

SHORTER NOTES

SAPPHO'S 'ROSY' MOON

The transmitted text of Sappho, fr. 96.8, uses the epithet *βροδοδάκτυλος* of the moon. The word in this context has attracted considerable comment, and led Page to declare the line corrupt.¹ The present note offers a solution to the difficulty (and to the grammatical problem over the use of the definite article, noted by Page) by way of emendation.

At first sight, 'rosy-fingered' is as inappropriate as an epithet for the moon as it is poetically telling in Homer's evocation of the dawn. Commentators have proposed two main lines of interpretation. On the one hand, it is suggested that at certain times or under certain conditions, the moon really is 'rosy'—or at least reddish.² But even if one sets aside the uncertainty as to precisely what colour is envisaged, one surely needs an epithet which is of general application to the moon, not one limited to certain uncharacteristic sets of conditions. Others argue that the word *βροδοδάκτυλος* (with the kindred *βροδόπηχης*) developed in meaning from being an epithet of the (genuinely red) dawn in Homer, to being a symbolic reference to a young girl's beauty, as applied to the Nereids or the Graces.³ But the great differences in context render this doubtful as an interpretation of *βροδοδάκτυλος* in its application to the moon. *βροδοδάκτυλος* or *βροδόπηχης* may elegantly describe a young girl's beauty, but there seems to be no good reason to assume that the Nereids were 'greenish' in colour (as Heitsch implies⁴) or to deny that a rosy complexion continues to contribute to a broader appraisal of beauty. There is, however, in these references to semi-divine beings as beautiful girls no suggestion that a role in nature should be assigned to the one who is *βροδοδάκτυλος* or *βροδόπηχης*. On the other hand, in the context under discussion a strong emphasis is placed on the moon's regenerative power as it floods the earth with its light. Saake extends further the symbolic interpretation of the 'rosy-fingered' moon, arguing that the moon is here closely associated with the setting sun, and that into this cosmic setting it introduces the expectation signified by the rosy colour of dawn.⁵ Most recently, Balmer has suggested that the rose envisaged by Sappho might be white. But while this interpretation fits the context well, it must overcome the linguistic difficulty posed by Homer's usage. With the Homeric instances of *βροδοδάκτυλος ἥως* before her,

¹ E. Lobel and D. L. Page, *Poetarum Lesbiorum Fragmenta* (Oxford, 1955), fr. 96, with commentary in D. Page, *Sappho and Alcaeus* (Oxford, 1955), 90.

² H. Fränkel, *Wege und Formen frühgriechischen Denkens* (Munich, 1955), 49.

The writing of this Note happened to coincide with the total eclipse of the moon on 9 January 2001. From some parts of England the moon was for a time seen as red or reddish (captured in photographs, by *The Independent* newspaper of 10 January 2001). For this viewer in north London, the best that can be said is that for a short period the veiled disk of the moon assumed a dusky bronze colour.

³ E. Heitsch, 'Zum Sappho-Text', *Hermes* 95 (1967), 392. After Homer, the key passages are: Hesiod, *Op.* 610 (*βροδοδάκτυλος ἥως*), *Th.* 246, 251 (*βροδόπηχης*, of Nereids); Bacchylides, 18.18 (*Ἰνάχου βροδοδάκτυλος κόρα*); Sappho, fr. 53 (*βροδόπαχης*, of the Graces), fr. 58.19 (*βροδόπαχης*, of the dawn).

⁴ Cf. A. P. Burnett, *Three Archaic Poets, Archilochus, Alcaeus, Sappho* (Bristol, 1998), 307, n. 81, where the various interpretations are summarized. Burnett's own suggestion (that roses flourish 'under the touch of the rosy-fingered one') has to meet the objection that, in the same breath, the poet mentions flowers that are not rose-red.

⁵ H. Saake, *Zur Kunst Sapphos* (Munich, 1971), 168.

it is hard to believe that Sappho could contemplate changing the adjective's significance to 'white-fingered'.⁶

The various interpretations on offer are to my mind ingenious rather than persuasive, and it seems difficult to avoid Page's conclusion that the text is corrupt. Might one then entertain the thought that Sappho wrote, not *βροδοδάκτυλος* but a word which reflects the poet's known description of the moon, and is more appropriate to the context in sense than is the traditional reading? My proposal is that *βροδοδάκτυλος* should be replaced by the theoretically possible compound, *ἀργυροδάκτυλος*, while the Aeolic feminine article 'α' should be deleted. The word *ἀργυροδάκτυλος* is, so far as I am aware, unattested, but the force of this consideration is at least mitigated and, I would claim, outweighed by a consideration of the many similar compounds involving silver that do exist.

The reference to silver is prompted by a letter ascribed to the Emperor Julian, where it is recorded that Sappho said the moon was like silver, and that on account of this she obscured (*ἀποκρύπτειν*) the appearance of the stars.⁷ Whether or not the letter is spurious (as has been suggested), it may be taken as conserving a scrap of genuine tradition. Now the simile of silver for the moon occurs nowhere in the extant fragments of Sappho apart from [Julian]'s allusion, and considering the reported extent of her output, one can never rule out the possibility that the poet likened the moon to silver in a poem now lost to us. There are, however, two poems that pick up the theme (also in [Julian]) of the moon outshining the stars as a symbol of the beloved's beauty (explicit at fr. 96, implicit at fr. 34). At fr. 34, the poet speaks of the stars hiding their shining appearance when the moon is full, and at fr. 96 (according to the received text) the beloved's pre-eminent beauty is likened to the 'rosy-fingered' moon which at sunset surpasses all the stars. [Julian]'s allusion to the moon's silvery appearance has been associated with fr. 34, perhaps because of the reiteration of the verb *ἀπο-* (Aeolic, *ἀπυ-*) *κρύπτειν*. However, once doubt has been cast on 'rosy-fingered', the possibility arises of associating fr. 96 with [Julian]'s allusion, and some slender support for this hypothesis can be found in the different ways in which the simile is applied in each of the two fragments I have mentioned. In fr. 34, it is the stars that hide their light when the full moon appears. At fr. 96, however (as in [Julian]'s note), it is the moon that is the initiator, whether in surpassing the stars (fr. 96) or concealing them.

The aptness of the term 'silver' as a simile for the moon is now, of course, a commonplace. In recording the use of 'silver' as a verb, the *New Oxford Dictionary of English* says, '(especially of the moon) give a silvery appearance to'. By way of literary allusion one may recall the opening of one of Brahms's most beautiful songs: 'When the silvery moon gleams through the leafy shade.'⁸ Or one might mention the appearance of the moon at the funeral of the Canterville ghost in Oscar Wilde's story, where 'the moon came out from behind a cloud and flooded with its silent silver the little churchyard'.

So far as my knowledge goes, the earliest example of this link between the moon and

⁶ J. Balmer, *Sappho: Poems and Fragments, Translated with an Introduction by Josephine Balmer*, rev. edn (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1992), 19.

⁷ Julian, *Epistle* 19 (see I. Bidez and F. Cumont, *Imp. Caesaris Flavii Claudii Iulianici Epistulae etc.* [Paris and London, 1922], 264). Bidez and Cumont doubt the authenticity of this letter. But, whatever view is taken on that point, there seems to be no reason why the relevant passage should not represent a genuine tradition about Sappho.

⁸ Wann der silberne Mond, etc.: J. Brahms, *Die Mainacht*, op. 43, no. 2. Poem by L. Hölty.

silver is Sappho's use of *ἀργυρία* (as recorded by [Julian]). The image would also seem here to be associated with the first known formulation of an encomiastic commonplace which occurs in various forms over centuries, wherein the beauty of the beloved outshines others as the sun or moon excels the stars. In their commentary on Horace, Nisbet and Hubbard list examples of the trope from Sappho to Philostratus and beyond.⁹ It is from within this tradition, it would seem, that Ovid includes the following lines in an address to the moon by Leander, in praise of Hero.

Quantum (luna), cum fulges radiis argentea puris,
Concedunt flammis sidera cuncta tuis,
Tanto formosis formosior omnibus illa est. (Ov. Ep. 17.71)¹⁰

Here the language of the first line in particular is remarkably close in substance to that of Sappho fr. 96.8 if the proposed amendment *ἀργυροδάκτυλος* is adopted. *Argentea* may then be seen to parallel *ἀργυρο-*, and *radiis* to mirror the reality implicit in *-δάκτυλος*. In other words one may raise the hypothesis that Ovid is reflecting, if not consciously adopting, a tradition whose origins go back to the use of *ἀργυροδάκτυλος* by Sappho. It is true that [Julian] makes no reference to the striking 'fingers' image, and the possibility remains that he has some other poem in mind. But there is no incompatibility in affirming the splendour of the moon itself and observing its beams streaming over the earth. (And [Julian] is not necessarily telling us all he knows.)

For the purpose of the present note, however, it is sufficient to accept [Julian]'s testimony that Sappho made the link between the moon and silver. Once this is granted, it may be claimed that the word *ἀργυροδάκτυλος* not only provides a locus for the application of this simile in Sappho's poetry, but would also be intrinsically more appropriate than *βροδοδάκτυλος* as a description of the moon in fr. 96.

As to the supposed word itself, it would readily find a place in the large collection of compound words beginning with *ἀργυρο-* recorded by Liddell and Scott. The majority of these fall into two groups, referring (i) to the metal itself and things made of it (for example, *ἀργυρόηλος*, *ἀργυρήλατος*, *ἀργυρόπους*), and (ii) to *ἀργύριον* as money (for example, *ἀργυραμοιβός*, *ἀργυροθήκη*). But words are also found with the meaning 'looking like silver' or 'silvery', applied, in most cases, to water: According to LSJ, *ἀργυροδίνης* (silver-eddy) is attested in Homer, Hesiod, Bacchylides, and Callimachus. *ἀργυροειδής* is found twice in Euripides, who also uses *ἀργυρόρρυτος* (silver-streaming: LSJ Supplement 1996). Against this background, and with the precedent of Homer's *ρόδοδάκτυλος ἠώς* before her, it seems quite possible that Sappho could have coined the word *ἀργυροδάκτυλος* in describing the moon.

Two further considerations may be advanced in support of the hypothesis that *ρόδοδάκτυλος* has supplanted an original *ἀργυροδάκτυλος*. The mere unfamiliarity of the latter would render it vulnerable to a misreading, prompted by the ending *-δάκτυλος*, which could of itself have reminded the scribe of Homer's familiar description of the dawn. The likelihood of such confusion is increased by the possibility that the occurrence of *ρ-ο-δ* at the centre of *ἀργυροδάκτυλος* might give rise to a dittography in *ρόδοδάκτυλος*.

Furthermore, the proposed emendation would eliminate the problem raised by the

⁹ R. G. M. Nisbet and M. Hubbard, *A Commentary on Horace, Odes Book 1* (Oxford, 1970), on *Odes* 1.12.48–50. Also, E. J. Kenney (ed.), *Ovid: Heroides, XVI–XXI* (Cambridge 1996).

¹⁰ I am indebted to the anonymous referee for drawing my attention to the passage in Ovid, and for suggestions as to its interpretation. Responsibility for the result is, of course, mine.

occurrence of the definite article in the traditional reading's *ἡ βροδοδάκτυλος μήνα* (or, as amended by Schubart, *σελήνη* [Aeolic, *σελάννα*]). According to Lobel, as stated by Page, the rule in Sappho is that a definite article never accompanies an adjective + noun,¹¹ unless the noun is a divine personal name. It is also clear that on metrical grounds 'α' cannot be retained alongside *ἀργυροδάκτυλος*.¹² If, however, my argument so far is correct, one may assume that 'α' was added to the text in order to mend the metre, after *βροδοδάκτυλος* had ousted *ἀργυροδάκτυλος*. Once *ἀργυροδάκτυλος* is restored, the metrical need for 'α' disappears, and it can be excluded from the text. The first syllable of *ἀργυροδάκτυλος* preserves the metre in its place, while the grammatical problem is eliminated.

Finally, the emendation *σελάννα* (proposed on metrical grounds by Schubart) has been supported with further arguments by Heitsch.¹³ If this and the general argument of this note be accepted, I would venture to conclude that Sappho wrote of a woman's beauty in these terms:

... ὥς ποτ' ἀελίῳ
 δύντος ἀργυροδάκτυλος σελάννα
 πάντα περρέχοισ' ἄστρο...

... like the silver-fingered moon, once the sun has set,
 surpassing all the stars...

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¹¹ Page, *Sappho and Alcaeus*, 90.

¹² Various analyses of the metrical scheme of this poem agree that the third syllable of the line should be long. Cf. P. Maas, *Greek Metre*, trans. H. Lloyd-Jones (Oxford, 1962), 40 (para. 54.10); D. S. Raven, *Greek Metre: An Introduction* (London, 1962), 73; D. Page, *Sappho and Alcaeus*, 319 (para. V ii).

¹³ Heitsch (n. 3), 391.

THE ATHENIAN DECREE FOR CHALCIS (IG 1³.40)

This important complete Attic text is usually dated 446/445 B.C. and linked with the crushing of the Euboean revolt. It looks a perfect fit.¹ Some thirty years ago, however, I suggested 424/423 B.C. instead, since Philochorus reported Athenian military intervention in Euboea that year and he is no mean authority on Athenian affairs.² In order to help clarify the problem I would first stress two formal points.

IG 1³.40 is closely linked to IG 1³.35, the first decree for Athena Nike. In 40.40 we find, after a gap and starting a new line, just *Ἀντικλῆς εἶπε*: the usual amendment formula *τὰ μὲν ἄλλα καθάπερ τῷ βολῆι* is omitted. In 35.14 we find, again after a gap and starting a new line, just *ἡστιαῖος εἶπε*: the normal formula is missing once more.³

¹ See IG 1³ and Meiggs and Lewis *GHI* (henceforth *ML*), no. 52, 143–4.

² *JHS* 81 (1961), 124–32 = *Athenian Empire Restored* (Michigan, 1996: henceforth *AER*), 53–7: schol. on *Wasps* 718: *FGH* IIIB (suppl.), I, 504 and II, 407 (on 328 F 130).

³ In *The Athenian Boule* (Oxford, 1972), 71–2, n. 2, Peter Rhodes was content to note just how odd the two decrees were in this respect. Meiggs and Lewis were strangely inconsistent. On no. 44, p. 198 they wrote 'An amendment (though the normal amendment formula... is omitted) was carried by Hestiaios.' But on no. 52, p. 141 they note 'There follows a decree, moved by Antikles...'. The two phenomena should not be treated differently.