

## Leading from Within: Choral Incorporation in the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*

The *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* demonstrates a close engagement with the notion of the chorus throughout the poem, especially in its depiction of two choral performances (“Delian,” 156-178, and “Olympian,” 182-206). The archaic chorus was a site of social integration, as Calame (1997) has argued, but it also offers a model, through the *choregos*-figure, of how this incorporation can be balanced with retained individuality. Incorporation into the community forms a major motif within this hymn, as shown by Clay (1989), and its two choral scenes specifically showcase the importance of being part of the group. However, the need for singularity (even within the collective) remains a prominent and emphatic element of the choral scenes and the poem as a whole. While Apollo is incorporated into the Olympian hierarchy, he preserves his own individual attributes and power, a theme that the poet denotes through the representation of the chorus and, more specifically, the role of the *choregos* among the choral group.

Two elements of my argument—the theme of integration and the importance of the chorus in this poem—have been noticed by a number of scholars, but not treated together. In addition, the importance of the *choregos*-figure in this poem has not yet received full scholarly consideration. Clay has argued that the Homeric Hymns are, in general, preoccupied with the theme of incorporation as each deity works to find his or her place among the Olympian hierarchy. Although Calame’s arguments focus mainly on the transition from girlhood to womanhood, his more general identification of the chorus’s transitional role can be applied to this poem as a way to read Apollo’s own transition from reckless individual to part of the community. The Delian chorus has received considerable scholarly attention, from its role as a

thematic connection between the two halves (Lonsdale 1994-1995), to its position as a model of mimesis and an indication of the generally mimetic nature of choral performance (Peponi 2009, Nagy 2013). The connection between the chorus and the poem's greater thematic structure has gone largely unnoticed, however, and I extend Clay's contribution to consider how the chorus offers one model of this complex theme.

What is singular in the case of Apollo is the maintenance of individual identity: although he does integrate himself, he remains a standout figure, depicted explicitly in his taking up the role of the *choregos* in the Olympian chorus. In this paper, I reevaluate the role of the chorus in the poem by demonstrating that *Apollo* features a number of groups that, though not traditional choruses in any way, actively engage with the construction of group versus individual. I show that these scenes feature specific choral features, including coordinated, dance-like movement and poetic devices like the catalogue, which frequently occurs in poetic lists of choral participants (e.g., *Theogony* 75-79; *PMG* 1.70-77). The very opening of *Apollo* orients its subject within his larger community (1-13), and even in this simple configuration of individual god versus society of gods, it is possible to identify a choral tone: the sense of movement that pervades the scene locates it in a dance-like setting. Later on, the poet presents a catalogue of islands that refuse Leto, a list that culminates in Delos's humble but necessary individuality in choosing to accept the goddess and her son (49). This framework of individual versus community continues with Hera's refusal to take part in the birthing process (95), seen especially in her constraint of Eileithuia. These scenes, which meditate on the tension between individual and collective, are complemented by the performance of the Deliades and the figure of the Homeric bard (or Homer himself; see Spelman 2018), and the scene of Olympian festivity, in which Apollo accompanies and leads the chorus of goddesses. As the two choruses demonstrate,

there is a possible resolution between stark individuality and total incorporation, suggesting that, like the *choregos*-figure, Apollo may remain a singular god while still becoming part of the larger community.

### Bibliography

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