Sappho on Papyrus: Reading Some New Poems

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Prof. Kurke's abstract: After a brief review of the process of discovery, deciphering, and publication of the newest Sappho fragments on papyrus (P.GC and P.Sapph.Obbink), I turn to a reading of the new “Brothers Song,” focusing in particular on gendered spheres and complexities of speech in the poem. By complexities of speech, I mean various forms of verbal indirection, as well as multiple different embedded speech genres and levels of discourse. Under this rubric, I also consider Sappho's intertextual relations with earlier Greek poetry (especially Homer). Having explored these various features in the Brothers Song, I then offer a briefer reading of Sappho's “Tithonus Poem” (first published in 2004), tracking some of the same effects in this poem as well.

Leslie Kurke is Gladys Rehard Wood Professor of Classics and Comparative Literature at the University of California, Berkeley. She is the author of The Traffic in Praise: Pindar and the Poetics of Social Economy (Cornell University Press, 1991), Coins, Bodies, Games, and Gold: The Politics of Meaning in Archaic Greece (Princeton University Press, 1999), and Aesopic Conversations: Popular Tradition, Cultural Dialogue, and the Invention of Greek Prose (Princeton University Press, 2011), as well as many articles on ancient Greek literature (especially archaic poetry) and cultural history. She is the recipient of a John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Fellowship (1999-2004) and of the Goodwin Award of Merit from the American Philological Association in 2012 (for Aesopic Conversations).