Social and decorative fabrics: the coverlet in Catullus 64

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1. Catullus 64.1-4: *Peliaco quondam prognatae uertice pinus*

*dicuntur liquidas Neptuni nasse per undas*

*Phasidos ad fluctus et fines Aeeteos,*

*cum lecti iuuenes, Argiuae robora pubis,*

Once upon a time, pine trees, the offspring of Pelion’s summit, are said to have swum through Neptune’s liquid waves to the waves of Phasis and Aeetes’ borders, when chosen young men, the strength of the Argive youth… (translation mine)

1. Catullus 1.3-7: *Corneli, tibi: namque tu solebas*

*meas esse aliquid putare nugas*

*iam tum, cum ausus es unus Italorum*

*omne aeuum tribus explicare cartis*

*doctis, Iuppiter, et laboriosis.*

To you Cornelius: for you are in the habit of considering my trifles to be something, when you alone dare to show every age of Italy in pages learned and, by God, laborious. (translation mine)

1. Catullus 4.1-2 : *Phaselus ille, quem uidetis, hospites, |ait fuisse nauium celerrimus,*

The famous Phaselus, which you see there, friends, said she is the fastest of ships. (translation mine)

1. 64.47-5: *puluinar uero diuae genial locatur*

*sedibus in mediis, Indo quod dente politum*

*tincta tegit roseo chonchyli purpura fuco.*

*haec uestis priscis hominum uariata figuris*

*heroum mira uirtutes indicat arte.*

But see, this royal marriage bed is being set for the goddess in the midst of the palace, smoothly fashioned of Indian tusk, covered with purple tinged with the rosy stain of the shell. This coverlet, broidered with shapes of ancient men, with wondrous art sets forth the worthy deeds of heroes. (this and all subsequent translations from the Loeb Classical Library)

1. 64.60-70 : *quem procul ex alga maestis Minois ocellis*

*saxea ut effigies bacchantis, prospicit, eheu,*

*prospicit et magnis curarum fluctuat undis,*

*non flauo retinens subtilem uertice mitram,*

*non contecta leui uelatum pectus amictu,*

*non tereti strophio lactentis uincta papillas,*

*omnia quae tot delapsa e corpore passim*

*ipsius ante pedes fluctus salis alludebant.*

*sed neque tum mitrae neque tum fluitantis amictus*

*illa uicem curans toto ex te pectore, Theseu,*

*tot animo, tota pendebat perdita mente.*

At whom afar from the weedy beach with streaming eyes the daughter of Minos, like a marble figure of a bacchanal, looks forth, alas! looks forth tempest-tost with great tides of passion. Nor does she still keep the delicate headband on her golden head, nor has her breast veiled by the covering of her light raiment, nor her milk-white bosom bound with the smooth girdle; all these, as they slipt off around her whole body, before her very feet the salt waves lapped. She for her headgear then, she for her floating raiment then, cared not, but on thee, Theseus, with all her thoughts, with all her soul, with all her mind (lost, ah lost!) was hanging, unhappy maid!

1. 64.76-9: *nam perhibent olim crudely peste coactam*

*Androgeonae poenas exsoluere caedsi*

*electos juuenes simul et decus innuptarum*

*Cecropian solita esse dapem dare Minotauro.*

For they tell how of old, drive by a cruel pestilence to pay a penalty for the slaughter of Androgeos, Cecropia was wont to give as a feast to the Minotaur chosen youths, and with them the flower of unwedded maids.

1. 64.85-8: *magnanimum ad Minoa uenit sedesque superbas.*

*hunc simul ac cupido conspexit lumine uirgo*

*regia, quam suauis exspirans castus odores*

*lectulus in molli complex matris alebat…*

Thus then, speeding his course with light bark and gentle gales, he comes to lordly Minos and his haughty halls. Him when the damsel beheld with eager eye, the princess, whom her chaste couch breathing sweet odours still nursed in her mohters soft embraces…

1. 64.94-102 :*heu misere exagitans immiti corde furors*

*sancte puer, curis hominum qui gaudia misces,*

*quaeque regis Golgos quaeque Idalium frondosum,*

*qualibus incensam iactastis mente puella*

*fluctibus, in flauo saepe hospite suspirantem!*

*quantos illa tulit languenti corde timores!*

*quanto saepe magis fulgore expalluit auri,*

*cum saeuum cupiens contra contendere monstrum*

*aut mortem appeteret Theseus aut praemia laudis!*

Ah! thou that stirrest cruel madness with ruthless heart, divine boy, who minglest joys of men with cares, and thou, who reignest over Golgi and leafy Idalium, on what billows did ye toss the burning heart of the maiden, often sighing for the golden-headed stranger! what fears did she endure with fainting heart! how often did she then grow paler than the gleam of gold, when Theseus, eager to contend with the savage monster, was setting forth to win either death or the meed of valour.

64.104-11: *nam uelut in summon quatientem brachia Tauro*

*quercum aut conigeram sudanti cortice pinum*

*indomitus turbo contorquens flamine robus,*

*eruit (illa procul radicitus exturbata*

*prona cadit, late quaeuis cumque obuia frangens),*

*sic domito saeuum prostrauit corpore Theseus*

*nequiquam uanis iactentem cornua uentis.*

For as a tree which waves its boughs on Taurus’ top, an oak or a cone-bearing pine with sweating bark, when a vehement storm twists the grain with its blast, and tears it up; - afar, wrenched up by the roots it lies prone, smashing over far and wide all it meets: so did Theseus overcome and lay low the bulk of the monster, vainly tossing his horns to the empty winds.

1. 64.116-20: *sed quid ego a primo digressus carmine plura*

*commemorem, ut linquens genitoris filia uultum,*

*ut consanguineae complexum, ut denique matris,*

*quae misera in gnata deperdiat laeta<batur>,*

*omnibus his Thesei dulcem praeoptarit amorem:*

But why should I leave the first subject of my song and tell of more; how the daughter, flying from her father’s face, the embrace of her sister, then of her mother last, who lamented, lost in grief for her daughter – how she chose before all these the sweet love of Theseus.

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