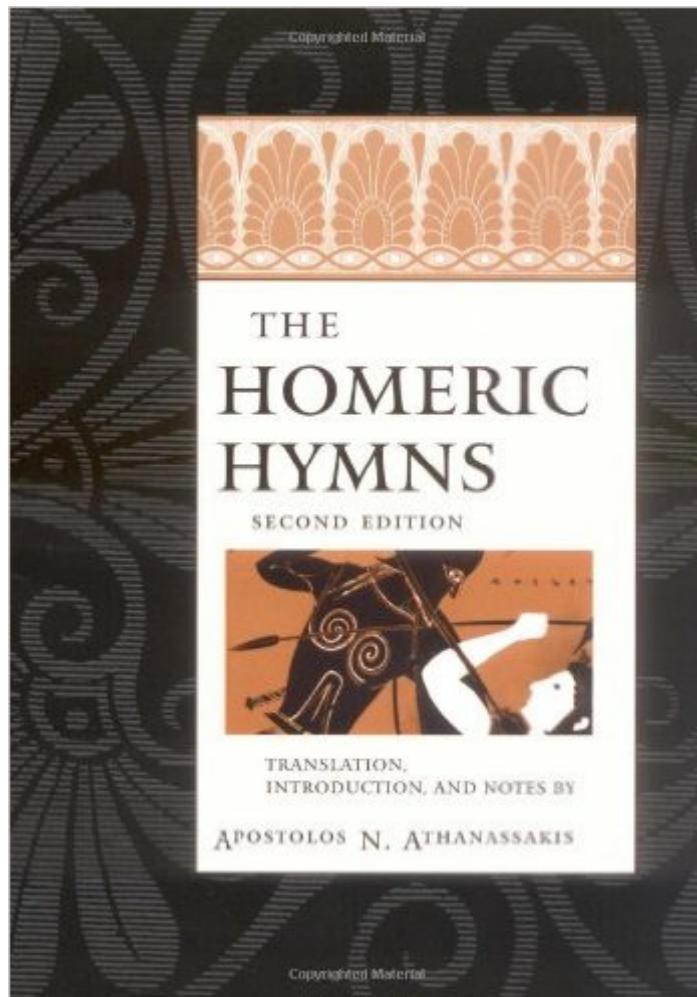


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The Homeric Hymns, 2nd Edition



Synopsis

A rich source for students of Greek mythology and literature, the Homeric hymns are also fine poetry. Attributed by the ancients to Homer, these prooimia, or preludes, were actually composed over centuries and used by poets to prepare for the singing or recitation of longer portions of the Homeric epics. In his acclaimed translations of the hymns, Apostolos Athanassakis preserves the essential simplicity of the original Greek, offering a straightforward, line-by-line translation that makes no attempts to masquerade or modernize. For this long-awaited new edition, Athanassakis enhances his classic work with a comprehensive index, careful and selective changes in the translations themselves, and numerous additions to the notes which will enrich the reader's experience of these ancient and influential poems.

Book Information

Paperback: 106 pages

Publisher: Johns Hopkins University Press; 2nd edition (June 28, 2004)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0801879833

ISBN-13: 978-0801879838

Product Dimensions: 7 x 0.3 x 10 inches

Shipping Weight: 6.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

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Customer Reviews

The Athanassakis translation of the "Homeric Hymns" -- a somewhat disparate collection of narratives, possible opening invocations for performances of longer poems, and a mix of what seem to be actual religious documents and literary exercises -- displays both literary grace (in the verse-line translations), and scholarly explication (in the introduction, and in the accompanying notes to the individual hymns). [In his 2004 revised edition -- my review is of the original 1976 publication -- the translator continues to insist he was not aiming at producing poetry. It is indeed not formal English verse, but after decades of use I still find his translation not only readable but exceptionally attractive, and at least poetic, and not just by comparison to the old Evelyn-White

translation.] The poems are described as Homer's in the manuscript tradition, in which they are offered together with hymns by historical poets, but also some attributed to the mythical Orpheus. They are in the dactylic hexameter line of the Homeric epics, which in some of them is employed as a lyric meter -- a somewhat astonishing idea to those who know the "Iliad" and the "Odyssey." Athanassakis does a wonderful job of producing consistently attractive English versions, while attempting to adhere closely to the original. (I have no claims to real scholarship in this, but I once took the trouble to work through passages against the corresponding lines in a Greek text, with the help of the Liddel-&-Scott "Lexicon" and several grammars.) After a long period of neglect on the part of translators into English, this group of poems has been translated in both verse and prose a number of times in recent decades.

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