

Looking at Praxilla's Fragment 8 as a Wedding Song

Since the historical information concerning the 5th century lyric poet Praxilla is sparse, there is much speculation about who she was and why her poetry, even the minimal amount that we have, has been preserved. Due to her popularity in her own time, attested by the statue of her created by Lysippus, and the fact that there are *scolia* attributed to her, a majority of scholars have speculated that Praxilla was a *hetaera*, while some more recent scholars have questioned the notion. Often in the midst of this debate is the poetry fragment *PMG 754* (Praxilla Fr. 8), in which a young woman is described as being both *parthenos* and *nymphē*, the former with respect to her head, and the latter to things below.

Based on the loose evidence surrounding Praxilla's popularity, as mentioned above, scholars for some time have read this fragment as a *hetaera* speaking to her sexual experience and then strengthened the claim using two pieces of material evidence. The first is a red-figure *kylix* with an inscription similar to the fragment's first line. Robert Renehan and others have even gone so far as to amend the poem to match more closely the inscription of the *kylix*. Second is the Thasos *stèle*, in which a portion of the inscription prohibits women both from looking out of windows and from being on the roof. A. J. Graham suggests that both of the provisions relate to prostitution and thus that they reaffirm the idea of Praxilla's Fr. 8 female figure being a prostitute herself. The difficulty with these pieces of evidence is that their relationship to the Praxilla fragment as verification of a *hetaera* figure becomes a circular argument.

In a recent publication, “‘Glancing Seductively through Windows’: The Look of Praxilla fr. 8 (*PMG 754*),” Vanessa Cazzato suggests that the fragment is perhaps part of a wedding song. Her reading brings to light a possible context for the poem which focuses on a bride's transition

from *parthenos* to *nymphē*, just as the female figure in the fragment. Cazzato's reading seems stronger than the previous school of thought. This paper will strengthen Cazzato's argument, using key words of the poem with parallels to other, primarily lyric, poems to reaffirm this fragment's relation to the bridal sphere and wedding song. Then it will continue on to suggest that in this fragment, Praxilla, as a poet, has inverted the stereotypical gender dynamics to create a more public position or position of power for the woman in her poem.

Bibliography

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