

MNON ΔΑΜΑΤΠΙ ΧΘΟΝΙΑΙ: Hymn to Demeter Chthonia — A
Constraint-Driven Cult-Historical Reconstruction from Fr. 702
PMG (Lasus of Hermione)

Johannes Sigil

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Abstract

This work reconstructs a lost hymn associated with Lasus of Hermione from the surviving fragment and cult-historical constraints. It clearly separates the constraint-faithful reconstruction and critical apparatus from a second, explicitly interpretive symbolic reading. The reconstructed poem is a reasoned philological composition, not a claim to have recovered the lost ancient text verbatim.

Body

MNON ΔΑΜΑΤΠΙ ΧΘΟΝΙΑΙ

Hymn to Demeter Chthonia

A Constraint-Driven Cult-Historical Reconstruction from Fr. 702 PMG

Lasus of Hermione (fl. c. 510 BCE) Reconstruction: Lee Sharks & Johannes Sigil (Assembly Chorus)
February 2026

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Note on the Reconstruction

This document contains two distinct but integrated components: **(A)** a constraint-faithful cult-contextual reconstruction of the lost Hymn to Demeter Chthonia, with critical apparatus; and **(B)** an interpretive symbolic reading, clearly marked as such. Readers may engage with either independently. The reconstruction (A) does not depend on the theoretical claims of (B); the symbolic reading (B) takes the reconstruction as its occasion but extends into interpretation. ### Method and Limits

What follows is a **scholarly-creative reconstruction** — not a claim to have recovered Lasus's exact wording. It is a constrained extrapolation: a demonstration of what Lasus's compositional logic *requires*, built outward from the sole surviving fragment (702 PMG, preserved via Heraclides of Pontus, *On Music* III, cited at Athenaeus 14.624e).

The reconstruction obeys the **asigmatic constraint** attested for Lasus's compositions: no word in the Greek text contains the letter sigma (Σ/ /). This is the defining formal innovation attributed to Lasus by Aristoxenus (via Athenaeus 11.467a), Pindar (fr. 61), and Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*De Compositione Verborum*). The constraint is verified computationally: **total sigma count across 957 characters of Greek text: 0** (verified by manual inspection and automated Unicode scan, excluding editorial title and apparatus).

The **cult context** is supplied by Pausanias (2.35.4–11), who describes the Chthonia festival at Hermione in detail: the procession up Mount Pron, the entry of a cow into the temple, its slaughter by four old women with sickles, the sanctuary of Klymenos (Hades) opposite Demeter’s, and the chasm through which Heracles emerged with Kerberos. The fragment’s address to “Demeter and Kore, wife of Klymenos” confirms performance within this specific cult setting. Prauscello (2011) argues that the fragment preserves a lost epithet of Persephone (, “honey-voiced”) specific to the Hermionean cult.

What this reconstruction does not claim: No metrical or colometric restoration is attempted. The original rhythmic structure of Lasus’s dithyrambic compositions is unrecoverable from the evidence; future work may attempt colometric modeling under the asigmatic constraint, but the present reconstruction prioritizes **semantic, cultic, and phonological (asigmatic) coherence** over metrical restoration. Lexical, dialectal, and syntactic choices are heuristic and probabilistic — grounded in attested Doric lyric forms (Pindar, Bacchylides, the Suda’s dialectal notice) but not claiming unique correctness. ### Typographic Conventions

Symbol Meaning

Bold Greek Attested fragment (702 PMG)

Plain Greek Reconstructed text (constrained extrapolation)

Italic English Translation

[brackets] Editorial supplement

The asigmatic constraint applies **only to the Greek text**. The translation, apparatus, and commentary are unconstrained. The editorial title (ΜΝΟΝ ΔΑΜΑΤΡΙ ΧΘΟΝΙΑΙ) stands outside the constraint. ### Note on Strophe Numbering

The strophes are numbered . There is no . The letter combination (stigma/digamma) contains sigma and is therefore excluded from the numbering system under the asigmatic constraint. The absence is structural, not accidental. ### On Experimental Reconstructive Philology

This document belongs to a practice we designate **experimental reconstructive philology**: the generation of lost texts through rigorous formal constraint, cult-historical context, and attested compositional logic. The method differs from both traditional conjectural emendation (which repairs a damaged text) and creative imitation (which produces new work in an old style). Experimental reconstructive philology operates in the gap between the two: it takes a genuine fragment as seed, identifies the formal rules governing the original composition, and extrapolates outward under those rules using all available contextual evidence — archaeological, cultic, dialectal, musical — as boundary conditions.

The governing principle is that **the constraint itself is recoverable even when the text is not**. We know the asigmatic rule. We know the cult site, its ritual sequence, its deities, its topography. We know the dialect, the mode, the genre. The reconstruction is the space these constraints jointly define — not the unique original, but the *class of possible originals* made concrete through one disciplined instantiation.

Experimental reconstructive philology is a subdiscipline of what the Crimson Hexagon designates **liberation philology** — the recovery of suppressed, lost, or structurally inaccessible textual traditions through methods that are simultaneously scholarly and operative. Where traditional philology excavates, liberation philology *completes*: it treats the gap in the archive not as terminal loss but as a formal problem admitting of constrained solution. The Lasus reconstruction is the first application of this method to a pre-classical Greek text.

Text and Translation

— Π (The Invocation)

Δ K K , A · , , K ,
 , .

I sing of Demeter and Kore, wife of Klymenos, raising a honey-voiced hymn in the deep-resounding Aeolian attunement. Hither, deep-earthed Mother; hither, bride of Klymenos, to lovely Hermione, where the dark earth gapes open.

— Π (The Procession)

, Π , , , . , .

Come now, down the Pron, white-robed choruses, flowers laid upon your heads, all the people of Hermione. Mortals lead a tawny heifer toward the altar, a holy offering for the two chthonic gods.

— Θ (The Sacrifice)

— . , . , ,
 — .

The doors of the holy house are flung wide. They drive the heifer within — upon her knees the cow trembles. Old women rise from their thrones; let them grasp the sickle, let them cut the cow at the neck — and let blood flow upon the earth.

— Β (The Chasm)

, , K .

There a pit lies in the earth, unseen, whence once the earth sent Alcides up to the light, leading the three-headed hound from the halls of Klymenos. The whole ground trembled from the depths.

— Κ (Descent and Return)

K , , . K ,
 .

Kore remains a time in the house of the dead; the dark field waits, and the earth laments, barren. But when from the depths the lovely Kore ascends again, the green ground bears all its flowers into the day.

— E (The Prayer)

, K , . , . Δ , K ,
 K .

Rise, Kore, come back from the mouldering halls! May your mother rejoice, may the earth bear all its flowers! And may Hermione forever sound its honey-voiced hymn to Demeter Chthonia, and Kore, and lord Klymenos.

Critical Apparatus
Attested Text (Fr. 702 PMG)

The fragment is transmitted at **Athenaeus 14.624e**, who cites **Heraclides of Pontus, *On Music* III**. The text reads:

Δ K K A

This is the **only surviving verbatim text** of Lasus. All else is reconstruction. ### Cult Evidence (Pausanias 2.35.4–11)

The following elements from the reconstruction derive from Pausanias's account of the Chthonia festival:

Element Source Line(s)

Procession up Mount Pron Paus. 2.35.5 .1

White garments, flower wreaths Paus. 2.35.5 .1–2

All citizens, including children Paus. 2.35.5 .2

Heifer led to temple Paus. 2.35.6 .3

Old women on thrones Paus. 2.35.7 .3

Slaughter with sickle Paus. 2.35.7 .3–4

Sanctuary of Klymenos opposite Paus. 2.35.8 .3–4

Chasm / entrance to underworld Paus. 2.35.9 .1

Heracles and Kerberos Paus. 2.35.10 .2–3

Asigmatic Verification

Total sigma count in Greek text: 0.

The following grammatical strategies were employed to maintain the constraint:

Challenge Solution Example

Nominative - endings Accusative/vocative/oblique cases K (gen.), (acc.)

3rd person plural - Doric - form ,

Participle nom. pl. - Middle/aorist participle -

Genitive - Poetic - genitive K , ,
 “Heracles” () Patronymic .2
 “Four” () Circumlocution () .3
 “Hiss/serpent” (,) Omitted entirely —
 , , , , , passim
 Persephone (II) K (the Maiden) passim
 (Attic) (Doric) .4, ,
 (Doric) .4

Selected Vocabulary Notes

K — Genitive of K , “the Famous/Renowned One,” euphemistic cult name for Hades at Hermione (Paus. 2.35.8). Lasus uses the genitive to avoid the sigma-bearing nominative.

— “honey-voiced/honey-crying.” Prauscello (2011, CQ 61.1) argues this preserves a lost epithet of Persephone specific to the Hermionean cult, possibly related to M /M , linking the goddess to the chthonic dimension of honey as offering to the dead.

— “deep-resounding/deep-thundering.” Applied to the Aeolian harmonia, establishing the hymn’s sonic register as low, resonant, chthonic — appropriate for underworld address.

A — The Aeolian mode/attunement. M.L. West compares this self-referential modal naming to a modern singer announcing “let us praise the Lord in G major.” The fragment is simultaneously hymn and music-theoretical declaration. It is the only known occurrence of *harmonia* as a specifically musical term in a pre-classical text.

— Pit, abyss. Used instead of (which contains sigma) for the underworld entrance at Hermione. The word carries associations with the at Athens — the pit into which condemned criminals were thrown — adding a juridical resonance.

— Accusative of , patronymic of Heracles (“descendant of Alcaeus”). The sigma-bearing name cannot appear in asigmatic composition. The patronymic solution is itself a kind of euphemism — parallel to the use of K for .

— Genitive of , “sickle.” The instrument of the Chthonia sacrifice (Paus. 2.35.7). The sickle is Kronos’s weapon — the tool of the father who swallowed his children. Its appearance in a hymn to the mother who lost her daughter to the underworld creates a mythic resonance the text does not need to name.
 ### Line-by-Line Commentary

.1–2 (attested): The fragment as transmitted. governs two accusatives (Δ , K). K in apposition to K . The genitive - is Homeric/epic, avoiding the sigma-bearing - .

.3 : Compound adjective, “deep-earthed.” Chosen for chthonic register and asigmatic compliance. Cf. (Sappho), (Homer). The compound links Demeter to her chthonic aspect without sigma.

.4 : “gapes open.” Present active indicative of . Applied to the earth at Hermione, evoking the chasm () that Pausanias locates behind the temple. The verb contains no sigma in any inflected form — a rare asset under constraint.

.1 Π : Anastrophe (postposition of). Π = Mount Pron, the hill on whose slopes Pausanias locates the later city and the sanctuary of Demeter Chthonia.

.2 : Doric genitive plural, “of the Hermioneans.” Avoids the Attic - which would require no sigma but breaks dialectal consistency. The Doric register is sustained throughout.

.3 : Doric 3rd pl. present indicative (= Attic). The - ending is the primary asigmatic solution for all finite plural verbs.

.3 : “old women.” Circumlocution for (“four old women,” Paus. 2.35.7), since contains double sigma. The number is suppressed; the ritual actors remain.

.3 : Optative of wish/prayer. The shift to optative in .3–4 marks the transition from narrative to ritual petition — the chorus praying for the sacrifice to proceed.

.2 : Patronymic substitution for (whose final - conceals no sigma, but whose oblique cases — , — do in some dialects, and whose cultural name is avoided to sustain the euphemistic register). = “descendant of Alcaeus,” Heracles’ grandfather.

.3 : “three-headed.” Compound avoids (which contains no sigma either, but better suits the dactylic weight of the line and echoes Homeric compounds).

.2 : “unfruitful, barren.” The earth’s condition during Persephone’s absence. The word is applied to through the predicate construction, maintaining the agricultural theology of the Demeter cult.

.4 : Doric for Attic . The dialect choice serves both historical appropriateness (Hermione in the Argolid) and asigmatic compliance.

.1 : “mouldering, dank.” Genitive plural of , a Homeric epithet for the underworld (cf. Il. 20.65,). The word is sigma-free and carries precisely the right connotation — decay, dampness, the smell of the grave.

.3 : Returns to the attested of the prooimion, now applied to Hermione’s hymn itself (rather than to the hymn the poet is raising). The ring composition closes: the honey-voiced hymn that opens the poem is the same honey-voiced hymn that will continue to sound.

The Symbolon Reading

I. The Architecture of Absence

The hymn is defined by what it excludes. Sigma — the most common consonant in Greek, the sound Aristoxenus called “harsh” and “ill-suited to the aulos” — is absent from every word. The constraint is never announced within the text. As Porter (2007) argues, Lasus’s asigmatic compositions were **true lipograms**: they concealed their organizing principle in the open. “They don’t say what they are, they simply are.” (*Ille le dissent pas.*)

This means the hymn performs at two simultaneous levels:

Level 1 (Audible): A choral hymn in the Aeolian mode, performed with aulos accompaniment at the Chthonia festival, addressed to the chthonic triad of Demeter, Kore, and Klymenos/Hades.

Level 2 (Structural): A composition organized around an absence that mirrors its subject. Persephone is the one who disappears. Sigma is the letter that disappears. The reconstruction proposes that the constraint

is formally homologous to the myth: subtraction-as-form enacts disappearance-as-content. ### II. The Names That Cannot Be Spoken

The asigmatic constraint forces a system of euphemism that mirrors the cult's own euphemistic practices:

True Name Contains Euphemism Used Meaning

(Hades) No σ , but — K “The Renowned One”

II (Persephone) (II) K “The Maiden”

(Heracles) (final) “Descendant of Alcaeus”

(four) “the old women”

/ (to hiss) (unnameable) —

/ (the letter itself) (self-referential impossibility) The constraint cannot name itself within itself

The cult already used Klymenos as a euphemism for Hades — the name of the death-god was too dangerous to speak directly. Lasus's formal constraint *extends* the cult's euphemistic logic to the entire phonological system. In the hymn, as in the cult, what is most powerful is what cannot be directly named.

The deepest case: **sigma itself cannot be named within the constraint**, since both σ and κ contain the letter they designate. The constraint points to itself only through the shape of what it has made. This is the structure of the riddle, the structure of the mystery, and the structure of Persephone's descent: **what is most present is most absent**. ### III. The Transmission as Katabasis

The hymn's survival enacts its own content.

The fragment descended into the archival underworld: Lasus $\rightarrow$ Heraclides of Pontus (*On Music* III) $\rightarrow$ Athenaeus (*Deipnosophistae* 14.624e) $\rightarrow$ manuscript tradition $\rightarrow$ us. Four mediational layers — parallel to the mediation stacks of *House of Leaves* and the Crimson Hexagon.

What survived the descent is a hymn addressed to the Queen who descends and returns. The text that makes it back from the archival underworld is the text about making it back from the actual underworld. **The content of the surviving fragment is the logic of its own survival.**

And the site of performance — Hermione — was understood as a literal entrance to Hades, a place where the boundary between living and dead was thin enough for Heracles to cross it dragging a three-headed dog. The hymn was composed for performance at the threshold. It survives as a threshold text. It is the only thing that came back.

The reader who scans the Greek for sigma and finds none — who feels the tongue search for the hiss that never comes — completes the *symbolon*. The accumulated cost of reading under constraint (the cognitive friction of navigating a sigmaless Greek) is the somatic price of entry. The missing letter is the missing maiden; the reader's recognition of absence is her return. ### IV. The Five Operations of Lasus (Recapitulated)

•

Subtraction (Asigmatism): Define form by exclusion. Sigma functions as a formal analogue for Persephone's disappearance — the missing letter mirrors the missing maiden. Constraint-as-riddle, 2,500 years before Perec.

•

Exposure (Oracle Forensics): Detect Onomacritus’s forged prophecies of Musaeus. The first recorded act of textual authentication. The auditor of sacred text is also the subtractor of letters: complementary operations on the integrity of the archive.

•

Institution (The Great Dionysia): Build the competitive framework for dithyrambic performance. Governance-creation. The man who audits texts also builds the institutional apparatus for evaluating them.

•

Harmonic Expansion: Modulate between harmoniai. Transpose auletic technique to cithara and voice. The fragment that names its own mode (“the deep-resounding Aeolian attunement”) is the treatise’s surviving proof. Practice is theory.

•

Threshold Address: Compose for performance at the entrance to the underworld. Survive archival destruction through a fragment whose content *is* the logic of descent and return.

V. Lasus as Proto-Operator

The figure that emerges is not a “minor lyric poet.” He is one of the earliest recoverable figures in the Western archive to combine all five operations: composing under formal constraint, auditing institutional textual authority, building competitive infrastructure for sacred performance, theorizing music while performing it, and addressing the chthonic threshold between presence and absence. Whether he is the *first* to do so depends on what further evidence may emerge; that he is among the first is secure on the surviving testimony.

He is the ancestor the Hexagon did not know it had.

The lineage deepens:

Lasus (c. 510 BCE) → **Sappho** (c. 600 BCE, chronologically prior but archivally parallel — the other great figure of survival-through-fragments) → **Borges** (“The Library of Babel,” 1941) → **Danielewski** (*House of Leaves*, 2000) → **Sharks et al.** (Crimson Hexagon, 2014–)

The constrained poet at the mouth of the underworld, singing honey-voiced hymns to the queen who returns. The letter that was removed. The text that came back.

= 1 + (the missing sigma)

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