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The New Sappho Papyrus of Cologne or the Eternal Youth of Poetry

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Abstract: In contrast to the idea of the first editors of Sappho's poem, taken up by other scholars more recently, who consider that the text is incomplete and that it continued in the four lines that follow its copy in *P. Oxy.* 1787 (fr. 58,23–26 V.), this contribution aims to show that the poem may be a complete, harmonious composition with unitary meaning. To do so, a study of the composition, structure and style of the poem is carried out, with a proposal of reconstruction and translation, as well as its classification as a monodic poem destined for dance.

1. In 2004, three sequences of lines of the Cologne papyri collection (with inventory numbers 21351 and 21376) were published by M. Gronewald and R. W. Daniel¹. The first two sequences (ll. 1–8 and ll. 9–20) were attributed to two poems by Sappho and the third (ll. 21–24) was not, because of the metrics, among other reasons. In 2007 they were published as *P. Köln* Gr. 11 429 + *P. Köln* Gr. 11 430 (= LDAB 10253 = M-P³ 1440.01)². The lost margin of the sequence of ll. 9–20 was completed owing to the testimony of *P. Oxy.* 1787 fr. 1 and 2, published in 1922, which contains another twenty-six Sapphic lines, in this case damaged on the left margin, in which lines 11–22 coincide with the 12 lines of the Cologne papyrus mentioned (and the last two of the following four lines are attributed to Sappho by Clearchus [fr. 41 Wehrli] in Athenaeus 15,687b). The Cologne papyrus was dated to the early 3rd century B.C., and is thus the oldest Sappho papyrus published: the Oxyrhynchus Papyrus had been dated to between the 2nd and 3rd century A.D.

According to this and thanks to the effort of a number of scholars to reconstruct the damaged left margin of the first four lines of the text plus the two short syllables of the first choriamb of line 10, the text (including the proposals indicated to fill the gaps) and the translation of the poem would be as follows³:

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1 M. Gronewald/R. W. Daniel, "Ein neuer Sappho-Papyrus", *ZPE* 147 (2004) 1–8.

2 M. Gronewald/R. W. Daniel, "Griechische Literarische Texte: 429. Sappho", *Kölner Papyri*, Band 11 (Ch. Armoni, M. Gronewald, K. Maresch, et al., eds.), *Papyrologica Coloniensia* 7 (Paderborn 2007) 1–11; "Griechische Literarische Texte: 430. Lyrischer Text (Sappho-Papyrus)", *Kölner Papyri*, Band 11 (Ch. Armoni, M. Gronewald, K. Maresch, et al., eds.), *Papyrologica Coloniensia* 7 (Paderborn 2007) 12–9.

3 On text reconstruction and different proposals to fill the gaps, cf. J. A. Fernández-Delgado, "On the Cologne Sappho papyrus", *ZPE* 191 (2014) 21–24.

Δέκεσθε τὰ Μοῖσαν ἰοκ[ό]λπων κάλα δῶρα, παῖδες, 1
 ὄρχησθε δὲ κατὰ τὰν φιλάοιδον λιγύραν χελύνην·
 ἔμοι δ' ἄπαλον πρίν] ποτ' [ἔ]οντα χροά γῆρας ἥδη
 ἐπέλλαβε, λεῦκαι δ' ἐγ]έροντο τρίχες ἐκ μελαίναν·
 βάρυς δέ μ' ὁ [θ]ῦμος πεπόηται, γόνα δ' [ο]ὐ φέροισι, 5
 τὰ δὴ ποτα λαίψηρ' ἔον ὄρχησθ' ἴσα νεβρίοισι.
 τὰ <μὲν> στεναχίσδω θαμέως· ἀλλὰ τί κεν ποεῖην;
 ἀγήραον ἄνθρωπον ἔοντ' οὐ δύνατον γένεσθαι.
 καὶ γάρ π[ο]τα Τίθωνον ἔφαντο βροδόπαχυν Αὔων
 ἔρωι [δίφρον] εἰσανβάμεν' εἰς ἔσχατα γᾶς φέροισα[ν] 10
 ἔοντα [κ]άλον καὶ νέον, ἀλλ' αὐτον ὕμωις ἔμαρψε
 χρόνῳ πόλλιον γῆρας, ἔχ[ο]ντ' ἀθανάταν ἄκοιτιν.

Take, girls, the beautiful gifts of the fragrant-breasted Muses 1
And dance to the lively sound of the song-loving lyre.
My skin, once smooth, by old age has now been taken,
and my tresses, once black, became white;
my vigour has gone sluggish and my legs no longer sustain me, 5
that once were nimble for dancing like fawns' legs.
Often do I lament this, but what can I do?
It is impossible not to age being human.
As well rosy-armed Aurora one day for love it is said
took Tithonus to the ends of the earth in her chariot, 10
because he was young and beautiful, but nonetheless in time
hoary old age took hold of him, though immortal wife he had attained⁴.

2. In contrast to the idea of the first editors of Sappho's poem, taken up by other scholars more recently, who consider that the text is incomplete and that it continued in the four lines that follow its copy in *P. Oxy.* 1787 (fr. 58,23–26 V.), I believe that the poem may be a complete, harmonious composition with unitary meaning⁵. I shall try to explain this once I have glossed the two halves that

- 4 This should be the Spanish (my native language) translation:
Acoged, muchachas, los hermosos dones de las Musas de fragante seno 1
y danzad al agudo son de la lira amante del canto.
De mi piel, que antes era tersa, ya la vejez
se apoderó y mis cabellos, que eran negros, se pusieron blancos;
mi vigor se ha vuelto lento y no me sostienen las piernas, 5
que antaño eran ágiles para la danza como las de los cervatos.
De ello a menudo me lamento, pero ¿qué puedo hacer?
No es posible no envejecer siendo humano.
También Aurora de rosados brazos decían que un día por amor
se llevó a Titono hasta el fin de la tierra montada en su carro, 10
porque era hermoso y joven, pero sin embargo con el tiempo
de él se adueñó la canosa vejez, aunque esposa inmortal había logrado.
- 5 This is also the opinion of H. Bernsdorff, "Offene Gedichtschlüsse", *ZPE* 153 (2005) 1–6; M. L. West, "The New Sappho", *ZPE* 151 (2005) 1–9; A. Hardie, "Sappho, the Muses, and Life after Death", *ZPE* 154 (2005) 13–32; H. Rodríguez Somolinos, "Safo, Titono y la cigarra (*PKöln.* inv. 21351re + 21376 + *POxy.* 1787)", in *Ad amicam amicissime scripta. Homenaje a la profesora M^a Jose Lopez de Ayala* (Madrid 2005) I, 129–136; M. A. Santamaría Álvarez, "La suerte de Titono. En torno al nuevo poema de Safo sobre la vejez", in G. Hinojo Andrés/

clearly comprise the poem and within these halves the pair of compositional sequences that symmetrically shape them based on a series of six smaller units, each of which is composed of a pair of hagesichorean metres with double choriambic expansion, in distichs of more or less autonomous semantics that seem to suggest the true rhythmic basis of the choreography proposed⁶. The type of metre, which was named based on its presence in unexpanded form in an emblematic line by Alcman⁷, is yet another element of kinship that Sappho's poem has with the choral melic, to be added to everything else previously noted⁸.

Although based on a stichic line, each of the six pairs of lines grouped in each half of the poem are actually a kind of relatively independent short stanza well worked from the syntactic, stylistic and semantic point of view, with perhaps

J. C. Fernández Corte (Eds.), *Mvnyv Qvaesitvm Meritis. Homenaje a Carmen Codoñer* (Salamanca 2007) 785–794 and even before of V. Di Benedetto, “Osservazioni sul nuovo papiro di Saffo”, *ZPE* 149 (2004) 5–6; “La nuova Saffo e dintorni”, *ZPE* 153 (2005) 7–20, and W. Luppe, “Überlegungen zur Gedicht-Anordnung im neuen Sappho-Papyrus”, *ZPE* 149 (2004) 7–9. In contrast, sharing the opinion of the editors are M. Puelma and F. Angiò, “Sappho und Poseidippos. Nachtrag zum Sonnenuhr-Epigramm 52 A.-B. des Mailänder Papyrus”, *ZPE* 152 (2005) 13–15 and M. Magnani, “Note alla nuova Saffo”, *Eikasmos* 16 (2005) 41–49, and subsequently E. Livrea, “La vecchiaia su papiro: Saffo, Simonide, Callimaco, Cercida”, in G. Bastianini/A. Casanova (Eds.), *I papiri di Safo e di Alceo* (Atti del convegno internazionale di studi, Firenze, 8–9 giugno 2006) (Firenze 2007) 67–81; D. Yatromanolakis, “P. Colon. inv. 21351+21376 and P. Oxy. 1787 fr. 1: Music, Cultural Politics, and Hellenistic Anthologies”, *Hellenika* 58.2 (2008) 1–19; A. Lardinois, “The New Sappho Poem (P. Köln 21351 and 21376): Key to the Old Fragments”, in E. Green/M. Skinner (Eds.), *Classics@ Volume 4* (The Center for Hellenic Studies of Harvard University 2011), online edition of March 9: *The new Sappho on old age: textual and philosophical issues* (Washington D.C./Cambridge Mass. 2009) <http://chs.harvard.edu/wa/pageR?tn=ArticleWrapper&bdc=12&mn=3534>; G. Nagy, “The ‘New Sappho’ Reconsidered in the Light of the Athenian Reception of Sappho”, in E. Green/M. Skinner (Eds.), *Classics@ Volume 4* (The Center for Hellenic Studies of Harvard University 2011), online edition of March 11: *The new Sappho on old age: textual and philosophical issues* (Washington D.C./Cambridge Mass. 2009) chs.harvard.edu/wa/pageR?tn...bdc=12...=3534; and A. Bierl, “Der neue Sappho-Papyrus aus Köln und Sapphos Erneuerung”, chs.harvard.edu/wa/pageR?tn...bdc=12...=2012. Nagy's idea, shared by Bierl and following the early editors, is that the P. Oxy. copy plus the four following lines constitute the complete and canonical version of Sappho's poem, copied incomplete on P. Köln, and that this shorter version would be justified by its use in citharodic competitions and symposium performances, given the anthological character of the set of lines transmitted on both papyri.

- 6 My idea of the structure of the poem thus differs from others that have been made, cf. M. A. Santamaría Álvarez, *op. cit.*, or M. Steinrück, “Sapphos Alterslied und kein Ende”, *QUCC* 86 (2007) 89–94, who, based on the quadruple analysis, in my opinion not always relevant, of metric word-endings, interaction of phonic repetitions and rhythm, semantic level and repetition of lexical units, considers the poem a complete composition as well, but at the expense of thinking it a wedding song – of which there is no trace in the poem – and the love between Tithonus and Aurora a function of it.
- 7 Cf. M. L. West, *Greek Meter* (Oxford 1982) 47s. It is the characteristic verse of the compositions contained in Book IV of the Hellenistic edition of Sappho, according to the reconstruction proposed by D. Page, *Sappho and Alcaeus. An Introduction to the Study of Ancient Lesbian Poetry* (Oxford 1955) 319, who points out its metric organization “marked off in distichs”.
- 8 Cf. J. A. Fernández-Delgado, *op. cit.*

the exception of that formed by the last two lines, the first of which (l. 11) depends syntactically on the previous one. This means that the movement and rhythm of the poem, despite the uniformity of the *stichos*, proceed based on these small stanza units that move ahead superimposed on one another. In the Spanish translation I have tried to reflect this effect by using *á-o* assonance at the end of each pair of lines.

Thus, the first pair of lines, addressed to the young girls (and even leaving to one side the possible phonic parallelism of the pair of verbal forms proposed for the beginning), are closely connected and marked off from what comes after, owing to the mention of poetry (τὰ Μοῖσαν ἰσοκ[ό]λπων κάλα δῶρα) in the first line, and of the accompanying music (τὰν φιλόοιδον λιγύραν χελύνναν) in the second line. In the second pair of lines the first refers to the effects of old age on the visible part of the body, on the skin, and the second one refers to the hair, both lines being joined in a forced enjambement. The third pair refers to the effects of age on the strength of the body in the first line, specifically on the legs in the first line and the second, with the end of both lines (5–6) coinciding in a similar distribution of words that includes a double homeoteleuton and an identical sequence of paroxytone plus proparoxytone (γόνα δ' [ο]ὐ φέροισι: ἴσα νεβρίοισι). The fourth pair of lines contains the question and the negative and already known answer to whether it is possible to do anything about bothersome old age apart from bemoaning it, and the last word of the line is trisyllabic in both cases (ποεῖην: γένεσθαι). Acting as an *exemplum* for what comes before, the fifth pair of lines refers to the mythical abduction of Tithonus by Aurora (Dawn), who fell in love with him and took him to the edge of the Earth, where she returns each day eternally, and the last pair of lines describes how he, who was young and handsome, was also overtaken by old age despite having an immortal for his wife. The last word in both these lines is also trisyllabic, as well as proparoxytone (ἔμαρψε: ἄκοιτιν).

The six pairs of lines, in turn, can be grouped into two halves of three and three, with a structure between them that is to a large extent specular. In the first half, the first of the three pairs of lines contains the invocation the poetic subject makes to the young girls of the Sapphic group exhorting them to take, to receive, in short to enjoy the gift of poetry and to dance to the rhythm of its song, as we understand (φιλόοιδον, l. 2), and its musical accompaniment. The other two pairs of lines posit, on the contrary, the inability of the poetic subject to dance because of old age, the effects of which are described concisely but effectively, at the level of the outer body and the hair in the first pair of lines and as concerns the energy and vigour of the body and legs in the second pair; emphasis is put on the last element, the most important one in the counterpoint, furthermore with the use of a line that includes, in addition to an adjective (λαΐψηρ', referring to the past), a comparison (l. 6), when the description of the other three elements is made only with adjectives (ἄπαλον, referring to the past; λεῦκαι and μελαίναν, referring to

the present and the past, respectively; βάρυς referring to the present, successively).

In the second half of the poem the first pair of lines replaces the invocative-interpellative component of its homologue pair of lines in the first part with a personal declaration and a purely rhetorical self-interpellation of the poetic subject as to what can be done in the face of old age apart from bemoaning it, followed by her negative response in the form of a gnome that has universal applicability (l. 8). The other two pairs of lines introduce the myth of Tithonus and Aurora in a summarized fashion limited to the aspects that are relevant to the case (the same as in the description of the effects of ageing in the two homologous pairs of lines in the first part). The one is named after the other in the same line (9), the name of Tithonus clearly standing out in front of the rest of the sentence, with Aurora falling in love and abducting him to her immortal residence away from the Earth, all for a beauty that age would also wither despite the immortality of the wife.

According to the myth, told for the first time in the *Hymn to Aphrodite* (l. 218 et seq.), whose intertext the debated imperfect ἔφοντο (l. 9) seems to be pointing to⁹ and whose *pars epica* in turn addresses the loves of this goddess with the mortal Anchises, Tithonus was a Trojan prince, the brother of King Priam, who looked after livestock, the same as the Trojan Anchises, who occasionally enjoyed himself playing the lyre (*h. Ven.* 80). Just as Aphrodite fell in love with Anchises, Aurora fell in love with Tithonus, and she asked Zeus to give him immortality, at the same time forgetting to ask that he will be saved from old age. Tithonus gradually grew old and withered, with the exception of his voice (*h. Ven.* 237), which a certain version of the myth present in the prologue to the *Aitia* of Callimachus (fr. 1,32–38 Pf.) transforms into that of the melodious cicada. Thus, although it is not mentioned in Sappho's text, this part of the myth suggests an extension of the comparison of Tithonus (and indirectly Anchises) with the poet herself to the extent that both of them practised the same profession of *aoidós*, a confrontation confirmed in turn by certain representations of Tithonus on ceramics holding a lyre in his hand¹⁰. The immediate function of the myth, as in many cases, is clearly to vouch for (καὶ γάρ, l. 9) the gnomic assertion given in answer (l. 8), and thus it also vouches for the postulate, formulated indirectly in the form of a rhetorical question (l. 7), that nothing can be done to avoid

9 Cf. R. Rawles, "Notes on the Interpretation of the 'New Sappho'", *ZPE* 157 (2006) 1–7; L. B. Bettarini, "Note esegetiche alla nuova Saffo: i versi di Titono (fr. 58, 19–22 V.)", *ZPE* 159 (2007) 1–10; *pace* C. G. Brown, "To the End of the Earth: Sappho on Tithonus", *ZPE* 178 (2011) 21–25, who has the merit of showing the true meaning of the phrase εἰς ἔσχατα γῆς in connection with the state of supreme happiness usually bound in myth to the ends of the earth, but who is not persuasive in contemplating the mythical reference by Sappho in two moments, from where the strange use of ἔφοντο instead of the verb in present, an explanation which doesn't take into account the presence of π[ο]τα, l. 9.

10 Cf. A. Bierl, *op. cit.*

old age. Thus we now have new points of affinity of Sappho's poem with particularly characteristic traits – the gnome and the myth and the connection between them – of the choral lyric genre, to add to those pointed out previously.

The paronomasia of the terms *χελόνναν*, l. 2: *μελαίναν*, l. 4, ending, respectively, the second line of the first two pairs of the first part of the poem, together with the two words with proparoxytone at the end and with homeoteleuton ([ο]ν) *φέροισι: νεβρίοισι* that ends the last pair of lines in this part (5–6), undoubtedly contribute to lending cohesion to the whole. In a parallel way, the words *γένεσθαι*, l. 8: *φέροισα*[ν, l. 10, on the one hand, and *ἔμαρψε: ἄκοιτιν*, ll. 11–12 on the other, which share, respectively, analogous characteristics and positions in the second part of the poem, also add to the cohesion of the poem's composition, at the same time that they reinforce the already indicated mirror reflection of this part of the poem with respect to the structure of the first part. Also contributing to this same objective is the semantic and formal correspondence between the sentence summarizing the description of the effects of ageing on the skin on the part of the poetic subject in the first part of the poem, *ἔμοι δ' ἄπαλον πρίν] ποτ' [ἔ]οντα χροά γῆρας ἦδη / ἐπέλλαβε*, ll. 3–4, and the one in the second part that tells how, with time, old age eventually reached Tithonus, young and beautiful as he was, *ἔοντα [κ]άλον καὶ νέον, ἀλλ' αὐτον ὕμωζ ἔμαρψε / χρόνῳ πόλλον γῆρας*, ll. 11–12, a correspondence that leaves patently clear the paradigmatic function that the myth adopts in this text. What is more, the actual function of the description of the effects of ageing with respect to the invocative-exhortative pair of lines that precede it, in the first part of the poem, is not very different from the expressly explanatory function (*καὶ γάρ*, l. 9) that the mythical story has in the second part in regard to the sequence of self-lamentation, rhetorical interpellation, and gnomic (and therefore self-exhortative) response contained in the preceding pair of lines: although not explicitly, this description likewise has an explanatory function (“[sc. because] my skin, once smooth, by old age has been taken ...”), in this case, of why the poetic subject cannot participate in the dance she is urging the girls to do. Thus the first half of the poem could easily pass for a manifestation of the *carpe diem* theme, if the second part did not clearly show the (self-)consolation for the deprivation by means of the gnome, the example from the myth and above all through the situational though not obvious parallel that it provides, and that I shall attempt to reveal to its full extent.

However, the stylistic resource that most contributes to reinforce the semantic cohesion of the second half of the poem is undoubtedly the strong alliteration and the symmetry (chiasmus) of the syllabic distribution (*α-α-εοντ*: 4-3-2 syll. :: *ε-οντ-α-α*: 2-4-3 syll.) among the words comprising the syntagmas *ἀγήραον ἄνθρωπον ἔοντ'*, at the beginning of the mythical reference, l. 8, and *ἔχ[ο]ντ' ἀθανάταν ἄκοιτιν*, at the end of it, l. 12, a stylistic connection which, taken outside the context as its sonorous power suggests it should be, seems to synthesize, creating a false expectation, the idea that could be expected from a story such as the one the myth refers to but nonetheless does not illustrate, that of not grow-

ing old and having a wife who is immortal. On the contrary, what the myth illustrates is the gnomic thought, expressed earlier (l. 8), that no human can avoid growing old, not even someone who, like Tithonus, has been blessed, the same as Anchises, with the love of an immortal woman.

In my opinion, then, it is undoubtedly this last point of the mythical story that actually completes and culminates the cohesion between the two parts of the poem, providing it with its true unity, although at first sight it may be more difficult to detect it than the other formal and semantic correspondences pointed out, as usually occurs in the so-called *pointe* of a literary genre like the epigram, the well-controlled and narrowly responsive nature of which this brief poem by Sappho seems to give a foretaste. Indeed, the concise mythical story of Tithonus clearly echoes the case of ageing that affects the poetic subject and she attempts to illustrate with this example, as seen in the formal parallels adduced and in another more specific one that it is still not too late to point out: the unusual *iunctura* even for Sappho $\pi\acute{o}\lambda\lambda\iota\omicron\nu\gamma\eta\rho\alpha\varsigma$, l. 12, expressively summarizes the several aspects of ageing referred to in ll. 3–4, including of course the whitening of the hair ($\lambda\epsilon\upsilon\kappa\alpha\iota \dots \tau\rho\acute{\iota}\chi\epsilon\varsigma$, l. 4). The mirror, then, into which the poetic subject looks in order to console herself ($\alpha\lambda\lambda\grave{\alpha} \tau\acute{\iota} \kappa\epsilon\nu \pi\omicron\epsilon\acute{\iota}\eta\nu$; l. 7) for the sorrow she feels ($\tau\grave{\alpha} <\mu\acute{\epsilon}\nu> \sigma\tau\epsilon\nu\alpha\chi\acute{\iota}\sigma\delta\omega \theta\alpha\mu\acute{\epsilon}\omega\varsigma$, l. 7) about not being able to take part in the dance of the girls in her poetic circle (for whom she composes poetry, sings it and accompanies it to music) because of the senile weakness of her legs, is Tithonus. His beauty and youth, which captured the love of Aurora ($\epsilon\acute{\omicron}\nu\tau\alpha \kappa[\epsilon]\acute{\alpha}\lambda\omicron\nu \kappa\alpha\acute{\iota} \nu\acute{\epsilon}\omicron\nu$, l. 11), are precisely what the poetic subject has lost, we infer, upon getting old, and by means of this parallel she insinuates it instead of expressly and inelegantly declaring it.

But what element in the first part of the poem is being mirrored in the expression $\acute{\alpha}\theta\alpha\nu\acute{\alpha}\tau\alpha\nu \acute{\alpha}\kappa\omicron\iota\tau\iota\nu$, l. 12, which closes the poem? And even before that, of $\beta\rho\omicron\delta\acute{o}\pi\alpha\chi\upsilon\nu \text{A}\acute{\upsilon}\omega\nu$, l. 9, the goddess emulating Aphrodite? According to West, the “immortal wife” alludes to the youth and beauty of the Sapphic cohort of girls, who, “like undergraduates, are always young”¹¹. Now, although it is true that the mention of the wife could perhaps refer to the type of sexual relation that Sappho seems to have with the young girls in her circle, the latter could never be described as immortal, despite the fact that the groups of girls were periodically renewed. What is, in contrast, as immortal as Tithonus’ goddess wife ($\acute{\alpha}\theta\alpha\nu\acute{\alpha}\tau\alpha\nu \acute{\alpha}\kappa\omicron\iota\tau\iota\nu$, l. 12), with whom not for nothing they share the only other reference to a divinity mentioned in the text and their description by means of a sonorous type of compound possessive epithet based on a part of the body and a flower with which it is compared (and thus of a purely metaphorical and purely ornamental nature: $\beta\rho\omicron\delta\acute{o}\pi\alpha\chi\upsilon\nu$, l. 9: $\iota\}ο\kappa[\acute{o}]\lambda\pi\omega\nu$, l. 1), are $\tau\grave{\alpha} \text{M}\acute{o}\iota\varsigma\alpha\nu \iota\}ο\kappa[\acute{o}]\lambda\pi\omega\nu$

11 M. L. West, “The New Sappho”, *ZPE* 151 (2005) 1–9. Cf. also C. Geissler, “Der Tithonosmythos bei Sappho und Kallimachos. Zu Sappho fr. 58 V., 11–22 und Kallimachos, Aitia fr. 1 Pf.”, *Göttinger Forum für Altertumswissenschaft* 8 (2005) 105–114 <http://www.gfa.d-r.de/dr,gfa,008,2005,a,05.pdf>; R. Rawles, *op. cit.*, 4–7; A. Bierl, *op. cit.*

κάλα δῶρα, v. 1, “the beautiful gifts of the Muses ...”, that is, the gift of poetry. This is the gift that Sappho gives to her young followers, and that like the goddess Aurora (and like Tithonus’ own voice according to the mythical version of *h. Ven.* 237) will last eternally despite its author’s ageing¹². This was the real surprise that Sappho reserved for the final moment of the poem and to which she subtly refers in its beginning in the form of a hidden *Ring-Komposition* (τὰ Μοῖσαν ... κάλα δῶρα, v. 1: ἀθανάτων ἄκοιτιν, l. 12), a compositional structure familiar to Sappho’s poetic techniques, as her best known poems attest (cf. 1 and 16 V.), starting with the one for which it shows a particular structural affinity (31 V.), as I have already said¹³.

3. Besides the explanation adduced by West and others, there have been other attempts to justify the presence of the myth of Tithonus in the poem and its ultimate meaning within it. In some cases it is seen simply as an illustration of the theme of old age in the person of the hero, Tithonus, who represents it *par excellence*¹⁴; at other times it is seen as an argument affirming that all humans necessarily grow old, within an ending structure that is supposedly “open” after

12 Theognis viewed it this way (cf. v. 250 ἀγλαὰ Μουσάων δῶρα ἰοστεφάνων) in the promise of immortality made to Cynos through his poetry (ll. 237–254). The compound epithet φιλόοιδον, which describes the lyre, v. 2, is not really ornamental but describes and defines the instrument, which is to accompany the song.

13 Cf. J. A. Fernández-Delgado, *op. cit.*, pace L. Edmunds, “The New Sappho: ἔφοντο (9)”, *ZPE* 156 (2006) 23–26; “Tithonus in the ‘New Sappho’ and the Narrated Mythical Exemplum in Archaic Greek Poetry”, in E. Green/M. Skinner (Eds.), *Classics@ Volume 4* (The Center for Hellenic Studies of Harvard University 2011), on-line edition of March 9: *The new Sappho on old age: textual and philosophical issues*, Washington D.C./Cambridge Mass. 2009 <http://chs.harvard.edu/wa/pageR?tn=ArticleWrapper&bdc=12&mn=3534>; D. Yatromanolakis, *op. cit.*; A. Lardinois, *op. cit.*; G. Nagy, *op. cit.* The greatest stumbling block, in my view, for the continuation, as these scholars propose, of the *P. Köln* poem in the four lines that follow it in *P. Oxy.*, is the content that can be glimpsed in the fragmentary state of these lines, which in their closest point of contact could refer to the fame of the poet after her death, in the same line as the fragment that precedes the poem in *P. Köln* and that surely can be explained by the fact that it formed part of a thematic anthology; but this is a theme that, albeit related, is different from that of the immortality or “unwitherability” of poetry in contrast to the poet’s ageing, and of which the twelve lines in question in the former make no mention. Below is the text of *P. Oxy* 1787 (fr. 58,23–26 V.):

[]μέναν νομίσδει

[]αῖς ὁπάσδοι

25 ἔγω δὲ φίλημμ’ ἀβροσύναν,] τοῦτο καὶ μοι
τὸ λάμπρον ἔρος τῶελίω καὶ τὸ κάλον λέλι,ογχε.

The integration of the fragment proposed by V. Di Benedetto, “Il tetrastico di Saffo e tre postille”, *ZPE* 155 (2006) 5 is as follows:

θάνοισαν ἄοιδον τὸ πᾶν οὐδεὶς φθ]μέναν νομίσδει
ἄλλοισι τύχην ὅσσα θέλωσι Κρονίδ]αῖς ὁπάσδοι.

25 ἔγω δὲ φίλημμ’ ἀβροσύναν, [ἴστε δὲ] τοῦτο καὶ μοι
τὸ λάμπρον ἔρος ἀελίω καὶ τὸ κάλον λέλογχε.

14 Cf. M. Gronewald, R. W. Daniel, “Nachtrag zum neuen Sappho-Papyrus”, *ZPE* 149 (2004) 1–4.

the use of the myth, as occurs, for example, in some of Pindar's poems¹⁵. More interesting in my view, however, are the explanations that address the consoling part of the myth, such as that by Geissler, who, adducing as parallels the passage from *h. Ven.* 237 according to which Tithonus preserved his voice in the midst of his progressive decrepitude, or the passages from Homer in regard to Nestor and his proverbial eloquence despite his elderliness, considers that Sappho finds her consolation in the continuing survival of her enduring poetic voice¹⁶. There is also the suggestion made by Rodríguez Somolinos, who points to the song of the cicada mentioned by Callimachus as the key to that endurance¹⁷. Further, we have the proposal made by Hardie, according to which Sappho's poem and the mythical story included in it serve as a compensation and consolation for the loss of beauty and youth, with the lesson in moral beauty, "the beautiful gifts of the Muses", that can be derived from the poem for the young girls¹⁸. Attempts have also been made to see Sappho's consolation in something that precisely differentiates her situation from that of Tithonus: that she sees hope in the liberation from the sorrows and troubles of old age that death will bring her, in contrast to what has happened to the immortal mythical hero, who must remain old forever¹⁹.

I believe, nonetheless, that in this case it is not necessary to force the receiver of Sappho's poem to appeal to literary testimonies beyond her own, to look for a key such as that of the moral lesson, only implicit in the poem, or the idea of death as liberation from old age, for which no allusion can be perceived in the poem itself, to prove that the true gift that the Muses gave to the poet, that is, their poetic inspiration as she suggests in the first line of the poem, is the equivalent in the paradigmatic and consoling mirror of the myth of Tithonus to that "immortal wife" with which the poem concludes, as well as the immortality of the mythical hero and perhaps his voice, the only thing that the goddess managed to have preserved in him unscathed. That is, the immortality that the gift of poetry provides, eternally surviving through the voices of the successive generations of its singers, is without doubt the consolation which Sappho turns to as a compensation for the lack of physical faculties – which are none other than those the poem describes – that old age has entailed. There is a well-known Sapphic fragment (55 V.) that very clearly expresses, albeit through negativity, this idea of immortality that the gift of poetry provides, as well as its opposite:

κατθάνοισα δὲ κείσῃ οὐδέ ποτα μναμοσύνα σέθεν
ἔσσετ' οὐδέ τ' ποκ' τ' ὕστερον· οὐ γὰρ πεδέχῃς βρόδων

15 H. Bernsdorff, *op. cit.*

16 C. Geissler, *op. cit.*

17 H. Rodríguez Somolinos, *op. cit.*

18 A. Hardie, *op. cit.*

19 M. A. Santamaría Álvarez, *op. cit.*, who to support his idea cites a testimony by Mimnermus in regard to Tithonus (fr. 4 W.) and another one classified among the Sappho fragments of uncertain authorship (*Inc. Auct.* fr. 18 (b) V.), both expressing a preference for death over old age.

22 Cf. in this respect the parallels, in Sappho and outside Sappho, contributed by the works by M. Gronewald/R. W. Daniel, "Ein neuer Sappho-Papyrus", *ZPE* 147 (2004) 1–8; "Nachtrag zum neuen Sappho-Papyrus", *ZPE* 149 (2004) 1–4; V. Di Benedetto, "Osservazioni sul nuovo papiro di Saffo", *ZPE* 149 (2004) 5–6; "La nuova Saffo e dintorni", *ZPE* 153 (2005) 7–20; H. Bernsdorff, "Schwermut des Alters im neuen Kölner Sappho-Papyrus", *ZPE* 150 (2004) 27–32 and *op. cit.*; M. L. West, "The New Sappho", *ZPE* 151 (2005) 1–9; A. Hardie, *op. cit.*; M. Puelma/F. Angiò, *op. cit.*

certain thematic considerations of old age as I have just pointed out, in particular by the narrow confluence between the compositional model of this poem and that adopted by the known fr. 31 V. Both are constituted by an invocation in second person to one or more girls in Sappho's poetic circle, followed by a semantic counterpoint with the contents of the former, which consists of the more or less detailed serial description of sensations or effects on the poetic subject herself, of mental motivation in one case, and physical in the other, followed by a consolatory self-interpellation, followed in turn by its justification, which in fr. 31 was lost (although it could consist of a gnome to judge by its hypothetical beginning: ἐπεὶ καὶ πένητα ... "because also (to) the poor ...") and in the present poem is expressed by means of a gnome followed by an *exemplum* from myth. And all of this is supported in both cases by an effective use of *Ring-Komposition* (φαίνεται μοι, 31,1: φαίνομ' ἔμ' αὖται, 31,16; τὰ Μοῖσαν ... κάλα δῶρα: ἔχ[ο]ντ' ἀθανάταν ἄκοιτιν, lines 1 and 12 of the present poem, with a more sophisticated use of the procedure), through which the poet usually shows longing (cf. Saf. 1 V. ἀλλὰ τυῖδ' ἔλθ', v. 4: ἔλθε μοι καὶ νῦν, v. 25; 16 V.,1–2: 19–20; that is, all the cases in which it is possible to see this).

As regards the unity of the poem, apart from the ring composition already pointed out and regardless of whether the poem consists basically of the same structural elements as poem 31 V. (invocation + self-descriptive counterpoint + self-consolation – which could possibly comprise gnome and even myth in both cases: that is, in the end, the well-known type of three-part composition), I have already indicated how in this case its components are organized into a mirror image or specular format that consists of two halves of the same length, each of which has three pairs of lines that are relatively autonomous, with a somewhat analogous relation between the first pair on the one hand and the other two pairs on the other. The meaning of the poem is to exhort the young girls in Sappho's poetic circle to receive poetic creation, in general, and the present song in particular, and make it their own while dancing to the sound of the song and the music played by the author/poetic subject, who says she cannot dance as she used to, because the progress of old age impedes it. But she does not wish to complain about something that is inevitable, since old age comes to all, as occurred with her *tertium comparationis*, Tithonus, despite his having attained immortality through the mediation of his immortal wife; the same, it gives us to understand, as the poet, who, like Tithonus (whose case in turn is an echo of that of Anchises), will also be immortal through her immortal poetry.

The poem is likewise extremely interesting as regards the question of its assignment to the poetic genres of archaic lyric poetry, and, since, as is well-known, it is not always easy to classify each of the items preserved into these genres. We have already seen how Sappho addresses a group of girls, most likely a chorus of dancers, accompanied by song and the music of the lyre, and whose performance could thus be imagined in the context of a more or less public celebration, although it surely did not go beyond Sappho's poetic sphere of activity. The poem

also shares the metre and a very refined use of combined gnome and myth with the choral lyric, even with the conciseness with which it is handled. A choral poem by Alcman (26 Page *PMG*) has been adduced as a close parallel of this one inasmuch as an expression of the feeling of being unable to dance owing to a weakening of the legs from old age²³. And indeed some scholars refer to Sappho's poem as if it were a choral song²⁴. Nonetheless, we have already seen that it is fitting to imagine that the context of its execution, unlike that for Alcman's poem, is that of a monodic song accompanied by the music of the lyre played by the poet herself and choreographed by the girls in her circle, who, unlike the author/poetic subject, still have legs light enough for dancing.

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- 23 οὐ μ' ἔτι, παρσενικαὶ μελιγάρυες ἰαρόφωνοι,
γυῖα φέρην δύναται· βάλε δὴ βάλε κηρύλος εἶην,
ὅς τ' ἐπὶ κύματος ἄνθος ἅμ' ἀλκυόνεσσι ποτῆται
νηδεὺς ἦτορ ἔχων, ἀλιπόρφυρος ἰαρόδς ὄρνις.

Alcman's fr. is also addressed to a chorus of girls, saying that his legs can no longer sustain him, but he does not insist on other effects of old age. Rather, he uses it as a pretext to manifest his desire to become a halcyon, and like the males of these sacred fish in their old age, be transported over the waves like a bird by the females. The girls in the chorus, on the other hand, are clearly singers at the same time (παρσενικαὶ μελιγάρυες ἰαρόφωνοι).

- 24 Cf. A. Lardinois, *op. cit.*; G. Nagy, *op. cit.*