

From Syracuse to Rome: The Travails of Silanion's Sappho*

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SUMMARY: Cicero's *Verrine Orations* offer a glimpse into the complex political posturings surrounding the reception of Greek art by Roman audiences. Cicero downplays his own (legitimate) collecting habits, and accuses Gaius Verres, the corrupt governor of Sicily from 73–71 BCE, of abusing his political office by looting the island's art treasures. One example that particularly disturbs Cicero is the theft of a statue of Sappho, commissioned by the Syracusans from the early Hellenistic sculptor Silanion for their town hall. This theft is shown to be part of a pattern in Verres' behavior, as he repeatedly removes public images of women and female divinities from their civic or cultic sites of honor, and transfers them to his private dwelling. The language of sexual exploitation pervades Cicero's narratives as he argues that Verres perverts the statues by using them for private delectation. Because Verres leaves behind the inscribed base of the Sappho statue, she may no longer be identifiable as the archaic lyric poet once she has been carried off to Rome. Verres' inappropriate passion for Greek art-work, according to his accuser, destroys the statue's identity as a famous female poet from archaic Greece, and reduces it to a nameless female body, a victim of imperialism and greed.

INTRODUCTION

ART AND TEXT SHARE A BASIC VULNERABILITY IN THEIR VERY EXISTENCE: as physical objects, they can be misinterpreted, mutilated, stolen, lost, or destroyed. When Theognis, for example, promised Kyrnos eternal fame in his

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verses (Theog. 237–52), he could not have fully predicted the complex textual history of loss and accretion that would eventually define the Theognidean corpus. Similarly, Sappho's nine books, lost somewhere along the path of later antiquity, bear witness to the fragility of the poem as textual artifact. The best guarantee for survival was a poem's, or an artifact's, ability to be adapted and re-used for new purposes. Thus Homer and Pindar, to name just two, continued to flourish in later periods, thanks to assiduous schoolteachers as well as gifted poets like Vergil and Horace.

While Roman authors fruitfully adopted and modified the masterpieces of their Greek literary forebears, Greek art served a related function not just for Roman artists, but also for the Roman elite. As the Roman army occupied formerly Greek territories, many valuable pieces of art were claimed for public display in Rome as part of triumphs, or ended up in collections in private villas. Much of this art was viewed as a valuable commodity in the exercise of Roman imperialism, a way for the elite to negotiate their status among peers (Barkan 1999: 129). The Roman appropriation of Greek art was just one aspect of their relationship with the Greek past, which also at times included, on the positive side, tourism of religious and cultural sites of interest, and on the negative side, the enslavement of educated Greeks. Although the emphases changed depending on the era, Roman responses to Hellenism consisted of a complex mixture of adoption, adaptation, imitation, and rejection, while the rhetorical poses preserved in contemporary texts included assertions of admiration, condemnation, and reconciliation (Woolf 1994: 120).

Cicero can function as a useful tour guide for this multi-layered process of converting Greek material into Roman property. In his letters and orations, he reveals the multiple rhetorical poses involved in assessing the collecting of Greek art, providing us with fascinating details on both the practical and ideological issues involved.¹ Many of his *Letters to Atticus* show him relying on the discrimination of his friend whom he has sent on a buying trip: the artwork must suit his taste as well as fit well into the places available for their installation at his various villas (1.8.2). He also provides insight into the proper way to exhibit some of the Greek art he purchases: in his *Brutus* (24), for example, we are told that he kept a portrait statue of Plato outside one of his villas in a grassy plot (...*in pratulo propter Platonis statuam*),² possibly in imitation of

¹ See Marvin 1989: 29–45; and Stewart 2003: 139–42, 223–28. Welch 2006: 119–161, esp. 126 argues that, as a relative newcomer to high society, Cicero was most concerned with outfitting his villas as quickly and as economically as possible with subject matter appropriate for the display context.

² See Vitruvius 6.7.5; Cicero *ad Att.* 1.8; *Brutus* 24. For further discussion, see Bartman 1991: 71–88.

a similar statue of Plato at the Academy in Athens. Throughout Cicero's correspondence with Atticus, we can sense that the acquisition of Greek bronze and marble statues, as well as herms, for display in his country villas is meant to mark him as an educated member of the intellectual elite.³

There are clearly many ways Greek statuary could make its way to Rome in this period. Statues could be legally purchased for a fair price, or captured in legitimate contexts of war or occupation; an example of both practices is the Portico of Pompey at Rome, a lavish public park established to celebrate Pompey's eastern victories. It was decorated with portraits of Greek authors, among which were statues of the Muses and female poets (including Sappho), some copies, and others originals by famous Hellenistic artists.⁴ Pliny (NH 7.74) tells us that Pompey commissioned some of the statues himself, but much of the contents of the park apparently came from his military campaigns. On the less savory side of the international art market, Greek artifacts could be extorted, stolen, or bought at ridiculously low prices through intimidation of the seller. While Cicero and Verres both sought actively to acquire Greek art, Cicero emphatically distances himself from his disreputable colleague. Verres becomes, for Cicero, a wholly negative symbol of the Roman culture of appropriation. He took into his possession through dubious means large amounts of Greek artwork not in the spirit of reverence or admiration, or to conjure up an impression of learning and civilized appreciation of great art; unlike the great Roman generals of the second century BCE, he was not interested in displaying Greek art publicly in Rome for all to appreciate. Instead, Verres was motivated by greed, lust, and the immunity provided (so he thought) by his powerful position as governor, to build up a private collection for his own enjoyment.⁵ In sharp contrast to his own careful and

³ See, in general, Dillon 2006: 39–41. For Cicero's collecting habits in particular, see Neudecker 1988 8–30. Neudecker points out that Cicero rarely discussed the specific type of statuary he wanted Atticus to purchase in Athens, but focused instead on quantity and (lowest) price (14). One exception is *ad Fam.* 7.23 (quoted in Neudecker 1988: 15–16), when Cicero's business transaction has gone awry: he lists in detail the statues he did *not* want because they were either too expensive, or did not suit his taste: "what should I, a lover of peace, do with a statue of Mars? I'm glad that there was no statue of Saturn available, since I think the purchase of both statues would have wasted money I don't even have" (*Martis vero signum quo mihi pacis auctori? Gaudeo nullum Saturni signum fuisse; haec enim duo signa putarem mihi aes alienum attulisse*).

⁴ Dillon 2006: 41; Steinby 1993: 148–49, on "*Porticus Pompei*." Tatian (*ad Graecos* 33) catalogues Pompey's Greek female statues and divides them into three groups: poetesses, courtesans, and women made famous by bizarre sexual behaviors or miraculous children.

⁵ Neudecker 1988: 19–23 presents a useful list of Cicero's references to Verres' acquisitions in Sicily, and notes that almost all of the nineteen named statues taken by Verres from Sicily are of divinities, including multiple Demeters and Apollos.

judicious purchasing habits, and his eagerness to display his newly acquired artwork to his friends, in the *Verrine Orations*, Cicero blames the defendant Verres for an excessive and unhealthy passion for Greek art, condemning him for his rapacity, his selfishness, and very “un-Roman” greed.⁶

In an attempt to understand better the phenomenon of Greek culture’s importation into Rome, this essay looks at the fate of one specific artifact, a bronze statue of Sappho by the early Hellenistic artist Silanion that happened to catch Verres’ eye. The statue’s story was immortalized in a legal attack by Cicero against the offending bureaucrat. There are two main parts to my investigation: an attempt to reconstruct the appearance of Silanion’s statue, and a consideration of the larger ramifications of Verres’ vandalism. After setting Sappho’s statue in the wider context of honorific statues, I present some earlier examples, both positive and negative, of Romans stealing Greek cultural property. Turning to the specific case of Silanion’s statue, I catalogue potential models for the artist in his depiction of Sappho: representations of the poet on vases and coins, and evidence from the literary tradition. I also include selected ecphrases, poems from the *Greek Anthology* describing representations of Sappho in art. An angry tirade by the Christian apologist Tatian, who had actually seen Silanion’s Sappho on display in Rome, reminds us that some ancient authors considered Sappho a model of misbehavior, a nymphomaniac with dubious morals. Cicero ultimately presents a case that argues for a kind of double vision. We, the educated readers, know that Silanion’s statue represents the lofty ideals of Greek culture: she was erected in a public space, the town hall (*prytaneion*) in Syracuse, and admired as a famous adopted daughter of the city. Verres, however, according to Cicero’s prosecution, is so depraved that he ignores the civic identity of the statue and sees only a female body, easily abducted and installed in his private residence, which is painted in lurid tones by Cicero as a cross between a museum and a brothel.

I. HONORIFIC STATUES AND ART THIEVES

Cicero tells us in his *Verrine Orations* that a statue of Sappho, cast by the fourth-century Athenian artist Silanion, was stolen from Syracuse, where Sappho had spent some years in exile from the stormy politics of her native Lesbos (Sappho T 5 = Parian Marble). Cicero accuses Gaius Verres, the cor-

⁶ Whitmarsh 2001: 14 notes the fine line Cicero treads here: “the possession of Greek education (‘possession’ implying imperialist dominance in addition to ownership) could be used as a counter in the game of elite self-positioning (and, conversely, the accusation of excessive devotion to Greek arts could be used rhetorically to impugn an enemy, as Cicero’s opponent Verres found).” See also Vasaly 1993: 104–10.

rupt governor of Sicily in the years 73–71 BCE, of the theft. He claims Verres abused his political office by exploiting the island, looting its art treasures, and then bringing them back to Rome for his personal collection.⁷ Cicero invites his audience to imagine the statue's empty base and remember what once stood there (Cicero, *Verr.* 2.4.57.127):⁸

Atque haec Sappho sublata quantum desiderium sui reliquerit dici vix potest. Nam cum ipsa fuit egregie facta, tum epigramma Graecum pernobile incisum est in basi, quod iste eruditus homo et Graeculus, qui haec subtiliter iudicat, qui solus intellegit, si unam litteram Graecam scisset, certe una sustulisset. Nunc enim quod scriptum est inani in basi declarat quid fuerit, et id ablatum indicat.

How greatly this stolen Sappho was missed can hardly be expressed. Not only was the statue itself exquisitely made, but upon the base was inscribed a very famous Greek epigram, which that erudite Hellenist [Verres], a fine connoisseur of these matters, the only man who understands them, would surely have removed along with the statue if he had understood a single Greek letter. As it is, the inscription on the empty base declares what used to stand there and proclaims that it has been removed.

Both the statue and inscribed base are now lost, and the “very famous Greek epigram” sadly irrecoverable, but we can use Cicero's text to explore how this Hellenistic sculptor might have represented the archaic Greek poet in material form, and how her statue became a site of cultural conflict in the Roman Republic.

By the time the Syracusans purchased their statue from Silanion, the ancient Greeks had long followed the custom of memorializing famous citizens in bronze or marble.⁹ Statues were a striking and memorable part of the visual environment in public spaces and temples (Stewart 2003: 118–56). The object, with its inscription, was set in a wider matrix of human activity, whether a specific location (agora, *prytaneion*, sanctuary) or a performance context (ritual, ceremony) (Alcock 2002: 28–30). As Susan Alcock has pointed out, a monumental work, like a musical one, has not just one but a whole horizon of meanings: different audiences, with their own expectations, needs, and levels of knowledge, bring different experiences to bear on the viewing of a monument (Alcock 2002: 29–30). In his *Verrine Orations*, Cicero tries to persuade his audience to condemn Verres for his particularly inappropriate response

⁷ On Verres as appropriator of public property, see Stewart 2003: 139–42.

⁸ All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

⁹ On the topic of honorific statues in general, see Zanker 1995; Krumeich 1997; Steiner 2001; and Keesling 2003. See also Stewart 1990: 76.

to the work of art. In general, Verres is blamed for art theft on a massive scale, but Cicero, the master rhetorician, appreciates the value of concrete examples. Verres' removal of Sappho's statue from its public place of honor deprives future audiences of a chance to engage with the monument, and also opens Verres up to accusations of misinterpretation and misuse of art.

In many cases, Roman rulers displaced Greek statues, religious or secular, and brought them back to Rome to serve their own imperialist aims.¹⁰ A typical instance of this kind of appropriation was that of M. Claudius Marcellus, who conquered Syracuse in 211 BCE and initially displayed its collected treasures in a triumphal procession at Rome. Plutarch has Marcellus boast that his captured art instructed Romans to admire and appreciate Greek art (Plutarch *Marc.* 21). According to Polybius (9.10.13), Marcellus then set a pattern for future conquerors by making a distinction between private and public when it came time to distribute the booty: "after transferring all these objects to Rome, they used such as came from private houses to embellish their own homes, and those that were state property for their public buildings."¹¹ Although Polybius did not approve of Marcellus's acts of plunder, he grudgingly acknowledged Marcellus's care in separating the two kinds of art, particularly since it kept sacred statuary in temples and out of private homes.¹² A more negative example is that of Mummius, the looter of defeated Corinth in 146 BCE, notorious for his avarice and ignorance about art: one anecdote describes him supervising the looting of Greek statuary, telling his soldiers that any statues broken in transit will need to be replaced by the person responsible for the breakage (Vell. Pat. 1.13–14; Pliny *NH* 35.24; Dio Chrys. 37.24).¹³ Closer to Cicero's time, we learn from Sallust (*Cat.* 11) and Martial (9.43) that Sulla, on campaign, stole art objects in order to impress his friends and compensate his soldiers, who apparently resisted melting the objects down into bullion and instead learned to appreciate them as tokens of luxury.¹⁴

¹⁰ On Greek art as Roman war booty after the sack of Syracuse in 211 BCE, see McDonnell 2006: 68–90. For the Republic, see Welch 2006: 91–161.

¹¹ See McDonnell 2006: 82; and Cicero *Mur.* 75–76: "the Roman people hate private luxury but love public munificence." McDonnell 2006: 83 suggests that Marcellus's ideas about public art can be traced back to his familiarity with customs in Greek Sicily at the court of Hiero II of Syracuse.

¹² McDonnell 2006: 77–78 has a discussion of the moralistic critiques of Marcellus by Livy, Plutarch, and Polybius. See also Welch 2006: 103–5 on Cato the Elder (*Uti Praeda in Publicam Referatur*).

¹³ See Gruen 1992: 123 ff., and Welch 2006: 140–41, who thinks the anecdote is exaggerated but that, based on other information (e.g., Polybius 39.2.1–2), Mummius may indeed have been quite ignorant about Greek art.

¹⁴ For evidence of looted Greek art that made its way into private Roman houses, see Welch 2006: 102–5.

Silanion's Sappho, however, is removed not as legitimate plunder in war-time, but rather, as Cicero is quick to emphasize, by a greedy civil servant for his own personal use.¹⁵ Verres is accused of robbing the Syracusans (Roman allies) of public cultural property for the sake of private luxury (*Verr.* 2.1.53–55) (Stewart 2003: 141). Cicero is the first author we know of in antiquity to make clear distinctions between public and private uses of art, and to convey a sense of what is appropriate for each; with Verres, we see a documented attempt of a private individual to build a private collection of art, removed from its public setting, and gathered up with a connoisseur's attitude (Miles forthcoming: 4). Verres' home is described as stuffed to bursting with stolen objects (*Verr.* 2.1.50ff.).¹⁶ Cicero expresses outrage at the private display of stolen public art, saying that those who are not wealthy can see large quantities of fine art only in public places, and that Verres has effectively deprived them of their rights. Pliny later follows the same line of argument: he praises Agrippa's opinion, for example, that all paintings and statues should be on public display in Rome, not spirited away to private villas (*NH* 35.26), and blames Tiberius for his selfish appropriation and privatization of art objects.¹⁷

With the disappearance of "Sappho" from the public space of the *prytaneion*, Syracuse loses a reminder of a proud moment in its cultural heritage. Sappho's statue could be understood as a quasi-cult image, a visual expression of the cult of learning that was so widespread in the Hellenistic period (Dillon 2006: 40). Such a famous work of art contributed to the city's civic identity, and Syracuse never would have parted from it willingly.¹⁸ We find similar customs in Athens during this period. Around 330 BCE, Lycurgus, the leading politician who was also in charge of state finances, proposed to the Assembly that they erect in the Theater of Dionysus honorific bronze statues of the three great classical tragedians, Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides (Zanker 1995: 43). The theater in question was the venue for both dramatic performances and the convocation of the Assembly itself, lending the proposed

¹⁵ Miles forthcoming: 123–24 points out that property could be described as sacred (*res sacrae*), public (*res publicae*), or private (*res privatae*); the theft of private property is *furtum* (theft); public property theft is called *peculatus* (embezzlement); and the theft of sacred property is *sacrilegium* (sacrilege). Cicero accuses Verres of leaving nothing behind, "neither private nor public, neither consecrated (*sacri*) nor unconsecrated (*profani*)" (*Verr.* 2.4.2; see also 1.14). For legal perspectives on Verres' property violations, see also Crawford 1989: 93–98.

¹⁶ Welch 2006: 123 argues for an aesthetic of crowding in domestic display in the first half of the second century BCE.

¹⁷ Barkan 1999: 55–70 discusses the issue of public vs. private enjoyment of art; see also Gruen 1992: ch. 3, "Art and Civic Life".

¹⁸ Miles forthcoming: 127: Cicero names nine Greek cities and their famous works of art that contribute to their civic identity (*Verr.* 2.4.125).

statues a double identity as both famous citizens and poets. In the third and second centuries BCE, we hear of retrospective portraits of archaic and classical poets in Alexandria that served as visual representations of a kind of cult for the city's intellectual heroes, complete with sacrificial rituals usually reserved for kings or benefactors (Zanker 1995: 159). While we are less certain of the precise social or political function of Sappho's statue in the Syracusan *prytaneion*, it was created by one of the finest bronze sculptors of that time, and for that reason alone must have been held in high esteem.

But what, precisely, does Verres hope to gain by his theft? Was he adopting the Hellenistic "strategy of cultural co-optation"?¹⁹ Or was this just another bronze trophy for his collection, a way to satisfy his huge appetite for prestige and power? Katherine Welch argues that most Romans in a position to loot cities and bring home objects for triumphal processions were motivated by a "booty mentality": they had less interest in subject matter and artist, but paid close attention to the object's size, figural type, pose, and material value (Welch 2006: 128–31). This mentality then affected even those Romans who were not directly involved in military campaigns. While it is certainly possible that Verres wanted to obtain as many statues and as many different categories of statues as possible, I suspect that he may have had particular fondness for statuary depicting poets and musicians, as well as for the female form. At Himera, Verres coveted a bronze statue of Stesichorus who had once lived there, but fortunately its owner fled to Rome and complained to the Senate, effectively stopping Verres in his tracks (*Verr.* 2.2.287). Verres was more successful in his theft of the figure of a lovely cithara player from Aspendos, so famous it had become the subject of proverbs (*Verr.* 2.4.54). But to begin to address the question of why Verres stole what he did (assuming, as I do, that he did discriminate), we should first try to reconstruct what we know of Silanion's Sappho statue.

II. SAPPHO IN ART

Silanion was a specialist in human figures, active just at the beginning of the Hellenistic period (ca. 325 BCE); he focused his creative energies on bronze statues of people, including heroes, athletes, and literary figures.²⁰ Pliny

¹⁹ Dillon 2006: 40 points out that the statues at the library of Pergamon are often cited as an important source of inspiration for the Roman practice of decorating libraries, gardens, and villas with Greek author portraits. See also Zanker 1995: 146–97. The fact that Sappho was an adopted rather than a native daughter of Syracuse adds yet another layer to the politics of cultural appropriation here.

²⁰ See Stewart 1990: 179–81 on Silanion.

mentions three works by Silanion, emphasizing how well he portrayed the emotions of one of his models (NH 34.19.81–82):

Silanion Apollodorum fudit, fictorem et ipsum, sed inter cunctos diligentissimum artis et iniquum sui iudicem, crebro perfecta signa frangentem, dum satiari cupiditate artis non quit, ideoque insanum cognominatum—hoc in eo expressit, nec hominem ex aere fecit, sed iracundiam—et Achillem nobilem, item epistaten exercentem athletas.

Silanion cast a portrait of Apollodoros, himself a sculptor, but among all artists the most meticulous in his art and a harsh critic of his own work, frequently smashing his finished statues, since his zeal for his art always left him unsatisfied; consequently they nicknamed him “the Madman.” This quality Silanion expressed in his portrait, and so represented in bronze not a man, but anger personified. He also made a famous Achilles, and a trainer of athletes.

In addition to these three pieces mentioned by Pliny, we know of eight other bronzes by Silanion: a Theseus in Athens; a statue of Plato dedicated to the Muses in the Academy by the Persian Mithridates; three boy boxers at Olympia; a dying Jokasta; a Korinna; and his Syracusan Sappho (Stewart 1990: 288).²¹

Many questions spring to mind about Silanion's Sappho, none easily answered. Who commissioned it for the town hall (*prytaneion*) in Syracuse? Statues and reliefs of women in the fourth and early third centuries in Athens were commissioned as votive offerings for display in sacred spaces such as temples on the Acropolis, reflecting women's important role in family and religion.²² But it seems more likely that the Syracusans memorialized Sappho as a poet, not as a pious wife or daughter, seeing that her statue was positioned in a public hall rather than in a temple sanctuary. Was the statue meant to be a kind of icon of cultural identity (i.e., Greekness), presiding over government meetings, civic dining parties, or a gathering of some sort of poets' guild? If the *prytaneion* was primarily a place for dining, was this particular statue displayed because of its value as a masterpiece, the work of the master sculptor Silanion, or because the figure of a poet was appropriate to a sympotic context (see e.g. Murray 1990)? What other statues, if any, were positioned near her? How might the artist have depicted her?

²¹ We know the most about his Plato (Diog. Laert. 3.25), and the boy boxer Satyros (Pausanias 6.4.5), although none of his works have survived. In addition to these eleven pieces, we have evidence of three bases signed by the artist.

²² See Eule 2002: 205–29, esp. 214. We know very little about Sicilian civic customs, but can perhaps extrapolate from Athenian evidence.

Hellenistic artists were famous for their increasingly realistic approaches to portraiture; Paul Zanker argues for the “astonishing range of subtly differentiated types” of the Hellenistic artists, as sculptors tried to “translate each subject’s intellectual, personal, and biographical traits into a ‘spiritual physiognomy’” (Zanker 1995: 154).²³ On the other hand, many of the portraits we have specifically of women from this period suggest that female statues were generally more homogeneous than their male counterparts (Smith 1991: 75). R. R. R. Smith claims that Hellenistic statues of women were not regularly portrait-like, beyond slight modulations in hair or face, or attempts to match dress style to the appropriate era of the model; in most cases of statuary of mortal women, precise identification would come only from the inscribed base or individual attributes (Smith 1991: 83–84). In Sappho’s case, it is unclear to me which of these interpretive approaches suits her best. Did Silanion and his Syracusan patrons think of her first as a poet, an intellectual peer of Homer, Plato, and Menander? In that case she could have been distinguished by a scroll or lyre in her hands, as is the case with the image of Sappho on the vase by the Brygos painter, to be discussed below. When the sons of the great Praxiteles modeled a public statue of Menander in the Theater of Dionysus at Athens shortly after the dramatist’s death (c. 290 BCE), they created a portrait type that still exists in over sixty copies: clean-shaven, middle-aged, with naturalistic hair, his slightly inclined head and furrowed brow reflecting the creative process (Smith 1991: 39; Zanker 1995: 77–85). Could Sappho have been similarly individualized as an artist and intellectual, or would Silanion have been compelled by her gender to downplay her individuality?

We can be sure of one thing at least: Sappho was clothed. But many marble statues of mortal women from this period and later wear a diaphanous shawl over their dresses, pulled tightly around the body to reveal a curvy and seductive shape beneath. R. R. R. Smith discusses this trend, which begins in the middle Hellenistic period; he points out that it is basically an inversion of Classical drapery style in which a heavier cloak was worn over a thinner dress (Smith 1991: 84). He acknowledges that many of these female statues send off mixed signals about the propriety expected of a respectable Hellenistic wife vs. the erotic potential hinted at by the sensual clothing, reflective of actual garments made of imported cloth that had just come into fashion: Egyptian linen or silk from the Greek island of Cos (Smith 1991: 84–85).

²³ Zanker does not refer to Silanion’s Sappho. Note the adverb used in his discussion of the Brygos vase, introduced as evidence for Anacreon: “This is, incidentally, one of the very few depictions of a female poet” (26). Perhaps Sappho, compared to Anacreon, is not “intellectual” enough to belong in his book?

This “transparent mantle” effect was not limited to marble: in the third and second centuries, artists employed the same technique for their bronzes.²⁴ We could speculate that Silanion, just a few decades earlier, may have employed the same effect for his Sappho, resulting in a clothed female figure that still had something vaguely seductive about it.

There is a series of seductive yet fully clothed female figures that emerges in the Hellenistic period that may offer us a good model for Silanion's lost Sappho: the Muses.²⁵ R. R. R. Smith states that a wide range of postures and of contemporary female dress style was employed for statues of Muses, partly to establish individual identities for them.²⁶ In her first volume on Hellenistic sculpture, Brunilde Ridgway publishes a series of plates of Muse types, and three in particular strike me as useful for this argument. The earliest extant sculptural monument that clearly depicts the Muses is the Mantinea Base, dated to the late fourth century BCE, so approximately contemporary with Silanion's Sappho (Ridgway 1990: 253–54, plates 132a–c). Among the figures are women holding a kithara and a scroll, two possible iconographical attributes for Sappho in her identity as poet; all the women present wear elaborately draped clothing. An example of a seated Muse from Agnano with clingy fabric around the bust strikes the viewer as highly suggestive (Ridgway 1990: 252–53, plate 126). We also have evidence of a dancing Melpomene, reminiscent of the early fifth-century vase by the Tithonos Painter, to be discussed below, in which Sappho kicks up her heels in a dance movement (Ridgway 1990: 262). I would like to imagine that Silanion's statue portrayed Sappho as a Muse, a category that would conveniently merge her identity as woman and poet, mortal and “tenth muse.”²⁷ This imaginary reconstruction would help us understand the double vision that Cicero is at such pains to present: a statue that could be viewed simultaneously as a respectable poet worthy of cult honors in Syracuse, and a seductive female form easily spirited away for private enjoyment by an unscrupulous individual.

²⁴ Smith 1991: 85: “in the early and middle third century, we have the Themis of Rhamnous and the Nikeso of Priene.”

²⁵ I am indebted to Rachel Kousser for this idea. For scholarly discussion of the Muses and related figures in the Hellenistic period, see Neudecker 1988: 64–74; Ridgway 1990: 246–74, plates 126–36; and Schneider 1999.

²⁶ Smith 1991: 77, with a plate of the leaning Muse (plate 95), also shown on the second-century Archelaos relief (plate 216).

²⁷ An epigram attributed to Plato labels her the “tenth muse” (AP 9.506). As we will see below, Christodoros's description of her bronze statue (AP 2.69–71) mentions the Muses, and Damocharis speaks of Leon's Hellenistic portrait of Sappho as “the Muse of Mytilene (AP 16.310.2). I hope to pursue the question of Sappho as “Muse” in a future article.

Given our ultimate lack of certainty, however, about which category Silanion actually chose—female or poet, seductive or intellectual, mortal or muse—it might be best to turn to other evidence for Sappho's physical appearance. We can consider both material and textual remains. Little evidence survives for statuary or painted portraits of Sappho at any period, although it is clear from the literary sources, which we will explore below, that they did exist. Our best material evidence comes from coins and vases.²⁸ Sappho appears on the obverses of coins from Mytilene and Eresos during the first through third centuries CE, sometimes with an inscribed name, and frequently holding a lyre.²⁹ While these last images were produced too late to inspire Silanion, it is possible that the coins reproduced images of earlier Greek statues or reliefs that might have directly influenced the fourth-century sculptor.

Four vases showcasing Sappho still exist in collections, dating from the late sixth to the late fifth centuries BCE.³⁰ An inscribed hydria produced in Six technique currently in Warsaw is, according to Beazley, the earliest representation of Sappho preserved (ca. 510 BCE). On his name vase, the Sappho Painter employed a technique visually similar to what later became red-figure, adding white paint to a black background and incising the details (Boardman 1974: 178). Sappho wears a *chiton* and *himation*, and plucks her *barbitos* with a *plektron*. Just above the *plektron* is inscribed the name *Psappho*. Sappho is presented here as a performing poet, accompanying herself on the stringed instrument. Probably the most famous vase, by the Brygos painter (ca. 480–470 BCE), is a red-figured krater now on display in Munich; it shows Sappho and Alkaios standing together, inscribed *Sappho* and *Alkaios*, each holding a *barbitos* and *plektron* (Richter 1965: 71). Both wear elegantly pleated transparent gowns (*chiton*); Alkaios wears a *mitra* around his head, while Sappho has a decorated fillet on hers (Snyder 1997: 109). Sappho's face is drawn from a somewhat unusual three-quarter perspective, an angle the Brygos painter usually avoids (Robertson 1992: 100). Jane Snyder has pointed out that, while Sappho has her *barbitos* in playing position, the *plektron* hangs down in front away from her instrument; she herself is not playing, but perhaps listening to Alkaios

²⁸ For this section, see Schefold 1943; Richter 1965; Snyder 1997 108–19; and the Beazley Archives.

²⁹ Richter 1965: 70 also includes evidence of literary sources for the minting of coins with portraits of Sappho: Aristotle *Rhet.* 2.23.11; Pollux *Onom.* 9.84.

³⁰ The Beazley Archives include a fifth vase in their group of portrayals of Sappho, but since the female figure is not identified with an inscription, I have not included it in my list. It is an Athenian black-figured lekythos now in Hamburg, attributed to the Diosphos Painter, dated between 525–475 BCE, on which a female figure is shown playing a *kithara* between two lions.

(Snyder 1997: 109).³¹ Dated to approximately the same time (ca. 480 BCE) is a red-figured calyx-krater by the Tithonos painter, now in Wuppertal. Here Sappho, identified by the label *Sapho* near her head, wears the familiar *chiton*, *himation*, and *sakkos*, and again holds a *barbitos* with its *plektron*, but two details are different: she performs a dance step as she plays, and an *aulos* bag hangs from the lower arm of her instrument, suggesting perhaps a connection to the symposion (Snyder 1997: 109). Finally, a hydria in Athens shows the poet, labeled *Sappho*, sitting on a chair (*klismos*) while holding a lettered scroll; she is flanked by three young women, one of whom takes down a wreath from the wall, while another seems to be offering Sappho a *chelys* lyre (Richter 1965: 71; Snyder 1997: 113). The vase is attributed to the school of Polygnotus, ca. 440–420 BCE.

While there are some constants in the vase paintings above—the presence of a lyre of some sort and hair decoration, for example—in all the material evidence, Sappho would not be identifiable without her inscribed name.³² Gisela Richter catalogues other possible representations of Sappho, including many marble and bronze heads that seem likely candidates because of their headdress: a *sakkos* or fillet wound around the head. But because of the lack of individualization, she remains skeptical of any secure identification, and concludes her entry on portraits of Sappho with an oddly personal claim to the power of the imagination:

One must, therefore admit that no reliable portrait in the round of one of the greatest figures in antiquity has so far been recognized, and that the inscribed representations on coins and vases can hardly be termed likenesses. But since any portrait of Sappho would be an invented likeness, one that would merely show us the conception of her by some ancient artist, the loss is not so serious, for we too can imagine what she looked like, judging from what little is known of her life, and based on what remains of her poetry. (Richter 1965: 72)

III. SAPPHO'S STATUE IN LITERATURE

Richter's suggestion that we turn to literary evidence—Sappho's poetry and the ancient biographical tradition—for information on Sappho's appearance should be taken up with extreme caution. These texts are never transparent, and certainly not documentary in nature. Alkaios says she is lovely, with hair

³¹ Snyder 1997: 114–15 later argues for the “muting of female figures as represented by male artists,” and interprets Sappho in several scenes as “more like a muse than a singer,” since Sappho is never shown actually singing on the vases which depict her.

³² The same is true for the inscribed bust of Sappho found included in a large Roman mosaic at Sparta, and two gems whose location is now unknown; see Richter 1965: 71.

dark as violets and a voice like honey; but these are all stock epithets that could be applied as easily to the Muses as to a flesh and blood woman. Socrates calls her “beautiful” (*Phaedr.* 235b: *kale*), but presumably for the beauty of her poetry. Conversely, Ovid has her complain that she is unattractive (*Her.* 15.31ff.), and an Oxyrhynchus papyrus from the late second or early third century CE declares that “in appearance she seems to have been contemptible and quite ugly, being dark in complexion and of very small stature” (*P.Oxy.* 1800 fr. 1 = Loeb T 1). In each instance, we should be suspicious of the author’s motivations for praise or blame. Sappho may be represented as ugly for the same reason Homer is imagined to be blind: to emphasize the contrast between an all too human body and a divine creative gift.³³

The authors above claim to describe the real flesh and blood Sappho; others, however, base their descriptions on statues or portraits of the poet. It is not always easy to separate praise of the artist’s craft from praise of the female body itself. Thus, when Cicero calls Silanion’s statue “perfect, elegant, and finely detailed” (*Verr.* 2.4.57.126ff.: *opus tam perfectam, tam elegans, tam elaboratum*), we should probably assume that he refers to Silanion’s artistic technique rather than Sappho’s physical appearance.

Two late ecphrastic epigrams from the *Greek Anthology*, on the other hand, describe artistic renditions of Sappho without reference to artist or technique. The first is by Christodoros, a poet from Egyptian Thebes, writing ca. 530 CE. He was an established poet in Constantinople who composed a detailed catalogue of a group of bronze statues displayed in the baths of Zeuxippos, erected by Septimius Severus in the last years of the second century CE.³⁴ Constantine further developed the site, adding more sculpture in both bronze and marble, and the Baths then not only offered public bathing access but also served as a gathering place for public speaking and debate throughout the fourth, fifth, and early sixth centuries CE (Bassett 2004: 51). In 532 CE, shortly after the commemorative verses were written, the whole Zeuxippan collection was destroyed in a major fire, but some of the actual pieces described by Christodoros have since been excavated, encouraging scholars to trust the catalogue’s historical accuracy (Bassett 2004: 52; 160).

Christodoros’s extant verses consist of 416 lines of description (*ekphrasis*) of statues or statue groups, including gods, mythological figures, and portraits of mortals. In the latter case, Christodoros includes thirty-three historical

³³ See also Maximus of Tyre 18.7, and the scholiast on Lucian’s *Imagines* 18, where Sappho is compared to a nightingale, a famously drab bird blessed with an enchanting voice.

³⁴ Bassett 2004: 52 thinks that Christodoros may have been asked to catalogue the collection in an official capacity.

figures from pre-Homeric through Roman imperial times, including poets, philosophers, military figures, historians, and statesmen.³⁵ The poems emphasize the lifelike quality of the statues: the poets and philosophers are depicted lost in thought or in the throes of poetic composition. Here is Christodoros's observation of a bronze statue of Sappho (AP 2.69–71):

Πιερικὴ δὲ μέλισσα λιγύθροος ἔζετο Σαπφῶ
Λεσβιάς, ἡρεμέουσα· μέλος δ' εὐῦμνον ὑφαίνειν
σιγαλέαις δοκέεσκεν ἀναψαμένη φρένα Μούσαις.

Sappho of Lesbos, the clear-voiced Pierian honeybee,
was sitting there quietly; she seemed to be weaving together a lovely song,
as her thoughts turned toward the silent Muses.

Yet Sappho's image seems hardly distinguishable from Erinna's several lines down, suggesting a standardized approach to "the female poet" (AP 2.108–110):

Παρθενικὴ δ' Ἑριννα λιγύθροος ἔζετο κούρη,
οὐ μίτον ἀμφαφώωσα πολύπλοκον, ἀλλ' ἐνὶ σιγῇ
Πιερκῆς ῥαθάμιγας ἀποσταλάουσα μελίσσης.

The clear-voiced maiden Erinna was sitting,
not touching the intricate lyre strings,
but silently distilling drops of Pierian honey.

And as we read further, we realize that Christodoros is a rather conventional poet, at least with regard to ecphrasis: his warriors are given weaponry, his prophets wear laurel crowns or fillets, and Apollo appears delighting in his long hair. Among the poets, only Homer receives any kind of elaboration or individualization (AP 2.311–350). So we have not progressed beyond the evidence already drawn from the vase paintings: Sappho is depicted as a female poet, but with no unusual attributes or specific characteristics that would allow us to distinguish her from, for example, Erinna.

The second relevant passage from the *Greek Anthology* is an epigram by the sixth-century CE poet Damocharis. Here we are fortunate to have more precise information about the work of art described. The statue turns out to

³⁵ Bassett 2004: 55 points out that the Zeuxippos collection was unusual in that the portraits had no particular political connection with Constantinople or Byzantium before it; only one of the total thirty-four portrait statues was a contemporary figure, the fifth-century general Fl. Pompeius. She argues for a calculated policy of "transcend[ing] the specificity of time and place to create a universal frame of reference" (56), allying the capital to the glorious history of the Greco-Roman empire through its literary heroes.

be relatively close in time to Silanion's: it is a portrait by the Hellenistic artist Leon (Pliny *NH* 35.40.141 = *Anth. Plan.* 310 Damocharis = *AP* 16.310):

Αὐτή σοι πλάστειρα Φύσις παρέδωκε τυπῶσαι
τὴν Μυτιληναίαν, ζωγράφε, Πιερίδα.
πηγάζει τὸ διαυγὲς ἐν ὄμμασι· τοῦτο δ' ἐναργῶς
δηλοῖ φαντασίην ἔμπλεον εὐστοχίης.
αὐτομάτως δ' ὁμαλή τε καὶ οὐ περίεργα †κολῶσα
σὰρξ ὑποδεικνυμένην τὴν ἀφέλειαν ἔχει.
ἄμμιγα δ' ἐξ ἰλαροῖο καὶ ἐκ νοεροῖο προσώπου
Μοῦσαν ἀπαγγέλλει Κύπριδι μιγνυμένην.

Nature herself, the creative artist, gave you, painter,
the Muse of Mytilene to draw.
Her eyes overflow with brightness, and this clearly shows
an imagination full of wisdom.
Her skin, naturally smooth and free of cosmetics,
reveals her simplicity,
And the mingled joy and thoughtfulness in her face
announce that her Muse is mixed up with Kypris.

This epigram is set within a series of poems on portraits and statues of ancient poets, including such luminaries as Pindar, Anacreon, and Aesop. The Loeb volume of the *Greek Anthology* goes so far as to illustrate this particular epigram with a sketch of a sculpted head of a woman, her hair bound in a *sakkos*, and a typically classical profile—loosely based on a marble head of Sappho in Rome (inv. 651/57) (Paton 1918: 345). But the epigram itself gives little concrete information: Sappho has bright eyes, glowing skin, and a face that reflects both pleasure in her worship of Aphrodite and seriousness in her role as Mytilene's famous poet. The verses are vague enough that Gisela Richter suspects the portrait might be wholly imaginary rather than real, perhaps a rhetorical exercise in ecphrastic composition or a piece exhibiting the Greek taste for *variatio* (Richter 1965: 70).

Looking back over the artistic and textual evidence gathered for Sappho's physical appearance, we must conclude, along with Richter, that we are left with very little to go on. The ecphrastic verses use commonplaces of female beauty, and the most specific attribute given to her on coins and vases is simply a lyre, the symbol of her art. Although the idea of Silanion's Sappho being modeled on contemporary statues of the Muses is appealing, there is no concrete evidence on which to build a solid argument. But this survey does reveal the variety of ways in which Sappho could be represented, leaving open the possibility that Cicero and Verres viewed the Silanion version through very different lenses, just as antiquity was already divided in its approval and disapproval of the content of Sappho's verses.

IV. TATIAN'S TESTIMONY: SAPPHO THE 'HETAIRA'

I do have one last text to bring forward as evidence, although it is rather a hostile witness. Tatian's *Oration against the Greeks* confirms, in its eyewitness account, the existence of Silanion's statues of Sappho and Korinna, and lists them in company with other statues of female poets, e.g. Lysippus's bronze Praxilla and Naucydes' Erinna. None of the works of art referred to have survived, and no copies have come to light, so for all its venom, Tatian's list, like Christodoros's above, is quite valuable as catalogue of lost works of art (see Stewart 1990: 296). In addition, Tatian informs us that all the statues he describes made their way somehow to Rome, possibly removed forcibly from their original sites: "I saw all these not having learned it from another...but while spending time in Rome, where I saw the statues carried off from you Greeks" (35.1).³⁶ The full passage is as follows (33.2–5)³⁷:

Πράξιλλαν μὲν γὰρ Λύσιππος ἐχαλκούργησε, μηδὲν εἰποῦσαν
διὰ τῶν ποιημάτων χρήσιμον, Λεαρχίδα δὲ Μενέστρατος, Σιλανίων
δὲ Σαπφῶ τὴν ἑταῖραν, Ἦρινναν τὴν Λεσβίαν Ναυκύδης, Βοίσκος
Μυρτίδα, Μυρῶ τὴν Βυζαντίαν Κηφισόδοτος, Γόμφος Πραξαγορίδα καὶ
Ἀμφίστρατος Κλειτώ. Τί γάρ μοι περὶ Ἀνύτης λέγειν Τελεσίλλης τε καὶ
Νοσσίδου; Τῆς μὲν γὰρ Εὐθυκράτης τε καὶ Κηφισόδοτος, τῆς δὲ Νικηρά-
τος, τῆς δ' Ἀριστόδοτος εἰσιν οἱ δημιουργοί· Μνησαρχίδος δὲ τῆς
Ἐφεσίας Εὐθυκράτης, Κορίννης Σιλανίων, Θαλ(ι)αρχίδος τῆς Ἀργείας
Εὐθυκράτης.

Ταύτας δ' εἰπεῖν προῦθυμήθην, ἵνα μηδὲ παρ' ἡμῖν ξένον τι πρᾶτ-
τεσθαι νομίζητε καὶ συγκρίναντες τὰ ὑπ' ὧν (ὕμιν πίπτοντ') ἐπιτη-
δεύματα μὴ χλευάζητε τὰς παρ' ἡμῖν φιλοσοφούσας. Καὶ ἡ μὲν Σαπφῶ
γύναιον πορνικὸν ἐρωτομανές, καὶ τὴν ἑαυτῆς ἀσέλγειαν ᾔδει· πᾶσαι δὲ
αἱ παρ' ἡμῖν σωφρονοῦσι, καὶ περὶ τὰς ἡλακᾶτας αἱ παρθέναι τὰ κατὰ
θεὸν λαλοῦσιν ἐκφωνήματα, σπουδαιότερον τῆς παρ' ὑμῖν παιδός.

For Lysippos cast a bronze statue of Praxilla, even though she said nothing useful in her poems; Menestratos made a statue of Learchis, Silanion of Sappho the courtesan (*hetaira*), Naukydes of Erinna from Lesbos, Boiskos of Myrtis, Kephisodotos of Myro from Byzantium, Gomphos of Praxagoris, and Amphistratos of Kleito. And what can I say about Anyte, Telesilla, and Nossis? The first was created by Euthykrates and Kephisodotos, the second by Nikeratos, the third by Aristodotos. Euthykrates made a statue of Mnesarchis from Ephesos, Silanion the Korinna, Euthykrates the Thalarchis from Argos.

³⁶ For more discussion of this passage, see Hunt 2003.

³⁷ The Greek text is from Marcovich 1995: 62–63.

I want to mention these women so that, when you compare their actions before your own eyes, you will not think that our women indulge in strange practices, or slander the women who philosophize among us. Your Sappho was a love-crazed prostitute (*gunaion pornikon*) who sang about her own love affairs. But all our women are modest, and our maidens at their distaffs talk about polite topics, more appropriately than that girl of yours.

Tatian had his rhetorical reasons for maligning Greek women; this section comes from a digression in which he compares the Christian custom of teaching without discrimination to all men and women, regardless of class, wealth, or age. In contrast, he points to the ancient Greek sculptors who immortalized such dubious characters as tyrants, courtesans, and that disreputable poet Sappho. But surely Silanion and the Syracusans did not think of their statue as that of a *hetaira*.³⁸ A more interesting question is whether Verres could have conceived of the Sappho statue in those terms.

We have returned to the question of Verres' motivations for stealing this particular statue. Art has various levels of value: the artist's fame, the medium (bronze), the subject matter (a famous poet). Verres could have appropriated the statue to show that he was a cultivated Roman who appreciated the fine arts, both sculpture and poetry (thus Cicero, although pointedly tongue in cheek). But Verres also had a pattern in Sicily of removing images specifically of women and female divinities from their cultic or civic sites of honor and transferring them to his private dwelling for personal enjoyment. This is the angle I wish to pursue next.

V. VERRES' VANDALISM: SAPPHO'S BODY

Ann Vasaly has argued that Cicero represents Verres as a tyrant in his *Verrines*, and that the depravity of his character is made particularly obvious by his inability to control his sexual urges. Numerous examples of offenses against real women are discussed at length (e.g. *Verr.* 2.1.63–85: the virgin of Lamp-sacus; *Verr.* 2.4.116: married women of Syracuse), but in the section dealing specifically with art theft, the theme is exploited “not through reference to the *actual* rape of women but through reference to Verres' assaults upon the *images* of women and female divinities.” (Vasaly 1993: 123). One of the most vivid incidents is his theft of an ancient sacred cult image of Ceres at Henna, a beautifully crafted bronze statue depicting the goddess holding torches as

³⁸ There is a tradition of the “other” Sappho who was a courtesan: Aelian *VH* 12.19 = Sappho T 4: “the poetess Sappho, daughter of Scamandronymus. . . I understand there was another Sappho in Lesbos, not a poetess but a *hetaira*.” Also Athen. 13.596e; Seneca *Ep.* 88.37 on Didymus the grammarian, who wrote a treatise on “whether Sappho was a *publica*”; and Martial 7.69.9; 10.35.15.

she searches for her lost daughter (Verr. 2.4.105–115). The Sicilians were horrified at the theft, which they viewed as a sacrilege; the whole land, says Cicero, became desolate after this crime, as if re-enacting Ceres' reaction to Hades' rape of Proserpina (Verr. 2.4.114). According to Vasaly, Cicero presents Verres' actions in Sicily as a kind of rape of the land through his theft of statues; the orator wishes his audience to read in his narrative an allegory for Verres' tyrannical rape of Sicily itself (Vasaly 1993: 123–24).

We could interpret the pilfering of Silanion's Sappho statue similarly. Verres absconds with a beautifully crafted representation of a woman who had formerly graced an official building of the Syracusan government. The statue was meant to remind the citizens that their city had once offered asylum to this famous poet during her exile from Lesbos, and that they had some claim to her international fame. But what Verres sees in the statue may be not just a famous poet, but also a beautiful female body.

There are three instances of Verres' rapacity that function as useful models for the present approach. First, Cicero reports that Verres had abused his power over his host Heius of Messana by stealing the very famous Praxitelean Eros and also several statues *non maxima, verum eximia venustate, virginali habitu atque vestitu* (Verr. 2.4.5: "not large, but of extraordinary charm, with the appearance and clothing of a virgin"), which are destined to end up associated with *lenonis domum ac meretriciam disciplinam* (Verr. 2.4.7: "the house of a panderer and the customs of a prostitute"). Second, Verres is said to have *flagrare cupiditate atque amentia coepit* ("begun to burn with an insane desire") to possess a huge statue of Diana from Segesta, which was *amplum et excelsum...verum tamen inerat in illa magnitudine aetas atque habitus virginalis* ("quite large and tall, but nevertheless, for all its magnitude, its age and appearance were that of a virgin") (Verr. 2.4.74–75).³⁹ Finally, in Syracuse, Verres plundered the paintings and doors of the Temple of Minerva, and *ornamenta Minervae virginis in meretriciam domum transtulit* (Verr. 2.4.123: "transferred the embellishments of the virgin Minerva to the house of a prostitute"). The language of sexual exploitation pervades these narratives. Cicero drives home the point that these are "virginal" statues, about to be debauched by Verres by their removal from safe and publicly sanctioned sites and their repositioning in his disreputable home.

If we broaden our perspective to include representations of the male body, there is another instance of displaced art that parallels Cicero's narrative of

³⁹ See Vasaly 1993: 117–20 for further discussion of images of rape surrounding the removal of the statue: for example, no Segestan was willing to "lay hands on it" (*attingere*), so Verres had to hire foreigners to accomplish the task.

Verres.⁴⁰ Lysippos, a contemporary of Silanion, had crafted a beautiful statue of a young athlete cleaning himself after a workout (the so-called *Apoxyomenos*), and it was displayed at the public site of the Baths of Agrippa. The emperor Tiberius, however, transferred the work to his bedroom, whereupon there was such a public outcry that he was forced to return it. Here, too, the language of eroticism and exploitation is hard to miss: Tiberius gives in to temptation and spirits the beautiful nude statue into his bedroom, where he falls more deeply in love (*adamatum*) with it (Pliny *NH* 34.62):

Non quivit temperare sibi in eo, quamquam imperiosus sui inter initia principatus, transtulitque in cubiculum alio signo substituto, cum quidem tanta pop. R. contumacia fuit, ut theatri clamoribus reponi apoxyomenon flagitaverit princepsque, quamquam adamatum, reposuerit.

Although at the beginning of his principate he kept some control of himself, in this case, Tiberius could not resist the temptation, and had the statue [Lysippos' *Apoxyomenos*] removed to his bedchamber, substituting another one in its place in the baths; but the Roman people were so opposed to this that they all shouted out at the theater "put back the *Apoxyomenos*!—the Man with the Strigil," and the emperor, although he was deeply in love with it, gave it back.

The transfer from public to private space changes the statue's horizon of meaning. As Leonard Barkan comments, this story questions "which is the truer message of the *Apoxyomenos*: the literal signification of a boy who is cleansing himself as a fittingly accessible emblem in front of the public baths or the erotic signification of a beautiful youth reserved for the emperor's private delight? Pliny has no doubts, particularly since Tiberius is famous for his perversity" (Barkan 1999: 70). Cicero, with all his rhetorical juices flowing, similarly has no doubts about the potentially dire consequences of Verres' misdeeds: that the female statues stolen by Verres will lose their "virginity" once they have been sullied by Verres' hands and introduced into his immoral household. Sappho, a victim of Roman imperialism, now becomes a *hetaira* after all.

VI. VERRES' VANDALISM: ABANDONED BASES

In the act of transferring public statuary to his private dwelling, we observe Verres revealing yet another behavior pattern in Sicily: he repeatedly leaves

⁴⁰ This story is discussed both in Barkan 1999: 70–71, and Miles forthcoming: 198–203. See also Bettini's discussions of the erotic allure of art (1999: 64–65): Nero cherished a sculpture by Strongylion of an Amazon with particularly fine legs (Pliny *NH* 34.48; 34.82), while Caligula was so mad with desire that he tried to remove from the walls two paintings at his home in Ardea—one of a nude Atalanta, the other of that quintessential beautiful woman Helen (Pliny *NH* 35.18).

behind the inscribed bases that mark the original placement and identity—artist's and subject's—of the sculptures. Was it, as Cicero mockingly claims, that Verres merely pretended to be an educated man, but in reality could not read the Greek letters, and therefore discarded them as useless (*Verr.* 2.4.57)? Or was it a calculated attempt to hide the provenance of the statue, displace it from its original context and make private what was originally created for public display?

The most probable answer to the questions above is a simple one, namely that the statue bases were just too heavy to transport easily, and had no intrinsic artistic value. Hollow bronzes were relatively lightweight, but heavy marble or stone bases, often constructed of several blocks trussed together, were not.⁴¹ There was also a busy trade in recycling old bases for new statues (see, e.g., Blanck 1969: 67). But it is nevertheless worth considering the ramifications of this “mutilation” of the artwork, since the base was an element of the whole presentation. A statue without its signed base is much more malleable for individual interpretation. Without its original label, the statue is physically incomplete, and this lack allows the viewer to enter into the work and alter its narrative by repositioning, redefining, and even re-identifying it (Barkan 1999: 8–9). When a statue is set up with an inscription, it presents an image and a text that guide the viewer in his or her understanding. It offers a pedigree: name of the author, occasion of its creation or dedication, identity of the subject, and possibly other contextualizing information (Barkan 1999: 72). The loss of the inscription can be as debilitating to the statue's identity and fame as a loss of body parts; but on the other hand, the de-contextualization of the statue opens up opportunities for a wholly new interpretation of the artifact.

Cicero mentions abandoned pedestals in several different Sicilian towns, some of which remind the viewer of previous instances of art plunder, thus offering a stark contrast between the honorable treatment of great art and Verres' indiscriminate acts of plunder. A prime example is the fate of the statue of Diana in Segesta, mentioned above (*Verr.* 2.4.72–83). When the Carthaginians sacked Segesta, they took the statue back with them, but were apparently so impressed by its beauty and aura of holiness that they made it an object of worship in their own city. Many years later, when Carthage fell to Publius Scipio, the victorious general sent it back to Segesta, where it was re-erected with an inscription honoring its benefactor. But its luck changes when Verres sees it: he is immediately smitten, as if by erotic passion (*Verr.* 2.4.75):

⁴¹ I am indebted to William Aylward for this information.

Hanc cum iste sacrorum omnium et religionum hostis praedoque vidisset, quasi illa ipsa face percussus esset, ita flagrare cupiditate atque amentia coepit.

As soon as that enemy of all religion and plunderer of all that is consecrated saw it, he was overwhelmed as if by the torch of love itself, and he began to burn with insane desire.

Giving in to his “insane desire” to possess the statue and carting it off without the new inscription crediting Scipio with its restitution, Verres flies in the face not just of proper respect for great public art and proud local ownership, but also of the appropriate behavior expected of a Roman citizen.

Cicero concludes this narrative with a final comment on the pedestal. Verres had left it behind as of no value, but it quickly became a rallying point for the unhappy Segestans. Verres reconsiders his initial decision (*Verr.* 2.4.79):

Quod cum isti renuntiaretur de basi ac litteris, existimavit homines in oblivionem totius negotii esse venturos si etiam basim tamquam indicem sui sceleris sustulisset.

When Verres was told this about the base and the inscription, he imagined that the whole affair would be forgotten if he also removed the pedestal that stood there as a witness to his crime.

Unfortunately for Verres, Cicero had in his possession the written contract for the removal of the pedestal. When he had it read aloud at the trial, Verres was unable to deny his guilt.

There are other stories of similar behavior during Verres’ time in Sicily. Near Engyon, in a sanctuary of Magna Mater, Verres found bronze Corinthian armor and intricately designed vessels that had been placed there as offerings by Scipio, along with an inscription containing his name. Verres carried all the items off and *nihil in religiosissimo fano praeter vestigia violatae religionis nomenque P. Scipionis reliquit* (*Verr.* 2.4.97: “left nothing behind in that holy sanctuary other than the traces of his sacrilegious theft and the name of P. Scipio”); the dedicational inscription is left behind, while the offerings become part of Verres’ household belongings, to be used for profane purposes with no regard for their previous consecrated status. When Cicero traveled around Sicily seeking evidence for his case against Verres, he must have purposefully sought out the sites of Verres’ vandalism, and been perversely pleased to find so many abandoned inscriptions, such clear proof of his opponent’s rapacity.⁴²

⁴² There is one famous incident in which the inscription could not be separated from the artifact itself: Verres stole some massive ancient ivory elephant tusks from a shrine to Juno on an island near Sicily called Melita, and the dedicator’s inscription was carved on the objects themselves (*Verr.* 2.4.103–104).

It is ironic that, in some instances, the original appeal of the stolen object was its value, determined precisely by inscription and base, yet Verres' greed inevitably led to the destruction of the valued object, separated from its identifying label. Pages can be torn from their manuscripts, statues severed from bases, and the loss of context deprives these objects of their status and leaves behind either an emptiness where the object once was, or a confusion of parts that no longer make up a whole. With regard to the Silanion statue, Cicero observes that the inscription without its statue *declarat quid fuerit, et id ablatum indicat* (Verr. 2.4.127: "declares what used to stand there, and proclaims that it has been removed"). One can imagine scores of abandoned pedestals dotting the countryside, with their inscriptions left pointing to empty space. Towards the end of his tenure as governor, Verres had taken so much away that the tourist guides in Syracuse found themselves having to talk about what was no longer there (Verr. 2.4.132):

Li qui hospites ad ea quae visenda sunt solent ducere et unum quidque ostendere, quos illi mystagogos vocant, conversam iam habent demonstrationem suam. Nam ut ante demonstrabant quid ubique esset, item nunc quid undique ablatum sit ostendunt.

Those known as "mystagogues," who act as tourist guides to visitors and show them all the sights worth seeing, have had to reverse the order of their presentations. For in former times they showed people everywhere what each thing was, but now they explain everywhere what has been taken away.

Visitors would have learned more by gaining access to Verres' private establishment in Syracuse, where he apparently hosted great parties for his privileged friends. Given Cicero's marked emphasis on the empty space where Sappho's statue once stood, are we encouraged to re-invent our own image of Sappho to fill in the gap, or do we accept the loss and, on a deeper aesthetic level, our own irrecoverable distance from antiquity? Richter, above, had encouraged each reader to reconstruct his or her own mental picture of Sappho. But isn't this exactly what Verres was trying to do in transferring the statue to his own power, to recreate her in his own way, use her for his own purposes?

The theme of proper and improper reactions to art runs through Cicero's narrative on Verres' crimes. He emphasizes two aspects in particular of Verres' vandalism: first, that he ignores previous models of appropriate behavior by Roman compatriots, and second, that he perverts the statues by using them for private delectation. Cicero presents a proper model early on in Book Four (Verr. 2.4.3–5). As mentioned earlier, a wealthy Sicilian by the name of Heius lived in Messana, where he piously guarded a family shrine in his home, an ancient sacred space established by his ancestors. Anyone could visit and

admire the shrine, which included four statues of great beauty: a marble Eros by Praxiteles; a bronze Herakles; and two bronze maidens carrying baskets on their heads. Before Verres, Gaius Claudius Pulcher (aedile in 99 BCE) had borrowed and subsequently returned the Praxitelean Eros to Heius; but Verres simply stole as much as he could carry, including the Praxitelean Eros, and ignored Heius's requests for a return of his paternal gods (Vasaly 1993: 112–14; Cicero *Verr.* 4.4.7). Heius valued the statues as works of great art, but even more importantly as sacred links to his past; Verres viewed the pieces as prize objects for his collection. Cicero drives his point home by informing us that Praxiteles had sculpted more than one Eros, and a famous copy existed in Thespieae, a statue as beloved to the Thespians as Silanion's Sappho was to the Syracusans. When the Roman general Mummius captured the town in 146 BCE, he took all the profane statues but left the Eros untouched because it was a sacred object, having been consecrated (*Verr.* 2.4.4).⁴³ Verres had no such religious scruples with the Eros in Messana.

Separating an Eros or a Segestan Diana from its base did not necessarily threaten the identity of the divinity, since other clues could be used to reconstruct it: attributes such as wings, arrows, or dress. But this is not likely to be the case with Sappho, who may well have lacked other distinguishing features. Verres' lack of interest in the inscriptional evidence for the artist's or benefactor's name, or for the statue's identification, may suggest that he is first and foremost interested in the object's physical beauty. As Leonard Barkan puts it, "statues are vividly corporeal objects to which an observer might develop a decidedly sensuous relationship, as though to a living thing" (Barkan 1999: 56).⁴⁴ When Sappho topples from her pedestal, she becomes the property of Verres, in the same category as the conquered women of Homeric epic, victims of imperialism and greed. Separating Sappho from her base means she may no longer be identifiable as the archaic lyric poet. We saw above how difficult it was to distinguish Sappho in Hellenistic art and poetic ecphrasis from any other woman without an identifying inscription. Verres may, for all we know, initially have been attracted to this statue because of its artistry and subject matter. But Verres' passion for the artwork, according to

⁴³ On the Praxitelean Eros, see Gutzwiller 2004: 383–418. Gutzwiller 2004: 386–87 discusses the Thespian Eros's later fate: its last known whereabouts were the Portico of Octavia at Rome, destroyed by fire ca. 80 CE; see Pliny *NH* 36.22; Pausanias 9.27.3.

⁴⁴ He offers some interesting examples beyond the usual Pygmalion theme: Magister Gregorius erotically drawn to a marble Venus (46); and the twelfth-century Bishop of Winchester, who shipped ancient sculptures off to England, claiming he was thereby preventing the return of pagan worship at Rome (32–33).

Cicero, ends up destroying the statue's identity as a famous female poet from archaic Greece, and reducing it to a nameless female body.

CONCLUSION

Cicero's anecdote about the theft of a statue of Sappho by a corrupt Roman provincial governor invites us to explore Hellenistic artistic representations of Sappho and the Roman appropriation (literally here) of its Greek past. Early Roman elites tended to negotiate their social status through overt gestures of intellectualism, connoisseurship, and association with all things old and Greek (see Alcock 1993). Objects that had functioned in their original Hellenistic Greek context as honorific statues in public places (e.g., agora, *prytaneion*), or dedications in sanctuaries, became in the Roman period "icons in the cult of Greek culture and learning" (Zanker 1995: 10). But there are better and worse ways to associate oneself with the Hellenistic past. Cicero implies that Verres, by ruthlessly pillaging the island under his governorship, is a disgrace to all Rome. In order to emphasize further the ethical and political impropriety of Verres' actions, Cicero represents the theft as that of the body of a woman, stolen away by Verres for his own private pleasure. The statue thus comes to symbolize more than Silanion or the Syracusans could ever have imagined.

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