

To Dilute or Not to Dilute: The Role of Pure Wine in Classical Greek Regimen

The symposium has been widely acknowledged as being an important socio-political component of Greece during the Archaic, Classical, and Hellenistic periods by scholars of the topic. Varying approaches to wine and the symposium have been discussed by Lissarrague (1990), Murray (1990), and Schmitt Pantel (1992). They agree that wine was central component of the institution and of Greek society. While Jouanna (2012) has outlined the ways in which wine was viewed by Greek physicians as both harmful and beneficial to their patients, and the internal and external uses to which wine was put, there has been little systematic discussion of wine in Greek medical texts between the late 5th and early 4th centuries B.C.E. This paper will attempt to bridge the gap between studies of wine, the symposium and medicine in Classical Greece, emphasizing in particular the tensions between the Hippocratic and contemporary literary approaches to diluted and undiluted wine. While ancient literature tends to favor the dichotomy between Greeks and “barbarians” based on their perceived preferred modes of consuming wine, the Hippocratic treatises present a much less biased perspective.

The Hippocratic treatises *Regimen* and *Regimen in Acute Diseases*, though separate in their concerns, were both produced in the late 5th to early 4th centuries B.C.E. (Craik 2015), and both address issues of proper regimen, which includes food, drink, and exercise. Although both texts are dedicated to more tailored, one-off therapies, the centrality of the issue of maintaining proper regimen is clear from *Regimen in Acute Diseases* 10, which describes the harmful effects of changes in one’s customary diet of wine (cf. *Vict.* 58). Moreover, it is clear in both texts that diluted or undiluted wine may be consumed depending on the context, as long as one remains consistent. By contrast, contemporary literary texts such as Herodotus (6.84), Plato (*Laws*

1.637e), and the comedies of Aristophanes (esp. *Ach.* 65 ff.) clearly privilege the ‘Greek’ custom of drinking one’s wine diluted with water, juxtaposing this practice with the ‘barbaric’ custom of drinking neat wine. Despite uncertainty about whether such texts represent contemporary Classical Greek sentiments, several modern scholars (Lissarrague 1990, 44; Wilkins and Hill 2006, 178) have viewed these sources, in addition to archaeological evidence such as the *krater* or mixing bowl, as indicative of the primacy of diluted wine throughout Greek society. In this paper, I will suggest that the Hippocratic treatises present a more plausible and accessible understanding of the relationship of the ancient Greeks to wine in the late 5th and early 4th century B.C.E. My argument will demonstrate that, although it is clear that there was a broad anxiety about over-indulgence and excess (which was also associated with foreigners, as well as women and slaves) amongst 5th and 4th century Greeks, the prohibition and denigration of undiluted wine as ‘barbaric’ was perhaps not as widely held a belief as was previously thought. *Regimen* and *Regimen in Acute Diseases*, in their indiscriminate use of both diluted and undiluted wine in their therapies, suggest that there was more variety in drinking habits amongst ancient Greeks than we realize, mirroring the variety in venues (private *andrones*, public *kapeleia*, civic and religious contexts) where commensal drinking occurred.

Bibliography

- Craik, E.M. 2015. *The ‘Hippocratic’ Corpus: Content and Context*. London: Routledge.
- Jouanna, J. 2012. “Wine and Medicine in Ancient Greece,” in *Greek Medicine from Hippocrates to Galen: Selected Papers*, ed. P. van der Eijk. Leiden: Brill.
- Lissarrague, F. 1990. *The aesthetics of the Greek banquet: images of wine and ritual. / Un Flot d’Images*. Trans. Andrew Szegedy-Maszak. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Murray, O., ed. 1990. *Symptica: A Symposium on the Symposium*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Schmitt-Pantel, P. 1992. *La cite au banquet: histoire des repas public dans les cites grecques.*

Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne.

Wilkins, J.M., and S. Hill. 2006. *Food in the ancient world*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.