

# Shifting Focalization in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*: the Case of Hermes' Cave

*Athanassios Vergados*

THE FOURTH HOMERIC HYMN, which recounts the birth-story of Hermes and the acquisition of his divine prerogatives, presents several problems to its reader. These problems range from the state of the text and its occasionally unusual diction to questions related to style and genre. In this paper I focus on a particularly perplexing issue, the shifting presentation of the god's cave. The cave's verbal representation constantly changes in a way not unlike its mercurial dweller: at times it is described as dark and gloomy, but on other occasions it appears as a regal μέγαρον or even a temple. The question I am asking is whether there is any way to make sense of the cave's different attributes. Is there any pattern according to which the cave's description is organized or does the poet assign the cave's characteristics at random or under the pressure of metrical and formular constraints?

In pursuing my analysis I will be using the terms poet or narrator as a kind of shorthand: I am examining the poem as we have it, without making any claims regarding its composition since this does not affect the core of my argument. But it should be pointed out that Homeric scholarship has come to acknowledge the wide spectrum that exists between "oral" and "written,"<sup>1</sup> and opinions on where each archaic hexameter

<sup>1</sup> On the various types of "oral poetry" see R. H. Finnegan, *Oral Poetry: Its Nature, Significance, and Social Context* (Cambridge 1977); E. J. Bakker, *Poetry in Speech. Orality and Homeric Discourse* (Ithaca 1997), esp. 7–32, 159–62, and his chapter "How Oral is Oral Composition?" in his *Pointing at the Past. From Formula to Performance in Homeric Poetics* (Washington 2005) 38–55. Cf. further

poem stands within this continuum vary. To cite only a few examples, composition that involved writing has been postulated for Hesiod's poems by scholars with as different an outlook as M. L. West and P. Pucci,<sup>2</sup> while R. Janko has suggested that fixed texts may have influenced the composition of the *Hymn to Hermes*.<sup>3</sup> Interestingly, the poet of the *Hymn to Hermes* has his main character improvise a hymn ἐξ αὐτοσχεδίας. But why specifically mention the improvisatory nature of Hermes' song? Was there perhaps a different technique of hexameter composition during the poet's time?<sup>4</sup>

Earlier scholarship, however, used the cave's shifting presentation as an argument for the poem's multiple authorship. A major proponent of this view was Carl Robert, who—pointing out that the cave is described in contradictory terms—went on to distinguish between two major sources for the composition of the poem.<sup>5</sup> The first was what he called the *Naturmythus* of

---

J. B. Hainsworth, "Criteri di oralità nella poesia arcaica non omerica," in C. Brillante, M. Cantilena, and C. O. Pavese (eds.), *I poemi epici rapsodici non omerici e la tradizione orale* (Padua 1981) 3–27, at 8–10, and M. L. West, "Is the 'Works and Days' an Oral Poem?" in *I poemi* 53–73, at 53–67.

<sup>2</sup> M. L. West, *Hesiod Theogony* (Oxford 1966) 40–41, 48–49; P. Pucci, *Hesiod and the Language of Poetry* (Baltimore 1977) 138–142.

<sup>3</sup> R. Janko, *Homer, Hesiod, and the Hymns* (Cambridge 1982) 40–41. By "fixed texts" Janko implies written texts as well. Note too that A. Hoekstra did not even include the *Hymn to Hermes* in *The Sub-Epic Stage of Formulaic Tradition: Studies in the Homeric Hymns to Apollo, to Aphrodite, and to Demeter* (Amsterdam 1969).

<sup>4</sup> The very use of αὐτοσχεδία in the sense 'improvisation' is a departure from Homer proper, where the word refers to combat at close quarters. Cf. H. Herter, "L'inno omerico a Hermes alla luce della problematica della poesia orale," in *I poemi* 183–201, at 195.

<sup>5</sup> C. Robert, "Zum homerischen Hermeshymnus," *Hermes* 41 (1906) 389–425, at 389–390. Robert's thesis was refuted by K. Kuiper, "De discrepantiis hymni homerici in Mercurium," *Mnemosyne* N.S. 38 (1910) 1–50, at 7–9, who remarked on Robert's arguments "artificiosa et de nihilo ficta tota illa de discrepantiis aedium divinarum ratiocinatio mihi videtur" and went on to suggest: "Ipsam poetam suis oculis in montis Cyllenii cacumine id (*sc. antrum*) vidisse ... non crediderim... *Quare ergo huius poetae*

the mother-goddess who always dwells in a gloomy cave. The second was the Ionic epic tradition that supplied the material for the presentation of the cave as a rich palace. According to Robert's *Quellenforschung* the hymn appears to be inherently inconsistent, as its building materials are a primitive mythologeme and the reflection of a more advanced and sophisticated literary age. Faithful to his analytic approach, Robert proposed that an originally shorter *Hymn to Hermes* was expanded by subsequent poets whose interventions were the reason for the contradictions in the cave's presentation. Thus while Hermes' dwelling started off as a foggy cave in the original core of the hymn, at a later phase were added those lines in which it appears to be a poor home, while at a subsequent stage it was given the attributes of a richly furnished palace.

Albert Gemoll remarked on the temple-like presentation of the cave at parts of the poem, but did not pursue this idea further.<sup>6</sup> Allen, Halliday, and Sikes in their commentary did not even raise the question of this conflicting description of Hermes and Maia's cave. Instead, they limited themselves to citing *comparanda* for some of the phrases that describe the cave without exploring their possible significance.<sup>7</sup> It is L. Rader-

---

*Mercurio, matricae Maiae, denegabis, quae concessa sunt Calypsoni Homericæ?*" (9; emphasis mine).

<sup>6</sup> A. Gemoll, *Die homerischen Hymnen* (Leipzig 1886) 219 on 148: "πίονα νηόν. Die Grotte der Maia wird als Haus gedacht mit Hofthüren (26), einem μέγαρον (146) und verschiedenen Kammern (247) im Innern des großen Hauses (246). Weil es aber das Haus eines Gottes ist, wird es hier νηός genannt. Schneidewin schrieb ohne Not: ἀπείρονα σηκόν." Note also that A. Matthiae, *Animadversiones in Hymnos Homericos cum prolegomenis de cuiusque consilio, partibus, aetate* (Leipzig 1800) 261–262, bracketed 247 which mentions the cave's *adytoi*.

<sup>7</sup> T. W. Allen, W. R. Halliday, E. E. Sikes, *The Homeric Hymns* (Oxford 1936). In their earlier (1904) edition, Allen and Sikes included in their notes on the relevant verses some evaluative comments that could raise questions regarding the status of Hermes and Maia's cave; cf. on lines 148, 169, and 247. It is curious that these comments were removed in the 1936 edition.

macher's merit to have realized that "the cave exists in the poet's imagination, and its description changes in a fairytale-like manner depending on the needs of the moment."<sup>8</sup> In what follows I will discuss precisely these "needs of the moment" which lead to the cave's seemingly contradictory presentation. The poet, I submit, engages in what could be called 'focalized intertextuality' (if the term be permitted): at various points in the hymn, he adapts the description of the cave to the perspective of the character who observes or comments on it by drawing on traditional formulaic material that conforms to the perspective of the character through whose eyes we view the cave. Crucial for my argument is J. M. Foley's concept of 'traditional referentiality', the idea that an epic formula acquires its meaning and connotations not only from its immediate context in the line where it occurs, but also from its previous occurrences elsewhere in archaic hexameter poetry. Because of these other occurrences the epic formulae possess for the audience (which was imbued in the language and workings of this traditional epic diction) certain associations with particular narrative situations, which create a 'horizon of expectations' that the poet may or may not materialize.<sup>9</sup> For the poet, the cave we will be considering is a purely imaginary space whose presentation can be adapted to the viewer's thoughts or rhetorical needs. To reconcile what appear to be conflicting descriptions of Maia and Hermes' cave, we need to be always mindful of who is perceiving the cave each time it is presented to us. In addition, the changes in the description of the cave go hand in hand with the changes in Apollo's evaluation of Hermes' divine status as well as Hermes' perception of his own divine identity.

<sup>8</sup> L. Radermacher, *Der homerische Hermeshymnus* (Vienna 1931) 65: "Die Höhle entsteht bei ihm als reine Phantasievorstellung, die sich nach dem Bedürfnis des Augenblicks märchenhaft verwandelt" (on line 26). See also the discussion in Herter, in *I poemi* 191–194.

<sup>9</sup> See J. M. Foley, *Immanent Art. From Structure to Meaning in Traditional Oral Epic* (Bloomington 1991) 38–60, and *Homer's Traditional Art* (University Park 1999) 13–34.

By examining the point of view of the cave's observers we will discover that there is a fairly consistent pattern in which the information regarding the cave is organized.<sup>10</sup>

The cave is first mentioned in the proem, at line 6, where it is termed *παλίσκιον*.<sup>11</sup> One might think that this epithet is 'colorless'. *παλίσκιον* does not add anything to our understanding of the cave that we would not have guessed on our own: on account of their configuration caves are naturally shady. However, *παλίσκιον* is motivated by what the poet illustrates at that specific section of the poem. Having mentioned the parentage, cult- or dwelling-place, and chief attributes of Hermes in good hymnic fashion,<sup>12</sup> he elaborates on the love-affair between Zeus and Maia. This, we are told (9), was taking place at night (*νυκτὸς ἀμολγῶ*) and away from Hera's view, and in fact it was not noticed by either gods or humans. In addition, *παλίσκιον* and the nymph's moral characterization (*αἰδοίη*) are in the center of a small ring (4–7) and thus acquire special

<sup>10</sup> For the application of the narratological concept of 'focalization' on early Greek poetry, I. J. F. de Jong, *Narrators and Focalizers. The Presentation of the Story in the Iliad* (Amsterdam 1987), is fundamental. The Homeric scholia have partly anticipated the modern discussion on focalization, as R. Nünlist shows: "The Homeric Scholia on Focalization," *Mnemosyne* 56 (2003) 61–71. See also his "Some Clarifying Remarks on 'Focalization'," in F. Montanari and P. Ascheri (eds.), *Omero tremila anni dopo* (Rome 2002) 445–453, and Y. Rinon, "The Pivotal Scene: Narration, Colonial Focalization, and Transition in *Odyssey* 9," *AJP* 128 (2007) 301–334, at 302–303.

<sup>11</sup> *Hymn.Hom.Herm.* 1–7: Ἑρμῆν ὕμνει Μοῦσα, Διὸς καὶ Μαιάδος υἱόν, | Κυλλήνης μεδέοντα καὶ Ἀρκαδίας πολυμήλου, | ἄγγελον ἀθανάτων ἐριούνιον, ὃν τέκε Μαῖα | νύμφη ἐνπλόκαμος, Διὸς ἐν φιλότῃτι μιν γείσα, | αἰδοίη· μακάρων δὲ θεῶν ἡλείαθ' ὄμιλον | ἄντρον ἔσω ναίουσα παλίσκιον, ἔνθα Κρονίων | νύμφη ἐνπλοκάμῳ μισγέσκετο νυκτὸς ἀμολγῶ. Text: F. Càssola, *Inni Omerici* (Milan 1994), who briefly discusses the cave's changing presentation on p.171.

<sup>12</sup> See E. Norden, *Agnostos Theos* (Berlin 1913) 168–169; W. D. Furley and J. M. Bremer, *Greek Hymns* (Tübingen 2001) I 52–56; and R. Janko, "The Structure of the Homeric Hymns: A Study in Genre," *Hermes* 109 (1981) 9–24, at 9–10.

prominence:<sup>13</sup> Maia appears to be a shy nymph who dwells apart from everyone and avoids the noisy gatherings of the gods. The darkness of the cave, then, in combination with the fact that Zeus and Maia's meetings occurred at night, explains why this secretive affair was possible, and *παλίσκιον* is thus motivated by the needs of the narrative context.

The situation changes, however, as soon as Hermes is born. At the beginning of the *pars epica*, the infant god leaves his "sacred cradle" (21) and abandons his dwelling.<sup>14</sup> But here we are faced with an unexpected situation. Hermes exits by "crossing over the threshold of the high-roofed cave" (23). What is more, this cave is said to have "courtyard-doors" (26) and is even called a *δόμος* (27).

The formulaic parallels are instructive, as they show that *οὐδός* is consistently used in early epic language only in the context of man-made dwellings, and especially palaces. Line 23 has a close parallel in *Il.* 9.582 (*οὐδοῦ ἐπεμβεβαὼς ὑψηρεφείος θαλάμοιο*). There, Oeneus entertains Meleager to return to battle against the Curetes by promising him lavish gifts, and in line 582 Oeneus enters Meleager's palace. At *Od.* 7.135 (*καρπαλίμως ὑπὲρ οὐδὸν ἐβήσατο δώματος εἴσω*) the phrase occurs (in a different *sedes*) when Odysseus enters Alcinous' palace. At 13.63 (*ὡς εἰπὼν ὑπὲρ οὐδὸν ἐβήσατο δῖος Ὀδυσσεύς*) the same expression recurs when Odysseus leaves the Phaeacian palace and heads towards the ship that will convey him to Ithaca. Finally, at 22.182 (*εὖθ' ὑπὲρ οὐδὸν ἔβαινε Μελάνθιος*) the same formula is used when Melanthius enters Odysseus' palace.

The *Hymn to Hermes* is the only exception to this norm: all three occurrences of *οὐδός* in the hymn qualify Hermes' cave.

<sup>13</sup> See M. Douglas, *Thinking in Circles. An Essay on Ring Composition* (New Haven/London 2007) 58, who points out that "a ring composition condenses the whole burden of its message into the mid-turn."

<sup>14</sup> 22–27: ἀλλ' ὃ γ' ἀναίξας ζήτει βόας Ἀπόλλωνος | οὐδὸν ὑπερβαίνων ὑψηρεφείος ἄντροιο. | ἔνθα χέλυν εὐρών ἐκτήσατο μυρίον ὄλβον. | Ἐρμῆς τοι πρῶτιστα χέλυν τεκτήνατ' αἰδόν, | ἧ ρά οἱ ἀντεβόλησεν ἐπ' αὐλείησι θύρῃσι | βοσκομένη προπάρριθε δόμων ἐριθηλέα ποίην.

At 233 the angry Apollo is said to “descend the stone threshold” (κατεβήσατο λάινον οὐδὸν—I shall return to this line below). And at 380 Hermes emphatically denies his involvement in the cattle-theft by stating that he did not cross over the threshold (οὐδ’ ὑπὲρ οὐδὸν ἔβην).

We obtain the same picture if we examine the use of the αὐλειαί θύραι in early Greek poetry. At *Od.* 18.239 (ὡς νῦν Ἴρος ἐκεῖνος ἐπ’ αὐλείησι θύρησιν | ἦσται νευστάζων κεφαλῇ) and 23.49 (νῦν δ’ οἱ μὲν δὴ πάντες ἐπ’ αὐλείησι θύρησιν | ἀθρόοι), the phrase designates the courtyard doors in front of Odysseus’ palace. This use has a parallel in lyric: at *Nem.* 1.19–21 Pindar employs the same phrase of himself singing at the palace of Chromius (ἔσταν δ’ ἐπ’ αὐλείαις θύραις | ἀνδρὸς φιλοξείνου καλὰ μελπόμενος).<sup>15</sup> Finally, the adjective ὑψηρεφής/ὑψερεφής is nowhere else used of a cave. It typically modifies a building or δῶμα as the parallels indicate.<sup>16</sup> Thus its combination with ἄντροιο at 23 is felt unexpected, and perhaps even jarring.

All this draws a picture different from the one we would expect on the basis of what little the proem has revealed to us: far from being a dark, shady cave, Hermes’ dwelling is rendered through the use of certain formulaic phrases into something greater, in fact a δόμος. The poet, however, points out this incongruity to his audience: the cave’s description as a

<sup>15</sup> The expression αὐλειον θύρωμα occurs at *IG* IV.1<sup>2</sup> 110.27 and 28, referring to a temple’s doorway (Epidaurus, *aedificia sacra*, IV/III B.C.). M. Christopoulos, “αὐλειος θύρα et cadre religieux: la rencontre du public et du privé,” *Kernos* 19 (2006) 303–312, argues that the αὐλειος θύρα is normally the locus through which the public/religious sphere penetrates the private sphere of the home. This is yet another indication that the use of αὐλειαί θύραι in *Hymn.Hom.Herm.* is problematic: we are dealing with a cave located in the wilderness and not a private home in a *polis*. Note too that Hermes’ cave has a πρόθυρον (271).

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *Il.* 9.582 (ὑψηρεφέος θαλάμοιο) and 5.213, 19.333, *Od.* 4.15, 7.225, 19.526 (ὑψερεφές μέγα δῶμα); further *Od.* 4.46, 4.757, 7.85, 10.111, 13.4–5, 15.241, 15.424, 15.432.

palace conflicts with reality, as the combination *ὑψηροφέος*, normally used of a man-made construction, and *ἄντροιο*, a natural formation, reveals at 23.<sup>17</sup>

Our poet seems to like to point out such incongruities. To the example just mentioned (*ὑψηροφέος ἄντροιο*) one might add the two similes that directly precede Hermes' construction of the lyre and his first musical performance. At 43–44 his swiftness of action is compared to the swift thought that crosses the chest of a man beset by cares.<sup>18</sup> The main point of this simile is obviously that Hermes is quick to put thought into action, thus efficiently combining words and deeds. The attentive audience, however, realizes that in addition to Hermes' speed the simile reveals also an incongruity: Hermes is *not* an *άνήρ*, but a new-born infant. Likewise, his first musical performance is introduced by a simile that compares it to the playful insults that young men exchange at banquets.<sup>19</sup> While the simile certainly informs us about the tone of Hermes' song—it will be a playful song, perhaps similar to the story of Ares and Aphrodite in *Odyssey* 8—at the same time it underscores the fact that Hermes is not a *ήβητής* (whether we take it to mean a youth or a reveler as Allen, Halliday, and Sikes preferred). It also foregrounds the fact that Hermes' song does not have an audience of companions who would react to it, as the youths react to these insults mentioned in the simile, unless we wish to consider Maia's maids at line 60 as Hermes' audience. But in that case too, we are not told anything about their response to the song, which creates a conflict between the reality of Hermes' performance and the poet's commentary on it. Thus the contradictions in the description of the cave mirror the contradictions in the presentation of Hermes: he is an infant, but compared to adult men; he is a god, but is craving for meat.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. later at 148 *ἄντρον ... πίονα νηόν*.

<sup>18</sup> 43–44: *ὡς δ' ὀπότ' ὠκὺ νόημα διὰ στέρνοιο περήσει | άνέρος ὄν τε θαμεινὰ ἐπιστρωφῶσι μέριμναι*.

<sup>19</sup> 55–56: *ήύτε κοῦροι | ήβηται θαλίησι παραιβόλα κερτομέουσιν*.



Hermes' first song offers a representation of the cave similar to the one at lines 23–27. When he constructs the lyre, he tests it by performing a hymn to himself. In that inset ‘Hymn to Hermes’, the infant god sings of the cave in terms that once again point to a royal palace. At line 60 Hermes expressly praises the ἀγλαὰ δώματα νύμφης, the splendid abodes of Maia, and praises the tripods and cauldrons that were stored there in abundance.<sup>20</sup> This wealth reminds us of another literary cave: the cave of the Nymphs at *Od.* 13.103–108.<sup>21</sup> This cave is also said to contain kraters and amphoras (105–106), while the Nymphs weave purple clothes for themselves on their looms (108).

The presentation of the cave changes radically after Hermes has completed his cattle-theft. At 155–161 Maia reproaches the young god for leaving the cave at night and warns him of the punishment that Apollo might inflict on him. Hermes retorts that he is not a child that fears his mother's chastising and he

<sup>20</sup> 60–61: ἀμφιπόλους τ' ἐγέραιρε καὶ ἀγλαὰ δώματα νύμφης, | καὶ τρίποδας κατὰ οἶκον ἐπηετανούς τε λέβητας; cf. 65 εὐώδεος ἐκ μεγάρου, 146 μεγάρου διὰ κλήθρον. The cave is called δῶμα also at 34 and 40; at 171–172 (ἢ κατὰ δῶμα | ἄντρῳ ἐν ἡρόεντι θαασσέμεν) Hermes objects to “sitting idly at home, in a murky cave.” Calypso's cave in the *Odyssey* is also termed δῶμα (5.6, 5.242); but, unlike Hermes' cave, the description of her dwelling is consistent. For the similarities and differences in the descriptions of both caves, see below and n.5 above. M. Vamvouri Ruffly, *La fabrique du divin. Les Hymnes de Callimaque à la lumière des Hymnes homériques et des Hymnes épigraphiques* (Liège 2004) 156–567, notices the discrepancy between the initial description of the cave in the proem and its description in Hermes' song (54–61) and observes that it is the song's “pouvoir normatif” that transforms the cave into a palace or temple; she maintains characteristically that “le discours poétique d'Hermès exerce un pouvoir tel qu'il opère la conjonction du fictionnel avec la réalité immédiate” (157). While these observations are valid, the description of Hermes' cave does not change in a linear fashion nor is this change effected by Hermes' song alone.

<sup>21</sup> ἀγχόθι δ' αὐτῆς ἄντρον ἐπήρατον ἡροειδές, | ἱρὸν Νυμφάων, αἱ Νηϊάδες καλέονται. | ἐν δὲ κρητῆρες τε καὶ ἀμφιφορῆες ἕασι | λάινοι· ἔνθα δ' ἔπειτα τιθαιβώσσουσι μέλισσαι. | ἐν δ' ἱστοὶ λίθιοι περιμηκέες, ἔνθα τε Νύμφαι | φάρε' ὑφαίνουσιν ἀλιπόρφυρα, θαῦμα ἰδέσθαι.

shows no fear of Apollo. In addition—and important for the purpose of this paper—Hermes refers to the cave by means of a disparaging circumlocution at 169 (αὐτοῦ τῆδε). Dwelling in such a cave is to Hermes' mind equivalent to inactivity or idleness (note θαασέμεν at 172). Finally, in his reply to Maia he qualifies the cave also as ἡρόεντι, an adjective that is generally reserved for the Underworld (with Τάρταρος or ζόφος).<sup>22</sup> We should note that the combination of ἡρόεν with ἄντρον is confined to our poet, who avoids the Odyssean σπέος ἡεροειδές (12.80, 13.366) or ἡεροειδέα πέτρην (12.233), ἄντρον ἐπήρατον ἡεροειδές (13.303), or σπέος γλαφυρόν (1.15 etc.), which do not have any associations with the Underworld. This description is extremely important, as it is the only occasion in the poem on which we *hear* of Hermes' own perception of the cave. In every other case, the description is mediated through the narrator's words.

At 228–234, it is through Apollo's eyes that we perceive Hermes' dwelling.<sup>23</sup> In this section the poet establishes beyond any doubt that in addition to Maia (a nymph), a full-fledged god dwells in that cave as well: the cave is progressively revealed to be similar to a temple. This gradual description resembles a riddle or a puzzle that the audience needs to piece together, as it were. Furthermore, the poet prefaces this description of the cave with a description of its surroundings, essentially a *locus amoenus* reminiscent of the surroundings of Calypso's cave which (interestingly) Hermes visits in *Odyssey* 5.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Cf. *Il.* 8.13, 12.240, 15.191, 21.56, 23.51, *Od.* 11.57, 11.155, 13.241; *Hymn.Hom.Cer.* 80, 337, 402, 446, and perhaps 464; *Hes. Theog.* 119, 653, 658, 682, 721, 723a, 729, 736, 807; fr.30.22, 280.23 (excepting *Od.* 20.64, *Theog.* 294).

<sup>23</sup> Κυλλήνης δ' ἀφίκανεν ὄρος καταείμενον ὕλη, | πέτρης εἰς κευθμῶνα  
βαθύσκιον, ἔνθα τε νύμφη | ἀμβροσίη ἐλόχευσε Διὸς παῖδα Κρονίωνος. |  
ὄδμῃ δ' ἡμερόεσσα δι' οὐρεος ἡγαθέοιο | κίδνατο, πολλὰ δὲ μῆλα ταναύποδα  
βόσκετο ποίην. | ἔνθα τότε σπεύδων κατεβήσεται λάινον οὐδὸν | ἄντρον ἐς  
ἡρόεν ἐκατηβόλος αὐτὸς Ἀπόλλων.

<sup>24</sup> On the motif see P. Haß, *Der locus amoenus in der antiken Literatur* (Bamberg 1998), esp. 11–26 and 38–45.

Let us begin with the description of the cave's surroundings and their parallels in *Odyssey* 5.55–77. Both caves are said to be the dwelling-place of nymphs. Maia is introduced as a *νύμφη ἀμβροσίη* (229–230), while her sister Calypso is a well-tressed nymph (*νύμφη ... ἐυπλόκαμος*, 57–58). We will recall that *ἐυπλόκαμος* was used of Maia elsewhere in the Hymn (at 4 and 6). At 228 we are told that the mountain in which the cave was located was completely covered in trees (*ὄρος καταείμενον ὕλη*), to which we may compare *Od.* 5.63–64 (*ὕλη δὲ σπέος ἀμφὶ πεφύκει τηλεθώσα, | κλήθρη τ' αἰγείρός τε καὶ εὐώδης κυπάρισσος*) and 68–69 (*ἡ δ' αὐτοῦ τετάνυστο περὶ σπείους γλαφυροῖο | ἡμερὶς ἡβώωσα, τεθήλει δὲ σταφυλῆσι*). A sweet fragrance spreads throughout the mountain (*ὄδμη ἰμερόεσσα δι' οὔρεος ἡγαθέιο | κίδνατο*, 231–232), to which compare *Od.* 5.59–61 (*τηλόσ' δ' ὄδμη | κέδρου τ' εὐκεάτοιο θύου τ' ἀνὰ νῆσον ὀδάδει | δαιομένων*). The origin of this fragrance in Cyllene is not specified; however, the use of *ἡγαθέιο* (“most holy,” 231) strongly suggests that we have here a reflection of the ‘divine fragrance’ motif, according to which divine presence is manifested by sweet fragrance.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, we should note the presence of animals around both caves: *Od.* 5.65–67 mentions three kinds of birds (*ἔνθα δέ τ' ὄρνιθες τανυσίπτεροι εὐνάζοντο, | σκῶπές τ' ἴρηκές τε τανύγλωσσοί τε κορώναι | εἰνάλαι, τῆσιν τε θαλάσσια ἔργα μέμηλεν*), while in the hymn sheep are said to pasture in the vicinity of Hermes' cave. This last detail may be explained in two ways: either as a reference to Hermes' association with small animals, and sheep in particular,<sup>26</sup> or as

<sup>25</sup> On the motif see E. Lohmeyer, *Vom göttlichen Wohlgeruch* (Heidelberg 1919), esp. 4–14; F. Pfister, “Epiphanie,” *RE Suppl.* 4 (1924) 316; S. Lilja, *The Treatment of Odours in the Poetry of Antiquity* (Helsinki 1972) 25–30; and P. Meloni, *Il profumo dell'immortalità. L'interpretazione patristica del Cantico 1,3* (Rome 1975) 2–4.

<sup>26</sup> At the end of the poem (570 ff.) Hermes is given tutelage of several kinds of animals; note too his cult-titles *κτηνίτης* (*I.Priene* 362.9) and *ἐπιμήλιος* (Paus. 9.34.3). At *Il.* 16.179–186 *Πολυμήλη* appropriately gives birth to Hermes' son *Εὔδαρος*.

a tongue-in-cheek afterthought on the pleasant fragrance just mentioned in the same line.

While the Odyssean and the hymnic passages certainly bear similarities to each other,<sup>27</sup> they also differ significantly. To begin with, the description of the cave's surroundings in the *Hymn to Hermes* is rather condensed. While the same motifs occur in both texts, the Odyssean passage elaborates on them much more than the hymn does. And again, I think the reason for the hymn's condensed description has to be sought in the viewer's attitude. In the hymn the cave is seen through the eyes of a character who has recently discovered that his cattle had been stolen and is aware of the thief's identity (cf. the omen Apollo receives at 213–214). He is angry and hastens to interrogate Hermes, hoping that he will reveal to him the animals' whereabouts. The poet underscores Apollo's urgency four times within twenty lines.<sup>28</sup> Thus, in contrast to Hermes in the *Odyssey* who takes the time to admire the natural beauty of Calypso's island,<sup>29</sup> Apollo is not interested in appreciating the landscape and simply bursts into the cave.

In addition, the poet is playing with audience expectations. While the Odyssean subtext would cause us to expect a confrontation or at least a conversation between Apollo and Maia,<sup>30</sup> the poet once again surprises us. The nymph is for-

<sup>27</sup> Some of the similarities have already been explored by S. Shelmerdine, "Odyssean Allusions in the Fourth Homeric Hymn," *TAPA* 116 (1986) 49–63, at 55–57.

<sup>28</sup> 212 *θάσσον*, 215 *έσσυμένως ήξεν, ήξεν* again at 227, and *σπεύδων* at 233.

<sup>29</sup> *Od.* 5.73–76: *ένθα κ' έπειτα και άθανάτος περ έπελθών | θηήσαιτο ιδών και τερφθείη φρεσίν ήσιν. | ένθα στας θηείτο διάκτορος Άργειφόντης. | αύταρ έπει δή πάντα έψ θηήσατο θυμῶ...*

<sup>30</sup> In the Odyssean subtext of this passage Hermes converses with Calypso. There may have been other versions of the story of Hermes' cattle-theft that involved a direct confrontation between Apollo and Maia; cf. *LIMC* V s.v. "Hermes" no. 241, on which see R. Bonaudo, *La culla di Hermes. Iconografia e immaginario delle Hydriai ceretane* (Rome 2004) 64–65; on the representations of versions of the Hermes myth on attic vase-painting see

gotten, and instead of the usual welcoming and hospitality scene we get another glimpse of the cave, this time through Apollo's eyes.<sup>31</sup> But let us now follow Apollo's footsteps.

When the god enters the cave, he is said to descend the stony threshold (233). This formula at the end of the verse may seem inconspicuous; caves, after all, are stony. But the other occurrences of this phrase in epic show that it has implications for the audience's perception of the cave. A *λάινος οὐδός* is never used elsewhere of the entrance to a cave. At *Il.* 9.404–405 (*οὐδ' ὅσα λάινος οὐδὸς ἀφήτορος ἐντὸς ἔέργει | Φοίβου Ἀπόλλωνος Πυθοῖ ἐνὶ πετρῆεσση*) it is the threshold of Apollo's temple at Delphi. The same is true of *Hymn.Hom.Ar.* 296 (*αὐτὰρ ἐπ' αὐτοῖς | λάινον οὐδὸν ἔθηκε Τροφώνιος ἠδ' Ἀγαμήδης*) where we are told that Trophonius and Agamedes established the *λάινος οὐδός* of Apollo's temple at Delphi. This formula can also indicate the entrance to a different kind of artificial, constructed dwelling: once in the *Odyssey* (16.41) it designates the threshold of Eumaeus' hut, while it occurs thrice in the same poem, at 17.30, 20.258, 23.88, for the threshold of Odysseus' palace at Ithaca. Finally, in a paean by Bacchylides (fr.4.21–22 Maehler), Heracles is said to have stood on the *λάινον οὐδόν* of Ceyx's palace (*στᾶ δ' ἐπὶ λάινον οὐδόν, | τοὶ δὲ θοίνας ἔντυον*). At any rate, whether we associate it with a modest dwelling (a swineherd's hut) or a more lavish one (a king's palace) or even Apollo's temple, *λάινος οὐδός* is certainly a unique way of describing the entrance to a cave.<sup>32</sup>

now C. Nobili, *L'inno omerico a Hermes e le tradizioni poetiche locali* (diss. Univ. Milano 2009) 184–189.

<sup>31</sup> See S. Reece, *The Stranger's Welcome. Oral Theory and the Aesthetics of the Homeric Hospitality Scene* (Michigan 1993) 211–212, for the hospitality scene of Hermes and Calypso in *Odyssey* 5, and 5–47 for the “conventions of the Homeric hospitality scene.” J. S. Clay, *The Politics of Olympus. Form and Meaning in the Major Homeric Hymns* (Princeton 1989) 133, remarks on Apollo's “violation of all human and divine etiquette.”

<sup>32</sup> Notice that *λάινον οὐδόν* is followed by *ἄντρον ἐς ἠερόεν*, which constitutes another incongruity; cf. 8 f. above. On the meaning of *οὐδός* see S.

Once in the cave, Apollo begins his search. Consistent with his initial reference to the stone threshold, the poet goes on to mention the *μυχοί* or recesses of the great *δόμος*.<sup>33</sup> Caves of course have recesses, as both our experience and the parallels from the Odyssean caves suggest. But it is worth noting that our poet avoids the use of any Odyssean phrase that could express this. For instance, at *Od.* 5.226 we encounter the *clausula* *μυχῶ σπείους γλαφυροῖο*, which with a slight modification (*μυχόν* instead of *μυχῶ*) could have been employed here, especially since the poet has already alluded to *Od.* 5 in the preceding lines.<sup>34</sup> Instead, he uses *πάντα μυχὸν μέγαλοιο δόμοιο* (cf. 252 *μυχὸς μέγαλοιο δόμοιο*) which, though elsewhere unattested, clearly points to artificial, constructed dwellings. It is furthermore reminiscent of such phrases as *μυχῶ δόμου ὑψηλοῖο* (*Il.* 22.440, *Od.* 3.402, 4.304, 7.346) and thus once again evokes an elaborate palace. To complicate matters further, *Pind. Pyth.* 5.68–69 (*μυχόν τ' ἀμφέπει | μαντήιον*) suggests that *μυχός* may be used in a religious context as well. Finally, *δόμος* may of course refer to a man-made house, but can also designate a temple, as will be seen below.

Having crossed the “stony threshold” and explored the recesses of the great *δόμος*, Apollo seizes the “shiny key” and opens the cave’s three *ἄδυτοι*. Now the picture becomes clearer. Whereas the formulae used previously were somewhat ambiguous, since they can refer to both temples and palaces (or

Rougier-Blanc, *Les maisons homériques. Vocabulaire architectural et sémantique du bâti* (Nancy 2005) 143–146.

<sup>33</sup> 246–253: *παπτήνας δ' ἀνὰ πάντα μυχὸν μέγαλοιο δόμοιο | τρεῖς ἀδύτους ἀνέφαγε λαβῶν κληῖδα φαεινὴν | νέκταρος ἐμπλείους ἠδ' ἀμβροσίης ἔρατεινῆς· | πολλὸς δὲ χρυσὸς τε καὶ ἄργυρος ἔνδον ἔκειτο, | πολλὰ δὲ φοινικέοντα καὶ ἄργυφα εἴματα νύμφης, | οἷα θεῶν μακάρων ἱεροὶ δόμοι ἐντὸς ἔχουσιν. | ἔνθ' ἐπεὶ ἐξερέεινε μυχὸς μέγαλοιο δόμοιο | Λητοῖδης μύθοισι προσηύδα κύδιμον Ἑρμῆν.*

<sup>34</sup> Cf. also *Od.* 9.236 *ἐς μυχὸν ἄντρου*, 13.363 = 24.6 *μυχῶ ἄντρου θεσπεσίοιο*; *Hymn.Hom.Aphr.* 263 *μυχῶ σπείων ἐροέντων*. On the definition and semantics of *μυχός* see Rougier-Blanc, *Les maisons* 204–205.

other kinds of human dwelling), now we are unambiguously in the realm of temples, since *ἄδυτον* designates the innermost part of the temple. In her study of the terms *adyton* and *opisthodomos*, Hollinshead distinguishes three types of *adyta*: first, “some kind of religious structure or enclosure, including temples or parts of temples, shrines, designated precincts, crevices, and caves”; second, “the place in which oracular inspiration occurs, most often in the sanctuary of Apollo at Delphi, but at other oracular sites as well”; and third, “a remote chamber, usually domestic in nature, removed from view or everyday experience. In this case there is no connotation of cult, but sometimes that of a storage function.”<sup>35</sup> In Hollinshead’s view, the cave’s *adytoi* investigated by Apollo in this hymn belong to the last category and thus the term does not have any religious connotations. The context of this occurrence, however, suggests otherwise.

First, we should consider what is stored in the three *adytoi*. There is nectar and ambrosia, the food and drink of the gods, abundant gold and silver, as well as the purple and silver-shining clothes of Maia. Obviously the presence of ambrosia and nectar point to the fact that the cave is the dwelling of gods. But there are some details in this description which suggest that the cave may be envisioned as a temple.<sup>36</sup> All the objects that Apollo discovers in the *adytoi* are items usually found in the “holy abodes of the blessed gods” (*θεῶν μακάρων ἱεροὶ δόμοι*, 251). These “holy abodes” are temples as the parallels suggest: at *Iliad* 6.89 *ἱεροῖο δόμοιο* designates Athena’s temple at Troy;<sup>37</sup> in the *Homeric Hymn to Hestia* (24).2 *ἱερὸς δόμος* is used of Apollo’s temple at Delphi; and in Euripides’

<sup>35</sup> M. B. Hollinshead, “‘Adyton’, ‘Opisthodomos’, and the Inner Room,” *Hesperia* 68 (1999) 189–218, at 191 with references.

<sup>36</sup> Of course, *δόμος* is inherently ambiguous in a religious/hymnal context, since even if perceived as ‘house’ it may designate the god’s temple where the cult-statue is housed.

<sup>37</sup> Hsch. ι 305 glosses *ἱεροῖο δόμοιο* as *ναοῦ, μεγάλου οἴκου*.

*Electra* 1000 θεῶν δόμοι are once again temples. Furthermore, all the objects Hermes threatens to steal from Apollo's Delphic temple (176–181) if Zeus should not award him the desired honors are exactly the same as those that Apollo discovers in the cave's *adytoi* (gold, silver, cauldrons and tripods, as well as clothes). The surviving temple inventories attest to the presence of golden and silver implements and jewelry,<sup>38</sup> while Herodotus informs us that gold, silver, and clothes were deposited in the *temenos* of Protesilaus.<sup>39</sup> In view of these, the cave is envisioned as a cult place or temple, and the shining key that Apollo seizes to open the three *adytoi*, (κληῖδα φαεινήν) may be what Diels calls a *Templeschlüssel*.<sup>40</sup> Such keys were carried by priestesses, and there are several representations of Iphigeneia as priestess carrying this type of key.<sup>41</sup>

Thus we obtain the following picture: Hermes and Maia's cave is introduced by a description of its surrounding environment that reminds the audience of Calypso's cave. The poet, however, continues with a description of the cave's interior and possessions so that it is progressively revealed to resemble a temple: initially described as a δόμος possessing multiple *μυχοί*, it turns out to have three *adytoi* (a term with religious connotations) which Apollo opens using a special key. These *adytoi* con-

<sup>38</sup> See *IG* I<sup>3</sup> 305 ff.; cf. W. E. Thompson, "The Early Parthenon Inventories," *AJA* 69 (1965) 223–229, at 227; "The Hekatompedon Inventories 414/413–411/410," *Hesperia* 34 (1965) 298–309, at 307; B. H. Hill, "Notes on Fifth-Century Inventories," *Hesperia* 35 (1966) 331–345; further S. B. Aleshire, *The Athenian Asklepieion. The People, Their Dedications, and the Inventories* (Amsterdam 1989) 103–111, on temple inventories in general. All these texts are replete with references to golden and silver implements; for items of clothing, see for instance *IG* II<sup>2</sup> 1533.102–103 (Aleshire's Inventory III), a κεκρύφαλος.

<sup>39</sup> 9.116: ἐν γὰρ Ἐλαιούντι τῆς Χερσονήσου ἐστὶ Πρωτεσίλειω τάφος τε καὶ τέμενος περὶ αὐτόν, ἔνθα ἦν χρήματα πολλὰ καὶ φιάλαι χρύσειαι καὶ ἀργύρειαι καὶ χαλκὸς καὶ ἐσθῆς καὶ ἄλλα ἀναθήματα, τὰ Ἀρταύκτης ἐσύλησε βασιλέος δόντος.

<sup>40</sup> H. Diels, *Antike Technik, sieben Vorträge*<sup>3</sup> (Leipzig/Berlin 1924) 45–49.

<sup>41</sup> *LIMC* V s.v. "Iphigeneia" nos. 14, 18–25.



tain items that one expects to find in a temple (e.g. golden and silver objects, luxurious clothing). In case the audience have not appreciated his hints, the poet solves the riddle in line 251 by comparing the cave's possessions to those commonly found in the "holy abodes of the blessed gods." If we agree that the cave is seen as a temple, then Apollo's bursting into it and his searching its *adyta* may even acquire a tinge of sacrilege.

This description raises questions. Do the lavish contents of this cave reflect nymph-cult? If this cave is supposed to be just Maia's dwelling or a place of nymph worship, then its wealth is far too exuberant. We know that nymphs were worshipped in caves. Sometimes their cult involved Hermes as well, but more often (and especially from the fifth century B.C. on) nymphs were worshipped alongside Pan. The offerings deposited in caves where nymph cult was practiced were not as rich as the objects Apollo discovers in the hymn. The findings are mostly 'rustic votives', wooden images (*ξέσματα*), sometimes terracotta figurines of pregnant women, *λουτροφόροι*, votive reliefs, and miniature inexpensive pottery.<sup>42</sup>

If this is the case, then why does the poet describe the cave in such terms? We can account for this description in two ways complementary to each other. First, this description is the continuation of a narrative strategy that the poet employed at the beginning of the hymn, with which he aimed at elevating Maia's status and consequently Hermes' position as well. Maia did not occupy a particularly central position in myth. In fact, besides being a Pleiad, daughter of Atlas, and Hermes' mother, she was known only as the foster mother of Arcas, the eponymous hero of the Arcadians, whom she reared when his mother Callisto was transformed into a bear.<sup>43</sup> Now, in a poem like the *Hymn to Hermes* that praises the god by portraying his antagonistic relation to his divine half-brother Apollo, the status of the god's mother becomes crucial, especially if we

<sup>42</sup> See J. Larson, *Greek Nymphs. Myth, Cult, Lore* (Oxford 2001) 226–258.

<sup>43</sup> Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.101; H. G. Gundel, "Maia," *RE* 14.1 (1928) 527–530.

consider that both gods are sons of Zeus and often refer to each other through periphrases involving the mother's name. Apollo calls Hermes "son of Zeus" only after their reconciliation has taken place (455).<sup>44</sup>

To cope with Maia's lack of mythological significance, the poet builds up her credentials in several ways. In the proem, where the praised god's parentage is normally only one of the subjects treated, Maia is mentioned more extensively than we might have expected. We hear about her appearance (*νύμφη εὐπλόκαμος*, twice) and we also find out something about her character: she is *αἰδοίη*, shy, since she avoids the company of the other gods. This also implies that her remote dwelling is not necessarily an indication of her lower status compared with the Olympians, but the result of her own choice that reflects her character. Furthermore, her relation with Zeus was not a one-time occurrence, as the iteratives *μισγέσκετο* (7) and *ὠρίζεσκον* (58) make clear. Finally, at 19 she is called *πότνια*, august, an adjective often reserved at this metrical *sedes* for Hera.

This is by no means the poet's only attempt to elevate Maia's status. We meet the same narrative strategy at 57–59, in Her-

<sup>44</sup> If we sort out the way in which the poet presents the two principal characters of the story (Hermes and Apollo), as well as the ways in which the two characters refer to each other, we obtain the following picture: the *poet* refers to Hermes as the son of Zeus slightly more often than he refers thus to Apollo (Hermes: 40, 101, 183, 432; Apollo: 215, 227, 328–329); he refers to Hermes through both his parents' name as frequently as he refers to Apollo (Hermes: 235, 579; Apollo: 243, 321); but he describes Hermes as the son of Maia far more frequently than he calls Apollo the son of Leto (Hermes: 73, 89, 244, 424, 430, 498, 521, 574; Apollo: 189, 314, 416, 500). Perhaps the repetition of Maia's name is meant to give her mythological presence and substance in the audience's subconscious. *Apollo* refers to Hermes as the son of Zeus at 455 and 567, as the son of Maia at 408, 439, and 514, and as the son of Zeus *and* Maia at 301, 446, and 550–551. Interestingly, *Hermes* calls Apollo the son of Zeus only at 468, the son of Leto only at 176, but never the son of Zeus *and* Leto. This absence is striking, and combined with what Hermes sings of his parents' relationship at 57–59, it may imply *e silentio* that Leto and Zeus did not share the same sort of *ἐταιρείη φιλότῆς* as Hermes' parents.

mes' short *mise en abyme*. The infant god performs a hymn to himself, in which he praises his own lineage. Maia appears to be *καλλιπέδιλος*, which though otherwise unattested may be a reminiscence of *χρυσοπέδιλος*, an adjective typically reserved in archaic hexameter for Hera in this *sedes*.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, we meet an iterative form, *ᾠρίζεσκον*, at 58, which again underscores the duration of Zeus and Maia's affair. Maia's presence (alongside Zeus) in 57, which resembles a typical hymnal opening (*ἄμφι* + accusative, following a form of *ἀείδειν*), indicates that she is the subject of Hermes' hymn as much as Zeus.<sup>46</sup> Finally, the *φιλότης* that linked Zeus and Maia is designated as *ἔταιρείη* (58). The word suggests a relation in which the involved parties are of equal status: it normally designates relations of mutual trust between male aristocrats, which can be exhibited either in peace (commensality) or in war (protection in battle).<sup>47</sup> The description of the cave is then another link in this chain. Just as Maia's status is equal to Zeus', so her dwelling is not the typical nymph cave: its contents are much more lavish, and Apollo's focalization of the cave appears to match Hermes' in the short inset hymn (cf. 61).

The other reason that accounts for the poet's description of the cave in 229–252 is related more directly to Hermes' divine status. Apollo knows that the cattle-thief is a son of Zeus: at 213–214 he receives a bird-omen, which reveals that the thief was *Διὸς υἱόν*. But *Διὸς υἱόν* is too generic: it could mean a god such as Apollo himself or a mortal demi-god, for example Heracles. This ambiguity is cleared up as we explore the cave through Apollo's eyes: it is the *δόμος* of a god.

This realization of Apollo's, furthermore, helps explain his first speech to Hermes, which as Sarah Harrell has pointed out

<sup>45</sup> Cf. *Od.* 11.604 (bracketed by von der Mühl), Hes. *Theog.* 454, 952, fr. 25.29, 229.9.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* whose opening announces the praise of both Demeter and Persephone.

<sup>47</sup> See H. Jeanmaire, *Couroi et courètes* (Lille 1939) 97–111.

uses “language of succession and domination.” In particular, lines 254–259 are reminiscent of two theogonic contexts.<sup>48</sup> First, 256–257 (ρίψω γάρ σε λαβὼν ἐς Τάρταρον ἡερόεντα | εἰς ζόφον αἰνόμορον καὶ ἀμήχανον) allude to those situations in the history of the divine cosmos in which Zeus had to obtain or re-affirm his divine power over the rest of the gods by means of force. At *Il.* 8.13 Zeus prohibits the Olympians from interfering in the Trojan war; for whoever does not obey his command will be cast into Tartarus (ἦ μιν ἐλὼν ρίψω ἐς Τάρταρον ἡερόεντα). At Hes. *Theog.* 868 (ῥίψε δέ μιν θυμῶ ἀκαχὼν ἐς Τάρταρον εὐρύν) this phrase refers to the time when Zeus cast Typhon into Tartarus, thus ridding the world of the last challenger to his power. In Hes. fr.30.22 the same phrase is used slightly modified (τὸν δὲ λαβὼν ἔρριψ’ ἐς Π[ά]ρταρον ἡερόεντα) of Zeus who cast into Tartarus Salmoneus, the king of Thessaly who dared to appropriate cultic honors due Zeus. Finally, at Hes. fr.54a we learn how Zeus intended to inflict on Apollo the same punishment with which Apollo now threatens Hermes, after he killed the Cyclopes who created the thunderbolt with which Zeus killed Asclepius: τὸν ῥα χολωσάμενος ρίψειν ἡμελλεν | Τάρταρον ἔς. This last parallel adds to the irony of the hymnic passage: Apollo appears to try to appropriate for himself one of Zeus’ prerogatives, namely to inflict punishment on other gods by hurling them to Tartarus, a punishment which Apollo himself almost suffered. But he miserably fails at it since Hermes is not afraid of his threats. Of course, imprisonment in Tartarus was the only effective punishment for the defeated gods, given their immortality. The Titans are a case in point. Apollo’s threat to inflict this specific punishment on Hermes

<sup>48</sup> ᾧ παῖ ὃς ἐν λίκνῳ κατάκειαι, μῆνυέ μοι βοῦς | θᾶσσον· ἐπεὶ τάχα νῶϊ διοισόμεθ’ οὐ κατὰ κόσμον. | ρίψω γάρ σε λαβὼν ἐς Τάρταρον ἡερόεντα, | εἰς ζόφον αἰνόμορον καὶ ἀμήχανον· οὐδέ σε μήτηρ | ἐς φάος οὐδὲ πατὴρ ἀναλύσεται, ἀλλ’ ὑπὸ γαίῃ | ἔρρησεις ὀλίγοισι μετ’ ἀνδράσιν ἡγεμονεύων. See O. Vox, “Apollo irato nell’inno ad Ermete,” *Prometheus* 7 (1981) 108–114, and S. E. Harrell, “Apollo’s Fraternal Threats: Language of Succession and Domination in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*,” *GRBS* 32 (1989) 307–329.

conforms to his realization of Hermes' divine status,<sup>49</sup> which has by now become clear, after Apollo has examined Hermes' dwelling.<sup>50</sup>

We have so far encountered the following perspectives on the cave. On the one hand, it is initially described as one would at first expect: a dark cave. Later it is thought of as resembling a palace (a *δόμος* or *μέγαρον*) whose praise forms part of Hermes' own hymn to himself. To take this a step further, the cave is seen through Apollo's eyes as a temple or the dwelling of a "blessed god." On the other hand, when talking to Maia, Hermes refers to the cave with contempt, as being gloomy like Hades and far removed from both human civilization and the Olympian gods. How can we reconcile these conflicting presentations?

At the beginning of the poem, Hermes is a new-born who has lived nowhere else but in Maia's cave. Consequently, we might expect that Maia's cave appears to him large and majestic. In other words, the poet may be exploiting here the naiveté of an inexperienced child. This childish naiveté appears also on another occasion in the same part of the poem: Hermes is said to leave his cradle specifically because he is searching for Apollo's cattle (22). However, his chance encounter with the tortoise makes him forget his initial plan and concentrate on fabricating the first lyre. Both the tortoise and the lyre are

<sup>49</sup> It appears that Apollo's first reaction is to downplay Hermes' divinity by addressing him with the derogatory *παῖ* at 254. But Apollo here acts clumsily: he follows up this derogatory address with his threat that he will imprison Hermes in Tartarus (a punishment inflicted on gods). In addition, as Vox suggests, *Prometheus* 7 (1981) 109, Apollo confuses Tartarus (the gods' prison) with the Underworld where Hermes is supposed to be the conductor of dead souls.

<sup>50</sup> Apollo actually attempts to restrain Hermes later in the hymn, when the divine babe produces the stolen cows (408–413). But there Hermes proves Apollo's attempt ineffective by performing a miracle: the bonds fall from his hands, take root in the ground, and bind Apollo's cows. Instead of restraining Hermes, Apollo realizes that he may lose his cattle again.

called by the poet an *ἄθυρμα*, a plaything, which underscores Hermes' status as a child (32, 40, 52). The god's childishness introduced at the beginning of the poem is a theme that will become prominent in the central section, where Hermes attempts to prove his innocence precisely by appealing to his status as an infant. In that case, of course, the childishness is a rhetorical ploy (as Hermes' words at 163–164 prove): the god *pretends* to be an ignorant infant (cf. 277).

Furthermore, at the beginning of the poem and up until the events at the Alpheius, Hermes does not seem to be fully conscious of his divine status or what it exactly entails.<sup>51</sup> Although a god, he is hungry for meat. It is only when he realizes that he cannot consume any of the meat he has roasted that his divine identity is established beyond any doubt. Once he has com-

<sup>51</sup> See Clay, *Politics of Olympus* 122, who speaks of Hermes' "identity crisis" in this section. S. Georgoudi, "Les Douze Dieux des Grecs: variations sur un thème," in S. Georgoudi and J.-P. Vernant (eds.), *Mythes grecques au figuré: De l'antiquité au baroque* (Paris 1996) 43–80, at 68–70, does not think that Hermes' inability to partake of the meat at the Alpheius is related to his divine status. In her view, his divinity is never questioned since both his parents are divine and he is called divine in the poem. For Georgoudi, Hermes does not eat his portion of meat because he is already one of the Twelve Gods, who act as an organized group: Hermes could not begin to eat before the other Olympians appeared. However, the text does not support this interpretation: Hermes is tormented by the savor *even though he is a god* (131 καὶ ἀθάνατόν περ ἔόντα), which suggests that the young god reacts in a way he is not supposed to, given his immortal nature. Furthermore, οὐδ' ὡς οἱ ἐπέιθετο θυμός ... περᾶν ἱερῆς κατὰ δευρῆς (132–133) does not indicate Hermes' table manners but that there is something in Hermes' divine spirit that prevents him from consuming meat. Similarly, D. Jaillard, *Configurations d'Hermès. Une 'théogonie hermaïque'* (Liège 2007) 105–106, does not think that Hermes' desire for meat casts any doubt on his divine status: gods rejoice with the smell of roasted meat (κνίση); he cites *Il.* 1.66–67 (Apollo κνίσης ... ἀντιάσας) and *Ar. Plut.* 1128 and 1130 that explicitly refers to portions of meat Hermes had consumed. However, desire for κνίση is not the same as desire for meat, and Aristophanes treats Hermes in extremely anthropomorphic terms in *Plutus*. Finally, Asclepiades of Cyprus *FGrHist* 752 F 1 (cited by Jaillard 113) shows that the desire for meat is only too human.

pleted his journey, Hermes returns aware of his divine identity, having enacted some of his main divine functions.<sup>52</sup> He now knows that while Maia's cave contains many valuable possessions, it is not a dwelling appropriate for an Olympian god. Hermes aims at something larger than simply wealth, namely *honor* equal to Apollo's that is translated into worship, prayers, and offerings from mortals, i.e. recognition by both gods and mortals. Hermes prefers to dwell and converse among the immortals (*μετ' ἀθανάτους ὀαρίζειν*), and thus the cave, though rich, will not suffice him.

Hermes' reaction to Apollo's threats culminates with his challenge that they go to Olympus to have their dispute settled by Zeus. Once he is introduced to the Olympian community (although not in the same triumphant manner as Apollo in the *Homeric Hymn* dedicated to him), argues his case in front of Zeus and the other gods (thus enacting his patronage of oratory), is admitted to the number of the Olympians, and reconciled to his brother, his divine status is further established beyond any doubt. Consequently, the cave is no longer necessary since he is now an Olympian, and it is therefore forgotten by the poet, who does not mention it again after Hermes and Apollo's confrontation (i.e. after 396).

The absence of any mention of the cave after the two gods' confrontation is by no means accidental. In fact, there is an interesting parallel to this narrative technique that is also related to the development of Hermes' status: the mention of the god's swaddling-clothes. Throughout the poem we encounter many references to Hermes' swaddling-clothes that obviously aim at reminding the audience of the god's age (151, 237, 268, 301, 306, 388). Significantly, they are mentioned specifically in that section of the poem where Hermes acts in a distinctly unchildlike manner (viz. delivering defense speeches), and thus

<sup>52</sup> Note that at this point the poet focalizes the description of the cave through Hermes who has just realized his own divinity; consequently, the cave is presented as a *πίονα νηόν* (148).

they are intended as a tangible proof of Hermes' argument against Apollo's just accusations: his defense rests on the premise that as a newborn infant he would not be able to abduct fifty cattle. (Of course the mere arguing of such a case is the source of profound comedy.) Thus, when Apollo enters the cave, Hermes wraps himself in his swaddling-clothes; likewise, when arguing his case on Olympus, we are emphatically told that "he had his swaddling-clothes on and would not remove them" (388). However, once the reconciliation between Hermes and Apollo has taken place, the poet does not mention the swaddling-clothes again. If we consider the final exchange between the two gods, in which Hermes instructs Apollo on how to use the lyre, and subsequently Apollo explains to Hermes how the Bee-oracle operates, both divine interlocutors appear to be equally mature, and there is nothing to suggest that Hermes is an infant at this point. In fact, even the structure of Apollo's speech resembles that of Hermes' preceding speech.<sup>53</sup> Once again the poet ignores a theme that was prominent in the first part of the poem, in which Hermes strove to obtain his status.

To recapitulate: the shifting presentation of the cave in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* can be explained if we take into consideration who is observing it each time. For the poet in the poem, it is a shady cave. For the newborn, inexperienced Hermes before his journey, it is his mother's dwelling and

<sup>53</sup> The poet uses the term *ἑρεεῖν* or *ἐξερεεῖν* to designate both the playing of the lyre and the consultation of the oracle (483, 487 ~ 547, 564). Both processes may have either of two outcomes: if the musician "questions" the lyre with the proper preparation, then the personified instrument teaches him many pleasant things; otherwise, it emits shrill and unpleasant sounds. Likewise, if one questions the Bee-oracle understanding the preparatory omens and if the bees have partaken of honey, he will not be deceived by the god; otherwise, he will receive a false answer. Cf. 488 *μᾶψ θρυλλίζει* ~ 546 *μαψιλόγοισι* and the *ὄς (τις) ἄν* ~ *ὄς δέ κεν*—clauses which present the alternative possibilities in the consultation of the lyre and the oracle at 482–489 and 542–549 (three of these four clauses are introduced at the same *sedes*).



resembles a great palace. Once he becomes fully aware of his divine status, he first asserts himself in his household during his exchange with Maia in the cave, and the cave then is too small and insignificant for him. Apollo, however, meets Hermes, the son of Zeus and divine thief, and this is reflected in his perception of the cave, which now resembles a god's dwelling, a temple. However, when Hermes has been fully admitted into the Olympian community, the cave and its nymph (as a distinct, acting character) are unnecessary for the remainder of the plot and so are forgotten.<sup>54</sup>

*December, 2010*

Seminar für Klassische Philologie  
Ruprecht-Karls-Univ. Heidelberg  
69117 Heidelberg, Germany  
Athanasios.Vergados@uni-heidelberg.de

<sup>54</sup> I would like to thank the editors of *GRBS* and the anonymous reviewer for their perceptive comments. Jenny Strauss Clay and Shawn O'Bryhim commented on a previous draft of this article. An earlier version was delivered at the "Hymns as Narrative and the Narratology of Hymns" conference, organized at the University of Wales, Lampeter (May 2009); I am grateful to the participants for the stimulating discussion. The final revisions to this paper were completed at the Seminar für Klassische Philologie (Universität Heidelberg) with the support of an Alexander von Humboldt postdoctoral fellowship.