

Ἀργεῖφόντης:

Etymology, Meaning and Myth

Laura Massetti

(Harvard Center for Hellenic Studies / University of Oxford)

Since antiquity Hermes' epithet Ἀργεῖφόντης has been interpreted as 'Argus-slayer', e.g., Aeschl. *Suppl.* 305 Ἄργον, τὸν Ἑρμῆς παῖδα γῆς κατέκτανε or connected with the semantic field of brilliance and visibility, e.g., Hsch. α 7037 LC ἀργεῖφόντης: ... λευκοφόντης. In this paper I investigate the multiple layers of Argeiphontes' etymologies, in the attempt to find out to which extent the epithet and the myth synchronically connected to it preserve an Indo-European inheritance.

On the purely formal level, I provide new support to the hypothesis that Ἀργεῖφόντης reflects 'shining of white light', as first proposed by Prellwitz (1897) and further sustained by Koller (1976) and Janda (2005:75–84).

Furthermore, I argue that the prevalent synchronic etymology of Ἀργεῖφόντης as 'Argus-slayer' is connected to an inherited myth. The combinatory phraseological analysis proves that the story of Hermes and Argus shares a variety of details with the myth of the 'wounded sun': all-seeing Argus may be interpreted as a 'stand-in' of the Sun-god; while the role of Hermes in this story is comparable to that of the Sun-god's enemy: the demon Svarbhānu (in turn, a 'stand-in' for the fire-god Agni) in the Vedic version of the story (Jamison 1991), the Nartic hero Syrdon in the Ossetic version (Dumézil 1959), Loki in the Old Norse version (Ginevra 2019 [forthcoming]). As my analysis will prove, Ἀργεῖφόντης is the archenemy of the Sun-god stand-in *because they compete in brightness*: Argus is eliminated by the god 'who shines with whiteness' in a similar way as Sūrya is wounded by Svarbhānu, 'the demon who possesses the brightness of the sun' (Campanile 1986, Jamison 1991).

My phraseological and mythological analysis thus contributes in enlarging the dossier concerning the common traits Hermes and further Indo-European fire-characters share (Hocart 1936, van Berg 2001, Haudry 2016).

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