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Sappho Fr. 96,8 Neri: Why the Moon Lost a Syllable*

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This piece is a fresh take on the *crux philologorum* in Sappho fr. 96,8, an extended moon simile, where Aeolic σελάννα, a commonplace of Sapphic poetry, easily restituted *ex coniectura* by W. Schubart in his *editio princeps* of PBerol. 9722 in 1902, was ousted by an unmetrical, if poetic, μήνα. The author offers an overview of the past and most recent scholarly effort along with an attempt (albeit a speculative one) to approach the issue of the irrational *ratio corruptelae* from the part of the resonant adjective βροδοδάκτυλος, an altogether uncommon epithet of the moon, paying close attention to the fact that the intruding word is disyllabic. The dactylic feel of the weighty adjective βροδοδάκτυλος is deemed at some point to have prevailed in a scribe's *dictation interne* to the result that ἥως could have landed in the text proper, or could have found its way there gradually from an intrusive marginal gloss left by a learned scribe unable to keep the Homeric clausula ροδοδάκτυλος ἥως to himself. At some point another, no less learned scribe, attentive to the context of the simile, picked up μήνα, not σελήνη, as his remedy of choice, sticking to the number of syllables in the now resident ἥως.

Keywords: Sappho, fr. 96,8, moon simile, conjectural criticism.

Vsevolodo Zelchenko quinquagenario

νῦν δὲ Λύδαισιν ἐμπρέπεται γυναί-
κεσσιν ὥς ποτ' ἀελίω

* Attending Vsevolod Zeltchenko's Sappho class when fr. 96 was read and discussed, the author idly promised herself (a promise soon forgotten) to try and discover how the corruption of σελάννα to μήνα arose. An explanation offered here suggested itself one day; it's a simple explanation, with the error presumed to be stemming from *dictation interne* and brought about not by the 'moon', but by its lengthy attribute. However unsuccessful this idea should prove, let the soft light of Sappho's moon simile bring, against all odds, some hope of a new morn, which, or so the author presumes, once found its unwarranted way into Sappho's text.

⁸ βροδοδάκτυλος perg. : ἀργυροδ- Hindley 2002 | σελάννα Schubart 1902 : μήνα perg. : <κε> μήνα Privitera 2008, 2009a.

And now she stands out among the Lydian wives as when after the sunset the rosy-fingered moon surpassing all the stars

The *crux* in line 8, all but effaced from the text of the most recent critical edition of C. Neri (his text and apparatus criticus above), lies in the absence of a convincing *ratio corruptelae* for the substitution of a rare, and above all, unmetrical (the metre requires a three-syllable word of a pattern $\cup - -$) Homeric μήνα of PBerol. 9722 for Aeolic commonplace σελάννα, the word Sappho uses in similar scenes in fr. 34, 154 (each time in verse-end bacchius). Promptly and easily corrected by W. Schubart in his *editio princeps* of 1902, the conjecture σελάννα, palmary in itself, had a weakness of being ungrounded, with Schubart himself refraining from any attempt at its defense. It has proved difficult ever since to explain just how a rare unmetrical word could have ousted a metrical common one. Giving a brief outline of the scholarly effort that followed, which, to my mind, has somewhat run out of road, I would then suggest shifting attention to the adjective βροδοδάκτυλος.

D. Page was the first to voice doubt and obelise the whole phrase †ἄ βροδοδάκτυλος μήνα†, and then μήνα alone (thus 96 L-P), without accepting σελάννα either.¹ Putting explanations of a simple one-word marginal gloss² aside, one is left with either mechanical corruption or some kind of complex involvement of the conscious or semi-conscious mind of a scribe or a number of them with the text and any marginal exegetical material. R. Janko suggests a haplographic error in ΟΣΣΕ with further elements of conscious conjecturing or “intelligent misreading” of the remaining letters on part of a (very intelligent) scribe,³ while C. Neri seems to fancy this explanation as well,⁴ but prefers to consider μήνα a gloss of a more complex provenance, stemming from certain marginal notes on dialect, Sapphic scholia, and synonyms, later epitomised, and the result crammed to ἄλλοι σελήνη, τινὲς δε μήνα, further abbreviated to σελήνη μήνα.⁵ Neri, in fact, comes close to the idea suggested below, but still seems to consider glossing to be the initial cause, with μήνα then prevailing as a variant in its own right, and more pleasing to the ear of those who still had the rhythm of the Homeric clausula ῥοδοδάκτυλος ἥως on their minds.⁶

¹ Page 1955, 87, 90.

² Heitsch 1967, 391, suggesting that μήνα, by that time a rather common poetic word (see, indeed, LSJ s. v.), could be required as a gloss not for σελήνη, but for σελάννα; Bolling 1961, 155, suggesting Attic provenance, with μήνα an Acc. of μείς, a gloss on Acc. σελάνναν, an “unconscious peculiar error” on part of the scribe.

³ Janko 1982, 323.

⁴ Neri 2018, 28: “possono in effetti aver partorito questo miracolo lunare”.

⁵ Neri 2001, 11–18; Neri 2018, 31–33, a lengthy reiteration of 2001 with minor additions.

⁶ Neri 2018, 34, in small print.

Let us now turn to this very adjective βροδοδάκτυλος and voice a point of difference with the above. Deemed (wrongly⁷) unsuitable as an attribute of the moon, its corruptive potential has not, as it transpires, been given enough attention, while the fact that obtrusive unmetrical μήνα is disyllabic could offer a welcome hint. What I would suggest is that the dactylic (and together with the article forming 2da) Homeric adjective ῥοδοδάκτυλος with its fixed position in the fifth foot (see LfrgE s. v.), the very own epithet of disyllabic ἠώς, prevailed over the Sapphic context altogether. Before the ultimate scribe became ignorant of any meaning whatever — thus Schubart commenting on the quality of the PBerol. 9722 dated between 6th and 7th CE — the Sapphic texts were long held in the hands of people who knew their Homer, and ἠώς could have thus directly found its way in the text ousting σελάννα and making the line more dactylic than it should be (it is a phalécian) in what could be treated as a semi-conscious instance of *dictation interne*. Later on, in a more conscious moment, another scholarly scribe realised that the context required the moon, and changed the insidious ἠώς to equimetrical μήνα, thus preserving — or so he thought — the metre and restoring the sense.

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Sappho Fr. 96,8 Neri: почему луна стала двусложной

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В заметке предложена попытка нового взгляда на *crux philologorum* à βροδοδάκτυλος μήνα в Sappho fr. 96,8, развернутое сравнение с луной, в котором эолийское слово для луны σελάννα, обычное в сапфической поэзии (оно встречается в целом ряде фрагментов) и легко восстановленное В. Шубартом *ex coniectura* в *editio princeps* PBerol. 9722 1902 г., было вытеснено неметричным поэтизмом μήνα. Автор заметки предлагает краткий обзор прошлых и недавних научных работ, посвященных анализу этого места, а также попытку (хотя и неизбежно умозрительную) подойти к проблеме иррациональной *ratio corruptelae* со стороны звучного прилагательного βροδοδάκτυλος, редкого, но возможного эпитета луны, обращая при этом внимание на то, что вторгшееся на место σελάννα слово является двусложным. Можно предположить, что дактилическое звучание весомого прилагательного βροδοδάκτυλος, неотъемлемой части гомеровской клау-

⁷ See LfrgE s. v.; West 1978, ad v. 610.

зулы ἡ ῥοδοδάκτυλος ἦώς (2da пятой и шестой стопы), в какой-то момент возобладало в *dictation interne* писца, в результате чего двусложное ἦώς могло попасть прямо в текст, или проникло туда постепенно из навязчивой маргинальной глоссы, оставленной ученым писцом, не сумевшим удержать столь знакомую гомеровскую клаузулу при себе. В какой-то момент другой, не менее ученый переписчик, более внимательный к контексту и образу в сравнении, исправил текст, выбрав в качестве замены не общеупотребительное слово σελήνη, а μήνα, придерживаясь количества слогов в ставшей уже привычной двусложной ἦώς.

Ключевые слова: Сапфо, fr. 96,8, развернутое сравнение с луной, конъектуральная критика.

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