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(Re-)modelling religious experience: some experiments with hymnic form in the imperial period

Abstract: Religious experience has been the topic of many different theoretical approaches. This paper starts from the premise that subjective individual experience is communicable only in terms of locally-available schemes, primarily linguistic, and thus ignores somatic signs such as ecstasy or frenzy. In the case of Greco-Roman Antiquity, this involves recourse to literary sources. The paper uses three Greek hymns of the imperial period, all of them experimental by comparison with “classical” models, to infer what we may call requisite rather than subjective experiences on the part of audiences. The hymns chosen are Mesomedes’ *Hymn to Isis* (no. 6 Regenauer), the Orphic hymn to the Nymphs (no. 51 Ricciardelli) and the hymn to “Apollo” in *PGrMag* VI 30–38. The suggestion is that rhetorical analysis enables us to gain a mediated idea of the contrasting responses ideally evoked in the course of ritualized performance.

1 Religious experience

Until the 1980s, the dominant terms in which religious experience was discussed were subjectivist and attributivist/attributional. At any rate in the field of religious studies, this was largely due to the dual influence of Schleiermacher’s evangelical Protestant intuitionism and William James’ asymmetrical opposition between institutional and personal religion (cf. Proudfoot 1985, 9–40; 155–189); more recently, however, to social psychology (e.g. Hood 1995) and the various forms of phenomenology (Martin 2016, 526–528).¹ Thanks to its simplicity, Rodney Stark’s fourfold typology of religious experience, confirming, responsive, ecstatic and revelational, has been, and continues to be, influential (Stark 1965, cf. 1999). Resistance arose from two sides, cultural anthropology and the linguistic turn. Already in 1961 Godfrey Lienhardt, a pupil of Evans-Pritchard at Oxford, entitled his account of Dinka religion *Divinity and Experience*, which among other things tackled the issue

¹ For a highly critical account of the influence of phenomenology on religious studies, particularly Rudolf Otto, G. van der Leeuw, Wach and Eliade, see Murphy 2010. Rappaport 1999, 391–395 (on Ultimate Sacred Postulates) reads to me like an attempt to save this sort of evaluative intuitionism.

of how to represent the self-knowledge of a culture that not only had no conception of “mind” but no very clear ontology of divinity (1961, 147–170). Nevertheless, he argued persuasively that the Dinkas’ “Powers” can be understood as images of complex experiences within their specific life-world. “With this knowledge, this separation of a subject and an object in experience, there arises for them also the possibility of creating a form of experience they desire, and of freeing themselves symbolically from what they must otherwise passively endure” (Lienhardt 1961, 170). It was, however, mainly Victor Turner’s later work that spawned an entire movement in US cultural anthropology, the “anthropology of (mainly bodily) experience” (Turner and Bruner 1986). Despite the enormous success of this trend over the past three decades, it has not proved particularly interested in specifically religious experience (cf. James 2003, 181–210). Where this was attempted, it tended, at any rate early on, to produce efforts at intuitionist “insights”, such as Turner’s *communitas* (1974, 166–299), a reversion to Durkheimian collectivist apriorism, or the anti-rationalism of Bruce Kapferer’s analysis of performance in major Sinhalese exorcisms (Kapferer 1986; cf. 1997), which, despite its impressive notation of ritual, often reads like the projections of a novelist. In the present context, therefore, I am more interested in the other form of resistance to authenticity-discourse, which was largely inspired by the linguistic turn (Martin 2016, 532–536).

Within religious studies, Wayne Proudfoot, without denying the possibility of Jamesian “experiences”, emphasized the logical priority of the concepts and interpretative frames available for the very identification and formulation of experiences claimed as “religious”, thus re-stating the most obvious socio-cultural conditions for the articulation of supposed mental events of this kind (1985, 190–227). A year or two later, Joan Scott, an historian critical of mainstream historical writing, emphasized historical discontinuities and the variety of local discourses that produce subjects and their experiences: “Experience is at once already an interpretation and is in need of interpretation” (1992, 37; cf. Fitzgerald 2000). Equally pertinent is the radical skepticism of an anthropologist such as Robert Sharf, who was inclined to doubt the referentiality of all reports of supposedly religious experiences, comparing such reports to the thousands of detailed “subjective” accounts of abduction by alien beings in the US in the 1950s and 60s (1998, 108–109; cf. 2000).

Perhaps the most important recent discussion of religious experience, by Ann Taves, attempts to outflank pure constructivism by developing an analytical framework that includes special experiences both religious and non-religious (2009, 120–160). Here the framing of all experience is taken as read; it is rather the category “religion” that is questioned, moving away from theological or formal conceptions towards acceptance of what “interacting subjects viewed as emerging

and how they decided to act on it” (2016, 6). Religious experience is not simply discursive but also embodied, and as such is neither stable nor fixed but a matter of how people decide on the meaning and significance of experiences. Taves’ work seems to suggest that in the field of Religious Studies there is a continuing desire to save something of authenticity (“special experiences”), albeit via the detour of cognitive psychology and theories of group dynamics (cf. Fitzgerald 2010).

Given the irremediable problems of evidence, however, the historian, especially the ancient historian, is better advised to start from the assumption that subjective individual experience, insofar as it is not purely staged as in Sharf’s comparison, is at any rate communicable only via the relevant constructs available in a given culture or sub-culture. Conversely, for practical purposes, we can view these locally-available linguistic and schematic resources as not merely the frame but in effect the stuff of religious experiences. At its simplest, we can call this the “Rhine-postcard” phenomenon, as noted by the British tourist Michael Quin in 1843: the gorge between Koblenz and Bingen is where “the Rhine begins to look like itself” – i.e. where it begins to resemble the guide-books’ descriptions of what it was supposed to look like (Quin 1843. 2, 116).

2 Exploiting Greek hymns as evidence for “requisite” experiences

Granted that “Greek religion” is a construction of post-Romantic scholarship, there is no denying that there survives a vast deal of evidence for what we at any rate view as religion, over a period of, say, 1,200 years, despite the fact that its practice and performance is irremediably lost. Much of this evidence is antiquarian and retrospective, much of the remainder oblique and by no means self-explanatory. If we are to speak of “locally-available linguistic and schematic resources”, we need to focus on direct sources, namely first-order texts. In this paper, I suggest using Greek ὕμνοι (“hymns”) experimentally for this purpose, which, as more or less complex songs in different forms directly addressed to named deities and performed in specific contexts perceived as related, directly or indirectly, to τὰ θεῖα (*ta theia*, things relevant to the gods → “religion”) (cf. Thraede 1994, 917–918), we can assume satisfy Taves’ criterion of appropriate ascription (“deemed religious”) (2009, 22–28).² Whereas “ritual performance” is too

² This formulation is intended to by-pass the discussion over the sort of distinction(s) to be made between “cultic hymns” versus “literary hymns”: cf. Furley and Bremer 2001 (1), 2–6; Pörtulas 2012, 235–240.

amorphous/complex an entity to invoke (cf. Sax, Quack and Weinhold 2010), and is anyway, for lack of adequate materials, more or less unavailable in the context of antiquity, one can make a virtue of the necessity of taking texts alone. As the current surge of interest in Aelius Aristides' *Hieroi Logoi* attests, his hermeneutics of dreams, visions, and conversations provides by far the most sophisticated account surviving from antiquity of what can be done on the interface of complex schemes, tropes, self-staging and stimuli (e.g. Petsalis-Diomidis 2010; Downie 2013). The topos of epiphany, too, perfectly exemplifies the fluency with which cultic resources could be drawn upon in imagining divine encounters (Platt 2011; Petridou 2015).

My suggestion is that, given the sort of doubts about the accessibility of “experience” raised by Sharf, we might use Greek hymns to infer “requisite” experiences rather than “special” or “subjective” experiences. We might treat them as one (rather sophisticated) component of the multiple interpretative frames available for the identification and formulation of experiences claimed as “religious” within a specific context of practice. If we cannot have any direct knowledge of subjective states, analysis of such texts may, I suggest, give us an inkling of the responses intended to be evoked in the course of ritual performances. Although we can know nothing directly about these wider contexts, we can at least examine the surviving texts and make inferences from them. Of course in reality actual responses to these, at least those that were performed on at least one or more occasions, must have varied considerably (indeed, the “hymns” of the magical papyri assume a secret recital, with the addressee (the deity/ies) as sole auditor/s). But of that diverse reality again we can have no knowledge. It may be objected that such an approach presupposes reception, which I readily admit; but it does not presuppose specific audiences. Adopting the terms of reader-response theory, I take “requisite” experiences as those of an ideal reader/auditor, which can now only be approximated by a learned commentator armed with lexica, concordances and data-bases and alert to the danger of myopic “atomization” of the text (Shuttleworth Kraus 2002, 10–16).

Although cult-hymns cannot formally be distinguished from other lyric forms as regards their religious content, a pragmatic distinction can be made, inasmuch as they are a “form of worship directed towards winning a god’s goodwill and securing his or her assistance or favor” (Furley and Bremer 2001 (1), 2–3). By virtue of its literary polish, the hymn has been likened to an ἄγαλμα, a “(god’s) delight”, that aims to store up divine χάρις on behalf of the community that stages the performance (Race 1982, 8–10; Furley and Bremer 2001 (1), 61–63; Pòrtulas 2012, 234). As in the case of sacrifice, the gods themselves, led by Apollo, καὶ ὕψι βιβὰς αἴγλη μιν ἀμφιφαίνειν / μαρμαρυγαὶ τε ποδῶν καὶ ἐυκλώστοιο χιτῶνος, “high-stepping, radiant, feet-flashing, robe-gleaming”

(*HomHymn Apollo* 202–203 Allen), model hymnic performance for human beings (cf. Lonsdale 1995, 30–31). Ideally, as Strabo emphasizes in a famous passage relating to the Kourêtes on Crete (Bremer 1998, 522–523), such performances took place in an atmosphere of relaxation and rejoicing:

It is a common characteristic of both Greeks and non-Greeks to perform religious ceremonies in an atmosphere of relaxed festivity, whereby some rituals are performed with ‘enthusiasm’ and some not, some with music, some without it, some only by initiates in secret, others in the open. . . Whilst it is well said that men imitate the gods best whenever they do good, it is perhaps more appropriate to say ‘whenever they are happy’. And this happiness is found in gladness, in the celebration of festivals, in philosophy and in making music.
(*Geogr.* 10.3.9, 467C tr. H.L. Jones, with changes)

In the special case of healing-gods, Asklepios and his assistant Telephoros could be imagined as dancing for joy when a patient recovers (*IG* III.1 171 = Furley and Bremer 2001, 7.7.1 ll.9–15). Indeed, the joy might extend still further: the Archaic poet Alkaios imagined nightingales, swallows and cicadas all singing to welcome the return of Apollo from the land of the Hyperboreans (frg. 307c19–22 Voigt = Furley and Bremer 2001, no. 2.1).

3 Greek hymnic production in the Hellenistic and Roman periods

It is generally thought that hymnic production greatly increased in the Hellenistic and Roman periods,³ with local literati routinely turning out songs (and music) for public performance.⁴ In many cities of the province of Asia and on the Black Sea coast there were formal associations of ὑμνωδοί (*hymnôdoi*), of varying social catchment, from prominent – for example at Smyrna, where the son of a city-councilor records that he was *hymnôdos* both of Hadrian and of the *gerousia*, positions that he had inherited from earlier generations of his family (*IGR* IV 1436) – to middling (e.g. οἱ ὑμνοῦντες τοὺς Σεβαστοὺς: Dionysopolis, Moesia Inf.: *IGBulg* I² 15[3] = 30). Although the precise organization is disputed,

³ A rapid but detailed overview in Lattke 1991, 37–39. Since this is not an epigraphic publication, I make no effort to cite the latest editions of inscriptions, but refer simply to familiar collections.

⁴ E.g. Kleochares of Athens: *Syll*³ 450; Glaukos of Marathon at Olympia (*IOlymp.* 457); a ὑμνητὴς of the *orgeônai* (sic) of Belêla in the Piraeus: *Syll*³ 1111; a ὑμνογράφος διὰ βίου from Laodikeia: *IGR* IV 1587 l.14–15 etc.).

and altered over time, from the Julio-Claudian period they were formally responsible for staging and executing performances in individual cities in connection with all imperial celebrations, such as birthdays and victories (Halfmann 1990; van Nijf 1997, 165–167). To this end, such associations enjoyed civic, provincial and imperial subventions (e.g. *IGR* IV 1431 l.34–40) and are frequently included among the beneficiaries of euergetic gestures by the very wealthy (e.g. at Smyrna: *IGR* IV 1431 l.39; Miletos: *IG* XII 68 l.12; Ephesos: *IEphesos* Ia. 27 l.146; [267]). Their connection to the imperial cult prompted cities to set up copies of at least the imperial documents in a bid for status (*IGR* IV 1608 with Keil 1908, 103–104). Another major panhellenic institution requiring hymns was that of the organized Dionysiac *technitai* (Le Guen 2001). In many places there were local groups of singers, some ancient, such as the *Molpoi* at Miletos (*Syll*³ 57 with Deshours 2011, 276–293 no. 25) and the *hymnôdoi* of Artemis at Ephesos, some more informal, such as the numerous ephebic and maiden choirs,⁵ and Metroac (e.g. *ILS* 4164) ceremonies. An important series of 2nd-century CE documents from Klaros records the delegations sent each year by cities to the oracular temple of Apollo, including boys' and girls' choirs, sometimes mixed (*SEG* 37: 961–978). All of these institutions required a regular supply of hymns for performance, whether by groups or by solo performers. Especially notable productions were even thought worthy of inclusion in the local epigraphic assortment, sometimes with the approval of an oracle: there survive at least twenty hymns of various kinds inscribed on stelai, mainly at panhellenic centers, between the second half of the 4th century BCE and into the 2nd CE, two of them with musical notation.⁶ Although the range of styles and quality is very variable, all are simple in structure and tend increasingly to brevity (Parker 2012, 715).

5 E.g. Eleusis: *Syll*³ 885.27–30; Magnesia: *Syll*³ 695 with Deshours 2011, 197–208 no.1; Teos: *IGR* III 90.7–10; the *paianistai* of Asklepios in Munichia (*Syll*³ 1110); and performers who sang at various Isiac ceremonies (e.g. the hymns of Isidoros of Narmuthis [*IMEGR* 175]; Chaeremon frg. 10 van der Horst; Tibull. 1.7.37–48; *RICIS* 104/0206).

6 Most of these are treated in Furley and Bremer 2001. In their enumeration they are as follows:

Delphi: 2.3 (Aristonoos' hymn to Hestia); 2.4 (Aristonoos' paian to Apollo); 2.5 (Aristodemos' paian to Dionysos); 2.6.1 (?Athenaios' paian to Apollo); 2.6.2 (Limenaio's paian to Apollo, both with musical notation). Epidauros: 6.1 (paian to Asklepios, which survives in four slightly different versions, from Erythrai, Ptolemaios Hermion, Athens and Dion in Macedonia, though not from Epidauros itself); 6.2 (hymn to the Mother of the Gods); 6.3 (Ariphron's paian to Hygieia, copied on two different stelai and in two mss.); 6.4 (Isyllos' paian to Apollo and Asklepios, which was to be chanted three times while circling the altar); 6.5 (hymn to Pan); 6.7 (hymn to all the gods). Athens: 7.5 (Makedonikos of Amphipolis, paian to Apollo and Asklepios); 7.6 ("morning song" of 6 lines to Asklepios); 7.7.1 and 2 (two hymns to Telesphoros). We can add at least *IPerg.* II 324 (hymn to Zeus and other deities; for a recent discussion, see Várhelyi 2001, 26–30); the Cretan hymn to Antinoos (*SEG* 53: 1747bis = *AE* 1975: 832); and perhaps the "Berlin paian"

At 156 lines, Philodamos' mid-4th century BCE paian to Dionysos is by far the longest; none of those dated to the imperial period is longer than 20 lines.⁷ At the same time, the metrical structure tends to increasing complexity, to the point at which dactylic, lyric and iambic cola can all be used together, as in the late *Hymn to all the gods*, or traditional rules seem no longer to apply at all, as in the case of Makedonikos' paian.

Despite the almost total loss of ancient Greek hymns, and the multiplicity of sub-genres, we can safely say that traditionally the dominant content was mythical: the main exposition consisted of an evocation of one or more myths relating to the addressee, often relating his or her first advent or epiphany (Furley and Bremer 2001 (1), 18–19). Recent interest in the narrativity and narrative strategies of Greek hymns is grounded in this assumption (e.g. Faulkner and Hodkinson 2015). The paians of Philodamos and Isyllos (which is very much shorter) are still firmly in this tradition. Yet increasingly it is the imagined cultic setting of the hymn that takes precedence, the evocation of an ambience, a mood, an expectation. In place of narrative, we find experimentation in other modes, most explicitly in the case of Aelius Aristides' prose encomia of gods, which by that date were regularly termed "hymns" (Parker 2016, 67 n.1). Thus the first 13 sections of the earliest, the *Hymn to Serapis*, usually dated to the early 140s CE, are devoted to an attack on the routinization of the usual run of metrical hymns:

There is nothing they do not dare or that presents difficulties for them (i.e. the poets). They treat the gods like puppets, and turn them into ordinary fellow-travellers, make them companions of human beings, even carousing with them and lighting their way with torches. And that is why I, as I said at the beginning, poets are so high-handed, so carefree, so 'easeful' as Homer puts it, when they compose hymns and paeans to the gods. In a couple of strophes or periods all is done: when they have said 'sea-girt Delos' or 'Zeus who delights in thunder', or 'the loud-roaring sea', and then have told in passing how Heracles came to the Hyperboreans and how Iamos was an ancient seer, or how Heracles slew Antaios, or when they have mentioned Minos, or Rhadamanthys, or the Phasis or the Ister, or have declared that they themselves are 'nurslings of the Muses' and 'unmatched in wisdom', they think their hymn quite good enough; and no ordinary person demands any more of them. (§2–3, tr. Behr, heavily adapted)

(on papyrus): *PBerol.* 6870^v = 1: 52 Heitsch = *TrGF* 2: 683, which some have ascribed to Mesomedes (Bélis 2003, 232–234) but may rather come from an anonymous tragedy.

⁷ I omit here the literary and philosophical hymns, e.g. by Callimachus, Aristotle to Virtue, the Stoic hymn on the creation of the universe (*SEG* 28: 793 = 2007: 969), parodies (e.g. Lucian, *Podagr.* 129–137 etc.) and those composed for novels, e.g. Philostratos, *Her.* 19.14. 12–13 Follet = p. 208 Kayser (to Thetis); 19.16.6–8 = p. 213f. (to Homer), that were not intended for performance in a cultic setting; cf. Regenauer 2016, 37f.

Notwithstanding its traditional appropriateness in religious contexts, then, poetry tends towards the recycling of banalities that can provide only a general, abstract sense, whereas prose, with its advantages of clarity, coherence and discursivity, can purify religious language, an argument that links to Plutarch's earlier skepticism in *de Pythiae oraculis* 23–24 (405d–406f, cf. 403f1–3) of oracular utterance in poetic form (Pernot 2007, 176; 181–184). Among the banalities, evidently, is hand-me-down mythic reference. The use of prose for a hymn is thus for Aristides a strategy of defamiliarization as well as a demonstration of piety (cf. Russell 1990; Pernot 2007; Goeken 2007; 2016).

Although they are not in prose, much the same can be said of the three groups of hymns I propose briefly to discuss in the remainder of this paper, the hymns of Mesomedes of Crete (like Phlegon of Tralles and Aristomenes of Athens an imperial slave freed by Hadrian), the collection we call the *Orphic Hymns*, and the “hymns” embedded in some of the Greco-Egyptian magical papyri. Although these are all very different in detail, all seek to re-model the cult-hymn to their own ends by means of formal experimentation. This in turn suggested to me that such shifts of formal strategy might have implications for religious experience: instead of viewing these compositions solely in terms of their overt aim of attracting divine attention and favor, we might also consider their possible cognitive, emotional and intellectual effects upon performers and audience (who, in the case of the *Orphic Hymns*, may well have been identical), in short, in terms of their construction of specific kinds of religious experience.

4 Three different experiments with the hymnic form

The three groups of hymns have been chosen for their diversity, despite the fact that all (probably) belong, at least in their original form, to the 2nd century CE.⁸ The thirteen surviving poems ascribed to P. Aelius Mesomedes, a prominent lyric poet and citharode at the court of Hadrian and a personal friend of the emperor (Cassius Dio 77.13.7), are fragile, allusive compositions in literary Doric for solo

⁸ The date of the twenty-six hymns incorporated into the longer Greco-Egyptian receptaries is conjectural, since in their surviving form they were only (re-)copied in the late 3rd and 4th centuries CE; however, although no parallel versions are known from other sources, and it is impossible to re-create the “originals”, they are probably based on earlier compositions, no doubt of the first two centuries CE, possibly even earlier (Furley 1995, 39–40; Brashear 1995, 3420; Bortolani 2016, 28–29).

performance, intermediate between the literary epigram and lyric poetry.⁹ Ignoring two very brief introductory addressees, only four of the surviving texts are hymns, though the poem to the Adriatic Sea (no. 6 Heitsch) uses hymnic *topoi* and it is known that he wrote an encomium for Antinoos (Suda s.v. Μεσομήδης); other poems are verse riddles and fables – one is on an astronomical orrery (cf. Brumbaugh 2015, 166).

Whereas Mesomedes was celebrated in antiquity (his work was imitated by Synesius, for example), no extant ancient source cites our *Orphic Hymns* (Morand 2001, 90), although they constitute the only known ancient “hymn-book”. Whereas the *Hymns* betray knowledge of Orphic-Bacchic lore, and various forms of Dionysos are prominent,¹⁰ their “Orphism” is *sui generis*, since none of them mentions any of the classic Orphic themes – the dismemberment of Dionysos by the Titans, the soul being trapped in the body so that death is a welcome release, underworld torments – so it is best to emphasize the diversity of “Orphism” and maintain simply that the collection is “Orphic” inasmuch as the group or groups who produced the hymns chose to consider Orpheus as their author (Rudhardt 2008, 167–168; Herrero de Jáuregui 2015, 229–232, cf. Morand 2001, 94). Hymns attributed to Orpheus had after all been current since at least the 5th century BCE (Euripides, *Alc.* 357–360, cf. *PDerveni* col. XXII ll.11f. p.22 Jourdan). Although in some cases they are clearly based on earlier material (e.g. in relation to Zeus: Bernabé 2010, 68), the *Hymns* affect an idiosyncratic style that pushes some current hymnic developments, above all asyndeton and polysyllabism, to their limit.

The circulation of the Greco-Egyptian “magical hymns” was likewise tightly restricted. With one or two exceptions in “activated” texts, they occur as elements within longer recipes (*praxeis*) contained in formularies whose contents derive from a ritual practice ultimately based on temple learning, although the actual practitioners are assumed to be working elsewhere, perhaps in the quarters reserved for temple-workers, perhaps in the village or urban area beyond. In the absence of close analogies, we can only say that they represent a fluent synthesis of Greek and Egyptian hymnic models, thoroughly integrated into their contexts by means of the introduction of *voces magicae*, the esoteric “names” whose utterance was deemed to provide direct access to the other world (Bortolani 2016, 32–38). They seem mainly to have been adapted, perhaps many times over, from Greek texts in honor of “classic” Greek gods, such as Apollo, Hermes, Aphrodite,

⁹ Cf. the succinct overview by Bélis 2003. Only two poems (nos. 11–12 Heitsch) are explicitly stated in the ms. tradition to be by Mesomedes (see e.g. Regenauer 2016, 17–19; 87–92). There are however fairly good grounds for ascribing the others to him.

¹⁰ Ricciardelli 2000b; 2008, 332; Jiménez San Cristóbal 2008; Morand 2015, 219–222.

or Helios, circulating in Egypt, whereas others, particularly those that display considerable familiarity with Egyptian theological concepts, especially those to Typhon-Seth, or address night-powers such as Artemis-Selene-Artemis, may have been composed directly by bilingual Egyptian priests.

4.1 Mesomedes

For reasons of space,¹¹ it seems best to illustrate Mesomedes' technique by means of the brief Hymn to Isis (no. 5 Heitsch = no. 25 Totti = no. 6 Regenauer), one of two hymns known only from *cod. Ottobon. gr.* 59 (O), in cretics interspersed with "palimbacchei", but unfortunately without the accompanying musical notation:

- Εἷς ὕμνος ἀνά τε γάν,
 ἀνά τε νέας ἀλιπόρους
 ᾄδεται, πολυτρόποις
 5 ἐν τέλος ἐν ὀργίοις: 5 ἅ βαθύκερως Ἴσις,
 ἅτ' ἔ[ι]αρος ἅ[τε] θέρεος,
 ἅτε χειματος ἄγει
 νεογόνους ἡνίας.
 Τὲ καλεῖσι πῦρ Αἶδος {τε},
 10 ὁ χθόνιος ὑμέναιος,
 οἱ φυτῶν ὠδίνες,
 οἱ Κύπριδος ἡμεροί,
 τὲ νηπιάρχου γονά,
 πῦρ τέλεον ἄρρητον,
 15 οἱ Ῥέας Κούρητες
 ὃ τε Κρόνιος ἄμητος·
 ἄστρα διφρηλάτῃ
 πάντα δι' ἀνακτόρων
 Ἴσιδι χορεύεται.¹²

One single hymn is sung/ on land and/ on the seafaring ships,/ just one addressee in many rites:/ long-horned Isis, who holds/ the neonate reins/ of Spring, of Summer,/ of

¹¹ Brumbaugh 2015, 174–181 chooses the *Hymn to Helios* and *To the Adriatic* for a similar purpose.

¹² For the numerous editorial interventions, see Regenauer's apparatus (p. 251). At the beginning of l.10 O and Heitsch read καὶ χθόνιος; Regenauer follows Powell in reading ὁ χθόνιος, whereas Lanna 2013 prefers <ἐγ>χθόνιος. Regenauer also marks a semi-colon after ἄρρητον at the end of l.14, and understands the Kurêtes and Kronos' harvest as dancing, like the stars. Here I follow Heitsch, Totti and Lanna 2013, all of whom understand them as part of the list starting in l. 9 and mark the break after ἄμητος.

Winter./ Light of Hades, chthonic marriage-rite,/ the birth-pangs of plants,/ the desires
 inspired by Kypris,/ the birth of a baby,/ mystic fire unspeakable,/ Rhea's Kurêtes,/ and
 Kronos' harvest / – (all) call upon you!/ The stars all dance/ over holy places/ for Isis in
 her car.

Despite their wide generic variety, Greek hymns have traditionally been understood as manifesting a tripartite structure, invocation, exposition (*"pars epica"*), request (*"precatio"*) (Wünsch 1914, 144–145; Furley 1993; Hopman-Govers 2001, 35–36). More recently this division has been replaced by invocation, praise (which may include predication of powers, anaphoric address, reminders of earlier benefits, descriptions of the god and his doings, narratives) and the climax, prayer (including petition) (Furley and Bremer 2001 (1), 50–64). In this case, however, Mesomedes neatly avoids narrative altogether, combining an allusion to the generic rules (ὕμνος) with a self-referential claim to originality (εἶς, i.e. *my* hymn), a hymn that is both uniquely fitting and all-comprehending – he manages at the same time to allude both to the spelling Εἶς of the aretalogies and to the mega-theistic acclamation εἶς θεός – even as it rises both from land and sea. Though a trope for “everywhere”, “land” and “sea” also evoke Isis as inventor of farming and founder of temples as against her maritime epithets, *Pharia*, *Euploia*, *Pelagia* and the major Isiac festival outside Egypt, the *Ploiaphesia/navigium Isidis*, celebrated on March 5th. At the same time, the twice-repeated switch from One to Many in ll.1–4 evokes Isis *myrionyma* (Bricault 1996, 11–75).

Although Mesomedes nowhere expressly thematizes Isis' Egyptian identity, it is deftly introduced in the epithet βαθύκερως (l.5), “deep-horned”, a *hapax*, whose first five letters initially arouse expectations of appropriate epithets, say βαθύκολπος (deep-breasted, implying fertility and fecundity, e.g. of Gê and the mountain nymphs as wet-nurses ...), but also βαθύκαρπος, “yield-rich”, or βαθυκύμων, “deep waved”, but whose finale is deliberately mystifying to anyone whose idea of Isis is formed by the Hellenistic iconography – say the auratic statue in black and white marble in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna (Gschwantler 2005): “horns? – what horns?” The image “deep-horned” is fitting only for those familiar with late-period Egyptian images of Isis-Hathor suckling Horus-the-Child, that is, those who have actually been to Egypt, not to those who know only the Isis with mini-horns occasionally found in Roman art. This hint at Egypt as other is immediately reinforced by an enumeration of the only three seasons, spring, summer and winter, recognized there (Diod. Sic. 1.26.5), whose imperceptible transitions are induced by Isis' motherly tenderness (νεόνους ἡνίας, l.8). Mesomedes' goddess is not so much a syncretistic as a polymorphic, polysemous deity (Malaise 2005, 193–99).

There follow eight lines in almost perfect asyndeton (except for minimal τε in ll.13 and 16), deftly intimating the contents of that other, imaginary, hymn,

evoking now this, now that Isiac presence – in this world, in the Underworld, in the mythic past. Here the most fitting adjective is “exquisite” – against the 57 clod-hopping lines of the Kyme aretalogy (Totti 1985 no.1 = *RICIS* 302/0204 etc.), to say nothing of the almost 300 lines of the Oxyrhynchus version (*POxy* 1380 = Totti 1985 no. 20) or the 178 lines of the verse hymn from Andros (Totti 1985 no. 2 = *RICIS* 202/1801), Mesomedes works in miniature, like one of the outstanding Greek intaglio-cutters of the Principate – Dioskurides, or his son Eutyches, or Euodos, or Thamyras. As such, he can hint transhistorically at grand themes through specific details, the slow unfolding of leaf buds and flowers (φυτῶν ὠδῖνες, l.11); the vision of the midnight sun at initiation (πῦρ τέλεον ἄρρητον, l.14); the *para prosdokian* whereby, in contrast to Callimachus, *Hymn to Zeus* 52–54, the Kurêtes – appropriate because of the identification of Isis’ mother Nut as Rhea – serve not to introduce the child-eating Kronos, but a quite different one; the neat rapprochement between the function of Isis-Renenutet-Thermouthis as bestower of bountiful harvests and the Greek identification of Isis’ father Geb as Kronos (cf. Plutarch, *De Iside* 12, 355f1-2), lord of the golden age, when the earth produced plentiful harvests αὐτομάτη, without the need for labor (Hesiod, *Op.* 118 Solmsen).

As a citharode, then, Mesomedes uses the privilege of performing to a restricted audience in a rarified genre to offer his own polysemous Greco-Egyptian Isis, the goddess whose power discreetly suffuses time, space and nature, by dismantling generic rules, dispensing with constatives, and working through hints and allusions (cf. Psaroudakes 2018). This, he suggests, is truly the way to intuit and experience such a deity. The Mesomedean cliché of the astral dance (l.19), evoking the clear night sky, omits all mention of the Moon. But the audience is assumed to be aware of its/her presence.

4.2 The *Orphic Hymns* (hereafter *HO*)

The *HO* consist (now) of 87 brief hexametric hymns,¹³ none longer than 30 lines, addressed to 87 different deities.¹⁴ A manuscript brought to Rome from Constantinople in 1423 by Giovanni Aurispa seems to have served as the basis

¹³ Quandt 1955 remains the standard text, despite its problematic punctuation; Ricciardelli 2000a is an excellent full commentary with translation; the Budé (Fayant 2014) also offers a serviceable tr. with a useful introduction. The best discussions for my purposes are Morand 2001; Ricciardelli 2008; Rudhardt 1991; 2008.

¹⁴ Rudhardt 2008, 183 counts 25 short hymns (6–9 lines); 45 medium-length (10–14) and 17 long hymns (16–30 lines).

of the four traditions known from later copies (Quandt 1955, 1–46*; Ricciardelli 2000, xlv–xlvii; Morand 2001, 33–35). Many of these include *HO* with the texts of (at least) the Homeric Hymns, Callimachus’ hymns, the Orphic *Argonautica* and Proclus’ hymns, thus establishing a Humanist “classical” genre that was completely discredited with the rise of scientific philology. It is in fact mainly the re-invention of Orphism, with the “publication officieuse” of the Derveni papyrus (1962) and the Bacchic-Orphic *lamellae* on precious metal (etc.), that has led to a recent surge of scholarship (Morand 2015, 209).

It is routinely observed that the hymns of *HO* display a unified style and manner, drawing upon Homer and Hesiod but adding lexis, grammar and expressions from Classical, Hellenistic and imperial-period poetry. This has led some, most recently Graf, to claim that they were all composed by the same person (Graf 1992, 161). More recent scholarship has tended to doubt this (Hopman-Govers 2001, 37; Rudhardt 2008, 223, 230), and it is certain that the proem (εὐχή), which purports to be an address by Orpheus to Musaeus, has been cobbled on, since, among the 70 divinities listed, it mentions several, such as Eniautos, Atlas, Aion, Chronos etc., who are *not* represented by a hymn in the collection, and omits at least ten, including Protogonos, the Moirai and Nemesis, that are. Moreover in modern editions the proem as represented in the ms. tradition has been shortened by ten lines now assigned to a Hymn no. 1 (to Hekate), although no such heading appears in the mss.¹⁵ Further evidence of ancient editorship and design is provided by the clear sense of organization: the collection proceeds through a sequence of themes, beginning with primordial Orphic divinities (2–6: Prothyraia, Night, Ouranos, Aither, Protogonos), moving on to cosmic order (7–11: stars, Helios, Selene, Physis, Pan); representatives of the Old Order (12–14: Herakles as Titan, Kronos as husband of Rhea, Rhea); the New Order (15–18: Zeus, Hera, Poseidon, Pluto) and so on, through a central section mainly devoted to manifestations of Dionysos (42: Misê, 45–47: Dionysos Bassareus Trieterikos, Liknitês, Perikonios, 52–53: Trieterikos, Amphiêtês), then a large miscellaneous group, and ending with Hestia, Hypnos, Oneiros and Thanatos (84–87) (Ricciardelli 2008, 330–332).

It is for this reason that Morand observed that it makes no sense to read just one hymn by itself (2001, 98). Whether that allows us to infer a coherent liturgical procedure, moving between this lighted altar to the next, with “real” apparitions of deities, and terrifying experiences, as Graf has suggested, may be doubted (2009, 175–181; contra: Rudhardt 2008, 181). It is clear enough that

¹⁵ The mss. headings commence with Prothyraia, “She before the doors”, i.e. Artemis Eilithyia; see Ricciardelli 1995; 2008, 327–330.

HO assumes τελεταί (*teletai*, rituals) celebrated by μύσται (*mystai*, initiates/worshippers),¹⁶ and the discovery of scattered altars to Misê, Hipta/Sabazios, and Dionysos Êrikepaios in west-central Asia Minor clearly indicates a movement that grew up in that area (Morand 2001, 169–181, 189–193), no doubt initiated by a charismatic mystagogue in the Weberian sense. As for the probable date, Wolfgang Fauth hazarded the guess that *HO* is roughly contemporary with Plutarch (1983, 2264), while Morand, excessively reliant on parallels with the lexis of Nonnus, offered 2nd to 5th century CE (2001, 304). Most recently, it seems to have become usual to settle for a date in the Antonine period (e.g. Herrero de Jáuregui 2015, 224).

HO retains vestiges of the traditional hymnic structure, in that the first-person orant briefly invokes the addressee, and at the end outlines a very brief, indeed schematic, request, for health, peace, security, wealth and prosperity, that is, the usual stereotyped this-worldly benefits, though the Clouds (21) are asked for rain, Gê (26) for καρπούς . . . πολυγηθεῖς, hearty crops, and Thanatos (87) for a good old age (Hopman-Govers 2001, 41; Ricciardelli 2008, 340–341; Morand 2001, 309–317). Except in the short hymns such as nos. 49, 75, 80, 82, where invocation merges directly into the request, the central “praise” section is, as in the standard scheme, much the longest, but consists almost entirely of descriptive adjectives and participial phrases in asyndetic style.¹⁷ A good example is the hymn to Eleusinian Demeter (40):

Δηώ, παμμήτειρα θεά, πολώννυμε δαῖμον,
 σεμνή Δήμητερ, κουροτρόφε, ὀλβιοδῶτι,
 πλουτοδότειρα θεά, σταχυοτρόφε, παντοδότειρα,
 εἰρήνηι χαίρουσα καὶ ἐργασίαις πολυμόχθοις,
 σπερμεία, σωρῖτι, ἄλωαία, χλοόκαρπε, 5
 ἢ ναίεις ἀγνοῖσιν Ἐλευσῖνος γυάλοισιν,
 ἱμερόεσσ', ἐρατή, θνητῶν θρέπτειρα προπάντων,
 ἡ πρώτη ζεύξασα βοῶν ἄροτῆρα τένοντα
 καὶ βίον ἱμερόεντα βροτοῖς πολύολβον ἀνείσα,
 αὐξιθαλής, βρομίοιο συνέστιος, ἀγλαότιμος, 10
 λαμπαδόεσσ', ἀγνή, δρεπάνοις χαίρουσα θερείοις·
 σὺ χθονία, σὺ δὲ φαινομένη, σὺ δε πᾶσι προσηγής·
 εὐτεκνε, παιδοφίλη, σεμνή, κουροτρόφε κούρα,
 ἄρμα δρακοντείοισιν ὑποζεύξασα χαλινοῖς

¹⁶ Τελετή/αί: e.g. 6.11, 24.10, 27.11, 35.7, 43.10, 49.7, 54.10, 76.7, 84.3; μύσται: e.g. 18.19, 23.7, 34.27, 50.10, 52.13, 56.12, 57.12, 61.10, 71.12, 75.5, 84.3. The gods are often invited to take part in these celebrations: Ricciardelli 2008, 333–335.

¹⁷ A variety of other techniques, for example phonic effects (alliteration, assonance), etymologization, and paradox, are discussed by Morand 2001, 61–68.

ἐγκυκλίους δίναις περὶ σὸν θρόνον εὐάζουσα, 15
 μουνογενής, πολύτεκνε θεά, πολυπότνια θνητοῖς,
 ἧς πολλὰ μορφάι, πολυάνθεμοι, ἱεροθαλεῖς....

An English translation captures none of this asyndetic brilliance:

Deo, divine mother of all,/ goddess of many names, / revered Demeter, nurturer of youths, / giver of prosperity and wealth,/ you nourish the ears of corn,/ O giver of all,/ you delight in peace,/ and in toilsome labor,/ present at sowing, heaping and threshing,/ O spirit of the unripe fruit,/ you dwell/ in the sacred valley of Eleusis,/ charming and lovely,/ you give sustenance to all mortals;/ you were the first to yoke/ the ploughing ox,/ the first to send up from below a rich,/ a lovely harvest for mortals./ You are growth and blooming,/ O illustrious companion of Bromios,/ torch-bearing and pure,/ you delight in the summer's yield. From beneath the earth you appear,/ gentle to all,/ O holy and youth-nurturing lover of children and of fair off-spring./ You yoke your chariot/ to bridled dragons,/ round your throne/ you whirl and howl in ecstasy./ You are an only daughter, but you have many children/ and many powers over mortals;/ the variety of flowers reflect/ your myriad faces and your sacred blossoms
 (tr. Athanassakis)

There are some exceptions to this model, such as 68 (Hygeia) and 87 (Thanatos), where virtually no epithets are used, and some complex examples, such as 18 (Pluto) and 34 (Apollo), where we find mythic allusions and references to favorite haunts, as in the classic praise-formula, but essentially *HO* achieves its singular effects by dense accumulation of epithets and short phrases.¹⁸ What interest me most of all in this connection are the compound adjectives. Although the use of this technique becomes common in Alexandrian poetry (especially Lycophron) and, later, Quintus Smyrnaeus and Oppian, in no extant Greek text is it deployed with the same intensity as in *HO*. The following list was drawn up by Jean Rudhardt (2008, 220–235), who alone has analyzed the compound epithets in detail:¹⁹

- 1) several dozen are taken over from the epic plus Hesiod, including the Homeric Hymns in particular, as part of the strategy of timelessness; these include a number, such as ἀγκυλομήτης (Kronos), πολυδέγμων (Pluto) or ἐλαφιβόλος (Artemis), that are typical of specific divinities

¹⁸ Hopman-Govers (2001, 36) provides a list of later Hellenistic and imperial-period texts that rely heavily on this technique, including *AnthPal* 9.524 (to Dionysos) and 525 (to Apollo) (both anonymous), which consist entirely of epithets arranged in alphabetical order, each of the 24 lines containing four epithets beginning with the same letter. Such jeux d'esprit imply a sophisticated awareness of the dangers of trivialization.

¹⁹ Bernabé's concordance (1988) is indispensable here.

- 2) then there are more than 100, such as βαθύστερνος, ἡερόφοιτος or σελασφόρος that are attested first in Classical authors
- 3) plus several dozen that, so far as we know, occur first in Hellenistic authors, including the *Garland of Philip* etc.
- 4) a restricted number known only from epigraphic and papyrological sources, mainly of imperial date
- 5) a smallish number, such as λυσιμέριμος, ὕγροπόρος or ψυχοτρόφος, known only from authors of imperial/late Roman date, such as Oppian, Nonnus, Synesius, Gregory of Nazianzen, and the later writers assembled in the *AnthPal*.²⁰ This leaves
- 6) no less than 140 compound adjectives that so far as we know are coinages of *HO* and found nowhere else, in other words, hapaxes of one sort or another, sometimes calqued on earlier compounds (listed in Rudhardt 2008, 225–229). And
- 7) a small number, such as ἀρχιγένηθος, χορομανής (“mad for choruses”), πυρίδρομος, that are only otherwise found in Orphic texts.

Whereas once Richard Wünsch could complain about “die endlosen Ketten” of epithets in *HO* (1914, 145), it has now become usual to stress the diversity and subtlety of the effects achieved by this “forme extrême de concentration” in achieving the overt aim of pleasing the gods (Hopman-Govers 2001, 37). Abundance, exhaustiveness, precision, grandeur, creative tension are some of the rhetorical aims that we can point to (Morand 2001, 72–76). The common view, which is surely at least partly true, is that, through the deployment of these and other performative techniques such as music and dancing, performers and audience felt “subsumed into divine company for the brief span of their celebration” (Furley and Bremer 2001 (1), 16; cf. Lonsdale 1995, 32–33). I want rather to suggest that the hypertrophy of rhetorical effects, and the multiplicity of compound adjectives in particular, constructed a complex, highly-differentiated experience of divinity that responded to the requirements of the self-image of a group that considered itself in every way elect and apart.

Of the many passages one might invoke, I take *exempli gratia* a section of the hymn to the Nymphs (51):

²⁰ Given the uncertainties of survival, Rudhardt agrees (2008, 223) that these are not to be given too much weight with regard to the issue of dating *HO*. On the importance of post-Trajanic hexameter poetry, including Dionysius Periegetes, for Nonnus see e.g. Whitby 1994, 105–107.

Νύμφαι, θυγατέρες μεγαλήτορος Ωκεανοῖο,
 ὑγροπόροις γαίης ὑπὸ κεύθεσιν οἰκί' ἔχουσαι,
 κρυψίδρομοι, Βάκχοιο τροφοί, χθόνιαι, πολυγηθεῖς,
 καρποτρόφοι, λειμωνιάδες, σκολιοδρόμοι, ἀγναί,
 ἀντροχαρεῖς, σπήλυγξι κεχαρμέναι, ἡερόφοιτοι, 5
 πηγαῖαι, δρομάδες, δροσοεῖμονες, ἴχνεσι κοῦφαι,
 φαινόμεναι, ἀφανεῖς, αὐλωνιάδες, πολυανθεῖς,
 σὺν Πανὶ σκιρτῶσαι ἀν' οὖρεα, εὐάστειραι,
 πετρώρυτοι, λιγυραί, βομβήτριαι, οὐρεσίφοιτοι,
 ἀγρότεραι κοῦραι, κρουνίτιδες ὕλονόμοι τε, 10
 παρθένου εὐώδεις, λευχεῖμονες, εὐπνοοὶ αὔραις,
 αἰπολικάι, νόμιαι, θηρσὶν φίλαι, ἀγλαόκαρποι,
 κρυμοχαρεῖς, ἀπαλαί, πολυθρέμμονες αὐξίτροφοί τε,
 κοῦραι ἀμαδρυάδες 14

O Nymphs, daughters of great-hearted Okeanos,/ you dwell inside the earth's damp caves;/ you are as secret as your paths, O joyous, O chthonic nurses of Bacchos./ You nurture fruits, you haunt meadows, O sprightly and pure / travelers of the winding roads, who delight in caves and grottos./ Swift, light-footed and clothed in dew, you frequent springs,/ visible and invisible, in ravines and among flowers,/ you shout and frisk with Pan upon mountainsides,/ gliding down on rocks, you hum with clear voice./ O mountain-haunting maidens of the fields, of gushing springs and of woodlands, sweet-smelling virgins, clothed in white, fresh as the breeze,/ herds of goats, pastures, you protect; wild animals love you./ Though you are tender, cold delights you; you feed many, you help them grow,/ Hamadryad maidens ...

(tr. Athanassakis)

It is virtually impossible for a modern western language to reproduce the insistent staccato rhythm created by the pitiless succession of vivid, evocative ideas in the Greek – one can only say that the combination of bathos and gushing paraphrase in Athanassakis' version is very unfortunate.²¹ As a whole, the hymn seeks to maintain a constantly renewed tension between the points of fecund, dark wetness, light aëry joy and the disturbingly uncanny, darting rapidly from one crystalline thought to another, now evoking epic, now contemporary poetic usage, and skillfully interweaving allusions to the arch-shapeshifter Dionysos. I see this as an attempt to communicate a vision of a complex, never to be comprehended, divine reality, a vision that, through being committed to memory via repeated performance, becomes the experience of these divinities that the worshipper internalizes – an experience that is itself brilliantly faceted, elusive and

21 The version by Jacques Lacarrière in the series *La Salamandre* (1995) is much more successful.

yet pregnant with possibility. The hymn can be imagined as a sort of Antonine Virtual Reality headset, at once super-real and totally phantasmagoric.

One of Jean Rudhardt's suggestions was that, notwithstanding the device of epiclesal polychromy, individual lines in *HO* tend to carry consistent images or thoughts (1991, 267). This is surely sometimes the case, but no less often, the associations are deliberately discontinuous, negating the desire for semantic continuity and development. In the case of no.51, such discontinuity fits perfectly both with the fiction of multiple Nymphs/multiple races of Nymphs (itself a knotty problem for a short text) and with the hymn's ambition to represent them in perpetual movement and flow – a motion at once counteracted by the insistence on fixity and locality. Other major contrasts are between high and low, light and dark, confinement and freedom, sound and silence, the tamed and the wild, mythic memory and joyful presence. It is precisely in the unresolved tensions between these binaries that the religious experience is formed, a never-ending series of aporiae, a figure for the central aporia, the knowledge of god in a highly complex polytheistic system (cf. Sfameni Gasparro 2013, 440f., 446), an attempt to rise to the challenge of reversing and gainsaying the deadening routinization inherent in ceremonial performance in the context of civic religion.

In order to suggest how such a hymn effects its “VR-function”, I just take a closer look at the first few lines of 51.²² The topography starts deep and wet: the Nymphs are said (l.1) to be daughters of Okeanos, not a widespread idea, but *μεγαλήτωρ*, “of grand emotions”, plus proper name reassure – this is an Homeric device.²³ The wetness implied by this parentage becomes explicit at the start of l.2: *ὕδροπόροις*, ambivalent between “wet-pathed” (cf. Homeric *πόροι ἄλός*) and “supplying wetness”, a common Nonnian word and a synonym of *ὕδρόκελευθος*, applied to the Nereids in *HO* 24.2, and later in this very hymn to the Nymphs themselves (l.14); and its domestic comforts for these creatures of wetness are suggested by the juxtaposition of *κεύθεσιν* and *οἰκιά*, which are grammatically unrelated but evoke the expression *κεῦθος οἴκων* for the interior of a house (e.g. Eur., *Alc.* 872). The twofold thought of darkness and movement is picked up in the first word of l.3, *κρυψίδρομοι*,²⁴ but immediately reduced to its first semantic component in the reference to looking after baby Dionysos to

²² Ricciardelli's commentary is indispensable (2000, 428–432). I do not here emphasize the semantics of the compound epithets, though they add another crucial level of tension.

²³ But note Dionysius Periegetes, *Orbis descr.* 658 (Hadrianic).

²⁴ Casaubon wanted to make this word pick up the reference to the house and proposed *κρυψίδρομοι*, but no one except LSJ⁹, who do not list the word *κρυψίδρομος*, has thought this was a good idea.

keep him safe from Hera;²⁵ then back to the underworld with χθόνια, followed by another apparent switch in πολυγηθεῖς, “extraordinarily cheerful, merry”, which is elsewhere in *HO* used of the effects produced by Hygeia (68.4), and here anticipates the mood evoked by λειμωνιάδες, “(disporting on) meadows” (l.4); but it also refers back to Dionysos, since the word is used of him twice elsewhere in *HO* (44.3;75.1).²⁶ A hidden reference to Dionysos (as god of shooting vegetation) provokes the next epithet, at the beginning of l.4, καρποτρόφοι, which with λειμωνιάδες brings us up from the damp depths into the sun-filled world of cultivation – and so settlement, a thought at once negated by σκολιοδρόμοι, “mazy” (cf. Spenser’s “the mазie thickette”)/“sinuoso”, which reverts back to the restlessness of ὑγοπόροις and κρυψίδρομοι in ll.2 and 3, and, while evoking maidens dancing in a circle, also suggests the aëry heavens, since σκολιοδρόμος is typically applied to the changes of the moon. l.5 amplifies this paradox by juxtaposing two words evoking caves (so back to the underworld, damp and darkness), ἀντροχαρεῖς and σπήλυνξι, with another aëry voyage in ἡερόφοιτοι, while at the same time picking up the joyful mood of πολυγηθεῖς (l.3) in κεχαρμέναι.

Many hymns in *HO* can be analyzed in a similar manner. By shifting our emphasis from their “social” or overt aim, and thinking back to the Rhine postcard, we can begin to disengage the sense, important for the LAR project, in which each of them constructs its own specific religious experience over time.

4.3 Greco-Egyptian “magical” hymns

Once again, given constraints of space, I confine myself to providing a single, fairly representative, example of the hymns that were included by the authors and/or editors in their instructions for the performance of complex ritual procedures for a variety of ends. The following text is part of a longer hymn to Apollo that has been broken up into sections and spliced with *voces magicae*, and forms part of an elaborate request for a dream oracle. In this case, the papyrus partly reproduces the metrical scheme but ignores it when it seemed appropriate to insert *voces magicae*:

²⁵ This allusion is amplified in ll.15–16, just before the request, where the Nymphs are called “Nysaeen” (cf. *HomHym Dion.* 26.3–5; also *Hom.*, *Il.* 6.132–133).

²⁶ *HO* 51 is placed right among the Dionysiac hymns. The association between D. and πολυγηθής is ancient, first found in Hes., *Theog.* 941 (with West’s note). In this connection it of course evokes the pleasures of wine, and suggests the Nymphs may also double as *bacchantes*.

κλῦθι μεν, ἀργυρό[τοξ]ε, ὃς Χρύσην ἀμφιβέ[βηκ]ας
 Κίλλαν τε ζαθέην [Τε]νέδοιό τε ἱφι ἀνάσσεις.
 χρυσοφαῖ, λαῖλ[α]ψ καὶ Πυθολέτα μεσεγκριφι / Λατῶε σιαωθ' Σ[αβ]αωθ Μελιούχε
 τύραννε / πευχρη νυκτε[ρόφ]οιτε σεσεγγενβαρφαραγης / ³⁵ καὶ αρβεθ ωπολλορφε
 φιλαίματε αρβαθιαω /
 Σμινθεῦ, εἴ ποτ[έ] τοι χαρίεντ' ἐπὶ βωμόν ἔρεψα,
 ἦ εἰ δὴ ποτέ τοι κατὰ πίονα μηρί' ἔκηα
 ταύρων ἡδ' αἰγῶν, τόδε μοι κρήνηνο[ν] ἐέλωρ.
PGrMag VI 30–38.²⁷

Pay heed to me, Silverbowed, protector of Chrysê and divine / Killa, and mighty Lord of Tenedos, // golden-gleaming [*vox magica*],²⁸ and Pythôn-slayer, [*vox magica*] / son of Letô [*vox magica*], Sabaôth, Meliouchos, Lord / [*vox magica*], night-rover, [*vox magica*], / and [2 *voces magicae*],²⁹ blood-relisher, [*vox magica*] // Smintheus, if ever I have piled the joyful altar high for you, / or burned for you the fat thighs of choice oxen or goats, then fulfil this desire of mine.

We happen to know that the five hexameter lines, except for the word βωμόν (1.36), are taken directly from the prayer in *Iliad* 1.37–41 to Phoibos Apollo uttered by the Trojan Chryses, the god's priest, who has been wronged by Agamemnon, a prayer that is at once answered by the god, who fires deadly arrows into the Achaean camp and causes a pestilence to break out. They represent therefore a crasis between two common resources of the magical papyri, the *historiola*, a mythical allusion or mini-narrative (Frankfurter 1995), and the deployment of Homeric citations, that is, words hallowed by centuries of repetition and re-contextualization, as inherently effective utterances (Karanika 2011).

²⁷ There are several uncertain readings (see also Kenyon 1893, 82 no. XLVII); I have mainly followed Preisendanz. Reproduced in *PGrMag* 2: 244 as Hymn III ll.30–38 (Heitsch), and somewhat differently by Bortolani 2016, 192 (her Hymn 8). Both present all the lines as though they were metrical. It has recently been recognized that the text (= *PLond* I 47 = *PGrMag* VI), which consists of a single sheet cut off a roll, is in fact the missing beginning of *PBerol*. 5026 = *PGrMag* II (see following note).

²⁸ Although λαῖλ[α]ψ could be a Greek word (“whirlwind”), it is not an Apollonian epithet, so that it is more appropriate in the context of a succession of epithets each “qualified” by a *vox magica* to understand it as λαῖλαμ, itself found in the form λαῖλαμψ at *PGrMag* II 117f. (relevant in that *PGrMag* VI is the lost beginning of *PGrMag* II) in the same sequence of Apollonian recipes, and XV 15 (cf. Bortolani 2016, 195).

²⁹ I follow Preisendanz in taking αρβεθ ωπολλορφε as a pair of *voces*, the latter apparently a fusion of Ἀπόλλων and the *vox* ορφι, cf. the *vox* λαητωνιον in *PGrMag* II 7, which is clearly inspired by the earlier epithet Λητοῖδῃ (“son of Letô”, 1.3). Bortolani follows Eitrem's conjecture (in the entry in Preisendanz' Index s.v. πολύμορφος) and inclines to think it is a miswriting or misunderstanding of that adjective in an earlier version (2016, 197–198).

This quotation, in itself a source of authority, has been “re-charged” by the insertion of ll.32–35, which begin as a pastiche of Apollonian epithets (χρυσοφαῖ, Πυθολέτα, Λατῶε),³⁰ segue into a sequence of names/epithets associated with cosmic powers (Σ[αβ]αωθ, Μελιούχε, τύραννε l.34), and end up with two epithets, νυκτερόφοιτος, “night-rover”, and φιλαίματος, “blood-relisher”,³¹ the first of which anticipates the later invocation of Paian Apollo, who “controls this night” (*PGrMag* II 8), while the second serves to link the preceding re-classification of Apollo to the blood-sacrifice that follows in Chryses’ prayer.

Although the original prayer had nothing whatever to do with divination, it has been effectively appropriated for its new purpose. The adjectival insertions by the author of the praxis are far from willful, since they re-contextualize the Homeric citation in order to embed it within a quite different “syncretic” thematic horizon, in which “Apollo” is mere cipher for a transcendent power, which can be activated by the succession of *voces* whose mere utterance takes over, usurps, each adjective in turn. The inclusion of Greek verse invocations into the complex *praxeis* of some practitioners is to be seen both as an open acknowledgement of the fact that Greek metrical incantations had historically played a significant role in creating the very practice of Greco-Egyptian “magic” in its developed form (Faraone 2000), i.e. a claim to the possession of a certain cultural capital, but also as a strategy of relativization, inasmuch as the anonymized texts are treated as so much raw material to be dismembered and adapted as suited the contingent aims of the author.

5 Conclusion

Adopting the view that it is the situational linguistic and schematic resources that provide not merely the frame but in effect the stuff of religious experiences, I suggest here that the rubric of “requisite experiences” may allow us to make use of certain kinds of religious literature from the imperial period, in the

30 “Apollonian”: χρυσοφαῖς is a relatively rare word except in Nonnus and, as a description of planets, in imperial-date astrological texts; the closest surviving parallel to this qualification of Apollo occurs in the four-line dedication of a golden wreath to him by T. Quinctius Flamininus at Delphi (196–94 BCE): Λατοῖδα, χρυσοφαῖ στέφανον (Plut., *Vit. T. Flam.* 12, 376bc). At *PGrMag* IV 458 the adjective is used as an epithet of Helios, as at Eur., *Hec.* 636 (lyric).

31 The papyrus reads φιλαίμαγε, for which Preisendanz read φιλαίματε; K.F.W. Schmidt wanted to “re-apollinize” by reading φιλάρματε, “chariot-loving”, a word that occurs precisely twice in Greek, in each case qualifying a city.

present case, consciously innovative or idiosyncratic hymns, to infer an ideal response, which, I would urge, formed a significant element of the interpretative frames available for the formulation of experiences claimed as “religious” within each context. Privileged by the implied conditions of performance within a select group of cultivated connoisseurs, the hymns of Mesomedes deliberately dispense with “normative” genre-expectations in order to intimate a variety of impressions in rapid succession, impressions that in combination evoke a polyvalent, yet almost mystical, conception of divine action-in-the-world. The *Orphic Hymns*, on the other hand, uphold, even renew, a vision of an overwhelmingly vibrant polytheism, overflowing with energy and daring, and thus transforming an ancient tradition – albeit only within the confines of a sophisticated, like-minded performative group. While they acknowledged Greek hymns as a source of religious capital, the Greco-Egyptian practitioners who appropriated these fragments into their *praxeis* subordinated them to a larger, and on its own terms more effective, ritual project, namely direct intervention into the order of things, a project in which the notion of praise, central within the Greek tradition, rubs uneasily against the technology of high ritual realism. As mere quotations, the fragments lose their autonomy and take on the secondary role of items in a multi-cultural *Universalinstrument*. As such, it is appropriate that the audience was reduced to one, the practitioner himself.

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