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ANOTHER GO AT THE TEXT OF PHILAENIS (P. OXY. 2891)

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Since Lobel's initial publication of a fragment of the beginning of Philaenis' *περὶ ἀφροδιείων*,¹ giving us our first tantalizing glimpse at the lost genre of handbooks of the *figurae Veneris*,² several articles have been published on the text, which have eliminated a number of difficulties and illuminated many obscurities.³

However, the major difficulty with the text remains in the last lines of Frg.3. column ii, where the author presents advice on giving compliments. The relevant portion of the text, following Lobel's transcription, reads:

τὴν μὲν [
ὥς ἰσόθεον [
ουσαν, τὴν δὲ αἰσχρὰ[ν	5
ὥς ἐπαφρόδιτον, τὴν	
δὲ πρεσβυτέραν ὥς [7
αν φαο[]ωνειναα [8
)-----	
περὶ φιλημάτων	

The problems in lines 7-8 are two. First, the letter sequence φαο-, though suggesting the root for "light, shining", etc., yields no known or acceptable word here. Thus Lobel (1972.54) with no conviction suggested Φαο[υ]ωνείναν 'Favonian', remarking, "I ... hasten to append the objections that no such Latin form is attested, that nothing known to me about any meaning of Favonius would make a derivation of it relevant to a flattering way of referring to a middle-aged woman." Merkelbach (1972.284) made considerable headway in seeing that the final letters must be the infinitive εἶναι, and proposed ὥς [νέ]αν Φαο[ϛ]ὼν εἶναι. Since the letter preceding α must be a vowel, [νέ]αν is an excellent supposition. However, his creation of a new proper name, *Φαοκώ (in which -αο- is the Ionic orthography for -αυ-), designating some sort of "shining good fairy" is problematic. Luppe (1974.281), retaining Merkelbach's [νέ]αν, instead proposed ὥς [νέ]αν φαό[χρ]ων 'like a young girl with shining skin.' The hole is perhaps just big enough for χρ, but the word *φαόχρων is not attested, and while complimentary its relevance at this point is unclear.

¹ Lobel, *Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 39* (1972) 51/54, no. 2891; with Plates I and III.

² For which see the author's "Love's Body Anatomized: The Ancient Erotic Handbooks and the Rhetoric of Sexuality," in *Pornography and Representation in the Ancient World*, ed. by Amy Richlin (Routledge, 1989).

³ R.Merkelbach, *Φαοκώ ?* ZPE 9 (1972) 284; Q.Cataudella, "Recupero di un' antica scitta greca." *Giornale Italiano di Filologia* 25 (1973) 253-63 and "Initiamenta Amoris," *Latomus* 33 (1974) 847-57; K.Tsantsanoglou, "The Memoirs of a Lady from Samos," ZPE 12 (1973) 183-95 [the most complete discussion to date]; Wolfgang Luppe, "Nochmals zu Philaenis, Pap.Oxy. 2891," ZPE 13 (1974) 281-2; Miroslav Marcovich, "How to Flatter Women: P.Oxy. 2891," CPh 70 (1975) 123-4.

Thus, the sequence φαο- is not working and should be abandoned. Accordingly, Tsantsanoglou (1973.187) is correct in seeing that the third letter is not an o but a c, and reads ὡς [‘Ρέ]αν φάκ[κ]ων εἶναι, retaining Merkelbach's infinitive, the usual construction with φάκω. To the reading φάκ[κ]ων, the objection might be made that the verb of speaking could have appeared earlier in the damaged portion of the papyrus and Merkelbach notes: "Am Ende von 8 ist εἶναι, zwar nicht konzinn mit 5 οὐσαν, aber doch unbedenklich." The correct solution to this was proposed by Tsantsanoglou: "It [i.e. -ουσαν] probably represents only the ending of a feminine participle preceded by a vowel," though I am not sure why he adds this last qualification. This solves the problem which Lobel noted (1972.54), that if the letters ουσαν were taken as the participle of εἶμι in indirect discourse, "Nothing should be missing between ἰσόθεον and οὐσαν," despite the amount of space.

However, Tsantsanoglou's reading ὡς [‘Ρέ]αν φάκ[κ]ων εἶναι, brings up the second difficulty: what lies in the gap between lines 7 and 8? As Luppe noted (1974.281), to call an older woman a Rhea is by no means a compliment, and Tsantsanoglou's citation (190; esp. AP 9.69) simply go to prove the point. Marcovich (1975.124) proposed an ingenious solution. He agrees that the third letter is a c, "written with its right curve continued to a complete circle, because it is linked to another sigma," correctly adducing P.Heid. 4011.6, and so reads: ὡς [μί]αν φακ[κ]ων εἶναι 'like one of the wild pigeons.' While I can accept the complimentary nature of the comparison, I am bothered by the superfluity of [μί]αν, which is unparalleled in the previous comparisons. Why should the writer say that the older woman is like "one of the wild pigeons," rather than simply "like a wild pigeon"? Epigraphically too little of the first letter remains (Lobel: "a dot off the line") for his certainty that this was a mu, nor is the near circular form of the first sigma necessarily due to a following sigma. Further, the previous comparisons have both used adjectives, not nouns, and the passage does need some verb of speaking and one which is consistent with the infinitive εἶναι.

Accordingly, I would retain Merkelbach and Luppe's [vé]αν, and Tsantsanoglou's φάκ[κ]ων. On [vé]αν Luppe rightly notes "the flattery apparently consists respectively of a statement of the opposite."⁴ No other noun or adjective is needed. Thus, I would read here: τ[ῆν] δὲ πρεσβυτέραν ὡς [vé]αν φάκ[κ]ων εἶναι [: "saying that the older woman is like a young girl," a clear and obvious compliment.

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⁴ Rightly noted by Lobel (54), who adduces the famous passages of Plato Rep. 474d, Lucr. 4.1160-69, Ovid Ars 2.657-62. However, both Lucretius and Ovid point out ways in which lovers find good sounding names for unflattering defects, while the author of the Philaenis fragment simply calls everything by its opposite, which lacks not only wit but might be dubious advice. Cf. Hor. Sat. 1.3.43-54 and Juv. 8.30-38 for such euphemistic antonymy, but a form of the technique seems to have worked for Petronius in flattering Nero (Plut. Mor. 60c-d).