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978-0-521-03565-1 - Homer, Hesiod and the Hymns: Diachronic Development  
in Epic Diction

Richard Janko

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HOMER, HESIOD AND THE HYMNS

Diachronic development in epic diction

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RICHARD JANKO

*Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge*

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TO MY PARENTS

*δυσκαταμάθητα, ἀλλὰ θρεπτήρια*

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## PREFACE

The Cambridge doctoral thesis of which this book is the final outcome began as a linguistic investigation into the manner of composition, dates and origins of the major 'Homeric' Hymns, but it was soon apparent that these questions ought only to be essayed in the broader context of the entire corpus of early Greek hexameter poetry. Whether the *Hymns* are oral poems is examined in Chapter 2; then the linguistic methodology is established and elaborated in the context of the whole epic tradition, and finally the results are tested against the other evidence, literary, historical and archaeological, for the dates and origins of the individual major hymns (I have limited the treatment of the Hymn to Demeter in view of Richardson's recent opus; regrettably, the recent Utrecht dissertation of J. van Eck on the *Hymn to Aphrodite* became known to me too late to be taken into account). But although the Hymns are both the seed and bole of this work, the reader will discover ramifications in topics as varied as the relative and absolute dates of Homer and Hesiod; the 'Contest of Homer and Hesiod'; the mutual relations of Hesiodic poems and Hymns, especially the two Hymns to Apollo; poetry as a political weapon in the sixth century; the homogeneity of the Homeric epics; how and why the poets used archaisms and formular modifications; the prehistory of the epic, its relation to vernacular dialects, and the impact of writing on what was in origin an oral tradition: that is to say, the 'Homeric Question' in general. To save this book from obesity, I have limited the discussion of some of these, such as epic prehistory and the homogeneity of Homer, to indications of what the method offers. The method and conclusions in which they are rooted is given in Chapters 3 and 4; its *a priori* assumptions are set out in Chapter 1 and reviewed in Chapter 10; individual discussions may be located by means of the indices.

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The method to which I refer accords with many contemporary developments, some good, others deleterious, in its quantitative basis. Lest the traditionalist be repelled, I must mention my surprise that it was not evolved in Germany a century ago, such is the love of statistics evident in Homeric studies at that time; furthermore, I did test its principles and coherence by marathons of manual counting before resorting to the computer to preserve my mind from distraction and my eyes from dittoblepsy. The figures given here are twy-born of man and machine: the computer produced a list, in sequence of occurrence with one line's context, of all instances of a given set of characters from an accurate but unlemmatised standard text (OCT); all irrelevant cases were then eliminated by inspection, and the results for the feature in question were then calculated. If, as often, I had already counted the feature by hand, the computer's list was matched against my own, usually to the detriment of the latter; the same is true of figures supplied by others too.

My examiners cannily inquired whether I had checked other features beyond the dozen enumerated below. *Vita brevis*: but looking again at the half-dozen I rejected as too infrequent, it is clear that for this reason none cast much light on poems shorter than the Homeric epics, although no doubt more which do will appear in due course. I have consigned γαῖα / γῆ, κείνος / ἐκείνος and ξύν / σύν to an Appendix, to illustrate the difficulties and potential gains which such counts offer. Similar is the pair ἰρός / ἱερός; the Lesbian and Chian form ἰρός falls from 30/83 cases (36.1%) in the *Iliad* to 17/77 (22.1%) in the *Odyssey* and 0/56 in the rest of the epic corpus. Here, although the statistics may tell a tale of decline in frequency of one of the Aeolic elements in Homer, they tell little of the *Hymns* or Hesiod, and thus remain peripheral. In other criteria it is not infrequency but lack of philological clarity that is the vitiating factor, e.g. in vowel contraction, where different combinations and environments entail excessive complications.

Although numbers are rampant in this book, the use of statistical tests has been kept to a minimum, to propitiate

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those unfamiliar with these techniques. While not needed to show that the clusters of results in Chapter 4 are not fortuitous, as this is plain even without applying such methods, they are indispensable when one wishes to test the hypothesis that any particular result is unlikely to be due to random variation from any given value. The tests used are all standard: I refer here to *Principles of Statistics* by M. G. Bulmer, and *Statistics Made Simple* by H. T. Hayslett.

The criteria tested in this study are all binomial (I have avoided testing the distribution of n-mobile here, as it conforms to the Poisson distribution). Binomial distributions, involving a choice between alternatives as in tossing a coin, can be tested directly when small numbers of trials are involved (Bulmer 81–90, Hayslett 62–71); when more instances are counted, we can use the *normal approximation to the binomial* (Bulmer 139–45; Hayslett 91–8), the results of which will be found expressed in terms of  $z$  and  $\pi_0$ , e.g. ‘ $z = 1.68$  if  $\pi_0$  is set at  $0.476$ ’;  $\pi_0$  denotes the expected or hypothetical frequency of the phenomenon (i.e. what I usually express as a percentage, recast as a decimal), and  $z$  denotes the value of the *standard normal variable*, which can be looked up in tables (e.g. Hayslett 230–1) to establish the area under the curve for this value, i.e. the probability of the event occurring by chance (the ‘level of significance’). Thus if  $z > 1.64$ , the result is significant at the 5% level (i.e. the chance of random occurrence is under 0.05, or 1 in 20). These tests will be one-tailed unless stated; i.e. they determine the likelihood that extreme results at one end only of the bell-shaped graph will occur. Statisticians regard 5% significance as a reasonable basis for judgement, but the greater the level of significance the better.

Another means of comparing results is the  $\chi^2$  test, which tests two sets of observed values against one another, or observed values against those predicted (expected) on a given hypothesis, taking into account different sample-sizes (Bulmer 124–9, 154–61; Hayslett 169–76, and the table on p. 223). This cannot be used for samples where less than 5 cases in one or other alternative are expected. The higher the

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value of  $\chi^2$ , which expresses the difference between observed and expected values, the more significant the result. A test of one feature in two works will have one *degree of freedom* ( $\nu$ ), but if more poems are compared, or features included, this parameter and the significant value of  $\chi^2$  increase accordingly, as will appear from Hayslett 223.

All decimals in this study are rounded up to the next significant figure: thus 70.08% becomes 70.1%, and  $\pi_0 = 0.7008$  becomes  $\pi_0 = 0.701$ .

In this study I use the term 'sample' to denote the population tested. Quite frequently this is a slight misnomer, since the limitations of the material compel one to use the evidence of whole poems and not merely that of samples drawn from them. In such instances it would be more correct technically to speak of target populations; I hope to be forgiven my licence, committed for the sake of that neglected goddess, Brevity, and Simplicity her sister.

In conclusion I would like to stress the importance of the size of the population tested. A sample more divergent from the expected result than another of greater size may sometimes turn out to be less significant, i.e. more probably the outcome of mere random variation from the average. It all depends on the amount of divergence relative to the size of the sample. Sample-size must not be disregarded in what follows, and I am not sanguine that I have always managed to avoid this error myself.

Wherever much is owed to many predecessors, originality is a difficult concept; this is as true of this study as of the early Greek poetry which concerns it. The approach adopted here owes most to G. P. Edwards, and to the perceptive remarks he made about the directions future research might take (*The Language of Hesiod* 206ff.), but many other streams here find their confluence. In compiling and checking the statistics, the programming skills of Dr J. L. Dawson (of the Literary and Linguistic Computing Centre, Cambridge) were the *sine qua non*: responsibility for the choice of features and their analysis remains my own. I am grateful for advice,

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useful discussion and correspondence to many, especially the late Professor D. L. Page, Dr J. B. Hainsworth, Professor G. S. Kirk and Professor A. B. Lord. I would like to thank Professor Dr W. Burkert, Dr N. J. Richardson and Professor M. L. West for discussion of the *Hymn to Apollo*. I must apologise for differing from the latter so frequently; without the stimulation of his ideas this field would have been much the poorer, and, as he will know, my views have often diverged from his only after much agonising. Special thanks go to Dr C. Carey and my examiners Dr Richardson and Dr Edwards for detailed and valuable comments and criticisms, and above all to Dr J. Chadwick, who has guided this work throughout with much swift assistance and encouragement. In sombre times I must express thanks to the free society which has permitted and indeed funded this esoteric quest for truth, and to the Classical Faculty and University Press for its publication. Finally, if *The Language of Hesiod* prompted my approach, for introducing me to the singers of tales I shall always be indebted to Mr Andrew Wilson, *ὅς τέ με τὰ πρῶτιστα καλὴν ἐδίδαξεν ἀοιδίην*.

*Trinity College, Cambridge*  
*November 1980*

Richard Janko

*Postscript:* delays in publication permit me to add that Karl Förstel's excellent work on the *Hymns to Apollo* came into my hands too late for inclusion in my text, and its relegation to the notes implies no disrespect. The publication of parts of over 100 lines of the *Ehoiai* in *P. Leiden* inv. 502-9 (*Papyri, Greek and Egyptian, in honour of E. G. Turner*, ed. P. J. Parsons, P. J. Sijpesteijn and K. A. Worp, London 1981, 1-20) offers a disappointing harvest statistically, and no help to the solution of the problems discussed in Appendix C.

*Vatby, Ithaca*  
*September 1981*

R. J.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

I have in general attempted to use the standard scholarly abbreviations: those for ancient authors are as used by LSJ; for periodicals I have endeavoured to follow *L'Année Philologique*; those for books are indicated in the bibliography. As the longer Hymns and the other poems of the epic corpus are referred to so frequently, I have adopted the following conventions to refer to them:

*Il* Iliad (individual books are designated A, B, Γ etc.)

*Od* Odyssey (individual books are designated α, β, γ etc.)

*Tb* Theogony

*Erga* Works and Days

*Aspis* Shield of Heracles (lines 1–56 excepted: these are cited as [Aspis] and counted with *Cat*)

*Cat* Ehoiai or Catalogue of Women (Hesiod, fragments 1–245 M–W)

*Dem* Hymn to Demeter

*Ap* Hymn to Apollo, which is usually subdivided into:

*DAP* Hymn to Delian Apollo (*Ap* 1–181), and

*PAP* Hymn to Pythian Apollo (*Ap* 182–546)

*Herm* Hymn 4 to Hermes

*Apbr* Hymn 5 to Aphrodite

*Hy* 6 Homeric Hymn 6, etc.

The following symbols are used in the discussion of formulaic parallels: \*M 303 means ‘also at M 303, at the same place in the line’ (this can always be distinguished from the asterisk marking reconstructed or hypothetical forms); ~ denotes the omission of identical material; / denotes the beginning or end of a line. Note also (+) V for (before) vowel, C for consonant, and <sup>0</sup>/<sub>00</sub> for ‘per thousand’.

Finally, a note on accents. If we are to use iota adscript, we ought to be consistent in accenting the second element of the diphthongs in which it appears, as in all other diphthongs (cf. West *Tb* p. vi). As this book concerns early Greek almost entirely, I have ventured to be consistent in this way. In retrospect, I am not sure whether it was right to do this, but the reader can judge the result of the experiment for himself.

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οὐπω δὲ δύο ἢ τρεῖς ἡμέραι διεληλύθεσαν, καὶ  
προσελθὼν ἐγὼ Ὀμήρωι τῶι ποιητῆϊ, σχολῆς  
οὔσης ἀμφοῖν, τὰ τε ἄλλα ἐπυνθανόμην καὶ  
ὄθεν εἶη· τοῦτο γὰρ μάλιστα παρ' ἡμῖν εἰσέτι  
νῦν ζητεῖσθαι . . . καὶ μὴν κακεῖνο ἐπεθύμουν  
εἰδέναι, εἰ προτέραν ἔγραψεν τὴν Ὀδύσσειαν  
τῆς Ἰλιάδος, ὡς οἱ πολλοὶ φασιν· ὁ δὲ ἠρνεῖτο.

Lucian

Oral poetry, traditional and indeed archaistic  
though it is, cannot avoid the continuous pro-  
cess of slight and unconscious modernization.

G. S. Kirk