

THE STANZAIC ARCHITECTURE OF ISIDORUS, HYMNS 2 AND 4 (SEG 8.549 AND 51)

The Hymns of Isidorus are inscribed on two piers of the entrance to the outermost forecourt of the large temple complex of Isis in the town of Narmouthis (modern Medinet Madi), which lies in the southernmost part of the Fayyum. These hymns date at the latest to the first century B.C.E. and each hymn ends with the brief prose declaration ‘Isidorus wrote (it)’.¹ Isidorus, who is otherwise unknown, composed Hymns 1 and 3 in dactylic hexameters, a common metre for hymnic compositions, but he rendered the other two in elegiac couplets, a metre used only occasionally in the extant corpus of Greek hymns.² These four short poems of Isidorus have, perhaps understandably, attracted little interest among historians of Greek poetry, because they are metrically faulty and poetically inept, and even to the casual reader they seem repetitive and monotone.³ In recent years, however, Hymns 2 and 4 have been adduced as useful comparanda for Callimachus’ *Bath of Pallas*, a hymnic composition written in the same metre,⁴ and this line of inquiry can be pursued even further, as it has not been noticed that the elegiac hymns of Isidorus are both composed in an oddly round number of lines (thirty and forty respectively), raising the suspicion that they may have been composed as a series of five-couplet elegiac stanzas,⁵ a technique that was – as I have shown elsewhere – popular among Archaic elegists,⁶ but seems to have fallen into disuse in the Hellenistic

¹ Vanderlip (1972), *passim* and Dielemen and Moyer (2010). For the date, see Bollók (1974). I am grateful to Fred Brenk, Marco Fantuzzi, Ian Moyer and the anonymous reader for their comments on earlier drafts of this study.

² Aside from Callimachus’ hymnic *Bath of Pallas*, full-fledged hymns are difficult to find in the extant corpus of Greek literature. There is, of course, Solon’s famous ‘Hymn to the Muses’, a handful of short prayers in the *Τηρογγυιδα* (e.g. the collection of short invocations at 1 ff. and two longer prayers: 341–50 to Zeus and 773–82 to Apollo, both of which comprise a single stanza; see Faraone [2008], 26–30) and among the fragments of Hellenistic poetry (e.g. *SH* 206, an eight-line invocation of Demeter). But in each case it is unlikely these are in fact hymns in the traditional sense, but rather prayers embedded in longer elegiac compositions or collections of epigrams. Bulloch (1985), 35 by conflating prayers and hymns maintains that ‘an elegiac exhortatory “hymn” to Athena was far from contra-conventional’, even though four pages earlier (31) he admits: ‘Alone of Callimachus’ six hymns the *Bath of Pallas* is in elegiacs, and in the whole ancient anthology of hymns, as part of which the Callimachean collection was transmitted, no other abandons the heroic metre.’

³ See e.g. Keydell (1952). Bernand (1969), 651 summarizes such trenchant critiques and tries to defend Isidorus as, albeit bad, a thoroughly Hellenized Egyptian poet. I print the text of Vanderlip, which does not correct the metrical errors.

⁴ Fantuzzi and Hunter (2004), 32 and 350–62.

⁵ It is important to note at the outset that, as far as I can tell from the photographs in Vanderlip (1972), neither Isidorus nor his stonecutter made any attempt to indicate the individual stanzas on the stone, e.g. by placing spaces or marks between them. The two hexametrical hymns (nos. 1 and 3) are both thirty-six lines long.

⁶ Faraone (2008) extending the pioneering work of Weil (1862) and Rossi (1953/4); for reviews and notices, see *BMCRev* 00.08.30 (2008); *G&R* 56 (2009), 97; *AJPh* 130 (2009), 291–4; *JHS* 129 (2009), 136–8.

and Roman periods, with the notable exception of Callimachus, who seems to use the same technique in the prologues to his *Aetia* and *Bath of Pallas*.⁷

In what follows I offer a close analysis of the stanzaic architecture of both elegiac hymns and then close with some thoughts on why Isidorus chose to compose these poems in such a metre and in such an archaic style. But before analysing the two hymns it is useful to sketch briefly the important features of the Archaic elegiac stanza, which is usually five couplets in length and comprises an independent unit in terms of its content, rhetorical focus and/or style. Single elegiac stanzas can, for example, contain a free-standing prayer, a catalogue or a mythological exemplum,⁸ and are often marked by a somewhat heavy-handed kind of ring composition between the first and fifth couplets and the second and fourth.⁹ In the longer fragments, however, the internal structures of individual stanzas tend to be less pronounced and their boundaries are often marked more by a change in content or linguistic mode. We also find elaborate responsion between stanzas, which, like strophic responsion in choral poetry, often provides an armature for organizing the overall structure of a longer fragment.¹⁰

These features of stanzaic architecture are most obvious in the extant fragments of Tyrtaeus who, for example, makes dynamic use of the elegiac stanza in his fragment 10, the first thirty lines of which divide up quite easily into three alternating stanzas of meditation and exhortation:¹¹

[10 lines] Meditation introduced by *γάρ*
(indicative verbs and singular participles, primarily in the accusative,
but then ending in the nominative);

[10 lines] Exhortation introduced by *τοί*
(plural hortative subjunctives and imperatives with plural nominative
participles);

[10 lines] Meditation introduced by *γάρ*
(indicative verbs and singular participles, primarily in the accusative,
but then ending in the nominative).

Weil also noted how the last line of the third stanza, in addition to recalling the first line of its own stanza, also echoes the very first line of the fragment:¹²

τεθνάμεναι γὰρ καλὸν ἐνὶ προμάχοισι πεσόντα (1 = first line of first stanza)

αἰσχρὸν γὰρ δὴ τοῦτο, μετὰ προμάχοισι πεσόντα (21 = first line of third stanza)

ζωὸς εἰὼν, καλὸς δ' ἐν προμάχοισι πεσών (30 = last line of third stanza)

⁷ Faraone (2008) 138–55.

⁸ For stanzas encompassing single set pieces, see Faraone (2008), 26–9 who discusses prayers: *Τηρογνιδεα* 341–50 (to Zeus) and 773–82 (to Apollo). For catalogues, see Faraone (2005b) and for the Archaic elegiac practice of framing an exemplum within a single stanza, see Faraone (2008), 97–100 and 165–7.

⁹ See Faraone (2008), 198 s.v. ‘ring-composition’ for many examples.

¹⁰ Faraone (2008), 60–70.

¹¹ First noted by Weil (1862), 11 and first explained by Rossi (1953/4), 414–15; for a summary of their insights, see Faraone (2008), 45–51.

¹² Weil (1862), 11 and Rossi (1953/4), 415.

This combination of ring composition within the third stanza and respension between the first and third serves two important functions: similar line endings articulate the architecture of the fragment by calling attention to the beginnings and endings of individual units, while at the same time diametrically opposed moral terms at or near the start of these same lines (*καλόν ... αἰσχρόν ... καλός*) highlight the great moral differences between the choices outlined in the individual stanzas.

ISIDORUS, HYMN 2

Isidorus seems to compose his two elegiac hymns in a similar fashion, although with less finesse. He begins the first stanza of Hymn 2 by invoking Isis in her twin roles as the Greek goddess Agathe Tyche and as the local Egyptian deity Hermouthis:¹³

χαίρε, Τύχη Ἀγαθή, μεγαλώνυμε Ἴσι μεγίστη,
 Ἐρμούθι· ἐπί σοι πάσα γέγηθε πόλις,
 ζωῆς καὶ καρπῶν εὐρέτρι<α>, οἷσί τε πάντες
 τέρπονται τε βροτοὶ σὼν χαρίτων ἔνεκα.
 ὅσσοι σοὶ εὐχονται ἐπ' ἐμπορίην τε παρεῖναι, 5
 πλουτοῦς εὐσεβέες εἰς τὸν ἅπαντα χρόνον·
 καὶ ὅσοι ἐν νοῦσοις θανατώδεσι μοίρῃ ἔχονται
 σοὶ εὐξάμενοι ταχέως σῆς ζωῆς ἔτυχον.
 ὡς ἐτύμως ὁ ἀγαθὸς δαίμων, Σοκονώπις κραταιὸς
 σύνναος ναίει πλουτοδότης ἀγαθός. 10

Hail, Tyche Agathe of great name, Isis the greatest,
 Hermouthis! In you the whole city rejoices;
 O discoverer of life and of the crops, in which all
 mortals delight on account of your blessings.
 Those who pray to you to assist their commerce, 5
 are rich in their piety for all time;
 and those who are bound by fate in mortal illnesses,
 by praying to you quickly attain life from you.
 How right it is that the Agathos Daimon, mighty Soconopis,
 shares your temple as a good giver of wealth! 10

Here the divine couple provide the trigger for some obvious ring composition between the first and fifth couplets: Soconopis' Greek name in the middle of the last hexameter (*ὁ ἀγαθὸς δαίμων*, 9) recalls Isis' similar Greek name near the beginning of the first (*Τύχη Ἀγαθή*, 1) and at the ends of these same verses we find the Greek renditions of their native Egyptian names, each with a powerful epithet: *Ἴσι μεγίστη* (1) and *Σοκονώπις κραταιός* (9).¹⁴

¹³ I use the text of *SEG* except where noted. The translation is mine, but dependent on Vanderlip (1972).

¹⁴ Agathe Tyche and Agathos Daimon were commonly paired in Greek religion, for example, Aeschin. 3.111 and Lys. 13.16. Fred Brenk points out that the *interpretatio graeca* here was probably triggered by the fact that in Egyptian representations Hermouthis and Soconopis were depicted with snake bodies, just as the Agathos Daimon was in the Greek world.

We may see a similar kind of repetition of the word for ‘life’ in the second and fourth couplets: Isis is first identified as the ‘discoverer of life’ in line 3 (ζωῆς ... εὐρέτρι<a>) and then in line 8 we learn that those who pray to Isis ‘obtain life from you’ (σῆς ζωῆς ἔτυχον), that is: the life discovered in line 2.¹⁵ And while the first and fifth couplets speak only of the divine couple, the three internal couplets concern themselves primarily with mortals and benefits that come to those who pray to the goddess (πάντες ... τέρπονται τε βροτοί, 3–4; ὅσοι σοὶ εὐχονται, 5; ὅσοι ... σοὶ ἐξάμενοι, 7–8). The exclamatory final couplet (ὡς ἐτύμως ... ἀγαθός, 9–10) provides, moreover, a fitting conclusion to a stanza about the ‘good’ gods (Agathe Tyche and Agathos Daimon), the latter of whom shares Isis’ temple and presumably shares with her his trait of being ‘good at giving wealth’ (πλουτοδότης ἀγαθός, 10). Indeed, given Isidorus’ interest in words and text (see the discussion of Hymn 4 below), one wonders if he is using ἐτύμως here in its more narrowly ‘etymological’ sense,¹⁶ and thus calling attention to the repetition of the word ἀγαθός in the first and last couplets: ‘How truly (i.e. to his name) the Agathos Daimon ... shares your temple as a good (ἀγαθός) provider of wealth!’ Soconopis is, in short, a perfect temple mate for Isis, because she, too, is a ‘good’ deity (Τύχη Ἀγαθή, 1).

The next stanza focusses on the effect of Isis and her retinue on the world of nature, rather than culture (lines 11–20):

κτίστης καὶ γαίης τε καὶ οὐρανοῦ ἀστερόεντος
καὶ ποταμῶν πάντων κῶκυτάτων τε ῥοῶν,
καὶ Ἀγχόης ὁ σὸς υἱός, ὃς οὐρανοῦ αἰθέρα ναίει[ι
ἥλιος ἀντέλλων ἐσθ', ὃς ἔδειξε τὸ φῶς.
ὅσοι δὴ ἐθέλουσι γονὴν παίδων τε ποιῆσαι, 15
εὐξάμενοι ὑμῖν εὐτεκνίης ἔτυχον.
Νεῖλον χρυσορῆσαν πείθοσ' ἀνάγεις κατὰ [ῶρας]
Αἰγύπτου ἐπὶ γῆν ἀνδράσιν εὐτερπίνην.
εὐανθεὶ τότε καρπὸς ἅπας καὶ πᾶσι μερίζ[εις,
οἷσι θέλεις, ζῶην παντοδαπῶν ἀγαθῶν. 20

For he (i.e. Soconopis) is the creator of both earth and the starry heaven,
and of all of the rivers and the swiftest streams;
and your son Anchoes, who inhabits the heights of heaven,
is the rising sun who revealed the light.
Those, indeed, who wish to create the birth of offspring, 15
by praying to you, obtain healthy children.
Persuading the gold-flowing Nile, you lead it in season
over the land of Egypt as a joy for men.
Then all vegetation flourishes and you apportion to all
whom you favour, a life of all good things. 20

Of all the transitions that Isidorus makes between stanzas in Hymns 2 and 4, this is admittedly the most inept, because we would expect a full stop at the end of line 10 and new sentence to begin in line 11. Most commentators, however, place

¹⁵ Lit. ‘your life’ (σῆς ζωῆς). Bernand (1969) ad loc. prints {σ}ῆς ζωῆς and translates ‘la vie’, but Isidorus uses similar expressions in this poem to indicate personal gifts that come from the goddess herself, e.g. ‘on account of your favours’ (σῶν χαρίτων ἕνεκα, 4); ‘your great favours’ (χάριτας μεγάλας σάς, 22) and ‘the luxuriousness that comes from you’ (τῆς παρὰ σοῦ τε τρυφῆς, 28).

¹⁶ For ἐτύμως meaning ‘etymologically’, see LSJ s.v. II.

a comma at the end of line 10 and allow the sentence to continue.¹⁷ One could, of course, easily attribute this lapse to Isidorus' amateur status as a poet, especially given his metrical and poetic failings elsewhere (see n. 2 above), but it is in fact possible to translate the beginning of this stanza ('For he ...') as I have done above to reflect the explanatory use of asyndeton here.¹⁸ I do so for two reasons: (i) because it is fairly common to begin a new stanza in explanatory mode with *γάρ*, as we saw twice in the outline above of Tyrtaeus 10 (at lines 1 and 21) and as we shall see below twice again in Hymn 4 (at lines 11 and 21);¹⁹ and (ii) because the first ten lines of this Hymn exhibit a common 'four plus one form' of the Archaic stanzas, which sometimes end in a similarly exclamatory mode.²⁰

The internal ring composition is also weak in this second stanza,²¹ but there is some close resposion between this stanza and the previous one. The third couplets of both stanzas, for instance, have parallel syntax:

ὄσσοι σοὶ εὐχονται ἐπ' ἐμπορίην τε παρῆναι,
πλουτοῦσ' εὐσεβέες εἰς τὸν ἅπαντα χρόνον. 5

ὄσσοι δὴ ἐθέλουσι γονῆν παίδων τε ποιῆσαι,
εὐξάμενοι ὑμῖν εὐτεκνίης ἔτυχον. 15

The second couplets of each stanza, moreover, describe a god as 'first inventor': ζωῆς καὶ καρπῶν εὐρέτρι<a> (3) and ὃς ἔδειξε τὸ φῶς (14).²² There also seems to be a cross-lingual parallel at the start of the third hexameter of each stanza: line 3 begins with the word for life (ζωῆς) and line 13 with καὶ Ἀγκόης, 'and the Living One', a name formed from the Egyptian word for 'life' (*ankh*).²³ Finally Isidorus composes a hemiepes at the end of the second stanza (*παντοδαπῶν ἀγαθῶν*, 20) that is clearly designed to echo, in both sound and sense, the final hemiepes of the first stanza (*πλουτοδότης ἀγαθός*, 10).²⁴

The third and final stanza, however, displays the strongest ring composition and thematic coherence in the entire poem (21–30):²⁵

¹⁷ Vandoni (1952), Bernand (1969) and the editors of *SEG* all put a comma at the end of line 10 in their texts. Vanderlip (1972) ad loc. seems to have been in two minds: in her Greek text she places a full stop at the end of line ten and makes 11–12 an independent sentence, but in her translation she places a comma at the end of line 10 and treats 11–12 as a subject clause that is attached to line 10.

¹⁸ myth, *Greek Grammar* § 2167b.

¹⁹ ee Faraone (2008), 200 s.v. *γάρ*. I know of no other example, however, of an Archaic stanza beginning with asyndeton – except, perhaps, Solon 4.30, for which see Faraone (2008), 171–2.

²⁰ This form is especially popular in the *Theognidea*; see e.g. two stanzas that end with a couplet introduced with *οὕτω* (191–2 and 1349–50; discussed at Faraone [2008], 23), or two others that end with a pentameter beginning with *οὕτως* (*Theognidea* 496 and Mimnermus 1.10; discussed at Faraone [2008], 91).

²¹ Isidorus repeats the rhythm and sound in the genitive plurals in the final hemiepes of the first and last pentameters (*κῶκυτάων τε ῥοῶν*, 2 and *παντοδαπῶν ἀγαθῶν*, 10).

²² Following Vanderlip (1972), 22–3 who takes the aorist verb *ἔδειξε* as an historical tense (e.g. 'who [i.e. first] revealed light [i.e. to mortals]'). Anchoes here is presumably Horus, son of Osiris, who is usually associated with the rising sun.

²³ Vanderlip (1972), 41–2.

²⁴ The final hemiepes of the second stanza also echoes (in a different manner) the sound of the final hemiepes of the first couplet (12) of this same stanza; see n. 22 above.

²⁵ One suspects, but cannot prove, that the final stanza of Archaic elegiac poems also showed the most internal structure and thematic coherence; see Faraone (2008), 54–6 (the final stanza of Callinus 1) and 156–7 (the final stanza of the 'Prologue' to Callimachus' *Aetia*).

σῶν δῶρων μνησθέντες, ὅσοις πλοῦτόν τ' ἀνέδωκας
 καὶ χάριτας μεγάλας σάς τε ἔχειν δι' ὅλου,
 τούτων σοι μοῖραν δεκάτην ἀπένειμαν <ᾶ>παντες,
 χαίροντες κατ' ἔτος, σῆι τε πανηγυρίῃ
 εἶτα ἐδωρήσω περιτελλομένου ἐνιαυτοῦ 25
 αὐτοῖς μηνὶ Παχῶν πᾶσιν ἐς εὐφροσύνην.
 τερφθέντες δ' εἰς οἶκόν τε πανηγυρίσαντες ἔβησαν
 εὐφύμῳσ πλῆρεις τῆς παρὰ σοῦ τε τρυφῆς.
 σ]ῶν δῶρων κάμοι μετὰδος, Ἐρμούθι ἄνασσα,
 σῶι ἰκέτηι ὄλβον καὶ ἅμα εὐτεκνίην. 30

Mindful of your gifts, those men to whom you have granted wealth
 and your great favours to possess for their whole life,
 they all set aside for you one tenth of these blessings,
 rejoicing each year in your festival.
 Therefore you grant them, as the year rolls round,²⁶ 25
 all to rejoice in the month of Pachon.
 Joyful after your festival, they return home
 reverently filled with the luxuriousness that comes from you.²⁷
 Grant a share of your gifts also to me, Mistress Hermouthis,
 to your suppliant, (namely) happiness and healthy children.²⁸ 30

The stanza is mainly concerned with gift exchange, a theme that the poet accentuates by repeating the spondaic *σῶν δῶρων* at the very start of the first and last couplets (21 and 29), where he seems to contrast subtly the material 'wealth' (*πλοῦτον*, 21) that the goddess 'has given' (*ἀνέδωκας*, 21) to other worshippers at Narmouthis with the more metaphysical 'wealth' (i.e. 'blessedness') that the poet asks the goddess to 'give' him (*κάμοι μετὰδος ... ὄλβον*, 29–30) as a suppliant (*σῶι ἰκέτηι*, 30). Isidorus also places another verb (*ἐδωρήσω*, 25) near the start of the fifth hexameter in such a way that the root *δωρ-* echoes *δῶρον* in the first and last hexameters. The three central couplets describe the festival at which the hymn was undoubtedly recited, and they too are tied together by a significant repetition between the second and fourth couplets (*πανηγυρίῃ*, 24 and *πανηγυρίσαντες*, 27). This stanza is so well constructed internally that it might, with a few changes, stand as a short poem by itself, a claim that one cannot make for either of the first two stanzas.

Isidorus' final request for wealth and children (*ὄλβον καὶ ἅμα εὐτεκνίην*, 30) also pulls together the stanzaic architecture of the whole poem. The first stanza is primarily concerned with material wealth, as summed up in the third and central couplet (*ὅσοι σοι εὐχονται ἐπ' ἐμπορίην τε παρεῖναι ... πλουτοῦσ',* 5–6) and by the description in line 10 of Soconopis as a god who grants wealth (*πλουτοδότης*), whereas the closely responding central couplet of the second stanza (as discussed above) is entirely concerned with the generation of healthy children (15–16): *ὅσοι δὴ ἐθέλουσι γονῆν παίδων τε ποιῆσαι ... εὐτεκνίης ἔτυχον*. Likewise, in his invocation of Hermouthis in the final couplet of the poem (*Ἐρμούθι ἄνασσα*,

²⁶ Bernand (1969), ad loc. translates *ἐδωρήσω* passively as 'tu reçois les dons'.

²⁷ The word *truphḗ* at the end of line 28 is perhaps an odd choice, because it so often has a negative connotation, e.g. 'wantonness'. Bernand (1969), ad loc. translates it as 'plaisir'.

²⁸ There follows a brief signature of sorts ('Isidorus wrote this') that we find at the end of all four hymns and then, as a kind of poetic postscript, a single couplet: 'The gods heard my prayers and hymns and granted in return to me tranquillity (*euthymia*) as a boon (*charita*).²⁸ Was this added after Isidorus had in fact been granted the wealth or child he had hoped for?

29) Isidorus recalls the same vocative in the first couplet (*Ἑρμοῦθι*, 2), while his description (in the penultimate couplet) of human delight at the end of her annual festival in Medinat Madi (*τερφθέντες ... πλήρεις τῆς παρὰ σοῦ τε τρυφῆς*, 27–8) recalls the general claim – note also the initial position of the spondaic verb in the hexameter – that all mortals take delight because of Isis’ gifts (*πάντες | τέρπονται τε βροτοὶ σῶν χαρίτων ἕνεκα*, 3–4). The hymn, finally, closes with the personal plea of Isidorus, who does not name himself in the body of the poem, but one cannot help but wonder whether the ring composition of the words *σῶν δώρων* in the first and last couplets (21 and 29) is designed to recall the name of the poet himself, which means, of course, ‘the gift of Isis’.

ISIDORUS, HYMN 4

In his fourth hymn Isidorus describes the temple buildings constructed and the miraculous acts performed by a famous pharaoh, whom he (eventually) names in the fourth and final stanza as Porramanres (34), the son of Sesoösis (31), whom modern scholars identify as Amenemhat III, the son of Senusret III, who ruled during the 12th Dynasty.²⁹ The first stanza praises this pharaoh because he built the original temple complex before which the hymns were set up and where, we presume (cf. ‘rejoicing each year in your festival’, Hymn 2.24), they were performed annually (1–10):³⁰

<i>τίς τόδε ἄγνόν ἔδειμ’ ἱερὸν Ἑρμοῦθι μεγίστη;</i>	
<i>ποῖς θεὸς ἐμνήσθη πανιεροῦ μακάρων;</i>	
<i>ὥς αἰπὺν καὶ ἄδυτον ἐσημῶσατ’ Ὀλυμπον</i>	
<i>Δηοὶ ὑψίστην Ἴσιδι θεσμοφόρῳ,</i>	
<i>καὶ Ἀγχόηι νιῶι καὶ δαίμονι ἀγαθῶι Σοκονῶπι,</i>	5
<i>ἄθανάτοις ὄρμον εἶρε δικαιοτάτον.</i>	
<i>Αἰγύπτου τινα φασὶ γενέσθαι θεῖον ἄνακτα,</i>	
<i>ὃς πάσης χώρας κύριος ἐξεφάνη,</i>	
<i>πλούσιον, εὐσεβέα, δυνάμει πάσῃ τε μεγίστη[ι</i>	
<i>ὃς κλέος καὶ ἀρετὴν ἔσχεν ἰσουράνιον.</i>	10

Who built this holy temple to Hermouthis the greatest?	
What god remembered the all-holy one of the immortals?	
How steep and unapproachable an Olympus he marked out	
for Demeter the Highest, Isis Thesmophoros,	
and for Anchoes her son, and for the Agathos Daimon, Soconopis,	5
for immortals he created a most fitting haven!	
They say he was born a divine ruler of Egypt,	
who appeared as lord of the whole land,	
rich, pious and with complete and the greatest power,	
who had fame and virtue equal to heaven.	10

The stanza begins with two questions, which are then answered at the end of the stanza in a way that cleverly fails to mention the builder by name, but instead

²⁹ See Widmer (2002) for discussion.

³⁰ Fantuzzi and Hunter (2004), 360 also treat these five couplets as a discrete rhetorical unit. Vanderlip (1972), 71 suggests that the first twenty lines are a unit when she says: ‘the questions of 1–2 are answered in 7–20’.

manages to name and give the titles of the triad of deities worshipped at the temple complex – Isis (= Hermouthis [1], Demeter the Highest [4] and Thesmophoros [4]), her son Anchoes and her husband Soconopis, the Agathos Daimon (5) – and then to record two titles of the builder pharaoh himself as a ‘divine ruler of Egypt’ and ‘lord of the whole land’ (7–8).³¹ In the final couplet Isidorus piles up this pharaoh’s personal qualities without any poetic artifice at all: wealth, piety, power, fame and virtue (9–10).

Isidorus has composed these first five couplets, then, in fully hymnic mode, and although he lavishes more attention on the divine occupants of the temple (1–6) than on its divine builder (7–10), the entire stanza is focalized through the latter: all the verbs in the stanza describe the actions of the pharaoh alone, who built the temple (1), remembered Isis (2), measured out the shrine (3), created a haven (6), was born a divine ruler (7), appeared as a lord (8) and held fame and virtue (10). This first stanza shows little of the ring composition discussed above, aside from the repetition of the significant adjective *μεγίστη* in the dative case at the end of the first and last hexameters, an echo that compares in superlative fashion the yet unnamed builder ‘with the greatest power’ and the central goddess of the shrine: ‘greatest Hermouthis’, a comparison that he reiterates in the final pentameter by saying that the pharaoh, who has built an ‘Olympus’ on earth for Isis and family (3), has himself fame and virtue ‘equal to heaven’ (*ἰσουράνιον*, 10).³²

In the second stanza Isidorus shifts away from such high praise and offers instead an explanation for why such praise is appropriate in the case of the pharaoh-builder (11–20):

τούτῳ γὰρ καὶ γαῖα ὑπήκοος ἦν τε θάλασσα
καὶ ποταμῶν πάντων νάματα καλλιρῥόων,
καὶ πνοιαί ἀνέμων καὶ ἥλιος, ὃς γλυκὺ φέγγος
ἀντέλλων φαίνει πᾶσιν ἀριπρεπέως.
καὶ πτηνὸν τε γένη ὀμοθυμαδὸν ἔκλυεν αὐτοῦ
καὶ τὰδ’ ἐπιστέλλον πάντα ἐπήκοα ἦν.
δῆλον τοῦτ’ ἐστὶν ὅτι ὄρνεα ἔκλυεν αὐτοῦ
ὡς οἱ τῶν ἱερῶν γράμμ’ ἀναλεξάμενοι
φάσκουσίν ποτε τοῦτον ἐπιστείλαντα κορώνην,
σύν τε ἐπιστολίῳ ἦλθε φέρουσα φάσιν.

For to him both earth and sea were obedient,
and the waters of all the beautifully flowing rivers,
and the blasts of the winds and the sun, who a sweet light
shines brilliantly for all as he rises.
The races of winged creatures with one accord listened to him
and he was instructing all those attendant creatures.³³
It is clear that the birds obeyed him,
because those who read the script of the holy ones

³¹ Vanderlip (1972), 67 understands this last title to mean ‘lord of the whole earth’, but the Greek word here (*chōra*) must have had (for an Egyptian audience) a more limited designation of ‘lower Egypt’ or ‘Egypt’ alone; see Bernand (1969), 648. As Moyer (forthcoming) notes, Hymn 4 presents Isis as an entirely local deity.

³² For the meaning of *ἰσουράνιον* see Vanderlip (1972), 68.

³³ My translation here is tentative, because the syntax of this line is difficult, in part because of the awkward periphrastic construction (*ἐπιστέλλον ... ἦν = ἐπεστέλλε*) that Isidorus uses elsewhere in the hymns; see Vanderlip (1972), 98.

insist that once he sent as a messenger a crow,
and that she carrying his command with a letter went off.³⁴ 20

Like the meditative stanzas in Tyrtæus 10, this one begins with *γάρ* and tells us why, precisely, the pharaoh was so wealthy, proud, powerful, famous and virtuous.³⁵ To do so, Isidorus describes how the entire natural world is obedient to him: earth and sea (11), streams and rivers (12), the winds and the sun (13) and all of the birds (15). The stanza closes with a proof within a proof: we know that the birds obeyed him, because he once used a crow as a messenger (19–20).³⁶

In this stanza, as in the first, Isidorus continues to use the past tense to describe the pharaoh's reign at an earlier time, but otherwise the difference in content between the first and second stanzas is stark and quite similar to that noted earlier between the first and second stanzas of Hymn 2: in both poems we have an initial stanza of high praise followed by a stanza of meditation (marked at the start by explanatory asyndeton or *γάρ*) that defends the claims made in the first stanza by pointing to the power of the divinity in question over nature.³⁷ In the first stanza of Hymn 4 we saw a proliferation of divine names, titles and abstract qualities like fame and virtue, and all of the actions are performed by divine agents. In the second stanza, however, we hear about the natural world only and it is the various parts of nature and not the gods who are the agents of every finite verb: earth, sea, rivers, winds and sun 'were obedient' (*ὑπήκοος ἦν*, 11), the rising sun 'shines' or 'appears' (*φαίνει*, 11), the race of birds 'listened' (*ἔκλυεν*, 15 and 17) and 'were obedient' (*ἐπήκοα ἦν*, 11) and once upon a time a crow 'came' with a letter (*ἦλθε*, 20). This stanza is, moreover, generally concerned with communication, both listening to the spoken word (*ὑπήκοος* – *ἔκλυεν* – *ἐπήκοα*) and reading the written (*γράμμι' ἀναλεξάμενοι*, 18; *σύν τε ἐπιστολίωι*, 20). There is, in fact, no ring composition at all in the second stanza, but as was mentioned earlier this is not uncommon in stanzas like this one, where (as we saw in the second stanza of Hymn 2) the poet constructs the stanza less by internal structure or ring composition than by highlighting the boundaries between neighbouring stanzas and the contrast between their style and content.

The third stanza, in turn, explains why the divine builder had such power (21–30):

*οὐ γὰρ ἔην βροτὸς ἀνὴρ, οὐδ' ἐκ βροτοῦ ἦεν ἄνακ[τος,
ἀλλὰ θεοῦ μεγάλου ἔκγονος ἀενάου,
Σούχου παγκράτορος μεγάλου μεγάλου τε μεγίστου
δαίμονος τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ υἱὸς ἄναξ ἐφάνη.
Μητροπάτωρ τούτου δ' ἐστὶν ζωῆς ὁ μερ[ιστής, 25
Ἄμμων, ὃς καὶ Ζεὺς Ἑλλάδος ἠδ' Ἀσίας.
τοῦνεκα καὶ τῶι πάντα ἐπήκοα, ὅσσ' ἐπὶ γαίηι
ἐρπετὰ καὶ πτηνῶν οὐρανίων τε γένη.*

³⁴ Bernard (1969) translates the main verb here differently as 'revint'.

³⁵ For the alternation between stanzas of meditation and exhortation, see Faraone (2005a), who extends the work of Rossi (1953/4) on Tyrtæus 10. See also the index to Faraone (2008), s.v. *γάρ*.

³⁶ Ael. *NA* 6.7 tells a very similar story, attributing the miracle to an Egyptian king named Mares; for Aelian's text and discussion, see Bernard (1969), 649 n. 3.

³⁷ The wording of Hymn 2.11–14 and Hymn 4.11–14 is remarkably similar, especially in line 12 (cf. Hymn 2.12: *καὶ ποταμῶν πάντων κώκυτάτων τε ῥοῶν*).

οὐνομα δ' ἦν ποταπὸν τούτωι; καὶ τίς τόδ' ἔθηκε
 κοίρανος ἢ βασιλεὺς ἢ τις ἀθανάτων; 30

For he was not a mortal man, nor the son of a mortal king
 but rather the offspring of a god, great and eternal,
 of Suchus (= Soconopis), all powerful, great, great, the greatest,
 son of the Agathos Daimon he appeared as king.
 The maternal grandfather of this god is the distributor of life, 25
 Ammon, who is also Zeus of Hellas and Asia.
 For this reason, too, all things obeyed him, those on earth
 crawling and the races of the winged creatures of the sky.
 What is the name of this one? And who determined it,
 be he commander, king, or one of the immortals? 30

Like the preceding explanatory stanza, this one begins with γάρ. It surely must be significant that this particle appears only twice in the seventy lines that comprise Hymns 2 and 4 and in both instances at the very start of a stanza. In the second stanza Isidorus argued that the obedience of nature to the pharaoh was proof of the pharaoh's divine status, but here in the third, he shifts his argument to genealogy. After three couplets describing the builder's family (21–6), Isidorus reiterates why all creatures in nature obey him (27–8) and ends the stanza with a pair of questions (οὐνομα ... ποταπὸν; καὶ τίς τόδ' ἔθηκε |... τις ἀθανάτων; 29–30) that recall the two questions at the very start of the poem (τίς τόδε ... ἔδειμ'...; ποῖς θεὸς ἐμνήσθη; 1–2).³⁸

The final stanza begins by answering these two questions in reverse order (31–40):

ὁ θρέψας Σεσοῶσις, ὃς οὐρανοῦ ἔσπερ' ἀφείκται,
 οὐνομ' ἔθηκε καλὸν ἠλίου εὐφεγγέος.
 ἐρμηνευσάμενοι δ' Αἰγύπτιοι οὐνομα τούτου
 Πορραμάνρην κλήζουσι, τὸν μέγαν, ἀθάνατον.
 θαῦμα δέ καὶ παράδοξον ἐγὼν ἐσάκο[v]σα παρ' ἄλλων, 35
 ὡς ἐπλει ἐν ὄρει ἄξιοι καὶ ἰστίωι.
 ἀσφαλῶς δέ μαθὼν τε παρ' ἀνδρῶν τῶν ἱστορούντων
 ταῦτα καὶ αὐτὸς ἐγὼ πάντ' ἀναγραφάμενος
 ἡρμήνηυσ' Ἑλλήσι θεοῦ δύναμιν τε ἀνακτος,
 ὡς βροτὸς οὐδ' ἕτερος ἔσχεν ἴσην δύναμιν. 40

Sesoösis, his nourisher, who has gone to the western heaven,
 gave him the fair name of 'Beautifully well-shining Sun'.
 But when the Egyptians interpret his name
 they call him 'Porramanres the great, immortal'.
 And a wonder and a paradox have I myself heard from others, 35
 how he navigated on the mountain by wheels and a sail.
 Reliably learning these facts from the men who study history,
 I myself, too, by inscribing all of these things
 interpreted for the Greeks the power of the god and king,
 how no other mortal ever possessed equal power.³⁹ 40

³⁸ Vanderlip (1972), 70–1.

³⁹ Following Bernand (1969), ad loc.

Again there are a few signs of internal ring composition here in the final stanza. Isidorus does, for example, effectively contrast the double cultures of Hellenistic Egypt (as he did in the first stanza of *Hymn 2*), when he claims that by inscribing his elegiac hymn publicly he has ‘interpreted for the Greeks the power of the god and king’ (*ἡρμῆνηυσ’ Ἑλλησι θεοῦ δύναντίν τε ἄνακτος*, 39), echoing the statement at the start of the stanza (with a participial form of the same verb similarly placed at the beginning of the hexameter) of how the Egyptians called the founder of the temple Porramanres, ‘when they interpret his name’ of the god (*ἐρμηνευσάμενοι δ’ Αἰγύπτιοι οὖνομα τούτου*, 33).⁴⁰

And as we saw in Tyrtaeus 10 and in Isidorus’ second *Hymn*, the final stanza of this elegiac poem echoes the preceding stanzas in significant ways. The final couplet, for example, nicely summarizes the achievement of this hymn by recalling the first couplet of the third stanza:⁴¹

οὐ γὰρ ἔην βροτὸς ἀνὴρ, οὐδ’ ἐκ βροτοῦ ἦεν ἄνακ[τος],
ἀλλὰ θεοῦ μεγάλου ἐκγονος ἀενάου (21–2)

For he was not a mortal man, nor the son of a mortal king,
but rather the offspring of a god, great and eternal

ἡρμῆνηυσ’ Ἑλλησι θεοῦ δύναντίν τε ἄνακτος,
ὡς βροτὸς οὐδ’ ἕτερος ἔσχεν ἴσην δύναντιν. (39–40)

I interpreted for the Greeks the power of the god and king,
how no other mortal ever possessed equal power.

Here the closing claim about ‘the power of the god and king’ (*θεοῦ δύναντίν τε ἄνακτος*, 39) states positively, what Isidorus had denied in the first hexameter of the third stanza (*οὐδ’ ἐκ βροτοῦ ἦεν ἄνακ[τος]*, 9). The final pentameter of the poem, moreover, is clearly designed to echo both the sound and the sense of the final pentameter of the first stanza, especially the second hemiepes: *ὄς κλέος καὶ ἀρετὴν ἔσχεν ἰσουράνιον* (10) and *ὡς βροτὸς οὐδ’ ἕτερος ἔσχεν ἴσην δύναντιν* (40).

Finally, there is evidence that Isidorus constructed this twenty-couplet hymn as two coordinated pairs of stanzas.⁴² This is most evident in the manner in which he places in parallel position the two most puzzling passages in the poem, which describe the two different ‘miracles’ performed by the builder of the temple (17–20 and 35–9):

δῆλον τοῦτ’ ἐστὶν ὅτι ὄρνεα ἔκλυεν αὐτοῦ
ὡς οἱ τῶν ἱερῶν γράμμ’ ἀναλεξάμενοι
φάσκουσίν ποτε τοῦτον ἐπιστείλαντα κορώνην,
σύν τε ἐπιστολίωι ἦλθε φέρουσα φάσιν. 20

⁴⁰ Vanderlip’s translation (1972), 77 suggests that she thought that Porramanres was the Egyptian equivalent to ‘(the son of) the shining sun’ but the full phrase (*οὖνομ’ ἔθηκε καλὸν ἡλίου εὐφεγγέος*, 32) suggests that his father gave him ‘the fair name of “Beautifully well-shining Sun”, which would be appropriate for the pharaoh as Horus. See Bernard (1969), ad loc. who translates ‘a donné le beau nom du soleil resplendissant’.

⁴¹ Vanderlip (1972), 74: ‘line 40 sounds like a concluding refrain. Cf. 21’.

⁴² For the use of coordinated pairs of stanzas in early elegy, see Faraone (2008), 60–9.

It is clear that the birds obeyed him,
 because those who read the script of the holy ones
 insist that once he sent as a messenger a crow,
 and that she carrying his command with a letter went off. 20

*θαῦμα δὲ καὶ παράδοξον ἐγὼν ἐσάκο[v]σα παρ' ἄλλων,
 ὡς ἔπλει ἐν ὄρει ἄξοσι καὶ ἰστίωι.
 ἀσφαλῆως δὲ μαθὼν τε παρ' ἀνδρῶν τῶν ἱστορούντων
 ταῦτα καὶ αὐτὸς ἐγὼ πάντ' ἀναγραφάμενος
 ἡρμῆνηυσ' Ἑλλησι θεοῦ δύναμίν τε ἀνακτος ...* 35

And a wonder and a paradox have I myself heard from others, 35
 how he navigated on the mountain by wheels and a sail.
 Reliably learning these facts from the men who study history,
 I myself, too, by inscribing all of these things
 interpreted for the Greeks the power of the god and king ...

Here, by placing these two passages in parallel positions at the end of the second and fourth stanzas, Isidorus explores the differences between written and oral communication. He knows about the story of the messenger crow, because the people who read the written account of the sacred priests (*οἱ τῶν ἱερῶν γράμμι' ἀναλεξάμενοι*, 18) keep repeating or insisting upon (*φάσκουσιν*, 19) the story presumably to the poet among others. But in the last stanza Isidorus himself admits that after he learned (presumably in an oral discussion) from 'the men who study history' (37: *παρ' ἀνδρῶν τῶν ἱστορούντων*) the tale of the pharaoh's ship sailing on land, he himself had the whole account inscribed (*ταῦτα καὶ αὐτὸς ἐγὼ πάντ' ἀναγραφάμενος*, 38) in the temple. Here, moreover, the description of his own epigraphic project placed at the end of the penultimate couplet of the fourth stanza (*πάντ' ἀναγραφάμενος*, 38) is clearly meant to recall the wording in parallel at the end of the penultimate couplet of the second stanza (*γράμμι' ἀναλεξάμενοι*, 18). It seems, in short, that Isidorus uses the reported testimony of old Egyptian hieroglyphics (which were read to him) to complete his argument in the second stanza about the obedience of nature to Porramanres.⁴³ But in the final stanza he boasts that he has in fact himself joined the ranks of these Egyptian sages, by setting up his own inscription in Greek 'hieroglyphics' (i.e. an inscription on a temple pylon) about the god and by reporting what he learned from the presumably oral folktales about the pharaoh.

CONCLUSION

Isidorus seems to have composed both Hymn 2 and Hymn 4 as a series of five-couplet elegiac stanzas. The stanzas in the second Hymn show more internal ring composition and less resposion between stanzas, whereas the opposite is true in Hymn 4, which is longer and displays a more sophisticated and well-wrought stanzaic architecture. One should perhaps ask at this point why Isidorus chose to compose these two hymns in elegiac couplets rather than in dactylic hexameters. There are, in fact, some interesting differences in content and style between the hexametrical hymns (1 and 3) and the elegiac ones (2 and 4). The former bear

⁴³ Vanderlip (1972), ad loc.

close similarities to the usually prosaic Isis aretologies and they generally isolate Isis and proclaim her status as an international or even universal goddess, for example in Hymn 1.15–21, where Isidorus rehearses her Syrian, Lycian, Thracian, Greek and Egyptian names, or in Hymn 3.12–13, where she is said to rule over Asia and Europe. Both of these hymns, in short, catalogue the goddess's names and titles and then offer brief descriptions of her numerous powers, before ending with a brief personal entreaty from the poet.

The elegiac hymns, on the other hand, are somewhat indifferent to Isis' role as ruler of the world and they focus more tightly on her manifestation as Hermouthis in a triad of local divinities in the bi-cultural Greco-Egyptian world of the Fayyum.⁴⁴ Thus, as we have seen, Isidorus frames the first stanza of Hymn 2 around the doubly named divine couple Tyche Agathe/Hermouthis (line 1) and Agathos Daimon/Soconopis (line 9), in both cases placing the Greek name before the Egyptian. One should also note the manner (discussed earlier) in which the poet compares and contrasts (towards the end of stanzas 2 and 4 of the fourth Hymn) Egyptian and Greek modes of epigraphy and nomenclature. The elegiac hymns seem, moreover, much more personal and urgent, and this makes sense, since elegy was a well-known vehicle for impassioned personal statements like those, for example, of Archilochus and Mimnermus. The contrast in stanza 3 of Hymn 2, for example, between the material wealth (*ploutos*) of others who pray to Isis and Isidorus' own personal plea for blessed happiness (*olbos*) seems quite pointed and his self-designation at this same point as a suppliant (*hiketês*) suggests a much higher level of personal involvement. We hear this personal voice even more strongly in Hymn 4, which is rhetorically the most sophisticated of all the hymns and which reveals in its final stanza the poet's own understanding of his poetic and epigraphical mission.⁴⁵

I suggest, moreover, that the organizing possibilities of elegiac stanzas were especially useful to Isidorus in Hymns 2 and 4, for example in his dyadic comparisons between the Greek and Egyptian features of divine nomenclature. In Hymn 4, moreover, the stanzaic format allows the poet to develop his fairly complex argument as to why the founder's fame and virtue were equal to the gods' and (then) why all of nature obeys the founder. Hymn 4 does, in fact, display the highest density of overtly rhetorical features, including two pairs of rhetorical questions, a host of explanatory particles and prepositions (*γάρ*, 11 and 21; *ὅτι*, 17; *τοῦνεκα*, 27) and emphatic expressions like *δῆλον τοῦτ' ἐστίν* (17) and *ἀσφαλῆως ... μάθων* (37). It is also the only hymn in which Isidorus feels compelled to cite the sources for his paradoxical claims (about the messenger crow and the wheeled ship). The hexametrical hymns, on the other hand, simply state well-known Isiac dogma in simple declarative sentences.

Finally, given Isidorus' situation as a poet writing in Greek in the Fayum at the end of the Hellenistic period, one must wonder if he has been influenced in any way by the elegiac poems of Callimachus, who seems to have organized into stanzas a sizable part of the introduction to his own elegiac *Bath of Pallas* in order to articulate a series of aetiologies concerning Athena's cult and perhaps to

⁴⁴ See e.g. Bernand (1969), 652.

⁴⁵ By 'personal voice' I do not mean simply that Isidorus asks for personal favours from the gods, for he does this at the ends of the two hexameter hymns as well. I mean, rather, that he situates and even promotes himself as a special source of information and influence in the community for whom the hymns were inscribed.

imitate the regular rhythm of a processional hymn.⁴⁶ There are, moreover, parts of Isidorus' fourth Hymn that call to mind Callimachus' elegiac masterpiece, the *Aetia*. Especially notable is the way that Isidorus uses the question-and-answer format and how he alludes obliquely to the riddling folktales about the messenger crow and the sailboat in the desert and then offers learned 'footnotes' on his sources that contrast and even confound oral and written history. Throughout the *Aetia*, Callimachus asks his various Muses and interlocutors questions and then records their answers, for example, at the end of the story of Acontius and Cydippe, where Callimachus cites the local Cean historian Xenomedes as his source (*Aetia* fr. 75.53–5): 'I heard (ἐκλύομεν, 53) of your passion (i.e. that of Acontius and Cydippe) from the ancient Xenomedes, who set down the whole (sc. history of the) island in a mythological memorial (μνήμη ... μυθολόγω, 55).'⁴⁷ Isidorus is not, of course, by any stretch of the imagination a poet as learned or as talented as Callimachus, but there is no reason why he would not try to imitate his famous countryman, not only in his choice of elegiac stanzas,⁴⁸ but also in his desire to keep in mind both Greek and Egyptian audiences and sensibilities as he composed his hymns.⁴⁹ On the other hand, it is also possible that the elegiac hymns of Callimachus and Isidorus might all reflect an otherwise lost tradition of stanzaic hymns used in processions or other rituals – indeed it may not be coincidental that Callimachus stages the stanzaic prologue of the *Bath of Pallas* near the entrance of Athena's temple in Argos, just as Isidorus has inscribed his hymns at the entrance to the outermost forecourt of Hermouthis' temple – a likely place, in fact, for their performance. In the end, then, even an amateur poet like Isidorus can give us important insights into the generic expectations of his audience with regard to elegiac hymns generally, as well as possible explanations for the use of elegiac stanzas in the composition of more personal and local hymns.

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⁴⁶ Faraone (2008), 136 n. 56 and (forthcoming).

⁴⁷ For the repeated conflation and tension in the *Aetia* between spoken and written words, see Bruss (2004), 53–5.

⁴⁸ See Fantuzzi and Hunter (2004), 32 and 350–62 for other similarities.

⁴⁹ For a full treatment, see Stephens (2003), who discusses Callimachus' hymns in detail.

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