

Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*: *Miasma* and the *Hippocratic Corpus*

My paper centers ancient medicine against the backdrop of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*; and the different definitions and usages of *miasma* in the *Agamemnon* and in the Hippocratic Corpus. Jouanna hypothesizes that some texts familiar to Aeschylus, but now lost, contained similar vocabulary to the *Hippocratic Corpus*, allowing for possible overlap (75). While Jouanna has focused on the Greek terms φαγέδαινα (cancerous sore) and λειχήν (liver-wort) as well as the Sacred Disease (thought to resemble epilepsy), other words and concepts, especially as relate to the *Oresteia* broadly remain unstudied (Jouanna 73-78). Scholarship such as Miller's general gloss of medicinal terminology in the *Hippocratic Corpus*, while immensely useful, commenting on φαγέδαινα and λειχήν, does not however engage with broader themes of the play(s) (Miller 278).

My paper studies the role of *miasma* in both a tragic and Hippocratic sense. In tragedy, *miasma* is ritual pollution caused by the murder of kin. However, the Hippocratics, rejecting the notion that the gods can stain humans in such a way, refine *miasma* to refer to a stain in the air. This paper explores whether the *Agamemnon* contains precedents for this radical change of thinking—a rejection of traditional *miasma*. I also explore the extent to which Clytemnestra resembles the Hippocratic doctor (whether an upright or corrupted version). Clytemnestra tries to heal her household by acting as a Hippocratic doctor. Her objective is to ritually clear the house of *miasma* (here Agamemnon) and heal the generational curse against her family. The differing definitions of *miasma* in a tragic sense (a stain caused by the murder of kin) and the Hippocratic sense (a stain in the air) complicate the argument (Jouanna 58-59; Hp.*Aer.*6.98). Although Aeschylus and Hippocrates were not exact contemporaries, it is illuminating to analyze the use

of *miasma* in the *Agamemnon*, both magico-religious and medical—to gain insight into Aeschylus’ characterization of *miasma*, healing, and ritual cleansing.

Bibliography

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