

# The Corycian Nymphs and the Bee Maidens of the Homeric *Hymn to Hermes*

Jennifer Larson

AT THE END OF THE Homeric *Hymn to Hermes* (552–66), Apollo bestows upon Hermes certain oracular bee maidens as a consolation prize for his refusal to let the younger god share in his own mantic privileges.<sup>1</sup> These three sisters live “beneath a ridge of Parnassus” and teach a form of divination that Apollo praised as a boy:

σεμναὶ γάρ τινες εἰσὶ κασίγνηται γεγαυῖαι  
παρθένοι ὠκείησιν ἀγαλλόμεναι πτερύγεσσι  
555 τρεῖς· κατὰ δὲ κρατὸς πεπαλαγμένοι ἄλφιτα λευκὰ  
οἰκία ναετάουσιν ὑπὸ πτυχὶ Παρνησοῖο  
μαντείης ἀπάνευθε διδάσκαλοι ἦν ἐπὶ βουσί  
παῖς ἔτ' ἐὼν μελέτησα· πατήρ δ' ἐμὸς οὐκ ἀλέγιζεν.  
ἐντεῦθεν δὴ ἔπειτα ποτώμεναι ἄλλοτε ἄλλη  
κηρία βόσκονται καὶ τε κραίνουσιν ἕκαστα.  
560 αἱ δ' ὅτε μὲν θυίωσιν ἐδηδυῖαι μέλι χλωρὸν  
προφρονέως ἐθέλουσιν ἀληθείην ἀγορεύειν·  
ἦν δ' ἀπονοσφισθῶσι θεῶν ἡδεῖαν ἐδωδὴν  
ψεύδονται δὴ ἔπειτα δι' ἀλλήλων δονέουσαι.  
τάς τοι ἔπειτα δίδωμι, σὺ δ' ἀτρεκέως ἐρεεινῶν  
565 σὴν αὐτοῦ φρένα τέρπε, καὶ εἰ βροτὸν ἄνδρα δαεῖς  
πολλάκι σῆς ὀμφῆς ἐπακούσεται αἶ κε τύχησι.

Their identity is an old puzzle that once appeared to be resolved by Hermann's conjecture that they were the Thriac, a trio of sisters personifying the mantic pebbles used at Delphi.<sup>2</sup> Her-

<sup>1</sup> Text of the *Hymn*: T. W. ALLEN, W. R. HALLIDAY, and E. E. SIKES, edd., *The Homeric Hymns*<sup>2</sup> (Oxford 1936: hereafter 'AHS').

<sup>2</sup> According to Philochorus (*FGrHist* 328F195), “nymphs inhabited Parnassus, the nurses of Apollo, three, called *thriai*, after whom the mantic pebbles are called *thriai* and prophesying, *thriasthai*.” Cf. *Suda* and Hsch. s.v. θριαί;

mann's 1806 identification of the bee maidens as the Thriae became widely accepted by editors and critics, though the actual emendation of σέμναι or μοίραι (552) to θριαί did not have a parallel success.<sup>3</sup> In 1979 Scheinberg published a detailed reexamination of the problem, concluding that the Bee Maidens could not, and probably should not be equated with any other group of mythological sisters. She pointed out the similarities between the Bee Maidens and several other groups of kourotrophic sisters—the Charites, various nymphs, the daughters of Cadmus, *etc.* In fact, she argued, these groups are so numerous that to single out one particular group as the Bee Maidens' equivalent would be ill-advised.<sup>4</sup> Given her arguments, the similarities of the Thriae to the Bee Maidens are not so striking, and there are further objections: the Thriae have nothing to do with either bees or Hermes; and the *Hymn* mentions nothing about mantic pebbles, the main attribute of the Thriae.

Despite some compelling arguments against the Thriae hypothesis, Scheinberg did not sufficiently examine the possibility that the Bee Maidens might be identified with the other group of sisters located on Mt Parnassus, the Corycian Nymphs. Although many groups of kourotrophic sisters existed, all having similar properties, only the Bee Maidens, the Thriae, and the Corycian Nymphs are located on Parnassus.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, Scheinberg did not take into account the excavations of the

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Callim. *Ap.* 45 with Σ; Pherecydes *FGrHist* 3F49. Steph. Byz. *s.v.* θρία, *Etym. Magn.* *s.v.* θρία, and Zen. 5.75 have the Attic variant legend that Athena discovered or was given the mantic pebbles; see U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, *Der Glaube der Hellenen* I (Berlin 1931) 379ff.

<sup>3</sup> Among the many works that explain the Bee Maidens as the Thriae are AHS 346; S. Eitrem, "Hermes," *RE* 8.1 (1912) 784. For the early reception of Hermann's emendation see M. FEYEL, "ΣΜΗΝΑΙ: Étude sur le v. 552 de l'Hymne Homérique à Hermes," *RA* 25 (1946: hereafter 'Feyel') 7-11; dissenters from the Thriae hypothesis: P. AMANDRY, *La mantique apollinienne* (Paris 1950: 'Amandry') 62; M. Delcourt, *L'Oracle de Delphes* (Paris 1955) 77; and, more recently, F. Cassolà, *Inni Omerici* (Milan 1975) 542f, as well as Feyel.

<sup>4</sup> S SCHEINBERG, "The Bee Maidens of the Homeric Hymn to Hermes," *HSCP* 83 (1979: hereafter 'Scheinberg') 14.

<sup>5</sup> Location is always an important factor in cult identity, whether that of gods, heroic figures, or nymphs. The Corycian Nymphs have been briefly suggested as possible candidates by J. Fontenrose, *Python: A Study of Delphic Myth and its Origins* (Berkeley 1959) 426f; P. Amandry, in *Antre* II (n.6 *infra*). To avoid confusion I use an upper-case N when referring to the Corycian Nymphs or other specific groups, and lower case when speaking of nymphs in general.

Corycian cave, which have brought new evidence to the debate.<sup>6</sup>

## Dionysus

I take Scheinberg's reason for discounting the Corycian nymphs to be their association with Dionysus. She describes these nymphs as the mythical equivalents of the Thyiads, or Delphic and Attic maenads "in the entourage of Dionysus at Delphi" (12). In fact, there is little evidence for this characterization. Amandry emphatically argues (*Antre* II 400 n.9) that the Corycian nymphs have no link at all to Dionysus before the Hellenistic period. The truth appears to be somewhere between these opposing views. Two pieces of evidence from tragedy juxtapose Dionysus and the Corycian nymphs.<sup>7</sup> The first is the well-known opening of Aesch. *Eumenides* (1–26), where the Pythia lists the deities of Delphi: the 'first generation' deities Ge, Themis, Phoebé; then the latter-day occupants Apollo, Athena, the Corycian Nymphs, Bromius, the springs of (the river) Pleistus, Poseidon, Zeus. The text (Page [1972]) runs as follows:

σέβω δὲ νύμφας, ἔνθα Κωρυκίς πέτρα  
 κοίλη, φίλορnis, δαιμόνιον ἀναστροφή.  
 βρόμιος ἔχει τὸν χῶρον, οὐδ' ἀμνημονῶ  
 25 ἔξ οὔτε βάκχαις ἐστρατήγησεν θεὸς  
 λαγῶ δίκην Πενθεΐ καταρράψας μόραν.

There seems to be no consensus among editors and translators whether the placement of Bromius after the nymphs implies a relationship. The issue turns on whether τὸν χῶρον means Parnassus and the general site of Delphi or, specifically, the Corycian cave. As the Pythia refers repeatedly in the speech to

<sup>6</sup> *L'Antre corycien* II (= *BCH* Suppl. 9 [Paris 1984: hereafter 'Antre II'] esp. 411; see also the preliminary reports by Amandry and J.-P. Michaud, *BCH* 95 (1971) 771–76; Amandry, *BCH* 96 (1972) 906–09.

<sup>7</sup> Aristonous *Paeon in Apoll.* 35ff (3<sup>rd</sup> c. B.C.) puts the Corycian Nymphs between Poseidon and Bromius; Philodamus Scarphaeus *Paeon in Dion.* 20–23 speaks of "Delphian korai" accompanying Dionysus in the glens of Parnassus; it is unclear whether the reference is to the Nymphs or the Thyiads. See Powell, *Coll. Alex.* 162–70. Nonnus (*Dion.* 9.287) speaks of Corycian Bacchantes and Macrobius (*Sat.* 1.18.3ff) mentions "Bacchic caverns on Parnassus."

“this place,” *i.e.*, Delphi, the former interpretation is less forced.<sup>8</sup> The Corycian nymphs were said (Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 2.711) to be the daughters of Pleistus, and Bromius’ appearance between the Nymphs and Pleistus is suggestive but not definitive.

The other passage, Soph. *Ant.* 1126ff, cited by Scheinberg but not Amandry, lists the many places where Dionysus holds sway. Eleusis and Thebes are mentioned in turn, and finally Parnassus, where Κωρύκτιαι στείχουσι βακχίδες.<sup>9</sup> Here at last is evidence that the Corycian Nymphs were thought to participate in the biennial Dionysiac celebrations on the mountain. This does not show, however, that Dionysus was worshiped in the Corycian cave, nor that the Corycian Nymphs were merely mythical counterparts of the Thyiads. The Nymphs are year-round residents of Parnassus who welcome Dionysus’ arrival; they are his neighbors. Thyiads were said to honor Apollo on Parnassus (Paus. 10.32.7); why should the Corycian Nymphs not honor Dionysus? In view of Dionysus’ links to nymphs in other contexts (*e.g.* his nurses), it would be surprising if the Corycian Nymphs remained completely pristine of associations with him. The location of both the Thyiads and the Nymphs’ cave on the mountain would encourage such a rapprochement. Pausanias (10.32.7) casually juxtaposes discussions of the Corycian Nymphs and Dionysus’ Thyiads because they both belong to the mountain slopes, but gives no sign that they are related and no hint of Dionysus’ worship in the cave. In fact, he remarks that the cave is well

<sup>8</sup> τήνδε γαίαν (line 11), χώρας τῆσδε (line 16); *cf.* τόδ’ ... μαντεῖον (lines 3f). A. J. Podlecki, *Aeschylus Eumenides* (Warminster 1989), comments on lines 22f that “the Corycian grotto ... was a well-known haunt of the Nymphs, who are often associated in art and cult with both Apollo and Dionysus.” A. Sommerstein, *Aeschylus, Eumenides* (Cambridge 1989), makes no mention of any association between the Nymphs and Dionysus, and in fact comments that the order of the gods in the Pythia’s speech “seems almost random.” Translators are divided on whether ἐξ οὗτε of line 25 is temporal (Podlecki) or spatial (Latimore). Podlecki (131) translates: “Bromios too inhabits the place (as I am fully aware) from the time when the god commanded an army of Bacchants and wove a net of death for Pentheus as for a hare.”

<sup>9</sup> “Nymphs of Parnassus” undoubtedly refers here to the Corycian Nymphs, in view of their rank in the invocation of the priestess in *Eumenides*. Notice that they are identified by location alone. Similarly we can understand the “Parnassian nymphs” of Hypothesis C in Σ Pind. *Pyth.* as the Corycian Nymphs. They brought gifts to Apollo after his combat with the dragoness and the Corycian Nymphs are said to have encouraged him with their cries of *ie, ie paian*: Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 2.711.

below the heights at which the celebrations took place, and it would be difficult to reach these heights from the site of the cave (Paus. *loc. cit.*). Furthermore, the excavation of the cave revealed no evidence of a link to Dionysus. None of the cave dedications mention the god. Lolling's reading "Thyiads" on an inscription from the cave is very uncertain.<sup>10</sup> Thus, any "rappports à voisinage"<sup>11</sup> between Dionysus and the Corycian Nymphs are secondary to the Nymphs' association with Apollo and other gods, as we shall see. Certainly there is not sufficient evidence to characterize the Nymphs as part of the Dionysiac entourage at Delphi.<sup>12</sup>

## Apollo

The Corycian Nymphs are part of an ancient tradition of nymph-worship in spring-bearing caves that has nothing to do with Dionysus.<sup>13</sup> They are associated first of all with Apollo's youthful deeds; secondly, I argue, with Hermes; and finally with Pan.<sup>14</sup> At Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 2.711ff Orpheus' song to Apollo tells how the god slew the monster Delphyne beneath a rocky ridge of Parnassus, and how the Corycian Nymphs, daughters of Pleistus, encouraged him with their cries of *ie, ie*

<sup>10</sup> J.-Y. Empereur cites two completely different readings of the inscription, the relevant portion of which is extremely worn. Lolling's reading probably depended on the literary evidence discussed here. See *Antre* II 344f no. 8. On the Thyiad ritual of Delphic and Attic women at Parnassus see A. Henrichs, "Greek Maenadism from Olympias to Messalina," *HSCP* 82 (1978) 152-55.

<sup>11</sup> See Amandry, in *Antre* II 400 n.9. Although "Thyiads" can be nymphs, as in Alc. fr. 63 Page ("naiads, lampads and thyiads"), it does not follow that the Corycian Nymphs must be Thyiads.

<sup>12</sup> On nymphs as companions of Dionysus see T. Carpenter, *Dionysian Imagery in Archaic Art* (Oxford 1986) 79-85, who emphasizes the need to distinguish as far as possible between 'nymph' and 'maenad'. In a similar vein see now G. Hedreen, "Silens, Nymphs and Maenads," *JHS* 114 (1994) 47-69.

<sup>13</sup> For a list of nymph cults in caves see Amandry, in *Antre* II 403-11.

<sup>14</sup> These are the deities most often associated with nymphs in cult (along with the generalized river-god Achelous). That the Corycian Nymphs belong to the theogonic stratum of Delphic myth is supported by Ovid's account of the flood myth: Deucalion and Pyrrha, landing on Parnassus, worship the Corycian Nymphs, the *numina montis*, and Themis (*Met.* 1.313-21).

*paian*. Similarly, Hypothesis C of Σ Pind. *Pyth.* says that the Parnassian Nymphs brought gifts to Apollo after his victory.<sup>15</sup>

Both the Bee Maidens and the Nymphs had connections with Apollo's early life. The *Hymn* states that the Bee Maidens were his teachers (διδάσκαλοι) when he was a youth tending cattle. Notice that the association mentioned is in neither case the cliché of "nurses" (τρόφοι) to an infant god (as is the case with the Thriae). Instead, both Nymphs and Bee Maidens contribute to Apollo's assumption of his adult powers, through slaying the dragon and learning the mantic art respectively.<sup>16</sup> The *Hymn* makes it clear that the form of divination he learned from the Bee Maidens and practiced as a youth was a simple method that might be used by *nomioi* (556f): *μαντείης ἀπάνευθε διδάσκαλοι, ἦν ἐπὶ βουσὶ παῖς ἐτ' ἐὼν μελέτησα*. It is not coincidental that just as he practiced this art while tending cattle, so he passes it to Hermes along with the whip for herding.<sup>17</sup> The two gifts given by Apollo are linked through this rustic association. Both Apollo and Hermes were gods associated with livestock; both consorted with nymphs, the denizens of the wild, remote places where shepherds work, and both were linked to divination; Hermes had to do with lucky finds and with lesser methods of divination such as cleromancy. The *Hymn*, then, asserts the prestige of Apollo, who is represented as ceding his humbler interests to Hermes in favor of music and the exclusive rights to disseminate the will of Zeus.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Wilamowitz (*supra* n.2: 379ff) correctly identified these Parnassian Nymphs with the Bee Maidens of the Homeric *Hymn* on the basis of their shared location, though he did not make the further connection with the Corycian Nymphs, but instead accepted Hermann's view that the Thriai are the Bee Maidens. He also attempted to bring into the equation the *leukai korai* of the oracle at Cic. *Div.* 1.37.81 (ἐμοὶ μελήσει ταῦτα καὶ λευκαῖς κόραις); this cannot be accepted with certainty.

<sup>16</sup> It is indeed possible that divination using bees was part of early Delphic tradition. The second temple of Apollo was supposed to have been built by bees and birds of wax and feathers (Paus. 10.5.5); Pindar (*Pyth.* 4.61) calls the Pythia "Delphic Bee," and so on. See Scheinberg and C. Sourvinou-Inwood, "The Myth of the First Temple at Delphi," *CQ* ns. 29 (1979) 231–51.

<sup>17</sup> Hermes and the nymphs are especially associated in the context of livestock and herdsmen: Eumaeus' sacrifice to Hermes and the nymphs at *Od.* 14.432ff; Semon. fr. 20 West.

<sup>18</sup> Likewise Apollo's remark about this method of divination, *πατήρ δ' ἐμὸς οὐκ ἀλέγιζεν*, does not so much place the Bee Maidens "outside the mainstream of prophetic technique" (Scheinberg 10), as it emphasizes their humble status. On the Delphic point of view of the author see R. JANKO, *Homer, Hesiod and the Hymns* (Cambridge 1982: hereafter 'Janko') 149; AHS 345.

In the *Hymn* the Bee Maidens are said to practice their form of divination “apart” from Apollo (ἀπάνευθε, 556). As Scheinberg notes (10), in Homeric diction this adverb denotes geographical rather than metaphorical distance: “Whether in this case it means ‘apart from me’ and hence ‘not at Delphi,’ or ‘apart from the temple at Delphi,’ or ‘apart from Olympus’ where Apollo and Hermes are conversing, or even ‘apart from the haunts of men,’ the adverb helps isolate the sisters from the mature Delphic Apollo.” Why should the word not indicate the physical separation between the sites of Delphi and the Corycian cave, a distance of about seven miles? There is a further physical resemblance between the abodes of the two groups of sisters—the cave. The Bee Maidens are specifically said to reside ὑπὸ πτυχὶ Πάρνησος (“under a ridge of Parnassus,” 555). More will be said of the cave later, but for now I merely mention that the cave is the normal cult site for nymphs (and is not particularly associated with the many other groups of kourotrophic sisters listed by Scheinberg).

Thus we are looking for maidens with links to both Apollo and Hermes, located “under a ridge” of Parnassus, yet not at the site of Delphi itself, and in connection with whom a humble form of divination is practiced. The Corycian Nymphs fit this description perfectly. The excavations of the Corycian cave revealed 25,000 astragali, which were almost certainly used for divination.<sup>19</sup> The cave seems to have been visited not by the

<sup>19</sup> For divination with astragali in sanctuaries see Σ Pind. *Pyth.* 4.337f and Paus. 7.25.6, where astragali are used (and large numbers accumulate) in a cave sanctuary of Heracles at Bura in Achaia. Amandry, *Antre* II 376 n.60, collects citations of astragali at several sanctuaries, to which should be added Ephesus: D. G. Hogarth et al., *The Archaic Artemisia: British Museum Excavations at Ephesus* (London 1908) 190f; and the Leokoreion in Athens: H. A. Thompson, “Athens Faces Adversity,” *Hesperia* 50 (1981) 348. Artemidorus (2.69) characterizes the use of astragali as an inferior method of divination akin to palm-reading. Astragali often appeared on coins, perhaps as symbols of local oracles; early examples include coins of Himera (482–472: Head, *Hist. Num.* 144) and Cierium-Arne in Thessaliotis (400–344: A. Moustaka, *Kulte und Mythen auf Thessalischen Münzen* [Würzburg 1983] 120, Pl. 3; Head 293). A local nymph may be shown using the astragali or figures may cast them before a cult statue: see W. R. Halliday, *Greek Divination: A Study of its Methods and Principles* (London 1913) 205–16. Amandry (*Antre* II 409) mentions as a possible alternative explanation that the astragali were dedicated by young people before marriage; but the Corycian cave, unlike other caves of the nymphs, does not seem to have been used for this purpose; the miniature loutrophoroi common at other sites are here missing. Astragali were, however, placed in graves, particularly but not limited to those of young

richer clients of Delphi, but by the humble, probably with a large admixture of locals. The ceramics in the cave are numerous but quite poor in quality. The evaluation of A. Jacquemin is striking when read in the context of our passage in the *Hymn to Hermes*: "on a l'impression d'avoir devant soi les rebuts de Corinthe et d'Athènes, encore assez bons pour les paysans et les bergers de Phocide et les humbles divinités de l'Antre ... la clientèle de l'oracle d'Apollon et celle de l'Antre n'étaient pas absolument identiques!" (*Antre* II 153ff).

The version of Hermes' birth and exploits given by Apollodorus is important for our argument. It is not derived directly from the Homeric *Hymn*, but contains many similar elements pointing to a common source: Hermes' birth in the cave, the theft of Apollo's cattle, Apollo's search for the culprit, and the exchange of gifts at the end.<sup>20</sup> In Apollodorus' version, Hermes gives the lyre in exchange for the cattle, and makes a further trade of his shepherd's pipes for Apollo's golden wand that he owned when he herded cattle, as well as divination by pebbles (τὴν διὰ τῶν ψήφων μαντικήν). The two versions are strikingly similar, but instead of divination through the Bee Maidens, Hermes learns a form of cleromancy, "divination by pebbles." Below I shall suggest that these two seemingly disparate accounts can be reconciled.

## Hermes

The next task is to demonstrate that Hermes is associated with the Corycian Nymphs and their cave. Amandry discusses a relief belonging to the second half of the fourth century B.C., found at Delphi.<sup>21</sup> The lower and larger register of the relief shows a scene of sacrifice beside a stylized mountain. The upper register shows the deities of Parnassus: three seated

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people; their significance in this case is unknown. See the citations for Myrine, Cyme, Samos, Rhodes, and Locri in L. Robert, "Les épigrammes satiriques de Lucilius sur les athlètes. Parodie et réalités," in A. E. Raubischek, ed., *L'Épigramme grecque* (=Entretiens Hardt 14 [Vandœuvres 1969] 229ff with notes.

<sup>20</sup> See Feyel (9) and AHS (271) for differences between the two accounts, which show that Apollodorus is not derived from the Homeric *Hymn*. His source may have been Soph. *Ichneutai*: AHS 271.

<sup>21</sup> See M. A. Zagdoun, *FdD* IV.6 (1977) 32–36 no. 8; Amandry, in *Antre* II 398ff.



nymphs wearing *poloi*; beside them the figures of Apollo (with his lyre) and Hermes, plus another unidentified figure.<sup>22</sup> There can be little doubt that the Corycian Nymphs are the three maidens in this relief; the only other possibility is the Muses, but they are not as well attested at Delphi for the Classical period as the Corycian Nymphs.<sup>23</sup> Also found in the cave was a fragment of an Attic nymph relief of the standard type, showing three nymphs led in the dance by Hermes.<sup>24</sup>

Before the Hellenistic period, Hermes is more frequently associated with nymphs in cult, literature, and art than any other Olympian deity, including Artemis.<sup>25</sup> From the battle of Marathon (490) through the fourth century, Pan's worship spread from Arcadia to other areas including Attica and Delphi. Pan quickly came to fill the position vis-à-vis the nymphs that had earlier been Hermes'.<sup>26</sup> The Corycian cave became the cave of Pan and the Nymphs, though the earliest dedications and literary allusions mention only the Nymphs.<sup>27</sup> It is not unlikely

<sup>22</sup> The third figure cannot be conclusively identified as either male or female. Amandry argues persuasively for the river god Pleistus, as the figure seems to be holding a horn; on the horn see R. M. Gais, "Some Problems of River-God Iconography," *AJA* 82 (1978) 355–70; Kritzas (n.23 *infra*) identifies the figure as Agathe Tyche.

<sup>23</sup> The Muses are considered and rejected by C. Kritzas, "Muses delphiques à Argos," in *L'Antre corycien I* (= *BCH* Suppl. 7 [Paris 1981] 208. Hermes also has links to Parnassus through his cattle-stealing son or protégé Autolykus, who is said to live on Parnassus (*Od.* 19.392–466; *Paus.* 8.4.6).

<sup>24</sup> See J. Marcadé, in *Antre II* 314f. On reliefs of the nymphs see C. Edwards, *Greek Votive Reliefs to Pan and the Nymphs* (diss. New York University 1985); R. Feibel, *Die attische Nymphenreliefs und ihre Vorbilder* (diss. Heidelberg 1935); W. Fuchs, "Attische Nymphenreliefs," *AM* 77 (1962) 242–49, figs. 64–69.

<sup>25</sup> The association of the nymphs with Artemis belongs primarily to epic and with a few exceptions, such as the Laconian Caryatids, does not extend to cult. Hermes and nymphs: *Hymn. Hom. Ven.* 262f; *Hymn. Hom. Pan* 27ff; *Semon. fr.* 20 West; *Hes. fr.* 150.31 M.-W.; Eumaeus' sacrifice to Hermes and the nymphs: *Od.* 14.435ff; *Ar. Thesm.* 977; *Soph. OT* 1104; etc. For black-figure vases see P. Zanker, *Wandel der Hermesgestalt in der attischen Vasenmalerei* (Bonn 1965) 19–24, esp. 21; 56–59; Pl. 1–2; for inscriptions: *IG II/III*<sup>2</sup> 2934, 4278, 4546, 4728. In nymph reliefs Hermes is usually shown as *nymphagetes*; Hermes is part of the original composition and Pan is added to the rocks above or is squeezed in to one side: P. Borgeaud, *The Cult of Pan in Ancient Greece*, tr. K. Atlass and J. Redfield (Chicago 1988) 158f.

<sup>26</sup> On Pan's introduction to Attica see Borgeaud (*supra* n.25) 133ff.

<sup>27</sup> Amandry, in *Antre II* 398. Pan is not mentioned among the Parnassian gods in Aesch. *Eum.* 1–28. For a terra cotta circle dance of Pan and the nymphs, probably marking the introduction of Pan's cult to the cave, see A.

that the cave may have been sacred at first to Hermes and later passed into the sphere of Pan, who in many ways succeeded Hermes as the companion of the nymphs.

The date of the *Hymn to Hermes* is unknown, but scholars seem to agree that it is one of the latest hymns, belonging perhaps to the late sixth century, though some studies place it as late as the fifth.<sup>28</sup> Cult activity at the Corycian cave begins in the seventh, though the period of greatest use according to the excavators was 550–350.<sup>29</sup> Thus the *Hymn* appears to coincide with the first great popularity of the cave. In the context of the present theory I would suggest that the section of the *Hymn* describing the Bee Maidens antedates the advent of Pan at the cave, which came sometime after the battle of Marathon. Given the debate on whether the last lines are a “late addition,” I shall assume, with the majority of recent scholarship, that they are contemporary with the rest of the poem (Janko 133).

### Cleromancy

The presence of the astragali in the Parnassian cave is compatible with a cult of Hermes, a god associated with games of chance, lucky windfalls, and cleromancy.<sup>30</sup> Astragalus-oracles of Hermes are well-attested at several sites in Asia Minor, though these are all considerably later than our passage.<sup>31</sup> Hermes also

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Pasquier, “Pan et les nymphes à l’ancre corycien,” *BCH* Suppl. 4 (1977) 365–87, esp. 383.

<sup>28</sup> Scholarship on the date of the *Hymn* summarized in Janko 133–50.

<sup>29</sup> Jacquemin, in *Antre* II 154; cf. Amandry, *Antre* II 396f.

<sup>30</sup> On the astragali see *supra* n.19; on Hermes, good and bad luck, and cleromancy, see A. Bouché-Leclercq, *Histoire de la divination dans l’antiquité* (Paris 1879) 190–97; Eitrem (*supra* n.3) 783f; Hermes is associated with the first lot drawn or thrown; also the first portion given: Hsch. s.v. Ἑρμοῦ Κλήρος; *Suda* s.v. κλήρος Ἑρμοῦ; Pollux 6.55 Bethē; Σ Ar. *Pax* 364f.

<sup>31</sup> Inquirers at these oracles threw sets of astragali, then consulted metrical inscriptions listing the interpretations of their throws. The presiding gods were usually Apollo and Hermes. This particular system, however, seems to have been unique to Asia Minor, and the attested examples (from Pamphylia, Pisidia, Phrygia, and Lycia) date to the second century. If an astragalus oracle existed at the Corycian cave, it must have been a much simpler affair. For the sites in Asia Minor see the early work of T. Hopfner, “Astragalomanteia,” *RE* Suppl. IV (1924) 51–55; F. Heinevetter, *Würfel- und Buchstabenorakel in Griechenland und Kleinasien* (diss. Breslau 1912); and the discussion in W. R.

had an oracle at Pharae in Achaëa (Paus. 7.22.2), which was consulted by burning incense and filling with oil the lamps attached to his statue, then whispering the question in the god's ear. The answer was the first phrase heard after making the petition. This type of divination is very old indeed (*cf.* Odysseus and the women at the mill, *Od.* 20.100). The absence of a priestly intermediary gives it (like the use of astragali) both a popular appeal and a lower status.

It might be argued that because mantic pebbles continued to be used at Delphi, it makes little sense for Apollo to have 'handed over' a form of cleromancy to Hermes (Feyel 10). On the other hand, it is possible to distinguish between cleromancy performed by the Pythia, *i.e.*, under Apollo's influence, and the do-it-yourself methods practiced by 'pebble-tossers'.<sup>32</sup> The Pythia might draw lots under Apollo's influence<sup>33</sup> or she might interpret pebbles agitated in a tray or jar, as in some later accounts.<sup>34</sup> But in no case does she 'toss'. The solitary user, without the aid of a priest or seer, consults both mantic pebbles and astragali by "tossing" (*ballein*).<sup>35</sup> The notion of this method's inferiority might also have been reinforced by its similarity to gaming with dice and astragali—another activity in the sphere of Hermes.

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Halliday (*supra* n.19) 213 with n.3. See now C. Naour, *Tyriaion en Cabalide* (Zutphen 1980) 22–36, where the oracle was ceded from Apollo to Hermes, as in our *Hymn*; J. Nollé, "Epigraphica Varia," *ZPE* 48 (1982) 274–82 (*SEG* XXXII 1313).

<sup>32</sup> The pebble-tossers (θριοβόλοι) were the subject of a derisive proverb, πολλοὶ θριοβόλοι, παῦροι δὲ τε μάντιες ἄνδρες (Steph. Byz. *s.v.* θρία). For the distinctions between *ballein*, *piptein*, and *anairein*, see Amandry 26 n.15.

<sup>33</sup> Hence the term *anairein*; see Scheinberg 9 with n.36; Nilsson, *GGR*<sup>3</sup> 171; Amandry 25 n.1.

<sup>34</sup> See Amandry 27–36, 63f; Scheinberg 9; *Suda s.v.* Πύθω; Fontenrose (*supra* n.6) 426–33, and *The Delphic Oracle: Its Responses and Operations with a Catalogue of Responses* (Berkeley 1978) 219–23, who argues unconvincingly against all use of lots at Delphi.

<sup>35</sup> Thus Athena is said to have "tossed" pebbles (*thriai*) into the Thriasian plain: *Etym. Magn. s.v.* θρία. "Thria" is a generalized term for lot: *thriai*, sometimes "leaves," can also be drawn (Apollodorus, *FGrHist* 244F153; Hsch. *s.v.* Θριάζειν). Artemidorus (3.1) equates κύβοι (dice), ἀστράγαλοι (knucklebones), and ψήφοι (pebbles) in the context of gaming, presumably because they are all thrown.

## Bees

The main objection to the theory I have outlined is that the Corycian Nymphs are never, so far as we know, referred to as 'bees'.<sup>36</sup> This may not, however, be a serious problem. The connection of nymphs in general with bees is much stronger than usually supposed, and in several instances bees and nymphs are interchangeable. From the time of Homer, bees are said to issue from clefts in the rocks (*Il.* 2.87ff, 12.167ff). Their hives require sheltered spots with access to water. Caves are the ideal homes for bees because they often contain springs—hence their selection as the standard cult site of the nymphs. The cave of the nymphs on Ithaca actually contained a hive of bees (*Od.* 13.103), and we must assume that such installations in other caves, whether of wild or domesticated bees, were not unusual.<sup>37</sup>

In the stories of Zeus' infancy in a cave, he is often said to have been fed on honey either by nymphs, bees, or both.<sup>38</sup> Scholiasts to Pindar preserve Mnaseas' fourth-century account of how certain nymphs discovered honey and taught mankind, along with its use, to refrain from cannibalism, to eat fruits, and to wear clothing. The nymph Melissa gave her name to the insect, and this explains why "those who devote themselves to holy things" are called "melissai," for without nymphs,

<sup>36</sup> This is an important reason for ruling out the Thriai, who likewise have no connection with Hermes; but the Corycian Nymphs, like other nymphs worshiped in caves, have strong associations with both Hermes and bees. The Thriai, though referred to by Philochorus (*supra* n.2) as nymphs, are transparently personifications of the mantic pebbles used at Delphi and probably have no separate existence in cult.

<sup>37</sup> The literature on bees in Greco-Roman antiquity is extensive. See A. B. Cook, "The Bee in Greek Mythology," *JHS* 15 (1895) 1-24; H. Ransome, *The Sacred Bee in Ancient Times and Folklore* (London 1937); L. Bodson, *Hiera Zoia: Contribution à l'étude de la place de l'animal dans la religion grecque ancienne* (Brussels 1978); M. Davies and J. Kathirithamby, *Greek Insects* (Oxford 1986) 47-73; also of interest: M. Fraser, *Beekeeping in Antiquity*<sup>2</sup> (London 1951); E. Crane, *The Archaeology of Beekeeping* (London 1983).

<sup>38</sup> Bees: Rhea gave birth in a cave sacred to bees, who nourished the infant Zeus with honey: Boio, in *Ant. Lib. Met.* 19; bees nourish the infant Zeus: Verg. *G.* 4.149ff; Serv. in *Aen.* 3.104; Lactant. *Plac. in Stat. Theb.* 7.784 (= *Myth. Vat.* 1.104, 2.16); nymphs: nymphs feed honey to Zeus: Diod. 5.70.3; the nymphs Adrasteia and Ida, daughters of Melissaeus: Apollod. *Bibl.* 1.1.7; Zeus cared for by Dictaeon Meliai and bees: Callim. *Jov.* 46ff; Nilsson, *GGR*<sup>3</sup> 320f; on Zeus' birth and early life in caves see P. Fauré, *Fonctions des cavernes crétoises* (Paris 1964) 110-26.

continues the scholiast, no rite of Demeter is conducted, nor is any marriage accomplished. Thus the scholiast assimilates the various meanings of *melissa*: "bee," "priestess," and "nymph."<sup>39</sup> The bee may be a messenger or proxy of the nymph. In the story of Rhoecus (Charon of Lampsacus, *FGrHist* 262F12), a nymph agrees to sleep with him after he spares her tree. She says that a bee will act as the messenger when the time comes to fulfill her promise. But when the bee arrives, Rhoecus shouts at it and incurs the wrath of the nymph, who blinds him. The other usual place for beehives was the hollow of a tree, which coincides of course with the other main locus of nymph lore.<sup>40</sup> These connections were recognized in the ancient name of "nymph" for the larval bee.<sup>41</sup> Bee and nymph are both paradigms for different aspects of ideal wifehood: the nymph is a model of the bride's beauty and sexual allure; the bee represents the ideal wife's industry and sobriety. Both, however, unlike the human wife, retain their independence and both can visit punishment on men when they are displeased.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>39</sup> ΣPind. *Pyth.* 4.106. Hesychius glosses Βρίσαι as νόμοι. The word is etymologically related to βλίττειν ("to remove honeycombs"). Brisai too are nymphs who taught about apiculture: *Etym. Magn. s.v.* βρίσαι; Arist. fr. 511 Rose; for parallel rôles of bee and nymph in the Aristaeus myths see Verg. *G.* 4.317; M. Detienne, "The Myth of Honeyed Orpheus," in *id. et al., Myth, Religion, and Society*, ed. R. L. Gordon (Cambridge 1981) 102f, esp. 60–63; on bee-nymphs see further Hsch. *s.v.* ὀροδεμνιάδες· αἱ νόμοι καὶ αἱ μέλιτται; Cook (*supra* n.37) 15ff, 19.

<sup>40</sup> For the bee in the hollow tree see Hes. *Op.* 233, *Tb.* 594 with West's notes; Strab. 2.1.14, C73.

<sup>41</sup> Arist. *HA* 551b, 555a, etc.; Phot. *s.v.* νόμοι; Pollux 2.147 (bees when their wings are grown); Plin. *HN* 11.48. See G. Fernandez, *Nombres de insectos en griego antiguo* (Madrid 1959) 208–12; J. Winkler, "Gardens of the Nymphs: Public and Private in Sappho's Lyrics," in H. P. Foley, ed., *Reflections of Women in Antiquity* (New York 1981) 78. The folktale of the poet or prophet whose lips are moistened with honey by the bees is widespread, but it also has many intersections with nymph lore. In Plato's case the visitation by the bees is said to have happened when his parents took him to Mt Hymettus to sacrifice to the nymphs and Apollo Nomios (Olympiodorus in *Alc.* 2.24–29; other sources in Riginos *infra*). This story probably refers to the cave of the nymphs at Vari on Hymettus: see A. S. Riginos, *Platonica: The Anecdotes concerning the Life and Writings of Plato* (Leiden 1976) 20f; G. Fowden, "City and Mountain in Late Roman Attica," *JHS* 108 (1988) 48–59, esp. 57. In Neoplatonic theory the bee-nymph equation was taken for granted, as in Porphyry's discussion of the nymphs and bees as souls. On the bee-nymph-soul intersection see esp. Davies and Kathirithamby (*supra* n.37) 64f; Cook (*supra* n.37) 16f; Fernandez 208–12.

<sup>42</sup> Semonides' Bee woman: fr. 83ff West; Xen. *Oec.* 7.32ff; Plut. *Mor.* 144D.

These associations make it at least plausible that we understand the bee maidens of the *Hymn* as nymphs. The Corycian Nymphs did have one rather beelike quality: they were said by the fifth and fourth-century dithyrambic poet Philoxenus to inhabit "golden-roofed chambers" (αὐτοὶ γὰρ διὰ Παρνασσοῦ χρυσορόφων Νυμφέων εἶσω θαλάμων), and the cave was said to appear golden.<sup>43</sup> Words derived from ἐρέφω are often used to describe caves; they also are appropriate to beehives, as Hes. *Tb.* 594, ἐν σμήνεσσι κατηρέφεσσι μέλισσαι κηφῆνας βόσκει, 598, ἐπηρεφέας κατὰ σίμβλους, and Arist. *HA* 624a6, where ὄροφή is used to describe the inner ceiling of the beehive to which the bees first attach their combs.<sup>44</sup> Ancient (and many modern Greek) beehives were terra cotta vessels shaped like cylinders with one end closed and rounded; the analogy to the cave is obvious (see Crane [*supra* n.37] 45–50).

### Bees and Divination

Another issue is the exact nature of the Bee Maidens' method of divination, for they are said to tell the truth when given honey, but without it they "lie as they swarm in and out" (562f). Scheinberg envisions priestesses who drink an intoxicating beverage made from honey and prophesy under its influence. This scenario, though it has an excellent Indo-European pedigree, is not without problems. First, there is little or no evidence in the Greek world for divination under the influence of intoxicants. The Pythia is never said to drink an intoxicating substance, and her chewing of laurel leaves, if true, had no

<sup>43</sup> In Page, *Poet. Mel. Gr.* 430. Philoxenus is quoted by Antig. Car. *Mir.* 127 (p.31ff Keller), who comments, "the Delphians say that on Parnassus at certain times the Corycian cave appears golden." Cf. Boio's story of Zeus' birth cave, sacred to bees (*Ant. Lib. Met.* 19), where a fiery light comes from the cave at certain times of the year. Cf. Fontenrose (*supra* n.5: 431), who interprets the Philoxenus passage rather loosely to mean either that the Nymphs wear golden raiment or that the cave contains a golden treasure. The description of their cave as a hollow rock by the Pythia (*Aesch. Eum.* 22: πέτρα κοίλη) is also suggestive of the hollow rocks from which bees issue at *Il.* 2.87: πέτρης ἔκ γλαφυρῆς; 12.167: κοῖλον δόμον.

<sup>44</sup> ἐπηρεφής of overhanging rocks: *Od.* 10.131, 12.59; of overhanging rocks in a cave: Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 2.736; κατηρέφης, the "vaulted cave": *Od.* 13.349; of a cave embowered with laurels: *Od.* 9.183. σίμβλος, used at Hes. *Tb.* 598 for "hive," means a hole in the rock used as a hive at Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 1.880.

pharmacological effect.<sup>45</sup> Maenads were under the influence of wine, but they were not noted for prophecy.<sup>46</sup> In fact, the evidence for the brewing of mead in the archaic and classical periods is scanty, though the Greeks seem to have been well enough acquainted with 'hydromel' and other such mixtures.<sup>47</sup>

Secondly, Scheinberg assumes that the Bee Maidens are human prophetesses like the Pythia. Presumably they would be attached to a cult of Hermes, for the ὀμφή given in the oracles will be his (566). This too is problematic. Although priestesses called "bees" are known, they are attested with certainty only in the cult of Demeter. Possibly also they were connected with Artemis Ephesia.<sup>48</sup> But nowhere are they, or any other priestesses for that matter, attached to Hermes. The "Bee Maidens" of the *Hymn* are actually described in sharp detail not as metaphorical bees but as real insects. They have wings and they fly; they rage (clearly the buzzing of an excited hive); they swarm in and out. Why should we not assume that the bees described are real bees residing in an oracular cave of the Nymphs? A normal libation for both the nymphs and Hermes is honey.<sup>49</sup> Perhaps the visitor made a libation to the bees/nymphs and consulted

<sup>45</sup> The trance was self-induced: W. Burkert, *Greek Religion*, tr. J. Laffin (Cambridge [Mass.] 1985) 116; H.-W. Parke and D. E. W. Wormell, *The Delphic Oracle I* (Oxford 1956) 39.

<sup>46</sup> Despite Eur. *Bacch.* 298–301. For the question of Dionysiac influences on the Pythia see Fontenrose (*supra* n.34) 207.

<sup>47</sup> Use of the term 'hydromel' is problematic, because it can refer to either a mixture of honey and water, or the same product fermented, or mead proper: Plin. *HN* 22.24; see Fraser (*supra* n.37) 142–46.

<sup>48</sup> On Bee priestesses see Pind. fr. 158 Snell<sup>3</sup>; Hsch. s.v. μέλισσαι; Porph. *De Antr. Nymph.* 18; *P.Oxy.* XV 1802 xi.29–35; Callim. *Ap.* 110ff; Σ Pind. *Pyth.* 4.106c; Serv. in *Aen.* 1.430; Lactant. *Div. Inst.* 1.22; Page, *GLP* no. 91.408f (3<sup>rd</sup> c. B.C.). Priests at Ephesus were called "drones" (*Etym. Magn.* s.v. ἑσόν; Callim. *Jov.* 66; Paus. 8.13.1) and Melissonomoi are mentioned at Aesch. *Hiereai* fr. 87 Nauck<sup>2</sup>, but this does not constitute sufficient evidence for bee priestesses at Ephesus: see Bodson (*supra* n.37) 38–43; cf. Sourvinou-Inwood (*supra* n.16) 231–51. Pindar called the Pythia the "Delphic Bee" (*Pyth.* 4.61), but it unclear whether this is a cult title.

<sup>49</sup> Wineless libations to the nymphs were made in Attica and Olympia: Σ Soph. *OC* 100; Paus. 5.15.10; on νηφάλια in Attica see A. Henrichs, "The Sobriety of Oedipus: Sophocles *OC* 100 Misunderstood," *HSCP* 87 (1983) 57. Bronze amphoras filled with honey were found in the shrine of the Nympe at Paestum: B. Neutsch, *TAS NYNPHAS EMI HIARON: zum unterirdischen Heiligtum von Paestum*, *AbhHeid* (1958) 16 with n.18. Hermes is satisfied with libations of honey and milk from shepherds: *Anth. Pal.* 9.72.

the oracle, afterwards leaving his dice in the cave.<sup>50</sup> If one tried to use the dice without making the customary libation, however, one could not expect a true answer.<sup>51</sup> Certainly bees would have been attracted to such a libation, for honey is the food of adult bees.<sup>52</sup> The discovery of such an offering might well have made the hive 'rage' with excitement. Probably too much emphasis has been placed on the use of *θυίω*, leading scholars to believe that a process analogous to that experienced by maenads is described.<sup>53</sup> But even if the word has these overtones, they might be metaphorical here. The same goes for the description of the Bee Maidens as having heads covered with barley meal—an apt description of the appearance of worker bees, whose bodies are covered with stiff hairs for the purpose of collecting pollen; especially the foreparts would be covered with what appeared to be flour.<sup>54</sup> Thus, most past explanations of the Bee Maidens have taken as metaphorical precisely those elements that I would consider literal, and vice versa. The theory I have offered, though it is not satisfactory in all

<sup>50</sup> Strictly speaking, dice (*kuboi*) should be distinguished from knucklebones (*astragali*). The only functional difference, however, is that *astragali* have four usable sides; dice have six. Both *kuboi* and *astragali* were found in the Corycian cave, though the *astragali* were by far the more numerous.

<sup>51</sup> It is also possible that the movements of the bees were used as oracular indicators. The text certainly seems to suggest such a method, and the possibility occurred to Amandry (63 n.1). This would not explain the presence of the *astragali*, but they could have been used somehow in conjunction with the bees, or they could represent a method that replaced the early use of bees. Oracular bees are not unknown: a swarm of bees led men to the site of Trophonius' oracle (also in a chasm or cave: Paus. 9.40.1f). This may be especially relevant in view of the *Hymn's* apparent Boeotian authorship: see AHS 174f; Janko 143, 149. For prophecies derived from the buzzing of bees see F. Jacoby, *FGH Hist IIIb Suppl.* 560. Bees could foretell the weather: Arist. *HA* 627b10; Plin. *HN* 11.20; Ael. *NA* 1.11; Verg. *G.* 4.91, etc.

<sup>52</sup> The ancients knew that bees could be fed in the winter with solutions of honey and water or wine: Varro *Rust.* 3.16.

<sup>53</sup> On this verb see Amandry 63 n.1. It is used in Homeric diction to describe rushing and rapid movement: e.g. a flying spear (*Il.* 11.180), a river (21.234), and a storm (*Hes. Th.* 874).

<sup>54</sup> This explanation was first put forward by Ilgen (1796): see AHS 347. The barley meal has been interpreted as an allusion to the ritual use of meal by *kanephoroi* or to aliphitancy: Amandry 61. The description of the Bee Maidens as "aged maidens" or "hags" in AHS and H. G. Evelyn-White, *Hesiod, the Homeric Hymns and Homericica* (Loeb ed.: Cambridge [Mass.] 1939) 403 n. is unjustified. *Parthenos* refers not to virginity but to youth (cf. Scheinberg 5) and is also used to denote nymphs: e.g. Ibycus fr. 286 Campbell (1991).



respects, at least is consistent with what we know about Greek divination and about the cult of Hermes.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> The fact remains that cleromancy, whether of pebbles or astragali, is not mentioned in the *Hymn*. This is not necessarily a problem, for we know from Delphi that more than one method of divination might be used at a given site and Hermes has independent connections with cleromancy. The objection carries more weight against the Thriai than against the Corycian Nymphs, as the Thriai are personifications of the pebbles; see Scheinberg 11.

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