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ADAPTATION OF THE POETIC HYMN GENRE TO THE ORATORY OF THE SECOND SOPHISTIC

Аннотация. О времени и обстоятельствах появления жанра прозаического гимна известно очень мало. Первое упоминание о нем встречается в риторической литературе римской эпохи, которая тоже ориентирована на позднеантичные образцы. Едва ли не главным таким образом для греческих риториков были прозаические гимны Элия Аристида — оратора, аттикаста, крупного представителя Второй софистики (II в. н. э.). Основываясь главным образом на них, Менандр Лаодикейский почти столетие спустя составил стилистические предписания, касающиеся этого жанра. Гимны Аристида в честь богов написаны с 142 по 177 г. и адресованы различным богам: Зевсу, Афине, Посейдону, Гераклу, Серапису, Дионису, Асклепию и др. По всей видимости, до Аристида прозаические гимны не имели широкого распространения: на религиозных праздниках гимны в честь богов исполнялись обычно поэтами. Адаптация этого жанра к прозе, осуществленная Аристидом, заключается в контаминации традиционно поэтических элементов с классическим панегириком. Такого рода «энкомий» часто служил не только целям прославления определенного божества, но и центра его культа, жителей данной местности и даже римской власти. Высокий социально-политический статус риторики в эпоху Второй софистики и личный авторитет Аристида могли способствовать дальнейшему развитию этого жанра, формированию его канонов и утверждению в позднеантичной риторической системе.

Ключевые слова: античная лирическая поэзия, поэтические гимны, античная риторика, древнегреческое ораторское искусство, Вторая Софистика, эпидейктическое красноречие, прозаические гимны, Элий Аристид

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ADAPTATION OF THE POETIC HYMN GENRE TO THE ORATORY OF THE SECOND SOPHISTIC

Abstract. Little is known about the time and circumstances of the appearance of the prose hymn genre. The first mention of it appears in the rhetorical literature of the Roman era, which also focuses on examples from late antiquity. Probably the most important such example for Greek rhetoricians was the corpus of prose hymns produced by Aelius Aristides — an orator, Atticist, and major representative of the Second Sophistic (2nd century A. D.). Based mainly on these texts, Menander of Laodice almost a century later drew up stylistic prescriptions for this genre. Aristides' prose hymns were written between 142 and 177 A. D. and addressed to various gods: Zeus, Athena, Poseidon, Heracles, Serapis, Dionysus, Asclepius and others. Apparently, prose hymns were not widespread before Aristides: at religious holidays hymns in honor of the gods were usually performed by poets. The adaptation of this genre to prose, carried out by Aristides, consists in the contamination of traditionally poetic elements with the classic panegyric. This kind of “encomium” often served not only to glorify a particular deity, but also to honor the center of its worship, the inhabitants of a given area, and even Roman power. The high social and political status of rhetoric in the era of the Second Sophistic and Aristides' personal authority may have contributed to the further development of this genre, the formation of its canons, and its affirmation in the rhetorical system of late antiquity.

Keywords: ancient lyric poetry, poetic hymns, ancient rhetoric, old Greek oratory, Second Sophistic, epideictic eloquence, prose hymns, Aelius Aristides

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This article is devoted to the problem of studying and describing the genre of the prose hymn, determining its place in the system of genres of epideictic eloquence as well as its genesis and development in the rhetorical tradition of late antiquity. Both these questions — the nature of this formation and the genre — are closely interrelated. On the one hand, a complete characterization of the prose hymn is possible only if it is compared with the poetic one, the oldest genre of ancient Greek choral lyric, from which it originates. On the other hand, without a clear idea of how the genre of poetic hymn adapts to oratorical prose, it is difficult to understand how the corresponding canon was formed in late ancient rhetoric.

The earliest examples of the prose hymn belong to the period of Second Sophistic, known simultaneously for a strict orientation to the stylistic norms of classical Greek literature and for a desire for rhetorical innovations, verbal improvisation and contamination of various stylistic means to express the author's individuality. One of the most prominent experimenters in this field, with all his stylistic traditionalism and pedantry, was Aelius Aristides, the greatest orator and Atticist of his time (117–180 A. D.). In his work we find examples of several rhetorical genres that were either not widespread or not found in previous literature. Among them are ten prose hymns to the gods written by the orator at different times and on different occasions (“Regarding Zeus”, “Regarding Serapis”, “Dionysus”, “Athena”, “The Isthmian oration: Regarding Poseidon” etc.), which have received insufficient attention. Despite a marked increase in interest in his prose hymns (see: [Pernot 2007; Goeken 2012; 2016; Hodgkinson 2015; Russell et al. 2016; Vergados 2017]), the primary focus of current scholarship is analyzing and describing their genre and their stylistic and linguistic features. The question of the adaptation of the hymn genre in oratorical prose of the Second Sophistic and its transformation in the works of Aristides himself, as well as the more general problem of the genesis of the prose hymn in ancient literature, have also not yet received sufficient coverage.

The appearance of hymns dedicated to the gods as the earliest form of folk poetry is closely related to the specific character and nature of the religious cult in antiquity. Aside from offering sacrifices to the gods, the most important element of cult practice was the singing of songs which later became known as “hymns”¹.

¹ The etymology and origin of the Greek word “hymn” (ὕμνος) remains unclear. According to Proclus (Phot. *Bibl.* 320a. 9–10), this word comes from ὑπόμονος (cf. ὑπομένω — “to stay in place”, “to remain”), which as a result of syncope gave ὕμνος. See also: καθὼς εἰς ὑπομονὴν καὶ πράξιν ἀγειν τὰς τῶν ἐπαίων ἀκοάς καὶ ἀρετάς (*Etym. Gud.* 540.38 Sturz). Thus, the “hymn” is “something preserving,” that is, giving the glorious deeds and virtues a reliable and durable form. This etymology emphasizes the festive aspect of hymns, their function of capturing and documenting the laudable acts and the power of the gods. Another etymology is discussed by P. Chantraine [1968–1980: 1156 f.], who is inclined to raise the word “hymn” to ὕμην (“shell”), that is that which envelops, binds — by analogy with λίμνη from λιμήν, ποιμνη from ποιμήν, etc. At the same time, Chantraine refers to Brugmann's older hypothesis [Brugmann 1876: 256], which interprets ὕμνος as “joint singing”, as well as to Diehl, etc. [Diehl 1940: 89; Patzer 1952: 323], who make attempts to tie ὕμην to ὑφαίνω (“to weave”). But Chantraine admits that the derivative ὕμνος from ὑφή ὑφαίνω (“fabric”, “to weave”) presents great phonetic difficulties. A. Wünsch [1914: 141], however, accepts this hypothesis. Nevertheless, at an early stage the word “song” is used in this meaning, and in classical time it already meant “song of praise to the gods”. Plato (*Res.* X.607a), for example, draws a clear line between hymns as songs in honor of the gods and encomiums as songs in honor of people. The ancient definition of the hymn also includes the religious aspect, calling it “a word to the god with bow and prayer, mixed with a praise” (*Etym. Gud.* 540.42 Sturz).

The purpose of the hymns was to praise, cajole and win over the supreme powers that were beyond human control, thus to motivate them to a reciprocal act of beneficence. As a rule, the hymns were sung in choir by all adult members of the community who participated in religious festivals. An integral part of this performance was the dance with musical accompaniment. Three performative elements were thus intertwined — music, dance and word (speech), which, in particular, are reflected in the term “to put the choir” (χορὸν ἱστάναι) [Burkert 1977: 168]. Such songs are always based on myth as the “verbal aspect of religion” [Furley, Bremer 2001: 6], serving to glorify a deity through narratives of birth and deeds and through a description of the power and greatness of the god in order to cause it to repeat its actions for the benefit of the worshiper. Thus, myths constitute the main content of hymns.

Only a very small number of hymns are preserved from the archaic and classical periods, which leads to serious problems for recreating a complete picture of the development of this genre, especially if we take into account that religious hymns in antiquity existed in two forms: religious (cult) and literary. Although the latter are more or less well known thanks to the preservation of Homer’s hymns as well as the transmission of fragmentary works of such outstanding masters of choral lyric as Simonides, Pindar and Bacchylides, most of the ancient Greek cult poetry, which was predominantly anonymous, is irretrievably lost². Religious hymns were performed during religious holidays in Delphi, Athens, on Delos and in Thebes, and constituted the basis of a festive ritual (performance). Examples include the 6th and 9th paians, two large fragments of dithyrambs, and the Pindar’s hymn to Zeus. At the same time, hymns differed in terms of both function and form: in accordance with the type of cult for which they were produced (praises in honor of Dionysus, paians and nomes in honor of Apollo and Asclepius, *partheneia* in honor of Athena) the place and circumstances of recitation (at the altar itself or during a solemn procession³) the nature of the performance (the presence or absence of the accompanying dance, the type and method of musical accompaniment); the participants (boys, girls or all members of the community); etc.

Thanks to surviving fragments of the dithyrambs of Bacchylides and the paians and dithyrambs of Pindar, we can not only get an idea of the distinctive features and character of the cult hymns, but we can also observe the development of a new form of literary hymn. This new genre resulted on the one hand from an increasing refinement of the poetic form, and on the other from a gradual decline in religious pathos [Furley 2007: 130]. The second of these processes, however, does not apply to Pindar’s paians, in which a lively, genuine feeling is preserved [Rutherford 2001]. A special place among literary hymns is occupied by Homeric hymns, which are

² One of the surviving examples of early hymn poetry is the Cretan hymn to Zeus (see: [Furley, Bremer 2001: 68–76]). From the 4th century B. C., in such important ancient Greek sanctuaries as Delphi, Epidauros and Athens, the texts of hymns began to be recorded on stone, so that Hellenistic cult poetry is better known to us. Examples are the Palaikastro hymn to Zeus, the *Paeon Erythraeus* to Asklepios, the hymns of Limenius, Isyllos, Philodamos, etc. (see: [Ibid.: 45]). Of particular note are the two famous Delphic hymns to Apollo with musical notation (one of them dates back to 128 B. C.), which were captured by the Athenians on the walls of the treasury at Delphi [Ibid.: 129–134].

³ The separate descriptions of prosodic hymns (τὰ προσόδια) are available from Xenophon (*Ages.* 2.17), Pausanias (IV.4.1), Plutarch (*Nic.* 3.4–6) and Heliodorus (3.2).

rhapsodic proemia to other epic songs performed during Greek lyric competitions (see: [Allen et al. 1936; Clay 1989]). They each contain a concise mythological narrative (that is, the story of the birth and deeds of the god), ending with a prayer, the task of which is to win the deity's favor for the rest of the singer's performance. Many later literary genres developed under the latent or explicit influence of hymnic poetry. Thus, the traditional form of cult hymns in relation to new social conditions is taken over by antique monody lyric⁴ and eulogic poetry (epinicia, encomiums to people and places, etc.). Separate hymn elements, such as appeals to gods, prayers, and a mythological narrative, are found in Greek drama. The genre of the literary hymn receives its final design in the works of Callimachus and other Hellenistic poets. The hymns of Callimachus are literary texts, behind which stands a powerful hymn tradition — from cult poetry and Homeric hymns to choral lyric and drama. They contain a lot of realistic details related to the cults of the gods and demonstrate the poet's superior knowledge of religious practice and cult ritual (see: [Haslam 1993]). All this together allows an accurate description of the literary form of the hymn, which was fairly stable and changed little over the centuries.

The structure of most poetic hymns consists of three elements [Furley, Bremer 2001: 51 f.]: 1) an introductory address to a deity (*epiklēsis*); 2) praise (*eulogia*⁵); and 3) a final prayer (*euchē*). The epiclesis aims to establish contact between the deity and the speaker, which allows the latter to proceed to the second part of the hymn — the praise of the god's power and deeds. The praise is offered in order to appease and to endear the speaker to the god. This element is sometimes also called the argumentation, since it is the basis for a subsequent request. After this comes the request itself, which is formulated at the conclusion of the hymn as a short prayer. In some cases, hymns may have a more complex composition. For example, some of them begin with an appeal to those present, to the Muses or to a local deity, which is perceived as an intermediary between the expected god and his adepts. Sometimes the poet refers to himself, thus expressing an intention to proceed to the hymn.

We can say that the usual epiclesis consists of two elements: 1) the poet's emphasized desire to start the song and 2) the appeal to the deity or deities whom he chooses as his addressee(s). A classic example is the Delphic paian to Apollo. The address contains the name not just of one god, but the names of several, due to the poet's fear of offending one of them, as well as because of numerous syncretic cults in a later era. The most common elements of the epiclesis, although not all present in all hymns, are the name (names) of the god(s), his attributes, his favorite places, and also the deities close to him⁶.

When the epiclesis was completed, the poet proceeded to the main part of the hymn. At the same time he often demonstrated insecurity about the best way to begin a praise. To a greater degree this, of course, concerns literary hymns, since it enabled the speaker to demonstrate his poetic mastery (cf. Homer's *Hymn to Apollo*, Callimachus' *Hymn to Delos*, etc.). The main part of the hymn (*eulogia*)

⁴ The monodic hymns of Sappho, Alcaeus, Anacreon and others are very close to the cult hymns. However, they apparently were not intended for the official cult, but were of a private nature; that is, they were performed in a narrow circle of friends, at symposiums, etc. [Danielewicz 1974].

⁵ The term was first coined by Norden [1913: 149].

⁶ For different types of poetic introductions, see: [Furley, Bremer 2001: 53–55].

consisted of the following elements: 1) reminder to the god of his former good deeds (*hypomnēsis*); 2) description (*ekphrasis*), which includes the characteristics of the god (nature, strength, power, habitat); and 3) the mythological narrative (*diēgēsis*), that is, the story of individual episodes from the life of the deity (birth, deeds, and relationships with other gods). The reminders could take different forms: for example, the poet reminding the god of the reverence that people showed him (Callinos' fragment of hymn to Zeus, Aesch. *Sept.* 176–181), or describing the history of divine epiphany in the past (Homer's *Hymn to Demeter*; Isyllos' paian to Asclepius). In the field of mythological narrative, the poet also had a choice. He could tell the story of the birth of the god, as Isyllos did in his paian to Asclepius; describe his former beneficence to people; or combine both of these motifs (Homer's *Hymn to Hermes*).

After the favor of the god was obtained, the poet proceeded to the final and most important part of the hymn – the prayer. Addressed to the deity, it usually contained requests from the speaker (for patronage, well-being, prosperity, peace etc.) to the whole community of worshipers (Lymenios' paian, Callimachus' *Hymn to Demeter*). These plot patterns and motifs are common to most cult and literary hymns. However, there are significant differences between them. The main difference derives from the intention of rhapsodic hymns to sing about the deity, so that: they display a more impersonal character than the cult hymns, describing a deity in the third person (Er-Stil) and aimed at enumeration of divine attributes rather than expressing any special request. By comparison, cult hymns are more personal, addressing the god in second person (Du-Stil), and often associated with the specific situation of their recitation, and placing their major emphasis on the request itself [Race 1990: 102–106]. The distinguishing feature of the literary hymn is also its dual address — to the god who is praised and to the audience in whose presence it is recited. In this respect, we can talk about internal and external communication. An example is Pindar's 6th paian, in which the author first addresses Delphi and Delphians, and at the end the choir calls upon Apollo-Paian. It was also important for the hymn to entertain listeners, although it could perform a didactic function (in particular, emphasizing the role of a deity in people's lives). Thus, it is never performed for the purpose of receiving anything in return from the deity. Literary hymns thus differ from cult hymns in that they are less conventional.

Also affecting the development of literary hymns are adaptations of the traditional form to a wide variety of subjects. Hymns with philosophical content began to appear from the 4th century. A striking example is Cleanthes' hymn "To Zeus", in which Zeus, his image reinterpreted in the spirit of Stoic philosophy, is praised as the highest power and "universal law" governing the world (see: [Cambronne 1998; Cassidy 1997]). The cycle of Orphic hymns is finalized in the second century B.C., representing praise of various gods, among whom are allegorical characters such as the Law (νόμος), Nature (φύσις), Accident (τύχη), Justice (δικαιοσύνη) and other images from Orphic cosmogony (cf: [Quandt 1962]). In the 2nd century A. D., the poet Mesomedes wrote hymns to Nemesis, the Adriatic Sea, and Nature on behalf of the emperor Hadrian (see.: [Horna 1928]). Finally, Proclus used the form of hymn to state his philosophical concept of world existence, which is based on the triad of the One, the Intellect, and the World Soul (see: [Van den Berg 2000]). Already from the end of the classical era hymns could be performed in honor not only of the gods, but to honor rulers as well. Praise of Demetrius Poliorcetes by the

Athenians is known from Athenaeus (Ath. VI.62). In the Roman era the ceremony of welcoming the ruler acquired an official character through the singing of hymns and proffering of greetings when a solemn procession was sent to the emperor or to an official arriving in the city (see: [Graindor 1934: 182; MacCormack 1976: 43–45; Halfmann 1986: 112 ff.; Millar 1989: 29; MacCormack 1981: 17–22, 65]). In a similar way, Tacitus described the ceremony of meeting Germanicus with the Athenians (*Annal.* II.53.3). From his story it is clear that Germanicus was met not with paiaans and prosodies, but with oratorical welcoming speeches — a genre that attained an independent status in the later rhetorical tradition⁷. When exactly the custom of welcoming arriving rulers with oratorical speeches was established among the Greeks is not known, but it undoubtedly occurred under the direct influence of poetic hymns.

Prose, or rhetorical hymns to the gods also have a rather late distribution. The *terminus post quem* for them can be considered the 2nd century B. C., since Dionysius Thrax knew them only in poetic form: “a hymn is a poetic work consisting of praise to the gods and an expression of gratitude to them” (ὕμνος ἐστὶ ποίημα περιέχον θεῶν ἐγκώμια μετ’ εὐχαριστίας) (451.6 Hilgard). Most likely the hymns to the gods in prose, as well as welcoming speeches to the rulers, appeared in the Hellenistic-Roman period as a result of the social and cultural significance afforded oratorical art at that time⁸. This assumption is confirmed by the rather late references to this genre in rhetorical literature, which also all belong to the Roman era (cf. Quintilianus III.7.7–9 and Alexander Noumenius 336–329 Sp.). The adaptation of the hymn genre to oratory could occur in various ways. On the one hand, the dependence of prose texts on poetic samples in terms of both the compositional structure and the poetic technique is obvious. For example, Aristides’ prose hymns are characterized by an abundance of poetic vocabulary, a series of epithets, numerous metaphors and comparisons, frequent quotes from poets, etc. On the other hand, sacred texts in honor of the gods in prose, widespread among the Egyptians (see the prose hymn to Isis on the temple stele in Memphis) and well known to the Greeks, who enjoyed visiting Egypt as tourists, could also be a likely source of rhetorical hymns. These texts could well serve as models for Greek orators like Aristides, who spent a lot of time in Egypt getting acquainted with the customs of the Egyptians and seeing the local sights⁹. Similarly, Alexandrian poets, following the example of the Greeks, wrote prose hymns to the Egyptian gods in verse, using the traditional poetic (hexametric or elegiac) form [Bernard 1969: 631–652; Merkelbach, Stauber 2001]. It is known that the earliest of the hymns of Aristides, “Regarding Serapis”, was written shortly after he made a pilgrimage to Egypt, the famous religious center of the god. The orator’s recent impressions of the trip make themselves felt in §§ 15 and 32, where Egyptian priests, the Nile and the forty-two temples of Serapis are mentioned.

Attempts to praise the gods in prose most likely existed in the classical period, as evidenced in particular by Plato’s dialogue “The Symposium”, in which the participants of the conversation, including Socrates himself, praise Eros in different

⁷ See: Menander Rhetor (414–418 Sp.).

⁸ For Second Sophistic see: [Bowersock 1969; Anderson 1993; Gleason 1995; Borg 2004; Whitmarsh 2005].

⁹ See the Russian translation of “The Egyptian Discourse” in [Mezheritskaya 2016–2017].

ways (178a–212b). Of course, in this case we are not talking about the prose hymn as an independent literary genre, but it is impossible not to admit that this is a rather interesting and illustrative case of the traditional poetic form adapting to the needs of philosophical prose. It is quite possible that Aristides took into account Plato's previous experience and could to a certain extent have been guided by it. Judging by the references in his speeches, this dialogue was well known to him (cf.: XLVII.60 K).

The hymn "Regarding Serapis" is preceded by a lengthy introduction in which Aristides proves the advantage of prose over poetry and defends the right of speakers to compose hymns to the gods along with the poets (XLV.4–5 K). This clearly indicates that the orator is embarking on a new path for himself and his contemporaries. This reasoning would not be necessary if the hymns to the gods had been at all common in Greek oratorical prose before Aristides. It is the opinion of the majority of scholars in dating of Aristides' prose hymns that the oration "Regarding Serapis" was his first attempt at mastering this rhetorical genre [Wilamowitz-Möhlendorf 1925: 336; Mesk 1928: 664]¹⁰.

A comparison of the compositional structure and the poetic technique of the cult hymns and the hymns of Aristides shows that the orator carefully followed the traditional pattern, including significant hymnic *topoi*. Consider for example the hymns "Regarding Serapis" and "Regarding Zeus", which are the earliest examples of this genre in the works of Aristides. The epiclesis in both hymns contains a standard appeal to a deity, who then graciously receives a speech addressed to him (XLV.14 K; XLIII.1 K). This is followed by a common poetic hymnic topos demonstrating the orator's uncertainty as to how best to begin praise (XLV.16 K; XLIII.2–5 K). In the hymn to Zeus there is also an appeal to the Muses. The main part of the hymn in both cases is the praise of the appropriate god. Praise of Serapis begins with a reminder (*hypomnēsis*) that people owe to this god the wisdom that led them to the very idea of the gods, as well as temples, sacred rites, laws, the state, various tools, and all kinds of crafts. Thanks to this, their whole life was put in order (17); Serapis grants them health and well-being, helps them in adversity, and accompanies them in danger (18–19). This segment is followed by an ephrasis attributing the following characteristic to the God: Serapis also rises above all the gods, like the "coryphaeus of the choir"; he is omnipotent, therefore many people worship him instead of the other gods; and he is the "supreme god of the Universe" whose power extends everywhere, while other gods rule only over their patrimony (22–24). Serapis serves people as a guide both in life and after death (24–26). He is the eternal giver of goods, the flow of which for humanity never stops (30–31). A comparison of the acts of Serapis to those of the other gods, depicted as clearly inferior to him in terms of the benefits brought to people, can be considered here as an element of the mythological narrative.

¹⁰ Another point of view is held by Amann and Höffler [Amann 1931: 35; Höffler 1935: 5], who believe that the hymn "To Zeus" was written first. They explain the polemic proemium in the hymn "To Serapis" by the probable criticism that Aristides could have incurred from the Egyptian audience. In support of his hypothesis, Amann, relying on Boulanger [1923: 307, n. 1] and Schmid [Schmid, Christ 1920: 113; 702], refers to the special addiction of the Greek population of Egypt to poetry and their hostility towards rhetoric. According to Amann, the innovation of Aristides most likely did not meet with sympathy in Alexandria, and he found it necessary to respond to criticism in his next speech.

In the hymn to Zeus, the god is praised as the creator and ancestor of all things, the first and most ancient god, born from himself (7–9). Creator of the earth, the mountains, the plain, the sea, the sky, animals and people (10–15), Zeus ordered the Universe, dividing it between gods and people, and fixed a strictly defined locality for everyone (16–20). This part, which is a typical cosmology in the epic spirit, can be qualified as a reminder, ecphrasis, and mythological narrative at the same time. Everything that happens is done by the will of Zeus (23–24). Each of the gods fulfills the role assigned to him by Zeus, and thus is his assistant and representative: for example, Apollo gives oracles on his behalf; Asclepius heals according to his instructions; Athena observes the order established by him; Hera, patroness of marriages, and Artemis, obstetrician and hunter, help people, following his orders; Poseidon and the Dioscuri, also obeying Zeus, rescue people floating in the sea; and the Muses at his bidding invented musical art to teach people about him (25–26).

In the final part of the hymn to Serapis, the orator, as expected, thanks God for his salvation and expresses hope for his favor in the future (33–34). In the hymn to Zeus, however, we do not find a direct appeal to the deity in the second person in the form of a prayer, which is typical of poetic hymns. Instead, the narrative continues in the third person, as in the main part of the hymn. Following the example of the poets, Aristides endows Zeus with a whole series of epithets, calling him the Patron of the people, Trophy, Savior, Liberator and Merciful; Father, Emperor, City-defender, God of Thunder, Rain, Heavenly etc. (29–30). In conclusion, Aristides notes that it is appropriate for Zeus to begin and end any business, calling him leader and helper (31). In this respect the finale of the hymn “Regarding Zeus” deviates somewhat from the traditional model.

In the subsequent hymns that Aristides wrote over more than three decades, such deviations from the poetic pattern become more and more the norm. A comparative structural-stylistic analysis of the hymns shows a gradual strengthening of the rhetorical elements in them due to a noticeable weakening of the poetic component [Russell 1990: 200–201]. The innovations carried out by the orator relate not only to the compositional structure and the genre nature of the speeches, but also to their subject matter, the nature of the address, the degree of author’s insecurity at the beginning, etc. At the same time, Aristides does not follow any particular universal scheme in his hymns, but in each case creatively adapts the poetic form to the subject, place, circumstances and tasks of the oration. All this, of course, contributed to the further adaptation of the hymn genre to oratorical prose and the gradual development of its rhetorical canon.

Thus, if Aristides had some predecessors in this field, their activities were rather spontaneous and arbitrary by comparison. It is unlikely that Plato, writing a religious hymn to Eros, thought about creating a new genre of praise to the gods in prose along with the poetic hymn. Aristides’ activity, however, was quite deliberate and purposeful. In this respect, perhaps, it can be compared with Isocrates, who in “Evagoras” also emphasizes the novelty of the enterprise he conceived — “to praise human valor in a prose work” (§ 8). In a rather extensive introduction (8–11), Isocrates, like Aristides in the hymn to Serapis, substantiates his desire to give praise to the dead man in an oratorical speech rather than a poetic form. At the same time, Isocrates agrees that there are obvious advantages for poets in comparison with orators. In Isocrates’ argumentation the passages are found to be very close to those

of Aristides', which, I would argue, is hardly a coincidence if we take into account how carefully Aristides imitated the language and style of Isocrates' speeches (see: [Hubell 1913]).

As did Isocrates, Aristides consciously positions himself as an innovator, adapting a poetic hymn to the needs of rhetoric. Another important merit of Aristides in this area is that he created the hymns on his own initiative — to participate in festive ceremonies, by a vow or as a token of gratitude and an expression of personal religious feeling. Apparently, it is due to Aristides' light hand and thanks to his great oratorical fame and prestige among contemporaries and descendants that the prose hymn was easily and quickly rooted in the ancient system of rhetorical genres. An important literary evidence of its existence in later times is one of Apuleius' orations, in which he notes that he had repeatedly brought to Aesculapius "both prose and poetry" (Flor. 18). A few decades later the rhetor Menander of Laodicea (331–344 Sp.) gave a detailed overview of the different types of prose hymns along with recommendations for their compilation, relying on the samples of Aelius Aristides. The further development and flourishing of the prose hymn is associated with the names of Libanius and his pupil Julian the Apostate — both fiery admirers of Aristides, whose works complete the traditions of classical Greek eloquence.

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