world. So, which is the role
of Sappho in this culture? How is she associated with the religious beliefs of that era, and why is
she allegedly praised by Plato as the tenth Muse?

Two basic aspects of ancient Greek music illuminate how the pre-existing musical tradition
set the basis to Sappho’s cultural and spiritual elevation of her audience and constituted the
canvas to her musical innovations: singing or lyrical expression, and the musical system. The art
of singing (*āσµα*) was the initial form of music and was strongly connected to lyric poetry

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4 Thomas J. Mathiesen, *Apollo's Lyre: Greek Music and Music Theory in Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Lincoln, Neb: University of Nebraska P, 1999), 76.
5 *Hymn to Muse* was composed by Mesomede from Crete around 2nd century.
6 Thomas J Mathiesen, *Apollo's Lyre: Greek Music and Music Theory in Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, 58; translation from D. Yeld in *Musique de la Grece antique*. 
Thus, poetry was interwoven with music to the extent that these two arts were considered equivalent. This union did not occur in retrospect; on the contrary, music and poetry as concepts and as words formed and represented one single unity. Song had a prominent place in ancient Greek society and it was present from cradle to grave, including at competitions, theater, school, war, family, and home. This is also visible from the hymns and songs of that era, which played a substantial role in the ancient Greek world and were an excellent product of music and lyric combination. Their content referred to the gods and the values that they represented, and sometimes they also described the deeds of famous heroes. In Homer's epic *Odyssey*, the singer Demodokos interprets songs about the deeds of Odysseus and praises his prowess and courage – two virtues necessary to classical notions of the hero. Singers in ancient Greece were present for various activities of everyday life, and they taught the virtues of a benevolent society by singing about history and mythology. Mathiesen notes, “*Iliad* and *Odyssey* could themselves be sung as extended musical forms or recited.” To that end, the ancient Greeks considered an excellent musician to be a transmitter of moral values, virtues and ideals, and viewed singers as the antecedents of philosophers.

The musical system in ancient Greece was based on seven τρόπους (modes): Lydian, Phrygian, Dorian, Mixolydian, Hypodorian (or Aelolian, Locrian), Hypophrygian, Hypolydian.

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7 Dimitrios Delfinopoulos, Conductor of the musical ensemble Orfeia Armonia which recreates ancient Greek music. Personal Interview (12 October 2013).


These modes produced a variety of musical combinations and were strongly related to the
teaching of moral values. They also represented a specific character and emotion. Thus, the
Lydian was considered funereal; the Phrygian was agitated and Bacchic, connected to the
religion of Dionysus; the Dorian was courageous, virile, and warlike (the most appropriate to
form a perfect male citizen); the Hypodorian was majestic and stable; the Hypophrygian was
active; the Hypolydian was debouched and voluptuous; and the Mixolydian, which was invented
by Sappho, was lamentational, sensitive, pathetic, and sad.¹⁰

The Poet and Musician Sappho of Lesbos

_Yes! Radiant lyre speak to me_

_become a voice...₁¹_

Sappho came from an aristocratic family and was an acclaimed composer and teacher of lyric
poetry, which means that she was also a composer and teacher of music; in fact, the term “lyric

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Alexandru Ioan Cuza, Iasi. [https://www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/Anci/AnciCozm.htm] (accessed 25 November 2014);

"poetry" means poetry written for the accompaniment of the lyre. She lived during the Archaic period around the seventh century B.C. E. on the island of Lesbos; a large island in the Aegean that constituted one of the most important commercial centers in the Mediterranean basin from 700 to 500 B.C.E. This means that the island was enriched with intercultural exchange in various aspects of everyday life including art. Most of the information about Lesbos’ society in the seventh century comes from the poetry of Sappho and Alcaeus. Thus, the information is fragmented, and consideration must be taken when we draw generalizations and conclusions about everyday life then. From Sappho’s work, it appears that women in Lesbos were freer than women in other Greek πόλεις (city-states) such as Athens.

Unfortunately, only fragments of Sappho's poetry have survived, and there is not enough evidentiary material to recreate her music. However, “according to Aristoxenos, Sappho invented the Mixolydian mode,” which was also associated with feminine sensuality and tenderness, and/or with lamentation. These features may fit in Sappho's surviving lyrical fragments (her poems are examined below). Furthermore, Thomas Mathiesen notes that Sappho was also the inventor of the πηκτίς (pektis). This beautiful and unique instrument in the shape of a small harp with 20 chords tuned in semitones belonged to the category of ψαλτικά (psaltika)

16 Ibid., 2.
instruments which were played by naked fingers, in contrast to those instruments that were played with the use of a wooden piece, πλήκτρο (plektron). Furthermore, the pektis, as well as the other psaltika instruments, had a sensitive and hedonic sound and were played mostly by women.\(^{17}\) It is possible that this tradition may have been established by the musical practices in Sappho's educational and musical environment.

Sappho was an educator in the House of Therapainides Muses (Οἶκος τῶν Θεραπαινίδων Μουσῶν) where she taught the art of poetry and music to young women of the upper class. As Claude Calame notes, these women were known either as parthenai and korai, and also as hetairai and mathetria.\(^{18}\) Calame also stresses the pedagogical aspect of Sappho's work and further notes that, “In Sappho's group, there is no doubt about the didactic relationship between the poet and her companions.”\(^{19}\) Clearly, Sappho held the role of the instructor and mentor in this institution and contributed to the personal development of her students through the expression of the musical arts.

Sappho’s poems indicate that the poetess gave tributes to Apollo, Hera and Artemis, but most of all to Aphrodite – goddess of Eros/Love and Kallos/Beauty. For example in Fragment 17 Sappho writes: “Close to me now as I pray,/lady Hera,/may your gracious form appear.”\(^{20}\) In Fragment 33, she writes: “If only I, O goldcrowned Aphrodite,/could win this lot.”\(^{21}\) Fragments of Sappho’s poetry celebrate fierce love and beauty to the extent that Eros may gain theological existence beneath the umbrella of the cult of Aphrodite. As Anne Carson notes, “After all,

\(^{17}\) Dimitrios Delfinopoulos, Conductor of the musical ensemble Orfeia Armonia which recreates ancient Greek music. Personal Interview (12 October 2013).


\(^{19}\) Claude Calame, 117.


\(^{21}\) Ibid., 67.
Sappho is believed by some historians to have been not just a poet of love and worshipper of Aphrodite, but also a priest of Aphrodite's cult and a teacher of her doctrines. Perhaps Sappho's poem [Fragment 31] wants to teach us something about the metaphysics or theology of love.²²

To that end, it is plausible that the group of young women under Sappho's guidance experienced along with their artistic development, spiritual consciousness and growth. This might have been achieved either by singing Sappho's poetry or by being exposed to it. There is not much evidence about who interpreted Sappho's compositions at that time; her music could have been performed either by her students, or by the poet herself. In the first poem that is examined below, Sappho includes her own name, which might mean that she was the one singing this specific composition.

Sappho’s poem, *Ode to Aphrodite,*²³ unfolds the spiritual relationship of the poetess with the goddess, and outlines the theological dimensions of *Eros* and the relationship between human and divine nature in ancient Greece. In this hymn, Sappho uses her poetic mastery and implores Aphrodite to come and soften the pain caused by a reluctant lover/friend.²⁴ What the poetess actually asks for here is divine intervention and implementation of justice. In order to gain the goddess's favor, Sappho illustrates her devotion and faith to Aphrodite, and describes how the goddess responded to her invocations and pleas in the past (lines 5-17). Aphrodite's response in the poem reveals her intimate spiritual relationship with Sappho, and promises that she will help the poetess one more time. This spiritual relationship that emerges through Sappho's mellifluous

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²³ See Appendix I.

²⁴ *Love* (ἔρως) in ancient Greece has many and different dimensions; therefore it is not easy to understand if Sappho refers to a lover or a friend who did not respond in her love; however, Sappho in her poem does not mention the word ἔρως, but the word φίλει/φιλήσει which is also an expression of love and thus it is translated in English language as “love.”
lyrics and vivid imagery may be described also in the context of a troubled child who seeks the help and care of the parent – an idea found later in Christian religion. In these lyrics the idea of divine justice and its implementation comes to the fore: “Who wrongs you Sappho?... ,if she does not love [you], soon she shall, even against her own will” (lines 20-24). Here, Aphrodite is committed to provide relief to the broken heart of her devoted worshipper by using the divine powers that control Eros. The concept of restorative justice and faith in this hymn – also found later in early Christianity – are highly connected with the doctrine of ethos. This song contributed to the spiritual and moral development of Sappho's students and audience, and it served as a bridge to a better understanding of the universe.

Although never mentioned in this poem, Eros dominates as the ultimate concept in this hymn, and reveals itself in three dimensions. The first dimension is that of love between two mortals – Sappho and the reluctant lover/friend. The second dimension is that between a mortal and a goddess – Sappho and Aphrodite. The third dimension is that of Eros as god – Aphrodite's child. Eros in this hymn signifies a theological entity not only in the latter case, but also in the other two. In the first case love can be seen and defined as a creation of superior divine forces; this derives from the notion that only divine intervention has the power to control and regulate human emotions. In the second case love acquires a direct divine expression since Aphrodite is the goddess and mother of Eros and the one who fuels the desire of Sappho to love and worship her. In return for Sappho's devotion, Aphrodite expresses her love to Sappho by responding to the poetess's prayers and pleas. Although it is not clear at first glance, the notion of irony is present in the latter relationship. In the first place, it seems that Aphrodite guides Eros to act against Sappho's emotions and then she is the one who promises to offer comfort and relief from the poetess's pain. What Sappho actually creates here is a drama with elements of comedy and self-
irony. There are three characters in this play: Eros, Aphrodite, and Sappho. Although the dialogue unfolds between Sappho and Aphrodite, Eros is the protagonist role in this drama. In fact, Eros upsets Sappho, and Sappho driven by love for her lover/friend, falls in artistic ecstasy and creates a hymn that glorifies Aphrodite in order to ask for her aid. To express this, Sappho uses vivid bird imagery that glorifies Aphrodite's descent and appearance. Aphrodite, who obviously knows what is going on and is probably testing Sappho's faith, reveals herself as deus ex machina to save the broken heart of her beloved believer; this is a comedic element. Sappho – even though she does not write it – places Eros, the playful god – in readers’ mind and understanding – between her and Aphrodite. This means that Sappho also knows very well Aphrodite's intentions from the beginning – another comedic element. So, is it Aphrodite and Eros who play with Sappho, or is it Sappho who plays with gods? This hymn is an excellent example for the understanding of ancient Greek religion. Sappho signifies here how Greek gods represent the strengths and weaknesses of human nature. This way, the poetess actually identifies herself through Eros and Aphrodite to the extent that these three characters may be seen as the same person, and converts the dialogue to monologue; here is the concept of self-irony. Sappho recognizes her weaknesses and with the use of religious beliefs finds the strength to confront her troubles. The application of these beliefs in the hymn gives Sappho the title of religious poetess who strived to expose and reveal the relationship between human and divine nature in the ancient Greek world.

In order to understand how the Ode to Aphrodite further contributed to the spiritual and the moral development of Sappho's students and audience, it is important to examine the lyrics and the musical character that may be hidden underneath. As mentioned above, Sappho was the inventor of the emotional Mixolydian mode, which belonged to the ancient Greek musical
system of seven τρόπους (modes). Although there is no evidentiary material for the music of Sappho's hymn, her lyrics reveal a lamentory, melancholic character – “with anguish, with grief” (line 4) – and a delicate feminine expression of love – “fulfil everything that my heart desires…” (lines 26-27). The Ode to Aphrodite awakens human emotions that fit the character of the Mixolydian mode. This song might have been an example where Mixolydian mode was most appropriate.

Sappho’s Fragment 2 Hither to me from Crete\(^{25}\) was also written in honor of Aphrodite. This is not a complete poem. The surviving material includes four stanzas probably all written in four lines. Here, Sappho calls Aphrodite Κυπρί (Cyprian or Kypris);\(^{26}\) this name for Aphrodite refers to the goddess’ birthplace, Cyprus.\(^{27}\) In this poem, Sappho creates a monologue in which the devoted believer invites the divine nature to join the holy festivities. Sappho does not invite Aphrodite to “save” her from an unpleasant situation. The poetess implores the goddess to join her in the “holy temple” (lines 1-2) to celebrate a ritual dedicated (probably) to Aphrodite. In lyrics 12-14, Sappho reveals the royal and divine erotic nature of the goddess as she refers to the “golden cups” that “pour… nectar.” A unique relationship between Sappho and Aphrodite is evident in this fragment. Sappho reveals this intimate relationship on the very first lyric Hither to me from Crete. The beginning of this poem implies that Sappho already knows where Aphrodite is, which means that the goddess has trusted her location at that specific moment to Sappho. In ancient Greek mythology, the gods and goddesses reveal themselves and their intentions only to people they valued the most. Here, it seems that Aphrodite has chosen Sappho to be her

\(^{25}\) See Appendix II.

\(^{26}\) Cyprian and Kypris mean the exact same things; translators use the two interchangeably.

trustworthy messenger in order to transmit and fulfill goddess’s desires. However, one may argue that Sappho could have chosen Aphrodite to be her beloved goddess. In any case, Sappho sings these beautiful lyrics to indulge the goddess and urge her to travel from Crete to Lesbos to be present in the holy ritual prepared by her beloved worshipper. This poem supports the theory that Sappho was also a priest of Aphrodite, and reinforces the views that she may be examined as a religious composer.

In this fragment, Sappho writes a delicate description of Aphrodite’s temple and uses vivid and sensuous imagery of nature that guides the audience to place the specific holy ritual in time and space. The temple in the “grove of apple trees” (lines 2-3), the “roses” (line 7), and the “spring flowers” (line 10) reveal that the holy ritual takes place during springtime in the “meadow” (line 9) where everything “blooms” (line 10). Her poetry is full of beauty and eroticism, and celebrates the awakening of human senses, as we read in lines 2-4 and 14-15:

“where… your grove/of apple trees is, the altars/smoke with frankincense…/nectar mingled together with our festivities” and opens the door to the senses of taste and smell.

Furthermore, Sappho uses in her description some of the elements of nature such as earth – “apple trees” “roses” “meadow,” – water (lyric 5), and wind(s) (line 10) which arouse erotic desires. All of nature is prepared for the arrival of the goddess. Here lies the great mastery of the composer. Sappho chooses her lyrics very carefully. She creates the perfect scene of an ideal natural environment, in a metaphysical and spiritually ecstatic state – being at the spring season – that correlates to Aphrodite’s incomparable dazzling beauty and eroticism.

In this poem, Sappho teaches her students/audience what it means to be a devoted worshipper of Aphrodite. The glorification of natural beauty and eroticism are elements of utmost importance in the cult of Aphrodite. The delicate natural environment here represents the
κάλλος (beauty) of the goddess to the extent that these two spheres – the earth and the divine – become one entity that reveals a paradise on earth. In this paradise the worshippers may recognize Aphrodite’s features – beauty and eroticism – to be present in nature itself. To that end, Sappho does not glorify the beauty of nature, but the divine characteristics of the goddess. Sappho teaches her students/audience that they need to celebrate κάλλος (beauty) and έρως (eros/love) through their own bodies and spirits in order to come closer to the goddess; the poetess demonstrates how nature flourishes as it prepares for its union with the Divine in order to inspire her students/audience to prepare themselves for Aphrodite’s arrival. To that end, the elements of nature here may be interpreted as metaphors for female human nature.

Sappho’s Fragment 5 is another hymn which elaborates the powers of female deities, including Aphrodite as the main divine entity. Sappho implores “Kypris” and Nereids” (line 1) – the daughters of “the Old Man of the Sea,” Nereus – to protect her brother during his journey and bring him back home “undamaged” (lyric 1). This could have been an example of a προπεµπτικόν poem – a farewell poem/song. One may argue here, that Sappho has composed this prayer for her brother Charaxos. In any case, this poem reveals that Sappho appreciated and valued the power of the female deities.

In this fragment, Sappho has chosen female deities to protect a man on a journey full of “enemies” (line 6). One would expect someone to ask protection from Zeus, Ares, Artemis, or

28 See Appendix III.
29 Kypris is a translation of Κύπρι, another name for Aphrodite that referred to goddess’ birthplace, Κύπρος (Cyprus).
31 Ibid., p. 18.
32 “It was common that composers would write songs upon request from clients;” Dr. Louis Ruprecht, Personal Correspondence. (17 March 2016).
Athena; deities associated with power, war, and wisdom. The lyrics of Sappho that invite Aphrodite and Nereids to become the guardians of the traveler in this fragment reveal a journey at the sea. As mentioned above, as the daughters of Nereus, the Nereids were associated with the calm sea. Aphrodite emerged from the sea foams and thus, she was also considered a protector of the sailors. In this fragment, Sappho creates an interesting gender relationship in order to bring equality among the divine female and male entities. She suggests that female deities may as well produce pain and damage, and at the same time guard their protégés from evil. Sappho moves beyond the divine realm and endeavors to bring gender equality in human society as well. The composer has wisely chosen to project first the powers of the female deities in order to prepare for the empowerment of women. In the poem, Sappho asks that the brother “may…willingly give his sister/her portion of honor” (lines 7-8). This line suggests that female members of the family deserve a portion of the honor attributed to the male members on their return from their heroic deeds. Sappho highlights the important role of women in society and asks for a symbolic reward of respect and appreciation. To that end, the composer elevates the feminine. She emphasizes this concept by writing that the man on the journey owes his achievements and safety to the prayers of his sister. In this fragment, the sister expresses concern for more than just the physical safety of her brother, praying for the forgiveness of his “wrong” (line 4) in order to release him from past mistakes. Being a man of virtue who brings “joy to his friends” places the man among the good men in society – a concept of utmost importance in ancient Greece. Furthermore, the sister asks the deities to give him “all that in his heart he wants to be” (line 3). To that end, man achieves his internal catharsis, the development of his inner good, and who he becomes/is through a woman’s intervention who fights and prays for his dignity and honor to the gods.

This composition teaches Sappho’s students and audience that the female nature – divine or
human – deserves respect and appreciation. Sappho urges people to praise and honor female deities, as well as female nature on earth. Elaborating the power of goddesses to protect and/or damage humans, as well as the powers of the women to implore deities in order to guard, forgive, and form a man of virtue, the female sphere is placed on equal footing next to the male sphere.

The lyrics of this poem unfold a feminine sensitivity and power. However, since much of the poetic material, and all of the music material are missing, it is very difficult to draw safe conclusions about what kind of mode Sappho might have used in this poem.

Sappho's compositions incorporated not only hymns to gods, but also songs about the expression of love and wedding songs, *epithalamia*. Her work was, and is, characterized by unique mellifluous lyricism, which may have inspired the Hellenistic poets to regard Sappho as “the tenth Muse” or “the mortal Muse.” Through the passionate and delicate expression of *Eros*, Sappho moved beyond human consciousness and understanding, and led her audience to the experience of metaphysic and spiritual ecstasy. The transcendent dimension of *Eros* – found not only in hymns, but also in Sappho's love songs – contributed to the spiritual development of people in Lesbian society, and the establishment of the extensive cult of Aphrodite as a part of the main religion; songs and hymns expressed this religion. Sappho's musical innovations – the Mixolydian mode and the pektis – are canonical. The influence of a woman artist on the works of other Greek composers and musicians through the ages is undeniable.

Many centuries later, another extraordinary female composer, Hildegard of Bingen, influenced and fascinated the music world of the twelfth century C. E., and contributed to the spiritual expression through uniquely religious poetic and musical compositions.

Music in Medieval Europe

The marvels of God are not brought forth from one's self. Rather, it is more like a chord, a sound that is played. The tone does not come out of the chord itself, but rather, through the touch of the Musician.

I am, of course, the lyre and harp of God's kindness. — Hildegard of Bingen

During the Middle-Ages, music developed and flourished under the umbrella of the Catholic Church which dominated the lives of people culturally and politically. This period was characterized by the construction and function of many monasteries, convents and cathedrals where music was composed, documented, taught, practiced, and performed. During the early medieval period, music in the Catholic Church circulated through oral tradition. Practice and performance in the monasteries played a significant role in the preservation of early chants and hymns. In the ninth century, the need to produce a liturgical music that would reinforce the spiritual experience through musical text led musicians to seek ways to enhance musical accuracy. To that end, musicians developed a system of musical notation and theory that allowed them to record and learn music. The eight ecclesiastical modes as we understand them today came in to being as a part of the musical theory and system that was developed during this early period. The modes were classified as either “authentic” or “plagal” based on their range, and they shared the names of the ancient Greek modes. According to church officials, the primary purpose of music was to express the spiritual importance of sacred texts, and therefore,

36 Although that the ecclesiastical modes used the names of the ancient Greek modes, they do not have the same characteristics in terms of pitch organization.
appropriate musical styles developed and practiced.\textsuperscript{37} Thus, music was notated, monophonic, and based on a modal system; this means that composers created a single and simple melodic line, and used the appropriate ecclesiastical modes in order to draw the attention of the audience to the sacred lyrics. Furthermore, music was expressed with the use of syllabic, neumatic or melismatic text underlay.\textsuperscript{38} Hymns and chants held a prominent place in the musical tradition of the church and were extensively performed in the Divine Office and in the holy congregation of the Mass.

Around the twelfth century, prompted by the desire for new creations and expressions, musicians proceeded to the development of trope – adding new words or music to a pre-existing chant,\textsuperscript{39} which in turn gave birth to a new genre, the sequence. In time, the sequence gained an independent and distinct place in the Proper parts of the Mass, where it followed the musically ornate Alleluia (the word “sequence” means “to follow”). As Douglass Seaton explains, “creative musicians soon began to expand the Sequence texts into elaborately structured poetry and even to provide entirely new music.”\textsuperscript{40} The most graceful, rich and evocative sequences of the twelfth century are attributed to Hildegard of Bingen, a German abbess who excelled not only in musical compositions, but also in other literary and scientific writings.


\textsuperscript{38} In syllabic text underlay the composer uses one pitch per syllable and thus, the text moves faster. In neumatic text underlay, the composer uses four to six pitches per syllable and creates a more ornate melody. In melismatic text underlay, the composer uses more than six pitches per syllable and creates a highly embellished melodic line.

\textsuperscript{39} Douglass Seaton, Ideas and Styles in the Western Musical Tradition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 41.

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 42.
Hildegard of Bingen, Germany twelfth century

Hildegard was born in 1098 in Rheinhessen, Germany, and came from an aristocratic family. In her early years, she claimed to receive visions from God in the form of intense light. In part because she was the tenth child of her family, she was given to the church at age of fourteen, where she found a friendly environment where she developed and expressed her unique and intimate relationship with God through a variety of writings and musical compositions.

Hildegard was educated next to her teacher, Jutta, another Christian nun with prophetic powers. Jutta taught Hildegard Latin, Christian practices, and the Psalter. However, Hildegard viewed herself as uneducated because she did not receive a scholarly education like the boys of her time. Although during Hildegard’s time a small female population of aristocratic women and nuns had access to education in a variety of settings –such as court schools, castle schools, convents, – Hildegard notes that they did not enjoy the same privileges with men in terms of education, and she implies that female education was inferior compared to that of men. However, Hildegard’s motivation, inspiration, and creativity were attributed to the voice of God who spoke to her, and led her to compose a variety of books, which incorporated knowledge of medicine,

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and natural science,\textsuperscript{44} and also musical hymns, sequences, antiphons and responsories. Hildegard’s visions were recorded in her work \textit{Scivias}, where she described what she saw and heard from Heaven. Hildegard composed \textit{Scivias} with the help of her scribe, Volmar, to whom she confessed her visions. She found confidence next to Volmar who urged her to write her spiritual experiences.\textsuperscript{45} Her musical compositions were collected in the \textit{Symphonia armoniae celestium revelationum}.\textsuperscript{46} Hildegard’s revelatory experience was unique and unprecedented in the Christian world of the twelfth century. She claimed that she received her visions while she was awake and had all her senses, meaning that Hildegard was aware of the divine experience, and was not in an ecstatic state. This contradicted with the previous recorded experiences from other Christians who had been exposed to prophetic dreams.\textsuperscript{47} Hildegard’s distinct experience with the Divine acted as catalyst for being acknowledged as an important female-figure in the male-dominated Catholic Church of her time.

Hildegard established her own convent at Rupertsberg, which operated with economic independence beginning the year 1158.\textsuperscript{48} Her convent was devoted to spiritual knowledge and education, and therefore she accepted women from the upper-class who were talented and educated – either through private education, or court schools, – and who desired to achieve spiritual development and growth through the expression of art and literature. Hildegard notated

\begin{footnotes}
\item[46] Translation: Symphony of the Harmony of Heavenly Revelations.
\end{footnotes}
her music and then taught her compositions to the nuns of her monastery, “as she has heard them sung by celestial voices.” To that end, the nuns formed Hildegard’s choir and performed the composer’s remarkable and divine music.

Hymns, antiphons, responsories, and sequences held a prominent place in Hildegard's music compositions. Following the musical trends of her era she composed in monophonic style, and used the modal musical system of her day which she expanded beyond the normal practice of the time. She also used her own religious apocalyptic and visionary texts which were adorned with exceptional musical and poetic mastery. Hildegard often used metaphors in her poems and songs to create an evocative dimension that fit the spiritual aspects of her work. Then she “painted” the lyrics either with syllabic text underlay or with beautiful melodic lines of neumes (small melodic ornamentations where the composer uses four to six pitches per syllable) that contributed to the notion of the divine nature of these compositions. In brief, Hildegard’s compositions are characterized by rich musical and poetic imagination that include a symbolic language and delicate musical sound.

*Columba aspexit,* a sequence written for St. Maximinus, illustrates how Hildegard handles this musical technique of text painting – like a canvas full of colors – in order to highlight and praise the spiritual imagery of the lyrics. This sequence includes four couplets of poetic lines, and an extra line in Latin. Thus, Hildegard has composed this piece in paired-lines, using the same melodic line for two different texts; the melody changes after every couplet. For example, the lines 1a and 1b form the first couplet share the same musical elements. However, it is important to note that Hildegard innovates here; she does not use the exact melodic line in the

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50 See Appendix IV.
51 See Appendix IV; she uses the same melody for 1a. and 1b, or 2a. and 2b.
paired-lines, but she produces small variations that differentiate the musical elements. In lines 2a and 2b she colors some parts differently. While it is expected to use the same melodic movements in the words “Lebanon” (line 2a) and “to the fountain,” (line 2b) she uses a slightly different melody; in the word “Lebanon” she writes c-b-c-a-g-f-g, and in the word “to the fountain” she writes c-b-a-g-a-g-e-f-g.

![Figure 2: Lebanon](image1)

![Figure 3: At the fountain](image2)

Here we notice that Hildegard keeps the first and last pitches the same (c and g), and plays with the middle section in order to highlight appropriately the meaning of the words – “Lebanon” and “to the fountain.” In both words, Hildegard draws her audience’s attention by adding small pitches in stepwise motion. However, she elaborates the word fountain more by using a greater number of pitches, and the musical flow of these pitches depicts the flow of the water in the fountain. To that end, Hildegard is not fully consistent in keeping the exact same melody in paired-lines. Also, the last stanza of the sequence does not even have a pair, and thus it holds a distinct melodic line that differs from the previous melodies; however this was normal practice for earlier composers.

Extensive lyricism, metaphors, vivid and evocative images dominate this sequence, and awaken the human senses. Hildegard creates bright depictions of nature to describe the holiness of St. Maximinus, and to highlight the divine origin of the lyrics. In the first words, the poetess introduces the presence of the Holy Spirit with bird imagery: “the dove peered in.” These first words reveal the relationship that Hildegard held with God. As mentioned above, Hildegard
claimed to have visions from God. Therefore, the dove here may represent the Holy Spirit that came from Heaven to guide her to write this sequence. The presence of bird imagery here serves as heavenly inspiration and guidance to both the poetess and St. Maximinus. This idea of Heaven dominates in the sequence. In line 3b Hildegard writes, “who longed for the wings of an eagle,” and uses again bird imagery. She does that because the way to heavenly skies and by extension to God requires “wings.” In this sequence, Hildegard presents the basic element of Christian doctrine, which is the coexistence of human and divine nature in Heaven. St. Maximinus is the shining example who reached the highest levels of spirituality and earned his place among the saints and angels in the “gardens of the King” (line 3a).

In this sequence, Hildegard manages melodic movements and marries lyrics with music in order to contribute consciously to human spiritual elevation. Hildegard teaches her students and other devout Christians that “purest…heart” (line 1b) and faith may lead to the ultimate spiritual experience – the experience of Heaven. Furthermore, this sequence reveals Hildegard’s talent to produce a wide range of unique beautiful melodic lines that intend to teach the audience that the way to heaven is a long process, full of living experiences that demand persistence, patience, belief, and great will. In order to give more depth and meaning to the spiritual expression of the text and invite the audience to spiritual participation, Hildegard uses syllabic text underlay, but also highlights specific words with the use of beautiful ornamentations that are known as neumes. For example, in the word “mount” in line 4a, Hildegard ornaments as follows: g-a-b-c-b-a-g. The singers’ range is wide throughout the song – from g below the staff to d inside the staff (12 notes), – and creates the sense of moving upward which also correlates with the notion of moving toward heaven.
Figure 4: Example of wide range

The sequence also demonstrates how Christians may connect briefly with Heaven during the act of worshipping. The composer reminds and teaches her audience that the ultimate union with the holy nature is in Heaven. Hildegard’s desire to express the relationship between the human nature and the divine through this music text reinforces Christian beliefs, and offers comfort to the believers.

*O Ignis Spiritus paracliti*\(^{52}\) is another sequence, composed by Hildegard, dedicated to the exaltation of the Holy Spirit. In this composition, Hildegard elaborates how the marriage of lyrics and text may lead to the ultimate experience with the divine nature of the Holy Spirit. This sequence includes five couplets of poetic lines in Latin that range from three to four lines. Hildegard uses again here the technique of paired-lines with small variations. For example in 3a she uses in the words “and o” the interval of perfect fifth a-e. In the 3b, instead of using the same melodic movement in the word “whose,” she just uses one note, e; this slightly alters the expected melodic elements. Intervals of perfect fifths and fourths, as well as stepping melodic movement dominate this sequence. Hildegard creates long lyrical melodic lines which start with an interval – of third, perfect fourth or perfect fifth – and develop through a stepwise motion; most of this motion is associated with neumes – such as in the word “depth” (line 4a) or syllabic text underlay. The vocal range is very wide from the low e inside the staff to the b above the staff; this range fits perfectly the soprano’s range.

During Hildegard’s time it was unusual to compose chants with a big vocal range. In fact

\(^{52}\) See Appendix V.
most of the ecclesiastical vocal music did not exceed the octave. In Hildegard’s work, the long lyrical lines and the wide range of the singing line lead to the conclusion that Hildegard’s students were highly vocally trained in order to perform this kind of demanding musical work.

In O Ignis Spiritus paracliti, Hildegard praises the divine nature of the Holy Spirit and uses vivid metaphors of the four elements of nature – fire, wind, water, and earth – to evoke human senses and emotions. The element of water is of utmost importance in this sequence. Hildegard describes the Holy Spirit as the “clearest fountain” (line 2b), and uses the watery imagery again later in the sequence – “their moisture hold/the waters rivers springs” (line 4b) – in order to highlight the concept of divine purity. In the Christian tradition, water is associated with the ritual of Baptism during which the human soul is cleaned, purified, and blessed. The idea of cleansing and purification is also found in line 1b, where the composer writes “cleansing/the festering wounds.” This is a metaphor in which Hildegard uses the word “wounds” to represent sins of the human nature which should be cleaned and purified. With this sequence, Hildegard teaches her audience the significance of Baptism in Christian tradition, and also introduces the element of forgiveness through submission to the divine nature of the Holy Spirit. Hildegard uses also the technique of text painting and highlights the word “fire” with neumes (lines 1a and 2a) in order to praise the fierce nature of the Holy Spirit and to enhance its divine power on the earth. The Holy Spirit is the protector and “Defender” (line 1a) of human nature, and acts as catalyst to the salvation of the human soul. As in Columba Aspexit, the stretching of the long melodic lines towards a higher register signifies the connection of the Holy Spirit with Heaven. The small melodic steps that represent a gentle movement from Earth to Heaven and the opposite – with an ascending or descending melodic motion – enrich the sequence with a sacred mystic sound that fits the nature of the sanctity of the Holy Spirit.
**O Ignis Spiritus paracliti** is characterized by warmth, brightness, plasticity, softness, and a female sound that together create a sense of fragility and power at the same time. In this sequence, the gravity on Earth and the airiness in Heaven sway in an eternal dance that celebrates the union of human nature with the divine. Hildegard strengthens the faith of Christians by combing the earthly elements with the heavenly elements; the ascending and descending melodic lines represent this union. The fragility of human soul acquires strength and power through faith to the holiness of the Spirit.

Hildegard’s **O Splendidissima gemma**\(^ {53} \) is an exceptional antiphon dedicated to the Virgin Mary. In this antiphon, Hildegard acknowledges Mary’s important role to the salvation of humanity, and highlights that the female nature should gain appreciation and reverence in the Christian world of the 12th century. This Latin antiphon consists of two verses; the first verse includes nine lines and the second verse includes five lines. It is through-composed, which means that Hildegard did not repeat any music. The continuous development of music in the Phrygian mode, in E, and use of a middle-range (from b below the staff to high e inside the staff) reflect an earthy, warm sound that corresponds to the human female nature of Mary.

The first verse is written lower than the second. Hildegard gradually introduces higher pitches in the second verse which move back to lower pitches towards the end. Through small musical steps in ascending and descending lines, Hildegard represents the marriage of the human nature of the Virgin Mary with the Divine, the union of humanity with Heaven on Earth. Hildegard uses text-painting and embellishes the syllables with neumatic and melismatic lines such as in the word “heart” (line 5) in order to elaborate the richness of the warmth of God’s love. She also highlights the word “Word” (lines 6 and 10) in order to emphasize the importance

\(^ {53} \) See Appendix VI.
of the meaning of God’s Word for the salvation of the human soul. Most of the music is written in a stepwise motion with a few small leaps of seconds, thirds, fourths, and fifths. The interval of a perfect fifth in e-b and a-e pitches produces a pure sound that may represent virginity; the concept of virginity may also be reflected in the text through watery imagery in line 4, “the fountain leaping.” The pure water that flows in nature from the fountain is associated here with the Virgin Mary’s purity.

In this antiphon, Hildegard uses the element of light and explores the holiness of the Virgin Mary through her connection with the “sun” (line 2) that represents the Holy Spirit. Here, the composer implies that the divine light of the Holy Spirit flows inside Virgin Mary; this means that Virgin Mary is blessed to give the light from Heaven to humanity, and thus, she is viewed as a saint. Furthermore, Hildegard uses the famous Biblical theme of Eve whose original sin led mankind to mortal life through the experience of death. The composer uses neumes in the word “confusion” (line 9) to elaborate how Eve’s actions flustered the work of God. The composer chooses this theme in order to remind humanity that Eve’s mistake was corrected through the existence of Virgin Mary who gave birth to God’s son enabling human salvation. To that end, Hildegard absolves, liberates, and purifies the female nature, and teaches her students that women have their own place in the higher step of the divine ladder next to God, Jesus Christ, and Holy Spirit. In the line 5, the composer gives human attributes to God, “Father’s heart,” and elaborates once more the union of the human nature with the Divine. Here, Hildegard teaches and reminds her students that “love” is a divine feeling that flows from Heaven. This signifies the existence of the Creator inside the human soul. The composer here emphasizes the internal need of humans to find their way back to Heaven, where they belong, through love and faith.

*O Splendidissima gemma* depicts the Virgin’s Mary blessed nature through which the
female essence in the human world is purified from its sins, and finds its place back to the realm of Heaven. Hildegard’s beautiful melismatic lines of delicate, gentle, and open sound, and uses the intervals of perfect fifths represent how feminine sensitivity may co-exist with power and strength of the female nature. This means that Hildegard is working towards equality between male and female nature in the Christian Church; this idea might have challenged the Catholic World of her time. Hildegard may have identified parts of herself through Virgin Mary, since she has also experienced a form of communication with God. Hildegard’s choice to use the metaphor of light here may be attributed to the fact that she experienced the divine through a dazzling light.

Like most of Hildegard's musical works, the above compositions are characterized by great expressiveness, plasticity and bright-angelic sound, and unfold through the spiritual veil which dominated the composer's work and life, and which made her music and poetry distinct and unique. The concept of spirituality and the creation of unique highly expressive poetic lines are characteristics that define the work of the ancient Greek poetess, Sappho. Both composers found a common ground through religious expression that inspired them to develop their own unique artistic styles.

Two ecstatic composers: Sappho and Hildegard of Bingen

Hildegard and Sappho were both charismatic, gifted women of the upper-aristocratic class. Their social class was a catalyst to the actualization of their talents and intellectual interests in their societies. Sappho developed her talents through “school,” and Hildegard through the “church,” while both relied on spirituality as the vehicle to self-actualization. They both were unconventional women, and were able to express their creativity to audiences in their own time,
as well as inspire audiences centuries later. So, what is the common element between Sappho and Hildegard that inspires musicians, poets and other artists to this day? Where do these personalities converge and diverge?

Although they lived in different societies and eras, Sappho and Hildegard of Bingen both composed music in a monophonic style and modal system. Also, they both held a unique relationship with the Divine that defined their work and lives. Sappho was considered a priest of Aphrodite, while Hildegard was an Abbess dedicated to the love of God. As Sappho presented her intimate connection with the goddess of Eros, Aphrodite, through her compositions, Hildegard reflected in her work her visionary and prophetic experiences with God. The examined compositions in this essay reveal that Sappho and Hildegard had a cognitive experience with the Divine. In *Ode to Aphrodite*, Sappho speaks with the goddess, and portrays herself as completely conscious of Aphrodite’s presence. Hildegard confesses that she has all of her senses while God is revealing to her, and that all of her compositions come through this mystic and conscious experience with Him. Sappho and Hildegard were motivated by divine belief and will, and devoted a big part of their lives to religious expression. Thus, it is reasonable to give them both the title of “religious composer.” However, it should be noted here that while they both may be considered religious composers, their compositions express different ideas of the metaphysis. This means that they serve a different Theology. Sappho believed in the ancient Greek polytheistic-pagan religion, while Hildegard was a devoted worshipper of the monotheistic Catholic Christian religion. To that end, their works represent different religious ideas and interpretations of the world. Thus, Sappho’s poetry embraces self-irony, and vivid eroticism – to the extent that her hymns may be viewed at the same time as love-poems – and presents the divine entity as a tool for the accomplishment of human’s desires. However, Hildegard
highlights a deep spiritual and humble devotion to the superiority of God – any notion of irony would be considered blaspheme and hubris. According to the religious traditions of their respective eras, Sappho and Hildegard both expressed the concept of Heaven as the union of the Divine with human nature in a unique way.

In *Ode to Aphrodite* and *Columba Aspexit*, both composers present bird imagery which correlates with the expression of divine existence and the concept of heaven – in Sappho’s hymn, Aphrodite reveals herself with wings “with a whirl of wings, beating fast, from heaven,” (line 11) and in Hildegard’s sequence the Holy Spirit makes its presence as a dove (line 1). In both cases the divine nature comes from the skies to guide and save the human nature. However, the main difference between the two religions that dominate the lives of the composers becomes clear. In Sappho’s poem, Aphrodite descends from heaven to help her beloved worshipper on Earth – this emphasizes the concept of humanism. This idea is also present in Sappho’s Fragment 5, where the divine entities are called to offer heavenly happiness and glory to human nature on Earth. Furthermore, in *Hither to me from Crete*, Sappho elaborates a flourished paradise on Earth, and calls the divine entity to join the heavenly-earthy beauty along with her mortal worshippers. However, in Hildegard’s sequence *Columba Aspexit*, the composer presents the dove as the messenger from God, that comes down on Earth to inspire, lead, and guide St. Maximinus, and by extension the human nature, to Heaven in order to be saved. Furthermore, Hildegard highlights this idea in all of her three examined poems by composing descending and ascending melodic lines that correlate with the motion from Heaven to Earth and from Earth to Heaven. Thus, while Sappho presents a blurred idea of Heaven that may exist both on Earth and beyond, and may be part of both the mortal-human nature and the Divine, Hildegard set boundaries, and recognized the true Paradise in Heaven, in the realm of the Divine.
For both composers, the boundaries between human nature and the Divine are fluid, and their marriage may take place through physical or spiritual experience, or both. In *Hither to me from Crete*, Sappho elaborates how the female human nature is united with Aphrodite, the goddess of κάλλος (beauty), through contact with the natural environment that represents the goddess’s body and spirit as well as female human nature. In *O Columba Aspexit*, and *O Ignis Spiritus*, Hildegard presents the union of human nature with God through the presence of the Holy Spirit. Although that in these two compositions this union is imagined as spiritual and transcends the human body – an idea that contradicts Sappho’s representation of divine-human union, – in *O Splendidissima gemma*, Hildegard elaborates this union through both the body and spirit of the Virgin Mary. Hildegard, like Sappho, uses the female nature to experience a connection with the realm of heaven through its own body and spirit. This element highlights how both composers seek the exaltation of the female human nature – and by extension their own feminine nature – through a complete and absolute binding with the Divine. Thus, the composers do not only work towards equality between the two genders, but at the same time they move beyond and above the male nature by presenting female nature as the agent to a unique, all-encompassing divine experience.

The concept of Heaven as the union of the Divine with human nature addresses the need of the composers to be engaged in an intimate and unique relationship with metaphysical religious entities. Thus, they both praise the holy nature through beautiful extensive lyrical poetic lines that embrace vivid images of nature, as well as metaphors that awaken the human senses, and emotions, and travel the audiences to the realm of metaphysic, to the realm of ecstasy. To that end, Sappho and Hildegard of Bingen transcend their “religious composer” status, and gain the title of “ecstatic composer.” This is the element that makes Sappho and Hildegard of Bingen
unique in their time; their desire to urge other people to see what they see, feel what they feel, and believe what they believe through the creation and transmission of an “ecstatic state.”

Sappho and Hildegard of Bingen were two extraordinary women who managed to hold a prominent place among the most important personalities of the artistic, philosophical and literary worlds of their time. They took advantage of their social class and overcame obstacles associated with the stereotypical position of woman inside a patriarchal regime, and acquired a unique and admirable place in their societies, and by extension in human history. Through the art of poetry and music, both personalities contributed consciously to the spiritual development and growth of their societies, taught their students and audiences religious beliefs and practices, and promoted the acquisition of critical thinking for a better understanding of the universe. What made this possible lies probably in their intense passion and zeal that characterize both personalities – the glorification and praise of the divine nature that dominates the spiritual world of humanity.

Today, Sappho and Hildegard of Bingen may be considered as two prolific female “ecstatic composers” whose extraordinary compositions become source of inspiration to young artists who seek self-expression, and a form of experience with the metaphysic through poetry and music.
“Ωδή στη Σαπφώ και στη Χίλντεγαρντ”

Μούσα της Ποίησης, της Μουσικής

Εσέ καλώ

άλλες θυσίες δεν απέμειναν

ό,τι σώθηκε, εδώ,

στα πόδια σου αφήνω

στερνή σταλαγματιά ψυχής

ανθρώπινη πνοή

κι αν έτσι επιθυμείς, ροδοκέντησε

tης λησμονιάς τραγούδια

όνειρα ξεστά και πεφταστέρια

μύρα

ν’ανασταίνουν τα κορμιά

κι όταν άγγελος φανεί με κουρασμένα τα φτερά

Εσύ τραγούδα πιο γλυκά

του παραδείσου η προσευχή, εδώ

ήσυχα να κοιμηθεί

κάτω από τη δροσερή σκιά μας.

“Ode to Sappho and Hildegard”

Muse of Poetry, of Music

to Thee, I call

other sacrifices have not remained

what has been saved, here,

before your feet I leave

last drip of soul

human breath

and only if You so wish, knit with roses

songs of forgetfulness

warm dreams and falling stars

myrrh

to resurrect the bodies

and as the angel comes with tired wings

Sing even sweeter

the prayer of paradise, here

quietly to sleep

under our dewy shade.

Aikaterini Grigoriadou
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Appendix I

Ode to Aphrodite

1. Immortal Aphrodite, on your patterned throne,
daughter of Zeus, guile-weaver,
I beg you, goddess, don't subjugate my heart
with anguish, with grief

5. but come here to me now, if ever in the past
you have heard my distant pleas
and listened; leaving your father's golden house
you came to me then

with your chariot yoked; beautiful swift sparrows

10. brought you around the dark earth
with a whirl of wings, beating fast, from heaven
down through the mid-air
to reach me quickly; then you, my sacred goddess,
your immortal face smiling,

15. asked me what had gone wrong this time and this
time

why I was begging

and what in my demented heart I wanted most:

'Who shall I persuade this time
to take you back, yet once again, to her love;

20. who wrongs you, Sappho?

For if she runs away, soon she shall run after,
if she shuns gifts, she shall give, if she does not love
[you], soon she shall,
even against her own will."

25. So come to me now, free me from this aching pain,
fulfil everything that
my heart desires to [be] fulfil[led]: you, yes you,
will be my ally.
Appendix II

_Hither to me from Crete_ (Fragment 2) \(^{55}\)

1. Hither to me from Crete, to this holy
temple, where your lovely grove
of apple trees is, and the altars
smoke with frankincense.

5. Herein cold water rushes through
apple boughs, and the whole place is shaded
with roses, and sleep comes down
from rushing leaves.

9. Herein a meadow where horses graze
blooms with spring flowers, and the winds
blow gently…

12. Here, O Cyprian, taking [garlands],
in golden cups gently pour forth
nectar mingled together with our
festivities…

Appendix III

Fragment 5

1. O Kypris and Nereids, undamaged I pray you
grant my brother to arrive here.
And all that in his heart he wants to be,
make it be.

And all the wrong he did before, loose it

5. Make him joy to his friends,
a pain to his enemies and let there exist for us
not one single further sorrow.

May he willingly give his sister
her portion of honor, but sad pain
 ] grieving for the past

10. ]
] millet seed
] of the citizens
] once again no
]

15. ]
] but you Kypris
] setting aside evil [

57 This fragment exist in partial lines and the ] symbol represents the missing parts.
Appendix IV

Columba aspexit (Sequence for St.Maximus)\textsuperscript{58}

1a. The dove peered in through the lattices of the window where, before its face, a balm exuded from incandescent Maximinus.

1b. The heat of the sun burned dazzling into the gloom: whence a jewel sprang forth in the building of the temple of the purest loving heart.

2a. He, the higher tower, constructed of cedar of Lebanon and cypress, has been adorned with jacinth and onyx, a city excelling the crafts of other builders.

2b. He, the swift hart, ran to the fountain of clearest water flowing from the most powerful stone which courses with delightful spices.

3a. O Perfume-Makers, you who are in the sweetest greenness of the gardens of the King, ascending on high when you have completed the holy sacrifice with the rams,

3b. The builder shines among you, the wall of the temple, who longed for the wings of an eagle, kissing his nurse Wisdom in the glorious fecundity of the Church.

4a. O Maximinus, you are the mount and the valley and in both you seem a high building, where the goat went with the elephant and Wisdom was in rapture.

4b. You are strong and beautiful in rites and in the shining of the altar, mounting like the smoke of perfumes to the column of praise,

5. Where you intercede for the people who stretch towards the mirror of light to whom there is praise on high.

Appendix V

_O Ignis Spiritus Paracliti_\(^{59}\)

1a. O fire of the Spirit and Defender, the life of every life created: Holy are you—giving life to every form.

1b. Holy are you—anointing the critically broken. Holy are you—cleansing the festering wounds.

2a. O breath of holiness, O fire of love, O taste so sweet within the breast, that floods the heart with virtues’ fragrant good.

2b. O clearest fountain, in which is seen the mirrored work of God: to gather the estranged and seek again the lost.

3a. O living armor, hope that binds the every limb, o belt of honor: save the blessed.

3b. Guard those enchained in evil’s prison, and loose the bonds of those whose saving freedom is the forceful will of God.

4a. O mighty course that runs within and through the all—up in the heights, upon the earth, and in the every depth—you bind and gather all together.

4b. From you the clouds flow forth, the wind takes flight, the stones their moisture hold, the waters rivers spring, and earth viridity exudes.

5a. You are the teacher of the truly learned, whose joy you grant through Wisdom’s inspiration.

5b. And so may you be praised, who are the sound of praise, the joy of life, the hope and potent honor, and the giver of the gifts of light.

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Appendix VI

*O Splendidissima gemma* (antiphon for the Virgin Mary)\(^{60}\)

1. O jewel resplendent
   and bright and joyous beauty of the sun
   that’s flooded into you—
   the fountain leaping

5. from the Father’s heart.
   This is his single Word
   by which he did create the world’s
   primordial matter,
   a motherhood into confusion cast by Eve.

10. This Word the Father made
    you into man—
    and this is why you are that bright and shining matter,
    through which that Word has breathed
    forth every virtue, just as he brought forth

15. all creatures in a primal motherhood