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To See or not to See: Blind People and Blindness in Ancient Greek Myth

As other disabilities, blindness seems to be ambiguous in Archaic Greece and later, both a disease and an advantage. Blind people are known in Myths as very respected and honoured persons : poets (*aoidoi*) or soothsayers. Those professions might have been their specialties, as is still seen in such countries as Africa. Their blindness seems to have been given them as a compensation for their gift, or the reverse, in formulas typical of an exchange rather than of a punishment.

We'll start with a formal analysis of the vocabulary and the formulas, which will lead to an analysis of some characters and myths.

1. 1. Tuflovç

The first word one thinks of is of course *tuphl-* and its family. We sought it in the whole corpus of the TLG.

Tufl- is met only one in Homer, in *Iliad* 6, about Lycurgus : let's remind the context. Diomedes sees Glaukus coming out before the fighting-lines with a hostile attitude, seeking for a single combat with him. As he is much stronger, this challenge seems foolish, and Diomedes first supposes he could be a god (v. 128-9).

Then, Diomedes takes a mythological paradigm for such a foolish behaviour, that of Lycurgus, who dared to pursue young Dionysos' nurses in the holy mountain of Nyseion (probably a popular etymology for the god's name). Young Dionysos dived into the sea down to Thetis' cave, whereas the Nymphs used their goad (*bouphl`gi*) against Lycurgus. The text doesn't specify if this very arm took L. his sight, but his blindness is due to Zeus, as well as his further death. The gods were detesting him, blindness and death are clearly a punishment (138 *wjduvsanto*, 140 *ajphvcqeto*).

This first and sole Homeric example seems without ambiguity.

Hom. *Il.* 6.139 Lycurgus : 130-143
6.130

oujde; ga;r oujde; Druvantoç uiJo;ç kratero;ç Lukovorgoç dh;n h`n, o{ç rJa
qeoï'çin ejpouranivoiçin e[rizen: o{ç pote mainomevnoio Diwnuvçioio
tiqhvnac çeu'e katΔ hjgavqeon Nuçhvi>on: ai} dΔ a{ma pa'çai quvçqla
camai; katevceuan uJpΔ ajndrofovnoio Lukouvrgou qeinovmenai bouphl'gi:
Diwvnuçoç de; fobhqeï;ç duvçeçqΔ aJlo;ç kata; ku'ma, Qevtiç dΔ

uJpedevxato kovlpw/ deidiovta: kratero;ç ga;r e[ce trovmoç ajndro;ç
oJmoklh'/. tw'/ me;n e[peitΔ ojduvçanto qeoi; rJei'a zwwonteç, **kaiv min
tuflo;n e[qhke Krovnu pavi>ç**: oujdΔ a[rΔ e[ti dh;n

6.140

h\n, ejpei; ajqanavtoičin ajphvcqeto pa'çi qeoi'çin: oujdΔ a]n ejgw;
makavreççi qeoi'ç ejqevloimi mavceççai. eij dev tivç ejççi brotw'n oi}
ajrouvrhç karmo;n e[duçin, a\ççon i[qΔ w{ç ken qa'ççon ojlevqrou peivraqΔ
i{khai.

But the same word is met in the end of the Delian part of the *Hymn to Apollo*, alluding clearly to the best of the poets (169 h[diston ajoidw`n, 173 ajristeuvousin ajoidaiv) in a context of praise. Of course we won't deal here with the problem of Homer's person and historical reality. We're concerned only with the legend of the blind poet, this passage is the first attestation of. A proof of its interpretation as a clear allusion to Home'r is found in Thucydides 3, who explains the purification of Delos by the Athenians (beginning of § 104 tou`d`j aujtou`ceimw`noç... ejkavqhran), telling how the island became for all the Ionians a place for meetinf (megavlh xuvnodoç) with *agones*, game and choral competitions. He quotes usccessivly two passages of the *Hymns*, and in the second one, je mentions that Homer praised himself (ejtevlauta tou`ejpaivnou ... eJautou`ejpemnhvsqh).

Therefore, though *Iliad* 6 could lead us to the hypothesis that **tuflo-** means a disease sent by the fods, the *Hymns* seems to deny such a strong conclusion.

hAp. 3. 172 (Allen, T.W. Halliday, W.R. Sikes, E.E. ed.)

ejnqavde pwlei'tai, kai; tevw/ tevrpeççe mavliçta... uJmei'ç dΔ eu\
mavla pa'çai uJpokrivnaççqΔ ajmfΔ hJmevwn: tuflo;ç ajnhvr, oijkei' de;
Civw/ e[ni paipaloevççh/, tou' pa'çai metovpiççen ajriçteuvouçin
ajoidaiv. hJmei'ç dΔ uJmevteron klevoç oi[ççomen o{ççon ejpΔ ai\an

cf. *Thc.* 3.104.5.12

ejnqavde pwlei'tai, kai; tevw/ tevrpeççe mavliçta...æ uJmei'ç dΔ eu\
mavla pa'çai uJpokrivnaçççai ajfhvmwç: ætuflo;ç ajnhvr, oijkei' de; Civw/
e[ni paipaloevççh/.æ toçau'ta me;n "Omhroç ejtekmhrivwççen o{ti h\n kai; to;
pavlai megavlh xuvnodoç kai; eJorth; ejn th'/ Dhvlw/:

Let's have a look on some other formulas before coming to the Palladionmyth. **tuflovç** is exceptional in Homer, but everybody knows there are several blind persons among the characters, only men : thus other expressions are used, and that's where we'll find ambiguity.

2. Other idioms

The famous introduction of the blind *aidos* in Alkioos' court for a poetic performance in book 8 shows a notion of poetic gift as a possible compensation for his lack of sight, with a storn opposition between the two hemistichs marked by mevn/dev, bringing near

the two verbal forms **a[merçe, divdou**. As this verse is the sole use of *amerse* in Homer, no help may be found from other contexts. Though the balance **a[merçe mevn, divdou d j** seems to imply a strong emphasis on **ojfqalmw'n / Δ hJdei'an ajoidhvn**. The amplification of the second term by the adjective has the same result.

- Demodokos, *Od.* 8.62-66

kh'ruX dΔ ejgguvqen h\lqen a[gwn ejrivhron ajoidovn, to;n peri; Mou'çΔ ejfivhçe, divdou dΔ ajgaqovn te kakovn te: **ojfqalmw'n me;n a[merçe, divdou dΔ hJdei'an ajoidhvn**. tw'/ dΔ a[ra Pontovnooç qh'ke qrovnon ajrgurovhlon mevççw/ daitumovwn, pro;ç kivona makro;n ejreivçaç:

The notion of a kind of exchange may be stressed by another passage where disability, maybe blindness, seems also to balance with *aoide*, that concerning Thamyris in *Iliad 2*: this *aidos*, coming from Thraceas the famous Orpheus did, foolishly pretended once to compete with the Muses (

Was Thamyris blind ? Thamyris, *Il.* 2, 595-600 Dwvrión, e[nqav te Mou'çai ajntovmenai Qavmurin to;n Qrhvi>ka pau'çan ajoidh'ç Oijcalivhqen ijovnta parΔ Eujruvtou Oijcalih'oç: çteu'to ga;r eujcovmenoç nikhçevmen ei[per a]n aujtai; Mou'çai ajevdoien kou'rai Dio;ç aijgiovcoio: **ai} de; colwçavmenai phro;n qevçan**, aujta;r ajoidh;n qeçpeçivhn ajfevlonto kai; ejklevlaqon kiquariçtuvn:

this *aidos*, coming from Thraceas the famous Orpheus did, foolishly pretended once to compete with the Muses (çteu'to ga;r eujcovmenoç nikhçevmen) and was punished of this pretention by a disability, **phro;n qevçan**. He had the gift for singing before, they deprived him of this gift (ajfevlonto). Notice the emphasis on **ajoidh;n qeçpeçivhn** with the rhythmic effect produced by the enjambment, and also the strong use of the factitive *ejklevlaqon kiquariçtuvn*, « made forgot ». Once more, the adj. **phro;n** is a *hapax* in Homer. Later on, it was used in the generic meaning of « disabled ». But the parallel with Demodokos is tempting. Among the Phaeacians, the man knew the limits of mankind, and blindness and *aoide* seem to equipoise, whereas Thamyris was punished of his *hubris* by both disability and losing his poetic gift. As a piece of evidence for interpreting this generic disability as actually being blindness, we'll invoke Euripides' or Ps. Eur. *Rhesus* 924, where the *Mousai* of the Pangeion speak in the first person of the plural, telling they *blinded* Thamyris the Thracian.

- - Polyphemus is one of the better known blind Epic characters, after the process of turning the big stake in his eye by Odysseus and his companions, The poet actually never says the Kukllops is *monophthalmos*, but he constantly uses in the

whole passage the singular *ophthalmos*, never the archaic dual *osse* neither a plural form. The most interesting passage for us is in the end of the episode, when Polyphemus recalls Telemos's prophecy :

- - *Od.* 9.507-521 Telemos' prophecy
511-2 ... ο[ç moi e[fh
ceirw`n ejx jOduçh`oç aJmarthvçeçqai ojpwpfh`ç

516. 516 ojfqalmou` ajlavwsen, ...

The formal analysis shows that the adjective *tuphlos* still exist in the Homeric poetry, but is rarely used, whereas the poet knows a lot of other means for expressing the loss of sight, be it violent as in the cas of Polyphemus or an accident, meant as the will of the gods.

3. 3. The *Palladion* myth

The most detailed and best known telling of the *Palladion* myth, not mentioned in Homer, is found in the *Bibliotheca* attributed to Apollodorus : no mention of blindness there. But we meet an interestinf variant in Plutarchus' *Minor Parallels* : Ilos, one of the founders of Ilion-Troie, took the statue (h[rpase : violently ?) from the naos of Athena and became blind (ejtuflwvqh : suddenly ?) Plutarchus gives the reason for this : ouj gavr ejwh`n uJp j ajndro ;ç blevpesqai). This is the version he puts as Derkullus' one. The he give another one, by Aristeides of Miletos, who said the *temenos* was burning (kaiovmenon) ; so Ilos may have tried to put the statue in safety, but he became blind all the same. This detail could explain why he recovered his sight afterwards (u[steron dj exilasavmenoç ajnevbleyen/ same wording in a different order). The *Palladion* first fell from the sky, in the time of Dardanos : it's not an ordinary statue, it has magic powers (Virgil mentions this in the *En.*)

- - Polyphemus, *Od.* 9.507-521 Telemos' prophecy
511-2 ... ο[ç moi e[fh

ceirw`n ejx jOduçh`oç aJmarthvçeççai ojpwph`ç

516 ofjqalmou` ajlavwsen, ...

Was Thamyris blind ? Thamyris, *Il.* 2, 595-600 Dwvrión, e[nqav te Mou'çai
ajntovmenai Qavmurin to;n Qrhvi>ka pau'çan ajoidh'ç Oijcalivhqen ijovnta
parΔ Eujruvtou Oijcalih'oç: çteu'to ga;r eujcovmenoç nikhçevmen ei[per a]n
aujtai; Mou'çai ajeivdoien kou'rai Dio;ç aijgiövcoio: **ai} de; colwçavmenai
phro;n qevçan**, aujta;r ajoidh;n
qeçpeçivhn ajfevlonto kai; ejklevlaqon kiqariçtuvn:

[Euripides] *Rhes.* 922-5 Pavggaion ojrgavnoičin ejxhshkhmevnai

Mou` sai megivsthñ eijç e[rin melwideivaç kleinw`i sofisth`i **Qrhiki;**

kajtuflwvsamen

Qavmurin, o{ç hJmw`n povll j ejdevnnasen tejcñhn.

The Palladionmyth : Plut. *Parall. Min.* 309 F

EN ILIWI tou' naou' th'ç ΔAqhna'ç ejmprhçqevntoç proçdramw;n «lloç to;
diopete;ç h{rpaçe pallavdion kai; **ejtuflwvqh: ouj ga;r ejxh'n uJpΔ ajndro;ç
blevpeççai: u{çteron dΔ ejxilaçavmenoç ajnevbleyen:** wJç Devrkulloç ejn
prwvwtw/ Ktivçewn (FHGr. IV 587).

METELLOÇ ajnh;r tw'n ejpiçhvmwn poreuovmenoç eijç to; proavçteion uJpo;
koravkwn ejpeçcevqh pavovntwn tai'ç ptevruxi. fobhqe;ç de; to;n oijwno;n eijç
ÔRwvmhn uJpevçtreyn.

310."A".1

ijdw;n de; to; tevmenoç th'ç ÔEçtivaç kaiövmenon kai; to; pallavdion aJrpavçaç
ejtuflwvqh: u{çteron dΔ ajnevbleyen ejxilaçavmenoç: wJç ΔAriçteivdhç Milhvçioç
ejn ΔItaliko;ç (FHGr. IV 323). cf. *ib.* 305 C 4 çumblhqeivçhç de; th'ç
paratavxewç Poluvzhloç me;n uJperavnqrwpon fantaçivan qeaçavmenoç th;n
o{raçin ajpevbale kai; tuflo;ç ejgevneto: Kallivmacoç de; polloi'ç
peripeparmevnoç dovraçi kai; nekro;ç ejçtavqh: Kunevgeiroç de; Perçi- kh;n
ajnagomevnhñ nau'n kataçcw;n ejceirokophvqh.

Cf. Ps. Apollodorus, *Bibl.* 142-146

«lloç de; eijç Frugivan ajfikovmenoç kai; katalabw;n uJpo; tou' baçilevwç aujtoç
teqeimevnon ajgw'na nika'/ pavlhn: kai; labw;n aqlon penthvkonta kovrouç kai;
kovraç ta;ç i{çaç, dovntoç aujtw'/ tou' baçilevwç kata; crhçmo;n kai; bou'n poikivlhn,
kai; fravçantoç ejn w/per a]n aujth; kliqh'/

3.143.1

tovpw/ povlin ktivzein, ei{peto th'/ boi?. hJ de; ajfikomevnh ejpi; to;n legovmenon th'ç
Frugivaç "Athç lovfon klivnetai: e[nqa povlin ktivçaç «lloç tauvthñ me;n "Ilion
ejkavleçe, tw'/ de; Dii; çhmei'on eujxavmenoç aujtw'/ ti fanh'nai, meqΔ hJmevran to;
diipete;ç pallavdion pro; th'ç çknhh'ç keivmenon ejqeavçato. h\ñ de; tw'/ megevqe
trivphcu, toi'ç de; poçi; çumbekhkovç, kai; th'/ me;n dexia'/ dovrü dihrmevnon e[con
th'/ de; eJtevrü/ hjlakavthñ kai; a[trakton.

3.144.1

^aiJçtoriva de; hJ peri; tou' palladivou toivade fevretai: façi; gennhqeï'çan th;n ΔAqhna'n para; Trivtwni trevfeççai, w/ qugavthr h\N Pallavç: ajmfotevraç de; ajçkouvçaç ta; kata; povlemon eijç filoneikivan pote; proelqeï'n. mellouvçhç de; plhvttain th'ç Pallavdoç to;n Diva fobhqeivnta th;n aijgivda protei'nai, th;n de; eujlabhqeï'çan ajnablevyai, kai; ou{twç uJpo; th'ç ΔAqhna'ç trwqeï'çan peçeï'n. ΔAqhna'n de; perivlupon ejpΔ aujth'/ genomevnhn, xovanon ejkeivnhç o{moion kataçkeuvçai, kai; periqeï'nai toi'ç çtevrnoiç h)n e[deiçen aijgivda, kai; tima'n iJdruçamevnhn para; tw'/ Diiv. u{çteron de; ΔHlevktraç kata; th;n fqora;n touvtw/ proç- fugouvçhç, Diva rJi'yai metΔ aujth'ç kai; to; pallavdion eijç th;n ΔIliavda cwvran, «Ilon de; touvtw/ nao;n kataçkeuvçanta tima'n. kai; peri; me;n tou' palladivou tau'ta levgetai.^o

3.146.1

«Iloç de; ghvmaç Eujrudivkhn th;n ΔAdravçtou Laomevdonta ejgevnhçen, o}ç gamei' Çtrumw; th;n Çkamavndrou, kata; dev tinaç Plakivan th;n ΔOtrevwç, katΔ ejnivouç de; Leukivpphn, kai; teknoi' pai'daç me;n Tiqwno;n Lavmpon Klutivon Ôlketavona Podavrkhñ, qugatevraç de; ÔHçiovnhñ kai; Kivllan kai; ΔAçtuovchn, ejk de; nuvmfhç Kaluvbhç Boukolivwna.

2. Other idioms

Demodokos, *Od.* 8.62-66

kh'rux dΔ ejgguvqen h\lqen a[gwn ejrivhron ajoidovn, to;n peri; Mou'çΔ ejfivlhçe, divdou dΔ ajgaqovn te kakovn te: **ojfqalmw'n me;n a[merçe, divdou dΔ hJdei'an ajoidhvn.** tw'/ dΔ a[ra Pontovnooç qh'ke qrovnon ajrgurovhlon mevççw/ daitumovnwn, pro;ç kivona makro;n ejreivçaç:

Was Thamyris blind ? Thamyris, *Il.* 2, 595-600 Dwvriov, e[nqav te Mou'çai ajntovmenai Qavmurin to;n Qrhvi>ka pau'çan ajoidh'ç Oijcalivhçen ijovnta parΔ Eujruvtou Oijcalih'oç: çteu'to ga;r eujcovmenoç nikhçevmen ei[per a]n aujtai; Mou'çai ajevdoien kou'rai Dio;ç aijgiovcoio: **ai} de; colwçavmenai phro;n qevçan,** aujta;r ajoidh;n qeçpeçivhn ajfevlonto kai; ejklevlaqon kiqariçtuvn:

search:

'kwfo' OR 'kwfw'

proximity 1 lines

extract 2 lines

in set:

12 Homerus Epic.

1 Ilias

2 Odyssea

3 Epigrammata

253 [Homerus] <Epic.>

1 Margites (fragmenta)

exported rtf/all of 2 cases

Homerus Epic.

8 B.C.

Ilias

Allen, T.W.

"0012"."001".11.390 kwfon

nu'n dev mΔ ejpigryvaç tarço;n podo;ç eu[ceai au[twç. oujk
ajlevgw, wJç ei[me gunh; bavloi h] pavi>ç a[frwn: Æ kwfo;n ga;r
bevloç ajndro;ç ajnavlkidoç oujtidanoi'o. h\ tΔ a[lwç uJpΔ ejmei'o,
kai; ei[kΔ ojlivgon per ejpauvrh/, ojxu; bevloç pevletai, kai;
ajkhvrion ai\ya tivqhçi.

"0012"."001".14.16 kwfw

tou;ç me;n ojrinomevnoç, tou;ç de; klonevontaç o[piçqe Trw'aç
uJperquvmouç: ejrevripto de; tei'coç ΔAcaiwn. Æ wJç dΔ o{te
porfuvrh/ pevlagoc mevga kuvmati kwfw'/ ojççovmenon ligevwn
ajnevwmwn laihra; kevleuqa au[twç, oujdΔ a[ra te prokulivndetai
oujdetevrwçe,

"0012"."001".2.599 phron

Æ çteu'to ga;r eujcovmenoç nikhçevmen ei[per a]n aujtai; Mou'çai
ajeivdoien kou'rai Dio;ç aijgiovcoio: Æ ai} de; colwçavmenai phro;n
qevçan, aujta;r ajoidh;n qeçpeçivhn ajfevlonto kai; ejklevlaqon
kiquariçtuvn: tw'n au\qΔ hJgemovneue Gerhvnioç iJppovta Nevçtwr:

Homerus Epic.

8 B.C.

Odyssea

von der Mu+hll, P.

"0012"."002".11.287 phrw

hJ de; Puvlou baçivleue, tevken dev oiJ ajglaa; tevkna, Nevçtorav
te Cromivon te Perikluvmenovn tΔ ajgevrwcon. toi'çi dΔ ejpΔ
ijfqivmhn Phrw; tevke, qau'ma brotoi'çi, th;n pavnteç mnwvonto
periktivtai: oujdev ti Nhleu;ç tw'/ ejdivdou, o}ç mh; e{likaç bovaç
eujrumetwvpouç