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“Hermes and Hestia” Revisited: Hermes ἀκάκητα and the Funerary Fire *

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The paper focuses on some features of the Greek god Hermes in order to revisit Jean-Pierre Vernant’s interpretation of the couple Hestia-Hermes. I argue that the polarity *unmovable* (Hestia) vs. *movable* (Hermes) may ultimately apply to two complementary aspects of a fire-deity, namely: the *static* hearth vs. the *dynamic* messenger/*psychopompos* (Hermes). Specifically, I concentrate on the role of Hermes in Homer and on his epithet ἀκάκητα (‘?’ of Hermes and Prometheus). I propose that the form means ‘burning together’, or possibly ‘hungry’ (to PIE **kenk-* ‘to dry, burn’). The semantics of the word thus suits both Hermes and Prometheus, who are connected with the discovery of fire-sticks and the invention of the sacrificial share. Both achievements are connected with the preparation and consumption of meat. Additionally, I emphasize that figures associated with the element fire are big eaters in other Indo-European traditions (Old Indic, Old Norse).

1. In a seminal study first published in 1963, Jean-Pierre Vernant pointed out that the Greek Olympian gods Hestia and Hermes pair in a variety of contexts without a clear reason. For instance,

- (i) in the twenty-ninth *Homeric Hymn*, after addressing Hestia, the poet unexpectedly invokes Hermes (cf. v.7 καὶ σύ μοι, Ἀργειφόντα, Διὸς καὶ Μαϊάδος υἱέ “and you, Argeiphontes, son of Zeus and Maia ...”¹) and concludes with a prayer to both gods (cf. v.13 χαῖρε, Κρόνου θύγατερ, σύ τε καὶ χρυσόρραπις

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1 Translations are my own, except for the following: Jamison and Brereton 2014 (*Rigveda*), Frazier and Goold 1931 (Ovid), Most 2007a, b (Hesiod), Murray and Dimock 1995 (*Odyssey*), Murray and Wyatt 1999 (*Iliad*), West 2003 (*Homeric Hymns*).

Ἑρμῆς “I salute you, daughter of Kronos, and you too, gold-wanded Hermes”);

- (ii) according to Pausanias (5.11.8), the pedestal of Zeus’s statue in Olympia featured eight gods and eight goddesses, coupled according to their reciprocal relationship: husband-wife (Zeus-Hera, Hephaestus-Charis, Poseidon-Amphitrite), son-mother (Eros-Aphrodite), helper-hero (Athena-Heracles), brother-sister (Apollo-Artemis, Helios-Selene). The pair Hermes-Hestia, however, seems to escape any possible classification.

Vernant (1963:15) explained the association between these two Olympian gods as the religious expression of the polarity *stasis* vs. *dynamis*: Hestia is the most unmovable deity, while Hermes is the most movable one. In this paper, I revisit this hypothesis: I make the case that Hermes and Hestia represent the polarity movable vs. unmovable applied to the element fire. I focus on Hermes in particular and on his epithet ἀκάκητα. In this connection, I propose that the epithet may be a clue to Hermes’s fiery nature. Additionally, I point out that some of Hermes’s distinctive traits parallel those belonging to deities or heroes associated with the element fire in the Greek and other Indo-European traditions (Gk. Prometheus, OInd. Agni, ON Loki and Logi).

2. While the identification of Hestia (: Lat. *Vesta*)² as the hearth is explicit in the Classical sources,³ Hermes is never said to be a fire-god. Nevertheless, as Hocart (1936:16–21) and van Berg (2001:189–202) emphasized, Greek literary sources might preserve clues to his “fire-dimension.”⁴ In Homer, Hermes is the

2 On the identification between Hestia and Vesta cf. *DELG* 397.

3 Cf. Hsch. γ 576 L γιστή· ἐσχάρα “*gistiē*: fire-place.” Ovid identifies Vesta as the fire; cf. *Fasti* 6.295–7 *esse diu stultus Vestae simulacra putavi, / mox didici curvo nulla subesse tholo: / ignis inextinctus templo celatur in illo* “long did I foolishly think that there were images of Vesta: afterwards I learned that there are none under her curved dome. An undying fire is hidden in that temple.” The etymology of Gk. ἐστία and Lat. *Vesta* is the subject of debate. The two forms were traced to a PIE root **h₂ues-* ‘to shine’ by Nagy (1974:72–8); alternatively to **h₁eus-* ‘to burn’ (cf. *LIV*² 245) by the majority of scholars in the field of comparative religion (cf. Dumézil 1974:329 and more recently West 2007:145, 267). Differently, Pinault (forthcoming:8–12) derives Gk. ἐστία and Lat. *Vesta* from a basis **ués* ‘inside, down’. He proposes that Gk. ἐστία reflects an abstract **uestiā* ‘the most interior place’, lexicalized as ‘hearth’, to an adjective **uestó-* ‘interior, inner’, while Lat. *Vesta* reflects an individualizing abstract **uesteh₂* ‘interior place’, personified as ‘Home’.

4 In particular, van Berg (2001:193–4), who also proposes a comparison between Hermes and Agni, points out a few interesting passages from the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*, such as the simile in *h.Merc.* 238–9 πρέμων ἀνθρακίην ὕλης σποδός ἀμφικάλυπτει, / ὧς Ἑρμῆς “as wood-

psychopompos, who, as such, is primarily connected with the movement of the dead.⁵ In *Iliad* 24 he acts as Priam's guide (Gk. πομπός), when the Trojan king retrieves Hector's body; cf.

τοῖον γάρ οἱ πομπὸν ὀπάσσομεν ἄργειφόντην (*Il.* 24.153)

Indeed we (: the gods) will give him (: to Priam) such a **guide, the Argeiphontes**.⁶

The use of πομπός in *Iliad* 24 is reminiscent of a passage from *Iliad* 16. Here the term applies to Thanatos and Hypnos, whom Zeus sends off to carry Sarpedon's body to Lycia; cf.

πέμπε δέ μιν πομποῖσιν ἅμα κραπνοῖσι φέρεσθαι
 Ὕπνω καὶ Θανάτῳ διδυμάοσι οἳ ῥά μιν ὄκα
 θήσοις ἐν Λυκίῃς εὐρείῃς πίονι δήμῳ (*Il.* 16.671–3)

[Zeus to Apollo:] And **send** him (: Sarpedon) to swift **conveyers**, to the twin brothers **Sleep and Death**, to bring with them; they will set him down speedily in the rich land of wide Lycia.

Although Hermes does not appear in this Iliadic episode and he is not represented on the majority of vase paintings inspired by the same story,⁷ he acts as Sarpedon's escort on the renowned krater of Euphronios (6th c. BCE).⁸ Even in the *Odyssey*, where Hermes acts as the messenger of the gods (*Od.* 1.37–8, 42, 84; 5.29–30), he guides the suitors' ghosts to the underworld; cf.

ash covers over the deep embers of tree-stumps, so Hermes"; the description of Hermes's gaze in *h.Merc.* 414–6 τότε δὴ κρατὺς Ἀργειφόντης/ χῶρον ὑποβλήδην ἐσκέψατο, πῦρ ἀμαρύσσων/ ἐγκρόψαι μεμαῶς "then the strong Argeiphontes surveyed the area with his eyes darting fire, intent on hiding it from view"; the use of διαπυρπαλαμέω in connection with the god; cf. *h.Merc.* 357 καὶ διαπυρπαλάμησεν ὁδοῦ τὸ μὲν ἔνθα, τὸ δ' ἔνθα "and after he had completed his conjuring act (*diapūrpalamēsen*) on this side of the road and that." This verb was connected to πυρπαλάμης 'whose hand is fire/who has fire in his hand' by ancient commentators; cf. Suet. 6.22 πυρπαλάμης: ὁ πανοῦργος: ἐξ οὗ καὶ πυρπαλαμᾶσθαι, τὸ κακοτεχνεῖν καὶ οἰονεῖ διὰ πυρὸς ἰέναι πανουργίας ἔνεκα "pūrpalamēs: the knavish one, from which also pūrpalamāsthai, to use base arts just as if going through the fire because of (his) knavery."

5 Cf. Heubeck, West, and Hainsworth 1988:257.

6 Cf. also *Il.* 24.182–3, 335–8, 679–94.

7 Cf. *LIMC* VII, Sarpedon 2–15.

8 Beazley Archive Pottery Database 187 (<http://www.beazley.ox.ac.uk/record/2F320D8E-61D8-4965-A2C5-C2E76A149354>).

Ἑρμῆς δὲ ψυχὰς Κυλλήνιος ἐξεκαλεῖτο
ἀνδρῶν μνηστήρων [...]

[...] ἦρχε δ' ἄρα σφιν

Ἑρμείας ἀκάκητα κατ' εὐρώεντα κέλευθα. (*Od.* 24.1–10)

Then Hermes of Cyllene summoned the ghosts of the suitors [...] **Hermes** *akakēta led* them down into the moist⁹ paths.

In what follows, I will try to show that an association between Hermes and the funeral fire underlies his role as “guide of the dead,” one of his primary functions in the Homeric poems.

3. In connection with the latter passage from *Odyssey* 24, I propose that the epithet ἀκάκητα (v.10) may be interpreted as a clue to Hermes’s *fiery* nature. To begin with, let’s focus on the attestations of the form: the epithet occurs four times in Greek hexameter poetry, in connection with Hermes (*Il.* 16.185, *Od.* 24.10, Hes. fr. 137.1 MW) and Prometheus¹⁰ (Hes. *Th.* 614 Ἰαπετιονίδης ἀκάκητα Προμηθεύς “Iapetus’s son, *akakēta* Prometheus”). According to the majority of ancient lexicographers and commentators, ἀκάκητα is to be equated with Gk. ἄκακος (Sapph.+), meaning ‘guileless’; cf. Apollon. *Lex.* 20.1 ἀκάκητα [...] ὁ Ἑρμῆς ὁ μηδενὸς κακοῦ περιποιητικός “*akakēta* [...] Hermes, (who is) unable to do any harm,” while in a less well-attested exegetic tradition the term is glossed as ‘knavish’; cf. *EM* 44.55 K ἀκάκητα: ὁ στερίσκων τὰς λύπας· ἢ ἀπὸ τοῦ ἐν Ἀρκαδίᾳ ὄρους Ἀκακησίου· ἢ πανοῦργον· “*akakēta*: easing pains, or from Mount Akakesios in Arcadia, or knavish/smart.”

Modern semantic and etymological explanations for Gk. ἀκάκητα substantially rely upon Greek synchronic etymologies. According to Risch (1954:395–6), the term was built on Gk. ἀκάκῳς ‘benevolent, guileless’ (*A. Pers.* 855)¹¹ and remodeled after μητίετα ‘wise’ (Hom.+). Differently, Hoffmann (1891:328–9)¹² proposed to derive ἀκάκητα from a putative verb *ἀκακέω ‘to understand’, which is

9 On the meaning and etymology of this epithet cf. Le Feuvre 2007:112–7.

10 Both Hermes and Prometheus are brought into connection with Mount Akakesios; cf. Schol. in Hom. *Il.* 16.185b καὶ οὐκ ἀπὸ τοῦ ἐν Ἀρκαδίᾳ ἄντρου Ἀκακησίου προσηγόρευται καθ’ Ὅμηρον ὁ Ἑρμῆς Ἀκακήσιος “and not from the cave of (Mount) Akakesios in Arcadia Hermes is called Akakesios in Homer” (cf. also Call. *Dian.* 143, Paus. 8.3.2.8, 8.30.6.4, 8.36.9.7, 8.36.10.1); Schol. in Hes. *Th.* 614bis Ἀκακήσιον δὲ ὄρος Ἀρκαδίας ἐνθα ἐτιμάτο ὁ Προμηθεύς “Akakesios is a mountain in Arcadia, where Prometheus is worshipped.”

11 Cf. *IG* VII 117.3, Megara.

12 Cf. also Leukart 1994:239 n.279a.

preserved by Hesychius: α 2239–40 L ἀκακίεις· συνίεις “*akakieis*: you understand,” ἀκακίει· συνίει “*akakiei*: he understands.”

The interpretation of the word as ‘guileless’ suits neither Hermes nor Prometheus. Both figures are tricksters par excellence in the Greek tradition. As such, they are the most skillful liars and thieves, full of guile.¹³ Conversely, the interpretation of the term as ‘clever, wicked’ semantically fits Hermes and Prometheus better, but there is no way to prove that the verb ἀκακέω* is not a secondary back-formation to ἀκάκητα. If ἀκάκητα at some point came to be interpreted as ‘the quality Hermes and Prometheus share, i.e., intelligence’, a verb ἀκακέω* might have been back-formed to the epithet, since, according to Greek *Sprachgefühl*, agent nouns in -τής¹⁴ pair with verbs in -έω; cf. αὐλητής ‘flute-player’ (Thgn.+): ἀνταυλέω ‘to play the flute against (someone)’ (Agath. 4.23); note further (with alpha-privative) the type ἀδικητής ‘wronger, injurer’ (Eust.), based on a verb ἀδικέω ‘to do wrong/to injure’ (cf. Dor. ἀδικίω, *Tabl.Heracl.* 4th–3rd c. BCE).

Instead, I propose that ἀκάκητα reflects a compound with first member *sm^o ‘one, together’ and second member based on the PIE root *kenk- ‘to dry, heat, burn’ (*IEW* 565, 2. *kenk-*; cf. Goth. *hūhrus*, ON *hungr*, OE *hungor*, OHG *hungar* [*< *kḡkru-*] ‘hunger’), meaning ‘burning together*/burning up’ (cf. Gk. συνκαίω ‘to set on fire *at once*, hence *to burn up*’), or possibly ‘hungry’ (see §a below).¹⁵ Specifically, the first compound member ἀ- < *sm^o is psilotic, as in other terms that are first attested in Greek hexameter poetry, such as ἀδελφός ‘brother’ (*sm^o-g^helb^ho-), ἄκοιτις ‘spouse’ (*sm^o-kōiti-), ἄλοχος ‘spouse’ (*sm^o-log^ho-).¹⁶

As for the second compound member, Greek etymological congeners of the root *kenk- were long ago identified by Schulze (1888:269–70) and display different apophonic grades, namely:

13 On the distinctive traits of trickster figures see the typological study by Hynes 1997:34–45.

14 Apollon. *Lex.* 20.1 ἀκάκητα ἀντί τοῦ ἀκακήτης, τῇ κλητικῇ ἀντί τῆς εὐθείας “*akakēta* instead of *akakētēs*, with vocative instead of nominative.”

15 The same root may underlie Lith. *kankà* ‘pain’, *kankinti* ‘to distress’, *keñkti* ‘to damage’.

16 The reinterpretation of ἀκάκητα as a synonym of ἄ-κακος, i.e., with first member < *ḡ-, may also have played a role in maintaining the psilosis. García Ramón (2017:6–7) offers a possible parallel to this phenomenon. According to him, the name Ἄτλας (Hes.+) goes back to *sm^o-t^h₂- ‘the one holding (the world and sky) together’ but was synchronically reinterpreted as ‘the one who doesn’t endure (his task)’; cf. *Et.Gen.* 1357 K Ἄτλας δ’ οὐρανὸν εὐρὺν ἔχει· [...] ὁ μὴ τλῶν καὶ ἀνάγκη ποιῶν “*Atlas* holds the broad sky [...] the one who does not endure it and makes it out of necessity.” However, van Beek (2018:48–50) proposes a different etymology of Ἄτλας as ‘the one holding (the sky) up’ with first compound member ἀ-, the apocopated form of Gk. ἀνά ‘up, above’.

- a. A full-grade **kenk-*; cf. Hsch. κ 1962 L κέγκεις· ἐπιδάκνη “*kenkeis*: you bite,”¹⁷ Phot. κ 565 T κένκω· πεινῶ “*kenkō*: I starve.”
- b. A zero-grade *κακ-* (: **κηκ-*); cf. Hsch. κ 306 L κακιά· λιμηρά “*kakithá*: hungry” and Hsch. κ 308 L κακίθης· χαλεπόν· λιμηρές “*kakithés*: difficult, hungry.”¹⁸ Both κακίθης* and κακίθός* may be interpreted as compounds meaning *‘having burning/drying heat’, hence ‘hungry or causing hunger (= λιμηρός)’, with second compound member °ιθής or °ιθός to IE **h₁aidʰ-* ‘to produce warmth.’
- c. A zero-grade *καγκ-*, analogical to a full-grade **kenk-*;¹⁹ cf. πολυκαγκής (of δίψα ‘thirst’, in *Il.* 11.642), which may be interpreted as ‘whose burning is great*’; cf. the πολυκερδής type (‘very wily’ to κέρδος ‘wiles’; cf. *Od.* 13.255), or as ‘very parching’; cf. the ὑπαγόρης-type (‘booster’ to ἀγορεύω ‘to speak, proclaim’; cf. Risch 1974:210); κάγκανος ‘dry’ (of fire wood);²⁰ cf. *Il.* 21.364–5 ὑπὸ δὲ ξύλα κάγκανα κείται, / ὥς τοῦ καλὰ ῥέεθρα πυρὶ φλέγεται “and dry kindling is set beneath it, so burned in fire his fair streams”;²¹ Hsch. κ 25 L καγκαίνει· θάλπει, ξηραίνει “*kankáinei*: (he) warms up(/dries up)”; Hsch. κ 30 L καγκομένης· ξηρᾶς τῷ φόβῳ “*kankomenēs*: dry with fear”; Hsch. κ 27 L καγκαλέα· κατακεκαυμένα²² “*kankaléa*: burnt.”

The distribution of the Greek apophonic grades can be explained as follows: the *hjo/e*-present (καγκαίνω ‘to dry’ [ξηραίνει], Hsch.) may be interpreted as a denominative form, based on the *-(a)no*-adjective κάγκανος (of ξυλά; cf. §c). At the same time, the existence of a *no*-derivative (Gk. κάγκανος) besides linguistic cognates in *-ru-* to PIE **kenk-* (Goth. *hūhrus* ‘hunger’ < **kénk-ru-*/**κηκ-r-éus*)²³ may

17 A cross-reference analysis of Hesychian glosses proves that this gloss is connected to the semantic field ‘hunger’, since ἐπιδάκνω systematically applies to λιμός; cf. (ἐπι)δάκνεσθαι στόμαχον ὑπὸ λιμοῦ ‘to bite the stomach for hunger’ (Hsch. κ 800 L, Suid. 371, both s.v. καρδιώττειν). Differently Garnier (2004–5), who proposes that Gk. κέγκειν* means ‘to sting, bite’ (‘riquer’).

18 κακίθης for κακίθης (: κακοίθης; cf. Hp. *Nat.Mul.* 2.141, Nic. *Th.* 152), with κακ° to κακός, can explain χαλεπόν, but not ‘hungry’.

19 Cf. García Ramón 1985:195–226.

20 Cf. Hsch. κ 26 L κάγκανα ξύλα· ξηρά “*kankana ksula*: dry.” The form is accented like μέρμερος, βάρβαρος, because it was synchronically interpreted as reduplicated (Probert 2006:264–5).

21 Cf. *Od.* 18.308; *h.Merc.* 112, 136; Theoc. 24.89.

22 Cf. Skt. *kāṅkāla* ‘skeleton’ (*MBh.* I 202); cf. the semantic shift of σκελετός ‘dried body, skeleton’, from σκέλλω ‘dry up’.

23 Schaffner 2001:499–501.

point to a heteroclitite noun; cf. the pattern seen in ὕδραίνω ‘to water’: ὕδωρ/ὕδατ- ‘water’; μαιίνω ‘to stain, dye’: μαιρός ‘stained’, **mijan-*.²⁴

As for ἀκάκητα, one possibility is that it reflects a νεφεληγερέτα-type epithet, which was adjusted to the metrical requirements of the Greek hexameter. This type of compound displays a second member based on a thematic aorist; cf. ἀγείρω ‘to gather’: ἀγέροντο ‘they gathered’ (*Il.* 18.245): (νεφελη)γερέτα ‘cloud-gatherer’ (Hom.+). According to a recurring pattern, a thematic *e*-present may pair with a zero-grade root or thematic aorist; cf. τρέπω: ἔτραπον (cf. Risch 1974:259). In a similar way, κέγκω (see §a above) might have paired with a zero-grade thematic aorist with a stem *ἔ-κακ-. It follows that a second compound member based on this stem would have appeared as °κάκετα*. However, a putative form ἀ-κάκε-τα* was incompatible with the metrical requirements of the hexameter because of the inadmissible sequence [~ ~ ~ ~], so it was reshaped into ἀκάκητα [~ ~ ~ ~]. It must be stressed that such a metrical lengthening ($\epsilon > \eta$) is unparalleled and therefore problematic.²⁵ This scenario thus remains possible only under the assumption that the epithet was reshaped under the influence of the type αἰχμητά ‘speared’ (*Il.* 5.197).

On the other hand, the existence of the form ἀκακήσιος (epithet of Hermes in Call. *Dian.* 143) speaks in favor of ἀκάκητα as reflecting a stem-formation based on participial *ἀκακητός to *ἀκακέω, denominative to an unattested *ἄ-κακος (: **sm-kḡk-o-*) with the putative meaning *‘burning together/hungry’. As already pointed out, a form *ἀκακέω is actually attested in Hesychius, who nevertheless glosses it as ‘to understand’, cf. Hsch. α 2239–40 L ἀκακίεις: συνίεις “*akakieis*: you understand”, ἀκακίει: συνίει “*akakiei*: he understands.” Since the ancient lexicographer does not provide a context for the glosses, it is difficult to assess whether these two forms should be kept apart from the Greek congeners of PIE **kenk-*, or whether they should be included, under the assumption of a folk-

24 Some *r/n*-neuters pair with *s*-stem neuters; cf. ὕδωρ: ὕδος (Call., Hsch.), ἄλκαρ: °αλικής (Hr.+); analogously **kenk-r* could pair with the *s*-stem underlying °καγκής (cf. πολυκαγκής); cf. Blanc 2018:416.

25 The metrical lengthening of short *e* (spelled ⟨ε⟩) is normally spelled ⟨ει⟩ (Chantraine 1958:98); cf. εἰρεσίη ‘rowing’ (*Od.* 11.640 vs. ἐρέτης ‘rower’ (Hom.+). Moreover, as Chantraine points out (1958:101), in a sequence of four short syllables it is the second that is most commonly lengthened. A possible case of metrical lengthening of the type $\epsilon > \eta$ has been seen in Hom. ἠὺ ‘good’, as metrical lengthening of εὖ- (see *NIL* 242, n.14, with bibliography); but this has been criticized by Widmer (2004:193–4) and Nussbaum (2014:232–3, contra Nussbaum 1998:151–2; cf. 2014:233 n.21 contra Widmer). For a possible case showing the alternation $\eta \sim \epsilon$, cf. ἄσκηθής ‘unscathed’ (Hom.+), beside the secondary metrically *shortened* form ἄσκηθής* ‘id.’ (var. lect. in *Od.* 14.255).

etymological interpretation by the glossator. In a speculative (but possible) scenario, Hsch. α 2239–40 may reflect a connection with the root of ἀκούω ‘to hear’, in terms of synchronic etymology. On the one hand, ἀκούω means ‘to hear and understand’, while on the other, συνήμι means ‘to understand, perceive, hear’ (LSJ s.v. ἀκούω II 3; συνήμι II, cf. Hdt. 1.47 καὶ κωφοῦ συνήμι, καὶ οὐ φωνεῦντος ἀκούω “and I understand the mute and hear the voiceless”). In this regard, it is interesting that Hermes is given the epithet εὐηκοός ‘inclined to give ear’ in a later epigram (*AP* 9.316.5, Leon.).²⁶

In any case, if ἀκάκητα and *ἀκακέω belong to the linguistic family of Gk. κέγκω and καγκαίνω, the meaning of the epithet can be reconstructed as ‘burning together, burning up’* (cf. καγκαλέα· κατακεκαυμένα, §c above) or ‘hungry’ (cf. κέγκω).²⁷

4. The use of the epithet in connection with Hermes *psychopompos* (*Od.* 24.10) is remarkable, because this function of the god might ultimately reveal an association with fire as dynamic. Indeed, as we understand from Homer, dead souls do not reach the netherworld unless they are “given a share of fire”; cf.

[...] οὐ γὰρ ἔτ’ αὐτίς/ νίσομαι ἐξ Αἴδαο, ἐπὶν με πυρὸς λελάχητε (*Il.* 23.75–6)

For never again will I (: Patroclus) return out of Hades, when **once you have given me my share of fire.**

At the same time, an epithet meaning ‘burning together/up’* or ‘hungry’* would suit both Hermes and Prometheus. Besides a set of other common similarities,²⁸ both these characters are connected with:

26 See also Pausanias 7.22.2–3: in the agora of Pharai (Achaia), consultants of Hermes’ oracle whispered a question into the god’s ear.

27 A semantic evolution from ‘burning’ to ‘hunger’ is unproblematic; cf. λιμοῦ αἴθωνος “fiery hunger” (Hes. fr. 43a.6 MW), αἴθου λιμός ‘id.’ (Hes. *Op.* 363, see also Aeschin. in *Ctesiph.* 184.7, Call. *Cer.* 66–7), Schol. in Lyc. 1396 (Levaniouk 2000:36–9); ἀυσταλέη λιμῶ καταπεπτηῖα “parched, cowering in hunger” (Hes. *Sc.* 265); λιμῶ γένηται ξηρὸς (Hippon. fr. 10.1 W); *Ov. Met.* 8.828–47 (Erysichthon’s episode, on which cf. Massetti [forthcoming]); also Quint. *Decl.* 12.8.17 *igneae fames*, Sen. *Th.* 169–70. On fire as ‘all-eater’ cf. §5.

28 They are both descendants of Iapetus (: Prometheus’s father and Hermes’s great-grandfather). Furthermore, they are described as ‘cunning’, e.g., ποικιλομήτα (Hermes, *h.Merc.* 155–6) :: ποικίλον αἰολόμητιν (Prometheus, Hes. *Th.* 510–1), ποικιλόβουλον (Hes. *Th.* 531). Moreover, Hermes and Prometheus are associated with ‘thievery’ and ‘hiding’: Hermes is the companion of thieves (cf., e.g., Hippon. fr. 3a W+) and is described as ‘hiding’ (*h.Merc.* 415–6); Gk. Προμηθεύς is probably derived from PIE *math₂- ‘rob’ (cf. Narten 1960:132–5, Oettinger 2016). Consistently, he hides the fire after stealing it (cf. Hes. *Op.* 50–1). In Plato’s *Protagoras* (321c–

- (i) the invention of “fire-sticks”; cf. *h.Merc.* 111 Ἑρμῆς τοι πρότιστα πυρήια πῦρ τ’ ἀνέδωκε “Hermes was the first to give fire and fire-sticks (to men)”; D.S. 5.67.2 εὐρετὴν γενόμενον τῶν πυρείων “(Prometheus) was the inventor of fire-sticks.”
- (ii) the “sacrificial allotment”;²⁹ cf. *h.Merc.* 131 ἔσχισε δώδεκα μοίρας “(Hermes) divided twelve shares”; Hes. *Th.* 544 διεδάσσατο μοίρας “Prometheus divided the shares.” In turn, the invention of the sacrificial portion is strictly associated with a theft and with the consumption of meat. In the fourth *Homeric Hymn*, Hermes’s craving for meat is the driving force for the theft of Apollo’s cattle, which ultimately leads to the invention of sacrifice; cf. *h.Merc.* 64–5 ὁ δ’ ἄρα κρείων ἐρατίζων/ ἄλτο κατὰ σκοπιὴν εὐώδεος ἐκ μεγάροιο “but he, craving for meat, sprang out of the fragrant house, up to the watch.” Hermes’s desire for meat might even have been perceived as *inappropriate* for an Olympian god, since Greek deities only eat nectar and ambrosia.³⁰ Consequently, the poet of *h.Merc.* feels the urge to specify that Hermes did not eventually eat the meat; cf.

ἐνθ’ ὄσις κρεάων ἠράσσατο κύδιμος Ἑρμῆς·
 [...] ἀλλ’ οὐδ’ ὥς οἱ ἐπέιθετο θυμὸς ἀγήνωρ,
καὶ τε μάλ’ ἱμείροντι, περᾶν ἱερῆς κατὰ δειρῆς (*h.Merc.* 130–3)

Whereupon glorious **Hermes craved his own due of meat**, [...] Nevertheless his stout heart did not give way to his longing to let it pass down his holy throat.³¹

Prometheus’s invention of the sacrificial share is connected with the unfair apportioning of meat, through which the Titan tricks Zeus; cf.

322d) Hermes brought to mortal men “respect and right” (Gk. δίκην καὶ αἰδῶ) after Prometheus had bestowed fire on them. In this way, Hermes brings to completion the process of civilization that the Titan started with the gift of fire. On Hermes’s and Prometheus’s role of messenger/herald and the root IE **h₁aidʰ-* ‘to produce warmth’, cf. Massetti 2018.

29 Cf. Sowa 1984:200–1.

30 On the gods’ food cf. *Od.* 5.196–9 [...] νύμφη δ’ ἐτίθει πάρα πᾶσαν ἐδωδὴν./ ἔσθην καὶ πίνειν, οἷα βροτοὶ ἄνδρες ἐδουσιν./ αὐτὴ δ’ ἀντίον ἴζεν Ὀδυσσεὺς θεῖοιο./ τῇ δὲ παρ’ ἀμβροσίην δμωαὶ καὶ νέκταρ ἔθικαν “and the nymph set before him all kinds of food to eat and drink, of such sort as mortal men eat. But she herself sat opposite divine Odysseus, and before her the handmaids set ambrosia and nectar.”

31 Differently, according to Pseudo-Apollodorus, Hermes eats the meat; cf. [Apollod.] 3.112–3 δύο δὲ καταθύσας [...] τῶν δὲ κρεῶν τὰ μὲν κατηνάλωσεν ἐψήσας “But he (: Hermes) sacrificed two (cows) [...] while of the flesh he boiled and ate some.”

[...] τότε ἔπειτα μέγαν βοῦν πρόφρονι θυμῷ
 δασάμενος προέθηκε, Διὸς νόον ἐξαπαρίσκων.
τοῖς μὲν γὰρ σάρκας τε καὶ ἔγκαταπίονα δημῷ
ἐν ῥινῷ κατέθηκε καλύψας γαστρὶ βοεῖη,
 τῷ δ' αὖτ' ὅστέα λευκὰ βοῶς δολίῃ ἐπὶ τέχνῃ
 εὐθετίσας κατέθηκε καλύψας ἀργέτι δημῷ. (Hes. *Th.* 536–41)

Even then Prometheus with eager spirit cut up a great ox and set portions before them, trying to deceive the mind of Zeus. **Before the rest he set flesh and inner parts thick with fat upon the hide, covering them with an ox paunch;** but for Zeus he put the white bones dressed up with cunning art and covered with shining fat.

5. Comparative phraseological analysis indirectly supports the identification of “hunger” as a prominent characteristic of deities, semi-deities, and heroes associated with the element fire in other Indo-European traditions. In Greek and Old Indic texts, the reference to fire’s appetite is extremely common: ‘all-eating’, ‘omnivorous’ apply to ‘fire’ in Greek (cf. E. *Med.* 1187 παμαφάγου πυρός “of all-eating fire”) and to the fire-god in Vedic (cf. *viśvādā* [...] *agnīm* “omnivorous Agni,” RV 8.44.26).³² In the Old Norse tradition, Loki, who is identified with fire in some Scandinavian traditions,³³ engages in an eating competition against Logi (cf. Germ. *Lohe* ‘flame’), the ‘wild-fire’;³⁴ cf.

Hafði þá Loki etit slátr allt af beinum, en Logi hafði ok etit slátr allt ok beinin með ok svá trogit [...] Þá var þat it fyrsta er Loki gerði, hann var mjök soltinn

32 In the *Rigveda*, references to Agni’s appetite are so widespread that they are commonly regarded as a trope (cf. Jamison and Brereton 2014:1511). For example, Agni is ‘insatiable’, *ásinvant-* (RV 7.39.6+), ‘omnivorous’, *viśvād-* (RV 1.189.6+), ‘the mouth of the gods’, (RV 2.1.13+; cf. RV 2.1.13 *tvām agna ādityāsa āsīyām ... cakrire* “you, Agni, did the Ādityas make their mouth”), and many of his epithets sketch him as a huge mouth (cf. Macdonell 1897:88–9, Oberlies 2012:114–5, Jamison and Brereton 2014:40).

33 Olrik (1909:69–84) and Dumézil (1959:45–52). Ginevra (2017:71–93 and forthcoming) emphasizes that Loki’s roles in some Scandinavian myths parallel Agni’s role in the corresponding Old Indic myths. In this regard, it is remarkable that kennings for ‘fire’ and ‘Loki’ describe them as ‘thieves’; cf., e.g., *húsbjóf* ‘the house-thief’ (‘fire’, in *Ynglingatal* 20+); *Skp.* 23a *Hvernig skal kenna Loka?* [...] *þjófjotna, hafrs ok Brisingamens ok Þunnar epla* “How shall Loki be referred to? [...] thief from giants, of goat, and Brisingamen and Þunn’s apples.” This aspect may count as a further common trait, which Loki shares with Hermes and Prometheus. Even though Agni is never called ‘thief’, he is compared to a hiding cattle-thief in RV 1.65.1.

34 The association between ‘fire’ and ‘food’ underlies the ON kenning *eldsmat* ‘fire-nourishment’, i.e., ‘firewood’ (*Áns saga bogsvægis*, Lv. 1). Nagy (1974:84–8) proposes that OInd. *arāṇi* ‘churning fire-stick’ goes back to IE **h₂el-* ‘to nourish’; cf. Lat. *alō* ‘to nourish’.

ok út títt. En sá er Logi heitir, þat var villieldr, ok brenndi hann eigi seinna trogit en slátrit (Gylf. 46d–7d)

By that time **Loki had eaten all the meat** from the bones, but **Logi likewise had eaten all the meat, and the bones with it, and the trough too**; [...] That was the first, which **Loki did; he was very hungry and ate zealously, but he who was called Logi was “wild-fire,” and he burned the trough no less swiftly than the meat.**

Neither Agni nor Loki is as explicitly associated with the invention of the sacrificial allotment as Hermes and Prometheus are within the Greek tradition. However, in at least one Rigvedic passage Agni is compared to a knife cutting an ox; cf. RV 10.79.6cd [...] *hárir áttave ’dán ’ví parvaśás cakarta gām ivāsím* “tawny (Agni) has to eat without teeth. He has cut apart (the wood) piece by piece, as a knife does a cow joint by joint.” Loki is portrayed as cutting the portions of an ox in Þjóðólfr ór Hvíni *Haustlǫng* 5; cf. *Fljótt það foldar dróttinn/ Fárbauta mög Várar/ þekkiligr með þegnum/ þrymseilar hval deila* “The gracious lord of the earth [: Óðinn] bade the son of Fárbauti [: Loki] share out quickly the whale of the Vár [: Skaði, an ox] among the fellows” (Clunies Ross 2017:439).³⁵

Finally, although Agni is often described as ‘all-eating’ in the *Rigveda*, the prerogative of ‘eating (raw) flesh’ applies to him when he brings the dead to the forefathers. On this occasion, “flesh-eating Agni,” i.e., “cremation Agni,” seems to contrast with “the other Jātavedas,” who is in charge of different types of sacrifice; cf.

*yó agniḥ kravyāt pravivéśa vo grhám
imám páśyann ítaraṇ jātávedasam
tám harāmi pitryajñāya devām
sá gharmám invāt paramé sadhásthe* (RV 10.16.10)

The **flesh-eating Agni** who entered **your house**, though **he saw this one here, the other Jātavedas, that god I take for the sacrifice to the forefathers.** He will send the gharma (drink) to the highest seat.

In RV 10.16 cremation Agni is ‘the conveyer of raw flesh’ (*kravyavāhanah*, RV 10.16.11), ‘the eater of raw-flesh’ (*kravyād-*, RV 10.16.9+), who is sent to the forefathers (*yamárājño gachatu ripravāhah* “carrying away defilements, let him go to those who have Yama as their king,” RV 10.16.9b). As such, he leads (Ved. *vah-*) the forefathers to their oblation (: the dead); cf. RV 10.16.12cd *usānn usatá*

35 Cf. *Skp.* 2 for a similar story.

ā vaha, pitṛñ havīṣe āttave “eagerly convey the eager forefathers here, to eat the oblation.” These distinctive traits of his parallel the usual descriptions of Agni, as the god in charge of other types of sacrifice. The fire-god is commonly described as “the conveyer of the ritual offering” (*havyavāhanah*, RV 1.44.2+), “the oblation-eater” (*havyād-*, RV 7.34.14),³⁶ “the messenger, who leads the gods to the sacrifice”; cf. RV 3.5.9d *ā dūtó vaksad yajáthāya devān* “(Agni) as a messenger will convey the gods to the sacrifice.” In other words, cremation Agni in RV 10.16 seems to be sketched as a sort of *special/marked* Agni, who interacts with the forefathers as the fire-god usually interacts with the gods. In this context, the association between cremation Agni and the prerogative of “eating raw flesh” is remarkable. In the Greek tradition, where different types of fire are distinguished on the basis of the prerogative of “mobility,” the association with the consumption of meat came to be a specific trait of Hermes the *psychopompos*, i.e., the cremation fire-god.

6. In conclusion, I have tried to point out that the role of Hermes and one of his epithets as *psychopompos* may be interpreted as a reflex of one of his *fiery* prerogatives, which the Greek god has retained from an older tradition. As a closing remark, I would like to highlight some significant differences in the descriptions of (i) the static fire-goddess and (ii) the dynamic fire-god in Greece.³⁷

(i) Hestia ‘sits down’ (PIE **sed-* ‘id.’) in the middle of the house and takes a portion of ‘fat’. As such, she is in charge of domestic fire-rites; cf.

36 On the compounds with first member *kravya*^o cf. Das 1987:99–101 and Scarlata 1999:35–7 (contra Pinault 1982:265–9), who propose that *kravya-* has been created *innervedisch* on the model of Ved. *havya*^o.

37 The category of “mobility” seems to provide a distinction between static and dynamic fire in at least one other Indo-European tradition. As pointed out by Nagy (1974:88–96), Italic languages seem to preserve an opposition between unmovable and movable fireplace: Lat. *āra* is (the static) ‘fireplace’, whereas *focus/foculus* is the “optionally movable” fire (Nagy 1974:89); cf., e.g., Verg. *A.* 12.285 *crateras focosque ferunt* “they take away the craters and the *foci*.” Analogously, Umbrian has a term for ‘fireplace’, *aso-* (cf. Umbr. *ase* ‘on the altar’ [*Tab. Ig.* III 21–2]), and one for ‘movable fireplace’, *ahiti-*, etymologically an abstract noun **ag-ti-* ‘*carrying’ (**h₁ag-ti* or **h₂eg-ti* to the same Indo-European root as Lat. *agō*, Gk. *ἄγω* ‘to lead’). More recently, Nagy (2017:12–13) has provided a revised interpretation of Umbr. *ahiti-* as ‘activation’, specifying that “the result of the ‘action’ or ‘activation’ is the carrying of the sacrificial fire, and the Umbrian *ahiti* is the container that is used for achieving this ‘action’.”

καὶ τε μέσῳ οἴκῳ **κατ’ ἄρ’ ἔξετο πῖαρ ἐλοῦσα** (*h.Merc.* 29)

And she (: Hestia) **sat down** in the middle of the house and took (her portion of) **fat**.³⁸

- (ii) The dynamic fire-god Hermes (ii.a) acts as a messenger, who travels in different directions, namely: upwards (to the sky/to the gods) and downwards (to the underworld/the chthonic gods), and is associated with (ii.b) the consumption of meat and the invention of the sacrificial share. Cf.

(ii.a) Ζηνὶ δ’ ἄρ’ Ἀτλαντὶς Μαίη τέκε κύδιμον Ἑρμῆν,
κήρυκ’ ἀθανάτων, ἱερὸν λέχος εἰσαναβάσα (*Hes. Th.* 938–9)

To Zeus, Maïa, daughter of Atlas gave birth to **Hermes**, the **herald of the immortals**, having gone up into (his) holy bed.

(ii.a) [...] κύδιμον Ἑρμῆν,
οἶον δ’ εἰς Αἴδην τετελεσμένον ἄγγελον εἶναι,
ὅς τ’ ἄδοτός περ ἐὼν δώσει γέρας οὐκ ἐλάχιστον (*h.Merc.* 570–2)

And (sc. Apollo declared) that glorious **Hermes** alone should be **empowered as envoy to Hades**, who without receiving offerings will yet confer not the smallest of boons.

(ii.b) δύο δὲ καταθύσας [...] τῶν δὲ κρεῶν τὰ μὲν κατηνάλωσεν ἐψήσας ([*Apollod.*] 3.112–3)

But he (: Hermes) **sacrificed two** (cows) [...] **while (some) of the flesh he boiled** and **ate some**.

In conclusion, the analysis of the phraseology and the main prerogatives of Hermes, including a new etymological interpretation of ἀκάκητα, provides support for the hypothesis of J.-P. Vernant (1963) that we have revisited: the pair Hermes and Hestia may ultimately reflect the polarity movable fire vs. unmovable fire in Greece.

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38 Hestia is invoked as δέσποινα (etymologically ‘lady of the house’) in *E. Alc.* 163.

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