

The Genre of Hymn in Antiquity

ABSTRACTS



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Pindar, Folksong and the Hymn - Choral Ethnopoetics

Pindar's poetry offers us a privileged view of the song culture's particular notion of textuality and intertextuality, where the dominant characteristic of a song-text was its voice, which was in turn rooted in traditions of written and unwritten song which were in constant interaction with each other. Hellenists, particularly in Britain, have often shown considerable hostility to any suggestion that Pindar's poetry can have been influenced by the wider, unwritten song tradition; and the term 'folksong' or 'folk culture' in relation to Greek song-texts of the fifth century BCE is still largely anathema. While it is difficult to study song traditions that left no textual trace, it is not impossible; and we can gain some notion of what these traditions may have looked like both from song-texts preserved on stone, and from allusions in Pindar's own poems. This paper offers an initial exploration of this largely unmapped territory through the concept of the 'hymn': an important category in the study of Classical Greek choral poetry, since no communal celebration happened without, or in contrast to, the worship of the gods. An initial section will discuss the evolution of the term in the vocabulary of song and the relation of Pindar's idea of the 'hymn' to the Alexandrian critical tradition's; a second part will look at traces of folksong and folk-music tradition in Pindar's sacred poetry; and the third and final part will trace the same theme out in selected epinicians, where the 'hymn' runs together with the *komos* in an outburst of collective joy and communal celebration. The paper will contribute to our understanding both of Pindar's texts and of the still-living song traditions that underlay them.

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Anti-Hymns in Greek Literature

What happens when someone (a chorus, a character in a play) sings or recites the opposite of a hymn? And what is the opposite of a hymn? Is it something that can even exist in ancient Greek literary and religious culture? The paper will argue that several Greek literary texts invert the hymnic conventions of praise while still following the hymning structure. There are three main ways to do so: turning hymnic praise into anti-hymnic insult/blame; denying the truth of (conventional) hymnic praise; praising entities that cannot or are not normally praised. The paper will analyse examples, mostly of the first two types, from archaic and classical poetry, using also comparative evidence.

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*For a Pragmatics of the Call to the Divinity in Greek Hymnal Forms: Speech, Sung
Performance, Ritual*

After the “linguistic turn”, the “pragmatic turn”: Greek poetic forms no longer considered as texts, but as discourse; the Greek poems apprehended not only in their semantic development, but also in their enunciative dimension through forms which destine them to a sung performance, with effects of aesthetic order, affective order and above all practical order. These methodological considerations apply in particular to all forms of ritual poetry, such as the Homeric Hymns or the cult hymns.

This will be illustrated by focusing attention on the invocation and naming of gods and goddesses in different forms of hymnal poetry; denominations and qualifications make it possible as much to define and identify the divinity concerned as to call the divinity’s presence, *hic et nunc*, while requiring an intervention: religious efficacy of a speech uttered in ritual and musical modes through the intermediary of the not only invocative, but also the semantic power of the sung nomination, in ritualized musical performance.

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Tracce e testimonianze di poesia innodica in Teocrito

Oltre al carme 22, noto come *Inno ai Dioscuri*, esistono nei carmi di Teocrito sezioni che possono essere ricondotte ad un codice innodico? L'inno rappresenta una delle forme di poesia più diffuse in età ellenistica e allora Teocrito ne ha tenuto conto inserendo nella sua poesia movenze dal codice innodico? Quali possono definirsi tali? A quali divinità sono rivolte? Esiste insomma la possibilità di rintracciare nella sua opera forme o accenni di inno e sono di tipo tradizionale o sub specie bucolica.

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Orphic and Magical Hymns as Cletic Prooimia for Ritual Performances

Scholars have noted in passing that a few of the hymns in the ‘Magical’ Papyri share some linguistic features with the *Orphic Hymns*, primarily the piling up of numerous compound adjective as a technique of praise, but in my paper, I will look more the context of performance, which is increasingly seen as the foremost feature of genre. Relying on Fritz Graf’s recent re-assertion of the role of the *Orphic Hymns* in third century cult, I will treat both sets of hymns as performance texts or liturgies for household rituals that include the burning of incense and other forms of sacrifice.

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Speaking the “Truth” to the Mother: Alternative Retellings in the Hymn to Demeter

The *Hymn to Demeter* is one of the most important *Homeric Hymns* and has naturally received a lot of scholarly attention over the past decades, with the debate on many issues flaring up rather than quieting down. One major reason for this phenomenon is the unique content of the *Hymn*, the only one of the *Homeric Hymns* where female voices are not only preeminent but also appear to directly oppose the patriarchal rule of Zeus to an unprecedented extent. In this paper, I want to move away from the debate regarding the *Hymn*'s authorship and/or primary audience and rather address the concept of truth and its implications for the way we understand the hymn's narrative. I begin from Clay's (1989) excellent analysis of the hymn as the mythical basis behind the ascendance of the new divine order, under Zeus, after the defeat of the Titans. Although dedicated to Demeter and the establishment of her mysteries, the hymn's main focus appears to be on Persephone's transformation from an innocent girl to the ἐπαινή Περσεφόνηα of the Homeric epics, who overshadows her husband and abductor, Hades, and acquires an important, and often terrifying, role in the Greek Pantheon. For this transformation to ensue however, the “marriage” of Persephone and Hades must be accepted, and thus legitimised, by the unfortunate bride's mother, Demeter. I argue that this process of acceptance is much more intricate than it appears at first glance, with the poet employing the concept of subjective, or alternative truth at various parts of the *Hymn*, blurring the personal perspectives of the protagonists with those of the official narrative, and thus creating an ambiguity that resists confident interpretation even today. Combining the inaccessibility of Hades with the remarkable poetic ability of accessing it, and relating events happening in the realm of the dead, the poet succeeds in asking the audience to decide for themselves whether Persephone becomes an active player in the plan of Zeus or whether she is indeed the unfortunate victim of Hades' machinations, with any theological implications either decision carries with it.

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Derridean Mourning and the Homeric Hymn to Demeter

In the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, mourning is a crucial psychic experience as both Demeter and Metaneira grieve the (presumed) loss of their children—Persephone’s abduction by Hades and Demophoon’s immersion into fire by Demeter, two incidents that carry the threat of death. This paper seeks to read the Demophoon episode from the prism of Derrida’s model of mourning, as articulated in *MEMOIRES for Paul de Man*, a work written on the occasion of de Man’s death in 1983 and delivered as a series of lectures on the east and west coasts of the United States before it was published in 1988. Two aspects of Derrida’s conception of mourning are especially relevant to my reading, the death of the other as constitutive of our self-relation and as the occasion for an ongoing engagement with them via a “thinking” externalizing memory that is future-oriented and productive. These two aspects of Derridean mourning strengthen known narrative parallelisms between the Demophoon mid-segment and the Demeter frame, while shedding new light on Demeter’s role in Eleusis both as Demophoon’s nurse and as the initiator of the Eleusinian mysteries. Demeter’s mourning becomes active memorialization of her lost daughter, an ongoing dialogue with her that restructures Eleusis according to the animating principle of their relationship, or, as Derrida puts it, a “remembrance of the future.”

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Crossing Boundaries: Between Epic, Iamb and Hymn

The discussion about the generic identity of a Greek poetic work is triggered by Plato and Aristotle who made clear-cut distinctions in their handling of genres. A genre is a set of specific formal and thematic properties; it fulfills “a set of expectations” by its recipients even if it can be adapted according to specific social and political conditions and performative occasions. Aristotle spoke of a chronologically undefined prior phase of ‘un-split poetry’ that someday split according to the poet’s own nature, in noble and base and, respectively, contained positive (praise) and negative (blame, abuse) discourse. In Greek literature genres were believed to have ritual origins and were linked to specific divinities.

The paper will focus on some test cases in chronological order of appearance that seem to transcend the clear-cut boundaries between three major genres, Epic, Iamb and Hymn. According to Aristotle, Homer is the supreme model also in his capacity to produce both kinds of noble and base discourse as his *Margites* (together with other unnamed by Aristotle similar works) demonstrates with its mixing of Epic with Iambic meter and content. Nevertheless, we encounter stories on gods that also display the same mixture within the Homeric epics too. In the Hymnic genre, the *Homeric Hymns to Demeter* (and its late counterparts of Philicus’ and Callimachus’ *Hymns to Demeter*) and *to Hermes* also insert into the expected praising tone of a Hymn the base and abusive discourse in close relationship to the honored god. It will be argued that the generic instability of these test examples and more similar cases verifies Aristotle’s remark on a prior “un-split” poetry which nevertheless did not disappear but continued to revive and thus to blur the rigid rules of genres.

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Domesticating the Hymnic Form: Isidoros Between Traditions

The paper revisits the four interlocking hymnic compositions in honour of Hermouthis-Isis, which an otherwise unknown individual by the name of Isidoros had inscribed on the pillars of the entrance to the southernmost forecourt of the Narmouthis temple some time, presumably not long, after 96 BCE when the entrance gate was erected (Vanderlip 1972; Bernand 1969, no. 175). Since their discovery by an Italian archaeological mission in 1935 the hymns have been discussed extensively. Recent scholarship has sought to integrate the hymns in the Greek tradition of praise (Fantuzzi and Hunter 2004, 350-63), to elucidate the compositional poetics of the parts in elegiac couplets (Faraone 2012) and to correlate the gradual development of the epichoric themes throughout this mini aretalogical corpus with the spatial arrangement of the inscriptions on the gate pillars (Moyer 2016). This paper will revisit the narrative and compositional elements in the hymns that derive from the Greek tradition, cultic and literary, of praising and praying to divine beings. These include structural elements such as the formula for extending the praise, the modes of addressing the divinity in various parts of the hymn, the incorporation of a *pars epica*, references to the divinity's location and haunts, and related narrative modes such the construction of the hymnist's projected image. I will analyze how these generic modes and elements are adapted and in a sense reactivated in the given – culturally mixed – context. The discussion will hopefully shed further light on the balancing act of Isidoros as he attempts to channel local Egyptian religious lore into Greek hymnic forms at the same time as he domesticates these forms by engraving them on the walls of his local temple.

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“Hail, Lord Heracles, you and Iolaus”: Genre in Archilochus fr. spurium 324 West

The Scholia to *Olympian* 9 dispute about whether Archilochus’ lyric piece (fr. spurium 324 West) is a *hymn* or *epinikion* and whether Pindar’s epithet *triploos*, when he mentions this song explicitly at the opening of *Olympian* 9, means that the song had three strophes, or that the refrain was thrice repeated. This confusion suggests that there was little evidence available to the Hellenistic scholars beyond the remaining verses of Archilochus’ song and the literary references to it, and is not of help in understanding the uses of the words *hymn* and *epinician* as the names of specific εἶδη. Furthermore, in recent years scholars have doubted the attribution of the song to Archilochus challenging the information of the Pindaric scholia where Archilochus is said to have composed a spontaneous song for Heracles at Olympia.

Along with the poem’s problematic generic classification, according to the ancient scholiast, the poet formed the word *tenella* to imitate the sound of the musical accompaniment he was missing and performed the sound standing in the middle of the chorus, while the chorus sang the rest of the song.

In the paper I will look at the traditional view and the challenges in more detail, then I will explore the role of performance assumptions in the perception of early poetic genres. By looking at the intersections between hexameter hymns, lyric hymns and *comparanda* deployed by other literature (drama) I will try to elucidate the genre of lyric celebratory hymn by Archilochus, a poet firmly connected to blame and *iambos* and argue that fr. 323 evokes one aetiology of the Olympics: foundation by Heracles and inauguration of the contests with Iolaus as a first victor.

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Erotic Epiphanies and their Epiphenomena in the Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite

μή τις ἀνθ]ρώπων ἐς ὠρανὸν ποτήσθω

μηδὲ πη]ρήτω γαμῆν τὰν Ἄφροδίταν

φ]άν[α]σσαν κτλ.

Alcman Fr. 1.16-18 Davies (P. Louvr. E 3320)

‘Let no man fly to heaven or attempt to bed Aphrodite, the queen ...’, says Alcman in his celebrated Partheneion. In these lines, the poet equates flying, one impossible condition for humanity, with sexual union with Aphrodite, another forbidden fruit for humans. And yet, the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*, possibly the earliest poem in the collection (Janko 1982, 200), seduces its audience by narrating not one but three instances of erotic encounters between omnipotent deities and immobilised mortals. One of the encounters narrated happens to include the erotic epiphany of Aphrodite to the hero Anchises, their subsequent union, and the fate of their offspring Aeneas. This paper follows in the steps of recent scholarship on the poem (e.g.: Faulkner 2009; Douglas Olson 2012; Cyrino 2013; Petridou 2016; Noussia and Manakidou 2018) and revisits the three mortal-immortal *liaisons dangereuses* featured in the hymn (Zeus-Ganymedes; Eos-Tithonos; Aphrodite-Anchises) as, collectively, a *sine qua non* for the praise of the goddess of erotic union. Extra emphasis is placed on the spatio-temporal context of these erotic epiphanies and on the role of dreams and sleep as facilitating the erotic unions of mortal ‘sub-bodies’ and immortal ‘super-bodies’ (Vernant 1991). Unlike previous scholarly work on the hymn, which has variously emphasised the poem’s humorous overtones (Walcot 1991) or Panhellenic orientation (Van der Ben 1986, Clay 1989, Nagy 1990, and others), this study approaches the work as a simultaneously playful and solemn philosophical exploration of the peaks and perils of the human condition.

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“Argumentation”: A Feature of Cult Hymns and Prayers in the Major Homeric Hymns

The genre of the major *Homeric Hymns to Demeter, Apollo, Aphrodite and Hermes* has been an issue of debate. They are treated as cult hymns, which have a ritual function at religious festivals (e.g. Depew; García; Johnston) or as rhapsodic hymns, which were performed for entertainment, either as independent compositions or as proems to the recitation of the Homeric epics (e.g. Furley and Bremer; Nagy; Clay). In this paper, I explore one aspect of cult hymns and prayers, which is adapted in the four major *Homeric Hymns*. This is the “argument section”, according to Bremer (196), which convinces the god to fulfill the request of the person who prays. This section includes the following forms of argumentation: “da quia dedi”, “da ut dem”, “da quia dedisti” and “da quia hoc dare tuum est.”

In the *Homeric Hymns* it is the premise “da, at dabo (give, moreover/and I will give)” that is found both in the objective (epic) narrative of the major *Homeric Hymns* in the case of exchanges between gods and humans (e.g. Demeter and Metaneira, Aphrodite and Anchises, Apollo and the Cretan priests, Hermes and the Old Man), *and* in the concluding formulaic lines, in which the hymnist addresses directly the god, as in personal prayers and cult (*clitic*) hymns. In the narrative section a pact is proposed by a god to a mortal, which includes an imperative that frames the demand and a verb in the future tense (along with a transitional particle) which presents the offering in return. Similarly, in the closing lines the poet asks the god to rejoice (χαῖρε) or to provide (ᾄπαζε h. *Dem.* 494) and in return he announces that he will remember (αὐτὰρ... μνήσομαι) the god and another song, or that he will move to another hymn (μεταβήσομαι h. *Aphr.* 293). The successful balanced (*quid pro quo*) reciprocity in the narrative section (internal reciprocity), albeit not personal, offers in a way an argument for the hymnist’s implicit (explicit only in the *Hymn to Demeter*) request to receive divine favor in exchange for the hymn (external reciprocity).

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Λῆε βαρεῖαν ὀφρὺν: The Role of Humour in Hellenistic Hymns

In Philicus' of Corcyra partially preserved *Hymn to Demeter* we read the following question: σεμνοῖς ὁ γελοῖος λόγος ἄρ' ἀκερδής<ς>; (SH 680.55) The same query is in fact the aim of this paper – to analyse the function and meaning of humour and irony in selected Hellenistic hymns. The comic elements in Callimachus' *Hymn to Demeter* have already been discussed in detail by many scholars (e.g., McKay 1962). However also other Callimachean Hymns (I to Zeus and III to Artemis) show considerable comic flair. It seems that the humorous presentation of the world of deities in a poem of, after all, religious character is, from the literary perspective, a risky task, as the poet is forced to balance deftly between high and low style as well as between familiarity and reverence towards the immortals. The use of humour in the hymns seems to be therefore an interesting and daring poetic experiment, for which some model and point of reference was undoubtedly the Homeric *Hymn to Hermes*. Subtle emulation and mastery in creating the sacred character and momentous atmosphere in the poems was a challenge taken up by at least three Hellenistic poets: the aforementioned Philicus and Callimachus as well as Theocritus in the *Idyll XV*. It seems that precisely in this use of comic/humorous elements in the religious genre we can catch these three poets holding a literary discussion on the role and limits of generic enrichments and innovations in religious compositions devoted to the gods.

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How to Prove Gods' Power in a Greco-Egyptian Context ?

It is commonly accepted that the way Callimachus chooses to praise the god stands in contrast to traditional forms of praise. The new aspects of aretology that he introduces are the very proof that the genre we call "hymn", like any other literary genre, is characterized by a certain plasticity linked to the poet's aesthetic choices and the hymn's context of performance. One of these aspects is the notion of verisimilitude that the poet seeks to give to his hymns. In the *Hymn to Zeus*, for example, the poet introduces rhetorical notions to present the appropriate version of the divine biography by using the terms 'plausible' (v. 63, 85 : ἔουκε) and 'to convince' (v. 65: κεν πεπίθουεν ἀκούην). He thus shows that he seeks to persuade the listener immediately rather than to render a historical truth. It is in fact as if the power of the god and his aretology must be proved here and now by the poet and the poem. From this point of view, the hymn is sung not only to praise the god but also to establish, affirm and confirm his power. One of the means the poet employs to give his composition an aspect of verisimilitude is to make the presence of the god tangible to men by introducing multiple references to places recognizable by the listener into the narrative. Through the geographical details he gives, through the references to the change of placenames following the passage of the god, the poet links the divine biography with his own time and space of interest. The places, rivers and springs that the god visits, crosses or reveals mark his imprint on the earth and in the space of men. The verisimilitude takes shape through reference to a recognizable reality that the poet recounts thanks to his erudition. In my presentation, I will first focus on this new feature in the hymnic praise linked precisely to the search for the plausible, I will then try to understand the pragmatic function of this same feature. By referring to various geographical locations, not only does Callimachus give his tale an aspect of verisimilitude but also creates a link between a here (Egypt) and a there (Greece), between the present and the divine past. At the same time he

proves to what extent metropolitan Greece is a place just as fertile and rich in water as Egypt with the Nile. By doing so, Callimachus sheds light on a new form of panhellenism.

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Ἐγερσινόων ἀπὸ βίβλων: The Poetics of Proclus' Hymns

Proclus' *Hymns* have been read primarily for what they can tell us about Neoplatonic philosophy and late antique theurgy; they have received very little attention from literary scholars. This paper seeks to winkle out the poetics of these texts, in particular by reading them in dialogue with Nonnus' *Dionysiaca* (which, as has often been noted, itself contains many hymnic elements).