

Rewriting the Gods: Theogonic Elements in the Orphic *Hymns*

Theogonies act as aitiological accounts of the origin of the world, the birth of the gods, and often the role of humans in the greater cosmic web. Various theogonic traditions existed in antiquity, for example, the more famous *Theogony* of Hesiod and the less well-known Orphic theogonies. Interestingly, the Orphic theogonies achieve many of the same mythic and narrative effects as the Hesiodic theogony: Orpheus is said to be the son of the Muses and Apollo, which by nature grants him some level of poetic authority (as is granted to Hesiod by the Muses) and his theogony is not devoid of intergenerational conflict and deceit. Perhaps the Hesiodic theogony could not suffice as a cosmological explanation because the discrepancies between Orphism and mainstream religion could not be reconciled if they shared an origin; rather, an Orphic theogony was needed to make sense of the world according to Orphism.

Following the recent discovery of the Derveni Papyrus, scholars have turned their attention to the Orphic theogonies, which consist of the Eudemian, Hieronyman, Rhapsodic, and now the Derveni theogonies (Betegh 2004; Janko 2002). In particular, Meisner (2018) reevaluates the Orphic theogonic traditions and suggests a new means of examination, namely that these be studied as short, theogonic hymns. Though this comprehensive study certainly provides a very useful theoretical framework for the study of Orphism and Orphic texts, most of the attention is placed on the early part of the Orphic tradition, which dates to the 6th or 5th century BC.

Therefore, in this paper, I examine the Orphic *Hymns*, which belong to the later part of the Orphic tradition (2nd century CE), within the framework of theogonic hymns as proposed by Meisner and reconstruct the theogony as it appears in the *Hymns*. The nature of the collection,

though, renders this a difficult task. As Athanassakis and Wolkow (2013) note in their introduction to the *Hymns*, they are very unlike Hesiod's *Theogony* and provide no single, long narrative account of the birth of the gods and the order of the cosmos. Further difficulties arise from the lack of clear lineage of the gods, the inclusion of gods without enough genealogical details to weave them into the overall theogony, and general lack of narrative features and in-depth genealogies. Though at first, these may seem to be substantial obstacles, a closer examination of genealogical epithets and the overall cosmological structure of the collection provide ample evidence for a reconstruction of the theogony as it appears in the *Hymns*.

Thus, in this paper I first intend to briefly discuss the Hesiodic and earlier Orphic theogonies to provide a backdrop for the examination of the theogony in the Orphic *Hymns*. Next, I examine the genealogical elements in individual hymns, paying particular attention on genealogical epithets. From this examination, I reconstruct the family tree of the gods in the *Hymns*. Finally, I turn from individual elements within the hymns to an examination of the structure of the collection at large in order to show how the orphic theogony manifests through, what I call, cosmic clusters, or small groupings of hymns based on the genealogy or cosmological domain of the gods. With this paper, I hope to posit the Orphic *Hymns* among other evidences for the Orphic theogonic tradition and thus enhance our understanding of this tradition through previously (nearly) unexamined evidence.

Bibliography

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