

A House Divided: Reading the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* through Household Roles

The household (οἶκος) was the most important unit of Archaic Greek society, but the developing *polis* put the aristocratic *oikos* under new stress. These households were largely defined by who ruled them, who resided within them, and who was excluded from them, and yet the relationships within the household also define the roles and value of individuals. The *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* – dated by Richardson (1974), Janko (1982), and Clinton (1986) to the late seventh or early sixth century – is a text that comments on the strained aristocratic *oikos* by depicting a discontented household. Order is only restored once a distorted coupling is replaced with a traditional aristocratic marriage.

In the *Hymn*, three divine characters – Persephone, Demeter, and Zeus – epitomize three primary roles within an Archaic aristocratic *oikos*. Zeus plays the patriarch, fatherly protector of the house and family, but fails in this role by allowing Hades to seize Persephone dishonorably. This action upsets the household as Persephone, the unwedded daughter, and Demeter, a mother and household manager (ταμία) of the *oikos*, react to the untraditional, violent union which resembles the seizure of women in the Homeric epics studied by Gottschall (2008). The plot does not conclude until the *oikos* is returned to a stable, balanced state in which all members hold honors fitting to their household positions.

This paper will analyze the *Hymn to Demeter* as a commentary on the distress placed on the aristocratic *oikos* by the development of the *polis*; this tension between the *polis* and the *oikos* has already been considered independently from the hymn by Patterson (1998). Similar to Thalmann's study (1998) of the *Odyssey* and Ormand's study (2014) of Hesiod's *Catalogue of Women*, this analysis will demonstrate that conservative authors were resistant to *polis* developments, and, therefore, championed the aristocratic *oikos*, using aristocratic marriage, the

source of noble lineages, as a symbol for the Archaic *oikos*-system. Building on the work of DeBloois (1997), the marriage of the hymn will be shown as a dishonorable capture turned traditional aristocratic marriage.

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