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Original Article

Lyric Indecorum in Archaic Mytilene (and Beyond): Sappho F 99 c. I.1–9 L-P = Alcaeus F 303Aa V*

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Abstract

This paper considers a remarkable epithet in a lacunose fragment of Archaic Lesbian poetry that some have assigned to Sappho, others to Alcaeus (Sappho F 99 L-P = Alcaeus F 303A V). The epithet, *olisbodokos*, which a majority of scholars understand to mean ‘dildo receiving’, is applied by the poet to the *chordai* ‘strings’ of a lyre (or a lyre-like instrument). It is no doubt intended as invective abuse, presumably directed against a member or members of the Polyanaktidai, an aristocratic family of Lesbian Mytilene, who are also mentioned in the fragment. This paper offers a new appraisal of the invective poetics of *olisbodokos* by taking a musicological and sociological approach, that is, by attending to the musical as well as the sexual dimensions of the epithet, and by reading it within the socio-musical context of Archaic Mytilene and Archaic and Classical Greece more widely. It is argued that the motivation and impact of the “dildo-receiving strings” evoked in the fragment are best appreciated in terms of the prestige of musical culture in Archaic Mytilene, a prestige in which both Sappho and Alcaeus, and presumably also the Polyanaktidai, were invested. In this society, sexually framed musical invective would have had a powerful effect, with political, social, and moral implications that went beyond the musical and the sexual. The paper concludes with a hypothesis about the origin of the tradition, reported in the *Suda*, that Sappho invented the plectrum.

Keywords

Ancient Greek Music • Archaic Greek Poetry • Archaic Lesbos • Sociology of Music •
Music, Gender, and Sexuality

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The Phallic Plectrum

Players of stringed instruments in ancient Greece, whether the tortoise-shell lyre (*chelys, lyra*), the elongated, baritone lyre called the *barbitos*, the round-bottomed wooden lyre, the *phorminx*, or the *kithara*, the large concert lyre, struck the strings with a plectrum (πλήκτρον, *plēktron*). The *plēktron* had substantial size and heft—it was designed to be gripped in the palm of the hand, not held by fingers alone—as well as a distinctive form quite unlike the compressed, bulging v-shape of the modern guitar pick. As Martin West describes it, “The Greek plectrum had a blunt flat or spoon-shaped blade of bone, ivory, etc., attached to a rounded handle; in vase-paintings it often presents a strikingly phallic appearance” (1990, p. 1). Other scholars have also remarked on the device’s “phallic appearance” in the iconography, and understandably so—it does not take a prurient eye to see it.² Consider this image, a detail from an Athenian vase painting the fifth century BCE, showing a *plēktron* suspended by a cord from a *barbitos*:³



The only ancient writer who explicitly comments on the form of the *plēktron* is Aristides Quintilianus, who says it has the shape of the letter *tau* (*De Musica* III p. 130.10–13 Winnington-Ingram). But its phallic shape seems not to have escaped the ancient imagination. This is evidenced by several passages from Greek and Roman literature that associate plectrum and phallus. The association appears already in Archaic Lesbian poetry and as late as the Byzantine poet Paul the Silentiary. In the latter case, it is only implicit, a slyly humorous subtext. Paul describes Maria, an attractive female lyre player, in a witty epigram that begins:

² Cf. e.g. Headlam (1922, p. 302).

³ Detail from the tondo of an Attic red-figured kylix attributed to the Clinia Painter. Cabinet des Médailles, De Ridder 812. Photograph by Marie-Lan Nguyen (Wikimedia Commons). (The horsetail belongs to the silen who holds the *barbitos*.)

πλῆκτρον ἔχει φόρμιγγος, ἔχει καὶ πλῆκτρον ἔρωτος·
κρούει δ' ἀμφοτέροις καὶ φρένα καὶ κιθάρην.

She holds the *plēktron* of the *phorminx* and she holds the *plēktron* of desire [*erōs*]:
she strikes with both [plectra] the heart and the *kithara*.

Anthology 16.278.1–2

Maria's "*plēktron* of the *phorminx*" doubles as a "*plēktron* of *erōs*," that is, a goad-like spur to desire in the hearts of those who watch and listen to her play. (*Plēktron* is derived from the verb *plēssein* 'to strike'.) Crucial to appreciating Maria's "erotic plectrum," however, is not only understanding the etymological wordplay, but also recalling the phallic shape of the device, which suggests the effect Maria is having upon her sexually stimulated male audience.

Other literary representations of the *plēktron* play more explicitly salacious variations on the visual similarity between *plēktron* and phallus, or rather *plēktron* and dildo. For, in our literary sources, which likely reflect obscene joking about the *plēktron* that circulated from generation to generation in the popular conversation in and around musical culture, the phallic plectrum is typically figured not as an organic penis, but as its artificial stand-in, the dildo.⁴ Before going further, I must emphasize that I am not suggesting the *plēktron* was routinely used by real people as a sex toy. My comments here bear upon representation and fantasy, not actual practices of self-stimulation. Naturally, some women and men may have used the plectrum as an impromptu sexual device. (See discussion in note below.) Needless to say, however, whether it was so used in reality has little bearing on how it figured in fantasy: what matters is that people did imagine it could be so used. That it was "readily to hand," as West notes, at women's private gatherings could encourage all manner of prurient speculation (1990, 2). Thus the lurid portrait painted by Juvenal of a Roman noblewoman, a lover of music and musicians, drifting from her lyre playing into an erotic reverie, during which her plectrum, or rather, the plectrum of the handsome (male) lyre-singer, Hedymeles, after whom she lusts, plays a predictable role:

Musical instruments are always in her hands; her thick sardonyx rings sparkle all over the tortoise-shell; the strings resound at the quivering plectrum, with which the tender Hedymeles performed his works; this she grasps, with this she consoles herself, and she lavishes kisses upon the beloved plectrum.

Juvenal *Satires* 6.380-384

⁴ An extraordinary exception in the visual record comes by way of a Hellenistic terracotta figurine of a young man playing a lute with his erect penis (held in his right hand) in place of a plectrum. A photo of the figurine, which was auctioned at Christie's New York in December 1998, is accessible online: <http://www.christies.com/lotfinder/lot/a-greek-terracotta-musician-hellenistic-period-circa-1403974-details.aspx?from=salesummary&intobjectid=1403974&sid=58c69876-129c-4455-9ff9-b3f1b6248a74>

I should emphasize too that, phallic shape aside, the *plēktron* was materially quite unlike an ancient dildo.⁵ In vase paintings, dildos are longer and wider than any plectrum.⁶ And, unlike dildos, which were made from leather, plectra were designed to be fairly rigid and unyielding inside and out; they would also have been too pointy for comfort. A Hellenistic citharode (a singer to the *kithara*) says that the *plēktron* he uses, made from a special type of thorn, is appropriately *sklēron* ‘hard’ (Antigonus of Carystus *Mirabilia* 169). Heracles was said to have killed his lyre teacher Linus with his *plēktron* (Aelian *Historical Miscellany* 3.32), something that would seem difficult to do with a dildo.

Indeed, the inappropriateness of the plectrum for the actual work of the dildo is the subject of a telling joke made in the sixth *Mimiamb* of the Hellenistic poet Herodas. Two women, Metro and Koritto, are talking about where to get a quality dildo (called here *baubōn*, rather than the more common *olisbos*). One craftsman makes products that are “firm, but also soft as sleep”; another, less talented craftsman, Kerdon, “couldn’t even stitch a *plēktron* for a lyre” (70–71; 50–51). The joke turns at once on the superficial similarity *and* essential dissimilarity between plectrum and dildo. “So far from being able to construct a *plēktron* soft as sleep,” A.D. Knox observes, “[the untalented Kerdon] could not even make a hard *plēktron* for a lyre” (in Headlam, 1922, p. 302).⁷ But dissimilar as the two devices might have felt, it is significant and not at all coincidental that they are closely paired here. When Herodas’ housewives talk about dildos, they are easily put in mind of plectra. Part of this is “social realism”: dildos and plectra very probably did circulate together in the everyday (i.e. non-poetic) cultural conversation of ancient Greece. But Herodas’ treatment of the theme also stands in a poetic tradition connecting the two objects that goes back to the Archaic period, as we will see in the next section.⁸

Chordai Olibodokoi “Dildo-Receiving Strings”

Although it appears in artistic representations in the seventh century BCE, the *plēktron* is mentioned in neither the *Iliad* nor the *Odyssey*. The earliest explicitly attested mention of it is in the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* (probably later sixth century

5 Headlam (1922, 301–302) points out that the cord of the plectrum may also have suggested its likeness to the dildo, which could have straps (ἰμαντίσκοι). There is one, or what appears to be one, literary description of a *plēktron* actually being used to penetrate a sexual orifice (a man’s anus in this case). It appears in a colorful invective passage in Achilles Tatius’ novel *Leucippe and Clitophon* (8.9.4). The villainous and perverted character Thersander, it is claimed, used to “straddle the *plēktron*” (*plēktron* corrects the corrupt *plektron* in the MSS) before entering the ring to wrestle against handsome young men. It is not entirely clear, however, whether *plēktron* is used to describe an actual plectrum that Thersander inserted into his anus (presumably in order to amplify sexual stimulation as he wrestled), or the reference is to some more innocent sort of “gymnastic exercise,” as Caciagli (2011, p. 226) wonders.

6 See the representative collection of images in Keuls (1993, pp. 82–86).

7 Caciagli (2011, p. 26) interprets the phrase “stitch a plectrum for a lyre” (πληκτρον ἐς λύρην ράψαι) differently, as referring to the attachment of the *plēktron* to the lyre by a leather cord. But this reading does not properly account for ράψαι ‘stitch’, and it misses, I think, the humor of the imagery. Stern (1979), following an observation of Kaibel, makes the appealing suggestion that Herodas also plays on the sexualized personification of the lyre: women employ the dildo as the lyre notionally does the phallic *plēktron*.

8 Neri (2013, 17 n. 27) collects further literary references linking dildo and plectrum.

BCE), where it is what seems to be an already well-established component of the iconic image of lyre-playing Apollo: “his *phorminx* under the golden *plēktron* makes a lovely sound” (184–85).⁹

The *plēktron* is mentioned three times (53, 419, 501) in the later *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*, each time in the same formulaic phrase, πλήκτρῳ ἐπειρήτιζε κατὰ μέρος ‘he sounded out [the lyre] with the *plēktron* string by string’. The phrase has the distinct tone of the technical, which suggests it was already part of the professional discourse of lyre playing.¹⁰ The *Hymn* pays lavish attention to Hermes’ invention of the lyre (39–51), but notably none to the *plēktron*; the god simply has one ready at hand. Nevertheless, Hermes was said to be the inventor of the *plēktron*, as we learn from the *Library* of Pseudo-Apollodorus (3.113).

However, the antiquarian encyclopedia of the tenth-century CE called the *Suda* records an alternative tradition about the origin of the *plēktron*, according to which its inventor was Sappho, the lyric poet-composer active in the city of Mytilene, on the island of Lesbos, around 600 BCE. I will return later to the entry in the *Suda* in which this heurmatographical tradition is mentioned. But first let us look at the fragmentary text of a lyric poem—that is, a song that was in all likelihood originally sung to the lyre or *barbitos*—that a number of scholars have attributed to Sappho. This song text, preserved in a lacunose state on a papyrus discovered at Oxyrhynchus, Egypt (P. Oxy. 2291), dates to a time earlier than the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*. It contains what appears to be a reference to the plectrum, and one that seems already to involve its eroticization. That is, this apparent reference to the plectrum does not employ the word *plēktron*, but rather ὄλισβος (*olisbos*), a word that, when next it appears in Greek literature, in Attic Old Comedy of the fifth century, and everywhere else thereafter, means ‘dildo’.¹¹

9 Compare the clearly depicted *plēktron* in one of the oldest images of Apollo playing the *phorminx*, on an early seventh-century pot from Melos (Athens, National Museum 911).

10 Cf. Franklin (2003, pp. 303–304). The manuscript tradition of the *Hymn to Hermes* records a variant of the phrase with κατὰ μέλος ‘by sounding out a melody’ in place of κατὰ μέρος at lines 419 and 501.

11 In Cratinus F 354 K-A someone says that “lecherous women use *olisboi*” (cf. F 394). Lysistrata in Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata* speaks of the *olisbos* as a “leather helper” (109–110; cf. F 332.13 K-A). For the late lexicographers, *olisboi* were simply ‘leather penises’ (Photius *Lexicon* s.v. Ὀλισβοί; *Suda* ο 169 A).

.] .γα. πεδὰ βαῖτο[ν]α	1
δ[.]οῖ Πωλυανακτ[ί]δαίς	
_...αισαμιασσι.ιε .[.] τρισ....[.]	3
χόρδαισι διακρέκην	
_ὀλισβοδόκοις(ι) περκαθ....ενος	5
τεούτ[οι]σι φιλοφ[ρό]νως	
].... δ' ἐλελίσδ[ε]ται πρ.τανεως	7
]ωγος δὲ διο[.]ω	
]υαλωδ' .[.]..ενητε[.].χ..	9

4 χόρδαισ' ἴδια κρέκην Lobel 7 π]ᾶκτις Ferrari

a little later	1
the Polyanaktid(s)	2
	3
striking strings	4
that receive the <i>olisbos</i>	5
with such people as those gladly	6
and [and a stringed instrument] is set	
to quivering (gently?)	7

Sappho F 99 c. I.1–9 L-P = Alcaeus F 303Aa V¹²

Obviously, it is difficult to come to any firm interpretive conclusions about a text that, as Denys Page put it, “is so mutilated that not a single sentence or clause can be understood” (1955, p. 145). But, for all its uncertainties, this fragment gives us enough to determine that the song included a striking piece of invective involving themes of both musical and sexual transgression. This invective, I contend, reflects broader mentalities surrounding the sociocultural significance of lyric music in Archaic Mytilenean society. Before we can consider the social context of the fragment, however, we must address three fundamental (and not unrelated) problems it presents: its authorship; the meaning of the compound epithet ὀλισβοδόκος (*olisbodokos*) ‘receiving the *olisbos*’ in line 5; and the gender (and number) of Polyanaktid(s). These problems have been treated by previous scholars, most recently Neri (2013). But given the complexity of the interpretive issues surrounding them, a detailed review is, I think, necessary for those readers not familiar with the scholarship, and may be useful even to those who are.

It is clear from meter, dialect, and certain lexical items that the fragment, along with two other fragmentary songs included in P. Oxy. 2291, is the work of either Sappho or her Mytilenean contemporary Alcaeus. But which? Lobel (1951, p. 10), the first editor of the fragment, followed by Page (1955, p. 145), assigned it to Sappho

¹² The fragment was attributed by the editors E. Lobel and D.L. Page (L-P) to Sappho and by E.-M. Voigt (V) to Alcaeus. (I will refer to the fragment as “F 99” throughout the rest of this paper, but only for ease of reference. I do not mean to endorse the attribution to Sappho.) In the text and translation above, I do not include any of the uncertain conjectures that have been made for lines 3, 8, and 9 (see e.g. Ferrari, 2010, pp. 82–83; West, 1990, pp. 1–2).

on the grounds that its metrical structure of three-line stanzas is otherwise attested for Sappho but not for Alcaeus. Given the minimally preserved state of both Sapphic and Alcaean poetry, however, this is far from a stable criterion for attribution (cf. Caciagli, 2011, p. 225; Neri, 2013, pp. 21–23). Other scholars have reasonably inclined toward Alcaeus. For most of them, it is *olisbodokos* that tilts the scale. If the word, which appears only here in Greek literature, is in fact an obscenity, that is, if the poet understood *olisbos* to mean dildo and meant the epithet to describe lyre strings as “receiving the dildo” (instead of the *plēktron*), then, their thinking goes, such an expression would be too coarse for Sappho’s poetry as we know it, yet in line with Alcaean lyric, which elsewhere (e.g. F 429 V) resorts to coarse invective (see e.g. Gomme, 1957, p. 261; Ferrari, 2010, p. 84; a thorough overview of the debate is provided in Caciagli, 2011, pp. 225–26).

Martin West took a different approach, maintaining the attribution to Sappho by attempting to remove the supposedly problematic coarseness from the fragment. He argued that *olisbos* here means simply *plēktron*, not dildo, and that in fact the latter sense is only a later semantic development from the first. In Archaic Mytilene, West thought, the plectrum was called an *olisbos*; *olisbodokos* thus refers to strings that merely ‘receive the plectrum’. What the fragment presents, then, is an innocuous description of music making.¹³

Yet there is little reason to support this neutering of the epithet. Again, everywhere else in Greek literature *olisbos* appears, it means ‘dildo’, and we have seen that there was a clear association made between plectra and dildos.¹⁴ Furthermore, much of what we think we know about Sappho’s poetry is necessarily conditioned by the relatively small sample of what is preserved. Thus, attempts to defend notions about the propriety of her language may be very much misplaced. Indeed, Philodemus (first century BCE) says that Sappho composed some poems “in an iambic manner” (*de Poem.* fr. 117 Janko), while the *Suda* tells us she composed iambic poetry proper. If this iambic or iambically styled verse was anything like the remains of iambos by other Archaic poets, it would have contained abusive and sexual language (see now Rosenmeyer, 2006 and Martin, 2016 on “iambic Sappho”). Sappho’s biographical tradition alludes to her antagonistic relationship with women from rival aristocratic houses, and several fragments of her poetry contain insults apparently directed

¹³ West (1970, p. 324) and (1990, p. 1: “sex toys are alien to [Sappho’s poetry]”).

¹⁴ See detailed criticisms of West’s view in Caciagli (2011, p. 226) and Yatromanolakis (2007, 251–52), who speaks of its “misapplied moralizing” (251 n. 373). Etymologically, as Chantraine holds, *olisbos* may derive from a verb *olisthein* ‘slide’ via the intermediary form *olisthos*, meaning ‘sliding, slipperiness’ (*Dictionnaire Étymologique de la Langue Grecque* p. 792, s.v. ὀλισθος). An *olisbos* would thus be a ‘slider’. Chantraine thought the word obscene from the start: the ‘slider’ was always a ‘dildo’. See other views in Neri (2013, 16 n. 21). Nelson (2000), building on West, argues that *olisbos* was not originally obscene, but musical: it described the plectrum’s sliding action as the player applied it to the strings. But it seems unlikely that “sliding” would have been a natural way to conceptualize –for Lesbians or anyone else– what the player does with the plectrum to the strings, or even what the strings are made to do by the plectrum. What the plectrum normally does is *strike* the strings from above or below –thus *plēktron*, a word which, as the *Hymns to Apollo* and *Hermes* show, was widely known and used already in the sixth century BCE.

against these social and, as we will see, musico-poetic rivals.¹⁵ These insults, while not in the same realm of obscenity as *olisbodokos*, can nevertheless have a rough edge (Aloni, 1997, p. LXVI–LXVII; Rosenmeyer 2006, pp. 25–30). For instance, in F 155 V, Sappho delivers an unmistakably passive-aggressive greeting –a “kiss off,” really– to someone who has presumably fallen from her favor, or was never in it: “I wish the daughter of the house of Polyanax a very fine day indeed!”

Sappho’s hostility toward this Πωλυανάκτιδα παῖδα ‘daughter of the house of Polyanax’ is of course notable in respect to the Πωλυανακτ[ί]δαις ‘descendant(s) of Polyanax’ named in F 99.2. It both supports the view that Sappho is the author of the latter fragment and strongly suggests that *olisbodokos* was intended as an attack against the Polyanaktid(s). That a member or members of this family –presumably one of the leading houses of the aristocratic world of Mytilene in which Sappho moved– are the objects of abuse in F 99 is further confirmed by another of the song fragments contained in P. Oxy. 2291, which refers to some person or thing connected to the Polyanaktid family as *margos* ‘greedy’, or perhaps ‘lascivious’ (F 99.14–15 L-P; cf. Caciagli, 2011, p. 226; Aloni, 1997, p. 169).

Yet, while the sexual invective of *olisbodokos* thus seems almost certain, the case for attributing F 99 to Sappho is hardly airtight. No fragment of Alcaeus mentions or alludes to antagonism with the Polyanaktids, but it is entirely possible that he, like Sappho, found himself at odds with them and attacked them in song (cf. Ferrari, 2010, p. 89). The grammatical gender of the patronymic Πωλυανακτ[ί]δαις may in fact point toward Alcaean authorship. It has been said that Πωλυανακτ[ί]δαις could represent either a masculine or a feminine accusative plural (see e.g. Yatromanolakis, 2007, p. 374), and so refer to either the men or the women of the house of Polyanax (or perhaps both). For those who support Sapphic authorship, the assumption has been that the word must be feminine, referring specifically to Polyanaktid women, Sappho’s rivals; in F 155, recall, Sappho dismisses a “daughter of the house of Polyanax.” But we might expect the accusative plural of the feminine patronymic to be *Πωλυανάκτιδας, a third-declension form with short final alpha (see Πωλυανάκτιδα in F 155, with Neri, 2013, 15 n. 15).¹⁶

It is possible that Sappho used (masculine) Πωλυανακτ[ί]δαις to refer to the house in general, but with implicit reference to the Polyanaktid women whom she was targeting. Yet if the name is taken, perhaps more naturally, to refer to the men of the house (cf. Snyder, 1997, pp. 113–115), Alcaeus may then be the more likely author. So too if we read Πωλυανακτ[ί]δαις in a third grammatically possible way, as a

15 For relevant fragments and testimonia, and attempts to reconstruct the rivalrous social scene in which Sappho operated, see Page (1955), Ferrari (2010), and Caciagli (2011).

16 This was also a point made to me *viva voce* by M.L. West. Πωλυανακτιδαν at 99.14 is probably masculine accusative singular agreeing with μάργον (“the greedy/lewd son of Polyanax”), though Aloni (1997, p. 169) points out it could also represent a feminine genitive plural.

masculine singular nominative. Franco Ferrari takes this course (2010, pp. 82–89), arguing that Alcaeus imagines a scene in which “the son of Polyanax,” whom he identifies with Hyrras, the father of Alcaeus’ enemy Pittacus, makes music in the context of the symposium, the drinking party where the lyre (or *barbitos*) was most at home.¹⁷ He notes that the sympotic setting of an invective song of Alcaeus (F 70 V), which I will discuss below, offers a parallel. This reading is, I think, quite compelling, although the identity of Πωλυανακτ[ί]δαϊς remains an open question.

It is time to summarize the main points of this section. First, the attribution of F 99 is uncertain; there are convincing arguments for both Sappho and Alcaeus. Second, *olisbodokos* is best understood to describe the strings, presumably those struck by the Polyanaktid(s), as “dildo receiving.” While the sexual tenor of this epithet exceeds anything we see in the language of Sappho or even Alcaeus, it is certainly not inconsistent with either poet’s capacity for invective. Finally, while Πωλυανακτ[ί]δαϊς may refer to either the male or female members of the Polyanaktid house, a reference to one or more men of that house may be more likely.

In regard to this last point, it should be noted that males too, at least in the popular imagination of early Greece, could use *olisboi*. Oversexed satyrs are depicted on Attic vases anally inserting dildos (Dover, 1989, p. 102). A passage from the novel *Leucippe and Clitophon* by Achilles Tatius, in which a morally debased man “straddles a *plēktron*,” is also suggestive (8.9.4; see note above). What is clear from both image and text is that men’s enjoyment of *olisboi* was a sign of sexual excess, moral deviancy, and pathic effeminacy. As such, its imputation to male Polyanaktid(s), whether by Sappho or Alcaeus, would make for highly effective abuse. In the ideology of sex and gender in early Greece, self-penetration with the *olisbos* would indicate not only sexual perversion, but fundamental political unfitness as well.¹⁸

Lyric Decorum in Mytilene

But such abuse comes by way of *strings*. It is the *chordai*, presumably of a tortoise-shell lyre or the *barbitos*, an instrument closely associated with Archaic Lesbos and the Archaic symposium more widely, to which *olisbodokos* is apparently attached. In my opinion, previous scholars have not adequately addressed the distinctly musical focus of the epithet. In this and the next section, then, I would like to consider its invective as music criticism of a sort, criticism that is responsive to the social and musical world of Mytilene in the time of Sappho and Alcaeus.

¹⁷ Ferrari reads περκαθ[θ]όμενος ‘dining’ in line 5, which he thinks agrees with nominative Πωλυανακτ[ί]δαϊς (2010, p. 83). If we take Πωλυανακτίδαν at 99.14 as a masculine singular (see previous note), the same “son of Polyanax” is presumably the target of invective in both the songs in P. Oxy. 2291.

¹⁸ On the politics of penetration, see above all Halperin (1990, pp. 88–112), who focuses on evidence from Classical Athens. But it is difficult to suppose that male usage of a dildo would not have had the same political ramifications in Archaic Mytilene.

Archaic Lesbos was famous above all for two things: civil strife (*stasis*) and music. As for the first, as Peter Green puts it, “The pattern of internal politics on Lesbos –violent feuding between cities, and, in cities, between aristocratic-oligarchic and democratic, or, earlier, ‘tyrannical’ (i.e. anti-oligarchic) factions– was established early, and proved to be perennial” (1998, p. 56). Seventh- and sixth-century Mytilene was especially fractious (Spencer, 2001). Alcaeus found himself in the thick of the turmoil. His “stasiotic” lyric poetry provides a first-hand account of shifting allegiances and enmities between rival factions and the aristocratic houses with which they were affiliated, and no doubt contributed to the intensification of the political struggle. Sappho’s poetry, while not as explicitly political as Alcaeus’, also reflects her involvement in the factionalism of the Mytilenean elite.¹⁹

At the same time, Lesbos enjoyed a reputation for being the “most musical” island of Greece (Phanocles F 1.22), and was particularly known for its lyre music. It was believed that Orpheus’ singing head and resounding lyre floated down the Hebrus River in Thrace and across the sea to Lesbos, where both were preserved (Lucian *Adv. Ind.* 11). Lesbos was the home of Terpander, the semi-legendary founder of the art of citharody and inventor of the *barbitos* (Pindar F 125 S-M), of Arion, a citharode “second to none in his time [later seventh century BCE]” (Herodotus 1.23), and of other world-famous lyre singers.²⁰ Sappho herself was aware of the musical prestige of her homeland. In one fragment (106 V), she boasts of the supremacy of “the Lesbian singer,” presumably with reference to the island’s great citharodes, but probably not without an implicit nod to her own repute as well. Mytilene was especially distinguished for its musical culture. Isocrates, writing in the fourth-century BCE, calls it “the *polis* agreed by all to be the most musical” (*Letters* 8.4). This assessment must not be based solely upon the posthumous fame of Sappho and Alcaeus alone, but surely reflects too the seriousness with which the broader elite of Mytilenean society had long cultivated music. Aelian, writing in the later Imperial period, records that when Mytilene “ruled the sea” –he probably refers to the Archaic period, when the city was a power in the eastern Aegean– it punished rebellious subjects by depriving their children of an education in music, since the Mytileneans “thought it the gravest punishment to live in ignorance and without musical culture (*amousia*)” (*Historical Miscellany* 7.15). Aelian’s account, while perhaps apocryphal, very likely derives from an earlier source. Whatever its origin or historicity, however, it provides sufficiently reliable testimony for the Mytileneans’ high estimation of both the cultural and political prestige of music.

¹⁹ Page (1955) remains a useful analysis of the political entanglements of Sappho and Alcaeus. Cf. Ferrari (2010) and Caciagli (2011).

²⁰ See full discussion with sources in Power (2010, pp. 317–402). There is some irony in the fact that the Lesbian citharodes, beginning with Terpander, were proverbially known for resolving *stasis* in other city-states such as Sparta with their lyre songs (see e.g. Diodorus Siculus 8.28), while on Lesbos itself factionalism and lyric music long coexisted, and, if Alcaean lyric is indicative of wider musico-political contentiousness, indeed fueled one another. As Aelius Aristides remarked, the famously musical Lesbians were infamously “unmusically disposed” toward one another (24.55).

The aristocratic rivalries in which Alcaeus and Sappho were enmeshed of course had sociopolitical bases, but, in a society where musical culture was taken so seriously and was so closely bound up with civic and elite identity, we may well expect to find sociopolitical hostilities expressed in terms of music criticism. Such criticism is, I suggest, what we find in F 99, specifically, the accusation of a breach, whether real or imagined, of what we could call lyric decorum, the socially correct, technically accomplished display on the lyre of proper musical education (*paideia*), competency, and comportment. My use of “lyric decorum” is inspired by Leslie Kurke’s application of the concept of decorum to the high, dignified verbal register of Lesbian lyric monody, which Alcaeus occasionally violated, for political-rhetorical effect, by importing language from the lower, invective register of iambic poetry (1994). On my reading, such pointed violation of generic norms is exactly what happens in F 99: the break with poetic decorum in Kurke’s sense serves to censure (or rather impute) a break in musical, i.e. lyric decorum; obscene invective is brought to bear –within a song that was itself very likely sung to the lyre– against an opponent in order to announce, fairly or unfairly, that he (or she) lacks good lyric culture, with all the social opprobrium that goes with that charge. For, in Archaic Mytilene, to charge someone with lyric indecorum would also be to attack his or her worthiness as a member of the civic community, or at least the city’s aristocratic elite. This is certainly the implication of Alcaeus F 70, discussed below. In the case of Sappho, there is good reason to think that musical reputations were contested in the poetic crosstalk between competing groups of female *moisopoi* ‘attendants of the Muses’, as Sappho (probably) characterizes her own clique in F 150 V, that were aligned with different aristocratic houses such as the Polyanaktidai.²¹

The Mytilenean elite, though it may have been especially zealous in its policing of music as a status marker, was hardly alone in Archaic and Classical Greece in its ideological regard for lyric decorum. Alcman could say that, in the aristocratic warrior society of Archaic Sparta, “when weighed against the steel, fine lyre playing (τὸ καλῶς κιθαρίσδην) tips the scales” (F 41, trans. Campbell, 1988, p. 425). Lyric elitism –the branding of outsiders as musically incompetent or unsophisticated– is well attested for democratic Athens, where an entrenched aristocratic ruling class relied on its lyric *paideia* as an index of sociopolitical distinction (Power, 2007; Wilson, 2004). Charges of incompetence on the lyre were leveled by elites, and subsequently taken up in the popular culture, against the Athenian political upstarts Themistocles (Plutarch *Cim.* 9.1) and Cleon (Aristophanes *Knights*, 987-96).

A variant of lyric elitism pervades Attic Old Comedy’s criticism of the innovatory, popular compositional and performance styles introduced by certain citharodes,

²¹ See e.g. F 55 V, with Williamson (1995, pp. 86–89). *Moisopolos* is a term that may have not only had cultic associations (Hardie, 2005), but also intimations of music professionalism. (It is applied to competitive citharodes at Euripides *Alcestis*, pp. 444-47, and in the Hellenistic period to a Theban guild of Dionysian Artists (*IG* 7.2484).) We can imagine that Sappho’s rivals conceived of their cliques along similar lines, as musico-poetic associations with distinct identities and competing claims to superiority. Maximus of Tyre calls Sappho’s rivals Gorgo and Andromeda her *antitekhnnoi* ‘rival artists’ (*Orations* 18.9).

dithyrambists, and tragedians in the fifth century BCE. This “new music” met with resistance from cultural conservatives in Athens, who saw it as a threat to the “classical” musical culture they cherished as an essential part of their cultural patrimony and social identity (Power, 2007). Old Comedy, giving voice to this resistance, often metaphorizes perceived transgressions against traditional musical norms as sexual transgressions, in a manner reminiscent of the invective in F 99. A fragment from Pherecrates’ *Cheiron* (155 K-A) presents the most illustrative example of comic criticism’s moralizing conflation of the musical and the sexual: a personified Music (*Mousikē*) comes onstage to accuse the new musicians of violating her “body” with their perverse technical novelties. The accusations she makes against the Mytilenean citharode Phrynis merit special attention:

Phrynis, hurling his own peculiar whirlwind [*idion strobilon*] of sorts into me, has ravaged me completely with his bending and twisting, having a dozen *harmoniai* in five strings. Even so, he too was a tolerable partner, for if he did go astray at all, he made it good again.

Pherecrates *Cheiron* fr. 155.14–18 K-A [trans. West (1992, p. 360), adapted]

Much in this passage is unclear, on both the musical and sexual sides of the double-entendres (Restani, 1983). I will restrict my comments to the *strobilos* mentioned in the first line. As West convincingly argued (1992, 360 n. 19), we probably need not think the *strobilos* some otherwise unattested “gadget” used to tune *kithara* strings.²² Rather, it is a typically surreal comic portmanteau of the figurative and the material, and one hinting strongly at sexual impropriety. On the one hand, the *strobilos* is a destructive “whirlwind” of “bending and twisting” notes characteristic of Phrynis’ harmonically experimental, virtuoso style.²³ On the other, *strobilos* can also mean ‘spinning top’ or ‘pine cone’, objects whose phallic shape evokes the plectrum, and in turn perhaps a dildo, which Phrynis violently sticks into his strings –that is, into a feminized *Mousikē* (cf. D’Angour, 2005, pp. 103–104; Landels, 1999, p. 59). While we cannot know whether Pherecrates had the Mytilenean poet’s *plēktron-olisbos* in mind when he assigned this Mytilenean citharode the similar-sounding and -looking *strobilos*, a conscious allusion may not be all that far-fetched –the comic poets were familiar with a range of Archaic lyric (Kugelmeier, 1996; Olson, 2007, p. 181). At the least, there is an incidental conceptual continuity between the invective thrusts of the two texts.

Immoral Lyres

For Pherecrates and other comic poets, the putatively crass musical and cultural values of Phrynis and his ilk were expressed in terms of sexual deviancy. So it is with *olisbodokos* in F 99. The epithet turns upon two poetic or rhetorical devices that

²² Pöhlmann (2011, pp. 126–31), however, takes *strobilos* to refer to a special sort of tuning peg; he believes remains of such pegs have been recently discovered in an excavation in Leucas. But even if such a device is what Pherecrates has in mind, the sexual/phallic humor of the passage likely remains the much same.

²³ In Aristophanes’ *Clouds*, Better Argument, a figure representing Athenian cultural conservatism, targets the musical innovations of Phrynis as a subversion of the traditional lyric *paideia* provided to elite Athenian youths (969–70).

in fact foreshadow comedy’s musico-sexual invective.²⁴ First, catachresis, a figure deployed to conjure up a shockingly “wrong” image: the plectrum, which visually resembles a dildo, notionally *becomes*, when held in vulgar hands, a dildo, and is so called. The epithet concretizes a metaphor, even as the concretization it evokes is impossible –you cannot really play the lyre with a dildo. As in comedy, however, questions of practicality and realism are not pertinent. We are not supposed to imagine the Polyanaktid(s) strumming strings with an actual plectrum or an actual dildo. The fantasy conjured up resides somewhere in between, and to try to make “literal” sense of the epithet, as some scholars have done, is to misrecognize its poetics. The *plēktron-olisbos* is an absurd travesty, an appropriately inappropriate emblem of the debased musicality and perverse character of the Polyanaktid(s).

In this respect, there may be something to Lobel’s reading of line 4, *χόρδαισ’ ἴδια κρέκην* (instead of *χόρδαισι διακρέκην*): the Polyanaktid(s) make a peculiar or strange (*idia*) sort of music on their strings (cf. Yatromanolakis, 2007, 251 n. 372). On this reading, the poet would be reinforcing the impression that the Polyanaktid technique of lyre playing is perceptibly –both audibly and visually– corrupt, deformed. (It is tempting to compare the *idios strobilos* that Phrynys inserts into his strings.)

It may well have been the case that the *plēktron* –how it was held, how it was applied to the strings– was integral not only to proper lyre-playing technique, but to the decorous comportment, the *hexis* of the aristocratic lyre player, the *bella figura* he (or she) cut. This seems implicit in the idealizing evocations of citharodic Apollo wielding his “golden plectrum” in both literature and art. A passage in Plutarch’s *Life of Alcibiades* is also suggestive. The aristocrat Alcibiades gives as his rationale for rejecting the reed pipe (*aulos*), yet continuing to play the lyre, that “the use of the *plēktron* and the lyre do nothing to corrupt the bearing and appearance fitting for a free man” (πλήκτρον μὲν γὰρ καὶ λύρας χρῆσιν οὐδὲν οὔτε σχήματος οὔτε μορφῆς ἐλευθέρῳ πρεπούσης διαφθείρειν, 2.4). The decorum of lyre playing was thus as much about visual and physical aesthetics –cultivating proper bearing (*schēma*) and appearance (*morphē*), in Alcibiades’ words– as it was about making harmonious sounds or even cultivating good inner values. The importance of projecting a correct image in musical performance seems implicit in the claim attributed to the fifth-century sophist Damon of Oa, that a young man should display not only his sense of justice when he plays the lyre, but his manliness (*andreia*) and self-control (*sōphrosunē*)

²⁴ Old Comedy’s invective is a descendant of the same Archaic iambic *psogos* (blame poetry; see Rosen, 1988) from which the Lesbian monodist borrows. It is remarkable, however, that we find no analogous musical invective in our fragments of the old iambographers. These poets conceivably did not share the same investment in lyric decorum with the aristocratic exponents of lyric monody (and, later, the culturally elite poet-composers of Attic comedy). It is worth noting here an Attic red-figured vase of the fifth century (Paris, Louvre C 10784), on which a satyr is labeled Phlebodokos ‘receiver of the vein’, i.e. ‘of the penis’, a name that might suggest the use of the *olisbos* as well as actual penile penetration (see Dover, 1989, pp. 102–103, 176 n. 9). As Hedreen (2006) shows, there is a significant continuity between the sexual language of Archaic iambos and the sexually excessive world of satyrs depicted on Attic sympotic vessels. Phlebodokos and *olisbodokos* emerge from a shared iambic sexual imaginary.

as well (D-K 37 B 4). Against this ideological backdrop, the catachrestic image of “dildo-receiving strings” becomes all the more cutting.

The second figure at issue is hypallage (transferred epithet), which also implies a personification. This was already observed by G. Giangrande, who noted that the *chordai* of the “instrument used by the player...are called ὀλισβοδόκοι because the player herself was ὀλισβοδόκος” (1980, p. 250). Giangrande, however, missed the invective thrust of the fragment and concluded, rather unfortunately, that the epithet “leaves us in no doubt as to what Sappho and her companions were up to, and confirms the ancient view” that Sappho practiced lesbianism. The epithet in fact confirms no such thing, but Giangrande’s initial point is nevertheless well made: like player, like instrument, the essentializing logic goes. The stringed instrument of the Polyanaktid(s) is personified in the debased image of its owner(s). In this regard, we should also take note of the verb *elelisdetai* at 99.7, which may –certainty is impossible– describe the same instrument whose strings are *olisbodokoi*. The instrument was presumably named in the lacuna that begins the line. Ferrari proposes πᾶκτις, a kind of harp. But harps were played with fingers, not plectra, and *elelisdein* is elsewhere in poetry used of the lyre, not the harp.²⁵ (Perhaps the poet had *barmos*, a shortened by-form of *barbitos*; the word would fill the lacuna.) In any case, the vibrating or quivering indicated by the verb might carry a louche, seamy sense beneath its primary musical one: the instrument is itself sexualized (cf. Aloni, 1997, p. 167).²⁶

We find an analog for the personified “immoral lyre” in Aristophanic comedy, where it has a distinctly political emphasis. The chorus of *Knights* claims that, when a boy, the notorious demagogue Cleon could learn to tune his lyre only “in the bribe-receiving mode” –*dōrodokisti* a pun on *dōristi* ‘in the Dorian mode’ (989-91). The formal similarity of this comic compound to *olisbodokos* may, for all we know, not be entirely coincidental. Certainly, the young Cleon’s implicitly personified lyre, a “bribe-taker,” is meant to foretell his indecorous political future.

Alcaeus F 70 V offers a comparandum to F 99 that is closer to home. I cite only the most relevant part of this song, lines 3-5 (with Liberman’s supplement ἐπα[νδάνει in line 5):

ἀθύρει πεδέχων συμποσίω.[

βάρμος, φιλώνων πεδ’ ἀλεμ[άτων

εὐωχήμενος αὐτοισιν ἐπα[νδάνει

participating in the symposium the *barmos* makes merry;

feasting with idle braggarts it delights them.

25 E.g. Pindar *Olympian* 9.13, *Pythian* 1.1–4. An epigram of Leonidas contains a line that perhaps alludes to F 99, μελίσδετα δὲ τὸν χέλον διακρέκων “striking the lyre (*chelus*) he [Anacreon] sings (*melisdetai*)” (*API* 16.307.5; cf. Neri, 2013, p. 16).

26 Neri (2013, 18 n. 30) points out that (*dia*)*krekehēn* might also have sexual connotations.

There are themes of socio-musical invective in Alcaeus F 70 that appear to inform F 99 as well; the two songs seem to work from shared ideological premises vis-à-vis social and lyric decorum.²⁷ Alcaeus imagines a symposium attended by the faction (*hetaireia*) of his former ally and current enemy Pittacus, who betrayed Alcaeus' *hetaireia* in his demagogic rise to power in Mytilene and now promises to “devour the city” (70.7). A contrast is implied: whereas at the symposia of Alcaeus and his friends –where F 70 itself was performed– the lyre or *barbitos* accompanies and adorns graceful discourse and decorous company, at Pittacus', the musical scene could not be more different. Alcaeus personifies the *barmos* (the by-form of *barbitos*) as one more of the uncouth symposiasts around Pittacus. Like the “idle braggarts” (φιλώνων ἀλεμ[άτων) who pretend to make proper music on it, the *barmos* glibly feasts and sports, with a view only to pleasing its vulgar fellows.²⁸ There may be intimations here of Pittacus' own crowd-pleasing politics –if we do accept Liberman's supplement– in αὐτοισιν ἐπα[νδάνει ‘it delights them’, a phrase whose suggestion of indiscriminating musical bonhomie perhaps recalls τεούτ[οι]σι φιλοφ[ρό]νως ‘gladly with men such as those’ in F 99.6.²⁹ For Alcaeus, indecorous lyric and sympotic culture equal corrupt politics and character –an equation not only Alcaeus' friends would recognize as true, but all Mytilenean elites would presumably endorse. (It is entirely conceivable that Pittacus' faction disparaged Alcaeus' music making along similarly politicized lines.) If this vulgar *barbitos* exemplifies all that is wrong with Pittacus, in F 99, the “dildo-receiving strings” speak volumes about the corruption of the Polyanaktid(s). In the latter case, of course, the explicitly sexual nature of the invective makes it all the more damning, musically, personally, and politically.

If we understand Πωλυανακτ[ί]δαῖς to refer to a male member or male members of the house of Polyanax, then the symposium would likely be the imagined setting of F 99, as in F 70. If we choose to take Πωλυανακτ[ί]δαῖς as targeting the female members of the house –in which case Sappho's authorship is more likely– then the Polyanaktid women are presumably imagined to be engaged in the same kind of music making activity as Sappho's group, perhaps in domestic women's quarters, a cultic sanctuary (see e.g. Sappho F 2 V), or even a ritualized choral performance. But, in these scenarios as in a sympotic one, the strings likewise take on the vulgar personality of the players, and the musical scene evoked has a louche, depraved

27 Ferrari (2010, pp. 84–85) draws the connection between the two songs, but chooses to follow West in reading *olisbodokos* as ‘plectrum receiving’. As such, he misses the full extent of their common deployment of musical invective.

28 On the meaning of φιλώνων, see Kurke (1994, pp. 73–74). For a different interpretation of the word, as meaning “cronies,” see Rodriguez-Somolinos (1994, p. 122).

29 Ferrari (2010, 84 n. 11) notes, correctly, I think, the “censorious tone” of τεούτ[οι]σι. Lucian relates a remarkable tale of lyric indecorum in Mytilene featuring Pittacus' son, Neanthus, “an unmusical and unskilled boy,” who misappropriates Orpheus' lyre. Hoping to wield its powers of enchantment, Neanthus attempts to play the lyre, but the noisy racket he makes instead incites a pack of wild dogs to attack and tear him to bits –a violent subversion of Orphic myth (*Adv. Ind.* 11–12). Lucian is quite late (second century CE); this story may well be his own invention. But he presents it as if it were a traditional Lesbian account (a Λέσβιος μῦθος πάλαι γενόμενος ‘Lesbian tale (*mūthos*) that happened long ago’), and we may not want to dismiss too quickly the possibility that he is drawing from an earlier source, or that his *mūthos* reflects, through however many layers of mediation, musico-political mentalities (and polemics) of Archaic Mytilene.

aspect. As a character in a comedy of Cratinus puts it, “lecherous women” use *olisboi* (F 354 K-A), and this would doubtless too be the implication of *olisbodokos*: the lyre strings are degraded in such a way as to reflect the sexual incontinence of the women who play them.³⁰ But the epithet may also trigger another assumption, that the Polyanaktid women’s very lack of good musical culture is the *cause* of their lecherousness. In any case, lyric and sexual decorum seem to be put on a par, and a violation of one signals a violation of the other.³¹

Sappho’s Invention

Regardless of the identity (and gender) of the poet and the Polyanaktid(s), we can, and indeed we must, understand the motivation and impact of the “dildo-receiving strings” in terms of the prestige of musical culture in Archaic Mytilene, a prestige in which both Sappho and Alcaeus, and presumably their enemies as well, were invested. In this society, musico-sexual invective would have had a powerful effect, with political and social implications that went beyond the musical and the sexual.

I would like to conclude by considering the possible reception in Classical Athens of F 99, and its conflation of plectrum and dildo. The long *Suda* entry on Sappho (σ 107) consists mostly of (spurious) biographical data. It includes an account of the various poetic genres in which Sappho worked, in the midst of which we read the unexpected claim that she was the inventor of the *plēktron* (“She wrote nine books of lyric songs, she invented the *plēktron*, and she wrote epigrams, elegies, iamboi, and monodies”). The information about Sappho in the *Suda* contains a mixture of inferences from her poetry and the way the poetry was filtered through the cultural imagination of Classical Athens, in particular Attic comedy (Most, 1995). The symposium also played a role in shaping Sappho’s early Athenian reception (Nagy, 2007; Yatromanolakis, 2007). Sappho’s songs were reperformed at Athenian symposia, and there they inspired bawdy biographical constructions of Sappho herself. Traces of the sexual profanation of Sappho –via symposia and comedy– are apparent in the *Suda*. For instance, many have taken the name attributed to Sappho’s husband as an iambic/comic creation: Kerkylas from Andros (‘Prick from Isle of Man’, as Campbell, 1982, 5 renders it).

Yatromanolakis reasonably suggests that, even if the poet of F 99 did not originally intend *olisbos* to mean dildo, but rather simply plectrum, then *olisbos* would reflexively have become a dildo in the reperformances of the song at Athenian symposia: “a

30 Aloni (1997, 167) detects a possible swipe at their menfolk, too: Polyanaktid men are not able to satisfy their women. More broadly still, by attacking Polyanaktid women’s sexual and musical integrity, the poet would be undermining the political authority of the house as a whole.

31 The profanation of the lyre in F 99 stands in marked contrast to the exaltation of the instrument in two fragments of Sappho. In F 118 V, Sappho invites a “divine lyre” (ἄγι δὴ χέλυ δῖα) to accompany her song. In F 58, the poet apparently casts herself in the role of a chorus leader, calling attention to her “song-loving, clear lyre” (φιλάοιδον λιγύραν χελύνην, 2).

plēktron ... could well have been scanned ... as an *olisbos* [i.e. dildo] in late archaic and classical Athens” (2007, p. 252). But, if we imagine that Athenian symposiasts thought, rightly or wrongly, that F 99 was a composition by Sappho, we could push the implications of such “scanning” further.³² That is to say, in the context of her Athenian reception, it is easy to see how *olisbodokos* could be misread, such that its original invective force was turned against Sappho herself –Sappho the sexualized composer of erotic lyric (as per the sympotic-comic construct). The musical and political rivalries of Mytilene that were the original context for the significance of *olisbodokos* would thus have been overlooked, and the original profanation of the Polyanaktids’ musical pretenses through the figure of the plectrum-dildo would have become part of Sappho’s own profaned musical and sexual persona.

Such a misreading of F 99 could have been the genesis of the tradition reported in the *Suda* that Sappho invented the *plēktron*. If so, missing from the *Suda*’s straightforward report would be the fantastical, obscene subtext underlying this tradition (or better, this “urban legend”), which is that Sappho invented it to serve double duty as *olisbos* (or possibly that she used her *olisbos* as the first *plēktron*). A heurematological joke along these lines may have gotten its start in the symposium and then moved to the comic stage, or perhaps it was first created by an Old or Middle comic poet who brought Sappho onstage to show off her convenient “invention,” the *plēktron*.³³

³² Confusion between Sapphic and Alcaean authorship of songs among Athenian symposiasts seems to be suggested by schol. Ar. *Wasps* 1238. See discussion in Yatromanolakis (2007, 215–16).

³³ In his *Sappho*, Antiphanes “makes the poet herself” propose a riddle to a male interlocutor (Athenaeus 10.450e–451b). The riddle delivered by this comic Sappho deals with a writing tablet, but riddles about musical instruments are attested for both the symposium and the stage (see Power, 2007, 201–202). Menaechmus of Sicily, a writer of the later fourth century BCE, attributed the invention of the *pēktis*, a harp, to Sappho (Athen. 14.635b). This attribution, however, would seem to reflect a less creatively tendentious biographical misreading of Sappho’s poetry (which mentions harps, instruments that were widely associated with Eastern Greece and women and thus naturally with Sappho) than the claim made about the plectrum. It may well be Menaechmus’ own inference.

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Uzun Özet

Arkaik Mytilene’de (ve Başka Yerlerde) Lirik Şiire Konu Olan Yakışsızlık: Sappho F 99 c. I.1–9 L-P = Alcaeus F 303Aa V*

Timothy Power¹

Öz

Bu makale Arkaik Lesbos şiir geleneğine ait, kimi uzmanların Sappho’ya, kimilerinin Alkaios’a atfettiği (Sappho F 99 L-P = Alkaios F 303A V), metni hayli noksan bir fragmandaki ilgi çekici bir yakıştırma ile ilgilidir. ‘Yapay fallus alan’ anlamına geldiği neredeyse kesin olan *olisbodokos* yakıştırması lirin ya da *barbitos* gibi lir benzeri bir çalgının tellerini (khordai) nitelemektedir. Büyük olasılıkla, Polyanaktidai adıyla fragmanda da geçen, Lesbos Adası’nın Mytilene şehrindeki aristokrat aileden biri ya da birilerini hedef alan bu yakıştırmanın amacı hiç şüphesiz, sövgüyle kötümektir. *Olisbodokos* terimini hem müzik hem cinsellikle ilgili boyutunu göz önüne alarak, Arkaik Mytilene ve daha geniş çerçevede Arkaik ve Klasik Dönem Yunan kültürünün sosyo-müzikal bağlamı içinde değerlendiren çalışmamız bu şiirsel sövgü için müzikoloji ve sosyoloji perspektifinden yeni bir yorum önerisi sunmaktadır. ‘Yapay fallus alan teller’ yakıştırmasının amacını ve bıraktığı etkiyi tam olarak anlamak istiyorsak Arkaik Dönem Mytilene’inde, Sappho, Alkaios ve muhtemelen Polyanaktidai ailesinin de önemsedığı müzik kültürünün saygınlığı meselesini göz önüne almamız gerektiği kanısındayız. Söz konusu toplumda müzikle ilgili, cinsellik bağlamına oturtulmuş sövgüler, müziğin de cinselliğin de ötesine geçen politik ve toplumsal çağrışımlarıyla büyük etki yaratıyor olmalıdır. Makalenin son kısmında, mızrabı (plēktron) Sappho’nun icad ettiğiyle ilgili Suda sözlüğünde kaydedilmiş aktarımın kaynağına ilişkin bir hipotez ileri sürülmüştür.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Antik Yunan Müziği • Arkaik Yunan Şiiri • Arkaik Dönemde Lesbos Adası • Müzik Sosyolojisi • Müzik, Toplumsal Cinsiyet ve Cinsellik

* Bu metin daha önce Salerno (İtalya) ve Baton Rouge (Louisiana, USA)’da bildiri olarak sunulmuştur. Yazıya bu halini verirken söz konusu etkinliklerdeki dinleyicilerin yorumlarından da yararlandım.

Yazının İngilizce başlığında geçen ve hem edebî/müzikal hem ahlaki anlamda uygunsuzluğu ifade eden *indecorum* kelimesini Türkçede tek kelimeyle karşılamak pek kolay değildir. Seçtiğimiz “yakışsızlık” teriminin bu çift anlamlılığı kısmen de olsa yansıttığını düşünüyoruz. (Özetteki bu notlar editöre aittir.)

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Bu makale Arkaik Lesbos² şiir geleneğine ait, kimi uzmanların Sappho’ya, kimilerinin Alkaios’a³ atfettiği (Sappho F 99 L-P = Alkaios F 303A V)⁴, metni hayli noksan bir fragmandaki ilgi çekici bir yakıştırmayla ilgilidir. ‘Yapay fallus alan’ anlamına geldiği neredeyse kesin olan *olisbodokos*⁵ yakıştırması lirin ya da barbitos gibi lir benzeri bir çalgının tellerini (khordai) nitelemektedir. Büyük olasılıkla, Polyanaktidai adıyla fragmanda da geçen, Lesbos Adası’nın Mytilene şehrindeki aristokrat aileden biri ya da birilerini hedef alan bu yakıştırmının amacı hiç şüphesiz, sövgüyle kötümektir. *Olisbodokos* terimini hem müzik hem cinsellikle ilgili boyutunu göz önüne alarak, Arkaik Mytilene ve daha geniş çerçevede Arkaik ve Klasik Dönem Yunan kültürünün sosyo-müzikal bağlamı içinde değerlendiren çalışmamız bu şiirsel sövgü için müzikoloji ve sosyoloji perspektifinden yeni bir yorum önerisi sunmaktadır. ‘Yapay fallus alan teller’ yakıştırmasının amacını ve bıraktığı etkiyi tam olarak anlamak istiyorsak Arkaik Dönem Mytilene’inde, Sappho, Alkaios ve muhtemelen Polyanaktidai ailesinin de önemsedığı müzik kültürünün saygınlığı meselesini göz önüne almamız gerektiği kanısındayız. Söz konusu toplumda müzikle ilgili, cinsellik bağlamına oturtulmuş sövgüler, müziğin de cinselliğin de ötesine geçen politik ve toplumsal çağrışımlarıyla büyük etki yaratıyor olmalıdır.

“The Phallic Plectrum” başlığını taşıyan ilk bölümde, Eski Yunan’ın görsel ve edebî kaynaklarında mızrabın (plēktron) çoğunlukla, fallusu andıran biçimine, özellikle de yapay fallusla belirgin benzerliğine atıfta bulunan betimlemeleri değerlendirdik. Mızrabı yapay fallusla ilişkilendiren bu betimlemelerin bir yandan, müzik kültürünün ve ilgili diğer alanların halk deyişlerinde nesiller boyunca aktarılan, mızraba dair müstehcen şakaları, diğer yandan söz konusu F 99 fragmanına kadar geri götürülebilecek kalıplaşmış bir edebî mecazı yansıttığını düşünüyoruz.

“*Chordai olisbodokoi* ‘dildo-receiving strings’” başlıklı ikinci bölümde ilgili fragmana odaklanarak, bu metnin toplumsal bağlamına ilişkin her türlü araştırmanın öncesinde ele alınması gereken, yoruma ilişkin şu üç temel problemi irdeledik: yazarının kim olduğu sorunu; bileşik kelime olan *olisbodokos* yakıştırmasının anlamı; fragmanın ikinci satırında geçen Πωλυανακτ[ί]δαϊς (Polyanaktidais) kelimesinin morfolojisi (özellikle cins ve sayısı)⁶. Öncelikle, Sappho’ya da Alkaios’a da işaret eden eşit derecede ikna edici gerekçeler nedeniyle F 99 fragmanın yazarıyla ilgili belirsizlik devam etmektedir. İkinci olarak, *olisbodokos* sıfatı “yapay fallus alan” anlamıyla telleri, muhtemelen de Polyanaktidai ailesinden biri ya da birilerinin çaldığı telleri nitelemesi durumunda daha anlamlı olmaktadır. Bu yakıştırmının cinsellikle ilgili anlam yükü Sappho’nun ve hatta Alkaios’un dilinde rastladığımız

2 Türkçede Midilli Adası.

3 Yunan lirik şiirinin, MÖ 7. yüzyılın ikinci yarısında Lesbos’ta doğan iki ünlü ozanı.

4 Özet boyunca kısaca F 99 olarak anılacaktır.

5 ‘Yapay fallus’ anlamındaki *olisbos* ismine ‘almak, kabul etmek’ anlamındaki dekhomai fiilinden türemiş -dokos biçiminin eklenmesiyle oluşan sıfat.

6 Söz konusu fragmanın yazılı olduğu tek papirüste bu kelimenin, bazı harfleri noksan, bazıları eksik olduğu için, adı geçen aileden kimi gösterdiği tam olarak okunamamaktadır.

diğer örneklerden daha yoğun olmakla birlikte, müstehcenlik her iki şairin de yergi tarzına asla yabancı değildir. Diğer yandan Πολυανακτ[ι]δαίς (Polyanaktidais) kelimesiyle Polyanaks hanesinin erkekleri de kadınları da kastedilmiş olabilir, ama erkek ya da erkekleri ifade ediyor olması kesin değilse de daha muhtemeldir.

Başlığı “Lyric Decorum in Mytilene” olan üçüncü bölümde F 99 fragmanındaki sövgüyü, Mytilene’deki sosyo-müzikal dünyanın daha geniş bağlamıyla etkileşimde olan bir müzik eleştirisi olarak ele aldık. Arkaik Dönem’de Lesbos Adası ve başta Mytilene şehri, toplumsal ve politik mücadelelerinin yanı sıra müzik sanatına, özellikle de lirik sanata verdiği önemle de tanınmıştı. Bu sövgünün Mytilene toplumunun bu iki yönünü de yansıttığı düşünülmelidir: Rakip hanenin üyelerine (Polyanaktidai) karşı şairin beslediği kişisel ve(ya) politik düşmanlık, varlığını bu “lirik şiirdeki edebin”, müzik eğitiminin teknik açıdan kusursuz ve toplumsal beklentiye uygun teşhirinin ve lir icrasındaki rafine zevkin ezici, aynı zamanda da bu kişilerin ahlaki ve politik liyakatini sorgulayan eleştirisinde belli eder. Karşılaştırma olanağı sağladığından, “lirik seçkinciliğin” Atina’daki Yeni Komedyanın müstehcen, politik ve ahlakçı müzik eleştirisindeki benzer başka örnekleri, özellikle Pherekrates’in⁷ *Kheiron* oyununun bilindik pasajı da (F 155 K-A) tartışmaya dahil edilmiştir. O pasajda bir kadın olarak kişileştirilen Müzik, Atina’daki popüler “Yeni Müzik” hareketinin öncüleri arasında yer alan çeşitli şair-bestecileri kendisine cinsel tacizde bulunmakla itham eder. Bizce popüler müzisyenlere yönelik, komedyaya ait bu türden eleştiriler, F 99 fragmanında geçen, müzik anlamında şaibeli Polyanktidai ailesine karşı *iambos* şiiri biçimindeki saldırıyla aynı çizgidedir. Hatta Pherekrates *Kheiron* oyununda Mytilene kökenli *kitharōdos*⁸ Phrynis’e saldırısında bu fragmana atıfta bulunuyor bile olabilir.

“Immoral Lyres” başlığını taşıyan dördüncü bölümde *olisbodokos* teriminin şiirsel anlamına daha yakından bakılmıştır. F 99 fragmanındaki bu yakıştırmada, komedyanın müzik ve cinsellikle ilgili sövgüsünü gölgede bırakan, şiirsel veya hitabete özgü iki teknik kullanıldığı kanısındayız. Bunlardan ilki *katakthesis* denilen, zihinde çarpıcı ve grotesk bir görüntü canlanmasını sağlamak için kullanılan söz sanatıdır: biçimce yapay fallusu andıran mızrap, görgüsüz ellere düştüğü zaman düşünsel olarak gerçekten de yapay fallusa dönüşür ve böyle anılır. Komedyalarda olduğu gibi burada da meselenin pratik boyutu ve gerçekçilik gözetilmez. Polyanaktidai üye veya üyelerinin gerçekten de mızrap ya da yapay fallusla telleri çaldığını varsaymamız gerekmez. Zihinde canlandırılmak istenen mecaz yüklü hayal ara bir noktada durur ve kimi araştırmacıların yaptığı gibi sadece gerçek anlamıyla almaya çalışmak söz konusu yakıştırmaların şiirsel sanatıyla ilgili boyutunu gözden kaçırmak anlamına gelir. Mızrap-yapay fallus (plēktron-olisbos) absürt, Polyanaktidai üye veya üyelerinin bayağı müzisyenliğinin ve sapkın mizacının, duruma uygun biçimde “uygunsuz” bir imgesidir.

7 Atina’da MÖ 5. yüzyılın ikinci yarısında ün kazanan, günümüze yirmiye yakın eserinin sadece adları ve diğer antik yazarların alıntılardığı tek tük cümleleri ulaşan komedyacı yazarı.

8 Kendi şarkısına telli çalgı *kithara*’da eşlik eden profesyonel müzisyen.

Söz konusu yakıştırmadaki ikinci söz sanatı, kişileştirme de içeren bir *hypallage* kullanımınıdır. “Yapay fallus alan” teller, doğrudan bu telleri çalanı da çağırır; Polyanaktidai üye veya üyelerinin çalgısı, sahib(ler)inin bayağı imgesiyle özdeşleştirilerek kişileştirilmiştir. Benzer biçimde “edepsiz bir lirin” kişileştirildiği, politik vurgusu apaçık bir örneğe Aristophanes’te⁹ de rastlarız. *Atlılar* oyununda (989-99 str.) koro, ünlü demagog Kleon’un küçüklüğünde lirini sadece “rüşvet alma makamına” – ‘Dor makamında’ anlamına gelen *dōristi* ile ‘rüşvet alır tarzda’ anlamındaki *dōrodokisti* arasında bir kelime oyunu yapılmıştır – göre akort etmeyi öğrenebildiğini iddia eder. Bilebildiklerimiz itibarıyla, komedyada geçen bu bileşik kelimeyle *olisbodokos* arasındaki biçimsel benzerlik tümüyle tesadüf eseri olmayabilir. Açıkça kişileştirilmiş, “rüşvet alan” liri, Kleon’un nahoş politik geleceğinin daha gençliğinden belli olduğunu belirtmek amacıyla kullanılmıştır hiç şüphesiz. Alkaios’un F 70 V fragmanı daha da yakın bir örnek teşkil eder. Şarkı formundaki bu metinle konumuz olan F 99 fragmanının, toplumdaki ve lirik şiirdeki edeple ilgili kabulleri ortak bir ideolojiye dayanmaktadır. Alkaios, eski müttefiki şimdiki düşmanı Pittakos’un da üyesi olduğu politik kanadın katıldığı bir şölen (symposion) tasavvur eder; Mytilene’de demagojiyle iktidara gelirken Alkaios’un bulunduğu tarafa ihanet etmiş, şimdi de “şehri yutmak” üzeredir (70.7). Aradaki şu fark hissettirilir: Alkaios ile dostlarının tertiplemediği şölenlerde – F 70 fragmanının inşadı bu vesileyledir – lir ve barbitos çalgıları nazik konuşmalara ve sofrada eşlik edip, bunları taçlandırmaktayken, Pittakos’un şölenlerindeki müzikal manzara bunun tam tersidir. Alkaios *barmos* (*barbitos* kelimesinin başka bir söylenişi) çalgısını şölenlerde Pittakos’a eşlik eden görgüsüz konuklardan biri olarak kişileştirir. Kendisini tıngırdatırken münasip müzik yapma edaları takınan “tembel palavracılar” gibi *barmos* çalgısı kendinden olanları hoşnut etmekten başka bir şeye tasalanmadan yırtınır ve coşar. Eğer bu kaba *barbitos* Pittakos’un tüm yanlışlarını örnekliyorsa, F 99 fragmanındaki “yapay fallus alan teller” de Polyanaktidai hanesinin bozulmuşluğu hakkında nicesini söylüyor olmalıdır.

Πολυανακτ[ί]δαϊς (Polyanaktidais) kelimesinin Polyanaks hanesinin erkek üye veya üyelerini gösterdiğini kabul edecek olursak, F 99 fragmanında tasavvur edilen sahnenin, F 70 fragmanındaki gibi bir şölen olması oldukça muhtemeldir. Diğer yandan, hanenin kadın üyelerine karşı söylendiğini düşünecek olursak – bu durumda yazarın Sappho olması daha muhtemeldir – o zaman muhtemelen Polyanaks kadınlarının müzik yapma etkinliğinin Sappho takipçilerinininkiyle aynı türden olduğu, belki ev kadınlarının bir araya geldiği yerlerde, belki bir kültür tapınağında ve hatta belki de, ritüelleşmiş bir koro icrasında gerçekleştiği tasavvur edilmiştir. Ama şölenle ilgili olan gibi bu durumlarda da teller yine çalanların bayağı mizaçlarına bürünür: Lir telleri kendilerini çalan kadınların şehvet düşkünlüğünü yansıtacak biçimde değersizleşmiştir. Söz

⁹ Eski Attika komedyasının en büyük ismi; MÖ 5. yüzyıl sonu 4. yüzyıl başında Atina’da büyük başarı kazanmış, eserlerinden on biri günümüze tam ulaşmış, Batı edebiyatının sayısız komedyacı yazarı tarafından örnek alınmıştır.

konusu yakıştırma şu diğer varsayımı da tetikleyebilir: Polyanaks kadınlarının cinsel edepsizliklerinin gerçek nedeni iyi bir müzik kültüründen yoksun olmalarıdır. Ne olursa olsun, lirik şiirdeki edeple cinsellikteki bir tutulmuş ve birinin çiğnenmesi diğerinin de çiğnenmesi anlamına gelmiştir.

“Sappho’s Invention” başlığını verdiğimiz beşinci bölümde, Suda sözlüğünde (σ 107 maddesinde) Sappho’nun yaşamı ve kariyeriyle ilgili genel açıklamada geçen şaşırtıcı bir nokta değerlendirilmiştir. Maddenin sonuna doğru Sappho’nun denediği çeşitli şiir türlerinin bir listesi verilmiştir ve bunun ortaya yakın yerinde onun mızrabın mucidi olduğu iddiasını buluruz (“Lirik şarkılardan oluşan dokuz kitap kaleme almış, mızrabı icat etmiş, ayrıca epigramlar, *elegeia*, *iambos* ve *monōdos*¹⁰ türünde eserler yazmıştır.”). İcatlar tarihiyle ilgili bu yanlış kayıt bizce Sappho’nun Atina’daki alımlanışı bağlamında, şölen sırasında ya da komedy sahnesinde ortaya çıkmıştır. Bu etkinliklerin ikisinde de Sappho figürü sürekli itibarsızlaştırılmış, erotik nitelikli lirik şiirin şehvet düşkününü bir yaratıcısı olarak görülmüştür. F 99 olarak bildiğimiz fragmanı Atinalıların Sappho’ya ait şarkılardan biri saydığını varsayarsak, *olisbodokos* kelimesinin nasıl yanlış okunabildiğini de kolayca görürüz; öyle ki, metnin özündeki sövgü Sappho’nun kendisine karşı çevrilmiştir. Ancak o durumda *olisbodokos* kelimesinin anlamıyla ilgili asıl bağlam olan Mytilene’deki müzikal ve politik çekişmeler dikkate alınmamış ve mızrap-yapay fallus figürü üzerinden Polyanaks hanesinin göstermelik müzisyenliğine karşı kurulan asıl itibarsızlaşma Sappho’nun kendi itibarsızlaşmış müzikal ve cinsel kimliğinin parçası haline gelmiş olurdu. F 99 fragmanının bu yanlış yorumu Suda sözlüğündeki mızrabı Sappho’nun icat ettiğini kaydeden aktarımın kökenini oluşturmuş olabilir. Bu basit kayıta geçmeyen, bu geleneğin, Sappho’nun bu icadı aynı zamanda *olisbos* olarak kullanmak üzere yaptığı (ya da mızrap olarak başta *olisbos*’u kullandığı) yönündeki müstehcen alt metnidir. Bu şaka şölen ortamında doğmuş ve sonradan komedy sahnesine aktarılmış, ya da belki ilk olarak, kendisinin o “kullanışlı” icadını, yani mızrabı göstermek için Sappho’yu sahneye taşıyan bir Eski veya Orta Komedy şairi tarafından bulunmuş olabilir.

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¹⁰ Yunan lirik şiirinin konu, vezin ve inşat/terennüm geleneği açısından farklılık gösteren türleri.

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