

The Newest Sappho's Two Minds

One of the two new poems of Sappho published in 2014, the so-called Kypris poem, is neither an entirely new fragment nor unlike Sappho's other known love poems. According to Obbink, the Kypris poem "substantially augments Sappho fr. 26 Voigt (as previously known from P. Oxy. 1231 fr. 16), previous reconstructions of which it corrects as it invites new ones. As such, it can be seen to exhibit some of the motifs and language familiar from Sappho's love poetry elsewhere in book 1..." (2014, 37). This paper focuses on the similarities to fragments 1 and 31, and particularly on the way that fr. 26 presents contradictory expressions of love.

The language of the Kypris poem certainly shows verbal and thematic overlaps with fr. 1 and thematic repetitions with fr. 31 regarding the paradoxical nature of passion, in which the speaker is full of life and close to death, experiencing pain and desire. All three poems present a specific moment for the speaker, at the same time clarifying with words of repetition (such as "again," "repeatedly," "whenever") that the moment is not unique. The three also present general statements on desire by not naming the beloved, or (in fr. 26 and fr. 31) not giving the gender of the beloved, who is indicated in fr. 26.2 as "whomever one loves." Fr. 1 and fr. 26 directly address Aphrodite, requesting that she not inflict pain (both using the same word).

Obbink's translation of the first three lines (2014, 49) aligns the Kypris poem with others of Sappho's that recall the beloved's absence (such as frs. 16 and 94):

How wouldn't anyone feel anguish repeatedly,

Kypris, Queen, and especially wish to call

Back, whomever one really loves?

In my paper, however, I argue that the word and phrase order of the Greek present a more complex idea of passion, in which love causes pain and—even so—desire for the beloved:

πῶς κε δὴ τις οὐ θαμέως ἄσαιτο, How could someone not repeatedly feel pain,
Κύπρι δέσποινα, ὅτινα [δ]ὴ φιλεῖται Queen Kypris, by that person, whomever one loves
καὶ] θέλοι μάλιστα πάλιν κάλεσθαι; and wishes most of all to call back?

Or in Rayor's translation (2014, 41):

How can someone not be hurt and hurt again,
Queen Aphrodite, by the person one loves—
and wishes above all to ask back?

In this fragment, absence of the beloved does not cause anguish, but rather the loved one her or himself. The paradox is that even with the repetition of pain, the speaker wishes most of all to seek that person's return. In the Kypris poem, both the presence and the absence of the loved one cause pain. As is frequently true in Sappho's songs, the order of information matters in hearing the subtlety of her "two minds" (fr. 51).

Bibliography

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- Obbink, D. "Two New Poems by Sappho," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 189 (2014) 32-49.
- Rayor, D. and A. Lardinois. *Sappho: A New Translation of the Complete Works*. Cambridge, 2014.