

# Dating the *Homeric Hymn to Selene*: Evidence and Implications

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Μήνην αείδειν τανυσίπτερον ἔσπετε Μοῦσαι  
ἠδυεπεῖς κοῦραι Κρονίδεω Διὸς ἴστορες φῶδης·  
ἦς ἀπο αἴγλη γαῖαν ἐλίσσεται οὐρανόδεικτος  
κρατὸς ἀπ' ἀθανάτοιο, πολὺς δ' ὑπὸ κόσμος ὄρωρεν  
αἴγλης λαμπούσης· στίλβει δέ τ' ἀλάμπετος ἀήρ 5  
χρυσέου ἀπὸ στεφάνου, ἀκτίνες δ' ἐνδιάονται,  
εὐτ' ἂν ἀπ' Ὠκεανοῖο λοεσσαμένη χροά καλὸν  
εἴματα ἐσσαμένη τηλαυγέα διὰ Σελήνη  
ζευξαμένη πώλους ἐριαύχενας αἰγλήεντας  
ἐσσυμένως προτέρωσ' ἐλάση καλλίτριχας ἵππους 10  
ἐσπερὶ διχόμηνος· ὅ τε πλήθει μέγας ὄγμος,  
λαμπρόταταί τ' αὐγαὶ τότε ἀεξομένης τελέθουσιν  
οὐρανόθεν· τέκμων δὲ βροτοῖς καὶ σῆμα τέτυκται.  
τῆ ῥά ποτε Κρονίδης ἐμίγη φιλότητι καὶ εὐνή·  
ἠ δ' ὑποκυσαμένη Πανδείην γείνατο κούρην 15  
ἐκπρεπὲς εἶδος ἔχουσιν ἐν ἀθανάτοισι θεοῖσι.  
χαῖρε ἄνασσα θεὰ λευκώλενε διὰ Σελήνη  
πρόφρον ἐϋπλόκαμος· σέο δ' ἀρχόμενος κλέα φωτῶν  
ἄσομαι ἡμιθέων ὧν κλείουσ' ἔργματ' αἰδοῖ  
Μουσάων θεράποντες ἀπὸ στομάτων ἐροέντων. 20

**C**ONSENSUS HOLDS that *Hymn.Hom.* 32 is a product of the Hellenistic or even the Roman period, and both its lateness and its brevity have meant that it has played only a marginal role in studies of the *Homeric Hymns* in general. Allusions to the *Hymn* by several literary works, the earliest of which dates to the mid-fifth century BCE, point instead to a date of composition in the archaic period. In what follows, I will present the evidence for this earlier date and discuss its

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implications for our understanding of the *Hymn to Selene* specifically and the *Homeric Hymn* collection as a whole.

The conception of the *Hymn to Selene* as a Hellenistic composition appears early, in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century commentators on the Homeric Hymn collection, most notably in the landmark work of Allen, Halliday, and Sikes.<sup>1</sup> The argument for a Hellenistic date, as articulated by these commentators (AHS 434–435), rests on two points: word choice and mythological content. Several words in the *Hymn* are characterized as “Alexandrine”: ἐνδιόονται (line 6), meaning usually ‘linger’ or ‘frequent’, but perhaps in the *Hymn* ‘be as bright as day’, appears nowhere else in extant literature before Theocritus’ *Idyll* 16; προτέρως’ (10) is described by the commentators as “un-Homeric,” but they note its appearance in Apollonius’ *Argonautica*; ὄγμος (11) is usually a technical term for ‘orbit’, appearing principally in Hellenistic astronomical authors like Aratus. Even more than the vocabulary, Allen, Halliday, and Sikes point to the story of the tryst of Selene and Zeus, and the birth of their daughter (narrated in lines 14–16), as evidence that *Selene* is Hellenistic: this mysterious goddess, Pandēia, is mentioned elsewhere only by Photius in the ninth century, and, they argue, the inclusion of this obscure figure is a sure sign that the *Hymn* is a product of the Hellenistic period.

This view of the *Hymn* as late has become the nearly unanimous consensus. It is especially apparent in remarks on the dating of the collection as a whole. Thus both Clay and West, in providing general accounts of the age of the *Homeric Hymns*, describe *Selene* as late.<sup>2</sup> Gelzer, in developing the idea of a genre of “astral hymns,” to which the unusual *Homeric Hymn to Ares* might belong, offers the *Hymn to Selene* as another member of

<sup>1</sup> T. W. Allen, W. R. Halliday, E. E. Sikes, *The Homeric Hymns* (Oxford 1936: henceforth AHS). Greek texts of the *Homeric Hymns* are taken from AHS. Translations, unless otherwise specified, are my own.

<sup>2</sup> J. S. Clay “The Homeric Hymns,” in I. Morris and B. Powell (eds.), *A New Companion to Homer* (Leiden 1997) 489–507, at 493; M. L. West, *Homeric Hymns, Homeric Apocrypha, Lives of Homer* (Cambridge 2003) 19.

this possible genre, owing to the fact that it, like the *Hymn to Ares*, both concerns an astronomical deity and is a late composition.<sup>3</sup> So strong is the consensus that Gelzer is able to treat the latter fact as being as self-evident as the former. A late date for the *Hymn to Selene* may, it appears, be assumed, rather than argued.

Despite its prevalence, this consensus about a late date was challenged by Filippo Càssola. He argued that the evidence cited to make the *Hymn* Hellenistic could as easily point to an archaic date. Because archaic poetry in general survives in such a fragmentary state, it is impossible to be certain, for instance, whether a word like ἐνδιόονται, appearing in Theocritus, is a Hellenistic coinage, or an archaism drawn from a now lost source.<sup>4</sup> In the same way, a story like the birth of Pandeia may seem recondite to us simply because we do not possess other, older works in which it appears. On the basis of all this, Càssola both attacked as subjective the approach of the earlier commentators in general, and called for skepticism about the lateness of *Hymn* 32 specifically.

Càssola's objections, however, have not succeeded in altering the standing consensus, nor for that matter have they exerted much influence over subsequent discussion of the *Hymn*.<sup>5</sup> This is probably due, at least in part, to the fact that his argument is purely negative. No matter how valid his criticisms of the methods employed by his predecessors for dating the *Hymn* to a

<sup>3</sup> T. Gelzer "Bemerkungen zum Homerischen Ares-Hymnus (Hom. Hy. 8)," *MusHelv* 44 (1987) 150–167, at 166.

<sup>4</sup> F. Càssola, *Inni Omerici* (Milan 1975) 440.

<sup>5</sup> As an indication of Càssola's lack of influence, one need only note that Clay, West, and Gelzer, cited above, all wrote after the appearance of his commentary and yet make no mention of his position. Not even Zanetto, not only writing another commentary on the *Hymns* but writing it in Italian, takes notice of Càssola (though he does note Gelzer: G. Zanetto, *Inni Omerici* [Milan 2006] 313). Only Faulkner, in the introduction to his recent volume, cites Càssola, and even seems to agree with his position: A. Faulkner, *The Homeric Hymns: Interpretative Essays* (Oxford 2011) 15–16.

later period, such criticisms do not in themselves offer support for the archaic date he prefers. What is needed, if the prevailing understanding of the *Hymn to Selene* is to change, is positive evidence for a different date.

Just this sort of evidence is offered by several intertexts between the *Hymn* and other, I would argue later, sources: the fragments of Empedocles, Aristophanes' *Birds*, and Apollonius' *Argonautica*. While intertext is of course a perilous tool to employ for dating texts, I believe that the number and quality of the examples (three different texts, each in a different genre and from a different period) makes the evidence offered by each, if not completely certain, at least more probable. Although doubts can certainly be raised about each example, all three taken together lend one another support, and, I hope, support in turn Càssola's archaic date for *Selene*.

#### *Evidence*

The first intertext to be considered is one that has so far gone unnoticed by scholars: between line 3 of the *Hymn* and Empedocles fr.45 D.-K. Both passages deal with the same topic, the light of the moon. What is more, the language in both is strikingly similar. *Hymn* 32.3, ἥς ἀπο αἴγλη γαῖαν ἐλίσσεται οὐρανόδεικτος, "from whom sky-revealing shine entwines the earth"; Empedocles fr.45, κυκλοτερὲς περὶ γαῖαν ἐλίσσεται ἀλλότριον φῶς, "in a circle, light from another place entwines around the earth."<sup>6</sup> In both lines we find that the light of the moon is the subject of the verb ἐλίσσεται and that the verb immediately follows the accusative γαῖαν, at the same point in the hexameter.<sup>7</sup> These features all suggest that the overlap in

<sup>6</sup> Text: M. R. Wright *Empedocles: The Extant Fragments* (New Haven 1981).

<sup>7</sup> That the light Empedocles describes is moonlight is made clear by Achilles Tatius *Astron. Isag.* 16 (43.6 Maass), by whom the fragment is preserved. To judge from Tatius' introduction to the fragment, it is possible that φῶς refers not literally to light but to the moon as a whole, using light metonymically. Modern commentators, however, interpret the fragment as dealing with moonlight specifically, and thus translate the word literally; see Wright, *Empedocles* 203. Even if φῶς is a metonym, its literal meaning would

language here is more than coincidental.

It is worth noting too that the collocation γαῖαν ἐλίσσεται is, to judge from the TLG, unique in extant Greek. It is therefore unlikely that the similar language in the two passages is simply coincidental, nor the result of formulaic overlap, i.e. the use of identical phrasing in two texts employing the same traditional poetic language, a phenomenon which Janko cautions can undermine the viability of intertext as a tool for dating.<sup>8</sup> If this phrasing were simply a conventional way of describing moonlight, whether because it was a standard formula in epic *Kunst-sprache* or just a cliché, we would expect to find examples of it in other sources. In the absence of such examples, what we have seems to be an intentional reference by one text to the other.<sup>9</sup>

If this is an intentional reference, it should be possible to date the texts as earlier and later, provided we can determine which is the source and which the imitator. In the absence of an explicit marker of an allusion, a “they say” or the like, such a determination is dependent upon subjective judgment, and thus becomes at least somewhat uncertain. Nevertheless, I think a much stronger case can be made for Empedocles alluding to the *Homeric Hymn* than vice versa. This case rests on the treatment of the topic in both passages, and on a close reading of their language.

Turning first to content: the two lines, for all their sim-

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still be present in the background for readers, and thus would create an affinity between Empedocles’ language and that of the *Hymn*.

<sup>8</sup> R. Janko, *Homer, Hesiod, and the Hymns: Diachronic Development in Epic Diction* (Cambridge 1982) 9. Overlap of this type is a source of doubt only if the *Hymn to Selene* was orally composed, and therefore early. In a Hellenistic writer, such an overlap in language, if it were not purely coincidental, would be an explicit allusion.

<sup>9</sup> It is of course impossible to prove the absence of the phrase in texts now lost. I would argue that it is far less probable that a common phrase would survive in exactly two places, or that both depend upon an authoritative but lost third source, than that one of the two has intentionally borrowed the language of the other. May mummy wrappings prove me wrong.

ilarities, project fundamentally different (in a sense, opposing) pictures of their subject. Moonlight, in the *Hymn to Selene*, is produced by the moon herself, and the luminosity of the goddess is repeatedly emphasized. In line 3, the ἀΐγλη or “shine” which encircles the earth comes from Selene; the same word appears again in 5, and an adjectival form (αιγλήεντας) is applied to her horses in 9. We hear that she wears a golden crown (6), and εἵματα τηλαυγέα, “clothing visible from afar” two lines later. She also emits both “rays” (ἀκτῖνες, 6) and “brightest beams” (λαμπρόταται ἀνάγαι, 12). The brightness of Selene is constantly on display in the *Hymn*, a brightness which is consistent with the portrayal of the goddess in early sources, and with the aesthetics of the archaic period as well.<sup>10</sup>

Empedocles by contrast follows other pre-Socratic philosophers in understanding the radiance of the moon to be reflected sunlight.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, fr.45 articulates this very position, since the light there is specifically ἀλλότριον φῶς, “light from another place.”<sup>12</sup> It is conceivable that the similar language we see in Empedocles and the *Hymn* is the result of the former adopting traditional language to articulate his non-traditional idea. At first glance, this might seem to undermine the very idea that the passages are connected, but reversals of this type are a common part of Empedocles’ poetics: he would often borrow the language of an earlier source (particularly Homer), only to change or even reverse its original meaning.<sup>13</sup> Further,

<sup>10</sup> For the interest in light among archaic poets see B. Fowler, “The Archaic Aesthetic,” *AJP* 105 (1984) 119–149, at 144–146. It would of course be a mistake to place too much weight on such stylistic analysis in judging date, at least in the absence of more objective evidence.

<sup>11</sup> Wright, *Empedocles* 203; A. H. Coxon, *The Fragments of Parmenides*<sup>2</sup> (Las Vegas 2009) 373–376.

<sup>12</sup> The same phrase is used by Parmenides, a major source for Empedocles, in discussing moonlight. The relationship between the two philosophers will be considered below.

<sup>13</sup> Wright, *Empedocles* 201–203; see also J. Hershbell, “Hesiod and Empedocles,” *CJ* 65 (1970) 145–161, for Empedocles’ sometimes polemic relationship with another early source.

such an account of the similarity is much more probable than the reverse, that the author of the *Homeric Hymn* would borrow Empedocles' language to paint an old-fashioned picture. This is especially true if, as is generally assumed, the *Hymn* is a Hellenistic composition. In those instances of which we are aware when Hellenistic or later authors allude to Empedocles, the engagement is usually on the level of ideas as well as language.<sup>14</sup> The *Hymn*, however, while sharing common phrasing with the philosopher, does not reflect his thought: the moon in *Hymn* 32 produces its own light, rather than reflecting that of the sun. Thus, it is probable that the *Hymn* is the earlier work, and that Empedocles is referring to it.

This conclusion is reinforced by examination of another of Empedocles' sources, Parmenides. As mentioned above, the phrase ἀλλότριον φῶς is borrowed from Parmenides (fr.14 D.-K.): νυκτιφαῆς περὶ γαῖαν ἀλώμενον ἀλλότριον φῶς, "night-shining light from another place wandering around the earth."<sup>15</sup> The two lines have more in common than this single phrase. Both, again, are about the light of the moon, its reflected nature, and its path around the earth, περὶ γαῖαν. The shared use of this prepositional phrase in the two philosophers is especially interesting because it also marks the only point of syntactic difference between Empedocles fr.45 and the *Hymn to Selene*. In the *Hymn* the accusative γαῖαν is the object of the verb ἐλίσσεται; by contrast, in Empedocles (as in Parmenides) it is the object of the preposition περὶ. For Parmenides, the use of this construction is a grammatical necessity, as the verb ἀλώμενον is only intransitive. For Empedocles there was no such necessity, as the transitive middle of ἐλίσσω is attested as early as Homer.<sup>16</sup> A possible explanation for his use of both the

<sup>14</sup> See in particular P. Kyriakou, "Empedoclean Echoes in Apollonius Rhodius' 'Argonautica,'" *Hermes* 122 (1994) 309–319, for the treatment of Empedocles by Apollonius.

<sup>15</sup> A slight variation on this formula, ἀλλότριος φῶς, "a foreign man," appears in Homer; see Wright, *Empedocles* 203.

<sup>16</sup> *Il.* 13.204. This is admittedly a quite different formulation of the transi-

preposition and the verb is that he is employing both Parmenides and *Hymn* 32 as sources, and that he has combined the language of both into his line. This is yet more evidence that the *Homeric Hymn* was known to Empedocles, and, since the philosopher's *floruit* was approximately 450 BCE, this would make the *Hymn* a product of the early fifth century at the latest, if not earlier.

The evidence of Empedocles may also change our understanding of two other intertexts with the *Hymn to Selene*, intertexts which have been noticed previously, but considered unlikely to be references to the *Hymn* owing to its presumed Hellenistic date. The first is a quotation attributed to Homer in Aristophanes' *Birds* (908–914):

- Πο. ἐγὼ μελιγλώσσων ἐπέων ἰεῖς ἀοιδὰν  
 Μουσάων θεράπων ὀτρηρός,  
 κατὰ τὸν Ὅμηρον.  
 Πε. ἔπειτα δῆτα δοῦλος ὦν κόμην ἔχεις;  
 Πο. οὐκ, ἀλλὰ πάντες ἐσμὲν οἱ διδάσκαλοι  
 Μουσάων θεράποντες ὀτρηροί,  
 κατὰ τὸν Ὅμηρον.

Poet: I am the speaker of the song of sweet-tongued words, an assiduous servant of the Muses, as Homer says.

Peisthetaerus: You have long hair, even though you're a slave?

Poet: No, but we teachers are all assiduous servants of the Muses, as Homer says.

The phrase Μουσάων θεράπων does not appear in the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*, in either singular or plural. It does appear (in the plural) at the close of *Hymn* 32. Allen, Halliday, and Sikes, who as discussed prefer a Hellenistic date, mention the possibility that the quotation here is not from the *Hymn* but another work attributed to Homer, the *Margites*, which is cited by a scholiast on Aristophanes:<sup>17</sup> Μουσάων θεράπων καὶ ἐκηβόλου Ἀπόλ-

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tive middle than we find in the *Hymn*. The point remains, however, that the construction has an early precedent.

<sup>17</sup> AHS 435–436. They seem to entertain the idea of an allusion to the



λωνος, “a servant of the Muses and of far-shooting Apollo” (fr.1.2). Note that while the ‘Homeric’ sources use either the singular or the plural, Aristophanes uses the phrase once each in both formations, both times with the attribution κατὰ τὸν Ὀμηρον. It is possible, then, that he is making two separate quotations, one of the *Margites*, one of the *Homeric Hymn to Selene*. Only the former is noted by the scholiast, because ancient scholars tended to overlook the *Homeric Hymns* as a group.<sup>18</sup> Naturally, we should be cautious of attributing too many scholarly scruples to Aristophanes.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, if he did have *Hymn* 32 in mind here, it means that he knew it as a source, bolstering the case for an early date.

The other possible reference comes at the opening of Apollonius’ *Argonautica*: ἀρχόμενος σέο, Φοῖβε, παλαιγενέων κλέα φωτῶν / μνήσομαι (1.1–2), “Beginning from you, Phoebus, I shall recall the deeds of men born long ago.” This opening, generally hymnic in form,<sup>20</sup> shows several striking parallels to the close of *Selene*: σέο δ’ ἀρχόμενος κλέα φωτῶν / ἔσομαι ἡμιθέων (18–19), “beginning from you I shall sing the deeds of demigod men.” The close resemblance between the two passages has been noted by Clauss, who argues that the verbatim overlap of ἀρχόμενος σέο (with the conjunction omitted) and the line end κλέα φωτῶν make it likely that this is not merely a general similarity, but a case where one source is using another. Owing to the uncertainty about when *Selene* was composed, he declines to analyze the allusion further.<sup>21</sup> In light of our new evidence for the *Hymn*’s date, however, it is probable that Apollonius, as the later author, is alluding to the *Hymn*.

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*Hymn* by Aristophanes, but given their characterization elsewhere of *Selene* as Hellenistic, they are not ultimately persuaded by it.

<sup>18</sup> AHS lxxix; Faulkner, *The Homeric Hymns* 178.

<sup>19</sup> N. Dunbar, *Aristophanes’ Birds* (Oxford 1995) 529, states that Aristophanes, “may have been combining familiar epic phrases without recalling their context.”

<sup>20</sup> See Faulkner, *The Homeric Hymns* 193.

<sup>21</sup> J. Clauss, *The Best of the Argonauts* (Berkeley 1993) 15–16.

This conclusion is reinforced by an oddity of Apollonius' grammar. The verb *μνῶμαι*, "to remember," only rarely takes an accusative object, as here, and never does so in the *Homeric Hymns*, on which this opening is likely modeled. Apollonius' use of the accusative *κλέα* might therefore be retained from the *Hymn to Selene*, from which much of his language (though not the verb) is derived.<sup>22</sup> This is yet more evidence of a pre-Hellenistic date for the *Hymn*.

#### *Implications*

What are the implications of this earlier date? Beginning with the most modest, an early date for the *Hymn to Selene* makes it quite likely that the *Homeric Hymn to Helios* is also pre-Hellenistic. The two *Hymns*, apart from sharing the common subject of astral deities, also show many commonalities of language, as commentators have noted. It is likely that the two poems were composed, if not by the same author, than probably by the same 'school'.<sup>23</sup> Given this affinity of language, I would have liked to be able to present a stronger case for an earlier date by finding early allusions to *Helios* as well, but this desire was hampered by the fact that descriptions of the sun (whether literal or metaphorical) are so common and so similar that it is difficult to find cases where one is clearly dependent on another. The best example I find is in the Strasbourg Empedocles (252): τὴν σὺ νόῳ δέρκευ, μήδ' ὄμμασιν ἦσο τεθήπῳς, "with mind regard her (Love), and sit not with eyes be-dazzled."<sup>24</sup> This line slightly resembles line 9 of the *Hymn to Helios*, *σμερδὸν δ' ὅ γε δέρκεται ὄσσοις*, "he (Helios) glances terribly with his eyes." If we read Empedocles' line as deni-

<sup>22</sup> Apollonius' most likely source for the verb is the long *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, where exactly this form is the first word, *μνήσομαι*. It is interesting to note, however, that there, as in most cases (and all in the *Homeric Hymns*), the verb governs a genitive rather than an accusative object.

<sup>23</sup> AHS 431; Càssola, *Inni Omerici* 440.

<sup>24</sup> Text and translation: R. Janko "Empedocles, *On Nature* I 233–364: A New Reconstruction of *P. Strasb. gr. Inv. 1665–6*," *ZPE* 150 (2004) 1–26.

grating physical sight to the benefit of the metaphorical sight of the mind, we might understand the line as responding to the language of *Hymn* 31; but that is likely stretching the evidence farther than it can reach. Instead I say only, if *Selene* is early, then *Helios* probably is as well.

An archaic date for *Hymn* 32 (and/or *Hymn* 31) could have a profound impact on how we understand the *Homeric Hymns* more broadly, particularly as regards their performance. As we saw in examining the opening of the *Argonautica*, the closing of the *Hymn to Selene* clearly states that the singing of the *Hymn* will be followed by the recitation of κλέα φωτῶν ἡμιθέων, “the deeds of demigod men.” The *Hymn to Helios* ends with a similar statement, about the γένος ἀνδρῶν ἡμιθέων, “the generation of demigod men.” Such statements are in keeping with the ‘proem theory’, first advanced by F. A. Wolf, that the *Homeric Hymns* were in origin preludes to epic performance.<sup>25</sup> A shift in the date of *Hymn* 32 from the Hellenistic to the archaic period makes this *Hymn* both the earliest and the clearest evidence in support of Wolf’s theory. However, it also necessitates reexamination of the details of that theory.

According to Wolf and subsequent scholars, the subject of each *Hymn* would have been the deity at whose temple or festival the performance took place. By beginning his performance with a hymn to that god or goddess, the bard makes that performance relevant to its larger ritual context.<sup>26</sup> The problem with this idea in the case of *Hymn* 32 is that *Selene* was not the object of any known festival or the patron of any known temple in the Greek world.<sup>27</sup> Where, then, could this *Hymn* have been performed? Clay has proposed that the longer *Homeric Hymns*, which are unlikely to have served as preludes

<sup>25</sup> F. A. Wolf, *Prolegomena to Homer, 1795* (Princeton 1985) 112–113.

<sup>26</sup> A. Aloni, “*Prooimía, Hymnoi, Elio Aristide e i cugini bastardi*,” *QUCC* N.S. 4 (1980) 23–40, at 35–36, articulates this view most clearly.

<sup>27</sup> AHS 432; Cássola, *Inni Omerici* 447. *Helios* suffered from a similar lack of cult, save for his worship in Rhodes. On the neglect of both gods (by Greeks) see Pl. *Cra.* 397C–D, *Ar. Pax* 406–411.

owing to their size, were performed not at temples and festivals but in homes as part of the entertainment at feasts.<sup>28</sup> The existence of a *Hymn* like *Selene*, clearly a prelude and yet out of place at any known festival, suggests that preludes, too, may have had a place in such a context.

Why a hymn to Selene specifically (or to Helios, for that matter) would be desirable as a prelude at a symposium is its own question. A possible answer is suggested by attention to the contrast between the ending of the *Hymn to Selene* and that of the *Hymn to Helios*. Both *Hymns* conclude with clear, nearly identical statements that what follows will be a performance of epic, the “deeds of demigod men”: nearly identical, but not perfectly so. The two closings differ in how they characterize the epic poetry to follow. The *Hymn to Selene*, as we have seen, emphasizes the beauty, literally the desirability, of the song (18–20):

σέο δ' ἀρχόμενος κλέα φωτῶν  
ἔσομαι ἡμιθέων ὧν κλείουσ' ἔργατ' ἀοιδοὶ  
Μουσάων θεράποντες ἀπὸ στομάτων ἐροέντων.

Beginning from you I shall sing the deeds of demigod men,  
whose works the poets, servants of the Muses, declare from their  
charming mouths.

The adjective ἐροέντων is best taken as a transferred epithet probably belonging to the song, whose issuance from the poets' mouths is what makes them charming. The *Hymn to Helios*, by contrast, emphasizes the origin of the song in divine revelation (31.18–19):

ἐκ σέο δ' ἀρξάμενος κλήσω μερόπων γένος ἀνδρῶν  
ἡμιθέων ὧν ἔργα θεοὶ θνητοῖσιν ἔδειξαν.

having begun from you, I shall declare the generation of articu-  
late demigod men, whose works the gods revealed to mortals.

These are both fairly standard descriptions of epic song (or

<sup>28</sup> J. S. Clay, *The Politics of Olympus: Form and Meaning in the Major Homeric Hymns* (Princeton 2006) 7.

even of song in general), and they are certainly not mutually exclusive. Nevertheless, the contrast is striking, particularly in light of how similar the two closings are in other respects.

Moreover, the two descriptions of song follow naturally from the main content of the *Hymns* they conclude. In the *Hymn to Helios*, epic poetry is concerned with demigods “whose works the gods *revealed to mortals*.” The divine power to show or reveal is one often associated with Helios in his capacity as divine watchman. Indeed, early in *Hymn* 31 Helios is called ὃς φαίνει θνητοῖσι καὶ ἀθανάτοισιν, “who shines for mortals and immortals” (8), though had the clause had a direct object, φαίνει could as easily be translated “shows.” It is only natural to touch on the divine revelation of poetry just after hymning that ultimate divine revealer, Helios.

In a similar way, the characterization of epic as “charming” or desirable fits well at the close to the *Hymn* to Selene, which is concerned centrally with the beauty of the goddess, and particularly of her light. This is especially clear in two places: at the end of the central section, where Selene gives birth to her daughter Pandeia “possessing a form conspicuous among the immortal gods” (16); and at 4–5, where we hear that πολλὺς δ’ ὑπὸ κόσμος ὄρωρεν / αἴγλης λαμπούσης, “much beauty<sup>29</sup> rises up from under her shining light.” As in the *Hymn to Helios*, the description of epic that follows is thematically consistent with the rest of the *Hymn*.

At first glance, this is not surprising. In typical hymns the whole point of the central narration is to lay the groundwork for a final request. In other *Homeric Hymns* we even find such requests connected to the subsequent performance. *Homeric Hymn* 6, which narrates the arrival of Aphrodite on Cyprus and her adornment by the Horae, ends with the prayer, δὲς δ’ ἐν ἀγῶνι / νίκην τῷδε φέρεσθαι, ἐμὴν δ’ ἔντυνον ἀοιδίην, “grant victory in the contest, and deck out my song” (6.19–20). The

<sup>29</sup> κόσμος is difficult to translate; I use here the fairly bland “beauty,” but will suggest another possibility below.

prayer request not only is concerned with the beauty of the song to follow, but in using the verb ἔντυνον it harks back to the description of the goddess being clothed earlier in the *Hymn*.<sup>30</sup> *Homeric Hymn* 7, to Dionysus, is a bit more oblique, ending: οὐδέ πη ἔστι / σεῖό γε ληθόμενον γλυκερὴν κοσμηῆσαι ἀοιδίην, “it is not at all possible for one who has forgotten you to adorn sweet song” (7.58–59). This is not explicitly a request for poetic assistance, but given that this *Hymn* begins with a declaration that the poet will “remember (or memorialize) Dionysus,” the clear implication is that having done so, he is able to “adorn sweet song.” What is more, the appellation “sweet” recalls several earlier parts of the *Hymn*, where Dionysus’ miracles include the sudden appearance of wine and sweet smells. These examples, at least, show the *Homeric Hymns* acting both as epic preludes and as typical hymns, making a request specifically tied to performance.

The *Hymns* to Selene and Helios, however, do not precisely follow this model. They are not asking for poetry to be made desirable or to be revealed. They simply state that the songs that follow will share those traits with the deities just hymned. This is not to minimize the continuity between the rest of the *Hymns* and their closings. Indeed, in *Selene* in particular the language used to describe the goddess’ beauty is, in several key places, also language employed in early poetic aesthetics. The emphasis on light, for instance, aligns the *Hymn* with many archaic poets, who showed a particular interest in the vocabulary of shining light as a marker of beauty.<sup>31</sup> A more specific example of such language can be found in the passage mentioned above, where κόσμος arises in response to Selene’s light. There I translated “beauty,” but another possible meaning would be “a beautiful song.”<sup>32</sup> The language here, and

<sup>30</sup> Since the verb also has a strong connotation of preparation, this makes it likely that the “song” in question is not the *Hymn*, now concluded, but some kind of subsequent performance, whose character is not specified.

<sup>31</sup> See n.10 above.

<sup>32</sup> See M. Finkelberg, *The Birth of Literary Fiction in Ancient Greece* (Oxford

throughout the *Hymn*, seems to have been chosen with the conclusion, and its poetic emphasis, in mind. Nevertheless, it stretches the language of that conclusion to say that it represents a request to the goddess to share her traits with the song that follows.

It can be urged, however, that the aesthetic dimension of the *Hymn*'s language carries the germ of an answer as to its function. As in a typical hymn, the preceding aesthetic language anticipates the climax and transition to another song. Unlike a typical hymn, this climax does not take the form of a request, but a description of the subsequent performance. The function of the *Hymn*, then, is perhaps not primarily hymnic, to secure the goodwill and gifts of the goddess, but primarily aesthetic, to prime the minds of the listeners to judge the remainder of the performance in a particular way. In such a formulation, the goddess Selene would make an apt subject for the *Hymn* not because she was particularly suited to answer its prayer, nor because it was to be offered at her temple or festival (since she neither had temples nor was generally the addressee of prayers), but because the description of her mapped most closely onto the aesthetic palate favored by the performer. Thus, the answer to the question "why a *Homeric Hymn* to Selene" would be "to make an aesthetic statement."

If this understanding of the proemic function of the *Homeric Hymn to Selene* is valid, the next question is: might other *Homeric Hymns* function in a similar way? Might their content, including their choice of divinity, have been guided primarily by a desire to plant a particular aesthetic in the minds of their audiences? At the very least, it is likely that the *Hymn to Helios*, so similar to *Selene* in other ways, and dedicated as *Selene* is to a deity without substantial cult, serves a similar function. It is also possible that *Hymns* 6 and 7, discussed above, can be interpreted in this way. Admittedly it is not necessary, as it is for *Selene*, to seek out a

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1998) 124–126. It is also worth noting that κόσμος is cognate with κοσμησαι, used at *Hymn* 7.59 of adorning poetry.

non-cultic explanation for these *Hymns*, since Aphrodite and Dionysus were both objects of cult. Nevertheless, their conclusions clearly reveal interest on the part of their authors in their performances being judged in particular ways. The possibility that aesthetics exerted influence on their content should not be discounted. Indeed, if the *Hymn to Selene* is not an outlier in the collection, whose idiosyncrasies can be explained in terms of a late date, then it is necessary at least to consider the other *Homeric Hymns* in light of its oddities, to see if perhaps it is not so unusual after all. This movement of the *Homeric Hymn to Selene* from the obscure periphery to a place of relevance to the rest of the collection is the most important implication of this analysis.

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