

Dionysian Resonance in Athenaios' Hymn to Apollo

My paper explores an unappreciated poetic device in the first two lines of the 2nd c. BCE hymn to Apollo attributed to Athenaios:

[Προμόλεθ' Ἑλικ]ῶνα βαθύδενδρον αἱ λά-

[χετε, Διὸ]ς ἐ[ρι]βρόμου θύγατρεις εὐώλ[ενοι,]

[Come forth!] You who have Deep-Wooded Helikon as your allotted portion,

Fair-Armed daughters of Loud-Roaring Zeus.

The text has received little literary attention. Prior scholarship has been concerned primarily with establishing the reading of the text (especially the accompanying musical notation), as well as its performative context. Difficulties with vocabulary have been glossed to resolve any perceived oddities, such as Zeus being described as ἐριβρόμος rather than the expected ἐριβρεμέτης (Bélis, 1992; Pöhlmann & West, 2001; Furley & Bremer, 2001; etc.). These oddities, properly understood, suggest a heretofore unnoticed degree of artistic merit and illuminate an under-discussed aspect of audience reception.

In these two lines the poet employs three epithets in close order: “Deep-Wooded” Helikon, and the “Fair-Armed” daughters of “Loud-Roaring” Zeus. These are easy to read as descriptive adjectives, however they are unprecedented in composition with these nouns. Each by itself might be nothing to remark upon, but in combination they are suggestive of a Dionysian resonance. (βαθύδενδρος is a hapax, but see βαθυξύλος in Euripides, *Bacchai* 1138, and later Nonnus, *Dionysiaka* 45.203; ‘Διόνυσος ἐρίβρομος in *Homeric Hymns to Dionysos* 7.56, 26.1; one expects λευκώλενοι rather than εὐώλενοι, and thus a scholiast glosses Pindar, *Paean* 9, a compliment applied to goddesses, but also to mortal women, significantly the variant λευκοπήχης in Euripides *Bacchai* 1206.) In my paper, I explore the history, usage, and

etymology of each of these epithets. I also make brief comment on the “famous Delphian women,” whom lines 5 and 6 have dance with Apollo upon Mount Parnassus. It is significant that the Athenians regularly sent a *theoria* of women to play the role of maenads (the Thyiades) in honor of Dionysos in this location (McInerney, 1997).

In this hymn to Apollo we find a textual practice similar to contemporary graphic depiction at Delphi, where Dionysos was portrayed upon the Western pediment of the temple to Apollo with Apollonian accoutrements (Croissant, 1994). This blurring of lines between the two gods at Delphi has been discussed, especially with regards to Philodamos’ paian to Dionysos (Stewart, 1982; Strauss-Clay, 1996). Prior discussion has focused on the more explicit features of Philodamos’ text, as well as how they relate to sculpture. My paper shows how this blurring of the gods could be evoked textually with nuance and subtlety. Additionally, and quite importantly, a consideration of the reception of these epithets should encourage us to diversify the audience. At least two, non-exclusionary, audiences may be constituted by Athenaios’ hymn: 1) The general audience able to understand Greek, recognize mythological reference, and appreciate musical performance; 2) a more select audience constituted by the ability to perceive (*receive*) the potential resonance of these terms and able to nod with approbation at the subtle, yet traditional by this time, blending of Dionysus and Apollo within the Delphic context.

Bibliography

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