

## FAWNS AND GENDER. A NOTE ON SAPPHO'S TITHONUS POEM

by

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ABSTRACT: Much has been made of the absence of gender markers in this poem, but this absence is not surprising in a poem of this length and type, and consequently is of little significance to its interpretation. Furthermore, the comparison with *νεβρίοισι*, fawns, clearly points to both a female speaker and female addressees as well.

Since the publication of the Cologne papyrus in 2004<sup>1</sup>, scholars have repeatedly commented upon the fact that neither the gender of the speaker nor that of the addressees in the so-called Tithonus Poem is made explicit. JANKO (2005) was the first to describe this poem as “ambiguously gendered”. He developed the subject thus:

...one other peculiarity. This ode is unisex. Nowhere does the speaker state her gender, indicate the gender of the young people whom she is addressing, or signal the sex towards which the speaker's and addressee's desires incline. Not even the “fawns” to which the speaker is likened in line 6 are gendered: the word is neuter<sup>2</sup>.

RAWLES made a similar observation in ZPE CLVII 2006, p. 4. Referring to JANKO, he notes “the remarkable absence of gendered words to indicate either the singer or the addressees”. This has since been reiterated by Ellen GREENE, who, also referring to JANKO, comments on the address to the *παῖδες* in line 1 and claims that “while it may be tempting to think of the poem's addressees, the *paides*, as referring to the girls whom many believe comprise a circle of affiliation in Sappho's poems, the poem itself does not support such a reading”. She

<sup>1</sup> M. GRONEWALD, R.W. DANIEL, *Ein neuer Sappho-Papyrus*, ZPE CXLVII 2004, pp. 1–8.

<sup>2</sup> R. JANKO, *Sappho Revisited*, Times Literary Supplement, 23–30 December 2005, p. 19, an abbreviated version of a paper given at a seminar on Lesbos in August 2005. At the time of writing the full version is still awaiting publication in A.L. PIERRIS (ed.), *Proceedings of the Symposium Lesbium*.