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Language Use and Iconicity in the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* (182–206): Meter and Poetics, Orality and Storytelling[1]

Abstract
L'inizio della cosiddetta sezione delfica dell'*Inno omerico ad Apollo* illustra una scena di esecuzione corale da parte di Apollo e alcune precise divinità sul Monte Olimpo. Aspetti formali e tecniche poetiche, come la composizione ad anello, marcano i versi 182–206 come un'unità narrativa a sé stante. Nella narrazione è presente anche un elemento di iconicità, come la figura del cerchio, che è possibile analizzare attraverso la linguistica cognitiva. Infine, il passaggio epico (*HHAp* 182–206) viene studiato nell'ottica della letteratura orale, la poetica indoeuropea comparata e l'analisi formale della poesia. Nonostante alcune anomalie metriche e stilistiche, che vengono analizzate come una precisa "intenzione" del cantore (Werner Knobl), il brano mostra una precisa costruzione con l'obiettivo di celebrare il *kleos* di Apollo attraverso il suo Oracolo a Delfi.

Parole chiave: Iconicità e linguistica cognitiva; Anomalie metriche; Poesia e performance; Composition ad anello e arte del racconto; Dizione poetica greca e indoeuropea.

The beginning of the so-called Pythian movement of the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* presents a song-and-dance scene of Apollo and certain deities on Mount Olympus. Thanks to some formal and poetic features, such as ring composition, verses 182–206 consist of a narrative core which exhibits the cognitive linguistic feature of iconicity, namely the circular shape. This epic passage (*HHAp* 182–206) is then investigated in the frame of oral literature, comparative Indo-European poetics and formal poetic

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[1] **Acknowledgement:** I dedicate this essay to my Vedic poetry teacher and friend, Werner Franz Knobl (1942–2023), with whom I shared the passion for the formal analysis of poetry, the interface between sound and poetic storytelling, and the dream of reading the minds of poets. All the translations from Ancient Greek and Old Indo-Aryan in this article are mine. Greek author and works' abbreviations follow those of *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek*, except for the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* which is here abbreviated as *HHAp* for reasons of clarity. It is understood that the responsibility for the article is entirely mine.

analysis. The text presents awkwardness in meter and diction, which are argued as being a precise "intent" of the poet (Werner Knobl). Nevertheless, the passage exhibits a precise composition and aims to celebrate Apollo's *kleos* through his Oracle at Delphi.

Keywords: Iconicity and cognitive linguistics; Metrical anomalies; Poetry and performance; Ring composition and storytelling; Greek and Indo-European poetic diction.

1. Introduction

The present paper is structured as it follows. After the philological contextualization of verses 182–206 of the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* (§1.1), the theoretical framework concerns iconicity, namely from a standpoint of cultural anthropology and cognitive linguistics (§1.2). The text of the analyzed section of the *Hymn* is presented and divided into thematic and narrative cores, together with a translation and interpretation (§2). The commentary consists of the main part of this article and is structured in three moments. First, the formal features, such as meter, diction and poetic figures (§3). Then, interpretation of the hymnic passage, operating a comparison with choral melic and tragic poetries, and describing the storytelling (§4). Finally, a broader iconic and cognitive image from *HHAp* 186–206, revealing the aim of poetry and the celebration of the Oracle of Delphi, in the frame of Indo-European poetic phraseology (§5).

1.1. The Structure of the Hymn and the Philological Problem

There has been a debate among scholars about the composition and structure of the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*. It clearly exhibits a bipartite structure: the so-called Delian movement (verses 1–181) and the so-called Pythian one (verses 182–546), as described in the 'classical' work by Richard Janko (1982: XIV). As for the whole Homeric question, the *Hymn to Apollo* also provides support for both positions: that of a unitarian view and that of separatist theory. It is the latter which seems the prevailing one today (for a detailed history of the theories, see Chappell 2011).

The Delian section appears stylistically superior in diction and storytelling, and is generally dated to the mid 7th century BCE, albeit not unanimously. On the other hand, the Pythian part exhibits unconventional composition and epic diction (see Kirk 1981: 174), and is generally dated to the early 6th century

BCE. It is here assumed that the Delian and the Pythian movements consist of two different hymns which were then merged in the same textual tradition. For this reason, the Pythian section lacks a proem (see Càssola 1975: 99): it opens with a great scene of "song-and-dance"[2] where specific deities perform together on Olympus, with verses 182–206 forming the focus of this essay.

I will argue how choral melic poetry plays a prime role in this section of the *Hymn*: in fact, these verses share many features of melic poetry in diction and imagery. These features can be traced back to Indo-European mythology and poetic diction. In addition, they describe a choral scene with its performative processes and hierarchies. The predominant image is that of the circle, including the poetic structure of the passage and the description of the dance performed and beyond.

1.2. Iconicity between Cognitive Linguistics and Anthropological Research

Words have their shapes, and minds create figures and images with them. This cognitive process is known as iconicity. It is the act of associating linguistic signs with the objects they express. In the beginning narrative core of the *Hymn* (verses 182–206), a diagrammatic icon of a circle can be traced, even from a poetic point of view: in fact, the passage has a ring composition, but the narration itself also suggests the image of a circle. The circular shape reflects, first, Delphi as the Navel of the World, and second, the "wheel of the sun" with its rays and spokes to celebrate the glory of Apollo and the Arts.

Within linguistic iconicity, diagrams consist of those signs that show relationships with the parts of the objects indicated. These relationships are based on analogical processes. Diagrammatic iconicity is typical in narrative, where the diegesis mirrors the order of the narrated events, with different layers of iconicity. This means that a narrative's chronological sequence can be altered (see Nöth 2008: 90), as in the following statements:

(1) Mary earned a PhD and was hired by the University.

(2) Mary was hired by the University after she earned a PhD.

[2] I use this word (henceforth without quotation marks) that, thanks to the useful hyphenation in the English language, was created by Gregory Nagy (2013: 228) to provide a better translation of Greek χορός and emphasize all the components of the μουσικὴ τέχνη 'the arts of the Muses', namely words, music and dance (see §3.2 below).

Both (1) and (2) are syntactically diagrammatic, but (1) is also semantically diagrammatic. This is because the sentence's narrative sequence follows the natural order of the events (see Jakobson 1965: 27). As far as the passage *HHAp* 182–206 is concerned, the natural order of the song and choral performance is reflected in the order of appearance of the deities in the narration.

Since ancient oral poetry is a social performance (see Nagy 1996), such an iconic correspondence among texts, melodic cycles and the organization of the performers can be found in anthropological fieldwork and theatrological research (see Becker 1980: 161–165 and Di Bernardi 2017: 433–437). In fact, in *wayang* , the Javanese traditional puppet theatre of the shadows, there is semiotics of voice qualities and dialects which causes the audience to associate particular attributes to character types. The *dalang* 'puppeteer' learns to reshape his mouth and alter his entire vocal mechanism to systematically distinguish certain characters. The sequence of voices diagrammatically represents the order of the performance and the importance of the characters themselves, from the audience's viewpoint.

As far as *HHAp* 182–206 is concerned, a performative approach allows one to identify the song-and-dance of the gods as a choral narrative performance (see Nagy 1996: 56), where divine performers play themselves. It is important to highlight that the hymn was likely performed by a single singer with a chorus (see Aloni 1998: 65–66 and Nagy 2013: 235–236). The order of lines iconically diagrams the oral performance as heard and seen by the ancient audience, and nowadays read by the present-day audience.

2. The Song-and-dance Scene on Olympus

The verses 182–206 of the *Hymn* are a narrative unity, showing different cores and poetic themes. I present here the text divided in sections, according to their diagrams[3].

HHAp 182–188: Apollo leads the performance and starts playing the *phorminx*.
εἶσι δὲ φορμίζων Λητοῦς ἐρικυδέος υἱός
φόρμιγγι γλαφυρῇ πρὸς Πυθὼ πετρήεσσαν,
ἄμβροτα εἵματ' ἔχων τεθυωμένα· τοῖο δὲ φόρμιγξ

[3] The Greek text is that established by Nicholas Richardson (2010).

χρυσέου ὑπὸ πλήκτρου καναχὴν ἔχει ἱμερόεσσαν.
ἔνθεν δὲ πρὸς Ὄλυμπον ἀπὸ χθονὸς ὥς τε νόημα
εἶσι Διὸς πρὸς δῶμα θεῶν μεθ' ὁμήγυριν ἄλλων·
αὐτίκα δ' ἀθανάτοισι μέλει κίθαρις καὶ ἀοιδή.

The son of glorious Leto comes to play the hollow lyre on rocky Pytho, together with his immortal censed garments: His lyre has a delightful sound under the golden plectrum. From there on earth he comes as a thought to Olympus, to the dwelling of Zeus, amid the gathering of the other gods: immediately the deities take an interest in music and singing.

HHAp 189–203: the song-and-dance.
189–193: the Muses start an amoebean song about gifts and sufferings in human lives.
Μοῦσαι μέν θ' ἅμα πᾶσαι ἀμειβόμεναι ὀπὶ καλῇ
ὑμνεῦσίν ῥα θεῶν δῶρ' ἄμβροτα ἠδ' ἀνθρώπων
τλημοσύνας, ὅσ' ἔχοντες ὑπ' ἀθανάτοισι θεοῖσι
ζώουσ' ἀφραδέες καὶ ἀμήχανοι, οὐδὲ δύνανται
εὑρέμεναι θανάτοιό τ' ἄκος καὶ γήραος ἄλκαρ.

The Muses all together respond with beautiful voice, and sing in accord about the immortal gifts of the deities and the adversities of men, thanks to all that from the immortal gods they [= the men] live devoid of awareness and resources, and they cannot find a solution to death nor a defense for oldness.

194–196: the circular dance of some goddesses, enacting the gifts (§4.1).
αὐτὰρ ἐϋπλόκαμοι Χάριτες καὶ ἐΰφρονες Ὧραι
Ἁρμονίη θ' Ἥβη τε Διὸς θυγάτηρ τ' Ἀφροδίτη
ὀρχεῦντ' ἀλλήλων ἐπὶ καρπῷ χεῖρας ἔχουσαι.

Thus, the lovely-curled Kharites and the favorable Horai, Harmonia, Hebe and Aphrodite, the daughter of Zeus, dance holding mutually hands on wrists.

197–201a: the circular dance of Artemis and other gods, enacting the sufferings (§4.2).
τῇσι μὲν οὔτ' αἰσχρὴ μεταμέλπεται οὔτ' ἐλάχεια,
ἀλλὰ μάλα μεγάλη τε ἰδεῖν καὶ εἶδος ἀγητή
Ἄρτεμις ἰοχέαιρα ὁμότροφος Ἀπόλλωνι.
ἐν δ' αὖ τῇσιν Ἄρης καὶ ἐΰσκοπος Ἀργειφόντης
παίζουσ'· [– ᴗᴗ – ᴗᴗ – ᴗᴗ – ᴗᴗ –⏑]

Among them, neither disgracefully nor lowly, but proudly magnificent and lovely in shape, archeress Artemis, twin of Apollo, joins the song-and-dance. Among them, at the same time, Ares and the slayer of Argos, who has sharp eyesight, dance.

201b–203: Apollo closes the circle playing and dancing, and acquires *kleos* (§5).
[– ⏑⏑] αὐτὰρ ὁ Φοῖβος Ἀπόλλων ἐγκιθαρίζει
καλὰ καὶ ὕψι βιβάς, αἴγλη δέ μιν ἀμφὶ φαεινή
μαρμαρυγαί τε ποδῶν καὶ ἐϋκλώστοιο χιτῶνος.

Meanwhile, Phoebus Apollo plays the lyre and steps beautifully and high, so the bright splendor encircles him, the glimmer of feet and the well-woven chiton.

HHAp 204–206: Leto and Zeus are delighted to see Apollo dancing among the gods.
οἱ δ' ἐπιτέρπονται θυμὸν μέγαν εἰσορόωντες
Λητώ τε χρυσοπλόκαμος καὶ μητίετα Ζεύς
υἷα φίλον παίζοντα μετ' ἀθανάτοισι θεοῖσι.

For him Leto with golden curls and wise Zeus are greatly delighted in their hearts, whereas they watch their beloved son dancing among the immortal deities.

3. The Formal Poetic and Metrical Features

3.1. Ring and Chiasmus Structure

In the whole Pythian movement of the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, verses 182–206 consist of a narrative unit, celebrating Apollo's poetic inspiration. The unity of the passage is due to the archaic poetic technique of ring composition, which embeds a peculiar moment into a circular structure. This is typical of oral literature and ancient Indo-European poetry. It is used to embed formular scenes in Greek and Old English epics (see Parks 1988), highlight precise poetic figures and similes (see Benediktson 2013), or focus on specific scenes with an important narratological development for the whole story (see Muscianisi 2023: 228 and, for Greek choral poetry, Massetti 2024: 12–22).

The ring-composition features are metrically demarcated[4], in fact phrases occupy the emphatic positions in hexameter and refer in particular to Apollo,

[4] Hereafter, the following metrical symbology will be used: #αβγ and αβγ# mark respectively the beginning and the end of a verse; symbols || and | mark respectively verse-end and word-

as the leader of performance. They are represented in the following iconic diagram (Table 1):

	activity	identity	status
182	#εἶσι δὲ φορμίζων		
		|^{P} Λητοῦς ἐρικυδέος	
			υἱός#
206			#υἷα φίλον
205		#Λητώ τε χρυσοπλόκαμος |^{E}	
206	παίζοντα |^{T}		

Table 1. Ring composition in *HHAp* 182–206

Both the beginning (verse 182) and the end (verses 205–206) of this section describe some of Apollo's characteristics, all of which are metrically emphasized in the hexameter, namely:

(1) status: the fact that he is a '(beloved) son' (verses 182 υἱός and 206 υἷα φίλον);
(2) identity: his familiar association with his mother Lato (verses 182 Λητοῦς ἐρικυδέος and 205 Λητώ τε χρυσοπλόκαμος);
(3) activity: in the embedded narration, Apollo enters the performing space, plays and dances (verses 182 εἶσι δὲ φορμίζων and 206 παίζοντα).

Furthermore, even a kind of chiastic figure can be traced between activity (A) and status (S) and their hexametrical position in verses 182 and 206 according to the diagram:

182 #εἶσι δὲ φορμίζων (A) : 182 υἱός# (S) = 206 #υἷα φίλον (S) : 206 παίζοντα \|^{T} (A).

end, thus caesura; superscript H stands for hiatus, then superscript P, T, E and B stand for the penthemimeral, trochaic, hephthemimeral and bucolic caesuras respectively. As for linguistic abbreviations and symbols, morphology follows the Leipzig glossing system, thus symbol = marks cliticization.

3.2. The Arts of the Muses

Although the word *music* in most of European languages derives ultimately from Greek μουσική, the ancient μουσικὴ τέχνη of the Greeks was not the *music* of the present-day languages. In fact, in mythology the number of the Muses is equal to the number of codified kinds of arts, standardly nine. It is also true that in the oldest sources of Greek there is at the same time either a single goddess, as in *Od.* 1.1 (Μοῦσα) and *Il.* 1.1 (θεά), or several unspecified Muses, as in Hesiod (*Th.* 1, 25) and in *Il.* 2.491 (the catalogue of ships).

This is because the 'Craft or Arts of the Muses' is an inseparable unity of instrumental music, poetic words and dance (see Nagy 2009: 423–425 and Murray 2004). This is the same as in *nāṭya* 'theatre, drama' in Indic and Sanskrit tradition (compare Schwartz 2004: 21–36), which according to the *Nāṭya-śāstra* (Treatise on the Arts) and other theatre writings, as the *Abhinaya-darpaṇa* (Mirror of Expressions), is a dense combination of vocal singing (*gīta*), instrumental accompaniment (*vādya*) and body movement and gesture (*nṛtta*).

As far as the Delphic section of the hymn in the present paper is concerned, the verses highlight songs and dancing through emphasizing the verbs of physical and performance in the hexameter: verses 182 (Apollo) #εἶσι δὲ φορμίζων |P "comes playing the *phorminx*", 190 (the Muses) #ὑμνεῦσίν ῥα "sing in accord", 196 (some goddesses) #ὀρχεῦντ(αι)' "dance", 201 (Ares and Hermes) #παίζουσ(ι)' "dance" and (Apollo) ἐγκιθαρίζει# "plays the *kithara*", 202 (Apollo) #καλὰ καὶ ὕψι βιβάς |P "stepping fine and high", and finally 205 (Apollo) #υἷα φίλον παίζοντα |T "the beloved son dancing".

From the point of view of poetic diction, the most significative signal of the unity of the Muses' Arts is attested in *HHAp* 188 |T μέλει κίθαρις καὶ ἀοιδή#, where the two feminine nominatives "music and singing" are given a singular verb "plays" (3SG.PRS). Such subject-verb agreement is ungrammatical, and in this case formularity is not an acceptable explanation, although the same words are attested only in *Od.* 1.159. It, thus, cannot be considered a formula (*pace* Richardson 2010: 112), as here explained:

HHAp 188

αὐτίκα=δ(ὲ)’	ἀθανάτοισι |^{T}	μέλει	κίθαρις	καὶ=ἀοιδή
now:ADV=thus:PTCL	immortal:DAT.PL	care:3SG.PRS	sound of *kithara*: NOM.(F.)SG	and:CONJ=song: NOM.(F.)SG

Literary translation: and now music and singing are in the thoughts of the deities.
Meaning and interpretation: immediately the deities take an interest in music and singing.

Od. 1.159: Telemakhos tells Athena what the suitors love to do in Odysseus’ house

τούτοισιν=μὲν	ταῦτα	μέλει, |^{E}	κίθαρις	καὶ=ἀοιδή
this:DAT.M.PL=PTCL	this:NOM.N.PL	care:3SG.PRS	sound of *kithara*: NOM.(F.)SG	and:CONJ=song: NOM.(F.)SG

Literary translation: these things are in the thoughts of these men [= the suitors], music and singing.
Meaning and interpretation: they [= the suitors] take care of this, music and singing.

In fact, syntax and meter reveal two completely different situations. The caesuras fall differently in the two hexameters, because there is distinct syntactical information[5]: in *HHAp* 188 the caesura is the trochaic one, so the constituent [$_{DP}$ κίθαρις καὶ ἀοιδή] is the subject of [$_{VP}$ μέλει], with the ungrammatical agreement (see below §3.4). On the contrary, in *Od.* 1.159 the hephthemimeral caesura makes [$_{DP}$ ταῦτα] the subject of [$_{VP}$ μέλει] with a perfect grammatical agreement, then the constituent [$_{NP}$ κίθαρις καὶ ἀοιδή] is an adjunct, namely an apposition.

From a comparative viewpoint, Werner Knobl (2004, and page 274 in particular) has shown that even in the *Ṛgveda* several examples of morphological and syntactic awkwardness occur. The explanation for this

[5] For syntactic constituents, abbreviations DP, VP and NP stand for determiner phrase (the subject), verb phrase (the predicate) and noun phrase (here, any further information) respectively.

falls within a precise "intent of irregularity" made by the poet/composer to emphasize a "surplus of meaning" and at the same time to remind the hearers/audience of other concepts and words. As far as *HHAp* 188 is concerned, that the subjects κίθαρις καὶ ἀοιδή (plural) are accorded to verb μέλει (singular) did not likely 'scandalize' any hearer, because for every Greek person the cognitive idea behind was that the *mousikē* was a unity of elements. Therefore, the formally plural κίθαρις καὶ ἀοιδή in poetry was perceived just like the singular μουσικὴ τέχνη, as if in everyday speech[6].

3.3. Iconizing Simultaneity: The Use of Connectives

The choral scene in the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* shows the god Apollo leading the performance with the *phorminx* and starting a song. The Muses respond with their hymn, then, some deities join with song-and-dance. The movements of the scene (with their musical meaning) do not appear to be chronologically related starting with Apollo playing the *phorminx* and succeeded by the other mentioned deities, as in single, separate performances (*pace* Lonsdale 1993: 53).

Rather, some of the linguistic elements, namely modal and temporal connectives and adverbs, suggest simultaneity of the actions. In fact, Apollo "comes and plays the *phorminx*" or "comes while playing" (182 εἶσι δὲ φορμίζων), and following him the Muses "sing in accord" (190 ὑμνεῦσίν ῥα). The connective ἄρα (tonic) and =ῥα (clitic) might etymologically derive from the Proto-Indo-European (henceforth PIE) root *h_2er- 'to fit', cognate to the verb ἀραρίσκω 'to fit together' and Latin *ars* 'the Arts' (see Beekes 2010: 1.121, 123).

From a pragmatic linguistic point of view, connectives αὐτάρ 'so, thus' (verses 194 and 201) and αὖ 'so, thus' (verse 200) grammaticalize the simultaneous dancing of the other deities and their thematic continuity with the previous dancing (compare Bonifazi 2012: 229). From a narratological and discourse analysis point of view (see Inglese 2017: 163), αὐτάρ marks the

[6] There is, of course, another grammatical explanation, which would probably be the preferred one by philologists and grammarians, namely the possibility of syntactic attraction of the closest nominative κίθαρις (singular) to the verb μέλει (singular), traditionally known as σχῆμα Ἀλκμανικόν, see *GH* 2:18–19. However, this alternative is far from the purposes of the present paper that aims at an investigation through the lens of cognitive linguistics and orality.

processing of two different moments of the discourse, still connected by the context and thematic continuity.

Thus, the choral scene in the *Hymn* delineates an integrated and organized performance with a plurality of participants, who articulate their specific moments in the performance, as narrated by the poet with accurate storytelling (see below §4).

3.4. Meter and Epic Diction

Geoffrey Kirk (1981: 174–175) criticized *HHAp* 182–206 as "vulgar conception", degeneration and extravagance of rhapsodic composition. There are, moreover, various metrical and prosodic anomalies just in this passage. These consist mainly of:

- external hiatus, even between vowels of the same height: verses 185 χρυσέου ᴴ ὑπό, 198 τε ᴴ ἰδεῖν, 199 ἰοχέαιρα ᴴ ὁμότροφος;
- internal hiatus: verses 194 (twice), 200, 203 ἐϋ-, albeit very common and tolerated;
- abbreviated synizesis: verse 185 χρυσ**ε͡ο͡ῦ** ᴴ ὑπό, actually common in choral poetry;
- *brevis in longo*: verse 198 #ἀλλὰ μά**λα** μεγάλη, and in addition verses 191 and 206 **ἄ**θανάτοισι, 199 **Ἄ**πόλλωνι, which are very common and tolerated.

Kirk correctly highlighted the "anti-traditional usages" of several stylistic features, because the passage is short. Awkward poetic features appear very close together or even in the same verse, in particular, for example, the enjambement at verses 190–191 θεῶν δῶρ' ἄμβροτα ἠδ' ἀνθρώπων || τλημοσύνας "the immortal gifts of the gods and the sufferings of the humans". Another example is the meaning of 204 θυμὸν μέγαν |ᴮ "sublime disposition" (I interpret it differently, see above §2), different from *Il.* 9.496 #ἀλλ', Ἀχιλεῦ, δάμασον θυμὸν μέγαν |ᴮ "now, O Akhilleus, calm down your great heart [= rage]".

Apart from the correct identification of a non-canonical use of diction in *HHAp* 182–206, Kirk's critique is in general unwarranted, because he denies any artistic and poetic intent to the poet of the *Hymn*. His criticism

assumes that there was a one and only use of words and formulas in orally composed literature, and what is different is considered as 'transgression' or 'deviation'. This could not be further from what orality and anthropological research on poetry reveal (see Nagy 1996: 7–38 and Finnegan 2012: 3–27). Indeed, this demonstrates that poems are constantly changing and adapted to fit the poetic occasion and the audience (καιρός). This is due to the individual artistic abilities of the poets, who of course remain traditional in composition, execution and transmission of the tale, but are not required to simply 'repeat' only old stories. Within the communities and families of artists and poets of oral traditions, it is almost impossible to find the concepts of 'convention' and 'transgression' when related to the tradition of their arts.

The composition of the *khoros*-scene on Olympus is, on the contrary, precise and carefully articulated in its storytelling. This is clearly shown by the ring structure of the passage (see above §3.1) and the linguistic features that mark the performing hierarchy[7] and the roles of the members (see below §4). The harshness of style just mirrors a lack of the fine-tuning processes which had been applied to the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* since the early centuries, although in the Homeric poems some harsh passages still remain. The style of this passage from the *Hymn* may in fact be due to a process of composition-in-performance, such as Nagy (2011: 307–322) has argued for the Delian movement of the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* as actual performance at the time of Thucydides.

4. The Storytelling of the Song of the Muses

After Apollo enters the performing space on Olympus, the Muses in accordance with him start to sing a choral chant concerning "the immortal gifts of the gods and the sufferings of the humans" (verses 190–191 θεῶν δῶρ' ἄμβροτα ἠδ' ἀνθρώπων || τλημοσύνας). With them several other deities join to

[7] About the leadership and hierarchy of the members within this performance, see Muscianisi 2020: §5.3–5.7. During my 2019–20 Post-doctoral Fellowship at Harvard University's Center for Hellenic Studies, I was invited to contribute to the *Delphic Preview: Festival of the Muses* (June 2020) with that essay also accessible to the non-academic readership by the then Director of the Center for Hellenic Studies, Gregory Nagy (Harvard University), to whom I still express my most gratitude.

perform, namely the Kharites, the Horai, Harmonia, Hebe, Aphrodite, Artemis, Ares and Hermes. The scholars who have commented on *HHAp* 182–206 have generally criticized the chaos and confusion in the verses. This occurs on multiple levels from content to myth, to style and diction (see Kirk 1981: 174). Modern scholars have also revealed various textual and mythological sources concerning the deities, but they have not provided an examination of the relationships and the connections between the deities within the passage itself (see Londsdale 1993: 56–61 and Richardson 2010: 112–114).

Unlike previous studies, my approach to the hymn focuses on the performance itself. I link the godheads in the passage to a precise poetic intent of storytelling. I believe that the deities participate in the Muses' song about the divine gifts and human sufferings (verses 189–190) while simultaneously representing themselves as gifts or sufferings for mankind. Based on their names, cults and myths, in the following sections, I interpret their roles within the frame of inner Greek phraseology, in particular, from choral melic, and comparative Indo-European *Dichtersprache* and mythology.

4.1. The "Immortal Gifts of the Gods"

4.1.1. Joy and Beauty

Joy and beauty are some of the divine gifts that the Kharites represent in Apollo and the Muses' song-and-dance. In Hesiod (*Th.* 909) their names are Ἀγλαΐην τε καὶ Εὐφροσύνη Θαλίην τ' ἐρατεινήν "Splendor, Joy and lovely Floridity". They are the mistresses of what is beautiful and joyful in human lives (see Hsch. χ 191 χαρίεν· καλόν [...] ὡραῖον, in Homer), and Pindar says:

> Pind. *O.* 14.5–9 Snell–Maehler
> [...] σὺν γὰρ ὑμῖν τά <τε> **τερπνὰ καί**
> **τὰ γλυκέ'** ἄνεται πάντα βροτοῖς,
> εἰ σοφός, εἰ καλός, εἴ τις ἀγλαὸς ἀνήρ.
> οὐδὲ γὰρ θεοὶ **σεμνᾶν Χαρίτων ἄτερ**
> κοιρανέοντι χοροὺς οὔτε δαῖτας.
>
> Together with you **the pleasant and gentle things** are destined to mortals, either a man is wise or handsome or splendid. The gods do not even arrange song-and-dances or banquets **without the holy Kharites**.

From a comparative viewpoint, Greek word Χάριτες derives from PIE *$ǵ^{h}er$- 'to delight, be delighted' and is cognate with the Old Indo-Aryan root √har_2 'to be delighted with' (*EWAia* 2:804, verb *háryati*). This verb in the *Ṛgveda* (abbreviated RV) describes the joy of the spirit that is generated in the worshipers through prayers, namely poetic songs:

RV 4.37.2a, c: hymn to the *ṛbhú*-s, thus artists and craftsmen

a	*té=vo*	***hṛdé***	***manase***	*santu*	*yajñā́*, [...]
	this:NOM.M.PL= you:GEN.PL	**heart: DAT.SG**	**mind:DAT.SG**	be:3PL.IMPV	prayer: NOM.(M.)PL
c	*prá=vaḥ*	*sutā́so*	***haryanta***	*pūrṇā́ḥ*, [...]	
	toward:ADV= you:ACC.PL	*soma*: NOM.M.PL	**enjoy:3 PL.PRS.INJ**	filled:NOM.M.PL	

May these prayers abide with your [= of the artists] **hearts and spirits**, [...] may the filling of *soma*-drink **delight** you [= the artists].

4.1.2. Floridity and Civic Order

The Horai are known by Hesiod (*Th.* 902) as Εὐνομίην τε Δίκην τε καὶ Εἰρήνην τεθαλυῖαν "Good-Order, Justice and bloomed Peace". Their names were firmly enstablished in archaic sources. They are daughters of Themis and patronize the floridity of the State (see Nagy 1990a: 270–272), as Pindar claims:

> Pind. *O.* 13.6–8 Snell–Maehler
> ἐν τᾷ γὰρ Εὐνομία ναίει κασιγνήτα τε, **βάθρον πολίων ἀσφαλές**,
> Δίκα καὶ ὁμότροφος Εἰρήνα, **τάμι' ἀνδράσι πλούτου**,
> χρύσεαι παῖδες εὐβούλου Θέμιτος.
>
> There, they dwell: Eunomia and her sister, **the secure ground of states**, Dike and the (other) sister Eirene, **the treasurer of wealth for men**, (all they are) the golden children of wise Themis.

4.1.3. Cosmic Order

The name of Harmonia derives from PIE *h_2er- 'to fit'. This root is attested in Old Indo-Aryan *ṛtá* 'cosmic fixed order, law' and Latin *rītus* 'ritual', and has been connected with Greek δίκη 'justice' by Calvert Watkins (1979: 183–189, see Magnone 2022 for the connection between *ṛtá* and *dharma* 'justice' in Indic

tradition) and with κόσμος 'universe, order' by Laura Massetti (2014: 129–130). This is an ancient Indo-European image, as shown by Velizar Sadovski (2017: 726, 733) with the Indo-Iranian evidence from the *Avesta* and *Veda*.

In Greek, ἁρμονία is also a technical musical term for rhythmic melody, which philosophers, including the Pythagorean and Aristotelean schools, use for describing the order of universe (see Barker 1989: 33). By describing all the gods celebrating the double wedding of Kadmos with Harmonia and Peleus with Thetis, Pindar seems to reveal the idea of such a cosmic order, enacted by Harmonia in the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*:

> Pind. *P.* 3.86–95 Snell–Maehler
> [...] αἰὼν δ' ἀσφαλής
> οὐκ ἔγεντ' οὔτ' Αἰακίδᾳ παρὰ Πηλεῖ
> οὔτε παρ' ἀντιθέῳ Κάδμῳ· λέγονται {γε} μὰν βροτῶν
> ὄλβον ὑπέρτατον οἳ σχεῖν, οἵτε καὶ χρυσαμπύκων
> μελπομενᾶν ἐν ὄρει Μοισᾶν καὶ ἐν ἑπταπύλοις
> ἄϊον Θήβαις, ὁπόθ' Ἁρμονίαν γᾶμεν βοῶπιν,
> ὁ δὲ Νηρέος εὐβούλου Θέτιν παῖδα κλυτάν,
> **καὶ θεοὶ δαίσαντο παρ' ἀμφοτέροις**,
> καὶ Κρόνου παῖδας βασιλῆας ἴδον χρυσέαις ἐν ἕδραις, ἕδνα τε
> δέξαντο.
>
> However, a secure life was destined neither to Peleus, son of Aiakos, nor to divine Kadmos. It is said that they among mortals obtained the highest prosperity, since on the mountain and in seven-gated Thebes they heard the Muses with golden fillets singing, when one [= Kadmos] married Harmonia with ox eyes and the other [= Peleus] (married) wise Thetis, the glorious daughter of Nereus. **Even the gods celebrates for the two**, they saw the kings, sons of Kronos, on golden seats, and received bridal gifts.

4.1.4. Vigor of Youth

Hebe embodies the vigor of youth. It is important to highlight the double concepts of [STRENGTH] and [YOUTH] present here. Her name is likely the outcome of PIE **(H)iéǵʷ-eh₂-* in Greek ἥβη 'youth,' cognate to Lithuanian *jėgà* 'power, strength' and Latvian *jẽga* 'power, strength' (see *DELG*² 404–405 and Beekes 2010: 1.507–508).

In myth, Hebe 'youth' is the wife of Herakles who represent strength. Such a mythical marriage confirms the concept with comparative evidence from Indo-European (compare Barker & Christiansen 2019: 98–100). The same idea

is attested in choral phraseology, where the "weaving" of youth and aging guarantees vigor into old age, as in Pindar:

> Pind. *N.* 7.98–101 Snell–Maehler
> εἰ γὰρ σύ ἰν **ἐμπεδοσθενέα βίοτον ἁρμόσαις**
> **ἥβᾳ λιπαρῷ** τε γήραϊ διαπλέκοις
> εὐδαίμον' ἐόντα, παίδων δὲ παῖδες ἔχοιεν αἰεί
> γέρας τό περ νῦν καὶ ἄρειον ὄπιθεν.
>
> Whether you, **fitting together** for him **youth** with a bright old age, weave (for him) **a strongly settled life**, the children of the children can always have the gift of today and the better in the future.

4.1.5. Love and Marriage

Aphrodite is the deity of Greek mythology that is always surrounded by several kinds of nymphs and goddesses concerning beauty, joy, grace, namely the Kharites and the Horai or Harmonia herself (compare Càssola 1975: 499). However, I believe that in this passage Aphrodite embodies the gift of love, as her usual quality from Greek religion, mythology and literature, together with the symbol of love marriage (like the *gāndharva* rite in Indic tradition). This can be revealed by Pindar's tale of the marriage between Apollo and nymph Kurene, eponym of the Libyan city of Cyrene:

> Pind. *P.* 9.9–13 Snell–Maehler
> ὑπέδεκτο δ' ἀργυρόπεζ' **Ἀφροδίτα**
> Δάλιον ξεῖνον θεοδμάτων
> ὀχέων ἐφαπτομένα χερὶ κούφᾳ·
> καί σφιν ἐπὶ γλυκεραῖς εὐναῖς ἐρατὰν βάλεν αἰδῶ,
> **ξυνὸν ἁρμόζοισα** θεῷ τε **γάμον** μιχθέντα κούρᾳ θ' Ὑψέος εὐρυβία.
>
> Silver-footed **Aphrodite** welcomed the Delian guest from his divine chariot, touching him with a gentle hand, and she cast lovely modesty on their pleasant union, **joining together in a common marriage** that bound the god [= Apollo] and the daughter of mighty Hupseus [= Kurene].

4.2. The "Human Sufferings"

After the section about the "immortal gifts of the gods", there is the syntactic construction of verse 197 τῇσι μέν "among them on one hand" (the deities enacting the gifts) and verse 200 ἐν δ' αὖ τῇσιν "simultaneously among

them on the other hand", which consist of the deities with the roles of the sufferings.

In the cluster name + epithet, all personal names are given in sequence, the last of which witnesses an epithet. Behaghel's Law in Indo-European poetry exhibits the following structure (see Watkins 1995: 31): Hes. *Th.* 902 Εὐνομίην τε Δίκην τε **καὶ Εἰρήνην τεθαλυῖαν** and 909 Ἀγλαΐην τε καὶ Εὐφροσύνη **Θαλίην τ' ἐρατεινήν**, *HHAp* 195 Ἁρμονίη θ' Ἥβη τε **Διὸς θυγάτηρ τ' Ἀφροδίτη** and from choral poetry, Alcman *PMGF* 1.75–76 Φίλλυλα || Δαμαρ[έ]τα 'τ **ἐρατά τε Γιανθεμίς**.

Although in these verses, there is not the usual structure, Otto Behaghel (1909: 122) explains that within poetic discourse the sequence and number of epithets reveal the importance of the name attached, but the last one must have an epithet. As far as *HHAp* 197–201a is concerned, the members are Artemis (noted as element A), Ares (B) and Hermes (C). Their epithets follow this structure: A + two epithets (ἰοχέαιρα and ὁμότροφος Ἀπόλλωνι), B + no epithet, and C + one epithet (ἐῦσκοπος), highlighting the prominence of Artemis among the group.

4.2.1. Disease

Artemis is presented as archer (199 ἰοχέαιρα) and twin of Apollo (ὁμότροφος Ἀπόλλωνι): Leto's twins are generally responsible for sudden deaths of women and men respectively. In this song-and-dance scene of the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, Artemis *iokheaira* represents her ascribed role as bringer of disease. Myth uses the image of firing invisible arrows of disease to cause sudden death or death due to illness, such as in the myth of Niobe, whose daughters and sons are killed by Artemis and Apollo, respectively.

The phraseological explanation is attested in the *Odyssey*, in the mirror-image repetition (hendiadys) with which Odysseus asks his mother Antikleia if she died of sickness or by one of Artemis' arrow:

> *Od.* 11.171–173 van Thiel
> τίς νύ σε κὴρ ἐδάμασσε τανηλεγέος θανάτοιο;
> ἦ δολιχὴ νοῦσος; ἢ Ἄρτεμις ἰοχέαιρα
> οἷς ἀγανοῖς βέλεεσσιν ἐποιχομένη κατέπεφνεν;
>
> What destiny of woeful death did now subdue you? maybe a long sickness?
> or did Artemis the archeress kill (you), visiting (you) with her mild arrows?

The hendiadys or mirror-image is phraseologically clear. The poet operates a crossover in the structure noun + adjective, namely a chiasmus between the attributes of referents. In fact, sickness (νοῦσος, noted as A) has an epithet δολιχός 'long', more properly ascribable to arrows (or spears), while the arrows (βέλος, noted as B) are described as soft or gentle (ἀγανός). It was thought that death due to sickness was an *easy* death, compared to death battle field. The chiasmus in meaning shows the following diagram:

νοῦσος (A) : δολιχός (B) = βέλος (B) : ἀγανός (A).

4.2.2. War and Violence

In Greek tradition, as in *HHAp* 200, Ares is the god designated for warfare and violence. There is little or no variation in the attributes and conception of him. This is unlike other deities, who can take on several facets, due to syncretic or other assimilative processes in religion. For this reason, the cognitive linguistic outcome in language use allowed the Greeks to choose either the word πόλεμος (and synonyms) or the name Ἄρης to express just the concept of [WAR] (for a detailed survey, see Daneš 2020).

However, Ares does not just embody the war, but more in general the concept of [VIOLENCE] (see Millington 2021). In fact, in Pindar there is one attestation where Ἄρης is used in the semantic sense of 'murder':

Pind. *P.* 11.36–37 Snell–Maehler
[...] ἀλλὰ χρονίῳ **σὺν Ἄρει**
πέφνεν τε ματέρα θῆκέ τ' Αἴγισθον ἐν φοναῖς.

But **with** a belated **slaughter** he [= Orestes] killed the mother and left Aigisthos in his blood.

4.2.3. Death and Oldness

Hermes is mentioned with a common formula in the *Homeric Hymns* and elsewhere as ἐΰσκοπος Ἀργειφόντης "keen-sighted slayer of Argos" (verse 200). The meaning "slayer of Argos" is synchronically recognizable among the Greeks (see Nagy 2017 on *Od.* 17.292; for a different interpretation, see Massetti 2021). However, Calvert Watkins (1995: 383–385 and before Davis 1953) has demonstrated that this meaning does not work from a historical

linguistic point of view. Indeed, he has found the inherited Indo-European meaning of "Serpent-slayer", phraseologically attested in an anonymous tragic fragment (*TrGF* 2:199 ἀργῆν ἔπεφνεν "he slew a serpent") and in Eustathius on *Il.* 2.104 (183.12) ἀργεϊφόντης· ὁ ὀφιοκτόνος.

In Indo-European and Greek religion, serpents are associated with evil power, and often appear as the autochthon guardians of sacred spaces. This is the case with the cosmic serpent Vr̥tra, who held the cosmic waters captive and was then later slain by Indra in *R̥gveda* 1.32 (compare Oberlies 2023: 54, 167–169). In Greece, Delphic Apollo kills the she-serpent Pytho in the *HHAp* 300–304 and is called Ἀργειφόντης in Sophocles *TrGF* 4:1024. In Greece and Rome, serpents are often associated with chthonian deities of death (see *DAGR* 2/1:408b for the sources) and Hermes fills his funerary role as ψυχοπομπός 'soul-guide'.

Thus, in the choral scene of the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, Hermes might represent the worst evils of the world, namely death and aging, recalling what is said in verse 193 θανάτοιό τ' ἄκος καὶ γήραος ἄλκαρ "a solution to death or a defense against oldness".

5. The Shape of Glory: Icons, Circle and Delphi

The song-and-dance of deities on Olympus ends with the splendor (αἴγλη φαεινή) of Apollo and his clothes (*HHAp* 201b–203). The same concept of brightness (σέλας) appears when Apollo and the Cretans docked at Krisa (*HHAp* 440–443), before they reached the site of Delphi dancing all together a paean (*HHAp* 513–523) at the very end of the Pythian section of the hymn, as well as the hymn in general. The "splendor" and "brightness" represent glory and fame (κλέος), according to an icon attested from choral poetry.

In fact, in choral poetry there is a cognitive linguistic and iconic metaphor, according to which fame shines its rays as the sun, such as in Pind. *O.* 1.23 λάμπει ... κλέος "the glory shines" and *P.* 11.45 δόξ' ἐπιφλέγει "the fame inflames". In general, the lexicon of "light, brightness" is shared between the sun and moon and fame, designating the radiance of *kleos*[8].

[8] For a literary and archaeological insight, see Neer & Kurke 2019: 99–101. For a comparative poetic perspective, see Meusel 2020: 398–415, 559–566.

Such an image traces back to an old Indo-European metaphor [SUN as WHEEL] known in Old Indo-Aryan from the *Ṛgveda* 4.28.2 *sū́rasya … cakrám* (sun:GEN.SG + wheel:ACC.SG) 'the wheel of Sūrya/the Sun' for god Sūrya himself as the Sun, then in Old Norse from the *Harmsól* 36.7 *sunnu hvéls … konungr* (sun:GEN.SG + wheel:GEN.SG + king:NOM.SG) 'the king of sun's wheel', namely a *kenning* for God (see Schmitt 1967: 166–169).

This known and highly investigated metaphor (PIE **sh₂uéns* or **súh₂liosio kʷékʷlos*) is attested also in Greek, from early tragedy onwards:

> Aeschl. *Pers.* 504 West
> φλέγων γὰρ αὐγαῖς λαμπρός **ἡλίου κύκλος**
> μέσον πόρον διῆκε θερμαίνων φλογί.
>
> Inflaming with his rays, the bright **wheel of the sun [= the sun]** runs along the middle of the path [= noon], warming with the fire.

To this data, I add a further iconic phraseology found by me in choral poetry: the *kleos* of Theseus irradiates like the sun, within a cognitive twine of metaphors, namely [FAME as SUN] and [SUN as WHEEL] (for further connections between this ode by Bacchylides and the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, see Pavlou 2012: 518–523):

> Bacchyl. 17.103–105 Maehler
> [...] ἀπὸ γὰρ ἀγλα||ῶν λάμπε γυίων σέλας
> ὥτε πυρός.
>
> From the splendid limbs (of Theseus) brightness shone like (the brightness) of fire.

Finally, the poetic glory of Apollo in *HHAp* 202 reflects the glory of the Oracle of Delphi, which the god is going to found in subsequent verses of the Pythian movement of the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*.

There is a close connection between poetry and oracles. This is because, at least during the age of the *polis*, Pythian priestesses were found in the *aduton* of the temple and responded to enquiries with oracles that were put into hexameters or iambic trimeters by an intermediary person (see Nagy 1990b: 162–163 and Muscianisi 2021: 20–25). Moreover, the image of circle even becomes linguistically an icon itself of the Sanctuary, since Delphi is known as the Navel of the World.

The subjects of the enquiries to the Oracle were mainly those indirectly mentioned in the *Hymn*, namely the blessings and the evils of life performed by the deities. For this reasons, Delphi and Apollo give joy to the World, such concept is revealed in the coda of the passage here analyzed. In fact, verb τέρπω 'to delight, be delighted' in *HHAp* 204 is semantically associated with musical and poetic performance (see Nagy 2015: 173–176). The same root appears in the names of Muse Εὐ-τέρπη "she, who delights well" and Muse Τερψι-χόρη "she, who delights with song-and-dance", phraseologically comparable to Bacchylides 17.107 χορῷ δ' ἔτερπον "(the Nereids) cheered (the heart) up with a song-and-dance".

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, *HHAp* 182–206 at the beginning of the Pythian movement of the hymn consists of a circumscribed section, highlighted by the poetic feature of ring-composition (§3.1). Thematic cores describe a complex choral moment and poetic storytelling, where Apollo is the leader of song-and-dance, the Muses as the singers of a tale about the blessings and the evils of mankind (verse 190 "immortal gifts of the gods" and "sufferings of the men"), and some deities join the performance dancing as the *khoros* and play the roles of themselves in the Muses' song (§4).

From a formal poetic point of view, the passage has several awkward features, both in meter and epic diction (§3.4). Nevertheless, the construction of the text is characterized by a precise artistic intent of the poet. The storytelling and narrative aim to 'overcome' some of these metrical and diction features (such as metaphors), and represent a situation similar to what occurs even in the *Ṛgveda*, as shown by Werner Knobl (2007).

The most important characterization is that of iconicity, a cognitive linguistic feature according to which language mirrors the objects it refers to (§1.2). The predominant image in the whole scene is the circle: the composition of the verse-section is circular (ring composition), the Navel of the World is circular, and the glory of Delphi and Apollo is circular, just like the sun and its rays. These features are all phraseologically attested in choral melic poetry, as I showed with some new items (Bacchyl. 17.103–105, 107). A performative approach has demonstrated the importance of the performance itself (§3.2).

This research allow to defining the deities' roles as the main enquiries to the Delphic Oracle, with the precise poetic intent to celebrate Delphi (§5).

Finally, comparative Indo-European linguistics and poetics has helped define the roles of the dancing deities. The research has delved into their onomastic and mythical significances, concerning in particular an inner Greek shared phraseology with choral melic poetry (§4). On the base of such evidence, it is reasonable to argue the precise intent of the poet of this section of the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* (182–206), although some harshness of style and diction.

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