LUGALBANDA AND HERMES

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In recent years, scholars have increasingly come to recognize the pervasive influence of the Near East on nascent Greek culture. In particular, a large number of stylistic, structural, and thematic parallels between Akkadian and Greek poetry have been identified. Here, I add to the list of parallels by exploring the striking similarities between the first 150 lines of the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* and the Neo-Sumerian Lugalbanda epics, especially the newly translated *Lugalbanda in the Mountain Cave* (Black et al., 1998–). This case diverges from most previously detected examples in that there are not only similarities in the main points of the narrative, but also a number of shared details. The correspondences as a whole suggest that the Lugalbanda material played a role in the genesis of the *Hymn to Hermes*. At the same time, both the outline and the details of the story take on new meanings when they are imported to a different cultural context.

As the Sumerian epic *Lugalbanda in the Mountain Cave* opens, Lugalbanda is identified as the youngest of eight heroic brothers born to the goddess Urac. His seven siblings have been raised to positions of leadership in the army of Enmerkar, king of Uruk,[1] while he is left to follow "in awed silence." To make matters worse, during a march Lugalbanda becomes ill and incapacitated. His grieving brothers leave him in a mountain cave with some supplies and provisions that are obviously analogous to grave goods, planning to bury him on their return journey if he dies. Lying immobile in the cave, Lugalbanda prays to Utu the sun god, Inanna the evening star, and Suen the moon. At sunrise on the next day, Lugalbanda is healed and emerges from the cave, where he nibbles lifesaving plants and drinks lifesaving water. He sets an ambush near his cave, though its purpose is left unexplained until later in the poem. In the evening he sets out with some of the supplies from the cave. At a campsite, he makes a fire by striking stones together and prepares a special food (LB I 276–99):

> Repeatedly he struck [the stones] together. He laid the glowing (?) coals on the open ground; they went onto the open ground. The fine flintstone caused a spark. Its fire shone out for him over the wasteland like the sun. Not knowing how to bake bread or a cake, not knowing an oven, with just seven coals he baked *gizi*ecta dough. While the

1. Many Assyriologists now refer to Uruk as Unug. In this paper I follow the older practice in order to avoid confusion.

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> bread was baking by itself, he pulled up *culhi* reeds of the mountains, roots and all, and stripped their branches. He packed up all the cakes as a day's ration.[2]

Next comes a detailed description of a wild bull browsing the plants in the mountains and drinking from the river. Lugalbanda captures it, presumably in the ambush he set earlier, and fashions a halter for it from a juniper tree, which he uproots and trims with his knife. In the same way, he captures two wild goats and tethers them. Then he lies down, overcome by sleep, and Zangara the god of dreams bellows at him like a bull (LB I 351–60):

> Who will slaughter (?) a brown wild bull for me? Who will make its fat melt for me? He shall take my axe whose metal is tin,[3] he shall wield my dagger which is of iron. Like an athlete I shall let him bring away the brown wild bull, the wild bull of the mountains, I shall let him like a wrestler make it submit. Its strength will leave it. When he offers it before the rising sun, let him heap up like barleycorns the heads of the brown goat and the nanny goat, both the goats; when he has poured out their blood in the pit—let their smell waft out in the desert so that the alert snakes of the mountains will sniff it.

Lugalbanda awakes, performs the actions described in the dream, and prepares a ritual meal (LB I 371–93):

> As the sun was rising . . . , Lugalbanda, invoking the name of Enlil, made An, Enlil, Enki, and Ninhursaja sit down to a banquet[4] at the pit, at the place in the mountains which he had prepared. The banquet was set, the libations were poured—dark beer, alcoholic drink, light emmer beer, wine for drinking which is pleasant to the taste. Over the plain he poured cool water as a libation. He put the knife to the flesh of the brown goats and he roasted the dark livers there. He let their smoke rise there, like incense put on the fire. As if Dumuzi had brought in the good savors of the cattle pen, so An, Enlil, Enki and Ninhursaja consumed the best part of the food prepared by Lugalbanda.

To conclude the ritual meal, Lugalbanda apparently (the text becomes lacunose at this point) sets up altars of the three deities to whom he prayed in the cave: Utu, Inanna, and Suen. Upon these altars he sets out the cakes that he prepared.[5] As the tablet becomes increasingly difficult to read, this segment of the epic closes with a detailed description of several demons or spirits who appear in the night, but their relationship to the narrative is unclear.

LUGALBANDA IN SUMERIAN POETRY

Lugalbanda, a divinized hero, is familiar to many readers as the father of Gilgamesh. He is named in the Sumerian king list (c. 2000 B.C.E.) as king of Uruk and became the subject of two Neo-Sumerian narratives. These are part of a larger poetic cycle known as the *Matter of Aratta,* which deals with

2. Translations of *Lugalbanda in the Mountain Cave* (LB I) are from Black et al. 1998–. The citations of LB I throughout refer to groups of lines in the translation, as individual lines are not numbered. Other full and partial translations include Black 1998, 176–84; Hallo 1983; and Wilcke 1969, 49–60, 67–70, 75–84.

3. Vanstiphout (1998, p. 399, n. 11) suggests an alternative translation for "tin" here: "metal of the sky" or meteoric iron; cf. Hallo 1987, 9.

4. According to Hallo (1987, 9), the term for banquet in this passage is *gizbun,* a Sumerian word later equated with Akkadian *takultu,* the technical term for a cultic meal.

5. Just before setting out the cakes, Lugalbanda also ritually bathes an object called *a-an-kara;* according to Black (1998, 122, p. 162, n. 40), this is a weapon associated with Inanna.

the conflicts between Lugalbanda's predecessor, king Enmerkar, and the Lord of Aratta.[6] Our poem (LB I), known as *Lugalbanda in the Mountain Cave* or *Lugalbanda in Hurrumkurra,* is at least as old as the Ur III period (2110–2004 B.C.E.), but the tablets containing these tales are primarily Old Babylonian, excavated at Nippur. A sequel (LB II), known as *Lugalbanda and the Imdugud Bird* or *Lugalbanda and Enmerkar,* begins where our story left off, with Lugalbanda lost in the mountains. He ingratiates himself with the divine Imdugud/Anzu bird and is granted a wish: the power to run anywhere he wishes without tiring. To the great surprise of his brothers, Lugalbanda rejoins them and discovers that they are conducting an unsuccessful siege of Aratta. Lugalbanda volunteers himself as a messenger and in a single day carries a message to Inanna in Uruk, returning with an oracle that allows Enmerkar to vanquish Aratta.[7] LB II was edited by Claus Wilcke (1969), but an edition of LB I has yet to appear, though transcriptions of the texts have been circulating among Assyriologists since the 1960s. Much of the scholarly discussion has centered on the relationship between the two poems: are they two halves of one larger poem, or separate compositions?[8] The two are always found on separate tablets, suggesting that they were viewed as distinct poems, but each seems incomplete without the other, for the siege of Aratta is not resolved in LB I, while the surprise of Lugalbanda's brothers at his unexpected appearance in LB II is satisfactorily explained only if one has knowledge of LB I. Finally, the two compositions share many stylistic similarities. The conundrum is perhaps best explained by positing an oral version in which the narratives of LB I and LB II were both included. When the scribes took up the story of Lugalbanda, the poem was broken into two parts, and the conservatism of the scribal tradition ensured that they were not reunited in written form, even as a full oral version continued to be passed on.

Specialists have commented that the two Lugalbanda narratives follow the format of a *rite de passage:* the hero experiences a separation from his community and has a "near-death" experience. After a time of isolation in the wild, during which he communes with the gods, he returns to his fellows and is reintegrated, with a new, higher status.[9] Lugalbanda's experiences in the wild have been compared to the tale of Robinson Crusoe because of the ingenuity he uses in the reinvention of fire, cooking, and hunting.[10] According to William Hallo, LB I provides etiological explanations for fire making and the inauguration of animal sacrifice (as well as meat consumption, for the two go hand in hand). Finally, Herman Vanstiphout discusses Lugalbanda's epithet *ku(g)* ("pure, holy") and describes how the hero undergoes a series

6. For details on Lugalbanda, see Wilcke 1987, 117–32. For a summary of the *Matter of Aratta,* see Vanstiphout 1995, 5–20.

7. For detailed discussion and translations of LB II, see Wilcke 1969, Black 1998.

8. On this issue, see Wilcke 1969, 5–8; Black 1998, 68–70, 120–24; Alster 1990, 63; Vanstiphout 1995, 8–11, 2002, 261–63.

9. Falkowitz 1983, 105; Black 1998, 165–67; Vanstiphout 2002, 264.

10. Alster 1990, 65; Vanstiphout 2002, 268.

of trials and tests leading to his transformation into a saintlike holy man, one who mediates between the world of gods and the world of men.[11]

LUGALBANDA AND HERMES

Both poems focus on the attempt of a hero, the youngest sibling, to gain the recognition of his elders through his clever exploits. In both poems, the hero begins at an apparent disadvantage, lying immobile in a mountain cave, but leaves the cave on a mission to prove his mettle. The theme of the "first inventor" is prominent in both accounts. Each protagonist uses his own ingenuity, making use of whatever materials come to hand to aid his mission. Each captures livestock, builds a fire from scratch in a pit, and slaughters the animals single-handedly. Each presides at a meal intended for the gods. In both poems, there is a strong emphasis on chronology, and the action involving the cattle is carefully described as taking place within the period of one night, from the time the protagonist sets off in the evening to the slaughter of the animals shortly before dawn. In both poems these actions form a rite of passage through which the late-born protagonist is able to prove himself to his elder fellows and win greater honors. Finally, important further parallels between Hermes and Lugalbanda are revealed in LB II. Both characters possess a secret that they use to their advantage at the right moment: Hermes produces his lyre, and Lugalbanda reveals his gift from the Anzu bird. Both Hermes and Lugalbanda possess the power of swift travel, and both act as messengers for the gods.

Just as Lugalbanda's time in the wilderness forms the first half of an adventure, one that can be read separately or together with LB II, so the first 150 lines of the *Hymn* form a coherent episode that is self-contained in some ways but also forms the prelude to the complete poem. Taken together, LB I and LB II have as their primary purpose the praise of the hero-god Lugalbanda, which is achieved, as in several of the *Homeric Hymns,* through an account of the deity's early exploits and rise to prominence. The final line of LB II is "praise be to Lugalbanda the pure."

These are striking similarities, yet nobody has noted them before, presumably because LB I was inaccessible to nonspecialists until the recent appearance of full translations. In his magisterial *The East Face of Helicon,* Martin West observed a different parallel (see p. 6 below) but did not discuss LB I in detail. Charles Penglase asserted in his 1994 study of Mesopotamian poetry and Greek epic that the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* was utterly lacking in parallels.[12] As in most examples of parallels between Sumerian and Greek materials, there is a very large time gap between the written manifestations of the two poems. The *Hymn to Hermes* is usually considered one of the latest of the major *Homeric Hymns;* Richard Janko's analysis places it in the late sixth century.[13] The Lugalbanda epic belongs to the Third Dynasty

11. Hallo 1983, 171, 179; 1987, 9–11; Vanstiphout 2002, 278–85.

12. Penglase 1994, 181.

13. Janko 1982, 133–34. Allen, Halliday, and Sikes ([1936] 1980, 276) suggest a date in the seventh century, but the majority of scholars assign the poem to the sixth or the fifth century.

of Ur in the late third to early second millennium, and is known mainly from Neo-Babylonian (i.e., eighteenth-century B.C.E.) copies. The sequel to our poem, LB II, was absorbed into the later Babylonian canon and is known from first-millennium B.C.E. copies, but *Lugalbanda in the Mountain Cave* is so far not attested in such late copies. Thus the problems of transmission are even more murky than usual. Even if we posit that late copies of this text once existed, there are obstacles to any hypothesis of direct literary influence upon the Greeks from cuneiform texts.[14] Moreover, cuneiform was reaching the end of its legibility even in the Near East by 500 B.C.E. Given these arguments, if one accepts the parallels adduced here as significant, one must assume either a form of the story written in a script more accessible to Greeks, or the oral transmission of the story from East to West. The existence of an oral version incorporating elements of both LB I and LB II, as hypothesized above, would best explain the parallels.

One obvious problem with the hypothesis of East-to-West influence in this case is the scholarly consensus that the Indo-European cattle-raiding myth is reflected in Hermes' exploits.[15] The version in the *Hymn* does not provide a particularly close parallel with the reconstructed Indo-European myth, which involves the hero *Trito's recovery of cattle stolen from him by a monstrous, three-headed indigene; the myths of Geryon and Cacus are variants.[16] Discussion has focused more upon the relation between the *Hymn* and the social context of the cattle-raid myth, which involved the maturation of young warriors through the honors won during cattle raids. Here, too, there are important differences between the *Hymn* and the putative models: most ancient Greek descriptions of cattle raids are acts of open war, conducted against an enemy, whereas Hermes' feat is one of stealth and is intended to bring about a closer relationship between Hermes and his victim, Apollo. Indeed, Adele Haft has demonstrated that these aspects of the *Hymn* (the emphasis on stealth and the amicable relations resulting between thief and victim) have closer parallels in the practices of modern Cretan villagers.[17] Still, there can be little doubt that the theme of cattle theft in the *Hymn* derives from older Greek models such as the cattle raids described in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey.* Lugalbanda, of course, does not raid cattle but captures a wild bull and subdues it. Yet his accomplishment can equally be regarded as a sign of maturation, a trial of strength against a wild animal that confirms a youth's status as a man.

14. Powell 2002, 112–24.

15. Allen, Halliday, and Sikes [1936] 1980, 270; Johnston 2002, 112–13; Walcot 1979, 343–46.

16. Lincoln 1981, 103–22; Burkert 1979, 83–88. In spite of the perhaps distant relationship between the Indo-European myth and that of the *Hymn,* it should be noted that certain details mesh well with the IE paradigm. For example, Hermes hides the stolen cattle in a cave, as do Trita/Indra's opponent Visvarupa (Burkert 1979, p. 85, n. 1), Cacus (Verg. *Aen.* 8.193–218), and Neleus (Paus. 4.36.2). Hermes' strong desire for meat (*Hymn. Hom. Merc.* 64, 130, 286–88) appears in the IE paradigm as a motive for raids; cattle raiders in the Iranian tradition are described as "desiring meat" and the root *xru-* is cognate with the *Hymn*'s κρέας; see Lincoln 1981, 155.

17. Haft 1996, 27–28, 35; see also Herzfeld 1985, 163–205. For further discussion of the issue of stealing from a brother, see Johnston 2002, 111–15, 120.

The story of a cattle theft by Hermes was related in two works that are probably earlier in date than the *Homeric Hymn:* the Hesiodic *Megalai ehoiai* and a hymn of Alcaeus. Both are too fragmentary to provide much information about early versions of the myth (though Alcaeus specifies that Apollo was the victim). Sophocles' *Ichneutai,* meanwhile, diverges in several particulars from the *Hymn* and may be an independent version.[18] The myth of the theft per se almost certainly predates the *Homeric Hymn* in its present form. If we posit, however, that the composer of the *Homeric Hymn* or an immediate predecessor was exposed to the Lugalbanda material and, attracted by the similarities between the figures of Hermes and Lugalbanda, incorporated elements from LB I into his account of Hermes, new light may be shed on certain aspects of the *Hymn*. In the following sections I examine in more detail the most salient of the parallels, focusing primarily on lines 1–150 of the *Hymn* and on LB I.

THE CAVE ON KYLLENE

Both Lugalbanda and Hermes spend time lying in a cave before embarking on their cattle-related activities, and it is possible that the motif of the cave in the *Hymn* is borrowed from LB I. While Hermes was associated with Mt. Kyllene from early Archaic times onward, nothing indicates that the local myth of his birth there was set in a cave, nor do the Arcadian forms of his cult have any particular connection with caves.[19] In recounting the local traditions, Pausanias (8.16.1) speaks not of a cave, but of the springs near Pheneos where the infant Hermes was bathed. The *Ichneutai,* which appears to provide an independent version, also sets the birth in a cave, but the cave was a standard element in the staging of Greek drama, particularly in plays with comic elements.[20] West (1997) pointed out the similarities between LB I and Sophocles' *Philoctetes,* in which the ailing hero is forced to take refuge in a cave when his companions abandon him. This may well be another reflex of the Lugalbanda myth, for both stories tell of a siege that cannot succeed until an abandoned member of the attacking party rejoins the group. Susan Shelmerdine, on the other hand, compared Maia's cave with the cave of Kalypso in the *Odyssey,* drawing out the similarities between Odysseus' departure from the cave and that of Hermes. Ultimately, caves are so prominent in Greek mythology and figure so often as the setting for the birth and rearing of gods and heroes that this parallel by itself tells us little about the relationship between the *Hymn* and LB I.[21]

18. Hes. frag. 256 M-W; Alc. frag. 306Ca, 308a–d Campbell. The Hesiodic version dealt with Battos, who betrayed Hermes' identity as the thief (cf. Ant. Lib. *Met*. 23), while Alcaeus' hymn added that Hermes also stole Apollo's quiver. Sophocles' *Ichneutai* has the cattle concealed on Kyllene, and a mountain nymph of the same name acts as Hermes' nurse in place of the *Hymn*'s Maia. The fullest version apart from the *Hymn* appears in Apollod. 3.10.2. For discussion of other late versions see Allen, Halliday, and Sikes [1936] 1980, 270–74; and Nisbet and Hubbard 1970, 125–28.

19. See Jost 1985, 35, 440–46. Evidence for the cult on Kyllene is slim, but Pind. (*Ol*. 6.79) speaks of the games conducted at the foot of the mountain.

20. Caves in Greek drama: Jobst 1970, 141–54.

21. Philoctetes: West 1997, 485. Odysseus: Shelmerdine 1986, 55–57. Caves in Greek myth: Buxton 1994, 104–7.

CHRONOLOGY

In the first 150 lines of the *Hymn,* the poet repeatedly notes the time as the action unfolds.[22] All Hermes' inventive and furtive activities are carefully circumscribed within the space of one day and one night, as the poet stresses (17–18) by way of introduction. The night, in particular, is a very busy one, and scholars have noted that too much seems to be packed into the time allotted, causing an incongruity between the temporal setting and the action.[23] The sun is sinking below the horizon as Hermes comes to Pieria (68–70). The night has mostly passed and dawn is coming on, but Selene, the moon, is high when he drives the cattle to Alpheus (97–102). Selene is still visible when he completes his activities beside Alpheus, and at dawn he immediately returns to the cave (142–43). In contrast, the remaining three quarters of the *Hymn* exhibit no such careful marking of time. The poet's reasons for limiting the initial action to one day and one night are not completely clear, though this choice helps to stress the miraculous precocity of the infant Hermes and forms a comic comparison with the account of Apollo's sudden growth spurt in the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* 125–35. The night, too, is the appropriate time for thievery, and Hermes must complete his activities before daylight reveals the crime.

In LB I, the unfolding of the action in one day and night is integral to the narrative structure: it corresponds to the healing process undergone by the immobilized hero, who prays in succession to the sun, the evening star, and the moon as each appears (151–227), and is fully healed at sunrise on the following morning, when he emerges from the cave (264–75). That evening he sets off through the mountains as the moon shines down (276–99). In a dream he is advised to sacrifice the animals before the rising sun, and the banquet for the gods also takes place as the sun is rising (371–93). The time compression just before dawn is similar to that in the *Hymn*.

STRUCTURE

Twenty-four hours after emerging from the cave, Lugalbanda makes offerings to two sets of gods. He offers a meat meal with libations to An, Enlil, Enki, and Ninhursaja. This meal is the result of Lugalbanda's first creative activity upon leaving the cave, the setting of a trap. Similarly, the second activity he undertook was the baking of cakes, which he now offers to the deities who healed him: Utu, Inanna, and Suen. While not fully explained in the beginning, Lugalbanda's first actions have important consequences that only become clear at the end of the story. In the *Hymn to Hermes,* we see a similar ring composition in which the result of the god's initial burst of creativity, the lyre, is invoked later to bring the plot full circle.

Furthermore, the *Hymn* is unique among the extant versions of the myth in placing the invention of the lyre *before* the cattle raid instead of after it.

22. Shelmerdine 1995, 103. The careful demarcation of time in LB I is mentioned by Black (1998, 122) and by Wilcke (1969, 125). The emphasis on time of day is dropped in LB II.

23. Zanetto 1996, 264; Càssola 1997, 172; Allen, Halliday, and Sikes [1936] 1980 on line 97.

In the sequence attested in both Sophocles' *Ichneutai* and Apollodorus, for example, it is clear that Hermes has slaughtered some of the cattle and used their body parts to complete his lyre. This more logical sequence may reflect a version older than that of the *Hymn,* for the latter shows Hermes using an ox hide to make his lyre (49–50), but does not explain where he got it.[24] Moving the creation of the lyre to the beginning of the poem clears the way for the introduction of a different use for the cattle: the preparation of a ritual meal. In other words, if the poet made conscious use of the Lugalbanda model, he would have found it expedient to move the episode of the lyre. Compiling elements from more than one source, Apollodorus (3.10.2) clumsily retains both these outcomes, so that Hermes uses some parts of the cows for the sacrifice and others for the making of the lyre.[25]

SIBLING RIVALRY

In the *Hymn,* Hermes is understood to be one of the latest-born gods. An assembly of the immortals exists and meets on Olympus (325–26), while Hermes' elder brother Apollo, a member of the younger generation, is already well established. Hermes' new identity as the last of a canonical group of Twelve Gods is alluded to in the banquet that he prepares, and in his performance of a theogony (427–33), a genre made possible only when the tally of the gods is complete.[26]

Hermes uses the cattle theft to gain the attention of Apollo and Zeus. He desires that which his brother possesses, and makes it clear that if his father rejects his claims, he will direct his aggression toward his more fortunate brother (173–81). The poem shows how Hermes wins his τιμαί and his place among the gods as a result of conflict with Apollo, whom he outwits by producing the lyre, his hidden advantage. Sibling rivalry is also an important motivation in the story of Lugalbanda. As the army of Uruk marches to war, the poet describes the glory of Lugalbanda's seven elder brothers (LB I 59–70):

> At that time there were seven, there were seven—the young ones, born in Kulaba, were seven. The goddess Urac had borne these seven, the Wild Cow had nourished them with milk. They were heroes, living in Sumer, they were princely in their prime. They had been brought up eating at the god An's table. These seven were the overseers for those that are subordinate to overseers, were the captains for those that are subordinate to captains, were the generals for those that are subordinate to generals.

24. Soph. *Ichneutai* frag. 314 Radt; Apollod. 3.10.2. Wilamowitz (1912, 454) suggested that the poet of the *Hymn* suppressed the existing connection between the theft of the cattle and the construction of the lyre.

25. Noting the close relationship in Greek culture between music and sacrifice, Burkert (1984, 841) suggests that Apollodorus preserves an older version. I propose instead that the earlier versions linked the slaughter of the cattle with the creation of the lyre but did not include the ritual meal. For the materials used in the lyre, compare *Hymn. Hom. Merc*. 49–51 (ox hide, horn, sheep-gut strings); Apollod. 3.10.2 (cow-gut strings); and Soph. *Ichneutai* frag. 314.314 Radt (ox hide). Johnston (2002, 112, 124) points out the utility of the *Hymn*'s arrangement in allowing the poet to draw a contrast between Hermes' status among the Olympians before and after the cattle raid through the first and second songs he performs on the lyre.

26. Clay 1989, 138.

In contrast to these exalted brothers, Lugalbanda lacks prestige and must serve as a lowly member of the infantry: "Lugalbanda, the eighth of them, . . . was washed in water. In awed silence he went forward, . . . he marched with the troops" (LB I 59–70). The story thus follows the folktale convention that the youngest brother turns out to be more clever or stronger than the others.[27] In LB II, Lugalbanda's brothers are amazed at his sudden appearance in their camp (220–50). Later, the hero comes into conflict with his brothers when he is chosen by Enmerkar to carry a message to the goddess Inanna at Uruk. Envious of his new status, they deny that he is able to undertake the journey (320–40). According to Vanstiphout, one of Lugalbanda's goals is to show up his brothers: "He has a power about which they know nothing; he does not reveal it, but uses it in a manner which makes them look like fools."[28] Just as Hermes keeps his lyre a secret until the right moment, Lugalbanda refrains from mentioning his secret power to his brothers, but uses it when he has the opportunity to improve his status. Given the late date of the *Hymn,* Apollo's role as the victim of the cattle theft cannot be traced to LB I or II, for Apollo was already specified as the owner of the cattle in Alcaeus' version of the story. Still, it is possible that the theme of sibling rivalry developed so extensively in the *Hymn* and the presentation of Apollo as both the butt of Hermes' jokes and the amazed witness of his talents draw upon the situations described in LB I and II.

INVENTION

Hermes is credited in the *Hymn* with the introduction of fire making by means of the drill, while Lugalbanda creates fire by striking stones together. In both cases there is some ambiguity about the status of these activities: are they inventions or reinventions? The majority of scholars argue that Hermes does not invent fire, for the original gift of fire came from Prometheus. Hermes instead devises a way to create fire independently, so that live embers need not be transported from one place to another.[29] In Lugalbanda's case, fire is already known, for soon after setting off from the cave he comes upon the remains of his companions' campfire (LB I 276–99). Still, Lugalbanda's method of producing fire with flint may have an etiological significance, since his companions could have carried the fire or produced it by a different method. The *Matter of Aratta* contains other etiological episodes, most notably the invention of writing on clay that is detailed in *Lugalbanda and the Lord of Aratta*.[30] As in the *Homeric Hymns,* the events recounted in the Lugalbanda epic take place in the early days of the world, before the establishment

27. For this narrative pattern, known as "the law of final stress," see Olrik 1992, 52–55.

28. Vanstiphout 1995, 11, 16. For the envy of the brothers, see Alster 1990, 64, 68.

29. See, e.g., Allen, Halliday, and Sikes [1936] 1980 on line 110; Clay 1989, 116. It should be noted, however, that in the line confirming the etiological character of the passage, the poet specifically ascribes fire to Hermes (111). Still, the poet seems to indicate that Hermes' contribution is the τέχνη of fire (108) rather than fire itself.

30. For this episode see Vanstiphout 1995, 8.

of many institutions. The beginning of LB I is fragmentary, but stresses the setting of the poem "in ancient days" soon after heaven was separated from earth, and describes the first placing of boundary stones, digging of wells, and so on (1–19).

In the *Hymn,* Hermes exhibits two types of inventive behavior. First, he is a culture hero: he initiates such technologies as the lyre and fire sticks, which are then adopted by mortals. The other aspect of his creativity, part of his identity as a trickster god, consists in his ability to improvise.[31] Thus he adopts various stratagems in order to thwart any pursuit: he takes a winding path, he reverses the tracks of the herd, and he fashions sandals with which to disguise his footprints. These θαυματὰ ἔργα are woven together with tamarisk and myrtle twigs (79–85). Lugalbanda's creativity similarly extends to both lasting inventions (the institution of meat offerings to the gods) and improvised devices. After baking his cakes, he uses reeds to weave a container for them, and he uproots and trims a juniper to make tethers for the bull and goats. Lugalbanda and Hermes also share the trickster's propensity for secrecy and riddling speech. After he manipulates the Imdugud bird into helping him, Lugalbanda is advised by the bird not to reveal his experiences to his brothers (LB II 210–20), and when they question him as to how he survived in the wild, he answers in riddling terms (220–50).[32]

BANQUET

The odd meal served by Hermes has been the subject of much debate, partly because its very role in the narrative is puzzling. Earlier critics such as Norman Brown considered it an etiological digression, but more recent scholars have detected in the banquet a decisive episode that clarifies Hermes' status as a god and expresses his desire to be recognized by his fellow immortals.[33] According to my hypothesis, the banquet is imported into the story under the influence of LB I, displacing the previous version that had the creation of the lyre as the pendant to the cattle theft. The only other extant version of the myth to include the banquet is that of Apollodorus, who probably took it from the *Hymn*. Blind to the theological niceties of meat consumption by gods, Apollodorus faultily recalls or reinterprets Hermes' actions in the *Hymn* as a standard sacrifice. Therefore he has Hermes boil some of the meat and eat it according to the normal practice, while other parts are burned.

The banquet in the *Hymn,* often referred to as a sacrifice, does not closely follow known sacrificial procedures. Hermes' use of a fire pit rather than an

31. On the two aspects of Hermes' inventiveness, see Clay 1989, 113.

32. Compare Hermes' misleading oaths (*Hymn. Hom. Merc*. 274–77, 383–86) and riddling speech to the old man of Onchestos (92–93).

33. On the banquet as an etiology see Radermacher 1931, 98; Brown [1947] 1990, 102–32; Càssola 1997, 526; Burkert 1984, 840; Clay 1989, 120; Johnston 2002, 125–26. Burkert suggested a local Arcadian ritual with reference to Olympia, while Brown opted for the cult of the Twelve Gods in Athens. Hermes' desire for recognition as the unifying theme of the poem, and the role of the banquet in his plan, are mentioned already in Gemoll 1886, 184–85. Kahn (1978, 41–73) described the meal as an inverted sacrifice reflecting Hermes' role as a liminal deity. Clay (1989, 116–27) gives the fullest interpretation of the banquet as a pivotal episode in the *Hymn*.

elevated rock altar is surprising if a sacrifice to the Olympians is intended. In LB I, the dream command specifies that the blood of the animals must be poured into a pit.[34] Normally the officiant is not required to wrestle the victim to the ground, but both Hermes and Lugalbanda perform this feat. Both poems emphasize the physical strength required to subdue the animals:

> Like an athlete he brought away the brown wild bull, the wild bull of the mountains, like a wrestler he made it submit. Its strength left it. (LB I 361–70)

> ὅφρα δὲ πῦρ ἀνέκαιε βίη κλυτοῦ Ἡφαίστοιο,
> τόφρα δ' ὑποβρύχιας ἕλικας βοῦς ἕλκε θύραζε
> δοιὰς ἄγχι πυρός· δύναμις δέ οἱ ἔπλετο πολλή.
> ἀμφοτέρας δ' ἐπὶ νῶτα χαμαὶ βάλε φυσιόωσας·
> ἐγκλίνων δ' ἐκύλινδε δι' αἰῶνας τετορήσας. (*Hymn. Hom. Merc.* 115–19)

> While the strength of glorious Hephaistos was beginning to kindle the fire, he dragged out two lowing, horned cows near the fire, and great power was with him. He threw them both panting on their backs upon the ground. And he rolled them, bending [their necks] and piercing their vital chords.

For the moment, Hermes' babyish physical form is disregarded by the poet as the god masters the two cows, though later in the *Hymn* (405–8), when Apollo sees the flayed hides of the cows, he comments on the incongruity between Hermes' great strength and his size.

The preparation of the meal by Hermes is generally thought to refer to the cult of the Twelve Gods at Olympia because Hermes sets out twelve portions of meat at a spot near a ford of the river Alpheios (398).[35] A ford of the Alpheios is specifically associated with Olympia and the cult of the Twelve Gods by Pindar (e.g., *Ol.* 10.43–50), who makes Herakles the founder of the cult. On the other hand, the banquet does not seem to take place at Olympia. The poet seems far more eager to link Hermes' activity to a local geological feature (124–26) near "Pylos," which is named four times in the poem, than to specify a connection to Olympia.[36] Still, the number twelve must be an allusion to the cult of the Twelve Gods, which is attested at several sites in Greece starting in the sixth century B.C.E. The names of the twelve gods vary from one place to another, but the number twelve serves as a constant, expressing the Panhellenizing idea of a core pantheon. Lugalbanda similarly serves a meal to the four main deities of the Sumerian pantheon, each of whom represents a major division of the universe: An (heaven), Enlil (air and storms), Enki (water), and Ninhursaja (earth).

The emphasis on equal portions in the *Hymn* (127–29) led Jenny Clay to suggest that what Hermes prepares is not a sacrifice at all, but a δαίς, or

34. From the perspective of Assyriology, the ritual that Lugalbanda performs is surprising because of its focus on blood. While common in West Semitic ritual, interest in the blood of the sacrificed animal was thought to be absent from Sumerian religion: Oppenheim 1977, 192, p. 369, n. 18; Katz 1990, 110; Lambert 1993, 194.

35. For the Twelve Gods, see Long 1987, 58–62, 156.

36. The poet specifies Pylos at 216, 342, 355, 398. This is apparently the Triphylian Pylos between Samikon and Lepreon (Strabo 8.3.14, 344), not the Elean or Messenian city. The poet may be alluding to Nestor's account of a cattle raid (Hom. *Il.* 11.670–761) in which both Pylos and the river Alpheios figure prominently.

banquet.[37] Recent discussions of Greek practice point out that it is difficult to distinguish sacrifice from banquet, because virtually all meat consumption, with the exception of wild game, began with sacrifice.[38] Still, the high ritual and dining aspects of a banquet were sequential, and a given account might focus more upon one part of the sequence than the other. The description of Hermes' preparations omits the extraction of the upper viscera or σπλάγχνα, which were normally roasted and consumed by privileged participants as part of the ritual, and the burning of the gods' portion. The poet focuses instead on the table meats that belong to the feasting part of the sacrificial sequence and carry much less ritual weight. Specifically, Hermes roasts the σάρκες, or cuts of meat; the νῶτα γεράσμια, portion(s) of the backbone with especially desirable cuts of meat attached; and the μέλαν αἷμα ἐργμένον ἐν χολάδεσσι, "black blood enclosed in bowels" (*Hymn* 122–23). The latter is apparently the equivalent of black pudding or blood sausage, which in its simplest form consists of blood congealed in lengths of intestine. (Note that the blood here receives a culinary rather than a ritual treatment.) All of these meats are lacking in ritual importance, but represent good eating. This supports Clay's contention that the poet is more concerned to depict Hermes preparing a banquet for equals than to show him sacrificing.

There is no sign that Hermes burns any bones, fat, or bits of meat from the limbs, as one would expect in a standard Greek sacrifice. Instead, he merely cooks the meat and sets it out as for a meal, just as Lugalbanda does. The latter's preparation of a meal follows the Sumerian and Assyrian practice of sacrifice, in which food was not burned for the gods on altars but was instead cooked and placed as a meal before their cult images.[39] The gods were thought to consume the food in a metaphysical sense, after which it was removed to be eaten by the king or priests, or distributed to the people. In the mythic setting of LB I, the gods appear to partake physically of the food, an event that is fully consistent with Mesopotamian theology. Viewed from a Near Eastern perspective, the distinction between sacrifice and banquet disappears.

In the *Hymn,* of course, no gods arrive to join in the banquet, and in spite of his hunger, Hermes himself does not eat. As many scholars have pointed out, his abstention confirms his identity as a god, for the Greek gods did not partake of mortals' food.[40] They are described as consuming nectar and ambrosia, or at most delighting in the sweet savor of the sacrificial smoke. Near Eastern gods enjoyed the smoke of burnt offerings, yet in stark contrast to Greek understandings of the gods, they also consumed the same food as mortals—not only meats, but vegetables, grains, dairy products, and so on. Indeed, the need to provide food for the gods formed an important ideological

37. Clay 1989, 117–27, incorporating the remarks in Clay 1987.

38. Detienne 1989, 3; Durand 1989, 87; Van Straten 1995, 145.

39. Oppenheim 1977, 187–93; Katz 1990, 107–10; Lambert 1993, 194–201. There are partial analogies for this custom in Greek practice: Van Straten 1995, 131–33, 155.

40. Gemoll 1886, 217; Vernant 1989, 165; Clay 1989, 122–23. Shelmerdine (1986, 57–59) understands Hermes' abstention as an allusion to Odysseus' refusal to eat the cattle of Helios.

justification for the entire alimentary and worship systems in Mesopotamia.[41] The uneaten meal of the *Hymn,* then, represents an important adaptation of the source material to reflect Greek beliefs about the gods. LB I does not specify whether Lugalbanda partook of the meal he prepared. Perhaps his participation is to be assumed from the line "as if Dumuzi had brought in the good savors of the cattle pen, so An, Enlil, Enki, and Ninhursaja consumed the best part of the food prepared by Lugalbanda." This delicately implies that Lugalbanda partook of whatever was left, and reflects the pious fiction in Mesopotamian religion that normal food production was undertaken primarily to feed the gods. In any case, the meal marks Lugalbanda out as a holy man, chosen to mediate between the human and divine spheres.[42]

The banquet scenes in the *Hymn* and LB I are by no means identical, but they share a sequence of details that I have been unable to find in other Greek descriptions of animal slaughter: (1) the action takes place at a pit; (2) the animal is subdued without a weapon; (3) the meat is cut up; (4) parts of the carcass are roasted; (5) a meal is served; (6) the savor of the meat is mentioned. The Greek parallel closest to the *Hymn,* as Shelmerdine points out, is the slaughter of Helios' cattle as performed by Odysseus' men (*Od*. 12.352–69).[43] Both the *Odyssey* and the *Hymn* emphasize the effect of the savory smell upon those present—and of course, Odysseus does not partake of the meat. Yet the parallel with the *Odyssey* does not explain Hermes' division of the meat into twelve portions or his care to divide them equally. Furthermore, the scene in the *Odyssey* follows the conventions of sacrifice very closely. In contrast to the *Hymn,* the sacrifice of Helios' cattle is almost a textbook example, with prayer, libation, burning of the thighbones, roasting of the σπλάγχνα, and so forth.

THE ETIOLOGY OF MEAT CONSUMPTION

Whether we call Hermes' activity a sacrifice, a banquet, or both, it can be understood as yet another innovation: the use of domesticated animals as food. Hermes cannot partake of this meal, but he institutes it nevertheless. The *Hymn* refers to Hermes' dominion over wild and domesticated animals, and hints that the divine cattle given into his care will be the progenitors of the domesticated cattle used by mortals (490–98). Clay has argued that Hermes' actions inaugurate human commensality, symbolized in the shared meal of meat, and that the previous state of humankind is represented in the *Hymn* by the old man of Onchestos, an uncivilized, solitary vegetarian.[44]

41. Oppenheim 1977, 187–93; Hallo 1987, 7; Lambert 1993, 197–98; Katz 1990, 116.

42. Vanstiphout 2002, 273, 278–79.

43. Shelmerdine 1986, 59.

44. Clay 1989, 114–16, 119–27, 145–46. The relationship between the events of the *Hymn* and the Hesiodic etiology of sacrifice is unclear. Clay (126) argues that Hermes "reinstitutes the *dais* that Prometheus had perverted, but with an important modification: gods and mortals will never feast together again as they did at Mekone." Yet the Hesiodic account seems to presuppose the domestication of cattle, which the *Hymn* presents as an innovation of Hermes. The two accounts, however, are complementary in the sense that they focus upon different parts of the sacrificial sequence: Hesiod on the high ritual and the *Hymn* poet on the meat banquet.

Lugalbanda's activities have been similarly interpreted by Hallo, who suggests that the hero introduces meat as a new food, replacing a previous vegetarian dispensation.[45] He further relates LB I to modern theories about the guilt induced by animal slaughter, but in spite of the focus upon hunting, there is no "comedy of innocence" in the narrative or any hint of unease with the taking of animal life.[46] The focus is instead on the wildness of the animals, which belong to the natural world, not the world of humans. Lugalbanda's sojourn in the wild permits him to make the transition to this wild space. He even simulates the feeding practices of the wild bull and goat in his first meal outside the cave, one of herbs and water (264–75). This activity seems intimately linked to his successful ambush and capture of the animals.[47] But the final step of slaughter and consumption cannot be taken without the sanction of the gods, who express their desire for this new menu item in a dream. They also provide a detailed prescription for the ritual slaughter: it is to take place at sunrise, the weapon is to be made of a rare metal, and the blood is to be poured in a pit. Once the gods have enjoyed meat, it is available for humans to eat as well. Rather than a scenario of guilt and reparation of the wrong done to the animal, the Mesopotamian model of "sacrifice" is predicated on the need for food items to be offered to the dominant members of the hierarchy (first the gods, then kings and priests) before the lower-status members can consume them. This forms a striking contrast to Hermes' establishment of the meat meal, or δαίς, with its servings apportioned by lot to ensure that the diners are treated as equals.

CONCLUSION

The question of the specific relationship between the exploits of Hermes and those of Lugalbanda will repay further study. In this paper I have focused upon the similarities between the two stories, similarities that will seem more compelling to some readers than to others. Important differences also exist between the narratives; among these are the *Hymn*'s emphasis on music (entirely absent from the Lugalbanda narratives) and the dream sequence (entirely absent from the *Hymn*). If the hypothesis presented here is correct, the author of the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* incorporates detailed correspondences to a Sumerian story, but adapts the episodes and themes in LB I (and perhaps LB II) for his own purposes. The arguments I have marshaled above focus primarily on the similarities between lines 1–150 of the *Hymn* and

45. Hallo 1987, 9–11. The introductory lines of LB I speak of the presentation of wild mountain goats and stags to Enmerkar, so presumably hunting is known. Domestication is suggested by the presence of butter and cheese in the list of provisions left in Lugalbanda's cave (87–122). But meat is lacking: under this mythic scenario, meat consumption had not been introduced as a regular part of the diet for the community.

46. On the absence of the "comedy of innocence" in Mesopotamian religion, as opposed to West Semitic and Greek traditions, see Katz 1990, 110, 114–17. Katz argues that there is no "animal sacrifice" as such in Mesopotamian practice because the feeding of the gods took the form of a meal including a variety of foods, and there is no indication that meat was given a different sacral status, as in Israelite or Greek practice.

47. Lugalbanda eats "lifesaving plants" and sips "lifesaving water" at LB I 264–75, after which he immediately sets his ambush. The bull (300–313) and the goats (314–25) are later described as eating a variety of plants and drinking "water from the rolling rivers."

LB I, though the additional themes shared with LB II hint that the composer of the *Hymn* was familiar with a fuller version of the story than LB I. Given the strict scribal division of LB I and LB II in separate tablets, and the apparent absence of LB I from the first-millennium literary canon, it is preferable to posit oral transmission of a version combining elements of the two. At the same time, however, the significance of the Lugalbanda text goes beyond a mere addition to the long list of Greek–Near Eastern parallels. Scholars of the Lugalbanda text have suggested that it provides etiologies for human control of fire, the consumption of meat, and the origin of sacrifice, themes that have also been recognized in the *Hymn to Hermes* and are important in the Hesiodic corpus. *Lugalbanda in the Mountain Cave* provides valuable new comparative material for the study of mythic representations of sacrifice and its origins.[48]

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