The Homeric Hymns consist of a heterogeneous collection of 33 hexameter poems, composed in the epic \textit{Kunstsprache}, and dedicated to divinities. They range from 3 to 580 lines in length and come from the 8th to the 2nd century B.C. and later.\footnote{The major modern editions are Allen (1912) vol. 5; Allen, Halliday, and Sikes (1936); Humbert (1936); and Càssola (1975). The \textit{Hymn to Ares} (8) is generally recognized to be later than the rest. See M. L. West (1970); Gelzer (1987) 150–167, attributes \textit{Ares} as well as \textit{H. 31} and 32 (to the Sun and Moon) to Plotinus’ circle.} The context of their manuscript transmission is indicative of their uncertain status: a few MSS include them with the Homeric poems, while the majority transcribe them with a variety of poetry from the Hellenistic and even later periods.\footnote{For a description of the manuscripts, see Allen, Halliday, and Sikes (1936) xi–lviii.} The \textit{Hymn to Demeter} is preserved in only one manuscript, where it follows the final lines of what must have been a fairly extensive \textit{Hymn to Dionysus}.\footnote{Nine other lines from near the beginning of the Dionysus Hymn are preserved in Diodorus 3.66.3.} The relatively small number of extant manuscripts and ancient quotations, the lack of scholia, and sparse papyrus fragments point to the general neglect of these poems in antiquity. While some ancient authors attribute the Hymns to Homer, the scholars of Alexandria must have disassociated the corpus from the poet, a fact which led to their subsequent obscurity.

Very little is known for certain about their dates, provenance, or circumstances of composition and performance, which were doubtless as diverse as the poems themselves. One thing, however, is fairly clear: while sharing many features with prayers and cult hymns, our Hymns show little connection with ritual practice.\footnote{See Norden (1923); Keyssner (1932); Meyer (1933); and Fröhder (1994) 17–60. Outside the opening and closing formulas, the ‘Du-Stil’ is relatively rare in our Hymns: \textit{Dionysus} 1–7; \textit{Apollo} 19–29, 127–129, 149–150, 179–181, 207–230, 242–246; cf. \textit{H. 8, H. 21, H. 24, H. 29, H. 30}.}
Linguistic Criteria for Dating

Because the Hymns offer little in the way of solid internal evidence for their dates or provenance, in the hope of discovering objective dating criteria, scholars have turned to linguistic evidence to determine the relation especially of the four major Hymns to Homer and the Hesiodic corpus. O. Zumbach focused on what he considered innovative, i.e. post-Homeric, features. On the basis of the neglect or observance of digamma, Allen, Halliday, and Sikes concluded that Apollo is the oldest, followed by Aphrodite, Demeter, and quite a bit later, Hermes. In the wake of Parry's discoveries, and refuting Notopoulos' claim that linguistic phenomena could not be used for dating oral poetry, Hoekstra's study also included modifications of formulac diction, but his results did not diverge much from earlier conclusions. Finally, by systematically gathering a large number of linguistic features and attempting to correlate them statistically, R. Janko has undertaken the most extensive investigation to date to determine the relative chronology of not only the Hymns, but also of Homer and Hesiod. Janko also deals with the issues of oral composition, false archaism, epic imitation, and regional variations in the diction of the Hymns. On this basis, he sets out to refute the position of C. O. Pavese who argues that the Hymns and Hesiod belong to a school of Continental poetry distinct from the Ionian epic of Homer. According to Pavese, these traditions are parallel and synchronic rather than earlier and later; hence linguistic criteria cannot be used to trace their diachronic development. Janko's arguments are too complicated to summarize here, but his conclusions situate Aphrodite in a somewhat divergent northern Aeolic tradition as the earliest of the major Hymns (675 B.C.), followed by Delian Apollo (660 B.C.) in a line closer to the Ionian tradition, with Demeter (640 B.C.) more closely related to the Hesiodic tradition, and finally, Pythian Apollo (585 B.C.), descended from the line of the Delian Hymn, but showing special affinities to the Odyssey.

---

5 Zumbach (1955).
9 Pavese (1974); and (1972) 111–165.
10 See Janko's stemma on p. 200.