Intertext without Text? The *Homeric Hymn to the Dioscuri* and its Sources

A close reading of the intertextuality of the *Homeric Hymn to the Dioscuri* (33) raises interesting questions regarding our approach to texts the date of which is uncertain, and which were not originally texts at all. The terminology of intertextual analysis relies heavily on two concepts: textuality and chronology. The former is largely due to the central place given to Latin and Hellenistic Greek sources in most of the recent discussions of intertext, particularly intertextual theory (e.g. Hinds (1998)). The latter, by contrast, is simply an unavoidable aspect of the way we talk about the relationship of one work to another. Whether we insist on tight authorial control of "references," as does Thomas (1986), or prefer Conte's (1986) model of an open, "truly intertextual" relationship, it is nearly impossible to describe, much less analyze, intertexts without pinning down the chronology of the texts involved. By examining the *Homeric Hymn to the Dioscuri*, I hope to explore some of the difficulties posed by these basic assumptions of our language.

Despite its brevity, *Dioscuri*, relating the gods' rescue of storm-tossed sailors, is richly intertextual. In particular, scholars have noted the *Hymn*'s many thematic connections to Theocritus' *Idyll* 22, which it probably antedates (Allen, Halliday, and Sikes (1936); Gow (1942)), and also with Alcaeus fr. 307 L.-P., with which its relationship is more uncertain (cf. Page (1959)). Specifically, since the *Hymn*'s precise date of composition is unknown, scholars have been unwilling to interpret the connection between it and Alcaeus, beyond noting that some connection is present. The difficulty is only compounded by the fact that both Alcaeus' poem and *Dioscuri* arose out of an oral tradition, or perhaps two distinct traditions, creating the possibility that neither poem was composed with the other in mind, but rather that the interaction took place at some earlier (now lost) phase of their histories.

A partial solution to these problems is offered by another set of interexts within the *Hymn*. In describing the gods' epiphany in lines 12-13, "οἱ δ᾽ ἐξαπίνης ἐφάνησαν / ξουθῇσι πτερύγεσσι δι᾽ αἰθέρος ἀΐξαντες...", the hymn employs language used by Bacchylides (*Ode* 5.17-18) and a lyric fragment of either Sappho or Alcaeus (L.-P. 10), both describing eagles in flight. Since this language, particularly the mention of πτερύγεσσι, applies literally to birds and only metaphorically to the Dioscuri, it seems most probable that the *Hymn* has appropriated the language from the lyric sources, and therefore post dates them, and Alcaeus fr. 307 as well. But even this evidence has its difficulties. If *Dioscuri* were a Hellenistic text, we could be confident that this intertext was an intentional reference, arising from the knowledge of the lyric texts on the part of the hymnist. Given the oral origin of the *Hymn*, however, it could be argued that this type of intertext is simply too subtle to reflect real knowledge on the part of the author. Furthermore, even if this evidence fixes the *Hymn* in time, it does not entirely resolve the issue of a possible, now invisible interaction of oral traditions.

While I conclude tentatively that the *Homeric Hymn to the Dioscuri* is early classical, and refers intentionally to both Alcaeus and Bacchylides, I am more interested in the questions, perhaps unanswerable questions, that this line of analysis raises. Can intertext be used as a tool for dating? Are there interexts, which we might consider intentional in other circumstances, which are too subtle to be interpreted as "references" when they exist between oral poems? For that matter, is it even possible to discuss or analyze intertextuality in texts that were oral, and not originally texts at all?

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