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► **To cite this version:**

Françoise Letoublon. Palamedes and Letters.: A Hero and Martyr in the War of Troy. Athina Papachrysostomou, Andreas P. Antonopoulos et al. *Γρα: Studies in honor of Professor Menelaos Christopoulos*, ed. Athina Papachrysostomou, Andreas P. Antonopoulos, 2023, Classics@25: <https://nrs.harvard.edu/URN-3:HLNC.ESSAY:103900175>. hal-04500032

**HAL Id: hal-04500032**

**<https://hal.univ-grenoble-alpes.fr/hal-04500032>**

Submitted on 11 Mar 2024

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# Palamedes and Letters

## A Hero and Martyr in the Trojan War

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In earlier essays on the Epic Cycle, I studied the strange case of an important object in the Trojan War, the Palladion, which was considered a key to the victory but was not mentioned by Homer.<sup>1</sup> In the present chapter I would like to examine the comparable case of a character, Palamedes: mentioned once in the *Cypria* (fr. 19 = Pausanias 10.31.2), Palamedes is elevated to the rank of a hero in Philostratus' *Heroikos* and Dictys' *Ephemeris*. His—rather intriguing—absence from the *Iliad* is explained by Philostratus as resulting from Odysseus' conspiracy.

### Palamedes in the *Cypria*

Never mentioned in Homer, Palamedes' character is known from two scanty passages of Proclus' summary of the *Cypria*:<sup>2</sup>

- 118-122 ἔπειτα τοὺς ἡγεμόνας ἄθροίζουσιν ἐπελθόντες τὴν Βελλία. Καὶ μαίνεσθαι προσποιούμενον Ὀδυσσεῖα ἐπὶ τῷ μὴ θέλειν συστρατεύεσθαι ἐφώρασαν, Παλαμήδους ὑποθέμενον τὸν υἱὸν Τηλέμαχον ἐπὶ κόλασιν ἐξαρπάξαντες.  
Καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα συνελθόντες εἰς Αὐλίδα θύουσι.
- and 166 ἔπειτα ἐστὶ Παλαμήδους θάνατος.

It may seem difficult to build a hero from those short mentions, but as they are complemented with several details found throughout Greek literature, they help us draw a more precise story.

In particular, the fact that all three great playwrights of tragedies wrote a *Palamedes*<sup>3</sup> implies he was well-known in the Classical period. It is a misfortune that only few fragments from these tragic plays survive.

<sup>1</sup> Létoublon 2009, 2014a, 2014b.

<sup>2</sup> Davies 1988:27–44, Davies 1989:32–50, Bernabé 1996:36–64, Debiasi 2004:111–122, West 2013:102, 123–125.

<sup>3</sup> Apart from Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, we know of fourth tragedy by the same title, composed by

Proclus' summary is substantiated by various texts: [Apollodorus'] *Bibliotheca* (Epitome) 7 discusses Odysseus' feigned folly and the manner Palamedes thwarts it:

ὄντων δὲ πολλῶν προθύμων στρατεύεσθαι, παραγίνονται καὶ πρὸς Ὀδυσσεῶα εἰς Ἰθάκην. Ὁ δὲ οὐ βουλευόμενος στρατεύεσθαι προσποιεῖται μανίαν. Παλαμήδης δὲ ὁ Ναυπλίου ἤλεγξε τὴν μανίαν ψευδῆ καὶ προσποιησαμένην μεμνημένοι παρηκολούθει ἄρπασας δὲ Τηλέμαχον ἐκ τοῦ κόλπου τῆς Πηνελόπτης ὡς κτενῶν ἐξιφούλκει. Ὀδυσσεὺς δὲ περὶ τοῦ παιδὸς εὐλαβηθεὶς ὠμολόγησε τὴν προποίητον μανίαν καὶ στρατεύεται.<sup>4</sup>

And while many were eager to join in the expedition, some repaired also to Ulysses in Ithaca. But he, not wishing to go to the war, feigned madness. However, Palamedes, son of Nauplius, proved his madness to be fictitious; and when Ulysses pretended to rave, Palamedes followed him, and snatching Telemachus from Penelope's bosom, drew his sword as if he would kill him. And in his fear for the child Ulysses confessed that his madness was pretended, and he went to the war.

[Apollodorus] *Bibliotheca* (Epitome) 7, transl. Frazer<sup>5</sup>

Hyginus provides even more details on Odysseus' device: he put on a cap, pretending madness, and yoked a horse and an ox to the plow.<sup>6</sup>

## 2. Palamedes' death: A thrilling blockbuster

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Astydamas.

<sup>4</sup> As we will see later, [Apollodorus] immediately thereafter narrates Odysseus' revenge and Palamedes' death, while it must have taken some time in the *Cypria*, as Proclus' text itself suggests.

<sup>5</sup> After Apollodorus, other texts give more details on this fake madness and on Palamedes' outsmart; see Frazer's note ad loc. with further references.

<sup>6</sup> Hyginus *Fabulae* 95: *Agamemnon et Menelaus Atrii filii cum ad Troiam oppugnandam coniuratos duces ducerent, in insulam Ithacam ad Ulixem Laertis filium venerunt, cui erat responsum, si ad Troiam isset, post vicesimum annum solum sociis perditis egentem domum rediturum. Itaque cum sciret ad se oratores venturos, insaniam simulans pileum sumpsit et equum cum bove iunxit ad aratrum. Quem Palamedes ut vidit, sensit simulare atque Telemachum filium eius cunis sublatum aratro ei subiecit et ait "Simulatione deposita inter coniuratos veni." Tunc Ulixes fidem dedit se venturum; ex eo Palamedi infestus fuit.* See also Philostratus, *Heroikos* 10.2.

## 2.1. “Illiterate” versions

Various texts from Greek (and Latin) literature attest to Odysseus taking revenge through Palamedes’ death, building a kind of antique thriller; several versions of the story refer to the conspiracy that leads to Palamedes’ death, which is always violent.

For Pausanias, who explicitly relies on the *Cypria*, Palamedes was drowned by Odysseus and Diomedes thanks to a common fishing party:

Παλαμήδην δὲ ἀποπνιγῆναι προελθόντα ἐπὶ ἰχθύων θήραν, Διομήδην δὲ τὸν ἀποκτείναντα εἶναι καὶ Ὀδυσσεῖα ἐπιλεξάμενος ἐν ἔπεσιν οἶδα τοῖς Κυπρίοις.

Palamedes, as I know from reading the epic poem *Cypria*, was drowned when he put out to catch fish, and his murderers were Diomedes and Odysseus.

Pausanias 10.31.2

This death by fishing might have been the subject of a vase black-figure painting of the sixth century which has been interpreted as representing Palamedes’ ghost seeking vengeance.<sup>7</sup> This version is arguably an early one, especially since Pausanias explicitly says that he drew it from the *Cypria*.

Philostratus provides a more detailed narrative of this “illiterate” conspiracy in his *Heroikos* 6.1:8

Ὁ δὲ Ὀδυσσεὺς ἐν Τροίᾳ ξυνετίθει λόγους πρὸς τὸν Ἀγαμέμνονα ψευδεῖς μὲν, πιθανοὺς δὲ πρὸς τὸν εὐηθῶς ἀκούοντα. ὡς ἐρώη μὲν ὁ Ἀχιλλεὺς τῆς τῶν Ἑλλήνων ἀρχῆς, μαστροπῶ δὲ τῶ Παλαμήδει χρῶτο [...] 3. Καὶ διεξῆλθεν ὡς ἠτοίμασται αὐτῶ τὰ περὶ τὸν Φρύγα καὶ τὸ χρύσιον τὸ ληφθὲν ὁμοῦ τῶ Φρυγί σοφῶς δὲ τούτων ἐπιπονενοῖσθαι δοκούντων καὶ ξυνθεμένου τῆ ἐπιβουλή τοῦ

<sup>7</sup> Woodford 2013:64: “An Attic black-figure neck amphora in the British Museum (PLATE VI d) depicts a winged warrior rushing to the right to overtake a ship that is sailing in the same direction. To the left a bird perches on a craggy rock. The winged warrior in this enigmatic scene should, I believe, be identified as the ghost of Palamedes, whose urgency in outracing the ship is dictated by his thirst for revenge.” See also LIMC, s.v. Palamedes.

<sup>8</sup> Note that Philostratus does not mention a trial nor a formal criminal conviction, as implied in Gorgias’ and [Alcidamas’] versions of the trial.

Ἀγαμέμνωνος· [...] 7.4 Ἄλλ' ἔφθησαν αὐτὸν αἱ Ὀδυσσέως μηχαναί, σοφῶς  
 ξυντεθεῖσαι, καὶ χρυσοῦ μὲν ἦττων ἔδοξε προδότης τε εἶναι κατεψεύσθη,  
 περιαχθεὶς δὲ τῷ χεῖρε κατελιθώθη· βαλλόντων αὐτὸν Πελοποννησίων τε καὶ  
 Ἰθακησίων· ἡ δὲ ἄλλη Ἑλλὰς οὐδὲ ἑώρα ταῦτα, ἀλλὰ καὶ δοκοῦντα ἀδικεῖν  
 ἠγάπα.

Philostratus *Heroikos* 10.6

Odysseus, however, was composing reports to Agamemnon in Troy, reports that were false, but convincing to whoever foolishly listened, to the effect that Achilles lusted after dominion over the Hellenes and that he was using Palamedes as a go-between.[...] Protesilaos then related how the events surrounding the Phrygian and the gold that had been received by the hand of the Phrygian had been arranged by Odysseus.[...] But the wiles of Odysseus, which were already cleverly devised, had anticipated him. He was reputed to give in to gold and was falsely accused of being a traitor, and so with his hands twisted around behind his back, he was stoned to death, with both Peloponnesians and Ithacans throwing stones at him. The rest of Hellas had not seen these events, but were pleased with them too even though they seemed to be unjust.<sup>9</sup>

So does Dictys' *Ephemeris* of the Trojan War, a novelistic pseudo-diary allegedly composed day-by-day<sup>10</sup>:

*Per idem tempus Diomedes et Ulixes consilium de interficiendo Palamede ineunt, more ingenii humani, quod inbecillum adversum dolores animi et invidiae plenum anteiri se a meliore haud facile patitur; igitur simulation quod thesaurum repertum in puteo cum eo partiri vellent, remotiis procul omnibus persuadent, uti ipse potius descenderet eumque nihil insidiosum metuentem adminiculo funis usum deponent ac propere arreotis saxis, quae circum errant, desuper obruunt.*

<sup>9</sup> Transl. <https://chs.harvard.edu/primary-source/flavius-philostratus-on-heroes/>

<sup>10</sup> See Ní Mheallaigh 2008, speaking of "Pseudo-Documentarism".

*ita vir optimus acceptusque in exercitu, cuius neque consilium umquam neque virtus frustra fuit, circumventus a quibus minime decuerat indigno modo interiit. Sed fuere, qui eius consilii haud expertem Agamemnonem dicerent ob amoris ducis in exercitum et quia pars maxima regi ab eo cupiens tradendum ei imperium palam loquebantur; igitur a cunctis Graecis veluti publicum funus eius crematum igni, aureo vasculo sepultum est.*

Dictys *Ephemeris* 2.15

During the same time Diomedes and Ulysses devised a plot to kill Palamedes.<sup>6</sup> (It is characteristic of human nature to yield to resentments and envy; one does not easily allow oneself to be surpassed by a better.) Accordingly, these two, pretending to have found gold in a well, persuaded Palamedes – they wanted, they said, to share the treasure with him – to be the one to descend. He suspected nothing; and so, when no one else was nearby, they let him down by means of a rope, and then, picking up stones which were lying on around, they quickly stoned him to death. Thus Palamedes, the best of men and the army's favourite, one whose counsel and courage had never failed, died in a way he ill deserved, treacherously slain by the most unworthy men. There were those who suspected Agamemnon of having shared in this plot, for Palamedes was very popular with the soldiers, most of whom wanted him as their king and openly said that he should be made commander-in-chief. After burning the body, a ceremony which was attended, like a public funeral, by all the Greeks, the ashes were placed in a golden urn.

Dictys *Ephemeris* 2.15<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Translation: <https://www.theoi.com/Text/DictysCretensis2.html>.

## 2.2. A (fake) letter

Other sources give different and more complex versions, mostly implying a fake letter, with Phoenician or Phrygian characters sometimes playing a significant role.<sup>12</sup>

The main source, a *scholion* to Euripides' *Orestes*, contains in less than twenty lines an actual biography of Palamedes, as well as the revenge by Palamedes' father, Nauplius (the latter was told in at least two classical tragedies by Sophocles):<sup>13</sup>

Οἷαξ τὸ Τροίας μῖσος: Ναυπλίου καὶ Κλυμένης τῆς Κατρέως ἐγένοντο Οἷαξ καὶ Παλαμήδης. ὁ δὲ Παλαμήδης ἀπελθὼν εἰς Τροίαν τὰ μέγιστα ὤνησε τὸν Ἑλληνικὸν λαόν. Λιμωσσόντων γὰρ ἐν Αὐλίδι καὶ περὶ τὴν διανομὴν τοῦ σίτου δυσχεραίνόντων τε καὶ στασιαζόντων, πρῶτον μὲν τὰ Φοινίκια διδάξας γράμματα αὐτοὺς ἴσῃν καὶ ἀνεπίληπτον τὴν διανομὴν ἐν τούτοις ἐπραγματεύσατο. ἔπειτα καὶ περὶ κύβους ἔτρεψεν αὐτῶν τὴν ὀλιγωρίαν καὶ μέτρα ἐξεῦρε καὶ ψῆφον ὥστε μέγα σχεῖν ὄνομα παρὰ τοῖς Ἕλλησιν. ἐπὶ τούτῳ δὲ φθονήσαντες οἱ περὶ Ἀγαμέμνονα καὶ Ὀδυσσεά καὶ Διομήδην τοιόνδε τι σκευωροῦσι κατ' αὐτοῦ. λαβόντες γὰρ Φρύγα αἰχμάλωτον χρυσίον κομίζοντα Σαρπηδόνη ἠνάγκασαν γράψαι Φρυγίοις γράμμασιν περὶ προδοσίας ὡς παρὰ

<sup>12</sup> Ceccarelli 2013:72–88.

<sup>13</sup> Ceccarelli 2013:77: “Our main source for the ‘tragic’ Palamedes is a *scholion* to Euripides’ *Orestes* (432). According to the scholiast, Palamedes’ first intervention in favour of the Achaeans took place during their involuntary stay at Aulis: he solved the difficulties caused by the rationing of food by showing them the use of Phoenician characters, presumably for numbering the rations (πρῶτον μὲν τὰ Φοινίκια διδάξας γράμματα αὐτοὺς ἴσῃν τε καὶ ἀνεπίληπτον τὴν διανομὴν ἐν τούτοις ἐπραγματεύσατο). Here the idea of a Phoenician origin of writing is combined with a Greek hero, Palamedes, and with distributive numbering. Rather than seeing in this a memory of the ‘real’ origin of writing and of its initial purpose, I would argue that this is a result of fifth century and later amalgamation of the various traditions concerning the origin of writing. On the same occasion Palamedes was also said to have invented measures, as well as games of dice and draughts, thereby offering the troops distraction from hunger and inaction (κύβους ... καὶ μέτρα ἐξεῦρε καὶ ψῆφον). This provoked the jealousy of Agamemnon, Odysseus, and Diomedes, however, who decided to destroy him. They forced a Trojan prisoner to write a letter in Phrygian characters as if sent by Priam to Palamedes, revealing the latter as a traitor (ἠνάγκασαν γράψαι φρυγίοις γράμμασι περὶ προδοσίας ὡς παρὰ Πριάμου πρὸς Παλαμήδην). Next, having persuaded a servant of Palamedes to hide the letter and the ‘Trojan’ gold under Palamedes’ bed, they accused the hero of betrayal and ordered a search of his tent. The letter and the gold were found, and the Achaeans stoned Palamedes to death. The *scholion* continues with the arrival at Troy of Nauplius, who has heard of the events, and with his request for justice. [...] in this version of the story Palamedes does not really ‘invent’ writing, but simply transposes Phoenician characters [...] 78 Moreover, the purpose of his invention is clearly stated, namely to help with the rationing and distribution of food. [...] This has the further implication that Palamedes is convicted by a piece of evidence that the Greeks cannot decipher, for otherwise they would not have needed a Trojan prisoner to write it.”

Πριάμου πρὸς Παλαμήδην. Καὶ τοῦτον φονεύουσι, θεράποντα δὲ Παλαμήδους πείθουσι χρήμασιν ἅμα τοῖς Τρωικοῖς χρήμασι καὶ τὸ γραφὲν πινάκιον ὑπὸ τὴν κλινὴν θέσθαι Παλαμήδους. Αὐτοὶ δὲ παρελθόντες προδοσίαν κατήγγελλον τοῦ ἥρωος καὶ φοραθῆναι τὴν σκὴν ἐκέλευον. Εὐρεθέντος δὲ τοῦ πινακίου καὶ τῶν χρημάτων ὑπὸ τὴν κλινὴν λίθοις φονεύεται Παλαμήδης. Ναύπλιος δὲ ἀκούσας ἤκεν εἰς Ἴλιον δικάσαι τὸν φόνον τοῦ παιδός. Τῶν δὲ Ἑλλήνων κατολιγρῶντων αὐτοῦ πρὸς τὸ κεχαρισμένον τοῖς βασιλεῦσιν ἀποπλεύσας εἰς τὴν πατρίδα καὶ πυθόμενος ἀποπλεῖν τοὺς Ἕλληνας ἤκεν εἰς Εὐβοίαν καὶ χειμῶνα φυλάξας φρυκτωρίας ἤψε περὶ τὲς ἄκρας τῆς Εὐβοίας. Οἱ δὲ εὐεπίβατον νομίσαντες τὸν τόπον προσορμίζονται καὶ ἐν ταῖς πέτραις ἀπόλλυνται.

Σ Euripides *Orestes* 432

Let us note in this text the enumeration of Palamedes' deeds for the Greeks (ὤνησε τὸν Ἑλληνικὸν λαόν): he cured the famine at Aulis through a sane distribution of food, the teaching—rather than the invention—of Phoenician letters (τὰ Φοίνικα διδάξας γράμματα), the discovery of measures and pebbles. Palamedes' reputation made Agamemnon, Odysseus, and Diomedes jealous, which explains the plot against him; i.e. a Phrygian captive was forced to write a letter in the Phrygian alphabet,<sup>14</sup> “as if it was from Priam to Palamedes,” and then he was put to death, while an attendant of Palamedes placed the tablet with the Trojan gold under Palamedes' cot. Palamedes was denounced for treason and they had his tent searched. Once the tablet and the gold were found, Palamedes was killed by stoning. His father Nauplius took revenge (as probably told in the *Nostoi* of the Epic Cycle).

This is roughly the same version told by [Apollodorus] in the *Epitome* of the Library:

“Ὅτι Ὀδυσσεὺς λαβὼν αἰχμάλωτον Φρύγα ἠνάγκασε γράψαι περὶ προδοσίας ὡς παρὰ Πριάμου πρὸς Παλαμήδην· καὶ χῶσας ἐν ταῖς σκηναῖς αὐτοῦ χρυσὸν τὴν

<sup>14</sup> This precision is surprising, since Trojans and Phrygians were allies, but spoke different languages, see Ceccarelli above n.13, and Ross 2005:313: “The transcendence of human linguistic barriers is what makes the scene from the *Hymn to Delian Apollo* worthy of mention, while the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* mirrors the patterns of linguistic division between Trojan and ἐπίκουροι in the *Iliad*: Aphrodite, disguised as a Phrygian, can only communicate with Anchises, a Trojan, because she once had a Trojan nurse who taught her his language.”



δέλτον ἔρριψεν ἐν τῷ στρατοπέδῳ. Ἀγαμέμνων δὲ ἀναγνοὺς καὶ εὐρῶν τὸν χρυσόν, τοῖς συμμάχοις αὐτὸν ὡς προδότην παρέδωκε καταλεῦσαι.

Having taken a Phrygian prisoner, Ulysses compelled him to write a letter of treasonable purport ostensibly sent by Priam to Palamedes; and having buried gold in the quarters of Palamedes, he dropped the letter in the camp.

Agamemnon read the letter, found the gold, and delivered up Palamedes to the allies to be stoned as a traitor.

Apollodorus *Epitome* 3.8

In a note to his translation Frazer speaks of a “Machiavellian device”;<sup>15</sup> Gantz remarks that Apollodorus’ version, “too brief to add much to this”, has Odysseus act alone, like Hyginus.<sup>16</sup> This is what Hyginus says in his *Fabulae*:<sup>17</sup>

*Vlysses quod Palamedis Nauplii dolo erat deceptus, in dies machinabatur quomodo eum interficeret. Tandem in consilio ad Agamemnonem militem suum misit qui diceret ei in quiete uidisse ut castra uno die mouerentur. Id Agamemnon uerum existimans castra uno die imperat moueri; Vlysses autem clam noctu solus magnum pondus auri, ubi tabernaculum Palamedis fuerat, obruit, item epistulam conscriptam Phrygi captiuo ad Priamum dat perferendam, militemque suum priorem mittit qui eum non longe a castris interficerent. Postero die cum exercitus in castra rediret, quidam miles epistulam quam Vlysses scripserat super*

<sup>15</sup> For Jouan 1966:343–344, Apollodorus, Hyginus, and the scholia to Euripides’ *Orestes* represent the three main versions of this plot, each of them corresponding to one of the tragic versions, [Apollodorus] to Aeschylus, Hyginus to Sophocles and the scholia to *Orestes* to Euripides’ *Palamedes*.

<sup>16</sup> Gantz 1993:605.

<sup>17</sup> Ceccarelli 2013:78: “Hyginus’ *fabula* 105 preserves a slightly different version. Odysseus, determined to ruin Palamedes, convinces Agamemnon of the necessity to move the camp for one day, and then during the night hides gold where that tent of Palamedes had been. He then gives a letter for Priam (presumably written by himself: the foreign aspect of the writing is not stressed in this account) to a Phrygian slave, whom he dispatches to Priam, having previously arranged for him to be killed while on his journey. On the following day, when the army comes back to the camp, the body is found, and with it the letter. It turns out that it contains a message sent by Priam to Palamedes, promising him as much gold as Odysseus has hidden in the tent if he will betray the Greeks according to the proposed agreement. An *agon* followed in which Palamedes defended himself; to prove his innocence, he asked for his tent to be inspected, but at this point the gold was found and Palamedes put to death.”

*cadaver Phrygis positam ad Agamemnonem attulit, in qua scriptum fuit  
 "Palamedi a Priamo missa"; tantumque ei auri polliceretur quantum Vlysses in  
 tabernaculum obruerat, si castra Agamemnonis ut ei conuenerat proderet.  
 Itaque Palamedes cum ad regem esset productus et factum negaret, in  
 tabernaculum eius ierunt et aurum effoderunt, quod Agamemnon ut uidit, uere  
 factum esse credidit. Quo facto Palamedes dolo Vlyssis deceptus ab exercitu  
 uniuerso innocens occisus est.*

Ulysses, because he had been tricked by Palamedes, son of Nauplius, kept plotting day by day how to kill him. At length, having formed a plan, he sent a soldier of his to Agamemnon to say that in a dream he had been warned that the camp should be moved for one day. Agamemnon, believing the warning true, gave orders that the camp be moved for one day. Ulysses, then, secretly by night hid a great quantity of gold in the place where the tent of Palamedes had been. He also gave to a Phrygian captive a letter to be carried to Priam, and sent a soldier of his ahead to kill him not far from the camp. On the next day when the army came back to the camp, a soldier found on the body of the Phrygian, the letter which Ulysses had written, and brought it to Agamemnon. Written on it were the words: "Sent to Palamedes from Priam," and it promised him as much gold as Ulysses had hidden in the tent, if he would betray the camp of Agamemnon according to agreement. And so when Palamedes was brought before the king, and so denied the deed, they went to his tent and dug up the gold. Agamemnon believed the charge was true when he saw the gold. In this way Palamedes was tricked by the scheme of Ulysses, and though innocent, was put to death by the entire army.

Hyginus *Fabulae* 105<sup>18</sup>

Although different authors give different accounts of Palamedes' death and of the devices used to kill him (using a fake letter or not), they all incriminate Odysseus' jealousy and hatred against

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<sup>18</sup> Translation: <https://archive.ph/BTFmO>

Palamedes,<sup>19</sup> be Diomedes implied in the plot or not. Another striking feature is the presence of a trial, giving Palamedes a voice and a possibility to defend himself (or not<sup>20</sup>); in the case of a trial, he was condemned to die by lapidation.

Hence, we are reasonably led to wonder why Odysseus—and possibly Diomedes—desperately needed to get rid of Palamedes. The first reason seems clear from the very text of the *Cypria* quoted above: Odysseus had his fake madness discovered,<sup>21</sup> so he felt a deep hatred against the person responsible, i.e. Palamedes. Yet, in this case, how could Palamedes accept to go out with him some time later, as the text suggests? In addition, it seems that Palamedes' intelligence, multiple successes, and maybe his popularity during the preparation for the war provoked Odysseus' lasting jealousy; whatever the case, these were some of the main arguments featuring in Palamedes' defense (regardless of their historicity).<sup>22</sup>

### 3. Palamedes' apology

#### 3.1. Palamedes in the early period of the war

Let us now try to reconstruct how Palamedes' defense proceeded, be it in his own words in the cases where he is allowed to defend himself in the “mytho-forensic” genre,<sup>23</sup> or through his brother Oiax' or his father Nauplius' voice, as several fragments of tragic poets or later texts imply—always emphasizing the important role Palamedes played during the period of preparation and at beginning of the Trojan War—as narrated in the *Cypria* in the form of a “prequel” to the *Iliad*. As known, the text itself of the *Cypria* is now lost, surviving only partially through a summary by Proclus, which in turn is preserved in a testimony of the Byzantine scholar Photius.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Dictys mentions a first fake letter written by Odysseus as if from Agamemnon to Clytemnestra, asking her to send their eldest daughter to Aulis: *profectus namque Mycenae nullo consilii particeps falsa litteras tamquam ab Agamemnone ad Clytemnestram perferi, quarum sententia haec erat: Iphigeniam, name a major natu erat, desponsam Achilli, ...* (*Ephemeris* 1.20, ed. Eisenhut), which throws on him a dark shadow.

<sup>20</sup> Knudsen 2012, Bassino 2021.

<sup>21</sup> After his madness was revealed as fake, Odysseus even took part in the recruitment of other warriors, as shows the episode of discovering Achilles disguised among Lycomedes' daughters.

<sup>22</sup> Gorgias' *Defense of Palamedes* is the more detailed extant version of it.

<sup>23</sup> Knudsen 2012.

<sup>24</sup> References given in n.2.

According to Dictys, Palamedes even took part with his brother Oiax in the Cretan assembly in charge of dividing Atreus' heritage. They are both mentioned in the first paragraph of the *Ephemeris*, after Idomeneus and Merion and before Menelaus and Agamemnon; later Palamedes parleys with Priam.<sup>25</sup>

Palamedes must have held important responsibilities in the early stages of the Trojan War, recruiting warriors<sup>26</sup> (cf. the case of Odysseus), but also taking part in embassies to Troy,<sup>27</sup> being a military commander on several occasions,<sup>28</sup> and ensuring food supplies at the Aulis encampment; according to some sources, it was he who fetched the *Oinotropoi* from Delos (Scholia by Tzetes to Lykophron *Alexandra* 581 μετεπέμψατο τὰς Οἰνοτρόπους διὰ τοῦ Παλαμήδους).<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Dictys *Ephemeris* 1.1: *Convenere autem Clymenae et Naupli Palamedes et Oeax. item Menelaus, Aerope et Plisthene genitus.* Dictys *Ephemeris* 1.6: *Interim apud Troiam legatorum Palamedes, cuius maxime ea tempestate domi belloque consilium valuit, ad Priamum adit conductoque consilio primum de Alexandri iniuria conqueritur ...* While Achilles, Ajax and Phoenix obtain command of the fleet, Palamedes receives with Diomedes and Odysseus command of the army (1.16), and after Agamemnon's deposition he becomes commander in chief with Diomedes, Ajax, and Idomeneus (1.19). During the first campaign, Palamedes obeys an oracle of Apollo Smintheus by making a common sacrifice: *Eadem tempestate oraculum Pythii Graecis perfertur: concedendum ob omnibus, uti per Palamedem Apolloni Zminthio sacrificium exhiberetur, quae res multis grata ob industriam et amorem viri, quem circa omnem exercitum exhibebat, nonnullis ducum dolori fuerat* (2.14). Note that the conspiracy for Palamedes' murder succeeds immediately in 2.15.

<sup>26</sup> Fowler 2013:530 mentions a passage by Ion "in which a prophecy is delivered that the Greeks will be able to sail if they drink their wine mixed with three parts water. The text is corrupt: changing Παλαμήδην to the nominative has been favoured by some editors, but he is never called a prophet and εὐρών remains to be explained. Palamedes was sent on a recruiting embassy to Chios before the war according to Alkidamas (*Odysseus* 20), who will have got it from the *Cypria*; perhaps according to Ion Palamedes received this useful advice on that occasion. This would be a way of giving some credit to the Chians for assistance in the Trojan War, from which they were otherwise conspicuously absent (cf. Katsaros, *BNJ* comm. on this fr.). The advice would have been recalled when the fleet was later windbound at Aulis."

<sup>27</sup> Dictys *Ephemeris* 1.4.

<sup>28</sup> Dictys *Ephemeris* 1.16 and 1.19.

<sup>29</sup> Lykophron, *Alexandra* 570–585 evokes the three daughters of Anios, Oino, Spermo, and Elaïs, who furnished abundant food, summoned by Palamedes according to the scholiast to 581, or by Menelaus and Odysseus according to Simonides (Fr. 537 PMG, see Rutherford forthcoming); Odysseus' mention to Nausicaa of a travel to Delos could confirm this version of the myth (*Odyssey* 6.164 and Σ.). See also Apollodorus *Epitome* 3.10, Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 13.623–674, Dictys *Ephemeris* 1.23. See Gantz 1993:577; Debiasi 2004:119–120; Gourmelen 2015 who adds Eustathius, *Commentarii ad Homeri Iliadem* X, 20.

### 3.2. Palamedes as πρῶτος εὐρέτης

Apart from those scanty allusions to Palamedes as a benefactor for the Greek army,<sup>30</sup> most of the references to him deal with his numerous inventions, especially of writing, but not before Stesichorus, as it seems.<sup>31</sup>

A *scholion* to Aeschylus' *Prometheus* refers to three of its lines as belonging to the Palamedes instead:

Καὶ μὴν ἀριθμὸν ἔξοχον σοφισμάτων  
 ἐξηῦρον αὐτοῖς γράμματων τε συνθέσεις,  
 μνήμην ἀπάντων, μουσομήτορ' ἐργάνην.

Thus numbers and letters would result in Palamedes' invention rather than Prometheus', and are precious for memory, and hence for the Mousai.

Another fragment mentions military invention (ταξιάρχας καὶ στρατιάρχας καὶ ἑκατοντάρχας) and the distribution of food (σῖτον δ' εἰδέναι διώρισα). Another allusion to sharing food could explain the allegation met in a Sophocles' fragment to his success in stopping the famine (Sophocles' fragment 438.1 N. οὐ λιμὸν οὔτος τῶν δ' ἔπαυσε).

Sophocles' *Nauplios* 32, probably in the context of the defense of the hero after his death, put on stage a catalogue of Palamedes' inventions, mainly for military needs, for astronomy, time counting, nautical uses and others:

οὔτος δ' ἐφηῦρε τεῖχος Ἀργείων στρατῶ,  
 στατμῶν, ἀριθμῶν καὶ μέτρων εὐρήματα  
 τάξεις τε ταύτας οὐράνιά τε σήματα

<sup>30</sup> The term πρῶτος εὐρέτης is due to Kleingünther 1933.

<sup>31</sup> Ceccarelli 2013:74: "It is unclear how far back in time the tradition reaches that assigns to him the invention of letters: a fleeting reference in the scholia to Dionysius Thrax informs us that Stesichorus in his *Oresteia* (fr.213 PMG) attributed to Palamedes the invention of στοιχεῖα (letters, or possibly numbers); unfortunately, the context in which the discovery was made is not given, nor its purpose. Palamedes can only have been incidentally relevant to the *Oresteia*: he might have been mentioned as the reason of the hatred of Oeax, Palamedes' brother, for Orestes, attested in Euripides' *Orestes* (Euripides *Orestes* 432). At any rate, from this the inference has been made that Stesichorus was alluding to a story already known;" and Ceccarelli 2013:75: "Stesichorus might have recounted the story of Palamedes at greater length in his *Nostoi*, where the vengeance of Nauplius would have been pertinent."

<sup>32</sup> See Jenkins 2006.

κάκεϊν ἔτευξε πρῶτος ἐξ ἑνὸς δέκα  
 κάκ τῶν δέκ' αὖθις ἠῦρε πεντηκοντάδας  
 καὶ χλιοστῦς, καὶ στρατοῦ φρυκτωρίαν [19]  
 ἔδειξε κἀνέφηνεν οὐ δεδειγμένα.  
 ἐφηῦρε δ' ἄστρον μέτρα καὶ περιστροφάς,  
 ὕπνου φύλαξι πιστὰ σημαντήρια  
 νεῶν τε ποιμαντῆρσιν ἐνθαλασσίοις  
 ἄρκτου στροφάς τε καὶ κυνὸς ψυχρὰν δύσιν,

This man devised the wall for the Argive army; his was the discovery of weights, numbers, and measures; these battle lines; and the signs [*semata*] of the heavens. And more—he was the first to count from one to ten, and so to fifty, and so to a thousand. He showed how to create a beacon for an army, and he unveiled things that had earlier been obscure. He discovered the measurements of the stars, and their revolutions, faithful signs for those who guard while others sleep; for the shepherds of ships upon the sea, he discovered the wanderings of the Bear and the chilly setting of the Dog-star.

Sophocles *Nauplios*, fragment 432 N.

As far letters are concerned, it is sometimes discussed as if he had invented or rather adapted them,<sup>33</sup> and in this case, if it was from Phoenician characters: in this case, he would have invented the Greek alphabet taken from syllabic writing. Phillips aptly remarks<sup>34</sup> that the

<sup>33</sup> On διδάξας commented by Ceccarelli, see above n.13.

<sup>34</sup> Phillips 1957:268: “This is no doubt due to the traditional connection of Palamedes with the use of the Phoenician alphabet among the Greeks, which will be discussed later. My purpose in this article is to suggest that the civilized character of Palamedes is not necessarily a mere addition made in later ages of Greek history to the rough memories of the heroic age but may represent a genuine piece of ancient tradition;” and Phillips 1957:272: “Stesichorus, Gorgias, Alcidas, the scholiast on Euripides, Dio Chrysostom, Philostratus, and Tzetzes make him the inventor of letters. Elsewhere Cadmus, repeatedly said to have come from Phoenicia, is made the carrier of the Phoenician letters to Greece, and Palamedes is credited only with additions and improvements to the alphabet. Now if Palamedes or any other figure of the legendary period, which we now call late Minoan and Mycenaean, originated or spread any form of writing among the Greeks, this could not have been the Phoenician alphabet. It must have been some form of the Minoan linear script, known from Cnossos, Mycenae, and Pylos, and belonging to the Aegean and not to Western Asia, which after the end of the Mycenaean age was lost [...]”

various uses of the letters mythically attributed to Palamedes in Euripides' fragment 578 N,35 are historically known for Mycenaean writing, leading him to conclude: "Thus there seem to be grounds to supposing that Palamedes is a figure that represents, in some sense, many characteristic achievements of the Minoan civilization as inherited and developed by the Mycenaean Greeks."<sup>36</sup>

Anyhow, writing is often related to numbers and measures, all of them source of benefit for mankind, as we see in some of the texts already mentioned. While waiting in Aulis or later at Troy, Palamedes is also credited for having invented playing dice and possibly other games, as a mean for passing time: for Pausanias 10.31 Palamedes was shown as the inventor of dice in Polygnotos' painting in Delphi,<sup>37</sup> and it is specified that it is used as a game (παιδιᾶ):

Εἰ δὲ ἀπίδοις πάλιν ἐς τὸ ἄνω τῆς γραφῆς, ἔστιν ἐφεξῆς τῷ Ἀκταίῳ Αἴας ὁ ἐκ Σαλαμίνοσ, καὶ Παλαμήδης τε καὶ Θερσίτης κύβοις χρώμενοι παιδιᾶ τοῦ Παλαμήδου τῷ εὐρήματι· Αἴας δὲ ὁ ἕτερος ἐς αὐτοὺς ὁρᾷ παίζοντας.

If you turn your gaze again to the upper part of the painting, you see, next to Actaeon, Ajax of Salamis, and also Palamedes and Thersites playing with dice, the invention of Palamedes; the other Ajax is looking at them as they play.

We do not know any iconic representation of this very scene, but a beautiful black-figure painting signed by Exekias shows Achilles and Ajax playing a board game.<sup>38</sup> Both images, by Exekias and by Polygnotos, might recall that Palamedes inventing such games aimed at

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<sup>35</sup> Euripides Fragment 578 N: τὰ τῆς γε λήθης φάρμακ' ὀρθώσας μόνος,  
ἄφωνα φωνήεντα συλλάβας τιθεὶς  
ἐξηῦρον ἀνθρώποισι γράμματ' εἰδέναί,  
ὥστ' οὐ παρόντα ποντιάς ὑπὲρ πλακὸς  
τάκεῖ κατ' οἴκους πάντ' ἐπίστασθαι καλῶς,  
παισὶν ἀποθνήσκοντα χρημάτων μέτρον  
γράψαντας εἰπεῖν, τὸν λαβόντα δ' εἰδέναί.  
ἂ δ' εἰς ἔριν πίπτουσιν ἀνθρώποις κακὰ  
δέλτος διαιρεῖ, κούκ ἔῃ ψευδῆ λέγειν.

<sup>36</sup> Phillips 1957:278. Although many scholars wrote more recently about Palamedes and writing (see particularly Ceccarelli and Jenkins) I did not notice this judicious remark on the possible relation to Mycenaean writing elsewhere.

<sup>37</sup> On the *Nekyia* painted by Polygnotos in the Lesche of Delphi, see Cousin 2012:268–269.

<sup>38</sup> Musei Vaticani:540–530 BCE: <http://arthistoryresources.net/greek-art-archaeology-2016/archaic-BF-exekias-achilles.html>, see Beazley 1951:65.

entertaining the warriors during the dead time between fighting, as poetically says Sophocles' fragment 438 N.<sup>39</sup>

### 3.3. From the alphabet to letters and fakes or *Palamedes tragicus*

Though Euripides' fragment 578 ends in an optimistic way, saying that writing forbids lying (ἄ δ' εἰς ἔριν πίπτουσιν ἄνθρωποις κακὰ / δέλτος διαιρεῖ, κοῦκ ἔ᾿ ψευδῆ λέγειν), writing, once invented, allows misuse. Several versions of Palamedes' story actually show that once he invented *grammata* whose uses were intended to the benefit of humanity, they could be used in fact for less commendable purposes, and even ironically turned against their author.<sup>40</sup> That seems to have been the main argument of the *Palamedes* tragedies, proving the success of this general line of plot in the Classical period. Vasunia (2001:148–149) calls this “the slippery nature of the written word”.

This unexpected twist of Palamedes' invention implies the characters' opposition: good and right Palamedes vs bad and crooked Odysseus, good and right use of written means vs bad and crooked use of fake letter for murdering the inventor.<sup>41</sup>

Be that as it may, Palamedes was very popular among Greek army, which brought the jealousy of the other leaders, particularly Agamemnon, Odysseus, and Diomedes.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Οὐ λιμὸν τῶνδ' ἔπαυσεν σὺν θεῶ  
Εἰπεῖν, χρόνου τε διατριβὰς σοφώτατας  
ἐφῆυρε φλοίσβου μετὰ κόπον καθημένοις,  
πεσσοῦς κύβους τε τερπνὸν ἀργίας ἄκος;

<sup>40</sup> Apollodorus, *Epitome* 3.8, Hyginus, *Fabulae* 105 above. Ceccarelli 2013:72 calls Palamedes “An Ill-fated Greek Hero”.

<sup>41</sup> For Dictys, Odysseus used the device of a fake letter already once when the oracle had predicted that for the army to sail to Troy, goddess Artemis should be appeased with the killer of her favorite deer sacrificing his eldest daughter. As the epidemic was spreading, Odysseus claiming his intention of leaving, actually goes to Mycenae where, without any mission and gives Clytemnestra a –fake– letter telling her to send Iphigenia as soon as possible with the necessary for her wedding. (Dictys *Ephemeris* 1.20 quoted above)

<sup>42</sup> Dictys *Ephemeris* 1.6 quoted above; Philostratus, *Heroikos* 154.10 “φιλῶ σε, ὦ Παλάμηδες, εἶπεν ὅτι μοι δοκεῖς φρονιμώτατος ἀθλητῆς τῶν κατὰ σοφίαν πραγμάτων, πεπονθένειά τε ὑπὸ τῶν Ἀχαιῶν ἐλεινὰ διὰ τὰς Ὀδυσσεῶς ἐπὶ σοὶ τέχνας ...” Anyhow, Odysseus' hatred lasted long after the Trojan War since Quintus of Smyrna assigns to Ajax, after Achilleus' death, a long tirade on Odysseus' torts (*Posthomerica* 5.181–236) beginning with ὦ Ὀδυσσεῦ φρένας αἰνέ, recalling the shameful episode of the feigned madness (190–194), and blaming him for Palamedes' murder (198–200):

ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀντιθέω Παλαμήδει θῆκας ὄλεθρον  
ὅς σέο φέρτερος ἔσκε βίη καὶ εὐφρονη βουλή.  
You also contrived the death of godlike Palamedes,



### 3.4. Palamedes as sophist?

We barely mentioned until now an important defender of Palamedes, the sophist Gorgias who wrote a *Defense of Palamedes* (*ὑπὲρ Παλαμήδους ἀπολογία*),<sup>43</sup> with well-substantiated rhetorical arguments, so that some specialists have compared it with Plato's mention of Palamedes in his *Apology of Socrates*,<sup>44</sup> others to the debate on writing in the *Phaedrus*.<sup>45</sup> It might be possible that the success of the Palamedes tragedies made this character very popular at Athens in the second part of the fifth century; as the tragedies probably put on stage – an *agon* between Odysseus and Palamedes, his popularity led the sophists to imagine him as a rhetorical model, hence Gorgias' *Defense of Palamedes* and later on *Odysseus: Against the Treachery of Palamedes* by an anonymous sophist sometimes called Alcidas.<sup>46</sup>

As an example of the sophistic feature Gorgias lends to Palamedes, see the end of his discourse, showing a rarely seen in such length accumulation of rhetorical figures:

Οὐ γὰρ μόνον εἰς ἐμὲ καὶ τοκέας τοὺς ἐμοὺς ἀμαρτήσεσθε δικάσαντες ἀδίκως,  
ἀλλ' ὑμῖν αὐτοῖς δεινὸν ἄθεον ἄδικον ἄνομον ἔργον συνεπιστήσεσθε  
πεπονηκότες, ἀπεκτονότες ἄνδρα σύμμαχον, χρήσιμον ὑμῖν, εὐεργέτην τῆς  
Ἑλλάδος, Ἕλληνας Ἕλληνας, φανερόν οὐδεμίαν ἀδικίαν οὐδὲ πιστὴν αἰτίαν  
ἀποδείξαντες.

If you put me to death unjustly, you will bear the blame in the eyes of all Greece,  
as I am not unknown and you are famous. The blame will be yours, not my  
accuser's, because the issue is in your hands. There could be no greater crime

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Who was your better in strength as well as intelligence. (transl. A. James)

On the "Denigration" of Odysseus, see Stanford 1949.

<sup>43</sup> Diels-Kranz, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, II, 82, 11a.

<sup>44</sup> See Coulter 1964, Biesecker-Mast 1994.

<sup>45</sup> Zeitlin 2001, Hodkinson 2011:63, Knudsen 2012:37, Werner 2012:188, Favreau-Linder 2015, Decloquement 2019, Billings 2021:25–26. Bassino 2021:45 quotes Plato's *Apology of Socrates* 41b and comments: "The mention of Palamedes among the people Socrates would like to meet in the underworld is particularly relevant: not only were the two charged, tried and put to death unjustly - but being accused of using speech deceptively, they themselves fell victims of deceptive speakers".

<sup>46</sup> Hodkinson 2011:85: "the figure of Palamedes came to be proverbial for cleverness and invention in later literature; hence the adjectives Παλαμήδειος Παλαμηδικός." See also on these texts, the "mytho-forensic" genre, and the kind of arguments they use Knudsen 2012, Lampe 2020, Bassino 2021.

than if you as Greeks put to death a Greek, an ally, a benefactor of yours and of Greece, when you can show no cause.

Gorgias, Fragment 11.36<sup>47</sup>

So much so that Palamedes, clashing with a liar, plotter, and betrayer Odysseus, appears himself one of the sophists. At least, both of them may be equally considered as such, taking the risk of being condemned by philosophers.

Be that as it may, Palamedes played such a role in sophistic that he reemerged later in the current of second sophistic with Philostratus, who mentioned him in passing in the *Vita Apollonii*,<sup>48</sup> and made him a central hero in Protesilaos' discourse in the *Heroikos*.<sup>49</sup> As I quoted an example of his alleged eloquence by Gorgias, let me choose a passage from Palamedes' brilliant rhetoric and thought recreated by Philostratus:

Ὁ δὲ Ὀδυσσεὺς ἐς τὸν Παλαμῆδη βλέψας· αἱ γέρανοι, ἔφη, μαρτύρονται τοὺς Ἀχαιοὺς ὅτι αὐταὶ γράμματα εὔρον, οὐχὶ σύ. Καὶ ὁ Παλαμῆδης· Ἐγὼ γράμματα οὐχ εὔρον, εἶπεν, ἀλλ' ὑπ' αὐτῶν εὐρέθην· πάλαι γὰρ ταῦτα ἐν Μουσῶν οἴκῳ κείμενα ἐδεῖτο ἀνδρὸς τοιούτου, θεοὶ δὲ τὰ τοιαῦτα δι' ἀνδρῶν σοφῶν ἀναφαίνουσι.

Odysseus, glancing at Palamedes, declared "The cranes bear witness to the Achaeans that *they* [the cranes] discovered writing (*grammata*), not you." To which Palamedes replied: "I did not discover writing (*grammata*) - but rather I was discovered by them. For a long time, the letters (*grammata*) have been lying in the house of the Muses, waiting for such a man as me; the gods reveal such things only through men who are wise (*sophos*)".

Philostratus *Heroikos* 38. 10-11

<sup>47</sup> Transl.: [http://demonax.info/doku.php?id=text:gorgias\\_fragments](http://demonax.info/doku.php?id=text:gorgias_fragments)

<sup>48</sup> VA 6.21.4, see Hodkinson 2011:87.

<sup>49</sup> The *Heroikos* is composed in interlocking pieces, on the Platonic model, see Hodkinson 2011, especially 59–79 on Protesilaos' *logoi*.

#### 4. The *erasure* of Palamedes from the Iliadic tradition?<sup>50</sup>

Palamedes is often mentioned among the *prôtoi heurêtai*, and sometimes said to have invented the letters of the alphabet, or to have adapted them for the Greek alphabet. As such, he is a hero of Hellenism and culture.<sup>51</sup> He died early in the course of the war, which might explain why he is not mentioned in the *Iliad*. His death is caused by Diomedes and Odysseus, as states Dictys without more precision; there are several narratives and explanations of his death, among them a letter, and moreover a false one incriminating him, invented by Odysseus.

If the omission of the Palladion from the Iliadic tradition might be due to a pro-Achaean tradition, couldn't we suppose a comparable explanation for the fact, not that Palamedes died so early during the war, but that no memory of him remains in the narrative?

In the version that Philostratus lends to Protesilaos in the *Heroikos*, Odysseus' perversity and his hatred for him extended as far as beyond Palamedes' death: he met with Homer<sup>52</sup> himself and obtained from the poet a total silence upon and oblivion of his rival:

ἀπιόντος δὲ ἤδη τοῦ Ὀμήρου βοήσας ὁ Ὀδυσσεύς “Παλαμήδης με” ἔφη “δίκας ἀπαιτεῖ τοῦ ἑαυτοῦ φόνου καὶ οἶδα ἀδικῶν καὶ πάντως μὲν πείσομαί τι, οἱ γὰρ θεμιστεύοντας ἐνταῦθα δεινπὶ, Ὀμηρε, καὶ τὰ ἐκ Ποινῶν ἐγγύς, εἰ δὲ τοῖς ἄνω ἀνθρώποις μὴ δόξω εἰργασθαι τὸν Παλαμήδην ταῦτα, ἧττόν με ἀπολεῖ τὰ ἐνταῦθα· μὴ δὴ ἄγε τὸν Παλαμήδην ἐς Ἴλιον, μηδὲ στρατιώτη χρῶ, μηδέ, ὅτι σοφὸς ἦν, εὔπτης, ἐροῦσι μὲν γὰρ ἕτεροι ποιηταί, πιθανὰ δὲ οὐ δόξει μὴ σοὶ εἰρήμενα.” αὕτη, ξένε, ἢ Ὀδυσσεώς τε καὶ Ὀμήρου ξυνουσία, καὶ οὕτως Ὀμηρος τὰ ἀληθῆ μὲν ἔμαθε, μετεκόσμησε δὲ πολλὰ ἐς τὸ συμφέρον τοῦ λόγου, ὃν ὑπέθετο.

Moreover, just when Homer was leaving, Odysseus cried out and said, “Palamedes is demanding justice from me for his own murder! I know I did wrong, and I am completely persuaded of it. Those who issue judgments here

<sup>50</sup> We borrow the term *erasure* from Jenkins 2005, without his brilliant *Derridian* analysis.

<sup>51</sup> On Palamedes as a culture hero, Billings 2021.

<sup>52</sup> On Homer in the Second sophistic, see Kim 2022.

are terrible, Homer, and the punishments of the Poinai are near at hand! If to mortals above the ground I do not seem to have done these things to Palamedes, the forces here will destroy me less. Do not lead Palamedes to Ilion, neither treat him as a soldier nor say that he was wise! Other poets will say these things, but because they have not been said by you, they will not seem plausible.” [§43.16] This, my guest, was the conversation between Odysseus and Homer, and in this way, Homer learned the truth, but he modified many things for the expediency of the account that he composed.

Philostratus *Heroikos* 43.15<sup>53</sup>

For the character of Protesilaos who tells his story to a wine grower, Palamedes could vindicate with Achilles for the title of “Best of the Achaeans,” but Odysseus, having treacherously killed him, negotiates with Homer himself the entire loss of his achievements and even his name: that is why he never appears in the *Iliad*.

This tradition went so far that Palamedes even received the status of a poet, hence playing the role of a contender, not only of Odysseus, but of the author of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and his erasure becomes a strong necessity for Homer himself, which is confirmed by the *Suda* Lexicon, at the entry Palamedes:

Τὰ δὲ ποιήματα αὐτοῦ ὑπὸ τῶν Ἀγαμεμνονος ἀπογόνων διὰ βασκανίαν ὑπολαμβάνω καὶ τὸν ποίητην Ὅμηρον αὐτὸ τοῦτο πεπονθέναι καὶ μηδεμίαν τοῦ ἀνδρὸς τούτου μνήμην ποιήσασθαι.

One could argue however that since Palamedes died before the beginning of the tenth year of the war, when the *Iliad* begins, it is normal not to meet him in its time span. The *Iliad* mentions nevertheless a good amount of characters who died before the plague sent by Apollo to the Achaeans as a punishment for Chryseis detained by Agamemnon, and many deeds accomplished before its beginning. Palamedes appears stuck with a taboo, maybe not as

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<sup>53</sup> <https://chs.harvard.edu/primary-source/flavius-philostratus-on-heroes/>

explicitly as the Palladion was.<sup>54</sup> I do not think that Odysseus' will occasioned this erasure, as the ancient authors mentioned in this paragraph state –though nice the fiction of Odysseus negotiating this disappearance with Homer may appear– but it seems clear that the *Iliad* is “already” pro-Odysseus, whereas Dictys and Philostratus are against him, following Oiax' and Nauplius' arguments, and charging him perhaps with more crimes than he could commit. Palamedes perhaps reveals that literature, far being politically neutral, testifies to political leanings as early as Homeric epic. Which is quite clear in the Classical period (think of Plato, Demosthenes and Aeschinus for instance), is more surprising in the case of the epics, but we see here an obvious contrast between the *Iliad* and the Cycle tradition. As well as some mentions of the Antenorids may refer to a conflict inside the Trojan camp,<sup>55</sup> strives and conspiracies may have swirled the Achaean side apart from Achilles' wrath told in the *Iliad*, and of the fundamentally political nature of the *Iliad*, as shown by Dean Hammer (2012).

Above all, the study of Palamedes' traces in Greek literature might be the sign of the multiformity of the tradition in Archaic period:<sup>56</sup> apart from his possible erasure in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, he has given the occasion to a lot of different stories in the Cycle tradition, from the manner he discovered Odysseus' fake madness to his prolific capacity of inventions, and particularly to the numerous versions of the conspiracy leading to his death.<sup>57</sup> Doesn't this multiformity attest to a living tradition of the Epic Cycle, be it in oral or written form? Of course, several accounts of Palamedes' death from the Classical period or later have probably been “invented” or at least embellished by their authors, as the fake letter forged from the legend of

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<sup>54</sup> See the texts quoted in the articles mentioned above.

<sup>55</sup> I tried to deal with this issue in a Homeric online conference in Tours, in press.

<sup>56</sup> Nagy 1996, 2001, Burgess 1996, 2002, Finkelberg 2000, and more recently Porter 2022.

<sup>57</sup> Burgess 1996:85: “Note that in its summary the *Cypria* does not end with the capture of Briseis and Chryseis. It continues on with the death of Palamedes and a catalogue of Trojan allies. Allen suggested that the *Cypria* is narrating a variant account of the wrath of Achilles, pre-Homeric in origin, in which the murder of Palamedes is the cause of Achilles' withdrawal. The unfortunately concise summary by Proclus does not provide us with enough information to disprove this theory, but it seems unlikely. In fact, I do not think that the narration of the death of Palamedes in the *Cypria* has much bearing on our investigation. It does separate the capture of Chryseis and Briseis from its apparent conclusion, the quarrel of Book 1 in the *Iliad*, but this quarrel does not have to follow immediately after their capture. If the poet of the *Cypria* was indeed preparing for the *Iliad*, he could have simply included additional material at this point. Allen (1924:72–73), citing a few ancient sources which follow this version. Allen otherwise portrays the *Cypria* as an introduction to the *Iliad*, so it is difficult to understand why he does not think it would correspond to the *Iliad* on this matter.”

the invention of writing. Since the tool used by Odysseus (and Diomedes or without him)<sup>58</sup> to lead to Palamedes' death differs so much with the authors, it is probable they had read in the *Cypria* or other ancient source a short mention of it without details, upon which they may have embroidered such and such point.

On the issue of Odysseus' and Palamedes' last confrontation, it seems to me that one can conclude from the tragic and sophistic fragments that in such a trial, none of the parties can prove either his own innocence either the adversary's culpability. Although history or legend seems to teach us Palamedes' innocence and, through his rhetorical skill, Odysseus' cunning paid off and the evil prevailed, leading to huge philosophical problems.

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<sup>58</sup> During the discussion in Patras, Olga Levaniouk opportunely said she understood the relation between Palamedes and Odysseus, but why that of Palamedes with Diomedes, who is a "good guy." I have indeed no response, but it may be remarked that we meet the same association of Diomedes with Odysseus in two episodes of the war. I mentioned orally the theft of the Palladion, present only in the Epic cycle, cf. Létoublon 2009; 2014a, 2014b), and also in the spy expedition during the night as told in *Iliad* 10. I forgot to mention this in the discussion. Both episodes, like Palamedes' story, show Diomedes sometimes sharing Odysseus' dark side. May we suppose that an episode narrated in the Cycle, but not kept in the summary, gave the key?

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