Expressions of love and sexual union in Hesiod's *Catalogue of Women**

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RESUMEN

En el *Catálogo de las mujeres* la unión sexual de las heroínas con los dioses o los héroes está mencionada por medio de diferentes fórmulas que aluden a la boda humana, al lecho nupcial, u otras expresiones que se refieren al amor de diferentes formas. El propósito de este artículo es examinar el uso que el poeta hace de esas expresiones formulares, la alternancia entre ellas, y sus preferencias. Por otro lado pretende comparar esas expresiones que describen el amor y la unión sexual en los fragmentos que hacen referencia a la descendencia de algunas mujeres mortales con el pasaje final de la *Teogonía* –o incluso con toda la *Teogonía*–, en donde también aparece este tipo de fórmulas, intentando encontrar similitudes y diferencias que permitan relacionar ambos poemas.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Hesíodo, *Catálogo de las mujeres*, fórmulas, amor, unión sexual, boda, heroínas.

ABSTRACT

In the *Catalogue of Women* the sexual union of the heroines with the gods and heroes is conveyed by various formulaic expressions which allude to a human wedding or to nuptial bed, or by some other expressions which refer to love in different ways. The aim of this article is to examine the use that the poet makes of those formulaic expressions, the alternation between them, and his preferences. Furthermore, this study aims to compare the expressions describing love and sexual union in the fragments referring to the offspring of several mortal women with the last passage of the *Theogony* –or even with all of the *Theogony*–, trying to find similarities or differences which might allow us to relate both poems.

KEY WORDS

Hesiod, *Catalogue of Women*, formulae, love, sexual union, wedding, heroines.

The last passage of the *Theogony*[1] offers a list of the offspring born from the unions of several goddesses with mortals, and the poem ends with two lines which anticipate the

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[1] *Th.* 963-1018.

unions that will be celebrated later, those of the heroines with gods and their descendants[2]: «But now, sweet-voiced Muses of Olympus, daughters of Zeus who holds the aegis, sing of the company of women». The *Catalogue of Women* or *Ehoiai*[3], preserved only in fragmentary form, seems actually to refer to those descendants of the «company of women» and because of that fact, was considered in antiquity to be a natural sequel of the *Theogony*[4].

In the *Theogony*, an epic poem whose aim is to sing of the successive descendants of gods, we find a series of formulae and formulaic expressions of different lengths referring to the way the offspring of gods were born. Throughout the poem, Hesiod makes use of a whole system of formulae strictly designed to create genealogies. And, although genealogies might not seem intrinsically a very varied subject, the poet always avoids repetitions, using several combinations of verbal forms and other expressions or formulae which indicate the sexual union of the divine couple and the offspring[5]. The *Catalogue* is also a genealogical poem. It is composed of a series of genealogies which aim to trace the Hellenic race[6]. The first of the fragments, the proem –which appears as a programme of the whole poem–, starts with the same two lines found at the end of the *Theogony*. After the invocation of the Muses it alludes to those women who were in union with the gods and had children as a result of their relationships[7].

The poet usually places the mother as subject of the genealogical sentence. However, there is an alternation between the mother's name and ἡ δ᾽, nearly always at the beginning of the line, as we find in the *Theogony* where genealogies are matrilinear (with the exception of three special cases where the subject of the verb «to bear» is the name of the father)[8].

Generally , after this subject, we find a verb meaning «she bore». This verbal form can be τέκε, ἔτεκε –maybe the most frequent–, or else γείνατο, γένετο. Even with another structure of the sentence, when the mother is not the grammatical subject, there appears the form ἐγένετο with the meaning «to be born»[9]. This alternation in

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[2] *Th.* 1019-1022.

[3] The poem was called *Ehoiai* in antiquity because of the expression ἡ οἵη which introduces the stories of several heroines. For the function of that expression *cf.* for instance West, M.L.(1985): 167; Cohen, I.M. (1989-90): 12-13.

[4] According to West. *op. cit.* 125, genealogies of men are treated as the natural sequel to genealogies of gods.

[5] *Cf.* Aguirre, M. (1998): 462, 467.

[6] *Cf.* Fowler, R. (1998): 1-19.

[7] Fr. 1,3-7 (Merkelbach, R.-West, M.(1967). For the Proem of the *Catalogue of Women cf.* for instance Treu, M. (1957): 169-186; Schmitt, A. (1975): 19-31.

[8] In the *Theogony* (as in the *Catalogue*) there is a predominance of matrilinear genealogies, *cf.* Adrados, F. R.(1986): 19; Aguirre, M. (1998): 462. However, as Fowler, R. comments (1998: 5-6) this is not evidence of a real matrilinear system in Greece: mothers are important for the poem's composition because it is they who give birth to children, but the heroes are designated through their fathers: Perseids, Atreids etc.

[9] For instance in Fr. 10,1. In the *Theogony* the form γείνατο is usually placed at the beginning of the line such as the form τίκτε, although we also find γείνατο or ἐγείνατο in the fourth or fifth dactyl or in the third and

the sentence structure «subject+verb to bear+children names» is similar, as I have already said, to what we find in the *Theogony*, where the poet avoids repeating the same words and formulaic expressions in adjacent lines[10].

However, some differences between the *Catalogue* and the *Theogony* are found in the formulaic expressions for sexual union, marriage and love. Now it is not a matter of the union between primal gods —more or less anthropomorphic— or personifications such as Night, Pontos etc., but between lovely women and gods who felt attracted to them. Or between other mortal women —their descendants— and famous heroes.

First of all, the females are described in terms which allude to their beauty and qualities. Homeric epithets, for instance εὐπλόκαμος «with lovely hair» for Tyro (Fr. 30) κούρην ἡλικώπιδα καλλιπάρηον «the girl with sparkling eyes and fair cheeks» for Mestra (Fr 43a.19) which Homer employs to describe Alkestis, Penelope, Helen, Circe etc. Some of these epithets are also used by Hesiod in the *Theogony*, for instance for Echidna, Metis etc. However, we find here not only individual epithets but also longer phrases (some of them non-Homeric and not found in the *Theogony*): Χαρίτων ἀμαρύγματ' ἔχουσαν «who had the sparkling eyes of the Graces». The women are sometimes compared with the goddess Aphrodite, which makes them especially seductive: ἡ εἶδος ἔχε χρυσῆς Ἀφροδίτης: «looking like golden Aphrodite». The same comparison with Aphrodite is used by Homer for Briseis (*Il.*19.282), Cassandra (*Il.*24.699) or Penelope (*Od.*17.37)[11].

All these traditional expressions of epic poetry are used here to emphasize the characteristics of these women who deserve to be loved by a god or by a hero. Gods and heroes are attracted to them precisely because of that beauty which can be compared with that of a goddess.

Some of the longer fragments also give us some information about the love story. The poet not only mentions the union of the couples and their offspring, but also relates how the desire for the woman was aroused (Fr. 16), how the god fell in love with the lovely girl (Fr. 30[12], Fr. 145 about Minos' love), or how she was woed by many suitors (the cases of Atalanta, Demodice, Helen). Fragment 75, for instance, offers in its first lines a description of the young Atalanta, surrounded by her suitors. She awakens the admiration of those who are looking at her when the wind moves her clothes around her breasts which are then exposed[13]. This scene recalls other situations in ancient epic poetry: when a woman appears before a male audience which is immediately smitten

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fourth, *cf.* De Hoz, J. (1964): 290. For the functions of these verbal forms in the *Catalogue* see Heilinger, K. (1983): 22,n.14.

[10] *Cf.* note 5.

[11] *Cf.* Cohen, I.M. (1989-90): 16-27.

[12] This story is also known in the *Odyssey* (11. 235-239) *cf.* Lefkowitz, M.R. (1993).

[13] Fr. 75, 8-11.

with desire. For instance in the *Odyssey*, Penelope in the presence of her suitors looks so irresistible that she arouses them to sexual desire (*Od.* 18.187-213); or in the *Iliad* (3. 121-160), Helen awakens the admiration of Priam and some other old men of Troy who are absolutely fascinated by her beauty; and also some other scenes which are intended to represent the seduction of males, whether intentionally or not[14].

Referring to expressions and formulae which allude to the sexual intercourse of the couple, the *Catalogue* presents us with a variation and alternation, the same alternation noticed in the *Theogony*. Indeed, in the unions of the primal deities of the *Theogony* the most common expressions are the most simple and we do not find them very often. Although Eros is one of the earliest figures born after Chaos as the force that unites the pairs of gods, so that they will be able to have descendants, ἔρος is not the word employed by the poet to express the love unions in the *Theogony*. The word he uses to designate the physical union of the lovers is, rather, φιλότης, which substitutes for Eros[15]. In the *Catalogue* the most simple formulaic words, common to the *Theogony*, are μιχθεῖς ἐν φιλότητι «joined in love» at the beginning of the line (Fr. 5, 165, 253), or μίγη φιλότητι (Fr. 17, 141). And a more particular formula μίχθη ἐρατὴ φιλότητι «joined with her in sweet love» which includes two words ἐρατή and φιλότης (Fr. 64, 235)[16].

Another usual expression is ὑποδμηθεῖσα (δμηθεῖσα) «subdued», used in the *Theogony* six times[17] and also in the Catalogue in Fr. 23, referred first to Clytemnestra and later to Timandra with an allusion to the action of the goddess Aphrodite. We might ask whether in these cases the woman is forced by the male god: maybe there is not a reciprocal feeling? The meaning of the verb could suggest that this formula would imply in origin a union without agreement, the woman is being forced or subdued by the man (or by the power of Aphrodite). However, in what survives of the Hesiodic *Catalogue*, the poet does not describe how the women involved in relationships with the gods felt about the experience. Anyway, violence is not a characteristic of these encounters with gods. The verb δαμάζω is used in Greek related to marriage with the idea of submission to a husband, and some parts of the wedding ritual have the meaning that the bride is ready to be under her husband's control[18]. A new idea related to human wedding is given here then for some of the unions of mortal women and gods, and, at the same time, the idea of Aphrodite's mind-controlling power, as we will discuss later.

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[14] For scenes of seduction and love in ancient Greek epic *cf.* Forsyth, N. (1979): 107-120.

[15] *Cf.* Bonnafé, A.(1985) : 11,n.8. For the function of Eros in cosmogony *cf.* Rudhardt, J. (1986) .

[16] These complete formulae are not frequent in Homer, particularly in the *Iliad* where we only find the form μιγεῖσα and usually with a different meaning (*Il.* 6. 386, etc.). The form μιγεῖσα (or μιγῆναι) appears in the *Odyssey* at the end of the line with a similar meaning than in the *Catalogue*, *cf.* De Hoz, J. (1964): 285 ff.

[17] *Th.* 327, 374, 453, 962, 1001, 1006.

[18] *Cf.* Sebesta, J. (2002): 17.

But, as we are talking about mortal women, other expressions allude to the wedding: the formula ποιήσατ᾽ ἄκοιτιν «made his wife» (Fr. 14, 17, 23, 33), sometimes accompanied by the adjective θαλερήν «fertile» which can be reconstructed in some lines, or the verb «to marry» γῆμε or ἔγημε (Fr. 23). This «legalization» of the union is not frequent in the *Theogony*, especially in the unions of the first gods, which are mere sexual unions destined to engender children. Only in the cases of Thaumas and Electra and of Iapetos and Klymene do we find the verb ἠγάγετο with the same meaning[19]. But the allusion to the wedding is more usual in the unions of the Olympian gods (Zeus'wives) and, indeed, in the unions of goddesses with mortal men (for instance Medeia with Jason), that is, when the couples are placed in a «human» situation and a nuptial ceremony is supposed before consummating the union in bed. Furthermore, here it is the male figure who dominates, because he makes the female his wife although later the children will be designated through their mother's name.

Other expressions which also place the action at a human level refer to the nuptial bed. These expressions are not used by Hesiod to allude to the union of primal gods in the *Theogony* (Ouranos, Gaia, Night etc.), but they are more common in the unions of Olympian gods, for the same reason that I have just given. Expressions such as θαλερὸν λέχος εἰσαναβᾶσα «going up to his fertile bed» at the end of the line (Fr. 23, 25, 26) with the variant ὁμὸν λέχος εἰσαναβῆναι «to share one bed» (Fr. 129, 180, 193) and changing the adjective ἱερὸν λέχος εἰσαναβαίνων «going up to a holy bed» (Fr. 211)[20].

As I have already mentioned, we find the participation of the goddess Aphrodite inspiring some of these unions, in Fr. 23 a, 221 and 253. The formula διὰ χρυσὴν ᾽Αφροδίτην or πολυχρύσου ᾽Αφροδίτης «through golden Aphrodite» is sometimes associated with one of the formulae of union and it is more frequent in the last part of the *Theogony*: four times in less than hundred lines as opposed to once in the rest of the poem.

According to the *Homeric Hymn* Aphrodite is the goddess who arouses desire in gods and mortals[21]. She represents the universal desire of all creatures to reproduce, although she was born from an act of violence, the castration of Ouranos, which is the complete antithesis to love[22]. Several myths tell us about the influence of the goddess in the passions and feelings of men or gods. She makes Pandora, the ancestor of the company of women, a beautiful and seductive woman. She adorns her with grace and

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[19] *Th.* 267,508.
[20] According to Heilinger, K.(1983): 19-34 all these formulae of wedding and nuptial bed at the beginning of the different episodes or women's stories have a special function marking the conclusion of one of the stories and leading into her descendants.
[21] *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*, 1, ff.
[22] *Cf.* Bonnafé, A.(1985): 33-34.

with the power to arouse «cruel longing and limb-devouring cares»[23]. But, in many cases her influence can be dangerous; her destructive and beguiling power will be fatal for Helen who will abandon her husband and will cause the fall of Troy. Precisely Helen knows very well that the goddess'divine power cannot be resisted[24]. In all cases Aphrodite demands respect for her power, punishing severely those who in any way reject it[25]. There are some examples in myth: the case of Hippolytus and Phaedra in Euripides'*Hippolytus*, and in our fragments the case of Atalanta (Fr. 75)[26].

It is not unusual then that the traditional epic language reminds us of the function of Aphrodite in these formulaic expressions of sexual union. However, the formulae are not as frequent as we could expect in the *Catalogue*, particularly in the most famous love stories of Greek myth due to the direct action of the goddess.

Indeed, as we are dealing with a poem preserved just in fragments, it is not possible to study in detail the use and alternation of different formulae in successive lines as we can do in the *Theogony* [27]. We cannot see the poet's way of composition to shape the genealogical structure, but it is possible to deduce that the poet of the *Catalogue* plays with the same system of formulae and expressions according to what he wants to say and which he can adapt to his needs. Furthermore, it seems that here, as in the *Theogony*, the poet is searching as much as possible for variation and alternation[28].

It is true that, as some authors have argued and as I have already commented, there are some changes of style and formulaic vocabulary in the *Catalogue* which links it closely with the last passage of the *Theogony*[29]. Some commentators think that this passage and the *Catalogue* are not Hesiod's work. There are indeed some other aspects to be considered about the authenticity of the *Catalogue* and its date of composition[30]. It is an open question whether the poet who composed it is Hesiod or not, but, in general, with regard to the structure and the use of expressions and formulae, there are not apparently very deep differences between the *Catalogue* and the *Theogony*. The similar content of the end of the *Theogony* and the *Catalogue* would logically link them together in a more specific way, and that could explain their stronger proximity, at least according to the use of the expressions and formulae that we have considered. We have

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[23] Hesiod *Works and Days*, 62-65.

[24] *Cf.* Thornton, B.S. (1997): 57-58. In the *Iliad* the angry goddess reminds Helen that she survives only because of her sexual beauty (*Il.* 3. 414-417) and she threatens her with destruction by an evil fate.

[25] *Cf.* Thornton, B.S.(1997): 94-96.

[26] This is the first evidence of the story of Atalanta who races with her suitors to avoid marriage.

[27] For studies on the composition and structure of the *Theogony cf.* for instance Kirk, G.S.(1960): 61-108; Schwabl, H. (1966); Minton, W. W. (1975): 25-54; Hamilton, R. (1989): 3-43.

[28] *Cf.* note 5.

[29] *Cf.* West, M.(1985): 127, ff.

[30] Some mythological reasons make certain authors think that the *Catalogue* was composed about the fourth century, *cf.* West, M. (1985): 136; Fowler, R.(1998): 17.

descended from Heaven to Earth, from primal gods to Olympian gods and mortals. The unions have been getting more «human»; here, the divine mothers , such as the heroines, deserve to be embellished by some special characteristics to make them attractive, and the sexual unions have a different character. We are now in the sphere of golden Aphrodite.

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