“Starting from the Immortal Father”:
The Incipit of the First Homeric Hymn to Dionysus

Marios Skempis

Abstract: I propose a plausible supplement for the incipit of the Homeric Hymn to Dionysus (1) that is meant to illuminate the priamel structure of Fragment A. Consequently, I give a full account of how ring composition works in the surviving fragments of the opening and the end of the Hymn. I argue that the Nyse variant is corroborated in way concomitant with another Homeric Hymn to Dionysus (26). The hymnic instance is supported through recourse to interformular occurrences in the Homeric Hymns, in Nonnus’ Dionysiaca, in Callimachus’ Hymn to Zeus. I conclude with an appreciation of contextual parameters that make the priamel structurally cohere.

Keywords: First Homeric Hymn to Dionysus; textual criticism; ring-composition.

In 1994, André Hurst brought to light fragments of the First Homeric Hymn to Dionysus preserved in the Geneva papyrus 432. Fragment A, part of which was known through indirect transmission,1 deals with Dionysus’ birth from Zeus’ thigh at Nyse2 in the frame of a priamel that valorises this variant as true one among several competing birthplaces it disqualifies as false (bBacch. 1A.7 ψευδόμενοι).3 The priamel structure may overwhelm the opening section of the Hymn, but the actual incipit is missing, except for four letters that leave much to figure out. In this article, I do not set out to supplement the text exempli gratia as is usually the case in similar situations. On the contrary, I use intertextual evidence from the Homeric Hymns, signs of interformularity in the discourse of early Greek epic and hymn, and, finally, contextual cues that accentuate structural conformity. [A] The way to conceptualise intertextuality is by specifying the relation of an epigonic text to its predecessor.4 Current philological criticism uses an entire taxonomy of concepts in order to describe varying forms of connection between texts, such as allusion, echo, parallel, model, reminiscence/recollection, evocation, cue. In the Homeric Hymns to Dionysus, intertextuality warrants a category of verbal connections (however one may wish to call them) with other poetic compositions

✉ marios.skempis@gmail.com

1 1A.2–10: D. S. 3.66.3; 1A.9–10: D. S. 1.15.7, 4.2.4; Schol. in A. R. 2.1211.
2 On the myth of Dionysus’ birth see Gasparri 1986, 417; Gantz 1993, 112.
3 For the priamel see Dihle 2002, 428; Furley 2011, 225–6; Bernabé 2013, 59.
4 According to Genette 1997, 1–2, intertextual is “a relationship of copresence between two texts or among several texts: that is to say, eidetically and typically as the actual presence of one text within another”.

114:1 (2023) 7–19 • doi: 10.33063/er.v114i1.269
of a literate, rather than oral, song-culture, which proves itself by the sheer fact that the story at hand competes with the existence of a plethora of further known (therefore, obviously well-attested in written form) story variants about the birth of this particular deity. [B] Interformularity is “[s]peech [...] introduced in a way of signaling that a number of events [here: of discursive instantiations] are judged to be similar to each other. No single instance [...] has primacy in the sense that it is “first”, a prototype “quoted” by other, secondary, instances [...]”. I shall argue that interformular connections are a mean to the end of construing associative thinking expressed through the medium of typified language. [C] Context denotes ‘a joining together’, a conjunction, which consists of a number of components. It “is [...] a frame that surrounds the event being examined and provides resources for its appropriate interpretation”. Understanding context in hymnic narration designates how individual narrative segments are put together in the form of a sequence, and the reasons that underlie them. Hence, my method of doing textual criticism is one that reduces the degree of idiosyncratic textual conjecture, and thus draws on structural plausibility in ways that render a supplement consonant with intertextual, interformular, and contextual environments.

Given the sorry state of the opening line in the *First Homeric Hymn to Dionysus*, I supplement it in the following way by taking heed of several respects, which I discuss in detail below:

πῶς Διόνυσον πατρὸς ἀπ’ ἀθανάτοι ἀείσω;

How should I sing of Dionysus, starting from the immortal father?

In my apprehension, the hymnic narrator affectedly wonders how he should commit to the task of praising a deity as dubious as Dionysus. Since the succeeding part of the narration gives an account of the Nyse variant of Dionysus’ birth from Zeus’
thigh, I foreground the distinctive aspect of his single-parented birth by referring to Zeus, the begetter of men and gods, through the *periphrasis* ‘immortal father’. I also find it proper to infer that the divine *laudandus*’ personal name occurs in the very beginning of the narration.

I organise my argument along the lines of nine major points in order to be as lucid as possible about how I proceed with my belief that the *Hymn* opens in the way, which I suggested above:

1. objections to diplomatic transcription;
2. acknowledgment of Dionysus’ birth from Zeus in fragment A;
3. ring composition in fragments A and D;
4. link with the Nyse variant in the *Third Homeric Hymn to Dionysus*;
5. naming of the divine *laudandus* in the opening line;
6. hymnic self-reference in the *incipit* through a form of *ἀείδω*;
7. intertextuality with Nonnus’ *Dionysiaca*;
8. *priamel* as pointer to Callimachus’ *Hymn to Zeus*;
9. etymological wordplay.

I regard these nine thematic aspects as tokens of cogency for my argument. Here, I print the text together with the conjectured *incipit*:

πῶς Διόνυσον πατρὸς ἀπ’ ἀθ[ανάτοιο ἀείσω; 5
οἱ μὲν γὰρ Δρακάνωι σ’, οἱ δ’ Ἰκάρωι ἠνεμοέσση
φάσ’, οἱ δ’ ἐν Νάξωι, δῖον γένος ἀφαιριστά,
οἱ δὲ σ’ ἐπ’ Ἀλφεῖωι ποταμῶι βαθυδινήντι
κυσαμένην Σεμέλην τεκέειν Διὶ τερπικεραύνωι, 10
ἄλλοι δ’ ἐν Θήβαισιν ἄναξ σε λέγουσι γενέσθαι
ψευδόμενοι· σὲ δ’ ἔτικτε πατήρ ἀνδρῶν τε θεῶν τε
πολλὸν ἀπ’ ἀνθρώπων, κρύπτων λευκώλενον Ἦρην.
ἔστι δέ τις Νύση ὕπατον ὄρος ἀνθέον ὕληι
τηλοῦ Φοινίκης σχεδὸν Αἰγύπτοι ῥοάων·   15
(hBacch. 1A.1–10)11

How should I sing of Dionysus, starting from the immortal father?
For some say it was at Drakanos, some on windy Ikaros,
and some at Alpheios the deep-swirling river
that Semele conceived and bore you to Zeus whose sport is the thunderbolt,

10 On the problem of omitting this line see Hurst 1994, 319. The standard editions of the *Homeric Hymns* do not omit the line: Allen, Halliday, Sikes 1936, 1; Cassola 1975, 18. I consider the line authentic (see my discussion about the structural conceit of ring composition).

while others, Lord, say that it was at Thebes you were born.
All false! The father of gods and men gave you birth far from humankind, to conceal you from white-armed Hera.
There is a place Nyse, a mountain most high, burgeoning in forest, in a distant part of Phoenicia, almost at the waters of the Nile.  

Line 1 on the papyrus counts four letters, which are hard to discern. The photograph of the Geneva Library (P. Gen. 432, 3 118 recto) leaves several questions still open. Contrary to popular opinion that reads Π, I take the first letter to be C whose lower sideline is written in unison with the following letter in manner similar to the sequence OPOCAN in line 8. Lower and upper section of the preceding part of the papyrus are severely damaged. There could be remnants of the lower part of a horizontal stroke on the right side of a letter or signs of shading such as the ones above line 1 and elsewhere in the document. I cannot rule out the possibility of a round-shaped letter, given the squareness of O in the sequence MENOIKEA in line 14. Upon this very possibility rests my interpretation ΠΑΤΡΟ, which is endorsed by the seemingly quadruple shape of the fifth letter, presumably Θ according to West, which is written in a high position compared to the other letters of the line, just as my conjectured O may be. Anyhow, Π is impossible due to dead-end solutions such as forms of ἐνέπω, παπταῖνω, παππάζω or elision after Π. Second and third letter can be identified as Α and Π, judging from hand-writing in the rest of the document. Fourth letter resembles the contours of Α in micro-scale compared to the first one, though far less discernible. Scraps of a fifth letter have a curve on the left side, which points to O, E or Θ.

My main quibble against the three propositions put forward so far has to do with an aspect entirely irrelevant for the reconstitution of the text: it focuses on the uncomplicated part of the diplomatic transcription that deals with the placement of words in the exact position designated by the papyrus with respect to the other lines, which are wholly transmitted. For instance, André Hurst, in the editio princeps, prints ]παπ.[ approximately three letters after its original position, for the papyrus clearly reads that the in-between α is located directly above o of οἱ δ’ in the succeeding line:

---

12 I use the translation of West 2003, 27, *incipit* excepted. The form Ἐρραφιώτης, which is transmitted by Alcaeus (fr. 381 L-P), the epiteth’s earliest attested form, is a firm indication that it derives from Ἐρράφθαι [< Ἐρράφ- (Perfect stem) + -άφ-ιώτης (ending); see OF 328; Eur. Ba. 242–3; hOrph. 48.2–3; Nonn. D. 42.313; Hdn. Orbth. 3.2 p. 502 Lentz; Hsch. ε 1000; Eust. Comm. in D. P. Orb. des. 566 Müller; Ps.-Zon. E 627; Sud. ε 177; EG s.v. Ἐἰραφιώτης p. 425 de Stefani; EM s.v. Διώνυσος p. 280 Gaisford], and that Ἐιραφιώτης is a poetically elaborated, extended form. For the notional equation of the two forms see West 2011, 40.


14 A digital photograph of the papyrus has been published on the website of Bibliothèque de Genève:
http://www.ville-ge.ch/musinfo/bd/bge/papyrus/resultat_detail.php?limite=0. Date of electronic access was October 21, 2020.
Paul Schubert sets his own version \textit{παῖδες} [one letter before \textit{ο} of \textit{οἱ δ’} in the line that follows:

1
2 \textit{παῖδες}
3 \textit{οἱ μὲν γὰρ Δρακάνων οἱ δ’ Ἰκάρωι ἠνεμοέσσηι.}

Martin West goes even further than Schubert and places the first \textit{α} of his version \textit{παῖδες} [approximately three letters before \textit{ο} of \textit{οἱ δ’} in the next line:

1
2 \textit{παῖδες}
3 \textit{οἱ μὲν γὰρ Δρακάνωνι σ’, οἱ δ’ Ἰκάρωι ἠνεμοέσσηι.}

Should one judge from the metrical position of \textit{hBacch. 1A.2} (\textit{οἱ μὲν γὰρ Δρακάνωι σ’, οἱ δ’ Ἰκάρωι ἠνεμοέσσηι}), one may reasonably come to the conclusion that what survives in the incipit of the \textit{First Homeric Hymn to Dionysus} according to the Geneva papyrus, must occupy the latter part of a caesura \textit{kατὰ τρίτον τροχαῖον (˘¯˘˘¯˘˘¯¯)}.\footnote{For occurrences of this caesura in opening lines of early Greek poetry see Hom. \textit{Od}. 1; \textit{hAp}. III 1; \textit{hVen}. V 1; \textit{hDian}. IX 1; \textit{hVen}. X 1; \textit{hDiosc}. XVII 1; \textit{hMerc}. XIX 1; \textit{hHepb}. XX 1; \textit{hAp}. XXI 1; \textit{hPos}. XXII 1; \textit{hHepb}. XXIII 1; \textit{hHest}. XXIV 1; \textit{hBacch}. XXVI 1; \textit{hGa}. XXX 1; \textit{hSol}. XXXI 1.}

The \textit{priamel} consists of five placenames that rival each other for the birth of the god (Dracanus, Icarus, Naxus, Alpheius, Thebes), and end up losing the contest over Nyse: the site, which is finally prioritised. The hymnic narrator disqualifies these five placenames as fake and goes on to approve the latter as the only true one.\footnote{Jacob 1998, 46 argues that the poet of the \textit{First Homeric Hymn to Dionysus} emerges as claimant of self-esteem with regard to the untraditional stance toward established versions of the myth and defender of truth in a mouldable tradition.}

In spite of what appears to be a multifarious contest over Dionysus’ birthplace, the actual rivalry concerns Thebes and Nyse, judging from the way these sites parallel each other in terms of discourse: whereas the \textit{periphrasis} δἰὸν γένος εἰραφιῶτα “you, divine offspring, sewed-up” \textit{(hBacch. 1A.3)}, which is placed after the first two variants, Dracanus and Icarus, alludes to the birth from Zeus, the ‘Thebes variant deploys the verb ‘beget’ in order to designate the birth from Semele \textit{(hBacch. 1A.6 ἄλλοι δ’ ἐν Θῆβαισιν ἄναξ σε λέγουσι γενέσθαι).} The parallel γένος/γενέσθαι somewhat compromises the dynamic of the \textit{priamel} because it sets up a narrative framework, which is marked by the allusion to Dionysus’ birth from Zeus’ thigh, on the
one hand, and by the explicit attestation of his birth from Semele, on the other. It is most likely that the *incipit* accommodated the personal name Διόνυσος, followed by the circumlocution δῖον γένος in the second line, which serves as etymological explanation. In this way, the opening *priamel* makes sense for it answers the initial question of the hymnic narrator about how he ought to praise Dionysus’ birth from his immortal father: by recounting the Nyse variant.

The conjectured *incipit* I put forward, forms a ring composition with the Nyse variant of Dionysus’ birth, which is prioritised over others on the basis of veracity in 1A.9–10. The proposed junction πατρὸς ἀπ’ ἀθανάτοι “starting from the immortal father” that fits the four-letter-space from metrical and notional point of view, given that *Homeric Hymns* acknowledge the divine *laudandus*’ parentage in their beginning,21 comes full circle in 1A.7 (σὲ δ’ ἔτικτε πατὴρ ἄνδρῶν τε θεῶν τε)22 in which it is explicitly stated that the narration at issue privileges Dionysus’ birth at Nyse from (the thigh of) Zeus, the father of men and gods, over several other discredited stories. I draw special attention to the structural conceit of ring composition because the surviving fragments of the narration itself pay tribute to this compositional strategy:

```plaintext
1. 1A.1 πατρὸς ἀπ’ ἀθανάτοιο ~ 1D.6 κρατὸς ἀπ’ ἀθανάτοιο
2. 1A.1 Διόνυσον ~ 1A.3 δῖον γένος ~ 1A.5 τεκέειν Διί ~ 1A.7 ἔτικτε πατὴρ
3. 1A.3 εἰραφιῶτα ~ 1D.11 εἰραφιῶτα
4. 1A.5 Σεμέλην ~ 1D.12 Σεμέληι
5. 1A.6 ἄναξ ~ 1D.5 ἄνακτος
6. 1D.8 ἵληθ’ ~ 1D.10 ἐπιληθόμενον
7. 1D.8 ἀοιδοὶ ~ 1D.9 ἀίδομεν ~ 1D.10 ἀοιδῆς
```

One may deduce from the items listed above that the narration as a whole engineers three different sorts of ring composition: [1] ring composition that occupies the start (items 1–2); [2] ring composition that occupies the end (items 6–7); [3] ring composition that occupies beginning and end (items 3–5). As opposed to the in-between disclaimer of diverse traditions concerning the birth of Dionysus, the conjectured junction πατρὸς ἀπ’ ἀθανάτοιο,23 a modifier of the interformular junction

---

22 See West 2011, 30.
23 The implication is that Dionysus, the divine offspring of the immortal father, is also immortal. On the immortality of Dionysus see Hes. *Th.* 941–2; Philod. *Pae. in Dion.* 57–62 CA; Ar. *Ra.* 631. For the junction ἀθανάτος Ζεύς see Hom. *Il.* 2.741; 14.434; 21.2; 24.693; *H. Eliz. Ξέν.* 5; Nonn. *D.* 25.242.
κρατὸς ἀπ’ ἀθανάτοιο,\(^{24}\) sets the stage for the focalisation of Dionysus’ paternal descent, which constitutes the theme of fragment A.\(^{25}\)

The priamel’s structure juxtaposes Dionysus’ birth from Zeus at Nyse (1A.7–10)\(^{26}\) to his birth from Semele at Thebes (1A.5–7), which is rejected as a lie next to further traditions. The reign of the father, the supreme authority of Zeus, which is exemplified through the singularity of paternal filiation, is what the narration of this particular hymnic instantiation, the *First Homeric Hymn to Dionysus*, recognises as truth. The conjectured junction πατρός ἀπ’ ἀθανάτοιο should be viewed in context with the Nyse variant of the *Third Homeric Hymn to Dionysus*, which furnishes two references to Zeus as Dionysus’ father: [1] nymphs receive Dionysus from the divine father to rear and foster (26.3 παρὰ πατρὸς ἄνακτος); [2] he grows up at a distance from his father in company of numerous immortals (26.5 πατρὸς ἔκητι).\(^{27}\) The emphasis put on paternal filiation in the Nyse variant of the *First Homeric Hymn to Dionysus*\(^{28}\) is in accord with references to Zeus as father of Dionysus in the *Third Homeric Hymn to Dionysus* (26.2 Ζηνὸς [...] υἱόν; 26.5 πατρὸς ἔκητι) and justify the conjectured junction in the incipit in terms of thematically determined intertextuality.

A typical referential habit of *Homeric Hymns* is to name the divine laudandus in the opening section.\(^{29}\) Considering that δῖον γένος ‘divine progeny’ (1A.3) functions as antonomasia for Διόνυσος\(^{30}\) in the ring compositional framework set up by the sequences δῖον γένος εἰραφιῶτα (1A.3) in the beginning and Διώνυσ’ εἰραφιῶτα (1D.11) in the end, one expects an occurrence of the laudandus’ name in the incipit (Διόνυσον).\(^{31}\) The name Διόνυσος is etymologically thought to derive from Δίός

---

\(^{24}\) Hom. II. 1.530; hBacch. 1D.6; hLun. XXX 4; AP Epigr. sep. 635.15 κρατὸς ἀπ’ ἀθανάτοιο; cf. Hom II. 14.177 έκ κράατος ἄθανάτοιο. The formula κρατὸς ἀπ’ ἀθανάτοιο “from his/her immortal head” always occupies the initial metrical position of a hexameter verse. This is a symptomatic instance of ‘traditional phraseology’, as John Miles Foley has termed it, which “locates “words” of substantial metrical extent” within semantically “available units” (Foley 1995, 52) and thus pays tribute to what he comprehends as ‘register’, “a particular selection of words and structures” […] “in terms of meaning” (Foley 1995, 50). For ‘dedicated register’ in *Homeric Hymns* see Foley 1995, 150–60. On the genitive singular -οι (here, in the adjective ἄθανάτοι) see Horrocks 1997, 207–8; Foley 1999, 77, 294 notes 40–1.

\(^{25}\) Il. VI 132 mentions the ‘Nysean [mountain]’ (ἡγάθεον Νυσῆιον) in the frame of the Lycurgus episode where Dionysus is said to have been taken to this site by nymphs so he may be nurtured. See LfgrE s.v. Νῦση, Νυσῆιον (ὄρος); Kirk 1990, 174.

\(^{26}\) LfgrE s.v. Νῦση, Νυσῆιον (ὄρος); Kirk 1990, 174.

\(^{27}\) For further instances outside the *Homeric Hymns* see Eur. Ba. 1340–3; Nonn. D. 9.16–24. One may also compare the presentation of Heracles’ contested descent from Zeus: Hom. II. 5.635.

\(^{28}\) At different places, when early Greek poetry talks about Dionysus’ birth, it mentions Semele only (Hes. Th. 940–2; hBacch. 7.1, 7.56–8; see Herrero de Jáuregui 2013, 236–7) or both parents (Hom. II. 14.325; hBacch. 26.2).

\(^{29}\) See West 2003, 3; Nagy 2011, 327.

\(^{30}\) On Dionysus’ polyonymy see Bierl 2013.

\(^{31}\) The majority of the *Homeric Hymns* name the laudandus in the first line. There are two exceptions to this general rule: [i] the *Homeric Hymn to Pan*, which addresses Hermes as father of Pan in...
(gen.) and the Thracian gloss νῦσος ‘son’, and, thus, to convey the sense ‘son of Zeus’.\(^{32}\) The junction δῖον γένος may acquire a Thracian connotation with a view to the etymology of Dionysus’ name for a Thracian mountain clan bears the name Δῖος ‘offspring of Zeus’.\(^{33}\) Note that Nyse was thought to be located, next to other places, in Thrace, a variant that is not supported here by the hymnic narration.\(^{34}\) Thus, the junction δῖον γένος suggests a glossing of the name Διόνυσος as ‘son of Zeus’ against a Thracian linguistic backdrop, apart from its rendition as ‘divine offspring’ in the epic-Ionic discourse, especially since the follow-up appellation εἰραφιῶτα ‘sewed-up’ points to Dionysus’ birth from the thigh of Zeus.

The hymnic function of \textit{Homeric Hymns} is frequently conveyed in the \textit{incipit} with a verbal form of ἀείδω ‘to sing’\(^{35}\) or the congener ἀοιδή ‘song’. Verbal forms with the stem ἀεισ- usually occupy the midpoint of a line in the \textit{Homeric Hymns},\(^{36}\) yet ἀείσω, my supplement for the \textit{clausula},\(^{37}\) occurs in connection with Dionysus in particular in the opening section [I] of Nonnus’ \textit{Dionysiaca} (1.29 Δίονυσον ἀείσω) where he is referred to as ‘son of Zeus’ (1.24 υμνήσω Διὸς υἷα; cf. 1A.3)\(^{38}\) and as ‘son of Thyone’ (1.26–7 υἷα Θυώνης | ἀείσω; cf. 1D.12).\(^{39}\) A further reason that compels me to deploy this form in the \textit{clausula} is metrical: after the conjectured junction πατρὸς ἀπ’ ἀθανάτοι, there is room for three syllables. Next to the metrical con-
finement, I have taken into consideration the influential imitation of the *priamel* in the *First Homeric Hymn to Dionysus* by Callimachus’ *Hymn to Zeus*:

\[
\text{Ζηνὸς ἔοι τί κεν ἄλλο παρὰ σπονδῆισιν ἀείδειν}
\]

\[
\text{λώϊον ἢ θεὸν αὐτόν, ἀεὶ μέγαν, αἰὲν ἄνακτα;}
\]

\[
\text{Πηλαγόνων ἔλατῆρα, δικασπόλον Οὐρανίδηισι;}
\]

\[
\text{πῶς καὶ νῦν, Δικταῖοι ἄεισομεν ἠὲ Λυκαῖον;}
\]

\[
\text{Ζεῦ, σὲ μὲν Ἰδαίοισιν ἐν ὀφρῇσι φασί γενέθηκα,}
\]

\[
\text{Ζεῦ, σὲ δ’ ἐν Ἀρκαδίηι- πότεροι, πάτερ, ἐψεύσαντο;}
\]

\[(\text{Call. Jov. 1–7})\]

The correspondences between the two texts are worth noting: [a] honorific appellation of the *laudandus* as ‘lord’ (1A.6 ἄναξ ~ Jov. 2 ἄνακτα); [b] enquiry into lineage (1A.3 γένος ~ Jov. 5 γένος); [c] *Du-Stil* (1A.2 σ’, 1A.6 σ’, 1A.7 σ’ ~ Jov. 6 σ’, Jov. 7 σ’); [d] dependence on tradition (1A.3 φᾶσ’ ~ Jov. 6 φασί); [e] antithetical ordering of views (1A.2 μὲν [...] δ’, 1A.3 δ’, 1A.4 δέ, 1A.6 δ’, 1A.7 δ’ ~ Jov. 6 μὲν, Jov. 7 δ’); [f] competing birthplaces (1A.2 Δρακάνωι [...] Ἰκάρωι, 1A.3 ἐν Νάξωι, 1A.4 ἐπ’ Ἀλφειῶι, 1A.6 ἐν Θήβηισι ~ Jov. 6 Ἰδαίοισιν ἐν ὀφρῇσι, Jov. 7 ἐν Ἀρκαδίηι); [g] condemnation of lying (1A.7 ψευδόμενοι ~ Jov. 7 ἐψεύσαντο). Taking the major influence of the archaic hymn on the Hellenistic into account, which deploys twice a verbal form of ἀείδω, once in the *clausula* of the *incipit* (Jov. 1 ἀείδειν) and a second time in aporetic manner (Jov. 4 πῶς [...] ἀείδειν [...] ἀείσω;),\(^{41}\) I supplement the *incipit* of the *First Homeric Hymn to Dionysus* with a direct question in future tense (πῶς [...] ἀείσω;)\(^{42}\) whose verbal element takes heed not only of formal conventions of *Homeric Hymns* as I argued above, but also of hymnic instantiations of Dionysus in classical and late antique poetry.\(^{43}\)

Having brought forth intertextual arguments for my supplementation, I turn to the contextual environments that make it plausible from a structural point of view. In a hymnic narration that aims to validate truth (1A.9 ἔστι δέ τις) over falsehood (1A.7 ψευδόμενοι), a preliminary question about how one should commence his topic, is due (1A.1 πῶς). Etymologising the personal name of the *laudandus* is a habitual practice that enhances the ingenuity of the hymnic narration (1A.1 Διόνυσον ~ 1A.3 δῖον γένος).\(^{44}\) The theme of divine birth is central (1A.7 σὲ δ’ ἐτικτε πατὴρ ἀνδρῶν

\(^{40}\) See West 2011, 41; Stephens 2015, 55.

\(^{41}\) For the affected hymnic *aporia* cf. *hAp*. 19 = 207 πῶς τ’ ἄρ σ’ ύμνήσω πάντως εὔυμνον ἐόντα; with Nagy 2009, 211–12.

\(^{42}\) On the final section of the *First Homeric Hymn to Dionysus* that gives emphasis to song performance with forms of ἀείδω (1D8–10), see Bierl 2017, 252–3.

\(^{43}\) Eur. *Ba*. 72, 155.

\(^{44}\) For (par)etymologies of divine names in *Homeric Hymns* see: *hDem*. II 122 Δώς (μὲν) ἐμοὶ γ’ ὄνομ’ ἐστι· τὸ γὰρ δέτο πότνια μητήρ (δίδωμι/Δημήτηρ); *hAp*. 13 = 8 ἀλ’ ἐμὸν καὶ ἐκδίδησαν, ὡσ’ τῷ ἔθνῃ | *Φοῖβος* δέξαται (Φοῖβος/φόβος), 52–3 *Φοῖβου Απόλλωνος*, θέσθαι τ’ ἐν πίνακα νηόν. | ἄλλος δ’ οὖ τις σείδ πόδ’ ἄνετα (Ἀπόλλων/Ἀλλός: Ἀπόλλωνος), 140–3 αὐτὸς δ’ ἀργυρότετο ἀνάξ εκατηβέλ’ Ἀπόλλων, | ἄλλοτε μὲν τ’ ἐπὶ Κύνθου ἐβήσατο ποιμαλάδεντος, | ἄλλοτε δ’ ἐν νήσους τε καὶ ἀνέρας ἠλάσκαζες.
Marios Skempis

τε θεῶν τε) and, in this particular case, involves the acknowledgment of divine descent (1A.1 πατρός ἀπ’ ἀθανάτοιο), a starting-point for putting the narration in theogonic context, and the birthplace of the laudandus (1A.9 Νύση), which contrives a wordplay by drawing on νύσσα ‘starting-/turning-point’ that a truthful variant signifies over false ones, and on the personal name Διόνυσος (< Δίος + νύσος ‘son’), thus setting the initial naming practice in contextually circular course.

Bibliography


| πόλος | τοι νομετομένο ελκομένου (Ἀπόλλων/Ἀλλο-τε/πόλοι), 299–31 ού τινε τε προτερομεν οὐκ εἶκε (Ἐρμῆς ἔρημε 'pile of stones' ~ ἀντρον 'stone cavern'), 46–8 δε ἀντονομασε αὑτὸν κώμαυν Εἰραφιώτης [ ... | παιδαρίων δια νύστα λιθορρίνοις χελώνιος (Ἑρμῆς/ἐρήμα 'pile of stones' ~ πέτρη 'stone'). 404 πέτρη ἐπὶ ἑλιβάτῳ, τάχα δ’ ἀντείκλες Ἐρμῆς; Παν ΧΙΧ 1–4 ἀμφί μοι Εἰραφιώτης φίλον γόνον ἐννέα εἰς ὀρείαν Ἐρμῆς. [ ... | αἱ τε κατ’ αἰγίλλοπες πέτρας στείβουσι κάρηνα (Ἑρμῆς/ἐρήμα 'pile of stones' ~ πέτρη 'stone').

The placename Νύση is etymologically linked with the word νύσσα, which according to Pherecydes, denotes the tree (FGrHist 3 F 178 δηλοὶ δὲ Ἡφαιστίῳ, καὶ μετ’ ἐκείνου Ἀντίοχος, λέγοντες καὶ διὰ τούτο κεκληθήμεν Διόνυσον, ὡς ἐκ Δίος εἰς νύσσας ρέοντα νύσας γάρ, φησίν, ἐκάλουσι τὰ δέντρα). The Nyse variant supports this etymological derivation of the placename because it “flourishes in forest”, and puns on the name of Dionysus.

46 See LfgrE s.v.
“Starting from the Immortal Father”: The Incipit of the First Homeric Hymn to Dionysus • 17


“Starting from the Immortal Father”: The Incipit of the First Homeric Hymn to Dionysus • 19

P.Gen. inv. 432r