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MUSICAL REMEDIES FOR DEADLY PROBLEMS. MUSIC THERAPY IN THE HOMERIC POEMS

The attempt to cure illnesses by having recourse to music¹ is one of the most interesting phenomena of ancient Greek culture, but also one of the most controversial, because of the complex relations between religion, magic, medicine and music constituting its background². The Greeks derived music therapy – which in the most ancient form takes on the characteristics of the ‘sung spell’ (ἐπωδή) – from the Near East³, where the use of sung charms for healing was very widespread⁴ and magic healers were at

¹ I just briefly mention here the interest aroused by music therapy also nowadays, when it is used mainly in neurological and psychiatric diseases both together with drugs, and also alone – especially for rehabilitation after the recovery from a disease. Chronically ill people usually benefit from musical experiences and from the relationship established with their music-therapists, so that both their health conditions and the quality of life are in many cases improved. Among the very many essays on music therapy nowadays, see for a general overview Bunt, 1994; 2001; Wigram – Saperston – West, 1995; Laufer – Montgomery, 2002; Aldridge, 2005; Baker – Tamplin – Kennelly, 2006.

² The necessity of leaving aside our modern prejudices when considering magic in the Ancient World is highlighted in many studies, such as Dickie, 2001 (in part. ch. I: The Formation and Nature of the Greek Concept of Magic, 18-46). On magic and its criticism see Lloyd, 1979 (in part. ch. I, The Criticism of Magic and the Inquiry Concerning Nature); Neusner – Frerichs – McCracken Flesher, 1989; Graf, 2002. On Greek magic see also Faraone – Obbink, 1991; Versnel, 1991; Bremmer, 1999; Meyer – Mirecki, 2001; Carastro, 2006; Collins, 2008.

³ As for the oriental origin of Greek magic, see Burkert, 1992, 41-87; Graf, 1997; Burkert, 1999; Bremmer, 2008. Also the origins of Greek music were connected with the Middle East: see West, 1992, *passim*; West, 1997, 31-33.

⁴ Pinch, 1995; David, 2004, 131-136. The skill of the Egyptians as magicians is mentioned in *Od.*, IV, 231-232. As far as Ancient Mesopotamia is concerned, the therapeutic use of spells is absolutely the most attested one (Cunningham, 1997, 1-8; 162).

the same time also singers⁵. Hence in a more ancient phase music therapy represents a particular meaning of magic medicine, in turn tightly interwoven with religion: indeed, a clear-cut separation between medicine, magic and religion only comes beginning from Hippocrates' treatise *On the Sacred Disease*, where the traditional magical-religious remedies are considered both 'irrational' – because of a 'divine' origin associated with every kind of disease – and 'impious' – for practitioners of magic would even claim to subject gods to their own will⁶ – and so are rejected⁷ on the basis of a 'natural' origin advocated for each kind of disease⁸. In this sphere, the most ancient literary testimonies on the therapeutic use of music in Greece, contained in the Homeric poems, on one side show its connection with religion – illness has a divine origin, and it is necessary to act on it by trying to appease the offended divinity – while on the other they seem to show a true 'sympathetic' relationship between therapist and patient that does not contemplate recourse to prayers and hymns to the divinities. Thus in the Homeric poems two forms of music therapy appear to be involved, one – attested in the *Iliad* – concerning the use of the paean, a hymn addressed to Apollo, and the other – in the *Odyssey* – consisting in the ἐπωδή, the 'sung spell' not contemplating the invocation of a divinity but apparently addressed to the very illness to be healed. These two Homeric testimonies, which sum up the fundamental aspects of 'traditional', pre-Hippocratic medicine, will be dealt with afterwards, an endeavour being made to highlight the fact that their success is based on persuasion.

The Paean for the Healing of the Plague in the First Book of the *Iliad*

In the first book of the *Iliad*, the god Apollo, angry with the Achaeans for the outrage suffered by his priest Chryses, to whom Agamemnon has refused to return his daughter Chryseis, shoots his darts at the Achaean camp sending a deadly plague (10, νοῦσον ἀνὰ στρατὸν ὄρσε κακίην)

⁵ Beaulieu, 2007, 10-15 (Babylonian magic); Hdt. I, 132 (the Persian *Magi*, priests performing sacrifices and sung incantations) with De Jong, 1997, 362-367 and Bremmer, 2003 (also in Bremmer, 2008).

⁶ *Morb. sacr.* 31, εἰ δὴ τοῦ θεοῦ ἡ δύναμις ὑπὸ ἀνθρώπου γνώμης κρατέεται καὶ δεδούλωται.

⁷ See Lloyd, 1979, 15-29, 47-49; Jouanna, 1999, 181-193; Laskaris, 2002, 97-124.

⁸ See *De aëre aquis et locis*, 22, ἕκαστον δὲ ἔχει φύσιν τῶν τοιουτέων, καὶ οὐδὲν ἄνευ φύσιος γίγνεται. Hippocratic medicine was then based on a careful inquiry of the symptoms of diseases and of their courses (see Lloyd, 1979, 49-58; 146-169; Lloyd, 1990, 47-62), and not on the knowledge of specific remedies such as spells and purifications (*Morb. Sacr.* 18). For a general survey on hippocratic medicine s. Jouanna, 1999; Nutton, 2004, 53-102.

which can only be remedied by appeasing the god and repairing the damage suffered by the priest. So, after the girl's return, the god is appeased through sacrifices and the singing of paeans lasting a whole day long (*Il. I*, 472-474, οἱ δὲ πανημέριοι μολπῇ θεὸν ἰλάσκοντο/καλὸν ἀεῖδοντες παιήονα κοῦροι Ἀχαιῶν/μέλποντες ἐκάεργον· ὁ δὲ φρένα τέρπετ' ἀκούων, 'for the whole day the young Achaeans appeased the god with song and dance⁹, intoning a beautiful paean, honouring with song the god that casts arrows; and his heart was glad to hear.').

Hence in these verses in the *Iliad* the paean is a religious song to Apollo¹⁰ intoned by a male choir, regarding which no accompanying musical instrument is mentioned¹¹ – while other sources refer to accompaniment with the φόρμιγξ¹², which alludes to the connection between Apollo and string instruments¹³ – and it is shared by the community as a part of the ritual offered to the god. The episode in the *Iliad* is therefore set in the public and collective dimension of the religious rite, in which choral

⁹ Μέλω - as well as μολπή - means 'to sing and dance' altogether (Chantraine, 683, s.v. μέλω and Kaimio, 1977, 81), but is often used as a synonym for ᾄδω, 'to sing', sometimes also in mournful contexts (see for instance Aesch., *Agamemnon*, 1445, τὸν ὕστατον μέλψασα θανάσιμον γόον, 'singing the last dirge'). Μολπή used together with ὄρχηστος tells 'song' from 'dance' in *Od. I*, 152 (see also *Od. IV*, 17, where it is referred to the φορμιζῶν singer (18), while in *Od. IV*, 19 (μολπῆς ἐξάρχοντες ἐδίνευον κατὰ μέσσοις) it refers just to dancing).

¹⁰ For what concerns paeans, their performances and contexts see Käppel, 1992 and Rutherford, 1993. The epithet 'Paeon' is often referred to healing gods, such as Apollo and Asclepius (for what concerns paeans to Asclepius engraved on stones see Käppel, 1992, 189-206, 372-374, 380-384. These paeans are the *Erythraean Paean* (380-360 BC), the *Paean of Macedonicus* (a text that may be dated to 300 BC, although engraved on stone in the 1st century BC) and the *Paean of Isyllus* (300-280 BC)).

¹¹ As noticed by Wegner, 1968, 33.

¹² The oldest piece of evidence concerning a paean sung with the accompaniment of a stringed instrument is the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* – cited also by Wegner (see previous footnote) –, where Apollo plays the φόρμιγξ (514-515, ἦρχε δ' ἄρα σφιν ἄναξ Διὸς υἱὸς Ἀπόλλων/φόρμιγγ' ἐν χεῖρεσσιν ἔχων ἐρατὸν κιθαρίζων) while leading to Delphi the Cretans singing the paean (515-519, ἔποντο/Κρητὲς πρὸς Πυθῶ καὶ ἠπταύων' ἀεῖδον, οἰοί τε Κρητῶν παιήονες οἰοί τε Μούσα/ἐν στήθεσσιν ἔθηκε θεὰ μελίγηρον ἀοιδίην). It seems worth reminding that the word φόρμιγξ (verisimilarly Thracian in its origins, this term is the oldest one referred to stringed instruments in ancient Greek; s. Durante, 1971, 152-153, 159) is in archaic Greek literature the general term for designating instruments of the lyre class, and verisimilarly 'a strictly poetic word for a considerable time' (West, 1992, 50-51).

¹³ See for instance *Il. I*, 603-604 and *Hymn. Hom. Ap.*, 131 (κιθάρις). See also Dumezil, 1982.

hymns are addressed to the god¹⁴. In this circumstance, the benefits of music are not exerted directly on those people that are affected by an illness, but the musical performance is offered to a divinity whose anger has to be appeased, because it is the divinity that causes the evil and can rid people of it and, in virtue of this, the human intervention shows apotropaic aims. Thus the recovery of the Achaeans affected by the plague is not due to the music in itself, but to the beneficent and persuasive effect that it has on the divinity that, ritually sweetened by the musical form linked to him, brings about liberation from evil. In this case the people entrusted with the musical performance – a chorus of young boys – intone a song composed for the purpose on behalf of the community and carry out a rite entrusted by the seer (μάντις) Kalchas¹⁵, who interprets the god's will by indicating the ways to drive away the evil consequences of his anger¹⁶. Besides, just as the cause of the illness consists in a religious infringement, likewise liberation from evil will come about within religion. In this connection, according to a very ancient conception illnesses originated from a malignant demon, which entered the body causing sufferings, or also from a hostile divinity, which punished human ὕβρις¹⁷ and had to be appeased with expiatory sacrifices¹⁸ suited to restoring the balance in the individual or the community.

¹⁴ As for Apollo in the *Iliad*, see Wathelet, 1993. The juxtaposition between the paean as the choral song offered to the god by and for the whole community and the individualistic ἐπωδή has been highlighted among others by Furley (1993, 102).

¹⁵ See *Il.* I, 68-101.

¹⁶ In *Il.* I, 62-67, Achilles in the assembly suggests to ask either a 'prophet' (μάντις), a 'priest' (ιερεύς) or an 'interpreter of dreams' (ὄνειροπόλος) for knowing the reasons of Apollo's wrath, so that they could appease him.

¹⁷ See Lanata, 1967, 27-28 and Laín Entralgo, 1970, 6-10. As for the first case, Laín Entralgo (8-9) appropriately reminds of *Od.* V, 394-398. Against the daemonic origin of diseases and the wrath of divinities as their cause see Plut., *De superstitione*, 170 e; Hipp., *Morb. Sacr.*, 27, ὃ τε πολὺς αὐτοῖσι [*scil.* charlatans and soothsayers] τοῦ λόγου ἐς τὸ θεῖον ἀφήκει καὶ τὸ δαιμόνιον.

¹⁸ Agamemnon's actions – he is the head of the ill community – belong to a real cathartic rite (458-471) including not just prayers to the offended god, but also lustrations (313, λαοὺς δ' Ἄτρεΐδης ἀπολυμαίνεσθαι ἄνωγεν) – with the ensuing cleansing from defiling offscourings (314, οἱ δ' ἀπελυμαίνοντο καὶ εἰς ἄλλα λύματα βάλλον) – and sacrifices (431, ἱερὴν ἑκατόμβην). Hecatombs and paeans are mentioned together also by Theognis (777-779). It is important to notice that neither the word κάθαρσις, nor the corresponding verb καθαίρω ever occur in the first book of the *Iliad*.

Hence, as has been well highlighted by Laín Entralgo¹⁹, the paean in the first book of the *Iliad* is an example of ‘supplication in a non-magic form to obtain health’²⁰. Once the offended divinity has been placated, the illness too disappears: it is not by chance that from this testimony there also emerges the expiatory value of song itself, codified by its prolonged repetition (472, *πανημέριοι*: the young Achaeans sung their paeans the whole day long), as a form of ritual ‘penitence’. Hence the connection between the paean and recovery from illnesses appears essential, so that this musical genre is ‘song that cures’ par excellence: indeed, it is intoned in circumstances in which it is necessary to drive off an evil from the community, rather than from the single individual, as also appears evident in a testimony regarding a lost *Life of Thelestes* by Aristoxenus of Tarentum²¹ (4th century BC) which narrates the strange madness of the women of Locri and Rhegium, who fled out of the city as soon as someone called them while they were having lunch; this madness was healed after consultation of an oracle that prescribed continuous and prolonged use of paeans: twelve a day for sixty days, during the spring²².

Beginning from the *Iliad* the paean represents the song par excellence ‘that puts an end to the plague’²³: in this connection the Greeks connected

¹⁹ 1970, 23.

²⁰ Magic can be found instead in other pieces of evidence concerning the healing of a plague through a supplication to Apollo, especially in places where a syncretism between Greek and oriental cults can be traced – as for instance in the case of the oracle of Apollo at Claros (see Várhelyi, 2001). The paean sung by the Achaeans is instead considered a magic song – for instance – by Poccetti (1991, 192-193).

²¹ Aristox., fr. 117 Wehrli = Apollon. *Hist. Mirab.* 40.

²² The manuscript tradition (εἰπεῖν τὸν θεὸν παιᾶνας ἄδειν ἑαρινούς + δωδεκάτης + ἡμέρας ξ') has been emended by West (1990), whose reading is δώδεκα τῆς ἡμέρας <ἐπὶ ἡμέρας> ξ' (he also quotes *Il.*, I, 472). The Pythagorean cathartic rite told in Iambl., *De vita Pyth.*, 110, which took place in spring as well, and consisted in singing and listening to paeans performed with the accompaniment of the lyre in order to become harmonious and to acquire an ordered life-style (ἐμμελεῖς καὶ ἔνρυστοι), sounds very different from this one, since musical catharsis is there aimed at soothing the soul and excludes any prayer to the gods, entailing the direct action of songs on individuals and the ‘purification’ of their souls thanks to the soothing effect of music (see also Aristox., fr., 26, Wehrli).

²³ See Schol. Vet. in Hom., *Il.*, I, 474 a-b; Schol., *Genev.*, *Il.*, I, 473. Thaletas of Gortyna (7th c. BC), an author of paeans, was said to have healed the Spartans from a plague by means of his music (see [Plut.] *De Mus.*, 9-10, 1134 b-e; 42, 1146 b-c (= Pratinas, *TGrF* 4 F 9); Philod., *De Mus.*, 4 (= Diog. Babil. *SVF* II, 232 von Arnim); Aristot., *Pol.*, 1274 a 25-28; Thiemer, 1979, 124-126).

the noun *παιάν* with the verb *παύω*, 'to cause to stop'²⁴, through a sort of spurious etymology that appears indicative of the perception that they had of this musical genre as a remedy for every kind of evil. Besides, Apollo seems to take on the medical features of an ancient god called *Παιάν* or *Παιών*²⁵, whose presence is attested in the Mycenaean Age²⁶: it was probably to this divinity that paeans were addressed as religious songs containing, in the characteristic refrain *ιῆ παιάν*, the invocation of the god²⁷, although in these verses in the *Iliad* the noun *παιήων* is not used as a synonym of Apollo but clearly indicates the musical genre connected with the cult of the god²⁸.

The ritual correctness of the procedure used by the Achaeans to appease the offended god is sanctioned by the adjective *καλόν*, proleptic with respect to *παιήονα*, which is meant to stress that Apollo cannot fail to appreciate the sacrifices of the Achaeans, made exactly as required by the solemnity of the moment. In this way, from the structural point of view, the verb form *ἰλάσκοντο* in verse 472 goes perfectly with *τέρπετ' ἀκούων* in verse 474, which can only be its legitimate consequence, prior to the healing intervention of the god, whose anger has been placated²⁹. We can then say that the sharp noise of arrows in the god's quiver (46, *ἔκλαγξαν δ' ἄρ' οἰστοὶ ἐπ' ὤμων*), and then the perturbing twang of his bow (49, *δεινὴ δὲ κλαγγὴ γένετ' ἀργυρέοιο βιοῖο*)³⁰, are quenched at the end by the music of the healing paeon.

The Use of the *ἐπωδή* for Odysseus' Wound in *Odyssey*, Book XIX

Wholly different from this is healing through the *ἐπωδή*, the 'sung spell', in Book XIX of the *Odyssey*, which gives us the first testimony of this rem-

²⁴ See for instance E. M. 657, 11 ('it is then said *πανάν* ε *παιάν* from the (verb) *παύω* - changing -v- into -i- the hymn that causes the plague to stop'). See also Chantraine, s.v. *παιάν*.

²⁵ Detienne (1988, 33) defines Apollo 'le dieu purificateur à visage d'archétype'.

²⁶ See for instance KN V 52 + 52 bis + 8285.2 (*Pa-ja-wo-ne*).

²⁷ Rutherford I., 1993, 87.

²⁸ Schol. Vet. in Hom. *Il.*, I, 473 a 1, <*παιήονα*> οὐ τὸν Απόλλωνα, ἀλλὰ τὸν ἐπὶ καταλύσει λοιμοῦ ὕμνον.

²⁹ As highlighted by S. Pulleyn (2000, 242), the effect of the paeon on Apollo is sometimes compared with that of a sacrifice, as we can notice for instance in Callim., fr., 494 Pfeiffer = Eustath. proem. comm. Pind. 31 (Schol. Pind., III, 302, 15 Drachmann): Pindar was once asked in Delphi what he was going to offer to the god and answered 'a paeon'.

³⁰ As for the use of *κλάζω* and *κλαγγή* - properly meaning a sharp cry, such of birds and cranes - in the Homeric poems, see examples in Kaimio, 1977, 80-81; 96.

edy. Odysseus, having returned to Ithaca in disguise, is recognized by his old nurse Euryclea from a scar above the knee, the visible sign of a boar's bite while he was hunting on mount Parnassus³¹ together with his grandfather Autolycus and his uncles on his mother's side³².

The haemorrhage from Odysseus' wound is healed by his uncles, who 'skilfully bound the wound of the godlike noble Odysseus, arrested the dark flowing blood with a sung spell and at once reached their father's house' (*Od.*, XIX, 456-458, ὤτειλῆν δ' Ὀδυσῆος ἀμύμονος ἀντιθέοιο/δῆσαν ἐπισταμένως, ἐπαοιδῆ³³ δ' αἶμα κελαινὸν/ἔσχεθον, αἶψα δ' ἴκοντο φίλου πρὸς δῶματα πατρὸς).³⁴

The word ἐπωδή³⁵ actually consists of ᾠδή, contracted from αἰοδή, 'song', and the preposition ἐπί, 'upon', so that it can be understood as song upon 'someone', or 'some part of his body.' Thus ἐπωδαί are spells for healing, probably sung at the beginning, and even though they cannot be properly considered as a part of real musical art³⁶. Actually both the structure itself of the word ἐπωδή, and the 'charming' effects that music in ancient Greece was credited with – resulting especially in verbs such as θέλω³⁷ and κελέω³⁸ – seem to stress the musical element of the ἐπωδή, and also to connect the magic use of ἐπωδαί with music therapy.

³¹ Hunting represents for the young Odysseus a rite of passage into adulthood and its responsibilities. On this symbolic aspect of Odysseus' hunting on Parnassus see Felson-Rubin - Merritt-Sale, 1983, whose authors highlight the differences between Odysseus' initiation and Meleager's one (actually the latter breaks the *καϊρός* falling in love with Atalanta).

³² On the very important role of uncles on the mother's side in the rites of passage of young boys into adulthood, see Felson-Rubin - Merritt-Sale, 1983, 146 and 166 n. 11.

³³ This is the only attestation of this term in the Homeric poems.

³⁴ On this episode see Renehan, 1992.

³⁵ See Pfister, 1924; Lain Entralgo, 1970; Furley, 1993; Rocconi, 2001.

³⁶ It seems worth reminding that at least since the Hellenistic age the word ἐπωδή refers to incantations just as 'magic formulas', in contexts where no reference to music is ever made. As for these magical texts which have come down to us in papyri (our most important source on Hellenistic magic) see Preisendanz, 1973-1974; Betz, 1992² (collections of texts) and Betz, 1991.

³⁷ See for instance Plut., *Quaest., Conv.* 745 d (Sirens). Θέλω is both associated with the lyre and the *aulos*: see Athenaeus, XIV, 618 a (concerning the musical practice of *synaulia*).

³⁸ See for instance Soph., *Trachiniae*, 1000-1003 (the charmer is called αἰοδός, so that the musical element appears clearly); Plato, *Symposium*, 215b - 216c and *Phaedrus*, 266d-267d.

In Book XIX of the *Odyssey* we thus find the use of a medico-magic remedy, the ἐπωδή, for the healing of an individual illness, very differently from what we find in the case of the paean in *Il.*, I, 472-474, serving to obtain liberation from a collective evil through the healing intervention of the divinity itself that was offended and caused it. In this case, the origin of the evil is not divine, and the healing of the haemorrhage is enacted by men, who have no recourse to the invocation to a god. The healing of traumas – above all from war – was the fundamental part of Homeric medicine and gave little scope to the concept of a divine origin of the signs of the evil³⁹, represented above all by the wounds produced during the dynamics of the fight: hence its methods concern healing of the evil in itself, acting on its external signs.

Another fundamental aspect of the episode in the *Odyssey* is the existence of a direct relationship between the person that intones the spell for recovery and the sick person, representing the only two ‘extremes’ of this therapeutic process.

Hence recourse to the ἐπωδή as a medical remedy would attest to ‘a use of music that is not ethical but empirical’, as Lasserre⁴⁰ has happily stressed, and this testimony would induce one to think that in the attempt to overcome suffering no distinction was made between pharmaceuticals based on the use of medicinal herbs⁴¹ and potions and magic, which contemplated use of the ἐπωδή⁴², made of words on which a particular ‘musical lilt is conferred.

At all events, the ἐπωδή through which Odysseus is treated constitutes the first part of the healing of the haemorrhage due to the wound: on the basis of these verses, it also contemplates tight bandaging of the wound (456-457, ὠτειλήν [...] / δῆσαν ἐπισταμένως), to serve as a ‘tourniquet’. Thus bandaging and spell are two separate actions, as is evident from the very structure of verses 456-458: ὠτειλήν (456) is the object of δῆσαν (457), while αἷμα (457) is the object of ἔσχεθον (458), which the instrumental

³⁹ See Scarborough 1991, 141. Kudlien (1967, 49) interprets Odysseus’ wound as a ‘rational fassbares faktum’ healed with the therapeutic methods of a ‘vorrationaler Stufe des Heilens’. This scholar yet states that Odysseus’ wound hasn’t got any superhuman origin, so that it is very different from the plague of the first book of the *Iliad*.

⁴⁰ See Gentili Pretagostini, 1988, 284-285.

⁴¹ As far as such remedies are concerned, see Scarborough, 1991.

⁴² Smith (1965) highlights the combination in Greek medicine of ‘pharmacology’ and ‘theurgy’ (understanding the latter as a divine intervention and also – more generally – as a superhuman influence on illnesses and their treatments).

dative ἐπαοιδῆ (457) in turn refers to. The fact is that bandaging of the wound alone, however skilfully it is performed (ἐπισταμένως), is not sufficient to arrest the haemorrhage, just as ἐπωδῆ alone is not sufficient without 'manual' intervention on the body of the wounded person⁴³.

A different opinion was expressed by Pfister, who, stressing the magic meaning of the Latin verb *ligare* (corresponding to the Greek δεῖν), maintained that the verb form δῆσαν was also to be understood in a magic sense as a coercive action against the malignant powers at the origin of the haemorrhage according to the demonic conception of the origin of illnesses⁴⁴. However, in my opinion, the distinction between the two moments of the bandaging of the wound and the intonation of the ἐπωδῆ and their complementarity and inseparability in the episode in the *Odyssey* give more credibility to the hypothesis that it is possible to distinguish, in the therapeutic intervention of the children of Autolycus, an immediately 'practical' part, evidently suggested by experience, i. e. the compression of the wound with tight bandaging, and a 'magic' and ritual part, constituted

⁴³ See Renehan, 1992 and Furley, 1993, 80. According to Furley (1993, 83), the 'purification' of the plague in the first book of the *Iliad* is an example of a 'combined' remedy as well, so that in this respect it might be considered very similar to the treatment with the ἐπωδῆ. Actually while the Achaeans - with Agamemnon - cleanse themselves before the hecatomb and throw the defiling offscourings into the sea (313-314), elsewhere - in the place where Chryseis is given back to her father - young boys sing paeans for soothing Apollo's wrath. The presence of the sung charm with the bandaging of the wound is highlighted also by López-Eire (2000, 87-88): this scholar compares our verses with the well-known passage in Plato's *Charmides* (155 e) where Socrates states that he is able to heal Charmides' headache by means of an ἐπωδῆ which must be used together with a herb - since each one of them isn't effective without the other.

⁴⁴ Pfister, col. 325. Kotansky (1991, 108) - who seems to agree with Pfister - reminds us of the old popular belief in the sympathetically impeding power of knots: in his opinion, the knot causing the bleeding to stop can be compared with the knot that sympathetically aims at preventing from either an enemy or an evil daemon. Also Laser (1983, 117, n. 309), Laín Entralgo (27 e n. 43) and Sigerist (1961, 37 n. 34) agree with the magic interpretation of δῆσαν, which should entail the 'binding' of a kind of daemon of the bleeding. Sigerist (159) also reminds us of an old Vedic medical text from the *Atharvaveda* (I.17.1), a collection of prayers, hymns and charms. That text is a magic formula for 'closing veins' to be used together with an ointment made of mud, sand and dust that was to be applied on the wound and represented the properly 'pharmacological' component of that therapy. As Dickie (2001, 24) highlights, Pfister's interpretation of the treatment of Odysseus' wound as an exclusively magical treatment overlooks that for the earliest stages of the Greek civilization - and at least till Hippocrates - it isn't possible to mark any boundary between medicine and magic.

by the ἐπωδή. Indeed, the haemorrhage appears to be a serious and inscrutable event, whose final outcome can be death if everything possible is not done to halt it: therefore it is not enough to apply a bandage to try to arrest the loss of blood, but the haemorrhage itself, life that flows away through blood, must be addressed, so that it does not oppose resistance to the obstacle represented by the bandaging, and stops. However, it is to be stressed that in the socio-cultural context relating to the episode the two moments were not distinguished as two different methods that were combined: besides, convergence in the same people of the two actions of bandaging the wound and intoning the ἐπωδή further stresses the impossibility of distinguishing 'proper medical remedies' and 'magic' ones in the earliest sources. Subsequently – and above all with Hippocratic medicine – the application of φάρμακα, the bandaging of the lesions, and the administration of 'material' remedies were instead clearly to be separated from the use of ἐπωδαί, demoted to the rank of practices at the confine of superstitious and blameable behaviour, entirely unfounded from a rational point of view.

The fundamental intent of such treatment seems to be to remedy the physical pain: in this sense, the ἐπωδή, as a sung magic formula, in my opinion was intended to produce a sort of 'anaesthetic' effect, preventing the mind of the sick person from concentrating on his or her physical feelings through a musical combination of rhythm and words⁴⁵ that served to act on the evil itself. Besides, the cause of Odysseus' wounding was material, and the wound itself perfectly represented a sign of visible and concrete discomfort. Hence the sung spell would be part of the treatment habitually given by anyone present to a wounded person exposed to the risk of dying from a haemorrhage: recourse to the ἐπωδή also appears to be well encoded and usual in the higher social classes and to belong to common medical practices, handed down from generation to generation.

⁴⁵ Cf. *Il.*, XV, 393-394, where Patroclus applies some herbs on Euripilus' wound while comforting him with words (393, τὸν ἔτεθπε λόγους). The therapy of war wounds in the *Iliad* then entails both drugs and a word-therapy aimed at comforting and persuading. The power of the words in incantations (it didn't matter for their efficaciousness that each word were understandable, since many of them came from the Middle-East; s. Graf, 1991, 191) is attested for instance in a passage from Plato's *Euthydemus* (289e 5-290a 4), where the τέχνη of the rhetoricians (λογοποιοί) is considered as a part of the τέχνη of the charmers (ἐπωδοί), which were believed able to effect a κήλησις on dangerous beasts and diseases. As for rhetoric and magic, see De Romilly, 1975.

The use of this remedy must therefore have been founded on experience on the basis of which a soothing and reassuring effect of musical therapy on the sick person was ascertained. This particular aspect of the ἐπωδή appears to be confirmed some centuries later in a testimony by the physician Diocles of Carystus⁴⁶ (first half of the 4th century BC) in a scholium to *Od.* XIX, 457 stating that 'Diocles handed down that [it was] a charm [that acted as] the assuagement. For [he said that] this brings the bleeding to a halt, whenever the breath of the wounded [person] is connected and as it were fixed to the person assuaging' (Διοκλῆς ἐπαοιδὴν παρέδωκε τὴν παρηγορίαν. ἰσχαμιον γὰρ εἶναι αὐτήν, ὅταν τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ τετραμένου προσεχῆς ἦ καὶ ὥσπερ προσηρημένον τῷ παρηγοροῦντι)⁴⁷. Highlighting the psychosomatic repercussions of ἐπωδή, meaning a παρηγορία ('consolation'), interaction in the sense of συμπάθεια between physician and patient, Diocles therefore considered it an effective haemostatic, strengthened by the affective harmony and emotional exchange between the two⁴⁸. These observations also seem valid with respect to the episode in the *Odyssey*, in which the action of the charm seems to contemplate the same emotional interaction between the health-giver and the wounded person, who, depending on the cares of the therapist, has in a sense to be 'convinced, giving himself or herself up to the soothing and 'anaesthetic' effect of the magic song⁴⁹.

Besides, the ἐπωδή was destined to survive for a long time in the Greek world, as is shown not only by the hippocratic treatise *On the Sacred Disease* but also by Plato: actually it is one of the remedies which Socrates lists in the *Republic* for the treatment of illnesses⁵⁰, but the philosopher particularly makes it an effective metaphor of philosophy and its strength

⁴⁶ As for Diocles and his works, see Van der Eijk, 2001.

⁴⁷ Diocles, fr., 150 Van der Eijk = Schol. *Od.* XVIII, 457 (vol. 2, p. 681 Dindorf); trans. in Van der Eijk 2001.

⁴⁸ Cf. Plot. *Enn.*, IV, 4, 40, πέφυκε δὲ καὶ [scil. ἀγειν] ἐπωδαῖς τῷ μέλει καὶ τῇ τοιαύτῃ ἡχῇ καὶ τῷ σχήματι τοῦ δρώντος· ἔλκει γὰρ τὰ τοιαῦτα, οἷον τὰ ἐλεινὰ σχήματα καὶ φθέγματα.

⁴⁹ According to Laín Entralgo (1970, 26-27), the sick person's will was completely subdued by the ἐπωδή, and he/she lied between two magic forces - the demonic and the healing one - contrasting the one with the other till the ἐπωδή prevails.

⁵⁰ Plato, *Resp.*, 426 b 1-2: immoderate people will benefit 'neither from drugs, nor from cauteries, surgery, spells, amulets and thigs like these' (οὔτε φάρμακα οὔτε καύσεις οὔτε τομαὶ οὐδ' αὐ ἐπωδαὶ αὐτὸν οὐδὲ περιήπτα οὐδὲ ἄλλο τῶν τοιούτων οὐδὲν ὀνήσει).

in coaxing people towards good. Indeed, in *Charmides*, Socrates proposes the ἐπωδή to his young interlocutor as a remedy for his headache together with a medicine, consisting in a herb: without the sung charm, the pharmacological remedy would not have brought any benefit (155 e 5-8, καὶ ἐγὼ εἶπον ὅτι αὐτὸ μὲν εἴη φύλλον τι, ἐπωδὴ δὲ τις ἐπὶ τῷ φαρμάκῳ εἴη, ἦν εἰ μὲν τις ἐπάδοι ἅμα καὶ χρῶτο αὐτῷ, παντάπασιν ὑγιᾶ ποιοῖ τὸ φάρμακον· ἄνευ δὲ τῆς ἐπωδῆς οὐδὲν ὄφελος εἴη τοῦ φύλλου).⁵¹ Plato therefore uses the term ἐπωδή as a metaphor of λόγος, with a view to σοφροσύνη⁵²: to come to it, Charmides is prepared 'to let himself be charmed' by Socrates every day, until Socrates recognizes that the young man possesses it⁵³. Hence the ἐπωδή heals through the dialogue procedure, dear to Socrates, and in line with the heritage of its long tradition it represents an effective metaphor of the 'fine discourses' that aim at persuading people to move towards good.

Conclusion

The therapeutic use of the paeon in the first book of the *Iliad* and of the ἐπωδή in Book XIX of the *Odyssey* attests to the fact, as we have seen that the Greeks used music for the healing of illnesses starting from the most ancient times, but it is worth stressing the fundamental differences between the two testimonies. In the first case, healing concerns a whole community, and it takes place in the religious sphere: the paeon is a hymn to Apollo and, although it is intoned by a group of young people devoid of religious connotations, it is nevertheless prescribed by a *mantis* as part of a rite of purification, in turn administered by the priest of the god that has caused the evil, and that will free the community from it. At the centre

⁵¹ See above, n. 43. According to Kotansky (1991, 109-110), the herb referred to by Socrates in *Charmides* was a remedy to be applied on the sick part of the body - a *περίαιπτον* - and not to be eaten or used otherwise. In Plato's *Charmides* we can find in fact the first piece of evidence in Greek literature of the combined use of a spell and an amulet in the treatment of headache. Actually spells and amulets were often used in combination. Other occurrences of ἐπωδή in Plato are for instance *Leg.*, 659 e-660 a, 670 e-671 a, 837 e 5-6; *Phaed.*, 77 e-78 a; *Theaet.*, 148 e-151 d. On the meaning of ἐπωδή in Plato see Laín Entralgo, 1958 and 1970, 108-139; Gellrich, 1993-1994, 281-283; Casertano, 1998; Pelosi, 2004.

⁵² See Coolidge, 1993.

⁵³ *Charm.*, 176b 2-4, ὦ Σώκρατες, πάνυ οἶμαι δεῖσθαι τῆς ἐπωδῆς, καὶ τό γ' ἐμὸν οὐδὲν κωλύει ἐπάδασθαι ὑπὸ σοῦ ὅσαι ἡμέραι, ἕως ἂν φῆς σὺ ἰκανῶς ἔχειν, 'Socrates, I believe I am absolutely in need of the spell, and - as for myself - nothing prevents me from being 'charmed by you every day, till you don't say it's enough'.

of the therapeutic context there is thus the god, while there is no reference to 'pharmacological' remedies like herbs, potions or manual procedures like the bandage applied on Odysseus' wound. In the latter circumstance, the healing process consists of two moments, closely integrated and functional to one another – the *ἐπωδή* and the bandaging – and is entirely administered by men devoid of religious or 'professional' connotations, who undertake an initiative – not dictated by anyone else – in relation to an apparent evil, not hidden inside man like the plague that kills the Achaeans. Odysseus' bloody wound, moreover, is an individual evil: it is to this individual evil, considered an autonomous entity, that the *ἐπωδή* is addressed; in turn, it does not represent a musical genre but a sort of singing intended to induce a suspension of the will and trusting abandonment to the person that administers the treatment, as we have seen in connection with the testimony of Diocles of Carystus.

Apart from these differences, we nevertheless find a fundamental aspect common to the two circumstances, the element of the rite, that, though according to different modalities, in both cases is the background to the treatment: while in the case of the *Iliad* it is evident, and is described in its various phases, nevertheless it must not be forgotten that young Odysseus' hunting constitutes a rite of passage to the adult age 'administered' by his grandfather and by his maternal uncles, who have to serve as an example to the young man, also teaching him, in this case, an important first-aid practice that will serve him in his future life as a warrior⁵⁴.

These two testimonies thus sum up the fundamental aspects of 'traditional', pre-Hippocratic medicine and put Greece of the Homeric poems on the same wavelength as the other civilizations in the ancient Mediterranean, for which there are abundant testimonies of the therapeutic use of prayers and magic formulas, that is to say of the inseparable bond between medicine and religion. The use of such remedies attests to the use of the word as a powerful remedy against forces that transcend man and determine the precariousness of his existence. Overcoming the limit of the body and its frailty, the word – which in the first case, sung through the paean, persuades the divinity, and in the second, as a magic singsong, arrests the haemorrhage – in the last analysis represents the most powerful remedy against evil. Moreover, above all in the *ἐπωδή*, the strength of

⁵⁴ The Homeric heroes learned medicine from Cheiron: see for instance *Il.* IV, 219 (Machaon, the son of Asclepius); XI, 831-832 (Patroclus learned from Achilles how to heal war wounds, while Achilles on his turn learned it from Cheiron); cfr. Aelian, *N.A.*, II, 18.

words in the form of a singsong produces powerful persuasion which cannot be resisted: indeed, as Gorgias maintained, the word 'is a great sovereign' (λόγος δυνάστης μέγας ἐστίν), and 'performs the most divine works, for it is able to end fear, eliminate pain, cause joy and increase pity' (*Hel.*, 8, θειότατα ἔργα ἀποτελεῖ· δύναται γὰρ καὶ φόβον παῦσαι καὶ λύπην ἀφελεῖν καὶ χαρὰν ἐνεργάσασθαι καὶ ἔλεον ἐπαυξῆσαι). Of the effects enumerated by Gorgias, the first two, regarding fear and pain, particularly seem to concern our case: the fear of the wounded man is eased in the sympathetic interaction with the person who attends to it, and the pain is anesthetized by the magic song, to which he pays his full attention. Besides, speaking of the reactions aroused by listening to poetry - φόβικη περίφοβος ('terror that causes shivers'), ἔλεος πολύδακρος ('pity that causes a lot of weeping') and πόθος φιλοπενθήs ('desire to indulge in mourning') - Gorgias adds that 'through vicissitudes and misfortunes that concern other people's lives and bodies, the soul feels emotions of its own, induced by words' (ἐπ' ἄλλοτριῶν τε πραγμάτων καὶ σωμάτων εὐτυχίαις καὶ δυσπραγίαις ἰδίῳ τι πάθημα διὰ τῶν λόγων ἔπαθεν ἢ ψυχῇ). These words are perfectly suited to what happens during the performance of ἐπωδαί, whose verbal formulas were constituted by poetic verses: those verses often belonged to cosmogonies, so that they were verisimilarly used in order to restore the order lost through contamination⁵⁵. On the basis of some late testimonies, we also know that the verses of ἐπωδαί were often Homeric ones which had some relation with the present evil to be charmed, and whose authority was based on a long tradition⁵⁶. On the other hand, the aspect of the similarity between the event referred to in the spell and the present circumstance is also evident in a testimony mentioned by Lévi-Strauss concerning a shamanic sung spell used in Central America in cases of difficult childbirths⁵⁷. The song begins with the description of the difficulties of the midwife and her recourse to the shaman, who, at the head of a group of protecting spirits, goes to the house of the demon responsible for the foetus, who has imprisoned the

⁵⁵ See Burkert, 1982, 8 and Obbink, 1997, 50 (the latter, on the Derveni Papyrus).

⁵⁶ See for instance Luc. *Charon sive contemplantes* 7, 1-5 (attesting to the use of a Homeric ἐπωδή against a disease affecting eyes); Iamb. *De Vita Pyth.* 111 (Pythagoras used the verses by Homer and Hesiod 'for correcting the soul', πρὸς ἐπανόρθωσιν ψυχῆς) and Porph. *VP* 32 (the verses by Homer and Hesiod were used for soothing the soul, ὅσα καθημεροῦν τὴν ψυχὴν).

⁵⁷ See Lévi-Strauss, 1963, 200-201. Midwives used spells also in Ancient Greece, as we can notice for instance in Plato's *Theaetetus* (148 e-151 d).

soul of the parturient. In the song the difficulties of the shaman and his allies in the struggle against the demon are described, but in the end, after achieving victory, the shaman frees the soul of the parturient, her child is born and the song ends. With repetitions and details, the song causes the patient to participate, paying attention and memorizing the phases, which are related to the difficulties that she faces in labour. The woman's hopes of recovery are therefore only founded on her siding with the shaman and his allies: their victory against evil is her own against suffering. The effect of the ἐπὶ ὄδῳ of Odysseus' uncles therefore appears very similar to what is at the basis of Gorgias' affirmations and also to the characteristics of the shamanic spell mentioned, a sign of the continuity of a tradition bearing witness to the universality of man's fundamental needs, and mainly to that well-known painful feeling of the precariousness of life which must have distressed the Ancients at least as much as us.

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