

Virginitv and Motherhood in Callimachus' 3rd and 4th *Hymns*

In this talk, I argue that the motifs of virginitv and motherhood animate the *Hymns* of Callimachus and serve as thematic links within an intentional poetry collection. From Rhea's labor in the *Hymn to Zeus* to the plight of Erysichthon's mother in the *Hymn to Demeter*, and from the rape of Cyrene in the *Hymn to Apollo* to the myths of the virgin goddesses Artemis and Athena, mothers and virgins play an important role in all six hymns. By analyzing the development and interplay of these themes between *Hymns* 3 and 4, I will show that these two poems form a coherent central diptych that simultaneously links the beginning and end of the collection.

Discussions of the poetic unity of the *Hymns*, both individually and as a collection, constitute a significant thread in Callimachean scholarship. It is now considered likely, if not certain, that the poet himself was responsible for the arrangement of the six *Hymns* as we have them (Stephens 2015). Of the individual hymns, the *Hymn to Artemis*, in particular, has required defending on the charge of disunity. Bing and Uhrmeister (1994) argue that the poem is unified around the development of Artemis from a child into a fully-fledged goddess of the outdoors and cities alike. Vestrheim (2000), on the other hand, argues that the hymn "does not aspire to unity" but uses disunity "consciously," putting into practice the poetic trope of abundance of material. Critics are more assured about the unity of the *Hymn to Delos*, generally treating the poem almost as a second hymn to Apollo carefully organized around the god's birth (Schmiel 1987; Vestrheim). Others highlight the island's poetological significance (Bing 1988).

No work to my knowledge has carefully examined the themes of virginitv and motherhood in the two poems. At the opening of *Hymn* 3, Artemis requests and receives "perpetual virginitv" (παρθενίην αιώνιον, 6) as a gift from her father. The significance of this

aspect of the goddess is highlighted throughout the poem by the insistent presence of female followers who cannot follow Artemis' example indefinitely. The hymn's catalogue of Artemis' attendants (184-224), for example, is a litany of women who are pursued, raped, or forced into marriage against their will. Similarly, shrines are dedicated to Artemis in thanks for her role in restraining the virgin daughters of Proetus for marriage (233-236). The motif highlights Artemis' virginity as a defining feature of her divinity that is paradoxically intertwined with her role as a goddess of childbirth.

Virginity and motherhood are also central themes of the *Hymn to Delos*. The island of Delos, the poet declares, merits extraordinary praise by virtue of Apollo's birth there (5-6). As Depew (2004) and Faulkner (2010) have noted, the theme of virginity conspicuously connects Delos, through her alias Asteria, to the goddesses celebrated in the preceding and following hymns. In particular, Asteria's initial depiction as a fleeing virgin closely mirrors the story of Artemis' attendant Britomartis (35-50). For her initial flight and escape from Zeus' amorous pursuit, she gains the respect of Hera; but admitting Leto for the birth of Apollo is figured as a kind of marriage which brings her again to the jealous goddess' attention. Hera allows the earlier favor to stand as compensation for the present offense, and Delos becomes fixed in place and takes on the duties of motherhood (240-248).

My thematic analysis of the *Hymns* thus highlights the continuity between the two central poems in Callimachus' collection—and not just continuity, but even development and closure in the *Hymn to Delos* of the particular thematic variation introduced in the *Hymn to Artemis*. Yet the same broad themes of virginity and motherhood also connect this central diptych to the two additional diptychs constituting the collection. By exploring the complex intratextuality of these themes, I offer a new argument for regarding the *Hymns* as an intentional authorial collection.

Bibliography

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