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### SAPPHO AND 'Πόλιον γῆρας'

The so-called 'new Sappho poem'<sup>1</sup>, discovered some two years ago in the papyri collection of the University of Cologne, attracted attention of all interested in Greek lyric poetry. It is particularly important for me as in my monograph<sup>2</sup> dedicated to Sappho's poetry I considered the fragment numbered 58 in the well-known Lobel-Page edition<sup>3</sup> (which Michael Gronewald and Robert Daniel identified with the Cologne poem) to be the main source for comprehending the Greek poetess' weltanschauung. So, on reading the Cologne find, I was quite certain that the final lines of the fragment should be its logical ending. However, what puzzled me was Martin West's conclusion: "When we had only the Oxyrhynchus portion, we had only line-ends, preceded and followed by line-ends of other poems, and it was not clear where one poem ended and the next began; the left hand margin, where this would have been signaled, was missing. That question is now settled. We have a poem of twelve lines, made up of six two-line stanzas. The last eight lines are virtually complete. The first four are still lacking two or three words each at their beginnings. But we can make out the sentence structure and restore the sense of what is lost, if not the exact words." Although I regard Martin West as a scholar of great authority, who indeed has an amazing feel for ancient Greek language and lyric poetry, I would still like to express my opinion about one detail, which I find very interesting. I mean the last lines of the Oxyrhynchus papyrus, which Martin West considers to be a part of another poem. To put it straightforward, I admit that I do not agree

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<sup>1</sup> West M., A New Sappho Poem, in: *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, 151, 2005, 1-9.

<sup>2</sup> Tonia N., *The Poetic World of Sappho*, Tbilisi 1991 (in Georgian). The same opinion on the fragment is put forward in my doctoral dissertation *Sapphic Phenomenon and the Poetry of Antique Women*, Tbilisi 1993.

<sup>3</sup> Lobel E., Page D., *Poetarum hesbiorum fragmenta*, Oxford 1955.

with this idea, as I believe that lines 25-26 of the Oxyrhynchus papyrus, which without the first ten lines are numbered 15-16, make up a logical ending to Sappho Cologne version. What compels me to suppose so is the following phrase by Joachim Latacz: "Wer Sapphos Art kennt, möchte sich mit dem matten Ende des Tithonos-Beispiels nicht so gern zufriedengeben. Denn Sappho war nicht nur die Dichterin der Blumen, Kränze, Düfte, schönen Kleider und graziösen Tänze, sie hat in ihrem Mädchenkreis, der demals weitberühmt war, gelehrt, daß Schönheit nichts ist ohne Geist, der sie erst eigentlich zur Schönheit macht ..."4 I will attempt to corroborate this emotional phrase with a more prosaic argument connected with versification:

One chapter in my book called *The Poetic world of Sappho* is dedicated to the analysis of archaic composition and the structure of Sapphic verses.<sup>5</sup> Bearing in mind the idea commonly admitted in cultural studies that each historical epoch tends to a particular structure, deeply imprinted in human psyche and subconsciously expressed in their artistic creations<sup>6</sup>, and analyzing Sappho's best survived poems, I come to the following conclusion: Sapphic verses are structured to the so-called 'triad principle', which represents a certain equivalence to the tendency towards tripartite composition attested in the archaic art. It is very important to mention here that the greater artists are and the closer their compositions are to the aesthetic principles of the epoch, the more intensely does their work reflect the leading compositional pattern of their contemporary epoch. Time has attested that in this respect Sappho holds the same place in the archaic poetry as Homer in the Geometric period. The principle of triad composition is distinctive and discrete in her poetry in the same way as the geometric principle in the Homeric epics. Now let us consider if the Cologne poem follows this pattern and reconstruct its full version:

If we accept the assumption that Sapphic verses are structured to the principle of triad composition, the principle should embrace both levels – inner and outer. Since the complete version of the poem concerned is still arguable, let us start with the inner composition, which clearly includes the following elements:

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<sup>4</sup> Latacz J., Ein neues Sapphi-Lied.

<http://www.klassphil.uni-muenchen.de/~waiblinger/sappho.html/>

<sup>5</sup> About the archaic composition and the structure of Sapphic verses, see: Tonia N., 1991, 125-144.

<sup>6</sup> For the review of the question, see Гордезиани Р., Проблемы Гомеровского Эпоса, Тбилиси 1978, 276; Also Andreea B., Flashar H., Strukturäquivalenzen zwischen den Homerischen Epen und der frühgriechischen Vasenkunst, Poetica, Bd., 9, Hft. 2, 1977, 217...

Character triad: girls (children);  
Sappho;  
Tithonus;

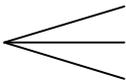
Poet's disposition: [my...] body old age now (γῆρας ἐπέλλαβε);  
I oft bemoan (στεναχίσδω);  
What's to do? (κεν ποείην);

The poet is old: my hair's turned [white] (τρίχες λεῦκαι δ' ἐγένοντο);  
My heart's grown heavy (βάρυς δὲ μ' ὁ θυμός πεπόηται);  
My knees will not support me (γόνα δ' οὐ φέροισι);

Paradigm: the tale was (ἔφαντο);  
Love-smitten (ἔρωι...);  
Carried off to the world's end (ἔσχατα...);

Moral: handsome (κάλον);  
Young (νέον);  
Yet in time grey age / o'ertook him (ἔμαρψε... γῆρας);

Below is the model of its **outer composition**:

1. Axis: Sappho  addresses girls (lines 1-2);  
personal reminiscences (lines 3-12);  
addresses girls (lines 15-16);
2. Time: Present (addresses girls, lines 1-2);  
Past (reminiscences, lines 3-12);  
Present (addresses girls, lines 15-16);
3. Space: Location of Sappho's school (actual, lines 1-2);  
Mythic space (Tithonus' paradigm, lines 9-12);  
Sappho's place (irreal, lines 15-16).

So, this small poem, which Martin West rightly called 'a masterpiece', is structured to the tripartite compositional pattern, typical of the lyric period. The tendency is obvious at the level of individual elements analysis. However, when I approached the piece as a structural whole, I was convinced that the element rendered through 15-16 lines is indispensable for the comprehensive analysis of the poem. Apart from its structure, the unity is also

dictated by its content. ‘The ... Muses’ lovely gift’, which Sappho advises young people to be zealous for, is disclosed in these final lines. Namely, it is ‘love for the sun’. Let us try to comprehend the symbol: Sappho maintains that outer looks and beauty are short-lived in the same way as the pleasure to enjoy these merits. However, there is another, everlasting happiness, which the Muses bestow upon artists, and which in fact is the ‘great gift’ (‘κάλα δῶρα’). In another surviving fragment Sappho calls her gift for poetry ‘the holy gift of the Muses’ (‘Μοῖσαν ἄγλαα δῶρα’).<sup>7</sup> In this respect, particularly interesting is the note survived in Aelianus’ work: ‘I think you have heard about Sappho claiming the following in the face of some women who believed they were rich: the Muses will grant her happiness and enviable glory, as she will not be forgotten after her death’ (Fr. 193 L.P.).

The fragment clearly suggests that the Muses made the poetess ‘ὀλβία(ν)’ ‘happy’ and ‘ζηλοπιή(ν)’ ‘enviable’. Besides, owing to them, she will not be forgotten after her death. The same idea is stated in another Sappho fragment.<sup>8</sup> Sappho believes that true poetry and true artist will be endowed with everlasting glory. Hence, it can be suggested that she was the first to state what in later poetry was established as Horace’s ‘exegi monumentum’.

Let us return to the Cologne poem: in the very first lines the poetess urges the girls to be zealous for ‘the Muses’ ... lovely gifts’ (implying that the gift is the source of everlasting happiness). This is followed by the lines describing her old age; however, the poetess is aware that outer beauty is perishable as illustrated through the paradigm of the myth about Tithonus. The renowned mentor of maiden’s school would not leave ambiguous the call concerning ‘the ... Muses’ lovely gift’ stated in the very first lines. Such a ‘requirement’ is provided for by the ring composition, characteristic of her verses, and the so-called tripartite pattern. As to the implications of ‘ἔρωσ τῶελίω’ (‘love for the sun’), it is a different point and is discussed in detail in my above-mentioned monograph. In my opinion, Sappho coined the expression to function as ‘the symbolic image for everlasting happiness’.<sup>9</sup> So, the above-mentioned closes up the logical circle: ‘You, girls, be zealous for the Muses’ lovely gift; despite my old age, I was allotted splendour (ἀβροσύνη), through which I have already been initiated into the glamour and grandeur of everlasting happiness (or love for the sun)’.

So, I believe there is every ground to suppose that the final lines of the Oxyrhynchus papyrus make up a logical ending for the Cologne poem.

<sup>7</sup> For more details, see: The Problem of Awakening an Individual and Some Aspects of Sapphic Weltanschauung, in: Tonia N., 1991, 47-75.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Fr. 147 L.P.; Fr. 55 L.P.

<sup>9</sup> See Tonia N., 1991, 56.