ON SAPPHO, FR. 16 (L.P.)

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In recent years Thorsen¹, Liebermann² and Most³ have contributed largely to the interpretation of preamble, myth and organization of this poem as a whole. Important as these contributions are, we believe that some relevant problems still remain. They will be examined in the subsequent analysis of the poem, with the following outline serving as basis of our discussion.

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1 Thematic structure

1.1 The poem contains three elements viz. preamble, myth and link, which are organized thematically as follows:

lines 1–4 contain the opening preamble referring to the various views on what τὸ κύλλος is. Three military objects are listed next to οὐ in contrast with Sappho’s principle of δέτο τις ἐρωτεί.

lines 5–6a constitute the first of two links in this poem. Here the function is to introduce Sappho’s demonstration of the above-named principle. Two aspects in connection with its use may be noted: (i) firstly it serves to render universal validity to her principle (cf συμαρακ. . . /πάντα, 5–6); and (ii) secondly it exemplifies the myth.
lines 6b–14 contain the myth of Helen as demonstration of Sappho's principle. The myth itself refers to three aspects: (i) Helen's κάλλος (6b–7a); (ii) her conduct (7b–11a); (iii) her relation to Aphrodite (11b–14).

lines 15–16 constitute the second bridge passage or link, which refers to the existing relation between Sappho and Anactoria, and in which the word (καμέ) . . . άνβαινε again underlines the exemplificatory function of the myth.

lines 17–20 contain the concluding preamble defining (more exactly) (in reverse order) the content of the opening preamble. This reverse order is emphasized by means of certain verbal responses e.g. πόσον (1) — πεποιημένης (20), and ἔρατο (4) — ἔρατον (17). Sappho's object of love, in this case Anactoria, is named as example of her general principle in lines 3b–4, followed by two military objects which (by means of the qualifications Λύδων and ἐν ὀπλοιμα) are defined more exactly than those in the opening preamble.

1.2 This thematic structure can be schematized as follows:

A a military objects in general
   b love object in general
B a link
C Myth
B b link
A b love object in particular
   a military objects defined in particular terms.

Note (i) the chiastically structured frame formed by the preamble (abba) as well as (ii) the overall enclosing pattern of the poem with the myth forming the centre (ABCBA).

2 Preamble

2.1 Types of preamble and their function.

Basically two types of preamble can be distinguished in Greek literature. The first problem then will be to determine the type Sappho used in this poem. This question is not merely of a formal, but especially of a functional nature, since each type has a definite function.

2.1.1 In type A, which Schmid has classified as 'zweipolig' in form and contrasting, paranetical–polemical in essence, the spokesman contrasts his own preference (Höchstwert?) with a series of other outstanding values, culminating in the so-called 'nächtliche Wert' — the latter then being rejected, as for example in Tyrtaius Fr. 9D 1–14.

2.1.2 Type B, the second type in Schmid's classification, is indicated as 'einfolig' in form and not contrasting, paranetical–polemical in essence. The spokesman merely presents his own personal preference without any intentional contrast, only valid for himself, as for example in Od. 14, 222–228.

In addition to this criterion that Schmid has established, Thorsen added that of modality (verb and mood). Type A asserts a truth or statement with the verb in
the indicative mood, e.g. γάνητα in Tyrtaius Fr. 9 D 14, ἔστι in Xenophanes Fr. 2 D 12 etc. In type B a preference is expressed with the verb normally in the optative, but not necessarily: οὐ φιλέω, εἴη in Archilochus Fr. 60 D; εἴη in Euripides Medea 542 etc.

2.1.3 Schmid distinguishes a third type with Sappho Fr. 16 as prototype. This type is again ‘zweipolig’ in form, but in this case the emphasis is shifted “from a prominence given to the spokesman’s value system to a balanced presentation of the value systems of both parts”. The function could be that of either type A or B. Thorsen rightly disagrees with this, but acknowledges that Sappho Fr. 16 is difficult to classify even according to his criterion of modality, because both φαίνει ... ἐμένα and βολοθίμοι are employed by Sappho (i.e. a statement of truth as well as a preference).

2.2 Theories regarding the function of the preamble in Sappho Fr. 16.

In accordance with type A and B two theories regarding the function of the preamble have been put forward:

2.2.1 The correction theory: in this case the spokesman corrects other views as to the nature of τὸ κάλλιστον, thereby rejecting them, and presenting his view as the only universally valid one.

2.2.2 The relativity theory: according to this theory the μὲν (1) — δὲ (1) — δὲ (2) and δὲ (3) all operate on the same level: each view is equally valid; but each view therefore has only relative, not universal validity. In Sappho’s view the military objects also qualify as beautiful, but the most beautiful to her mind is the object of one’s love.

2.3 The frame of reference of the preamble in Sappho Fr. 16.

The problem that requires attention is:

2.3.1 What is the significance of καίν’ ὁτ' ὡ τις ἔρωταί?

2.3.2 What relation, if any, exists between Sappho’s view and other views as to the nature of τὸ κάλλιστον?

The following may serve as a condensed overview.

2.3.1 The meaning of καίν’ ὁτ' ὡ τις ἔρωτα

2.3.1.1 according to one interpretation τὸ κάλλιστον is whatever one loves (adores) in general, with the emphasis on ὁτ' ὡ.

2.3.1.2 according to a second viewpoint τὸ κάλλιστον refers to erotic love as such with emphasis on ἔρωτα. This erotic love, however, is qualified as referring to its overwhelming force or its destructive power.

2.3.2 The question of relation or comparison

2.3.2.1 Some scholars suggest that the τὸ κάλλιστον of Sappho implies a feminine world of value systems as opposed to the military activities of a masculine world of such systems.

2.3.2.2 Others think that a comparison is intended between the movement and glamour of military objects and the walk of Anactoria and the radiance of her face.

2.3.2.3 Others again state that the visual perception of Anactoria as object of love is preferred by Sappho to the visual perception of military objects.
2.3.2.4 Finally there are those who reject any relation of comparison at all.\textsuperscript{21}

3 The Myth of Helen

3.1 Helen's κάλλος.

The question here is why the κάλλος of Helen is given such prominence in this poem. What is the relation between her κάλλος and the fact that her love for Paris constitutes τὸ κάλλιστον for Sappho. While some scholars\textsuperscript{22} have ignored this problem, Most\textsuperscript{23} has classified the various suggestions in connection with this problem as follows:

3.1.1 her κάλλος is seen instrumentally\textsuperscript{24} (a) in terms of the number of objects it made available to her, or (b) because it makes her Aphrodite's favourite. The emphasis is thus shifted to the influence of Aphrodite as the bond between Helen and Sappho.\textsuperscript{25}

3.1.2 Sappho criticizes Helen's κάλλος as something external as opposed to the true concept of τὸ κάλλιστον. Her κάλλος thus signifies the destructive force of her sensual love.\textsuperscript{26}

3.1.3 Seeing that Helen is in everyone's view the most beautiful human being, she serves as legitimate figure of authority. She, if anyone, has the authority to judge what is τὸ κάλλιστον. This is the view of Most\textsuperscript{27} himself as well as that of Liebermann.

3.2 The function of Helen's conduct. The following possibilities have been suggested:

3.2.1 The exemplary function.

Helen's conduct serves to illustrate the power of erotic love as against all other norms\textsuperscript{28} or it illustrates specifically the destructive power of erotic love.\textsuperscript{29}

3.2.2 The transfigurative function.

The myth has a transfigurative function in that it serves as allegory, of the Sappho–Anactoria reality (Helen = Anactoria; Paris = a male figure outside the Sapphic circle; Menelaus, child and parents = Sappho (representing the parties abandoned); the voyage to Troy = marriage)\textsuperscript{30}

3.2.3 The authoritative-referential function.

In the myth Helen, and especially her κάλλος, serves merely as reference figure for the thesis of Sappho.\textsuperscript{31} (See above under 3.1.3).

3.3 Helen and Aphrodite

The relation between Helen and Aphrodite concerns the moral character of Helen's conduct. The following views may be noted:

3.3.1 Helen's wickedness and moral guilt are contrasted with her physical beauty.\textsuperscript{32}

3.3.2 Helen is overpowered by the goddess of love, and is therefore without moral blame. Aphrodite's power is either strongly emphasized or is seen as merely incidental.\textsuperscript{33}

3.3.3 Helen is not judged morally, but neither is she praised by Sappho. She is represented as the 'Unheil Troias' or the 'femme fatale'.\textsuperscript{34}
4 Evaluation

In this final section we evaluate the various views on each problem, stating what in our view represents the most probable solution.

4.1 Preamble

4.1.1 Type

Thorsen has rightly indicated that Schmid has applied his criterion for the classification of the various types of preamble too mechanically, with the result that he unnecessarily introduced a third type on the basis of Sappho Fr. 16. Thorsen's criterion for classification is therefore a necessary and satisfactory addition. However, in the case of Sappho Fr. 16, he does not fully apply this principle, for he here concentrates more on the content as norm: "... the poem can be difficult to classify, by means of my criterion too, since the preamble includes the verb ἐμενα and the ring-compositorical parallel strophe has βολλοίμαι (V. 17)".

In structure and content the concluding preamble (vv. 17-20; p.2) more or less reflects the first (vv. 1-4). But differences do exist, as will be indicated below (4.1.2), and which will prevent us from placing them on an equality or to view the second merely as an extension of the first, as has thus far been done. In fact, we have in this poem an example of both type A and B, something which, (as far as we know) has not been noted or stated in previous studies. The opening preamble is of type A: it is 'zweipolig' and asserts a certain truth (παντα ... ἐμενα), while the final preamble is of type B and clearly states a preference (βολλοίμαι). The reason why Sappho uses both will be discussed below (4.1.2).

4.1.2 Function

Sappho in the first strophe uses type A: in contrast with other views on what τὸ κάλλιστον is, she states her own. Note the positional emphasis placed on ἐγὼ: the repeated ἔ in lines 1 and 2 answer the μέν of line 1, but the ἔ of line 3 has an adversative force and contrasts strongly with μέν (1), ἔ (1) and ἔ (2). Note also the anaphora of ... ἐμενα which recall Tyrtaius Fr. 9D. Judging by its form preference should therefore be given to the corrective theory: i.e. Sappho rejects any other view as to what constitutes τὸ κάλλιστον; her view is the only one that has universal validity (cf. παντα in line 6). But what of the concluding preamble? She there (v. 15) explicitly names the person who exemplifies the thesis stated in the opening preamble, and whom she loves. But for this she uses type B, because Anactoria can surely be only her preference as far as κῆν' ὀτρω τις ἔραται is concerned. She states as a fact that everyone will easily agree (ἐμαρεκ ... πάντε) to her universal principle of κῆν' ὀτρω τις ἔραται, but she can certainly not expect that the walk of Anactoria and the radiance of her face will constitute for all τὸ κάλλιστον as far as κῆν' ὀτρω τις ἔραται is concerned. In other words, the concluding preamble merely has relative validity as far as the principle of κῆν' ὀτρω τις ἔραται is concerned.

Most scholars have agreed, and rightly so, that the concluding preamble contains the particular and concrete example of Sappho's thesis as stated in the
opening preamble; but they have merely assumed that the concluding preamble is of the same type as the opening preamble, though Thorsen realized the difficulty of putting both on the same level of type and function. Yet this criterion of modality points to the right solution: Sappho in fact here uses a preamble of both type A (opening) and type B (final), thus stating a truth but also a preference.

4.1.3 Meaning and reference of κῆν' ὅττο τις ἔρασα

The verbal repetition ἔρασα (4) — ἔρασαν (I) as well as the whole meaning and atmosphere of the myth of Helen (see below 4.2.1 and 4.2.2) clearly marks ὅττο τις ἔρασα as the person whom one loves in an erotic sense. Radt has demonstrated that κῆν' is neuter because of καλλιστον. It is therefore not merely a question of one object which one admires next to other objects. However, scholars, following Koniaris, have tended to over-emphasize ἔρασα. The criterion of Sappho is not ἔρασα as against ὅττο — i.e. not only (erotic) love as such, but the person whom one loves. Erotic love is not something abstract. It always refers to an event in which a person is involved. The phrase as a whole carries emphasis. Sappho wrote κῆν' ὅττο τις ἔρασα and not ὅ ἔρος.

What is the frame of reference of this phrase? Three aspects should be noted:

(i) firstly the objects expressed in the two preambles differ except that infantry appears in both: this is further proof that Sappho is not polemical or corrective in the final preamble since otherwise she would have listed the same objects;

(ii) secondly whether the movement and radiance of Anactoria's walk and face respectively should be interpreted as applying to infantry and chariots, as Page and Kirkwood suggested, is unclear. It is however important to realize that visual perception are manifested by the text itself (ἀδήν . . . ἤ) as has been stressed by Barkhuizen and to a lesser degree by Stern also.

(iii) thirdly the question arises why Sappho has chosen military objects. Style always implies meaningful choice; it is part of communication in general, and of literature in particular. It is therefore part and parcel of literary analysis to raise this question. (a) We do not believe that a contrast is intended between a feminine and masculine world of values: ὅττο τις ἔρασα is applicable to both sexes. (b) The choice of Helen could have influenced her, as Thorsen suggested, because the name Helen not only recalls beauty and sexual love, but also war and tragedy. (c) We may furthermore also refer to the so-called question of what constitutes true arete, which can be traced back to Homer (Iliad 15,662 ff/Od. 14,222–228), and which constitutes the main subject of Callinus Fr. 1, Tyrtaius Fr. 9D, Solon Fr. 3D, Xenophanes Fr. 2D, and Pindar Isth. 7. The concept of arete as the military virtue of manliness in Callinus and Tyrtaius may have contributed to influence Sappho here. This is however a mere possibility; but there is no inducement in the text to interpret the concept of the destructive effect of war as symbolic of erotic love (so suggested by Bagg). On the contrary, Sappho emphasizes the erotic at the expense of military concepts and their association with war.

4.2 The Myth of Helen.

4.2.1 Helen as ἔρωμένη.
Most and Liebermann have in our opinion correctly interpreted the widely discussed reference to Helen’s καλλος, viz. that it makes Helen the most authoritative and legitimate person to judge what is καλλιστον. We are however of opinion that their point of departure leading to the above conclusion is less valid, viz. Most by relying on the later evidence of Aristotle (Rhet. 2.23.12 = 1398b 19—1399 a 6), and Liebermann relying on modern English moral philosophy. A more valid point of departure is the works of Homer, which constitute the main source for Greek archaic poetry. In the Iliad book 3 (and in other epic tradition in general) Helen is renowned for her καλλος; she is the most beautiful of all women, who above all excites ερός in men. Thus the old men on the Trojan wall, when they caught sight of Helen, possibly even still veiled, could understand why men endured so much because of her (vv. 158 ff). And for Helen herself her καλλος is of vital importance: when she opposes Aphrodite’s will to bed down once more with Paris, it is precisely her καλλος which the goddess uses as threat against her (vv. 413—417). Without her καλλος, or the effect she has on men, to protect her, Greeks and Trojans alike will realise the senselessness of their struggle, and consequently unite in wrath against her — a threat to which Helen therefore immediately yields.44 The καλλος of Helen as described above pictures here as Helen epoménη, a term derived from the context of erotic love.45

4.2.2 Helen as ἔρωστα.

The second element in the myth of Helen in Sappho Fr. 16 concerns her conduct. Not only is she pictured as pre-eminently ἔρωμενη, but also as one who in her own person experienced ἔρος for Paris (Iliad 3,441—7), to such an extent that she sacrificed everything dear to her, all that constituted the norms of Homeric and archaic society — i.e. husband, child, parents, friends, possessions, and city (Iliad 3,174—5; 15,662). In accordance with the technical term ἔραστης we have referred to her here as Helen ἔρωστα. It is precisely the fact that she is not only depicted as ἔρωμενη but also became herself ἔρωστα that caused discord in her relations with others, as is evident in the Iliad (1,158—160; 3,87,91, 154—160, 171—5, 382—420; 6,344—348; 24,763—766 etc). Thus, without any doubt, she is presented or manifested in the Iliad as a femme fatale. The question whether Homer delivers moral judgement on her conduct, does not fall within the scope of epic poetry. That Homer presents her apologetically as Most suggested, is not supported by the Iliad either. What is in any case important to note is that both these aspects — Helen as ἔρωμενη and Helen as ἔρωστα — qualify her as the most ideal choice to illustrate Sappho’s thesis: Helen, the ἔρωμενη par excellence, has herself fallen a victim to ἔρως, and because of that did what she did; she can therefore easily prove (εὔμαρας) to all (πάντι) that τὸ καλλιστον is κήν’ ὀττω τις ἔρατι.

4.2.3 Helen as παραχωβίσα

It has been stated above that Helen is represented in the Iliad as a femme fatale. In book 3 we see her struggling against the power of Aphrodite, yielding to the goddess in the end. But we have also maintained that this is no apologetic representation, for Helen yields only at that point where Aphrodite threatens to
destroy her κάλλος. This makes her a non-tragic figure in comparison e.g. with Achilles, who sought κλέος, but was prepared to pay the price — by his untimely death. Now this attitude of Achilles is heroic and tragic. With Helen it is rather different. She also sought κλέος but not at the cost of her κάλλος. She knows of the pain she is causing Greeks and Trojans alike. She hates herself for it; she tries to resist Aphrodite and to hate Paris. One almost feels sympathy for her — as if Homer is apologetic — until she is threatened — and threatened with respect to her κάλλος. Yielding then to the goddess is no act which is represented apologetically at all. It is un-heroic and un-tragic.

For Sappho it is different. To suffice as legitimate and ideal exemplum for her thesis, she merely states that Aphrodite has overpowered her — how, she does not mention — unless she did so in the fragmentary part of the poem (lines 11 ff). But the strong adversative ἄλλα of line 11 suggests that Sappho in any case by no means connects her κάλλος with the threatening action of Aphrodite as it is related in the Iliad. In accordance with the verb παράγει which most likely refers to Aphrodite, we have coined the phrase Helen παραχθεῖσσα, by which Sappho implies that Helen is for the purposes of her poem exempted from all moral blame.

4.3 Conclusion

The meaning of the poem as a whole may now be briefly stated as follows:

4.3.1 Contrary to other views on what τὸ κάλλιστον constitutes, Sappho states as the universal valid and correct judgement that τὸ κάλλιστον is the person whom one loves (erotically).

4.3.2 As exemplum, with which she knows all will agree, she refers to Helen. She is indisputably the ἐρωμένη of all people (Most rightly emphasizes ἄνθρωπον). Yet she herself has fallen a victim to ἔρως to such an extent that as ἐρωστικα she rejected all norms for the sake of her loved one. She is, however, without moral blame, being overpowered by Aphrodite (παραχθεῖσσα).

4.3.3 Such a Helen (ἐρωμένη, ἔρωστικα and παραχθεῖσσα) reminds Sappho of Anactoria in the sense that Anactoria is the person whom the poetess wishes to see more than chariots or infantry. However, she realises that Anactoria is not τὸ κάλλιστον for everyone as regards the principle of ὅτω τις ἐρωτικ. For this reason she only expresses her own preference. Typically she recalls only certain features of the person she loves. At this moment (vöν, line 15) it is Anactoria, but we know from other poems that there were other girls as well. How many or whom they were, is irrelevant. The fact that they existed underlines the relative nature of the final preamble.

NOTES

4. Thematic structure or pattern should not be confused with structure as such. The latter may be defined as the total integration of all constituent elements of a given text.

5. It is also possible that μελανον (2) is intended as contrasting response to κάμηρυχτα λάμπρον.


7. Schmid ix.


10. Idem 51.


14. For Thorsen the extreme form of this theory has become a ‘definition theory’. See p. 9.


17. This interpretation was championed by G.L. Koniaris, 'On Sappho. Fr. 16 (LP)', *Hermes* 95 (1967) 1 ff, but had already been suggested by D. Page, *Sappho and Alcaeus*, Oxford 1959, 55. Koniaris has been followed by most scholars, e.g. S.L. Radt, 'Sapphica', *Mnem.* 23 (1970), 338–340; E.M. Sterh, 'Sappho Fr. 16 L.P.', *Mnem.* 23 (1970) 348–361; also Barkhuizen, Thorsen, Most and Liebermann. R. Bagg, 'Love Ceremony and Daydream in Sappho's Lyrics', *Arion* 3 (1964) 44 ff, qualifies this love as a destructive power.


20. Stern 348, 361; Barkhuizen 18.


27. Most 15; Liebermann 64 note 59.

28. E.g. Eisenberger, Fränkel etc.

29. Thus Schadewaldt; Bagg.

30. Thus Merkelbach.

31. Thus Most and Liebermann.

32. C. Theander, 'Studia Sapphica', *Eranos* (1934) 70.


35. For a discussion of this fourth type see Thorsen 18 note 14.

36. See Thorsen 8.


38. Radt 339.


40. This confirms the concept of preference.

41. Barkhuizen 18.

42. Stern 353.

43. Thorsen 15.


45. Cf. Thorsen 12.

46. Most seems to refer only to her κόμα as qualifying her as a reference figure. But the whole myth
or all three aspects (see also 4.2.3) serve as illustration for Sappho’s thesis. This is the reason why he explains the function of the myth as authoritative, rejecting the exemplary or illustrative function. However, it is difficult to see why the one should exclude the other: she serves indeed as authority on what is τὸ καλλιεργον, but Sappho’s reference to the myth of Helen as such is a typical example of the use of myth in Greek literature as ματαίως for an author’s thesis in question.  

This is obviously in contrast with Most’s view (p. 16) that Sappho here represents a continuation of the apologetic tradition already found in Homer. As has been argued above, Homer’s Iliad gives us no apologetic picture of Helen.  

47. On παράγαγον see Most 16 note 32.  
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