

15 *strophium* I – hair circlet (pls. 15.1, 23.2)

1. Terminology and appearance

2. Social usage and history

The *strophium* (στρόφιον) is a trivial accessory: a hair circlet with a twisted structure. The evidence on the headdress is altogether slim. Discussion is also impeded by the fact that the *strophium* can designate different accessories—it often refers to a belt (B 21)—and that some dictionaries omit the female headdress.¹ For this reason, the following discussion also shortly reviews the Greek evidence. It should be read in conjunction with B 21 (*strophium* II).

15.1 Terminology and appearance

The word *strophium* (στρόφιον) is a Greek loanword. The Greek word στρόφιον is a diminutive of στρόφος (cord, rope) and derives from στρέφω (to twist). The meaning is therefore self-explanatory: In neutral language, the Greek term designates something that is twisted. The Latin loanword *strophium* is used in the same sense. Descriptions of the *strophium* as headwear are rare. Because of its twisted nature, the *strophium* is twice compared to a wreath (*corona*).² It thus probably had the shape of a closed or nearly closed circlet that was put on the head, and it consisted of a solid material.

15.2 Social usage and history

The headdress called *strophium* was used by various social groups in different functions. In the case of men, it was an exceptional headdress, and it was an insigne of various Greek priests or magistrates.³ In the case of women, it was only a profane ornamental accessory. It probably served to add colour to a woman's attire and keep her hair in

¹ LSJ only gives the meaning 'headband worn by priests.' In GRD (2007) there is no reference to the meaning 'headband' at all.

² Festus p. 410.6–12 L. (n. 8); Ps-Verg. Copa 31–32 (n. 9); Plin. NH 21.3 (n. 10).

³ Philochoros FGtHist 328 F 64 b: οἱ μὲν γὰρ ἄρχοντες ἀνέβαινον εἰς Ἄρειον πάγον ἐστεφανωμένοι, οἱ δὲ νομοφύλακες στρόφια λευκὰ ἔχοντες [the *archontes* went up to the Areopagus wreathed with crowns, the *nomophylakes* having white *strophia*]; IG V 1390 (= Syll.³ 736).179 (Andania): φορούντων δὲ οἱ δέκα ἐν τοῖς μυστηρίοις στρόφιον πορφύριον [the ten men shall wear a purple *strophium* during the mysteries]; Syll.³ 869.21–22 (Eleusis): τὸ στρόφιον παρὰ τῷ Αὐτοκράτορι θεῶι Ἀντωνεῖνῳ λαβόντα [receiving the *strophium* from the emperor and god Antoninus]; Arrian. Epict. 3.21.16 (on the Eleusinian mysteries): οὐκ ἐσθῆτα ἔχεις ἣν δεῖ τὸν ἱεροφάντην, οὐ κόμην, οὐ στρόφιον οἷον δεῖ [you do not have the garb a *hierophantes* should have; you do not have the haircut and the *strophium* it needs]; POxy. 33.3.5–7 (about the insignia of a magistrate in Alexandria): Ἀππιανὸς λαβὼν τὸ τροφεῖον ἐπὶ τῆς

place, depending on her hairstyle.⁴ The term *strophium* allows for a certain breadth of meaning. Hence we do not know whether all *strophia* looked alike. The female headdress was maybe smaller. The priests' *strophium* had artificial colours (we hear of white and purple), and we may assume the same for the female variant.

The *strophion* appears twice in Attic Old comedy among other accessories pertaining to the head. It is a common misogynistic trope in comedy to decry the supposed female propensity to luxury that, according to the male critics, manifests itself in various trivial articles of female beauty care. In Pherecrates, a character lists a headscarf (*mitra*), a *strophium*, an *ochtoibos* (an obscure headwear), and a comb;⁵ in Aristophanes, a character lists perfume, a pumice-stone, a *strophium*, and an *opisthosphendone* (another type of obscure headwear) as items that women vainly obsess over.⁶ The catalogue in Aristophanes is very long, and it also contains *mitrae* and *anademata*. In both fragments, the term *strophium* with all probability designates a type of female headwear, and not a belt. The distinction between headwear and belt is necessary because a belt (*zona*) is often a *strophium* (i.e. a twisted cord). We may hence assume that a *strophium* as headwear was in fashion in fifth century Athens.

The first Latin author to mention a *strophium* as female headwear in connection with Roman culture is Varro. In his *Menippean Satires*, a girl offers figurines, balls, hairnets (*reticula*), and *strophia* to the household gods (*lares*).⁷ The scene is probably not representative of Roman life during Varro's lifetime, and it is instead an idyllic picture of good old Roman times. In the OLD, the passage is rubricated under the female belt, but hair circlets fit in well alongside hairnets in the list of a girl's small innocent offerings.

After Varro, there is a long gap in time before we hear of *strophia* again. They are just too trivial to be mentioned in literature. In Festus (Verrius), they are included in an aside when discussing the gloss *struppis*;⁸ in Ps-Virgilian *Copa*, a *strophium roseum* (a

κεφαλῆς ἔθηκε, καὶ τὸ φαυκάσιον ἐπὶ τοὺς πόδας θείς [Appianos took the *strophium* and put it on his head, and putting on the *phaecasisium* on his feet ...]; Plutarch. Arat. 53.6 (about a priest): στρόφιον οὐ ὁλόλευκον, ἀλλὰ μεσοπόρυρον ἔχων [having a *strophium* that was not all white, but had some purple in the middle]; Festus p. 410.6–12 L. (n. 6).

4 In Rome, it is the *vitta* (much like the *stola*) that is charged with symbolism (B 16).

5 Pherecrates F 106 K.-A.: μίτραν ἀλουργῇ, στρόφιον, ὄχθοιβον, κτένα.

6 Aristoph. F 332.4 K.-A.: μύρον, κίσσηριν, στρόφιον, ὀπισθοσφενδόνην.

7 Varro Men. 463: *suspendit Laribus manias mollis pilas || reticula ac strophia* [she hung up figurines, soft balls, hairnets, and *strophia* on the *lares*]; cf. A 9 p. 193; B 12 p. 691.

8 Festus p. 410.6–12 L.: *struppis est, ut Ateius Philologus existimat, quod Graece στρόφιον vocatur, et quod sacerdotes pro insigni habent in capite. quidam coronam esse dicunt, aut quod pro corona insigne in caput inponatur, quale sit strophium* [According to Ateius Philologus, a *struppis* is what is called στρόφιον in Greek and which the priests have as an insigne on their heads. According to some, it is a wreath or the insigne that is put on the head in place of a wreath, like the *strophium*].

hair circlet of roses) is mentioned.⁹ As is often the case, it is Pliny the Elder who again comes closest to Roman everyday culture. In his *Natural History*, he discusses flowers suited for making garlands and wreaths (*coronamenta*) and the related terminology. Like Festus, he mixes scholarly pseudo-knowledge with actual facts. According to Pliny, ancient Romans used smaller wreaths they called **struppi* or *stropi* (a gloss), and this is supposedly how the dress tradition of wearing a smaller *strophium* and the diminutive *strophium* took their origin.¹⁰ Pliny's etymological theory is likely wrong, and the word *strophium* is simply a Greek loanword. However, it shows us that small *strophia* were still used in Rome.

This is all of the Latin evidence we have on this fashion accessory. The word's scarcity stands in contrast to the 'holy' matronal *vitta* discussed in the following chapter. Much like how the rare matronal *stola* has an outsize presence in Latin literature compared to the common *tunica*, the matronal *vitta* is much more prominent than the common *strophium*.

⁹ Ps-Verg. *Copa* 31–32: *hic age pampinea fessus requiesce sub umbra || et gravidum roseo necte caput strophio* [come on, rest from your labours here, in the shadow of the vine foliage, and wrap your heavy head with a *strophium* of roses].

¹⁰ Plin. *NH* 21.3: *tenuioribus* (sc. *coronis*) *utebantur antiqui stroppos appellantes, unde nata strophiola* [the ancients used thinner crowns and called them **stropi*, from which is derived the *strophium*].

