

## Call Me by Your Name: New Hymnic Norms in the Roman Empire?

In their comprehensive study of Greek hymns, Jan N. Bremmer and William D. Furley omit the magical hymns in the *Papyri Graecae Magicae* (PGM), the Orphic *Hymns*, and prose hymns to Isis because, at least for their purposes, these hymns are hardly representative of Greek hymnic norms. Bremmer and Furley center Greek hymns from the Archaic to Hellenistic period, most of which were used in a civic-cult context, and rely on long mythic narratives to establish a reciprocal relationship between hymnist and hymned, in thus named narrative hymns (Bremmer, Furley 2001). The hymns in the *PGM* (first-fourth century CE, Egypt), the Orphic *Hymns* (second-fourth century CE, Asia Minor), and prose hymns to Isis, here exemplified by Apuleius' prayer to Isis in his *Metamorphoses* (second century CE, North Africa), replace this mythic narrative with long strands of nearly unintelligible epithets that comprise the praise portion of hymns. In his study of the Homeric *Hymns*, Richard Janko labels such hymns that rely on attributes of the gods rather than a narrative 'attributive hymns' (Janko, 1981). In this paper, I adapt this term to refer specifically to these hymns whose entire praise section is composed of epithets. These later, attributive hymns represent a shift in hymnic norms that reflect religious movement from a civic-cult to individual or small-group centered worship, as exemplified by the heightened importance of individual knowledge of esoteric names and divine lore. These hymns rightly earn their position outside the scope of Bremmer's and Furley's study; however, to my knowledge there has been no extensive examination of these hymns in conversation with each other, nor of how their striking similarities reveal shifts in both hymnic norms and the religious practices that they accompany.

Therefore, in this paper I examine these three representations of attributive hymns from the Roman Empire in order to highlight a stylistic shift from narrative to attributive hymns

that reflects an overall preference for more individual-centered style of worship, particularly in the context of cult and magic. I hope to demonstrate through the overwhelming similarities of these hymns that the divide between magic and religion is far less rigid for the ancient practitioners and worshippers than we conceive of it.

First, through a stylistic analysis I show that in the Orphic *Hymns*, PGM *hymns*, and Apuleius' prayer to Isis, the long narrative of earlier hymns is replaced by long strings of epithets alluding to divine lore. Then I move from stylistic elements to an examination of the identity of the gods in these hymns. I highlight the syncretic nature of the gods not only within each type of hymn, i.e. the gods Persephone and Semele within the Orphic collection share elements of identity, but also across these hymns, i.e. the characteristics and praise of Isis in Apuleius closely resembles the praise of a number of goddesses in both the Orphic *Hymns* and the hymns in the *PGM*. This innovative replacement of narrative hymns through epithets that allude to divine lore and syncretism of the divine reflects the broader shifts in performance context from civic to individual worship. Ultimately, I argue that these shared stylistic features and shared identity of the divine that permeates each of these types of hymns suggest a fluidity of practice between cult and magic in the first to fourth century CE in the Roman Empire.

### Bibliography

Athanassakis, A, Wolkow, B. 2013. *The Orphic Hymns*, Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins

University Press.

Bremmer, J.N., Erskine, A. 2010. *The Gods of Ancient Greece: Identities and*

*Transformations*. Edinburgh University Press.

Bremmer, J.N., Furley. W.D. 2001. *Greek Hymns: Selected Cult Songs from the Archaic to the Hellenistic Period*. Tübingen.

Faulker, A., Hodkinson, O. 2015. (eds.) *Hymnic Narrative and the Narratology of Greek Hymns*. Leiden, Boston. Brill.

Janko, R. 1981. 'The Structure of the Homeric Hymns: A Study in Genre.' *Hermes*, 109, 9-24.

West, M. L. 1983. *The Orphic Poems*. Oxford. Oxford University Press.