

Citizens Forged in Flame and Song: *The Homeric Hymn to Hermes*, the Apatouria, and the Peisistratids

A range of performance contexts have been suggested for the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* (*Hymn* 4). Burkert (1984) and Thomas (2017) connect Hermes' sacrifice to the altar of the twelve Olympians at Olympia (cf. Tsagalis 2018), while Brown (1947), followed recently by Johnston and Mulroy (2009), connects the hymn to the Peisistratidae and the foundation of the altar of the twelve gods in the Agora. Recently Iles-Johnson (2002) offered a different ritual context, linking the hymn to the Hermaia. Vergados (2013; see also discussion at Clay 2006, 100-101) provides crucial assessment of many of these suggested contexts.

This paper reexamines the evidence for the religious and local contexts which might have given rise to the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*, staking two independent claims: first, that the adventures of the infant Hermes must be read against the backdrop of the Ionian cycle of rites of incorporation for newborns, and most especially the Apatouria. In the *Hymn*, Hermes' activities demonstrate the sort of supervivacity, ingenuity, and genetic legitimacy looked for in the inspection of infants for inclusion in the family and the phratry. Such thematic parallels between *Hymn* 4 and the Apatouria suggest a connection to the singing contests described as occurring on the Koureotis at Plato *Timaeus* 21B-21C. Rather than insisting that the *Hymn* was performed at one particular Koureotis celebration, I argue that the *Hymn* alludes to the rituals of this festival in order to undergird its presentation of Hermes as heralding infants through the fraught period extending from birth to these rites of incorporation, which conferred a social identity as a citizen and a person (Lambert 1998; Hedrick 1991; Vidal-Naquet 1981).

My second claim is that elements of the *Hymn* which invoke the Apatouria are also well-suited to performance in a Peisistratid context. I adduce evidence that the *Hymn* was performed

to serve the specifically Peisistratid end of continuing the process of defining citizenship in Athens (cf. Lavelle 2005). The younger Peisistratus' dedication of the altar of the Twelve Gods in the Agora in 522/1 in a location not far from Building F, suspected by many to have been Peisistratus' residence, and Building C, identified by Homer Thompson with the location of Solon's Council of 400; the Peisistratid dedication of the Herms; the Peisistratid development of the symbolism of the Prytaneion as a civic hearth and ritual focus for Athenian citizenship all offered opportunities for fire sacrifice around a communal hearth in a manner that recalled the Attic myth associating the invention of fire with the Apatouria. I offer evidence for reading the account of Hermes' invention of the fire sticks at *Hymn 4* as a reference to this facet of the Apatouria (Aelius Aristides' *Panathenaicus* 102-103, Jebb; *Herodotean Life of Homer* 29; Lambert 1998, 154). By referencing the symbolism of the Apatouria and transforming it from a regional to a civic event focused on the old Athenian Prytaneion and Agora, the *Hymn*, in a Peisistratid context, exploited the metaphor of polis as family of citizens, resembling the Olympian family into which Hermes wins access across *Hymn 4*.

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