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Gendering Power: Hekate *Mounogenesis* in Hesiod's *Theogony*

Commentators have long debated the significance of the extensive "Hymn to Hekate" at the center of Hesiod's *Theogony* (ll. 404-452). While early editors sought to excise the passage as un-Hesiodic, or set it apart as a hymnic digression, more recently scholars have been interested in how the portrait of Hekate fits into the progression of the poem's divine genealogies and the guiding narrative of Zeus' bid for patriarchal power. Hekate is indeed a crucial figure in the construction of Zeus' power, yet the question nevertheless remains: what is Hesiod's poetic justification for giving Hekate such extraordinary prominence? This paper will argue that the description of Hekate as "*mounogenês ek mêtros*" ("only child born of her mother" *Th.* 448) offers a key to understanding Hesiod's motive in according her this prominence. By hinting at matriarchal descent the phrase gives Hekate a provocative status within the poem's narratives of power and gender, and this status requires Zeus to negotiate his relationship to the goddess through strategic distribution of *timai*.

The presentation of Hekate in matrilineal terms has generally confounded scholars (West 1966, 289). If we accept that the marriage of her parents, Asteria and Perses (*Th.* 409-410), is thematically significant as a marker of increasing social organization in the poem (Bonnafé 1985, 120, 156), then why should Hesiod disrupt this thematic by subsequently eliding Perses? A solution to this question lies in recognizing that the marriage contract has been sidelined in order to make way for a more important contractual relationship that is, in fact, rhetorically highlighted—the gift-giving relationship by which Hekate, honored by Zeus, redistributes *timai* among humans. As Clay has recently argued, her wide-ranging *timê* gives Hekate an important function as cosmic mediator in Zeus' new order (Clay 2003). However, in terms of the gendered narrative of the *Theogony* described by Arthur [Katz] (1982), Hekate's unique prominence is also a provocative reminder of the matriarchal generative force represented by Gaia. Hekate's lack of male kin—both fraternal and paternal—makes her at once a valuable ally for Zeus and a potential threat.

Hesiod uses the figure of Hekate to portray a point in divine history when the balance of power between male and female remains uncertain and a fully realized patriarchy has yet to evolve. The gift economy of *timai* that enables Zeus to honor and subordinate Hekate in a single gesture also allows Hesiod to depict a relationship that represents not perfect patriarchy but something much closer to human reality.

Select Citations: Arthur [Katz], M. B. 1982. "Cultural Strategies in Hesiod's *Theogony*: Law, Family, Society." *Arethusa* 15: 63-82; Bonnafé, A. 1985. *Eros et Eris: Mariages divins et mythe de succession chez Hésiode*. Lyon ; Clay, J. S. 2003. *Hesiod's Cosmos*. Cambridge.