

"Shades" of Sappho: Melic Allusion in *Aeneid* 6.450-475
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"*Invitus, regina, tuo de litore cessi*" (*Aen.* 6.460). This line, spoken by Aeneas to Dido during their last meeting in the Underworld, has been the subject of much debate and investigation (cf Clausen, 1987; Conte, 1986; Griffiths 1995). At issue is the allusion (or more properly, allusions) it seems to contain to Catullus 66 and to Callimachus' *Coma Berenikes*: in a scene so filled with pathos and seriousness, why would Aeneas utter these words, only one word separated from a statement made by a lock of hair? I wish to add to this debate the suggestion that the line contains another allusion, to the melic poetry of Sappho, more specifically to fragment 94, in which a former lover says in anguish, "Ψάπφ', ἥ μάν σ' ἄέκοισ' ἀπυλιμπάνω," "Unwillingly, Sappho, did I leave you behind." Nor is this an isolated appearance of melic: the simile of the moon at 6.451-452 and Aeneas' vain pursuit of Dido at 6.475-476 both also contain strong Sapphic resonance (Campbell, 1983).

In the immense scholarship of intertextuality which has developed around the *Aeneid*, Greek archaic melic has received scant attention. In fact, at least one writer has dismissed the possibility of melic allusion in the Dido episode, citing the homosexuality and promiscuity so common in archaic Greek love poetry as inimical to Vergil's agenda (Cairns, 1989). I would argue, however, that the relationship between Dido and Aeneas follows perfectly the attributes of a "lyric" love affair as enumerated by Calame: it is intense, largely one sided, and ultimately does not lead to marriage or a permanent familial connection (Calame, 1999). In fact, much of the "tragedy" of the story can be said to arise from the conflicting views of love adopted by the two protagonists: Dido sees Aeneas as her husband, their physical and emotional relationship as inevitably a legal one as well, in Calame's terms not "lyric" but an "epic" love, such as is portrayed in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Aeneas does not share this view, instead feeling that whatever he and Dido might share, it is temporary, and so when the gods command him to be on his way, he, like Sappho's one time lover, obediently leaves.

The allusions to Sappho during the meeting in the Underworld can thus be understood as underlining this point: Aeneas pleads compulsion, and asserts that though he left, he was "unwilling." Dido's response, a stony silence, recalls Ajax's answer to Odysseus in *Odyssey* 11, and thus emphasizes her "epic" view of their relationship. Thus we see how allusion to melic helps to reinforce the characterization of Aeneas' relationship with Dido: intense, but thanks to misunderstanding, ultimately doomed.

Select Bibliography

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