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Attic Tradition and Tragic Allusion in the Ithyphallic Hymn for Demetrius Poliorcetes

Abstract: In this paper, I explore how the ithyphallic hymn for Demetrius Poliorcetes engages with conflicting interpretations of the Athenian literary past. I show how the hymn draws on Attic tragedy to associate Demetrius with two key figures of the dramatic stage: the divine Dionysus and the heroic Oedipus. I begin with a detailed analysis of the hymn's intertextual engagement with Euripides' *Bacchae* and Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Oedipus at Colonus*. On the surface, both Dionysus and Oedipus serve as flattering mythical exempla: the hymn exploits local literary idioms to legitimize and authorize Demetrius' divine power, just as its theological reflections appropriate Athenian philosophical thought. Yet despite this overt praise, both figures are polyvalent and ambiguous models, through which the hymn also provides a more subversive undercurrent of coded Athenian resistance. The ithyphallic hymn not only seeks to secure Demetrius' ongoing favor, but also hints at the king's ultimate fragility and participates in a broader cultural contest between Athens and Macedon for control of the Attic tragic tradition.

Keywords: Athens, Demetrius Poliorcetes, Dionysus, Hymn, Ithyphallic, Oedipus, Theology, Tragedy

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In 291 or 290 BCE, Demetrius Poliorcetes returned to Athens at the very same time as the Eleusinian Mysteries were due to be performed.[1] On his arrival, he was welcomed and celebrated with the honors due to a god: incense, garlands, libations, dancing and hymns (Democharesa *BNJ* 75 F 9).[2] All that survives today from these celebrations are 34 verses of an anonymous ithyphallic hymn preserved by Athenaeus.[3] As it stands, the text seems to be incomplete, probably missing its beginning and perhaps also its end.[4] But enough of the hymn remains to gain a clear sense of its general flavor and broader encomiastic strategies. Athenaeus first offers Democharesa' pejorative paraphrase of the poem (*Deipn*. 6.253b–d = *BNJ* 75 F 9) before quoting the hymn directly via Duris of Samos (*Deipn*. 6.253d–254a = *BNJ* 76 F 13):

> Δοῦρις δ' ὁ Σάμιος ἐν τῇ δευτέρᾳ καὶ εἰκοστῇ τῶν Ἱστοριῶν καὶ αὐτὸν τὸν ἰθύφαλλον < . . . >·
>
> ὡς οἱ μέγιστοι τῶν θεῶν καὶ φίλτατοι
> τῇ πόλει πάρεισιν·
> ἐνταῦθα γὰρ Δήμητρα καὶ Δημήτριον
> ἅμα παρῆγ' ὁ καιρός.
> χὴ μὲν τὰ σεμνὰ τῆς Κόρης μυστήρια
> ἔρχεθ' ἵνα ποήσῃ,
> ὁ δ' ἱλαρός, ὥσπερ τὸν θεὸν δεῖ, καὶ καλὸς
> καὶ γελῶν πάρεστι.
> σεμνόν τι φαίνεθ', οἱ φίλοι πάντες κύκλῳ,
> ἐν μέσοισι δ' αὐτός,
> ὅμοιον ὥσπερ οἱ φίλοι μὲν ἀστέρες,
> ἥλιος δ' ἐκεῖνος.
> ὦ τοῦ κρατίστου παῖ Ποσειδῶνος θεοῦ,
> χαῖρε, κἀφροδίτης.
> ἄλλοι μὲν ἢ μακρὰν γὰρ ἀπέχουσιν θεοί,

[1] This simultaneity was framed as a coincidence (see ὁ καιρός in v. 4 of the hymn below), but it was likely choreographed: Chaniotis 2011: 161–62. Cf. Thonemann 2005 and Rose 2018 on Demetrius' careful manipulation of Athens' religious and civic calendar. On the hymn's contested date (which "hinges on a number of imponderabilia": Henrichs 1999: 243n.65), see Green 2003: 260n.11; Kolde 2003: 382–84; Rose 2018: 258n.1.

[2] On such welcoming of Hellenistic kings: Perrin-Saminadayar 2004. For Demetrius' ruler cult and his relationship with Athens (dating back to his and his father's original "liberation" of the city from Cassander and Demetrius of Phaleron in 307 BCE): Habicht 1970: 44–55; Kertész 1978; Landucci Gattinoni 1981; Weber 1995: 295–305; Parker 1996: 256–64; Mikalson 1998: 75–104; Kuhn 2006; Grieb 2008: 68–85; Shear 2012: 278–81; Mari 2016; Pelling 2018: 41–48; Wheatley and Dunn 2020: 113–44, 206–12, 222–28, 256–59, 301–17, 345–58, 394–405; Worthington 2021: 71–101; Jim 2022: 172–80.

[3] On the hymn's anonymity and its "ithyphallic" metre, see further below.

[4] Note especially the opening lacuna: Athenaeus' introductory blurb lacks a main verb, reinforcing the sense that something has dropped out at the start: Renehan 1964: 381. Cf. Ehrenberg 1946: 180; Mikalson 1998: 94; Palumbo Stracca 2000: 504.

ἢ οὐκ ἔχουσιν ὦτα,
ἢ οὐκ εἴσιν, ἢ οὐ προσέχουσιν ἡμῖν οὐδὲ ἕν,
σὲ δὲ παρόνθ' ὁρῶμεν,
οὐ ξύλινον οὐδὲ λίθινον, ἀλλ' ἀληθινόν.
εὐχόμεσθα δή σοι·
πρῶτον μὲν εἰρήνην πόησον, φίλτατε,
κύριος γὰρ εἶ σύ.
τὴν δ' οὐχὶ Θηβῶν, ἀλλ' ὅλης τῆς Ἑλλάδος
Σφίγγα περικρατοῦσαν,
Αἰτωλόν, ὅστις ἐπὶ πέτρας καθήμενος,
ὥσπερ ἡ παλαιά,
τὰ σώμαθ' ἡμῶν πάντ' ἀναρπάσας φέρει,
κοὐκ ἔχω μάχεσθαι·
(Αἰτωλικὸν γὰρ ἁρπάσαι τὰ τῶν πέλας,
νῦν δὲ καὶ τὰ πόρρω)·
μάλιστα μὲν δὴ κόλασον αὐτός· εἰ δὲ μή,
Οἰδίπουν τιν' εὑρέ,
τὴν Σφίγγα ταύτην ὅστις ἢ κατακρημνιεῖ
ἢ σπίλον[5] ποήσει.

ταῦτ' ᾖδον οἱ Μαραθωνομάχαι οὐ δημοσίᾳ μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ κατ' οἰκίαν, οἱ τὸν προσκυνήσαντα τὸν Περσῶν βασιλέα ἀποκτείναντες, οἱ τὰς ἀναρίθμους μυριάδας τῶν βαρβάρων φονεύσαντες.

But Duris of Samos in Book 22 of his *History* <preserves?> the ithyphallic hymn itself:

> How the greatest and dearest of the gods are present for the city; for a timely opportunity has brought Demeter and Demetrius among us at the same time! She comes to celebrate the solemn mysteries of Persephone, while he is here full of joy, as befits the god, handsome and laughing. It seems a solemn thing: all his friends surround him, and he himself is in the centre; as if his friends were stars, and he the sun. Hail, child of Poseidon, the mightiest god, and of Aphrodite! For the other gods[6] are either far away, or they have no ears, or they do not exist, or they pay us no attention at all. But you we see present here, not made of wood nor stone, but real. To you, then, we pray: first, make peace, dearest one; for you have the power. And as for the Sphinx who controls not just Thebes, but all of Greece, the Aetolian one who sits on a rock, like the Sphinx of old, and seizes all our

[5] This final noun is Meineke's emendation for the transmitted σπεινον (A) and πεινῆν (C), and I think the most plausible of current suggestions. Cf. Schweighäuser's σπίνον ("chaffinch" or "rock"); Wilamowitz's σποδόν ("dust"); Green's 'ς πίνον ("to dirt"). For a full apparatus criticus, see *CA* 174–75.

[6] I follow Fantuzzi 2020: 30n.86 in seeing a contrast between Demetrius and "*all* the other gods", following Homeric precedent for ἄλλοι ... θεοί = οἱ ἄλλοι θεοί (*Il.* 2.1, 10.1 with Σ A ad locc.); contrast Chaniotis 2011: 179–80.

> forces and carries them off, and I do not have the power to resist her — for it is an Aetolian custom to seize the property of neighbors and now even what is further away — punish her, please, yourself! Otherwise, find some Oedipus, who will either hurl this Sphinx from the rocks or transform her into stone.
>
> This is what the victors at Marathon sang, and not just in public, but in their own homes — the people who put to death the man who knelt before the Persian king, and who slaughtered countless myriads of barbarians![7]

This extant portion of the hymn survives thanks to the intense disgust it provoked in ancient critics like Demochares and Duris, who cited it as an example of the decline of Athens – a city once synonymous with "freedom", now reduced to pathetic servitude and flattery. Even Demetrius himself was allegedly astonished and displeased by the Athenians' excessive sycophancy (*Deipn*. 6.253a = Demochares *BNJ* 75 F 9). This negative framing of the hymn has substantially influenced its modern reception: nineteenth- and twentieth-century critics, for example, complained of the hymn's "unmeasured idolatry and subservience", as well as its "facile blasphemy."[8] In scholarly narratives of Hellenistic "decline", the poem epitomizes the decay of traditional religion and the collapse of the civic polis.[9] And nor has it fared any better in assessments of its literary qualities. According to one critic, the poem exhibits "shoddy composition", "poor thought" and "flabby syntax", while for another, it is characterized by "simplicity and humdrum triviality" and is "certainly … not a specimen of high poetry."[10]

In recent years, however, this hymn has been redeemed as a privileged historical document, offering insight into the complex processes and negotiations of Hellenistic ruler cult.[11] It is not unadulterated flattery, as Duris and Democharesc complained, but a carefully coded request for assistance in the present, appropriating the reciprocal demands of Greek prayer to spur Demetrius to action: specifically, he is asked to prove his manifest presence and power by attacking the Aetolians (vv. 21–34). On the usual logic of hymnic reciprocity, "if Demetrios did not listen to the prayer of the Athenians, he could not expect continuation of his godlike honors."[12] Such an appeal is grounded in the contrast between Demetrius' power (κύριος γὰρ εἶ

[7] Tr. adapted from Olson 2008: 163–67.

[8] Grote 1888: 318, and an unnamed scholar cited by Charlesworth 1935: 6.

[9] Cf. Walbank 1992: 215: "The hymn to Demetrius is an admission of political and perhaps spiritual helplessness in what had been the leading city of Greece."

[10] Kerkhecker 1999: 148; Ehrenberg 1946: 181, 180, cf. 197: "Its unknown author is no great loss to literature." Cf. Versnel 2011: 445n.32: "To be frank, the literary quality of the Greek text is not particularly breathtaking."

[11] Especially Chaniotis 2011; Versnel 2011: 444–56. On Hellenistic ruler cult: Price 1984: 23–53; Walbank 1987; Chaniotis 2003; Buraselis 2003, 2008; Iossif et al. 2011; Erskine 2014; Gnoli and Muccioli 2014.

[12] Chaniotis 2011: 187, cf. 181–83 on the hymn as "a persuasion strategy." Cf. too Shipley 2000: 161; Platt 2011: 143–47; Thonemann 2016: 57–59. On such conferral of "proleptic honors": Domingo Gygax 2009, 2016: 45–57.

σύ, v. 22) and the Athenians' helplessness (κοὐκ ἔχω μάχεσθαι, v. 28).[13] And indeed, the hymn may well have achieved its goal, since we know that Demetrius launched an attack on the Aetolians in 289 BCE (Plut. *Dem*. 41.1–2; *Pyrrh*. 7.3). Scholars still debate the degree to which we should take the hymn as a serious expression of belief, but regardless, it is clear that the poem engages in a calculated political transaction.[14] And nor is it an isolated phenomenon: such hymns became a frequent feature of the negotiations between communities and Hellenistic rulers, including the Erythraean hymn to Seleucus (*CA* 140); the hymn decreed by Teos for Apollonis, the wife of Attalus I (*OGIS* 309); and the hexameter hymns for Ptolemy II (Theoc. *Id*. 17) and Attalus III (Nicander fr. 104 Gow-Scholfield).[15]

Despite these recent advances in contextualizing and understanding the poem, however, I believe that there is still far more going on in this ithyphallic hymn, and that we should remain attentive to the local inflections and variations in the practice of Hellenistic ruler cult. In this article, I will explore how the hymn engages not only with broader trends of Hellenistic kingship, but also with conflicting interpretations of the Athenian literary past. In particular, I will show how the poem draws on Attic tragedy to associate Demetrius with two key figures of the tragic stage – the divine Dionysus and the heroic Oedipus. On the surface, both of these figures serve as flattering mythical exempla, authorizing Demetrius' divine power through local literary idiom. Yet despite this overt praise, Dionysus and Oedipus are both polyvalent and ambiguous models, through which the hymn also invites a more subversive undercurrent of coded Athenian resistance.

One of the greatest difficulties in interpreting the hymn is its anonymity. The poem is sometimes attributed to Hermocles (or Hermippus) of Cyzicus, but only on very slim grounds: this poet won a prize for composing a paean in honor of Demetrius and his father in 307 BCE. Yet as Angelos Chaniotis notes, "there is no reason to assume that the poet who composed the *paian* of 307 also composed this hymn 17 years later."[16] The precise agency behind the hymn is thus unclear. I take the hymn to be a native Athenian response to Demetrius' presence; this is certainly how it is framed by Athenaeus. But its authorship is not crucial to my argument.

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[13] The shift between the first-person plural (ὁρῶμεν, v. 18; εὐχόμεσθα, v. 20) and singular (ἔχω, v. 28) is typical of choral discourse: cf. Alcman fr. 1.60–77 (ἄμιν, 60; με, 77), which also exhibits a similar concern with attacking (μάχονται, 63) and protection (ἀμύναι, 65; τηρεῖ, 77). Note too the shifting presentation of Demetrius in both the third person (vv. 1–12) and second person (vv. 13–34): Stehle 1997: 44–46.

[14] "Seriousness": for example, Mikalson 1998: 96 is "wary of attributing great religious seriousness to this song," and detects an underlying playful and sympotic flavor. Cf. Ehrenberg 1946: 186 on Demetrius' divine parentage: "a kind of playful invention, not primarily an expression of religion." Cf. the verbal play of v. 3 (Δήμητρα/Δημήτριον) and the iotacistic pun in v. 19 (οὐδὲ λίθινον, ἀλλ' ἀληθινόν). Those who print σπίνον in v. 34 also detect verbal play with Σφίγγα (v. 33).

[15] Cf. Dunand 2002: 70. *Id*. 17: Hunter 2003. Nicander fr. 104: Nelson 2020b. On the poem's typical hymnic elements: Chaniotis 2011: 171–73. On its generic blurring of the ithyphallic hymn and paean: Palumbo Stracca 2000: 509–11; Bartol 2016: 509–14.

[16] Chaniotis 2011: 158n.5. Hermocles/Hermippus: Philochorus *BNJ* 328 F 165 = Athenaeus 15.697a.

Whoever its author, the hymn contains the material for multiple different readings: not only of straightforward panegyric, but also of latent ambiguity.

In what follows, I begin by charting the hymn's surface praise of Demetrius through its appropriations of the tragic Dionysus (§I) and Oedipus (§III). We will see how the poem draws on Attic tragedy to provide a local and familiar framework for making sense of Demetrius' 'divinity'. I intersperse these analyses with a brief discussion of the hymn's central theological section, which similarly appropriates local Athenian traditions of philosophy and drama (§II). Finally, I focus on the hymn's subversive underlayer: through the ambiguous models of Dionysus and Oedipus, the poem constructs an internal *peripeteia* for the king and exposes his all-too-human fragility (§IV). Ultimately, the hymn not only seeks to secure Demetrius' ongoing favor, but also participates in a broader cultural contest between Athens and Macedon for control of the Attic tragic tradition.

I. Demetrius and/as Dionysus

In his own lifetime, Demetrius appears to have fostered a particularly close association with the god Dionysus. In this he was not alone. Alexander the Great had fashioned Dionysus as a model, especially after his invasion of India, and other early Hellenistic kings regularly followed his lead.[17] But Demetrius' Bacchic affiliations were particularly strong: his own festival in Athens, the Demetrieia, was an extension of the City Dionysia (*IG* II^2 649 ll. 41–43; cf. Plut. *Dem*. 12); he was depicted with bull's horns on his silver coinage, a likely assimilation to the bull-horned god; and a decree was passed in Athens that whenever he came to the city, he would be received with the honors due to both Demeter and Dionysus (Plut. *Dem*. 12.1).[18] In Plutarch's assessment, Demetrius "emulated Dionysus more than any other deity, since he was most fearful in waging war and also most skilled, when war was over, in directing peace towards merriment and delight" (μάλιστα τῶν θεῶν ἐζήλου τὸν Διόνυσον, ὡς πολέμῳ τε χρῆσθαι δεινότατον, εἰρήνην τε αὖθις ἐκ πολέμου τρέψαι πρὸς εὐφροσύνην καὶ χάριν ἐμμελέστατον, *Dem*. 2.3).[19]

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[17] Alexander: Bosworth 1996. Ptolemies: Rice 1983: 45–115; Dunand 1986; cf. Theocles' ithyphallic hymn in honor of Ptolemy Philadelphus (*CA* 173: Gentili 1952: 96). Attalids: Hansen 1971: 451–53, 461; Nelson 2020a: 188–90. Cf. already Dionysius I of Syracuse: Wilson 2017: 10–17. Generally, see Nock 1928: 21–38; Tondriau 1952; Thomas 2002.

[18] Demetrieia: Thonemann 2005: 74–80; Chaniotis 2011: 164–65; Buraselis 2012: 248–49. Dionysian horns on coinage: Eckhel 1794: 122; Smith 1993: 207–8; Thonemann 2005: 83–84; Barre 2013: 130–33; Diefenbach 2015: 121–22 with n.41; Lorenzo 2020: 454; contrast those who less plausibly take the horns as "a very general symbol of divine power" (Ehrenberg 1946: 193) or as a link to Poseidon (Newell 1927: 72–73; Ehling 2000). Demeter and Dionysus: cf. Petridou 2015: 302–9. On Demetrius and Dionysus generally: Scott 1928: 222–39; Müller 2010: 562–65.

[19] Citations of Plutarch's *Demetrius* follow Ziegler 1971. Cf. Diod. Sic. 20.92.4: τὸ σύνολον ἐζήλου τὴν μυθολογουμένην ποτὲ γενέσθαι κατ᾽ ἀνθρώπους τοῦ Διονύσου διάθεσιν ("in general he emulated the conduct that Dionysus was once fabled to have performed among humans"); Herodian 1.3.3: Ἀντίγονος [Δημήτριος: Chaniotis 2011: 170] δὲ Διόνυσον πάντα μιμούμενος καὶ κισσὸν μὲν περιτιθεὶς τῇ κεφαλῇ ἀντὶ καυσίας καὶ διαδήματος Μακεδονικοῦ, θύρσον δὲ ἀντὶ σκήπτρου φέρων ("[Demetrius] imitating Dionysus in every respect: wearing ivy around his

Such Bacchic role-playing is also apparent in this hymn, especially its opening lines (vv. 1–14). Demetrius is not syncretized directly with Dionysus: he is named independently in an aural pun alongside Demeter (v. 3),[20] and he is given his own divine parentage, as the son of Poseidon and Aphrodite (vv. 13–14).[21] But the poem's performance, metre and language all combine to align Demetrius with his model deity. The very context of the hymn's performance evokes Dionysiac ritual: the newly arrived Demetrius is welcomed into the city just like Dionysus at the Athenian Anthesteria and City Dionysia.[22] This situational parallel is reinforced by the poem's metre, a combination of iambic trimeters and ithyphallics, which was the distinctive rhythm of Dionysus' ithyphallic processions. Compare, for example, another snippet of popular song preserved by Athenaeus (*Carm. Pop.* 851a *PMG*):[23]

ἀνάγετ', εὐρυχωρίαν[24]
τῷ θεῷ ποιεῖτε·
θέλει γὰρ ὁ θεὸς ὀρθὸς ἐσφυδωμένος
διὰ μέσου βαδίζειν.

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head in place of the *kausia* and Macedonian diadem, and wielding a thyrsus in place of a scepter"). This conduct is mirrored in the biography of Antony, Demetrius' Plutarchan parallel: Διονύσῳ κατὰ τὸν τοῦ βίου ζῆλον, Plut. *Ant.* 60.5; Pelling 1988: 209.

[20] Demetrius and Demeter are also aligned in contemporary comedy: Antiphanes fr. 81 *PCG*; cf. Scott 1928: 233–34. Demetrius' affinity with the goddess extends beyond their similar names to their similar function of providing grain to the city (150,000 *medimnoi* in 307 BCE; 100,000 in 295/4 BCE: Plut. *Dem.* 10.1, 34.5); Mikalson 1998: 89–90. Scholars have often seen a reference to Demetrius' new wife, Lanassa, behind the mention of Demeter (e.g. Reinach 1911: 221 with n.1; Scott 1928: 232; Wehrli 1968: 177; Green 2003: 274), but it is unclear whether she accompanied Demetrius to Athens on this occasion: Ehrenberg 1946: 185; Marcovich 1988: 10–11; Versnel 2011: 448n.40.

[21] On the significance of this parentage, see Chaniotis 2011: 183–85 and Holton 2014, who both attractively link the duo with Demetrius' naval victory at Salamis on Cyprus in 306 BCE. Cf. Miedico 2010 on Demetrius' naval power. Aphrodite has also been taken as an allusion to the Athenian cult of Demetrius' first wife, Phila (Kertész 1978: 170; cf. Alexis fr. 116 *PCG*); to Demetrius' beauty (Marcovich 1988: 13; cf. Plut. *Dem.* 2.2); to his laughter (Ehrenberg 1946: 190; cf. φιλομμειδὴς Ἀφροδίτη, *Il.* 3.424, etc.); and to his notorious "amatory exploits" (Austin 2006: 94, §43n.3).

[22] On Dionysus' various ritual advents: Parker 2005: 302–3, 318. Cf. too Pindar's dithyramb for the Athenians, bidding the gods to come to Athens, with a particular focus on Dionysus (fr. 75 S–M).

[23] Cf. Gentili 1952: 94–96; West 1982: 148. On 851a *PMG*: Davies 2020: 174–76. On the Dionysiac phallic processions: Csapo 1997; Parker 2005: 318–24. For this epodic metre, cf. too Call. *Ia.* 6–7, frr. 196–97 Pf.; Theocles *CA* 173; Theodoridas *AP* 13.21 = 15 Gow-Page, *HE* 3562–69.

[24] I follow all recent editors in retaining v. 1 as a lekythion, though it could be emended easily to a full trimeter: e.g. with Tyrwhitt and Porson's ἀνάγετ' <ἀνάγετε κῶμον> or Bergk's ἀνάγετ' <ἀνάγετε πάντες>. Cf. Palumbo Stracca 2000: 507n.8; Davies 2020: 174.

> Move back, make room for the god! For the god, erect and swollen, wants to pass through your midst!

The Demetrius hymn's re-use of this metre thus immediately puts us in mind of Dionysus. But it also evokes the traditional context and function of such ithyphallic song: the welcoming of a new god into the city. There is obvious innuendo in the popular song's demand to "make room" for the "erect and swollen" deity,[25] but this desire to accommodate an over-sized presence equally applies to Demetrius, who stands "in the middle" of his companions (ἐν μέσοισι, v. 10), just as the ithyphallic Dionysus proceeds "through the middle" of his celebrants (διὰ μέσου, 851a.4 *PMG*). At a formal level, the hymn's metre aligns Demetrius with Dionysus as a new arrival who should be incorporated into the city. In addition, the very description of Demetrius in verses 7–8 recalls key attributes of Bacchus: his beauty (καλός) and laughter (ἱλαρός, γελῶν). When the hymn specifies that Demetrius displays these traits "as befits *the* god" (ὥσπερ τὸν θεὸν δεῖ, v. 7), it is tempting to see the definite article as a direct pointer to Dionysus himself.[26]

This Dionysiac resonance continues with the solar simile in verses 11–12 (ὅμοιον ὥσπερ οἱ φίλοι μὲν ἀστέρες, | ἥλιος δ' ἐκεῖνος). Such a cosmological comparison is a frequent feature of poetic praise and imbued with significant symbolism.[27] In part, it draws on traditional choral imagery, projects a vision of divine order and serenity, and reflects Demetrius' own cosmic pretensions: the king wore a cloak with the cosmos, stars and twelve Zodiac signs woven into it (Plut. *Dem*. 41.7–8; Duris *BNJ* 76 F 14); he was depicted on the *proskenion* of the Theater of Dionysus riding on top of the world (Duris *BNJ* 76 F 14); and his shield is decorated with a Macedonian sunburst surrounded by seven stars (*SEG* 49.702).[28] Stars, after all, could be considered "visible gods", an effective parallel for the manifest Demetrius (ὁρατοὶ θεοί, Pl. *Tim*. 40d; *Epinomis* 984d).[29] Yet in addition to this, the simile also has a particularly Dionysiac edge,

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[25] Cf. Killeen 1973, comparing the ribaldry of Sappho's wedding poetry, where the bridegroom is "far larger than a large man" (ἄνδρος μεγάλω πόλυ μέσδων, fr. 111.6 Voigt).

[26] Cf. Scott 1928: 227, 233; Cerfaux and Tondriau 1957: 184; Bergmann 1997: 32; Chaniotis 2011: 178; contrast Marcovich 1988: 12. Some scholars believe that Dionysus was already mentioned in the hymn's lost opening, which would reinforce the Dionysian connection: Ehrenberg 1946: 190; Kolde 2003: 385.

[27] Cf. Sapph. fr. 34, fr. 96.7–9; Meleager *AP* 12.59.2; Marcus Argentarius *AP* 5.110.6; Hor. *Sat*. 1.7.24–25 (*solem Asiae Brutum appellat, stellasque salubres | appellat comites*), *Odes* 1.12.46–48; Ael. Aristid. *Panath*. 96 (ὅπερ … σελήνην ἀστέρες ἐγκλείουσι, ποιητὴς ἂν εἴποι τις); *Life of Aesop* 113 (τῇ σελήνῃ ἔοικας, καὶ οἱ περὶ σὲ τοῖς ἄστροις: Dillery 1999: 272–73). This last example refers to the Egyptian pharaoh Nectanebo, suggesting a further pharaonic tradition that might underlie the motif's Ptolemaic inflection, especially in the *Coma Berenices*: cf. Gutzwiller 1992; Koenen 1993: 89–115; Selden 1998: 326–54.

[28] Choral imagery: Csapo 2008; Gagné 2019; Steiner 2021; cf. Alcman fr. 1.41 (ὥτ' ἄλιον). Divine order: cf. the tent tableau of Eur. *Ion* 1147–58, with Mastronarde 1975: 169; Zeitlin 1989: 168–69, 174–77; Gibert 2019: 296–97. Cosmic Demetrius: Bergmann 1997: 36–46; Versnel 2011: 448–49n.42; O'Sullivan 2008a; Michels 2017. On astral and solar imagery in Hellenistic ruler cult more generally: Kyrieleis 1986; Bergmann 1998: 40–57; Anagnostou-Laoutides 2013.

[29] Cf. Bergmann 1997: 33. Some of Demetrius' star-like *philoi* also received heroic honors: see n.103 below.

as Eric Csapo has noted, evoking a key aspect of the Eleusinian Mysteries.[30] The chorus of Sophocles' *Antigone* invoke Dionysus as "the chorus leader of the fire-breathing stars" (ἰὼ πῦρ πνεόντων | χοράγ' ἄστρων, *Ant*. 1146–47) and bid him in the role of the Eleusinian Iacchus (Ἴακχον, *Ant*. 1152) to come "along with your revolving Thyiads" (σαῖς ἅμα περιπόλοις | θυίασιν, *Ant*. 1151–52), fashioning Dionysus as the sun and his Bacchic train as circling stars.[31] The scholiast to this line further clarifies that Dionysus was called the "chorus leader of the stars" "in accordance with some doctrine of the mysteries" (τῶν ἄστρων χορηγέ· κατὰ γὰρ τινα μυστικὸν λόγον τῶν ἀστέρων ἐστὶ χορηγός, Σ *Ant*. 1147b Xenis). By applying the same image to Demetrius in the hymn, our anonymous poet equates god and king, while casting the king's *philoi* as a band of Eleusinian and Bacchic attendants. The bulk of the hymn's imagery in the first half thus contributes to a consistent picture of Demetrius as a Dionysiac divinity. The hymn builds on Demetrius' Bacchic self-fashioning elsewhere to authorize and legitimize his divine posturing, casting him in the image of the parvenu Dionysus.

What I would like to stress here, however, is the way in which this image is constructed in local terms: the specific link with the Attic Eleusinian mysteries is a useful starting point, but I think we can go further and argue that the Dionysus whose image Demetrius adopts in this hymn is specifically that from the Attic tragic stage. The hymn's language is strongly Attic and its iambic rhythms already formally evoke Athenian drama.[32] But the king's Dionysiac description in verses 7–8 resonates particularly with the depiction of the god in Euripides' *Bacchae*.[33] In that drama, Dionysus appears as a god among men, a new arrival (ἥκω, *Bacch*. 1) whose manifest presence is highlighted repeatedly (e.g. πάρειμι, *Bacch*. 4; πάρει, 454; παρών, 621 ~ πάρεισιν, v. 2; πάρεστι, v. 8; παρόνθ', v. 18). Moreover, like Demetrius, he is characterized by his beauty and laughter: his dangerous allure is a key part of his identity, articulated by Pentheus in a marked litotes: he is "not without form" or "beauty" (οὐκ ἄμορφος, 453); and his laughter is a recurring trope (γελάσαι, 380; γελῶν, 439; προσώπῳ γελῶντι, 1021 ~ γελῶν v. 8).[34] Given the popularity

[30] Cf. Csapo 2008: 267–72, on which the remainder of this paragraph draws. On Demetrius and Eleusis: Landucci Gattinoni 1983.

[31] For the syncretism of Iacchus and Dionysus: Graf 1974: 51–58. For Dionysus' assimilation to the sun, cf. Diod. Sic. 1.11.1–3; Macrob. *Sat*. 1.18; Csapo 2008: 272.

[32] Attic elements: Palumbo Stracca 2000: 507, noting e.g. the use of ἐνταῦθα, πόρρω and ὅστις for ὅς. Cf. too the Attic synizesis of ᾗ οὐκ in vv. 16 and 17 (LSJ s.v. οὐ F), and Attic ποεῖν for ποιεῖν in vv. 6, 21 and 34 (an emendation by Marcovich, but necessary for the metre): Threatte (1980) 324–25. σπίλον (v. 34), if the correct reading, may also have a tragic resonance: cf. Ion fr. 19 *TrGF* (σπίλον); Lycophr. *Alex*. 188 (σπίλον), 374 (σπίλοι). As Michael Reeve notes (pers. comm.), the hymn's trimeters are rather "Menandrian" ("line 7 Porson ignored in the fifth foot, line 17 anapaest in third foot, line 21 no caesura and Porson ignored, 33 anapaest in fifth foot"); the metre thus taps into more contemporary trends of trimeter production, but it is still evocative of the dramatic stage.

[33] Cf. Henrichs 1999: 244 who notes this *Bacchae* parallel in passing, but does not develop the point further.

[34] On Dionysus' laughter in the *Bacchae*: Seaford 1996: 186 on 439; Billings 2017. Cf. *Hom. Hymn* 7.14 (μειδιάων); Sophocles, *Dionysiskos* fr. 171 *TrGF* (διαγελῶν); Accius, *Bacchae* 418 Dangel (*praesens praesto irridens*). For "laughter-loving" Demetrius, cf. Phylarchus *BNJ* 81 F 12 = *Deipn*. 14.614e (φιλόγελως).

of the *Bacchae* in the late Classical and Hellenistic age,[35] Euripides' boundary-blurring god is an ideal model for the Macedonian god-king Demetrius. This would be even more true if the *Bacchae* was originally written or performed in Macedon, as some scholars have argued: Euripides' Dionysus would then be an apt god to appeal to both Athenian and Macedonian audiences.[36]

This evocation of the tragic Dionysus fits into Demetrius' own political self-representation: we have already noted how his festival, the Demetrieia, was connected to the City Dionysia, the major event for the performance of Attic drama. But we can also cite the earlier occasion in 296/5 BCE when Demetrius presented himself before the Athenian public in the theater, as if a tragic actor himself (ὥσπερ οἱ τραγῳδοί: Plut. *Dem*. 34.4–7). Peter Thonemann has attractively argued that this event directly embedded Demetrius' re-conquest of Athens into the dramatic festival, so that the annual celebration of the Dionysia and Demetrieia recalled and re-enacted his usurpation of the city.[37] Demetrius' Dionysiac and tragic associations encode his political domination of Athens. The ithyphallic hymn builds on and reinforces this self-portrayal, casting Demetrius as a distinctively tragic – and Attic – god: a new, manifest arrival in Athens. In so doing, it renders him readily accessible and comprehensible to a local Athenian audience who remained staunchly proud of their tragic heritage even as Attic drama was exported across the Greek-speaking world (cf. §IV below).[38] The *Bacchae* had already tackled the challenge of how "to conceive of divine epiphany in wholly real corporeal terms,"[39] and so it provides a familiar framework for conceptualizing the divinity of Demetrius' royal power. The king appears as a manifest and tangible presence, just like Dionysus on the Attic stage: a figure who is indeed "not without form" (οὐκ ἄμορφος, *Bacch*. 453).[40] Yet at the same time, this Dionysian analogy may also contain a latent threat to the people of Athens: we all know what happens if you try to resist Dionysus, so it is best to welcome Demetrius with open arms.

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[35] Cf. Call. *Epigr*. 48 Pf. = *AP* 6.310 ~ *Bacch*. 494; Theoc. *Id*. 26 (Cusset 1997); Plut. *Alex*. 53.4 ~ *Bacch*. 266; Plut. *Crass*. 3. On the wider reception of the *Bacchae*: Seaford 1996: 52–54; Sauron 2007; Friesen 2015; Perris and Mac Góráin 2020; Nelson forthcoming a.

[36] The idea of a Macedonian "première" is embraced most enthusiastically by Lane Fox 2011: 209–10; cf. Hammond and Griffith 1979: 149; Csapo 1999–2000: 414–15. But note the sensible caution of Dodds 1960: xxxix–xl and Revermann 1999–2000: 461–62, who notes "just how subtle" any "Macedonian link" in the play would be (462). The passing mentions of Pieria and Macedonian rivers (*Bacch*. 409–11, 565–75) may simply envisage future re-performance in Macedon: cf. Easterling 1994: 77–79; Scullion 2003: 393–94. The play was certainly performed in Athens: Σ *Ran*. 67. For more on Euripides and Macedon, see §IV below.

[37] Thonemann 2005: esp. 79; contrast Osborne 2006. On Demetrius as a "tragic king," see Mastrocinque 1979 and n.87 below; and on the theatricality of Hellenistic politics in general, see Chaniotis 1997. See too Csapo and Wilson 2022 for the longstanding relationship between theater and autocracy.

[38] Theater outside Athens: Bosher 2012; Csapo et al. 2014; Stewart 2017; Csapo and Wilson 2020.

[39] Billings 2017: 25.

[40] On the epiphanic Dionysus, cf. Henrichs 2011. Demeter is an apt companion for Demetrius because she also disguised herself as a mortal before establishing the Eleusinian rites (*Hom. Hymn Dem*. 98–267): Stehle 1997: 45.

II. Demetrius and Local Philosophies

The first section of the ithyphallic hymn thus draws on Athenian tragedy to frame Demetrius within a familiar local framework. Such evocation of local ideas and idioms fits into a broader strategy of the hymn. Scholars have long identified allusions to contemporary philosophy in the poem's provocative dismissal of traditional gods. What has not been sufficiently stressed, however, is the strong local inflection of many of these ideas, which draw particularly on both Athenian philosophy and Attic drama. The lines in question read (vv. 15–19):

> ἄλλοι μὲν ἢ μακρὰν γὰρ ἀπέχουσιν θεοί,
> ἢ οὐκ ἔχουσιν ὦτα,
> ἢ οὐκ εἴσιν, ἢ οὐ προσέχουσιν ἡμῖν οὐδὲ ἕν,
> σὲ δὲ παρόνθ' ὁρῶμεν,
> οὐ ξύλινον οὐδὲ λίθινον, ἀλλ' ἀληθινόν.[41]
>
> For the other gods are either far away, or they have no ears, or they do not exist, or they pay us no attention at all. But you we see present here, not made of wood nor stone, but real.

These are radical sentiments, and it is worth asking how securely Demetrius himself can escape their troubling implications (see §IV below). But for now, I will focus on their deep literary, historical, and philosophical resonances. Already in archaic epic, Olympus is "far away" (μακρὸν Ὄλυμπον, cf. μακράν, v. 15), the gods are out of reach when visiting the Aethiopians (*Il*. 1.423–25; *Od*. 1.22–27, 5.282–83), and Apollo is a god who works and shoots "from afar" (ἑκάεργος, ἑκηβόλος).[42] Moreover, the dismissal of other gods as inanimate artefacts (v. 19) may reflect Demetrius' own contemporary rhetoric: according to Clement of Alexandria, the Athenians offered Athena as a bride to the king, but he did not want to marry a mere statue and preferred the hetaera Lamia instead (*Protr*. 4.54.2–6). Just like the author of the hymn, he prefers a real living presence to a lifeless cult statue.[43]

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[41] Compare Democharesʼ paraphrase: ἐπᾴδοντες ὡς εἴη μόνος θεὸς ἀληθινός, οἱ δ' ἄλλοι καθεύδουσιν ἢ ἀποδημοῦσιν ἢ οὐκ εἰσίν ("claiming in song that he was the only true god, while the others are either asleep or abroad or do not exist," *Deipn*. 6.253c = *BNJ* 75 F 9); cf. Marasco 1984: 199–203.

[42] Cf. Apollo's journeys to the Hyperboreans in the distant north: Gagné 2021. Note too the hymn's inversion of traditional epiphanic language in v. 15 (μακράν): cf. ὁ γὰρ θεὸς οὐκέτι μακρήν, Call. *Hymn* 2.7.

[43] Scheer 2000: 277–79 and O'Sullivan 2008b argue that this anecdote is ahistorical, copied from another anecdote concerning Mark Antony (Sen. *Suas*. 1.6), though see Ogden 2011: 228–31; Versnel 2011: 452n.58. If it is true, the story further aligns Demetrius with Dionysus, recalling the Athenian *hieros gamos*, in which Dionysus was "married" to the wife of the *archon basileus* ([Aristot.] *Ath. Pol*. 3.5; Apollod. *Neaer*. 73; Parker 2005: 303–5). For the differentiation between Demetrius and the other gods, cf. Plut. *Dem*. 42.10–11, where Demetrius delights in the difference between his epithet ("city-sacker") and that of Zeus ("city-protector").

Yet in addition to these resonances, these verses particularly echo contemporary philosophical doctrines. Many scholars have noted how the gods' supposed distance (v. 15) and lack of interest (v. 17) recall the aloof gods of Epicurean thought, tapping into another epichoric intertext: Epicurus' garden was established in Athens in 307/6 BCE, around the very same time that Demetrius first visited the city.[44] I would add, however, that these lines offer no single or coherent philosophical view. Rather, we find echoes and inversions of various doctrines, all of which had a strong presence in Athens. Besides Epicureanism, these lines recall the three categories of disbelief outlined in the tenth book of Plato' *Laws* (10.885b),[45] while the dismissal of the traditional gods as wood and stone (ξύλινον … λίθινον, v. 19) echoes the puppets of Plato's famous cave allegory in the *Republic* (λίθινά τε καὶ ξύλινα, 7.515a): like those shadow-casting puppets, traditional cult statues are artificial constructs, distortions of reality.[46] In addition, the notion of earless gods (v. 16) adapts the Stoic belief that god is not anthropomorphic (Diog. Laert. 7.147),[47] and the claim that the gods do not exist (v. 17) draws on contemporary strands of atheistic thought.[48] The verses offer a potpourri of philosophical perspectives. But this amalgam would still have carried a strong local resonance, since all these philosophical positions were particularly – if not exclusively – associated with the city of Athens.[49]

These philosophical reflections are also indebted to the precedent of the Attic tragic stage. Many of the hymn's ideas parallel the notorious *Sisyphus* fragment ascribed to Critias or Euripides, where the invention of the gods is presented as a "false speech" (ψευδεῖ ... λόγῳ, [Critias] fr. 19.26 *TrGF*). Like the hymn, this fragment undermines the traditional gods'

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[44] Marcovich 1988: 13–17; cf. Weinreich 1926: 647; Ehrenberg 1946: 188; Alfonsi 1963; Sommariva 1982. Heßler 2018: 415–20 notes further parallels between Athens' treatment of Demetrius and the veneration of Epicurus. On Epicurus' theology, cf. Koch 2005; Konstan 2011; Sedley 2011.

[45] Cf. Marcovich 1988: 13, citing W. Haase. Cf. too *Hipp. Maj.* 292d for a Socratic interlocutor's unresponsiveness framed as being stone-like (~ v. 19) and having no ears (~ v. 16).

[46] Besides two other Aristotelian instances (*De gen. an.* 2.734b, 740a), this is the only conjunction of these adjectives in extant literature before the hymn. Later, cf. Diod. Sic. 22.9.4; *Sib. Or.* 3.588, 5.82; *Psalm* 115.4–8; *Daniel* 5.23, where Baltasar's "gods of wood and stone who do not hear" (τοὺς θεοὺς … ξυλίνους καὶ λιθίνους … οἳ οὐκ ἀκούουσι) are opposed to the Jewish God (τὸν Θεόν); and Oenomaus of Gadara *apud* Euseb. *Praep. Ev.* 5.36: οὐκ ἀθάνατοι, ἀλλὰ λίθινοι καὶ ξύλινοι δεσπόται ἀνθρώπων ("they are not immortals, but stone and wooden masters of humankind"). For the broader Cynic and Stoic tradition of criticizing divine images, cf. Marcovich 1988: 17; Dunand 2002: 76. Cf. already Heraclitus D15 L–M, and ancient art's interrogation of the relationship between god and cult statue: Platt 2011: 114–23.

[47] By contrast, v. 17 challenges Stoic ideas about divine existence and providential care. On Stoic theology, cf. Algra 2003.

[48] On ancient atheism, see Bremmer 2007; Whitmarsh 2016; and Sedley 2013: esp. 333 on Plato's portrayal of atheism "as a creed rife at Athens in particular."

[49] On philosophy as Athens' distinctive cultural product in the first two centuries of the Hellenistic period: Netz 2020, esp. Part II (239–523); cf. *Id.* 14.5–6. Theological scepticism was not exclusively Athenian: cf. Heraclitus, Xenophanes and the pre-Socratic Ionian tradition; see n.46 above.

existence, exposing their hearing (ἀκούων, fr. 19.18; ἀκούσεται, 20 ~ ἔχουσιν ὦτα, v. 16) and attention (προσέχων, fr. 19.19 ~ προσέχουσιν, v. 17) as part of a lie that conceals the truth (ἀλήθειαν, fr. 19.26 ~ ἀληθινόν, v. 19). Its anthropological explanation for the gods' creation is not identical to the hymn's contrast between Demetrius and the other gods, and the wider context of the fragment is unknown; but in challenging the "truth" of the gods' existence, it provides further precedent for the hymn's radical philosophizing.[50] More generally, tragedy's detached theology also offers a model for the critique of the traditional gods' aloofness. Tragedy had long thematized the issue of divine (im)perceptibility: Odysseus only recognizes Athena by her voice (Soph. *Aj*. 14–17; Eur. *Rhesus* 608–9), and Hippolytus only perceives Artemis by her fragrance (Eur. *Hipp*. 1391–93).[51] Moreover, the genre had also set clear precedent for the criticism of the divine: tragic characters variously object to the gods' heartlessness (ἀγνωμοσύνην, Soph. *Trach*. 1266), lack of care (ἀμελεῖ, Eur. *Ion* 439), and falsity (they are "no more truthful than winged dreams," οὐδ' ... πτηνῶν ὀνείρων εἰσὶν ἀψευδέστεροι, Eur. *IT* 570–71).[52] In its questioning of the traditional gods, as in its portrayal of the Dionysiac king, the hymn adopts local idioms, both philosophical and dramatic, to authorize Demetrius' divine presence and power through familiar frameworks.

III. Demetrius and/as Oedipus

The appropriation of a distinctively Attic literary heritage is also apparent in the hymn's final section, the mythical analogy of Oedipus and the Sphinx (vv. 23–34). The hymnist compares the growing threat of the marauding Aetolians in central Greece to the legendary sphinx that once ravaged the Theban countryside, and asks Demetrius for help.[53] He can either play the role of Oedipus himself by punishing this new "Sphinx" directly (κόλασον αὐτός, v. 31) or find some other to do so (Οἰδίπουν τιν' εὑρέ, v. 32) – a polyvalence to which we shall return. But either way, this analogy figures Demetrius as the future savior of Athens, just as Oedipus once saved Thebes.

[50] Cf. Marcovich 1988: 13. On this *Sisyphus* fragment: Whitmarsh 2014; Alvoni 2017; Billings 2021: 84–89. On the general importance of divine listening: Versnel 1981: 26–37; Pulleyn 1997: 134–44; Dunand 2002: 74; Brenk 2007.

[51] Cf. Eur. *Bacch*. 1077–79; Mastronarde 1990: 274–75; Easterling 1993: 81–83; Pucci 1994. On the philosophical character of Attic drama: Billings 2021.

[52] Cf. Pucci 2016 and Plato's objections to tragedy's divine critiques: *Resp*. 2.379d–380c; Halliwell 1996. Of course, such criticism can rarely be read straight: Parker 1999: 20–25; cf. Lefkowitz 2016.

[53] Cf. Henrichs 1999: 246. On the Aetolians' conflicts with Demetrius: Flacelière 1937: 68–80; Lefèvre 1998; Grainger 1999: 89–92; Wheatley and Dunn 2020: 347–48, 357; Worthington 2021: 95–96. For their maraudering reputation: Polyb. 4.1.3; Champion 2007. On the underlying gendered opposition: Stehle 1997: 126.

Numerous details of the hymn closely match the traditional *fabula* of the Oedipus myth.[54] The new Aetolian sphinx is pictured sitting atop a rock (ἐπὶ πέτρας καθήμενος, v. 25), a likely allusion to the "rock of Delphi" which the Aetolians currently occupied (Plut. *Dem*. 40.7–8).[55] This is a close parallel to the tradition of the Theban Sphinx sitting atop Mount Phikion to utter its riddles;[56] in art too, the monster was usually pictured perched on a rock or column.[57] The Aetolians' habit of plundering their neighbors' property (ἀναρπάσας, v. 27; ἁρπάσαι, v. 29) is also matched by the Sphinx's reputation for ravaging the land and city of Thebes, destroying its fields and snatching away its people.[58] And the wish that Demetrius may find some Oedipus to hurl this new Sphinx to the ground (κατακρημνιεῖ, v. 33) not only evokes a Delphic tradition of punishing *hierosylia* by throwing someone from the rock of Delphi, but also recalls the Sphinx's traditional death: she hurled herself from her peak after Oedipus successfully solved her riddle.[59] Oedipus' mythical encounter with the Sphinx maps closely onto aspects of the Athenians' contemporary historical experience.

Beyond these general thematic parallels, however, scholars have rarely looked further to consider the larger resonance of this Oedipus analogy for a local Athenian audience, a population who were very familiar with the Oedipus myth from its frequent performance on the tragic stage.[60] Besides Sophocles' two extant *Oedipus* dramas, we know that Euripides produced his

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[54] For this use of *fabula* to refer to the general contours of a myth, cf. Burgess 2009: 27; Nelson 2022b: 57–58. The term derives from narratology: de Jong 2014: 38–39, 76–77; Bal 2017: 154–87.

[55] "Rock of Delphi": Δελφὶς … πέτρα, Soph. *OT* 464; Eur. *Andr*. 998; Theoc. *AP* 6.336.4 = 5.4 Gow-Page, *HE* 3395; cf. Πυθοῖ ἔνι πετρηέσσῃ, *Il*. 9.405; Δελφίδ' … πέτραν, Aristonous, *Paean in Apollinem*, *CA* 162, v. 2: cf. Wilamowitz-Moellendorff 1881: 242; Henrichs 1999: 246n.76; Finglass 2018: 321.

[56] Cf. καθίζουσα δὲ ἐπὶ Φικίου ὄρους, Palaephatus 4; ἐπὶ τὸ Φίκιον ὄρος ἐκαθέζετο, Apollod. *Bibl*. 3.5.8. Cf. too Sen. *Oed*. 95; Stat. *Theb*. 2.504–5, 2.555–57, 4.375–76. Mt Phikion is effectively "Mt. Sphinx": cf. Hes. *Theog*. 326; Lycophr. *Alex*. 1465–66; Σ Hes. *Scut*. 33. Cf. Edmunds (1984) 12.

[57] See *LIMC* VII s.v. "Oidipous" 10–39, 46–65. Cf. Demisch 1977: 96–100; Moret 1984: I 67–75; Renger 2013: 15–19; March 2020: 7–8.

[58] Cf. ἁρπαξάνδραν κῆρ', Aesch. *Sept*. 776–77; ὡς δ' ἐπεζάρει | Σφὶγξ ἁρπαγαῖσι πόλιν, Eur. *Phoen*. 45–46; ἀναρπάζουσα δὲ μικροὺς καὶ μεγάλους κατήσθιεν, Σ Eur. *Phoen*. 1760; cf. Hyginus, *Fab*. 67. Cf. *LIMC* VIII s.v. "Sphinx" 172–80. On the Aetolians' reputation for plundering, cf. Scholten 2000.

[59] Delphic punishment: cf. *Life of Aesop* 132; Froelich and Phillips 2019. Sphinx's death: ῥίψασα ἑαυτὴν ἀνεῖλεν, Palaephatus 4; τὴν μὲν σφίγγα … ἑαυτὴν κατακρημνίσαι, Diod. Sic. 4.64.4; ἡ μὲν οὖν Σφὶγξ ἀπὸ τῆς ἀκροπόλεως ἑαυτὴν ἔρριψεν, Apollod. *Bibl*. 3.5.8; cf. Hyginus, *Fab*. 67; Stat. *Theb*. 2.516–18, 11.490. The Sphinx usually throws herself from the rock, but Oedipus is held responsible for solving the riddle and can be said to have destroyed her: Aesch. *Sept*. 775–77; Corinna fr. 372 *PMG*. Though see Gantz (1993) 497–98 on a possible alternative tradition in art in which Oedipus may have destroyed the Sphinx by force; cf. *LIMC* VII s.v. "Oidipous" 73–81; Moret 1984: 77–91; March 1987: 124–25.

[60] As far as I am aware, the only other scholar to have done so is Bartol 2016: 514–18. See n.66 below.

own *Oedipus* (frr. 539a–57 *TrGF*) and that Aeschylus wrote a whole tetralogy on the theme, comprising the *Laius*, *Oedipus*, *Seven Against Thebes*, and the satyr-play *Sphinx*. Besides those of the "big three", we also know of *Oedipus* plays by no fewer than twelve other dramatists between the fifth and third centuries.[61] It is perhaps no surprise that a character in one of Antiphanes' comedies (4th century BCE) could remark that a poet need only mention Oedipus' name for an audience to call to mind all the details of his family, deeds and suffering (*Poiesis*, fr. 189.5–8 *PCG*). Amid this mass of versions, however, one treatment of the myth appears to have gained a canonical status at an early date: Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*. Aristotle's selection of the play as the epitome of tragedy may well have helped elevate it to this status, but his choice must also reflect the play's pre-existing popularity: as Patrick Finglass has remarked, "he can hardly have been selecting a little-known playwright" or "a little-known play."[62] Alongside evidence for the tragedy's reception on vases and its repeated reperformance through the centuries, it is clear that this was a drama that endured in the Athenian public consciousness.[63]

Returning to Demetrius' ithyphallic hymn, therefore, it seems likely that the poet's very mention of Oedipus would have been more than enough to prompt Athenian audiences to recall Sophocles' famous tragedy, especially in a poem addressed to a tragic-Dionysiac king. And indeed, the hymn resonates strongly with Sophocles' exploration of Oedipus' role as a savior, especially at the very start of the play. In an opening scene of supplication, a delegation of the Theban people, led by the priest of Zeus, begs Oedipus to save them from the plague that has descended upon them, recalling his previous defeat of the Sphinx (Soph. *OT* 31–48):

θεοῖσι μέν νυν οὐκ ἰσούμενόν σ' ἐγὼ
οὐδ' οἵδε παῖδες ἑζόμεσθ' ἐφέστιοι,
ἀνδρῶν δὲ πρῶτον ἔν τε συμφοραῖς βίου
κρίνοντες ἔν τε δαιμόνων συναλλαγαῖς·
ὅς γ' ἐξέλυσας ἄστυ Καδμεῖον μολὼν
σκληρᾶς ἀοιδοῦ δασμὸν ὃν παρείχομεν,
καὶ ταῦθ' ὑφ' ἡμῶν οὐδὲν ἐξειδὼς πλέον
οὐδ' ἐκδιδαχθείς, ἀλλὰ προσθήκῃ θεοῦ
λέγῃ νομίζῃ θ' ἡμὶν ὀρθῶσαι βίον.
νῦν δ', ὦ κράτιστον πᾶσιν Οἰδίπου κάρα,
ἱκετεύομέν σε πάντες οἵδε πρόστροποι
ἀλκήν τιν' εὑρεῖν ἡμίν, εἴτε του θεῶν
φήμην ἀκούσας εἴτ' ἀπ' ἀνδρὸς οἶσθά που·
ὡς τοῖσιν ἐμπείροισι καὶ τὰς ξυμφορὰς
ζώσας ὁρῶ μάλιστα τῶν βουλευμάτων.
ἴθ', ὦ βροτῶν ἄριστ', ἀνόρθωσον πόλιν·

[61] See Finglass 2018: 25–27 for these other dramas and 13–27 for the general prehistory of the myth. Cf. Kurke 2013: 116–17 on Oedipus as a "symbol of tragedy."

[62] Finglass 2018: 83, quoting and adding to a remark made by Taplin 2007: 89.

[63] Cf. Macintosh 2009: 4: "By Antiphanes' time, a repertoire of Greek tragedies was well established, and a mention of Oedipus may well have meant primarily (as it does to us) Sophocles' version of that myth." On the play's early reception: Vahtikari 2014: 181–83; Finglass 2015, 2018: 82–89.

ἴθ’, εὐλαβήθηθ’· ὡς σὲ νῦν μὲν ἥδε γῆ
σωτῆρα κλῄζει τῆς πάρος προθυμίας.

> It is not because we rank you with the gods that I and these children are seated at your hearth, but because we judge you to be the first of men, both in the incidents of life and in dealing with the higher powers. For it was you who came to the city of Cadmus and released us from the tribute we were paying, the tribute of the cruel singer; and that with no special knowledge or instruction from us; no, it is by the extra strength given by a god that you are said and believed to have set right our life. But now, Oedipus, mightiest man in the sight of all, all we suppliants implore you to find some protection for us, whether your knowledge comes from hearing a message from a god or from a man, perhaps; for I see that the setting together of counsels is most effective for those who have experience. Come, best of living men, raise up the city! Come, take care! For now this land calls you its preserver on account of the energy you showed before.[64]

Openings of literary texts are always a ripe target for literary allusion.[65] And such, I would argue, is the case here: the end of the hymn looks back to the start of Sophocles’ play.[66] The Theban delegation supplicates Oedipus just like the Athenians do Demetrius (ἱκετεύομεν, *OT* 41; ἱκέτευον, Democharesˎ *BNJ* 75 F 9) and they praise him as a “savior” (σωτῆρα, *OT* 48), the very same title which Demetrius was awarded – like many other Hellenistic benefactors – after first freeing Athens from its former tyrant (σωτῆρα, Plut. *Dem.* 9.2).[67] Oedipus is also celebrated as accessible and present to all (πᾶσιν, *OT* 40, cf. πάντες, 41) just as the hymnic poet emphasizes Demetrius’ proximity and visibility (πάρεισιν, v. 2; πάρεστι v. 8; σὲ δὲ παρόνθ’ ὁρῶμεν, v. 18: cf. too φίλοι πάντες in v. 9). And he too “hears” (ἀκούσας, *OT* 43), unlike the other earless gods of the hymn (v. 16). In addition, both figures are asked to find something: Oedipus to “find some protection” for the city of Thebes (ἀλκήν τιν’ εὑρεῖν ἡμίν, *OT* 42), and Demetrius to “find some Oedipus” to help Athens if he cannot defeat the Sphinx himself (Οἰδίπουν τιν’ εὑρέ, v. 32).[68] In both cases, this request is framed by looking back to the precedent of Oedipus’ defeat of the Sphinx as a paradigm for the present (*OT* 35–36; cf. vv. 23–34).[69] The hymnic poet’s appeal to Demetrius parallels the priest’s approach to Oedipus on both a structural and a verbal level.

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[64] Tr. Lloyd-Jones 1994: 329–31.

[65] See Nelson forthcoming b, with further bibliography. Cf. §IV below for further echoes of the openings of Euripides’ *Bacchae* and Sophocles’ *Electra* and *OC* in the reception of Demetrius.

[66] For such allusive inversions of beginnings and endings, cf. Zetzel 1983: 261 with n.28. This Sophoclean allusion has also been independently proposed by Bartol 2016: 514–18, whose work I encountered after developing my own argument here. Our conclusions are complementary, although I remain more open to a wider range of resonances.

[67] Cf. Jim 2022: 166–213.

[68] Discovery is a key concern of the *OT*: Oedipus’ skill lies precisely in “finding” solutions (as he did to the Sphinx’s riddle: ἄριστος εὑρίσκειν, *OT* 440). And as the tragedy reaches its climax, it is “time” for the details of Oedipus’ past to be “found out” (ὁ καιρὸς ηὑρῆσθαι τάδε, *OT* 1050; cf. καιρός, v. 4; εὑρέ, v. 32).

[69] For other mentions of the Sphinx incident in *OT*, see 130–31, 390–400, 507–11, 1197–1201, 1524–27.

Most striking of all, however, and most relevant for my current purpose, is the manner in which this opening passage of Sophocles' play flirts with the prospect of Oedipus' potential divinity. At the outset, the priest denies that Oedipus is akin to the gods (θεοῖσι μέν νυν οὐκ ἰσούμενόν σ' ἐγώ, *OT* 31), but in the remainder of his speech, he comes very close to suggesting otherwise. By recalling Oedipus' defeat of the Sphinx (*OT* 35–39), the priest co-opts a familiar strategy of prayer, in which the speaker appeals to the evidence of former services to establish a favorable relationship in the present. As Patrick Finglass notes, "it is remarkable to see the Priest employing [this topos] immediately after disclaiming any desire to compare Oedipus to a god."[70] The same can also be said of the relative clause which introduces the account of Oedipus' past achievements (ὅς, *OT* 35), another characteristic element of hymnic narrative.[71] Moreover, the very language used to address Oedipus has a divine resonance: we have already seen the epithet "savior" (σωτῆρα, *OT* 48), which is frequently used of the gods and especially Zeus, but Oedipus' description as "most mighty" (κράτιστον, *OT* 40) also evokes a divine grandeur, shared in the hymn by Demetrius' alleged father, Poseidon (κρατίστου, v. 13).[72] Far from cementing Oedipus' mortal status, the priest's opening words thus raise the possibility of Oedipus' divinity, a possibility that continues to linger throughout the play, especially later in the third stasimon when the chorus speculate whether Oedipus may in fact have divine parents (*OT* 1086–1109).[73] If we recall this opening scene of Sophocles' play, Oedipus becomes not only an exemplary city-savior, but also a paradigm for the divinized ruler, straddling the boundary between mortal and divine.

Such an association is reinforced by Sophocles' other major Oedipus play, *Oedipus at Colonus*. Despite the extreme suffering that Oedipus has faced (cf. §IV), he is elevated at the end of this play to a quasi-divine protector status, and even heroized as a local guardian of Colonus and Attica: he now provides the ἀλκή which the priest of Zeus had sought at the beginning of the earlier play – but now crucially for Athens, not Thebes (*OC* 1524, cf. *OT* 42). Oedipus is ultimately transformed into a benevolent protector of the Attic landscape. Like Demetrius, he is a new arrival with quasi-divine power that he will harness to protect Athens.[74] Moreover, in leaving it open whether Demetrius will play the part of Oedipus himself (vv. 31–34), the hymn also creates the space to align Demetrius with a further character from the play: Theseus, the mythical ruler of Athens who later welcomes and receives Oedipus. Theseus is another son of Poseidon, like Demetrius (v. 13), and another hero known for hurling monstrous figures down

[70] Finglass 2018: 178. Cf. Cairns 2013 on the Priest's earlier mention of Oedipus' altars (*OT* 16).
[71] For the hymnic relative, cf. Norden 1913: 168–76; Janko 1981: 10–11; Nelson 2020b: 186n.17.
[72] σωτῆρ: Finglass 2018: 182, citing *Phil*. 738, 1470–71; Hdt. 8.138.1. For the Athenian cult of Zeus Soter, cf. Rosivach 1987; Mikalson 1998: 110–13. For the importance of "saving" as a larger theme of the play, cf. *OT* 67 (of the chorus), 303–4, 312–13 (of Teiresias), 1030 (of the herdsman who rescued Oedipus as a child). κράτιστος: Finglass 2018: 180, citing Diggle 2004: 224 on Theophr. *Char*. 5.2.
[73] This speculation again aligns with the hymn's assertion of Demetrius' own divine parentage: vv. 13–14.
[74] New arrival: ἀφιγμεθ', *OC* 2; cf. μολών, *OT* 35 (Oedipus to Thebes). Oedipus' transformation: Burian 1974; Morin 1996; Bowman 2007; Brook 2019. Athens/Attica and the *OC*: Kirkwood 1986; Blundell 1993; Scodel 2006: 71–77; Markantonatos 2007: 71–193; Kelly 2009: 86–106.

from a cliff (in his case, the bandit Sciron; cf. κατακρημνιεῖ, v. 33).[75] Such an association would tie Demetrius not only to Oedipus, but also to the most celebrated of Athens' mythical rulers.[76] In addition, a link with the *OC*'s Theseus evokes the common tragic topos of Athens as a welcoming haven for strangers: besides Oedipus, we could cite the likes of Euripides' Medea (*Medea*), Aeschylus' Orestes (*Eumenides*) and Euripides' Theban suppliants (*Supplices*), all of whom receive a hospitable welcome in the city.[77] The Oedipus analogy thus not only provides a positive model for Demetrius (in the form of Oedipus and Theseus), but also for Athens itself (as a welcoming haven for the new arrival).

As with the evocation of the tragic Dionysus, the hymnic poet appears to draw on the Athenian literary tradition to authorize Demetrius' status and position. For an Athenian audience struggling to come to terms with Demetrius' divinity, this allusion grounds it in local terms. By evoking the quasi-divine Oedipus of Sophocles' dramas, the hymn builds on the literary tradition to construct a paradigm of power and protection in a distinctively Athenian framework. In so doing, the hymn provides an early instance of a broader phenomenon of Hellenistic kingship: the co-option and adaptation of local idioms to make sense of a king's superhuman power and status.[78] As such, the hymn is both thoroughly Athenian and thoroughly Hellenistic.

IV. Tragic Subversion

In aligning Demetrius with Dionysus and Oedipus, this hymn draws deeply on Attic tragic precedent. Such tragic allusion can be readily paralleled in later Hellenistic poetry: Callimachus, Apollonius and Theocritus, amongst others, frequently turned to the model of Attic drama.[79] But I have suggested that the tragic allusions in the present hymn have a more specifically local Attic resonance, embracing Athens' literary past as a framework for making sense of Demetrius' presence in the city. In this section, I would like to push this argument further and interrogate more fully why the hymn turns specifically to tragedy for this Athenian flavor when other

[75] Theseus as son of Poseidon: cf. Chaniotis 2011: 185. Sciron: cf. Call. *Hecale* frr. 59–60 Hollis; Euphorion fr. 11.6–9 Lightfoot; Nelson and Molesworth 2021: 213–14. The final wish for the Sphinx to be petrified (v. 34) has been interpreted as an allusion to another heroic model, Perseus, who petrified the monstrous Medusa: Kolde 2003: 389n.110. But this seems unlikely; the wish rather evokes the image of a sphinx statue, a familiar feature of Greek iconography, and expresses a desire to render the Aetolian threat as distant and unreal as the "stony" gods (λίθινον, v. 19).

[76] On Theseus and Athens: Herter 1939; Walker 1995; Calame 1996; Mills 1997. Theseus and the *OC*: Jusino 2019.

[77] Cf. Bernek 2004; Tzanetou 2012; Call. *Aet*. fr. 51 Harder.

[78] See Ma 2003 with further bibliography. For the possibility of such adaptation in Ptolemaic literature, cf. Hunter 2003: 46–53; Stephens 2003; Heerink 2010; Kampakoglou 2013; Nelson 2022a: 115–18.

[79] For example, Apollonius' *Argonautica* ~ Eur. *Medea*: Hunter 1989: 18–19, 2015: 5–6; Knight 1991; Nishimura-Jensen 1996. Callimachus' *Hymn* 5 and 6 ~ Eur. *Bacchae* and Soph. *OT*: Hunter 1992: 23–24; Heyworth 2004: 153–57. Generally, cf. Sistakou 2016.

options were available (Callimachus, for example, drew particularly on old comedy and Atthidography to create a local Attic ambience in his *Hecale*).[80]

We have already encountered various explanations for the hymn's tragic allusions: Demetrius' own Bacchic role-playing, the king's broader association with the theater, and the theological precedent of the Attic stage (§I–II above). In addition, however, I would argue that these tragic allusions participate in the broader contestations of Athens' tragic heritage in the early Hellenistic period. Already in the fourth century, ownership of the tragic past had been a focal point of Athens' response to Macedonian power. As Johanna Hanink has shown, in the aftermath of Athens' defeat at the Battle of Chaeronea (338 BCE) the city went about "reaffirming and publicising" its "status as capital and rightful home of the theatre."[81] Both Philip II and Alexander the Great were enthusiastic fans of Attic tragedy and attracted leading actors to their courts, just as Euripides allegedly ended his life in "exile" with Archelaus.[82] In response to the lure of Macedon, Athens fined performers who did not fulfil their duties, while Lycurgus passed a law that erected statues of the three major tragedians in the Athenian theater of Dionysus and established official texts of their plays ([Plut.] *Vit. Dec. or.* 841f). In so doing, he elevated these tragedians to the status of Homer and asserted Athens' control over its theatrical heritage.[83] By the time of Demetrius, Attic tragedy had long served as a focal point for Athenian resistance to the growing hegemony of Macedon.[84]

These same cultural contestations also seem to underpin the ithyphallic hymn's engagement with tragedy. This is most apparent in the ambivalent associations of Demetrius' two main intertextual models, Dionysus and Oedipus. Both paradigms are subversively re-applied in Plutarch's *Life* to mark Demetrius' fall from power. In 287 BCE, Demetrius lost control of Macedon to Pyrrhus and Lysimachus and subsequently fled in exile, travelling through Greece in search of allies (*Dem.* 45.1). According to Plutarch, a Theban onlooker adapted the *Bacchae* to describe Demetrius' loss of godhood (*Dem.* 45.3):

> καὶ τό γε πρῶτον ἰδιώτης καὶ τῶν βασιλικῶν κοσμίων ἔρημος ἐπεφοίτα ταῖς πόλεσι, καί τις αὐτὸν ἐν Θήβαις τοιοῦτον θεασάμενος ἐχρήσατο τοῖς Εὐριπίδου στίχοις οὐκ ἀηδῶς·
>
> μορφὴν ἀμείψας ἐκ θεοῦ βροτησίαν
> πάρεστι Δίρκης νάμαθ' Ἰσμηνοῦ θ' ὕδωρ.

[80] Cf. Hollis 1992, 2009: 5–10.

[81] Hanink 2014: 65.

[82] On the Euripidean *Vita*, see Hanink 2008. Whatever the reality of the tales surrounding his exile (cf. Scullion 2003), Euripides evidently had some connection with Macedon, given his composition of the *Archelaus* (cf. Harder 1985: 125–39). The story of his exile was already known to Aristotle (*Politics* 1311b30–34).

[83] Hanink 2014: 60–89; cf. Dué 2003; Scodel 2007; Nervegna 2020. On Athens and tragedy more generally: Carter 2011.

[84] For later reflections of this tussle, cf. Ptolemy III's alleged theft from Athens of the official performance texts of the three major tragedians (Galen, *Comm. in Hipp. Epidem. 3*, 607.5–17 = 79.23–80.6 Wenkebach) and Dioscorides' various epigrams on dramatists which evince a concern with space and the movement from Athens to Egypt (esp. 24 Gow-Page, *HE* 1617–22 = *AP* 7.708): Gutzwiller 1998: 259–60; Fantuzzi 2007: 487–95.

> At first he went about visiting the cities in the garb of a private man and without the insignia of a king, and one who saw him thus at Thebes applied to him, not inaptly, the verses of Euripides:
>
> Exchanging now the form of god for that of man,
> He visits Dirce's rivulets and Ismenus' flood.[85]

Except for a simple adjustment of the verb (πάρεστι for πάρειμι), these lines are a verbatim quotation from the prologue of the *Bacchae*, in which Dionysus asserts his presence in Thebes (*Bacch*. 4–5). In this case, however, the association of god and king only drives home the difference between the pair: whereas Dionysus willingly and temporarily adopted a mortal disguise, Demetrius was only ever a human masquerading as a god, and his true mortality has now been exposed.[86] A short while later, when Demetrius' army struggled on an inland journey towards Armenia and Media, Plutarch reports how a soldier jokingly adapted the opening lines of Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* to similar effect (*Dem*. 46.10 ~ *OC* 1–2):

> τέκνον τυφλοῦ γέροντος Ἀντιγόνου, τίνας
> χώρους ἀφίγμεθα;
>
> O child of blind and aged Antigonus, to what regions have we come?

With another simple change (the masculine genitive Ἀντιγόνου for the feminine vocative Ἀντιγόνη), this unnamed soldier evokes the moment when Oedipus was at his lowest ebb: old, blind and desolate. In Plutarch's narrative, both Dionysus and Oedipus become models not for the king's quasi-divine power, but for his bathetic fall.

Of course, these anecdotes form part of Plutarch's wider construction of Demetrius as a "tragic" king and so it is possible that they simply reflect an anachronistic reframing of Demetrius' life.[87] But this is unlikely: scholars have traced the anecdotal and tragic aspects of Plutarch's *Life* back to contemporary critics of the king, especially Democharesof Leuconoe and Duris of Samos.[88] And we have already noted Demetrius' close association with the theater in his

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[85] Tr. Perrin 1920: 115.

[86] Cf. Monaco 2011/2012: 52; Pelling 2018: 48. Contrast Mossman 2015: 157, who optimistically believes that Demetrius remains "a god in disguise," despite his loss of royal trappings.

[87] See Plutarch's other tragic quotations in the *Life* (*Dem*. 14.3–4 ~ Eur. *Phoen*. 395; 35.4 ~ Aesch. fr. 359 *TrGF*; 45.3 ~ Soph. fr. 871 *TrGF*) and his recurrent theatrical imagery (*Dem*. 18.5, 25.9, 28.1, 34.4, 41.5–8, 44.9, 53.1, 53.10). Cf. de Lacy 1952: 168–71; Pelling 1999: 365–68, 2016: 126–28; Duff 2004; Pimouguet-Pédarros 2011: 311–25, 2020; Santi Amantini 2013; Enrico 2019.

[88] Duris: Sweet 1951: 179–81; Kebric 1977: 55–60; Pédech 1989: 348; Billows 1990: 334 with n.11. For Duris' critical views of Athens and Demetrius, cf. Landucci Gattinoni 1997: 126–30, 2016; Pownall 2013: 46–50. Democharas: Marasco 1981: 61–63, 1984: 97–98. Generally, cf. Diefenbach 2015: 128–46; Rose 2015: 40–56. For other contemporary critiques of Demetrius, cf. Philochorus (*BNJ* 328 FF 66, 165) and the comic Philippides (fr. 25 *PCG* = Plut. *Dem*. 12.7, 26.5; Philipp 1973: 505–9).

own self-portrayal, which would have thus been a natural target for his critics (§I). Moreover, Plutarch's anecdotes fit into a wider contemporary appropriation of tragic paradigms to ironize Demetrius' rule: Leslie Kurke has explored how anecdotes about Demetrius in Machon's *Chreiai* similarly manipulate tragic quotations to offer insight into the "hidden transcript" of the public Athenian honors lavished on Demetrius – the "coded, unofficial and ironic version of the 'public script'."[89] In one case, the hetaera Mania quotes the opening of Sophocles' *Electra*, bathetically equating "her proffered ass with the rule of Argos, and so also the rule of Athens" (Machon fr. 15, 226–30 Gow ~ *El*. 2);[90] while in another, the hetaera Lamia adapts the disdainful words spoken by the quasi-divine Medea to her helpless husband Jason (Machon fr. 12, 168–73 Gow ~ *Med*. 1342). In both cases, "a prostitute ironically flaunts the fifth-century poetic heritage of Athens at the moment she seems to be subjecting herself to the power of Demetrius."[91] Already during his lifetime, Demetrius' Athenian critics repeatedly turned to tragedy as a source of irony, mockery and resistance, even at apparent moments of submission.

In any case, regardless of the historicity of Plutarch's anecdotes, they demonstrate the inherent instability of Demetrius' mythical models. Dionysus and Oedipus both belong to the world of Thebes, a city that was figured in tragedy as an "anti-Athens," a space of danger, disruption and otherness.[92] In addition, both also carry a host of troubling associations: Dionysus was a god whose divinity was open to question, and whose followers resorted to an extreme degree of violence.[93] Moreover, the role-playing and metatheater of the *Bacchae* leave open the possibility that Demetrius' divine epiphany might be nothing more than another mimetic fiction.[94] As for Oedipus, he too is hardly a straightforward exemplum: although he begins Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* as a near-divine and benevolent ruler, he ends it in despair and disgrace, after discovering the truth of his parricide and incest. With the benefit of historical hindsight, he proves an all too apt parallel for Demetrius, whose life similarly unravelled in its final stages.[95] Indeed, Oedipus' *peripeteia* follows from his overvaluation of his own authority and his subsequent disparagement of traditional religion and prophecy: as Douglas Cairns notes, he arrogates to himself "prerogatives that truly belong only to the gods."[96] He is thus a particularly ominous paradigm of a mortal ruler who hybristically overreaches into the domain of the divine.

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[89] Kurke 2002: 33–40 (quotation 37); cf. McClure 2003: 278–79.

[90] Kurke 2002: 36. *El*. 2 may well be the first line of the play, given the suspect authenticity of *El*. 1: Finglass 2007: 90–92.

[91] Kurke 2002: 39.

[92] Zeitlin 1990, 1993.

[93] Cf. Henrichs 1993. Pentheus' death is a perverted sacrifice: Foley 1985: 205–58, esp. 208–18.

[94] *Bacchae* metatheater: Goldhill 1986: 265–86; Easterling 1993: 81; Segal 1997: 215–71; Dobrov 2001: 70–85; Dunn 2012: 362–68. Cf. Easterling 1993: 79: "in the theatre the characters identified as gods might be perceived as only partial or oblique reflections of true godhead and not fully representing the true 'reality' of divine beings."

[95] When his ruin becomes clear, Demetrius' wife Phila commits suicide in extreme grief (περιπαθής, *Dem*. 45.1), much like Jocasta (*OT* 1234–62).

[96] Cairns 2013: 155, with 154–56 on Oedipus' "status-rivalry with the gods"; cf. Whitmarsh 2016: 102–6.

Such troubling resonances would have already been present at the original performance of the hymn. In particular, Oedipus' incestuous relationship with his mother would have been a particularly discordant analogue for Demetrius, whose return to Athens followed shortly after his new marriage to his fourth wife, Lanassa.[97] And the whole Oedipus myth would have cast in a radically different light Athens' contemporary attempts to source an oracle directly from Demetrius, since Aetolian-occupied Delphi was inaccessible (Plut. *Dem*. 13.1–3).[98] Oedipus failed to grasp the true meaning of the Delphic oracle, so he is an inauspicious precedent for the oracle-bestowing king.

Of course, there are ways to avoid or downplay this conclusion. We could, for example, argue for some kind of underlying cognitive dissonance in the hymn's mythical analogies.[99] Hellenistic praise frequently seems to involve considerable cherry-picking, as poets selectively import mythical parallels for their rulers: the Ptolemaic queens were compared to Helen without necessarily implying that they were all arch-adulterers, while a Pergamene prince was likened to Orestes without suggesting that he was at risk of commiting matricide.[100] Ancient audiences appear to have been encouraged to read mythical analogies selectively, omitting and ignoring uncomfortable elements.[101]

Alternatively, we could also foreground the hymn's suggestion that Demetrius should find one of his subordinates to play the role of Oedipus (vv. 31–34). At one level, this remark may further deflate Demetrius' alleged power, implying that this "manifest god" cannot even live up to the precedent of myth.[102] But it also provides some comforting distance between Demetrius and Oedipus. The remark looks back to the φίλοι who accompany Demetrius like stars (v. 11), many of whom allegedly received heroic honors at Athens, rendering them an apt parallel for the heroic Oedipus.[103] It is possible that this unnamed general could even allusively refer to one of Demetrius' recent military commanders in Thebes, either Hieronymus of Cardia or his son Antigonus Gonatas (Plut. *Dem*. 39–40).[104] By aligning this general in Thebes with the heroic but

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[97] Oedipal desires feature explicitly in Plutarch's *Life of Demetrius* when he recounts Antiochus I's love for his father's wife, Stratonice, Demetrius' daughter: *Dem*. 38. Cf. too Sotades' later mapping of mythical incest onto the Ptolemies (fr. 1, *CA* 238; fr. 16, *CA* 243): Cameron 1995: 18–22. On Lanassa, see Antonetti 2015.

[98] Cf. Habicht 1979: 34–44; 1997: 93–94.

[99] For the application of "cognitive dissonance" to another aspect of Demetrius' ruler cult, cf. Martin 2019.

[100] Ptolemaic queens and Helen: Pantelia 1995; Hunter 1996: 164–66. Attalus and Orestes: Nelson 2020a: 184.

[101] Cf. Goldhill 1991: 279 on "the need for selective, controlled reading" of encomium. Such practice can be traced back to Homer's *Odyssey*, where Orestes serves as a paradigm for Telemachus without the implication that he should kill Penelope: Katz 1991: 29–53; Alden 2017: 77–100.

[102] Cf. Bartol 2016: 517. For such ironic deflation, cf. Eur. *Rhesus* 342–79, where the Trojan ally Rhesus is hymned as a manifest god, although he will ultimately suffer a premature and unheroic death, unable to save Troy; see Fantuzzi 2020: 27–32 for parallels with the ithyphallic hymn.

[103] Democharis *BNJ* 75 F 8 on Adeimantus (cf. *SEG* 14.58), Burichus and Oxythemis (cf. *IG* II² 558): Marasco 1984: 191–98; Mikalson 1998: 88; Versnel 2011: 446n.33.

[104] I thank Peter Thonemann for this attractive suggestion.

vulnerable Theban king, the hymn would then leave space for Demetrius to remain a more divine force, less hindered by Oedipus' ominous associations.

These interpretations alone, however, do not provide a wholly satisfying solution. In the case of cognitive dissonance, any attempt to supress one specific detail of a myth inevitably presupposes the implied voices that work in the opposite direction, especially given the degree to which Oedipus' name stood as a shorthand for misery and woe (Antiphanes, *Poiesis*, fr. 189.5–8 *PCG*). As for Demetrius' Oedipal general, if Antigonus does indeed lie behind this reference, that would only further complicate the mythical analogy, given the strained father-son relations of Theban myth. Even in the *OC*, there remain significant notes of disquiet about Oedipus' actions and temperament, especially in his implacable dismissal of his son Polyneices' supplication.[105] It is very difficult to efface all of these disquieting notes.

After all, the very structure of the hymn seems to construct a *peripeteia* for Demetrius that encourages such troubling interpretations.[106] It begins by staging Demetrius as Dionysus, a relatively successful god who cannot be resisted, but it then restages him as a more problematic model: in comparison to Dionysus, Oedipus is a deeply unfortunate figure who is only ever ambiguously divine. This shift reverses the trajectory of the priest's opening appeal in *OT* (which moved from an assertion of non-divinity to a flirtation with something more: §III).[107] It is facilitated here by the theological reflections of vv. 15–19, whose strains of doubt are difficult for Demetrius to escape entirely: the king's 'divinity' is fragile and situational, dependent on his ongoing success.[108] Indeed, in setting Demetrius apart from all the other gods (ἄλλοι **μὲν** … θεοί, v. 15; σὲ **δέ**, v. 18), the hymn even encourages us to question his alleged "divinity"; Demetrius' very perceptibility marks him out as all too human. Beneath its consistent surface praise, the hymn thus enacts its own implicit *peripeteia*, undercutting its opening hyperbole and hinting at Demetrius' ultimate vulnerability. This pivot also flips the hymn's underlying monitory script. While the Dionysus analogy may act as a warning to the Athenians ("worship Demetrius, or else!"), the sceptical strain that follows serves as an implicit warning to the king: he should beware of being thought a god, since it is an Athenian tradition to harbor doubt about the divine and those who overreach their mortal bounds *à la* Oedipus.[109] The Athenians are not the kind of people to be satisfied with a single and simple idea of divinity.

One more dramatic intertext lies behind the ithyphallic hymn that further destabilizes any attempt to offer a straight reading of it. As Hendrik Versnel has shown, the hymn's praise of Demetrius also displays many striking similarities with the conclusion of Aristophanes' *Birds*, where the "deified" mortal Peisetaerus is welcomed and celebrated as a new Zeus (1708–14):[110]

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[105] Hesk 2012: 183–85.

[106] I thank an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this point, and James Warren for further discussion; the following paragraph is deeply indebted to their suggestions.

[107] The Sophoclean priest's request for Oedipus to "raise up the city" (ἀνόρθωσον πόλιν, *OT* 46) may also acquire some intertextual irony given Demetrius' soubriquet of πολιορκητής ("city-sacker").

[108] Cf. Weber 1995: 305 on the ambivalence of καιρός in v. 4, which underlines the ephemeral nature of Demetrius' power.

[109] Cf. n.96 above on Oedipus' failed "status-rivalry with the gods".

[110] Versnel 2011: 480–84. On Aristophanes' exploitation of ruler-cult motifs here: Currie 2020: §3–14.

δέχεσθε τὸν τύραννον ὀλβίοις δόμοις.
προσέρχεται γὰρ οἷος οὔτε παμφαὴς
ἀστὴρ ἰδεῖν ἔλαμψε χρυσαυγεῖ δρόμῳ,
οὔθ' ἡλίου τηλαυγὲς ἀκτίνων σέλας
τοιοῦτον ἐξέλαμψεν οἷος ἔρχεται
ἔχων γυναικὸς κάλλος οὐ φατὸν λέγειν,
πάλλων κεραυνόν, πτεροφόρον Διὸς βέλος.

Welcome your ruler to his prosperous palace! Yea he draws near, more dazzling to behold than any meteor flaring on its path of golden beams, more than even the flare of the sun's far-beaming splendor of rays, as he comes bringing a lady of beauty surpassing description, and brandishing the thunderbolt, winged missile of Zeus.[111]

Numerous details of this closing scene resonate with the hymn: the welcoming of the king (1708), the cosmic comparisons to stars and the sun (1709–12), the ruler's accompaniment by a goddess (1713), and his assimilation to another deity (in this case, Zeus: 1714).[112] The herald goes on to stress Peisetaerus' visible presence with an emphatic deictic: "he himself is *right here*" (ὁδὶ δὲ καὐτός ἐστιν, 1718). And the chorus celebrate Peisetaerus as the "highest of gods," supplanting the traditional pantheon (δαιμόνων ὑπέρτατε, 1765). In addition, the finale is framed as a wedding song for Peisetaerus and the unnamed goddess, self-consciously replaying the mythical marriage of Zeus and Hera (1731–35). For the newly wed Demetrius, these parallels would hit rather close to home.

Versnel explains these similarities as the "result of similar motivation in comparable circumstances," but – as he notes – if we *were* to detect direct "imitation", it "would lend support to an ironic interpretation of the Demetrios hymn."[113] After all, in *Birds* these expressions of praise are satirical and humorous: a scene of hybristic excess, capping the dangerous overreaching of the whole play. Moreover, this Aristophanic scene seems to allude to another moment of Athenian history, when Peisetaerus' close namesake Peisistratus returned to Athens alongside a goddess – or rather, the mortal woman Phye dressed up as Athena (Hdt. 1.60.4–5).[114] Peisetaerus' own divinity is undermined by that former episode of drama, disguise and faked epiphany. Given the broader dramatic allusions that we have been charting in the ithyphallic hymn, it is plausible that some audience members would have detected Aristophanes' ending as yet another dramatic intertext underlying (and undermining) the hymn's overt praise.[115] Demetrius is the latest pretender and overreacher not just from the Attic stage but also from

[111] Tr. Henderson 2000: 245.
[112] On the identity of the accompanying goddess: Hofmann 1976: 147–60; Sommerstein 1987: 298 ad 1536; Bowie 1993: 164–65; Dunbar 1995: 703–4 ad 1537; Holzhausen 2002.
[113] Versnel 2011: 484.
[114] For this episode, cf. [Aristot.], *Ath. Pol*. 14.4; Clei(to)demus *BNJ* 323 F 15; Connor 1987: 42–47; Sinos 1993. On the Aristophanic parallel: Bonner 1943; Kavoulaki 1999: 317–18; Munn 2006: 39–42; Anderson and Dix 2007: 324–26.
[115] On Aristophanes' reception in antiquity: Slater 2016; Nelson 2018.

Athenian history. Attic drama – both tragedy and comedy – offered a rich source of material to destabilize the divine pretensions of Demetrius.

Ultimately, then, the hymn provides no neat or straightforward reading of Demetrius' tragic parallels: beneath the superficial positive interpretation, there is considerable room for more subsersive readings. It is likely that different audience members would have responded to these ambiguities in different ways – a polyvalence that maps onto the hymn's various contexts of performance: according to Athenaeus, the hymn was sung "not only in public, but also at home" (οὐ δημοσίᾳ μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ κατ' οἰκίαν).[116] Overt and public praise co-exists with more closed and covert criticism – criticism to which Demetrius seems to have been oblivious.[117] Indeed, the hymn's latent doubleness is even reflected in Athenaeus' presentation of it, which combines Democharesʼ relatively flattening summary with Duris' verbatim quotation of its words; the former encourages a straightforward surface reading of the hymn's flattery, while the latter offers the material for a deeper reading as I have advanced here.[118]

It is significant that these polyvalences are constructed and contested through the prism of Attic drama. The hymn draws on familiar Attic traditions, providing a local framework for negotiating Demetrius' divinity. But in so doing, it also participates in a broader contest between Athens and Macedon for the control of the city's tragic heritage. The major models of Dionysus and Oedipus leave space for a "hidden transcript" of ironized and coded resistance, like the tragic allusions of Machon's *Chreiai*. With these disquieting notes, the ithyphallic hymn invites a voice of resistance that would continue to play a major role in later receptions of Demetrius's rule. In appropriating the figures of Dionysus and Oedipus, the poem asserts Athens' own control of its tragic past, which Demetrius – despite his best attempts – can never truly master.

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Abbreviations

BNJ: Worthington, I. 2007–2022. *Brill's New Jacoby*. Online: http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/brill-s-new-jacoby.

CA: Powell, J. U. 1925. *Collectanea Alexandrina: Reliquiae Minores Poetarum Graecorum Aetatis Ptolemaicae, 323–146 A.C., Epicorum, Elegiacorum, Lyricorum, Ethicorum*. Oxford.

HE: Gow, A. S. F. and Page, D. L. 1965. *The Greek Anthology: Hellenistic Epigrams*. 2 vols. Cambridge.

IG: 1873–. *Inscriptiones Graecae*. Berlin.

LIMC: 1981–2009. *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*. 16 vols. Zurich.

[116] These closing comments are likely Athenaeus' own, rather than lifted from Duris: Baron 2011: 100–4. For such interplay of public and private performance, cf. Hor. *Odes* 4.2.45–60, 5.31–40. Such polyvalent responses mirror earlier Athenian reactions to Alexander's "divinity": see e.g. Dinarchus, *Contr. Dem.* 1.94; Hyperides, *Contr. Dem.* 32; Polyb. 12.12b; Aelian *VH* 5.12; Plut. *Mor*. 219e, 804b, 842d.

[117] According to Democharesʼ, Demetrius interpreted the Athenians' behavior as outright flattery (*BNJ* 75 F 9 = *Deipn*. 6.253a).

[118] I thank an anonymous reader for this point.

L–M: Laks, A. and Most, G. W. 2016. *Early Greek Philosophy*. 9 vols. Loeb Classical Library 524–532. Cambridge, MA.
PCG: Kassel, R. and Austin, C. 1983–2001. *Poetae Comici Graeci*. 8 vols. Berlin.
SEG: *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum*
S–M: Snell, B. and Maehler, H. 1987–1989. *Pindari Carmina cum fragmentis*. 2 vols. Leipzig.
TrGF: Snell, B., Kannicht, R. and Radt, S. L. 1971–2004. *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*. 5 vols. Göttingen.

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