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SAPPHO 1. 1–4 L.-P.: THRONE OR PATTERNS?*Vlada A. Chernysheva*

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The paper is concerned with the meaning and translation of the adjective ποικιλόθρονος used by Sappho as an epithet of the Greek goddess of love in the so-called Ode to Aphrodite. Classical scholars interpret this compound epithet in different ways. The majority of scholars are inclined to understand the second part as the stem θρον- which means ‘throne’. However, as it was proposed by G. Wustmann, this part of the word could be thought to have been derived from θρόνα and thus to be translated as ‘embroidered flowers’. In this paper, I am trying to show that the once suggested reference to embroidered flowers and further to Aphrodite’s charms is more pertinent to the meaning of the ode than a throne.

Keywords: Sappho, *Ode to Aphrodite*, hapax legomenon ποικιλόθρονος.

Ποικιλόθρον’ ἀθανάτ’ Ἀφροδίτα
παῖ Δίος δολόπλοκε, λίσσομαί σε
μή μ’ ἄσαισι μηδ’ ὄνιαισι δάμνα
πότνια θῦμον.

‘Dapple(?)-throned/patterned immortal Aphrodite, daughter of Zeus, weaving wiles, I beg you, mistress, not to torment my soul with anxieties and sorrows.’

The beginning of the celebrated Ode is an invocation of the goddess whose name is framed by epithets, either common or peculiar: ποικιλόθρονος, ἀθάνατος and δολόπλοκος. Of these ποικιλόθρονος is the most notable one, a *hapax* which, since the verse goes first in all editions of Sappho, introduces a reader to her poetry.¹ Translators render the word in two ways: ‘dal trono variopinto’ (F. Ferrari), ‘auf buntem Throne’ (M. Treu) or ‘throned in splendor’ (W. H. Appleton), ‘splendour-throned’ (J. M. Edmonds). The abundance is thus expressed in variety or in intensity. But still, for all that, why should Aphrodite’s throne be ‘coloured’ or ‘shining’?

¹ An alternative reading ποικιλόφρων is rejected by the majority of scholars in view of the following δολόπλοκε.

Obviously, the semantics of each part of the compound is relevant. Ποικίλος usually means ‘many-coloured’ (*LSJ* I). Its more specific second meaning in *LSJ* is ‘wrought in various colors’, ‘of woven embroidered stuffs’, ‘of intricate work’. This implies different materials, but also many shapes and patterns, a complicated technique in which an object is made. -θρονος is commonly considered to be identical with θρόνος ‘throne’ (see e. g. Wilamowitz 1913, 44; Page 1955, 5). However, as early as in 1868 Gustav Wustmann suggested that it could be derived from Homeric θρόνα ‘patterns’.²

In Homer ποικίλος as an attribute denotes the ‘spotted skin’ of a leopard (*Il.* 10. 30) or a fallow deer (*Od.* 19. 228), the ‘beauty’ and ‘splendor’ of πέπλος (*Il.* 5. 734-735), ἰμάς (Aphrodite’s belt: *Hom. Il.* 14. 219–220), κλισμός (*Hom. Od.* 1. 132), τεύχεα (*Il.* 3. 327), δίφρος (*Il.* 10. 501) etc. In Sappho ποικίλος defines μάσλη (‘leather shoes’) and μίτρα, i.e. it is used in the second meaning. As a part of a compound: ποικιλόμητης, ‘full of various wiles’, epithet of Odysseus (*Hom. Il.* 11. 482, *Od.* 3. 163; 13, 293), of Zeus (*Hymn. Apoll.* 323), of Hermes (*Hymn. Merc.* 155). By Hesiod ποικιλόβουλος, ‘of changeful counsel, wily’ is applied to Prometheus (*Hes. Th.* 21), and ποικιλόδειρος, ‘of varied voice, many toned’ (*OD* 203) — to the nightingale. In these compounds the metaphoric ποικιλ- is also derived from the second sense.

The element -θρονος is found in two compound adjectives — εὔθρονος (*Il.* 8. 565, *Od.* 6. 48; 15. 495; 17. 497) and χρυσόθρονος (*Il.* 1. 611). The last epithet is applied to Eos, Hera and Artemis, the first — to Eos alone. The combination of ποικίλος and θρόνος is attested only in Paus. 5. 11, in the description of the statue of Zeus in Olympia: ὁ δὲ θρόνος ποικίλος μὲν χρυσῶ καὶ λίθοις, ποικίλος δὲ ἐβένῳ καὶ ἐλέφαντί ἐστι (‘The throne is decorated with gold and stones, ebony and ivory’).

The sustainable capacity of each of the two elements to form various compound words predetermined both their naturally sounding combination, as in Sappho, and the ambiguity of the neologism in question. In view of Wustmann’s interpretation (supported by Aly 1920, 2375 and Burnett 1983, 250–251), considering the Homeric ἐν δὲ θρόνα ποικίλ’ ἔπασσε (*Il.* 22. 441), I doubt strongly, whether the traditional rendering of ποικιλόθρονος largely fostered by Wilamowitz (“Hier darf wahrlich niemand an θρόνα ποικίλα denken: wo wären sie denn?”) is correct.

It seems that ποικιλόθρονος is put in a prominent position deliberately. The poem begins with the most important word. A flowery belt symbolizes the taming power of love, for which Sappho is waiting, whereas a throne is a symbol of governance and has virtually nothing to do with love. The idea of dominance is sufficiently expressed by πόντια.

In most cases ποικίλος in Homer goes together with arms, clothes and furniture. Hence the adjective is likely to mean ‘shining’. A throne can gleam, while patterns cannot. Accordingly, T. G. Miakin (2004, 95–98) renders ποικιλόθρονος as “with shining throne”. However, to refer only to the contexts with armor, the majority of which is found in the *Iliad*, is hardly correct. Besides, ‘shining armor’ is somewhat trivial and in such case as *Il.* 3. 327: ἵπποι ἀερσίποδες καὶ ποικίλα τεύχε’ ἔκειτο, the epithet rather highlights the intricacy of the work made. Thus, there is no need to substitute ‘splendor’ for ‘subtlety’, and, indeed, θρόνα fits no less than θρόνος. Together with the pathos of the poem in favor of θρόνα counts an allusion to Διὸς ἀπάτη: just as Hera makes use of Aphrodite’s embroi-

² Cf. *LSJ* s. v. θρόνον, ‘flowers embroidered on cloth’, and Wustmann 1868, 238.

dered belt to seduce Zeus, Sappho desires to win the heart of her beloved girl with the help of goddess' charms: αἰ δὲ μὴ φίλει, ταχέως φιλήσει.

Why, then, Sappho does not define Aphrodite as 'colorfully belted'? Probably, because she just could not design such a word: compounds with -μαῖς are not attested, an artificially formed one would be metrically problematic, and, after all, it would hardly appear as ingenious as ποικιλόθρονος.

It seems not impossible that the author invited her listeners and readers to think what the striking initial term really means. The trivial 'painted throne' comes to mind first, gradually giving way to a more coherent interpretation. The epithet reveals its meaning fully by the end of the poem, in the sixth stanza and in the seventh, the last one, where Sappho asks the goddess for help and begs her to be her ally.

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SAPPHO, 1, 1–4 L.-P.: ТРОН ИЛИ УЗОРЫ?

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Статья посвящена анализу прилагательного ποικιλόθρονος, которое у Сапфо служит эпитетом Афродиты. Большинство толкователей склонны видеть во второй части композита корень, означающий «трон». Однако, согласно гипотезе Г. Вустманна, вторая половина слова может быть образована от θρόνα и, таким образом, означать «цветочные узоры». В настоящей заметке делается попытка доказать, что отсылка к вышитым цветам, а далее и к чарам Афродиты, выглядит более уместно, чем упоминание трона.

Ключевые слова: Сапфо, Гимн Афродите, гапакс ποικιλόθρονος.

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