

**ODE TO APHRODITE:  
A Translation of Sappho Fragment 1**

By Shen Zhou Hong      St. John's College

April 3, 2019

**Preface to the Hong translation**

# Sappho Fragment 1 “Ode to Aphrodite”

## Original Aeolic Greek

ποικιλόθρον' ἀθανάτ' Ἀφρόδιτα,  
παῖ Δίος δολόπλοκε, λίσσομαί σε,  
μή μ' ἄσαισι μηδ' ὀνίαισι δάμνα,  
πότνια, θῦμον,

ἀλλὰ τυίδ' ἔλθ', αἶ ποτα κατέρωτα  
τὰς ἔμας αὖδας αἰοῖσα πῆλοι  
ἔκλυες, πάτρος δὲ δόμον λίποισα  
χρῦσιον ἦλθες

ἄρμ' ὑπασδεύξαισα· κάλοι δέ σ' ἄγον  
ώκεες στρουῦθοι περὶ γὰς μελαίνας  
πύκνα δίννεντες πτέρ' ἀπ' ὠράνωϊθε-  
ρος διὰ μέσσω·

αἶψα δ' ἐξίκοντο· σὺ δ', ὦ μάκαιρα,  
μειδιάσας' ἀθανάτῳ προσώπων  
ἦρε' ὅττι δηῦτε πέπονθα κῶττι  
δηῦτε κάλημι

κῶττι μοι μάλιστα θέλω γένεσθαι  
μαινόλαι θύμῳ· τίνα δηῦτε πείθω  
μαῖσ' ἄγην ἐς σὰν φιλότατα; τίς σ', ὦ  
Ψάπφ', ἀδικήει;

καὶ γὰρ αἰ φεύγει, ταχέως διώξει,  
αἰ δὲ δῶρα μὴ δέκετ', ἀλλὰ δώσει,  
αἰ δὲ μὴ φίλει, ταχέως φιλήσει  
κῶν ἐθέλοισα.

ἔλθε μοι καὶ νῦν, χαλέπαν δὲ λῦσον  
ἐκ μερίμναν, ὅσσα δέ μοι τέλεσσαι  
θῦμος ἰμέρρει, τέλεσον, σὺ δ' αὐτὰ  
σύμμαχος ἔσσο.

## English Translation

Immortal Aphrodite, on the dazzling throne,  
Daughter of Zeus, Oh clever seductress, I pray to you!  
Please don't overwhelm me, with such grief and heartbreak,  
Please, my Queen — don't overwhelm my heart.

But instead, come to me,  
If ever my cries you've heard,  
on the other side from afar,  
leaving your father's golden home, to me.

With your chariot under arm, escorted with  
lovely swift sparrows, circling,  
down to the dark-soiled earth,  
from the stratosphere of mid-air.

Suddenly they arrive, with you, oh blessed one.  
A smile upon your immortal face,  
to ask me once again, who it was that  
broke my heart.

“What is such desperate longing in your heart?  
Who is it, that I must bewitch,  
in order to bring her back to your love?  
Oh Sappho, who is it, that spurns?”

“If she flees your advances, soon she shall pursue  
Should she reject your gifts, soon she shall give them, in turn,  
And if she loves you not, soon she will love  
Even unwillingly.”

Oh come to me now, Goddess. Unbind me  
from such anxious thoughts, and accomplish all things that  
my heart so desperately longs for, to fulfill.  
That you yourself can fight alongside me, in this war.

## Translation notes and interlinear gloss

### Stanza 1: Sappho's Prayer

ποικιλόθρον' ἄθανάτ' Ἀφρόδιτα,  
 παῖ Δίος δολόπλοκε, λίσσομαί σε,  
 μή μ' ἄσαισι μηδ' ὀνίαισι δάμνα,  
 πότνια, θυμόν,

Greek word	Type	Gloss	Meaning
ποικιλόθρον'	Adj.	sg. fem. voc.	<i>On richly-worked throne</i>
ἄθανάτ	Adj.	sg. fem. voc.	<i>undying/immortal</i>
Ἀφρόδιτα,	Noun	sg. voc.	<i>Aphrodite</i>

Greek word	Type	Gloss	Meaning
παῖ	Noun	sg. fem. voc.	<i>child</i>
Δίος	Noun	sg. masc. gen.	<i>(of) Zeus</i>
δολόπλοκε,	Adj.	sg. fem. voc.	<i>weaving wiles</i>
λίσσομαί	Verb	1st. sg. pres. mp.	<i>I pray (for myself)</i>
σε,	Pron.	2nd sg. acc.	<i>you</i>

Greek word	Type	Gloss	Meaning
μή	Neg.	N/A	<i>not</i>
μ'	Pron.	1st sg. acc.	<i>myself</i>
ἄσαισι	Noun	pl. fem. dat.	<i>to/with distress</i>
μηδ'	Partic.	N/A	<i>and not</i>
ὀνίαισι	Noun	pl. fem. dat.	<i>to/with grief, sorrow, distress</i>
δάμνα,	Verb	3rd. sg.	<i>to overpower</i>

Greek word	Type	Gloss	Meaning
πότνια,	Noun	sg. fem. voc.	<i>Queen</i>
θυμόν,	Noun	sg. masc. acc.	<i>soul</i>

### Translator's Notes

- μ' stems from ἐγώ
- The Liddell and Scott also gives a variety of possible translations for ἄσασι, stemming from ἄση. Alternative meanings can include: surfeit, loathing, nausea, distress, vexation, or even longing and desire.
- μηδ' is taken as μηδέ, which is a particle of negation.
- δάμνα as stemming from δαμνάω instead of the etymologically similar μι-verb δάμνημι

### Stanza 2: The Appeal to Arrive

ἀλλά τυίδ' ἔλθ', αἵποτα κατέρωτα  
τᾶς ἔμας αὐδῶς αἰοῖσα πῆλγι  
ἔκλυες πάτρος δὲ δόμον λίποισα  
χρύσιον ἦλθες

### Translator's Notes

- τυίδ' stemming from τυῖδε
- ἔλθ' is probably an enclitic form of deponent verb ἔρχομαι
- Supposedly κατέρωτα is Aeolic for ἐτέρωθι.
- πῆλοι taken as the Aeolic τηλοῦ, according to the Liddell and Scott.
- πάτρος is father in the genitive. This translation assumes the same usage as in the phrase τὰ πρὸς πατρός.

### Stanza 3: Journey from Heaven to Earth

ἄρμ' ὑποζεύξαια, κάλοι δέ σ' ἄγον  
ὥκεες στρουῖθι περὶ γᾶς μελαίνας  
πύκνα δινεῦντες πτέρ' ἀπ' ὠράνω  
αἶθερος διὰ μέσσω.

### Translator's Notes

- ὑπασδεύξαια is compound, taking form of both ὑπο (lit. under) and the μι-verb ζεύγνυμι.

- δίννεντες was especially difficult to find in the dictionary, but eventually I took it as “to circle about”
- ἀπ’ ὠράνωϊθερος appears to be some form of crasis, perhaps ὠράνου αἰθερος. It is glossed as “heaven” in my translation.

#### Stanza 4: Aphrodite’s Arrival

αἶψα δ’ ἐχίκοντο, σὺ δ’ ὦ μάσαιρα  
 μειδιάσαισ’ ἀθάνατῳ προσώπῳ,  
 ἦρ’ ὅττι δηῦτε πέπονθα κῶττι  
 δῆγτε κάλημι

#### Translator’s Notes

- Note that likewise μειδιάσαισ is not standard Attic, but rather Aeolic of μειδιᾶν participle in aorist feminine singular.
- “Smiling, immortal face’d” is indeed an exceptionally ugly translation. However, this is just the rough translation, done with emphasis of speed and preservation of word-order. The final polished translation will be much nicer.
- κῶττι is the crasis form of καὶ ὅττι
- ἦρ’ Aeolic for ἐρωτᾶν?
- δηῦτε is poetic crasis for δὴ αὖτε
- κάλημι is Attic of καλέω

#### Stanza 5: Query for the Heartbreaker

κῶττι μοι μάλιστα θέλω γένεσθαι  
 μαινόλα θυμῷ, τίνα δηῦτε πείθω  
 μαῖσ’ ἄγην ἐς σὰν φιλότατα τίς τ’ ὦ  
 Πσάπφ’, ἀδίκηει;

#### Translator’s Notes

- And once again, κῶττι is the crasis form of καὶ ὅττι
- μάλιστα is given as the superlative of μάλα
- δηῦτε is poetic crasis for δὴ αὖτε

- Taking ἄγην as the present infinitive form of ἄγάω

### Stanza 6: Aphrodite's Consolation

καὶ γάρ αἰ φεύγει, ταχέως διώξει,  
αἰ δὲ δῶρα μὴ δέκετ ἄλλὰ δώσει,  
αἰ δὲ μὴ φίλει ταχέως φιλήσει,  
κῶϋκ ἐθέλοισα.

#### Translator's Notes

- Here the sigma which denotes the future tense is merged in διώξει.
- Thankfully, the only complicated part of this stanza was the usage of κῶϋκ, the crasis form of καὶ οὐκ
- The Aeolic ἐθέλοισα is the Attic ἐθελοῦσα. Note that it is feminine, hence the unrequited lover is a woman.

### Stanza 7: Sappho's wish

ἔλθε μοι καὶ νῦν, χαλεπᾶν δὲ λῦσον  
ἐκ μερίμναν ὅσσα δέ μοι τέλεσσαι  
θῦμος ἱμέρρει τέλεσον, σὺ δ' αὖτα  
σύμμαχος ἔσσο.

#### Translator's Notes

- The scholar C.W. Conrad notes that the ἐκ is in tmesis, where it actually belongs to ἐκλύσον, but is cut off in some reason. However translating it as a simple preposition seems to work out fine.
- Taking τέλεσσαι as the aorist optative.
- ἱμέρρει is another Aeolic superlative, most likely the Attic ἱμείρει.