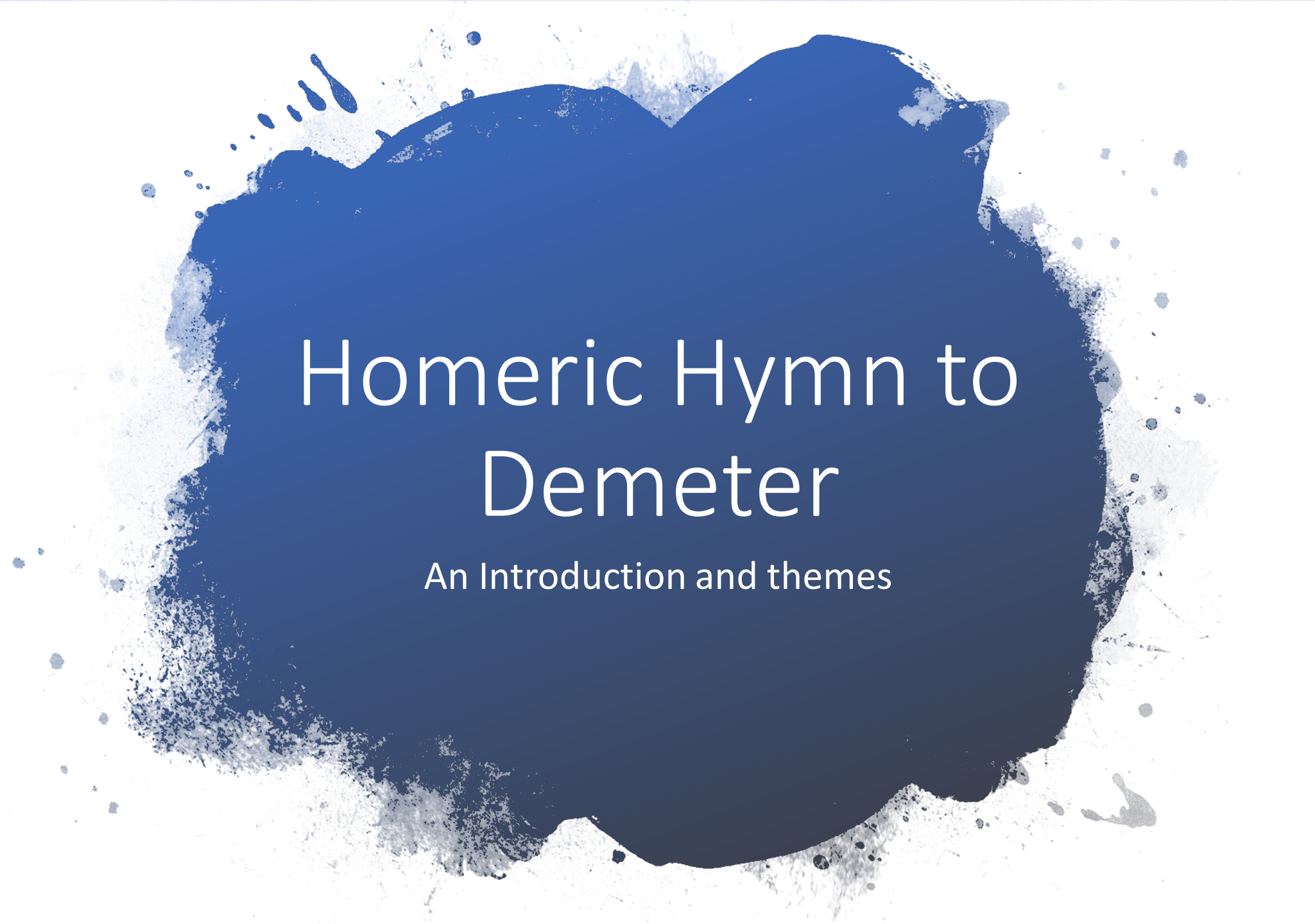




Homeric Hymn to Demeter

An Introduction and themes

A story of discovery





Russian peasant dwelling circa 1900, Prokudin-Gorsky collection

The Discoverer:
Christian Frederick
Matthaei (4 March 1744,
Mücheln – 26 September
1811), a Thuringian,
palaeographer, classical
philologist, professor
first at Wittenberg and
then at Moscow.



*Вірамо
Матфеюмъ Мухельнъ*



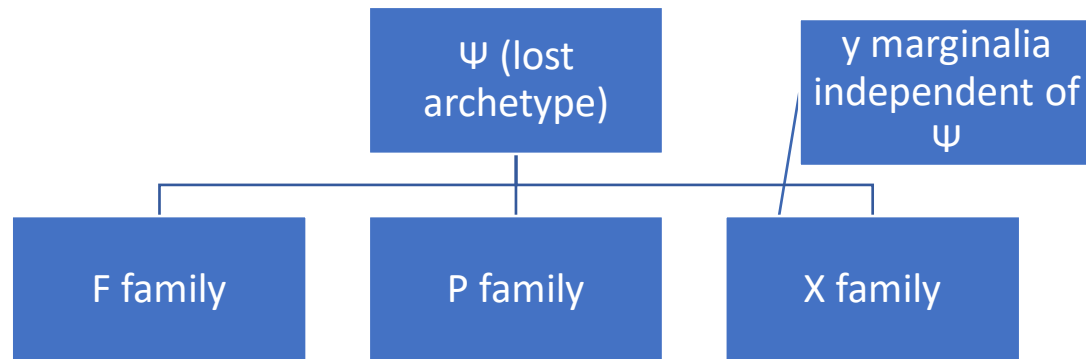
Leidensis BPG 33H

Discovered by Matthaei in Moscow Holy Synod
Library in 1777

Taken/stolen and given to Leiden

The manuscripts

Major transmission – all hymns EXCEPT Demeter



Total surviving: 28 manuscripts

Hymn to Demeter

?? (definitely NOT Ψ)

M (the one from Moscow – c1400)

M² (corrections to M – 16th C)

The effect of one manuscript

- HHD from one MS (M)

“But when the earth starts blossoming with fragrant flowers of springtime,
flowers of every sort, then it is that you must come up from the misty realms of darkness,
once again, a great thing of wonder to gods and mortal humans alike.” (*HHD* 401ff., Demeter to Persephone)

- "These lines are incomplete: the gaps in the text are caused by a tear in the manuscript (the *Hymn to Demeter* is preserved in only one medieval manuscript). The reconstructed context: Persephone also runs to her mother. Demeter finds out that Persephone has eaten of the pomegranate that had been offered her by Hadês. It is determined that Persephone must therefore stay in Hadês for one-third of the year, even though she may spend the other two-thirds with her mother." (Nagy, n. 45)

Themes: Time - Honour

- TIMH is honour in archaic poetry, and is a classical value of both heroes and gods.
- e.g. relationships between gods and men; *τιμή* (honour)
- Men are to give gods honour
- Homeric hymns and evolution of divine relationships:
 - Apollo & Hermes = changing the existing divine order (new gods to be added)
 - Demeter & Aphrodite = changing the existing relationships between men and gods
- SO: Same world but different perspective from Homeric Epic or Hesiod.

Themes: power
games in the HHD;
development of
cosmic order;
divine honour.

- Zeus gets more power (marriage to Hades links the Underworld with Earth and Olympus) BUT power also challenged: forced to compromise
- Power of Demeter: attempt to bestow immortality upon Demophoon; threat of famine; (partial) restoration of daughter; Persephone gets the role of queen of the underworld.
- “And he promised *tímai* that he would give to her [Demeter], which she could receive in the company of the immortal gods. He [Zeus] assented that her daughter, every time the season came round, would spend a third portion of the year in the realms of dark mist underneath, and the other two thirds in the company of her mother and the other immortals” (HHD 443-7)
- Think of the divine female. Contrast:
 - “Calypso, the beautiful goddess, shuddered, and she spoke, and addressed him with winged words: “Cruel are ye, O ye gods, and quick to envy above all others, seeing that ye begrudge goddesses that they should mate with men [120] openly, if any takes a mortal as her dear bed-fellow. Thus, when rosy-fingered Dawn took to herself Orion, ye gods that live at ease begrudged her, till in Ortygia chaste Artemis of the golden throne assailed him with her gentle shafts and slew him. [125] Thus too, when fair-tressed Demeter, yielding to her passion, lay in love with Iasion in the thrice-ploughed fallow land, Zeus was not long without knowledge thereof, but smote him with his bright thunder-bolt and slew him. And even so again do ye now begrudge me, O ye gods, that a mortal man should abide with me.” Hom. Od. 5.117-130

Themes: Plans

- Μηδεα = plan or council.
- In Hesiod exclusively to Zeus.
- Contrast HHD:
 - Demeter plans: l.453
 - Zeus does NOT plan well: 90-4, 201
 - Demeter's plans bring loss of TIMH: 350-4
- NOTE:
 - Zeus gets Olympus by LOT in HHD (85-6): "As for privileges, he has the portion he was allotted originally in the threefold division" (just like in the Iliad)
 - Zeus gets Olympus by planning and being better in Hesiod
- Does the HHD show Zeus' limits over the female? Fecundity?

Who has the power?

- “At this moment, she [Demeter] could have destroyed the entire race of meropes humans with harsh hunger, thus depriving of their *tîmê* the dwellers of the Olympian abodes—[the *tîmê* of] sacrificial portions of meat for eating or for burning, if Zeus had not noticed with his **noos**, taking note in his thûmos.” (HHD 310-14)
- “however unwilling Persephone has been to be led off by Hades and to remain for some part of the year in his home, through her marriage she gains a new importance and a kingdom of her own” (Lefkowitz 1993: 33, “Seduction and Rape in Greek Myth” in *Consent and Coercion to Sex and Marriage in Ancient and Medieval Societies* ed Laiou)
 - Note who speaks these words
 - Is it Persephone or Hades?
 - How does PERSEPHONE react to her future?



Human/divine interaction: isolation > integration

- “She went away, visiting the cities of humans, with all their fertile landholdings, shading over her appearance, for a long time. And not one of men, looking at her, could recognize her. Not one of women, either, who are accustomed to wear their girdles low-slung...” (*HHD* 93-5)
- “She was seen by the daughters of Keleos, son of Eleusinos,” (*HHD* 105)
- “they [Demeter and Persephone] went to Olympus, to join the company of the other gods.” (*HHD* 484)
- “In her anger at the one who is known for his dark clouds, the son of Kronos, she shunned the company of gods and lofty Olympus.” (*HHD* 91-2)



Human/divine interaction: isolation > integration

- “But no one was willing to tell her the truth [*etêtuma*], not one of the gods, not one of the mortal humans, not one of the birds, messengers of the truth” (*HHD* 44-6)
-
- “But he, all by himself, was seated far apart from the gods, inside a temple, the precinct of many prayers. He was receiving beautiful sacrificial rites from mortal humans.” (*HHD* 27-9, of Zeus)
- Contrast:
- “But blond-haired Demeter sat down and stayed there [in the temple], shunning the company of all the blessed ones [the gods].” (*HHD* 303-4)

Separation

- Where is Zeus during the abduction? Not there: “he began to drive her off on his golden chariot, with her wailing and screaming as she called on her father Zeus, the highest and noblest. But no one heard her voice, none of the immortals or of mortal men, nor yet the olive trees with their resplendent fruit—except that Perses’ daughter still innocent of heart, Hecate of the glossy veil, heard from her cave, and so did the lord Helios, Hyperion’s resplendent son, as the maiden called on her father Zeus: he, however, was seated apart, away from the gods, in his prayerful temple, **receiving fine offerings from mortals.**”
- Consider how the mortal world (directly for Demeter, indirectly for Zeus) acts as the separator/isolator



humans/gods: interest in contrast

- “Old Mother, we humans endure the gifts the gods give us, even when we are grieving over what has to be.” (*HHD* 146-7, Kallidike)
- “*Olbios* is he whom they, being kind, decide to love among earth-bound mortals” (*HHD* 486-7)
- “Those who violate *dikê*— will get punishment for all days to come —those who do not supplicate your *menos* with sacrifice, performing the rituals in a reverent way, executing perfectly the offerings that are due.” (*HHD* 367-9, Hades to Persephone)
- “There were four of them, looking like goddesses with their bloom of adolescence” (*HHD* 108)



humans/gods:
interest in
similarity

- “She [Demeter] in the meantime went over to the threshold and stood on it, with feet firmly planted, and her head reached all the way to the ceiling. And she filled the whole indoors with a divine light.
- She [Metaneira] was seized by a sense of *aidôs*, by a holy wonder, by a blanching fear.” (*HHD* 188-90)
- “For, right now, you look like the gods.” (*HHD* 159)



humans/gods: interest in similarity II

- Deity in disguise wondering the mortal world = common motif in Greek myth (and elsewhere):
 - “Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.” Hebrews 13.2 (think of Sodom and Gomora story)
- Deities expect hospitality – testing mortals’ morals:
 - “They soon reached their father’s mansion, and quickly told their mother what they had seen and heard. She told them to go quickly and invite the woman to come, at an unstinting wage.” HHD 171-3
 - “The object most worthy of mention is a sanctuary of Demeter on Pron. This sanctuary is said by the Hermionians to have been founded by Clymenus, son of Phoroneus, and Chthonia, sister of Clymenus. But the Argive account is that when Demeter came to Argolis, while Atheras and Mysius afforded hospitality to the goddess, Colontas neither received her into his home nor paid her any other mark of respect. His daughter Chthoia disapproved of this conduct. They say that Colontas was punished by being burnt up along with his house, while Chthonia was brought to Hermion by Demeter, and made the sanctuary for the Hermionians.” Paus. 2.35.4

impact on men of
relationships
between gods
(famine threat)

- κύντερος , α, ον, Comp. Adj. formed from κύων, **A.** *more dog-like*, i.e. *more shameless* (cf. “κύων” 11), *Hom.* only in neut.,
“ἐπεὶ οὐ σέο κύντερον ἄλλο” **Il.8.483**;
“οὐ . . κ. ἄλλο γυναικός” **Od.11.427**;
“οὐ γάρ τι στυγερῇ ἐπὶ γαστέρι κ. ἄλλο” **7.216**; *more horrible*,
“κ. ἄλλο ποτ’ ἔτλης” **20.18**: later in masc.,
“κυνῶν κύντερος” *Anon. ap. Suid. s.v. Διον υσίων*.

- “ But grief yet **more terrible and savage** came into the heart of Demeter” HHD 90
- “ Then she caused **a most dreadful and cruel year** for mankind over the all-nourishing earth” HHd 305-6

The power of the commentary

Discussion on all texts is partially linguistic – a commentary can help you there more than anything else.

90–97 In the *Hymn*, Demeter's motive for wandering on earth and withdrawing from the gods is *anger at Zeus* (*chôsamenê*, 91. At 90, her grief [*achos*] is *kynteron*, more brutal, shameless, or bestial; at 306 mortals experience a *kyntaton* year, due to Demeter's famine.) In other versions she comes to earth to search for her daughter. The wanderings of disguised deities on earth and the difficulty of recognizing them are standard motifs in Greek myth.⁴² Often these deities aim to test the piety or hospitality of mortals, and mortals who fail to recognize or who mistreat the gods are punished. Although the Eleusinians are admirably hospitable, Demeter is not aiming explicitly to test them; nor do they as individuals receive rewards or punishments in a fashion directly related to their treatment of the goddess. (By contrast Pausanias 2.35.3 reports an Argive legend in which one family was punished for rejecting Demeter, while another was rewarded for receiving