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Greek Hymns

Selected Cult Songs
from the Archaic to the Hellenistic period

Volume I
The Texts in Translation

Mohr Siebeck
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Figure 1: Apollo and Artemis, with Hermes (left) and Leto (right). Rf volute krater, possibly by Palermo Painter. J. Paul Getty Museum, Malibu, California. 415-410 BC.
For
Alexandra and Friederike
Preface

“Songs are the finest of gifts to the gods” (Theocritus 22.223)

This work is a collection and discussion of Greek hymns, i.e. of songs used by ancient Greeks in worship. Why did we bring them together? In the first place: nobody has ever done this before, and it seemed to us high time that a ‘source-book’ of Greek cult hymns was made. The last two centuries have seen the rediscovery, through archaeological excavation, of many lost hymnic texts: a number of Hellenistic and later hymns have been discovered as inscriptions on stone in the course of excavations at Delphi, Epidauros and elsewhere. At the same time finds of papyri from Egypt have returned to the human eye substantial portions of cult songs composed by choral lyricists, Pindar in particular, as well as new fragments of e.g. Sappho and Alkaios. These scattered texts, combined with those transmitted in the normal manuscript tradition, have all been published previously, but never before as a corpus, and never from the dedicated viewpoint of Greek hymnology. Our collection deliberately omits the well-known corpora of literary hymns: the Homeric Hymns and Callimachus’ six hymns. For one thing, excellent editions of these texts already exist; secondly, these texts are not cult songs proper. They serve a more literary purpose, being assimilated to other literary genres more concerned with narrative and literary mimesis than worship pure and simple.

There were two main decisions for us to take: which texts to include in our collection, and how to arrange them. As to the first, we decided not to produce a corpus in the technical sense: an exhaustive publication of all available evidence, including even the smallest, barely decipherable, scraps. Our collection should therefore be considered a selection. Nor did we include texts from the Graeco-Roman period, partly because we did not feel competent to treat adequately the texts addressed to newcomers in the Greek pantheon such as Isis, Sarapis, Mithras, and partly because the
book would have become too large. As for the second decision: over the years we have considered various arrangements, such as 1. chronological (the oldest specimens coming first etc.), 2. according to the genres distinguished by Alexandrian scholars: hymns, païans, dithyrambs, prosodia, partheneia, 3. according to the gods addressed in the hymns. We came to the conclusion that none of these three would really work, and decided in the end for the present arrangement, according to the cult centre in which the hymns functioned: Crete, Delphi, Delos, etc. Why? because – as biblical scholars have discovered in studying the Psalms – it is of the greatest importance to relate this type of texts to their *Sitz im Leben*: they are not autonomous works of art but rather the formalized script of certain types of worship offered in concrete situations and locations.

There is another aspect to the arrangement of our *Greek Hymns*, and for this we have followed the example set by ‘bilingual’ works such as Long and Sedley’s *Hellenistic Philosophy*. Like these we have divided our material into two volumes. Volume I, in which all material is translated into English, contains our general introduction, the hymns in translation, accompanied in each case by general remarks aimed at situating the song in its context of production and performance. Volume II presents all texts in the original Greek, with critical apparatus, metrical analysis and line-by-line commentary. We trust that volume I will be of use not only to classicists but also to those scholars (juniors and seniors) who – without advanced knowledge of Greek – are actively engaged in disciplines such as the history of religion, cultural anthropology, theology; this volume contains its own bibliography and general subject index. Classical scholars will of course prefer to use both volumes, side by side.

This book is a product of joint authorship. In 1992 WDF took the formal initiative towards it and invited JMB to cooperate in the undertaking, taking him up on his paper ‘Greek hymns’ (Bremer, 1981). From then onwards we have divided the material between us, WDF assuming the (somewhat) heavier burdens. We have intervened so intensely in each other’s contributions, sometimes rewriting parts, that we accept joint responsibility for the entire book. It fell also to WDF to give the book, in its two volumes, final shape and format. The entire process of orientation, research, writing and rewriting has – given the numerous other obligations and responsibilities of university teaching – taken us nearly a decade. During this process we have incurred many debts. The biggest debt we owe to our last benefactor, Richard Gordon, who most generously read, cor-
rected, and suggested revisions of, the penultimate version of the entire book. His knowledge of *Religionswissenschaft* has been of great value to us. JMB records gratefully the meetings of the Amsterdam ‘Hellenisten-club’ to whose members he was allowed to present first drafts of some particularly difficult pieces. Among these members C.J. Ruijgh deserves special mention for his advice on matters of Greek linguistics. Colin Austin has read the chapter on Aristophanes, especially the series of songs taken from *Thesmophoriazousai*: his observations were of great value. WDF thanks his Heidelberg colleagues A. Chaniotis and G.W. Most for their kind willingness to read sections of the whole work and offer critical comment. I.C. Rutherford (Reading) kindly made sections of his forthcoming edition, with commentary, of Pindar’s paian available prior to publication. The typesetting of the book would not have been possible without all those legion *T\TeX* specialists throughout the world who have contributed to such a versatile scholarly tool; in particular we wish to thank P. Mackay (Washington) for his Greek and metrical fonts, and A. Dafferner (Heidelberg) for countless useful tips.

Relatively late in the development of this work we were informed by C. Austin that the late Joan Haldane had been working on a monograph devoted to the Greek *hymnos* up until her death; her papers (including some nearly complete, typewritten chapters) had been entrusted to Austin, who kindly made them available to us. We refer to this work at several points and gratefully express here our respect for this unpublished predecessor.

Finally, we express our gratitude to various institutions for facilities and/or funds: our universities and libraries, Dr. Pflug of the Heidelberg dept. of classical archaeology (for the cover picture and help with illustrations), the Van der Valk-fonds (administered by the trustees of the A.U.V., Amsterdam) for allowing us to buy computer equipment; our publisher Mohr-Siebeck for taking on a lengthy work with enthusiasm and energy. Particular thanks go to Ch. Markschies (Heidelberg), tactful and resourceful editor of the series *Studien zu Antike und Christentum*. We are also grateful to the museums for permission to reproduce the illustrations.

We dedicate this, the fruits of our labour, to our wives Friederike B. (née van Katwijk) and Alexandra F. (née Horowski) in gratitude for their patience, support, and the fruits of their labour.

JMB (Amsterdam), WDF (Heidelberg) July 4, 2001
## Contents

Preface .................................................. IX
List of Illustrations ................................. XIX
List of Abbreviations .............................. XXI

Introduction ........................................... 1

1 The nature of Greek hymns ..................... 1
  1.1 What is a hymn? ................................. 1
  1.2 Ancient theory .................................. 8
  1.3 Cult song ........................................ 14
  1.4 Performance ..................................... 20
  1.5 Cult song and Pan-Hellenic festival ........ 35

2 A survey of the extant remains ............... 40
  2.1 The Homeric Hymns ............................ 41
  2.2 Lyric monody ..................................... 43
  2.3 Choral lyric ...................................... 44
  2.4 Callimachus ...................................... 45
  2.5 Philosophical and allegorical hymns ....... 47
  2.6 Magical hymns ................................... 47
  2.7 Prose hymns ..................................... 48
  2.8 The Orphic Hymns and Proklos ............... 49

3 Form and composition ............................ 50
  3.1 Invocation ........................................ 52
  3.2 Praise ........................................... 56
  3.3 Prayer ............................................ 60
  3.4 An example ....................................... 63

1 Crete .................................................. 65
  1.1 A Cretan hymn to Zeus of Mt. Dikta ......... 68
## Contents

2 Delphi  
- Theory of the Paian ........................................... 84  
- Early Delphic Hymns ........................................... 91  
- Delphic mythical tradition .................................... 93  
  2.1 Alkaios’ paian to Apollo .................................... 99  
  2.2 Pindar’s 6th paian ........................................... 102  
  2.3 Aristonoos’ hymn to Hestia ................................. 116  
  2.4 Aristonoos’ paian to Apollo ............................... 119  
  2.5 Philodamos’ paian to Dionysos ......................... 121  
  2.6 Two paians to Apollo with musical notation ........... 129  
    2.6.1 Athenaios’ paian and prosodion to Apollo .......... 135  
    2.6.2 Limenios’ paian and prosodion to Apollo .......... 137  

3 Delos  
- Olen and the Hyperboreans ................................... 146  
- International theòria to Delos ............................... 151  
- Fragments of Pindar’s Deliaka ............................... 153  
  3.1 Paian 7b ..................................................... 153  
  3.2 Paian 5, For the Athenians ............................... 156  
  3.3 (?)Paian 12, ?For the Naxians ............................ 157  

4 Lyric Hymns from Lesbos and Ionia  
- Sappho’s invocation of Aphrodite ........................... 163  
- Sappho’s prayer to Hera ..................................... 165  
- Alkaios’ hymn to the Dioskouroi ............................ 166  
- Alkaios’ hymn to Hera, Zeus and Dionysos ................ 171  
- Anakreon’s request to Dionysos ............................. 176  
- Anakreon’s bow to Artemis .................................. 178  

5 Thebes  
- Theban myth and cult song ................................. 182  
- Pindar ....................................................... 187  
  5.1 Pindar’s Theban hymn to Zeus ........................... 191  
  5.2 Pindar’s Theban dithyramb ............................... 197  
  5.3 Pindar’s ninth paian ..................................... 199
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contents</th>
<th>XV</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6  The healing cult of Epidauros</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1 Paian to Asklepios</td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2 Hymn to the Mother of the Gods</td>
<td>214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3 Araphron’s Paian to Hygieia</td>
<td>224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4 Isyllos’ paian to Apollo and Asklepios</td>
<td>227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.5 Hymn to Pan</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.6 A prayer to Asklepios in Herodas</td>
<td>243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.7 Hymn to All the Gods</td>
<td>244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7  Athens</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dionysos and the Dithyramb</td>
<td>248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1 Pindar’s dithyramb to Dionysos</td>
<td>256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2 Attic skolia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2.1 Athena</td>
<td>258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2.2 Demeter and Persephone</td>
<td>259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2.3 Leto, Apollo and Artemis</td>
<td>259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2.4 Pan</td>
<td>260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3 Sophocles’ paian to Asklepios</td>
<td>261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4 Aristotle’s hymn to Virtue</td>
<td>262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.5 Makedonikos’ paian to Apollo and Asklepios</td>
<td>266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.6 A morning-song for Asklepios</td>
<td>267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.7 Two hymns to Telesphoros</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.7.1 Hymn 1</td>
<td>268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.7.2 Hymn 2</td>
<td>269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8  Hymns in Drama I: Aeschylus</td>
<td>273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General introduction: hymns in tragedy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.1 Hymns to Zeus in the <em>Suppliants</em></td>
<td>279</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.1.1 Ancestral gods and Zeus</td>
<td>280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.1.2 ‘Lord of Lords’</td>
<td>281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2 Zeus in the <em>Agamemnon</em></td>
<td>286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2.1 ‘Zeus, whoever he may be’</td>
<td>286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2.2 ‘Almighty Zeus and friendly Night’</td>
<td>288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3 The Erinyes in <em>Eumenides</em></td>
<td>290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3.1 A ‘binding song’ of the Erinyes</td>
<td>290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3.2 Banishing the Erinyes</td>
<td>293</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
9  Hymns in Drama II: Sophocles  
   9.1  Eros and Dionysos in Antigone  
      9.1.1  Eros and Aphrodite  
      9.1.2  A hymn to Theban Dionysos  
   9.2  A paian in time of plague in OT  
   9.3  Hades and Kore in OC  

10  Hymns in Drama III: Euripides  
   10.1  Purity and love in Hippolytos  
      10.1.1  A hunter’s song to Artemis  
      10.1.2  The power of Eros and Aphrodite  
   10.2  A patriotic hymn in time of war in Herakleidai  
   10.3  The hymns in Ion  
      10.3.1  Ion’s monody  
      10.3.2  Athena Nike and Artemis  
      10.3.3  Kreousa’s denunciation of Apollo  
      10.3.4  Einodia  
   10.4  A narrative hymn in Iphigeneia in Tauris  

11  Hymns in Drama IV: Aristophanes  
   11.1  Two parabasis-songs in the Knights  
      11.1.1  Poseidon Hippios  
      11.1.2  Athena Nike  
   11.2  Hymns to ratify a peace treaty in Lysistrata  
   11.3  The hymns in Thesmophoriazousai  
      11.3.1  Agathon’s song to Apollo, Artemis and Leto  
      11.3.2  A song to All the Gods  
      11.3.3  ‘Come, join the dance’  
      11.3.4  Pallas Athena, Demeter and Kore  
   11.4  The hymns to Eleusinian deities in Frogs  
      11.4.1  Iakchos  
      11.4.2  ?Kore  
      11.4.3  Demeter  
      11.4.4  Iakchos  

12  Some Miscellaneous Hymns  
   12.1  Invocation of Dionysos by the women of Elis  
   12.2  A hymn to Poseidon and the dolphins
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12.3 A women’s song to Artemis</td>
<td>376</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.4 An anonymous paian to Apollo</td>
<td>378</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.5 A hymnic temple-dedication from Paros</td>
<td>379</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>383</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Index</td>
<td>393</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Illustrations

Fig. 1 (p. V) Apollo and Artemis, with Hermes (left) and Leto (right). Rf volute krater, possibly by Palermo Painter. J. Paul Getty Museum, Malibu, California

Fig. 2 (p. 22) Dancers of a parthenoeion. Rf krater by Villa Giulia Painter in Rome, Villa Giulia inv. 909

Fig. 3 (p. 27) A dithyramb chorus in action. Rf bell krater by Kleophon Painter. Copenhagen, National Museum of Denmark, Dept. of Classical and Near Eastern Antiquities, inv. 13817

Fig. 4 (p. 29) Sacrifice with processional hymn. Painted wooden tablet from Pitsa. Athens, National Archaeological Museum, inv. 16464

Fig. 1.1 (p. 76) The Palaikastro Kouros. LM1 B ±1500 BC. Photo curtesy of the authors of MacGillivray et al. (2000)

Fig. 2.1 (p. 79) A theoria arrives at Delphi. Rf volute krater by Kleophon Painter in Ferrara inv. T 57C

Fig. 2.2 (p. 98) Apollo flies over the sea on his winged tripod. Hydria by Berlin Painter. Museo Gregoriano Etrusco (Vatican) inv. 16568

Fig. 2.3 (p. 128) Dionysos greets Apollo at Delphi on his return from the Hyperboreans. Rf bell krater by the Kadmos painter in the State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, inv. Yu O.28

Fig. 2.4 (p. 133) Apollo with foot on Gallic shields. Archaeological Museum, Delos, inv. A.4124

Fig. 3.1 (p. 140) The Delian Trinity: Leto, Apollo and Artemis. Rf pelike by Villa Giulia Painter, Basel inv. Lu 49

Fig. 3.2 (p. 142) Apollo arrives on swan-back on Delos. Bell krater by Meleager Painter. London 1917.7

Fig. 3.3 (p. 144) A chorus of young women: the Deliades? Lebes gamikos from Delos, École Française d’Athènes, no. S 2275

Fig. 4.1 (p. 162) A symposiast strikes up a hymn to Apollo and (Artemis). Fragment of Rf krater by Euphronios. Munich inv. 8935

Fig. 4.2 (p. 168) The Dioskouroi attend a theoxenia. Attic rf hydria by the Kadmos Painter, Plovdiv

Fig. 6.1 (p. 211) Asklepios and his healing family. Votive relief from Luku in the Peloponnese. Athens National Museum, relief no. 1402.
Fig. 6.2 (p. 226) Hygieia and related personified blessings. Rf pyxis in the British Museum, inv. E 775. Photograph © The British Museum

Fig. 7.1 (p. 255) Dionysos Lenaios amid the Bacchants. Rf cup by Makron. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Antikensammlung

Fig. 11.1 (p. 344) Athena and Poseidon. Bf neck amphora by Amasis Painter in Paris, Cabinet des Médailles inv. 222

Fig. 11.2 (p. 352) Chorus-leader and chorus of young women. Rf astragalos by Sotades in British Museum, inv. E 804. Photograph © The British Museum

Fig. 12.1 (p. 377) A girl with krotala dancing to aulos music. Detail from rf. lekythos by Bowdoin Painter. Basel inv. BS 1944.2699
List of Abbreviations

Abbreviations of names of periodicals follow the conventions of *L'Année Philologique*.

AL  E. Diehl (ed.), *Anthologia Lyrica Graeca*, Leipzig vol. I 1925, II 1942
BKT Berliner Klassiker Texte
CA  I.U. Powell (ed.), *Collectanea Alexandrina*, Oxford 1925
CEG P.A. Hansen (ed.), *Carmina Epigraphica Graeca*, Berlin 1983
CIG A. Boeckh (ed.), *Corpus Inscriptionum Graecarum*, Berlin 1928ff.
EG  G. Kaibel, *Epigrammata Graeca, ex lapidibus conlecta*, Berlin 1878
EM  Th. Gaisford (ed.), *Etymologicon Magnum*, Oxford 1848
HCT A.W. Gomme, A. Andrewes, K.J. Dover, *An Historical Commentary on Thucydides*, five volumes, Oxford 1945-1981
IC  Margarita Guarducci (ed.), *Inscriptiones Creticae*, vol. III, Rome 1942
IG  *Inscriptiones Graecae*, Berlin 1873ff.
**List of Abbreviations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Introduction

1 The nature of Greek hymns

1.1 What is a hymn?

When we consider basic forms of religious worship both in antiquity and in modern societies, the singing of hymns in some form or other features conspicuously. The religious act typically constitutes a demonstrative change in behaviour or situation compared with a secular norm. A person adopts a particular attitude in order to pray, whether standing with hands clasped, or kneeling with head bowed, or prostrate on the ground: the important point is that the attitude marks the person praying in a manner recognizable to him and to others – and to the god concerned. One or more people may move from secular to sacred space around an altar, temple or shrine in order to offer worship. Buildings serving a religious purpose are normally marked off from surrounding construction by the style of architecture or the objects (altar, statuary, votive offerings etc.) set up in or around them. Religious dress, hairstyle, manner of walking or speech may differ from the everyday. And the transition between secular and sacred behaviour is frequently ritualized, whether by ceremonial washing, or a formal call for silence (Greek εὐφημείν) or a gesture (the Catholic crossing himself with holy water on entering a church). An animal destined for sacrifice is similarly marked out from the rest of the herd: it may be washed or adorned in some manner in order to make it seemly for sacrifice. From the point of view of the worshipper, all these actions serve to make his approach to god more acceptable: by adopting conventional modes of dress, behaviour, speech, location and even attitude of mind, the worshipper believes he will find god’s favour and come closer to achieving his purpose. From an observer’s point of view, religious behaviour represents a complex of utterances and actions (Greek: λεγόμενα καὶ δρόμενα) intricately linked with, but markedly distinct from, other areas of social life.

The hymn may also be viewed in this light. As a form of utterance,
it is distinguished from normal speech by any or all of the following features: words uttered by a group of people in unison; melody; metre or rhythm; musical accompaniment; dance performed either by the hymn-singers themselves or an associated group; repetition from occasion to occasion. And when we wish to distinguish the hymn from other forms of song, even choral song, we only have to consider the person or entity to whom the composition is addressed: the hymn differs from normal speech or song in turning from human society to address a god or company of gods either directly (second-person address: 'Du-Stil') or indirectly (third-person address: 'Er-Stil') or even vicariously (first-person annunciation). The hymn-singer has typically removed himself from a secular environment to join with others in abandoning their normal manner of everyday discourse in order to address a god using all the resources of artistic embellishment available.

Of course, there is considerable overlap between hymns and other forms of utterance in terms of form, content, and function. Formally, a hymn may be indistinguishable from a secular poem: there is no metre, poetic register or compositional technique exclusively reserved for religious poems performed in cult. And a distinction based on religious content can be difficult to maintain too. As Easterling (1985, 34-49) correctly observes, there is no clear distinction in Greek poetry between the sacred and the secular: many forms, such as epinician odes or tragedy, are imbued with religious elements such as hymnic address, prayer, divine or mythic narrative; likewise, many hymns contain literary elements such as narrative of divine or heroic exploits, or ekphrasis of places favoured by gods, or dialogue between gods or gods and people. The most ribald forms of literature – a satyr-play, for example, or Aristophanic comedy – may concern the gods directly or contain a choral ode indistinguishable from a cult hymn. But even if we cannot draw an absolute distinction between hymns and other lyric forms in terms of religious content, there is a pragmatic difference of emphasis and purpose between the cult hymn and the literary piece, however religious in theme. The cult hymn is a form of worship directed towards winning a god's goodwill and securing his or her assistance or favour. Literature is concerned with the entertainment and enlightenment of the audience addressed: it may treat of the gods but it does not address them directly. It may guide an audience to a heightened

\footnote{With the exception of certain repeated cries or refrains (epiphthegmata) such as υὴ παιαν in a paian or ἰαν χε in the procession of Eleusinian mystai.}
understanding of the influence of divinity on human affairs, but it does not devote its resources to securing something from that divinity through its performance.

There is another form of discourse which shares the hymn's goal of securing divine goodwill: prayer. Hymns share many of the compositional elements characteristic of prayers: there is the same direct address of a deity, the same gesture of supplication and often the same express request for help or protection. A distinction may be possible here by considering both the compositional elements of the two forms and their differing function in worship. Formally a hymn is likely to be a more finished artistic product than a prayer, both in terms of articulated speech and narrative and in performance. For the case of Mesopotamian hymns and prayers, Edzard draws a distinction with respect to the speed and manner of delivery of both forms: prayers tend to be uttered quickly, more in the manner of normal speech, without overt artistic embellishment, whilst hymns are sung or recited in a slow, deliberate and repetitive manner which emphasizes the performance itself. Simply to say that prayers are spoken and hymns are sung, however, will not do. As we will see, there were various forms of Greek hymn which were spoken or recited rather than sung, and, conversely, prayers which were spoken in unison and rhythmically by a congregation. In terms of function Pulleyn (1997, 49f.) has drawn an interesting distinction between prayer and hymn: the latter, by being a finished artistic product employing refined techniques of praise and persuasion, represents a kind of offering to the god, a verbal δαίμονας, or 'delight', comparable to a sacrifice or a votive offering, designed to please the god and store up divine favour (χαρίς) toward the hymn-singer and the com-

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2 A number of collections and studies of ancient Greek prayers have appeared in recent decades: Versnel (1981); Graf in Faraone & Obbink (1991, 188-213); Aubriot-Sévin (1992); Pulleyn (1997); Kiley (1997).

3 'Sumerische und akkadische Hymnen' in Burkert & Stolz (1994, 19-32); Pulleyn (1997, 54) writes: "The most obvious superficial difference between hymns and prayers consists in the fact that hymns were of their essence musical and prayers were not. A prayer can in principle be very simple. When one starts rehearsing a catalogue of the attributes of the deity, one is getting onto different territory. When one puts the whole thing into verse and sets it to music, it has moved a long way from being a prayer."

4 Pulleyn (1997, 44f.) takes issue with Bremer's earlier definition of a hymn as a 'sung prayer'. Pulleyn's main objection is not that hymns were not sung, but rather that the prayer element of a hymn may be small or negligible compared to the praise and adoration of the god; accordingly he denies that the performance criterion of singing/not singing is decisive.
munity he/she represents. Prayer, on the other hand, is a less embellished form of request in return for a different kind of offering on the part of the petitioner (sacrifice, libation, votive offering or promise to perform such in the future). In fact, however, this distinction is hard to apply rigorously; as Pulleyn is the first to admit, many spoken prayers contain elements of hymnic embellishment, and many hymns contain prayers, sometimes extensive and detailed.\(^5\) He suggests that linguistic embellishment of prayers is the result of the influence of hymns, but one could easily argue the reverse, that hymns are simply more refined prayers which develop and elaborate the elements of linguistic and artistic embellishment. We must content ourselves with recognizing complementary forms of religious discourse here, with a greater emphasis in the case of hymns on the attributes of song and dance, in short, performance on the part of the worshipper(s).\(^6\)

Because hymns represent a relatively advanced, artistic, form of worship we should not regard them as secondary, or late, in any way compared to other forms. The earliest cultures of which we have cognizance, and the most primitive still existing today, have their songs of worship or supplication of divinities. There is no stage of Greek literature or culture known to us which lacks a fully developed range of cult songs. Homer, for example, refers explicitly to paian sung to Apollo, choruses to Artemis, songs in honour of agricultural deities such as Linos.\(^7\) And the collection of essays in *Hymnen der alten Welt im Kulturvergleich* (Burkert & Stolz, 1994) shows that the Greeks' Egyptian, Hittite, Mesopotamian and Persian neighbours and predecessors all possessed a vital hymnic tradition as part of their divine worship. Together with prayer, the performance or recitation of hymns forms the verbally articulated complement to expressive action in religious worship. The doing and the saying or singing are inextricably linked and mutually supportive. When people move in procession to a place of worship they not only (typically) carry an effigy or symbol of the god in whose honour they are processing, they sing a hymn celebrating the god's glory: the action is identified and justified by the use of traditional

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\(^5\)For an interesting example of a prayer to Asklepios (for relief from gout) composed in a metrical and hymnic form, see *IG* III i Addenda no. 171a (pp. 488-9), a composition by Diophantos Sphetios.

\(^6\)Race (1990, 103 n.50) says: "The distinction between cultic hymns and prayers mainly involves a question of emphasis"; prayers, in his opinion, emphasize the request made of a god, whereas hymns "have more elaborate invocations", and sometimes contain no request.

\(^7\)Paian: *II*. 1.146; choruses for Artemis: 16.181; Linos-song: 18.570.
The nature of Greek hymns

songs. And when they reach the god’s altar they form up and sing more hymns before performing an action such as sacrifice or libation. The hymn is communication within the community and with the god(s) addressed.

As soon as ritual action is conceived as being performed for some deity, or in his honour, verbal communication becomes necessary and legitimate. And we know of virtually no religion which does not in some form posit gods attributed with intelligence. For this reason it appears to us of dubious heuristic value to ‘explain’ religious cult through ritual behaviour postulated for early man on the basis of observation of primates, to the virtual exclusion of higher expressions of religious belief such as are found in hymns.

True, the sacrificial rite may reflect hunting rituals among early man, which may in turn bear some resemblance to primates’ behaviour, but it is only when a ‘Mistress of Animals’ has been conceived of, for whom one performs the sacrificial ritual and to whom one sings such songs as Euripides, Hipp. 61-71 (our no. 10.3.2), that religion has been born.

It is particularly necessary to stake out a claim for the importance of our subject within Hellenic studies, as, whilst many might agree that ancient Greek hymns were important in the arts and religion, there is a de facto tendency to ignore them. The reason is not far to seek: the vast majority of archaic and classical cult hymns have vanished without trace. Wilamowitz (1921, 242) wrote: “Die gottesdienstliche Poesie der alten Zeit ist verloren”, and the statement is not far from the truth. It is only in the Hellenistic period that survivals become more frequent owing to the increasing use of written records of religious cult. Below we will exam-

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8Note the interesting passage in Apuleius, Met. 11.9.5 Helm, describing religious hymns sung during a procession in honour of Isis: carmen vetustum iterantes, quod Came-narum favore sollers poeta modulatus edixerat, quod argumentum referebat interim mai-orum antecantamenta votorum, “they repeat an ancient hymn which a skillful poet had composed with the help of the Muses, and which had as its contents the preludes (or aetia) of their ancestors’ sacred rites”.

9This double aspect of communication is brought out well in Danielewicz (1976, English summary pp. 116-26). See further below p. 59.

10Buddhism being a notable exception.

11We have in mind particularly the ‘ethological’ interpretations sometimes proposed by W. Burkert, most recently in Creation of the Sacred. Tracks of Biology in Early Religion, Cambridge Mass. 1996.

12Cf. N.D. Fustel de Coulanges, The Ancient City, (first published 1864), reprint 1980, Baltimore, 6: “But where are the hymns of the ancient Hellenes? They, as well as the Italians, had ancient hymns, and old sacred books: but nothing of these has come down to us.”
ine the discrepancy between the acknowledged fact of the prominence of hymn-singing in all forms of religious worship and the sad state of transmission of texts. At this juncture it is essential to point out the dangers involved in allowing this dearth of transmitted texts to distort our reading of Greek literature and religion. For many forms of literary production appear to have descended directly or indirectly from choral worship of the gods: Aristotle, for example, states that both Attic tragedy and comedy descended from various forms of cult song (*Poet*. 1449a10ff).\(^\text{13}\) Even more directly, choral lyric generally would simply not have arisen without a long tradition of ‘choruses for the gods and heroes’. But the dependence of later (transmitted) literature on (lost) hymns does not end with the external conditions of performance or delivery. There is a whole hymnic tradition of praise poetry which makes itself apparent in epinician poetry,\(^\text{14}\) in encomia of people and places, and in literary hymns which employ the form of ancient cult hymns in new social and emotional settings.\(^\text{15}\)

The disregard of hymns for lack of texts is even more regrettable in the field of Greek religion. In the leading works on Greek religion of our time, hymns are scarcely mentioned as a vital part of cult. Indeed we are repeatedly told that what mattered in Greek religion was doing the right things: sacrificing in the right manner above all. When the verbal aspect of religion is considered, it tends to be under the heading of ‘myth’. What is seldom adequately realized, however, is that myth is the substance of hymns, and that the stories told about the gods in myths were in fact the stories sung to the gods in worship in order to flatter, remind, praise and cajole a recalcitrant stone image into beneficial action.\(^\text{16}\) Once this is realized, myths cease to appear merely as speculative narratives about the uncanny powers of the universe,\(^\text{17}\) and may be seen partly, and perhaps primarily, as

\(^\text{13}\)The major and persuasive thesis of Herington’s *Poetry into Drama* (1985) is that tragedy represented a new amalgam of traditional forms, mainly various forms of cult poetry.

\(^\text{14}\)Well analyzed by Race (1990, 85-117) in his chapter ‘Style and Rhetoric in Opening Hymns’.

\(^\text{15}\)Examples in our chapter on ‘Lesbos and Ionia’. Cf. Danielewicz (1974).

\(^\text{16}\)Cf. Furley (1995a, 40-45). Even the subtle analysis of J.-P. Vernant tends to neglect this intrinsic connection: he treats myth and ritual as two separable aspects of religion in (e.g. 1987, 164-68).

narratives designed to ‘capture’ precisely those powers through words.\textsuperscript{18} By reminding a god through hymnic worship of his mighty and beneficent deeds in the past, the worshipper wishes both to define the deity addressed and his powers, and to secure a measure of that power for himself through divine grace.\textsuperscript{19} Whilst the whole ‘myth and ritual’ school of interpretation has worked on the premiss that there is an intrinsic connection between the two modes – the ritual and the mythical – it has not been adequately grasped just how close the link in fact was: the myths formed the substance of hymns sung before or during the ritual.\textsuperscript{20} Conversely, narrative acquires a new and enhanced dimension when it is realized that it was not intended solely for human recipients, but primarily for the ears of the deity about whom it narrates. The Python myth in Apolline cult, for example, is not only narrative of an exciting kind, it also features in numerous hymns to Apollo which seek to emphasize his might, and to petition for help in a current situation. By narrating the deeds of the gods, the \textit{Homeric Hymns} define the characters and areas of power of these gods (see Clay, 1989). These definitions then become the basis and legitimation of cult. Thus the narrative becomes a kind of charter for the god’s claim to worship of a certain kind, and conversely the basis for the worshipper’s expectation of help. In practical terms, the student of ancient religion must, in our opinion, pay close attention to any surviving hymnic texts relating to a cult concerned, and, in their absence, consider notices relating to their possible content. Later scholarship in antiquity is frequently helpful here: in one instance, a late author, Himerios, relates in prose the entire content of an original (lost) hymn to Apollo by Alkaios (no. 2.1).

One main purpose of this book, then, is to attempt to restore an imbalance. By collecting surviving hymnic texts from various anomalous contexts – inscriptions, papyri, Hellenistic scholarship as well as literary genres such as epic, lyric, tragedy, comedy – we attempt to gain as full a picture as possible of the sum of ancient Greek hymns and the variety within the genre as a whole. Just as the restorer of vases must collect a

\textsuperscript{18}One may compare the excellent elucidation of this aspect of mythical narrative in the case of epinician poetry in A.P. Burnett’s \textit{Art of Bacchylides} 1985, ch. 1.

\textsuperscript{19}Race (1990, ch. 4) uses the term ‘hypomnesis’ to describe this function of narrative in hymns: the god is ‘reminded’ of his prowess so as to induce him to repeat the performance in the worshipper’s interest.

\textsuperscript{20}For all her enthusiasms, Harrison (1963) was not guilty of this bias, as she made the ‘Hymn of the Kouretes’ (our no. 1.1) the basis of \textit{Themis}. 
multitude of shattered fragments, assess their original position, reassemble them as best he can, while conscious that there are gaps which will probably never be filled, we have collected and attempted to order the disiecta membra of ancient Greek hymnography. We hope that the result will be profitable for both literary and religious studies.

1.2 Ancient theory

It is time now to consider the principles of that order more carefully. Was there a genre of hymn in ancient Greece, or rather, was there one genre or many? ‘Hymn’ is, of course, a Greek word (ὑμνος) but its etymology and origin remain obscure. We find a number of ancient etymologies, none convincing. The Etym. Gud. 540.38 Sturz gives the following account: “Hymn comes from ‘remain’, being something which ‘remains’, because it draws the words of praise and the virtues into a durable form”.21 This derivation emphasizes the celebratory aspect of hymns, their function to record and document praiseworthy deeds and powers. It does not explicitly mention the gods. Linguistically it is more than suspect, involving a most unlikely syncopation of the verb hypomeno to hymenō, hence hymnos from hypomonos. This ‘etymology’ is also given by Proklos, who records another possible derivation, from the (rare) verb ὑδειν, which he glosses as ‘speak’ (ibid.). Here one would have to assume a syncopated form of a passive participle of the verb;22 but even if such a process was linguistically viable, the meaning ‘speak’ is hardly germane, or germinal, to any essential quality of the hymn. Finally, a number of passages in poetry exploit the similarity between the stems hymn- and hyph- from the verb hyphainō, ‘weave’.23 However, such etymological play belongs more in the realm of lyric inventiveness than the essential development of language.24

21 ὑμνος: παρὰ τὸ ὑμένω τὸ ὑπομένω, ὑπόμονος τις ὄν, καὶ ἐν συγχοτη ὑμνος, καθό εἰς ὑπομονήν καὶ παράξειν ἄγειν τὰς τῶν ἐπαινῶν ἀκοάς, καὶ ἁρτας. Cf. Proklos ap. Phot. Bibl. 320a9-10: ἄπο τοῦ ὑπομονον τινα εἶπα: E.M. s.v. ὑμνος: καὶ συγχοτη, ὑπόμονος τις ὄν, καθό εἰς ὑπομονήν καὶ μνήμην ἄγει τὰς τῶν ἐπαινουμένων παράξεις καὶ ἁρτας. “‘hymn’: a thing which is lasting (hypomonos), because it draws the deeds and powers of those praised into a durable and memorable form”.

22 Perfect ὑδειν — or ὑδέειν — > ὑδέειν cf. Wünsch (1914, 141).


24 Wünsch (1914, 141) approves this derivation whilst Chantraine, Dict. Etym. s.v. cautions against it.
At an early stage it bore the general sense of ‘song’, though possibly with connotations of praise or celebration. The more specific meaning ‘song of praise for a god’ developed from that, and is current in the classical period. Plato, for example, draws a clear distinction between hymns (ὕμνοι) as songs in praise of gods, and encomia (ἔγχωμιαι) for men (Rep. 10.607a). An ancient definition of hymnos used in this religious sense runs “hymnos is discourse in the form of adoration, with prayer conjoined with praise, addressed to a god”. The definition contains a number of essential points: the hymn worshiped gods with combined prayer (εὐχή) and praise (παῖνος). We may compare this with another ancient definition given by Dionysios Thrax (2nd c. BC): “the ‘hymn’ is a poem comprising praises of the gods and heroes with thanksgiving”. This formulation specifies that a hymn has poetic form (ποίημα), includes heroes among recipients of hymnic worship, and uses the expression eucharistia, ‘thanksgiving’ to denote an essential element of the worshippers’ offering of song.

In a way the more general ancient term for the collective singing of a deity’s praise by a group denoted the whole activity (song, dance, place of worship): choros, the chorus which learnt the dance steps, the words and the melody which in combination constituted the hymn’s performance. To ‘set up a chorus’ (χορὸν ἵσταναι) for the performance of ritual songs became the standard term for the inauguration of hymns in performance. Numerous passages describe the founding of the cult of a god or hero, either in conjunction with the erection of an altar and/or temple in his/her honour or with reorganization of the cult. For example, at Bacchylides 11.108ff., when Artemis persuaded Hera to reprieve the daughters of Proitos from their god-sent madness, they built her an altar and temenos and ‘in-

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25 See the PW article ‘Hymnos’ by Wünsch, 141-2.
27 Etym. Gud. ύμνος· ἔστιν ὁ μετὰ προσκυνήσεως καὶ εὐχής κεχαριμένης ἐπαίνων λόγος εἰς θεόν.
28 451.6 Hilgard: ύμνος ἔστι ποίημα περιέχον θεῶν ἐγκώμια καὶ ἡρώων μετ’ εὐχαριστίας.
29 In this collection we do not include hymns to heroes, limiting ourselves to those addressed to recognized divinities. For an interesting early ‘hymn’ to the hero Achilles see Simonides fr. 10-11 West; cf. L. Sbardella, ‘Achille e gli eroi di Platea. Simonide fr. 10-11 W’. ZPE 129, 2000, 1-11.
30 LSJ s.v. ἱματιά iii 4; cf. Aristoph. Clouds 271 with Dover’s note, and Birds 219 with Dunbar’s note; Burkert (1977, 168).
stituted choruses of women’ (καὶ χοροὺς ἵστατο γυναικῶν), whose role no doubt was to hymn Artemis. The hymn-singing which typically accompanied the inauguration or restitution of a cult is well illustrated by Aristophanes Peace 774ff., where the goddess Peace is restored to the accompaniment of joyous hymn-singing. Names such as Stesichoros, ‘Chorus-Trainer’ or Hagesichora, ‘Chorus-Leader’, Terpsichora (one of the Muses), ‘Chorus-lover’, point to the familiarity of the concept. At Eur. El. 177-78 we find the term used not of inaugural rites but of the regular choral singing performed by Argive girls for Hera.31

In earlier work we have discussed in greater detail the relation of the generic term ὑμνος with the various sub-categories of sacred song named in antiquity.32 Our position may be summarized here. A passage of Plato might at first sight be taken to point to a distinction between hymns proper and other types such as païans, dithyrambs and nomes.33 The Alexandrian classification of religious choral lyric (by e.g. Pindar, Bacchylides) into separate books of païans, dithyrambs etc. and hymns seems to point in the same direction. And at one point in his discussion of this very point, the taxonomy of sacred song, Proklos uses the expression ‘the hymn proper’ (ὁ κυρίως ὑμνος) of a song of divine praise sung round the god’s altar in contradistinction to prosodia and other forms which, although addressed to the gods, are, by implication, distinct from ‘hymns proper’. These and other passages led Harvey (1955, 166) to conclude that there was a specific poetic form for the ‘hymn proper’, a monostrophic poem to the gods sung by a stationary chorus.

On the other hand, as Harvey recognizes, there was a general sense to the word ὑμνος current in antiquity which made it the generic word for songs for gods, and other terms, such as dithyrambs and païans, subdivisions of the genus. A statement of Didymos quoted by Orion (p. 155-6 Sturz) runs: “The hymn is distinct from enkomia, prosodia and païans not in that the latter are not hymns, but as genus (sc. is distinct) from species. For we call all forms of song for the gods hymns, and add a qualifying

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32 Laws 700b1-5: καὶ τι ἵν εἴδος οὐθῆς εὐχαί πρὸς θεοῦς, ὁνόμα δὲ ὑμνοὶ ἐπεκαλούντο... καὶ παλαινες ἔτερον, καὶ ἄλλο, Διονύσου γένεσις ὁμία, διθύραμβος λεγόμενος: “... and one form of song consisted of prayers to the gods – these were called ‘hymns’ – ... and païans were another form, and another, the birth of Dionysos, I think, was called ‘dithyramb’”.
33 Bibl. 320a19-20 ὁ δὲ κυρίως ὑμνος πρὸς κυθάραν ἠδετο ἐστώτων.
abstract entities
worshipped as gods, 289
Achilles, 266, 375
cenotaph at Elis, 370
hymn to, 9
Acts of the Apostles
28.11, 170
Aelius Aristides, 49
cured by Telesphoros, 270
Aeschylus
Ag.
parodos, 287
Aigyptioi, 284
Egyptian trilogy, 284
Eum.
1-9, 96
Pers.
629ff., 275
Seven
176-81, 57
Suppl.
1039-42, 289
Agathe Tyche, 224
Agathon, 350
effeminacy of, 354
Agdistis, 224
Aiakos, 105
Aias, 266
Aidoneus, see Hades
aidōs
of women, 285
Aigina, 105
cult of Asklepios, 210
Aigla, 229
Aigyptos, 279
aischrologia, 350
aition
of festival, 13, 18–20
Akeso
daughter of Asklepios, 213
Alkaios
Alexandrian edition of, 99
and politics, 171, 174
exile, 102
fr. 129, 101
fr. 348, 175
hymn to Apollo, 83
prooimion to Apollo, 91
Alkestis, 277
Alkman
Partheneion, 22, 218
All the Gods, 355, 357, 359
at Epidauros, 245
altar of horns
at Delos, 141
Amasis Painter, 343
Amazons
dance of, 377
amoibaion, 349, 352
Amphikleia, 128
Amphiktyons
at Delphi, 127
anabolē, 255
Anakreon, 160
and Homer, 177
and politics, 178
hymns to boys, 179
PMG 356b, 177
PMG 410, 177
Ananke, 277
Anthesteria
and dithyramb, 257
Antigone, 300
Aphrodite, 313
at Delos, 152
cult attributes, 164
destructive power of, 314, 316
in Aeschylus’ Suppl., 285
in Lesbos, 164
Apollo
accused of negligence, 327
and archery, 322
and Artemis, 332
and Asklepios, 213
and aulos, 100
and Hyperboreans, 100, 149
and Neoptolemos, 108
and nome, 334
arrival at Delphi, 78
as ephbe, 90, 322
as kitharode, 14
at Megara, 35
Daphnephoros
at Eretria, 94
father of Ion, 322
favoured places, 378
hymn to in Theognis, 163
hymnic attributes, 327
in winter, 127
kitharōdos, 34, 145
Maleatas, 228
Nomimos, 335
Paian, 84, 207
Phoibos, 96
Pythios, 331
and dithyrambs, 252
Apollonia
at Delos, 142, 144, 151
Apollonius of Rhodes
Arg.
1.1097-1102, 217
Apuleius
Met.
11.9.5, 5
Arate, 235
Archilochos, 159
fr. 117, 250
fr. 120, 121, 159
Hymn to Herakles, 159
test. 4 Tarditi, 251
Areopagus, 291
Ares
unarmoured, 307
aretalogy
of Isis, 48
Aretē
hymn to, 262
aretē
ode to in Euripides, 266
argument
in hymns, 56
Arion, 159, 335, 373
and dithyramb, 251
Arion of Methymna, see Arion
Arifhron of Sikyon, 224, 265
Aristarchos, 333
Aristeas of Prokonnesos
Arimaspea, 149
aristocracy
at Epidauros, 230
in Mytilene, 174
Aristonooos of Corinth, 116–121
Aristophanes
Σ. Ach.
637, 257
Birds
1373-1404, 254
557-60, 337
910-925, 155
Clouds
300-13, 320
311-13, 255
595ff., 307
Σ Frogs
479, 362
Lys.
1-3, 164
641-646, 21
Peace  796, 348
Σ Plut.  431, 216
Wasps  122-23, 236
Wealth  653ff., 210  
662ff., 235
Aristotle, 263
accused of impiety, 264
and origin of drama, 274
Ath. Pol.  
56, 152
in Themistios 26.316d, 274
monument to Hermias in Delphi, 264
Poet.  
1449a10, 6
1449a11, 274
Pol.  
1271b31-35, 65
1285a35-37, 175
1342a-b, 254
Rhet.  
1415a11, 42
tutor of Alexander, 263
Artemis, 178, 376
Agrotera, 259, 347
and Nymphs, 218
and wild animals, 178
at Delos, 158
at Delphi, 306
Ephesia, 377
girls' choruses for, 23
huntress, 314
Korythalia, 218
kourotrophos, 381
Leukophryene, 178
Loch(e)ia, 140, 325
Orth(e)ia, 23, 218
Polo, 380
temple at Delos, 146
torch-bearing, 381
Asklepieion  
in Athens, 213, 267
on Aigina, 236
Asklepios, 208
1st temple at Epidaurus, 237
and Apollo, 208
and votive weaponry, 209
and war wounds, 209
arrival in Athens, 261
birth of, 238–239
daughters of, 210
related deities, 210
sacrifice of cock to, 244
Assembly  
and religious ceremonial, 356
Assos, 263
Asteria, 156
Astylaidas of Epidaurus, 229
asylum
and Alkaios, 176
Atē, 289
Athena, 318
and Athenian democracy, 319
and Poseidon
in Attica, 342
birth of, 325
Chalkioikos, 348
Nike, 325
temple at Athens, 346
old temple on Athenian Acropolis, 342
Pallas, 360
Pronaia, 96
at Delphi, 306
women attendants of, 293
Athenaios  
192b, 161
253b,d, 29
463e, 164
696b, 264
Athenaios (technites), 129, 135
Athens, 36
  main festivals, 255
Attic skolia, 161
Attis, 216
Aulis, 287
aulody
  at Delphi, 92

Bacchylides
  11.108ff., 9
  16.5-12, 127
  16.8-10, 83
  17 Eitheoi, 333
  17.124-29, 90
  17, 152
  apopemptic hymns, 295
  dithyrambs, 45, 250
  Kassandra, 333

Basilinna
  at Athens, 370
  binding song, see hymnos desmios
  binding spells, 291
    judicial, 291
Boio, 150
  and Delphic hymn, 92
Brennus, 132, 306
Bromios
  =Dionysos, 256
  bryllichistai, 218

calendar
  Athenian, 319

Callimachus
  and Ptolemies, 227
  edition of Hymns, 47

H
  2.6-8, 31
  2.97-104, 134
  3.12ff., 207
  3.170, 23
  3.237-45, 377
  4.281-295, 150
  4.296-99, 150

Charites, 227, 348
Charition Mime, 332
choreia, 21
choria, 33
  as education, 21
choros, 9
chorus, see choros
  secondary, in Aristophanes, 353
  secondary, in Euripides, 314
choruses
  of girls on Athenian Acropolis, 320
Chrysothemis
  and the nome, 335
  at Delphi, 80
Corpus Theognideum
  773-82, 163
cosmic powers
  in hymns, 318
Cretans
  at Delphi, 80
Crete, 65-68
Crimea, 139
Curetes, 222
curse
  in hymn, 172
Damophon of Pisa, 370
Danaids, 281
Danaos, 284
dance, 359
and dithyramb, 253
and ecstasy, 364
Bacchic, 33
geranos, 33
prylis, 33, 377
pyrrhic, 33, 222
tdrbasia, 254
Daphnephoria, 19
  at Rheidion, 24
death
  as helper, 299
  eased by hymn, 309
defixiones, see binding spells, 329
Dei Cucullati, 270
Deliaides, 143–145
  and mimetic song, 151
Delian trinity, 36, 139, 154, 351
Delos, 36, 327
  centre of Cyclades, 145
  French excavations of, 141
  landmarks, 140
Delphi
  and Crete, 80
  Apollo’s return in spring, 83
  Athenian treasure-house, 132
  competition for hymn to Apollo, 44
  Cretan votive offerings at, 81
  dithyrambs in winter, 127
  early hymns at, 91–93
  early victors in hymn-singing, 91
  embassies to, 77
  first hymn to Apollo, 91
  first hymn, 334
  first temples, 93–95
  Mycenaean remains, 96
  myth, 93–102
  myths of advent, 97–98
  pantheon, 36
  reconstruction of temple, 125
Delphic hymns, 36
Delphic Oracle

and Isyllos, 231
and plague, 306
in drama, 322
myth of previous owners, 95–97
Demeter, 362
  and grain, 324, 366
Demeter and Kore, 349
Demetrios Poliorcetes, 29
Demophilos
  accuser of Aristotle, 264
Dexiön, see Sophocles
Didymos
  06.6., 263
  6.15–17, 264
  6.39–43, 264
  ap. Orion
    p. 155–6, 10
diegēsis, 58
Dikaiopolis, 340
Dikta
  and Zeus’ birth, 74
  in Crete, 73
Diodorus
  5.70, 74
Diogenes of Epidaurus, 223, 245
Dion, 213
Dionysia
  at Athens, 160, 252
  City, 256, 348
  rural, 340
Dionysios Thrax
  451.6, 9
Dionysios Hal.
  De comp.
    17, 170
    22, 257
Dionysos, 176, 369
  and Apollo, 303
  and Eleusinian Mysteries, 303
  and Iakchos, 368
  and wine, 303
  and bull, 371
Index

and dithyramb, 258
and healing, 303
and Iakchos, 303
and Mt. Kithairon, 359
and theatre, 126
and Thebes, 302
and Underworld, 361
and wine, 270
as Paian, 127
at Delphi, 126
at Teos, 31
birth of, 250
devourer of deer, 175
favoured places, 302
in Aristophanes’ Frogs, 337
in paian, 307
in Sophocles’ plays, 302
lord of dance, 359
Diophantos Sphettios, 4
Dioskouroi, 166
and white horses, 167
at Sparta, 167
in the Aegean, 168
prayers to, 170
protectors of seafarers, 169
diplomats, 348
dithyramb, 248–256
‘new’, 255
a song for Dionysos, 248
ancient concept of, 248–250
and bull, 251, 371
and Dionysos, 334
and kyklos choros, 251
and myth, 252, 253
and tragedy, 252
and wine, 250
as narrative hymn, 333
at Athens, 251
at City Dionysia, 252
diction of, 254
in vase painting, 253
in Proklos, 12
musical style of, 249
new, 374
Pindaric style of, 257
popular etymologies of, 250
dithyrambs
at Athenian festivals, 252
Dithyramphos
on Attic vase, 254
divine precedent, 14–18
dokana
and Dioskouroi, 168
dolphin, 373
music-loving, 375
Doric farce, 218
doubt
in Aeschylean hymns, 283
drama
and song-dance, 273
Drimios, 173
East Crete, 73
Egypt
influence on Crete, 65
Eileithyia, 148
and childbirth, 325
at Delos, 146
Einodia, 328
elegy
symptic, 163
Eleusinian Mysteries
profanation of, 161
Eleusinian myth, 217
Eleusinian Mysteries, 340, 361–368
and afterlife, 361
gods of, 362
Eleusis, see Eleusinian Mysteries
flowery grove, 368
Elis, 369
archaeology of, 371
ephyeses
at Athens, 371
in Athenian ritual, 320
ephymnion
in Callimachus’ Hymns, 362
in hymn, 291
Epidauros
cult of Asklepios, 208
hymn with musical notation, 209
pantheon, 37
epiklēsis, 52
Epione, 210
epiphany, 58, 327
of Asklepios, 234, 235
epiphthegma, 295, 349
Erato, 229
Erechtheion, 346
Erinyes, 290, 329
and madness, 291
functions of, 292
in magic, 292
stage presence, 292
underworld deities, 293
Erinyes, 175
Eros
and Aphrodite, 300, 315
in Hellenistic poetry, 227
Erythrai, 212
Eteocretans, 73
Etymondas
archon at Delphi, 124, 126
euchē, 60
eulogia, 56
Eumelos, 29
Eumenides, 293
euphēmia, 56
Euphronios
krater, 161
Euripides
Alk.
962-983, 277
Andr.
768-801, 266
Andromeda
parodied, 361
Ba
200-14, 365
3f., 166
El.
174-80, 274
432-41, 375
860-65, 276
Erech. fr. 65, 135
Hek.
462-65, 144
Hel.
1301-52, 216
1301-68, 219
1495-1505, 170
HF
348-441, 276
687-90, 143
Hipp.
141ff., 208
hymns to Eros, 277
in Aristophanes' Thesm., 351
Ion
94-97, 210
125-27 and 141-43, 83
196-200, 324
283-85, 133
IT
1089-1105, 139
Med.
395ff., 328
Mountain Mother ode, 333
soul of, 361
Suppl., 318
180-83, 63
exarchon
of dithyramb, 254, 274
exhortation
in hymns, 51
fertility
rites, 350
festivals, 16
pan-Hellenic, 38
François vase, 152
Gaia
at Delphi, 332
Galloi, 222
Gauls
in Delphi, 132
Ge
=Mountain Mother, 220
at Delphi, 95
genealogy
in hymn, 238
generic allusion
in drama, 276
gephyrismos
at Eleusis, 368
Gera(i)rai, 370
girls’ rites, 21–23
gods
advent, 18
and cult centres, 37
awe of, 53
chthonian, 53
epiphany, 18
favoured places of, 54
hungry, 244
imitation by men, 16–18
jokes about, 340
of healing, 223
of seafaring, 169
plurality in prayer, 38
verbs expressing presence of, 55
worshipped in Mycenaean Crete, 67
gold
and Apollo, 327
Gortys, 209
Graces, see Charites
Hades
=Aidoneus, 308
Hebros (river), 127
Hekate, 328
Heliodoros
Aith. 3.2, 30
Helios, 298, see cosmic powers, 322
at Epidauros, 245
Hephaistion
de poem.
4.8, 178
Hera, 165
at Argos, 274
in Lesbos, 172
prayers to, 166
Hera, Zeus and Dionysos
in Lesbos, 171
location of cult in Lesbos, 173
Herakleidai
Athenians’ defence of, 318
Herakleides of Pontos
fr. 157, 334
Herakleitos All.
5.9, 171
Herakles, 159, 297
enkomion to, 277
Hermes
speaks prologue, 322
Hermias, 263
heroic death of, 264
Hermokles of Chios, 348
Herodotus
1.23, 251
1.23–24, 373
3.121, 43
4.32–35, 146
4.33.4–5, 150
5.7.9, 149
5.75.2, 167
6.27.2, 24
Herophile
hymn to Apollo, 92
Hesiod
Th.
36–44, 15
W&D
597–8, 609–11, 72
hesitation
as hymnic topos, 56
hieros gamos
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Index</th>
<th>401</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hippolytos, 312</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at Delos, 38</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.37-38, 53</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.472-73, 84</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.472-4, 20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.243-44, 168</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.245ff., 348</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.193; 514-15, 207</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.297ff., 278</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.448ff., 329</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.570, 323</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeric hexameters</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cited in hymn, 245</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeric Hymns, 41-43</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and competitive performance, 42</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>place of performance, 43</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to Apollo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>514-19, 80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to Aphrodite</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>117-21, 23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to Apollo, 140</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>147-64, 142</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>156-64, 151</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>187-206, 14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>388ff., 78</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>445-50, 90</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>514-18, 15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to Demeter, 39</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24ff., 329</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to Dioskouroi (33), 169</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-15, 169</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to Pan, 240</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to Poseidon (22)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-5, 343</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to the Mother of the Gods (13), 219</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hymneal, 349</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in Aristophanes, 342</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hymn, see hymns</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Alexandrian classification, 10–13
ancient classification, 10–13
ancient collection of, 41
and diplomacy, 347
and generic freedom in drama, 276
and hero-worship, 9
and myth, 6
and audience, 59
and dance, 33–34
and diplomacy, 349
and dramatic irony, 297, 304, 311
and dramatic performance, 219
and joy, 358
and literary genres, 41
and manual work, see worksongs
and mime, 219
and mimesis, 275
and mimesis, 17
and music, 34–35
and myth, 7
and pan-Hellenic festivals, 35–40
and para-hymns in tragedy, 276, 322
and state embassies, 78
and versimilitude in drama, 274
antithetical, 313
as traditional songs, 28
at private gatherings, 43
at symposion, 32, 258
at temple-doors, 31
at the symposion, 43
choral, 44–45
cletic, 61
definition of parts, 51
disappearance of, 5
dramatic, 40
epigraphic, 45
formal elements, 50–64
in Aeschylus, 279
in Aristophanes, 37, 337, 340
in drama, 37, 273–279
in Euripides, 311
in Greek religion, 4–7
in Homer, 4
in parabasis, 37, 338, 342
in Sophocles, 297–299
literary, 375
literary and hieratic, 38–39
literary and non-literary, 112
magical, 47–48
mimetic, 46
monodic, 43–44
nocturnal, 365
patriotic, 319
performance, 20–28
philosophical, 47
place of performance, 28–32
primitive, 39
private, 32
prose, 48–49
repetition of, 314
revelation in, 49
rhapsodic, 42
sequence of, 363
solo performance, 26
solo performance, 25
sung in sequence, 268
suppression of unseemly elements, 239
symptotic, 162
to abstract entities, 227, 311
to All the Gods, 38
tripartite structure, 51, 307
Hyperborean women, 150, 377
grave in Delos, 146
worship at Delos, 147
Hyperboreans, 35, 149
and Delos, 146–151
offerings sent to Delos, 150
Hypodikos of Chalkis, 252
hypomnēsis, 57
in hymns, 7
Iakchos, 362, 367
chant, 363

iamata
Epidaurian, 209

Ida
in Crete, 74

imagery
fire, 307
in Sophocles’ hymns, 307

incubation, 209, 235

inscriptions
CIG
3538, 278
Epidaurian Iamata
B 21, 235

IC
I 8.11, 349
III 4.7, 74
III 4.8, 74

IG
I 2(5).893, 380
II, 545, 371
II-2, 1006, 371
II 3045, 124
III i Addenda no. 171a, 4
V 1.1548-1551, 169
VII 1787, 372
XII 3.359, 169

Inschriften von Pergamon
II no. 324, 278
Kassel Stone, 224

SEG
38 no. 1476, 239

SIG
579, 348
II 695, 178

invocation, 52–56
Iole, 316
Ion, 320
forefather of Ionians, 323
Ionian migration, 157
Iphigeneia, 287, 329
Isis, 48

Isyllos, 18
and Lykourgos of Sparta, 232
Isyllos of Epidauros, see Isyllos
ivy

Kallikrates, 346
Kassel Stone, 268, 269
kastoreion, 167
katadesmoi, see binding spells
Keledones
at Delphi, 94
Keraton, 141
Kinesias
dithyrambic poet, 254
kitharody, 243
Kleanthes
Hymn to Zeus, 47
Kleoboulos
and Anakreon, 177
Kleochares of Athens, 120
Kleophon Painter, 26
köma
in cult of Aphrodite, 165
Kore, 329
Koronis, 208, 229, 238
mother of Asklepios, 261
Korybantes
in cult of Kybele, 220
Kos, 208
Asklepieion, 244
Kouretes, 17
and Palaikastro hymn, 75
Kreousa, 328
mother of Ion, 327
Kronia, 217
Kybele, 216
hymns to, 220
riotous processions, 221
Kydonia
in Crete, 173
Kynaithos
and HHApollo, 38
lament, 28
Lampon of Athens, 348
Lasos of Hermione, 251
and dithyramb, 252
laurel
and Apollo, 237, 267, 322
Lenaia, 362
Lesbos
and archaic lyric poetry, 159
Leto, 142
on Delos, 140
temple at Delos, 141
light
as gift of god, 381
Limenios of Athens, 129
Linear B
in Cretan documents, 67
Linear B tablets
Gh 3, 173
Tн 316, 173
Linos, 323
lions
in cult of Mother, 218, 220
location
in hymn, 54
locus amoenus
in hymn, 164
Lucian
*de saltat.*
16, 31
[Lucian]
*Demosth. laud.*
27, 214
Lucretius
*dRN*
2.600-60, 222
lustration, 323, 356
of temple, 322
Lyceum, 264
Lykambes, 160
Lykourgos
*rhetra*, 232
lyre
and Apollo, 327
lyric monody, 162
Lysias
13.80, 319
magic, 329
in hymns, 328
spells, 291
magical hymns
to Pythian Apollo, 295
magical spells
in hymns, 48
Magnesia, 178
sacked by Kimmerians, 178
*Magnificat*
in Luke 1.46-55, 341
Makedonikos of Amphipolis, 266
Makedonios, *see* Makedonikos
Malos, 229, 238
Marathon
battle of, 259
Maximus of Tyre
37.5, 179
Medea, 328
Melian Krater, 141
Menander Rhetor
*Apollo Smintheus*, 49
*Epid.*
333, 295
336, 295
Mentor of Rhodes, 264
Mesomedes, 47
hymns, 242
Messenia
and birth of Asklepios, 238
metragyrtes, 216, 222
metre
cretic, 82, 291
dactylic, 245
dactylo-epitrite, 226, 265
elegiac, 380
ionic, 351
lyric dactyls, 287
Index

paionic, 134
polymetry, 373
spondaic, 378
stichic, 241
telesillean, 215
trochaic, 243
trochaic-iambic, 287

Metroon
in Athens, 222

mimesis
in hymns, 17

Minoans, 65

Mistress of Animals, 66

monody
hymnic, 322
Kreousa’s anti-hymn, 327
morning-song
for Asklepios, 267

Mother
=Mountain Mother?, 216
and Pindar, 221
at Thebes, 221
cult in Athens, 221
cult in Greece, 220
cult of in Attica, 216
iconography, 218

Mother Goddess, 66
in pre-historic Aegean, 173
Phrygian-Anatolian, 221

Mother of the Gods
and Asklepios, 223
at Epidaurus, 214, 218

Mountain Mother, 219

Mousaios
Eumolpia, 95

Muses, 15, 107, 136, 154, 216, 266, 354

music
and Delphic paians, 132
in cult, 16
musical instruments, 34
Myrsilos, 174
mystai, 361

Mysteries, see Eleusinian Mysteries
Lesser, 362
mysteries
and myths of wandering, 223
myth
as negative exemplum, 316
in Pindar’s hymns, 154

naming
in hymns, 53–54

narrative
in hymns, 58

nativity
of Jesus, 239

necromancy
in Perseians, 275

neokoros, 322

Neoptolemos
at Delphi, 30, 106–112
Nereids, 356, 374
New Testament
Luke
1.46-55, 341
2.3-6, 239

Night, see Nyx

Nike, see Victory

Nikiades of Paros, 379

Nikias
and Delos, 30
theoria to Delos, 152

Nikias of Paros, 379

nome, 44, 334–336
contrasted with dithyramb, 335
in Proklos, 13
kitharodic, 334
Pythian, 334, 336

nomos, see nome

Nymphs, 176
as women’s deities, 356

Nysa
and Dionysos’ birth, 249, 250

Nyx, 288, 291

oath, 348
Index

Oedipus, 298, 306
Old Testament
  Haggai
    i 14-ii 9, 126
Olen
  and Delian hymns, 36, 146–151
    at Delphi, 150
  hymn to Achaiia, 149
  hymn to Eileithyia, 148
    nome of, 335
olive
  and Asklepios, 237, 267
ololyge, 90, 294
ololygmos, 297
Olympians
  company of, 241, 257, 355, 359
omphalos
  at Delphi, 81
Orestes, 331
  and matricide, 291
  madness of, 292
Orion
  and Palaikastro Kouros, 71
Orphic Hymns, 49
Orphic lamellae, 309
Osiris, 71
oupingos, 377
Oupis, 377

paian
  ancient definition of, 84
  and ephebes, 23
  and supplication, 278
  and Apollo, 24
  and initiation, 89
  and paionic metre, 82
  and state ceremonial, 232
  as healing song, 84
  as monody, 323
  as remedy to plague, 306
  at Delphi, 81–84
    cletic, 101
    epiphthegma, 322

  hymn of supplication, 86
  I.C. Rutherford’s theory of, 88
    in Homer, 84
    in tragedy, 276
  L. Käppel’s theory of, 85–88
    Lesbian, 82
    national, 130
    occasions for singing, 85
    political character, 231
    refrain, 86, 90, 134
    S. Schröder’s theory of, 87–88
      sung by women, 144
    theory of, 84–91
      to Apollo
        at Erythrai, 212
      to Health, 225
      to Poseidon, 20

  paian
    in honour of men, 265
  Paieon, 82, 207
    in Homer, 84
  Palaikastro hymn
    and inscriptions from Itanos, 74
    dating, 69
    discovery of, 67
  Palaikastro Kouros, 71–73
  palm-tree
    at Delos, 141
  Pan, 240, 277
    and Apollo, 297
    and dance, 241
    and Nymphs, 34, 241
    cave of, 259
    cosmic, 242
    epiphany of, 259
    play on name, 240
  Panathenaia, 319
  pannychis
    at Eleusinian Mysteries, 368
papyri
  P. Berlin 5026.183, 295
  P. Louvre 2391.257-62, 295
PGM
II hymns no. I and II, 241
POxy 413, 332
Σ POxy 23.2368, 333

parabasis
in Old Comedy, 338

parabômion, 32
Parnes, 133
parody, 353, 356
Paros, 379
partheneia, 22
for Hera, 274
partheneion, 376
Parthenon, 342
Parthenon frieze, 319

Pausanias
1.18.5, 148
2.26.3-6, 239
5.16, 370
5.7.7-8, 149
6.22.9, 218
7.24.4, 70
8.21.3, 148
9.27.2, 148
10.12.10, 92
10.24.5, 114
10.33.11, 128
10.4.3, 78
10.5.5-7, 95
10.7.2, 81, 91

Peace of Nikias, 348
Peithô, 289
Pelagias
king of Argos, 281
Peleiadai, 92
Pentheus, 372

peplos
at Panathenaia, 319, 342
for Hera at Elis, 370

performative speech, 291
Pergamon

hymn to Zeus et al., 278
Persephone, 308, 380
rape by Hades, 329

personification
of abstract entities, 47
Phaidra, 312
Phedias
statue of Athena, 346
Philikos
hymn to Demeter, 217
Philip II of Macedon, 125, 231, 233, 263
Philodamos of Skarpeia, 121–128
Philoctetes, 276
Philostratos
Vit. Apoll.
8.7.28, 262
Phlegyas, 229, 238
Phoibe
at Delphi, 96
Phoinix, 329
Phokas
in Lesbos, 173

Phrygian mode, 254
Phrynis of Mytilene, 335
Pindar

1st person statements, 157
1st person statements, 155
and Athenian Dionysia, 257
and Homer, 155
cult songs on papyri, 45
dithyrambs, 253, 333
epikia with hymnic proem, 265
fr. 2.8-9, 221
fr. 70 B, 15
fr. 128c, 83

N
2.1, 42

O
13.18-19, 251

P
3.47-53, 209
3.77-79, 221
10.37-39, 35

Pa
8, 93–95
paians for Delphi, 82
poetic persona, 258
speaking voice, 113
structure of paians, 154–155
works, 12
Pindar’s throne
at Delphi, 114
Pittakos, 174–175
aisymnetes, 175
Plato
Laws
700b1-5, 10, 11, 250
700b5-6, 335
712b, 165
Menex.
239b, 318
Rep.
10.607a, 9
394b8-c4, 333
pleasing
to god, 62
Plestiadas
dedication to Tyndaridai, 167
Plutarch
de E apud Delph.
388-9, 127
de E apud Delph.
389c, 82
Lyc.
6, 232
Lys.
12, 167
Mor.
388e-89c, 249
Nikias
3.4-6, 30
[Plutarch]
de Mus.
1132d, 334
14, 1135f., 100
17.1136f., 23
6.1133c, 42
14, 35

PMG
519 fr. 35, 133
519 fr. 55, 144
Podaleirios and Machaon, 207, 210
poison, 328
Pollux
Onom.
I 38, 11
Polybios
4.20.8-11, 28
Polykrates of Samos, 140, 179
Poseidon, 375
at Delphi, 95
Hippios, 232, 342
Praisos
in Crete, 73
prayer
apotropaic, 316
for childbirth, 325
for wealth, 121
in hymns, 60–61
rhetoric of, 50
predication, 56–59
grammatical forms of, 56
procession
of mystai, 363
to Asklepios, 237
torchlit, 294
proimion
kitharodric, 44
Proitos, 9
Proklos, 49
Chrest.
320a12-17, 11
320a18-20, 12
320a19-20, 10
320a21-24, 84
320a26-33, 248
320a5, 335
320b1-4, 335
320b12-16, 249
321a, 19
classification of choral lyric, 12–13
prooimion, 41–42
kitharodic, 334
Propompoi
attendants of Athena, 294
prosodia, 158
prosodion, 29, 132, 315
paian and prosodion by Límimos, 131
prosodion-hymn, 11
Prote, 169
proverb
‘nothing to do with Dionysos’, 252
proxeny
at Delphi, 120
Ptolemais
paian to Asklepios, 213
purification, 331
Pythaias, 21, 129, 132–135
Pythia, 93
Pythian nome, 92
Pythias
wife of Aristotle, 263
Pytho, 107
Python, 336
reciprocity
as concept in worship, 62
religion
Aeolian, 173
and politics at Athens, 232
Minoan, 66
Mycenaean, 67
pre-Hellenic, 172
repetition
as device in hymns, 291
Rhea, 220, 221
Rheneia, 153
ring composition
in hymn, 178, 300
ritual begging, 147
ritual play, 366
Sacred Way
to Delphi, 78
Sakadas
and Pythian nome, 92
Sappho
fr. 1, 177
fr. 5, 171
fr. 17, 172
self-referentiality
in hymns, 59, 307
Semele, 251, 316
in dithyramb, 258
semi-choruses
in hymnic performance, 219
Semele, 251, 316
in dithyramb, 258
semi-choruses
in hymnic performance, 219
Semele, 251, 316
in dithyramb, 258
semi-choruses
in hymnic performance, 219
Sleep
hymnic invocation of, 276
SLG
S 317, 161
Sophocles
Ai.
693–705, 277, 297
Ant.
100ff., 298
as priest, 261
calmed a storm, 262
Dexion, 261
El.
637–659, 304
OC
1157ff., 298
668–719, 343
OT
151-215, 37
parodos, 276
paian to Asklepios, 214, 261
Phil.
391-402, 220
827-32, 276
Trach.
205-224, 297
Soteria
at Delphi, 132
Sparta, 347
constitution of, 231
St. Elmo’s Fire
and Dioskouroi, 169
Stepterion
at Delphi, 97
Stobaios
1.131a, 245
storm
image of political turbulence, 171
Strabo
10.467-468, 16
478, 74
617, 175
suppliants, 318
swan
and Apollo, 323
symplekē, 121
in hymn, 177
symposion
and lyric poetry, 160
hymns sung at, 161
in sanctuary, 176
syncretism, 217, 219, 271
in hymns, 48
syzygy
in Old Comedy, 356
Tainaron, 373
Te Deum
in Catholic church, 319
Technitai, 129, 131, 135
of Dionysos, 25
Telesilla, 215
Telesphoros, 268
at Athens, 268
at Epidauros, 270
at Pergamon, 270
iconography, 270
popular etymologies of, 270
Terpander, 159, 334
 Amphixiakτίζειν, 52
and kitharodic prooimion, 44
orthios nomos, 334
Themis
at Delphi, 95, 332
Theocritus
2 Pharmakeutria, 328
10.42-55, 324
Adonis-song, 288
Theodoros hymnðodos, 24
Theognis
773-78, 35
theöria, 98, 134
Naxians to Delos, 158
of Athenians to Delos, 157
of Athenians to Delos, 152
to Delos, 21, 151–153
to Delphi, 21, 77
Theoxenia, 115, 231
and Dioskouroi, 170
at Delphi, 104, 121
Theseus, 152, 333
at Delos, 145
Thesmophoria, 349
elements of, 360
gods of, 355
Thesmophorion
at Athens, 349
thiasos, 177
of women, 160
Thucydides
3.104.6, 151
Thyiades, 78
Thyone
Index

Semele, 166, 172
Timotheos, 374
nemes, 334
Persai, 336
Tityos, 378
torches, 381
traditional language
in hymns, 50
Trikka, 208
tripods
and dithyramb competitions, 252
Troizen, 377
Trophonios and Agamedes
temple-builders, 93
Troy, 351
ty(m)pana
in cult of Mother, 220
ty(m)panon, 216
Tyndaridai
=Dioskouroi, 167
Tyrbas
on Attic vase, 254
Victory, 346
virginity
of goddesses, 325
W.H. Auden
Shield of Achilles, 40
water
in Asklepios’ cult, 210
wedding
in Aristophanes, 342
Φελχάνος
in Crete, 72
women
at Thesmophoria, 349
of Elis, 370
work-songs, 323
Xanthos
and birth of Asklepios, 239
Xenophon
A 45, 170
fr. 1, 161
fr. 1.11-14, 44
Zeus
Ammon, 284
and human suffering, 287
and Mother of the Gods, 216
and suppliants, 318
anger, 217
as young man, 67–71
birth of, 222
birth of in Crete, 70
Diktaios, 73
in Aeschylus, 283
in Aeschylus’ Ag., 286–289
in Aeschylus’ Suppl., 280–285
Katakthonios, 329
torch-bearing, 378
Xenios, 289
Zeus, Hera, Dionysos
cult on Lesbos, 166
Zonnisos
=Dionysos, 172
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