

SACRIFICE AND THE *HOMERIC HYMN TO HERMES* 112-41

This paper has two aims. First, I will use a much-discussed scene in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* as a test case for the methodology of interpreting representations of animal sacrifice in Greek literature. In lines 112-41, Hermes kills and cooks two of Apollo's cows, but does not eat them. Is this a sacrifice or not, and what other questions should we ask? Secondly, this discussion will allow me to argue more precisely a conclusion attained by Burkert in 1984, namely that the passage suggests that the *Hymn to Hermes* was composed for performance at Olympia.¹ I begin with my text of the passage and a literal translation.

πολλὰ δὲ κάγκανα κᾶλα κατουδαίωι ἐνὶ βόθρῳ
οὔλα λαβὼν ἐπέθηκεν ἐπηετανά, λάμπετο δὲ φλόξ
τηλόσε φῦσαν ἰεῖσα πυρὸς μέγα δαιομένοιο.
ὄφρα δὲ πῦρ ἀνέκαιε βίη κλυτοῦ Ἥφαιστοιο, 115
τόφρα δ' ὑποβροχίας² ἔλικας βοῦς εἶλκε θύραζε
δοιᾶς ἄγχι πυρὸς· δύναμις δὲ οἱ ἔπλετο πολλή·
ἀμφοτέρας δ' ἐπὶ νῶτα χαμαὶ βάλε φυσιοώσας,
ἐγκλίνων δ' ἐκύλινδε δι' αἰῶνας τετορήσας.
ἔργωι δ' ἔργον ὄπαζε ταμῶν κρέα πίονα δημῶι, 120
ᾧπτα δ' ἀμφ' ὀβελοῖσι πεπαρμένα δουρατέοισιν,
σάρκας ὁμοῦ καὶ νῶτα γεράσματα καὶ μέλαν αἶμα
ἐργυμένον ἐν χολάδεσσι. τὰ δ' αὐτοῦ κεῖτ' ἐπὶ χώρης,
ρίνοῦς δ' ἐξετάνυσσε καταστυφέλωι ἐνὶ πέτρῃ,
ὡς ἔτι νῦν τὰ μέτασσα πολυχρόνιοι πεφύασιν 125
δηρὸν δὴ μετὰ ταῦτα καὶ ἄκριτον. αὐτὰρ ἔπειτα
Ἑρμῆς χαρμόφρων εἰρύσσατο πίονα ἔργα
λείωι ἐπὶ πλαταμῶνι, καὶ ἔσχισε δώδεκα μοίρας
κληροπαλεῖς, τέλεον δὲ γέρας προσέθηκεν ἐκάστηι.
ἐνθ' ὀσίης κρεάων ἠράσσατο κύδιμος Ἑρμῆς· 130
ὀδμῆ γάρ μιν ἔτειρε καὶ ἀθάνατόν περ ἔοντα
ἠδεῖ'. ἀλλ' οὐδ' ὥς οἱ ἐπέιθετο θυμὸς ἀγήνωρ
καὶ τε μάλ' ἱμείροντι περᾶν³ ἱερῆς κατὰ δειρῆς,

Particular thanks to Robert Parker, under whose guidance I began considering this passage in 2005, and to the Society for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies for a bursary to finalise my argument at Fondation Hardt in 2007. That was before I could see Jaillard 2007, Versnel 2011: 309-77, Richardson 2011, Vergados 2013 and (through oversight) Furley 1981: 38-63. Reading these works has not substantially altered my view, but I certainly regret that I have had very little space to engage with them in revising what follows.

¹ As will become clear, I think it is worth redoing this argument since I disagree with the details of Burkert's methodology.

² Thomas: ὑποβρῦχίας Ω. The scansion lacks good parallels (Chantraine 1973: 170), and ὑπο- 'somewhat' is irrelevant. ὑποβρόχιος is not otherwise attested. However, semantically it is very apt, since cows must normally have been led to the altar with nooses (as seen in art; for the rings to which cows were tied at Claros see Delattre 1992: 22).

ἀλλὰ τὰ μὲν κατέθηκεν ἐς αὔλιον ὑψιμέλαθρον
δημὸν καὶ κρέα πολλά, μετήορα δ' αἶψ' ἀνάειρεν 135
σῆμα νέης φωρῆς. τὰ δ', ἐπὶ⁴ ξυλά κάγκαν' ἀείρας,
οὐλόποδ' οὐλοκάρηνα πυρὸς κατεδάμνατ' αὐτμῆι.
αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ δὴ πάντα κατὰ χρέος ἤγνυσε δαίμων,
σάνδαλα μὲν προέηκεν ἐς Ἀλφειὸν βαθυδίνην,
ἀνθρακίην δ' ἐμάρανε, κόνιν δ' ἀμάθυνε μέλαιναν 140
παννύχιος, καλὸν δὲ φῶος ἐπέλαμπε Σελήνης.

[Hermes] packed together much desiccated timber and added it in abundance, in a pit sunk into the ground. And the flame began to shine, sending far and wide the puffs of the strongly blazing fire. (115) While famous Hephaestus' force was kindling the fire, he dragged a pair of spiral-horned cows outside by a noose to near the fire – his strength was great – and cast both of them puffing to the ground onto their backs; then as he leaned over he pierced their vital parts and sent them rolling. (120) He added deed to deed after cutting up the meat rich with fat, and roasted it skewered on long wooden spits – the flesh together with the honorific chins and the dark blood enclosed within the intestines. Other parts lay there in their place, but he stretched out the skins on a rugged rock, (125) as still now in later times they are planted there indistinguishably, long-lasting, and have been so for a very long time after these events. And next joyful Hermes pulled off his rich handiwork onto a smooth flat rock, split twelve portions to be assigned by ballot, and added a perfect honorific portion to each. (130) Then glorious Hermes felt a lust for the right to consume the meat, since the smell was tormenting him despite his immortality, so sweet was it. But not even so did his manly spirit listen, though he greatly desired to pass the meat down his sacred throat. Rather, he deposited some parts – the (135) fat and the plentiful meat – in the lodge with the high-ridged roof, and straightaway raised it up on high,⁵ a sign of his recent theft. The rest, including all of the feet and all of the heads, he totally destroyed with the blast of fire, after piling on dry wood. But when the divinity had completed everything as required, he cast his sandals away into the deep-whirling Alpheus, (140) made the embers die down, and levelled the black ash into the sand for the rest of the night; and Selene's fair light shone upon him.

³ Barnes: περῆν M: πέρην' Θ: πέρην p. Though πέρηνημι/περάω normally refers to sea-crossings, Barnes's emendation seems best. Note that infinitives in -ναι are not elided in early epic.

⁴ τὰ δ', ἐπὶ Thomas: ἐπὶ δέ Ω. οὐλόποδ' οὐλοκάρηνα cannot modify ξυλά or τὰ μὲν: οὐλο-/όλο- implies a closer connection than 'along with all of', and Hermes can hardly create a 'sign' which he then burns before anyone sees it. The natural contrast expressed by μὲν... δέ is rather between the flesh and fat (stored) and the rest (burnt); and otherwise the poet carefully details the fate of most of the body-parts, but leaves those mentioned in verse 123 lying around. A definite article is needed, to show that the topic has shifted.

⁵ The sense may be 'suspended in the air' or 'piled up into the air'; see further n. 46.

One point which requires preliminary justification at some length is my translation of 130 ὀσίης. Three constructions of the genitive are possible: (i) ‘lusted after (the) ὀσίη of the meat’; (ii) ‘...the meat of (the) ὀσίη’; or (iii) ‘At that point of (the) ὀσίη...’. In my view, the noun normally means ‘being or behaving in a way authorized by divine law’, killing Apollo’s cattle is not ὄσιος behaviour, and this rules out (ii) and (iii). This suggests an approximate sense, for which *LSS* 115 A21-5 (Cyrene; fourth century, containing earlier material) gives a more precise parallel: for everyone there is ὀσία of the Akamantia and the shrines, but there is not ὀσία for the pure from most places of death.⁶ Here ‘ὀσία of the shrines’ seems to mean ‘religious authorization to consume the meat sacrificed at the shrines’, and ‘ὀσία from places of death’ perhaps ‘religious authorization to consume meat taken away from sacrifices at tombs’. It makes good sense here for Hermes to desire the right to eat his beef.⁷ This meaning does not, however, exhaust the word, and we will return shortly to add further interpretative precision (p. 000; n. 49).

ARE HERMES’ ACTIONS A SACRIFICE?

Burkert took Hermes’ action as a sacrifice, and a detailed *aition* for a real sacrifice. Kahn thought it a sacrifice, but only a ‘pseudo-sacrifice’, ‘au sens où son objet sera de subvertir la bipolarité infrangible [between sacrificer and recipient], non pour la détruire mais pour introduire passage là où il y avait frontière sans recours’. Clay argued that it is not a sacrifice of any sort.⁸

Function and intention were fundamental to animal sacrifice, which involved one class of beings carefully destroying animals in order to render cooperative beings who (they believed) were of a more divine class.⁹ In my view, to call an action without this function a ‘sacrifice’ risks confusion, even if the Greeks might have occasionally used ἱερεῦω or later θύω.¹⁰ Does Hermes, then,

⁶ See Parker 1983: 336-9. Sokolowski prints ὄσιᾶ, but the idiom οὐχ ὀσιᾶ should be preserved.

⁷ It is worth mentioning a different interpretation which is ungrounded. Van der Valk 1942 suggested that the notion ‘acquitted of debts to the divine’ was essential to ὄσιος, in opposition to ἱερός. Jeanmaire 1945 then argued that in six passages, including ours and the Cyrenaean law, ὀσία took on concrete senses based on desacralization. Against Van der Valk’s view of the ὄσιος/ἱερός distinction see e.g. Connor 1988. In three of Jeanmaire’s other passages one can translate ‘religiously acceptable behaviour’, as normal (*Hom. Hymn Dem.* 211, *Ap.* 237, *Herm.* 173); his final passage is corrupt (Diggle 1970: 118-20). Cf. Versnel 2011: 323 n. 45.

⁸ Burkert 1984. Kahn 1978, citation from 46-7: ‘...in the sense that its aim will be to subvert the unbreakable dipole [between sacrificer and recipient], not to destroy it but to introduce a crossing where there was an intractable boundary’. Clay 1989: 116-27.

⁹ I say ‘cooperative’ here rather than ‘well-disposed’ so as to include oath-sacrifices. Nymphs, of intermediary status, may sacrifice to Zeus: [Aesch.] *PV* 529-31. Gods do not sacrifice to each other, but may supplicate and pour libations to each other: for the latter see Patton 2009.

¹⁰ Casabona 1966: 22-5, 81. See Gibert 2003 on gods metaphorically ‘sacrificing’ humans.

aim to make other divinities cooperative by his actions, and does he think himself human, or of an intermediate divinity like that of a nymph, while he acts?¹¹

Regarding the first half of this question, Hermes does not want anyone to know about his actions, let alone to look favourably upon them. The whole theft is conducted secretly under the cover of darkness (66-8). He threatens a witness into silence (92-3), hides the cattle in a steading (106), and tries to elude his mother's notice (145-54). He does not advertise his butchery to anyone, and removes most of the traces after the event.

This interpretation certainly requires us to answer some further questions, which will be addressed below.¹² By contrast, alternative interpretations face a more durable objection: they introduce things about which the text is silent as fundamental aspects of motivation. According to Clay, Hermes expected the gods to come for the meat, then inferred that the gods do not eat meat, then cleared up out of embarrassment. But of expectation, inference and embarrassment the hymn gives no hint.¹³ Leduc suggests that Hermes expected the gods to come but not eat (as for a theoxeny) and that they approve: again, both expectation and approval would be crucial points which the hymnist omitted to mention.¹⁴

It is harder to judge how divine Hermes perceives himself to be, since the text gives little access to his thoughts. However, he is proud of his heritage (*Hom. Hymn Herm.* 59), and the presentation of his hunger suggests that he knows in his θυμός that gods should not eat meat, and thinks that this applies to him. Superficially, Hermes' strong bodily desire for food (64 κρειῶν ἐρατίζων – a formula applied to lions in the *Iliad*) looks like a reason to doubt his divinity, since most Greek literature represents the gods as neither desiring nor eating meat. However, there are various exceptions (notably in comedy), and a coherent interpretation is that Hermes' leonine hunger is a humorous touch.¹⁵ After all, when Apollo also describes Hermes as κρειῶν ἐρατίζων (287), this is in his mind compatible with Hermes' divinity: the hunger is an overstated characterization of Hermes' misbehaviour, and fits easily into the *Hymn's* light-hearted

¹¹ How divine Hermes is must not be confused with his initial status within Olympian society. His actions are explicitly aimed at progressing from his lowly status (cf. *Hom. Hymn Herm.* 166-81).

¹² For example, why does Hermes make twelve portions? Why does he fail to clear up properly?

¹³ Clay 1989: 122-3. She appears to assign Hermes the following reasoning: 'The gods eat meat and will come to my cooking; they have not come, therefore they do not eat; I also cannot eat, therefore I am a god.' I for one could not extract this complicated and invalid reasoning from the passage. Furthermore, Hermes finds himself able not to swallow the meat, rather than unable to, and that is not evidence about divinity: see below.

¹⁴ 2005: 158-62. I discuss Leduc's account of Hermes' actions from 128 onwards below.

¹⁵ Gods eating meat in Aristophanes: *Pax* 202; Hermes at 192-3, 386-8, *Plut.* 1128-30, 1136-7, cf. Versnel 2011: 352-64; for Heracles after his apotheosis, see e.g. *Pax* 741, *LIMC* IV i 798-801, 817-21. In the distant past, Zeus had chosen what looks like fatty meat at Mekone, and Demeter had eaten Pelops' shoulder. Hermes tastes his cooking in Apollodorus' version of our myth (n. 29). Athena, disguised as Mentor, appears to taste σπλάγχνα at *Od.* 3.66 (see Simon 1953: 9-13). All this refutes Vernant 1989: 165: 'If [Hermes] tasted it, he would become a man.'

representation of his mischief and immaturity.¹⁶ More telling is how Hermes' hunger is presented at 130-3, when Hermes still wants to eat but does not. His θυμός overrules temptation, and the fact that it 'did not listen' suggests that it had opposed his hunger before as well, but been ignored: in other words, what changes is the balance of power among his impulses. Specifically, the echo 130 ἔνθ' ὀσίης κρεάων ἠράσσατο ~ 64 κρεῖων ἐρατίζων marks how Hermes' unmediated desire has ceded to recognition of cultural rules. Furthermore, the reason for the intervention of the θυμός is suggested by the double reference to the norm that the gods do not eat meat: Hermes is troubled by the smell 'though immortal', and his throat is specified to be sacred.

Nor, probably, did the audience start with an expectation that Hermes had to learn his full divinity. This is not the case with Apollo, who has similar parentage and illegitimacy but knows his divinity instantly at *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* 131-2.¹⁷ Far from seeding suspicion about Hermes' status, the primary narrator tells us that Hermes was born of two immortal parents (20), is a θεός (54), and had a ἱερός cradle (21, 63).¹⁸

In sum, there are hints that Hermes knows from the start that he is divine and that divinities should not eat meat, and this is probably what the audience would assume anyway; nor is he aiming to propitiate anybody. His actions are, therefore, not a sacrifice by my definition.

HERMES' ACTIONS EVOKE SACRIFICIAL PROCEDURES

Models, perversions and parodies of sacrifice need not be sacrifices in the strict sense, but nevertheless require us to ask in what ways they resemble sacrifice. For example, Prometheus' division of the ox at Mekone aims to dishonour the gods, but must in other respects closely resemble the sacrificial ritual whose *aition* it is. As gods may be portrayed performing sacrificial procedures to provide a legitimating model for sacrifices by humans, so Hermes' actions clearly evoke sacrifices.¹⁹

He kills two flawless cows, exemplary sacrificial victims for whose slaughter the Greeks probably knew no regular context except sacrifices.²⁰ Verses 130-3 emphasize the division of participation in sacrifices, between gods smelling (normally burnt fat not roast meat: Versnel 2011: 310 n. 6) and the human

¹⁶ For infants' strong physical desires, see Democritus 68 B70 DK 'Unmeasured desire belongs to the child, not the man.'

¹⁷ This comparison is actively suggested by *Hom. Hymn Herm.*: Thomas 2009: 290-5.

¹⁸ Kahn 1978: 56 argues that Hermes' divinity is doubtful when he invents a fire-technique viable for humans (vv. 108-11), like a culture-hero. But Thoth and Enki, for example, are divine culture-'heroes', and Hephaestus teaches men firecraft.

¹⁹ On these portrayals, see Patton 2009: 27-180. For Mekone, see e.g. Hes. *Theog.* 535-60.

²⁰ The most difficult passage to square with this view is [Arist.] *Oec.* 1349b11-13, but even there the distinction is probably between perfunctory sacrifice and more formal sacrifice at a sanctuary. Clay 1989: 119 asserts that banqueting is 'sufficiently distinct [from sacrifice] to have its own set of rules', and then dismisses the interpretative schema 'sacrifice' entirely. But, as far as the evidence goes, most banquets entailed a kind of sacrifice, and Clay does not account for the pointed similarities mentioned in this section.

appetite for meat. We also find the language of ritual. This resonance is particularly clear in ὀσίης (130), but we are primed for the sacrificial connotations of other phrases too. ἔργωι δ' ἔργον ὄπαζε (120) presents a repetition typical of ritualized language; since ἔργωι 'handiwork' actually refers to the blood-letting, it is relevant that the stem ἐργ- often means 'sacrifice'.²¹ In v. 137, οὐλο-... οὐλο- is another repetition of a semantic item with ritual connotations (e.g. ὀλοκαυ(σ)τ- and ὀλόκαρπος, of sacrificial offerings); the special connection of feet and heads occurs several times in sacred laws.²² In τέλεον γέρας (129), τέλε(ι)ος is, along with τελήεις, a *vox propria* for sacrificial victims, and the γέρας from the animal is often mentioned in sacred laws. Blood sausages (123-4) and the assignment of portions by lot (129) also occurred at sacrifices.²³ πλαταμῶνι (128) probably evokes the tables placed in sanctuaries for carving or depositions.²⁴ Verse 121, and 127 εἰρύσσατο, unmistakably recall formulaic descriptions of sacrifice in the Homeric poems, while avoiding the exact phrases. Particularly close are:

μίστυλλον τ' ἄρα τᾶλλα καὶ ἀμφ' ὀβελοῖσιν ἔπειραν,
ὄπτησάν τε περιφραδέως, ἐρύσαντό τε πάντα.²⁵

They cut up the rest and skewered them over spits, carefully roasted them, and pulled them all off.

δαῖτ' ἐντυνόμενοι κρέα τ' ὄπτων ἄλλα τ' ἔπειρον *Od.* 3.33

They were roasting meat and skewering other parts in preparation for a feast.

οἱ δ' ἐπεὶ ὄπτησαν κρέ' ὑπέρτερα καὶ ἐρύσαντο... *Od.* x3

When they had roasted the remaining meat and pulled it off...

The *Hymn's* divergence from such formulas allows the poet to describe Hermes' actions in more than usual detail, and suggests that they do not follow predetermined procedures. But the overlap simultaneously evokes those procedures.²⁶ Similarly 138 κατὰ χρέος superficially means 'according to (his) need', i.e. to hide the traces from Apollo, but given the foregoing, the sense

²¹ 'Doing' and ritual: Casabona 1966: 301-4; Yatromanolakis and Roilos 2004: 9; Richardson 1974: 303-4.

²² Burkert 1983: 105 n. 11.

²³ Sacrificial sausages: *Ar. Ach.* 145-6, 1040-1 with Olson 2002; *Ath.* 4 138e-9a; Sokolowski on *LSCG* 151 A52 αἱμάτιον. Sacrificial ballots: *Plu. QConv.* 642f-4, *LSAM* 50.35-6 (Miletus, fifth century), *Hsch.* s.v. μοιρολογχεῖν.

²⁴ Carving: Durand 1986: 116-23, esp. fig. 38. Depositions: Gill 1974. For other tables, Gill 1991, Jameson 1994.

²⁵ *Il.* 1.465-6, 2.428-9, *Od.* 14.430-1; cf. *Il.* 7.317-18, *Od.* 19.422-3 (*v.l.*, in a δαίς-preparation which is not explicitly sacrificial).

²⁶ *Hom. Hymn Herm.*'s avoidance of formulas is emphasized by Van Nortwick 1975: 107-10. Clay 1989: 119 n. 82 takes it as evidence that Hermes' actions have nothing to do with sacrifice.

‘according to set [i.e. ritual] procedure’ can hardly be elided.²⁷ Finally, Hermes’ actions as a whole are proleptic of his role as patron of official κήρυκες who butchered the victims at some public sacrifices; in v. 331, Zeus will recognise Hermes as φυὴν κήρυκος ἔχοντα.²⁸

These links to sacrificial procedure were simplified by Apollodorus, who has Hermes boil and eat parts of the meat.²⁹ A different class of parallels come from other Greek narratives of cattle-rustling. The most famous extant one is that of Nestor’s companions at *Il.* 11.670-761. They steal their cattle and drive them back, at night, on an itinerary involving Alpheus and Pylos (all as in the *Hymn*), before sacrificing them in celebration. In a private enterprise, Heracles steals Geryon’s cattle and eventually brings them to Tiryns where they are sacrificed to Hera.³⁰

SACRIFICES AND LITERATURE: SOME METHODOLOGY

Hermes’ actions are not a sacrifice, but evoke sacrificial procedures and vocabulary, prompting us to compare them with those procedures. But how we should do that is not trivial. I will begin with four observations which I hope are relatively uncontroversial when stated.

(i) Greek sacrificial procedures were composed of numerous elements which could not be combined promiscuously. The significance of each element was partly context-dependent, and historical rituals were constructed from a series of elements which was felt to have a certain coherence.

(ii) Certain sets of elements frequently co-occurred, as the kernels of various ‘types’ of sacrifice. However, one must be cautious about assuming that two sacrifices of the same type (particularly that which is often called ‘Olympian θυσία’) were identical in all their elements, since our sources indicate a range of local idiosyncracies.³¹

(iii) Literary sources are selective, and generic norms affect how significant it is to omit particular elements. For example, most literary representations of sacrifice do not mention preliminary purifications, but that does not imply that such purifications were historically rare.³²

(iv) Literary representations are subject to both the logic of a broader narrative and the author’s literary aims (e.g. a particular characterization). They are not neutral documentation. Thus, given a good reason, an author could simultaneously evoke more than one ‘type’ of sacrifice.

²⁷ For κατὰ χρέος ‘according to proper procedure’, see Ap. Rhod. 4.889 (of stowing ship’s tackle), LSJ s.v. χρέος II 2.

²⁸ For κήρυκες at sacrifices see Burkert 1984: 840.

²⁹ *Bibl.* 3.112 ‘After sacrificing [καταθύσας] two, he nailed the hides to rocks, and of the meat he boiled and consumed some, and burned the rest.’ Kahn 1978: 67 nicely says that Apollod. reduces the ‘épaisseur opératoire’ of *Hom. Hymn Herm.*’s account.

³⁰ Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.106-12. For Heracles and Hermes, see below, p. 000.

³¹ See e.g. Bremmer 1996: 249-68, *ThesCRA* i 95-129, against the simplified composite picture in e.g. Burkert 1983: 3-6, Detienne 1989: 9-13.

³² For the norms of archaic hexameter, see Kirk 1980: 64, Hitch 2007. It is legitimate to consider why a generic norm might have turned an essential for real rituals into a rarity for fictional ones, but that will not be my concern here.

I now turn from this groundwork to previous analyses of our passage, beginning with Burkert 1984, which takes insufficient account of points (i) and (iv). With characteristic erudition, Burkert amassed parallels between Hermes' actions and elements known in cults, but the cults used as parallels form a very disparate set – they belong to different periods, different communities (including non-Greek ones), and mix Olympian and chthonian recipients. Burkert admitted this heterogeneity, but nevertheless suggested that Hermes' actions could as a whole reflect a real cult. However, since each similarity is only partial, he did not show that such a cult would have had a coherent significance; he simply assumed that there was a single sacrificial comparandum. Furthermore, he did not consider how narrative logic affects the description.

Kahn 1978 fails to take account of points (ii), (iii) and (iv). She takes the only relevant schema for judging Hermes' 'sacrifice' (as she sees it) to be the composite one of Olympian *θυσία*, interpreted through the narrative of Prometheus' ox-division. This imposes 'rules': her chapter is entitled 'Contre les règles: un sacrifice efficace'. All of the many omissions and divergences from the schema are ripe for interpretation. For example, Kahn thought that a common sacrificial element was the willingness of the victim, which is opposed by the cows' struggle at *Hom. Hymn Herm.* 116-19; but the victim's willingness (even setting aside the question of whether it was really needed) is not expected in archaic hexameter descriptions of sacrifices, so its absence is scarcely interpretable. Kahn barely considers broader narrative logic.³³

These objections certainly do not render Kahn's study worthless for understanding Hermes and his *Hymn*. In particular, 'Promethean' sacrifice does indeed offer an important interpretative schema (and we can now add this point to the evidence of the previous section that the *Hymn* is evoking sacrificial procedures). Hermes and Prometheus are related; both are renowned helpers of humans; both make a fire-technique available to humans; this act is intimately related to expert bovine butchery, and to sexual reproduction.³⁴ Prometheus' division also causes the distinction of eating (human) and savouring (divine) which, as mentioned, is evoked in *Hom. Hymn Herm.* 130-3. The hymnist probably knew Hesiod's treatment of Prometheus, and may allude to it.³⁵ The two

³³ The resulting analysis concludes that Hermes collapses the normal distinction between sacrificer and recipient, as in other respects he can penetrate boundaries without destroying their validity for others; in particular, by killing then refusing to eat the cows he can himself pierce the boundary between non-divine and divine. The last claim has been rejected above. Kahn argued her position via some dubious philology, which I discuss in Thomas 2012. On the 'willing victim' see Georgoudi in this volume, Naiden 2007.

³⁴ This is more subtle in Hermes' case: as well as the phallic fire-plough at *Hom. Hymn Herm.* 109-10, see 493-4 where Hermes promises to introduce Apollo's cows to reproduction; cf. Kahn 1978: 56.

³⁵ At *Hom. Hymn Herm.* 243 *ἴγνῶ δ' οὐδ' ἠγνοίησε*, Apollo recognises Maia and sees through Hermes' trick of pretending to be innocently asleep, which has been compared to a hidden ember (237-42); Apollo subsequently (256-9) threatens him with punishment in Tartarus. At Hes. *Theog.* 551 *ἴγνῶ ῥ' οὐδ' ἠγνοίησε*, Zeus sees through Prometheus' trick about dividing the ox; Prometheus later hides the seed of fire; Zeus ends up punishing

narratives are also opposites in important ways (see Table 1, and below), which nuance the intertextual relationship rather than detracting from it.

| Prometheus (Hesiod) | Hermes (<i>Hom. Hymn Herm.</i>) |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Unequal butchery. | Equal butchery. |
| Attempt to outwit Zeus. | Not even communicative. |
| Later needs to steal divine fire. | First decides to invent human-friendly fire-technique. |

The third and final work I wish to consider is Leduc 2005: 158-62. Her discussion takes better account of the four observations with which this section began, but is unsatisfactory in other ways. I have mentioned that Leduc suggests, without any hint from the text, that Hermes starts by preparing a human-style δαίς which turns into a theoxeny of which the other gods approve. She goes on to suggest that at verse 128 Hermes converts his rite into one involving *τραπεζώματα*, i.e. deposition of portions for gods who are *not* expected to come, and finally (134-6) into a dedication; this apparently incoherent series would be justified by a literary point of demonstrating Hermes' mastery of exchanges.³⁶ However, the allusion to a table (128 *πλαταμών*) is insufficient as a prompt for us to shift schema to that of *τραπεζώματα*. For one thing, tables were used in a variety of sacrificial situations; more particularly, the rock here functions as a carving-table, whereas an offering-table very probably received pre-cut depositions.

HERMES' ACTIONS RECONSIDERED

Let me recapitulate the groundwork up to this point. Hermes' actions are not a sacrifice, but they evoke sacrificial procedure, including the sequence of ritual actions for which Prometheus' ox-division formed the *aition*. The poet had to negotiate potential conflicts between these evocations and the demands of the broader narrative context; his choices were partly influenced by literary norms. In this section, I give my results in interpreting Hermes' actions on this basis.

Generally, the poet places weight on narrative coherence and does not evoke elements which would conflict with it. Hermes cannot waste time on defining a boundary for his actions (*ἴδρυσις* of the sacred site), or setting up a cauldron in which to boil the flesh slowly; nor does he find barley grains to hand and sprinkle them over the cows; he has no need to wash his hands, or pour liquid as if in libation. Narrative logic motivates Hermes' βόθρος (112), which enables him to create a large fire whose logs are not too high up (he is only an infant, after all) and whose blaze will be less conspicuous if Apollo is already chasing him; its

him as if in Tartarus (West 1966: 313-15). The phrase cited is not extant elsewhere. δόλον αἰπὺν occurs only at *Hom. Hymn Herm.* 66, and of Pandora at Hes. *Theog.* 589, *Op.* 83.

³⁶ The *Hymn* certainly emphasizes this mastery, especially at 516-17 *τιμὴν γὰρ παρ Ζηνὸς ἔχεις ἐπαμοίβιμα ἔργα | θήσειν ἀνθρώποισι*, 'For you have from Zeus the honour that you will lay down the business of interchange for humankind.'

ash can be hidden more quickly than a blood-spattered stone altar.³⁷ Hermes also cannot stun the cows from above (perhaps as an infant he is too short), but is powerful enough to throw them onto their backs. We are told that he bores through their αἰών (the precise anatomical sense of which here is unclear), because his capacity for piercing things is thematized in the hymn. Both actions are also conditioned by an intratext: this initial treatment of the cows echoes the treatment of the tortoise at vv. 41-6. Both animals are overturned and have their αἰών pierced through their fronts (in particular 42 αἰῶν' ἐξετόρησεν ~ 119 δι' αἰῶνας τετορήσας). The parallelism sets up the *Hymn*'s eventual exchange of lyre (dead tortoise) for cows.³⁸ Finally, one might infer from the omission of σπλάγχνα, which in epic are normally spit-roasted and tasted before the rest of the meat, that the poet wished to focus on the twelve equal, substantial portions. We will return to their importance shortly.³⁹

To my mind the only element whose evocation is noteworthy avoided, given the factors of narrative logic and generic norms, is the act of exsanguination, which could have been mentioned alongside the phrase δι' αἰῶνας τετορήσας which has replaced the act of slitting the throat. The exsanguination seems to be present merely in 120 ἔργωι. The 'euphemism' is unusual in epic, though it is found in vase-painting, where σφάξις is hardly ever depicted except in oath-sacrifices (σφάγια).⁴⁰

The presence of other elements suggest sacrificial rituals which take us beyond the comparison with Prometheus' ox-division. The ritual connotation of κατὰ χρέος would be confusing if the only applicable schema were that of Prometheus, since Hermes' actions are quite different. This tells us nothing specific about the other schema(s) evoked. However, the reference to distribution by lot may well have meant something precise to the audience. Certainly, characterization goes some way to explaining it, since it is one of the *Hymn*'s many prolepses of Hermes' future fields of operation, and adds to the contrast between Hermes' equal and Prometheus' unequal butchery.⁴¹ But these factors seem too weak to provide a full explanation: lots were, as far as we know, a peripheral association for Hermes, and the equality of the portions is already strongly emphasized by the assignment of a τέλειον γέρας to each, in pointed renunciation of the norm whereby very few participants received a γέρας.

³⁷ Building a fire in a depression also protects against the wind, and is regularly attested in Greece. We know little about the archaic and classical cultic significances of βόθρος: see Ekroth 2002: 60-74, which sadly leaves aside archaeological evidence. For pits in sanctuaries which have traditionally (but without cogent evidence) been labelled βόθροι and related to chthonic rituals, see Riethmüller 1999.

³⁸ Other acts of piercing occur at *Hom. Hymn Herm.* 178, 283, and the motif is rightly central to Kahn 1978.

³⁹ The σπλάγχνα are also omitted from Hesiod's description of Prometheus' sacrifice: Vernant 1989: 26 n. 17 explains that their intermediate status was incompatible with the sharp lines drawn there.

⁴⁰ See Van Straten 1995: 103-13.

⁴¹ Hermes is a patron of lots in Eur. fr. 24a. Lots are associated with equal portions in e.g. Plut. *Quaest. conv.* 643a.

As well as the equality of the portions, there is the problem of their number: why does Hermes make twelve portions if he is the only diner envisaged? The *raison d'être* of the eleven extra portions is not intrinsic (i.e. to be enjoyed by consumers), but a symbolic relevance can readily be perceived in their relationship of equality with Hermes' portion. Hermes carves them to symbolize his goal of attaining equal honours among a group of divinities. We have already been given hints of his ambition, in his eagerness to have contact with Apollo and his wily comment that the tortoise will benefit him (35); at 166-73 he explicitly states his ambition to lead an Olympian lifestyle.⁴² The hypothesized symbolism enhances the contrast between Hermes and Prometheus. The latter's unequal butchery unwittingly engenders the unequal division of the human and divine conditions, whereas Hermes' egalitarian butchery asserts his desire to equate his status with that of the other gods; Hermes and Apollo are brought to harmony at the end of the *Hymn*, whereas Hesiod leaves Prometheus and Zeus at loggerheads. However, the number twelve is a clear allusion to Dodecatheon-cults, which takes us beyond Prometheus.⁴³ A natural interpretation is that the poet alludes to a specific Dodecatheon. Alternatively, the Dodecatheon stands more vaguely as a symbol for an associated abstraction, namely equality among gods. In the next section we will see general arguments in favour of the more specific option.

Finally, the presence of some features is the more remarkable given that they override narrative logic, to which the poet generally adhered. Hermes kills not one but two cows. He forgets to clear away the skins, and actively leaves the steaks as a sign, when he is otherwise careful to cover his tracks. In summary, several features resist a simple explanation from the *Hymn's* narrative concerns, including the contrast with Prometheus. These are the butchery of two cows, and possibly the allusion to a Dodecatheon and to ballot, and the debris. It is in this residue that we will be best able to discern evocation of other sacrificial procedures.

BEYOND SIMILARITY: *AITIA* AND PRECURSORS

Hermes' treatment of the hides causes a topographical feature (a rock-formation) which is still visible; indeed, lines 124-6 tautologously use the expressions of continuity typical in *aitia*.⁴⁴ Since Hermes' failure in clearing up goes flatly against his apparent desire to do so and his cunning, the creation of aetiological debris must have been fundamental to some other poetic concern.⁴⁵ This

⁴² We come to realise that at 35 Hermes already saw the lyre as a potential bargaining counter by which he could keep the cows he already intended to steal, and thus acquire τιμή.

⁴³ On Dodecatheon, see Georgoudi 1996, Long 1987, Weinreich 1937.

⁴⁴ Pelliccia 1989; cf. e.g. Hdt. 3.48.3 τῆι καὶ νῦν ἔτι χρέωνται κατὰ ταῦτά, Call. *Hymn* 3.77-8 εἰσέτι καὶ νῦν... μένει.

⁴⁵ In Sophocles' *Ichneutai*, Hermes kills the cows to get gut strings for his lyre. But in *Hom. Hymn Herm.* he constructs the lyre before stealing the cows. More specifically an alternative account, which possibly preceded *Hom. Hymn Herm.* in the *Megalai Ehoiai* ('Hes.' fr. 256: cf. schol. Ant. Lib. 23), focused on a man called Battos, who saw Hermes mid-theft, promised not to snitch, but was later found susceptible to bribery and turned into a silent rock, namely 'Battos' look-out' in SW Arcadia. Our hymnist may thus have

reinforces the likelihood that the σῆμα of meat (134-6), which within the *Hymn* does not signal anything to anyone, is also an *aition* for an object existing in the poet's time – probably another stone formation.⁴⁶ There is a third possible topographical *aition*. Though Hermes quenches the embers (140 ἐμάρανε), a 'glinting fire' is still identifiable at verses 415-16.⁴⁷ The ashes could therefore be taken as the foundations of an ash altar expanded later by human worshippers. The *Hymn to Hermes* locates all three features by the Alpheus (101, 139) in the region of Pylos (398; cf. 216, 342, 355). This specificity, and the *aitia*'s rather forced inclusion, strongly suggest that they were to be identifiable for the audience. And in general, the local precision of ritual *aitia* is crucial to their ability to forge a 'wormhole' between the audience-community and the actions of gods in the legendary past, and thus to their socio-cultural value.⁴⁸

Hermes' sacrifice-like actions cannot have a full causal relationship to the ritual(s) evoked, since he must hide them. However, there are several reasons to think that their relationship to ritual is importantly affine to aetiology. The poet specifically chose this episode from many possible means to work in the topographical aetiologies, which prompts us to seek a concerted function. Such a function would further focus the interpretative lens provided by Prometheus' (aetiological) ox-division, and give fuller force to the ritual connotations of κατὰ χρέος and ὀσίη.⁴⁹ Sacrificial rites are standard territory for aetiological myth, since they are benefitted by antique and venerable precursors in obvious ways; Hermes' divinity makes him particularly apt to offer such legitimation. A precursor-relationship is also suggested by the passage's preview of Hermes' patronage of κήρυκες at sacrifices, and by the interpretation that his carving symbolizes his *future* equal status with other gods. Finally, the longer *Homeric Hymns*, like the aetiologies in which they abound, offered a shortcut through

chosen to reconfigure a motif of aetiological petrification, by transferring it to the passage under consideration.

⁴⁶ Depending on one's interpretation of μετήορα (n. 5), one might think of a stalactite, stalagmite, or cairn. Possibly the audience's local knowledge made them favour one option, or possibly the *aition* was *ad hoc* and designedly versatile. Leduc 2005: 159 suggests that the σῆμα evokes suspended dedications in general, rather than a topographical feature. Less plausibly, Crudden 1994: 148 envisages a rite where sacrificial portions were actually piled up, and Eitrem 1906: 259 n. 16 saw an *aition* for curing meat (though Hermes' meat has been roasted).

⁴⁷ πῦρ ἀμάρυσσον (Lohsee: ἀμαρύσσων Ω) | ἐγκρύψαι μεμαώς. Lohsee's emendation recovers the precise idiom ἐγκρύπτω πῦρ 'I cover a fire within ashes' (e.g. *Od.* 5.488-91, *Ar. Av.* 841, *Arist. Juv.* 470a12).

⁴⁸ See e.g. Kowalzig 2007: 24-32. The politicized, manipulable quality of *aitia* is a further reason not to assume – as Burkert 1984 assumed in our case – that they straightforwardly reflect ritual wherever possible. Johnston 2002: 111 aptly says that *Hom. Hymn Herm.*'s myth 'rephrases' ritual; cf. Furley 1981: 41-6.

⁴⁹ Compare *Hom. Hymn Dem.* 211: Demeter takes the *kykeon* rather than wine ὀσίη ἐνεκεν – primarily because it is not ὀσίη for mourners to drink wine, but also 'for the sake of (a future instance of) ὀσίη', namely the performance of the ritual drinking of the *kykeon* by Eleusinian initiates, for which Demeter's action is the *aition*. Very similar is *Eur. IT* 1461 ὀσίαζ ἐκάτι in another *aition*.

space-time by which the god became virtually present to the audience at the religious festivals where they were most likely performed.⁵⁰

Given these considerations about the poetic efficacy of evoking specific ritual(s) for which the audience find a precursor in Hermes' actions, I suggest the following position: the poet evoked a contemporary cult of a Dodecatheon including Hermes, which was of significance to the audience; Hermes' actions are not just similar to this cult, but are a precursor of it, performed in the same place, and leaving debris which becomes part of the sanctuary; this was in the Western Peloponnese by the Alpheus, and included some indoor correlate for rocks 'piled up' or 'suspended', a rock which could be interpreted as being covered in a petrified skin, and perhaps an ash altar; the cult would involve the sacrifice of two cows and perhaps distribution of portions by ballot. Other elements in the narrative may be overdetermined, and belong both to the cult evoked and to the narrative flow. For example, it is merely *possible* that two cows were butchered into twelve equal divine portions with γέρα which were deposed on an offering-table before the remainder was divided among humans, the head and feet being burnt.⁵¹

A less streamlined, fallback hypothesis is that the evocations are all relevant to the audience, but relate to different sanctuaries in one vicinity.

THE PERFORMANCE OF THE *HYMN TO HERMES*

Ours is the only passage in the *Hymn to Hermes* which is so strikingly designed around local knowledge.⁵² This suggests that the location of Hermes' actions is the location of the *Hymn*'s first performance. The *Hymn* does not need to and does not name this location, since Hermes must act in a secretive place, not yet populous enough for a name. The topographical information can be summarized by verse 398:

ἐς Πύλον ἡμαθόεντα ἐπ' Ἀλφειοῦ πόρον ἴζον.
They reached sandy Pylos and the πόρος of Alpheus.

This is related to known hexameter formulas whose referent is Thryon / Thryoessa:

οἱ δὲ Πύλον τ' ἐνέμοντο καὶ Ἀρήνην ἐρατεινήν
καὶ Θρύον Ἀλφειοῦ πόρον

⁵⁰ The 'shortcut' is created not only by *aitia*, but by the vividness of the narrative and the deixis of the closing χαῖρε-formula (e.g. *Hom. Hymn Herm.* 579); it is related to the desire of many lyric hymns to induce an actual epiphany. For the *communis opinio* that the *Homeric Hymns* were for performance at festivals, see e.g. Càssola 1975: xiii-xvi.

⁵¹ The twelve gods receive a procession, music, and τραπεζώματα in LSAM 32 (Magnesia on the Meander, 197/6). Their cult in other places is known only patchily: Long 1987.

⁵² Admittedly, *Hom. Hymn Herm.* 552-66 does describe an oracle near Delphi in a deliberately riddling manner, where I believe the audience need some awareness of the Thriai and Corycian cave if they are to see the *full* complexity of Apollo's riddle. It is impossible to estimate how widespread such knowledge was at the period.

As for those who inhabited Pylos and lovely Arene and Thryon, the ford of the Alpheus...

ἔστι δέ τις Θρυόεσσα πόλις, αἰπεῖα κολώνη,
τηλοῦ ἐπ' Ἀλφειῶι, νεάτη Πύλου ἡμαθόεντος
There is a state called Thryoessa, a steep hill, far away on the Alpheus,
on the edge of Sandy Pylos.

καὶ Θρύον Ἀλφειοῖο πόρον...
καὶ Πύλον ἡμαθόεντα
... and Thryon, the ford of the Alpheus... and sandy Pylos.⁵³

However, verbal similarities do not entail that the *Hymn to Hermes* also refers to Thryon. The Alpheus must have had other fords including one for visitors to Olympia, and in any case πόρος can also mean 'course', as at Pindar *Olympian* 1.92 Ἀλφειοῦ πόρῳι, 10.48 πόρον Ἀλφειοῦ 'the river Alpheus'.⁵⁴ As the passages about Thryon suggest, Greeks of the period envisaged a large ancient region called 'Pylos' with the Alpheus near its border.⁵⁵

In sum, the description of *Hom. Hymn Herm.* 398 could signify a long stretch of the banks of the lower Alpheus. However, only one Dodecatheon is known in this area, namely at Olympia, and this fits remarkably well with several other features of the *Hymn*.

Firstly, Hermes and Apollo, the two main characters whose attainment of friendship is traced in the *Hymn*, shared one of the six altars of the Dodecatheon at Olympia (Herodorus *FGrH* 31 F 34a). Secondly, classical βουθυσίαι are known for the cult: Psaumis conducts conspicuous ones during the Games at Pindar(?), *Ol.* 5.5.⁵⁶ Thirdly, Hermes was highly regarded at Olympia, as a patron of κήρυκες at the Games, and for his agonistic, palaestral side.⁵⁷ It is precisely in our passage that the *Hymn* alludes to those functions: the way Hermes casts down the cows (118) puts us in mind of a champion boy wrestler. The Games are separately related to the Dodecatheon, in so far as Pindar could imagine them as parts of the same foundation in *Olympian* 10.

⁵³ *Il.* 2.591-2, 11.711-12, *Hom. Hymn Ap.* 423-4. Thryon's location is unclear. Strabo and Demetrius were probably guessing when they equated it with Epitalion; Makrysia is an alternative possibility. See Hope Simpson and Lazenby 1970: 83, *Lfgre* II 1066, Visser 1997: 511-12. Leduc (2005: 151) thinks that Hermes' actions must be at Epitalion.

⁵⁴ I have not found archaeological consensus on where visitors to Olympia crossed the Alpheus. Pritchett 1980: 267 assumes a ford near the sanctuary.

⁵⁵ Fortunately we need not discuss the confusion between Messenian, Triphylian, and Elean Pylos: see *Lfgre* s.v. Πύλος, Frame 2006. The issue would, however, become important for a political analysis of *Hom. Hymn Herm.* based on my results.

⁵⁶ Paus. 5.15.10 is the only source for regular sacrifices for the Dodecatheon at Olympia. These are 'old-fashioned' but not necessarily old. They do not involve animal sacrifices.

⁵⁷ See e.g. Pind. *Ol.* 6.79 'Hermes... who presides over the Games and shares in the prizes'. For the sacrificial duties of Elean heralds at 5th-century Olympia see Pollux 4.91-2.

Fourthly, the aetiologies are compatible with the landscape at Olympia. Those of the hides petrified on a rock, and of the probable pile of petrified meat, were versatile and interpretable there as at most places. If Hermes left ashes visible for aetiological reasons, Olympia had the most famous ash altar of the Greek world. The hymn also refers to a ‘cave’ (401) in the landscape, and while the geology around Olympia is poor in caves, there were artificial grottoes in the sanctuary, most notably the ‘Idaean cave’ which was associated with Cronus and Rhea, who were one of the divine pairs in the Dodecatheon.⁵⁸

We might expect the *Hymn to Hermes* to engage with the *aition* for the Dodecatheon and ash altar at Olympia transmitted by Pindar, namely that Heracles founded them.⁵⁹ There are indeed noteworthy hints of this. Just before our passage, Hermes is called Διὸς ἄλκιμος υἱός (101): this is a formula for Heracles, here used instead of the more normal Κυλλήνιος Ἑρμῆς, κρατὺς Ἀργεῖφόντης, or Διὸς ἀγλαὸς υἱός.⁶⁰ Heracles’ institutions at Olympia were placed after his recovery of cows from Augeas by Pindar and after the Cretan bull by Diodorus 4.13.4-14.1 – both bovine-capturing exploits. Hermes’ impressive strength in wrestling two cows to the floor (118) may allude playfully to cults of Heracles where ephebes had to imitate him by lifting up the sacrificial cow.⁶¹

A separate line of argument also suggests Olympia during the Games as a promising context for the *Hymn to Hermes*. That such a long and virtuosic hymn was composed at all implies a centre with the repute and/or cash to attract rhapsodes of interstate calibre. Such a centre would also increase the likelihood of the hymn being disseminated and saved for posterity.⁶² Of the possible locations along the fifth-century Alpheus, Olympia is the most likely. No other figures at all in our patchy record of archaic and classical Greek music. Several sources mention musical performances on the periphery of the Games, besides epinicia and theoric choruses. In the early fourth century Dionysius I of Syracuse employed rhapsodes to perform his own poetry. A rhapsode of uncertain date called Cleomenes performed Empedocles’ *Katharmoi*. Dio Chrysostom’s portrayal of the non-athletic visitors includes ‘many poets singing their poems,

⁵⁸ For the Idaean cave see Pind.(?) *Ol.* 5.18 + schol. 42a, and Weniger 1907: 155-62 versus Hampe 1951: 336-40. Settlers at Olympia apparently imported to Cronus’ Hill the Cretan story that Curetes nurtured Zeus in a cave unbeknownst to Cronus. On other artificial grottoes at Olympia, Elderkin 1941: 132-5.

⁵⁹ *Ol.* 6.67-70, 10.43-9, 57-60. Burkert thought *Hom. Hymn Herm.* could be ‘either a rival tradition or a playful preview’ of Heracles’ sacrifices at Olympia (1984: 840 n. 33): the latter is more accurate, since Hermes is not precisely *founding* anything. Paus. 5.13.8 cites the Curete Heracles or ‘local heroes’ as alternative founders. On the politics of such alternatives, Ulf 1997.

⁶⁰ Διὸς ἄλκιμος υἱός applies to Heracles three times in the Hesiodic corpus, and is borrowed by Pind. *Ol.* 10.44-5, Theoc.(?) *Id.* 25.42.

⁶¹ See Theophr. *Char.* 27.5 with Diggle 2004. *Hom. Hymn Herm.* may also have fashioned its myth after Heracles’ abduction of Geryon’s cattle. The arguments are beyond my scope here: see Davies 2006, Thomas 2009: 250-1.

⁶² *Hom. Hymn Herm.* had reached Athens by the time of Soph. *Ichneutai*: see Pearson 1917 i 228, Vergados 2013: 79-86.

and other praising them', and it would be excessively cautious not to assume this situation for the fifth century too.⁶³

In the preceding section I posited a significant relationship between Hermes' actions and a sacrifice to a Dodecatheon known to the *Hymn*'s audience, with possible references to further cults in the vicinity. The only known Dodecatheon which fits the poem's geography was at Olympia. This performance context – perhaps specifically during the Games – also fits well with various independent considerations. To my mind, the theory that the *Hymn to Hermes* was composed for performance at Olympia therefore carries a high degree of coherence and conviction.

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This conclusion about the performance-context of the *Hymn to Hermes* will not be of equal interest to all readers. However, I hope that my methodology, together with the worked example, will help scholars of both more literary and more historical persuasions to think about how to interpret literary sources for Greek religion sensitively. Several interlocking factors influence literary compositions with a relationship to sacrifice, and the desire to describe a rite to future scholars was never a high priority. Therefore, no single interpretative 'key' is likely to tell the whole story. Our hymnist chose to mould a myth which – so far as we know – had been unrelated to Olympia, so as to include aetiologies for certain topographical features of the sanctuary, and evocations of a sacrificial ritual performed there. The surrounding narrative imposes specific logical constraints and competing literary goals, which play a larger part in shaping Hermes' actions than has generally been admitted. Furthermore, the references to future cult are encoded according to generic norms which allow for selectivity in descriptions of sacrifice. One of the poet's main purposes was probably to forge a connection between the two audiences – human and divine – of his hymn. But the episode also gives a preview of Hermes' 'kerykal' and palaestral functions, and characterizes him: his actions turn innately towards the sacred; he is like and unlike Prometheus; he seeks full Olympian status; his strength and cunning are praised.⁶⁴ Only with an analysis sensitive to this range of motives can we learn something both about a sacrifice at Olympia, and about the *Hymn*'s mode of engagement with its audience.

ABBREVIATIONS NOT IN *OCD*³

LfggrE: B. Snell et al. (eds.), *Lexikon des frühgriechischen Epos*. Göttingen. 1955-2010.

ThesCRA: *Thesaurus cultus et rituum antiquorum*. Basel and Los Angeles. 2004.

⁶³ Dionysius: Diod. Sic. 14.109 'He also sent the best rhapsodes, so that by presenting his poems during the *panegyris* they might bring Dionysius repute... When the rhapsodes undertook to present Dionysius' poems, at first the crowds ran up because of the quality of the performers' voices, and all were impressed. But afterwards they reconsidered the weakness of the poems and ridiculed Dionysius.' Cleomenes: Dicaearchus fr. 87. Dio Chrys. 8.9. According to Pl. *Hp. mi.* 368c, Hippias brought to Olympia hexameter (and other) poems which he had written; performance is not stated explicitly. See in general Weiler 1997.

⁶⁴ cf. Apollo's impressed responses at 405-8, 436.

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